TERRITORIAL IDENTITY AND ADMINISTRATIVE ISOLATION: THE CASE OF "IMPERFECT DISTRICTS" IN SOUTHERN ITALY

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1. The "imperfect districts"

Ever since the Unity of Italy, some administrative districts in Italian Mezzogiorno (Terra di Lavoro, Benevento, Isernia, Campobasso, L'Aquila) have undergone a series of boundary transformations. Due to main institutional transformations (the Unity of Italy, the Fascist regime, the reconstruction after World War II, the advent of special statutes for some regions) these territories have been affected by profound administrative changes.

The different transformations were driven either by ideological or functional motivations, and they have often caused the loss of socio-cultural identities in local communities. This issue mirrors political and administrative aspects, and also the questions of identification between groups and territory, i.e. the mechanisms used by a community to develop a sense of identity. In this analysis, the so-called 'imperfect districts' define such provincial bodies that in given historical moments have undergone significant alterations in boundaries and organizations; therefore, one can possibly assume that also their identity structures have been affected.

One of the most significant cases is Terra di Lavoro. Back in the middle of the nineteenth century it had a notable extension and it featured important towns as Cassino, Gaeta, Capua, Caserta, Aversa, Pozzuoli and Sorrento (Fondi, 1977). Its slow transformation began with the Unity: in order to favor the creation of a new province for Benevento (a province that was created from nothing, after eight centuries of papal administration on the town and its surrounding areas), the central government stripped the area of Piedimonte D'Alife (Sannio Alifano) which was split among the province of Isernia (Molise) and Benevento. This area included a considerable number of municipalities that had been united for centuries during the political and religious events of Campania and Terra di Lavoro[1]. At the same time, some municipalities within Campania were reshuffled; also the province of Campobasso was deprived of an important strip of land (Cfr. Decree 260/1861.).

The province of Terra di Lavoro had even been divested of the status of province for twenty years and it gained it back only after the second World War. It was named Caserta and it had more limited boundaries. Benito Mussolini, who had hoped for this intervention for a long time (Franco, 1990), ordered in 1927 the division of this land between the provinces of Rome, Frosinone, Naples, Benevento and Campobasso. Mussolini aimed at fragmenting Italian territory in smaller provincial units for a direct political control, and at the same time he wanted to enlarge the province of Naples in order to defend Lazio from Southern *banditi*. In this regard, some authors believe that the relationships between fascism and masonry had a significant role.

After the province was renewed in 1946, the municipalities of Nola area were definitively detached (and annexed to the province of Naples, as Aversa), as well as the municipalities of the areas of Gaeta and Sora (around Garigliano river), which were annexed to the provinces of Latina and Frosinone[2]. The reorganization did not "respect an administrative body that was rooted in the political and socio-economical past as well as in people's memory" (Aversano, 1995, p.253; Fabbri 1927, p.203).

Also the event of the province of Benevento, which dates back to 1861, overturned the structure of several provinces that belonged to Campania, Molise and Puglia. Molise was deprived of the area between rivers Tàmmaro and Fortore, close to the watershed between the basin of Volturno-Tàmmaro and that of Biferno (15 municipalities of Campobasso province).

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[1] Demonstrations against the separation from Campania still go on, as they share historical, geographical and economical backgrounds more with Campania than with internal Molise.
[2] These do not have much in common with Lazio.

The province was extended on the opposite side, on the right bank of the basin of river Volturno (13 municipalities of today's province of Isernia). As a consequence, a few years later the same region lost its independence and it was annexed to Abruzzo, and named 'Abruzzi e Molise'. This situation changed only in 1963 when Molise it regained its autonomy (Fondi, 1977, pp. 8-10).

Finally, the province of L'Aquila: again, due to the regime, the province was deprived of a strip of land that was annexed to Lazio, namely the province of Rieti and the Abruzzo North-Western area. Through these cuts, Mussolini wanted to give Lazio some higher mountains (Galluccio, 1998), so to create homogenous administrative units also from a physical point of view.

These districts feature a 'troubled administrative life', mainly due to centralization processes, and they can be defined today as 'imperfect'[3]. Actually such 'imperfection' can be considered one of the causes of the birth of movements that claim their territorial identity as a solution for development. This identity is not regarded as a historical or symbolic feature, but a material and functional one. Recently, such claims have been multiplying also due to transformations that have characterized these areas, both in social and economical terms, and they have opened new the ways for cultural and territorial identification[4].

2. Territorial identity

The sense of belonging can be defined as an independent category. It exists independently from its use and its connection with the social and political acting. Moreover, it is not necessarily real (sometimes it is only symbolic) or referred to a precise historical moment. In this respect one can distinguish between belonging to communities of memory, or belonging to communities of project. The former aims at rediscovering aspects of the past, sometimes with a nostalgic attitude, it is linked to elements of tradition and especially to protecting collective identities; the latter focuses its attention on definitions that contribute to work for the realization of future projects[5].

This approach highlights one of the crucial issues of modern geography, i.e. the relationship between identity and planning: "the regional territorial plan – as Quaini claims with reference to Borges' (1997) and Calvino's (1983) literature – instead of being a useless and illegible document as it usually is, could be structured as a geographic 'novel' so that it could be read and discussed by citizens. If this chance belongs to the sphere of 'utopian realism'[6], the geographer-historian should find in the territory a good plot to make the reading of the planning as interesting as a real novel!" (Quaini, 2001, p. 302).

With regard to the same point, Joel Bonnemaison and Luc Cambrezy for example say that the "territory is a builder of identity … just as we perceive it, as a cultural space of belonging, rich of sense and geo-symbols, and filled with memory; the territory is an unavoidable element of human experience, it is a convivial rather than a conflicting one, and it is engraved in time

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[3] With respect to the great 'cutting', Galasso has a different opinion. In another work *L'altra Europa...* (1982, p.369), he claims that "A posteriori experience has proven that the loss in 1927 of the area beyond Garigliano, between Aurunci Mountains and Mainarde, from Formia to Cassino (Campania's worst loss), and the loss of *Ponziane* islands, Venafro district and some areas of Mount Matese and the Apennine close to Benevento and Avellino, could not alter the unitary physiognomy of the original core born in 1860. The experience has shown that, as the region would pivot on Naples, Campania could not actually keep within the same traditional unitary relationship those North-Western areas that would have been soon attracted towards Rome after the drainage of Pontine Marshes".

[4] As a matter of fact, these underwent a historical evolution of life and society that improved literacy and independent workers, and proved the active spirit of these territories. There was also an economical evolution: in the areas that were more affected by emigration (Fortore area near Benevento and Molise, Daunia Mounts in Puglia) the cultural landscape has apparently preserved a continuity of rural culture. But shifting from these specific areas, one can pinpoint small urban-rural development centres (rural urbanization): between Tavoliere and Murge (Foggia), the area of Avellino and Benevento's hollows, Campobasso (which has achieved the role of regional administrative centre).

[5] Today, due to new non-EU immigration flows that characterize new marginalities, and the desolation of small Southern centres, the issue becomes very topical.

[6] "Utopian realism combines 'the opening of windows' of the future with the analysis of current institutional trends, and it makes future political scenario immanent to present". (Giddens, 1994, p. 174).

and space. It represents the last stake for the life of local identities and the autonomy of places and human groups before the possible dictatorship of a global order" (Bonnemaison and Cambrezy, 1996, p. 17).

From an in-between point of view, Claval claims that "the territory is like a *support* for identity feelings. The transition to post-modernity questions traditional identity foundations, and it evolves into an insane search for identification in objects and landscape. It implies the end of history philosophies which were the foundation of yesterday's identity and territory. The proliferation of debates on identity translates the lack of sense in contemporary world and it could turn out even more dangerous from the political perspective"[7] (Claval, 1996, 20, p. 93).

The above mentioned discussions can be useful today to understand some of the major problems connected to 'regionality' and regionalization.

3. Regionalisation and cultural politics

Is the political and administrative system ready to react with flexibility to the new tensions caused by the relationship between territory and population? Is it thus able to arrange boundaries giving the priority to functionality and in general to the principle of territorial suitability, favoring at the same time the recover of the identity of 'imperfect groups"?

At an institutional level, the first steps were taken with Presidential Decree 616/77 and Italian Law n° 142/90 (articles 15 and 16); these established also the minimum dimension for provinces (at least 200,000 people) and municipalities (not less than 10,000 people); this was meant to avoid the extreme fragmentation of primary institutions (Fratta, 1995, pp. 60-62).

Recently, through the decree 267/2000[8] and the law 3/2001[9] (which came after laws 142/90, 241/90, decree 77/95 and the three "Bassanini laws", and which were followed by law 131/2003[10]), the central government has given the planning task in the hands of peripheral administrations (Regions, Provinces, Mountain districts, Municipalities), and regarded them not simply as "the brawn that carries out orders from a superior brain" (Emanuel, 1999, pp. 312-313), but as bodies that had the necessary entrepreneurial skills and a more careful management attitude towards local features and potentials. According to these new instructions, the State represents a horizontal geo-institutional framework and not a vertical one; State, Regions (holding specific functions and expanding their power of management on the territory, in the perspective of a global planning for an economical-territorial rebalance), Provinces and municipalities (holding their specific functions and functions appointed by national and regional laws; municipalities can carry out "their functions also through the activities that can be pursued also by citizens' autonomous initiative and by their social groups" − article 3, Decree 267/2000) cooperate on the same level. We are now facing the achievement of a concept of regionalization and of a "differentiated regionalism" that aims at promoting the specific potentials of each region.

However, the reorganization of the territorial administrative structure is not an easy task. Several proposals of territorial revision have been suggested, both for a precise regionalization and for districts with several evident territorial identities (as evidenced by the various applications that many provinces and municipalities have submitted for a revision of their boundaries).

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[7] This position reinvents the space through an hypothetical 'identity tale'.

[8] TUEL (*Testo unico delle leggi sull'ordinamento degli enti locali*) of August 18th, 2000; as stated in articles 20 and 21, provinces are assigned the tasks of planning, 'creating districts', 'revising provincial districts'.

[9] Law of October 18th, 2001 n°3, "Amendments to the fifth Title of the second part of the Constitution": article 4, which substitutes article 118 of Italian Constitution, decrees that "State, Regions, metropolitan Cities, Provinces and Municipalities favour citizens' single or associated autonomous initiative for activities of general interest and on the principle of subsidiarity". Moreover, article 132 states precisely the need for "the approval of the vast majority of the population of a Province or a Municipality' in case of a reorganization of the territorial administrative structure.

[10] Law of June 5th, 2003 n°131 (*Legge La Loggia* - "Instructions for the adjustment of Italian regulations according to constitutional law of October 18th, 2001 n°3") starts the process of devolution and federalism, without any straining of Law 3/2001 (Violante 2003, p.11).

In this respect, the works of Giuseppe Dematteis and Lucio Gambi put forward some interesting arguments. In an essay on the different conceptions of Region (1989), Dematteis argues that the difference between Geographic Regions and Institutional Regions is now outdated. He starts from the premise of the conventionality of any regional cluster and the spatiality of reticules; he states that the flows of relationships that are at the heart of a modern definition of regionality are now so abstract and de-territorialized that we should accept the convention that justified the current cutting. However, "he does not update the parameters that redefine conventions" (Bonora, 1995, p.41).

Gambi, instead, suggests a rational territorial definition of municipalities, the root of public authority, as a starting point for a more regular planning of provinces and a new functional territorial structure of regions. In this respect, the author suggests some fixed points: a) local-scale economical, social or cultural polarity; b) local-scale economical homogeneity for defined territorial areas; c) local-scale consistent topographic arrangement for defined territorial areas; d) amount of population that tops the minimum threshold; e) the adoption of boundaries that have been traced according to clear and certain elements, widely perceived and carefully chosen" (Gambi, 1995, pp. 33-34).

Clearly, the functionalist appeal is still rather significant: the appointment of regional and provincial capitals corresponds to the principle of "central confluence", i.e. the "regionalist" rule that aims at creating the right circumstances for a better relationship between center and peripheral areas.

Nevertheless, facing globalization, new roads need to be found: an alternative development paradigm should be adopted so to provide useful suggestions for a productive and social renewal in certain territories; also a cultural policy of territories should be triggered, one that makes reference to the history and the evolution of the administrative system through political, economical and social transformations. As Dematteis puts it, we need a policy that could allow a territory to become a district "that corresponds to the 'cultural region', i.e. a basin of 'strategic' resources for innovative processes and for the quality of development" (cit., 1989, p. 460).

In such new context, the focus shifts on the principle held by the European Community over the last decade: "networking". This means focusing on "Negotiated planning" (Italian law n. 662/96 – characterized by straightforward and incisive typologies of arranged administration) and *bottom up* development. Such a new kind of "planning" that goes beyond the rigid municipal boundary and allows individual administrations (which share the same historical and cultural background and the same vocation) to network and become a 'virtual region' that is assembled around an idea of socio-economical development and territory rearrangement (pinpointing the strengths and weaknesses of the corresponding territory). This process should be supported by a whole series of ruling instruments (POR[11]; *Intesa Istituzionale*, regional and national laws, etc.), which entrust local autonomies with the development of strategic policies for the development of the territory and the coordination of initiatives, involving local actors for cultural initiatives.

However, the success of such policy depends on the way cities manage their wealth and use in a competitive way their hidden potentials, the *milieu*.

4. Hypothesis and appeals for new regionalizations based on historic and territorial motivations

Belonging to a given province rather than to a different one is still very significant to many and it not simply a matter of symbolic values. Even if Italian laws do not promote a territorial reorganization through easily accessible procedures, the expectations for changes to provincial plans have been giving birth to several initiatives. For example, the area of Sannio Alitano was suggested as an 'administrative-natural region', which dates back to 1810 when Joaquin Murat himself suggested to establish the province of *Sannio*. After the Unity, the project was resumed during the administrative rearrangement by the Farina-Minghetti bill (1860) and Crispi bill (1889) that suggested the political and administrative individuality for an area that

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[11] The analysis of the three reference POR (*Programmi Operativi Regionali*) focuses on local systems that are bound to agriculture activities, tourism and culture, which are the systems that have specific historical connotations and could act as a driving force for development.

included Benevento, Avellino and Campobasso; Benevento was suggested as the regional capital[12].

Again in 1923, as G. B. Bosco-Lucarelli had suggested, the district of Benevento, Avellino and Campobasso was created and it was later transformed in Benevento, Avellino and Salerno. In 1927 the *Società Storica del Sannio* was founded. The project was put forward again in the 70s when some local politicians applied for the establishment of the *Molisannio* as a possible solution to the contrast between Campania poorer internal areas and the stronger coastal strip. A more recent project (1993) is that of *Tirrenia* (including Benevento, Avellino and Salerno) that would rearranged the territory in a polycentric perspective (Bencardino, 1991, pp. 137-138). All these projects area certainly supported by sound cultural and historical motivations, but each case is different and they should be carefully analyzed in order to fulfil the needs of the whole nation (Nice, 1958, p. 223).

In the meanwhile, a 'virtual region' has been created, the so-called *Patto federativo* [federative pact] that was clinched by on the initiative of the President of Foggia province, Antonio Pellegrino, on September 26th 2001; this pact unites the provinces of Campobasso, Benevento, Avellino and Foggia[13], which had been attempting a similar network for a long time. This means that probably today the discussion on belongings seems to be coming up again in terms of material redefinition of administrative boundaries (the government seems to have no actual plans for the establishment of new provinces) and in terms of definition, redefinition and negotiation of symbolic boundaries.

The four provinces (about 300 municipalities divided into three different regions) want to prove their will to establish a single territorial district. This would be promoted by a series of common initiatives that range from tourist marketing policies, to the exploitation of typical food and cultural events (under the label *Marchio 4 Province*)[14].

These initiatives are estimated on the ground of the application of innovative technologies and the recover of aspects of the economical and cultural tradition.

That is the case of the 'immaterial roads' of information society, as suggested by a project of Province of Benevento and the University of Sannio for the experiment of satellite monitoring (*Il nostro progetto federale*, www.4province.it, cit.). Also the *Consulta per il Sud* is a *virtual* project for a *real* web made of movements, organizations, associations, clubs, local communities and citizens (Consulta per il Sud, 1999). Benevento and Avellino, instead, are trying to develop "*Samnium*", an on-line history journal, to improve identity structures, restore the *Museo del Sannio* and the *Biblioteca provinciale del Sannio*, and plan a new *media library* within Avellino library (Acocella, Cacciatore, Tessitore, 1990, pp. 843-890; see also Morante, 2002, p. 3).

As for restoration works instead, many initiatives have been undertaken, as for instance, the works over transport infrastructures that are focused mainly on roads, especially antique

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[12] Despite all discussions that spread at that time and the objections raised by local politicians (Cfr. VERGINEO, 1990), the new province brought such a strong cohesion between *Principato Ultra* (Avellino), *Benevento* and part of *Principato Citra* (Salerno) that the hypothesis of creating a new regional compartment (separated from that of Naples and Terra di Lavoro) gained ground. But it was not possible yet, because there was no firm road structure that had been started by the French and never completed. (Benevento had been disadvantaged by the control of the papal state and the creation of an orbital road development: outside the urban walls roads ended and they continued as mule tracks). In 1864, the *Strada delle Puglie* together with other Roman roads connected different sheep-tracks, the large trails from L'Aquila to the Tavoliere plain that lead transhumant livestock; in 1871 some roads had been built along the rivers: *Calore* road (Benevento-Alvignanello), *Sabato* road (Benevento-Avellino), *Tammaro-Fortore* road (Benevento-San Bartolomeo in Galdo) and many local ones. (Cfr. Bencardino, 1991, p.120).
[13] The Federation's seat is within the President office of the provinces of Avellino, Benevento, Campobasso and Foggia.
[14] The four provinces have already drawn a detailed map that can be viewed on the web with different tourist itineraries "that suggest different thematic tracks that continuously intersect and reveal a deeper identity of the four provinces: an antique and living beat of past, art and architecture, faith and traditions, naturalistic and landscape values, great culture". (*Itinerari & turismo*, in www.4province.it, cit., 2001).

tracks and Roman routes, (Via Appia, Via Traiana, Via Sacra Longobardorum) transhumance sheep-tracks,[15] and underused railways.

The initiatives of these four provinces are supported by the *Scuola di Pubblica Amministrazione* (in the Province of Foggia), a permanent structure that is a point of reference for an integrated planning, territorial marketing and the formulation of development strategies, as well as other scientific and cultural institutions.

5. Conclusion

Cultural identity is made of a series of practices that characterize a community and are considered a fundamental value. In this respect, local administration can be regarded as the first step for a large-scale diffusion of identities. That is the case of intermediate administrative districts, which due to historical and political events can be defined 'imperfect districts'. This is true especially in Mezzogiorno's provinces, which are not an abstract construction as Regions: they correspond to a real identity that is historically strengthened and acknowledged. Provinces are the result of a dialogue between productive economical systems and of a relationship of identities. However, tracing new boundaries requires paying particular attention to pragmatism and simplification, in terms of both geo-socio-economical criteria and political-administrative authorities, because their historical backwardness is a fact.

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[15] The three branches of transhumance from Abruzzo to Winter pastures were: *Dogana dei pascoli del Patrimonio di San Pietro in Tuscia* (from Rome to the boundaries with Tuscany and Umbria); *Doganella d'Abruzzo*, with two posts, one between rivers Pescara and Tronto (*Regi Stucchi*), and one in the area of ancient city of Atri (*Poste d'Atri*); and finally *Dogana delle pecore di Puglia* (in Tavoliere plain). These sheep-tracks slope down from L'Aquila to Tavoliere plain and their width was of 60 Nepolitan 'trapassi' (about 111,11 meters). They were linked to minor roads (*tratturelli* or *bracci*) which were 27 meters wide (Marino, Russo, 1977, pp.194-196 (2000). See also Marino, 1992; Sprengel, 1975, p.294.

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