

# THE ROLE OF TERRITORIAL IDENTITY IN LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES

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## 1. Territorial identity: a conceptual bounding

Since a few years ago the concept of identity has been included among the subjects of geography studies. As Grasso observes in an essay on this issue, which was published on the *Bollettino della Società Geografica* in the late 90s, "territorial identity has acquired a considerable position in geographic analysis" (Grasso, 1998, p.617). Such importance can be ascribed to the explicative value, that the concept of identity shows towards a wide and varied phenomenology; on the other hand it seems the consequence of a reductive and stereotyped interpretation of some local-scale changes. Therefore, an in-depth analysis of the concept of territorial identity seems rather appropriate, as well as grasping its featuring aspects and its applicative sphere within its geographic connotation. A first reflection can be developed on the term 'territorial', or as many would like to call it, 'geographical'<sup>1</sup>. As a socio-cultural *product*, identity can be a subject of interest for geography, because it becomes a moulding element for territorial structure, and in general it can determine structural, relational and sense transformations in the geographic space. Despite the limitations of a partly tautological definition, Caldo describes geographical identity as an "identity relationship that links a given community to its *lived space*" (Caldo, 1996, p. 285). Caldo highlights that the geographic connotation of identity cannot make reference to the mere spatial dimension of the identity phenomenon; rather it should be used to represent those belonging ties that create the 'territory'. In the above mentioned definition, the most interesting element that is impregnated with scientific consequences is definitively the reference to the "lived space", as such reference shows the complexity of geographical identity, and at the same time it enhances its explicative value in relation to territorial discontinuity. As Caldo suggests - drawing on the thought of Fremont (1976) - the lived space should be regarded as that moment of integration that combines the physical dimension of geometrical space and the social dimension of relational space. In this case, space is not only "the scenario of human action", but the "representation" of human action, and it condenses the values of the culture that is produced in it (1994, p. 17). Hence, this dimension corresponds to anthropization, i.e. the *territory* in its geographical meaning. In fact, the territory is precisely a relational space that grows in time as the product of a process of cultural sedimentation; the engine of this process is the identity relationship between a community and the space occupied by the community. As a matter of fact, the space becomes the territory of an *actor* as soon as it is involved in a social relationship of communication (Raffestin, 1983). Later on, Dematteis explains this definition: a *territory* is a land that functions as a medium of communication, a mean for work, production, exchange, co-operation (Dematteis, 1995). In brief, the territory can be regarded as that portion of geographical space which reflects a given community and represents the community's individual and collective actions; The territory's specificity - regarded as the difference from the geographic surroundings - comes from the process of interaction between this community and the environment (Pollice, 2003). If one attaches this explicative value to the concept of territory, the most correct meaning that expresses the process of identification between a community and its lived space must be that of territorial identity. This does not mean denying a geographical identity, but claiming its meaning and its interpretative value. First of all, geographical identity is a cognitive product: the result of a process of analysis and representation that allows us to extract a given space from the surroundings. Secondly, territorial identity originates from a self-referential process carried out by a community that culturally takes possession of a predefined spatial sphere; instead geographical identity is an external representation with merely descriptive and/or interpretative scopes.

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<sup>1</sup> The use of the term 'territorial' seems more suitable, as the identities that are the subject of this paper are the result of territorialization processes, and the local community identifies itself with material and non-material manifestations of this process.

From the observations expressed so far, the interdependency between identity and territory are evident. This is a cumulative relationship: on one hand territorial identity produces and orientates territorialization processes; on the other hand, the acts of territorialization themselves strengthen the process of identification between the community and its lived space. Before of the in-depth analysis of this kind of synergic interaction, the importance of identity in territorialization processes should be underlined. As a matter of fact, the *territory* should be interpreted as a *source for the creation of values that can be nourished only triggering identification mechanisms of local actors*. The territory - as sense of belonging – becomes a sentimental, social and symbolic product that represents the base for retrospective and prospective identities (Dai Prà, 2000).

If the concept of territory is substituted by the concept of milieu, conclusions are still the same. The *milieu* – drawing on the definition suggested by Dematteis – is a permanent series of socio-cultural features that have sedimented in a given geographical area through the historical evolution of intersubjective relationships which are in relation to the use of local natural ecosystems (Dematteis, 1994). But right in this process of sedimentation that creates the milieu it is possible to highlight the very determinants of territorial identity. Again, here the relationship between the two conceptual categories is not a dependence relationship, but rather a reciprocal one. In fact, Governa highlights that the *milieu* “represents at the same time the *local and territorial foundation of a specific collective identity*, but also the *whole of development endogenous potentials*” (Governa, 1998, p. 89)

As mentioned above, identity can be considered a consequence as well as a cause of territorialization processes. Also Turco has recently stated that territoriality has a "double configuration": *target* and *root* of identity dynamics (Turco, 2003). As well as territory, "not only does identity represent a support for territorialization stages and development process, but also the specific series of conditions that favour the bonds and possibilities for following actions" (Governa, 1997, p. 34). At the same time, identity can be interpreted as the effect of territorialization processes, as these tend to increase the "specificity of a place", and as the effect of territorial rooting of webs – an "anchorage" provoked by cultural factors – they determine a consolidation of the sense of belonging to the local community.

With regard to the processes of territorialization, identity plays a key role in all stages. Through Turco's interpretation, territorialization can be divided into three separate and consequential stages: denomination, reification, structuring (Turco, 1998). In the first stage, territorial identity acquires a strategic value as it gives meaning and motivation to the "denomination", regarded as the result of a "symbolic control of space". Precisely these control mechanisms allow territorial identity to spread and take root in a specific geographic sphere. The role that identity plays in the reification stage is a different one. This second stage is usually made of locally defined behaviours that aim at increasing what Turco defines a "practical control" of space. Also in this case the practice of control can be accomplished only if identity is a shared value and it is constantly reproduced in common acting. Reification implies a strong territorial identity, and at the same time reification can be a mechanism for strengthening identity sense and the factors that contribute to increasing this sense. However, identity plays a more significant role with regard to the stage of structuring. This stage requires a sensible control of space; such control can be actually exercised only within territorial contexts in which identity has a structuring value, so that identity can direct collective acting and modify the territory according to self-referential mechanisms.

Once an explicative value has been assigned to the concept of territorial identity and reciprocal identities that link identity, territory and territorialization processes, the analysis can focus briefly on the distinctive features of identity, or rather, on the aspects that characterise the interaction between identity and local-scale development processes.

The first observation on the peculiarities of territorial identity is about the dynamic connotation. Identity is not a static phenomenon but a dynamic one, as it is the result of the continuous interaction between a given community and its relational space. This does not deny the range of identity values that are rooted in time and space; this rather highlights the risks of a crystallization of historical identity, especially when these are suggested as regulating criteria for the present and planning references for the future.

Territorial identity has two key featuring aspects: it is the result of a mechanism of interaction in which identity plays the role of cause and effect of territorial dynamics; it is also interactive because it can establish a synergic relation with other territorial phenomena (Crosta, 1988)<sup>2</sup>.

As regards the local relationship between development and identity, the *structuring* character of identity is also very significant. This represents identity's power to produce *sense*, orientating collective actions and territorialization processes. As Governa (1997) rightly observes, in autopoietic systems identity is expressed in self-organization. This feature should drive the discussion to the role that identity can play within local development processes. Territorial identity can be interpreted as sense of belonging, social identification, shared representation of a collective *self*, but it cannot be identified in a *short-sighted* way in its exterior manifestation, in the signs it has left in the territory<sup>3</sup>. Territorial identity is what is hidden behind those signs and what gives sense to them. In fact, political action should aim at preserving not only identity expressions of local culture, but also the (identity) values that such expressions have molded.

Finally, (even though the list cannot certainly be exhaustive) identity is *reflexive* (recognition), *compound* and *oriented* (Cerutti, 1996). Identity's *reflexive* nature comes from an identification process that originates from the local community; it is expressed in the recognition of the difference from the surrounding geography to which the local community attributes its lived space. Identity is also *compound*, as all identity constructions are necessarily complex and contradictory due to the contrasts that lay at the heart of such constructions. The act of territorialization itself is always the result of a competition between different values and expectations that live in the same social space<sup>4</sup>. Identity is also *oriented* because it produces 'sense' and it leads the territorial system in its unceasing evolutionary process. This orientating function is one of the most interesting features of territorial identity, as precisely through this function it is possible to explain the role identity plays in local-scale endogenous development processes. A strong territorial identity is not only a great contribution for endogenous and self-centered development but it can also predetermine objectives and strategies. The apparent contradiction in terminology between the concept of identity and that of development may lead to some observations; identity is perceived as a static conceptual entity, both in synchronic and diachronic terms, while development is dynamic by definition. How can identity become a source for change? In fact, as it has already been proved, identity is dynamic, it changes in time as well as all other territorial components and the territory itself. Identity is highly variable, both in time and space. Such variability tends to be higher in the temporal dimension than in the spatial one. These observations cast a light on the relationship between identity and territorial innovation despite the contradiction in terminology. Territorial identity can contribute to the development and the implementation of local-scale innovation processes. Territorial innovation is successful when it is the result of choices shared by the local community and the authorities that govern the territory. This happens when there is a strong identity sense, a common feeling (empathy) that comes from a cultural sedimentation that is expressed directly by the territory. The implementation of the

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<sup>2</sup> As Raffstein observes in a recent essay on *Images and territorial identities*, "identity is a process in which space, time, work and memory are fundamental elements" (2003, p. 5). He claims that "there is not *one* identity, but a chain of identities", highlighting one of the main problems of geographic reflections on places' identity. See Crosta (1988) for the *procedural* aspects of territorial identity.

<sup>3</sup> Too often the intent for the preservation of territorial identity is translated into the 'museological' preservation of the forms that cultural identity has produced in time. Sepaking of "structural invariants" of the territory, Magnaghi highlights that these are not "forms to respect" but "relational rules" (2003, p.17). Probably a more adequate approach would be that of combining the respect of forms and the enhancement of ethical and behavioural grounds which represent communities' identity matrix.

<sup>4</sup> Two forms of competitions can be considered as key factors in the territorialization process: the competition between territories that is usually followed by processes of emulation/differentiation, whose territorializing or de-territorializing effects are at the core of geographic reflections; and the internal competition for the use of land (D'Aponte, 1994). In this respect, Magnaghi observes that is a place's statute is founded on a constitutional pact between the local actors, the reference scenario, "the representation of a possible future is the result of the expression of different representations of interests and of conflicting representations" (2003, p.19).

change itself requires the participation of culturally different individuals driven by contrasting interests; in this phase, the joining value of the sense of belonging (social expression of territorial identity) can be crucial, and it can contribute to investing individuals with responsibility and stimulate their proactive behavior. The role played by identity in exogenous innovation processes is even more complex. When territorial identity does not provoke a closure to change (see *ultra*), it can favor the contextualization of innovative drives of an exogenous nature and the manifestation of local/global co-evolutionary processes. When this does not happen, innovation can determine the loss of some identity reference and the consequent manifestation of de-territorialization phenomena. Part of the geographic reflection has focused on the negative effects that can occur on the identity level as a consequence to the change that have been caused by exogenous innovation processes. Identity is regarded as a weak 'element' of the territorial system, which is particularly sensitive to changes provoked by external innovative factors.

Following the models of autopoiesis suggested by Maturana and Varela (1985 and 1987), external stimuli can determine some perturbation within the system, which keeps its own *identity* only in virtue of its ability to reproduce itself (Grasso, '98). Others instead deny this interpretation and assign territorial identity an active role in the *management* of innovative processes, ascribing to this territorial component the power to contribute to the selection and the adaptation of innovative drives coming from other territorial systems. In the light of the observations mentioned above, this second interpretation seems more popular, especially according to the explicative value that the concept of territorial identity acquires with reference to territorial innovation processes, and more in general with respect to the local-global relationship. In fact, identity is not only the 'object' of innovation, but it is also the 'subject' of innovation through a mechanism of selective appropriation of external stimuli. As it has been rightly observed, *identity* as a 'vertical value' is enriched of new contents through a process of innovative reinterpretation (Persi, 2000; Dai Prà 2000).

*Identity* must be necessarily interpreted as "a guide to planning action, as a profound mark of creative action, and also a hierarchy in the open universe of planning spaces, an orientation in the particular mobility that is typical of the movement of indefinite production of alternatives" (Doria, 2002, p.126). At a local scale it is necessary to avoid the establishment of merely self-referential behaviors and to favor the development of such socio-territorial conditions that lead to configurations that are open to change according to the model of *milieu innovateur*<sup>5</sup>. If places competitiveness is always linked to the ability to produce awareness, the goal should be that of promoting a mechanism of virtuous interaction between local actors that can produce awareness and root it according the model of *learning regions* (Conti, 2003).

Territorial identity cannot be identified in the objects that express it even if such collective identities can be analyzed and estimated through the nature, the function and the location of such objects. As a matter of fact, these objects are the representations – partial and contradictory – of the specificities of the local context and the system of values that produced them. Identity is expressed in the territorializing acts and through them it reveals itself. Moreover, the process of identification is usually founded on the assignment of a symbolic value to specific cultural emergencies or to the landscape. Therefore, there is a close relationship between geographic reality and territorial identity; this is a reciprocal relationship that has no predefined boundaries and no univocal interpretations. The geographic reality is for many aspects the expression of territorial identity, and at the same time it is one of the agents of changes in identity itself. In order to understand this statement, it is necessary to make reference to the relationship that links territorial reality (signifier), the representation of reality (signs) and the explanation of reality (signified) in the discussion on representation (cf. Vallega, 2001). Territorial identity, a 'narrative enterprise' as Turco (2003) claims, is an

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<sup>5</sup> In order to understand what elements can determine this attitude towards change, we can address the conditions that Governa pinpoints as distinctive features of *milieu innovateur* (Governa, 1997, p. 31):

- a unitary geographical space, formed by material and immaterial as well as a set of individual and collective actors;
- an organizational logic that addresses innovation and allows actors to use the resources of milieu;
- a specific cumulative learning skill that allows actors to change their behaviour according to the changes that happen in the external environment.

epistemological interpretation of local specificities. But if on one hand this interpretation is justified by the representation of reality (signs), on the other hand it affects the signifier as molding agent of territorial reality. Therefore, a stronger molding action of territorial identity implies a higher level of sharing of the local community's self-narration, or, as highlighted above, a more univocally accepted representation of reality.

At this stage a new element can be introduced into the discussion: the perception of identity values, or rather, the differences between *outsiders* and *insiders* in pinpointing and representing identity values. A local community tends to assign a symbolic value to some elements of the landscape, and it acknowledges such elements as a tangible expression of its own territorial identity. The assignment of these values is based on the image that the local community (*insider*) has of itself and its own territorial specificity, and consequently not always there is a correspondence with *outsiders'* perception. Moreover, the latter tend to develop reductive and biased representations of others' identity, with no regard to cultural distance and objective difficulties, which cannot be easily overcome without the suitable interpretative instruments. Nevertheless, precisely these 'moments' of collective identification allow the strengthening of territorial identity and they assign territorial identities a strategic role in local development processes. As Gottmann pinpointed, the set of these abstract symbols represents the iconography of the territory and it contributes to the construction and the preservation of the identity of a community (Gottmann, 1983).

If territorial identity changes in time, also the symbols of this identity change; sometimes this change is triggered by the representation that *outsiders* give of territory and its specificity. In particular circumstances, the local community can be gradually driven to adapting the perception of itself and its own cultural specificity, and changing its own iconography. This happens especially when the *outsiders* bear a dominant culture and local-scale development processes have a strong exogenous root. Tourist areas are probably the ones that experience more frequent and more evident processes of mystification of identity values. In these areas, the tourist demand favors the creation and the transformation of a tourist space, working as a destructuring factor of territory identity values. One of the consequences of the separation between image and tourist location is the frequent inversion of the relationship between the representation of reality and reality itself. The place gradually adapts to the image and it loses its own authenticity or, in extreme circumstances, it may lose its own territorial identity (Pollice, 2003). Nonetheless, whatever is the source of these images, (identity) images "do not possess any dynamism if there is no intersection with immediate community social benefits" (Raffestin, 2003, p.11). Very often the ideological mobilization of identity is related to identity images rather than identity itself. These 'manipulation' processes of places' identity justify the critical observations about the concept of identity and the value that it can acquire with regard to local development processes. One of the main critical observations about territorial identity is related to the mystification of identity values on behalf of the local community due to different reasons (from claiming autonomy to trade issues). Some closed forms of identity of purely territorial origins tend to emerge, which are based on the assumption of historically younger identities or artificial revivals of lost traditions (*invented communities*) as original features. As Hobsbawm's studies (1987) prove, occasionally some territorial contexts take possession of other communities' identity values, or rather they simply 'invent traditions'. After all, as Caldo observes, identity movement can be regarded as a common reply – or at least of local elites – to cultural stress (cf. Caldo, 1996, p. 287-288). The affirmation of a territorial identity can be interpreted as a 'local reaction' to the changes on the global sphere; it is a self-representation of the local community determined by the 'narrative situation'<sup>6</sup>.

Some sociological schools of phenomenological origin interpret these *identity movements* as a reaction to one of the many significant features of modernity, which is the multiplication of the forms of belonging and the indefinite production of codes and symbolic resources. The demand for a solid identity therefore leads to the search for solidity against identity fragmentation (Doria, 2002, p.123). The potential anomy that follows the loss of culture spurs a kind of reactivity that leads to assigning symbolic values to given spots of the territory (Caldo, 1994, p.16).

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<sup>6</sup> This makes reference to the concept of identity as a narrative achievement recently suggested by Turco (2003).

Some particularly interesting arguments (even if they are not supported by scientific evidence) regard the manipulation of territorial identities as an attempt to use such identities as a 'control strategy' on the territory. To Harvey (1993), a permanent and final draining of identity sense and *possibilities* is occurring. What is left is either an identity that is functional for global-scale standardization processes (self-labeling), or an identity that is grown for political purposes (nationalism, localisms). Following these observations, some deny the existence itself of territorial identity; for example Remotti states that identity is twice as fake, as its causal matrix is artificial and occult (2001).

## 2. The fundamental relationship between identity and development

As argued above, territorial identity is not an abstract concept but an essential component of places; it could be rather defined as the essence itself of a place, as it is around its identity matrix that the place is structured and distinguished from its geographic surrounding. These observations highlight the close relationship between the concept of territorial identity and the metaphor of *genius loci*; the latter can be considered as "the set of physical features, cultural messages and emotive sensations that make a place what it actually is by making it unique and different from any other place" (Artusi, 1996, p.3). The *genius loci* becomes the perceptive manifestation of territorial identity, a synthetic expression of both tangible and intangible aspects that form an identity. Precisely the existence of intangible elements urges a deeper reflection on identity's perceptive dimension. Within a given territorial context, phenomena such as sharing identity values (locally determined values) or social cohesion are usually based on a local community strong identity sense; but it is the common perception of a common identity matrix that generates these phenomena, not just the matrix itself. In fact, identity values are symbolic values that have been identified by the way the community perceives itself and its own specificity. In this respect, it is appropriate to underline the analogies with the concept of *sociotopia* suggested by Angelo Turco; *sociotopia* is defined by Turco as "a sphere of physical and symbolic interaction in which the subject... exercises and develops his own attitude to living with other subject of the territory, to live a land that he perceives as his own".

Such reflections are certainly not exhaustive but they explain why identity can be assigned two different values: a sentimental value, which is bound to the socio-territorial consequences that are locally determined by the presence of a strong identity sense; and a patrimonial value, which is linked to the economic and social value that can be expressed by identity and its elements. Indeed these are two deeply connected values which can influence local development. As a matter of fact, giving a sentimental value to identity does not deny its patrimonial value; this simply highlights that such value is the consequence of a sentimental investment on the featuring aspects of the place. The affection towards the landscape can be interpreted as the ultimate result of a process of sentimental investment (Dai Prà, 2000). But precisely this process strengthens the sense of belonging in the local community and it triggers the endogenous and self-centered development processes. Claval (1996) wrote that "the territory works as a support for identity feelings", and it is by virtue of these feelings that the territory can be transformed without losing its own cultural specifics. So, also the sentimental component of identity, even in a non direct way, can interact with the processes of local development.

Giving a patrimonial value to identity means regarding identity as a resource that is immediately able to affect local development. As a matter of fact, identity is often identified with that set of resources that any territorially organized community has, and which constitutes the endogenous potential for development (Sthor, 1984; Grasso, 1997). The reference is not just to tangible resources (the result of space territorialization, such as products or territory organization itself), but also to intangible resources, such as: entrepreneurial attitude, cultural level, collaboration spirit, behavioral ethics, aesthetic sensitivity. These resources constitute the socio-territorial base of endogenous development models and, in particular, the models of those local systems that draw their competitiveness from the close and virtuous link between the territorial dimension and the economic-productive one. As a matter of fact, the analysis of the competitive specificity of industrial districts has pinpointed the strategic role that local identity can play in building and reproducing such specificity. As it has already been argued, the productive specialization that

can be observed in district areas tends to last in time also because the local community identifies in it and reproduces it in individual and common actions. After all, the sense of belonging inhibits or restrains the centrifugal tendencies that tend to occur in such productive contexts. In this respect, Becattini himself highlights that the sense of belonging is exactly one of the most important territorial determinants of district's economic-productive configurations (2000). Beyond those district forms that represent great examples of endogenous development, and the relationship that usually links this and local identity, the observation should focus on a wider range of economic-territorial configurations in which the endogenous nature of development is realized in the economic and cultural promotion of local resources. Endogenous development means essentially a development that is based on the activation of those factors that represent the identity of a place. The activation of these resources must not be pre-arranged for the achievement of merely economical goals but it should aim to wider development purposes that could correspond to the realization of all the potentials of a place. It is necessary to remember that the preservation of identity values is an unavoidable condition for the promotion of a place, and it requires the maintenance of social, political and environmental balances that lay at the heart of identity feelings. Such reflections highlight the close relationship between endogenous development and sustainable development; after all, in order to implement Agenda 21 (on the local implementation of sustainable development principles), the promotion of endogenous potentials, the preservation of identity values and the direct involvement of local community are identified as fundamental moments of sustainability.

If these observations contribute to a better definition of development, the adjective 'local' needs further explanations. If one seeks a virtuous relationship between territorial identity and local development, the *local* element must be identified in a spatial sphere that features territoriality, i.e. a sphere that is characterized by a strong territorial specificity compared to the geographic context in which it is located. As a matter of fact, there is a reciprocal tie between identity and territory which cannot be absolutely ignored. Therefore, *local* is not a general reference to a predefined geographic scale (or in contrast to *global*), but rather, *local* should be regarded as a historical structure of interaction between a community and its lived space.

Besides, the concept of endogenous development itself leads to considering *local* not as a mere spatial category but as a territorial context that has its own specificity. As a matter of fact, in his reflections on territorial development, Conti states that identity sense represents one of the fundamental conditions for the manifestation and the consolidation of local-scale endogenous development processes (Conti, 1989). Endogenous development requires the presence of a political subjectivity that expresses the local community and that continually makes reference to the local community with respect to political actions. In brief, *local* is a "bearer of specificities" (Giusti, 1994) and basically it tends to be associated to the geographic concept of *place*, i.e. "a space with a distinctive character" (Norberg-Schulz, 1979).

Through this interpretative path, *local development* takes on a very specific meaning: with respect to geographic reality, local development acquires a descriptive and interpretative value even in some fundamental concept – for example, the constant reference to the *place* as subject and object of strategic choices made in the local sphere.

The discussion that has been developed up to this point would be simply a theoretical contribution on the issue of identity in local development processes if it would not try and identify the virtuous interactions that actually occur between identity and local-scale development. This is exactly the aim of the following sections. These are not a descriptive summary of a direct survey of local development experiences; they are rather a mere investigations of those connections between identity and development that have been quoted in researches and debates over the last decades.

*Identity and social values.* Territorial identity tends to strengthen the ruling power of locally shared ethical and behavioral values. Sometimes identity itself is founded on sharing these values that are perceived by the local community as a tangible expression of its own cultural specificity. On a socio-economical level, such values allow to improve the level of productive and commercial relationships, favoring the manifestation of those forms of competitive collaboration that represent the core of district economies.

*Identity and knowledge transfer.* Territorial identity contributes to improving the inter-generational transfer of knowledge, and in particular, of non-codified knowledge. As a matter of fact, there is a 'sentimental attachment' to locally determined knowledge and a stronger tendency to the exploitation of this cognitive heritage.

*Identity and sense of belonging.* This relationship represents probably the epitome of the virtuous interaction between territorial identity and local development. The sense of belonging glues the economic-territorial system and drives local actors to choose transnational and cooperative relationships within the local sphere. For example, in territorial local systems, the de-localization of those economical activities with a strong identity value is strongly opposed by the local community; the pressure exerted by the local community on local actors is more effective than in any other territorial context.

*Identity and self-reproduction.* A representative example of the way identity can interact with development dynamics in entrepreneurial local systems is represented by self-reproduction processes of district economies. Such processes are determined by the identification relationship that links typical productive activities and the territory. In order to have a virtuous link, it is necessary that the self-reproductive process is founded on a critical and innovative re-interpretation of models and productive branches. Otherwise, the above mentioned tendency would cause an implosion of the local economy.

*Identity and critical acquisition of external knowledge.* The autopoietic ability of local systems is profoundly linked to the possibility of creating introjection mechanisms of change that may allow a progressive and selective adaptation to external spurs. The development of these adaptation mechanisms is the result of a critical attitude towards external knowledge which often is founded precisely on the strong identity matrix of the local context. However, such a critical attitude should not be translated into a closure to change; it should become a proactive tendency towards change itself. A strong territorial identity allows the selection of endogenous innovations or the adaptation of such innovations to the specificities of the local context (innovation contextualization). This occurs because identity sense determines a critical attitude towards innovations – on one hand it slows down the adoption of such innovations, but on the other hand it allows local actors to adapt them the needs of the territory, avoiding to upset local balances.

*Identity and promotion of territorial resources.* Endogenous development is represented by local communities' ability to promoting the territory and, in particular, those non-ubiquitous resources that are both an element of differentiation and a competitive plus in local development strategies. The promotion of these resources is not determined only by the availability of relevant local competence, but also by the local community's sensitivity, which will be as permeating as the identity value that has been assigned to such resources. The cultural wealth of a territory is the matrix of the identity of places, and it represents the strategic and priority action line for local development. To Raffestin (2003, p.11) "the places of memory" can free identity if their implication is not an end in itself, but it is connected to new collective projects.

*Identity and policy.* The relationship between identity and policy is very strong and it is expressed in different forms, which cannot be simply listed. The most significant expression of such relationship is the mechanisms of political consent and plan sharing. A strong territorial identity tends to increase the level of consent within the political arena on local development issues, and it decreases the tendency to opportunist or ideological conducts. At a local scale, the adoption of an efficient model of *governance* will be easier depending on the level of identity feeling that permeates political conduct. Similarly, once development goals and strategies have been defined within the political arena, the local community takes possession of them through a model of active sharing that is represented by an actual and factual support for the realization of those goals.

*Identity and sustainability.* Identity feelings locally determine a sentimental attachment to landscape and cultural values of the territory; territory itself tends to be translated into a general attitude towards the preservation and the promotion of such values. Preservation is not addressed only to tangible aspects of the territory, but also to intangible ones, such as ethical and cultural values, and in general, to all the expressions of the specificity of a place. A strong territorial identity favors the growth of sustainable development models because sustainable

development is based on the promotion of local specificities: a larger community involvement corresponds to a more efficient the promotion. Moreover, the 'sustainability' of local development processes cannot be estimated in environmental terms only, but also in terms of economy and culture; in particular, cultural goals originate from the need for forms of economical and productive development that may be able to preserve local culture and relevant values, and that may adapt to local specificities and attitudes (territorial consistency).

### **3. Conclusions: the promotion of identity as a strategy for local promotion**

Territorial identity's driving force in terms of local development comes from the significance of identity values within the organization of space and social life. The synergic relationship between identity and development will occur only where there is a strong identity matrix and where identity values are rooted and shared. Otherwise, any promotion strategy for alleged local identities will not have any driving force and will become a mystification process of the territorial reality, with negative consequences both on development dynamics and on identity itself. The competitive orientation of productive systems is determined precisely by local identities, and the promotion of such identities often represents a strategy for the improvement of this orientation or the support of change processes (competitive re-orientation). The promotion of non existent identities or of identities that have lost their molding power, means *dis*-orientating local forces and addressing them towards development models that are as unsuitable as exogenous ones.

The observations about the suitability of a strategy that enhances identity sense rather than local identities are definitively different. The difference between these two strategic orientations is actually much wider than what one might perceive due to the closeness of their names. Building, spreading and strengthening the sense of belonging and territorial identification are fundamental aims of any local community, not simply for economical repercussions but for the positive effects that can occur on the social and environmental level. The development of economic and productive collaborative relationships, the preservation of environmental and cultural resources, and the integration of different social and ethnical components in a coherent and united community, are all goals that require the creation of an identity space, the creation of the *place*. As a matter of fact, with reference to the *rebirth of places*, Magnaghi states that such rebirth "requires a strong self-identification of the community that has settled, which takes possession of its own territory, identifying itself in the territory's history, environmental balance, cultural, economic, aesthetic and organizational values, in a growth process through the promotion of internal qualities" (Magnaghi, 1994 p.33).

Nevertheless, territorial identities are too often exploited by policy, for purposes that do not aim at the promotion of internal qualities or the development of a dialectical relationship with the global scale; political aims are unfortunately more limited, they tend to a closure towards change, to the crystallization of a system of privileges, and to the affirmation of a supremacy that comes from a self-reflective conduct: in general, to all those degenerative manifestations that are usually grouped under the term of *identity drift*.

Such distortions are as worrying as the loss of local identity is. Surely, current changes increase consent towards certain political conducts that risk to jeopardize the identities they were supposed to preserve. *Local* should not fight *global*, but they should co-exist: they are two complementary dimensions and certainly they cannot substitute each other.

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