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1. YOU ARE A GEOGRAPHER. WHAT KIND OF GEOGRAPHY DID YOU STUDY AND WHERE? WHAT ARE YOUR MAIN INTERESTS IN GEOGRAPHY? WHAT READING AND RESEARCH DO YOU DO?

From a metropolitan and territorial planning background developed in the School of Architecture, I chose to deepen research in Economic and Political Geography, and now I am a full professor of this subject as well as of Economy and territorial planning in the School of Economics at “Tor Vergata” University of Rome. My interests cover several fields of theoretical and applied socio-economic and sustainability research, including cohesive and competitive planning at different geographical scales. In particular, I have developed and patented a “4th generation” methodological approach to making strategic policy/programme plans applying Environmental Strategic Assessment (ESA) and Territorial Impact Assessment (TIA) at the regional and local “bottom-up” levels, using GIS (called STeMA). At the moment, as vice-president of the Italian National Geography Association (AGel), I support this integrated and active vision vs. a sectorial one, disseminating a new European art of geography.

2. AS ESPON CONTACT POINT FOR ITALY, WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE VALUE OF ESPON TO YOUR COUNTRY?

ESPON allows Italy to participate in the European space and territory, in all its territorial, socio-economic, environmental and cultural differences; but it could also permit us to integrate and use these differences cohesively and sustainably, maintaining and developing competitive potentials and updating and disseminating new methods, tools and praxis in order to make territorial policy a common good for the whole European Union.

Again, ESPON asks institutional users, policy makers, researchers, stakeholders, practitioners to be reliable, flexible and rigorous under the ESPON work programme, and this vision could help the Italian society to better appreciate the added value of European integration.

3. ITALY IS FAMOUSLY A COUNTRY WITH A MAJOR DIVIDE BETWEEN AN AFFLUENT NORTH AND A POOR RURAL SOUTH. WHAT DOES ‘TERRITORIAL COHESION’ MEAN IN ITALY TODAY?

My research^[1], using European cohesion indicators and synthetic indices, shows that development processes have different cultural and socio-economic speeds in Italy: with values in the whole of Southern Italy being half of those of North-East regions, while Central regions of Italy show intermediate values. For example, several indicators influence social cohesion: lower income distribution in Southern Italy compared to Northern Italy to different levels of services, higher social exclusion of children and higher poverty risk of population in the South. So, cohesion appears to be related to the positive growth of GDP in the North of Italy. Likewise, the Adriatic macro-region is particularly co-operative and able to present an independent cultural-economic model.

Higher levels of territorial cohesion, expressed as trans and intra-regional cooperation and local capability to develop economic, social, cultural endogenous models, are achieved by the regions of the North-West and North-East arc. In contrast, Southern Italy appears isolated and not able to enhance its territorial capital and reciprocity and provision of good public value.

4. MUCH OF THE NORTH OF ITALY IS AN URBANISED COUNTRYSIDE WITH A LOT OF RIBBON DEVELOPMENT AND URBAN SPRAWL. DOES THIS HAPPEN BECAUSE OF PLANS OR DESPITE WHAT IS IN PLANS?

Empirical evidence shows that economic investments are at the basis of “3rd generation” strategic plans. In the North of Italy, plans have strictly local relevance, aimed at promoting local jobs, increases in gross local product and the dissemination and transfer of knowledge (i.e., technological and managerial know-how) through local planning choices.

The morphological pattern of urbanization (ribbon development or periurbanisation) is mainly related to the crucial influence of entrepreneurship on localisation choices and planning (the presence of innovative factors, the consistency and composition of internal market, the nature of local competition, and the existence of integrated productive networks). Urban sprawl is related on one hand to the inadequacy of local plans to manage non local socio-economic territorial dynamics; on other hand it is related to both local government fiscal needs and the new life-style of households.

5. THE ITALIAN URBAN SYSTEM IS VERY POLYCENTRIC. HOW WELL DOES THIS WORK? DO PEOPLE TRAVEL FROM ONE CITY TO WORK IN ANOTHER? DOES THE URBAN SYSTEM OF THE PO VALLEY COUNTER-BALANCE THE POWER AND INFLUENCE OF ROMA AS THE CAPITAL CITY?

Italian polycentrism has got different characters in the North and Capital regions, encouraging critical reflections on the definition of polycentrism in Italy. Some key territorial research results at the sub-regional scale have clarified that the Po Valley macro region is a polycentric area oriented by a competitive market which uses internal and differentiated development factors (intra and inter-regional mobility included), with respect to *g/local* socio-economic rules (governance).

In contrast, the territorial dimension of polycentrism in the Capital area is more local and localised; this is the result of a long period of blind cultural, political, and administrative government.

Analysing polycentrism at the regional and sub-regional levels, the Po Valley macro region confirms the substantial role of places networks, both subsidiary and inter-dependent, as alternatives to a monocentric focus on the big metropolises, capital, medium- and small-sized cities. These places networks could fulfill the integration of the rural environment, without disregarding the issue of urbanisation.

In Italy, polycentric conceptualisation involves urban systems and towns (urban capital stocks), the metropolitan regional network system, strategic central places, integrated productive areas and Industrial Districts, and mountain areas regeneration. In order to realize the polycentric vision, the Po Valley macro region (through the Adria Po Valley Development Agreement) proposes urban central places as the “backbone” able to organise this objective. In this model, the city is the engine of future development in relation to the economic system.

6. WHAT ARE THE ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES THAT ITALY FACES? HOW IS IT TACKLING THEM?

Italy shows a vulnerability of whole landscapes in regard to hydrological and geological risks as well as generally bad environmental conditions in densely urbanized areas affecting quality of life.

Italy is active on two main fronts: the policy effort to face climate change, including new energy choices and related technologies that improve quality of life; and integrated urban regeneration and its strategic potential for a sustainable and inclusive urban development of European cities (New Lipsia Charter and Toledo Declaration of Ministries of the Spatial Planning, 2010). This implies active engagement in the development of the “Europe 2020” Strategy and creation of new economic sustainable development and competitiveness (A New Lisbon Strategy) to respond to the effects of global crisis.

[1] Prezioso M. (ed) (2006), *Research on territorial cohesion indicators for monitoring 2007-2013 programmes - Italy*, Roma, CEIS-Min. Infrastrutture; ID (a cura di) (2007), *Competitività e sostenibilità: la dimensione territoriale nell'attuazione dei processi di Lisbona/Gothenburg nelle regioni e nelle province italiane*, *GEOTEMA*, 31-32, 2007, pp. 3-154; ID. (2008), *Cohesion policy: methodology and indicators towards common approach*, in *Romanian Journal of Regional Science*, 2, pp. 1-32