THE INTERREGIONAL TABLE FOR SUSTAINABLE TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE PADAN-ALPINE-MARITIME AREA.

THE PADAN–ALPINE–MARITIME AREA, GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE AND TERRITORIAL SYSTEM

It’s well known that the cooperation among multiple administrative and territorial systems at a macro-regional scale and the consequent adoption of suitable urban, territorial and infrastructure policies, may turn into a new factor of development, integration and territorial cohesion; in these cases, policies and strategies of diverse regions need to find a new trans-regional dimension able to go beyond both the administrative boundaries and the localism of different policies and strategic choices.

The understanding of this opportunity is the first step of a “roadmap” that surely has to be based on a common comprehension of territorial, economic and social capital of different regions and with the awareness that the sharing of common strategies and objectives give new development opportunities.

Among the various territories that show shared features with the macro-region concept there is the North of Italy. This area is made up of 7 Regions and 2 Autonomous Provinces (Valle d'Aosta Autonomous Region, Piemonte Region, Lombardia Region, Liguria Region, Emilia-Romagna Region, Veneto Region, Friuli Venezia Giulia Autonomous Region, Bolzano Autonomous Province and Trento Autonomous Province), it has a surface of 120.000 sq. km and 27 millions of inhabitants that produce 54% of the Italian GDP and more than 70% of Italian exportations. The area is crossed by three European transport corridors/axis (TEN) integrated with the motorways of the Sea of South-East and South-West Europe. It has 4 of the 6 Italian MEGAs (Milan, Turin, Bologna and Genoa) and 5 of the 11 Italian ports included within the 57 European principal ports (Genoa, Savona, La Spezia, Venice and Trieste).

Also looking at the European Territorial Cooperation, the Padan-Alpine-Maritime area shows unique peculiarities with respect to the European regional context, indeed various Northern Italian Regions are involved in several European Cooperation Programs: Transnational (Alpine Space, Central Europe, South East Europe, Med), Crossborder (Italy –France Alcotra, Italy –Switzerland, Italy - Austria, Italy - Slovenia, Italy – France Maritime), and within the CBC (Cross Border Cooperation) ENPI CBCMED and IPA Adriatic; this aspect constitutes an added value for the financing of cooperation initiatives for local development projects.
However, neither the National government nor the regions and provinces have elaborated a strategic vision of the whole area until now, but there are solid grounds to elaborate an integrated vision of Northern Italy economic and territorial system.

The main consideration concerns the role that this macro-area, together with few other European areas, can play in the polycentric development of Europe, that is a role of connection, integration, and balance. This is a crucial point, because our future depends on the ability to create an integrated and cohesive Europe on territorial and productive field as well as on social and cultural field; and moreover to make a Europe open to people and cultures coming from Southern and Eastern borders.

This area can play this role for two main reasons:

- for its geographic position, in the crossway of important East-West and North-South corridors, it’s integral part of continental Europe and at the same time it overlooks at the Tyrrhenian and Adriatic seas;
- for its production system highly integrated with the one of Central-Western Europe and for the relational system of its cities, enterprises and universities in the Mediterranean and in the Central-Eastern Europe.

In order to allow the macro-area to play this role, it’s necessary to enhance the integration of the territories to improve their capacity to face the competitiveness challenge in the globalized framework. In this sense, we think that the future of the macro-area has to be based on the correlation of functions and on the sharing of common objectives to avoid the competition among different regional territories and metropolitan areas.

The current competitive scenario requires participation in the networks of knowledge, ability to attract human and financial resources, project ideas, international profile.

Given the undoubted benefits of a polycentric urban structure, the solution can only be the construction of a large supra-regional system through a real integration between the different territorial policies, urban polarities, and production, services and research points of excellence; a very complex network, which is a node of other larger networks.

Cohesion and internal synergies on one side, and also the need of getting the recognition from Europe for the weight of the regional macro-area as a whole, which aims to rebalance Europe with respect to West-Central Europe, to the development and greater integration of Southern Europe and the Mediterranean basin.

Some problems shared by the Northern regions and provinces of Italy are an additional reason that shows the need to build a general overview. These problems include among the others the critical environmental conditions, the over-exploitation of the territory, which makes it difficult to develop any new infrastructure policies and further it requires recovery and requalification measures, and the excessive and disorderly sprawl in many parts of the territory.

To understand the territorial capital of this area is necessary a correct reading of the entire geographical area in relation to the European context.

One of the most common expression of the European Spatial Planning locates in Western and Central Europe an area that, for its political and economic weight, income, and capacity to influence the rest of the territory, can be considered the heart the continent. This area, called "Pentagon" in the spatial research jargon, is ideally included between the cities of London, Paris, Milan, Monaco and Hamburg.

Many of the documents dealing with a polycentric balance of the European territory, primarily the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), refer to this area as the core of rebalancing policies. In other studies, this area plays the role of integration in favour of EU as a whole (Global Integration Zone - GIZ).
We believe that many indicators show that the whole Padan-Alpine-Maritime region forms the southern side of the "Pentagon", albeit with the different emphases and issues as we move away from the city of Milan.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that initiatives oriented to the discussion and cooperation between regions are aligned with one of the main objectives of the new Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020, approved last 20 May by the Ministers of the Member States. In fact, the main goal of the planning document is to ensure a balanced development throughout the community, giving voice to the needs of specific local contexts, because only by highlighting the characteristics and the needs of each specific region, the territorial cohesion will be achieved.

Such a bottom up approach will offer a more targeted support, create numerous opportunities for cooperation between areas with similar problems, facilitate the financing and the success of new projects for reducing economic disparities within a region or a single urban area and thus encourage the pursuit of the overall European territorial cohesion.

The contribution of the Northern Italy regions and provinces towards integrating and improving territorial cohesion will be more effective and incisive as the Padan-Alpine-Maritime area will identify and therefore introduce united and integrated, sharing a common spatial and territorial vision and a shared goal of sustainable development.

A COMMON VISION – BIRTH AND AIMS OF THE INTERREGIONAL TABLE

The Interregional Table for sustainable territorial development of the Padan–Alpine–Maritime area was born in 2007 with the signing of the Venice Chart by the regional Territorial Development Ministers of Northern Italy.

The Table is the only Italian example of interregional cooperation that arises as a "voluntary" experience of technical and political cooperation between different regions and provinces rather than a requirement not strictly aimed at the participation in programs or objectives of the European programming.

The overall objective of the Table is to elaborate a common representation of the whole area identifying a system of coherences and to promote the competitiveness of the territories involved, in the framework of European development context, with a multi-regional scale vision.

For its peculiarities and potentials, despite the area is completely contained in one State only, the Interregional Table considers its own area as a macro-area that can play a strategic role in the relationships among the central Europe “core”, the Mediterranean, the east and, through Suez canal, the far east (Cina e India in primis).

The Interregional Table activity concerned the cooperation among institutions to face common problems with joint policies and to share a strategic vision of the whole area. In particular, with the aim to combine territorial cohesion, competitiveness and sustainable development, the activities have been carried out with a place based approach characterized by:

- valorisation of polycentric system considering the cities as nodes of networks at different scales, where the global city regions are nodes of global networks and jointly play the role of gateways between these networks and the local economies;
- promotion of intersectoral integration through the acknowledgement of the territory as platform where all policies have an impact;
- promotion of multilevel governance to go beyond the administrative boundaries and be able to face the problems in effective way at the most suitable scale.
PRODUCTS AND RESULTS

The Table is supported by a technical work-group composed of regional and provincial responsible for territorial plans that, since 2007, has met regularly to share tools and a working method based on substance and efficiency, referring to proven planning experiences and the specific nature of the territories of the Padan-Alpine-Maritime area, and promoting several activities on different relevant topics on spatial planning:

- to exchange of knowledge about local policies and best practices in the development of spatial planning actions and tools;
- to develop shared visions that have been incorporated in the regional planning documents which are being updated;
- to implementation synergies for European cooperation projects that start from the recognition of shared needs;
- to promote discussion tables related to the theme of water resources, ecological networks, infrastructure nodes.

The ongoing dialogue carried out by the technical work-group has allowed the development of a common language that facilitated inter-institutional relations and overcome the organizational differences of the respective administrations.

Europe has always been the common reference to both policies and studies. In particular, the ESPON approach, methodologies and territorial analysis have provided a sound basis for the studies developed by the various regions and provinces of the Table and their inter-regional coordination has been progressively integrated and improved in order to better adapt to the regional level.

One of the main result achieved until now by the Interregional Table concerns the elaboration of three maps of the macro-area:

- one represents the system of urban polarity which incorporates the identification of FUAs and MEGA (Functional Urban Area) recalculated using the same ESPON methodology, and updated data (data-based of 2001);
- one represents the infrastructure networks;
- one represents the system of ecological structures.
SYSTEM OF ECOLOGICAL STRUCTURES

All these maps have been included in the Territorial Plans – approved or in phase of elaboration – of all institutions involved in the Table activities.

In addition, the maps share a cross-sectoral and integrated planning approach that goes beyond the administrative aspects, and a vision of spatial development which, focusing on the different regional situations, aims to exploit local peculiarities.

In fact, the territory is seen as a set of social, economic and environmental resources, that is in terms of sustainability and cohesion.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

On October 12, 2010 the Interregional Table met in Genoa to renew the commitment to cooperation and set the prospects with a new program of activities. Given the economic crisis that has characterized the recent years, it becomes increasingly necessary to invest on the characteristics and peculiarity of the entire area, that is to implement the European agenda towards a greater territorial cohesion, taking into account the needs of our territories.

The activities will focus on the five following themes:

1. The European dimension.

The European Union has placed at the centre of its development policies both the dialogue between the Member States, and the regional dimension together with the territorial cohesion and cooperation, by identifying the valorisation of sustainable development as an element of global competitiveness.

The aim of the Table is to promote the territorial area of the regions in Northern Italy, as the most important aggregation of European regions on the Mediterranean basin, by emphasizing their economic and functional potential, not yet sufficiently recognized nor in the international
cooperation nor in the activities as individual regions. Through the cooperation started with the
Interregional Table, it is possible to maximize the potential of each region, improve the quality and
efficiency of the Padan–Alpine–Maritime area, promote the macro-region in the European scenario
by highlighting the great territorial capital, and make an important contribution for a new growth of
the country.

2. Sharing of regional policies for territory and landscape.
The activities of the Interregional Table aimed at defining common strategies and objectives for the
recognition of the importance of the Padan-Alpine-Maritime area in the European and national
level, start from the research for convergence of national policies for the government of the territory
and landscape. The Table actively searches and supports shared positions:

- In the implementation or proposals to amend the national legislation on landscape.
- In the territorial government, to ensure a more certain legal status to innovations already
  introduced at regional level with regard to planning tools, equalization methods and
  practices of territorial governance.

3. The coordination in strategic planning.
The territory is the multi-dimensional space where geography, history, culture, identity of the
people, skills and vocations met. The territory is not only a physical support, but it is above all the
set of economic, social and environmental issues that cross and shape it.

In order to govern the increasing relations involving the Padan-Alpine-Maritime area, are necessary
a common vision and a strategic planning of a wide area, which holds together development,
environment, landscape, location of large infrastructure and functions, setting shared rules that
ensure an efficient use of the resources.

It is from the use (or irrational use) of soil and the dissipation of natural resources that arises the
need to deepen their common themes of land use planning to achieve a shared vision of sustainable
development. In Italy, in fact, there are no data collection and methods on the use of land
sufficiently shared and reliable, that enable a monitoring and interregional discussion; although
several studies are pursuing different objectives, from the 'complaint' to the academic research, it is
difficult to use them for the activities of the government of the territory, and hence for the definition
of policies for controlling the phenomenon.
Moreover, one of the technical work of the Table is the analysis of the phenomenon of "soil
consumption" with a supra-regional reading, wide area, to understand the definition of policies
aimed to define and delineate a different model of spatial development.
This action gives birth to the construction of a mosaic of land use databases for the entire macrho-
area, the identification of a common glossary and a set of shared indicators for the analysis of
variation in the use of soil and comparison of best practices and criteria to prevent, contain and
reduce the irrational use of soil.
4. The construction of a map of the identity of the territory.

The landscape heritage is one of the key elements of the territorial capital of each regional area and is a precondition and fundamental factor in its development process; its protection, enhancement and planning are a theme to be developed within the activities of Table. This activity will start on the shared definition of the identity of the Padan-Alpine-Maritime area, taking into account the principles of the European Landscape Convention, representing the landscapes of each region / province in a recognized, acknowledged and shared map.

The regional and local authorities commit to promote coherent policies to protect, restore and enhance the landscape contexts that are synthetically represented in the map, and further to build a more effective relationship with the central government. Finally, they search for convergence in policies for the territory and the landscape, bringing also the Strategic Environmental Assessment to the same consistency and awareness.

5. The dissemination of good practices.

The general objective of the Interregional Table is the dissemination of knowledge of "best practices" and the development of shared reflection as the main instrument to make effective and practical the territorial vision of the Padan-Alpine-Maritime area. "Best practices" may also represent an opportunity for future collaborations between local actors, encouraging the construction of regional macro-networks.

The first comparison was launched on regional regulations, planning tools and policies on the consumption of soil and landscape, with the aim of highlighting as shared heritage the best regional experiences and identifying any critical issues.