

**Development, territories, institutions through *immediacy* and *mediation*. Rethinking
middle cities in Italy**

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Abstract

The connection between territorial development and middle cities constitutes an unexplored context, although the crucial role of the cities and the city systems for politics of regional development has been recognized, in Italy, in the National Strategic Framework 2007-2013, in the field of the European Structural Funds.

The notion of *averageness* deals with boundaries (territorial, operational, disciplinary, administrative). Borders constitute both “spaces” and “places”. They are historically embedded and context-specific. So what does the category *middle city* imply for territorial development policies in Italy (and in Europe)?

The contribution faces three topics. The first is the notion of *averageness* employed like a tool to interpret and to rethink the middle cities.

The *averageness*, is an attribute of a relational nature, thus through an exploration of different literatures, I argue that distinctive dimensions (slowness, exclusion, proximity) of the middle city depend on different kinds of categories (time, space, growth, power). I argue that, in the interpretations of most urban sociologists, it is not definitively deciphered the spatial construction and the territoriality (the justifications of the selection of the boundaries) of the concept of European middle cities.

The second issue: I suggest questions about a “lost mediation”: the role and notion of land in development policies.

At the end of the paper I propose a third topic: *averageness* like institutional metaphor, the reference to the societies of *immediacy* and the evolution of the *intermediate* institutions constitutes useful devices to operate a vital conceptual turn of *development*, in particular beyond territorial and urban competitiveness.

Key words:

Middle cities, boundaries, territorial development, institutions, public action.

Introduction. Play upon words

What does the middle city category actually mean? What I intend to do is to single out some issues which can be used to discuss this question, and subsequently identify which of them could be applicable to the feasible future development territorial policies. In Europe there are several network that involve middle cities¹, but the same European Union doesn't recognise the potentialities of the role of middle cities in economic development.

Just for a simplicity I shall use the notion of city like *collective actor*. As numerous studies confirm (Le Galès, 2002; Perulli, 2007), the issue of the collective actor, and the tendency to reify the concept of the city, are old problems of the social sciences.

The paper is built on a play upon words: average, middle, medium, mediation, immediacy, all similar in Italian language. The work consists in three topics and is divided into three paragraphs. In the first paragraph the notion of "averageness" is used as a heuristic tool to interpret the specific characteristics of the average city whatever the administrative boundaries. After all, it is difficult to construct an analytical theory because on one hand, except in the case of some exceptions, there is no structured research that has concentrated its efforts on the middle city and, on the other hand, many ambiguities arise upon consulting such data. The second paragraph is dedicated to something we are greatly lacking: development policy and the mediation of the land (particularly in an middle urban context).

The potential of averageness as an institutional metaphor and the policy perspectives for the middle cities, in Italy but also in Europe, constitute the topics dealt with in the third paragraph. Given the uncertain picture, it is necessary to try to recompose the fragments and to detect some possibilities for territorial development policies.

1. Averageness

Is the notion of averageness so taken for granted in the *koiné dialectos* of planners and in urban literature or does it create a problem?

Dwelling on the meanings and the interpretations of the term is by no means a banal enterprise, It is clear that the intention to investigate the meanings of the notion of middle cities doesn't coincide with the pretence of being able to rediscover an irrefutable identity, it somewhat helps however to identify

¹ In Great Britain there is the association of eight cities named *Core Cities* (260.000 - 950.000 inhabitants). See ODPM (2004a, 2004b). In France there is the association named *Villes Moyenne* that involves 140 cities through 20.000 - 100.000 inhabitants (Federation des maires des villes moyenne, 2006).

feasible reasonings; for example it allows one to highlight crucial aspects of the city/authority connection in governance network and the perspectives of territorial and urban policies.

Averageness in Aristotle's ethical doctrine (*Etica Nicomachea*), constitutes the correct mean (between excess and defect) achievable between two extreme terms, it is the condition of what has an intermediary condition. Average is what stays in the middle – a mean; that corresponds to the intermediary value of various sizes.

Middle in a syllogism, represents the term of the three terms used to relate the greatest and smallest; accordingly it is common to the two premises and eliminated by the conclusion. Middle is the term between another two terms and is the compromise between two solutions (*Società Francese di Filosofia*, 1980). Centre is the midpoint between two objects, and in particular what is found in the middle is at an equal distance from both ends, or in the centre of a drawing.

The meaning of immediate is also interesting for our purpose and objectives: in contrast to mediate, it describes all relations or actions where two present terms are compared without there being a third mediate or intermediary term.

To conclude let's discuss the meaning of average: it corresponds to the quotient obtained by dividing the total sum of a series of figures by the number of these figures.

If the attribute average is a ratio, then the concept of an middle city only acquires a meaning if the elements are defined in comparison to what they are in the centre of².

1.1. Slowness, exclusion, proximity, predictability

Even if a transdisciplinary orientation is used in the declination inspired by Hirschman (1981), the possibility to identify authors and research on middle cities is extremely rare, whether we refer to the theoretical or empirical literature, which make explicit reference to the category of “averageness³.”

If temporal categories are adopted, the distinctive dimensions of urban averageness, mainly consists in slowness⁴, if the categories of “power” are assumed then the average city is referred to using the exclusion from itineraries as fordism development, if spatial and temporal categories are adopted, then proximity comes into play.

² Perulli (2007) states that the relational culture in cities is described in 1940 by Simone Weil (1987) when he quotes *metaxy*, a Greek word meaning “average”.

³ A recent publication that investigates the evolutions and history of contemporary cities, uses analytical tools and key words and never mentions the expression average city as a category of investigation (Perulli, 2007). At an empirical level the first important research at a community level on a “typical average city” is Middletown (Lynd, Lynd, 1929), elaborated at the beginnings of the twenties in the XX century, in a town in Indiana with thirty thousand inhabitants. The unexpected success of the book encouraged the researchers to return following the great depression in the thirties (Lynd, Lynd, 1937). In Italy “typical” middle cities (in terms of economics and dimensional criteria) are several: Siena, Bolzano, Padova, Pavia, Brescia, Monza, Mantua, Lecce, etc.

⁴ A monographic issue of the Italian journal called *Territorio* was dedicated to slow territories (2005, n. 34).

Small centres is the definition proposed by an Italian planner Bernardo Secchi to refer to something that excludes both the villages and small areas which are clearly part of metropolitan outskirts or a vast urbanisation (Secchi 1989). This does not refer simply to demographic dimensions, but it refers to small cities excluded from large-scale phenomenon of new activities and populations, whose growth is rooted in a slow immigration from the surrounding territories, in the transformation of traditional activities, rather than in the appearance of large industrial complexes. Small centres are characterised by scarce requirements, but also by intense demand and they force the planners to pay attention to rules⁵ rather than to sizing or forecasts.

Giuseppe De Rita, a sociologist, discusses slowness with great intuition in a report entitled “Social settlement and the middle class: a dissimilar evolution” (Bonomi, Cacciari, De Rita 2004). De Rita introduces expressions such as “middle class propensity” (propensity towards the suburbs), “middle class migration ” which alludes to the disposition of living in small sized centres, in an attempt to search for a quality of life of a limited segment of the Italian middle class which is attracted by increasingly refined tastes. De Rita also approaches a second phenomenon which is defined in the verses of a poem by Mario Luzi: “the long return to the chrism”, through which he attempts to show how members of Italian society have not succeeded in becoming middle class but have simply become villagers. This process is strictly related to the creation of territorial social capital, to the reinvention of a local context, with rooting practices⁶.

Small metropolitan areas refer to a category which was introduced to the field of urban literature in a text which includes a view on the distinctive aspects of intermediary landscapes (Barbieri 2003). In small metropolitan areas it is possible to capture that particular type of distance that is referred to as proximity. This includes another relationship between cities and the countryside: the countryside is adjacent. Not only with regards to space, because the proximity can also be captured in time, in one’s memory and it is expressed in the habits of the people who conduct a rural existence⁷.

Barbieri returns to the literal meaning, that describes on one hand what is located in the distance between two different polarities, between the city and the natural environment. But also, in more

⁵ When referring to “rules” Secchi affirms that “it is something that not only involves the physical aspect of built-up space, but also the processes of its construction and the subjects that promote it (...) a rule is something weaker than a theory: it doesn't have foundations, but originates, genetically, from a series of elements and events, it has a specific character, which is not universal, it belongs to a place, not to an era” (p. 68, Secchi, 1989). For further precise contemplation of the issue regarding the prescriptive dimension of territorial planning, also in relation to the issue of the effectiveness of public action, please see the texts by Moroni (1999; 2007).

⁶ “In other words it is essential for me to emphasise that one has to understand the profound change in the composition of classes in the villagers culture and the tendency to rediscover territorial identity rather than the identities of the classes that reigned in the previous decades” (p. 60-61, Bonomi, Cacciari, De Rita, 2004). These intuitions effectively create problems for averageness, whilst the conclusions reached in a publication by Censis (2004) on the Italian cities in movement seem to be far too consolatory and mainstream.

⁷ “Proximity expresses the idea of a distinction, but at the same time a familiarity with things. The other person is one’s fellowman. Different but originally made of the same substance” (p. 44, Barbieri, 2003).

general terms, he describes the interference between different opposite couples: built-up and green areas, compact and open. Intermediate also suggests a chemical-physical phase between two different conditions of substance, a phase consisting in a hybrid and porous substance which therefore brings to life this condition of transition.

A notion which, in a problematic way, introduces new analytical categories, essential especially in those territories of diffusion, where there has been a lack of efficacy in the traditional descriptions and representations, and which was introduced at a national level by the Italian research entitled *Itaten* (Clementi, Dematteis, Palermo, 1996). The notion refers to “local settlement environments”, that interlaces the wide-scale environmental scenes with the settlement and social structures which have scales of detail which could also constitute a useful key to interpreting the issues regarding average cities. In brief, settlement environments refer to the structure of the relationships which exist among environmental scenes, territorial matrixes, social structures, settlement structures.

It is also possible to investigate the dimension of averageness intended as normality and predictability. This interpretation is also explored by Jane Jacobs in her text in 1961 *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (Jacobs 2000). The vitality of the great cities depends on the quantity of unexpected elements, far from average and referring to small quantities, Jacobs sustains. This “deviation from average” can be of many different natures (material, economic, cultural, social). The elements which deviate from average are essential to urban vitality; besides they are also important as forms of evidence. These forms of evidence, in fact, are the only detectors which record the way in which different “large quantities” function (or don't succeed in functioning) in relation to one another. This aspect approaches us to the idea of a city as a place of cultural innovation, of serendipity (Bagnasco 1994): the place where something is found whilst looking for another (Hannerz 1992).

If we use uncertainty as an interpretative category, averageness is the just mean between the unexpected deviance from “average” pointed out by Jacobs and the production of locations indicated by an ethnograph such as Appadurai (1996). An issue that takes a new approach to space and the symbolic or narrative production, that supports its cultural exploitation, is the central element of the contribution given by Appadurai. He also introduces a different meaning of locations which relates to the need for predictability, security, certainty⁸.

⁸ “Much local knowledge is in fact the knowledge on how to produce and reproduce locality in conditions of insecurity, entropy, social weariness, ecological uncertainty and cosmic fragility, (...) Local knowledge relates to the production of reliable local subjects and at the same time the production of reliable neighbourhoods within which such subjects can be recognised and organised.” (p. 234, 235, Appadurai, 1996). The author outlines the meaning of locality “in its relational and contextual aspects, rather than scaled and spatial” (p. 231, Appadurai, 1996).

1.2. Mésos. Average cities and middle classes

An interesting explanation of the construction of a middle city can be found in many geographical studies and, in particular, those by Farinelli (1984, 2003), who, in respect to the history of the urbanisation in Emilia along Via Emilia, creates the expression 'mesopolis'. Mesopolis describes a collection of average cities, because the term *mésos*, was already used by Erodoto to express the notion of centrality, of isonomy, that is the absence of dominion, even before being used as a mean condition; none of the centres in Emilia in fact prevails over the others, and as Farinelli declare, even the arrival of the railroad did not succeed in imposing a hierarchical relationship between Bologna and the other cities in the Emilia Romagna region.

In the field of urban sociology the explicit studies on middle cities are related in Weber tradition. The perspective of Max Weber is fundamental because he is the first author to draw an analysis model of local societies and cities as social structures, considering the economic, political, cultural dimensions and interpreting them as places of aggregation and representation of different groups of interests.

Starting from the connection between middle classes/average cities (Bagnasco, Negri 2004) it is possible to identify two types of middle cities where actors who define their own perspectives according to their own middle class position are able to direct the choices of local society⁹. Following the typology individualized by Max Weber (1922), average manufacturing cities and average consumer cities are hence described. The average manufacturing cities are industrial and business centres characterized by small businesses, for instance the industrial districts in which the entire society is mobilized towards wide-scale economic development due to the impulse produced by small entrepreneurs and artisans in the middle classes¹⁰.

In France the growth of the "learned earning middle classes", which refer to average industry, to the organization of commerce and the extension of state administrative bureaucracies, has encouraged the development of average consumer cities. The demanding behaviour of these middle classes concentrate on after-work and life styles¹¹. Oberti (2000) following in this conceptual line of thought, starts with an observation on four perspectives of three European countries: average large-scale industrial cities, average wide-scale economy cities, modernising cities and assisted and dependent cities, respectively Great Britain, North-East region of Italy, France and Southern Italy.

⁹ "Even of the middle city does not coincide with either of the models, as it is characterised by a more complex and balanced combination of structured class and order, the classes and order however appear to be crucial" (p. 55, Bagnasco, Negri, 2004).

¹⁰ Bearing in mind that the districts developed even in the absence of average cities.

¹¹ "In associations, but in some cases also in politics, they deal with the organisation of leisure time, sporting facilities, organisation of education, cultural events, they control the level of the services and even condition urban policies imposing their views on traditional interests" (p. 54, Bagnasco, Negri, 1994)

1.3. Dimensional prejudice

These comments seem however to suffer from what Febvre, already back in 1922, referred to as a “graphical prejudice” (Febvre 1980) and, which could be related to a “dimensional prejudice” in respect to average cities. The expression “graphical prejudice” is effective to relate the attitude of those who make do with formal similarity (and in this case also dimensional) to compare things that have nothing in common from a genetic point of view on the basis of a cartographic comparison.

In the interpretation mainly based on urban sociology, the spatial construction of the territorial status concept of middle cities is not entirely clear (the justification of the selection of the boundaries).

The opinion stated by an Italian urban sociologist (Perulli 2007) can therefore be shared, and refers to the fact that western cities are experimenting the challenge set by new complexities (social, economic, cultural) that can no longer be restrained within metropolitan spatial models¹². In fact they dispute the validity of models used by previous governments, based on the traditional relationship between central and local which outdates the axes (central/local government, centres/suburbs, cities/hinterland) along which the traditional governmental models organized their societies.

2. The lost “mediation”: development and regulation of urban land

2.1. The Italian context of development policies and territorial dimension

The barycentre assumed by this next issue that involves average cities, moves towards “regulating” issues, in relation to development policies that interpret the “governing” of the “territory.”

Nowadays, public policies that deal with development, as perceived in Italy, rarely consider the phenomenon of urban accumulation to be important¹³. An important question arises in view of this statement which concerns the relationship between land and development policies.

Within urban disciplines, that traditionally deal with land, the development processes are generally interpreted as processes of urban regeneration, or a real estate issue, commonly considered to be lacking in appeal, and entirely unrelated to development policies.

The last fifteen years have been crucial in Italy due to the experiments on innovative development policies: expressions such as “negotiated planning” and “new programming”– the latter based on the

¹² Perulli also declares the theory of a post-metropolitan dimension of cities (p. 207, Perulli, 2007) and this partly explains why he never mentions the words average city in his text.

¹³ See the ministerial planning documents and in particular DPS (2007).

increase in duties granted to the Regions and coordinated at a national level by the Development and Cohesion Policy Department – have taken on a fundamental role in the possible development strategies to be adopted in the South (but also in the Central Northern area) after the termination of the “extraordinary intervention.” Today, the start of the new planning cycle of Structural Funds is being implemented within our country along side the acknowledgement of the closure of a season of development policies. Accordingly, the public policy instruments used for development have become examples of an forceful comparison between two development theories. On one hand, there is a position which considers the results of the first territorial Pacts (elaborated spontaneously at a local level) and the “New programming” started in 1998 on the SF 2000-2006 cycle to be total disasters. These are critical opinions that propose an orientation which is more strongly addressed to the market and which, for instance, sustain the automatic support mechanisms for businesses (Rossi 2005). On the other hand, the position is confirmed by those who, whilst not denying the critical levels of the experiments and highlighting the urgency for a critical evaluation of these experiences, confirm the centrality of an approach to public policies which aim to exploit of the territorial dimension of development¹⁴.

The specific territorial dimension of development regulations leads to a conception which does not identify itself with a determined model of productive organization. The territory represents a “thickening of social relationships” and of local culture which can not be transferred (Scott, Garofoli 2007). The qualification of the territory is the presupposition to accompany local projects, but also to attract external activity that is not located in one single area merely for cost advantage reasons.

In this context, however, two limits of the development policies spring to mind: the insufficient understanding of what territorial notion actually means, and the lack of consideration of the crucial role of the land resource, particularly in urban neighbourhoods, particularly in middle cities. Land seems to be exclusively interpreted as support for other activities¹⁵. theory

2.2. Prospects and possibilities

The relationship between the State and the market in the regulation of urban land is considered herein to be a crucial factor for development policies: the types of regulation on the use of urban land

¹⁴ See the assumptions of Fabrizio Barca, who was Head of the Development and Cohesion Policy Department at the Ministry of Economy and Finance from 1998 to 2006, Barca (2003; 2007).

¹⁵ Whilst Dale (1997), and Daly, Cobb (1990), highlighted the aspect of the role played by the land resource which they considered to be far from secondary.

have both direct and indirect economic effects on public policies, which have yet to be fully investigated¹⁶.

It is therefore considered vital to concentrate on regulation issues which can lead to a different vision of development policies, but also to formulate some interpretative considerations regarding the new cycle of policies and, in particular, on the “City” priority of the National Strategic Framework for Structural Funds for the period 2007-2013. The exploration of the potential connections between middle cities, development, land and conditions for which the real estate market represents a decisive link for development policies (also re-examining the issue of the nature of land ownership and the real estate market) can turn out to be extremely interesting for the cities in Southern Italy, but also for so many middle Italian cities.

In the second post-war period the correlation between land and development was faced, in Italy, not only with differentiated and original research programmes, but also with regards to the policies, through the agricultural reform at rural levels (Lanzani 1996).

Today traces can be found in development policies relative to issues mainly orientated towards welfare and infrastructures, but not the regulation of land as a mechanism which produces development and neither property research¹⁷. There are many reasons for the absence of such an issue which, to a large extent, still has to be studied. On one hand planning that traditionally deals with land, has taken a separate course. On the other, the programming culture of those who “conduct development” in Italy, is rarely recognized as a proficiency that meets with the technical knowledge of planning; on the contrary it is presented as a knowledge that is distant from the issues of cities and land, where the technocratic approaches of economic planning based on “flows” and not on “backgrounds”, or a professional style which is entirely detached from most territorial aspects, have represented the most common orientation.

The treatment of urban land therefore, particularly in the context of middle cities, development policies and the treatment of urban development are indicative of a job where everything still has to be done with regards to the role of the land in the dynamics of development¹⁸.

This research work, which at this stage is still a draft, relates to the attempt to identify feasible answers to some research queries that lead to the need to establish relationships and to suggest

¹⁶ There is also documentation, which is quite well known, which describes cities as growth machines and the prospects of urban regimes which does not however constitute, in this sense, a privileged area of research.

¹⁷ On the crucial role and the nature of property please see Jacobs (2005), Krueckeberg (1995; 1999).

¹⁸ The reasons for the lack of a theory on the offer of land elaborated by the economic analyses over the last two centuries - whilst the other two main factors relative to production – work and capital - have been analysed in depth – are to be researched. The causes may be related to the dominance of the Ricardo theory elaborated at the beginning of the XIX century, which assumed that the offer of land was fixed. If this matter has rarely been questioned, some theories have however started to consider it to be less obvious than it may seem. Important contributions were made by Ratcliff (1949). See also Evans (2004).

interpretations: what role does land have in the territorial development policies in Italy? What is the relationship between real estate markets and urban development policies? What can the market learn from public policies, but also, what can the planning of public policies learn from the market? How can the development policies jointly determine and reflect the essential characteristics of the regulation of urban land? ¹⁹ If the operations and activities of the real estate market cannot be appraised without a clear understanding of public policies, are the policy decisions and planning also conditioned and affected by the status of the property market²⁰?

It could be important to reflect on these questions further: on one hand the introduction to Italian debates of literature on land markets and property – searching for intersections with the development policies on the territory – something which is widely unexplored in Italy. On the other hand, the consideration that is proposed however, specifically concerns the field of *policy design*, or rather a matter where many aspects are still uncertain, and where an attempt is being made to outline a speciality in the field of the planning of public land policies (Palermo 2004, 2006).

3. Institutional metaphors and development policies

3.1. What do intermediate institutions do?

How do territorial development policies and middle cities tie in, on one hand with regards to the vastly variegated and uncertain results of the development policies and, on the other with regards to the start of the new cycle of Structural Funds programming? The most common interpretative categories of urban and territorial averageness, that were referred to above (slowness, proximity, exclusion), often lead to the formulation of inert rhetoric issues which are not stimulating for policy making, where the iconography of a middle city ends up in depicting an ideal which is typical of a virtuous location and the elements of “gentle” and consolatory aesthetics.

It is vital to identify some orientation instructions for public exploitation, with regards to the policies for land development, however the exploration of the bonds between land, institutions and development in relationship to averageness seem however to be more important. The relationship between development²¹ and institutional profiles of middle cities constitutes a sphere of promising

¹⁹ Some important interpretations, especially in the relationship between planning and land markets, were elaborated in Cheshire, Sheppard (2004; 2006).

²⁰ Crucial comments in this directions were developed by Van der Krabben, Boekema (1994), Balchin, Kieve, *et al* (1995), Guy, Henneberry (2000), Evas (2002), Adams, Watkins, White (2005).

²¹ Literature on Italian development is immeasurable, for a complete view see Palermo (2004), Pasqui (2005); for updated literature see Seravalli (2006).

interpretation, even if practically unexplored²². In this sense averageness, used as an institutional metaphor, leads to referral to intermediate institutions. The intermediate institutions are important entrance doorways, but it is useful to specify that the field of such institutions constitutes a segment of investigation that does not satisfy and obviously does not circumscribe the considerations on middle cities.

The influence practiced by social and institutional factors in their functions within the economic sphere has been recognized for some time by economic theoretical research, but only recently specific attention was paid to the role conducted by intermediary institutions or rather the “peripheral” State structures, the local authorities, the institutionalized and semi-institutionalized organizations²³. Alongside the process of European integration, forms of rescaling have emerged in the consolidation of the role of intermediary levels in political regulation processes, therefore what is happening between the micro and macro sectors appears to be of fundamental importance in order to understand the operations and the performance of the national political systems.

In the definition given by Douglas North (1990), in the field of neoinstitutional economics, institutions have a “historical anchorage” role on economic mechanisms; in fact they reduce uncertainty and develop regularity in daily relations.

In the controversial institutional approach, the incoherence between macro and micro levels is a stable phenomenon²⁴ of the institutional systems due to the paradox of predictability (Zucker 1988), according to which great predictability at a micro level implicates that social regularities have eroded on a wider scale, and vice-versa²⁵. Zucker (1988) therefore demonstrates how institutions, when trying to produce conformity to pre-established practices and models, in actual fact generate variety and different local orders. The crucial point is that the institutional bodies are loosely coupled systems

²² On the backdrop of the recommendations of the international literature on the decentering of development policies, in a recent text, Seravalli (2006) highlighted the potential and importance of the organisation of the various institutional architectures for the efficacy of development policies.

²³ The intermediary institutions in Italy also include the public administration structures, including associations representing their interests, educational structures and consortium organisations.

²⁴ The distinctive characteristic of the social systems, obviously from an institutional point of view, is not established, where however there is a tendency towards disorder, towards entropy. Whilst order is an intentional construction, disorder is a spontaneous tendency; for example if we want to understand how a public authority office works, we do not limit the analysis to the formal regulations, that tell us what should happen, but which do not give us any idea of what actually happens (Zucker 1988; Lanzalaco 1999).

²⁵ Lanzalaco uses the example of the family: “a strong institutionalisation of practices, behaviour models, social relationships at a macro level require a weak institutionalisation of the individual family units. That is that the weak institutionalisation of the individual family units, that they are differentiate little from each other as they are units with their own specificity, given that each family has to limit itself to reflecting and reproducing models and behaviours, as they are standardised at a macro level and can not give themselves individual rules and regulations. The direct institutionalisation between the members of a community is therefore lacking with regards to regulations, practices, habits and therefore the probability increases that there could be unpredicted behaviours and that institutional entropy process may commence” (p. 15, Lanzalaco, 1999).

within which there are weak relationships and persistent tension among the different levels they consist in. What good is the intermediate level therefore?

The irremovable contradiction and the relative impermeability between micro and macro levels confer a specific role to intermediary institutions, as they represent a compensation factor for the deficit in stability and certainty created by the paradox of predictability. At a mesolevel the conflicting logics of reproduction of forms of collective action, enforces on the other two levels, “neutralize” each other reciprocally, finding an area of mediation.

The provinces for example, are Italian institutions “in the middle”, and on one hand are able to achieve levels of standardization that allow for the implementation of scale economies in the production of collective commodities and, on the other they permit the adaptation to local specificities and the exploitation of resources at a micro level. In this direction an interesting experiment that intends to interpret the resources of averageness, despite being immature, is represented by the Province Foundation in the North West²⁶ of Italy (Armondi, Briata, Gastaldi, Toldo, 2007): a territorial aggregation of intermediary institutions which aims to achieve the mutual production of public assets, to share the problems relative to development and social construction of the territory that does not take into consideration the geography of the traditional administrative borders. Such aggregations seem to be promising with regards to the content of the National Strategic Framework for regional development policies 2007-2013 (NSF). The NSF, in fact, identifies among the effective conditions of development policies, the presence of territorial bodies who are competent in creating projects, from the point of view of institutional cooperation and administrative proficiency²⁷. Thus the Western cities are experiencing the challenge coming from new complexities that are not explainables within metropolitan space models. It is possible to redesign the previous models of government, going beyond the axis along which the traditional models of government organized the societies, not only in the interpretation of governance but also, in the direction of community of practices, of assemblages of territories.

²⁶ The Italian Provinces have proved to have marked limits in relation to development planning with regards to the 2000-2006 planning cycle of the Structural Funds provided by the European Union. In Lombardy only two provinces took on the role of development project leaders relative to Ob. 2 (Como, Mantua), only two provinces elaborated a strategic plan (Lodi, Milan) and only the province of Milan started activities which involved support for industrial districts.

²⁷ In the priorities identified by NSF 2007-2013 (NSF, 2007) much attention is paid to the construction of territorial planning and design, based on the valorisation of the specific potential identities within the territorial contexts (NSP, 2007).

3.2. From immediateness to mediation, from development to care

In Italy the crucial and vital role of the cities and the urban systems with regards to regional development policies was declared in the National Strategic Framework 2007-2013. The considerations made so far allow us to reconsider the intermediate development strategies, implementing a redefinition of the same concept of development.

We have acknowledged that the divergence between institutional forms that tend to prevail at the two extreme levels, mainly depend on the different logic that regulates the institutionalisation of social regulations. The institutionalisation at a local level feeds off relationships and direct, or poorly mediated, experiences with other individuals, whilst the institutionalising at a macro level is based on elements of a formal nature (knowledge of rules, laws, statutes) and on forms of regulation at a cohesive level²⁸.

The institutions are not called upon to exclusively conduct regulating functions²⁹, but to produce public assets (Arrighetti, Seravalli 1999). The intermediate institutions therefore supply public assets at a local level, which require constant care in order to be achieved³⁰.

The intermediate institutions, however imperfect they may be, can allow one to overcome the paradox of predictability. It is possible to state that the institutions conduct practical and cognitive mediation work in their relationship with the common assets, thanks to which the collective elaboration of this subject can continue (De Leonardis 2004). They also represent a kind of storage backup of collective memory (Douglas 1986), so often ignored and disregarded by anti-institutional litanies. These invocations are supported in Italy with regards to the proposals to abolish intermediary authorities, such as the provinces, which would have the negative responsibility of interfering in the immediateness³¹ of relations and actions.

Even more radically, it is possible to state that the considerations on the correlation between averageness/slowness make the hypothesis of a slide in the development policies into policies of “daily” care of the Commons and the reflexive and relational skills of the actors (technical and political). The connotation therefore of the intermediary policies is more to do with the care of

²⁸Different elements are institutionalised at these two levels: relationships based on trust, idiosyncratic skills, organisational networks which comply with micro level detailed criteria (the local Council for instance); specific administrative bodies, typification of specific public policies, duties etc, incorporating universal criteria at a macro level (the Region).

²⁹ Production generally continues to connate the action of the central institutions. With regards to the relationships at a local level, the operating practices of the intermediary institutions consist in the coordination of the institutional actions at a macro level.

³⁰ The notion of care and its relationship with long time required to product common assets has already been faced by Toqueville (1996).

³¹ There are a multitude of theories on the various aspects of the immediateness in society, see Beck (1998), Bauman (1999), Sennett (1998).

institutions and common territorial assets than the notion of rivalry and competitiveness among cities. With an analysis of the emergent projects, it is possible to highlight the ability and possibility of use of the resources of the territorial resources, in terms of relational assets (Storper 1997), that is social, cognitive, institutional resources etc., which the territories have at their disposal and which are fundamental elements needed to inaugurate a construction process of local territorial systems, and create the “middle” contemporary city agenda.

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