

## Territorial conflicts in metropolitan areas. A regeneration project for the resurgence of a community

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**Abstract:** These guidelines provide instructions to format your full paper. The process of political and administrative rescaling affecting Italian cities and regions under the Law 56/2014, with the consequent establishment of metropolitan cities, has triggered new forms of territorial conflicts. In this paper, conflicts have risen to a privileged observatory to investigate government problems at the regional scale and to identify possible ways for an inclusive governance of Metropolitan territory. The main purpose is to propose a reflection on the territorial conflicts about metropolitan identity and on the role of the small villages in the promotion of forms of aggregation with a bottom up approach, as resource for the strategic government of the territory and the management of territorial conflicts (Lingua, Putilli, 2017). Focus of this paper is a case study concerning a process of empowerment of a group of citizens engaged in the promotion of a local project that has become a pilot project of regeneration of community places in the frame of the Strategic Metropolitan Plan of Florence. A tiny group of citizen who shared the same common destiny for absence of a connection with the municipal water supply chain. Instead of carrying out a territorial protest and they become an identity movement and, through the recognition of the patrimonial value of places, engaged a multiactorial and multiscalar renewal project aimed to the rebirth of the local community. The joint effort for the self-construction of the lacing of the aqueduct has become the kick off for the realization of an integrated project for the requalification of the complex of Sant'Angelo Vico L'Abate as a place of religious aggregation, social and producer of wealth and new economies. The contribution deals with the reconsideration of territorial conflicts in regional cities as a strategic action for the interaction between local and metropolitan institutions and, above all, as a strong point for enhancing governance at the regional level (Mariano, 2012) for the construction of a shared vision for development of actual and future of the Metropolitan city.

**Keywords:** participation; conflict; bottom-up processes; inclusive capacity.

### Contemporary geographies of vast area

The recent configuration of local authorities, which began in the 1990's, has opened up new institutional, socio-economic and urban considerations. The fragmented reality of the Italian territory and the plurality of urban plans no longer corresponding to the real processes of metropolization (Mariano, 2012), have made additional policies necessary to support the political-administrative rescaling of the territories. One among all the implementation of Law 56/2014, which redesigns the boundaries and competences of local administrations regulating unions and mergers of municipalities



and providing for the establishment of metropolitan cities<sup>1</sup> without calling into question the definition of their boundaries and imposing a new geography of the institutions. This imposition, characterized mainly by the disinterest of political and civil society, is concretizing a process of territorial reorganization «which could also jeopardize the very spatial configuration of the Regions» (De Luca, Moccia, 2017).

The process of structuring, still evolving and with obvious repercussions on the genesis of new forms of conflict, requires some reflection on the ability to promote a metropolitan culture and a shared vision of the vast area. The new metropolitan dimension, in fact, does not seem to belong to the inhabitants who, instead, through the rediscovery of a sense of belonging to the places claim sovereignty over their own territory.

The forms of conflict have assumed a role from which one cannot prescind in the territorial geography and in the planning of vast area, in particular, during the last few years a phenomenon of micro-has been observed growing conflict (Fregolent, 2014) calling for an active involvement in the choices regarding the transformations of the territory.

The increasing number of conflicts requires for a symmetrical reflection on the social dynamics triggered by the processes of political-administrative rescaling of the territories of vast area and on the resumption of civic activism to microscale.

The two reflections are closely linked by two key elements: the crisis of representative democracy on the one hand and the emergence of new territorial conflicts linked to the territory on the other.

### **A new narrative of territorial conflicts**

The point of view taken in this paper focuses on how territorial defined conflicts, characterized by a transversality of issues, can represent a privileged observatory (Puttilli, Lingua, 2017) to understand its dynamics and identify the policy for an inclusive governance of the metropolitan territory.

The characteristic feature of territorial conflicts, which have grown considerably compared to social conflicts, consists of a community that defends the territory and the living spaces from external aggressions (Bobbio, 1999). The causes of such conflicts are many and can be summarised as follows: increased environmental awareness; lack of strategic planning; the growing fragmentation of society and the crisis of representative democracy.

Recent years have seen an increase in media debates on climate change, one of which was the recent Global Climate Strike For Future movement, have contributed to the greater diffusion of the environmental theme and the adoption of more respectful personal behaviors towards the environment, increasing the desire to live in areas with higher quality of life. The flight from urban centers to the inner areas, a trend that sees many young people with a medium-level of education - high, can be traced back to the explanation of the proliferation of local conflicts of identity.

It can be noted that these are no longer environmental protests, but new forms of protest that tend to deal with issues related to the defence of the territory, of the landscape and of the historical and cultural heritage with a view to safeguarding and putting into value the common and collective good.

Luigi Bobbio (2011) explores the multiplicity of territorial conflicts by identifying six types of interpretation and describing the possible actions to be taken.

The first narrative highlights the development of local particularism that goes to hinder the satisfaction of the general interest and takes the epithet of nimby; the second one called agitation, emphasises the real object of the protest and the interests behind it; the third article examines the conflict caused by a disproportion between costs and benefits and sets as its object the sacrifices that a community has to suffer unjustly; the fourth interpretation argues that the conflict results from unacceptable risks (risks to health, the environment, safety, quality of life); the fifth, called places against flows, maintains that protests are triggered when a community with a strong local identity feels attacked; The sixth, finally, moves completely away from nimby logic and interprets territorial conflicts as a reaction to the new model of dominant development.

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<sup>1</sup> With the Law 56/2014 the Metropolitan City becomes a large-area institutional reality with a statute governing its functioning, strategic functions, planning and programming.

In order to understand the nature of such conflicts, it is appropriate to take into account the different dimensions through which they can be examined and to give them a separate interpretation. The research path stems from the analysis of one of these interpretations in particular that on the places against the flows, characterized by the ability to transform the protest into a local identity and which has as its real object the contention of the sovereignty of the places.

The democracy claimed by the opponents, as interpreted in the narrative, is characterized by a micro scale in which the protest has the capacity to strengthen or even generate local identities, contrasting in a clear way the “we” to the “their” (Della Porta and Piazza 2008, Fedi and Mannarini 2018).

In this context, it is necessary to highlight the conditions of malaise (Fregolent, 2014) of active citizenship that with voice capacity defends the right to common goods, identity and sovereignty of places, thus declining the narrative described by Bobbio in a form of territorial conflict with an identity character.

In Italy there is a belated attitude characterized by a negative approach to conflict situations, without grasping the advantageous aspects contained in the conflict. Situations that are usually associated with citizens' committees or nimby groups, identified as opponents or as «subjects of participation against» (Gelli, 2014), rather than as subjects of effective participation.

In contrast, current pathways undertaken by committees or active citizenship groups are increasingly resorting to activities that produce both knowledge and mobilisation of social capital resources and propose, through their local animations, ideas and alternatives. Their capacity to form networks and to work on a supra-local scale, to raise their level of political and cultural awareness and to involve experts capable of providing counter-measures projects, implements their effectiveness as well as their innovative potential and the ability to positively affect policy design (Paba, 2009).

In order not to reduce the debate to a simplified vision, and to understand its dynamics, it is necessary to analyse conflicts taking into account simultaneously the multiple dimensions through which they can be examined (Bobbio, 2011). According to the narrative supported in this contribution, it is difficult and reductive to demonstrate a specialization of conflicts because they belong only to the social, environmental sphere or to the mere territorial localization.

This narrative proposes the recognition of identity conflicts understood as complex conflicts with social, environmental and local dynamics that intersect. Characterized and represented by contrasts for the re-appropriation of spaces and places of life, for the claim of the right to civic uses and for the re-appropriation of territories and uncultivated lands.

Currently there are many identity bottom-up experiences active on the territory; all are in fact and separately cooperating to build a more advanced generation of forms of local development self-sustainable (Dematteis, Magnaghi, 2016).

Starting from this assumption it is useful to interpret the conflict as a tool of participation, kick off of an empowerment path put at work to enrich the panorama of available options (Giusti, 1998).

Taken this point of view, the paper puts the reflection on how the innovative forms of community - which spring from an active and conflictual citizenship, analyzing how essential traits the genesis and evolution - promote integrated territorial projects using asset values as policy tools.

These are groups of communities capable of mobilizing socio-territorial energies for the defence and valorization of the peculiarities of the places and able to indicate alternative projects and, through the collective use of the good, research forms of social management of the good itself and of the territory.

In this perspective it is useful to seek forms of community in which the citizens, initially animated by a common discomfort, direct the conflict towards the production of counter-projects actively mobilizing to give course to different proposals (Calvaresi, Pacchi, Zanoni, 2015), generating a dense network of collaborations and synergies.

The argument is that the micro stories born from conflictual situations, which have initiated a process of collective learning to defend the common good as a value of identity, are the precondition for the formulation of alternative development models and the promotion of territorial inclusive governance with visioning capacity.

### **The empowerment path as an essential trait**

The evolution of the conflict of identity in this session of the contribution takes the main focus. The innovative character of the narrative resides, in fact, in the process of collective learning generated by conflicting situations. Process that triggers the awareness of the inhabitants of the patrimonial values of their territory by starting the reconstruction of collective knowledge for the care and enhancement

of the places of life (Magnaghi, 2012) and moving from a position of opposition to a proactive attitude.

The conflict is thus interpreted as a growth of consciousness of place which, acquired through a path of cultural transformation of the inhabitants, is able to reconstruct the elements of community in relational and solidarity forms and to induce alternative actions. In this way, the conflict takes on a new explicit character, in that it is recognized as a producer of community.

The empowerment path can be summarized in three essential phases: 1) the genesis of the conflict situation; 2) the aggregation of a small group of people who share the same discomfort situation; 3) the production of knowledge and opposition activity on the territory with voice capacity. Once reached the final phase of the path, through the formation of new networks and synergies, the group passes from the local to the supra-local scale, thus triggering the switch from subjects of the participation against, to subjects of proactive participation.

As the group expands and networks between associations and active citizenship groups are developed, the multidisciplinary dialogue also involves experts capable of providing counter – links projects and alternative ways of linking contextual knowledge with expert knowledge. Expertise is frequently found among research bodies and among universities that make scientific expertise and method available to the community. Researchers are increasingly playing a key role in starting collaborations between universities and communities to make their innovative contribution to the collective learning process (Saija, 2016).

In this context the argued process becomes collective production of community and social construction of projects of territory investing in the spatial dimension of vast area. These processes translate conflict into proposal, transform lament into constructive work, «find and exploit the margin of unused energy of the community, underline the prevalence of positive action collective» (Mumford, 1952 cit. in Paba, 1997 pp. 193-219).

In order to substantiate the reflection on the narration of conflicts, understood as builders of community and policy for the implementation of integrated projects of territory, we refer to the path of a small group of inhabitants who, distancing himself from a situation of conflict, he adopted a proactive attitude towards the common good and initiated a community project.

Focus of this paper is a case study concerning a process of empowerment of a group of citizens engaged in the promotion of a local project that has become a pilot project of regeneration of community places in the frame of the strategic Metropolitan Plan of Florence. A tiny group of citizen who shared the same common destiny for absence of a connection with the municipal water supply chain.

Until 2017, the inhabitants of the metropolitan countryside around the Sant'Angelo Vico l'Abate complex were not served by the public aqueduct and were supplied thanks to the beaten wells near each house. In 2013, despite the difficulties and lack of resources invested so far by the Municipality, the competent authorities and the property, the inhabitants joined in the water Consortium Sant'Angelo" to establish a connection to the public water system. A case of good community practices: an intervention of self-construction that in two years has realized three kilometers and two hundred meters of piping thus bringing the drinking water in thirteen families.

Instead of carrying out a territorial protest and they become an identity movement and, through the recognition of the patrimonial value of places, engaged a multiactorial and multiscale renewal project aimed to the rebirth of the local community. The joint effort for the self-construction of the lacing of the aqueduct has become the kick off for the realization of an integrated project for the requalification of the complex of Sant'Angelo Vico L'Abate as a place of religious aggregation, social and producer of wealth and new economies.

The project “Sant’Angelo returns to its origins”<sup>2</sup> is promoted totally from below and is born from four families of young local entrepreneurs, owners of farms who, working daily the land and taking care of the territory, have witnessed the progressive abandonment of the countryside and the places of agricultural, social and religious life that revolved around the complex of medieval origin and the Church of San Michele Arcangelo.

The widespread presence of Catholic places of worship in the open territory and in the inner areas, focuses on the issue of the use of the ecclesiastical building patrimony. The parish communities established in the territory have distinct ways of relating to such places; today, in fact, we are facing not only a type of religiosity different from the past, but also different links between the inhabitants and the places of worship, which are often under-used, if not abandoned, thus losing their settled role as a reference point for local communities and territorial landmark.

The contingent risk of selling the ecclesiastical patrimony and the consequent loss of the artistic and identity historical value, affect many places of the Italian territory.

The case under study has seen an alternative proposal materialize thanks to the vision of a small group of inhabitants who, after the experience of self-construction of the aqueduct, knew how to dialogue with the property and start a collective path to give new life to the complex.

The property, the Diocesan Institute for the subsistence of the Clergy, welcomed the project proposal made with strong passion of the inhabitants and immediately identified a religious partner as the neighboring Parish of Gesù Buon Pastore a Casellina.

The four families have presented a project - in advanced state - with the objective of the redevelopment of the complex respecting the use of the premises and the care of the areas of external relevance, proposing to create a business network in order to manage the whole complex by providing human resources, skills and means.

Through the multidisciplinary dialogue a collective path is thus activated in which all the actors involved share the common objective of putting into value the good and regeneration of communities. Thus taking on the responsibility of carrying out together a collective project of caring for the common good, a community of commoners was created. Through the growth of the consciousness of place and collective re-identification, the commitment to care for the place and the vocation to consume in relational, solidarity and community forms (Magnaghi, 2012) and to produce happiness were rediscovered.

Although the relations were always calm, a dichotomy was created between the two parties involved; while on the proposers side the project was considered of great interest and attractor of new networks, on the property side it was not very concrete and feasible because of the irrelevant presence of resources available and for the number of people involved directly and indirectly.

At this stage of the course there was a need to be able to manage the complexity of the process, to regulate and stabilize the orientations and expectations of key players (Jessop, 2003) without creating further conflicts between the Parties. It is in this frame that is involved, as expertise, the Department of Architecture of the University of Florence that, with a research project-action, has played an active role in the process of local development.

With a view to revitalising the complex in a collective key and with an innovative approach to meta-governance, a system of actions and processes of participatory, communicative, animation and events has been launched, able to re-activate Sant’Angelo Vico l’Abate not only as a place of aggregation, but also as a place of exchange and work, a showcase of good practices for the territory. It has thus become a laboratory of community ideas, of sharing of spaces and knowledge in which everyone, inhabitants, priests, administrators, students, researchers and professors have put their experiences to system producing innovative ideas.

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<sup>2</sup> In the framework of the drafting of the Metropolitan Strategic Plan (PSM) of the Metropolitan City of Florence, cooperation relations have been established between the Promoting Committee of the PSM (formed by Metropolitan City, University of Florence, Ente Cassa di Risparmio di Firenze, Chamber of Commerce) and the Diocesan Institute for the subsistence of the Clergy of the Archdiocese of Florence (IDSC). At a later stage, the Sant’Angelo APS association presented the Sant’Angelo project, a return to the origin” to the group of the University of Florence.



From a fragmented community, but aware of the historical and identity value of the place, a community project of regeneration of a community space has been realized, able to activate networks and connections of vast area and to bring back the complex to assume the role of territorial reference point.

The researcher, also with emotional and communicative skills (Foster, 1987) took on the role of social facilitator; was a weaver of networks and relationships that accompanied the inhabitants during the journey of awareness and jointly identified alternative models of development capable of activating new economies on a territorial scale.

The activity from below and the enrichment of knowledge produce new policies of valorization and networking of common goods, generating wealth for the local community and the metropolitan area. It is limiting, in this case, to analyze the path in terms of ability to influence the design of policies, while it is more interesting the ability to construct policies starting from the re-identification in the patrimonial assets, materials and intangibles that connote the identity of a place.

To this end, the case of Sant'Angelo Vico l'Abate was taken at random pilot for the definition of a model of action aimed at building policy for the development of new economies and new lifestyles related to management and collective care of local heritage, activating innovative forms of social action and wealth production.

The effectiveness of the 'proactive approach held by the inhabitants in the empowerment path is demonstrated by the inclusion of the community project between the metropolitan strategic lines and, within the framework of the drafting of the metropolitan Strategic Plan (PSM) of the Metropolitan City of Florence, between the forecasts and the actions finalized to stimulate new forms of the inhabit for the inner areas.

## Conclusions

According to the approach discussed above, this contribution provides additional elements to the discussion of territorial conflicts of an identity nature. The main purpose is to propose a reflection on the territorial conflicts about metropolitan identity and the role of small villages in the promotion of aggregation with a bottom up approach.

The contribution concludes with some reflections and, of course, without definitive answers highlighting considerations on the method of investigation of the conflict and the effect produced on planning policies on a territorial scale.

Draws attention to the need to adopt a new criterion for the narrative and conflict management through practices involving contextual knowledge and expert knowledge, thus conferring an open and positive conception of the conflict itself.

The method of investigation of the dynamics recognizes like point of force the conservation of its complexity (Dematteis, 1995) putting to the center the same conflict and its distance of collective learning.

Introduces a narrative that starts from the bottom up and from the small communities, animated by conflictual situations, able to activate new forms of social action and reproduction of wealth through the collective use of good and heritage, taking on in fact the patrimonial values as a generator of community and territorial awareness. It is thus possible to build new policy tools from the valuables and re-identification of assets.

The effect of the switch from «participation against» to proactive participation, taken as the argument of this survey, is a resource for the growth of communities and for the strategic planning of vast area.

The observation and investigation of the empowerment path generated by conflicting situations can create cartographies in which to graphic this new narrative of the conflict. Literature is rich in attempts to map the numerous expressions of participations against (Gelli, 2014).

This contribution, instead, proposes a graphicalization of the propositive expressions that create network and activate synergies to the territorial dimension, thus building a graphic narration of the geographies of the values. Adopting a trans-scale approach and taking into account the different territorial scales to which the conflict is expressed and on which its effects are reflected (Lingua, Puttilli, 2017).

This approach, which redefines propositional participation as policy tools, is of great interest for the identification of a shared vision. The bottom-up experiences, in which the re-identification of values becomes a tool for the production of integrated projects, they are put to system drawing possible



futures in a position to defining strategies and shared actions and to reconstruct a collective image of belonging to the metropolitan dimension.

After this re-identification and working in a synergic and integrated way, the micro-stories emerged in the path and the macro stories become part of a wider intervention strategy and converge in formal acts of government (Lingua, 2016).

The last reflection focuses on the topic of the involvement of the University, in the activity of third mission<sup>3</sup>, as knowing experienced in the empowerment path of a community for a mutual exchange of knowledge and resources.

Through action research on the ground, universities make an innovative contribution to the process of collective learning through the figure of the «researchers in the action» (Saija, 2016) and facilitate a shared vision with a territorial dimension.

In this context the University also has the important function of experimenting with meta-governance approaches as the subject can manage the complex process between of plurality of social actors with diverging interests to promote and achieve common objectives by means of mobilizing and deploying a range of ideas and resources (Torfing, 2012).

The researcher in action has a significant role in moving societies toward resilient governance systems (Innes, 2010) modelling collaborative practice and demonstrate its value in the field of research.

The work carried out during the pathway triggers local-scale activities and projects that are networked on a supra-local scale and generate trans-scalar policies or projects.

The territory can assume the concrete connotations of community laboratory, useful for the restoration of relationships of trust and the production of social capital in which the conflictual dynamics create new awareness of citizenship and put into value the peculiarities of the identities of the places generating new policies for a and inclusive governance.

It's an innovative approach that ask new skills, although there is needing 'a full blown cultural transformation' (Peters, 2010) which the university can promote.

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<sup>3</sup> Third mission defined by the National Association Evaluation of the University and Research as the whole of the activities with which universities enter into direct interaction with society by flanking teaching and research activities traditional

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