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SYSTEMIC DESIGN AND POLICY MAKING: THE CASE OF RETRACE PROJECT

The systemic approach has been often applied to the realization of projects related to a single good, service or field of research. Whereas the systemic approach to problems has been nowadays recognized as the appropriate way to understand the complexity of an issue, in many cases projects that go in this direction face a barrier in the legislation that does not keep pace with the times or that does not supports these types of actions.

This is the framework of the RETRACE project that aims to act at the higher level of policy making, promoting the use of Systemic Design (SD) as a methodology to develop regional policies able to support the transition of regions towards Circular Economy (CE) in different fields. The purpose is to face the problem starting precisely from the legislative side to reduce barriers and promote through new policies the development of project related to SD and CE.

The SD methodology applied in the project refers to the one developed by the Department of Architecture and Design of Politecnico di Torino based on the key principle that the output of a system can be the input for another one, generating new models of production, economy and society (Bistagnino, 2011). The systemic perspective of this methodology expands the concept of reuse, recycle and recover proper of CE to the whole system existing around a single product, service or issue, linking it to its environmental, economic and social context. The two approaches are complementary one to the other and they are functional for the RETRACE project to address the EU challenge for transitioning towards a CE as specified in the priorities set up by the “Flagship Initiative for a Resource-efficient Europe” for a resource-efficient, low carbon economy to achieve sustainable growth as enshrined in Europe 2020 strategy and in the EC Communication “Towards a circular economy: A zero waste programme for Europe”.

The project has been financed under the Interreg Europe Call, focused on supporting policy-learning across Europe through the exchange of practices and ideas to improve performance of regional development policies and programs in the wider contexts of the EU effort. It promotes cooperation between European regions to reduce disparities between them and support the creation of a more sustainable, inclusive and innovative Europe (Interreg Europe, 2016).

RETRACE starts in Spring 2016 and it is focused on regions, the micro components of a State, that are currently undergoing many changes (especially in Europe) not only from the administrative side, but also from the environmental, economic, cultural and demographic points of view. Five regions from Italy, Spain, France, Slovenia and Romania are involved in a partnership that balances more and less advanced areas in a well variegated portfolio of situations. The partners include public and private bodies together with the Managing Authorities that have been directly (as partners) or indirectly (as supporters) involved in the project as the main actors responsible for policy making and implementation. Alongside them, stakeholder groups from each country take part in the different phases of the project as directly interested by the outcomes.

The general aim of promoting the adoption of SD for a transition towards CE is concretely achieved following the steps of systemic methodology: carrying of the holistic diagnosis (quantitative and qualitative analysis of the context) and exchange of good practices (analysis of the context and benchmarking), identification of policy gaps (identification of criticalities), definition of Regional Action Plans (creation of a solution) and implementation. These steps will be part of a process lasting four years divided in two phases.

- Phase 1 will focus on two parallel paths: on one side the Holistic Diagnosis of each region, seen as a complex system generated by the interactions between the environmental, social and economic levels, that will be investigated following the methodology developed by the Department of Architecture and Design of Politecnico di Torino (project leader) assessing both

the current situation of the territory and of policy instruments available at regional level. On the other side the exchange of Good Practices among countries through field visits in the five partner regions and two other EU areas, aims at sharing with partners the most relevant projects developed on the topics of SD and CE and the policy measures that made them possible. The outcomes of this phase will be complementary: the Holistic Diagnosis will highlight policy gaps that could be covered taking indications from the exchanged Good Practices. The match between these two inputs will lead to the development of five Regional Action Plans RAPs containing indications on the agreed measures for improvement to be integrated into policies. The documents will specify the actions to be taken, the activities planned, the responsible actors and funding sources. Their level of detail will be such as to enable their implementation into policy instruments promoting the SD and CE approach.

- Phase 2 will mainly focus on implementation of RAPs, creation of policy instruments and on monitoring of results.

Among the three projects dealing with Circular Economy financed by the Interreg programme out of the 64 project accepted, RETRACE is the only one promoting the introduction of a Systemic Design Approach to the topic of policy making and it represents an ambitious challenge that shows how the necessity to address issues in a systemic way is becoming increasingly perceived also at the legislative level.

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