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ScuDo

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WHAT YOU ARE, TAKES YOU FAR

Doctoral Dissertation
Doctoral Program in Urban and Regional Development (36th Cycle)

Beyond Marginality: Welfare, Governance and Spatial Imaginaries *Insights from Terre del Monviso*

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Summary

This doctoral dissertation deals with territorial marginality, particularly mountain and metro-mountain areas, analysing how these territories, often marginalised about the main poles of urban development, can be redefined through new forms of governance and innovative policies. Historically, cities have been considered the main drivers of economic and social development since the post-World War II period. However, recent changes, such as the climate crisis, the pandemic and growing social inequalities, have shifted the focus to peripheral territories, which have long been neglected in public policy and scientific debate.

This dissertation aims to understand how governance and welfare can be rethought to meet the needs of these marginalised territories, with a particular focus on the socio-spatial dimension of justice. The research focuses on the case study of Terre del Monviso e del Saluzzese, an area in the province of Cuneo in the north-west of Italy, to analyse how processes of socio-spatial marginalisation and the institutional vacuum at the intermediate level have influenced the development of this territory. The dissertation explores institutional and bottom-up responses, examining the role of public policies and local strategic initiatives in fostering territorial cohesion and accessibility to services.

The dissertation is divided into three main parts: the first focuses on socio-spatial justice and inequalities in access to essential services; the second examines spatial planning and governance between 'hard spaces' and 'soft spaces', i.e. between formal planning and participatory processes; finally, the third part analyses spatial imaginaries and their role in the construction of effective spatial policies.

A central aspect of the research is the concept of territorial welfare, understood as a response to the problems of socio-spatial inequality that afflict inland and peripheral areas. The importance of a new configuration of welfare, based not only on state intervention but on community and proximal forms of welfare, which actively involve citizens and local institutions, is emphasised. Analysing local policies and projects, such as the “Il Quartiere - Metromountain community hub” project in Saluzzo, and youth welfare and migrant integration initiatives, shows how cooperation between public and private actors can promote social inclusion and improve the quality of life in marginal areas.

From the governance point of view, the dissertation distinguishes between a ‘hard’ approach, based on regulations and formal planning, and a ‘soft’ approach, characterised by participative, collaborative and innovative processes. The analysis of the actors involved in the territorial governance of the case study shows how informal networks, co-planning processes and bottom-up participation are crucial to overcoming the limitations of traditional institutional structures. However, the ‘hard’ approach remains essential to ensure policies’ effectiveness and institutions’ stability.

The concept of spatial imaginary is used to explore how collective representations of the territory influence the construction of public policies. In the third part of the dissertation, we analyse the role of spatial imaginaries in promoting a new vision of the territory, capable of integrating local specificities with global challenges to build a more just and sustainable territorial development model. Terre del Monviso thus becomes a laboratory to experiment with new governance practices and innovative policies, using spatial imaginaries as tools for territorial cohesion.

Contents

INTRODUCTION

- i. Research topic and cultural foundations
- ii. Aim, research questions and objectives
- iii. Methodology and case study
- iv. Structure of the thesis
- v. Contribution of the research

PART 1 MARGINALITY AND TERRITORIAL WELFARE

Introduction

Chapter 1 - Justice and Rights

- 1.1 Social justice, the distributive vs procedural conundrum
- 1.2 The Spatial Dimension of Justice
- 1.3 Citizenship and Rights

Chapter 2 - Reconceptualising Marginality: A Theoretical Framework

- 2.1 Margins and marginality
- 2.2 Centres and peripheries
 - 2.2.1 Peripheralization as a conceptual tool
- 2.3 From Inner Peripheries to Left-behind

3.4 Towards a new territorial dimension

Chapter 3 - Conceptual framework on welfare

- 3.1 Definition and crisis of welfare state
- 3.2 From welfare state to second welfare
- 3.3 From welfare mix to community and proximity welfare
- 3.4 Contemporary welfare in marginalised territories
- 3.5 Social innovation in contemporary welfare
- 3.6 Foundational economy and self-organization
- 3.7 Spatialising social infrastructure

Chapter 4 - Experiences and innovations from Terre del Monviso

- 4.1 Socio-demographic background
- 4.2 Essential territorial services
 - 4.2.1 Education
 - 4.2.2 Health and social care
 - 4.2.3 Mobility
 - 4.2.4 Utilities and connections
- 4.3 Social infrastructure
- 4.4 Innovative experiences
 - 4.4.1 Il Quartiere – Metromountain community hub
 - 4.4.2 Territorial Welfare Youth Projects
 - 4.4.3 The cooperative experience: Viso a Viso in Ostana
 - 4.4.4 INNOVA.raita and Varaita Insieme
 - 4.4.5 Incl – Ageing well in Terres Monviso
 - 4.4.6 Valley car-sharing: CLIP E-transport experience in Po Valley
 - 4.4.7 Welfare for migrants integration
 - 4.4.8 Summary grid of innovative experiences

Concluding remarks

Spatially imagining welfare: where and how

PART 2 SPATIAL PLANNING AND TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE BETWEEN HARD AND SOFT SPACES

Introduction

Chapter 5 - On governance: an introduction

- 5.1 From government to governance in spatial planning
- 5.2 The governance concept
- 5.3 Territorial (and local) governance
 - 5.3.1 Multilevel governance
 - 5.3.2 Polycentric governance
 - 5.3.3 Public institutions in local multilevel governance
 - 5.3.4 The community turn in local governance

Chapter 6 - The 'formal' dimension of spatial planning

- 6.1 Hard planning
- 6.2 Hard spaces and their geographical dimension
- 6.3 Institutions in planning

Chapter 7 - The 'informal' side in spatial planning

- 7.1 The soft turn and the 'new spatial planning'
- 7.2 A definition of soft space planning
- 7.3 Soft space planning's characteristics
- 7.4 Soft spaces as governance's tool
 - 7.4.1 Soft cooperation and territorial cohesion
- 7.5 Soft spaces and institutions

Chapter 8 - Governance's ecosystem in Terre del Monviso

- 8.1 Actors and dimension of territorial governance
 - 8.1.1 Actors' levels of action
 - 8.1.2 Institutional and socio-economic interest
 - 8.1.3 Typologies of actors
 - 8.1.4 Hard and Soft Actors
 - 8.1.5 Summary grid of territorial actors
- 8.2 Spatialising governance
 - 8.2.1 Institutional geometries
 - 8.2.2 Strategic cooperation areas
 - 8.2.3 Services and utilities
 - 8.2.4 Other actors

Concluding remarks

How territorial mismatches tend to 'just territory':
the innovative political arenas

PART 3 SPATIAL IMAGINARIES AND TERRITORIAL DESIGN

Introduction

Chapter 9 - Spatial imaginaries and spatial planning

- 9.1 Definition and explanation of spatial imaginaries (SI)
 - 9.1.1 Places, idealised spaces and spatial transformations
 - 9.1.2 Material, discursive and affective SI
- 9.2 Spatial imaginaries and region-building
 - 9.2.1 Spatial imaginaries in territorial narratives
 - 9.2.2 Political and institutional changes
 - 9.2.3 Participation
- 9.3 Spatial Imaginaries in Practice
 - 9.3.1 Imaginaries and spatial planning: what nexus

Chapter 10 - Territorial design and SI: an overview from *Terre del Monviso*

- 10.1 Instrumental SI: local institutions and policies
 - 10.1.1 Governing fragmentation and the search for an intermediate institution
 - 10.1.2 The ‘comprensori’ experimental season
 - 10.1.3 The new administrative organisation after the Delrio Law
 - 10.1.4 From ‘Comunità Montane’ to ‘Unioni Montane’
 - 10.1.5 Territorial polycentrism in regional planning
 - 10.1.6 Inner areas, marginalised territories and policies
- 10.2 Political SI: actors and soft processes
 - 10.2.1 Political discourses
 - 10.2.2 Constructing soft policies and actions through SI
- 10.3 Cultural SI: historical and social constructions

Concluding remarks

Spatial imaginaries: a tool for conveying political intentionality

CONCLUSIONS

Future perspectives for (a real) spatial justice

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