

THE COMMUNITY AND THE COMMUNITARIAN DEVELOPMENT MODELS

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Summary: The concept of “community”, which seemed to be abandoned, is greatly being revived as regards to the possibility of explaining the changes and the interventions in a territory. Nowadays we have to formulate a new concept of community, as a collective intelligence, if we want to identify development models to realize the sustainability and the integration of individuals and territories.

Keywords: community, collective intelligence, territorial development, identity.

1. THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY

The contradictions more and more stressed in development, in economic growth, in the processes of institutional change are the product of changes in the financial and economic system of the western world. In this context, the way react different groups and cultures seem generally created by the autonomy of its actors that have their own specific resources and capacities. But the latter are destined to collective provisional action. In this way, even if we consider global society as being very important, the analysis of theories, experiences and the individual everyday life in a “community” have often re-evaluated “community” as only ways to organize people (Saccheri 2005). The community seems the only way to be able to read social problems and to define the actions to take.

In general, we define “community” a collective nature in which the members operate with reciprocity and they oppose everyone outside the community with their values, laws, traditions and collective interests.

The term “community” is ambiguous: when we talk of “community”, on the one hand, we refer to it as an element of dichotomy community-society, on the other hand, nowadays we must consider the concept of community as a social practice and collective phenomena. For these reasons, before we continue, it is best to briefly present the theory about community.

In the history of sociological thought the changes of social interactions is the starting point at which one gets an evolutionary view of society. The passage from community to society in XIX and XX century was very important. The first scholar that proposed the dichotomy community-society was Tönnies (1887). He defined the two concepts attributing to the first of two characteristics of “living organism” in which several forms (family, neighbour, relation, etc.) present a face to face interaction and sharing opinions typical of primary sociability. “Community” is a system of characterized relationship by a high degree of personal intimacy, emotions and social cohesion and stability. “Society” instead is a “mechanical aggregate” in which a relationship is possible only thanks to several tools as money or power, furthermore “society” is a particular type of human relationship characterized by a high degree of individualism and contractualism. Society creates a new way for human relations which are characterized by liberal rational choices, which reduce knowledge about others and the relationship becomes instrumental.

Another scholar that studied dichotomy is Durkheim [1893]. According to this author, to community corresponds the “mechanical solidarity” that consists of common values and laws, it permits all individual to stay in a society without conflicts because the intensity of common ideas and beliefs are stronger than everyone’s personal ideas. It is typical of traditional society. On the contrary in “mechanical solidarity” there is “organic solidarity” that is typical of a society in which the work division (functional differentiation) exists. In this kind of society the values and laws are less important. People act on the basis of their individual consciousness.

There are many other scholars that have studied these concepts (Weber, Parsons, etc.) but in this paper we cannot mention them all because we have very little time, we advice the lectors to read the literature available to improve his/her knowledge.

The passage from traditional society to modern society was intended as the transition from community to society. But at this moment, the reality that we observe is different. The societal relations are increasing, they are spreading and have changed our way of life, therefore communitarian forms still exist. In recent years, we have discovered that modern society consists of a mix between different forms of communities. Modern society seems to be characterized by integration of models of community and society which reproduce themselves and they leave open the possibility of interactions between themselves. There are two reason for this condition: one, the passage from tradition to modernity is seen as a process that looks for different ways to establish it, and the second is the type of social relationship that origins in particular context.

Finally, the term “community” includes both the political community (in global sense) and ethnic, cultural, religious “subcommunity” (Pesenti 2001). In simple words, “community” is then a people’s integrated system that linked by common customs, usages and existential situations, in this way the people speak and take common decisions. The members of a community actively participate in the decision making about community problems because they are a part of it. The community is a real example of a natural context in which there is a democratic process that is founded on the principle of participation and the building of local public spaces.

On this thought, the *New Communitarian*¹ does not re-evaluate the term of “community” in the sense of anti-modernity or nostalgic, but they re-evaluate it in the sense of new form to manifest the fundamental principle of participatory democracy in the process of decision making about *common goods*².

¹ Communitarians’ Group (New Communitarian), founded in 1990 by Amitai Etzioni, sees in it famous names, McIntyre, Sandel, Taylor, Bellah e Selznick, only to mention some. The original idea of this network is that possible an moral rebirth without to fall into Puritanism, they hope a “strong and participated democracy” in which the upper principle socio-political is the subsidiarity.

² The concept of “common good” is typical of Catholic’s thought and social doctrine of Church. It is best to explain the difference between “common good” and “public good” (Matteucci 1983): the first is a good of singles that are member of state and that the individuals can to obtain it only by solidarity; the second is a good of everyone in whom united.

The individuals that do not have a social tie, are not able to act freely, instead the individuals that have strong social ties are to be able to act and, in total liberty, make reasonable choices and give moral judgements. The cooperation between all individuals is very important for the life of everyone, because the responsibility of everyone towards the community does not come back on the underground of individual rights but only a balancing of individual interests to increase collective interests. On these basis, the *Communitarian* want to promote a “strong democracy” in which the participatory principle is the best way to obtain social cohesion and sustainable territorial development.

Thus, the concept of “community”, which seemed to be abandoned, is being greatly revived as regards the possibility to explain the changes and the interventions in a territory.

2. THE COMMUNITY AS EXPRESSION OF TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT

Nowadays we have to formulate a new concept of community, as a collective intelligence, if we want to identify development models to realize the sustainability and the integration of individuals and territories.

Collective intelligence (Lévy 1994) has to be intended as a form of intelligence distributed everywhere, constantly improved and coordinated in real time, leading to a real mobilization of resources and competences of a specific context. It is based on people’s acknowledgment and mutual enrichment, not on the worship of “fetished” communities. The Policy makers who really aim to start a territorial sustainable development have to facilitate and enhance the creation of “communities”, as they are fundamental structures in which it is important “to think about”: they represent the “factory” of a territorial human and social capital (territorial intelligence).

The word “community” in a global society does not have a negative sense, as the community considers individuals in their plenitude and not in one of the roles they have to play in the society. It is a whole of experiences and thoughts, tradition and engagement, participation and willingness, and at the same time it enhances the social dimension of the existence, the sense of belonging to a common destiny.

The keystone of a community representing the main resource and a representation of a territorial area, and expression of intelligences existing in that area, is included in the concept of the *Communitarian Network*, who assert that the condition of *social animal* is constitutive of men. This condition links men of different social status to their kindred in a context of rules and culture leading to the recognition of the concept of *common good* which gives a sense to human behaviour. This theory does not oppose liberalism neither the centrality of the individual, considering individuals as *embedded* in the territory, producing the sense of identity and the creation of protection and sustainable development networks (Etzioni 1995). Through the community we can affirm the social engagement, the respect of mutual rights and freedoms, the balance between needs and responsibilities, the reconstruction of satisfying relations among individuals, and the strengthening of the “social capital”, as a form of civil and free development, based on the cooperation of all the individuals within a territory.

Contemporary society has strong territorial and social differentiations to be decreased or totally removed. Cities (in many cases metropolis) are deeply fragmented, divided into neighbourhoods and suburbs, strongly differentiated per typology of inhabitants, presence of services and comfort of houses. These aspects of social differentiations cause a feeling of unequal and discriminated use of resources and services, increasing the perception of marginality. They cause the exclusion of adults, provoking an identity crisis, while the “non places” (Augè 1993), where the new generations meet, often become the only place of expression, fostering the sense of uneasiness and alienation. On the other hand, small rural or mountain villages continue depopulating, loosing the strong social and identity bonds which allowed them to survive wars and catastrophes in the past: in this case the sense of marginality affects young people who do not have the certainty of finding a job and abandon their original territories, along with the adults who do not recognize themselves and do not feel as if they belong to the territories whose policies often imitate the urbanization processes, importing only negative aspects.

These characteristics in the South of Italy have increased with experience the modernization processes of 1950s of last century: in fact, the southern communities subjected to these processes have been deprived without opposing a strength that develop the processes of empowerment. The cause of this condition is weak identity. In all cases, it should be very important to work, all together, to rebuild our community to be able to face up to the comparison inside and outside of them (D’Agostino 2002).

Due to these characteristics and conditions, the *community* is the most appropriate instrument to defend the territory from exclusion processes and to enhance the implementation of “communitarian” development models. It has to be considered as an open space in which environment and social networks find their best interrelation, in the way of sustainability of development and social protection activities, mixing environment, social and economic aspects. Territorial development projects do not have to improve the lifestyle of a few people, but of the whole community.

To do community means to valorise the differences to contribute to the construction of development models oriented to the preservation of a human dimension of life, starting from the feeling of identity and the *embedding* to the territory that each individual express when improving social forms of life.

The community is not only a form of territorial expression revealing itself, through consolidated *identity equipment* and shared traditions (Magnier, Russo 2002). It is the main resource, since is the unique form of social organisation focused on individuals capable of facing and overcoming “social pathologies” (overcrowding, depopulation, depression, identity crisis, etc.). Therefore, the community should start “promotion”, “participation” and “therapy” actions, leading to the assurance, especially for new generations, of life conditions enabling an itinerary of complete and integrated development.

3. IS IT STILL POSSIBLE FOR TERRITORIAL PROTAGONISM TO EXIST?

The concept of community, with globalization processes, was one of the aspects of dichotomy local-global. In this paper we must underline the importance of the term local, thus it is necessary to explain and define both the spatial or contextual aspects and relationship aspects. The last form is well described by Appadurai (1996) when he defines “locality” as a phenomenology of social life, a structure of emotions made by particular forms of intentional activity that produce typical material effects. It is clear that both aspects must be considered when we think of realizing patterns of territorial development, one does not exclude another, they are integrated.

At this point of our thought, we ask ourselves some questions: What is the dimension of “local” that can implement territorial development policy? Is only an univocal definition of “local” possible that integrates relationship and spatial aspects, and that consents to sharing perception between all disciplines that must intervene in the planning of a territorial development?

Certainly it is not possible for anymore to equate the local with the administrative boundaries of a territory, especially after the progress of the *“process of European integration, that appears or is increasingly perceived as the place at which two structures intersect: a formal one, resulting from the vertical and horizontal relationships among institutional subjects, that is legitimate but slow in acting, and an informal and spontaneous one, made up of open relations networks that offer the advantage of swiftness and flexibility, but it is limited by absence or by lack of legitimacy. So recognizing each other beyond the boundary means, for those who choose to venture onto the path of shared administration, to approach complex relationships that on the one hand, at the informal level, pose the existence of a community of destiny that can be actively involved in the new opportunities for movement and reciprocity, and on the other hand reaffirm the conditions resulting from the legitimate administrative territorial jurisdiction, its allocating power, the distribution of goods, the positioning of its government and representative powers”* (Mangone, 2001: 26).

A real and correct integration of these two structures is empowering the role of local territory that on the one hand, guarantees the principle of solidarity between among all citizens, it supports the civil society to exercise public responsibility and, on the other hand, that look for a right control on the complex offer of system with guarantees of impartiality and completely of the network’s services on the territory. Different subjects, with particular and specific interests, should organize to make an organic policy of territorial development and to answer its needs and demands of territory.

Development policies must try to make the most of territorial resources, by directly choosing the most suitable strategies and the management of their output: the territory must behave like a private actor within a market-driven logic, becoming a competitive actor able to grasp the best opportunities and the most adequate resources, without impairing local characteristics and peculiarities. In line with this logic, local government bodies must play a key role as “helmsmen” steering development, placing the emphasis on growth and enhancement of some aspects that are crucial for the effective implementation of interventions: *integration and coordination of interventions; networking through; stimulating role and advocacy and consciousness-raising activities* (Mangone 2008).

Regarding this last aspect (*advocacy and consciousness-raising activities*) a short analysis of it is necessary, because for the growth of a territory territorial marketing has a relevant position (Caroli 1999). Territorial marketing is the complex of techniques, processing and the tools that permit to establish the market’s objects with the attraction of several resources (financial, touristic, meetings, etc.). Territorial marketing is the planning and establishing of inventions, promoting and distributing ideas, goods and services to create exchange to establish objects of organizations and individuals: in this way, communication takes a fundamental role. The establishment of a territorial marketing system, that is constituted by the individuation of territory image and its subsequent diffusion and marketing of “product-territory”, should work out the problems related to communication and implementation of information network to promoting the territory and its development. In territorial marketing all actions that are directed to develop the territory attraction to re-evaluate the specificity of territory both for the internal individual or the external individual.

In the determining of marketing strategy is priority the concept of “territory vocation” has a priority. “Vocation” is the result of mix territory intangible and not tangible resources: “vocation” represents the natural habits to attract typical demands and to efficiently satisfy expectations. The implementation of the territorial marketing system must be characterized by the capacity to re-evaluate and to exalt territory characteristics promoting and making them attractive to the public.

Conclusion

In the light of what we have discussed above, we can say that the territory can still be the centre of attention even in a global society, instead of just the global society that determines some things that can favour the growth of territory consciousness respect to the opportunities of development that can be linked to utilizing and improving resources and characteristics that a community expresses.

Thus, the centre of attention for the territory is confirmed with development policies that are not residual, but they have been built on participatory citizenship of all its members, which the horizontal and vertical subsidiarity principle has considered as a support to spread the sense of responsibility and it has not denied the public part to take care of “governed territorial development”. This last, is the expression of a promoting dimension of new interventions and mobilizing community resources with a greater introduction of participatory planning that must involve the institutional actors (Municipalities, Health Systems, Schools, etc.) and civil society actors (associations, syndicates, the voluntary, third sector, etc.) and it must not favour the private subjects that work in the community.

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