



FOR A POLYCENTRIC EUROPE HOW TO SAVE INNOVATION FROM NEOLIBERISM

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ed.it

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**For a polycentric Europe.
How to save innovation from neoliberalism**

Introduction

This book is based on research aiming at updating the ESDP European Spatial Development Perspective-Towards Balanced and Sustainable Development of the Territory of the European Union (from now on referred to as ESDP 1999), which has been dealing with the economic and social development of the different territories of the EU, by presenting an assessment and indicating the most innovative directions. The issue addressed by the research is how the strategies of “territorial development” or “local development” can be improved, taking into account specific terms being used in the EU documents such as “spatial development” and “spatial dimension of development”. It is therefore a highly important topic, particularly for the public and private actors (municipalities, provinces, regions, business enterprises, trade unions, enterprises and research centres, universities, associations of civil society, educational and vocational training institutions) who are responsible for managing the development within the different territories of the EU.

The research, coordinated by the Federico Caffè Centre at Roskilde University under the direction of Andrea Gallina, is organised into two parts: the first part is an “update” of the ESDP 1999 document which takes into account the three main changes that have occurred in the EU between 1999-2005: a) qualitative changes in the reflections and analysis on territorial development in the intellectual debates within the academic institutions of the EU; b) quantitative changes in the indicators of the differences between the various regions making up the European countries after the last two enlargements; c) changes in

the official documents produced in the different European institutions and Directorates General of the European Commission which have directly or indirectly included a territorial/spatial dimension of the development process.

The second part is an “update” of the ESDP 1999 utilizing the contributions from “good practices” of local or territorial development which have been inspired by the ESDP, and whose applications have been presented at the local level. Along with the methodology developed to analyze good practices it will be possible to compare creative experiences of local development on which new project proposals for projects and actions in the EU, and their replication into other territories of the EU, can be based.

At the centre of the research and analysis of the different projects and documents produced within the European Commission on the direction of ESDP 1999 is the clash between two economic models: the so-called “neoliberal” economic model and the so-called “solidaristic” economic model.

The neoliberal model, also known as the “Washington Consensus”, is the dominant economic model adopted by the international financial and development institutions (World Bank and IMF), the U.S. government and organisations such as the World Trade Organisation and the World Patent Organisation. It is an economic model weighed in favour of multinational and transnational enterprises aiming at maximizing the shareholders’ profit. It assumes that generating “development” is possible through the “trickle-down effect” within nations, which would then close the economic gap within and between nations. According to the theoreticians of this model, the welfare state should be drastically reduced, trade unions dismantled, infrastructures and utilities privatised, environmental policies subordinated to the profit of the enterprises, labour markets liberalised and immigration policies in industrialised countries tightened or loosened according to the needs of the host countries. Following the logic of the neoliberal model, the objective is no longer to enlarge the number of consumers – the objective un-

derlying the Keynesian policies – but instead to supply the demand of a restricted number of wealthy consumers.

The neoliberal economic model is juxtaposed with a model defined as the “solidaristic” economic model which aims to valorise all different categories of people (including immigrants and other marginalised social groups) in both industrialised and non-industrialised countries, and preserve the environment and the quality of life of all people present in the territory. This model requires the enterprises to be responsive not only to the shareholders but also to the stakeholders, i.e. the workers and the society as a whole, and the environment and the territories which provide the products and services. In this model, there is an important role for local governments, research institutions, civil society associations, trade unions, and business associations. This alternative model has led to the creation of a network of intellectuals, NGOs, trade unions, associations and parties that have started dialogues and confrontations within the World Social Forum that started in Porto Alegre in 2001.

The emerging juxtaposition between the neoliberal model and the solidaristic model is important because the concept of “polycentric development” at the centre of the ESDP strategy (together with that of “sustainable development” and “social and economic cohesion”) is surely within the solidaristic economic model. Yet, the juxtaposition between the two models is more complex than the simple adhesion of the ESDP to one of them, and swaying between the two models can be detected even within same document and project.

This tension is analysed in the first part of the book. Through this, it is possible to assess the ESDP document and understand the existence of profound differences when considering a polycentric development within the regions of Europe or when considering the relationships between Europe and the rest of the world. In the documents analysed, the polycentric development model and the more general solidaristic economy model is especially well thought-out in the *internal* dimension of the EU, but when the ex-

ternal dimension is considered, i.e. the relationship with third countries, the neoliberal model becomes the prevalent one.

This first part of the research is useful in that it monitors the development of a wide range of documents and contributions which have been subject to hard criticisms by economists considering the proliferation of documents and official communications excessive in relation to the actual possibility of action¹. This part of the research discusses the main contributions of the ESDP projects and documents along with their gaps according to the theoretical framework and methodology.

In the second part of the book, the most interesting innovations within the ESDP are identified, aiming to orient the selection and transfer of good practices of local economic development. In the chapters presented in the second part, some good practices that take their inspiration from the ESDP and within the logic of polycentrism and solidaristic economy are analysed.

Notes

¹ This kind of criticism is developed in the essay by the Italian economist Alberto Quadrio Curzio, "L'Europa e la sindrome di Lisbona", *Il Mulino*, 2, 2006, pp. 337-345.

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