6.   Towards a visionary approach to LEADER?

The idea of planning has been discussed for a long time, it has evolved with different styles and basic logic that have inevitably conditioned the results and impacts on the territories. Such practices have evolved, bringing to light disputes about the role, legitimacy and even usefulness of the most recent practices defined as idealistic. These circumstances are even more acute in rural areas, areas with complex and contingent problems, for which planning activity has often led to the planning and imposition of problematic plans and policies, both in technical, political and social terms as societies become more diversified, informed and fluid.

The integration between different plans and policies at various levels, the need for vertical and horizontal integration, bring out new challenges for planners and planning policy. As discussed, for a long time, planning has been seen as a rationalistic process guided by utilitarian logic with obvious problems in terms of results, especially at local level, competing claims and consistency between objectives and practices.

At this stage of the study we will try to return to our initial aim, that is to better understand the LEADER approach through the examination of its main characteristics in which the transition from a traditional to a visionary approach clearly emerges. According to our assumption, explained in the course of this work, a misunderstanding has been created especially on an operational level, around the key features of the LEADER method, which has ended up in an over-simplification of processes and practices, making them ineffective on a local level. In the previous sections

we have highlighted some critical issues considering the different European experiences.

These practices have significant features in common, essentially related to the difficulties of adapting and implementing LEADER on a local level, therefore to better explore this field of investigation, we have examined a regional case, a representive and testing ground for LEADER at a national level, through the lens of these key features. While from the programmatic point of view the interpretation of the key features is clear, it is on the local level that problems emerge. There are persistent critical aspects in the style and processes of governance and planning adopted. What emerges is a traditional productivist approach which has revealed important critical issues in the implementation of the initiative on a local scale and which seem to be entrenched in traditional forms of institutionalized planning and participation, all of which poses limits on the construction of alternative scenarios for development.

In actual fact, from what has emerged in the course of this study it is clear that there is a substantial difference between what is indicated from a programmatic point of view and what occurs in practice. Another situation which may arise mainly in the most recent experiences and which has emerged in those examined (especially in the case of Apulia for several reasons such as inexperience, conflicts between constraints and objectives at different scales, the prevalence of a traditional and rational approach etc...) is the overlap and coexistence between different approaches to planning, making the failure of any experience and initiative inevitable. In other words, while from a programmatic point of view the approach would tend especially (in the last programming cycles) towards a territorial, visionary type, from an operational point of view, on a local scale, it would seem strongly traditional and sectoral.

On the basis of these considerations, an attempt has been made to formulate a logical framework that sums up and compares different and opposing approaches to LEADER (sectoral/traditional and visionary) which we have tried to develop in this monograph. The study reconstructs the main features that distinguish the two approaches, taking into account the style and planning approach, the aims of a local project, the

interpretation of innovation and of local resources, and the role of local actors. According to our assumption, these characteristics can reveal the approach and style adopted at the local level and can therefore be seen as indicators for the understanding, interpretation and self-assessment of practices on a local scale.

The reflections, the common criticalities and the territorial differences that have emerged are connected to issues and differentiations in the modalities and style of planning that emerged in Healey's work. Our assumption is that the LEADER method should move in the direction of the visionary approach in order to achieve full implementation especially on a local scale. These elements lead us to believe that there is an absolutely urgent need both for a rethinking of the LEADER approach in a visionary perspective and for finding ways to interpret the processes and provide recommendations for self-assessment and policy suggestions.

At this point it is clear that it is necessary to better define this approach and the characteristics that distinguish it from the traditional one, in order to avoid rhetoric and mere trivialization practices on a local scale.

The crucial aspect at this point concerns how do visions and strategies come about? It is clear that emerging strategies require substantial changes and revisions of planning systems. As Healey (2007) argues, the formation of the strategy in these circumstances does not proceed in an orderly way through specific technical and bureaucratic procedures, it must be understood as a messy process, back and forth with multiple levels of contestation and struggle. In this case the strategies emerging from these processes are socially constructed structures or discourses. Moreover, the formulation of the strategy is not limited to the articulation of strategic ideas but is conceived as persuasion and ability to inspire various actors in different positions, where specific ideas bring power, generating and regulating new ideas for projects.

Strategies, according to this assumption, are emerging social products in a complex governance; they are fluid, neither standardized nor imposed from above. For Healey (2007), strategy, interpreted in this way, is really transformative. It is not easy to define, like "vision" or the production of some kind of image. It is found in the generative, coordinative and

justifying style in governance contexts. Such a conception of strategy arises from a relational and interpretative perspective, which emphasizes two dimensions of relationships, or connections, for the creation of an effective strategy:

- the first is the way the "strategic frame" imagines links between phenomena, highlighting critical issues and interventions;
- the second concerns the "nexus of relations" within which a force is built up behind a strategic framework, sufficient not only to achieve some priority for attention in governance, but also to resist and flow to influence the critical arenas in which action is formed.

In these processes of building intellectual capital and socio-political force, the strategy can be continually reimagined, with shifted meanings and priorities. In fact:

> "In these processes of constructing intellectual capital and socio-political force, a strategy may be continually re-imagined, with meanings and priorities shifted. A powerful strategy is one that has interpretive flexibility but which retains and focuses on key parameters as it travels among governance arenas through time […]. In such conditions, social-learning processes become more important than bureaucratic procedure, rationalist scientific management or pluralist politics as modes of strategy formation (Christensen 1999). In summary […] strategies are selective constructions, 'sense-making' devices, created from a mass of material. Their formation occurs through time, but not necessarily in defined stages and steps" (Healey, 2007, pp. 184-185).

As emerged in this work so far, therefore the construction of a vision requires a paradigm shift. In fact only persuasive strategies are able to "orient and inspire activity, through motivating people with future hopes and through giving some actors an idea of what other actors may be up to". In this case intellectual and social resources are mobilized "to create the power to carry a strategic frame forwards, just as they may also mobilise resistances" (Ibidem).

For Healey (2007), then, strategies are efforts in the creation of collective meaning. If they gain strength through mobilization and persuasive processes they allow the flows of resources to be modeled, norms and normative topics to be structured and inspire the invention of new projects and practices. An important element to consider is the presence and mobilization of actors from different fields who, thanks to their knowledge and resources, make it possible to develop the strategy.

Therefore, these are processes that not only create knowledge but allow the reordering of values. Through feed-back, new networks and communities of practice are generated around a new strategic discourse. In this way, the elaboration of the strategy and the emerging vision is the result of a dynamic emerging social construction able to "contribute to stabilising and ordering" (Ibid., p. 186). In this sense, the LEADER method with the bottom-up approach and a participatory style, places strategic actors and the local community at the center of the process, radically changing the process itself.

The attempt to bring together the elements that emerged in the previous paragraphs makes it clear that there is a substantial difference between what is indicated from a programmatic point of view and what derives from the practices. In other words, there is a contrast between the approach from a programmatic point of view (it would tend especially in the last programming cycles towards a territorial, visionary type) and from an operational point of view, in particular on a local scale (it would seem strongly traditional and sectoral).

In fact, as emerges from the case studies analyzed, the objectives are mainly standardized, easily controllable, with a low degree of risk and mainly related to economic objectives or competitiveness. Innovation itself is interpreted in a technical, technological and productive sense, as an external, codified and linear process that is easily adaptable to different contexts, easily measurable through standard indicators, in contrast to what we discussed previously.

According to our argument, the litmus tests are the process and the style of planning adopted. In fact, as we have previously discussed, a rational and deterministic logic prevails, in which the results are at the

heart of institutional and political concerns and the community represents the vehicle through which to achieve the objectives. The community is involved in the processes to a limited extent, participation is usually nominal, limited to some initial and significant actors and steps and not influential in defining the local strategy. As regards the local strategy, it is often inconsistent with the resources and the perception of resources by the community, having been developed without community input and therefore without an internal knowledge and awareness of the territory.

By contrast, the visionary approach leverages the imagined future of the community and therefore cannot ignore the community itself which is at the center of the process, present in all phases in a dynamic, interactive process, in an active, responsible way. In this case the participation is at the highest levels, not mere rhetoric but direct activation of the various actors involved from the beginning. They also undertake to collaborate for the realization of single pieces of the local strategy.

In this important phase it is not possible to conceive the actors, even institutional ones, in their traditional roles but they become facilitators of the process. The choice of activating these processes is usually made by these institutional actors starting from the allocation of resources which certainly cannot be standardized but will have to take into account the different contexts, preparing them for change, acting mainly on the human and social capital. And it is precisely on this important point that the concept of territorial capital needs to be examined.

At this point, although the concept of territorial capital is often referred to in current strategies, we can argue that there is little awareness of its deep meaning and operational methods of intervention especially on a local scale. The references to territorial capital usually concern single components and although there is some emphasis on the intangible aspects (in particular the quality of human and social capital) as drivers of economic development, in reality the use of the concept as initially defined in our research (De Rubertis et al., 2018b), only makes full sense if it actually enters into programming, linking resources and modes of use based on the expectations of the community. In fact, the review of the literature has led to a definition of the concept of territorial capital and

also its attempted measurement (see De Rubertis et al., 2018a; 2019a; 2019b). In particular, the immaterial component is of great importance according to our assumptions of planning as a vision and strategy as a social construction.

Indeed according to De Rubertis et al., (2018a, pp. 157-158) territorial capital can be defined "as a set of immaterial socio-cultural, material and physical-environmental socio-cultural elements, moreover, it is identified and organized by the reference community on the basis of the development objectives that it could pursue or actually pursues. Territorial capital and its components therefore have relevance in relation to the value that individuals and communities attribute to it" (Ibidem). Therefore immaterial components of human, cultural and social capital influence other components of territorial capital. In fact, "interpersonal relationships, local institutions, widespread knowledge and skills, the tangible and intangible heritage settled over time are obviously affected by the common cultural matrix.

Moreover, the way in which it relates to its physical-environmental context also depends on the social and cultural qualities of the population: expectations, projects, strategies, actions result from the individual and collective representations of their respective living environments. From this perspective, the concept of "social capital", as a regulator of individual behaviour in a community, seems to play a pivotal role in the definition of the concept of territorial capital" (Ibidem).

In this examination based on the suggestions from planning practices and the literature, important clarifications made in previous research (Labianca et al., 2020) take on even more importance, that is:

1. recognition of territorial capital: the capacity of recognizing the territorial capital – or creating it cognitively - the local actors should have a reflexive capacity, that is, it is necessary that the essential preconditions for the creation of knowledge and sharing between the actors exist;

2. attribution of value to territorial capital: in consideration of the different values and sensitivities within a context, it becomes necessary to build consensus around the recognition of the territorial capital. Trust and social capital are fundamental in this step (Ibid., p. 116).

These assumptions about territorial capital, are certainly compatible with the visionary planning approach, while the more traditional interpretation linked simplistically to a set of resources as instruments of mere enhancement and not of development, is a feature of rational planning and in particular of the sectoral, traditional approach of LEADER.

On the basis of these considerations, an attempt has been made to formulate a logical framework that also in this case allows to compare different and opposite approaches (see Table 6). The considerations that emerged in the previous paragraphs are brought together and two approaches to LEADER, which we have tried to develop in this work, are compared. We have little by little identified the main characteristics that distinguish the two approaches: sectoral and visionary. These characteristics can be taken as indicators for the understanding, interpretation and self-assessment of practices on a local scale.

Certainly the visionary approach contains important elements which, although already present in the LEADER programmatic guidelines, as previously discussed, have remained at least in operational terms poorly applied. The LEADER of the future will have to reconsider and reflect on this approach and try to put it into practice in European rural areas, paiying particular attention to the local.

More urgent reflections concern the 'who' and 'how' of the processes. This is especially true for the territories lagging behind, at risk of progressive impoverishment, of among other resources, their human capital, the real creator of the processes of change. Reflecting on the 'who', certainly involves the allocation of resources, which must therefore be aimed at fostering the creation of skills and knowledge in the territory. Reflecting on the 'how' seeks to make this idealistic approach more operational.

The role of the LAGs will certainly be fundamental since they are the privileged "activators", and have a genuine, in-depth knowledge of the territory. They must be actively involved in a process of real multilevel governance, of mutual comparison and self-assessment, offering concrete,

strategic suggestions and recommendations, with their decision-making autonomy and centrality in the process being fully recognized.

Table 6. LEADER: key features of the approaches.

Key features	LEADER approach	
	Traditional	*Visionary*
Objectives	Economic goals Competitiveness	Creation of 'imaginaries' and alternatives for development
Planning approach	Rational	Spatial
Strategies	Sectoral	Relational
Development approach	Predominantly exogenous	Neo-endogenous
Innovation	Standardized, codified Exogenous, technical	Social innovation
Territorial capital	A set of distinct and unrelated tangible and intangible resources Strong prevalence of tangible and quantifiable resources Knowledge and recognition quantified from the outside	A set of strongly linked material and intangible resources Strong attention to intangible resources, especially relational ones (they represent the connecting element between them) Strong role of human, cultural and social capital Knowledge and recognition from inside
LAG's role and features	Implementation agency Low strategic and functional autonomy Low skills and knowledge Subject to and conditioned by formal external evauation	Active actor High strategic and functional autonomy High professionalism, expertise, knowledge Reflexive and self-evaluation ability

Source: Our elaboration.

Infact, as Healey (2007, p. 192) argues, strategies should be "culturally peculiar", to "have effects are not just abstract concepts, floating in the ether of design and planning discourses. They gather force because they resonate with the values, perceptions and particular needs of key actors. They develop energy as they are positioned in critical governance arenas. They answer to the sense that some kind of strategic orientation is needed to give meaning, justification and legitimacy to a stream of activity".

Obviously this will have to take due account of the local context. It will probably be necessary to consider that deep processes of social and institutional change will take longer, because according to Healey (2007, pp. 194-198) they need to accumulate the power of mobilization, to learn what it means to "see" the issues that concern them in a completely new way. The creation of strategies in a relational sense implies the connection of knowledge resources (intellectual and social capital) to generate a mobilization force (political capital). These resources (in our meaning the territorial capital) develop internal and external mobilization, becoming nodes and networks through which a strategic discourse is spread. The dynamics of mobilization, with the knowledge and internal relational resources, must therefore move towards central arenas both in terms of resources and to gain influence in a dynamic and complex context, to have sufficient legitimacy to survive in the governance context where power is widespread and positions shift continuously (Ibidem).

In the future, the LEADER must therefore reiterate the key points of the approach and clearly share with the local actors the methods for concrete application on a local scale, through a necessarily visionary and dynamic approach that starts from social innovation. In view of our discussion, a rethinking of the LEADER approach in a visionary perspective becomes urgent. As has emerged, it will certainly not be necessary to intervene on the basic characteristics but on their interpretation and formulation on a local scale. This will certainly require a different approach to planning than the traditional one. Therefore, a greater awareness on the part of the LAGs and the local community of their strategic role, a greater reflexive capacity and a new ethics in the style of discussion and planning are urgently required at numerous levels.

Significant efforts on a human, social, institutional and political level are required. In fact it is necessary substantial renewal efforts and work on the intangible local components that are difficult to quantify and to date underestimated in terms of evaluating the effectiveness of the community programmes. These intangibles regard fundamental components of the so called territorial capital, mainly human, social and cultural, whose quality affects the possibility of imagining alternatives and visions, profoundly changing ways of acting, rebuilding and redefining power relations inside the territories in which they are active.

Since strategies are complex social constructions, a complex institutional work is necessary in recognizing the role of actors and their relational networks, to create new communities and political networks that can elaborate and carry out strategic ideas through the necessary and contextual evolution of style of governance and processes.