Towards Smart City. Public Bodies and Italian medium – sized towns: governance strategies for a smart, sustainable, inclusive growth of the territory. ABSTRACT

Framing of the subject and recipients of research_ We live in a time of consistent geopolitical, social and economic transformations which generate problems and needs profoundly different from those of a decade ago. In recent times, cities have gained a strong importance from an economic, cultural, political and psychological point of view. Urbanization is becoming more consistent, with proportions and features never recorded in the past. The crisis of nonrenewable natural resources, abused for decades because of destructive economic policies, raises serious questions about the need to redefine the role of anthropic systems in relation to the environment. Cities are also the context that reflects the most impressive economic and socio-demographic changes of our time: if on one hand a general improvement of living conditions is recorded, deep unfairness and arbitrariness in wealth distribution still remain and determine explosive social tensions and conflicts especially in urban areas; furthermore, the increasingly multi-ethnic society underlines emblematic problems of segregation in many degraded urban environments all over the planet. Moreover, the interactions between people and physical space are significantly altered if compared to the past. The world is increasingly interconnected: through technological innovation and dissemination of digital culture, telematic infrastructures go far beyond technology and deeply permeate daily life and the relationships between individuals and the territory. In order to face the epochal changes associated with the transition from the industrial to the post-digital era, for about twenty years the concept of smart city has been debated. The concept of smart city was formulated almost as if it were a "magic wand" to respond effectively to current issues. It is therefore necessary to understand whether we are facing a real cultural change or we are simply spectators of a fascinating but ephemeral phenomenon: this commitment is essential especially for Public Administrations, which act as main directors of urban transformation.

Target_ The term smart city from the first definition of a purely digital city over time has evolved into a "holistic" vision that covers different fields of interest: environmental protection, economy, mobility, governance, participatory policies, inclusion and social innovation. The goal of this research is not to introduce new definitions of the concept of smart city - that is acquired as now established - but rather to investigate methodologies and operational tools at the disposal of the local authorities to pursue concrete results beyond purely programmatic formulations which may sometimes remain unimplemented.

Methodology_ Among the various aspects ascribed to the smart city (economy, environment, governance, living, mobility, people), it was decided in particular to deepen that of smart governance, in reference to the thematic fields of "environment", "society" and "economy". Among these areas, the research then turned its particular attention especially to the "physical" territory as milieu that includes social and economic aspects. The analysis of physical and related socio-economic transformations of the territory dictated the programmatic key of the research: instead of exploring the theme of smart city in the light of digital technologies, it was decided to focus on the transformation of the "physical" context, according to an unusual approach if compared to the interpretation of the smart city as a predominantly technological one. Particular attention was therefore given to urban regeneration processes, recognized as an emblematic testing ground to evaluate the effectiveness of public policies applied to environmental, social and economic fields.

Phases_ The first part of the research proposes a framework of the argument, first through the investigation of the concept of smart city in the current literature, then through the analysis of European experiences: this phase of the research was supported by the examination of documents mainly from indirect sources. Then, it was decided to limit the scope of the analysis to some of the most poignant and current themes recognized by the Europe 2020 Strategy for a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth: three different areas of research ("Environment", "Society" and "Economy") were identified, which formed the "grid" on which the following steps of the research were developed. Case studies of European cities of medium - large size have subsequently been analyzed from which critical and operational reflections emerged. In this phase data were collected from prevailing direct sources. Subsequently, the study focused on the analysis of a specific Italian case study, the city of Reggio Emilia. Finally, in the light of the cases analyzed, the contents accrued during the research were reworked and some possible operational guidelines of governance for Administrations of Italian medium-sized cities were outlined.

Achievements

ENVIRONMENT
- Urban regeneration. Contrast to land consumption and urban quality: the "mechanism of the bellows"
  Step 1: the "expansion" of the bellows. A systemic vision of public city (wide-area planning and inter-municipal cooperation, land management strategies, Public Administration control on urban planning)
  Step 2: the "contraction" of the bellows. A strategic approach at the neighborhood scale (administrative decentralization and citizens' involvement, community empowerment, enhancement of neighborhood identity)
  Step 3: the "expansion" of the bellows. The relaunch of the district at the urban scale
- Energy Policy (partnerships between City Council and utilities, increase of administrative efficiency)
- Policies for a sustainable food supply and for the protection of biodiversity (inter-municipal cooperation with farmers, land management strategies for public acquisition of natural/agricultural areas, adoption of a coordinated and "entrepreneurial" approach to urban farming)

ECONOMY_ Economic-financial feasibility: do ut des sed cum ratione
- Innovative procurement (pre-commercial procurement)
- Public-private partnerships (social impact bond, land value capture, negotiating policies with private according to a "win-win" logic)

SOCIETY_ "Social" and "socialized" innovation: the community as a "target" and as a "mean" of innovation
- Innovative procurement (social impact bonds, pre-commercial procurement and living labs)
- Participatory policies (innovative engagement, widespread presence of the City Council in the territory)
- Policies for integration: empowerment of multiethnic community (urban farming according to an "entrepreneurial" logic, implementation of social impact bonds procedures,...)

GOVERNANCE_ Networking strategies, administrative reorganization, internal systematization of data for a critic definition of the public demand
- Legal/administrative instruments
- "Outwards" and "inwards" digital tools