Ancient inspirations, new communities. Statuti e Capitolli della Terra di Agnone

Introduction

Issue of concern is the survival of small local communities which are geographically marginal in compare with large core and systems of economic production. Based on the back to the land as admonitory and motivation for effective local development, we want to suggest the recalling of Ancient statutes and chapters of Agnone’s land as inspiration for more effective methods for future management. It is necessary to operate a size reduction (LANARO 2011) and concentrate on different scale (GEERTZ 1999) from the global one (BAUMAN 2001). Small communities, also in marginal areas (CARROSIO 2010), can survive qualitatively and quantitatively only through the revival of a new dimension more little and closer, with the “coscienza di luogo” [awareness of place] (MAGNAGHI 2010, 296).

According to management level and civil level, there is not consciousness about the connection between development and non-economic factors pre-existing development. It is fundamental to considerer local inhabitant near to global citizen. The inhabitant needs to be aware of resources and opportunity for endogenous development in relation with the place where he lives. Moreover, he is responsible for preserving historical features of his territory and for protecting his land from exogenous and invasive interventions. It reflects an old sense of inhabit in compare with nowadays life style, in little villages too (CLIFFORD, KING 1993). This sense which traces ancient documents, though it cannot be rediscovered and revitalized in the same ways, it can help us to realize behavior and patterns of local life of the community (TORRE 2011). Because of macroeconomic dynamics, such as global market and international competitiveness, economy, society and culture of little local communities can difficultly survive (SACHS 1992; BEVILACQUA 2008). It is necessary to identify different models for economic production and valuation of local territory in order to enable the survive of these communities and to create microeconomic cycle, which will allow them to forsake the critical context of macroeconomics.

Molise is considered as the geographical reference context, it is a region with a small demographic rate, with very little villages and without the right perception of its own resources. It would be advisable to become conscious of the privilege of being unrelated with standard development procedure.

1 Ancient statutes and chapters of the Agnone’s land. It is an ancient municipal document dating XV century: all quotes from this document will be in original language, a literal translation will be provided in square brackets.
The historical development delay represents a value because the quality and the variety of the local territory has not been compromised from the negative aspects of the development. Moreover, the unique example of a healthy territory is not sufficient to produce another kind of local development. To focus the own resources, history, tradition and land with creativity, knowledge and competence are indispensable. The different regional history together with the different civic traditions in Italy may help to understand the reasons for so big cultural difference in this country (Putnam, 1993). However, there are historical exception very interesting. Agnone is known for his quality and is considered as Athens of Sannio regio, its environmental, cultural and socio-economic features are vital and have an extraordinary longevity, which after long times have survived until these days.

1. The equation place = land

According to an interpretation of the tradition, the ancient little town of high Molise, which stands high above the valley of the river Verrino, was called Angolorum “grosso angolo” [big corner] (Ferrandino 1994, 17). In the long and subjugated feudal history of the southern province, a first embryonic establishment of municipality consisted in the ancient universitas. Beside the large landowners who sold and bought their fief, burdening their people with continuous duties, born and grew institutions which represented all inhabitants of land: universitas, therefore, of all community member. The universitas, especially in Molise, contain feudal abuse and oppression and complain rights of freedom which are affirmed by the bottom. Agnone, in a regional context of still heavy feudal domain, since the beginning of the Aragon kingdom can be described as universitas ante-litteram. “A well-ordered community, concerned to give itself a practical and efficient regulations, as perfect as possible in an age where the right wasn’t yet codified” (La GamBa 1972, 17). A perfect X-ray of Agnone’s universitas, since the seventies of the last century, has been restored to history with the publication of the “Statuti e Capitoli originali della Terra di Agnone” by Filippo La Gamba in 1972.

Before considering directly some of the most significant chapters, we believe useful to underline how at that time, in referring to a particular area, city or rather a given feud, was used the word and concept of land. Such use did not meant only a terminological habit, but importance of the element land in life, economy, administration and in popular imaginary of the epoch. Land meant prosperity, work, subsistence, but meant also strong sense of belonging and struggle to defend it. When we enter in ambience of the ancient statutes and chapters of Agnone’s land, we realize the value which was given to the land, not only economic value, but civil and cultural too: a concept of land not purely agricultural-industry, landed or speculative like nowadays, however a concept which contains in itself also private buildings and common spaces, local crafts, arts and products, urban furniture and habits and traditions. It was therefore not an economic concept, but rather a cultural one. So a back to the land today, based on old local stories (Moreno, Raggio 1999), might start by giving again centrality to own land not only as territorial dividing line, but as cultural identity too, economic resource shared and commonly managed as well as source of social gathering and active involvement toward public range (Magnaghi 2012). We need to regain “the awareness that history and geography matter […] To sum up, I see a world of human groups settled in precise and specific places […]
and of a variously dense network of relations connecting together those groups and those places" (BECCATINI 2009, 249-250).

Why, in globalization era, do we want sustain something that might be defined a reentry in own walls as reply to global crisis and especially, in this specific case, as survival course? Is a symbolic memory which aim to recover for a local identity rooted in ages where walls were built to defend territories, traditions and common dignity. Sometimes look back to its own history, as well as being an inexhaustible source of knowledge, can encourage one common creative intelligence and so innovation and renewal in that part of earth we inhabit (VARINE 2011): core elements for vitality and hold of the small marginal realities.

Idea of land evoked, that of a space, an environment not economic-productive only but likewise cultural and of identity, has lasted lively in Agnone's community. Thanks to sharing of this environment, there is a chance to underline the creative thought and care the inhabitants harbour for their land. There is a strong presence of associations, tourist promotion centres or groups, NGOs, cultural centres and sport clubs. According to the city council data, there are 26 active associations out of 5223 total population. Intense membership activity testify an important cultural vivaciousness, despite Agnone's demographic and geographic context. A land which innovate its own features, therefore primarily get acquainted with them and recognise as potentiality. This is so the strength of an ancient concept in order to manage small and marginal communities in present and future time.

2. The chapters of the Agnone's land

The above mentioned statutes and chapters are not something like granting of the central power, but habits and rules already well-established at a civil and popular level that were recognized. Such chapters consist of municipal highly detailed regulations, over one hundred, that encompass around one century and a half: 1440 to 1675, with a gap from 1583 to 1646. More we enter into the heart of Agnone's chapters, which could be definable as "ancient statutes of freedom", and more realize of civic maturity that Agnone's universitas had reached already in the fifteenth century. Just see the titles of various chapters to understand the dense network of citizens obligations in addition to public and individual care of their land: "Della riparazione dei danni" [on damage repairing], "Che nessuno danneggi le mura del territorio" [that nobody damage the walls of land], "Di chi arrecasse danno alle fonti" [for those who cause damage to the fountains] (LA GAMBIA 1972, 194, 196, 198). The streets and squares of Agnone were crowded not only by the inhabitants, but also by the transit of many animals and occupied by many coppersmiths, tanners and cobblers who worked outside the shops: in this way there were many fines for frequent infractions. The infringements fined and their accurate descriptions, allow us to reconstruct the picture of a lively city of Molise in 15th-16th century. At that time Agnone was well governed and densely populated: "on the basis of fire count, in Agnone there were 693 tax household in 1532, 734 in 1545 and 813 in 1561" (FERRANDINO 1994, 46). The chapters on fines which the craftsman had to pay, give an idea of economic and social dynamism in Agnone at that time. Furthermore, permit us to get the high level of public morality. Some chapters of the section artigiani [craftsman] not only began
with a fixed formula: “in che maniera essi debbono esercitare la loro arte fedelmente e legalmente” [the manner in which they have to exercise their art faithfully and legally] (La Gamba 1972, 227-229), but all included severe fines for those who practiced the crafts with fraud and trick, the compensation of damages caused and prices fixed in detailed lists.

The artisans represented, and represent, the pride of Agnone, so there were many chapters concerning the rules for their craft and linked infractions (ivi, 225-232). A craftsman intimately engaged with his own territory, to that place which is such a place because those particular trades are performed there, those products are produced, thanks to those associations, because the inhabitants have those traditions and above all because they are acquainted with and care those peculiarity. This is the evocative sense of the ancient Statuti. Nowadays, clearly, the written rules no longer exist, however in the town sign of a particular working manner and a way of life last. These traces point out how the local Knowledge rather than the external expert consultant knowledge could be the key toward the good development or, at least, the good survival. Such a traces can be found in the existence of four historic copper handmade workshops with linked shops, in the endurance of an ancient carpentry workshop and in the age-old bronze foundry. Additionally there is a cobbler shop according to the old method and a wrought iron workshop. Some of these activities are located along the inner city in historic abode where the craftsman is back to an old lifestyle (Sennett 2008).

The old skills of local art and handcraft have been able to endure and, above all, adapt themselves to new economic and market circumstances, but keeping their historical identity.

In present Agnone, a different civic and cultural sensitivity certainly comes from what we are described and recalled so far. Here we cannot deepen into the current economic and cultural dynamics of Agnone nor to report interesting data (LL Al 1978; Incollingo 2005; Paolone, Mastronardi 2008), having wanted to present only a suggestive historical local re-reading to inspire a return to land as cultural warning rather than productive and economic. About Agnone, the sensation, however, is that the inhabitants have been able to mediate between the old and the new. In this way, after centuries and despite all internal problems, the High Molise city reconfirm itself as corner of quality from a civic and cultural point of view. Here terra [land] does not mean agriculture, but rather is synonym of community and city.

Conclusions

It would be desirable “a halfway meeting” (Magnaghi 2010, 259), a mutual willingness to do something: local institutions to reduce their powers widening democratic participation in decision-making, and civil society to engage itself voluntarily to care the public range.

A endogenous development so, originated from inside, which is capable of leaving that territory in good conditions, perhaps better than it was, for future generations. A self-sustainability therefore, not just sustainability (Tarozzi 1998a; 1998b). It must not only be a development which lasts, but must be also a development which can lasts relying on internal forces of a community, of a land in the ancient sense of term, avoiding to destroy progressively the territory that belong to it (Magnaghi 2010). A territory entrusted in the hands of those who inhabit it, of those who live it and are
in acquaintance with, of those who are able to identify potentiality and resources of it without appeal to planning and advice elsewhere conceived. Often, experts who formulate such solutions haven’t ever seen physically that territory. In this sense, is appropriate to re-start by the small and by the little to save the diversity and beauty of a whole variegated and resourceful which cannot be disregarded for a quality future life.

As first step, bring back the inhabitants of little marginal areas to their own identity is needed, although as evolutionary process and not as immutable element, educate for a symbiosis among the geography and history of that place going back to write, why not, new statutes and chapters drawing inspiration from old criterion. The latter, perhaps, at least as regard the survival first, and the good development then, of little marginal areas, will be more effective than current economic management and cultural patterns. This, in the end, might be a useful and possible back to the land.

References

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Abstract
Small and marginal territorial context are undergoing a process of demographic economic and cultural dissolution. The specific case of Agnone, a small and historical city in the high part of Molise in central-southern Italy, is a good community example thinking about a self-sustainable development as turns out from the analysis of the ancient statutes and chapters of the land. The re-reading of rules and municipal norm concerning that community in the 15th and 16th century, becomes source of inspiration, both theoretical and practical, in order to an improved civil participation and taking on responsibility toward the territory in which we inhabit. A memory which aim to underline the way back to an ancient concept of land as antidote or at least fight against the general dissolution of marginal territories: from land as purely economic and private concept to land as cultural concept, common local resource and historical-geographic identity.

Keywords
Endogenous development, marginality, self-governance, local identity, local heritage.

Bio
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