

# Towards Creative City Region Governance in Italy and Germany

City regions all over Europe are experiencing considerable pressure to rethink regional governance. They are well aware of the necessity of regional cooperation in times of globalization and urban competition. Although they have all experimented with various forms of regional cooperation in the past, no valid European model has emerged so far, which addresses the manifold challenges city regions are facing from Italy to Finland, and Spain to Germany. Scholarly research (Salet et al. 2003; Albrechts et al. 2003) and professional experience shows that in the end each city region in Europe has to find its own solution of how to organize regional cooperation.

Italy and Germany are two countries of the European Union with quite different traditions in urban and regional governance. While Italy is characterized by a clear-cut system of multi-tiered planning and decision-making with dynamic local political territories, Germany, being a federal country with powerful states or *Länder*, independent city-states and politically self-governing local governments, exhibits quite different regional political cultures. Given Italy's and Germany's different political and planning cultures, it is worthwhile to explore their different approaches to regional cooperation in city regions, or at last to learn from their respective efforts, their successes and failures.

In both countries there is no clear definition of the term "city region". Although the Federal German Ministry of Transport, Housing and Planning has identified seven metropolitan regions (MURL 1997), while neglecting the city regions of Hanover and Nuremberg, these city regions represent just one possible approach to the definition of city region territories. The city-states (Hamburg, Bremen and Berlin), which have grown over the last decades beyond their traditional boundaries, are forced to seek consensus with the federal states in which they are geographically embedded (Lower Saxony and Brandenburg). Frankfurt/Main is just one city in the conurbation extending over three federal states (Hesse, Bavaria and Rhineland-Palatine). The RheinRuhr ag-

glomeration, with a population of 12 million inhabitants in more than a dozen large cities such as Cologne, Essen or Dortmund, is as big as the conurbations of Paris or London. Stuttgart is surrounded by a large number of economically quite strong and politically independent medium-sized cities, Munich, in turn, is a powerful capital of a very much centralized state, surrounded by a plethora of suburban communities due to the limited development space of the central city. In East Germany, dreams to form a powerful city network made up of Dresden, Leipzig and Halle have not yet materialized.

In Italy, the law 142/1990 introduced the *Città metropolitana* as an independent institutional body at the intermediate level between city council and region. Ten Italian city regions received the metropolitan label: Turin, Milan, Venice, Genoa, Bologna, Florence, Rome, Bari, Naples and Cagliari. This new authority has never been implemented in any of these metropolitan cities, yet the initiative of the Central Government produced some interesting experiments across the country. In a few of these metropolitan cities new modes of governance emerged. As a rule they were initiated from the local government, hence "from the bottom" and were related to particular topics or particular territories within city regions. In recent years we have also seen the emergence of city regions that go far beyond the original concept of metropolitan area. This is particularly true for central Lombardy, where an area of at least five million people (belonging to five provinces and three regions) live in a very integrated pattern, in the Veneto Region, the area between Verona and Venice, in the area of Naples etc. For all these reasons the idea of "city region" is more appropriate than that of "metropolitan city", and at the same time it raises new governance issues.

Comparing Germany and Italy seems particularly valuable because – against a similar legal and institutional background – local and regional planning take on very different roles. Despite some emerging similarities, the role, the routines and approaches, as well as the

implementation and financing of planning strategies differ widely between these two countries. However, regional authorities in Italy – comparable to the *Länder* in Germany – developed quite innovative institutional planning procedures over the last decade, tools and policies, which are worthwhile to be examined and assessed from a German perspective, while the German efforts to cope with city region cooperation may offer some new insights for the Italian debate. As a rule, governance structures cannot be transferred from one country to another one-to-one. However, there is much room for mutual learning, from failures as from successes.

In November 2004, a colloquium "Creativity and Urban Governance in European City Regions" will take place at the Villa Vigoni, the Italian-German Centre of Cultural Exchange at Lake Como in Italy. The colloquium will focus on the elements, capacities, and legal as well as financial tools for city region cooperation. It will discuss the ways and means to initiate and maintain creative and effective governance within city regions in both countries, and the role local and regional institutions, planners and groups of civil society will have to play. It will particularly aim at bridging the information gap between the two countries.

Six dimensions of creative regional governance will be discussed at the symposium:

## 1 Why recognize a city region? The rationale and the initiators of city region formation processes

Though the perspective may vary, the need for larger territorial units in the European urban competition is widely accepted in political arenas. Core municipalities usually aim at maintaining international status or achieving competitiveness through the coordination of different roles and functions. They know that only large city regions with their extensive transport and knowledge infrastructures can provide the territorial framework for competitiveness, even if it is just the core city that is profiling the whole city region. Weak suburban com-

munities, in turn, see a benefit in forming territorial coalitions to counteract the power of the core city and to find functional niches and profiles within a larger city region. Initiators of city region formation processes are usually (and mainly) institutional actors, predominantly governments at the local or at the higher regional or even national tiers.

## **2 How to define the boundaries of a city region? City region formation processes and territorial boundaries**

The definition of the boundaries of city regions differs widely. Deciding upon a clear territorial definition of city region is a long and usually very controversial political bargaining process whether it is done "from below", hence among local governments, or "from above", that is, from a superior politico-administrative institution. As a rule, boundaries of a city region can be more flexible where the city region is less institutionalized. Consequently, a soft mode of institutionalization may be easier to handle than a hard one. A model that connects flexible boundaries of a city region with flexible agreements, but maintains political stability and guarantees longer term commitment, could be the way out of the usual political gridlock in bottom-up city region definitions.

## **3 How to politically legitimize a city region? Democratic legitimization and representation**

The political legitimization of city region governments varies widely. Some city regions always had or lately acquired democratic (through voting) legitimization, which is the most durable and accepted form of democratic control. Others are just politico-administrative bodies assigned to a regional institution without any further democratic legitimization. Still other forms of legitimization follow supra-legal and sub-legal (defined as in *Offe 1973*) modes and relate mostly to common visions or single projects more than to governance structures. There are many pros and cons for the respective models. Democratic legitimated bodies, though quite

sustainable in their institutional setting, often lose contact with the people, whereas more informal arrangements may gain more benefits from the basis that identifies with single projects, though their sustainability is always fragile.

## **4 How to envision city regions? Identity building processes, strategic planning and vision-building efforts**

Developing a joint spatial vision for the city region as a whole is crucial for creating a city region's identity beyond local political agendas and clichés. A regional identity, in turn, is indispensable for finding and maintaining regional consensus and identifying corridors of regional cooperation. Therefore the process of establishing the regional identity is often more important than the final plan or outcome of respective strategic planning process. It is the process that forces regional actors to communicate and cooperate, to clearly express their aspirations, to agree on common spatial goals and targets, to articulate their vested interests, and to jointly develop sectoral or comprehensive city region policies. There are various forms of producing regional visions. The approaches vary from in-house professional production of strategic plans to more process-oriented communication processes involving a wide regional public. Additionally, the vision is an important tool for raising the profile of the city region in the outside world; a policy text for negotiations with upper-tier institutions as well as a background document for potential investors. In order to avoid the internalization of expert knowledge, it is essential to communicate popular versions of the (new) regional vision to a wider public via exhibitions, posters, Internet and easily readable brochures.

## **5 How to enhance social learning in city regions? Communication and social learning processes**

More than not, it is the lack of communication and hidden vested interests that are constraining joint development ac-

tion in a city region. In the process of developing city-regional visions, the various actors in a city region learn about the arguments and concerns of others, unfiltered by local journalists and official politico-administrative statements. A weak civil society in a city region will be encouraged to articulate its concerns and contribute its knowledge. Experience shows that in the working style environment of envisioning processes it is easier to compromise. The final printed outcome of such learning processes in a city region does not conclude the social learning process. The output is rather the documentation of the goal-finding and decision-making processes than a traditional legally binding land use master plan. To sustain the momentum of such social learning processes after a strategic policy document has been produced is not easy. It often requires outside pressure or new events and opportunities to reassemble regional actors for joining forces in the city region.

## **6 How to implement city region development processes?**

### **Tools and creative financing**

Whilst in the past, all over Europe, various innovative informal and semi-formal ways have been found to facilitate city region communication processes, still only few region-specific tools for guiding and promoting regional development and cooperation are available beyond very traditional ones. Given the constitutional character of city regions, such tools may rather have to be soft in nature. Contracts between regional partners are one such tool, which has already proven its viability for project-related agreement. The applicability of other tools to the specific conditions of city region development still has to be explored and tested. Finally, an additional aspect deserves attention: the fact that city regions do not have an established financial basis is one of the major bottlenecks for regional action. Waiting for outside funding is not a promising way. However, facing inadequate access to funds and limited possibilities for raising new funds, much creative financing is required. This includes the estab-

lishment of innovative city region funds, reactive multi-budgeting, new city region taxes or private contributions. This, in turn, requires creative bankers and finance officers who, from their expert base, know how to act in a given legal and constitutional framework.

This current edition of DISP collects essays of some of the participants of the Villa Vigoni Conference. They have all been invited to write on creative governance in European city regions without any further direction from the editors. Consequently the contributions differ widely with respect to their spatial references, to their substantial focus and to the definition of what creative governance and creativity in governance is or could mean. The papers included in this issue of DISP – in its diversity and multitude of references – serve as background papers to address and stimulate the debate between scholarly academics and practitioners from Germany and Italy, supplemented by a few distinguished international scholars. Through the exchange of best practices, open discussions and mutual learning, the colloquium in the Villa Vigoni will explore ideas of how to enrich ongoing academic and political debates on city region governance in Europe.

A framing concept of creative governance will guide the debate. This will include the following aspects:

- Creative solutions to strategic and flexible boundary formation, such as introducing formally recognized agreements at “variable geometries”; favoring the coexistence of soft and hard forms of institutionalization with “fixed” decision-making routines and clear democratic control.
- Creative approaches to initiate city region formation and legitimize city region institutions, such as improving communication and exchange at the city-regional level; initiating “inclusive policies” towards all parties and actors forming the local arena.
- Developing alternative scenarios for the future strongly embedded and anchored within the city region to enhance more creative dimensions of the regional development processes.

- Identifying and involving creative actors to overcome administrative and political routine and clientelism. This may include the involvement of various groups of the regional civil society and may require new active modes of interaction.

- Selecting unusual catalyst projects for enhancing identity building, by discovering the symbolic and imaginative role of projects and by marketing the region effectively as a whole.

- Identifying new, more creative instruments for financing and implementing city region development projects, such as creative approaches to raise and manage private funds, organize cost sharing or sustain information and communication flows.

The debate in the Villa Vigoni will most likely show that creativity is a fuzzy concept that leaves much space for interpretation. Nonetheless, the confrontation of more “creative”, more flexible, and more imaginative Italian thinking with more systematic, better organized or regulated German deliberations may be a fruitful battle field for creative advancement in the ongoing European city region governance debate.

## References

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