



Visions from the City Representatives

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Making choices on priority areas as well as multi-level governance are key aspects of the smart specialisation approach. So, getting strong backing from elected representatives and other top policy decision-makers specially matters when boosting the local economic agenda through the lens of this policy concept. This is a series of short interviews conducted by TASO principal Miguel Rivas to Mayors, City Councillors and top executives in the context of the URBACT network InFocus-Smart Specialisation at City Level.

MR.- Torino Metropoli is the former province administration that has now been transformed into a new metropolitan authority by national law in 2014, serving a population of 2.3 million. The same administrative reform has taken place in the main urban agglomerations of Italy, which is a great boost to metropolitan governance in the country. How is this process running?

DDV.- The institution of Metropolitan cities can represent an important opportunity for enhancing territorial and multi-level governance. However, the reform has not been well designed and, at the moment, it is ineffective at creating the conditions

for the improvement of the Italian institutional and political framework.

A first reason is linked to the list of cities identified by the law no. 56/2014 as metropolitan cities (Roma, Milano, Napoli, Torino, Palermo, Genova, Bologna, Firenze, Bari, Catania, Venezia, Messina, Trieste, Reggio Calabria, Cagliari). These cities are so profoundly different in their size and territorial organisation as to raise doubts about the logic of having selected them.

A second issue concerns the boundaries of the metropolitan areas, which have been established by the national law as coincident to the boundaries of the former Province. But in most cases, as Turin,

provincial territories are very far from being functional urban areas, since they include vast rural and mountains areas.

The third - and most important - issue concerns human and economic resources. Metropolitan cities were given additional competences and responsibilities, but their personnel has been reduced by 30 percent by means of the very same reform, while budget restrictions contained in the Italian stability law obliged them to strongly contribute to reduce public spending, by drastically cutting their budget.

Despite the problems and limits of the national reform, I believe that – with enough resources - the Metropolitan city can still be an useful instrument to improve territorial and multi-level governance and to promote socio-economic development, by interpreting the new needs of the economy and society and by launching high-impact projects to promote the standing of Italian metropolitan areas within the network of global cities. As concerns the Turin area, the Metropolitan city can for instance play an important role in promoting innovation and economic growth, by increasing the cooperation and coordination among municipalities.

MR- Torino ´s economic profile has undergone a significant transformation in the past decades, from being the paradigmatic one-company town to an increasingly innovation-oriented and diversified ecosystem. In 2016, the city ranked 2nd at the European Capital of Innovation Awards. However, for many Torino still is the “capital of FIAT”. What industrial dynamics different to automotive, consolidated or emerging, can be found in Torino nowadays?

DDV.- Over the last 20 years, Turin has undergone deep economic and physical changes, with the result that today its economy is characterized by a strong diversity and by the increasing importance of sectors linked to the knowledge economy. In addition, the coexistence of conventional manufacturing activities with new trends led to the development of a range of new business services, closely connected to the dynamic needs of modern companies.

Despite the area maintains a strong industrial connotation, the importance of manufacturing sector has considerably decreased: the share of employees in manufacturing decreased from 39% to 30% over the last 15 years. Nowadays, besides the automotive industry, other important manufacturing sectors are the aerospace and the ICT. Other

emerging and particularly innovative sectors are represented by biotechnologies, mechatronic, green chemistry and cleantech, agrofood and textiles, design and digital creativity.

In addition, it’s worth pointing out that particularly after the 2006 Winter Olympics, the Metropolitan City of Turin has become an area with high touristic attraction potential: in the last 10 years, tourists in Turin have grown more than 84%.

MR- Smart specialisation is a policy concept well established mostly at regional level, since the European Commission declared the elaboration of Research and Innovation strategy for Smart Specialisation (RIS3) as an ex-ante conditionality to get ERDF funding via Operational Programmes. That ´s the case of RIS3-Piemonte. How, in your view, can a city or metropolitan administration contribute to this matter as a RIS3 actor or developer?

DDV.- Cities and metropolitan cities can play an important role in the elaboration and implementation process of the RIS3. For instance, due to the proximity factor, they can actively contribute to the entrepreneurial discovery process, by mobilizing socio-economic actors and involving business-related stakeholders more easily than regional governments. Cities and metropolitan cities can then actively contribute to better define and give more focus to the priority domains that have been shaped too broadly by RIS3. Moreover, they can play an important role in implementing the regional strategy by making local policies and initiatives converge on the priority domains identified by RIS3.

The Integrated Action Plan (IAP) we are elaborating thanks to the InFocus project represents a concrete example of how to establish a fruitful “two-way bridge” between RIS3-Piemonte and the development strategy of the Metropolitan city of Turin. On the one hand, the IAP identifies specific and concrete initiatives that can contribute to the implementation process of the RIS3 at the local level. On the other, I hope it will be able to influence and improve the Regional strategy, thanks to ideas and proposals from local stakeholders.

Moreover, the initiatives promoting innovation ecosystem, entrepreneurial ecosystem, and business growth and territorial development identified within the InFocus project and included in our IAP will be useful in order to enrich the Metropolitan Strategic

Plan - a planning tool compulsory for each metropolitan cities, that covers a three-year period and has to be updated every year.

MR.- On September 2017, Torino Metropoli organized the Infocus thematic workshop dedicated to entrepreneurship. So I take the opportunity to thank you for the excellent organization work. What is your role, as a metropolitan authority, in promoting the start-up and entrepreneurial local scene? And what about the future strategy in this field?

DDV.- It was really a pleasure for the Metropolitan City of Turin to organise the third InFocus thematic workshop. The topic of the workshop – tools and actions supporting local entrepreneurial ecosystems – represents a current and fundamental topic for our territory and for every territory. Entrepreneurial ecosystems are indeed one of the most important factors in generating economic development and social growth. New businesses are a valuable asset: they contribute to increase employment, they enable the renewal of the economic fabric, they create and foster innovation. International examples show that where there are integrated, dynamic and developed entrepreneurial ecosystems, there is greater economic and social growth.

The metropolitan area of Turin is characterized by the presence of a rich and articulated entrepreneurial ecosystem. The Metropolitan City is one of the founders and a partner of the two university business incubators (I3P-Innovative Enterprise Incubator of the Polytechnic of Turin and 2i3T-Innovative Incubator and Technology Transfer Center of University of Turin), both recognized as best practices at European level.

The Metropolitan City has also launched, since 1994, the MIP Program, a business creation service, now run in partnership with the Piedmont Region, thanks to ESF funding. It consists in a set of integrated actions, aimed at spreading the entrepreneurship culture, stimulating new business ideas and fostering the establishment and development of successful enterprises. The service, initially structured as an information desk, has indeed evolved in a more comprehensive process of accompanying measures, support to the elaboration of business plan and mentoring after the start-up phase.

Since the local entrepreneurial ecosystem presents a good number of actors involved in the support of creation of enterprises but still a low degree of coordination, the future strategy in this field will aim at increasing the integration of the ecosystem, in

order to ensure greater synergy between public policies and private initiatives, to pursue greater economies of scale and to encourage the exchange of information and know-how among the actors involved.

The future strategy of the Metropolitan city will also try to address two further weaknesses of the ecosystem: its low efficiency in promoting business mentality in young people and its low level of openness to outside. As concerns the first one, it will be useful to define a comprehensive programme of activities, in collaboration with universities, schools and local administrations, aimed at stimulating the entrepreneurial capacities and mindset of high school and university students. As concerns the second weaknesses of the ecosystem, it will be important to design and implement an integrated set of policies, in collaboration with local and regional stakeholders, aimed at both attracting business initiatives from other territories and connecting the local ecosystem to the international circuit.

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