

Towards a manifesto for local development in the Balkans

Foreword

The research-action design that we outline here was originated both from our deep awareness and the direct experience drawn along the paths of economical and social reconstruction in the Balkanic area.

The awareness. That the Balkans are an area of modernity, occupying a role not in the least marginal in the dynamics of globalization. And therefore that their present and future is closely related to their capacity to inhabit the long flows of global economy with a strong anchorage to local human and material resources, in a project of self-sustainable development.

The direct experience. That is, that international aid either pivot on a participation and local self-government tissue or it is useless, or worse, it ends up backing power groups not in the least alien to the wars and social and civic disruption of these countries.

Starting with the reflection begun with the April 2002 seminar with Civitas on a suggestion of the Observatory on the Balkans and of the Pluriverso Consorzio, the idea gets going of offering a tool of orientation for those active in the Balkans in local development projects, sharing this experience netwise, elaborating knowledge available and monitoring resources in the territory, being so able to offer international institutions, development agencies, ngos, and the actors on international cooperation a wide range project view in daily concrete action.

A design that will touch on a number of towns in Bosnia Hertzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo and Albania where cooperation projects supporting local development are already underway to achieve by the end of 2003 the constitution of a permanent Forum and the draft of a manifesto for local development in the Balkans.

1. War and market, the double deregulation in the Balkans

The failure of the economical-social models of the previous regimes and the decade of wars raging later through the Balkanic area demand careful and in many respects unprecedented pondering over the economical and social reconstruction guidelines for these countries.

The eruption of market economy on such a heavily damaged tissue in an essentially total absence of rules, has caused severely devastating social collapse, swelling poverty, annulling or badly injuring the welfare system, favouring the expansion of criminal control over the economy.

Evidently, those who had envisaged a selfregulating role of the market, capable of “normalizing” the economy of the area, have had to admit that exactly deregulation was the cherished interest of international investments, in an ambiguous connivance of financial capital, scruple-free investors, political nomenclature and local mafias.

2. Crime, favouritism, emergency: The public welfare as private resource

The union between economy and crime has constantly run through the Balkans in the 90s, in the financing of wars through valuable currency raking up operations and the powerful lobbies abroad, in the dynamics of the war economy, in criminal dealings as in dirty money recycling operations, in the capacity to lay hands on international aid as in the control of privatization processes of public goods.

In the after war period this union finds a worrying continuity, favoured by local institutions fragility and by the unsustainability of most international aid, in places where the very reconstruction has been channelled through local authorities often still connected with war responsibilities.

Favouritism practices prevailing before and during the wars have mixed with market principles, reinforcing the already widespread system of social nepotism. Also the pyramidal nature of the previous state model has perfectly integrated with the vertical logic of military mobilization and of international interventions, strengthening old and new apparatus hierarchies causing a growing general contest of personal unaccountability.

With the emergency quality of most international aid, and the following absence of sustainable criteria and of lasting positive impact on the territory, we could notice that little difference there has been between the humanitarian aid industry and investment by the private sector.

3 The fiscal crisis of states

In the end, the fiscal crisis of states. It is difficult to overcome the diffidence towards institutions marked by regimes and void of credibility. Thus public administration is paralysed: fiscal income is absolutely marginal owing to the economical and social deregulation contest and the prevalence of a grey or black economy evading any form of public control. The only relevant source of income at the moment are international aid programs, outlining thus a sort of dependency that risks to become structural. A situation that is reflected also on local administrations negatively affecting the relationship between citizens and the public administration.

4 This is postmodernity

Institutional collapse, war, and deregulation are the ingredients that place the Balkanic area not at the edge of the world-system but at the core of the main lines on criminal trafficking (weapons and drug, wastes and toxic materials, organs and people), that is, the places of “excellence” for international finance. On the other hand, low labour force cost, the absence of protection for labour and the environment, cause widespread forms of relocation of firms recycling obsolete or outdated machinery, health hazardous or environment polluting proceedings.

Also in the commercial aspect these countries become interesting dump grounds for second rate products of rich areas and for the riddance of stocks: great commercial centres controlled by powerful mafia networks pop up everywhere. In other words, here we witness the extreme

modernity of processes affecting this region, by far a different outlook from that of those who insist talking about transitional societies and do not realise we are dealing with postmodern attitudes.

5 new parameters for “new economies”

In this context resorting to traditional development indicators to describe the situation of these countries is misleading. Data on unemployment, on per-head income, on GNP cannot describe but in a superficial if not utterly wrong way the economical and social situation of an area evading parameters that are less and less effective anyway even in describing a non Balkanic present day reality.

This is why new evaluation parameters are needed, functional to the description of alternative routes to economical and social revival, such as sustainability and reproduceability of interventions, participation and the expansion of local selfgovernment models, accountability and respect of law. An altogether different idea of development, territory-centered this time.

6 A different approach to development: locally based

It is from these concepts that it is possible to outline a course of action pivoted on the idea of local selfsustainable development. A course of action founded on the territories and the experiences of local resources enhancement, strongly intertwined with local knowledge and intelligence. The territory meant as ‘a living subject’. Places are cultural subjects, they talk, through scenery they converse of the long process of human presence, they give back identity, memory, language, material cultures, symbolic and emotional messages.

A design of integrated development, growing from the territory, on which to channel local resources and even international aid, founded on one hand on the quality professions, with high human and creative intensity, on the other on the primary sector, where participated projects in agriculture, zootechny, the service network, the crafts and transformation industry network cohabit and integrate each other. A design able to enhance territories, their environment, their history and traditions, but also local productions, the uniqueness of its characteristics, the possible forms of hospitality and therefore flavours and savours, and finally a revival of rural tourism and of the ancient hot baths tradition as well.

7 Local development, a response to global omologation

The intersectoral complexity of a locally based economical system should ensure the precondition of selfreproduction of the system itself with regard to variations in the global context and for a correct use of resources. Specifically, the crisis areas of the industrial model – such as in effect the countries of eastern Europe are – require the dismissal of monocultural conceptions in the direction of complex economies ensuring the identitary preservaton of the system, enforcing hospitality and exchange forms coherent with the increase of assets value, following criteria of solidarity exchange towards the outside, of complementarity, of subsidiarity and of non exploitation of outside resources.

8 local development as community development

The proposal of selfsustainable local development is based on the awareness that it takes place not through an outside dependence, but on the contrary, in a selfcentered way through the mobilization

of all local potentialities (natural, human, economical, financial, organizational, cultural) reconstructing broken synergies between territory, environment and production.

In this context it is important to select and enhance farming, commercial, industrial and service activities that:

-enhance territorial and environmental assets;

-help the development of local self enterprise skills regarding local resource enhancement;

-produce relational goods subtracted to outside directed big firms;

-favour the growth of complex intersectorial production lines capable of establishing locally based district type economical systems and of adapting to context turbulence;

-qualify the productive, cultural, social identity of the region favouring inhabitant permanence and their integration as producers.

9 Local production: a six point strategy

The policy of local development implies measures addressed to projects which:

a) try to transform territorial raw materials locally using local energy sources, particularly in industry, agriculture and services;

b) aim at minimizing production costs, enforcing simple, inexpensive production processes, with high level of employment and establishing the widest intersectorial cooperation possible;

c) deal with production, transformation and commercial activities, but also tourism, information, education, trade education, firm assistance services;

d) aim at the production of goods defined “intelligent”, as offering good perspectives of placement on favourable, sure, lasting markets; for their production, methods should be needed with a high level of human work, of labour force technical skills, of knowledge and local cultural traditions, of energy saving and environment friendly technologies;

e) enable to increase export value through the production of transformed goods and specifically characterized by being typical and local production guaranteed through the adoption of a geographical denomination trademark;

f) attain production processes inducing the highest possible level of effects on the local economical and social system (job creation, added value increase, labour and enterprise income increase, work quality improvement, import abatement).

10 The institutional dimension: a six point strategy

A plan pivoted on self-sustainable local development requires specific attention on the political-institutional context aimed at the strengthening of the role of municipalities as service to the territory in the creation of favourable conditions to local self-sustained development. This implies:

-support to the role of municipalities in their function of programming economical development measures (for example: production plants plans, local fiscal mechanisms, territorial infrastructure building);

- the expansion of wide spread participation strengthening sense of community, also through participation budgets and the support and promotion of territorial communal planning;
- the formation of territorial coordinators and the monitoring of local human and material resources;
- the capacity to select production sectors in which to promote the birth of small or medium size firms, favouring supporting processes to traditional local economy , that is, enhancement of the quality and uniqueness of productions obtained in the respect of local cultures;
- curtailing of extreme delocalization or subcontracting processes, avoiding the exploitation of local both human and environmental resources;
- promotion of small loans and of the local finance system as a support to economy and also education to responsibility.

11 Community and territorial welfare

The same way, if we care for the development of the territorial welfare system we have to see it as an essential condition of any economical process. Without a previous plan and intervention on territorial welfare, without first seeing to the support of measures of inclusion and defence for the most vulnerable groups, any economical activity risks to be smoke in the eyes and cause of further problems and social costs. The definition and implementation of welfare measures have to be the meeting ground and compulsory collaboration arena for local non governmental organizations and municipalities, a school of united responsibility and co-planning and not a place of confrontation and claims. And above all of community feeling, meant in an open and not exclusive way, as the main form of resource mobilization.

12. A non conclusion

This first “working draft” on local development in the Balkans has no real conclusion, to underline the open and not definitive quality of the proposal. They are only notes for debate where we would like to involve all those who, active on this ground, share this general approach.