

EDITORIAL

THE ROLE OF NETWORKS AND CLUSTERS IN URBAN AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Following prior US experience, also in Europe downsizing of the nation state and fragmentation of local authorities give birth to a sort of entrepreneurial local government. Recent political experiences of vertical and horizontal subsidiarity, i.e. federalism/devolution and privatization/liberalization, leading to a shrinking role of the nation state, are getting widespread. Within a context of diffusion of power, cooperation through networking (among local stakeholders, among government tiers, among cities) may then be an efficient alternative also to the State.

Due to these reasons, networks and networking have become fashionable concepts and terms in regional science, and in particular, in regional and urban geography in the last decade: we speak about network firms, network society, network economy but also network cities, city-networks etc. Only catch-words for somebody, according to others a new paradigm seems to have emerged in spatial sciences.

In fact, the concept of spatial networks is sometimes utilised merely as a substitute for 'interaction': exchange of goods, services, information, contacts among places and nodes. In this case, the traditional paradigm of spatial interaction can be easily utilised. If interaction is underlined by research works interested in the 'space of flows', studies oriented towards the description of the 'space of places' often use the network concept as a synonym for polycentricism, as merely geographical and descriptive concept. Sometimes the same term is used to identify social linkages that characterize local communities or associations kept together by ethnic, linguistic, civic or even criminal goals, whose spatial effects may well be interpreted through other existing concepts of a more 'macro' nature like that of social capital. Finally, sometimes the term 'network' is used to interpret relations and flows that take place within an urban hierarchy, among centres of different hierarchical level.

On the other hand, there exist other phenomena, that cannot be interpreted through the usual tools—some of which were indicated before—for which the concept could be of use: spatial interaction taking place irrespective to distance, for selected and targeted goals; relationships between centres of the same size and level, performing the same tasks and functions on the territory; linkages among local actors giving rise to a network surplus as a consequence of synergies and cooperation; spontaneous or organised division of labour among centres in a regional context.

The relevant theoretical building block, on which the network concept or paradigm may be constructed, upon are various. (i) In the first place, it implies a new view of the economy as a system or web of links between individuals, firms and institutions, where links depend on experience and evolve through learning processes. The existing

endowment of knowledge and other production factors is put into value through a relational capability addressed towards the exchange and collection of information, building reputation and trust, creating synergies, cutting down uncertainty, boosting learning processes. (ii) Secondly, also the acknowledgement of cooperation as a new organisational and behavioural form, intermediate between hierarchy (internal development and merging of external activities through direct control) and market resort. Cooperation networks and clusters among firms collaborating with each other on technological advances and innovation projects were the earlier phenomena that were abundantly explored in the past.

The paradigm of city-networks, complementary to the traditional one of urban hierarchy, initially proposed by the Southern European tradition of spatial analysis, has gained interest and support in other scientific, and policy contexts. Recently it was supported by EU spatial documents as the ESDP and the Territorial Agenda in the specification of polycentrism, complementarity and synergy city-networks.

In a spatial perspective, two phenomena in particular are worth exploring today through the network concept:

- networking as cooperation among individuals, firms and institutions taking place inside the cities concerning collective action, public/private partnerships on large urban projects and the supply of public goods, and giving rise to new forms of urban governance;
- networking as inter-urban cooperation, assuming the cities as economic actors, competing but also cooperating in the global arena where locations of internationally mobile factors (professionals, corporations, institutions) are decided and negotiated.

The above discussion contributed to set the context for the Warsaw Regional Forum 2009 Networking in the European, Regional and Local Space, that took place at the Institute of Geography and Spatial Organization of the Polish academy of Science in the period 21–24 October.

During the event, several categories of networks of different nature and importance were explored and discussed. The present volume of *Europa XXI* builds on this discussion, presenting a first selection of the presented contributions dealing with the concept of networking among—and within—urban areas.

The first part of the issue focuses on urban areas and networks in the millennium. In this context, the contribution by Svitlana Pysarenko unfolds the concept of ‘metropolization’, describing the role of the latter in the formation of globalized economic regions in the different part of the world, before concentrating on the specific situation of Ukraine. In the second contribution, Cristiana Rossignolo develops an interesting analysis of networking policies and practices put in place in the last decades. Building on the different initiatives promoted by the European Union, Rossignolo resumes the main outcomes achieved and reflects on future perspectives for networking activities in the European space. Cooperation and networking, are then explored in the specific context of inter-municipal cooperation in Poland. The article by Mirosław Grochowski elaborates on this issue, exploring the way municipalities from the Warsaw Metropolitan Area join in unions and associations in order to deal with common problems and to establish common goals.

Whereas cooperation and networking among cities seems to have become a key condition for economic success, not all urban areas have the chance to benefit from the added value of such activities, often due to a set of internal problem connected to their economic structure or, more in general, to a widespread decline situation. The decline of specific urban areas constitute the focus of the article by Agnieszka Cieśla, that 'test' the term 'shrinking city' against an array of cases from both Poland and Germany. She goes back to the origins of the term in both the German and the Anglo-Saxon debate, and reflects on the many elements that may be behind the decline of a city. Finally, the last two contributions of the section focuses on two interesting case studies from eastern and western Poland, tackled through very different approaches. At first, Zbigniew Makiela and Agnieszka Sobala-Gwosdz compare the regional role of the metropolitan area of Rzeszów to the one of other regional capital in Eastern Poland, then reflecting on the influence of the main centre on its hinterland. The following article, by Ahmed A. H. Saeid and Robert Masztalski produce a spatial analysis of the urban network of Wrocław from a morphological perspective.

In the second part of the issue, the focus of the discussion shifts to a specific aspect of networking. Through an exploration of the concept of cluster and network, the different contributions of explores their effect on the promotion of regional development. Ákos Jakobi produces an evaluation of spatial categories and regional inequalities in the information age, evaluating the spatial characteristics of the information economy and society through an analysis of the role this concepts play in regional and spatial sciences and, more in detail, in the formation of spatial inequalities. A similar departure point characterise the contribution by Krisztina Jász, exploring the role of spatial planning—and of the different actors involved in such activity—in the mitigation of exclusion in the Hungarian context.

Clusters, and their role as a tool of cooperation and formation of regional networks, are then the focus of the article by Barbora Némethyová and Zuzana Dolná. According to their work, the cluster effect is similar to the network effect, representing a geographical concentration of interconnected businesses, suppliers and associated institutions in a particular field. The importance of such a concept in the context of the regional economy of Slovakia, is then explored thoroughly. Finally, the last contribution of the issue explores the role played by business education in the development of entrepreneurship in the EU. Here Sławomir Kurek and Tomasz Rachwał analyse the role of entrepreneurship in the educational strategy of European Union as well as the position of business education in the systems of national education in selected European states in relation to their level of entrepreneurial development.

In conclusion, the present volume constitute an interesting attempt to present and briefly discuss, through the presentation of case studies and more theoretical contributions, the rationale of networks as a paradigm in contemporary spatial science. These networks can be of different nature and of different importance and, in modern conceptions of cities, they play an important role in understanding the nature of existing connections between urban areas and the logics behind actors' interactivity.

Essentially, networks are the organisational manifestation of cooperative behaviour, as a distinct form from competition (market) and command (hierarchy). The issue of

the network paradigm appears to be linked to cost-benefit issue: the contexts in which cooperative behaviour prevails, and therefore human interaction is organised in networks, are determined by efficiency based comparative advantage of these forms—the advantage of cooperation depending on the amount of externalities and development opportunities this governance device can ensure. In a positive sense, networks will occur and be productive where stakes are high and individual failure is very likely.

In general, terms the above is valid from the perspective of cities, focusing on intra-urban networks and on inter-city networks, as well as, of enterprises, and actors of other kind. In this concern, and in order to achieve transparent networking actions and to limit specific privileges, upper-tier public authorities, such as the nation state or the European Union, may (should?) play a role setting general rules and act as a keeper of the different—and more vulnerable—individual rights.

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