“SUSTAINABLE GLOCALISATION”: A FRAMEWORK TO ANALYZE THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS

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“Sustainable glocalisation”: a framework to analyze the international relations of local and regional governments

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«The ‘global–local nexus’ is far more than merely a question of the geographic scale at which economic processes occur. More fundamentally, it is a question of where power lies, and it is a central problematic facing both firms and states.»
(Dicken, 1994: 102).

Introduction

Globalisation emphasises the spatial asymmetry between the field of action of policies and development. This is particularly true for regional and local policies which are running the risk of being structurally inadequate and condemned as such to “undergo” rather than to “govern” globalisation. Yet, what we are witnessing in many developed countries, and not since yesterday, is a real explosion of international initiatives undertaken by local and regional governments (Caciagli, 2003; Alfieri, 2004; Bramanti, 2007).

The international exposure of regions, the scale of the phenomenon and the characteristics it has developed (Brancati, 2005; Parisi, 2007) – the resources at stake, the organisational commitment and the political profile involved – make that it cannot be discarded as a mere activity of “institutional relations” or as tourist-cultural promotion. How should, therefore, the relationship between “international relations” at the sub-national scale and the processes of the regions opening-up to the global, be interpreted? (Ongaro, Valotti, 2002).

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In this paper the policies of internationalisation – with particular reference to the Italian situation (Ronza, 2006; Unioncamere Piemonte, 2006; Pitaccolo, 2007) – in its broadest meaning of growth and openness of the relationship between the global context and a local/regional community, will be discussed. The analysis of their characteristics will lead to the sketching of an evolutionary trend which can be described as a shift from the “policies of internationalisation” to the “internationalisation of policies”. Particular attention will be paid to the interaction between “economic sustainability” and “cultural and social sustainability”, which has important implications for the success of these policies. In the end the paper suggests a tentative conceptual framework for the analysis of these policies.

A phenomenon in evolution

This paper originates from the fact that contemporary approaches to globalisation give limited relevance to the analysis of the international relations of regional and local governments. Of course, important insights are provided by some streams of research, like, for example the literature on intergovernmental relations (King, Stoker, 1996; Scharpf, 1999; Weiler et al., 2003) and the works dealing with the issue of local/regional competitiveness (Hardy et al., 1995; Scott, 2001a, 2001b).

Other policy-oriented cues are offered by scholars dealing with the relationships between border regions. Historically, nation states have frequently separated and reintegrated areas sharing language, culture and traditions. The analysis of the “border effects” (Nijkamp, 1994; O’Dowd et al., 1996; Blatter, Clement, 2000) and the attempts to re-interpret the concept of “barrier” in a more positive, open sense (from “barrier” to “contact”: Van Geenhuizen, Ratti, 2001; Berezin, Schain, 2003; Farrel et al., 2005) have led to fruitful approaches that can also be applied in other relational contexts, namely the analysis of the so-called “costs of non-collaboration”. The costs of non-collaboration derive from: duplication (of services, infrastructure); failure to achieve possible scale economies; lack of agreement in the search for coordinated solutions to common problems (for example with regard to the environment); “adverse programming” and conflicting political decisions; unilateral obstruction of transborder mobility.

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3Especially in Europe, this topic is complicated by two factors: on the one hand, by the issue of the possible division of labour between the national state and the administrative Regions with regard to international relations (Börzel, 1997; Danson et al., 2000; Farrel et al., 2005); on the other hand, by the overlapping between the field of international relations and the relations with the EU, that must now be fully regarded as “domestic policy” as a result of the process of European integration (Graziano, 2004; Fargion et al., 2006).

4In more recent years, inside the EU, the Euregions have developed as a more formal framework for this kind of trans-border cooperation (De Boer, 2001; Fodella, 2005; Rossi, Bramanti, 2007).
of goods, services and persons (Senn, 1993; Bramanti, 2007). The costs of non-collaboration provide an economic ratio to trans-border collaboration which is often parallel to the political ratio, relating to cultural and linguistic homogeneity (Schack, 2000; Gidlund, Jerneck, 2000).

The relationships between areas are not always determined by their geographical vicinity, but also by a “vicinity” in a much broader sense (for example, of two coasts of the same sea – Driessen, 1996) or simply by political and planning analogies and complementarities (Pichierri, 1997; Bramanti, 1999; Maskell, Törnqvist, 1999), like, for example, in the case of networks of regions and cities (Keating, 2005). These cases have also been analysed and evaluated, although here the absence of a satisfying and comprehensive conceptual framework is more evident.

The contribution of political studies has been very ambitious (Börzel, 1997; Weiler, Wind, 2003; Alfieri, 2004; Farrel et al., 2005). From this perspective the phenomenon is linked to the emerging role of regional governments and has been labelled “para-diplomacy”. “Para-diplomacy refers to activities parallel to, often co-ordinated with, complementary to, and sometimes in conflict with centre-to-centre macro-diplomacy” (Hooghe, 1996: 385). Reference is mostly made to the initiatives of regional governments with a strong political and cultural identity, therefore only to a limited number of cases. The “para-diplomacy” approach hardly applies to the phenomenon of internationalisation at the local/regional level which is more complex and more diversified. This approach even seems to provide arguments to strengthen the old criticism, often voiced by national governments and national bureaucracies, that these activities are just a (dangerous) replica or fragmentation of foreign policy.

As a matter of fact, the conceptual (and in many respects also political) challenge lies, for example, in considering these initiatives not as a form of devolution, as the setting up of an alternative “foreign policy” at a smaller scale, but rather as a necessary and new response by local and regional communities to the challenges of globalisation, in a scenario where cognitive and relational opportunities turn into key resources for growth and development. This is important because, first of all, the international relations of local and regional governments are not state-centred. The traditional monopoly of the state which is typical of foreign policy does not characterise these initiatives. On the contrary, these activities imply more often governance than government, as they involve a variety of public and private actors, sharing projects, visions and resources in a non-hierarchical relationship.

Furthermore, these initiatives are very different from standard foreign policy and do not have the same level of consolidation of policy styles, methods and techniques. International relations of local and regional governments – as seen today – are not a stabilized/standardised phenomenon, but an evolutionary process where incremental learning takes place, leading to more (or less) commitment, often following a non-linear and discontinuous process driven by contingencies which can not be programmed (but can be
organisationally and strategically elaborated), and by the ability to exploit “windows of opportunities”.

Three evolutionary stages can be identified:

- the exploration phase;
- the consolidation phase;
- the integration phase.

In the exploration phase local and regional governments undertake initiatives to develop international relations. The term exploration underlines that this phase is characterised by a learning process which is performed with a timetable, methods, and outcomes which are often unpredictable ex ante. This phase is characterised by the relevance of contingencies: specific situations, often related to individuals, give rise a heterogeneous set of opportunities. In other cases international relations may originate from relationships which were developed for other purposes and which were inherited from the more or less recent past like relationships with emigrant communities, twinning originating from a variety of motives, individual cases of direct investments etc. Regional and local governments in this phase often suffer from a lack of professionalism. The staff in charge of international relations may not have specific skills or abilities, but may be “recycled” from other positions and supported by consultants.

Exploration yields unexpected outcomes. For example, not necessarily the strongest and most competitive economic sector or the most active cultural entity is most likely to seize the opportunities deriving from the processes of internationalisation. On the contrary, there may be other sectors or actors more ready to get involved in searching for new markets, economies of scale, competitive advantages, etc. Internationalisation, in short, plays a selective role with regard to the actors available in the region, offering a potentially “subversive” opportunity with respect to the existing hierarchies.

The consolidation phase is characterised by the professionalisation of the management of the international relations of the area, as a result of the emergence of specialised skills within the local government staff as well as in the civil society. As a consequence, the agenda is approached in a more systematic way and its management is better structured. A strategic vision has emerged based on the perception/identification of the opportunities and threats to the region that derive from the international context and from phenomena like immigration, globalisation, conflicts, etc. International agreements have become more complex and more wide ranging. At the same time the international relations get a higher political profile also within the government structure (Ongaro, Valotti, 2002).

The integration phase is marked by a twofold evolution. On the one hand relationships with foreign regions tend to become stabilized within permanent networks (Bramanti, 1999; Fodella, 2005). On the other hand, international relations are increasingly linked to (and part of) the main “domestic” policies. Of course, specialised staff is still involved in managing international affairs, but the international agenda and the
domestic one overlap more and more often, as it is increasingly recognised that an “international” approach allows for a more efficient and effective realisation of sectoral goals. This occurs for a variety of reasons: the existence of costs of non-collaboration (typical for the relationships between border regions); the opportunity to exploit capabilities that have been developed locally or specific competitive advantages; economies of scale; the opportunity to acquire competences through knowledge exchange with international partners or through learning processes in various contexts.

Internationalisation: goal or means?

Globalisation is influencing a large variety of fields: from the international diffusion of ideas and knowledge, to the global markets of consumer goods and production inputs, from the sharing and crossbreeding of cultures to global environmental movements. From whichever angle it is observed it is an excellent point of departure to reflect on the “failures of the market” and the “impotence” of the state with regard to its governance (Stiglitz, 2006). Globalisation, furthermore, “is not a condition of the world but a process” (Camagni, 2002). Growing/increasing global integration surely is not a new phenomenon and does not stem from some clear breakpoint or abrupt leap in the history of humanity. That which actually seems new to us is the acceleration of numerous long term integration processes which mutually reinforce each other.

Parallel to this, during the past years the territorial dimension of economic phenomena has gained interest. Four reasons make the reinforcement of the regional level rationally acceptable and politically winning (Keating, 2005):

- the necessity to plan new public goods which the economy needs in order to produce and compete (including the infrastructure of accessibility, whose importance is rapidly growing);
- the ability to steer the local processes of knowledge production, accumulation, and exchange from which economic development originates;
- the modernisation of the state, its institutions, rules and functioning (with a strong emphasis on governance);
- the pluralism and the democratisation which accompanies a correct realisation of the principles of subsidiarity (vertical and horizontal).

All this leads to the recognition that regions compete globally and therefore need to learn how to interact with the world, to direct and govern these relations, to correct possible imbalances which always accompany processes of adjustment. In short, they have to make up a consistent and effective internationalisation policy (Cheshire, Gordon, 1995; Camagni, 2001).

At the same time it needs to be emphasised that globalisation processes are not unambiguous. In a traditional approach one tends to emphasise the
ability of an area to affirm/strengthen its competitiveness (economic but not only) as it is facing challenges and opportunities originating from the dynamics of the global context. Less traditional approaches consider globalisation as the context not only within which to express and exploit strengths and identity, but also as in which and through which territories can re-define themselves and their potential for development. In other terms: the opening up towards internationalisation (in its various aspects) is not only the end in which economic, political and cultural “competitive advantages” can be expressed, but is the means through which new skills and new competitiveness can be developed or defined. Rather than identity and competitiveness which “resist” and are “reconfirmed”, identity and competitiveness are “constructed” and “invented” accepting new levels of interaction and “interference” between the development paths adopted by different communities (Florida, 2002; Cooke, Piccaluga, 2004). Apart from a competitive interpretation, which has been very fashionable during the past years (the competitiveness between areas) and which, not surprisingly, evokes a mercantilistic view, with all the roughness of a game which tends to be zero sum, we can recognise a much more complex interpretation which introduces besides competitive behaviour also forms of collaboration (Bramanti, 2007).

Furthermore, the debate often reflects a view of globalisation which is shaped by its economic dimension and which suggests to policy-makers that internationalisation is a process which is mainly economic and intrinsically positive. This “ideology” implies that the role of policies must be essentially one of supporting economic processes. Already the debate on economic development has shown us the need to shift from the traditionally predominant focus on economic development to a wider concern for the other two relevant aspects of the problem: the social and the environmental. Nowadays consensus is unanimous with regard to considering “development” – maybe labelling it “sustainable” – a balanced mix of various aspects. Whichever aspect of production is socially or environmentally unbalanced, accumulation and consumption ends up generating unsustainability (Bramanti, Maggioni, 1997). In the same way, the phenomenon of internationalisation has various aspects – economic, socio-cultural, and institutional – which are strongly interconnected and which have to progress in a parallel way or at least in a balanced way, otherwise they may turn into costs which easily become unsustainable for the area and which will block regional development. The history of colonialism, racism and nationalism are all examples of paths of internationalisation reflecting the inability (ideologically, culturally or materially) to coordinate and balance the tree aspects. The more we accept that internationalisation is a means (and not the end), the more it will be necessary to adopt approaches which help us to evaluate whether more
internationalisation, more openness, more permeability to incoming and outgoing flows of people, goods, capitals etc. will benefit the area.\(^5\)

It is not necessary to be part of the “no global movement” nor to believe in the need for local closure and protectionism, in order to adopt a more nuanced and critical view of the processes of internationalisation. Numerous examples can be given which will lead to reflect on the concept of “unbalanced development” and the negative repercussions it may have. On the social level – which concerns the integration of people and their contribution to civil society – one may think of illegal immigration and related criminal activities. With respect to healthcare, there is the cyclically returning risk of “pandemics” (at first mad cow disease and then bird flue) which make travelling more dangerous (with obvious social and economic repercussions). In the economy, internationalization may lead to concentration of economic power, oligopolies, etc.

But also outward internationalisation lends itself to analogous reflections. For example, social and economic sustainability problems are related to sometimes massive delocalisation processes. For example, the investments of small and medium-sized Italian companies in Rumania, do not always bring about conditions for real growth for the local economies in the host country, as companies are mainly aiming at exploiting the low labour cost and the “tolerance” of the local authorities. These cases should provide sound grounds to challenge a vision, at times also authoritatively expressed, which entrusts a guiding role in the process of internationalisation to companies and which at the same time restricts politics and society to a job of mere support or “non-interference”.

To summarise, we want to suggest that each analysis and evaluation of internationalisation processes and the accompanying policies, should not only meet the requirements of effectiveness, efficiency, credibility, etc., but should also adhere to requirements with regard to economic, social and cultural sustainability.

**Economic sustainability**

The adoption of (economic) internationalisation as a policy aim requires first of all the sharing of the hypothesis that there is a strong relationship between internationalisation and competitiveness (and therefore development). Essentially, this relationship is indisputable, but opening up is not necessarily a positive factor for the development of an area. In short (see figure 1), a territorial production system “in order to evolve positively has to be able to dynamically balance the degree of internal strength of its fabric (social rootedness, i.e. internal synergy) and the openness towards the outside world (participation in a-spatial network, i.e. external energy).”

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\(^5\)In the argument which is developed here “area” does not only refer to a geographical (physical) area, but also the community of people and the companies which operate in it. Area, unlike “space” therefore refers to relational aspects of the context (Bramanti, Maggioni, 1997).
Any ‘unbalanced’ solution will lead in the medium term to the dissolution of the territorial production system as such: either to a ‘death by entropy’ or to a disintegration of the system, and therefore to the fading away of the territorial effects of proximity. [...] Only a ‘correct mix’ of identity and openness (rootedness and globalisation, ‘internal synergies’ and ‘external energies’) allows the territorial production system to remain innovative, to acquire technological trajectories, to preserve and reinterpret over time its competitiveness in comparison with other systems” (Bramanti, Maggioni, 1997: 48). One wonders if and in which way policies can discriminate between the various opportunities for internationalisation and how those effectively useful for development can be identified.

Figure 1 – External and local relationships

Traditionally the distinction is based on the origin of the economic actors. In other words, one of the classic schemes of economic nationalism argues that the nationality of the owner of a company guarantees the compatibility with the “general interest”. Even though this branch of literature still has deep roots, the weakness of this assumption has been widely proven. Maybe the question can be better understood if it is placed in a knowledge economy perspective, in which internationalisation processes respond to the need for “extending and intensifying the division of labour in the production and use of knowledge” (Grandinetti, Rullani, 1996: 45).6

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6The following typology of internationalisation is also drawn from this work.
The complexity of economic internationalisation processes consists first of all in the fact that it is the outcome of three overlapping phenomena.

The oldest and best known of these processes is the mercantile internationalisation, or the internationalisation of the market of products and services. Here an exchange of knowledge is accomplished through the transnational exchange of goods and of the knowledge that is “built in” them. In this case policies aim at “export promotion”, or the exploitation of products and their (cultural and technical) aspects which are linked to the identity of the area.

More recent is the phenomenon of transnational corporations, i.e. the internationalisation of companies, expanding their operations beyond national borders. In this case knowledge is exchanged along the lines of communication inside the company. “Inward investment” policies (Hill, Morgan, 1998) – and in particular the so-called “place marketing” (Ashworth, Voogd, 1994; Kotler et al., 1993, Caroli, 2006) – attempt to attract foreign companies in the hope of exploiting knowledge which is new and/or complementary compared to locally available knowledge. Yet also opposite concerns exist, particularly when international investments are not greenfield but regard the acquisition of existing companies. The main concern is the fear of becoming dependent, or that opening up will result in the transfer of decision making power to distant and not necessarily friendly decision-makers. Concerns may also be related to outward investments, in particular when these are not part of an expansion strategy, but of a choice to delocalise manufacturing activities.

In the era of globalisation a third type of internationalisation has emerged which we will define as cognitive: it is in the strict sense the internationalisation of knowledge, i.e. the process of the construction of a transnational base of processes which regard the production, circulation and application of knowledge. This does not necessarily imply the suppression of variety and identities, but may lead to a better exploitation of them. Local knowledge may then be codified and made global and eventually re-interpreted and recontextualised (Malecki, Oinas, 1999). Through this circuit the original local cognitive system opens up to the global network, and the global network opens up to the local cognitive system of destination. This new pattern of internationalisation overlaps with the “new forms” of networks which are based on a variety of agreements, of the equity as well as the contractual kind. These agreements work in a medium-long term time span which represents not so much an unstable “second best” compared to other forms of internationalisation (as sometimes suggested in the literature), but efficient ways of resource coordination and interactive learning, that is especially relevant for small and medium sized companies. For these companies these networks are not only an alternative to more demanding and as a consequence less feasible modes of international commitment, through direct investments, but they are also solutions which can be more easily adapted to the characteristics of industries and of the market.
In short, internationalisation is viewed as a learning process which is incremental and not deterministic. It is based on the development of international networks of trust and on the accumulation of experiential knowledge, which generate the ability to exploit and explore and therefore to create commitment to external markets overcoming obstacles resulting from a lack of resources and knowledge (Johanson, Vahlne, 1990). Internationalisation is therefore a process which generates specific “relational capital” and “knowledge capital” (Florida, 2002). It is a process which tends to be self-reinforcing both in a quantitative and a qualitative way.

The role of policies differs for the three above mentioned types of internationalisation. Cognitive internationalisation requires policies which focus attention on the skills of local actors, starting from the technical and political structures, in order to support and/or manage cognitive circuits at a global level and/or to guarantee their reliability. Policies, therefore, may abandon the traditional distinction between “us” (our companies, our entrepreneurs) and “the others”, but only to the extent that they can count on knowledge, relations and specific skills to manage trans-contextual relationships, within both the economy and the society. In other words, the sustainability of economic internationalisation requires openness, contact, dialogue and integration which derive from the socio-cultural context.

**Socio-cultural sustainability**

Socio-cultural internationalisation (SCI) is a phenomenon which is at least as old as mercantile internationalisation. Culture and civilisation have followed markets and armies. Alexander the Great has reached – during his campaigns of military conquest and SCI – a geographical extension (considered as the sphere of influence) which, in modern times, can only be compared with the British maritime empire at its peak. The phenomena of mass migration at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century have determined to a large extent the states and cultures of western civilisation. Many countries (like the United States and Australia) have grown as a result of SCI.

SCI is not necessarily a positive phenomenon as the encounter of “diversity” can also turn into conflict. SCI can hold profoundly positive as well as tragically negative values, which can turn into intolerance, segregation, social exclusion and racism. This paper adopts a “positive bias”, emphasising the many values of SCI, without hiding the many “pathologies”.

If the engines of economic internationalisation are the companies (or, more generally the economic organisations), the engines of SCI are people and institutions. The places accordingly are preferably the cities, the main aggregated form of social cohabitation (Camagni, 2001; Amatasi, Salvemini, 2005; Carrillo, 2006). SCI is, therefore, a typically urban phenomenon which finds in cities its natural gateways: cities turn areas into hubs of the global network. There are few exceptions to this fundamental
rule. Exceptions regard areas – nowadays considered peripheral – which have at some time lived intensely a common identity deriving from the exceptional relationship with the physical geography. A meaningful example are the Alps: the people of the mountains (the inhabitants of the “high lands”) have for centuries practiced a true SCI, much more intensely than the economic one.

From an analytical point of view, the operationalisation of the concept of SCI, requires to investigate and bring to a synthesis a wide and heterogeneous range of qualitative and quantitative “indicators” concerning the fields of:

- research and advanced education;
- volunteering, particularly regarding the organisations involved in cooperation for development and humanitarian intervention;
- trans-national associations (like communities formed by foreigners in a area, and communities of people from a specific region living abroad);
- the performing arts and cultural and sporting events;
- individual behaviour and attitudes (the study of languages, the propensity to travel, the willingness to be mobile, the diffusion of internet in private homes, etc.);
- ICT relations, that webometrics can identify through the surveying of hyperlinks and of connections made to websites.

Omitting many questions regarding the concrete feasibility of these surveys, it could be more useful to try to subdivide the concept of SCI into logical subsets. We can identify at least four:

- mutual knowledge;
- tolerance/integration;
- privileged research into for interaction;
- stable inter-cultural connections.

These four subsets contribute to determine the degree of openness and the potential and actual attractiveness for the new creative class.

Mutual knowledge is the fundamental requirement for every type of road towards SCI. It is obviously determined/influenced by certain instruments and patterns of behaviour: the study and knowledge of foreign languages (and of the language of the country of residence for foreigners); the diffusion of the press (or more generally the media) in foreign languages; the diffusion of culture-specific activities from abroad (restaurants, cultural centres, etc); the time spent abroad for reasons other than tourism (study or work); the presence of foreigners in the country. Getting to know each another, talking together, benefiting from each other’s culture are ways to “listen” and to show an openness towards and an interest in interaction with different people, cultures and traditions.

A more advanced stage of SCI is characterised by the degree of tolerance and integration with regard to foreigners through the consolidation of their presence in civil life and in the economy of the hosting area. Integration,
however, also has its pathologies: illegal inflows of migrants, crime, the forming of ghettos of ethnic communities, religious fundamentalism.

SCI also expresses itself through the conscious search for qualified interaction in the various aspects of the social life and in particular with regard to culture and sports. One can think of the organisation of international events, but also of openness with regard to the regeneration of cities through the intermediation of architects and urban planners of international fame.

The fourth and last subset regards foreign connections, through the communities of nationals in the world organised in clubs, associations, formal networks, etc. and through international cultural foundations.

The complementarities between SCI and economic internationalisation allows for the identification of situations which vary in the mode of interaction between the two dimensions as summarised in Figure 2.

![Figure 2](image-url)

**Figure 2 – Complementarities between economic and socio-cultural internationalisation**

The absence (or low degree) of both types of internationalisation (bottom left) describes a “closed” territorial system which refuses to open up, is probably peripheral, not very innovative, possibly the victim of foreign competitors. The combination of the maximum presence of both types of internationalisation (top right) characterises a global area, such as the new “global city-regions” as discussed in the literature (Camagni, 2001; Scott,
2001b), which are capable of guiding the phenomena linked to internationalisation: these are areas characterised by a high degree of creativity and an inclination towards innovation phenomena which anticipate and guide global trends (Future Concept Lab, 2004; Amadasi, Salvemini, 2005).

Economic opening-up in combination with little socio-cultural integration (top left) frequently describes a dominated or “colonised” area which does not show adequate governance but rather an undergoing of its own evolution paying the price of internationalisation without being able to enjoy the benefits (Mlinar, 1992). This also applies to the fourth quadrant which shows areas with a predisposition to international collaboration but which still find it hard to find the right economic incentives like, for example, in the Mediterranean basin.

Policies: an interpretative framework

This paragraph presents a framework to interpret and analyse the international activities of administrative regions and local authorities. Their internationalisation policies can be interpreted as actions which aim at increasing a given endowment of specific assets for the internationalisation and thereby impact on the sustainability of globalisation. Figure 3 summarizes this interpretative framework.
The point of departure are the assets which can be used for the internationalisation. These assets:

- can be of a tangible nature and consist of institutions, actors and an infrastructure dedicated to internationalisation, or they can be intangible and consist of the relational, cognitive and reputational assets accumulated throughout time;
- have to be balanced between the economic and socio-cultural dimension so as to not undermine the sustainability of the globalisation processes. From this point of view, an imbalance has a negative impact, diminishing the accumulation of assets.

A number of factors influencing the processes of internationalisation are included in the model:

- geographic factors, such as the degree of peripherality, the contiguity with foreign regions (particularly in the case of border regions), the ethno-linguistic characteristics of the area;
- political and economic factors which exogenously induce a “demand for international relations”, like the exposure to immigration flows, the proximity to a crisis zone, the historical heritage of relationships deriving from migration, etc.;
- the social, human and creative capital of the area (cultural and relational) capital present in the area, or the total of factors favouring the realisation of cooperative behaviour between actors in the area’s society and economy.

These determining factors are of an exogenous and structural nature, which does not mean that they cannot change in time. Several geographic factors can be influenced by gate policies: for example the development of an airport can change the geographical marginality of an area. Intangible assets seem to be most vulnerable. Their social component may be created or destroyed and its creative component may be attracted or repelled by the respective balanced or imbalanced evolution of internationalisation processes (Keating et al., 2003).

Policies can adopt three different but largely complementary types of approaches towards internationalisation:

- policies of projection have the objective to incentivate and sustain the initiatives of local actors in an international context (Alden, Boland, 1996; Formez, 2004b). Examples are the policies to promote exports and the supporting of international agreements of companies, of other “intermediate forms” of economic internationalisation, of “privileged interactions” in the field of culture and research, of the international initiatives of Universities and of development cooperation;
- policies of attraction aim at attracting resources (capital and knowledge) and actors (investors, tourists, students and inhabitants) from abroad to the area. “Place marketing” can be traced back to these types of initiatives (Hill, Morgan, 1998; Dubini, 2006);
- *gate* policies aim at planning and reinforcing interface and communication with areas abroad (Cuadrado-Roura, et al., 1994; Malecki, Oinas, 1999). These initiatives can be both of a tangible nature (infrastructure and transportation, telecommunication, etc.; fairs and exhibitions) and of an intangible one (knowledge of languages and cultures; exploitation of the relational assets in the area; the relationships with communities from the area living abroad and with communities of foreigners living in the area).

Events and unplanned opportunities which are not generated by conscious actions (*contingencies*) can significantly affect policies and can also influence the assets for internationalisation. The role of contingencies tends to be more important in the first phases of the development of international activities.

The impact of policies is therefore twofold:
- they can contribute to the variation of the assets: an increase in the assets reinforces the sustainability of the process;
- they can affect their balance: as mentioned above, this leads to a variation in immaterial capital (in its various aspects and components), and to a variation in the degree of sustainability of the globalisation processes of the area.

**Conclusions**

The ongoing process of globalisation after an important phase where companies were the leading actors, has now entered into a new phase which shows – besides companies – persons, institutions and regions playing the lead role.

The process has evolved into multilateral and multidirectional tracks with a progressive shift from competition based on “macrosystems” – the nation-state – to competition based on “microsystems” – regional and/or urban (Jensen-Butler *et al.*, 1997; Scott, 2001b). Also as a consequence of this process the international projection of many regional and local governments, including the Italian ones, has by now become a reality which must be taken into consideration. Being regional and local matters:
- from an *economic* point of view, as they know “from inside” the productive vocations and the competitive advantages (absolute and relative) of their territories;
- from the *social* point of view, as they represent the institutional level which is closest to the citizens and which is therefore more suitable to promote the direct participation of people, to raise the quality of services, to provide for a context favourable for the accumulation of creative and cultural capital.
From an *institutional* point of view, the role of meso-level governments, like Regions, emerges, connecting transnational powers and local institutions (Hooghe, 1996; Maggioni, Bramanti, 2001).

The focus of attention is, as a consequence, shifting towards the decisive roles which the Regions, together with cities, assume with regard to the various pathways towards internationalisation. First of all the pathway of the internationalisation of people: as a matter of fact what is at stake nowadays is the internationalisation of everyday life, morals, culture and labour. This leads to the circulation of knowledge and creativity. Knowledge and creativity are as a matter of fact the new ingredients of post-industrial sustainable development. For the advanced European and Italian regions manufacturing is bound to progressively and rapidly relocate towards other continental platforms which are better equipped. That which comes before and after in the value chain is what needs to be developed and which requires an open and dynamic environment, an environment in which social capital, cultural capital and creative capital can work together.

From here derives the need to integrate economic and socio-cultural aspects. An excessive emphasis on the economic aspect alone, the insistence on the simple accompanying of SMEs abroad, can support the profits of some, but cannot generate sustainable development for all in the medium-long run.
References


