A new strategic role for Sardinia (Italy) in the Mediterranean[1]

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Abstract: The following are some preliminary assessments and reflections on the anthrop-socio-cultural prospects related to the definition of a strategic role that Sardinia (Italy) may have in the Mediterranean. Because of its geographical location, the island may in fact favourably intercept and become part of the new flow of goods from international routes, for example those which, from the Far East, pass through the Suez Canal in the direction of Western Europe. However, political, institutional, economic, and structural issues arising from the current international framework, impose new reference coordinates, which reduce and influence margins of choice. In this context Sardinia must modify its "insular" resource to present itself as even more determined to be an integral and strategic part of relationships in the Europe - Africa basin.

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[1] This paper takes some excerpts from a forthcoming publication of ongoing research by Pasquale Mistretta Professor Emeritus of Urban Planning and Chiara Garau, Post-doc researcher in urban planning, into the evolution of the Sardinian question.

1. Introduction

Some documents have been genuine social charters of Mediterranean culture, such as the "Charter of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation for the environment" (Nicosia, 1990), the "Chart of the Mediterranean" (Siviglia, 1992), the "Euro-Mediterranean declaration on tourism in sustainable development" (Hyres-Les Palmieres, 1993). The summary of what is required in these documents is represented by the activation of financial mechanisms that will contribute to the protection, enhancement and management of Mediterranean areas by establishing a network of area projects to set the Mediterranean standard for environmental quality. This will happen by activating government initiatives which integrate sustainable tourism. However, it is only with the Barcelona Process, with its strategy on the side of economic cooperation and with its consequent achievements in the last 10 years of implementation (1995-2005), where the starting point for a break with the past to switch to a dynamic system of cooperation between different countries can be found. On this basis, the ambitious opening of centralized and closed economies called for a dense network of cooperation in many cornerstone areas of socio-economic life in the Mediterranean Partner Countries. Their relations have ethnic and cultural roots characterized by a history that constantly intersects, the story of "*a sea too narrow to divide, but too large to be confused*"(B. Khader, 1992, 73), with economies whose prospects for development will depend on each other. Besides, the Mediterranean is nothing more than "*a thousand things together. Not a landscape but innumerable landscapes. Not a sea but a succession of seas. Not a culture but a series of cultures stacked one upon the other. For thousands of years everything has flowed towards this sea, upturning and enriching its history*" (Braudel F., 1987, 7).

However, it is unthinkable to have good cooperation without an adequate dose of competition. On the other hand, it is unthinkable to have a massive intervention in the field of competition, without a connection to national and decentralized policies of cooperation where interconnections and network infrastructure play a fundamental role as a means of dialogue between the two sides. In this Euro-Mediterranean view, it is important to read about how our country fits into this context and then focus on the issue of Sardinia, by taking a step back to look at the reasons for its current conditions because, as always, we find answers and explanations for present choices in the roots of the past. Bernard Lewis, a professor of Middle Eastern studies, says, "*those who do not want to confront their past, are unable to understand the present, and will not be able to face the future*" (Lewis B., 1999, 9).

2. The insularity of Sardinia: positive or negative factor?

The central position of Sardinia in the Mediterranean has always attracted great interest of a strategic nature. However, its centrality does not necessarily automatically imply the intensification of commercial shipping and an incentive for economic development. In fact, the island is facing both directly and indirectly, a complexity of issues that must consider the changing international situation and which require new questions. That is, at present it is important to visualize future scenarios for growth. Therefore, to the question of European policies, interrelationships with the mainland, migration of non-Europeans, various national scenarios open to fiscal federalism and a reinterpretation of the relationships between regions and between north and south, are added questions concerning the validity of references to institutional actors, by interpreting recent events.

Since it is evident that in cases which are so large and difficult to deal with at a national level, the very idea of reading and interpreting them to "Sardinian size", would be unrealistic. Therefore, to immediately enter into discussions "*with many voices*" (Bobbio L., 2004) between politics and people, we propose two interpretations. The first is pessimistic, because it derives from the low population density, the strong contrasts in the geography, the ritual and often inconclusive debate on the underlying endogenous economy (Friedmann, 2004) and infrastructural system, but especially the insularity interpreted as geographical, economic, social and human factors. The insularity therefore causes insulation which increases or decreases according to the economic, commercial or political interest in Sardinia from abroad.

Conversely, the second one is optimistic, because looking at the history of islands such as England or Ireland, we see how the negative factor may even become a winning feature. In fact an island can become central, be connected and be part of trading and relations. In other words, for the region of Sardinia, the insular factor is considered positive, in the conviction that because of this it will acquire a strategic role in the southern European system projected on the Mediterranean as an international trade and development border.

In fact, as pointed out by Catania, "*in the Mediterranean, hopes and conflicts, the clash of cultures, and ambitions of a future look out, because this stretch of sea is not only a geographical space, but it is an idea of coexistence and contamination* [...] *The Mediterranean has all the characteristics to be the place of the chosen frontier: the diverse and disjointed presence of cultures, the great monotheistic religions, peaceful coexistence and endless war* " (Catania G. 2009, 207).

In Sardinia's policies, the insular factor is interpreted as a fixed factor in time and not just in its geography, because the people of the island, even in recent history, have seen it as an element of economic instability and political marginality. This conviction is the result of an identity and

anthrop - cultural tradition that has often forcefully refused to accept the dynamics of the population, the evolution of cultures and the positive character of modernization. On this issue the literature and historiography, which take into account the historical evolution from the unification of Italy 150 years ago and before that the "ideal fusion" with Piedmont in 1847, are too eloquent when emphasizing the various stages of lively debate among historians and politicians.

3. Sardinia in the Mediterranean

Unfortunately, through different texts, a static interpretation of the various historical periods of Sardinia prevails, which instead requires careful consideration of the changes in society by analyzing the resulting dynamic interpretation of the values of identity and autonomy. To do this it is essential to broaden our vision beyond the confines of the island to the Italian "continent", the Mediterranean and the border countries to see if there are opportunities and positive signs for the "presence" of Sardinia in this complex system. In other words, in line with the principles of C.A.I.MED - Centre for Administrative Innovation in the Euro-Mediterranean Region – established by the U.N. and the Italian government, they seek to promote a new balance between competition and cooperation by intensifying institutional and economic relations between the two shores of the Mediterranean.

Before redefining insular relations with the Mediterranean, through which each choice must relate, it is useful and necessary to open a discussion on the entire Mediterranean - Sea - Land system to assess, on a more informed basis, the system's crucial factors through the most immediate indicators. It is important to emphasize that this paper does not address economic and specialized issues of shipping as it goes beyond the competence of the writer.

However, some considerations can be made. Firstly, it must be stressed that the Mediterranean - Sea - Land system is complex and cannot be read and interpreted in a future projection as a whole, since the Italian peninsula divides it down the middle into two geographically different areas. So the approach to the development strategy of the Italian regions on the Adriatic side (east) will be different from that of the regions bordering the Tyrrhenian Sea (west). At this point we can leave what might happen in the eastern basin, which with Italy brings into play Greece, Turkey, the Middle East, as well as Egypt and Libya, in order to look at the western side with Sardinia, the answer yet to be discovered.

To balance the argument in Veneto - North-East of the country (De Michelis G., Sacconi M., 2010) - on the potential of the Adriatic compared to the Tyrrhenian Sea, it is necessary to develop an equally convincing argument for the potential of the Tyrrhenian basin including the Ligurian Sea,

the Sea of Sardinia and the channel of Sicily. A set of "seas" which are far more complex than the Adriatic which is only a "channel" and moreover because the emergence of Sardinia and Corsica cannot be avoided.

Firstly, even before focusing on the role and implications that affect our island, it is important to understand the "moves" of the western region of the Peninsula in particular the relations it wants to form with Europe and not only with the French and Spanish.

In fact, like the North - East it proposes to interact with the new Europe, as should Liguria and Piedmont and the other regions on the Tyrrhenian coast because if they didn't, it would be disastrous.

Thus, the search for a different, more open, entrepreneurial and cultural dimension with even more real and virtual links through infrastructure systems becomes strategic. These conditions are essential to ensure the critical mass necessary to address the new competition at an international level. On the other hand, in Europe, after the political upheavals of the '90s (Rizzi F., 2004, 93), a real, constructive common policy for the Mediterranean was sought (Rizzi F., 2004, 85) through the definition of macro-areas or macro-regions needed to access community resources. "*The European Territorial Cooperation Groups are already working towards these new entities. Liguria and Piedmont have done this with the neighboring regions of France, Catalonia with the Balearic Islands, Aragon and Languedoc Roussillon*" (Milia G., 2010, 58).

It is assumed that this new dimension of international macro-areas puts most of their expectations on the Mediterranean, also in order to balance (not an easy task) the economic gravitation from the ports of northern Europe (De Langen P. W., 1998). If this path assumes the character of a European macro-scale developmental process overlooking the Mediterranean, it would create an entity of greater scope than that envisaged in the "*Dialogue in the North - East*" (De Michelis G., Sacconi M., 2010) which overlooks the Adriatic. At this point you can be confident and optimistic that the game of growth prospects and their effects, played between the east and west of the Italian peninsula, rebalances and even tips in favor of the western side.

Sardinia must be part of this hypothetical scenario, not only because of its geographical position, but even more if it can convince and be convinced of its added value.

The latest council administrations of Cagliari, the capital of the island, recently adopted the developmental objectives which focus on projecting of the city beyond the sea, even coining the slogan "*Cagliari capital of the Mediterranean*". Despite being quite obviously exaggerated, it seeks to spur the citizens of the political classes to make the appropriate steps in line with modernization. This optimistic forecast cannot underestimate the uneconomic differential of this insularity. To combat this, it will be necessary to create a pattern in which the sea will become "*a bridge of great*

light", which is stable enough to link the region to the mainland. "*A bridge that even the sea - the most necessary and risky of bridges, as the bridge is risky and needs paths traced by man* [...] *not a barren sea, above all because it is rich in islands. Even when it appears in all its immensity one does not doubt that there is a path which leads to one of these* [...] *this Sea is not, therefore, abstractly separate from the Land. Here the elements recall each other, they miss each other*" (Cacciari M., 2005, 14-16).

In reflecting on the image of the bridge and on the sea as a bridge, one wonders what have been until now, also with reference to the last 60 years of local history, the economic and political links with which it dealt and managed the virtual and physical continuum with the Italian peninsula and other border regions with which the island is now connected.

However, despite positive results, supported by major protocols and considerable financial resources from the state and region, the most important aspect for making "territorial continuity" an essential tool to allow Sardinia its role in the Archipelago Europe has not been resolved, and in some ways not even addressed.

4. Sardinia and Italy: the importance of national cohesion

Since the unity of Italy (1861)[2] we have seen a gradual gap opening between the north and south of the country, confirming the reciprocal "northern question" and southern question". (Ruffolo G., 2009, 147; 160; 161).

Among the many reflections on the 150th anniversary of the unification of Italy that political debate and civil society is considering, there are concerns about "confirming" the unity of the country in a time of particular agitation between north and south. The southern question ranks high on the list of priorities to be addressed. In this respect, almost all political parties and various commentators point out that it is the only problem which has not yet been resolved in the 150 years of unification. In fact, in the south 20 million people do not have an adequate standard of living. The issue of the south is a national priority which should not be seen as the sum of individual regions. We need an overall vision through concentrated funds for purposeful, not indiscriminate spending (Tremonti G., 2010).

From this point of view it is absolutely essential in the coming years for Italy to face, even through an unusual opening, a prominent role in international dialectic. "*The cultures and civilizations are hybrid, heterogeneous and so interdependent and interrelated as to jeopardize any uniform or*

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[2] "*Among historians and many economists it seems* […] *to take the idea that in 1861 there was already a gap, but that it was smaller than that of today, between 10% and 25% against about 40% of the last 50 years*". (Ricolfi L., 2010, 66).

simplistic description of their individuality" (Catania G. 2009, 40). So being Italian and being part of a nation is certainly vital to the macro objectives, rather than being from Lombardy, Tuscany, Campania, Sicily and Sardinia. "*National unity and social cohesion do not mean centralization and bureaucracy, do not mean the death of autonomy, diversity and social and political interests of conflict and confrontation. Unity and cohesion can grow only with reforms and their subsequent implementation at all levels of government and with civil and moral collective behavior, which is capable of renewing society and the state, aiming in particular to bring the north and south closer, to lessen the gap that continues to separate them*" (Napolitano G., 2010).

In this large scale scenario, against the background of Italy's strategies in Europe and the Mediterranean, the Sardinian issue should be revised and discussed to assess its context and prospects, at the same time trying not to go against all logic and the strategies needed to address major issues of globalization.

It is widely recognized that "*in a global economy where competition is fierce and the difference between success and failure often lies in small changes in the quality of goods and services, networks often have an advantage over the individuals in the market*. [...] *Networks foster creativity and innovation for the simple reason that they can exploit the intellectual resources of a larger group of people*" (Rifkin J., 2004, 192-193).

The use of networks is certainly not new (Mittner, 2008) because the model allows the protection of identities and prerogatives in the economic environment within a macro-scale framework to achieve goals otherwise unattainable. In fact, as *'the global economy is becoming increasingly dense and fast, no company alone can effectively compete as a single agent* [...] *today, working alone is a passport to extinction* [...]. *Cooperation is a vital element for survival and progress*" (Rifkin J.,2004, 193-195).

Since the political assessment our region makes to be independent in order to translate statutory autonomy into freedom of choice, without being dependent on and controlled by others, Rifkin argues that "*freedom is found in shared relations rather than in isolation*" (Rifkin J.,2004, 195). So it is important to act in networks not limiting ourselves "*to think global, act global*", but through the combination of thinking globally and acting locally; thinking locally and acting globally. (Morin E. 2010, 45). In this way the local components of territorial efficiency and relations play a crucial role, as opposed to the homogenizing tendencies of globalization.

These trends lead to an enhancing effect on local and regional environments, (Mela A., Belloni M. C., Davico L., 2000, 161-162), summarized by the term "*glocal*" (Magnaghi, 2000, Ecosfera, 2001; Sassen, 2003).

In such an interdependent and dense world cooperation cannot be disregarded (Friedmann, 2002).

"*Like multinational enterprises states are also slowly organizing themselves into cooperative networks, to adapt better into the reality of a globalized society at high risk*" (Rifkin J., 2004, 200).

Looking at the future, the conclusion of this argument which intends to emphasize the functional role of Sardinia in the Mediterranean macro-system can only lead to very clearly separating the issues concerning socio-economic development from those which concern unique identity and culture. "*All the recalled elements (political, conflictual, claims that animated the debate) also contribute to explaining why it is established as a clearly economic independence, because no one wants or is able to design a strong culturally motivated autonomy, a Sardinian uniqueness that would not end in backwardness and economic poverty. Although the protection and development of its wealth of culture and ethno - historical bases of autonomy are why it was conferred its special status, they are not the defining point of its special autonomy*" (Cardia M. R., 1998, 749).

Therefore it becomes imperative that a new statute, expression of the Sardinian people, adopts an understandable language. Firstly to explain to ourselves and then to the others: who we are, how many of us there are, what we want to be and especially by which autonomous means. In this way we can freely become part of the international system of which Italy is a legitimate part. With that, faced with a need to "leave behind" the historically consolidated condition of "dependency" (without underestimating its many achievements especially in the last 60 years), it makes no sense to insist on the possibility of independence from the Italian government to build a Sardinian nation. Clearly, just by being part of a macro region and a network of supranational organizations, you can "save" Sardinia with its own identity which is always recognized and appreciated internationally. In this context, the intellectual potential, the propensity for technological innovation and experimentation in the region which has a good competitive edge in the field of biomedicine, engineering and ICT, may be more successful.

This claim must be supported to demonstrate that the "small size" of Sardinia should not be seen as a fault or even as a sentence with no alternative but we must realistically take this into account, without the frustrations that may result from the demographic factor and the make up of the classes. In the processes of development, the demographic factor has always had a significant and decisive role, even if this at present, under the new geo-economic conditions, has changed its content. In fact, if earlier, the focus was on net birth rates, today's scholars on the other hand consider fundamental the potential "*of entering and the entrance of the actual workforce into the manufacturing world and the consequent impact on consumer markets - from food to oil - derived from the huge increase in purchasing power generated by employment growth in the world. The composition of the population by income bracket also counts since, the increase in income and wealthy classes increases opportunities for the more expensive and quality products, typical of*

developing countries" (Savona P., 2009, 99).

The only rule is that we need to look for the tools and ways to "*work together despite our great diversity and we must do so with mutual respect, exercising enormous patience and without giving in to the temptation to use force*" (Savona P., 2009, 19) for shared goals without conflict.

5. Conclusions

In recent years, the issue of competition between cities over the networks has become central, because of the ongoing processes which occur at an ever increasing pace, forcing regions and those who govern and live in them to work together in order to reposition themselves on the international scene and take advantage of the global markets. Therefore it is important to consciously return to the factors involved and the policy analysis with which the various parties should carry out action.

If on the one hand there is no question of the need for a more effective critical mass in size and weight to address the major issues in the Mediterranean area with the Europe – Africa connections, on the other hand a reinterpretation of the Sardinian question is required, provided it is done as a legal and economic instrument, in line with the modernisation of processes.

Action is needed with "*strategically correct* […] *decisions*" (M. Egemen, AN Mohamed, 2007, 1374) *on the internationalisation of the territory and the production system; on assisting the technological innovation of enterprises and on the modernization of infrastructure system, at the same time considering issues related to the modernisation of the tourism system and those related to energy*" (UniCredit, 2010, 23). In this context it will be necessary to firstly remove the "independence flag" and cut the umbilical cord with Rome and at the same time look for a the "link" to the most robust economies in the country and in Europe based on enterprise, motivation and on new technologies. Although "*The pessimism of reason* […] *lives with the optimism of will*" (Ricolfi L., 2010, 177) we must be fully convinced that our future depends on how we build it. "*Here in the world. And here in Sardinia*" (Merlier A., 2005, 13-23).

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