



“INLAND AREAS” AND INTEGRATION POLICIES Starting again from “the pulp and the bone”

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ABSTRACT

Following a long process of modernization - of which the urban systems and the plains have been the nuclei - the territories on the margins of development are beginning to be the subject of renewed widespread interest today.

Nonetheless, looking at and reflecting on this space does not mean focusing attention exclusively on it, however. It is not a matter of pitting marginal territories against those of modernity and development; rather, it is a matter of considering these parts of the territory, present in every country, in relation to each other. It is about reversing the dominant narrative, the one oriented by a discriminatory logic that divides the territory into areas that deserve more and others that deserve less. It is about reversing the gaze, through the acquisition of an awareness on the part of communities that the status of marginality does not represent a local and isolated condition, but instead concerns a significant part of European regional contexts.

Keywords: territorial differential, intra-regional gap, metaphor of “the pulp and the bone”, systemic territorial approach.

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Introduction

"Territories of bone (and pulp)" is a metaphor for the backbone of twentieth-century Italy; a plastic representation of the marginality that affected large parts of the national territory during the twentieth century. The origin of the expression "pulp and bone" is due to Manlio Rossi Doria, who used it to denounce the deep socioeconomic divide between the inland areas and the plains of Southern Italy.

Years later, the metaphor remains of great interest and effectiveness in order to interpret and address issues related to development differentials, not only interregional ones, but also intraregional, which appear, instead, analyzed today with excessive superficiality. The essay moves, in fact, from a substantial dissatisfaction with the European debate, both political and disciplinary, about the topic of marginal territories. It intends to bring to attention the need for complex readings of lived space, unencumbered by mainstream practices; to affirm the need to identify a different, more articulate and in-depth approach about the future of these places: a systemic, multi-disciplinary and multi-scalar approach that addresses the issue of removing the historically stratified constraints of failed development.

The choice of field, underlying implicit in the approach adopted, stems from a profound dissatisfaction with a debate that, in recent times, seems to have associated, even in the scientific-cultural sphere, the rediscovery of the consistency, in terms of opportunity, of the phenomenon of marginal areas with potentials for escape from that condition that are traced solely to exogenous dynamics, that is, to the ability of local communities to conform to the satisfaction of needs and requirements expressed elsewhere, particularly in large cities and metropolitan areas. This is a temporally stratified and spatially diffuse phenomenon; a phenomenon incapable of grasping the diverse and multiple characters that represent the main non-reproducible resource – identity, cultural, economic and social – of these places, prefiguring paths of homogenization and trivialization around a stereotyped idea of authenticity; a phenomenon that at the same time is functional in subjecting the future of these places solely to the presumed demands and aspirations of the inhabitants of the metropolis - or, more likely, of a narrow component of it: the far more affluent one - while conversely ignoring the needs and demands of those who bind their past and future lives to those places.

Starting with the desire to recognize dignity and a future for marginal territories, the effort to be made concerns the need to reverse the dominant narrative to which they are subjected. It is therefore proposed to counter the negative concepts conventionally attributed to these areas, promoting, starting from the endogenous resources of the places, favorable and advantageous images and scenarios, around which to build sustainable paths in economic, cultural, social and ecological terms.

The ultimate goal of the essay is to contribute to the international debate on the future of marginal areas, prefiguring forms of endogenous development of territories, shared with the inhabitants, intrinsically linked to processes of territorial re-signification and re-appropriation, inclusion and integration.

1. The (slow) compounding of territorial marginalization

Territorial marginalization and the more general issue of territorial imbalances must be placed in a long-term historical reading.¹ The processes of modernization, associated with urbanization, have, over decades, favored the formation of large urban, or metropolitan, systems, mostly located in the plains and – at the same time – they have marginalized large parts of national territories, almost throughout the European context, exposing them to serious environmental and social risks.

¹ Neoclassical formalism and the impossibility of explaining economic relations, including imbalances and inequalities, solely through mathematical-statistical models prompted economists and geographers during the twentieth century to take a closer interest in the social relations that define economic relations between "centers" and "peripheries," taking advantage of the renewed interest in Marxist-derived thought and the method of historical materialism. Initially, these were theories derived primarily from the observation of imbalances and growing inequalities between developed countries and countries of the global South, which were later applied in various forms to national and regional scales as well, eventually being used to interpret and explain intra-regional development differentials.

Among the main theoretical models proposed during the twentieth century are: Alfred Weber (1909), Walter Christaller (1933), Arthur Lösch (1940), Arghiri Emmanuel (1972), Immanuel Wallerstein (1974), André Gunder Frank (1977), Samir Amin (1977), and Alain Reynaud (1984).

This phenomenon involves – with different characterizations such as social, economic and environmental – large parts of territories of the Old Continent that have been progressively excluded from the processes and dynamics of development. Marginality, which can be briefly defined as a structural disempowerment of a local territorial system's capacity for action and reaction, is not a uniform phenomenon and does not affect all places in the same way: it can be contingent, if due to factors that can potentially be rescinded in a short time, but it can also be persistent, if not systematic and systemic, in the presence of cumulative processes, such as demographic decline, shrinking service supply and the rarefaction of the economic-productive system. At the origin of the marginalization of territories lie the dynamics of depopulation, abandonment and divestment, caused by the phenomena of population, skills and functions all rolling downstream. (Wood, 1999). The evolution of the capitalist development model and the spread of the belief, typical of the Fordist era but still pervasive today, that socioeconomic systems evolve toward arrangements dominated by economic and institutional gigantism have progressively expelled from the trajectories of development, marginalizing them, the most fragile and/or peripheral territories, in economic, geographic and/or sociocultural terms.

During the 20th century, the gap between the territories affected by development and the areas that were excluded from it increased: the geography of the whole of Europe was disrupted by the momentum of industrialization and the advent of urbanization. The development of urbanism, together with the greater opportunities offered by the city, the profitable incomes derived from industry and the tertiary sector, the more advanced standards in terms of services and opportunities, the easy mobility in the plains, in the imagery that capitalism was able to produce and impose, marginalized rural areas, mocked peasant class consciousness, emptied the highlands, denigrated the more secluded and hard-to-reach lands, and excluded them from the great financial flows, of people, goods and services (Rimbaud, 1969). Contextually, the crisis of the poor rural economy, which was unable to hold its own in competition with intensive lowland production, on the one hand, and, on the other, the overbearing and increasing mechanization of agriculture towards industrialization models, which also affected marginal areas, have drastically reduced the supply of labor, leading to a slow but steady and progressive exodus from rural and mountain territories (Sereni, 1947), forcing them into phenomena of abandonment, divestment, demographic decline, economic impoverishment, and sociocultural rarefaction (Guidicini, 1998).

2. The traits characterizing territorial marginality

These are varied contexts, in which fragments of history, traditions and folklore are sedimented; cultural deposits to which the places themselves are witnesses and bearers: a territorial, historical, architectural, cultural, social and economic capital of inestimable value; places to look at with great attention, in order to recover their deepest meaning (Teti, 2004). These lands present a rich endowment of historical and cultural resources, as a result of the centuries-long processes of anthropization that have passed through them; however, they are, first and foremost, areas of abandonment, where the widespread heritage is almost neglected.

With depopulation and abandonment, the sense and meaning of places are lost, and with them the sedimented cultures of identity, the deepest traditions, social capital, the infrastructuring of the territory, the careful care of the natural heritage, and the preservation and maintenance of a built heritage of inestimable historical and cultural value. The factual condition that unites these realities is the presence of underutilized or dilapidated built heritage and social fixed capital: complexes of buildings, residential and productive, infrastructure and equipment now abandoned. A set of interrelated elements built in a more or less distant era, affected by a phase of stalemate or deep crisis and no longer maintained, forgotten. Some seem to retain a certain symbolic charge, as if to testify to the weakness of human action on nature; others appear as scraps over which decline flows indifferently (Bauman, 2005); still others end up representing the character of the territories that host them and the desolation of an era. It is as if suddenly the ties between the human and nature were broken: those shared spatial codes that have allowed the construction of place – in anthropological terms: as inhabited, humanized, recognized and claimed by the people who make and feel part of it – and the feelings of mutual care and respect were lost.

The preservation of structural and functional characteristics of ecosystems is drastically reduced and compromised – and environmental imbalances accentuated – through the loss of the centuries-old interaction between nature and human action. Landscape disintegration, degradation and neglect represent the immediately visible effects generated by the emptying of human settlements, but the risks of inadequate land stewardship are far more dramatic. In an environment that has historically been produced and shaped through the continuous co-evolution between ecological systems and anthropogenic manipulation, the failure of this constant interaction deteriorates habitats, causing not only a serious loss in ecological terms of biodiversity and the role it plays as a producer of social cohesion, identity, recognition and belonging to place, but also increasing the risks and vulnerability of the environment in terms of security (Agnoletti, 2012).

The effects are particularly worrisome because they invest the possibilities of individuals to enjoy and exercise the citizenship rights. The main critical issue in these places, which is originally triggered by the weakness of the economic-productive base, is the strong and persistent quantitative and qualitative under-provisioning of essential public services that does not allow inhabitants to fully enjoy and exercise basic citizenship rights (De Rossi, 2018). In these contexts, enfranchisement from the status of marginality is particularly complicated because the strong deficit in terms of quality of life, in turn, negatively affects the attractiveness and competitiveness of economic forces – since an efficient local welfare is a relevant factor for the lives of businesses, workers and their families – thus fueling a real marginality trap (Coppola, 2021), which goes beyond the concrete boundaries of daily life and ends up investing the most intimate dimension of the person. The abandonment of places produces social damage that affects the whole community, making some essential services more costly and inefficient for the surviving inhabitants: from transportation to communications, from health services to education, and even involving job opportunities and the social, cultural and political emancipation of individuals (Barca, 2019).

In fact, what these realities have in common is the absence of aspirations:² a sort of surrender in the face of acquiring awareness of one's human condition of minority, awareness of one's subordination. Being marginal is not only a geographical condition, but connotes, more generically, a human condition of marginalization, understood as a status generated by the lack of power, by the continuous experience of a meager ability to influence one's own and others' future (Augé, 2009) and, ultimately, as a condition of marginalization and social and political exclusion. The condition of territorial, economic and social marginality is often associated with an idea of isolation and marginalization. The experience of the inevitability of certain processes generates the perception of a certain condition of inertia, almost apathy, paralyzing with respect to the ability to imagine an alternative future with respect to the status quo (De Leonardis & Deriu, 2012), both personal and collective, that is, in relation to the places experienced, as a possibility and ability to imagine and prefigure strategies to contrast the dynamics of abandonment and decline.

These considerations are, moreover, endorsed by the widespread perception of the absence of long-term political projects that offer credible hope in a better future; by the perceived exclusion from policies, strategic planning and governance, both of national governments and European apparatuses; concretely, this amounts to the absence of actions aimed at intervening to improve daily living conditions.

3. Renewed interest in marginal territories

In the last decade, places that are, in various ways, marginal have begun to be widely the subject of interest and attention, as well as the focus of national and European policies. This is not the first time that marginal areas have been a subject of discussion; however, recently, a more positive view of these territories is emerging, finally seen not only as a problem, but also as an opportunity (De Rossi, 2018).

² The concept is borrowed from Indian anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, according to whom the capacity to aspire is a navigational capacity; it refers to the ability to move (navigate) through the complex map of social norms to give substance to aspirations, to exercise and practice aspirations. In this sense, social inequity resulting from territorial inequalities is also about the unequal possibility to participate in the collective discourse about the desired society, to prefigure, design, build and practice, together with others, the future; since aspirations are never simply individual, they take shape in the context of social life (2011).

The change in perception, about the fate of marginal territories, seems to come in the early 1990s when, in the wake of environmental and ecological demands and reflections advanced within the no-global movements, a new narrative of uncertainties regarding the environmental sustainability of economic growth began to spread, growing environmental and sociocultural anthropogenic pressure, the crucial issue of energy resources, migration, the imposed disposal of some settlements or inexorable depopulation due to ecological and hydro-geological disasters.³ Reflection on the limits of indiscriminate growth, extractivism and nefarious consumption, inextricably linked to the processes of globalization of trade and production and to the neoliberalism characterizing Western economies and erected, over time, as an economic and managerial dogma of environmental and human resources (Gallino, 2003), is consolidated and enriched with new considerations and elements in the 2000s (Crouch, 2014). The crisis of cities and the model of development they represent, which allows for a new vision of marginal areas; the prominence assumed by the need for securing the territory and soil defense, which finds in these spaces one of the most critical points; the profound cultural metamorphosis, which leads to attributing to these places entirely new symbolic values; contribute to the spread of a new and more positive narrative of marginal spaces and territories (De Rossi, 2018). A process, moreover, on the one hand, urged by the implementation of national and supranational intervention strategies and, on the other hand, strongly accelerated, more recently, by the pandemic crisis, which has shown, rather definitively, the limits of the urban settlement system and the economic model underlying it. In the pandemic era, the endowment differential in the territorial, as well as urban, sphere has emerged with particular force, prompting numerous scholars from various disciplines, as well as policymakers at all levels of government, to reflect and act on the processes at work and to theorize strategies and actions for a return to small-scale (Fenu, 2020).

The awareness that the crisis, which has been afflicting the Western world and particularly Europe for more than fifteen years, is something more complicated and goes beyond the malfunctioning of the economic system is slowly spreading, in the public debate (Carrosio, 2020). The radical transformations imposed by the processes of globalization are expressed in a series of complex phenomena that affect and intertwine not only politics and economics, but also society and the environment. This means that the current upheavals do not only concern the economic, productive and financial structure and its political implications, but rather take the form of a socio-environmental crisis that implies a set of issues - including economic ones - that are interrelated and interdependent, feeding and reproducing each other through mutual causal relationships, producing an extraordinary and frightening instability.

In this dramatic scenario, marginal territories put themselves forward, and impose themselves, in a proactive manner, opening up entirely new perspectives: they assume a new and fundamental role within a process of re-signification and re-functionalization of the territory, centered on logics of environmental, social and, even, economic-productive sustainability (Barca, 2019). These spaces emerge as testing grounds for innovative and alternative socioeconomic and political practices and models to the dominant ones, where the chances of success, the ability to attract and retain inhabitants and investment is deeply linked to their ability to offer good levels of quality of life (Coppola, 2021).

4. The (almost successful) attempt at trivialization

It should be noted that, in parallel with the acquisition of awareness with respect to the opportunities offered by these rediscovered living places, we have witnessed, especially following the outbreak of the pandemic

³ As the Italian sociologist Luciano Gallino suggests, what happened at the end of the twentieth century can be summarized with terms such as "financialization" and "globalization": effective expressions to immediately call to attention and connote that set of structural changes, interrelated, destined to produce similar consequences on the distribution of power, income and wealth, as well as on patterns of economic growth, which have invested, since the last years of the twentieth century, the industrialized world (2013). Such changes are, inevitably, the outcome of precise political choices, matured in a specific cultural context; however, it has not only been a matter of laws, directives, regulations and agreements that, underlying dynamics of financialization of the economy, have favored financial liberalization and deregulation of constraints on the movements of capital; the aforementioned political choices have produced much broader repercussions. The expansion of globalization and the prevalence of the principle of financial accumulation have generated, especially in the Western context, a veritable tradition of public policies for economic development made up of large investments in concentrated areas of national territories and particularly in urban areas, as already structured and equipped systems, where investments promised greater profits and, at the same time, contributed to further weakening the peripheral and marginal areas of national territories.

crisis, the production of pompous and redundant narratives, discourses and imaginaries, almost always unresponsive to the concrete living conditions and fundamental dynamics at work. The exponential growth of proposals for intervention and planning related to the possible repopulation of these territories, as well as the full realization of the unsustainability of the urban-metropolitan model of life, of the urgent need to recover slower and more tolerable rhythms and ways of living and working, and even of the alleged economic opportunities, in terms of savings, arising from living in small towns, have fueled a rhetoric devoid, empty of content: a rhetoric functional in prefiguring simplistic solutions to complex and articulated issues.

According to this narrative, which has become mainstream in recent media communication, but also recalled in the redundant speeches of supposed intellectuals, the regeneration and recovery of small historic settlements transforms them (yes!) into garrisons of the territory's history and possible new places to live and work, but also, definitively accomplishing the much hoped-for transition, into places of relaxation and the occasional escape from the city, into places destined to host the out-of-town jaunt in search of a supposed identity, cultural and even gastronomic authenticity (D'Eramo, 2017). Elements such as identity, authenticity, proximity and local culture give territories previously considered peripheral or marginal places a potential and unexpected centrality, an added value, but provided that these elements are taken as components of an evolutionary process, in continuous becoming and not as a rigid nostalgic conviction. Instead, one often gets the impression that the dominant narrative, as well as most of the proposals put forward at the European level, end up being characterized by the substantial paucity and homogenization of the dominant ideas: in general, the idea of a re-functionalization of these places in an eminently urban-centric key, as dependent places totally subservient to urban needs. In other words, one gets the impression, that both the rhetoric and the policies respond, first and foremost and once again, to the very – if not all – urban and at times reactionary desire (as anti-urban) for natural spaces, for an escape from the overcrowding and ugliness of certain unstructured and de-qualified metropolitan contexts, to the recovery of an aspect of communal living, of a human-scale dimension, of a higher quality of life and a newfound sense of belonging.

It is, therefore, within the recent narrative of the return to small settlements and the associated human dimension—which is overbearingly affected by the archaeologization of territories, the musealization of places and the folklorization of history—that the seductive temptation of the small old world and the nostalgic narrative of a past that is no more (Bindi, 2021) are stereotyped. It comes, thus, to spread the vernacular ideal of "borgo", as an ennobling term that alludes to a communicative and economic game of territorial marketing, in which everything becomes a kind of packaging functional to the promotion of tourism, to the sale and consumption of the so called borgo-commodity, as an approximate and inadequate representation of small settlement centers (Barbera, Cersosimo, & De Rossi, 2022). It is in this light that mainstream rhetorics have been spreading that, to marginal territories, want to associate ideas such as the aesthetics of the borgo, the praise of slowness, the abused concepts of "resilience" and, even, "resistance," or, again, the back-to-the-land practices of smart-workers and digital nomads. Just as widespread have been the trivialized versions of concepts, brilliant and useful in origin, such as "restance" (Teti, 2022) or "Happy degrowth" (Latouche, 2017).

5. New (and old) approaches and visions to territorial marginalization

In a context effectively characterized by a lack of specific, or at any rate excessively fragmented, policies for marginal territories and by a pervasiveness of trivializing and homogenizing approaches, according to a logic that denies the possibility of developing articulated diagnoses and prefiguring futures based on the place-based model, it is a question of understanding whether and how it is possible to develop strategies for territorial restructuring starting from the enhancement of the endogenous capacities and resources of places. In other words, to understand whether it is possible to prefigure forms of development that are consistent with the specificity of local resources, functional to local demands and, at the same time, alternative to dominant and sustainable models.

What is taking shape, at the European scale, is a new problem geography related to territorial rebalancing that can no longer be traced back to regional gaps, but – conversely – declined in terms of intra-regional

differentials. In this sense, it may be useful to recover the careful scientific-cultural tradition, albeit referring to regional differentials, elaborated in the twentieth century.

In the Italian context, for example, the reflections proposed by Manlio Rossi Doria and the School of Portici, from which derives the famous metaphor of "the pulp and the bone," advanced in reference to the development of Southern Italy (Celant, 1990), remain highly topical, in the context of transversal readings of the territory; interpretative models more attentive to the differentiations present within the same territorial ambits, therefore more capable of capturing and representing the diversity of places (1958).

Rossi Doria makes explicit his own dynamic vision of Italy's Mezzogiorno by dividing southern areas into "pulp" and "bone," but the interpretive scheme can be applied not only to the entire peninsula, but to the whole of Europe: where the imbalances between rural and urban areas, between the hinterland and the coast, between the mountains and the plains have been growing.

"Pulp" and "bone": terms taken from peasant language and elevated to concepts of analytical value: a metaphor for the fundamental structure of Italy; a plastic representation of the marginality that affected the country's inland areas during the 20th century.

The "bone-and-bone" dialectic is still interesting today in understanding the dynamics of territorial development because it provides a dynamic interpretive key to the South, delving into the factors of differentiation and heterogeneity. In other words, Rossi Doria uses the metaphor to counter the negative and immobile representation of Southern Italy and, at the same time, highlight the factors of potential dynamism and vitality located in the South, but useful for Italian growth. In this sense, the metaphor, by insisting on the mutual interdependence between the two systems, is also useful for the interpretation of intra-regional dynamics and phenomena, at least to affirm the need for a systemic and integrated approach of the territory, attentive to endogenous resources and values, on a European, as well as national, scale.

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