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THE ROLE OF TERRITORIAL IDENTITY IN LOCAL DEVELOPMENT**VOLHA SHTEYER, LIUDMILA TIHANAVA**
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Territorial identity is the result of a mechanism of interaction in which identity plays the role of cause and effect of territorial dynamics. The development of economic and productive collaborative relationships requires the creation of a strong territorial identity that will contribute to local development processes.

Introduction. The contemporary world is marked by strong attachments to national, religious, ethnic, linguistic, social, cultural and/or even 'brand' or consumer-based identities. Such identities have become the refuge for many individuals and groups who see globalization and cultural change as a threat to their ways of life and standards of living. In this context, we witness the culturization of political claims, which run counter to the essentially dynamic and multifaceted nature of identities.

Until recently, the word heritage was largely associated with monuments, buildings, art and other cultural expressions, and always associated to something material. However in recent decades, the concept of immaterial or intangible heritage has appeared with force. The idea has become broadly and widely accepted and it is precisely on this aspect that the definition of regional, individual or national identity is based. Identity is nothing less than the sum of a series of diverse factors and features that combine to give a place a singular reality, by differentiating and defining it. Of course, this identity is not alienated to history, events, geography and other elements in the context on which human activity is developed. Thus, external factors subtly, naturally and imperceptibly shape and explain individual and collective behavior, as well as people's emotions.

In any case, we cannot deny the reality of a changing world, living together and coexisting with collective identities and even, the overlapping or common ground between them. This along with their respect, care and vindication in a varied present, is an internationally recognized fact, and is the subject of various statements by international organizations. Statements that not only defend the wealth that identity and diversity represent for humanity, but also highlight their singular vulnerability due to their intangible and immaterial nature within a changing, ever more globalized world in constant change. That's why in many cases we must start by recovering awareness of identity itself.

Identity is a many-sided phenomenon. What is important is that identities develop out of an understanding of communities and differences in the world. The key point is, however, that identity is a process where meaning about who we are and who we are close or distant is created. These ideas have important consequences for our lives and interaction.

Thus the aim of the paper work is to characterize the role of territorial identity in local development.

1. The conceptual interpretation of identity in the sphere of economy. The concept of identity refers in the first place to a feeling and a consciousness of a self that remains itself in face of others and notwithstanding change. The formation of identity depends on intricate processes of self-recognition and hetero-recognition. Identity, in different words, consists in the form and content of the answers to questions like "who am I?" "Who are you?" "Who is he/she?"

At the core of identity is a personal identification with a group or a community. Identity thus has both an individual and a collective aspect, referring to the identity of the individual or the identity of the group. The concept of "collective identity" refers to this phenomenon [1]. The contemporary social sciences pay particular attention to the themes of collective identity and identity politics. Although the expression "collective identity" has become familiar even in everyday language, in the social sciences its meaning is disputed – at both the explanatory and normative levels. The concept has sometimes been radically questioned in cases where it is referred to an extensive "social group", such as the one that we call "society". According to more moderate critics, however, the concept of collective identity may be appropriate, at most, for traditional societies characterized – in the current view – by a status of stasis, or by slow and imperceptible social change. In this case, moreover, the collective identity is perceived in "essentialist" terms as a typically closed, rigid, exclusive identity. In modern and industrial, post-modern or post-industrial societies, these identificationary features are regarded as being in constant decline. A similar argument has been put forward by Alain Touraine when he argues, for example, that "the strength of a society seems to increase in line with the slowness of its change and with the ability to reproduce its behavioral codes exactly. When we consider the most industrialized societies, we may even doubt the utility of the notion "society" [2, pp. 14–15].

At the same time for some years economists have been aware that identity is a fundamental aspect not only in enriching societies, but also as an important factor in their differentiation, competitiveness and comparative advantage.

This has been noted by Nobel Prize laureate George Akerlof, who in 2000 published a benchmark reference on this issue, where he states that identity is probably the most important economic decision that an individual makes.

Indeed, the concept has been gaining strength over the past 10 years and today it is common to handle concepts such as “identity-based economy”, “territorial-based identity” or “identity-defining economic sectors”.

From an economic standpoint, identity today is thought of as a resource for a region’s financial competitiveness, whilst at the same time it becomes an instrument for social cohesion and well-being. All the same, its instrumental economic role cannot under any circumstances, allow us to sideline its true reason for being. Care and preservation of identity should always be the main objective and this should be taken into account when considering its privileged role as a tool for growth, economic positioning and branding.

At the same time, the role that identity is acquiring in the economy cannot be denied. New parameters, criteria, consumers and markets have led to the concept of identity being spread through policies in the business world at many levels – such as in strategic positioning. This has led the regions, to look to promote production with proof of origin, so as to establish a clear and differentiated identity that will give their product a competitive edge. We are witnessing how regions are adding established brand names from the business world into the mix when they promote themselves. However, the opposite phenomenon also occurs: firms located in regions that have a clearly defined brand and position are adding these to their own promotion. This has the same aim: projection of values, image and uniqueness.

Touching upon the question of an identity-based economy, it becomes evident that the process is neither straightforward nor simple but involves three essential specifications. First, a true collective identity must exist, where there is a deep-rooted sense of belonging and awareness of this identity. Identity should represent the sum of different elements: it should have symbolic importance; be based on tradition, but also be dynamic and open to change. It should contain tangible elements such as material cultural heritage or topography, but also intangible elements such as traditions or ways of life.

The second specification requires this identity to be seen by foreign eyes and in economic terms by potential demand. Identity should be defined and differentiated using attributes that shape the “image” associated with it. These attributes, or this image, have to be explicit enough to be valued by the demand. In short, the image has to be recognizable as such if it is to become striking and attract attention. This is no easy task, since we are essentially talking about making something intangible tangible.

Thirdly, we must design strategies for the identity’s dissemination. These include marketing and promotion, but also the creation of regional indicators such as denominations of origin, labels stressing quality, or other more general types of certification. This is an area where it is critical to carefully devise actions that do not trivialize heritage [3, pp. 16–17].

With regards to economic activities, there is no doubt that sectors such as gastronomy, agriculture, the wine industry, crafts and cultural production in any of its guises (tangible or intangible) are some of the sectors directly linked to identity-based economy. However, we should not forget that identity, as an integral part of a region’s reality, permeates the area and its society and hence affects the entire economy. In this context, tourism becomes a transversal economic activity in constant expansion, immersed in a profound review of its parameters, having an important impact on territories and societies where it develops and represents a privileged shop window for an identity that gives tourism a prominent and fundamental role within it.

2. Territorial identity as a source of local development. During the last few years the concept of identity has been included among the subjects of geography studies. As Grasso observes in an essay on this issue, which was published on the *Bollettino della Societa Geografica* in the late 90s, “territorial identity has acquired a considerable position in geographic analysis” [4, p. 617]. Such importance can be ascribed to the explicative value that the concept of identity shows towards a wide and varied phenomenology; on the other hand it seems the consequence of a reductive and stereotyped interpretation of some local-scale changes. Therefore, an in-depth analysis of the concept of territorial identity seems rather appropriate, as well as grasping its featuring aspects and its applicative sphere within its geographic connotation. A first reflection can be developed on the term ‘territorial’, or ‘geographical’ [5, p. 107]. As a socio-cultural product, identity can be a subject of interest for geography, because it becomes a moulding element for territorial structure, and in general it can determine structural, relational and sense transformations in the geographic space. Despite the limitations of a partly tautological definition, Caldo describes geographical identity as an “identity relationship that links a given community to its lived space” [6, p. 285]. Caldo highlights that the geographic connotation of identity cannot make reference to the mere spatial dimension of the identity phenomenon; rather it should be used to represent those belonging ties that create the ‘territory’. In the above mentioned definition, the most interesting element that is impregnated with scientific consequences is definitively the reference to the “lived space”, as such reference shows the complexity of geographical identity, and at the same time it enhances its explicative value in relation to territorial discontinuity.

From the observations expressed so far, the interdependency between identity and territory are evident. This is a cumulative relationship: on the one hand territorial identity produces and orientates territorialization processes; on the other hand, the acts of territorialization strengthen the process of identification between the community and its lived space.

Identity can be considered as a consequence as well as a cause of territorialization processes. Also Turco has recently stated that territoriality has a “double configuration”: target and root of identity dynamics [7]. As well as territory, “not only does identity represent a support for territorialization stages and development process, but also the specific series of conditions that favor the bonds and possibilities for following actions” [8, p. 34]. At the same time, identity can be interpreted as the effect of territorialization processes, as these tend to increase the “specificity of a place”, and as the effect of territorial rooting of webs – an “anchorage” provoked by cultural factors – they determine a consolidation of the sense of belonging to the local community.

With regard to the processes of territorialization, identity plays a key role in all stages. Through Turco's interpretation, territorialization can be divided into three separate and consequential stages: denomination, reification, structuring [9]. In the first stage, territorial identity acquires a strategic value as it gives meaning and motivation to the “denomination”, regarded as the result of a “symbolic control of space”. Precisely these control mechanisms allow territorial identity to spread and take root in a specific geographic sphere. The role that identity plays in the reification stage is a different one. This second stage is usually made of locally defined behaviors that aim at increasing what Turco defines a “practical control” of space. Also in this case the practice of control can be accomplished only if identity is a shared value and it is constantly reproduced in common acting. Reification implies a strong territorial identity, and at the same time reification can be a mechanism for strengthening identity sense and the factors that contribute to increasing this sense. However, identity plays a more significant role with regard to the stage of structuring. This stage requires a sensible control of space; such control can be actually exercised only within territorial contexts in which identity has a structuring value, so that identity can direct collective acting and modify the territory according to self-referential mechanisms.

Thanks to globalization, territories are easy to seize and visit. However, their discovery is often only possible with a short visit that does not create any sentimental bonds. From an operational point of view, the necessary response to this contradiction is to prepare the places to cater for visitor expectations and creating precise interpretations of their identity. This is reinforced by the fact that, as Nogue points out, «tourists are fully aware of the unreal component of the tourist experience» [10]. As he further notes, it will become necessary to seriously raise the issue of «what sort of territorial identities we will be able to create in this new scenario and what symbol landscapes will act as a tie between past, present and future» [11, p. 163].

Once an explicative value has been assigned to the concept of territorial identity and reciprocal identities that link identity, territory and territorialization processes, the analysis can focus briefly on the distinctive features of identity, or rather, on the aspects that characterize the interaction between identity and local-scale development processes.

The first observation on the peculiarities of territorial identity is about the dynamic connotation. Identity is not a static phenomenon but a dynamic one, as it is the result of the continuous interaction between a given community and its relational space. This does not deny the range of identity values that are rooted in time and space; this rather highlights the risks of a crystallization of historical identity, especially when these are suggested as regulating criteria for the present and planning references for the future.

As regards the local relationship between development and identity, the structuring character of identity is also very significant. This represents identity's power to produce sense, orientating collective actions and territorialization processes. As Governa [8] rightly observes, in autopoietic systems identity is expressed in self-organization. This feature should drive the discussion to the role that identity can play within local development processes. Territorial identity can be interpreted as sense of belonging, social identification, shared representation of a collective self, but it cannot be identified in a short-sighted way in its exterior manifestation, in the signs it has left in the territory [12, p. 17]. Territorial identity is what is hidden behind those signs and what gives sense to them.

Finally, identity is reflexive, compound and oriented [13]. Identity's reflexive nature comes from an identification process that originates from the local community; it is expressed in the recognition of the difference from the surrounding geography to which the local community attributes its lived space. Identity is also compound, as all identity constructions are necessarily complex and contradictory due to the contrasts that lay at the heart of such constructions. The act of territorialization itself is always the result of a competition between different values and expectations that live in the same social space. Identity is also oriented because it produces 'sense' and it leads the territorial system in its unceasing evolutionary process. This orientating function is one of the most interesting features of territorial identity, as precisely through this function it is possible to explain the role identity plays in local-scale endogenous development processes. A strong competitive territorial identity is not only a great contribution for endogenous and self-centered development but it can also predetermine objectives and strategies.

Conclusion. “Identity” is a keyword of contemporary society and a central focus of social psychological theorizing and research. At earlier historical periods, identity was not so much an issue; when societies were more stable, identity was to a great extent assigned, rather than selected or adopted. In current times, however, the concept of identity carries the full weight of the need for a sense of who one is, together with an often overwhelming pace of change in surrounding social contexts – changes in the groups and networks in which people and their identities are embedded and in the societal structures and practices in which those networks are themselves embedded.

For some time now, productive process economists and researchers have been speaking about a new concept: identity-based economy. The growing pressure in the last decades of the 20th century for an ever more homogenous world represents a threat to social and cultural characteristics of peoples and nations worldwide. At the same time, globalization itself has brought along a revaluation of these characteristics. The idea that products, goods or local services are special because they come from a particular culture or region has been gaining ground.

Territorial identity's driving force in terms of local development comes from the significance of identity values within the organization of space and social life. The synergic relationship between identity and development will occur only where there is a strong identity matrix and where identity values are rooted and shared. Otherwise, any promotion strategy for alleged local identities will not have any driving force and will become a mystification process of the territorial reality, with negative consequences both on development dynamics and on identity itself. The competitive orientation of productive systems is determined precisely by local identities, and the promotion of such identities often represents a strategy for the improvement of this orientation or the support of change processes.

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