

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR – *TERRITORY, POLICIES AND GOVERNANCE*

12 March 2018, Rectory of the Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Lisboa

Summary – Morning

The morning session of the seminar was attended by four international speakers of recognized merit in matters of public governance and with a long experience of reflection (including at the academic, political and technical level) and the operationalization of instruments leading to more collaborative models of territorially based governance.

One of the main messages, common to all presentations, was the need to rethink the issue of regional development by placing it definitively on the political and public agendas of States. Such a need results from the recognition that 'traditional policies' don't respond adequately to the challenges and needs of populations and systems of collective action of the European regions. Claire Charbit (OECD) recalled that this is not an exclusive debate of the EU Member States. For instance, countries such as Australia, Canada and Colombia have a substantial experience in matters of multilevel governance.

The lack of effectiveness of "traditional policies" was demonstrated by Andrés Rodríguez-Pose (London School of Economics) through the analysis of three performance indicators such as low levels of economic development, employment and institutional performance in some European regions. For the speaker it is necessary to deal openly with the political and institutional inefficiencies of these regions, based on the knowledge produced and the lessons learned from the studies, evaluations and empirical experiences. It is also necessary to recognize, as Fabrizio Barca points out, that these inefficiencies deeply constrain the individual and collective experience of full citizenship, reducing their freedoms, rights and aspirations, and has the potential to create authoritarian dynamics (lack of trust in institutions, intolerance facing the differences and a demand for strong authorities and closed communities). For Fabrizio Barca and Andrés Rodríguez-Pose the central governments are responsible for the situation that several European regions have reached, as a result not of the globalization process but because of ineffective public policies, such as institutional reforms that ignore the territorial dimensions of the problems (space-blind), fiscal policies, oversized public investments in relation to the respective demand (white elephants) and essentially the welfare policies.

This evidence should result in an adjustment of the traditional instruments of public policy towards a real regional policy (based on an integrated territorial approach suitable to each territory) that enhance the socio-economic development of the territories without losing the link to national and European cohesion.

John Bachtler presented the example of Integrated Territorial Instruments (ITI) as an attempt to develop an integrated territorial approach for the current programming period of European funds 2014-2020. In his analysis of ITIs, he stressed the considerable level of innovation that these policy instruments brought to the territories, notably in terms of more collaborative governance models and the creation of new types of regions (especially functional areas).

For the above, another fundamental idea of the presentations is the role of the State and the Central Administration. For the speakers, placing regional development and multilevel governance on political and public agendas does not mean reducing the role of the state nor eliminating its responsibility for the harmonious development of society and economy. In other words, it does not imply depriving the State of its functions and responsibilities. Rather, it implies recognizing that public policies and services are not weakened within the scope of Central Administration responsibilities, and that the best scale of action and the best institutional arrangement for the provision of public services should be considered.

This challenge of political, administrative and functional reorganization, captured by the concepts of multilevel governance, finds in mechanisms such as contracts the essence of the relationships between different levels of government. Central Administration continues to be relevant in terms of equity, balance, cohesion as a whole and standardization of quality levels in public services.

Claire Charbit, in light of her reflection on the assumptions of multilevel governance and contracting mechanisms, underlined the widespread use of this type of legal (and tactical) solution to regulate relations between levels of government. Contracts are part of a broad set of possible governance mechanisms (regional agencies, intergovernmental councils, conditionalities) but could not be understood as a direct transposition of the private experience.

The relationship between levels of government has obvious specificities that must be incorporated into the contractual logic: the non-existence of competition and the fact that vertical integration is not a choice. For Claire Charbit, the use of the contractual mechanism should be subjected to a permanent validity analysis, in order to make good decisions about the best governance mechanism for a given policy, sector, territory and/or public service.

Another relevant issue of the presentations was no longer based in the diagnosis of the situation, but rather in the type of policies that should begin to be considered in order to overcome the constraints and historical difficulties of some European regions. For Fabrizio Barca, in the light of his recent experience in the inner regions of Italy, a radical reorientation of policies is necessary moving toward a place-based approach that reinforces the powers of local decision-makers, enhances the role of human resources (qualified and multidisciplinary) and consider the incompleteness of contracts resulting from a limited human rationality. However, this process will gain from the presence of an equidistant entity that contributes to the maintenance or reinforcement of practices of public transparency and accountability in order to avoid the capture of the process by local/regional interest groups.

For John Bachtler this approach still faces some constraints that need to be overcome, such as knowledge and skills deficits necessary to implement this type of approach; the crystallization of the traditional ways of working that limit the ambition of the approach; leadership of concrete processes and, finally, the difficulty of involving citizens in the design and implementation of strategies.