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**Forms of Participation, Nimbyism and Local Knowledge.**  
**Notes about two case-studies in the Campania region**  
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The theme treated: C

Topics: "C- Territorial governance, vulnerable populations and territories voltage"

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The field of development is subject to shifts in paradigms, and it is important to examine how some new approaches are present in this partial change. The relationship between different forms of local participation and local knowledge is interesting for a new approach to the sustainable development. In this paper the attention is pointed on the different forms taken by local participation and knowledge in the practice of development, with regard to the politics of waste management. Two cases in the Campania region are studied: Ariano Irpino, in the province of Avellino, and Acerra, in the province of Naples. The general goal is to point in evidence how some forms of informal participation can produce and stimulate different and deeper knowledge about local environmental issues.

### **1. Introduction**

The field of development is subject to shifts in paradigms, and it is important to examine how some new approaches are present in this partial change. The relationship between different forms of local participation and local knowledge is interesting for a new approach to the sustainable development. In this paper, the attention is pointed on the diverse forms taken by local participation and knowledge in the practice of development, with regard to the politics of waste management. In particular, it is being showed how informal participation has contributed to arise local knowledge in local health and popular epidemiology challengers about hazardous waste management and siting civic facilities in two cases in the Campania region: Ariano Irpino, in the province of Avellino, and Acerra, in the province of Naples. The general goal is to point in evidence how some forms of informal participation can produce and stimulate different and deeper knowledge about local environmental issues.

In the first part, the research methods and the main concepts are presented. Structures and limits of formal and informal kinds of participation are discussed, linked to definition of local knowledge. Analysing the informal kind of participation is also pointing in evidence some critics to definitions based on nimby label.

In the second part some results based on the two case-studies are proposed to evidence as grassroots movements and informal participation can contribute to elaboration, distribution and implementation of hidden knowledge for territorial planning and design.

### **2. Research Methods**

The research is part of a largest research project on the waste crisis, politics and management in Campania, a region of Southern Italy. It is a working progress conducted through some methods:

- Interviews with some activists of the local movements;
- Examination of local committees and groups' internet web sites; local newspapers and official data, documents and scientific researches;
- Participation to local movements public activities.

The research design foresees interviews with institutional representatives to catch different points of view. The proposed results are based on the methods indicated above.

### **3. Forms of participation and local knowledge**

Two forms of social participation are observable in the local development politics. One is the formal participation, activated when processes of territorial development dispose the promotion of participation by citizens groups like stakeholders in formal context to listen their voices. These cases usually interest the territorial transformation processes oriented to support local sustainable development (Agenda 21, strategic plans, Urban programmes). Formal participation is organized from institutional actors, interested to realize some specific development goals. It is structurally influenced by this official frame, that define mode of participation, including its procedures and temporal structure. In these cases, the activated participation is generally predetermined in its procedures and expected aims and social composition.

Informal participation is a typical form adopted by grassroots opposition movements, activated spontaneously to contrast with a specific facilities or policy proposed for the local development. It has been about 30 years since this kind of social movements has been defined by important part of mass media and political world and a part of social research through the 'nimby' (not-in-my-back-yard) label. Adopting this concept grassroots opposition movements are recognized as driven by a selfish and parochial attitude (Kraft and Clary, 1991), irrational suggestions and ignorance (Freudenberg and Pastor, 1992). The 'nimby' concept is not sufficiently defined (Hubbard, 2006; Van der Horst, 2007) and, above all, as Wolsink (2006) underlines, the use of theories based on this concept impedes our understanding. In fact, it does not recognize the complexity of the forms of local action, hiding their power of rediscovery, production, distribution and sharing of knowledge about the local area, that would not be activable otherwise in predetermined contexts.

Informal participation can actuate and empowering the specific local knowledge, that is the knowledge based on people's firsthand experience rooted in a specific territorial area. A review of some studies points in evidence an array of its constitutive traits (Agarwal, 1995; Geertz, 1983; Corburn, 2003; FAO, 2004). Local knowledge results:

- an organized, dynamic and evolving body of thought;
- distinguished from formal scientific knowledge.
- embedded in community practices, institutions and relationships based on common sense and empiricism;
- elaborated by groups who are intimate with their natural and social world;
- adapted to the local culture and environment;

The relationship between forms of participation, local knowledge and the politics of local development is analyzed through two case-studies in the Campania region. They have interested the politics of waste management, an important field for a good or bad local, but also global, future.

#### **4. The territorial contexts**

The grassroots movements in Campania have interested different places since the second half of the Nineties, taking action against some political decisions about siting hazardous waste treatment facilities, mostly landfills. In the figure 1, many local areas interested by social conflicts and local movements during a ten-years period are indicated<sup>1</sup>. They are mainly localized in the Caserta and Naples provinces.

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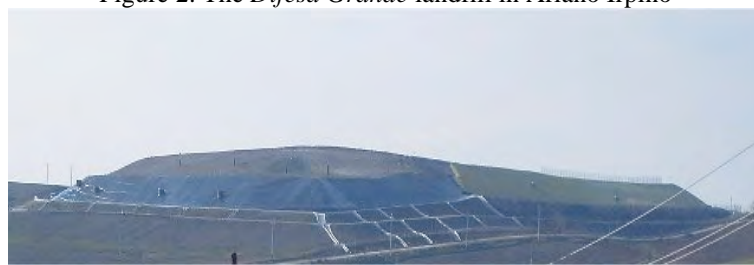
<sup>1</sup> The involved sites has been: Ariano Irpino (Difesa Grande), Savignano Irpino and Andretta in Avellino province; Montecorvino Rovella (Parapoti), Nocera Inferiore (Fosso Imperatore), Campagna (Basso dell'Olmo) and Serre (Macchia soprana) in Salerno province; Caserta (Lo Uttaro), Santa Maria La Fossa (Ferrandelle) and Carinola (Carabottoli) in Caserta province; Montesarchio and S. Arcangelo Trimonte in Benevento province; Villaricca, Terzigno, Giugliano in Campania (Taverna del Re), Napoli (Pianura and Chiaiano), Tufino and Acerra in Naples province.

In this general contexts two different cases-studies have been individuated for their differences. Ariano Irpino is located in the province of Avellino, in a vast rural area, distant from significant urban areas. It is the largest municipality in the Campania region with a total area of 185,52 kmq and about 23.000 inhabitants. In this context the grassroots movements have contested and fight for about eight years against the 'Difesa Grande' landfill extension (figure 2).

Figure 1. Map of waste conflicts in Campania region

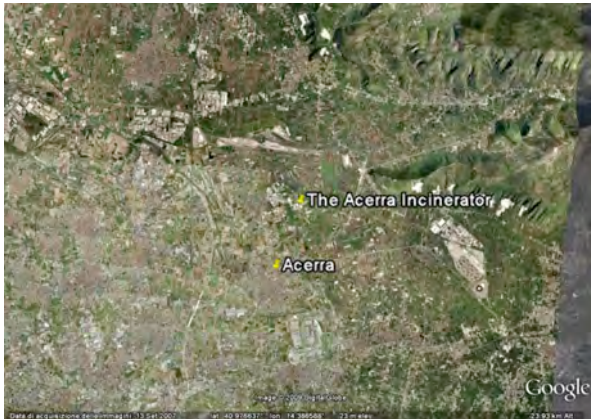


Figure 2. The *Difesa Grande* landfill in Ariano Irpino



Acerra is a municipality located in the province and metropolitan area of Naples and has a population of around 55.000 people distributed on 54 kmq. The grassroots movements have contested and fight against the building of an incinerator and the local contamination related to dioxin and other elements linked to legal and criminal waste discharge management and industrial pollution (figure 3).

Figure 3. The incinerator built in Acerra



## 5. Preliminary results

The processes of formation of social movements are interested by a production and circulation of multi-scale knowledge. This production is locally defined, because it activates local and informal knowledge, and is linked to other territorial contexts and intelligences. The former aspect is strengthened by the dissemination of the new and old local knowledge in the local and regional context, through the organization of public assemblies and workshops and the channels of social communication. The latter is an interlink that favours a relationship through different forms and geographical scales of knowledge, allowing the production of a trans-local knowledge.

Local environmental movements usually link their opposition against unwanted facilities to alternative proposals based on two kinds of knowledge: expert and local. The former is the analysis of technological possibilities conducted with some experts; the latter concerns the revaluation of the local social and technical knowledge. The production of some alternative political proposals and different definition of the situation is, indeed, based on an heterogeneous knowledge network, built arranging different and interlinked sources that are:

- The serious recognition of local population perceptions, memories and narratives
- The participation of researchers that point in evidence not-official or unattended analysis or data
- Citizens and activists that deepen their knowledge about the topics in object
- The interconnection to national or international research or activist groups
- The use and diffusion of scientific materials available on the internet or through academic sources.

In this way, grassroots movements point also in question the 'nimby label'. They usually tend to go beyond the local dimension and negative attitude to develop different and rational alternative, based on other experiences but also on local knowledge. In some cases, they assume a 'niaby' (not-in-anyone's-back-yard) attitude, that refuses a specific facility and promote some alternatives to it.

A social use of knowledge is evident in these movements, based on a different rationality. A scientific-social rationality is produced by the link across different (scientific and local) forms of knowledge. It is different from technical-scientific rationality, on which are based the institutional discourses that support the siting decisions.

In Campania, these different positions have produced two diverse solutions for waste and territorial management. After 15 years long extraordinary management, the institutional way has been oriented to:

- use the capacity of existing landfills;
- organize some new landfills;

- favour the separate collection of rubbish;
- build up two or three incinerators (Gribaudo, 2008).

This solution is sustained by scientific arguments that have individuated this road map as the one-best way for waste management in the Campania region coherent with the European Union waste management strategy and the national legislation..

The grassroots movements have proposed a different way, based on other technological and political solutions. They briefly are:

- the organization of very high levels of differential collection of rubbish
- the implementation of Mechanical-Biological Treatment of waste
- a general cleaning-up of polluted and contaminated sites.

These different ways are based on knowledge that sustain a different definition of the situation and diverse goals.

The grassroots movements ask for a drastic reduction of landfill size and a radical territorial reclamation, because their activists think that pollution levels are uncontrolled and dioxin levels in the animal and human blood are beyond the legal limits. This belief is based on data produced locally and researchers conducted by national and international institutes. For example, in Ariano Irpino some analysis organized by a citizen committee in 2004 pointed in evidence the pollution of the local river *Lavella* close to the landfill. The Regional Agency for Environmental Protection (Arpa Puglia) subsequently has recognized this condition, classifying the relative leachate as dangerous waste.

In the Naples metropolitan area an oncology physician and an Acerra shepherd have conducted in 2007 tests on their blood and verified high levels of dioxin (Marfella, 2008). Analogously, epidemiologic, and 'formal', researches conducted in the Naples metropolitan area by the *Istituto Superiore di Sanità* (Italian National Institute of Health) and other health and research agencies have recognized that:

although the causal nature of the association is uncertain, findings support the hypothesis that waste-related environmental exposures in Campania produce increased risks of mortality and, to a lesser extent, congenital anomalies (Martuzzi, 2009: 732).

And:

elevated cancer mortality rates and elevated occurrence of birth defects [...] These preliminary findings are consistent with a possible contributory role of waste-related exposures in determining ill health in the area over time. (Comba, 2006: 457-458).

In a territory strongly influenced by many environmental stressors - intensive agriculture, industrial activities, high consumption of land sustained by building industry and significant population density - and a long emergency, caused also by the illegal dumping of toxic wastes, it is not surprising that the most important form of local knowledge elaborated by the grassroots movements through informal participation has interested the public health conditions and risk factors. For their knowledge of local contexts and population, activists are becoming convinced that legal and illegal waste dumping has contaminated soil and air, favoring the death of their relatives or friends. For example, a privileged witness in Ariano Irpino said:

I am sure about my brother's death was caused by pollution depending on the landfill in Difesa Grande.

For a privileged witness of the anti-incinerator movement in Acerra:

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It would be urgent a general and deep cleaning-up of the Neapolitan territory because the pollution levels are very high.

## 6. Conclusions

Informal participation can make acting a potential deposit of historical, geographical, social, economic and also sanitary and epidemiological knowledge with respect the local area that would be otherwise invisible and unheard.

It implies some degrees of unpredictability, whilst formal participation is usually organized for the accomplishment of territorial development and transformation programmes. This promoted kind of participation is functional to the institutional and programmes goals, but, at the same time, is limited. Its composition and adopted procedures restrict the possibility to make critical contributions to development, because it is in a frame of interaction which is determined, linked to an high level of predictability. The participation involved in this model of interaction limits the action of unexpected actors and sources of knowledge that are divergent from institutional expectations.

The public and local knowledge of community toxic hazards in the last two decades has mostly stalked from the observations of ordinary people and it is frequently emerged through informal participation and grassroots movements. This local informal knowledge is linked to alternative forms of participation that go beyond nimbyism attitude and label.

Informal participation, that is usually linked to an opposition attitude, can contribute to arise local knowledge in local health and, as demonstrated in the case of spontaneous dioxin blood tests, developing popular epidemiology challengers about hazardous waste management and siting civic facilities (Clapp, 2002; Potts, 2004).

Local knowledge favours the development of the popular epidemiological approach as opposed to traditional or classical epidemiological research, by assuming that community residents are capable of understanding and identifying the sources of environmental hazards and health problems.

The observations of ordinary people favoured over the last 30 years the attention to hazardous and non hazardous waste, frequently emerging through informal participation and grassroots movements. This local informal knowledge is linked to alternative forms of participation that go beyond nimbyism attitude and label. This kind of participation can be a problem for local governance processes oriented towards local development, because it generally suggests a zero-sum conflict.

The recognition and legitimation of data, analysis and proposals emerging in the processes of informal and conflictual participation can nevertheless reduce this accelerating trend. This form of participation can produce a wealth of territorial knowledge and intelligences, which can be an input for original transformations at the local level.

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