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***Trovarsi fra l'incudine e il martello? Platform infrastructures and the work of place based policy entrepreneurs: a multiple-stream analysis of the regional Labour Market Planning processes in Lombardy, Italy***

**Abstract**

Policy entrepreneurs often experience thorny dilemmas, finding themselves between the 'rock and a hard place' or, as the Italian equivalent idiom would have it, between the 'hammer and the anvil'. Crisis and the associated problems that arise often brings changes in politics and policy in its wake and this begs the question of what are the resources and assets required to operate successfully as place-based public policy entrepreneur. The role of policy entrepreneurs has been studied over many years with one of the most influential theories being the Multiple Streams Approach (MSA) originally devised in the 1980's which sought to counter the apparently random or 'garbage can' nature of policy making and implementation. MSA describes a more rational process where policy entrepreneurs shape 'windows' of opportunity where streams of problem, policy and politics are brought together to create innovative responses to situations in society. We explore these ideas through the lens of a longitudinal case study of Labour Market policy interventions (including the role of a personal budget system for education and training called 'Dote') in the Lombardy Region, Italy using MSA as a framework to understand these activities. Our analysis suggests there is a need to move away from short term structural responses to complex social issues and identify an emerging approach for the deployment of sociotechnical platform infrastructure resources and superstructures which create streaming opportunities on which policy entrepreneurs can dynamically bring the Multiple Streams of Problem-Policy-Politics together across political cycles in a more persistent and sustainable way.

Keywords: policy entrepreneurs, multiple streams approach, labour market policy interventions, Lombardy region.

**Introduction**

One of the pre-occupations of regional Labour Market development programs concerns investment in vocational training. These programs provide a context for long-term, place based leadership associated with infrastructural investments to support the delivery of tailored/personalised approaches for the re-employment of

heterogeneous populations. However, the precise detail and implications of what a given regional approach should be, how diverse interests can be balanced and how plans can be put operationalised and brought to fruition, remain ambiguous and unclear. Faced with the political imperative to act, Civil Servants acting a policy entrepreneurs often experience intractable choices and dilemmas, finding themselves between the 'rock and hard place' or, as the Italian equivalent idiom would have it, between the 'hammer and the anvil'.

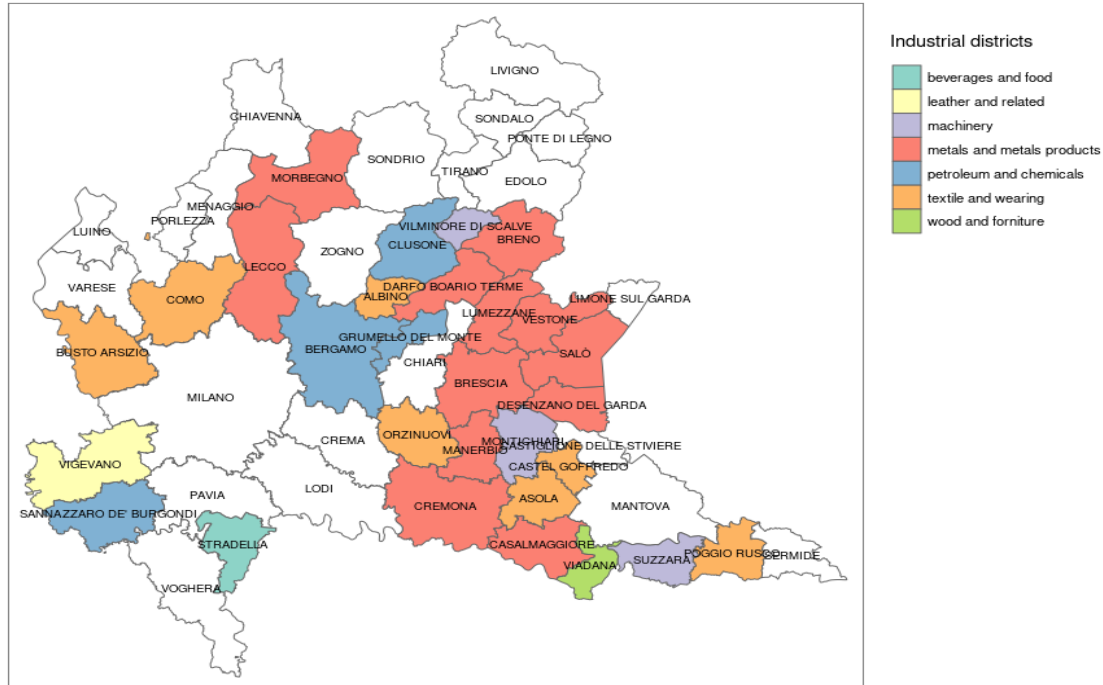
Since the constitutional reform of Italy in 2001 a devolution process started with the national Parliament including regional roles in national reforms and Regional Legislative assemblies promulgating new laws as a consequence (OECD, 2016). At the beginning of the period under consideration, political interest and actions were concerned with devolution of power to the Italian Regions. In particular, attention was focussed on the structure and performance of Labour Market support, and the relationship between public and private intermediaries in job-seeker support, training and job placement. At that time, the only available resource for Labour Market policy and intervention in Lombardy was an established training sector. This was perceived to be static, too dependent on public funds, not sensitive or responsive to employers' needs, lacking innovation and to be producing little or no value for the taxpayer. The need for change was perceived to be urgent. At this time, the political leadership in the Lombardy government was strongly oriented to horizontal subsidiarity rather than vertical direction (Colombo, 2005). The political vision was one of public intervention to stimulate autonomous growth in the local developmental service sectors not only in vocational training and re-training but also in health care and in all levels of life-long education. In the context of this book, this policy orientation can be seen as the creation and maintenance of entrepreneur friendly environments. At this time, the vocational training sectors were populated by not for profit providers offering relatively orthodox responses to traditional educational, developmental and welfare needs.

The GDP PPS per capita in Lombardy amounted up to €39,200 in 2018 (€29,700 in Italy and €31,000 in the EU). The GDP per capita is about 32% higher than the national average and the 26% higher than the EU average. In 2018, it is the fourth largest GDP among European regions. In 2019, the regional employment rate was 68.4% higher than national and the EU average of 59% and 69.2% respectively. The regional unemployment rate was 5.6%, below the Italian and European average (10% and

6.3%). “SMEs dominate the market, from a shareholding point of view mostly family owned businesses, with the exception of few very large firms” (RIM Plus, 2020).

SMEs in the north of Italy are often localised in industrial districts or clusters, where local concentration of entrepreneurs adopt different specializations within the various product phases in an industry. “Industrial districts represent about one-fourth of the Italian economic system, both in term of LMAs (Labour Market Areas) (23.1% of the total), workers (24.5% of the total) and local units (24.4% of the total). Manufacturing employment of industrial districts is over one-third of the Italian employment as a whole, in line with the trend registered 10 years ago. 22% of Italian residents live within industrial districts. (ISTAT, 2015).

Industrial districts have been considered as success case as resilient development places where a shared knowledge and entrepreneurial ethos is supported by the action of local governments providing services, location facilities (industrial polygons, in Italy called “industrial zones”) and some financial support (OECD, 2014).



**Figure 1:** Industrial districts in Lombardy (rendered on ISTAT 2015 data).

Industrial clusters of course went through a profound transformation process from the end of the second world war up to the present day partially as a result of engagement with the EU and wider shifts due to globalisation, but never losing their resilience and a support system provided by local authorities. The regional support systems for SMEs grew in the last 20 years in line with shifts towards regional governance. In fact Italy can be considered a 'regionalised country', since the constitutional reform of 2001 and the fiscal federalism law of 2009 both granted greater autonomy to the regions.

Since the 2001 Constitutional reforms Regions have significant legislative and administrative powers; Regions are responsible for healthcare, labour market policies and many other policy domains with responsibilities shared with the central government, resulting in significant overlap and concurrent responsibilities (OECD, 2016). Within these responsibilities, the Lombardy regional government in the last 20 years has been one of the leading regions in Italy using its powers to promote the development of local economies and sustain the development of local entrepreneurship. In 2012 an assessment of local entrepreneurship policies against the framework of the European Union's Small Business Act (SBA) highlighted that Lombardy 'performed well' but through examination of the existing regulations and policies of the region, proposed areas in which the further efficiencies could be achieved, within the SBA framework's priorities, in particular strengthening the systemic networking base among SMEs and relevant actors based in the region (reported in OECD, 2012). There is an evidence in this policy recommendation: SMEs networking should be reinforced, helping entrepreneurs to link more with local service providers and international networks in order to reinforce their capabilities. To finance active labour market policies (ALMP), Lombardy made an extensive use of EU funding.

This begs the question of what is the environment of those actors operating as place-based public policy entrepreneurs (Minstrom and Norman 2009; Cairney 2016; Cairney *et al.*, 2018) and the need to develop in parallel the infrastructure of local Labour Market systems rather than merely acting in it and/or hoping that a system emerges or is imposed. In the case study we consider two policy programming periods: the first one is the 2007-2013 regional operative program, POR 1 for short, and the second one is the 2013-2020 POR 2.

## Literature Review

On first encounter, entrepreneurship and the public sector may appear odd bedfellows as, on the face of it, the literatures have tended to examine the social world through quite different lenses. One place where these have come together to an extent is the entrepreneurial ecosystems literature which has tended to focus on the characteristics of places where there is a seemingly critical mass of activity including entrepreneurs, workers, investors, and business mentors coupled with availability of local customers and an entrepreneurial culture that encourages risk taking encased a wider environment of incentivising government policies, universities and other sources of knowledge (Spigel 2017). Our line of enquiry follows Carvallo *et al.* (2019) in their article which outlines the need for studies of Entrepreneurial ecosystems in particular territories and the debates around the focus of public sector's policy role in entrepreneurship (Hayter *et al.*, 2018, Frisch-Aviram *et al.*, 2019). We combine this with the current context of the UN Sustainable Development goals fits squarely with Goal 9 which is to: "*Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation*" and the related need for collaborative action (Mintrom and Thomas, 2018)

Drawing on a recent review of the literature of public sector entrepreneurship the key aim is the formation of public sector initiatives that transform socio-economic environments into ones more conducive to reponding to change in the midst of uncertainty (Hayter *et al.*, 2018). In fact that review goes on to suggest that entrepreneurship not only refers to the public sector entrepreneur who acts entrepreneurially as a single individual, but also to the appearance of public sector entrepreneurship as a multi-level concept referring to both organizational and policy-level action (Hayter *et al.*, 2018). One established framework for examining public policy entrepreneurship at a number of levels is the 'Multiple-Streams' approach (MSA) originated by Kingdon in 1984. MSA drew on the 'Garbage Can' theories of public administration from the 1970s, which foregrounded the apparent anarchical nature of public administration and policy making (Cohen *et al.*, 1972). Kingdon suggested that the apparently splenetic and random nature of public policy was due to actors having limited time and decision-making capacity in the ambiguous context of politics. He claimed that there were some overarching institutional strands of activity at play within which there were three streams that need to converge, or be coupled, to

produce a 'window' for change. This 'window' created an the opportunity for coalitions of politicians, policy makers and implementers to come together to then enact change. The three streams that were identified are the *problem stream* in which a socio-economic need is identified and articulated, the *policy stream* – which generates possible solutions, and the *political stream* – in which the will and opportunity to implement the policy are formed.

According to the literature Public Policy entrepreneurs employ three interlocking strategies:

- “telling a good story to attract the audience’s interest;
- producing feasible solutions in anticipation of attention to problems;
- adapting their strategy to the specific nature of each ‘window’” (Cairney, 2018).

The interaction with place based policy entrepreneurs (local training and service providers for jobseekers) is described as a key factor of regional and national place based development policies (Pastore 2019). After many years of discussion a number of new case studies focusing on the MSA approach and the emergent strategies of entrepreneurs have both informed further research in the area and real world policymaking activities (Cairney, 2018). Recent contexts where MSA has been applied include policy reform on Sugar (Akrill and Kay 2011), reform of local economic partnerships (Rossiter and Price 2013) and local policy making in Fire and Rescue Services (Eckersley and Lakoma 2021).

In the contemporary context a case study in this area which fails to address the role of digital systems as a mechanism for policy implementation is increasingly inadequate (Sussan and Acs 2017). In our analysis, we identify, the need for a fourth 'stream' of strategy emerging around the from the case discussion; which we will call the platform strategy for sustainable infrastructure (McLoughlin and Wilson 2013, Brown et al 2013, Jamieson et al 2020). Platform concepts have become an increasingly important part of implementation of policy in recent years often referred to as Government-as-a-Platform (GaaP) (O'Reilly 2011). GaaP as a concept proposes that the state can be organised into an online service where citizens and businesses can be supported remotely. The intention is that such an approach leads to both improved efficiencies and effectiveness of government and of governance at once reducing bureaucracy and improving transparency and access (Janssen and Estevez 2013, Lips 2019).

There remains several critical challenges that still require addressing across all aspects of the platform provision space when applied to the public sector in particular the relational contexts where services are provided by the state (McLoughlin and Wilson 2013, Srnicek 2017, Lips 2019).

The role of digital is the key channel for policy entrepreneurs to try to produce feasible policy in anticipation and adapt their strategy in complex and unstable areas. They need reusable resources and capacities that they can (re-)configure, (re-)scale and (re-)extend in response to rapidly changing political spaces and shifts of attention at the political level. In a world where Digital or ICT is supporting private and public initiatives, the flexible and reusable solutions have to be found in the design of infrastructural platform services. We refer here to the definition of infrastructure as a set of elements, that can be made general and reusable (see for instance Montaletti, 2002) and in particular information infrastructures where heterogeneous technical components interact with social relations in dynamic and unexpected ways (McLoughlin et al., 2013 and 2016). Explicit knowledge of infrastructural platform design process where different stakeholders and other interested parties and their worlds come together played a relevant role in this case.

In this chapter, we will make use of the Multiple Stream Approach (MSA) analysis as a theoretical lens to explore question of entrepreneurial place leadership in the context of a long term engagement in developments in the area of labour market policies in the devolved Region of Lombardy. The case we will be considering concerns Labour Market stimulation and facilitation and the related development of human capital through a policy support mechanism for training and education ('Dote') in Lombardy, Italy. It represents a typical context for the creation and maintenance of entrepreneur and entrepreneurial friendly environments. The relationships and interactions between (a) the structural initiatives of entrepreneurs, who innovate programmes and initiatives at level of the labour market itself, (b) the ways that they utilise infrastructural platform capacities and affordances and (c) the superstructural, governmental responses that are evoked by their actions, represent a further level of complexity which is overlaid on the internal complexities of each of the aforementioned individual layers. In the discussion of the case we will see how the managers in a regional government acted as 'policy entrepreneurs' over an extended period.

## **Methodology**



Following Kingdon’s (1984) seminal work on MSA we have undertaken a longitudinal case study approach to identify and classify the dynamics of the situation from the perspective of the three streams ‘Problem’ – ‘Policy’ – ‘Politics’ exploring the inter-relationships between the three streams. The use of an in-depth single case study design are useful in circumstances that require understanding complex phenomena in order to build and test theory (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007). The particular focus of the case study is the interrelationship of place based entrepreneurial activity with regards to Labour Market initiatives and the agencies that are concerned with their design, implementation, delivery and evaluation. Our context is the Lombardy Region with Milan as its capital and also the national centre for financial, industrial and services in the wider Italian economy.

	2006 to 2012	2013 to 2017	2018 to 2021
Regional laws	1	0	0
Regional Government acts	0	18	13
Regional management directives	7	54	2
Presentations and internal reports	27	80	19
Total	35	152	34

**Table 1:** Summary table of Study Documentation

We conducted this primarily through secondary analysis of documents produced from 2006 to 2020 by the European Commission and a variety of Lombardy Regional Government agencies (including internal notes and “grey literature” – including policy documents, evaluation reports – numbers summarised in Table 1 above) with extended interviews and discussions between those involved in the activities to understand the evolution of the narrative using the MSA concepts via a thematic analysis process (Miles and Huberman 1994).

### **Case Study**

*Context: Entangled problems, separate policies and political streams resulting in failed Labour Market policy (2001-2006)*

In the case study we consider in three stages which include the period leading up to the activity (2001-06) and the two subsequent political cycles in which the bulk of the activity took place: the first one is the 2007-2013 regional operative program, POR 1 for short, and the second one is the 2013-2020 which we will label POR 2. First we elucidate the context of the activity which had its roots in the devolution reforms of the Italian state at the turn of the century.

There were two sources of inspiration for different aspects of the 'Dote' policy approach drawn from international level. On one hand the policy makers looked to the UK and Australia as models for the transformation of the regulation of relationships with the private and non-profit sectors in terms of procurement and outsourcing, and on the other to Denmark and Germany for a model for a re-organisation of the public employment service networks (a central hub agency and a network of local offices and channels). During this period, the concept of personalised support and budgets for jobseekers was identified as an interesting and potentially effective approach. A personal budget support action for jobseekers locally named 'Dote' (italian for 'dowry' or 'endowment') was developed during the build up to the first POR (POR 1), but making use of regional financing resources and national resources but this was not explicitly included in the regional law (the n.22/2006 legislation) itself.

The legislation was focussed on creating the overall institutional foundations and governance oversight and included:

- A publicly funded and governed accreditation system for the private labour market service providers.
- An active labour market policy approach based on a mixed, public-private-charitable network and economy.
- Two formal commission structures to support ongoing consultations between of trade unions and business associations and local authorities.
- An observatory to collect information about the regional labour market and the accreditation system
- An independent evaluator of placement performance and outcomes, able to impose financial caps and penalties on the accredited providers depending on performance evaluation.

- An explicit list of activities reserved to the public employment services concerned with a set of statutory duties such as the certification of unemployed status and the collection of the employers' declarations of new employment contracts.
- An information system which could link to a national network, including a regional recruitment and job board and job application.
- A new Regional Agency to support the government in the formulation and implementation of Labour market policy and reforms.

The objectives of the new legislation in 2006 were to create a governance framework, together with a range of tools, resources and capacities to support the development and delivery of a new generation of labour market policy. 'Dote', in English "dowry", is an approach based on personal budgets for job seekers' training and support, has been described widely and has been object of a number of evaluations (Sabatinelli and Villa, 2015, Colombo et al. 2018, Scarano, 2018). In this period it was an experimental or pilot program with a strong focus on results and a significant involvement of private providers, Dote had been considered an at least partially successful measure.

The second POR makes explicit reference to 'Dote' as a standard for active labour market policies. The operative program had a total budget of EUR 940 million to invest: *"About 37% of the budget is allocated to boost employability, in particular among young people and women. Projects will also help workers and jobseekers to become more adaptable in the face of changing circumstances on the labour market."* (European Commission, 2014). For a technical summary of the measure readers can refer to the database of labour market practices (European Commission, 2015).

In a set of parallel developments at the National level, legislation issued in December 2006 (law n. 296, art. 1art. 1, 1180 to 1185), made the electronic declarations of employment contracts to the regional information services compulsory where every single public and private employer must use the CO electronic service to notify any employee team variation (Strano et. al. 2008). This has generated about 5 million notifications every year in Lombardy. As a result of the availability of individual information on labour contracts, a full monitoring and evaluation framework was made possible, based on the longitudinal records of individuals where the worker's history

needed to be reconstructed starting from the original CO data, so that the observation unit becomes the individual (Ghirigliano and Chelli, 2014).

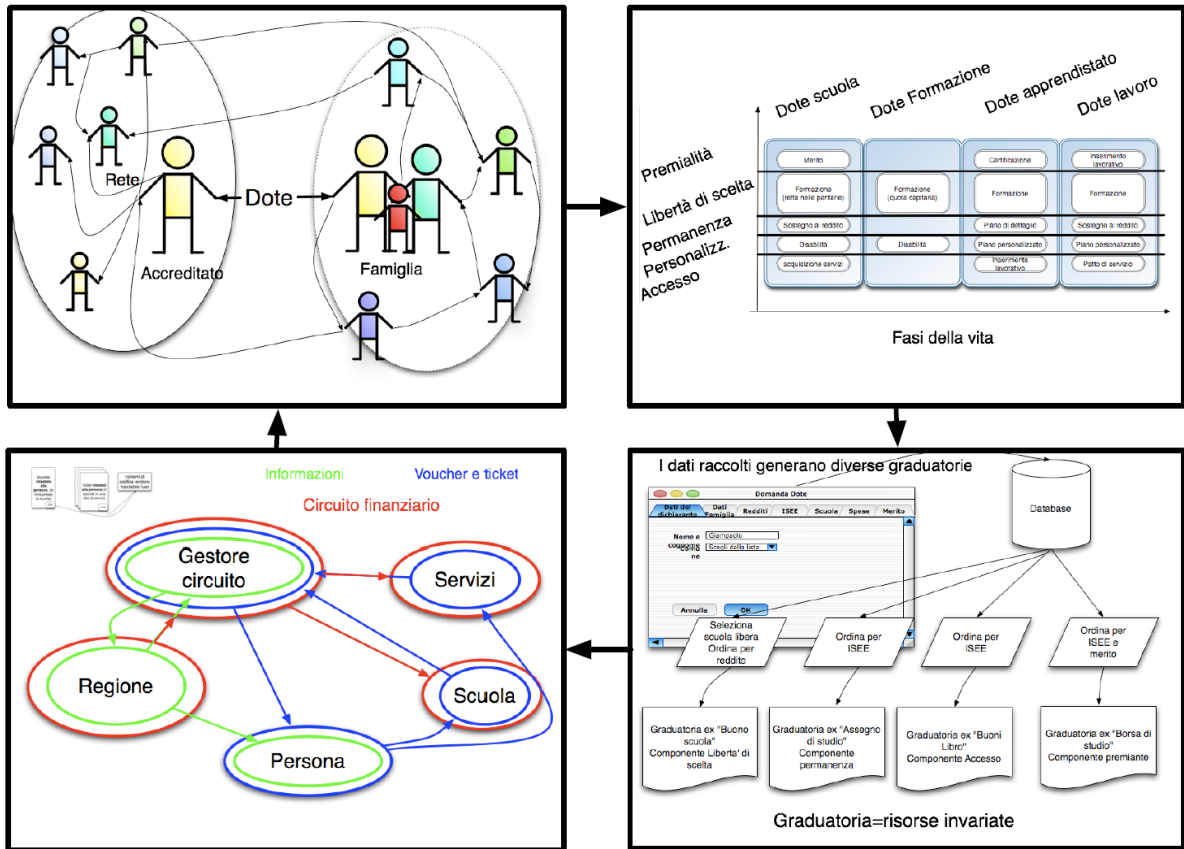
All the regional information services were federated as the COs are sent to the upper and lower area level towards electronic-gates (“Porta di Dominio”) that guarantee the confidentiality and security of communication through user identification, authentication, and authorization (Strano et. al. 2008). The same infrastructural service was used to exchange vacancies among regional public job boards: the regional node in Lombardy was named Borsa Lavoro Lombardia (BLL) (MPLS, 2003).

The BLL information system platform was a prominent project within the regional government. It was inspired by a one stop shop, online service joining up several different service components, the core component being the public job board. This was intended to be compulsory for employers, or at least for temporary placement agencies, to post all vacancies as they appeared. The jobseeker, subscribing to the service, could upload their CVs, receive notice for new vacancies and apply on-line. Anonymous messaging between employers and jobseekers was supported on the platform and, when both agreed, their identities were disclosed. A matching engine initially based on a dictionary of connected classifications and later on a more comprehensive and structured ontology, was deployed to support optimised matching between CVs and job vacancies. The background and realisation of this development, however, had by 2005/6 become somewhat confused and problematic with little clear understanding of the link of the national initiative to the problems, policies and politics in the Lombardy Region.

*Converging Streams to create the ‘window’: From Policy Failures to Policy Implementation (POR 1 2007-2013)*

From the 1st January 2007 the new regional agency was opened, bringing in managers from the private sector and from outside the region (including the first author of this chapter). The regional observatory, responsibilities for defining, procuring and deploying the new information system and the associated analytics and evaluation activities, were moved to the new agency. An innovative program, called LaborLab (ARIFL, 2007), was initiated in June 2007 to experiment with the allocation of personal budgets for jobseekers, involving private sector support service providers. This project was perceived to be a significant success, swiftly reaching more than 2000 users.

From December 2007 to June 2008 the new agency issued a set of presentations and papers giving the definitions of personal budget based on the 'Dote' approach discussed in the previous section (ARIFL, 2008). 'Dote' at this point was seen as a set of resources made available to maintain relationships of care, aimed at the development of personal human capital (Montaletti, 2008). What this political concept could come to mean in practice involved the development of shared language and commitments in a number of quite diverse constituencies: this is to say, the nurturing of a shared architectural discourse which brought the streams of policy. The principle tool for achieving this involves the creation and elaboration of a set of diagrams representing socio-technical models. These are presented in Fig. 2 (ARIFL, 2008). They represent the different "projections" of a complex socio-technical system and it is characteristic of the approach, which is based on an action research Living Lab practice (Martin et al 2019) is that a narrative evolves associated with the progressive reveal and build of the diagrams in the engagement of stakeholders. This involves deliberative conversations and a learning journey which culminates in shared understanding and commitment. In this approach it is not simply the content of the diagrams but their juxtaposition that helps to organise and interrelate the complexities of the envisaged system.



**Figure 2:** The socio-technical systems projections of the 'Dote' (ARIFL, 2008)

At the end of 2007 and the beginning of 2008, the debate about personal budget gained momentum, and the presentation materials and the concepts and the language that it made use of, evolved in a series of meetings and exchanges. One of the first outcomes In an event in June 2008 a vision document called “Agenda per la transizione” (a Transition Agenda) was launched and presented to Labour Market service providers and the wider Regional society (Lombardy Regional Government, 2008). This documented the vision in which all the ideas (some political and some technical) converge into an overall socio-technical architecture. The transition agenda was presented before the beginning of the financial crisis, to all the stakeholders (trade unions, business associations, public and private providers). When the crisis arrived, the projected schedule of implementation was significantly disrupted however the architectural platform concept persisted. In September 2008 the financial crisis exploded and, during 2009, the National Government signed an agreement with the Regional Governments to promote a furlough scheme for SMEs which was available on conditioned that they participated in the active labour market initiatives for their employees (Regione Lombardia, 2009). In Lombardy, the personal budget and support based, dote system was identified as the core program on which the response

would be built with the platform expected to re-scale to reach about 70,000 workers. This phase of the program lasted up to 2012, financed from the EU European Social Fund and partially by National and Regional funds and eventually involving about 150,000 participants.

As we have seen, the regional law n.22/2006 framed the governance of the proposed Regional Agency tasked to develop a range of active Labour Market interventions. The definition, development and implementation of the interventions remained within the scope of the Agency and took the form of a series of continuing deliberations, policy modelling and analysis exercises and experimental interventions. The first experimental program in 2007 *LaborLab experiment* (ARIFL, 2017) was based on the involvement of a small group of commercial providers. At the start of this project there were few, if any, actors in the network operating as pure intermediaries or brokers, helping clients identify aspirations, opportunities and needs and matching this to appropriate and available re-skilling or recruitment opportunities.

At that time there were three different groups of actors active in the labour market:

- Temporary commercial staff agencies operating in specific sectors such as nursing or office work, many of them branch offices of multinational companies.
- Vocational training schools, mainly depending on public funding.
- Not-for-profit institutions dealing with groups of traditionally frail or challenged job seekers.

The relative lack of brokerage and intermediation in the job market was seen as a structural weakness. In response, the Regional Agency started an Academy where the public and private sector providers could be trained as case managers for the envisaged program. The Academy has been the means for sharing the intentions of the Government and aligning the intended meanings of the program; in a broad sense it became a sensemaking governance space which established not only the operational resources and processes of the initiative but also an ethos of development. Here, we are using the term 'governance' in the sense of the evaluation of a system based on a comparison between the evidence of outcomes and consequences an intervention produces with the original vision and intentions which drove it. In this case, these were to operate in the interests of the unemployed individual, to be professional,

creative and effective and to support targeting and prioritisation in the interests of the wider regional economy as defined by an agile response to evolving policy situation.

In more abstract and precise terms, this is second order governance which continually reviews the answers to the following questions about the system: is *this* what we intended, do we still intend *this*, how can *this* be improved? Where what is being examined, "*this*", is evidential in nature. This was seen, within the (meta) entrepreneurial leadership within the agency, as an essential requirement on a 'system of development' which complements and completes conventional, first order governance. This latter, is based on the formulation, direction and monitoring of activities in the context of a legal framework, a mission and plan together with a set of resources and targets. Thus, first order governance acts *within* a system which evolves in response to the evaluation and learning of second order governance acting *on* the system.

A key aspect of the policy entrepreneurial activity within the Regional Agency was one of convening deliberations between actors in the LaborLab. Up to 2009, before the financial crisis, the participation in this process came largely from the non-profit and the vocational training sector. At this point the commercial temporary staffing agencies present in the labour market did not perceive sufficient opportunity or relevance to offer service or participate in a meaningful way. At the beginning of 2009 the program was scaled up in response to the financial crisis and the introduction of a furlough scheme. A consequence of the new situation was that the scheme became attractive to the bigger commercial agencies in Lombardy and providers from other regions. Subsequently, many participants in the expanded Academy case manager training programme came from branch offices of commercial temporary staffing agencies. Many of the new managers original training had been in commercial operations and hence the cohort were accustomed to selling services to companies, which usually entailed a significantly transactional approach. They had little or no experience in the relational work of case managers especially for those with the complex needs who now made up a significant proportion of those the regional government was seeking to support and as a result, a differentiated market with divergent provider orientations began to emerge.

The timeline and streams of this first phase of the case study (POR 1) are summarised in the following table (Table 1 below):



Year	Problem	Policy	Politics
2006	Growing recognition of need to change	Policy in Regional Laws n.22/2006	Stress on subsidiarity, quasi market, extensive use of vouchers
2007	Implement the regional law	Open a new regional agency, start Dote experimental programme	Extensive consultation with business associations and trade unions
2008	Beginning of the financial crisis	Preparation for scale up experiment, Dote is already available	Talks with the national government on furlough schemes extension for SMEs
2009	Surge in unemployment, SMEs at risk	Condition furlough schemes for SMEs to active labour market policy programme participation of workers	Agreement with the nation government on furlough schemes for SMEs for two year
2010	Crisis still perceived as unresolved	The programme involves about 70.000 participants	
2011	National debt crisis explodes	Program is prolonged for 80.000 participants	The agreement with the national government on furlough schemes for SMEs renewed for two year. In November a new national gov. is appointed with Mario Monti as pm.
2012	Unemployment is still growing	First evaluation shows 'poor' results	
2013	Unemployment is still growing	Decision to refocus Dote as universal programme for jobseekers, disjointed from furlough schemes.	Regional elections appoints a new regional government.

**Table 1:** Summary of Regional policy Program 2007-2013, (POR 1)

*Back to rooting in the 'garbage can'? Or dry stream bed waiting for the flood? (POR 2: 2013-2020)*

Elections which often represent an existential threat to any policy, became due in 2013. The aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis had produced four catastrophic years in the regional labour market the emphasis and approach shifted back to the original concept of intensive individual placement planning and action. Fortunately, the incoming regional government and management were looking for early and visible

success. So *dote* was refurbished and the political rhetoric appropriated again in a context in which Lombardy was preparing for EXPO2015 in Milan, an event that was anticipated to bring significant and lasting benefits to the regional economy.

The new '*dote*' (second POR) was remodelled to comply with regulatory and administrative requirements of the European Social Fund. While the rhetoric of the documents defining the new personal budget still echoed those of the original *dote* approach, there were increased constraints including metrics, payments by results allied to regulation of the private sector market share as an impetus for competition. The new ethos now emphasised 'freedom of choice' rather than 'resourcing development relationships' and the political drive moved from relational services stance to more a transactional basis (Regione Lombardia, 2013). These changes, however, represented reconfigurations and adjustments on rather than wholesale replacement of the digital platform, demonstrating the fact that the infrastructural platform approach had not 'hard wired' policy in the system but had achieved a potentially sustainable level of agnosticism to a particular MSA stream 'window' and therefore a move towards streaming re-configurability.

In 2013 three main industry associations were operating in the Lombardy Region. The first, Assolavoro, is the association of the temporary staff agencies was the strongest and most articulate. It's a national association has a strong influence in Milan, where many of the international agencies have their Italian headquarters. The second, ABF, is a regional association of training centres. It has a long history of relationships with the government and represents a mix of different organisations belonging partly to the Catholic and non-profit world, and partly from the commercial business associations. The third, Patto per il lavoro (employment pact) is the youngest association, founded by a group of intermediary organisations who did not feel represented by either the big temporary staff agencies or the traditional training centres who's services they brokered for their clients. It was not until 2018 that these associations were partially incorporated in the processes and governance of the Regional Government.

These changes took time to be properly understood. Up to 2015 the program was perceived as a very successful one. In 2015 the regional implementation of the Youth Guarantee program was based on '*dote*' which has now simply become payment by results for a standardised service mix (Dhéret, 2016). The national reform known as the "Jobs Act" made an unemployment benefit a program available to the job seekers

called 'assegno di ricollocazione' (employment voucher). Undoubtedly, at this point the Dote Unica Lavoro program was the inspiration behind the national government reforms of the sector (Pastore, 2019). What we were observing was the normalisation of a systemic innovation and, with that, the dilution and attenuation of its ethos and the dynamism that had originally generated it. The Regional Government made a strong political opposition to the national reforms which were seen as regional devolved powers and initiative whilst recognising the need for an evolution in the policy to make it fairer and more supportive for the hardest to help. This version of dote lasted almost untouched until 2019, where a new revision reduced the amount of resources available while setting higher standards for the results based payment. These changes were introduced in response to extensive gaming of the system by private providers.

The initial governance pact seemed, at this point, to be substantially broken, and a long discussion started in 2019 at a time when relative economic stability had returned and with it the possibility of a new round of meta-entrepreneurial action in the form of the promotion of creative policy exploration. At the beginning of 2020, however, the Coronavirus epidemic breaks out in Lombardy and the lockdown stops almost all economic activities. At the time of writing a discussion on how to revive the active labour market policies in the region is still open, but once again, in the context of crisis response and emergency management.

Also in 2020, a number of the activities of the Agency were incorporated in a bigger "research, statistics, training and employment agency" named PoliS-Lombardia. It is this expanded Agency that is now responsible for the Regional labour market Observatory and takes part in some evaluation tasks. The remaining Agency activities associated, with the development of active labour market policies, was incorporated in the Regional General Directorate. Twelve years after the original regional law was enacted, a full cycle of reforms concluded in a new distribution of fully institutionalised organisations. The innovative and transformational aspects of the reform lost momentum and the policy making seems to have lost its entrepreneurial capacity to generate innovation.

These changes are not only in tone in which policy is articulated but is also at the level of implementation and delivery where the same words are getting new meanings. The leading idea of horizontal subsidiarity is silently replaced by the idea of competition for government subsidy by placing people at work. It's no more a matter of "supporting

people in development”, but mainly a matter of finding jobs positions quickly and at as low public cost as possible. The emphasis on personalisation is replaced by standardisation of costs which is presented as a “simplification”, resulting in a commodification of actions so that personalisation is really no more in place.

The time-line and streams of this second phase of the case study (POR 2) is summarised in the following table (Table 2 below):

Year	Problem	Policy	Politics
2013	Unemployment is still growing	Need to refocus Dote as universal programme for jobseekers, disjoint from furlough schemes.	Regional elections appoints a new regional government.
2014	Lombardy prepares fo EXPO015	New dote program, called Dote Unica Lavoro (DUL). The new DUL shows positive results supported by rising labour demand.	A new national gov. appointed, led by Mr. Renzi, announces a labour market reform. Regions want to influence the reforms
2015		DUL used as a model by regional government to influence the design national YG and the reforms.	
2016	first counterfactual analysis shows need for a change	Dote II: programme renewed with minor modifications.	
2017		Dote II continues	
2018	Refocus budget for the hardest to help.	Dote III: the programme is relaunched for the hardest to help only	New regional elections
2019	The new dote slowly		

	taking off.		
2020	Covid19 pandemic	Need to refocus the programme to support the transition. Talk still in place	Lockdown and pandemic hits SMEs in the service sector

**Table 2:** Summary Regional policy Program 2013-2020 (POR 2)

*Policy Implementation ‘infrastructure’ The Borsa Lavoro Lombardia (BLL) system and its initial platform architecture.*

In this section we will examine the issues of the infrastructural entrepreneurialism required to support the evolving information, communications and transactional requirements generated by sequence of labour market policies and initiatives we have described.

Prior to the formation of the Agency on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007, The BLL information system was already a prominent project within the regional government. It was inspired by a one stop shop, online service joining up several different service components, the core component being a public job board. This was intended to be compulsory for employers, or at least for temporary placement agencies, to post all vacancies as they appeared. The jobseeker, subscribing to the service, could upload their CVs, receive notice for new vacancies and apply on-line. Anonymous messaging between employers and jobseekers was supported on the platform and, when both agreed, their identities were disclosed. A matching engine initially based on a dictionary of connected classifications and later on a more comprehensive and structured ontology, was deployed to support optimised matching between CVs and job vacancies.

Other services included:

- documents, guides and data about the local labour market;
- Lists of public and private providers;
- Calendars of events and training courses.

The system was intended to be part of a federation, able to exchange vacancies among regional systems and at the national level.

The background and realisation of this development, however, had become somewhat confused and problematic. For example, making a register of the all of different

operational systems, of which this was an example, proved impossible. Three registers of systems were identified, all purporting to be *the* comprehensive one, but only partially overlapping in content. Faced with this somewhat chaotic situation, the Agency and the managers in the government agreed on an initiative to impose some order.

The policy modelling and analysis representations, mentioned in the last section, were used to open discussions and negotiations with the information systems developers. This included a set of definitions regarding roles and relationships and a request to adopt some of the most up to date, open technical standards available at that time, deploying them as a shared and reusable infrastructure. The vision of the technical platform was one of applications visible to the service clients and managers and the back end data processing and management resources linked together by what are called “middleware services”. These fall into three broad categories:

- *Indexing services* registering identities and relationships and managing identifiers of documents and of users and their credentials,
- *Portal services* which support the publication, discovery and syndication of information in the form of documents, and messages.
- *Orchestration services* which support different types and instances of transactions, work-flows and tracks the progress of processes.

The traditional approach to the architecture of service platform had been to create new, bespoke middleware configurations to deliver integration on a per service basis: each resulting application represents a unit of integration. If the different service applications are to be connected both from the perspective of the client and for the managers and policy makers, then the middleware has to be shared between them. This was an understanding that had emerged from the prior work the authors had undertaken in previous EU projects which has been referred to in the background to the study section, above (Montaletti *et al.*, 2002). However, these architectural ideas, as an overarching principle in the design of the system, proved too challenging to the technical suppliers. While it was important that they were not lost completely, they had to be somewhat simplified and made more accessible.

There were some related and appropriate technological standards which had been adopted in national strategies for the information systems in the Italian public

administration which also had industrial support. They included an Information exchange layer based on a standard called PCCS (Public Connectivity and Cooperation System), which has a nationwide mandate in legislative decree (n.42 of 28 February 2005). Its scope included:

- The management of information exchanges independently of the particular service or application;
- The definition of a uniform interface for interactions between administrations and, possibly, between administrations and external entities;
- The achievement of predetermined service transaction capacity levels for accessibility, reliability and safety as a set of standardised capacity management mechanisms.

These are, indeed middleware services, with the purpose of interconnecting and joining up functions in a shared, generic way and correspond to a subset of the full scope of middleware we have outlined above. Their adoption represented the initiation of a federated technical middleware approach and were an acceptable and practical compromise.

This infrastructural level has survived and in Lombardy and is still in operation. While the job board declined as more commercially aggressive private services emerged in the market, the infrastructural layer was quickly adopted to connect other applications. One of its characteristics is its relative amenability for reconfiguration and the swapping in and out of front end and back end components.

It is important to stress that this flexibility was a stringent requirement requested by the highest level in the regional administration not just a “nice to have” embellishment. In case of a change of direction in politics (resulting from new elections, new market trends...) the systems to support the delivery of policy must, in principle, be capable of reverting to previous configurations, or transformed to something different, in less than 45 days. Even today the need for such on-the-fly reconfiguration seems to be far from realised, but the monolithic workflows of the past, without an infrastructural approach to services at all levels from the deepest technical ones to management and governance, ends up generating hard to modify monolithic systems. It is still the case that public managers say: “I would like to change this part of the program, but it takes too long”.

Moving up the layers of the “system”, and pursuing this architectural language, the case manager operating at the labour market service delivery level, represents an example of “Human middleware” making appropriate and locally dynamic links between clients and the opportunities and services that they need, producing care and development planning and delivery as a relational service rather than a set of transactions, while at the policy level, the policy entrepreneur performs another set of information exchanging and process orchestration functions (‘windowing’ for themselves and others).

The information systems before BLL and LaborLab were based on the concept of a “project” as a transactional application backed by a data collection system, as the approach to delivery for each new policy initiative. The participants or clients were represented as an identifier or attribute within a project’s data model. The transformation embodied in the new, infrastructural approach was so evident that the programmers generated the slogan “one project per person” rather than one project per policy. This transformation has had a significant impact on administrative procedures, achieving privacy by design, precision of the targeting of benefits and the reliable identification and quantification of the outcomes and returns of labour market investments. This focus on individuals has, so far, been an irreversible achievement, leaving its footprint in all the subsequent regional and national projects despite changes of political power. This is a clear example of the meta-entrepreneurial behaviour orchestrating innovations and changes which operate at the different time contents and in the different discourses of superstructure and infrastructure, delivering adaptable and responsive benefits at the structural level of the economy and market.



## **Policy and Practice recommendations**

*From Streams to Streaming? The need for continuing sociotechnical infrastructuralisation processes as the platform of sustainable place based policy entrepreneurship*

In this chapter we have sought to explore the challenge set out by Hayter et al (2018) for public sector initiatives that transform a socio-economic environment into one that is more conducive to creative change through a longitudinal lens on the Lombardy Region in Italy over a 14 year period. We have shown how governance is required at the superstructural, structural and infrastructural levels and have applied it to the horizontal relationships in what can be referred to as the sociotechnical networks of labour market support services. In the context of the vertical relationships, the 'garbage can' metaphor for the relationship between the organs of government and policy have been seemingly apt in this case. This seems to characterise the largely ineffectual signalling, communication and mutual influence between Government, at all levels, and market actors particularly the small and medium enterprises which represent the aspect of the economy most open to, and impacted by, entrepreneurial activities. The feeling of being alone and misunderstood was not mitigated by formal consultation processes, where the policy entrepreneurs attempt to play their roles in a political space to influence policy or represent public opinion and seek moments for 'windows' where problems, policy, and politics can be aligned.

Critiques of the 'Dote' policy have focussed on its application as a structural policy measure suggesting results of the approach have been temporary (Colombo et al. 2018), that it re-inforced existing power relationships rather than transformed them (Sabatinelli and Villa, 2015) and that it was subject to typical 'gaming' activities on the part of providers in quasi marketplaces (Scarano, 2018). Nonetheless, through a MSA lens an alternative analysis of 'Dote' is that it is unrecognised in terms of its infrastructural platform properties including its capacity to scale, generate and sustain links between entrepreneurs and labour market mediation services and in terms of interactions among policy entrepreneurs and local entrepreneurs, as to say in terms of governance.

The case study we have been examining tells the wider story of a transformational cycle where a status quo is shaken out of relative stasis and the existing system itself becomes an object of consideration and reappraisal. In this situation, the policy

entrepreneur identifies opportunities or 'windows' for systemic evolution and nurtures the conditions for the required learning journeys, creating and enabling conversations and spaces where a constructive dialog is made possible. This, in turn, generates policy design and analysis, the initial focus of which is on respective roles and relationships promoting a shared understanding of the problems and opportunities. This requires mutual shared sense making about the situation the participating network actors find themselves in. These spaces and occasions must be orchestrated with appropriate auspices, aegis and genius loci and progress captured in documents and diagrams that act the boundary objects, i.e. symbolic totems as well as instruments of analysis, communication and commitment which evolve as the shared resources of a community of language and of interest. The combination of diagrams in Figure 2 is an example of this. Following on from our governance terminology, the orchestration we have identified here represents the technique of the meta-entrepreneur and is third order in the sense that it is concerned with enabling and executing the required transitions between first order work within the system and second order work in which the system itself is modified.

At the scope and level of Regional Economy we are considering, the initial structural response to shock and crisis, of whatever intensity, is at the political level and it should be noted that, at this level, there is an ever present imperative for change that is essentially Brownian. Policy actuation is not just a matter of writing good legislation and designing good programs (of course, this helps) but we must recognise that policy requires actions and consensus within governments and from the society at large. It is at the level of "languageing" that we identify a new role of policy meta-entrepreneurialism operates where the purpose of the undertaking is the creation of new shared world views reflected in new discourse and the associated capital.

The case study we explored in this chapter focuses on these vertical and horizontal interactions using MSA as the analytical lens. From the case it is clear to see that there is need for further sorting of activity within and between structural, infrastructural and super-structural or governance levels, in the context of a Regional Economy, which is made up of many, dynamic and interacting streams, in response to a series of political, economic and epistemic opportunities, shocks and crises between 2007 and 2020. We have argued that we must consider the scales of both an extended duration and region-wide spread when we consider the characteristics and dynamics

of environments that encourage, support and sustain entrepreneurial behaviours. We have considered how the orchestration of innovation and coordination initiatives at, and between, the political (superstructural) level and the infrastructural levels can generate and support structural networks that are entrepreneur friendly, bearing in mind the inclusive concept of entrepreneurialism we have adopted. We have also observed that, over the span of history we have considered, the concept of entrepreneur friendliness may range from the equivalent of life support and intensive care in the face of crisis, to stimulus, provisioning, enablement and liberation in response to stability and opportunity always recognising that gaming and abuse are always possible responses which must be responded to.

## **Conclusions**

At the outset of our case study we observed the initial transformational MSE 'window' of opportunity which allowed public policy entrepreneurial activity at two levels (von Foerster, 1976): the transition to a platform infrastructural approach to digital information communications and transaction (in the form of BLL platform) and, at the level of service ethos, a commitment to the concept of a relational system approach to the definition of service which incorporated the bringing together of the multiple streams. These developments were confronted the shock of the financial crisis proved their sustainability through being rapidly re-scaled to distribute resources by an order of magnitude.

We then saw an agonistic process in which the language and the ethos of the service drifts in the absence of any transformational window and it is only when external events conspire that it became possible to create a new one. This observation and interpretation of the flux of external conditions, the needs for internal transformation to identify the opportunities to create a window, together with the facilitation of the architectural discourse about problems, policies and politics with platform, is the one of the emerging roles of the public sector entrepreneur. It is characterised by the combination of a deep grasp of the wider socio-technical and political system with technical knowledge with agile opportunism and the ability to convene and facilitate constructive deliberation.

Our case study is bookended by two major crises the banking crisis and the arrival of the Covid19 pandemic in early 2020, both with potentially devastating impact in the

region of Lombardy, seemingly changing the situation radically again: both with associated with new cycles of innovation and transformation and again with a 'window' opening for alignment of of problem – policy - politics again! Instead of usual the random rooting in the proverbial 'garbage can' the insights of this case study show that the combination the original P's with a fourth P that of Platform infrastructure that delivered 'dote' over two regional political administrations and three crises can be used as means to enable the shaping of effective coordination between:

- the policy making, strategy and governance processes of a Regional superstructure,
- the targeted and effective delivery of economic, developmental and health related interventions in communities and in the economy,
- a digital platform infrastructure that supports safe and reliable service delivery and provides dependable and timely evidence of needs, impacts and outcomes.

This represents a potentially new confluence into a streaming platform infrastructure for policy entrepreneurs which is able to be deployed in such a way as to nurture and crucially sustain the sort of dynamic, systemic, transformational approaches to social and economic development envisaged in UN Sustainability Goal 9. Such affordances will be demanded in a world increasingly faced with wicked sustainability issues where a new crisis can only ever be a short policy cycle away.

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