

SHARED ADMINISTRATION OF THE ITALIAN COMMONS. AN INTERESTING EXPERIENCE OF DEMOCRATIC REGENERATION

How to make citizens interested in the public sphere and the collective life again? How to dignify the citizenship through their inclusion in collective projects?

Some years ago, the Italian foundation Labsus (Laboratory for Subsidiarity, www.labsus.org) fostered an interesting project aiming to the adoption of municipal regulations institutionalizing a shared administration (Amministrazione condivisa).

Labsus' starting point is the constitutional principle of horizontal subsidiarity, which was developed by the Constitutional Law 3/2001 partially reforming Article 118 of the Italian Constitution. The new Article 118 lays down that "the State, regions, metropolitan cities, provinces and municipalities shall promote the autonomous initiatives of citizens, both as individuals and as members of associations, relating to activities of general interest, on the basis of the principle of subsidiarity".

Local laws are the necessary and most efficient instrument to develop this constitutional principle. Since the adoption of the first regulation by the city of Bologna, some 60 municipalities have followed its path. Through this initiative the local sphere aims to create a new model of administration based on the cooperation between the public authorities and the citizenship.

The local regulation has created the so-called "cooperation agreements" by virtue of which the local public authority and the citizenship establish all aspects necessary for the shared maintenance, repair and management of the commons.

The motto is that "if we enrich the commons, we enrich all our lives too; if we harm them, we harm ourselves". Think of a school located in a small village up a mountain that needs to be shut down due to the lack of students. What should we do with this school? Who can take care of it for the benefit of the whole village? The school, which is not a public school anymore, is not public property either and becomes common.

These cooperation agreements aim to contribute to the recovery of the sense of community amongst the population. Inasmuch as citizens take on this responsibility in the public sphere they will prove there still exists a sense of belonging to a community, a spirit of solidarity and initiative. Not only will the commons be properly managed but also the dignity of those involved will be enhanced.

Identifying the commons, fostering civic activities and adopting cooperation agreements are the three key points of the new shared administration that is becoming more and more present in Italy. The many examples of this ongoing experience can be found in the first Labsus report, published in 2015 on the foundation's website.

As stated by Gregorio Arena, Tenured Professor of Administrative Law and President of the foundation, “fostering the sense of community through the shared care of the commons is the best way to become a citizen. And it is essential in order to defend both democracy and our material well-being”. There is no doubt that this successful model should also be implemented in our country.

Joaquín Tornos Mas

Tenured Professor of Administrative Law. Universitat de Barcelona