Governance and Heterachy in Education. Enacting networks for school innovation

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Abstract: The paper deals with the complex issue of the shift towards heterarchical modes of coordination in educational governance, exploring the nexus established by the contemporary discourse on networking between networking itself and innovation. Once presented the main features of such a discourse, the work develops addressing those critical positions that challenge the 'magic properties' attributed to networks by the prevailing governance narratives in the field of education. A contribution to this critical pathway of analysis is given, presenting the findings of a case study on a policy program for combating social exclusion and school drop out developed through the establishment of a network to innovate the practices of teaching and learning in a group of Italian failing schools. The study highlights how the discourse on networks tends to offer a partial and simplitic view on the functioning of the networked forms of coordination and self-organising, eliciting those analytical dimensions that could be related to the issue of power. On the contrary it is crucial, it is argued, to take seriously into account the issue of power, if the dynamics of networks are to be understood. The study will also highlight and address the tension and the clash bewteen two different and conflicting representations of innovation. The prevailing of one or another understanding in the enactment of innovation policies can be regarded as strongly influencing, it is argued, the possibility to effectively pursue the development of a bottom-up innovation and the embedding of the innovations themselves in local contexts.

Keywords: educational governance, hetarchy, school drop out, innovation policies

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Introduction. Towards a heterarchical governance of education systems?

The analysis of the education reforms enacted in the last two decades in many countries of the OECD area discloses many similarities and a convergence between policy agendas. This trend could be interpreted as the outcome of the increasing dominant position assumed by a globalized *policyspeak on education* (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010), through which an 'unstable, unequal but apparently relentless' flow of strictly related reform ideas is becoming more and more widespread (Ball, 2008, p. 39). Levin suggests that the image of a *policy epidemic* represents the more effective metaphor to describe the increasing adoption of a set of policy ideas and solutions inspired by neoliberalism and *Third Way* by countries that differ significantly in terms of history and culture (Levin, 1998, p. 131). Many of these reform recipes concern the educational governance models, aiming at deconstructing those welfarist configurations whose main trait was the 'marriage' between centralised modes of regulation and organisational forms structured by the bureaucratic-professional compromise.

In many educational systems, the outcome of such reforms has been a deep transformation of policy processes and the arising of new methods of governing. Those transformations can be interpreted as progressive shifts towards hybrid or *mixed-modes of governing* that combine hierarchical structures and processes of coordination (*hierarchical governing*), forms of *self-governing* and heterarchical practices of *co-governing* (Kooiman, 2000; Newman, 2001; 2005; Ball, 2008).

Thus, the post-welfarist scenarios of governance in education are characterized by an increasing use of forms of heterarchy (Kooiman, 2000, p. 148). Heterarchies are organized forms of policy production and enactment that result, at the meso-level, in modes of coordination among interconnected organisations involved in activities that imply the continuing overlapping between hierarchical and horizontal relations. Moreover, at the macro level, such organized forms (re)produce mechanisms or arrangements of regulation where there is a question of co-ordination between and within the State, the market and networks (*ivi*, p. 149).

The reforms moved by the principle of decentralisation have produced an increasing regionalisation of educational systems, renewing the role of local governments and authorities and enhancing (at least apparently) the

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degree of autonomy of schools. These are common traits recognisable in many educational systems of the OECD area (Lauder *et al.,* 2006; Benadusi & Consoli, 2004; Serpieri, 2008a) and strongly contributing to their heterarchical transformation. In Italy, as in other countries, those changes have been described through the metaphor of the *polycentric systems* (Morzenti Pellegrini, 2004; Benadusi & Consoli, 2004; Jessop, 2002), whose architecture would be rooted in a system of connecting relations between institutional and non institutional, public and private actors and in the consequent opening of new spaces of educational policy-making beyond the State (Ball, 2008).

Exploring the new modes of *co-governing* that are distinctive of the post-welfarist scenarios, many scholars have identified the increasing development (and use) of policy networks and public-private partnerships as the most significant ones. Their diffusion probably represents the most important transformation concerning the structure of policy-making in the last decades (Rhodes, 1997; 2000; Newman, 2001; Skelcher *et al.,* 2005).

The literature on governance emphasizes *policy networks* and, more in general, the widespreading of networked organisational forms as constituting the new infrastructure of the policy-making processes. In this respect, it is worth to avoid any form of '*newism*' and remember that *policy networks* are organisational configurations and policy tools that have been also used within the welfarist modes of governing. What has significantly changed with the shift towards post-welfarist forms of governance is the balance between the hierarchical mechanisms of regulation, that seem to loose some weight, and the heterarchical ones, that become more and more important. In the light of the argument of this article, it also crucial to highlight the function that networks play within the new narratives on governance and the 'effective' modes of educational systems' governing (those narratives are mainly inspired by the discourse of *Third Way* – see Newman, 2001).

Jessop argues that in the last decades a generalised consensus has developed around the heterarchical model of governance, while goverments have increasingly used heterarchical solutions to tackle the policy problems (Jessop, 2002, p. 229). Network-like organisational forms have been proposed as effective governing tools to enact processes of innovation and improvement in many policy fields (Rhodes, 1997; Schelker *et al.,* 2005; Ball, 2008). According to this author, this trend can be interpreted as a secular response both to the dramatic intensification of societal complexity

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and to the partial recognition of the failure of neoliberal policies of quasi-marketisation. The search for modes of regulation alternative both to the State and the market to co-ordinate highly complex societies has determined a move towards forms of post-welfarist *governmentality* (Miller & Rose, 2008), that literature summarizes with the image of the shift from government to governance[2]. However, it is important to stress also that such a search has had as main outcome a 'shift in the institutional centre of gravity […] around which policy-makers choose among possible modes of coordination (Jessop, 2002, p. 229), radically changing those understandings and practices of signification that have as object the governing of education.

Network as a central concept in the discourse on educational governance

The ongoing diffusion of heterarchical modes of governance can be interpreted as rooted, among the other factors, in the rising of the '*policy discourse on networking*'. Such a discourse is part of a the wider neoliberal discursive constellation that has emerged in the last decades around the issue of education and educational governance (Jessop, 2002, p. 234). Moreover, it plays a crucial role in the economy of such a constellation, being one of the vehicle for significant discursive shifts. In fact, in the last decade, neoliberal discourses, and their *Third Way*-like evolutions, have still emphasized the virtues of market as a self-regulating and effective mode of governing and coordination without abandoning their critics towards the welfarist models. At the same time, at least a partial recognition has emerged of the failures of markets and their dysfunctional effects in terms of anarchy. Within this scenario, the rising of the discourse on networking has represented a viable intermediate strategy, shifting the attention towards the development of networked logics of action and self-organising as the key strategies to counter-balance the markets' failures and do not come back to the hierarchical modes of governing (Olssen *et al.,*

[2] The author highlights how this trend is associated with a complementary one: the increasing role of the State in the organisation of the conditions of actors' self-regulation, autonomy and self-organisation. In such a way, the State seeks to compensate the failures of markets and centralised (or decentralised) plannings in a society that is more and more networked (Jessop, 2002, p. 217). Jessop defines this trend as a shift from government to metagovernance, an apparently paradoxical trend.

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2004, p. 262). This has implied the possibility to keep alive the emphasis on the 'virtues of market', renewing the make-up of the neoliberal discourse on governance in education in a more progressive fashion. Then, the heterarchical model represents, in the discourse on governance, a '*third way*' between the anarchy of the market and the hierarchical coordination of the centralised forms of State (Jessop, 2002, p. 228).

Here, the objective is to point out the essential traits of the policy discourse on networking, interpreted in the foucauldian sense as a set of objects, enunciative modalities, concepts and strategies that define fields of validity, i.e. identify priorities and policy problems as well as the effective solutions to address them (Foucault, 1972). An attempt will be made to (de)construct the definition of network and networking as it emerges in the discourse, and the set of concepts, properties and potentialities associated with the idea of network, identifying the generative nexus that constitute such a discourse as a 'regime of truth' (Ball, 2006, p. 44).

The policy discourse on network (and the related idea that network represents a superior mechanisms of regulation and coordination) is a global discourse, penetrating and shaping many policy fields in the OECD area. In *education* it has been promoted by various international agencies and institutions in the last two decades. OECD has played a major role among them (OECD, 2003). For what concerns educational governance, the discourse on networks represents an effort to overcome the scenarios of school autonomy, considering the shift towards a *network governance* (Skelcher *et al.,* 2005) as a development of school autonomy itself that is more likely to enable the creation, the embedding and the transfer of knowledge and to create, in such a way, an innovation-lead educational system. For example, Hopkins, a champion of the *School Improvement* movement and the inventor of the influential *System Leadership* approach, claims:

Networks can provide a means of facilitating local innovation and change as well as contributing to large-scale reform. They offer the potential for 'reinventing' local support for schools by promoting different forms of collaboration, linkages and multifunctional partnerships (Hopkins, 2007, p. 132).

The urgency of abandoning centralised or quasi-market-like modes of governance in favour of network governance is claimed on the basis of two different arguments (Hatcher, 2008, p. 25):

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- the creation of a governing mode where schools and not governments lead the change is assumed as a pre-condition for improving both the quality of educational services and the students' achievements. Centralised, *top-down* and prescriptive approaches to system transformation are regarded as suppressing 'the *expertise*, the creativity and the capacity of innovation of practicioners, that are necessary for continuing improvement' (Hopkins, 2007, p. 24);
- network is the basic organisational form of such a new governing mode in education, being it an (inherently) effective tool for enhancing systems' efficacy and potentiality of innovation (Hargreaves, 2003).

It is interesting to note that the concept of network (as well as that of *partnership*, frequently used as an interchangeable one[3]) is loosely defined. The discourse on networks and *partnerships* seems to offer the idea that they represent a new, neutral and more effective organisational form, contrasting it with that of hierarchy. The effectiveness of network as organisational form is derived by a negative inferential process. *Partnerships* and *networks* are opposed as positive alternatives to negative concepts to be related to hierarchy and market as competition, bureaucracy, distrust, antagonism, monopoly. On the contrary networks and partnership are related to positive concepts such as cooperation, participation, flexibility, trust, confidence (Cardini, p. 395). The heterarchical model, as depicted, identifies in the processes of self-organising occurring between mutually inter-dependent actors the key element of the new mode of regulation (Jessop, 2002, p. 228). Networks are described as organized forms of governing characterized by horizontal relations and co-operation between the actors involved. They are seen as places where coordination, communication and learning occur as reciprocal processes without central or dominant actors (Kooiman, 2000, p. 148). In so far they are described as inherently democratic and participative, being opposed in that respect to

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[3] Once this point has been clarified, for the sake of simplicity from now on the two terms will be used as interchangeable in this work too. However, in the governance literature there are some critical scholars that clearly distinguish between networks and partnerships in analytic terms. The more helpful is probably Newman (2001, p. 108), who highlights how networks must be considered as sets of social relationships that are more «informal and fluid, with shifting membership and ambiguous […] accountabilities», while partnerships can be seen «as more stable groupings with defined structures and protocols» (see also Ball, 2007, p. 115).

hierarchy and bureaucracy. Network-like forms of coordination are attributed performative powers that appear at least surprising (Jessop, 2002): they are the one best way to assure an effective achievement of policy goals through the sharing of power with forces that are beyond the statual body and/or through the delegation of the responsibility for the achievement of specific policy goals (Jessop, 2002, p. 237).

Heterarchy is described as a reflexive governing mode, as opposed to the substantive and procedural form of rationality distinctive of market and hierarchy. Bargaining and negotiation around a long-term shared project between interdependent actors are regarded as the basis of any positive or negative process of coordination. The key for success lies in an ongoing *commitment* to dialogue, the scope being: a) to generate and exchange information (reducing the problem of bounded rationality); b) to reduce the risks of opportunism mutually linking the partners of the networks through a set of interdependent decisions and within short, middle and long-term temporal horizons; c) to encourage forms of solidarity between the actors involved and mutual learning (Jessop, 2002, p. 229).

The concept of network, in the way it is proposed by such a discourse, is undoubtfully powerful and persuasive, also on the ideological terrain. It presents to a certain extent a strong democratic *appeal* and recognizes a relevant role in the enactment of systemic change to practitioners, schools and local governments (see for instance Hargreaves, 2003, p. 34). An engaging scenario emerges, where 'the power of self-organisation and the emergence of complex self-organising systems' structured through 'open and horizontal relationships based on equitaly distributed power' is emphasized (Hatcher, 2008, p. 26).

Network as a tool for innovation in educational systems

The appeal and the pervasivity of the discourse on network and partnership as effective tools of heterarchical governance have implied a flourishing in the use of such concepts in the new narratives of education reform. Ball has recently defined the concept of *partnership* as a '*generic policy tactic*' to promote innovation in the educational services sector (Ball, 2008, p. 138), traditionally seen as change resistant.

In the development of the argument of this work, it is also important to notice how, in most of the cases, the discourse on networks coexists with a strong emphasis on the need to transform the public systems through the

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diffusion of best practices. It is not a case that the issue of identifying and disseminating best practices across and within schools through the establishment of various kind of partnership and networks plays a crucial role in many education reforms in the countries of the OECD area. As a consequence, many policy programs promote the constitution of networks between schools and other public and private actors, and have the wider scope to encourage the dissemination and the transfer of best practices between actors and institutions (Cardini, 2006, p. 399).

The basic assumption at stake here is that networking, as form of coordination, offers an effective solution to foster school improvement and increase the quality of educational services, facilitating the transfer of successful knowledge and practices. Then, networks are represented as meso-level tools that allow to avoid both the risk to dispel local and bottom-up innovations and the negative unintended outcomes of top-down compulsory innovation. Hargreaves' claims (2003) exemplify how in the discourse in focus a close relation of causation is established between network as connective organisational form and the transfer of innovation:

Transfer innovations and best practices though networks […]. Effective champions are practitioners who are well connected to other practitioners and have the skills to 'sell' a good practice and offer practical support to peers who are willing to adopt it, but need help to do so. Champions should therefore be sought in leading-edge schools, where they are most likely to be embedded in structures that aid dissemination (Hargreaves, 2003, p. 51).

Once again, it stands clear how network and partnership are used as 'magical concepts', being appealing because of their modernity, neutrality, pragmatism and positivity (Cardini, 2006, p. 396). In this respect, Ball highlights how the use of the concept of network within the discourses on educational governance represents 'a classic third way trope that dissolves important differences between public sector, private sector and voluntary sector modes of working and obscures the role of financial relationships and power imbalances between partners' (Ball, 2008, p. 142) as well as the role of conflict in the political arena (Cardini, 2006, p. 396).

It is not a case that studies and researches on networks for innovation, in *education* as well as in other policy fields, offer a different representation of the actual functioning of networks and *partnerships* (Cardini, 2006; Skelcher *et al.,* 2005; Huxham & Vangen, 2000; Woods *et al.,* 2007; Ball, 2007; 2008; Grimaldi, 2010).

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Discussing the macro-trends concerning the re-articulation of the Nation-states, Jessop has challenged the assumed superiority of heterarchy as mode of governing, highlighting how the conditions that assure an effective functioning of networks and the enactment of processes of reflexive rationality are as complex as the ones that guarantee the functioning of markets or centralised planning (Jessop, 2002, p. 229). Furthermore, he notices that processes of self-organising through *networks* do not necessarily produce more effective or adequate results in comparison with those produced by markets or hierarchical coordination. A strong *commitment* towards deliberation or bargaining (Miller, 2000) does not exclude eventual failures in terms of governance. Actors involved in networks could experience, for instance, the impossibility of defining or redefining the objectives to be pursued or could face continuous disagreements on the validity of the stated objectives (Jessop, 2002, p. 236).

The above considerations open a space of reflection and investigation for deconstructing the discourse on networks, and challenging its implicit or hidden assumptions, bringing into light the elisions and critically discussing its presuppositions and conclusions. Following Cardini, it has to be noticed that networked organisational forms widely vary in participants' number, sector, typology and in scale and objectives (Cardini, 2006, p. 394). At the same time it seems opportune to adhere to Ball's plea for analysing the actual functioning of networks looking in two directions: a) exploring the substantial aspects of networks, that is what issues do they work on, the problems they address, the solutions they enact, the groups and the logics they privilege; b) studying their organisational form and their actual functioning (Ball, 2008, p. 157). Given the specific focus of this work, a third suggestion could be added. It concerns the opportunity to analyze the functioning mechanisms of networks for innovation and best practices transfer focusing also on the representation of the innovation and knowledge creation processes they enact and/or are shaped by.

A partnership for innovation: a case study

Within this policy scenario, a contribution to this critical pathway of analysis will be given, presenting the findings of a case study on a policy program for combating social exclusion and school drop out. The policy

program, named *Spes Goal*, was promoted by a local government (*Provincia di Napoli*) in a inner-city disadvantaged area in the South of Italy and developed through the establishment of a *partnership*, involving a 'failing' school working in that area, academic experts, experienced head teachers and teachers. The main objective of the partnership was to support the school (and later on a network of schools) and their teachers in preventing drop out and increase the levels of students' achievements, jointly working at curricular, methodological and organisational innovations. The policy program was intended to represent, in the intentions of the promoters, a case of best practice. It was planned to transfer in other disadvantaged school contexts the activities realized, once tested and codified.

The development of the policy-program has been analyzed as a set of processes implying researches, discoveries, borrowing and struggles (Ball, 2007, p. 6), mediated through discourses that offer different representations of governance and innovation as well as of the functioning of networks (Thrupp & Willmott, 2003; Woods, 2005; Hopkins, 2007; Serpieri, 2008). Discourses are intended here in a foucauldian sense as heuristic devices to interpret the shifts in the practices, the values and the contents enacted by the actors of the network while acting out their roles. The study highlights how the discourse on network tends to offer a partial and simplitic view on the functioning of the networked forms of coordination and self-organising, eliciting those analytical dimensions that could be related to the issue of power. On the contrary it is crucial, it is argued, to take seriously into account the issue of power, if the dynamics of networks are to be understood. The study will also highlight and address the tension and the clash bewteen two different and conflicting representations of innovation. The prevailing of one or another in the enactment of innovation policies can be regarded as strongly influencing, it is argued, the possibility to effectively pursue the development of a bottom-up innovation and the embedding of the innovations themselves in local contexts.

Spes Goal was promoted by the *Provincia di Napoli* as a three-years long pilot policy. Its enactment started in 2006. Its initial aim was to support a vocational high school (the *Caracciolo High School*) in combating early school leaving. The *Caracciolo High School* is located in a highly disadvantaged area in the city-centre of *Napoli* where the high rates of drop out and the multiple forms of social exclusion still represent a real social emergency. The *Caracciolo* was choosen as a symbolic place where

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to enact the policy since it was in a critical situation, facing an apparently impossible task (to deliver education to hostile individuals and in an hostile environment), having a significant decrease of enrolments (and then risking the closure) and high levels of teachers turn-over. The *Provincia di Napoli* estabished a partnership involving the school, academic experts, pedagogists, sociologists[4], psicologists, experienced teachers and headteachers to support the *Caracciolo* in the task of innovating school planning, pedagogies, teaching methodologies and guidance activities to prevent early leaving. A further aim was to realize activities of professional development for *Caracciolo*'s teachers.

A *Spes Goal Planning Board* (SGPB) was established involving the experts and the *Caracciolo*'s head with her staff. Its task was to make possible and support a fruitful and collaborative interaction between the actors of the partnership in the planning of the innovation strategies to combat drop out and promote educational success. Moreover the SGPB was asked to codify the innovations enacted in order to translate them into transposable 'best practices'.

At least at the beginning, a coexistence of potentially contradictory ideas and strategies seems to characterize the rethorics inspiring the policy program. At a first glance, *Spes Goal* is as an equity-oriented policy. Drawing on the results of a long-standing reflection on the nature of drop out and early school leaving, the policy-makers promoting *Spes Goal* affirm the need for 'alternative modes of schooling', more child-centred, less standardized and more close to the young people 'life world'. A further aim of the policy is to 'open' the school, in the effort to integrate the processes of formal, informal and non formal learning. Given these general objectives, the experts are asked to build meaningful and collaborative relations with the *Caracciolo*'s teachers and students, involving where it is possible the local community too.

At the same time, a contradiction emerges since the schools and its teachers are not involved in the initial planning of the policy, the innovation strategies being planned by the experts alone. As a matter of fact, this enacts a hierarchical relation between the external experts, the school and its teachers. Another clue is worth to be highlighted. A first

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[4] The author of this article has been a member of the group of sociologists whose specific task was to observe the implementation of the policy *Spes Goal*, report on the various steps of the process and facilitate the development of practices of reflexivity, pointing out outcomes, problems and possible improvements.

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glance to the partnership composition reveals how the choice of the experts to be involved was done in the name of a disciplinary logic (an expert for each discipline), rather than on the basis of an integrated and contextual one (in what the so-called 'student at risk' need to be supported? Are there other similar and successful experiences? What can we learn from them?). Finally, in a paradoxical way, the *Spes Goal* partnership does not include any actor from the 'third sector', the civil society and the wider local community.

Methodology

The case study on the *enactment* of *Spes Goal* has been carried on adopting the *Critical Ethnography* approach (Soyini Madison, 2005; Thomas, 1993). The policy trajectory has been studied for four years (since 2006), collecting data through different research techniques: participant observation, in-depth interviews, document analysis.

Consistently with the ethnographic approach, observation has been the main source of data. The meetings of the SGPB as well as the activities with teachers and students realized within the school have been sistematically observed. Data from observation have been enriched through in depth interviews with the policy promoters, the experts in charge of the planning of the innovation strategies, the headteachers and the teachers involved. Finally, official documents have been analyzed, such as the SGPB annual planning, the final report concerning the activities realized, the tools used by the experts and the teachers (for instance questionnaires, contents of the teachers professional development activities, didactic tools, and so on).

The data collected have been analyzed using *NVivo8* through a process of coding and sub-coding. Drawing on the results of such an analysis, the case study has shed light both on the practices, the values and the meanings actualized by the actors involved in the *enactment* of *Spes Goal* and their consequences, trying to realize the sort of 'peopling of discourses' Tamboukou and Ball (2003, p. 13) talk about. Through the identification of multiple connections between analytical codes and sub-codes, a narrative of *Spes Goal* trajectory has been produced, highlighting some crucial aspect concerning the functioning of the partnership, the understanding of the school innovation processes that has prevailed and their implications for the *enactment* of the policy. The collected data have made possible to

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identify three main phases in the trajectory of *Spes Goal*.

The enactment of Spes Goal

In the Spring of 2006 the members of the SGPB had some meetings in order to define the strategies to be adopted and the activities to be realised. Interestingly enough, the *Caracciolo* did not participated to the planning and each expert planned her intervention autonomously. One of the group of sociologist involved set up an exploratory action-research aimed at recognising both the ways early school leaving and underachieving students were socially constructed within the school and the strategies adopted by the teachers to prevent and combat those phenomena. Nonetheless, this activity started with the others, the initial planning being highly decontextualised. Once defined the details of each intervention, the school was introduced to them and teachers were asked to participate to the pilot activities with their classes on a voluntary basis.

During the planning, translating the *Provincia*'s requests, the experts identified four key drivers for contrasting early school leaving and low achievements:

- improving teaching and learning through methodological innovation;
- developing practices of individualised vocational guidance;
- offering psycho-pedagogical support to teachers and pupils;
- researching existing practices of schooling, in order to better understand the phenomenon of early school leaving and to develop reflexivity.

Table 1 offers a synthetic view of the activities realized in the *Caracciolo* during three subsequent school years (from 2006-2007 to 2008-2009). Each activity is related to one driver.

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Table 1. The activities of Spes Goal

Key Driver	Activities in 2006-2007	Activities in 2007-2008	Activities in 2008-2009
Improving teaching and learning through methodological innovation	Planning and testing of innovative learning activities. *Caracciolo*'s teachers are divided in 5 working groups according to their disciplinary area. Each group is coordinated by an external expert. The activities' planning and testing develop through four steps: 1) planning 2) activities are carried on by teachers in their classrooms 3) the experts monitor the activities during an intermediate meeting 4) in a final meeting experts and teachers discuss and analyze the experience	The activities follow the model adopted the year before. However, only two groups actually work. The other three are not enacted due to the lack of voluntary teachers. Only two classrooms are involved.	A network is established involving the *Caracciolo* and four neighbouring low-secondary schools to plan a vertical curriculum. Teachers from the five schools are divided in working groups according to the disciplionary area. Each group is coordinated by an external expert. The planning of the vertical curriculum develop through six stages: 1) evaluation tools' planning; 2) tests 3) tests' result analysis and subsequent planning of learning activities; 4) realization of the learning activities within the classrooms and final evaluation (sociologists participate as observers); 5) feedback from sociologists in a dedicated meeting; 6) final meeting to analyze the experience.

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Key Driver	Activities in 2006-2007	Activities in 2007-2008	Activities in 2008-2009
Developing practices of individualised vocational guidance	Collective guidance activities and individual counseling. 55 students from the neighbouring low-secondary schools who expressed the will to enrol to the *Caracciolo* and their teachers are involved. The aim is to identify students at risk of drop out. Tools and techniques adopted: psyco-diagnostic tests and questionnaires, individual interviews, collective meetings, individual dossiers.	Activities of professional development for teachers on guidance. Collective guidance activities and individual counseling involving 87 students from *Caracciolo* and 65 students from the neighbouring low-secondary schools. The aim is to identify students at risk of drop out. Professional development takes place following a 'traditional and rationa-listic' way. Teachers are asked to apply the techniques and tools pre-sented by the experts. The tools proposed resemble those adopted the previous year: test, QI, questionnai-res, interviews, and so on.	A research is carried on to explore the self-efficacy of 30 teachers and 300 students from the schools of the network. The aim is to offer them counseling to increase their personal, professional and institutional self-efficacy. The tools adopted are: psyco-diagnostic tools; questionnaires on self-efficacy and resilience. The results concerning teachers' self-efficacy are used to plan and realize a professional training activity to improve their self-efficacy.

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Key Driver	Activities in 2006-2007	Activities in 2007-2008	Activities in 2008-2009
Offering psycho-pedagogical support to teachers and pupils	Autobiographical laboratories, whose general aim was to empower identities and self-esteem of both the teachers working in difficult contexts and the pupils at risk of early school leaving. Two laboratories have been enacted at the *Caracciolo*. 1) the first involved 15 voluntary teachers. It aimed at constituting an occasion of professional development for teachers, through the creation of a space of reflexivity on professional epistemolo-gies and identities, tea-ching practices, emotional and relational aspects in-volved in schooling (7 months). 2) the second involved 3 classes of the Caracciolo (first year – age 14). It had three objectives: a) to help the pupils in developing and reinforcing their identities; b) to offer them the possibility to recognize their achievements coming from experiences of informal education; c) to support them in projecting their future (7 months).	Experts idea was to repeat the same activities of the previous year. However, some administrative problems impede their participation.	An activity is realized of psycho-pedagogical counseling in four classes of *Caracciolo* (first year – age 14). The aim was to help the pupils in developing self-reflexivity on their dispositions towards school and education. An activity of counseling with the families of the pupils considered at risk of drop out. The aim was to support parents in reflecting on their crucial role in the education of the pupils. The activity was enacted through the opening of a counseling office in each school of the network.

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Key Driver	Activities in 2006-2007	Activities in 2007-2008	Activities in 2008-2009
Researching existing practices of schooling, in order to better understand the phenomenon of early school leaving and to develop reflexivity	A quali-quantitative research (interviews, observations, official documents) on the social construction of the drop our phenomenon within the *Caracciolo*. The research focus was on the practices of schooling, on the organisational processes and on school structures. The aim was to make available to the other experts a knowledge-base concerning the problems they had to tackle and to allow, in such a way, a contextualized planning.	After a long negotiation with the head teachers of the *Caracciolo* and the neighbouring low secondary schools, the experts realised a research in order to explore the possibility to build up in the following year (2008-2009) a network among the schools in order to plan joined activities for early school leaving prevention. The exploratory research has been carried out using the tecnique of focus-groups. The focus-groups have involved voluntary teachers and some head teachers of the schools.	

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Spes Goal has produced some significant results, introducing some effective innovations in the daily practices of schooling in the *Caracciolo* and, from the second year on, in some neighbouring schools too. At the end of the pilot initiative it was possible to recognise some encouraging outcomes in terms of pupils' motivation and achievements. Moreover, *Spes Goal* laid the foundations for the building of a network between the schools involved and the enactment of collaborative processes of interaction between their professional communities. Within those schools, the activities of professional development for teachers have contributed to reinforce internal cooperation and experiences' exchange.

Finally, the research activity carried on by the sociologists made available a relevant knowledge-base concerning the students of the classrooms involved as well as the factors influencing the social (re)production of phenomena such as drop out, early leaving and low achievement.

Notwithstanding, it is undeniable that the policy has had unsatisfying outcomes, not matching most of the stated objectives. The analysis of the *enactment* of *Spes Goal* shows how, it is the main thesis of this article, such disappointing outcomes can be partially traced back both to some features of the functioning of the partnership involved and to the understanding of the school innovation processes (the discourse of innovation) that has prevailed. In this respect, some preliminary considerations can be made here.

The research findings show how, given few exceptions, the activities of *Spes Goal* are hierarchically defined and decontextualized. Their undelying logic is the transfer of pre-designed and standardized models of intervention, formats and tools. Such a logic is reinforced by the lack of recognition of both the needs expressed by the teachers and the students involved, and the institutionalised practices of teaching (being such practices effective or not, they are not the starting point of the activities' planning). Where a knowledge-base is made available on these issues, it is not taken into consideration by the experts. Moreover, the establishment of the partnership is not followed by the enactment of any form of negotiation around the objectives to be pursued and the logics to be followed with the heads and the teachers of the schools (nor at the beginning of the policy trajectory, neither *in itinere*). Since from the second year, most of the activities start to focus on teachers' professional development, mainly adopting a traditional approach/setting and standardized tools. Finally,

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experts tend to avoid any interaction with the students, not offering to teachers any support *on the job*. Thus, the strategy prevailing is school-centred and sectorial. Contextual factors (and their role in producing drop out) are ignored, whereas the efforts to promote an integrated strategy seem unrealistic and inconsistent (at least those promoted by the experts).

The composite effect of these choices can be summarized as follows: a) a scarce and mainly ritualistic participation of teachers and students after the first year; b) the loss of trust and motivation among the teachers; c) the growing of the perception, among the teachers, that *Spes Goal* was the 'umpteenth ineffective and unuseful policy'.

An asymmetric partnership

The development of the activities concerning the planning and the realization of the innovations in teaching methodologies during the first and second year offers an example of what has been just said.

Data collected through observations and interviews show how the teachers' working groups cooerdinated by the experts have not been, as initially stated, symmetrical and collaborative but, on the contrary, have distinguished themselves for a high degree of internal conflict. Two traits of the experts' strategy seem to drive towards such an outcome. First, experts have tried to import in the activities of *Spes Goal* contents and methodologies developed within a wider action-research carried on in other high secondary schools of the city. They brought in the working groups teaching experiences already planned, being the work within them a transfer of *best practices* (or more precisely practices tested elsewhere and presented as *best*) from outside the school rather than a work of cooperative planning. Elsewhere means in such a case in other high-performing high secondary schools of the city whose students and families had high levels of cultural and social capital. In such a way, the *Caracciolo* and its neighbouring low secondary schools become the '*failing schools*' where to transfer the best practices developed in the excellent and successful schools. A crucial factor to be considered is the hierarchical relation that such a strategy creates between the experts and teachers of the schools. It has two main implications. First, it implicitly label in a negative way the schools (and their communities of teachers) considered as '*failing*'. Second, a sort of delegitimation, or to put it in other words a lack of recognition, of what the teachers involved in *Spes Goal* have done to improve their

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teaching practices takes place, labelling as irrelevant the stock of knowledge they have developed during their professional career in 'at-risk' contexts.

Some organisational traits made the hierarchical and asymmetric structure of the relation even more evident to the teachers. Activities are rigidly divided in sequential phases (planning, implementation, evaluation). Experts choose to not support teachers in their work with students, delegating them the whole responsibility to translate into practice the innovations planned. Therefore, teachers find themselves paradoxically forced to adopt externally defined plans without any kind of support *on the job*. Predictable effects of those choices are: a) the emerging of conflicts between teachers and experts during the planning phase; b) the inadequacy of the planned activities with respect to the students' educational needs; c) the consequent teachers and students' resistences to be actively part of the policy. The following quotes from some interviews support the key points just made:

Teacher 1: […] when first the experts came here and illustrated their formats, I haven't been really nice […] I told them clearly that our pupils are different, I asked them: «have you ever seen our pupils? Do you know them? The planning of any teaching activity has to be tailored on specific targets of pupils […] (Interview, May, 15th, 2007).

Teacher 2: […] there is nothing new in these proposals. As it always happens, 'experts' come from above and want to teach you things that you do since several years […] the experience you have as a teachers originated from the daily work with pupils, difficult pupils, that are very different from the pupils who attend the schools at Vomero [a rich borough in the City). Then, realising these 'beautiful dreams here, these hypothesises, here can be very difficult or unhelpful. This is way after the first meetings, the work in the group became boring […] since we were discussing about things that we already do or things that are impossible to realise (Interview, June, 8th, 2007).

As one expert admits at the end of the three years of *Spes Goal*:

Expert 1: The experience of *Spes Goal* has been very demanding and not easy. This is mainly why we have done a fundamental mistake. As experts, we have tried to transfer our models and formats in those schools, without any kind of adjustment, not taking into account the kind of students we were facing, their cultural deprivation, the risks of early leaving […]. In progress we have tried to mediate and introduce some changes, but the teachers have been a bit reluctant,

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strongly opposing our proposals […] I should say the assumptions and the
theorical roots of our proposals. […] We have changed a lot about the planning
[…] it has been very difficult, mainly because there were two different realities and
positions facing each others (Interview, September, 20th, 2007).

Similar considerations can be made for what concerns the other activities
realized during the first and second year of *Spes Goal*, except for the
exploratory research activities on the social construction of drop out and on
the building up of a schools network. Guidance and vocational counseling
develop thorugh the use of standardized and pre-defined psyco-diagnostic
tools, focused on motivation and self-efficacy, whereas contextual factors
are not taken into account by the experts to identify 'students at-risk'.
Teachers are not involved in the design of the tools, being those tools
briefly sketched out to them. A decontextualized planning is also the main
cause of the substantial failure of psycho-pedagogical support and guidance
offered to teachers and pupils.

In the case of psycho-pedagogical support, experts choose to work alone
in the classes, asking to teachers to leave them alone with the students. This
choice stands clearly against the inner logic of the policy (helping teachers
to improve their teaching activities and not substituting to them). The lack
of knowledge on the dynamics of each group of students (and the
consequent inadequacy of the planned activities to those contexts) emerges
as the cause of the experts' failure in establishing a reciprocal relation of
trust and collaboration with the students. This unavoidably leads towards
the failure of the whole activity. During the third year, as a consequence of
such a failure, teachers are involved in the work with students.
Notwithstanding, their participation is mainly peripheral and takes place
regardless of teachers' awareness of the objectives stated and the
techniques adopted.

The design of guidance activities is not oriented towards the peculiarities
of the school contexts too. Specifically, data collected through observations
and interviews highlight how the effort to produce a knowledge-base about
the 'students at risk' has been undermined by a lack of tools' calibration on
the competences of the students (mainly literacy competences). Students
had many difficulties in understanding and coping with the experts'
requests and the tasks proposed by the tests (questionnaires, tests and
games). Moreover, they were not adequately socialized to those tools. As a
consequence, during the activities, many students did not complete the tests
or showed distrust and anxiety, resisting to the explicit evaluative nature of

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the tools. Those behaviours have, at least partially, undermined the validity and reliability of the tests' results. In this respect, the development of the guidance activities can be also interpreted as the outcome of both the experts' lack of knowledge about the school contexts where the activities were to be enacted and the consequent scarce integration of the new proposals with the guidance practices already realized in the schools involved in *Spes Goal*. The teachers involved had the same reactions described in the case of teaching innovation: they resisted against decontextualized models imported from outside, judging them unuseful and ineffective. In 2008 a teacher involved in the guidance activities declared:

Teacher 3: […] it has been a specific request coming from myself to a psycologist who was here during the three days of the guidance activities […] the request was to have someone who help and support us […] alone we cannot accomplish to that, many times I am afraid to fail […] at the end we are alone. To work in schools like this one you would need to work as an equipe […] it is not sufficient that they show us 2 or 3 questionnaires, some psycological tests and a few methodological tools …this is not the reality…reality is different… I have worked and I am working with these boys and girls focusing on the social dimension of their lives […] everyday I think up a new strategy, a new activity, a new technique. Teachers need to be supported continuously by knowledgeable experts and agencies in their daily work (Interview, June, 17th, 2009).

As in the other cases, teachers participated to the guidance activities in a passive or peripheral way. The experts led the activities with the students. This choice originated many difficulties on the managing of the classes' internal dynamics and had negative consequences as regards to the effective transmission of the experts' *know how* to the teachers. As one expert stated:

Expert 2: […] this was supposed to be a supervision and not a direct intervention. Instead, what happened was that teachers have been very passive, they have peripherally supported us during the activities.

These considerations raise a question that will be dealt with later on in this work and concerns the modalities through which the experts 'share' their *know how* with the teachers of the schools involved in *Spes Goal* (and, then, the actual possibility that teachers can reproduce the innovations in the future after the end of the pilot policy).

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The crisis of Spes Goal: resistance, exit, delegitimation and negotiation

2007-2008 is the year of the crisi for *Spes Goal*. It is interesting to note how the difficulties experts have encountered do not drive them to change their overall strategy, valuing teachers' practices and know hows and students' needs. On the contrary, as Table 1 clearly shows, they suggest again the same kind of activities and, above all, the same unilateral modalities of activities design. The outcomes of the policy after the first year are not used as 'food for thought' among the *partnership* members, except for the group of sociologists that proposed a more participative process of activity planning including the schools and their teachers.

Facing this situation, schools started to negotiate their involvement in *Spes Goal*. Headteachers maintained an ambiguous and cautious position, trying to balance the need of pleasing the *Provincia di Napoli* and the effort to reduce their schools involvement in the policy. Many teachers chose to not participate to the activities experts proposed, creating serious problems for what concerns the continuance of the activities of *Spes Goal* (this actually implied a loss of *know how*, the need for re-establish a trustful relation between the new teachers involved and the experts, the need to socialize the novices to the logic of the policy, and so on). Some external factors reinforced the problems concerning the continuance. A significant number of temporary teachers working in the *Caracciolo* were transferred in other schools by the Ministry of Education, whereas other teachers asked and obtained to be trasnferred. The composite outcome was the decrease of participation and commitment among the teachers (for what concern the quantity and the quality). Trust between the experts and the schools is even more undermined by the reactions of the formers, who explicitly accused headteachers and teachers to have a low degree of motivation and sabotage the policy.

On their side, experts in charge of teaching innovation and psyco-pedagogical support respond to the crisis lowering their *commitment*. The formers, above all, do not recognise the effects of their strategic choices on the activities and react to the teachers' 'exit strategies' reducing the moments of interaction with them. They interpret their role as 'external consultants' who offer to schools pre-defined models of intervention, leaving to the teachers themselves the duty of adapting those models to the needs and the features of the school context. Experts' low commitment

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originates the enactment of two out of five working groups for teaching innovation and the failing of the activities of psyco-pedagogical support. Teachers simply turn down the invitation to be involved in the activities. During the inteviews realized at the end of *Spes Goal* second year, they highlighted to following weak aspects of the policy:

- an abstract, de-contextualized and detached-from-practice design and planning of the activities by the experts;
- the sufficient conditions to realize properly the activities were not acknowledged and guaranteed;
- activities' design and planning needed to be much more students' needs- and peculiarities-oriented;
- there was not any kind of shared reflection on the adequacy and the effectiveness of the methodologies and the tools proposed by the experts (*source: interviews with teachers realized between May and June, 2008*).

At the same time, part of the SGPB tried to react in a more proactive way to the crisis. Experts in charge of guidance intensified their activities, whereas the sociologists explored an alternative strategy to renew schools' *commitment* towards *Spes Goal* and re-create the initial enthusiasm. Both of them share the insight that, to make the activities more effective, there is the need to widen the extent and the context of the activities and to give a more durable form to the network of schools that is implicitly emerging through the enactment of the policy. Sociologists engage themselves in the establishment of a formal network between the Caracciolo and the neighbouring low-secondary schools.

Another interesting trend in the development of *Spes Goal* is the progressive shift of the activities towards teachers' training and professional development. A first comparison between the colums of Table 1 clearly shows how teachers' professional development becomes, year after year, the main experts' concern, and at the same time the activities implying the direct ad common interaction between experts, teachers and students simply disappear.

Observations and interviews realized during the second and third years of the policy enactment allow the making of some further considerations on the actual functioning of the *partnership*, on the kind of relationships connecting the partnership members and on the consequences of the

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prevailing within the partnership itself of a hierarchical understanding of the innovation processes.

Institutionalising practices: teachers and the appropriation of innovative tools and methodologies

An interesting side of *Spes Goal* enactment concerns the degree of sedimentation or institutionalisation of the innovative practices tested and, consequently, the awareness teachers gained of the issues approached, the methodologies adopted and the tools used during the activities.

One of the *Spes Goal* stated objective was to give teachers the means to reproduce and re-elaborate the methodologies and the tools proposed by expert after the pilot experience, guaranteeing the urability of innovation and change. Nevertheless, collected data highlight how teachers' understanding of the theoretical and methodological assumptions of the activities has been partial and confused.

A first trait to consider is probably the overload of traditional training activities for teachers, based on the simplistic learning model 'explanation-individual studying-learning'. As a matter of fact, such a model had ineffective results, leaving the teachers alone in the elaboration of the issues and the methodologies proposed. Observations made during the activities show how most of the teachers felt lost and confused, due to a lack of awareness concerning the structure of the activity, the objective to be pursued, the methodologies and the tools to be used.

The following quotes from an interview to a teacher and an observation regarding the professional development activities realized are emblematic:

Teacher 4: […] all they had to do was to give us some photocopies and we could study them at home! Why we have to waste time coming here and looking at an overhead projector and listening to people who repeat what is written on their slideshows, changing a 'but' or an 'instead'? […] I told you, it would have been sufficient to have some photocopies […] I am able to read on my own at home! […] I liked just few seminars, to be honest (Interview, March, 23rd, 2009).

[Context: during a seminar a test is presented to the teachers].
[…] Some copies of a standardized test on the structure of intelligence are distributed to teachers. Teachers give a quick look to the test and then, in a confused way, begin all together to ask questions about it. The expert has serious problems in answering the questions. One of the points made by the teachers is that

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the test does not report the right answers. More generally, teachers have not understood the nature of the test and still have many doubts and questions to do. However, the expert interrupts the discussion and goes on with his slideshow, answering that all the answers to their questions can be find in the handbook he will leave at the end of the seminar series. Once completed the explanation concerning the test, he moves on to the next argument, that is a scale of professional values (Observation, November, 27th, 2008).

The two quotes make evident how the training activities were not sufficient to introduce the innovative practices, tools and methodologies to the teachers of the schools involved. To accomplish this task activities of pre-testing, simulation, tutoring and support on the job would have been necessary.

As a consequence, teachers were completely unready when they was called to apply the methodologies and the tools proposed with their students. As one expert commented on teachers' participation to the activities:

Expert 3: […] they were interested, they were willing to understand, to do, to learn how to do but […] maybe it was my impression but they felt lost […] I do not know, but I have perceived in the teachers involved in the activities a feeling of confusion. […] they were asking themselves: why we do this stuff? Which is the objectve? Yes, I have definitely perceived a feeling of confusion [...] they were active, they asked, they tried to understand but this feeling of confusion has definitely prevailed (Interview, June, 8th, 2008).

Such an unreadiness and the feeling of frustration that derived from it have been, probably, two of the main causes of teachers' peripheral participation to the activities pf *Spes Goal*. Once again a teacher from *Caracciolo* proposed an effective image to summarize the traits of their participation:

Teacher 5: […] We were there as secretaries, as lackeys and suddenly the experts told me: «why don't you present the test about maths?». Can you believe it? He chose the one I did not understand at all! (Interview, March, 23rd, 2009).

The words '*I did not understand at all*' can be related to a wider issue rather than the mere understanding of a tool or a specific methodology. It is a detail indicating that the wider frame of meanings inspiring the guidance experts strategies (and then the activities, the objectives, the tools and the methodologies) were not shared with the teachers, i.e. the key actors of the

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whole policy. This resulted, as already said, in conflicting relations between experts and teachers, in disagreements, in mistakes by the teachers and in the related experts' effort to marginalise them during the activities with the students. The following quote from an observation is another example of such dynamics:

[Context: it is the second day of a guidance activity in a class of a low secondary school held in May, 2008].
[…] students are asked to participate to a collective game, whose aim was to enact a collective decision-making process. The game is the following: students are on a sinking boat. On the lifeboat it is possible to bring only one object in a list of ten. Every student has to express his/her opinion and then in limited amount of time the whole class has to make a shared decision. Students express very different opinions and experience many difficulties in reaching a shared position. The expert does not participate in the discussion and let the students debating alone, even when the discussion becomes heated. Suddenly, a teachers cut in on the conversation, trying several time to shut up the students and to organise a hand voting. For three times the expert tries to explane to the teachers that the objective of the game is not to reach a majority decision, but a shared one. The teachers does not understand the point and shows her disagreement to the students. The game does not end and a chaotic situation develops in the classroom (Observation, May, 7th, 2008).

Constructing a schools network to develop an integrated strategy to combat drop out

At the end of the second year of *Spes Goal* the failure of most of the activities realized push the experts to re-think about the overall strategy of the policy. The outcome of such a process of reflexivity, concerning three main aspects of the policy enactment, can be summarized as follows.

The experts become aware of the need for a more integrated strategy involving schools and experts to reach the ambitious objective of *Spes Goal*, to avoid the mistakes done and cope with the phenomenon of drop out in all its complexity. The enactment of effective forms of collaboration among schools, it is argued, is an unavoidable step in combating successfully drop out in disadvantaged areas. This is due to the possibilities opened by the network forms, that guarantee the chance to coordinate actions and resources and, moreover, to work in the perspective of the vertical curriculum (i.e. the continuity of the individualised educational plan in the passage of the children from one spet to another of their

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educational career).

On the basis of such considerations, the planning activities of the SGPB concerning the third year are inspired by the underlying idea to establish a formal network among the schools involved in *Spes Goal* and realise joint activities. The network is identified as the most effective organisational form in enacting integrated strategies and processes of collaboration.

The idea to establish a schools network is favourably judged by headteachers (who had participated in 2008 to a series of focus groups coordinated by the sociologists and aiming at exploring the possibility to establish such a network).

The third column of Table 1 describes the activities realized by the new network during the third year of *Spes Goal*. Of course, the establishment of the network, notwithstanding the unexpected resistances encountered in the teachers, could represent a relevant step and foreshadow to the institutionalisation of collaborative practices between the schools. Nevertheless, as it stands clear from the Table 1, although some moves towards a more participated planning are recognisable, the experts find it hard to detach themselves from a hierarchical understanding of the innovation processes. The rationale for the activities does not change, originating the same kind of resistances and critiques witnessed in the previous years on the teachers side. The process of teachers' negative labelling inherent in the experts strategies and enacted since the beginning of *Spes Goal* persists, becoming more and more evident given the shift of the policy focus on teachers training and professional development. The complaint about the underlying rationale for the policy expressed by a teacher well represents the feeling of the majority of their colleagues involved:

Teacher 6: I want to say one thing. This policy, I think, is too much centred on teachers […] I think the phenomenon of drop out is taken for granted and, as a consequence, the only reason for dropping out is the inadequacy of teaching and the learning processes in schools. […] but I think this is only one aspect of the truth! We need to use X-rays to get the gist of it! Of course, we have problems in teaching practices and methodologies, but there are also other aspects to be considered in the wider social context. And they are hardly ever clear! (Observation, February, 14th, 2009).

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Conclusion

The analysis of the internal and external dynamics that have influenced the establishment and the functioning of the *Spes Goal partnership* represents a clear example of how a deep immersion in the actual functioning of the network-like organisational forms discloses a scenario that differs from the one outlined by the neoliberal or *Third Way* discourses on networks.

The image of the functioning of networks that the case study offers is full of inherent tensions and contradictions and sharply contrast with the the elegant and seductive discourse on networks described in the opening section of this article, a discourse that is only centred on positive aspects such as collaboration, trust and participation. Unfortunately, reality reveals itself as much more complex, dynamic, contradictory and paradoxical.

Then a *partnership* for innovation, whose initial objective was to develop best practices through the enactment of collaborative processes and the mixing of different know-how and experiences, becomes unexpectedly theater of conflicts and delegitimation of teachers' expertise (of de-professionalization to quote Olssen *et al.,* 2004) and professional practices. Moreover, it turns into a place where decontextualized understandings of phenomena such as drop out and educational failure arise and schools are hierarchically forced to adopt best practices imported (or imposed?) from outside. Finally, the partnership itself evolves into a paradoxical means to label 'failing schools and teachers' and, at the same time, delegating them the responsibility of their supposed failure.

The findings of the case study allow the making of some considerations to be related to the shifting scenarios of governance described at the beginning of this essay. It stands clear how the heterarchical forms of governance are fallible and can partially reproduce the contradictions and inefficacies that the discourse on network assigns to the hierarchical or market-like modes of governance, both in the case of innovation governance and the wider governing of educational systems. At a macro level Jessop (2002, p. 239-40) identifies some sources of the potential failure of heterarchical modes of governance:

1) the promise of apparent symmetry inherent in the forms of reflexive self-organisation rarely becomes true due to the marked structural asymmetries hidden behind the relations of

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2) the heterarchical forms of governance are enmeshed within wider statual systems. Thus, their functioning is largely influenced by the 'relative primacy of different modes of coordination and access to institutional support and material resources to pursue reflexively […] governance objectives'. In this respect a central role is played by the measures of material and symbolic support or protection offered by the State and the 'extent of any duplication or counteraction by other coordination mechanisms' (ibidem);

3) in the processes of self-organisation 'coordination problems often arise on one or more of the interpersonal, interorganizational and intersystemic levels'. Those levels are strictly interconnected, and crucial aspects can be interpersonal trust, interorganizational negotiation, communication. Gaps and fractures inevitably open 'leading to representational and legitimacy crises and/or problems in securing compliance'.

The case study on *Spes Goal* allows the grasping of Jessop's arguments, starting from the intertwining between two issues, *networking* and innovation, that are presented as strictly related in the discourses on networks and the network-like forms of governance in the educational field.

The focus of the following discussion will be on two analytic dimensions, concerning the clash between different understandings of innovation as a social process and the actual functioning of networks as mechanisms of coordination.

The gap between the rethorics inspiring *Spes Goal* and its *enactment* shows how two different understandings of innovation can be put into practice through the network-like forms of coordination. Those understandings have really different implications as regards the effectiveness of innovation itself and the actual possibility of its institutionalisation in the local contexts. Table 2 summarizes the main traits of those two understandings.

The first column describes the first one, where innovation is interpreted as a process of transfer. Such an understanding, that prevailed in the *Spes Goal partnership*, socially constructs innovation as a one-way and hierarchical process of transfering of pre-design models of action tested and validated within contexts that can differ from the 'recipient' ones. The

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normative basis of the relationship between the actors involved in the process of innovation lays in the recognition/acceptance of the *expertise* (and then of the authority) of the expert (the donor) by the 'recipient' (Hatcher, 2008, p. 27). The *expertise* represents also what legitimates and validates the best practice and guarantees the 'goodness' of its transfer. The implicit outcome of such an understanding is a negative labelling of the recipient and, consequently, a delegitimation of his/her knowledge and experiences. The second understanding (second column) refuses the one-way donor-recipient model and, in a more democratic fashion, describes innovation as a multidirectional process that occurs through the collaborative construction of innovations and 'effective practices' (Fielding *et al.,* 2005) and has to be focused on the knowledge/experiences of the key actors of the innovation itself. In this second understanding, the normative basis of the relationship between the actors involved lays in the mutual *commitment* of the innovation co-constructors. The necessary conditions for the collaborative enactment of innovation is the recognition of the practices, aspirations/ambitions, learning, results obtained and difficulties enacted and encountered by the key actors of the innovation, and moreover the adoption of an approach attentive to the peculiarities of the context where innovation is produced.

Table 2 – Two models of innovation

Transfer innovation	Constructing innovation through collaboration
One-way Donor-recipient relationship	Two-ways Collaborative construction of innovations
Labelling Implicit delegitimation	Recognition: - of practices - of contexts' peculiarities - of aspirations/ambitions - of learning - of results obtained - of difficulties
Best practices and innovations pre-designed and validated ex-ante	An approach centred on the main actor of the innovation process
Authority coming from expertise	Mutual commitment

As the case study demonstrates, the prevailing of one understanding rather than the other in a network for innovation represents a crucial aspect to be grasped, that influences the networks' effective capacity to produce and institutionalize innovation, in the local contexts as well as at a systemic level.

Of course, each innovation process understanding resembles a different

idea of network as a tool for innovating schools and educational systems (Hatcher, 2008, p. 27). On the one hand, network can function as a dispositif of management and control, allowing the transfer and spreading of standardized knowledges and practices. On the other, it can be understood as an organisational configuration emerging from the bottom, being it planned or spontaneous, that develops through authentic peer-to-peer and self-organising logics. In the first case, network acts following a technical rationality, based on the idea that general solutions to situated and practical problems can be developed outside the contexts of those practices (*ibidem*). Such a model of network comes to be often associated to the logic of best practices transfer within failing and disadvantaged contexts, hiding a 'rescue intervention model' (Cardini, 2006, p. 404) (it is paradoxically the case of *Spes Goal*). Such a model implies a process of labelling, assignating negative identities to the subjects to be rescued, and does not generate trust since it produces a coercive transfer of practices, languages, definitions, concepts, solutions from a context to another one, establishing a hierarchical order between the two.

In the second case, the inspiring rationality is a dialogic one, that develops thorugh symmetrical relations within the network that are structured by: a) processes of exchange (comparison, influence, learning, and so on); b) the reciprocal recognition and understanding; c) the identification of common and shared interests; d) the overlapping between spontaneous and formal relations.

The second analtic dimension the case study allows to comment on concerns the actual functioning of the network-like forms of coordination. *Spes Goal* trajectory brings to the foreground how the analysis of real experiences can reveal a significant gap between the potentials the discourse on network gives to this organisational forms and their *enactment*. Cardini presents three fundamental mismatches between the discourse on networks and partnership and their working, that are hidden by an ideological work that promotes networks as effective and magic tools of governing (Cardini, 2006, p. 396). Whereas *partnership* and networks are analyzed in abstract terms and defined as superior organizational models due to their inherently positive features (cooperation, trust, interdependence), empirical evidences show how:

• although collaboration is presented as a main characteristic in theoretical definitions of networks and partnerships, these are spaces

where cooperation is very hard to achieve;
- although networks and partnership are depicted as symmetrical, working networks often tend to show asymmetrical and unbalanced relationships between their members. The discourse on network completely hides the complex struggles for power that occur within the network-like organisational forms and the continuous fluctuation between hierarchical logics and recognition, between trust and utility;
- although the concept of network is directly linked to that of community participation, in practice their establishment does not necessarily lead to the enactment of participatory processes. On the contrary, networks can function as tools to implement top-down planned contents, models and practices (*ivi*, p. 398).

The findings of the case study and, more generally, the above considerations suggest to avoid the ingenuous optimism showed by the champions of the discourse on networks. Drawing on Huxham and Vangen (2000) and Huxham *et al.,* (2000) works on the factors that hinder the development of collaborative logics within networks and *partnership*, an attempt is made to briefly identify some dimensions analysis should focus on if the actual functioning of networks and their internal dynamics have to be understood:

- *Objectives*

Every organisation has its structures, procedures and objectives. It is always complex and hard to define one or more objectives to be shared by organisations that are different in nature, scopes and resources. Such a process is not always a successful one and it has to be carefully analyzed (Huxham *et al.,* 2000, p. 342).

- *Culture and language*

Organisations differ significantly in terms of languages and professional cultures (Huxham & Vangen, 2000). Different professional languages, and their related value-set, are a relevant source of misunderstanding within networks. It happens that professionals with diverse backgrounds do not understand a concept in the same way and/or interpret differently the same situation of phenomenon (Cardini, 2006, p. 401).

- *Power and Trust*

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Hatcher highlights how the discourse on networks ignores the crucial dimension of power within and between the networks (Hatcher, 2008, p. 26). Partners can have different powers. Moreover, policies promoting networks can privilege and empower some actors over others. Some partners have the power to set the agenda and are key actors in the development of policies, whereas other partners have a limited role, that appears to be confined in the domain of the sole implementation. Some partners make decisions and have the power to transform other actors, whereas others approve decisions and are transformed (Cardini, 2006, p. 402). Motivation, commitment and trust among partners cannot be taken fro granted (*ivi*, p. 408) and all of these factors are crucial to the enactment of collaborative practices (Huxham *et al.,* 2000). In this respect, the need raises for carefully analyze the features of the networs' *design*, the modalities through which they are created and the objectives pursued, their composition. Moreover, the increasing complexity of the heterarchical governance environments the contemporary organisations (and schools among them) are enmeshed in does not have to be neglected. Those organisations enter within multiple networks of different kind and scale. (Hatcher, 2008, p. 26). The influence exerted by the wider policy scenario and the policies settlements promoting the establishment of networks have to be considered as well (Cardini, 2006, p. 402). Within this scenario, interdependence relationships become more and more articulated and, paradoxically, hidden.

Networks, as governance tools, are pluralistic (Hatcher, 2008, p. 29) and can be employed to pursue different interests (educational and non educational interests). As forms of coordination, networks actually have the potential to sustain and promote participatory processes within the professional communities and create new participatory relationships within and between the schools. At the same time, networks can work as a dispositif to hierarchically transfer contents and practices planned by experts, technocrats, governments and interest groups.

The majority of networks, as their actual working shows, does not bring into existence radically new forms of governance (Cardini, 2006; Huxham, Vangen, 2000), neither they necessarily reinforce democratic participation. On the contrary, networks can represent centres of privilege and power, or can assume a highly managerialist character (Skelcher *et al*., 2005; Klijn & Skelcher, 2007). The question Hatcher poses about the English education system can be extended to many other systems. He asks whether in the

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field of education we are witnessing the 'emergence of a new and complex multiple network landscape which is more participatory, more democratic and more dynamic' or one which is hierarchical (even if different from the welfarist one) and 'controlled by a technocratic managerial elite even more remore from the influence of representative democracy' (Hatcher, 2008, p. 29-30). Analyzing the actual functioning of heterarchical modes of educational governance and innovation represents a crucial task to be accomplished to answer this question. Such an analysis requires, however, a renewed and sociologically-informed understanding of networks as tools of governance, that distances itself from a discourse that neglects and does not recognize crucial issues such as power, dissent and conflict (Cardini, 2006, p. 412).

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