

Cluster development strategy and internationalization of SMEs of Regione Lombardia

by Roberto Maroni*

The Lombard context is characterized by a dynamic and diversified entrepreneurial and scientific-technological system, with peaks of excellence achieved in different industries and fields.

Over the past decade, Regione Lombardia has been facing the challenging task of decoding and governing the changes, taking place in the Region, in order to formulate regional policies that address real needs while shifting from a vertical approach, with a perspective on traditional sectors, towards a new horizontal logic with a perspective on “systems of competence.”

Therefore, Regione Lombardia developed a strategic vision for smart specialization including. “district-based” industrial policy.

Present policy is a result of several steps that brought to reinforce the transversal supply chain logic versus a local and sector based logic and starting from a bottom up approach, passing to top down one and finally adopting a combination of two: the top down approach based on national and European perspectives and the bottom up approach based on the regional aggregation perspective.

This evolution process started with the industrial districts with high levels of specialization in production, passing to the Meta-Districts concept, as production areas of excellence, representing poles of development with high technology potential, then implemented in the Regional Districts for Innovation, Attraction and Local Economic Dynamism (DRIADE) and, subsequently redefined as Priority Theme Areas (PTA), reinforcing the transversal supply chain logic.

Meantime, the High Technology Districts located in Regione Lombardia were recognized at National level by the Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR), launching, within the technology areas of strategic interest, specific joint initiatives to consolidate the levels of excellence achieved by the Lombard economy.

Governance action of Regione Lombardia continued with the identification of implementing bodies of the technology districts, then wrapped up into Regional Technology Clusters.

Recently, in the framework of “Europe 2020”, Regione Lombardia launched a strategy built on action and measures to focus projects and available resources on a handful of priority fields and industries identified as such for their strategic interest or for their potential vis-à-vis the public and private system, specifically on supporting innovation projects in manufacturing.

As outcome of this process, Regione Lombardia has identified seven specialisation areas, summarizing the majority of the economic and scientific bodies situated in the Region. The specialization areas identified are:

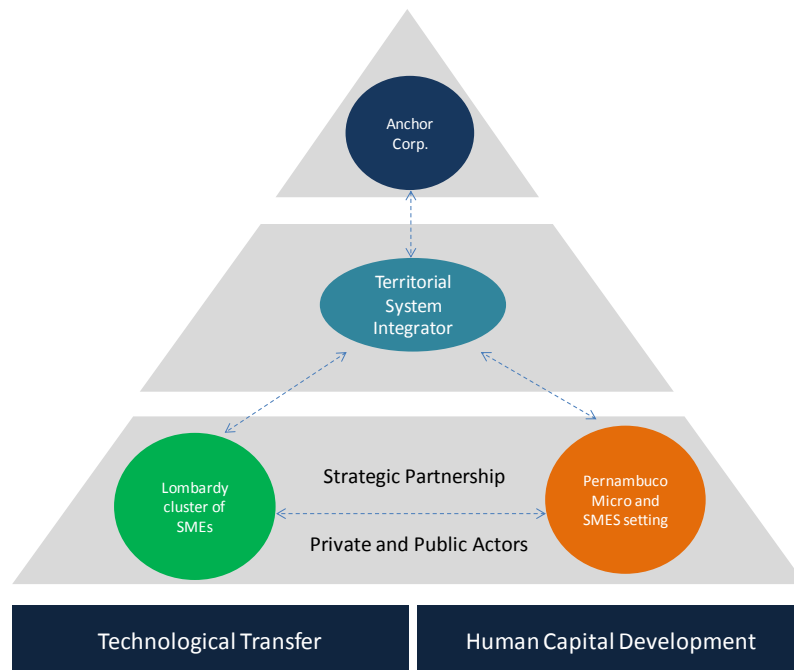
1. Aerospace
2. Agri-food
3. Eco-Industry
4. Creative and cultural industries
5. Health industry
6. Advanced manufacturing
7. Sustainable mobility

In this way, peculiarities of the territory are freshly identified through a continuous and inclusive mechanism and contribute to developing updated regional strategy.

Under this perspective, Regione Lombardia has recently activated the MetalMec project in partnership with the Government of Pernambuco, supported by the Federal SMEs Development Agency (SEBRAE, that aims at establishing technological and commercial partnerships between SMEs located in Pernambuco (Brazil) and clusters in Lombardy, operating in the metal-mechanical sector focusing on four cluster supply:

- Naval off-shore
- Petrochemical
- Automotive
- Wind.

The MetalMec Project in Pernambuco, conceived with the aim to reinforce the internationalization strategy of the region, presents three main components that contribute to overcome the “technological and institutional divide” in emerging territories, and provides the components that can take advantages of the strong technological and pecuniary externalities that intensive resource-base investments generate. The graph below synthesizes this approach:



Source: Eupolis Lombardia

The scope of the MetalMec project looks forward to create a territorial strategic partnership between Lombardy and Pernambuco Region. Such sub-national approach integrates public and private actors that allows the configuration of a strong partnership at institutional and enterprise level with the aim to build up a strong territorial eco-system where technology transfer and development of human capital can support a territorial system integrator, which allows to “fill the gap” between large corporations (anchor corporations) and SMEs from Brazil and Europe.

Such approach propose a win-win situation, where local and foreign SMEs can support the operations of large FDI initiatives, resulting in a synergic territorial eco-system that capture the strong technological externalities that are created within truly international poles of competitiveness.

Finally, it is important to underline that the integrator factors within the emerging poles is not only a strong partnership between anchor corporations (local and foreign) and SMEs (local and foreign) but also some typologies of economic activities, for instance the metal-mechanical; which has the capacity to create strong inter-links between mining, oil and gas

investments and the other economic activities, contributing in a significant way with the diversification of the economy, reducing the dependency of territories on intensive resource-based investments.

Such approach contributes to reduce the technological gaps in emerging territories and, through region to region partnership, build up a better institutional setting for internationalization. Consequently, we believe that MetalMec can become a valid instrument to promote growth and sustainability within and between Latin American and European regions.

In the framework of the strategic partnership with the EU-LAC Foundation, Regione Lombardia considers the strengthening of linkages between European regions and their Latin American counterparts as a key factor.

To foster the bi-regional strategic partnership, Regione Lombardia can contribute with an added value through its experience in policy design, governance and public private partnerships mobilization developing smart and competitive territories.

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