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FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE: EXPLAINING THE INNOVATIVE PLANNING
APPROACHES TO COUNTER THE FRAGILITY OF PERIPHERAL MUNICIPALITIES IN
NORTHERN ITALY

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ABSTRACT

Alto Lago di Como e Valli del Lario, Italy, is one of the current 124 project areas covered by the Italian Strategy for Inner Areas, which seeks to speed up the process of reducing socioeconomic disparities, counter demographic trends, and deliver better essential services (health, mobility and education), especially to fragile peripheral municipalities. In line with multi-level governance and place-based approach, each inner area constructs its local strategy by initially recognising the existing challenges, barriers, and territorial potential. The outputs of the participatory process are translated later into expected outcomes and local development projects. The study area is a real example where theory (planning concepts and territorial policies), design (participatory process and local strategy development) and implementation (local interventions, funding, agreements and monitoring) are combined to deal with multiple issues, territorial development and fragility reduction. The paper aims to explain the innovative planning approaches used to build the local strategy and examine the multi-level governance dimension and cross-border aspect. This study executes a content analysis on the territorial planning documents produced by the Italian government and the selected inner area, focusing on the multiple stages to co-create the local strategy, detailing the connection between the different levels of government, and checking the prospect chances arising from the recognition of current problems converted in concrete actions to tackle with numerous problems as well as positively impact the socioeconomic sectors. The results detail how the local strategy has been constructed and enlarge the literature on new governance arrangements and innovative planning systems.