

Analysing The Transboundary Impact Of Local Cross-Border Cooperation, Multi-Level Governance And Eu Cohesion Policy Influence To Address Fragile Peripheral Areas In Northern Italy

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Planning systems, territorial policies, governance models and administrative structures are alterable and change over the years as they need to be updated and coherent to respond to complex and uncertain challenges, particularly within the urban environment. In this process, a range of concepts and approaches are constantly created, adapted and revised; for example, “From government to governance”, the mix of top-down and bottom-up approaches, multi-level governance, social cohesion relevance, integrated regional planning, participatory processes, and cross-border relationships. In the European Union context, there is the pursuit of a more balanced, integrated and assertive territorial development through democratic processes that respect a sustainable energy transition as well as the implementation of innovative strategies that take advantage of the local territorial potential. The supranational level offers its members possibilities for policy changes, transnational planning, and cross-border cooperation through policies, priorities, instruments, mechanisms, tools, and funds. The EU Regional Policy has brought global attention to spatial planning and policy dimensions because of its conceptual contribution but also its means of counterattacking the disparities in terms of economy, opportunities, and income among member states’ regions. The cohesion aspect demonstrates the commitment to achieving spatial justice, especially in fragile and peripheral territories. Influenced by multi-level governance, local development projects and the place-based approach, the Italian National Strategy for Inner Areas has emerged as an innovative territorial policy for different reasons. Despite the goals of reducing demographic trends, mitigating depopulation and socioeconomic disparities, and providing better essential services, what is also relevant about the national policy and a subject of analysis is the requirement of cross-border cooperation between assorted municipalities, different levels of government, the private sector and civil society in constructing a local strategy to address fragile peripheral areas. The inner area of Alto Lago di Como e Valli del Lario was selected as a case study to address the local level and the cross-border aspects. This fragile area is located in two provinces (Como and Lecco), covers 32 municipal administrations, borders Switzerland and has Lake Como as the main natural asset for socioeconomic development. This paper aims first to explain and detail the functioning of cross-border relationships between multi-actor governance building a local strategy, second to analyse the transboundary effects of this new arrangement to overcome the current issues, challenges and barriers, and third, to check what is (if any) the strategic approach to interacting with municipalities outside the inner area boundaries. The research method analyses two official documents (national and local) that express the vision, axes, objectives, local development projects, and governance arrangement and functioning. They represent the leading indicators for the analysis outputs. Qualitative methods check the stakeholder engagement sessions and whether this new model has been innovative and coherent in generating a common vision among the inner area’s municipalities, translating the territorial opportunities into original projects centred on local needs. From a different perspective, whether the vertical and horizontal dimensions and the accumulation of actors in decision matters have brought institutional implications, additional challenges, barriers and conflicts between public entities and local communities given that the financial budget is limited, it needs to be in line with the EU’s thematic objectives, and there are multiple municipalities involved. Finally, the analysis also generates insights about the cross-border firm, missed and possible planning agreements and arrangements with municipalities inside and outside the inner area limits – which seem, on the one hand, critical to reverse the fragile condition and, on the other hand, a key aspect for establishing long-term strategic territorial planning with positive effects on local, regional and national levels.

Keywords : cross-border cooperation , transboundary planning impact, fragile peripheral areas, EU cohesion policy, national strategy for inner areas