Knowledge, Policymaking and Learning for European Cities and Regions

From Research to Practice

Edited by
NICOLA FRANCESCO DOTTI

NEW HORIZONS IN REGIONAL SCIENCE

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Nicola Francesco Dotti

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NEW HORIZONS IN REGIONAL SCIENCE

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Preface

Nicola Francesco Dotti

PRELIMINARY ANECDOTES ON KNOWLEDGE,
POLICYMAKING AND LEARNING

Each book has a story to tell, and this book probably starts in 2002 when I was on a train to Vercelli, Italy. At that time, I was a bachelor student in Urban Planning and used to commute across paddy fields for a self-promoted project of urban renovation around the newly established university. I did not know Vercelli, and I did not have a specific interest there apart from experiencing how planning students can contribute to urban development. I set up a team of students like me, and we worked for a couple of years on that project. Today, I would say that I was a 'policy entrepreneur', since I was interested in experiencing urban renovation in practice without any political interest (cf. Mintrom 1997), yet I will come back to this later.

   Paolo Fareri was my first professor of Public Policy Analysis during those years. He got interested in my projects in Vercelli, and my experimentations relied heavily on his lectures. He spontaneously offered to guide me coming to Vercelli when we had the major events. We were all excited to have him on board, and his guidance was extremely helpful to us; however, at a certain point, he stopped guiding me. I was disappointed and asked him why. Inspiring as only good professors are, he argued that I had already learnt because I was promoting and leading the project, coordinating the group, and having contact with key stakeholders. Thus, his supervision was no longer needed. On the contrary, he was interested in those students who have not yet learnt all those things because those are the ones who really need a guide to become 'good students'. Once they have become 'good students', a good teacher should move to work with those who have not yet learnt what he can teach. This is especially the case for students who have already 'learnt how to learn'. I understood it was a very positive evaluation for me. However, I was somehow disappointed: learning on my own was difficult, I did not know anyone else doing the same thing. Touchy as I am, I turned to economics where I thought I had more to learn.

In August 2006, I was in Glasgow when I received a phone call informing me that Paolo Fareri had just died. I could not attend his funeral because I was too far away, but I have kept thinking about how much I learnt from him, about the fact that he was right: a good teacher should invest in mid-quality students to make them 'good' ones. I have kept on thinking that I never said thanks to him. That evening on the train back to Edinburgh, I understood that I 'learnt to learn' thanks to him. What was disappointing at that time is, in fact, one of the best lessons ever. This book is built on these lessons: how to learn 'policymaking'? When I was working on this book, I found it somehow symbolic that the chapter on 'policy entrepreneurs' refers to Scotland (see Chapter 8), in some way closing an ideal circle with the sad news I received in Glasgow.

The second anecdote comes a bit later, in 2004–2005 when I was a student representative on the university council in Milan, Italy. Being a student representative is an awkward position: many efforts to be elected (especially in a university with about 35,000 students), once elected, you sit on a council where nearly 90% of the members are professors, and you have to deal with them.

During one of the council meetings, we discussed the implementation of the newly established rules for language tests for students, which were difficult for many Italian students, who had to provide evidence of mastering English, Spanish, French or German. I spoke up for the rights of the French- and German-speaking Italian minorities not to have to do those expensive and time-consuming tests because they are already native speakers. The Rector disagreed, arguing that, if they were native speakers, they would have no difficulties in passing the tests, whereas my request would have implied a heavy administrative burden. I replied that the Italian Constitution states the rights of those linguistic minorities. The Rector rejected my claim based on the limited interest in setting up a cumbersome administrative procedure for very few students and moved to the next issue. Later on, a professor came back pointing out the risk of being sued by those students for linguistic discrimination. After a consultation with his legal advisor, the Rector changed his mind acknowledging rights of those Italian linguistic minorities and accepting the extra administrative burden. This was one of the very few political victories I can claim as a student representative.

This anecdote taught me the importance of knowledge for policymaking. Despite having only two out of 26 members of the Council on my side, I won because I knew the law better than my Rector. In my university, French- and German-speaking Italian students were, nonetheless, such a small minority that this decision would never have increased my chance of being re-elected. On the other hand, my Rector was not pleased with

what I did. From a political viewpoint, I was standing for a cause without significant political returns from my constituency and somehow damaging my relationship with the Rector, who saw me as an opponent. Nevertheless, I learnt that my knowledge was able to change that small, minor, probably irrelevant policy because the key policymaker (i.e. the Rector) did not have a clear opinion on this issue. This anecdote would fit well with the importance of policy ideas under uncertainty, as already pointed out by Heclo (1974), although I did not know it at that time.

The third (and last) anecdote comes from the same period. As a student representative, I was often called to deal with students' issues in different fields, from building engineering to communication design. Coping with contents in disciplines so far from my field was difficult. Sometimes, I even had to speak on behalf of them on content-specific issues such as their job perspectives. While I quickly learnt to be evasive on content I was not familiar with, I also realised that I did not have real preferences on most of those political issues since they were too far from my expertise and interests. The most extreme case was a debate on the reform of the Italian justice system, where I had no clue of what to say (and to vote), and I merely repeated arguments taken from people I somehow trusted. I was the kind of politician who had to deal with a policy he does not understand, and I had no time (and no interest) in becoming an 'expert'. This challenge comes back to the first anecdote: how do you learn policy-making? Obviously, nobody can know everything, from urban planning to justice systems, and have definitive opinions on all the policy issues at stake. Later on, I learnt that this is called 'bounded rationality' (Simon 1991), while, at the same time, I understood the importance of acquiring a better understanding of policy issues to develop my own preferences and, if needed, mobilise my constituency to promote policy change. Finally, I learnt also the importance of an actor's techniques for dealing with such a situation (see, e.g., Johnstone 2012), though this probably goes too far from the focus of this book.

These anecdotes convinced me that knowledge matters for policymaking, and I turned this into a research field for three main reasons. First, policy can also be changed (i.e. improved) without being a politician, like in my case in Vercelli. In fact, politicians are not the only actors leading to policy change. Often, civil servants matter more than politicians when it comes to policy implementation (Maybin 2015), and I have identified also other profiles, such as scholars engaged in policy-relevant research (see Dotti 2018). Second, those able to change policy are often not the 'best students' who are already making policies, and many of them have not had any specific training on policymaking. On the contrary, many students can become 'good' ones by learning how to use their knowledge

for policymaking. This potential for having a policy impact – and this is the third leading reason – is related to the bounded rationality of decision-makers. Especially in a period of uncertainty, we do not know what to do, what we prefer, what works or what could work. Often the person that might know what to do is elsewhere. Thus, this leads to the question of how to learn policymaking 'here' and 'now'.

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Among my colleagues who helped me during the GREATPI project, I am especially thankful to Sara Rizzo, who does not appear in this book, but our discussions were fundamental to developing the key ideas presented in this book, especially the cognitive–evolutionary approach to knowledge for policymaking. During the preparation of this book, I had to change three university departments, and I am thankful to the directors and colleagues who have hosted me: Bas van Heur, David Aubin and, especially, Michele Cincera, who gave me the time needed to finalise the writing and editing of the book. In the list of inspiring colleagues I would like also to mention John Bachtler, Marth Bicket, Marcelline Bonneau, Eric Corijn, Marcin Dabrowski, Kevin De Bondt, Ugo Fratesi, Alessandro Meschinelli, Giulia Pastorella, Simone Reinhart, Fanny Sbaraglia and André Spithoven.

The first inspiration for this book came when I heard stories about my grandfather, Francesco Dotti, who died when I was just a kid. In the 1930s, he was a young university assistant of agriculture sent by the University of Bologna to teach local farmers about the most advanced techniques in agriculture he was studying in the university. While writing this book, my

father explained to me that, in fact, this story is not true, and I slightly overstated the position of my grandfather. In fact, he had an 'itinerant chair (in Italian, *cattedra ambulante*), but from the agrarian consortium of Ravenna (not the University of Bologna); thus, he was working in a completely different framework from what I thought. He became an academic later. Despite being a wrong 'family myth', the image of the itinerant chair was particularly inspiring when deciding to work on topics discussed in this book and, in general, on the idea of applying academic research to real-life issues. According to the Gianni Rodari's 'grammar of creativity', this was a 'creative mistake' leading to a more exciting story.

Last but not the least, the most significant help came from my family, especially my wife Maria who loves books, and gave birth to our second child on the days when I was finalising this book.

5. Spatial knowledge for regional governance: toward an alternative map of Castilla y León

Mario Paris and Juan Luis de las Rivas Sanz*

5.1 INTRODUCTION

During the last two decades, the EU Commission has shown a major interest in establishing a more systematic dialogue between different institutional levels of government (Committee of the Regions 2009; EU Commission 2001). They have pointed out the inter-municipal scale as the most functional scale to take into account both regional and local conditions (cf. EU Commission 2001: 4). The inter-municipal dimension is flexible enough to interact with existing institutional patterns (both local and regional ones), transmit local governments' experiments to associates, and involve public and private actors in solving sectoral problems as well as sharing financial and human resources. It could become one of the ways to introduce a new impetus to economic development in Europe and address the challenges of sustainable and inclusive growth (OECD 2015). Specifically, the inter-municipal scale allows planners and local governments to have: (i) critical mass and means for policy implementation and (ii) better knowledge of local needs and opportunities as well as a better management of resources (place-based approach).

In this chapter, we present and discuss a case study based on the process of reform, in which we took part as academic consultants who specialise in spatial analysis and planning. Within the framework of a research agreement between the regional presidency and our institution, the Instituto Universitario de Urbanistica de la Universidad de Valladolid, we have developed and proposed an original point of view, based on our multi-faceted background as researchers, consultants and practitioners. The first

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* Although the chapter is the outcome of a joint reflection, Mario Paris has authored Sections 5.1 and 5.3 and Juan Luis de las Rivas is the author of Sections 5.2 and 5.4. The introduction and conclusion are shared pieces developed by the two authors.

section describes the geographical and institutional context of the Castilla y León region. In the second section, the new institutional pattern based on inter-municipal associations is presented as developed for the Regional Council of Castilla y León. The third section concludes with a discussion of the initial outcomes of this process.

5.2   GOVERNING THE SUPRA-LOCAL SCALE: A TOP-DOWN MODEL APPLIED TO A HETEROGENEOUS TERRITORY

Castilla y León is a vast region with 2.5 million inhabitants (in 2015) and a surface area of 94,224 km^2 located in the centre of the 'Meseta' (the inner plateau of Spain). This region is the largest 'Comunidad Autónoma' of Spain and occupies more than 18% of the Spanish territory, though it ranks only sixth in terms of population and is marked by one of the lowest population densities in Europe (26.74 inhabitants/km^2). Clearly, the rural environment plays an important social and economic role in this context. Furthermore, the rural singularity of Castilla y León is enhanced by the number and the size of municipalities: the region has 2,248 municipalities, 28% of the whole of Spain; however, only 5.4% of the Spanish population lives in the region. Combined, these data describe a fragmented map of local power, in which 1,726 municipalities have less than 500 inhabitants. Against this socio-economic background and a permanent demographic decay, a political response with governance tools adapted to this territory is needed.

The settlement pattern shows a precise correspondence between regional geomorphology (mountains, riverbanks and central plains) and the localisation of major urban centres. Valladolid, the regional capital, and the other three largest cities of this system, León, Burgos and Salamanca, shape a virtual tetrahedron that contains the most important regional nodes, structuring its central space (De Las Rivas 2010). Around these nodes, a large and consolidated rural area, based on the cultivation of cereals, is progressively losing population and economic vibrancy, apart from some specific spots connected with historical corridors and/or strategic infrastructures.

In 2011, the regional council presented a new territorial strategy explicitly investing in a new role for municipalities, particularly the smaller ones (Junta de Castilla y León 2011). This new approach takes the elements usually considered as the weakest of the system and frames them as the main reference for territorial governance. For this reason, the regional government established a working group involving academics

and public servants to implement a new planning model in a context of transversal crisis and lack of resources. This strategy was one of the main points on the political agenda for the 2011–2015 mandate of the regional president, who has often underlined the importance of planning and its tools during his long-standing tenure (Juan Vicente Herrera – from the conservative 'Partido Popular' – has been the regional president since 2001). Nevertheless, he campaigned for a renewed effort to innovate the spatial planning system to support a new regional governance more suited to the contingent socio-economic conditions of Castilla y León as well as Spain in general (Herrera 2011).

The effort to renew the territorial governance of Castilla y León relies on a larger set of targets, implemented according to EU recommendations and transposed by the Spanish central government after the economic crisis (2008–2010). These targets implemented a severe spending review on welfare infrastructures to reduce the public debt of both national and regional bodies. The inherited existing deficit and the accumulation of unsustainable macroeconomic imbalances are due to measures instated to tackle the current economic crisis and have imposed an approach based on austerity and 'structural reforms' (Real Decreto-Ley 20/2012 2012). Accordingly, the central government imposed strict rules on public spending, which have influenced the agendas and programmes of regional and local governments through a snowball effect. In this framework, regional and local governments have to deal with stricter budgetary rules reflecting on the supply, financing and management of the existing service system, a sector that currently represents one of the major expenditures for the regional government. In this regard, it is important to highlight that the Junta de Castilla y León favoured a major rationalisation effort, avoiding linear cuts to the welfare system. In this regard, the reorganisation of the public services' system and the reorganisation of territorial governance play a central role. At the same time, we note the role of spatial knowledge (Limonta and Paris 2016, 2017) and territorial readings we produced for this work in support of processes of transformation of the current welfare state and, more in general, of recent decision-making processes.

5.3   THE REGIONAL SYSTEM FOR SPATIAL PLANNING

In Castilla y León, a specific aspect is a consolidated approach to spatial planning on regional regulation and the relevance of the spatial dimensions to the regional political agenda. Since the law 10/1998 (Ley 10/1998 1998) was passed, the institutional framework for spatial planning at

supra-municipal scales has been defined. Ten years later (Ley 3/2008 2008: 200), the key principles were confirmed and developed through the adoption of new 'planning guidelines' for the region. In this new version, the law introduced a new set of targets for the region: a new critical mass and representativeness (in sectoral planning, etc.) for rural municipalities through cooperation and voluntary association;

- more effective provision of public services, amenities and infrastructures;
- stronger cohesion and a territorial balance at the regional level, through a more operative and solid coordination of public administrations;
- a progressive implementation of strategies, policies and actions adapted to the new territorial model; and
- a clear subdivision of competences amongst bodies, avoiding repetitions and overlap.

These targets have marked recent regional policies. Accordingly, the government promoted the sharing of public services within the region: richer municipalities were asked also to provide public services to the poorer municipalities.

Furthermore, following the principles of the *European Regional/Spatial Planning Charter* (CEMAT 1983), spatial planning is defined as the 'geographical expression to the economic, social, cultural and ecological policies of society' (CEMAT 1983: 13). Accordingly, Castilla y León integrates these two dimensions: administrative structures and spatial planning. In this framework, spatial planning is the practice through which local governments promote policy reforms as well as setting targets and goals for other policies.

Spatial planning is a complex task, ranging from land use management to the 'rationalisation of policy across territory'. Its governance must acknowledge spatial singularities, adapting policy to natural and historical regional patterns as well as sustainable development (in social, environmental and economic terms). In a context of dramatic scarcity of resources, policymakers must set up a hierarchy of interventions. All these political constraints and regional specificities pointed to the need for a territorial model based on:

1. the effectiveness of municipalities and promotion of inter-municipal cooperation;
2. the rationalisation of sub-regional levels of governance, also considering the consolidated administrative role of Provinces;[1] and

3. the adaptation to the specificities of regional conditions (cf. Ley 7/2013 2013).

This model relies on inter-municipal cooperation generating new entities, the 'Distritos de Interés Comunitario' (Areas of Regional Interest) created during the first step and, later, the 'Unidades Básicas de Ordenación y Servicios del Territorio' (Basic Units for Territorial Governance and Services, or UBOST), both of which are composed of a variable number of existing municipalities.

   This new inter-municipal unit aims to improve the quality of public services, benefiting from economies of scale and improving efficiency as well as avoiding duplication of already existing administrative structures (e.g. municipalities, counties and associations of municipalities). The new UBOSTs should become the new point of reference for the design and management of the complex and heterogeneous spaces of Castilla y León. In general, the regional government was looking for something to simplify spatial governance as well as a model adaptable to geographical specificities and political circumstances.

5.4   RE-DRAWING THE MAP OF LOCAL GOVERNANCE

In the early stage of the reforms, the region required support to set up the cooperation process. Indicative, qualitative-quantitative criteria were selected for the Distritos/UBOST bodies, which reflected the integration between urban municipalities and their surroundings. During 2012–2013, as members of the Instituto Universitario de Urbanistica de la Universidad de Valladolid (a research cluster in the spatial planning field within the University of Valladolid), we supported this process of reform and innovation providing technical reports on three main areas:

1. Regional analysis of demographic, socio-economic and settlement factors, providing an understanding of the needs of these discrete spatial units and their opportunities.
2. A new map of inter-municipal associations, beyond administrative boundaries of single municipalities and referring to larger territorial identities, historical relationships and settlement processes as well as existing cooperations, sectoral management, etc.
3. A first reflection on 'Areas Funcionales' (Functional Areas), another regional tool for governing supra-local dimensions.

The regional government took our report and map as reference material in the proposal for the new regional spatial governance law (now adopted as Ley 7/2013 2013). Our contribution represents an effort to support the regional council in rethinking the spatial dimension of its policies and actions, adapting them to its territorial specificities. For this purpose, we developed a spatial analysis of the region and, through statistical, demographic and spatial readings, we underlined the limits and potential of this territory. This task is a process in which we create alternative maps, that, borrowing a term from rhetoric, figurative arts and geometry, we call 'figures' (Genette 1992; Pavia 2002; Secchi 1994). Therefore, we get a sense of territorial characteristics and map the resulting interactions of several sectoral logics. From these, we propose interpretative evaluations of the existing realities (De Las Rivas et al. 2014). Once the field of work has been described, we combine these figures with several scenarios (following principles imposed by politics, technical reflections and focusing on local needs and opportunities) and, finally, we produce useful spatial knowledge. Altogether, these materials represent original 'spatial knowledge' that can be an effective and useful tool in the decision-making processes to help build consensus within political and strategic debates.

5.5   A PROPOSAL FOR CASTILLA Y LEÓN

In this section, we present the main outputs of our policy-oriented research. Spatial knowledge has been produced through techniques of mapping and advanced spatial analysis, building a different territorial model for the region. Two main features shape the analysis: the urban/ metropolitan space and the pervasive and complex rural system of Castilla y León. The result is a map in which we represent two different bodies, UBOST and functional areas, both built on existing cooperative relationships while suggesting new collaborations across homogeneous areas.

Based on two decades of research in our department, this policy-oriented research has collected a significant amount of data and analysis of the Castilla y León territory (De Las Rivas 2009, 2010), and this legacy represents a sort of observatory of changes and transformations in the region. For example, we could identify the process of migration from rural areas to mid-sized cities as well as precisely defining the socio-economic profiles of the smaller municipalities, in which the ageing process, the loss of population (especially the feminine component) go hand in hand with the steady decline of rural economies (see, among others, CES de Castilla y León 2012; Del Barrio 2010; López-Trigal et al. 2009). The depopulation of the rural areas in Castilla y León is a long-standing process, which
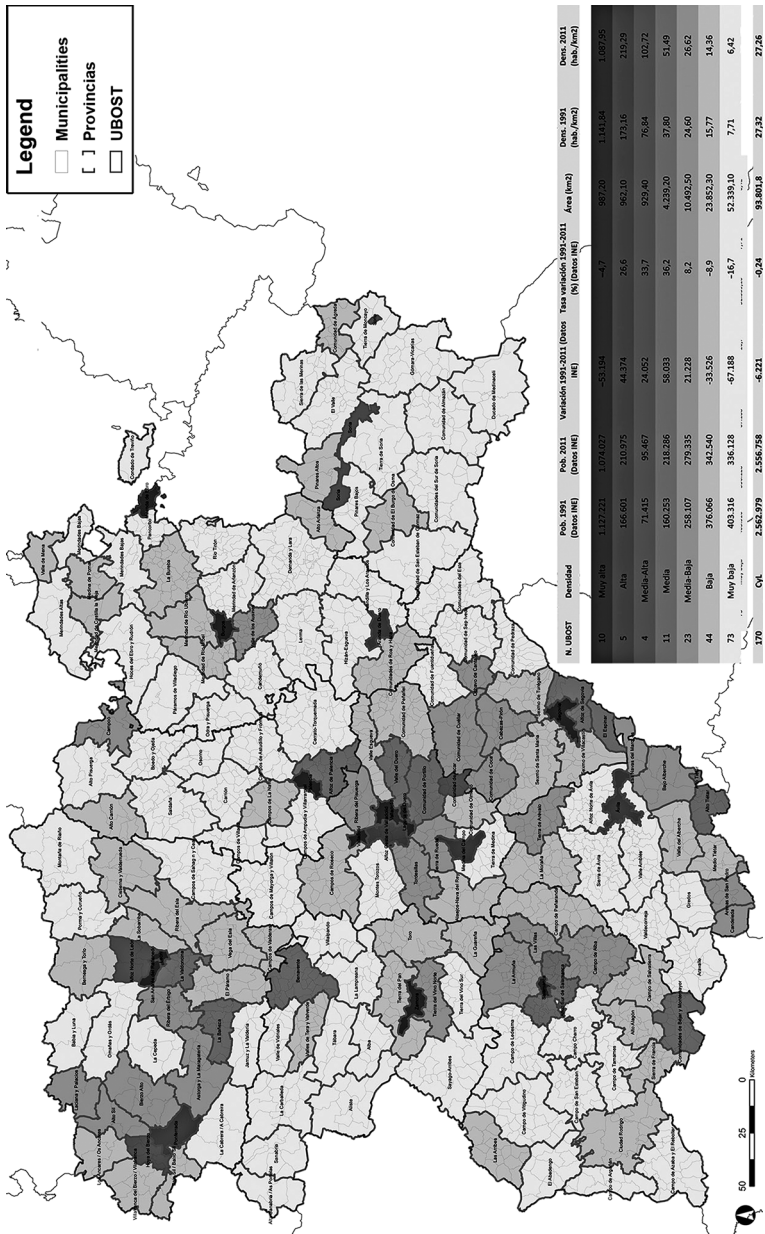
became more severe after the Civil War (1936–1939) and is still continuing today (6% population loss in rural areas between 2010 and 2015). The smallest municipalities (less than 500 inhabitants) make up 75% of all municipalities in the region, covering by far the largest part of the regional territory. In parallel, the largest cities in the region (more than 10.000 inhabitants) have increased in population or, in some cases, have lost less than rural areas.

This process of a draining population and the pauperisation of rural areas is incredibly complex, but, without entering into details, the demographic dimension depends on both cyclical factors and persistent difficulties. The population is rooted in a consolidated settlement pattern, where physical space (topography), resources (water and humid soils) and climatology are very demanding and impose specific 'living practices'. In parallel with those environmental conditions, a number of socio-economic changes (ownership structure, technological innovations, new infrastructures, tourism, etc.) have influenced the labour market and the whole economic system over the last 20 years. In order to govern this transformed and heterogeneous framework, it seems important to improve the capacity for prioritising policymaking and effectively providing public services.

The map for inter-municipal units (UBOST) that we proposed to the regional government (see Figure 5.1; for the full report, see Instituto Universitario de Urbanìstica de la Universidad de Valladolid 2012) takes into account these spatial and socio-economic constraints. It aims to improve the effectiveness of local management and to avoid the creation of new administrative bodies. Inter-municipal cooperation would be refined in the years that followed – especially from the point of view of legal competences – but this map was considered within the large process of negotiation between regional and local governments as the only solution to rethinking the messy arrangement of public services provision, mainly in the rural areas of Castilla y León where they co-exist with several different forms of inter-municipal associations (e.g. 'Mancomunidades',[2] 'Comarcas', 'Consorcios' . . .) and areas for the implementation of sectoral policy such as the 'Zonas Basicas de Salud', a spatial unit improved by the regional government to supply effectively health care to the whole population.

5.6 CONCLUSIONS

Our case study shows the potential of an innovative approach based on the integration of spatial planning and inter-municipal cooperation (land-use administration and services management), overcoming obsolete

N. UBOST	Densidad	Pob. 1991 (Datos INE)	Pob. 2011 (Datos INE)	Variación 1991-2011 (Datos INE)	Tasa variación 1991-2011 (%) (Datos INE)	Área (km2)	Dens. 1991 (hab./km2)	Dens. 2011 (hab./km2)
10	Muy alta	1.127.221	1.074.027	-53.194	-4,7	987,20	1.141,84	1.087,95
5	Alta	166.601	210.975	44.374	26,6	962,10	173,16	219,29
4	Media-Alta	71.415	95.467	24.052	33,7	929,40	76,84	102,72
11	Media	160.253	218.286	58.033	36,2	4.239,20	37,80	51,49
23	Media-Baja	258.107	279.335	21.228	8,2	10.492,50	24,60	26,62
44	Baja	376.066	342.540	-33.526	-8,9	23.852,30	15,77	14,36
73	Muy baja	403.316	336.128	-67.188	-16,7	52.339,10	7,71	6,42
170	CyL	2.562.979	2.556.758	-6.221	-0,24	93.801,8	27,32	27,26

Source: Instituto Universitario de Urbanística, 2012.

Figure 5.1   Proposal for UBOTS in Castilla y León

administrative structures (municipalities, counties, provinces and region) and rigid planning tools (programmes, actions and projects) that are often too generic and/or too sectoral. Therefore, in our proposal for Castilla y León, we studied and compared the spatial patterns of services management in the region (e.g. health care, water, solid waste, etc.). We took advantage of their effectiveness and adaptability to territorial constraints, and we proposed an alternative idea for regional governance. It meshes several sectoral logics and works to create spatial units marked by a 'giusta distanza' (right distance) in which supply services with scale economies face the current dimension of socio-economic dynamics and where actions can take place, without dispersing resources and thus maintaining a cohesive approach.

According to EU directives and documents (e.g. EU Commission 2008; Leipzig Charter 2007), the next goal for the European Territorial Agenda (2010) is integrated sustainable urban development and, specifically, research to inform a better balance between cities and rural areas. For this reason, these ambitions should rely on inter-sectoral, multi-level (i.e. different administrative actors) and legal dimensions. In this challenging framework, the regional territory is the field of work, but, as planners, we should adjust the scale according to local needs and potential. At the same time, the work of reading and understanding a space is an integrating practice that links phenomena and processes that co-exist within the territory. All these factors have a mutual influence on the space, and the particular features of local contexts should represent an asset for local governance, not merely an indifferent input, as has often been the case up to now.

Once the regional government turned our proposal into a regional law (Ley 7/2013 2013), they organised several public roundtables and working groups. In 2014[3] after a long process of revision and a rich debate on the criteria for selection and solutions, the regional government adopted the final definition based on a system of policy-specific spatial indicators (i.e. demography, location, accessibility, etc.) (Decreto-Ley 2/2014 2014): 13 'Áreas Funcionales Estables' (Permanent Functional Areas),[4] four metropolitan areas for larger cities (Valladolid, Burgos, Salamanca and León), and the 'Áreas Funcionales Estrategicas' (Strategic Functional Areas). Nevertheless, the presence of multiple definitions for inter-municipal cooperation across existing administrative bodies (municipalities, counties, provinces, 'mancomunidades', 'diputaciones') creates a certain ambiguity and confusion.

During this experience as consultants for the regional government, we experimented with a multi-faceted relationship with the different components (especially politics and public servants), divided into at least four phases. At the beginning (phase 1), we assumed a set of general principles

in our perspective as a framework. These were established according to specific political will. This set of wide, but rigidly defined principles showed our intention to take advantage of a severe spending review (recommended by the EU and central government) and use it as an opportunity to rethink the model of regional territorial governance. We were involved in providing an interpretative analysis of regional space (phase 2), strengthening our profile as experts/technicians. Through this step, and according to our political orientation, we provided a set of criteria aimed at stimulating the cooperation between municipalities and a territorial strategy for Castilla y León, based on the inter-municipal management of services. In this period, we experimented with a closer dialogue with public servants who had taken on the role of interface between political strategies and the territorial constraints, spatial characteristics and local identities of the region. Thanks to their support, we provided a map and a final proposal (phase 3) that had been developed by sharing targets and methodologies with the different constituents of the regional government. After this period, we experimented with an intense debate on the dimensions, competences and roles of UBOST in which local governments, existing associations, intermediate bodies and the third sector progressively gained pull and exerted a strong inertia in this process of change, influencing the final content of the proposal.

From the methodological point of view, we recognise that we have been involved in an interesting discussion about spatial planning and regional governance, which involved a set of different actors for a long time. Within this process, we would like to recognise that the spatial knowledge we provided has been a useful and open device that has collected suggestions and stimuli, changed political will and created emerging opportunities, but also revealed the potential and risks related to territorial governance and prefigured scenarios for Castilla y León. All these aspects have merged into a single map. In its dual role as a tool and product, it has become a powerful element within the regional debate regarding territorial cohesion.

NOTES

1. In Spain, Provinces ('Diputaciones Provinciales') have traditionally supported minor municipalities with a centralised technical and administrative structure.
2. In 2013, 216 out of 240 municipalities (89%) belonged to at least one 'Mancomunidad'. Those institutions are implemented by municipalities through a volunteer agreement and address different needs, for a single and specific reason (i.e. sharing a specific service or target) up to a broader array of purposes.
3. With the DECRETO-LEY 2/2014, de 25 de septiembre, por el que se declaran las áreas funcionales estables de Castilla y León.
4. In the final version, the 13 'Áreas Funcionales Estables' are: Avila (25 municipalities),

Burgos (32), Aranda de Duero (23), León-San Andrés del Rabanedo (16), Ponferrada (16), Palencia (20), Salamanca (24), Segovia (27), Soria (15), Valladolid-Laguna de Duero (18), Medina del Campo (21) and Zamora (28).

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