

INNER AREAS IN ITALY

A TESTBED FOR ANALYSING, MANAGING
AND DESIGNING MARGINAL TERRITORIES



EDITED BY
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BABEL
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To lose or to win, but at which game?

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To lose or to win: in every epoch, some regions seem to win while others seem to be on the losing side. In the mid-1960s, Jeffrey G. Williamson, an economist, published a paper in which he argued that in the first phase of growth, regional inequalities deepened, while regional inequalities would decrease gradually, thanks to the spread of growth and social benefits¹. Nevertheless, at the end of the Second World War, European countries implemented vigorous regional planning policies to help those who appeared to be the losers: the South and the mountains in Italy, everywhere outside Paris in France and the North of England². These regions were severely hit by agricultural change—the so-called “green revolution”—, which reduced the number of jobs, after missing the stream of post-war reindustrialisation. In Italy, it was a long story between North and South; France was more surprised because of its enduring rural roots. What could the State do then? Fund infrastructures and encourage companies, especially those nationalised, to invest in less favoured regions. Did these policies succeed? Very imperfectly, of course. However, some results were obvious. Within the framework of a Fordist division of labour, the ‘losing’ regions had something to offer: workforce, cheap land, transport and education infrastructures raised to national and international standards by national policies. Major firms were decentralising their factories; national policies merely accelerated this natural process of industry. Then, the territorial expansion of capitalist firms went worldwide. They deserted former industrial territories in Europe and America. National policies couldn’t prevent it and became noticeably inefficient. From the 1970s onwards, there appeared to be no simple solution to backwardness, for two main reasons. The first was that socio-economic fragility hit a great diversity of places: not only former rural or industrial regions, but also migrant neighbourhoods in big cities, remote outskirts, small and

1 Williamson J G (1965) Regional Inequality and the Process of National Development: A Description of the Patterns. Economic Development and Cultural Change, University of Chicago Press 13(4):1-84.

2 Hall P, Tewdr-Jones M (2010) Urban and regional planning, (5th éd.) Routledge, London.

middle-size cities. The geography of marginality had flourished. The second reason was that the national Fordist policies became inefficient: it was no longer possible to integrate all places in one pattern of growth and development. In France, placed-based policies multiplied the zoning: we now have more than 6 different programmes each targeting a type of territory such as small towns, middle-sized cities, rural industrial areas, deprived urban neighborhoods, etc. This ever-expanding geography questions not only the means and tools of policies, but also their goals. In a way, the goals of national planning policies in the 1950s and the 1960s were easy to define (or, more certainly, to reconceptualise *a posteriori*): it was about integrating all territories in one development scheme. Since this scheme was no longer efficient, what could be the new goals?

Then, national policies took a turning point in the 1980s. Since the state can no longer direct the economy, let’s put each territory on an equal footing in the globalised competition. Both Italy and France devolved more powers to local authorities to implement attractiveness policies. In order to attract people and capital, cities and territories develop their facilities, their residential attractions, their university and leisure functions, etc. The economy must develop by making the most of the territory’s resources and the skills of its inhabitants: this is the conceptual peak of local development. During the 1980s, most European states abandoned national planning schemes for local development policies: each territory was to build its own strategy, the existence of which became the main condition for benefiting from national and European subsidies. In return, local-national development strategies fuelled competition between territories. At this game, the more skilled and staffed territories were the winners. So, money and investment poured into major cities and to some rural areas that were equipped for competition.

If this new policy helped some places to build and achieve their strategy, it also helped to deepen the gap between territories. Since the 1990s, it has been observed that some regions are still lagging behind³. But from what? The interest of the critical work carried out by the young researchers whose productions are gathered here is to take a hard-hitting critical look at the various criteria for detecting these weaknesses. The policy of *inner areas* is defined according to a simple criterion: the distance to a few essential public services. But the elements of fragility of peripheral regions in Europe are not only linked to the question of the distance-time of access to some public services. In some cases, the fragility is demographic: the fall in population leads to a vicious circle, with fewer people to run facilities, the absence of which reduces their attractiveness, and therefore the number of inhabitants and jobs... Sometimes the fragility in question is that of society. Various indicators show that society’s self-confidence is eroding unevenly across the country. Protest votes are

3 Benko G, Lipietz A (1992) Les régions qui gagnent: districts et réseaux, les nouveaux paradigmes de la géographie économique, Presses universitaires de France, Paris.

POSTFACE

not uniformly distributed across the territory in Italy as they are throughout Europe. In short, if there is a malaise in defining the problem, it is also on the side of the solution. How can these weaknesses be resolved effectively? It is not enough to reactivate the post-war voluntarism; we must reinvent new levers of action. In the case of fragile rural areas, it is not possible to propose (effective) treatments without having carried out an absolutely complete diagnosis of the nature of the fragilities. Distance to essential public services may not always be the most relevant issue, because it depends on many factors, and mostly doesn't answer the question of the objective, although it can be useful for evaluating results. The young researchers take a bet: what if *inner areas* could be the place where new development schemes could be implemented? It is interesting that most of the papers don't focus on public services. Little by little, the chapters draw a picture of what could be a new development model. The book brings together a range of inventive solutions in the field of agrotourism, heritage enhancement, risk management and equipment management. This collection of proposals offers a form of local development "enhanced" by ecological concerns. Ecology is both an end of these policies and a means, as the invention of a new form of agriculture, renewable energies and sober management of water and soil seem to be levers of attractiveness and jobs. In effect, these places can illustrate and demonstrate the contemporary need for reconnecting socioeconomic systems with ecosystems. Researchers stress the revival of rural systems, natural heritage, architecture... This gamble does not lead to a lack of lucidity: the book denounces the lack of reflexivity of the State, which proposes this type of programme without thoroughly reviewing these a-spatial policies, particularly those relating to public services. These studies on the new levers of development for sparsely populated areas open up a reflection on the new part these areas can play in the productive system. These places lost their epochal autonomy with the destruction of ancient rural systems, based on a subtle balance between human needs, activities and natural resources. During the industrial era, most of them became so-called "mining territories", places where the extractive capitalism showed its most extreme dynamics: land, water, wood, stones and ore were provided by these territories. In short, these places played a part in the economy as long as their natural capital wasn't exhausted. Now that they have lost a major part of this capital, they seem to have no more use at all for the rest of economy, as long as it is still based on mining — extractive capitalism is now global and can obtain cheaper resources anywhere in the world. Sustainable development means, in that case, finding new ways of increasing natural resources without exhausting them. But this immediately raises another question: these territories cannot just rely on a self-centred path for development. As the post-Fordist economy goes, such self-centered strategies rely on public subsidies. That would mean maintaining these territories as natural reserves. This perspective is not acceptable, neither economically and socially, nor politically.

Therefore, ecology should not only be a springboard for endogenous development. It leads to a comprehensive rethinking and reshaping of all the connections and interdependencies between areas. Ecological issues require cities to reconnect with their rural environment for food supply, energy production or leisure areas. It is not a question of closing the parenthesis of the industrial revolution, which totally transformed the territorial metabolism by disconnecting cities from their immediate supply basin⁴: there is no sign today of massive reductions in the international circulation of goods and capital. However, this reconnection can produce new capacities for rural territories. It concerns both the layer of "material resources", but also those of "care", if we consider that rural areas are also places of leisure and residence for retirees and tourists. In return, local people expect some kind of reciprocity, in order to escape their mining functions. People no longer want to produce raw materials to be consumed by the urban economy. This perspective opens wider reflections on the economic model of ecological transition.

As we begin to understand, ecological transition is not limited to green washing, introducing new industrial processes, building electric cars and energy-efficient houses. It is about the transformation of our whole system of value. We can predict that, within a few decades, the nature of goods and services exchanged will change: not only material goods but more services, including ecosystem services. These functions can be found and protected in such places as *inner areas*. But for now, they are not part of the market. The eco-systemic and human services these areas can provide are not currently monetised. This raises a difficult question, since the most powerful support for low-density areas is provided by welfare state mechanisms, which are financed solely by the monetised economy⁵. How can the two transfer systems, monetary and non-monetary, be made to coexist between areas? Do their limits need to be redefined? We understand that the question is no longer who wins and who loses, but what is the game. It is likely that the game must change dramatically.

As always, an interest in the peripheries means questioning the norms of society.

4 Esculier F, et al. (2019) The biogeochemical imprint of human metabolism in Paris Megacity: A regionalized analysis of a water-agro-food system. *Journal of Hydrology*, 573 (1er juin) : 1028-1045.

5 Davezies L (2021) *L'Etat a toujours soutenu ses territoires*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris.

The book “Inner Areas in Italy. A testbed for interpreting and designing marginal territories” is a timely contribution to the international academic and policy debate on ‘Inner Peripheries’ and on the possible measures to reduce inequalities among different regions in Europe. The National Strategies for the Inner Areas (SNAI), a groundbreaking experience of place-sensitive interventions addressing marginal areas, was promoted in Italy in the framework of the EU Cohesion Policies 2014-2020.

Inner Areas were identified by SNAI, starting from 2012, due to their remoteness, environmental and architectural fragility, relative poverty, marginality and shrinking trends. The authors of the proposed book elaborate on the outcomes of the first funding cycle of SNAI (2014-2020) and look towards the coming cycle, thanks to the contribution of more than 150 young researchers, gathered under the umbrella of the recently born National Network of Young Researchers for Inner Areas in Italy. Through the different chapters this collective text returns the richness of the multidisciplinary discussions that took place in June and July 2020 during the workshop organized by the Network of Young Researchers for Inner Areas committee and contributes to the international debate on how to analyze, manage and design marginal territories, characterized by high degrees of fragility and exposed at various risks.

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