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Local narratives and spatial configurations of territorial cohesion: some evidences from COHSMO Project

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Abstract

This working paper presents and discusses some empirical findings from COHSMO Project regarding the local configurations of territorial cohesion in relation to the contextual forms of inequalities and urbanisation. In particular, it aims at improving the understanding on the role of territorial cohesion in the three Italian case-study areas (Milan, Legnano and Oltrepò Pavese). A specific emphasis is placed on investigating the relationship between spatial configurations and territorial cohesion policies, the reconciliation of the economic, social and territorial dimensions of policies, and the contribution of horizontal and multilevel governance arrangements in conducting territorial cohesion. The final section highlights the dominant rhetoric and discourses of policy documents and analyses the strategic response of institutional actors for achieving greater territorial cohesion.

Key-words

Territories; Territorial Cohesion, Milan, Legnano, Oltrepò Pavese.

Biography of the authors

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1. Introduction

The goal of this working paper is to synthesise and discuss some of the main empirical findings from COHSMO Project regarding the local configurations of territorial cohesion in relation to the distinctive local forms of inequalities and urbanisation. The main research question is whether and to what extent territorial cohesion is shaped by socio-economic inequalities and different scales/forms of urbanization, and can, in turn, contribute to shaping them.

In COHSMO, three case studies were selected for each of the seven countries involved in the project (Austria, Denmark, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, United Kingdom). The case-studies chosen in Italy are located in Lombardy region, in northern Italy, one of the largest and wealthiest regions of the country. The urban case-study area is Milan, the capital city of Lombardy and the main metropolitan area in the region. The suburban case area is Legnano, a town located north of Milan metropolitan area. The rural one is the Oltrepò Pavese, a group of 15 municipalities placed in the southern part of the region. The three localities are in a quite different position with respect to their territorial ranking which in turn significantly influences their evolutionary dynamics process. Milan has been traditionally recognized as an attractive and fast-growing metropolitan area with a positive economic outlook, though it has been deeply hit by the ongoing economic crisis due to the covid-19 pandemic. Currently the main challenge for the city is its socio-spatial polarisation and the rising levels of urban poverty and social inequality, particularly concentrated in some areas of the outer ring the city. Legnano is a satellite suburban town functionally dependent from Milan that is facing difficulties in adapting the pre-existing human resources to the restructuring of local economy. Oltrepò Pavese experiences a deep decline phase, with exogenous forces facing increasing difficulties in mobilizing territorial capital.

This working paper aims at understanding how territorial cohesion policies are defined in each of these three localities. It also analyses the ways in which spatial configurations (such as polycentric organization, urban-rural divide, infrastructure accessibility, etc.) play a role in the design and implementation of territorial cohesion policies, and highlights how the reconciliation of economic, social and territorial dimensions of cohesion works at local level and the extent in which this is explicitly part of local policy discourses. Lastly, it investigates the governance arrangements that have proved to be more conducive to forms of territorial cohesion.

Methodology is based on a combination of desk research on previous work done in COHSMO and in-depth interviews to members of the National Advisory Board (NAB) and to other key informants from public administration and third sector in the three case-study areas interviewed during the first phase of the project (Cordini et al., 2019). The NAB includes researchers, policy makers and civil society representatives with manifold expertise on the project topics. The phase of interviews to NAB members took place in December 2020. Each interview has been conducted in a virtual mode, it followed a track of questions/topics prepared on the basis of the main research questions stated in the project guidelines, lasted about 45-60 minutes and it was recorded and then transcribed. Interviews done in the first phase of the COHSMO project (related to interviewees PA3, PA4, PA6 and C5 in table 1) were conducted face to face on the basis of a semi-structured track and lasted around 1 hour each.

This Working Paper is organised in 5 sections. Section 2 includes a brief overview of the development of cohesion policies in Italy. In section 3, 4 and 5 the contents and aims of territorial cohesion policies in the three Italian localities are highlighted, with a specific emphasis on the role of spatial configurations in the design and implementation of policies, on the reconciliation of the economic, social and territorial dimensions, and on the role of governance for promoting territorial cohesion. Section 6 looks at the empirical elements gathered in previous sections and discusses the main differences between the three localities. It also scrutinizes the dominant rhetoric and discourses of cohesion policies and the strategic response by institutional actors for achieving greater territorial cohesion.

Table 1. Interviewees quoted in this working paper

Code	Profile of the interviewee
GC	Academic researcher on cohesion policies (NAB member)
FB	Public officer working on cohesion policies at regional level (NAB member)
PA3	Manager of the Development and Strategic Coordination of Peripheries Plan unit of Milan Municipality
PA4	Manager of the Peripheral Plan Development Unit of Milan Municipality
PA6	Head of the Pedagogical Technical Coordination of Children (0-6)'s Services of Milan Municipality.
C5	Scientific Manager of the regional branch of an environmental association

2. Territorial cohesion in Italy: a brief overview of the policy development

In Italy, the concept of territorial cohesion has been traditionally linked to the objectives of economic growth and reduction of territorial unbalances and disparities between the Northern and Southern regions of the Country. During the period 1950-1990, territorial cohesion policies were framed within the intervention of a technical public body, the *Cassa per il Mezzogiorno*, that was oriented to foster the economic competitiveness in Southern regions through infrastructural projects and incentives to local businesses, mainly in the industrial sector. Partly relying on supranational funding, the Cassa was inspired to the New Deal public intervention policies in the US. In mid-1970s, some theoretical contributions gave a new course to the debate. Arnaldo Bagnasco (1977) coined the concept of *formazione sociale territoriale* (socio-territorial system) to underline the specific link between economic development and social integration, going beyond the assumption that economic development is a homogeneous, unidimensional process. The concept is the result of a specific configuration of economic, social, cultural and political aspects, and it is at the basis of the creation of the so-called Three Italy model, used to explain the country's manifold trajectories of development (Cerea et al., 2019). Drawing on these stimuli, since the 1990s, a new policy approach to economic growth has emerged at the national level. This has followed a period (mid-1980s) in which the *Cassa del Mezzogiorno* started to lose reputation and efficiency, due to corruption and political clientelism. A crucial step was the creation in 2007 of a new unit within the Ministry of Treasury, the Department for Programming and Development directed by Fabrizio Barca, which led to a new programming phase, that has seen a specific attention to the strategic policy dimension, to the devices for transforming dispersed private knowledge into usable collective knowledge (Barca, 2004) and to the locality and its resources in supporting virtuous development trajectories. More recently, the territorial cohesion policy discourse has seen a specific focus on Inner Areas, defined as those areas significantly far from the clusters of primary public services, but rich of environmental and cultural resources, and vulnerable because of the marginalisation and de-anthropisation processes. In 2013, the Agency for Territorial Cohesion launched the SNAI – the National Strategy for Inner Areas – that has among its objectives the strengthening of local communities' wellbeing, the increase of local job demand and the better utilisation of territorial capital (Agenzia per la Coesione Territoriale, 2013; See also: Viesti, 2021). The Strategy is currently under implementation: 71 area strategies have been approved by the Agency and a good number of projects are in the process of being finalised. Deep differences among regions characterize the implementation phase mainly due to the complexity and articulation of the methodology adopted by policy designers (Carrosio, 2020). Lombardy is among the regions who are in a more advanced position in the process. The main problems of this phase are the scarce institutional capacity of the local administrations in

implementing the projects and the risk that local political elites hinder innovation, as also pointed out by a NAB member:

“Municipal administrations are sometimes not ready to govern the shock wave of such complex projects, including the making of the vision and the spending capacity [...] The ‘rent extractors’ in the territories have sometimes prevented their implementation [...] These are actors who have no interest for territories to innovate and become inclusive of social and economic coalitions that have no power in that territory” (NAB member GC).

Looking at the more recent developments of the cohesion policy, in February 2020 the Ministry for the South and Territorial Cohesion and the Prime Minister have presented the so-called *Plan for the South* (Ministero per il Sud e la Coesione Territoriale, 2020), a strategic document which is aimed to relaunch the public investments in the decade 2020-30 by attempting to rebalance the ordinary financial resources allocated to Southern regions (a threshold of 34% of total country expenditure has been set), increase the effectiveness in the use of national cohesion policy funding, and improve the implementation of the European cohesion policy.

As far as the implications of territorial cohesion policies since the 1990s are assessed, a model made of a combination of different tensions and trajectories emerges. This is mostly given by a constant swing between the centre – the national government – and the decentralised decision-making processes, at the regional and local level. The main issue lies on ensuring a positive balance between these two levels, the national and the local, and in preventing the potential threats, like the vulnerability of the local government representatives to be captured by local interests, or the risk that the national government takes a step over localities in defining projects and programmes that do not match or respond to local contextual conditions. Moreover, the high levels of territorial fragmentation – an outcome of the long-standing social and political fragmentation of the Country (Ferlaino & Molinari, 2009) – has greatly impacted on the territorial cohesion paradigm.

Within this background, the Italian debate has framed territorial cohesion as a “synergetic relationship between economic growth and social integration, supported through locally-based horizontal and vertical coordination mechanisms involving enterprises, social forces and civil society organisations” (Cerea et al., 2017: 78). In this sense, country’s territorial unbalances and the underdevelopment of Southern regions are problems associated with the low institutional capacity and collective efficacy of local communities. Among the critical targets for achieving territorial cohesion, the production of local public and collective goods emerges. This follows the awareness that a better provision of social, economic and material infrastructures and a stronger integration between endogenous and exogenous resources could lead to improve social and economic conditions for and the wellbeing of local communities.

Before focusing on the territorial cohesion policies in three Cohsmo localities, one aspect worthy to be mentioned concerns the policy orientation to territorial cohesion taken by the regional government in Lombardy. This sees a strong propensity towards sustaining private investments and devolving powers to civil society. During the last ten years, the approach endorsed by the center-right majority ruling the regional government has been to combine the horizontal and vertical subsidiarity to the freedom of choice principle. As also underlined by NAB members, one problem of this approach lies in its scarce territorial dimension and the low levels of adaptation of regional policies to the different subregional localities:

“There are problems related to the non-territorialization of policies as if they were an undifferentiated mesh covering the whole regional territory” (NAB Member FB).

“The idea of territorialization means bending policies to the diversity of places. It is a ‘acupuncture’ logic. What we have done today is taking a best practice and replicating it in a different context, it didn’t work” (NAB Member GC).

3. MILAN, a vibrant metropolitan city facing socio-spatial polarisation

In the last decades, the city stood out for its positive economic outlook. The capacity to attract and mobilise social and economic assets has been one of its main strengths. Despite this, currently the main challenge for the city is the socio-spatial polarisation and the rising levels of urban poverty and social inequality, particularly concentrated in some areas of city’s outer ring. The image of Milan as “A giant with the feet of clay” has been coined to indicate a city which is strongly projected upwards, though without being able to consolidate its social bases (Gianni, 2020). Another image used by local actors is “A city with leopard spots” which indicates the fact that, rather than urban sectors where disadvantage and segregation concentrate, there are hotspots in which problems emerge in a more conspicuous manner (e.g., Corvetto neighbourhood or some sections of via Padova).

Thus, a number of public policy programmes and private initiatives have been put in place to rebalance the city (Cordini, Pacchi, Ranci, 2019). The main objectives of these programs are the reconciliation of economic development and social inclusion and the reduction of social inequalities and unequal spatial distribution of growth and wellbeing across the metropolitan area. Despite the ambitious goals, most of the actions implemented had a remedial nature, as their focus was on specific physical and social interventions taking place in spots or portions of problematic neighbourhoods (e.g. Lorenteggio, Giambellino, Corvetto, San Siro), without being able to adopt a clear and consistent strategy.

In the last few years, an important urban regeneration program promoted by Lombardy Region and funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) under the “Sustainable Urban Development” axis has been implemented with the aim of improving the housing conditions and enhancing the social inclusion in public residential neighbourhoods where the levels of deprivation, vulnerability and unemployment are particularly problematic.

As the discourse analysis carried out has shown (Ibid.), some documents display a narrative about economic growth and social cohesion. The “Manifattura Milano strategic plan” and the “Milan Smart City document” interpret economic development as a tool for social inclusion and, conversely, social inclusion as a trigger for economic growth (Comune di Milano, 2014; 2017). Another meaningful example is the “Strategies of Sustainable Urban Development”, a document jointly developed in 2016 by the Regional and the Local Governments which identifies a number of objectives and key solutions for promoting a more sustainable urban development in the metropolitan area (Regione Lombardia & Comune di Milano, 2015). According to this document, one of the main factors contributing to the problems of socio-spatial inequality is the lack of identity. Poverty, deprivation and social disadvantage are thus interpreted as problems of identity of places, rather than structural features that need to be addressed through specific policies and interventions. Among the objectives identified by the program, the increasing urban cohesion is mentioned, a goal which is stated in relation to the need to strengthen the spatial integration of local contexts with the rest of the city, as well as the integration of the city with the surrounding metropolitan areas.

The attempt to integrate different dimensions of cohesion is evident when looking at regeneration-based policies. The renovation of existing fabric is an intervention able to generate economic benefits, related both to the financial resources that can be generated by the dwellings’ rents and to the new commercial activities attracted by the new households. An interesting case is the Lorenteggio Masterplan where the concept of *mixité* is introduced for breaking down the functional and spatial homogeneity into a more differentiated urban landscape (Regione

Lombardia et al., 2015). The concept refers to the diversity that the inflow of new functions and people in the neighborhood can create. The underlying idea is that more diverse urban neighborhoods can generate positive social and economic outcomes: from the employment created by the new commercial activities, to the social cohesion and the increased sense of belonging conveyed by the restoration of public and private buildings.

Even when the main goal of the policy documents is economic growth, the objective to reconcile – or at least relate – the economic dimension to the social and territorial dimensions is present. At the basis of these documents, the narrative that economic growth can also generate social cohesion emerges. This is also shown by the ‘Innovate to Include’ slogan endorsed by the political majority (Cordini, Pacchi, Parma, 2019). Although this connection is rarely deepened with solid and consistent arguments, frequent is the assumption that Milan can become a laboratory of smart, green, and socially inclusive policies and that the development of the so-called new urban economies can also enhance social cohesion through the creation of new employment opportunities, as also underlined by the “Manifattura Milano strategic plan” (Comune di Milano, 2017).

3.1 The role of spatial configurations in the design and implementation of territorial cohesion policies

Looking at the policies analysed in COHSMO project, the relationship between spatial configuration and territorial cohesion policies is not explicitly mentioned. Despite this, some reflections can be made on an assumption included in some policies that enhancing some spatial configurations can positively contribute to construct a more cohesive urban community. This is evident in the already mentioned “Strategies of Sustainable Urban Development” document, in which the focus n. 2 concerns the consolidation of the social cohesion, the reduction of the ‘extreme marginality’ and the strengthening of social inclusion networks. It is also mentioned that these goals should be achieved in connection and integration to the urban recovery and revitalization policies with an emphasis to sustain social cohesion in peripheral neighbourhoods. A similar approach is taken by the Report of the Local Plan of Milan (PGT) where the concept of territorial cohesion is implicitly tackled by some of the strategies identified in the plan. For example, in the Strategy “Adapt to social changes. Services close to all citizens” it is reported the opportunity to organise the system of public services in a polycentric way across the city, contributing to rebalance the relationships between Milan and its territory (Comune di Milano, 2019: 81). Or in the Strategy “Regenerate the city. Peripheries at the centre” which recognises the role of small and vacant lots, placed at the edge of the city and in low-density settlement areas, for “recomposing the fractures” with the more central areas and establishing new relationships with the metropolitan scale. Moreover, the plan identifies eight projects around which rebuilding the relationships of Milan with its metropolitan dimension. Although no explicit mention of territorial cohesion is made, some of these projects – the re-composition of the northern urban edge through the protection residual open spaces from urban developments and the improvement of the relations with the new major urban functions, or the green and blue infrastructures between Martesana and Parco Nord for improving the quality of life of peripheral settlements – underline an attention of the plan towards specific spatial configurations (urban/rural relationships, accessibility to green, blue and grey infrastructures but also polycentric organization of functions and services) as conducive of more sustainable urban models.

Density and concentration of population and activities produce an impact on the design and implementation of territorial cohesion policies. This aspect is addressed by the “Strategies of Sustainable Urban Development” document which interprets the Milan metropolitan area as a context characterized by a concentration of manifold social and economic problems, a process

which affects the capacity of the city to achieve objectives of economic competitiveness and social cohesion. This document establishes a direct logical connection among the process of demographic concentration and the density of social and economic problems. Among these, one of the most urgent is the growing and diffused housing disadvantage which directly relates to the emergence of new forms of urban poverty. This phenomenon manifests in multiple ways, from people living in informal housing to those living in incongruous or overcrowded dwellings, and tends to concentrate in neighborhoods that already present some conditions of spatial (e.g. distance from the urban center, lack of public transport and services, neglected public spaces) and social vulnerabilities (e.g. high rates of unemployment and illegal activities) (Regione Lombardia & Comune di Milano, 2015). If not recomposed and reintegrated into the city, these neighborhoods risk to be excluded from the dynamics of urban development but also to become areas of concentration of social conflict, disease and marginality.

Policy documents also reports that the concentration of innovation, technology and facilities within the city acts as a catalyst of economic growth, but also of social cohesion. In the Milano “SmartCity document of guidelines” approved by the City Council in 2014 it is evident an emphasis to a vision of smart city which is able to activate in its neighborhoods relational networks supported by new technologies for monitoring the most weakness sections of the population and involving them in processes of empowerment. According to this narrative, the SmartCity model can explicitly contribute to the objectives of social cohesion and collective efficacy and the investment on innovative projects can lead to solve issues at urban, metropolitan and territorial scales and promote integration and inclusion.

In the “Manifattura Milano Strategy”, the central role is played by the presence in the city of the so-called territorial services: fab-lab, community hubs, incubators and accelerators of innovative start-ups all have a positive impact in promoting the emergence of the new urban economies. Following this narrative, the city spatially configured as the core of a 4.0 revolution can produce effects both in terms of economic development and social cohesion thanks to the creation of new employment opportunities. The spatial dimension is also evident in the strategy’s attempt to regenerate, also through agreements with the private sector, unused or vacant urban spaces and providing incentives for allocating digital spaces and services in peripheral areas.

3.2 The reconciliation of the economic, social and territorial dimensions of cohesion policies

The actors mentioned the reconciliation objectives in relation to two main aspects. The first one is the capacity of specific projects and programs to work across the social and economic dimensions of cohesion. The analysis has shown that the reconciliation objectives have been successfully achieved through single projects cutting across different policy areas, rather than through statutory mechanisms or traditional policy instruments. The areas where these have been mostly focused on are social innovation, local welfare and urban regeneration.

The second aspect lies in the strategic cooperation between different municipal departments. Some actors (PA3, PA4, C5) mentioned the crucial role that cross-sectoral coordination has in constructing successful policies due to the importance of sharing manifold expertise and integrating different tools and knowledge forms. Sometimes these policies have been catalysed around some cross-cutting concepts, images or paradigms, such as the already mentioned Smart City paradigm, or the concept of ‘periphery’, which has served to build a multi-fold and place-based strategy based on the combination of different policy tools and funding sources and the creation of policy bundles. A recent attempt to build a cross-sectoral policy coordination and construct policy bundles is the *Piano Periferie* launched by the Municipality in 2016. The process was carried on by a steering committee specifically created for this purpose, and the plan was supposed to be drafted by the cooperation between the city departments traditionally involved in

urban regeneration (the urban planning and public works departments) and other departments (e.g. those dealing with welfare, culture and integration). The underlying idea was to characterise urban problems in terms of their spatial connotation, according to the objective of achieving the policy integration through a *place-based approach* (Cordini, Pacchi, Parma, 2019). Despite the initial positive assumptions, the *Piano Periferie* has failed to reach the objectives and recently the local administration decided to put it aside. Reasons of this failure lie in the difficulty to define a proper coordinated strategy among city departments and jointly use a different set of policy instruments, regulations and approaches, and in the scarce effectiveness of the governance mechanisms for implementing the plan.

A positive example of this approach is the so-called *Scuola dei Quartieri*¹, an initiative promoted by the Municipality of Milan in cooperation with local enterprises, institutions and foundations, and co-funded with funding from the ESF within the Multi-fund National Operational Programme Metropolitan Cities 2014-2020. The main objective is to support the creation of projects and services, designed and implemented by citizens and addressed to improve the quality of life in peripheral neighborhoods. The support by the Municipality consists in training activities with professionals and economic subsidies of up to 25.000 euros for co-funding the first year of activity. The second edition of the program has started in October 2020 and has involved 20 project proposals, selected in a two-stage call.

One actor highlighted that the development of place-based actions has significantly contributed to reconcile different policy dimensions in specific neighborhoods where levels of unemployment and social inequalities were particularly high (C5). Here, the reference goes to an idea of neighborhood as the unit through which the municipality can deal more effectively with the reconciliation objectives. As far as the neighborhood dimension is considered, a range of initiatives have been put in place by local administration. One of these is the reconversion of the covered food markets²: 8 projects have been implemented, some of which have been recently completed, and they aim at constructing multifunctional spaces that, alongside the traditional food market retailers, host restaurants, shops and social and cultural spaces. The main idea is to turn the former markets into new attractive places with the aim of triggering processes of neighborhood regeneration.

3.3 The role of governance for promoting territorial cohesion

The active civil society has always been one of the major resources of Milan. A long tradition of civic engagement has developed in the city and has generated high levels of collective efficacy which are visible in the countless number of associations and organisations working on a range of different issues.

The analysis has underlined no significant obstacles in policy arenas for the emergence of new ideas and bottom-up initiatives by community actors. Despite this, the high diversity of actors engaged in governance arenas runs the risk of generating fragmentation in collective efficacy and raises the difficulty of discerning a common, strategic vision for the city or a framework for directing all the individual efforts towards the same trajectory. The absence of a structured coordination can also result in producing controversial results and suffocating the small-sized and grassroots initiatives which in the last years have catalyzed significant social innovation practices. Another problem is the ways in which the outcomes of governance and participatory processes are taken into account by public officers in drafting the policies. Concerning this point, while pointing out the good listening capacity of the municipality, some actors reported the feeling that

¹ <https://www.lascuoladeiquartieri.it/#chi-siamo>.

² https://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2020/08/31/news/milano_mercati_comunali_comune-265882483/.

some interactions with municipal actors were just an occasion to talk and “get headlines on the media” rather than a process oriented to design policies and plan interventions.

While municipal administration has played a guiding role in pursuing local development strategies, important is also the role of the so-called “active actors of the city” (PA4), which include the third sector organisations, the businesses and the private foundations. In recent decades, the municipality has built good working relationships with the third sector associations and the foundations. Despite this, in the face of a growing societal complexity, there are quite low levels of vertical and horizontal coordination, which lead to the already mentioned risk of fragmentation of territorial governance (Cordini, Pacchi, Parma, 2019). Hence, according to some actors, the improvement of multi-level coordination is needed.

The most common and successful form of governance arrangement is the public-private partnership. The improvements generated by these horizontal governance forms translated in the production of new services in some specific neighborhoods, usually through pilot projects funded by the municipality and then carried out or managed by third sector organisations (see the case of WeMi in: Lazzarini et al., 2020). One problem concerns the not-always-easy matching between private and public actors and their resources. The bureaucracy and the scarce synergy between city departments are interpreted as the main obstacles intervening in this problem. Despite the high levels of territorial capital that the public-private partnerships have been able to mobilise (both in terms of financial resources and of social and material assets) in recent projects and initiatives, their effectiveness in targeting complex problems of socio-spatial inequalities and territorial cohesion is still questionable (Cordini, Pacchi, Parma, 2019).

A number of multi-level governance arrangements has also been experimented in some policy areas, though just few of them turned out to be effective. These have been the outcome of a cooperation between the municipality and the regional and national governments. One factor that partly explains the scarce success of these governance forms is the different political coalitions ruling the municipal and regional authorities. While the strategic cooperation between the regional-municipal authorities seems to be scarcely developed, the coordination on single projects is considered to be more effective, as shown by some interventions on distressed urban neighbourhoods, such as Giambellino where regional and local funding were jointly employed. Moreover, another problem of multilevel governance is the weak role of the Metropolitan City, an administrative tier introduced in Italy in 2014 which is still in search of a clear administrative position and governance structure. This results in the creation of quite ambiguous relationships with the municipality, even though both levels are guided by the same administrator (the Mayor of Milan).

Broadly speaking, the analysis seems to highlight the assumption that one model of governance would not be able to address all the problems of the city. This is due to the spatial and functional relationships of the city with different geographies and scales (local, metropolitan, regional but also European) and to the high number and variety of local actors shaping the governance arenas and the trajectories of policy making processes. Furthermore, as also mentioned by some interviewees, a more effective combination between horizontal and vertical dimensions within multilevel governance arrangements seems to be needed. One of the more striking evidences is the almost unexploited potentials, in terms of administrative capacity, knowledge resources and decision-making processes, of the Metropolitan City in territorial governance processes. For example, with reference to the already mentioned policy area of urban regeneration, a better coordination between the municipality and the Metropolitan City would be needed because peripheral settlements extent over the metropolitan area without solutions of continuity.

4 LEGNANO, a suburban town in transition

The analysis of policy documents underlined two critical factors that play a crucial role in achieving the objective of territorial cohesion. The first one is the need to strengthen local community's sense of belonging and attachment to place through a more active involvement of civil society networks, and the second one is the consolidation of the position of Legnano beyond the borders of the Alto Milanese area and in the wider metropolitan area (Cordini, Pacchi, Ranci, 2019). Interviews pointed out these two factors in strong relationship with a somehow rhetorical understanding of local contextual conditions and the vision of local politicians and interest groups. Concerning the position of Legnano in the metropolitan area, rather than a satellite suburban town functionally dependent from Milan, Legnano is interpreted as a city playing a pivotal role in solving large-scale territorial problems and in contributing to the social and economic development of the whole Milanese metropolitan area. Few informants mentioned that an enabling factor could be the current leading position of Legnano within the 'Patto dei Sindaci', the inter-municipal governance arrangement aimed at coordinating policies and integrating the municipal resources in strategic policy areas across the Alto Milanese area. One barrier highlighted for scaling-up the role of Legnano as a driving city in the metropolitan area is the difficulty of local administration and civil society organisations to govern the impacts on the local context of the economic transition started in the 1980s and culminated in the 2008 with the financial and economic crisis. An implication of this is the process of delocalisation of major industrial firms and the related increasing unemployment, especially for 40- and 50-years old blue-collar workers that encounter the difficulty to find alternative job opportunities. Last but not least, some local informants report the presence of some social problems, mostly related to the security issue, such as the illegal immigration, vandalism and drug dealing.

4.1 The role of spatial configurations in the design and implementation of territorial cohesion policies

The strategic location of Legnano at the heart of the Alto Milanese area and halfway between Milan and Varese is perceived by local informants as an aspect positively impacting on city's trajectories of development. However, related to this is the problem of commuting, especially towards Milan, which has increased a lot in the past ten years. Inefficiency of connections due to public transport's frequent congestion and damages is perceived as a problem affecting the overall connectivity of the city within the metropolitan area. Also, the presence of brownfields in the city, left empty by the long-term economic decline started in the 1980s and worsened by the 2008 financial crisis, are indicated as spatial factors having a connection to the rising unemployment, illegality and social disadvantage in the city, and creating an impact on its levels of territorial cohesion. Beyond the high levels of commuting and the presence of brownfields, the suburban and periurban location of the city in the Alto Milanese is not explicitly mentioned by informants as a factor influencing the design and implementation of territorial cohesion policies.

As in Milan, also in Legnano the concept of territorial cohesion is seldom explicitly mentioned by policy documents. Emphasis is placed on peripheral areas, interpreted as the spatial field where major social and economic problems concentrate. The analysis has shown that local administrators feel themselves committed to sustain urban regeneration and the social and economic development of peripheral urban neighbourhoods. In the "Planning guidelines for actions and projects to be realized during the mandate 2017-2022", the Mayor of Legnano highlights the need to support a vision of urban regeneration alternative to the prevailing one: instead of planning new urban expansions, the objective is to promote soft, minute and diffused interventions for improving the quality of public spaces. Hence, the document conveys the idea

that the rehabilitation of the city needs to be implemented through its polycentric reorganisation, rather than acting on large scale interventions (Città di Legnano, 2017).

In “Integration_Machine”³, one of the recent urban regeneration projects implemented in Legnano, the reference to territorial cohesion is made more explicit. In the project presentation it is highlighted the need to “lighten the overall load sustained by the cities and distribute the social supply systems on a wider territorial platform, [...] activating and enhancing, where present, the infrastructural networks (materials and intangible) present in extra-urban areas” (Comune di Legnano et al., 2016; Lazzarini et al., 2020). Thus, the approach taken by the project is oriented to enhance the polycentric development of the metropolitan region by regenerating spaces “in favour of the whole metropolitan area”, an objective achieved through the realisation of “an advanced structure of metropolitan services for the new hospitality, accompanied by a strong supply of services for the social integration of the weakest sections of population” (Comune di Legnano et al., 2016: 1). Another aspect emerging from Integration_Machine is the network dimension which characterises both the spatial configuration of the Alto Milanese area and the governance arrangement underlying the project. In fact, the form of urbanisation characterising the territory where Legnano is located resembles a network due to the presence of a number of towns and medium-sized centres strongly integrated between themselves by spatial and functional ties. The network concept also characterises the governance form conveyed by the project because the cooperation among three municipalities led to jointly work on strategic objectives and enforce their competitiveness in accessing funding from national and regional institutions.

4.2 The reconciliation of the economic, social and territorial dimensions of cohesion policies

The policy domain where the reconciliation objective is interpreted as most needed by informants is labour market, which is considered to be the main problem in Legnano and in the Alto Milanese area for the effects on the local job market produced by the economic transition started in the 1980s. This issue refers also to the local availability of workforce and human capital because the area is characterised by high levels of commuting directed di Milan and by the tendency to import low-skilled workforce and export high-skilled workers. Hence, as stressed by a number of community and business actors, the labour market problems relate to commuting but also to housing, welfare and other social and economic issues.

Moreover, local actors report the relationship among employment and housing as an important implication of the labour market problems already mentioned. This is due to an increase in recent years of the number of evictions from public housing neighbourhoods, a problem which relates to the increasing economic fragility of local families and to their difficulty to access the housing market. This economic fragility translates to a higher number of requests for support from social services, and requires a transformation of local welfare from the traditional social service provision towards forms of “generative welfare” where third sector organisations increasingly play the role of service providers (PA6).

Possible answers understood and enacted at the local level to tackle the issue of employment are manifold. First of all, the creation of new and the strengthening of existing firms, especially in a cluster mode, are interpreted as two objectives that can effectively mobilise territorial capital and contribute to increase local life chances. No explicit mention of the reconciliation of economic,

³ *Integration_Machine* is an urban regeneration project conceived in 2016 and promoted by the Milan Metropolitan City, in cooperation with three Municipalities of the Alto Milanese area, Legnano, Rescaldina and Castano Primo, that aims at creating a metropolitan cluster of housing and welfare services for the social integration of the most vulnerable sections of the population.

social and territorial dimensions of cohesion is made, though the emphasis is on the opportunity to preserve and further develop the culture of entrepreneurship, interpreted as one of the most distinctive aspects of local identity in Legnano (Tosi & Vitale, 2011). Entrepreneurship is seen as a factor that can significantly impact on the levels of wellbeing in the city and that can be used to strengthen city's social and economic development. A second answer is provided by urban regeneration which is seen as indirectly contributing to solve, or at least reduce, the spatial consequences of the economic crisis. Although one stated that "Legnano is mostly centre, there is no periphery" (PA4), a number of local informants mentioned urban regeneration with reference to two spatial fields: the brownfields and the abandoned industrial areas in the city centre that are the outcome of the prolonged process of economic crisis already mentioned, and a couple of neighborhoods (especially Canazza and Mazzafame) located close to the city centre but characterised by significant levels of social disadvantage, (mostly perceived) insecurity and, to a certain extent, also spatial segregation.

Concerning brownfields, some informants pointed out that these could be strategically used for hosting logistical hubs, economic incubators and social facilities within the city (Cordini, Pacchi, Parma, 2019). A relevant example is the case of Tecnocity Altomilanese in which twenty years ago a public-private partnership has created a high-tech citadel hosting SMEs, incubators and services for local enterprises, public services, training facilities and some offices of local institutions. Concerning the disadvantaged neighbourhoods, the presence of some urban regeneration projects is oriented to overtake critical issues such as housing shortage for low-income people and social exclusion. Some informants mentioned Integration_Machine as a project characterised by a strong place-based dimension (Città di Legnano et al., 2016). Here the reconciliation objective is not explicitly mentioned, though the project tackles it in the attempt to combine social and economic objectives for improving the internal cohesion of Canazza neighbourhood and its integration with the surrounding urban environment (Lazzarini et al., 2020). This idea is explicit in the project presentation, where besides the residential function, a number of "softer" activities and services (e.g., co-working spaces, artistic laboratories, and a shared greenhouse) are developed in the field of vocational training and education and active labour market policies. Furthermore, the project reports that one of its main distinctive features is the integration of social objectives, such as the integration of low-income inhabitants and the housing wellbeing, with economic sustainability objectives, achieved by the provision of different housing typologies.

4.3 The role of governance for promoting territorial cohesion

Among the governance arrangements that proved to be more successful in Legnano, the *Patto dei Sindaci* (Mayors' pact) emerges. This is an intermunicipal governance arrangement created in 2008 for improving the levels of cooperation between the 23 municipalities of the Alto Milanese area in the fields of infrastructure, transport and welfare policies by the means of common guidelines and inter-institutional communication. Informants highlighted it as a good mechanism to coordinate local institutional actors at intermunicipal level, and its effectiveness is interpreted as much higher than the one of the Milan Metropolitan City. Although some stated the need to improve its performance, the Mayors' Pact appears to be the form of governance which makes the more relevant contribution to the territorial cohesion in the Alto Milanese area. One limitation mentioned by informants is the unbalanced relationship between the municipalities joining the Pact. In fact, being the largest municipalities, Legnano plays the role of leader, creating dynamics of dominance in the cooperation. An interesting aspect lies in the relationship established between the Metropolitan City and the Mayors' Pact. On the one hand, the interaction among the two bodies follows a somehow traditional and statutory path because the governance arena of the Pact matches with the one of the so-called Homogeneous Areas (*Aree Omogenee*), the forms of horizontal cooperation foreseen by the Metropolitan City for coordinating policies and projects at

inter-municipal level. On the other hand, the Pact attempts to construct a policy discourse which is somehow autonomous and detached from the one of the Metropolitan City, given its focus on the contextual problems of the Alto Milanese area and the distinctive economic and territorial factors of local identity. Moreover, the relevance of the Pact lies in its capacity to work not just as a horizontal governance arrangement but also as a multi-level governance form, providing an opportunity for municipalities of being heard in metropolitan and regional governance arenas and of negotiating with higher level institutions.

Other successful governance arrangements are the Municipal Steering Committee, a management body internal to the local government in charge of coordinating the different policy sectors and integrating different expertise within a cross sectoral vision – though local informants reports the need to further improve the coordination among Welfare and Urban Planning sectors for solving the housing problems –, and the Unified Welfare Agency for the Alto Milanese area which has the objective of guaranteeing equal access to services for the citizens living in the suburban area and of sharing the resources of single municipalities in the welfare system.

The public-private partnerships are another common governance arrangement in Legnano, especially in the field of welfare provision and active labour market policies, even though the role of business actors in the cooperation is quite differentiated: some businesses are more involved than others due to some obstacles (timing and bureaucracy issues) affecting the overall success of the cooperation.

Governance arenas seem relatively open to new ideas and contributions from civil society, especially in the areas of welfare, labour, elderly and child care, though the organisations involved tend to be often the same, with low levels of engagement of new actors. Levels of participation are perceived as relatively high by local actors. One problem lies in the fact that the real impact of civil society initiatives and, more in general, participatory processes on policies seems to be highly dependent on the local administrators' commitment and orientation. Thus, some informants reported the recurring presence of diverging views among local politicians and civil society representatives. Other issues mentioned are the distance between those who promote innovative actions and those who have the power to implement them, and the often-instrumental nature of participatory processes when these are limited to specific projects and do not extend in the long term. More in general, community actors do not seem to be particularly positive about their ability to have an impact on local decision-making processes and influence future policies.

5 OLTREPO' PAVESE, a lagging rural area in search of new development trajectories

Territorial cohesion policies are implemented at national and regional level and, broadly speaking, they are addressed to contrast trends of economic and demographic decline by investing in cultural and social capital, promoting the empowerment of local communities, and strengthening their capacity to mobilise local territorial assets. Some local actors commented that in the last two decades the regional government has overlooked the territorial disadvantage of Oltrepò Pavese and that, despite the presence of some common problems, has historically oriented its attention to Alpine mountainous areas rather than to Appennines areas. Just recently, this trend has been rebalanced by a new attention of regional officers to the territorial development problems of Oltrepò.

Looking at the policy discourse, an important focus is the attempt to contrast the geographical isolation of the area. The "Inner Areas Strategy" addressed to Oltrepò Pavese explicitly mentions territorial cohesion as an objective of the strategy. It identifies the issue of connectivity, mostly given by the lack of public transport, as a factor affecting mobility and territorial cohesion and, more concretely, impacting negatively on the access to services. Alongside the "Oltrepò

Biodiverso”, a project elaborated within the framework of AttivAree policy programme funded by Cariplo Foundation (Eco&Eco, 2017), biodiversity is stressed as a somehow rhetorical concept for promoting local development. It is declined in different fields, either in education, agricultural production, regeneration and in the preservation of natural resources. Also, the STAR Oltrepò, a development plan elaborated in 2016 by the Foundation for the Development of Oltrepò Pavese (the former Local Action Group), focuses on building “a resilient territory, competitive in its economy, with productive systems able to innovate, cohesive in its social dimension, sustainable, with a high level of cooperation between actors” (Fondazione per lo Sviluppo dell’Oltrepò Pavese, 2016). The plan establishes a link between economic growth and social cohesion, suggesting that investing on new economies can generate positive social impacts. To achieve the objectives, some devices are foreseen in the plan, such as the productive chains which should strengthen the internal cohesion among the actors and facilitate the cooperative dimension, fighting conflicts and fragmentation in governance arenas.

The discourse analysis has shown that the objectives stated by the plans and programmes are the outcome of a rhetorical understanding of the trajectories of territorial development by local actors. Alongside this rhetorical dimension, what all these documents share is the attempt to frame the proposed actions and strategies through a remedial approach on the basis of which actions are merely oriented to compensate the existing territorial problems, rather than tackling them effectively. Problems as the demographic decline, the low collective efficacy and the scarce institutional capacity, are interpreted as structural factors deeply rooted in the local context. Hence, they are seen as territorial conditions, difficult to be counteracted and whose effects can only be reduced and limited.

5.1 The role of spatial configurations in the design and implementation of territorial cohesion policies

The policy documents analysed in the previous WPs point out that the territorial morphology strongly affects territorial cohesion. For instance, the S.T.A.R. Oltrepò Development Plan already mentioned reports among the territorial weaknesses the dispersion of settlements throughout the territory, the growing isolation of the mountainous areas from the plain, and the scarce dotation of physical and digital infrastructures. As concerns the territorial configuration, a relevant aspect is also the lack of public transportation which is perceived as greatly impacting the overall accessibility of the Oltrepò Pavese and its connectivity with the surrounding towns, cities and regions. Also, problems of connectivity strongly compromise the accessibility to public services, especially those related to education, health and active labour market. Accordingly, the general isolation of the area and the scarce accessibility to public services are, together with the lack of job opportunities, relevant factors that significantly impact on the social cohesion and the economic development of the area.

A further interesting aspect to highlight relates to the implications that the relationship among territorial fragmentation and local economy produces on territorial cohesion. In this sense, policy documents report the difficulty of constructing a more integrated economic system able to compete with the other surrounding territorial contexts due to the high fragmentation of the touristic and agricultural operators, the excessive variety of local productions (especially in the wine sector), and the scarce capacity of local enterprises to effectively organise their marketing. Thus, the present economic fragility, which is accentuated by existing territorial fragmentation, raises the need to improve the overall territorial cohesion of Oltrepò Pavese (Fondazione per lo Sviluppo dell’Oltrepò Pavese, 2016).

The interviews show that the role that spatial configurations play in influencing territorial cohesion is subjected to a dichotomic vision. On the one hand, local informants share the view that low-density settlements and the isolation of households across the mountainous areas are

obstacles to achieve a more cohesive territory. On the other, they also state that the proximity to environmental assets and the presence of landscape and natural biodiversity are assets that can be framed as potential economic drivers for Oltrepò Pavese. Some of them also refer to the absence of industrial settlements and the lack of an industrial vocation in local economy as conditions that have hampered the territorial development of Oltrepò Pavese. At the basis of this view there is the awareness that the local development could have been much more successful if based on exogenous conditions, rather than on endogenous resources. Accordingly, while territorial cohesion is strongly affected by the spatial segregation of the region, it can also take advantage of some inherent territorial features for developing local economy.

5.2 The reconciliation of the economic, social and territorial dimensions of cohesion policies

The local development strategy of the Local Action Group (LAG) explicitly highlights the need to build a more resilient territory by fostering economic competitiveness and social cohesion. The economic and social reconciliation objective is mentioned in relation to the capacity of the so-called integrated projects to generate new employment opportunities that should also generate high social impact activities (Fondazione per lo Sviluppo dell'Oltrepò Pavese, 2016). Among these projects, the action n. 4 "Social agriculture: a pact for the life quality in Oltrepò Pavese between environment, ethics and sustainable" clearly interprets the welfare generated by agricultural enterprises as a catalyst for the social, environmental and economic cohesion of the area. At the basis of this interpretation, there is an idea of multifunctional agriculture that can combine together social agriculture, environmental and food education, green economy, social and cultural services for the local community, with the aim of tackling the demographic decline of rural areas. A concept already mentioned that is mobilised by policy documents and highlighted by a number of key-informants to convey the reconciliation objective is biodiversity. This is a transversal notion which is interpreted as a rhetoric for delivering a vision of local development. The vision, according to one informant, serves to coordinate and create a connection among all the projects but also to highlight the multiple features (historical, cultural, geographical) of the area. In particular, this concept is used by the "Oltrepò Bio(diverso) Strategy" for realising new systems of internal and external relations and for bringing new resources to the territory, sustaining the local society and the productive systems. Innovation is here framed in a multidimensional way, from the balanced management of environmental and agricultural biodiversity to the improvement of educational and social services.

According to a number of informants, the SNAI project and the place-based approach upon which it is based (Barca, 2009), have allowed a shift from the current mode of expenditure, based on sectoral and short-term interventions, to a capital expenditure where social, economic and environmental dimensions are integrated. Nevertheless, public officials are not often ready to fully take advantage of the new strategy and of the sources of funding to achieve the reconciliation objectives. Some interviewees report that among the obstacles hindering the possibilities of territorial development, the low institutional capacity of the local context given by the local administrators' scarce expertise and competence, the high levels of nanny state (*assistenzialismo*) and the poor attitude towards local cooperation of both civil society and local institutions emerge. The latter aspect refers to the phenomenon generally recognised as *parochialism* which refers to the attitude of local institutional actors to focus on small sections of an issue rather than consider its wider context.

Another obstacle emerging from the analysis refers to the so-called "parasitic attitude" through which public officers have often managed the funding deriving from local development policies through patronage and opportunistic behaviours and distributing resources to the "known ones", without being able to establish any innovative processes and projects.

The identifiable policy domains where the reconciliation objective is considered more necessary by local actors are mainly two. The first one is tourism which is interpreted by many as an activity that can be able to reconcile different social, economic and territorial dimensions of local development, producing new employment opportunities for locals, improving the quality of life and decreasing the out-migration flows. Investing on an integrated vision of tourism (from accommodations to restaurants, food production and culture) may overcome the vision of the so-called “economy of local varieties” which is hardly able to coagulate individual operators, their resources and projects. The second policy domain is welfare and this has emerged more frequently in the policy documents than in the interviews with local actors. The concept of welfare is interpreted in a somehow wide sense, from economic to social aspects. The factors taken into consideration range from the capacity of local production systems to generate positive social impacts, and the development of social entrepreneurship, to the activation of complementary forms of welfare by companies and the support of agricultural activity through the community mobilization.

Concerning the examples of social innovation identified by local actors and local development strategies, the so-called *Maggiordomo Rurale* (door-to-door service) is quite known and developed, though the effectiveness is still under discussion. This is a domestic assistance service implemented within the “Oltrepò (bio)diverso project” by Cariplo Foundation alongside the AttivAree program (Eco&Eco, 2017). The rural butler provides different typologies of assistance (after-school, home assistance, babysitting) to families and elderly in Oltrepò Pavese. While some people recognised it as a good way to coordinate socio-assistance in a territory characterised by a high percentage of elderly population and low-density settlements, other pointed out that one of the problems relates to the difficulty to fully engage local inhabitants in the project. For instance, in some municipalities like Romagnese, local administrators presented the initiatives to locals but, in the end, they preferred to employ people from their networks to carry out the service because the cost of the program was higher than the one provided by usual housekeepers. Another example mentioned by policy documents is the Community Hub of Golferenzo, a project promoted by the municipality of Golferenzo, a couple of local cultural associations and funded by Cariplo Foundation alongside the AttivAree program. Though not considered strictly a social innovation initiative, the project embraces various social and economic dimensions such as promoting and selling local food products, providing training and professional courses, and organising cultural and laboratory activities.

5.3 The role of governance for promoting territorial cohesion

Cooperation between business actors, community organisations and institutions in Oltrepò Pavese often appears to follow selective paths. As seen in previous sections, a range of different local development programmes have been implemented and they generally work across multiple dimensions and with different coalitions, though not always being integrated between themselves and unable to build effective relationships because of the conditions of division, conflict and isolation that characterise the area.

“There are two political, institutional and economic coalitions. One that refers to the Mountain Community and the other that belongs to the Foundation for the Development of Oltrepò Pavese. Due to historical political conflicts, these two coalitions have always fought against each other. We have tried through formal and informal mediation to build some synergies; it was almost impractical because there is reluctance from both sides” (NAB member GC).

Another important aspect is the absence of a clear local leadership and of a shared strategic vision for the future. The emergence of collective endeavour seems difficult and meets many obstacles.

For all these reasons, the governance arrangements considered more innovative are mainly designed and proposed by external actors with the contribution of local actors, rather than emerging themselves from the locality. Nevertheless, external programmes often run the risk of triggering opportunistic behaviour, strengthening existing coalitions and reinforcing conflictual attitudes: the presence of power games among local actors and opportunistic coalitions based on personal connections and interests rather than on expertise and knowledge negatively affects the openness of governance arenas and the access of newcomers.

Thematic groups meetings, focus groups and workshops with local stakeholders are the forms through which the involvement of local actors in policy making processes more frequently happens in Oltrepò Pavese. Not much to design policies, their purpose is more to gather knowledge on the area, to facilitate the investigation of local assets by the project promoters. As the analysis has underlined (Aa.Vv., 2018), local actors stated that the public roundtables and meetings, particularly those organised alongside the SNAI program, have been successful, sometimes ground breaking, being also able to infuse a sense of cohesion into the local community.

An interesting aspect is that the existing development programs (SNAI and AttivAree) both rely on existing local governance systems, despite involving different set of actors and referring to different scales. The SNAI program, which is part of the national cohesion policy mentioned in section 2, relies on the local Mountain Community, which is an existing local inter-institutional form gathering 19 municipalities of Oltrepò Pavese and chaired by local mayors and administrators. The Mountain Community acts as a consortium for public service delivery in the territory. In this case, the SNAI programme reinforces the ordinary activities of the Mountain Community. In terms of governance, the main difference with the Mountain Community lies in the fact that the governance arena implementing the SNAI can be considered a multilevel platform as it involves not just local administrators or local businesses but also representatives and officers from the Regional Government.

The AttivAree project overlaps with the territorial scale and boundaries of the Sviluppo Oltrepò Foundation (the former Local Action Group LAG), a public-private foundation recognised by the Region since 2011 that employs regional and EU funds for the local development of the area through a place-based approach. The foundation is the coordinator and key-actor of the project, which is promoted and co-funded by Cariplo Foundation, and involves a number of local businesses, third sector and business associations (including also the Chamber of Commerce at provincial level), and local administrators, in the field of social assistance and welfare services, mainly addressed to elderly. This project has employed also European funds and some of the actions had been already experimented in previous Leader programmers. From the governance point of view, the project relies on a formalised partnership, in which the coordination with operators is direct and happens on specific themes.

Broadly speaking, the capacity of the governance arrangements to promote territorial cohesion is quite uncertain. The reason lies in the low levels of collective efficacy, lack of trust in local institutions and isolation characterising local communities. The two local development programs mentioned are surely encouraging and supporting processes of knowledge sharing and networking in the local context, but they are subjected to the risks of division and conflict present in the area. What the analysis has highlighted is that effective and fruitful cooperation seems to happen currently just within coalitions of interests gathered around a project able to produce short-term financial benefits, and the objective to gather different interest groups around a long-term vision and a strategic objective seems still difficult to achieve.

6 Conclusion

The analysis on the local configurations of territorial cohesion policies in the three case-study areas has highlighted a range of relevant issues.

The first issue concerns the role that spatial configurations have in the design and implementation of territorial cohesion policies. Just in Oltrepò Pavese the relationship between spatial configurations and territorial cohesion policies is explicitly mentioned. Here some policy documents state that territorial morphology strongly effects territorial cohesion. On a more general view, policy documents from the three cases highlight the assumption that enhancing some spatial configurations can positively contribute to construct a more cohesive urban community. In Milan this aspect is framed within the objective of promoting a process of concentration of population, activities and technologies in strategic locations across the metropolitan area for enhancing innovation and building new urban economies. While polycentrism is mentioned in relation to the opportunity to re-organise the system of public services in a spatially balanced arrangement across the city contributing to equalise the relationships among Milan and its territory, this objective is pivotal in the Legnano and Oltrepò Pavese cases where problems of connectivity (to SGIs and workplaces) are evident.

The analysis about the reconciliation of the economic, social and territorial dimensions of cohesion policies has shown that when the place-based dimension of policies is employed this has allowed to shift from a mode of expenditure based on sectoral and short-term interventions, to a capital expenditure where social, economic and environmental dimensions are integrated (Oltrepò Pavese). Moreover, the place-based dimension has been used with reference to the objective of improving the internal cohesion of particularly distressed urban neighbourhoods and strengthening the integration between peripheral and suburban areas and the wider metropolitan context. In the cases of Milan and Legnano this has also served to combine different policy tools and funding sources and create policy bundles.

With reference to territorial governance, in the three study areas the effectiveness of governance arrangements depends on the levels of collective efficacy (Sampson, 2011). In the metropolitan and suburban localities, the positive impact of multi-level governance arrangements in conducting territorial cohesion emerges. The main problems relate to the low levels of vertical and horizontal coordination, the risk of fragmentation generated by the high diversity of actors engaged in governance arenas (Milan) and the instrumental nature of participatory processes (Legnano). In Oltrepò Pavese, the low levels of collective efficacy and the related conditions of division, conflict and isolation characterising the area undermine the capacity of governance arrangements to promote territorial cohesion.

As far as the relationship between the objectives of economic development and social cohesion is considered, the analysis has shown not only that in policy documents the first objective generally prevails over the second, but also that a significant gap between the two emerges. More than a conflict, this is rather a mismatch since the two objectives are not in opposition between themselves but they rather coexist, albeit in a condition of *disconnection* in the ways in which policies and actors deal with them (Marsden and Franklin, 2015; see also: Boczy et al., 2020). In other words, it is evident the inability of policies to develop an integrated, reciprocal and complementary dimension between the social and economic objectives of cohesion. Moreover, the relationship between the two objectives is often framed according to the rhetoric that investing in new economies and innovation is sufficient to ensure greater social cohesion. In policy documents, these assumptions are not critically examined with indicators or data and they seem to be based on a univocal and narrowly-defined interpretation of the relationship between economic development and social inclusion, according to the common mantra that greater economic development necessarily corresponds to a more equitable and just society. As also Barca (2009) pointed out, despite the existence of some synergies between the two objectives, an increase in economic efficiency does not necessarily result in a reduction of social inequalities.

A final aspect concerns the strategic response implemented by institutional actors and policies to promote greater territorial cohesion. This differs substantially in the three cases. In the case of Milan and Legnano, the strategy conveys processes of concentration of territorial capital by working on the construction of hubs, poles and citadels where companies, technologies and services are clustered and integrated to generate knowledge and innovation and to strengthen competitiveness. A significant example of this process is the case of Tecnocity in Legnano, a high-tech citadel created with the aim of boosting the competitiveness of SMEs but also improving the services and facilities for businesses and the local community, and stimulating the cooperation between businesses, local institutions and research and training organisations. Other examples come from the three policy documents analyzed in the Milan case where the reference to concentration (of activities, technologies, innovation) as a process capable of catalyzing economic growth and social inclusion in the city is explicit. The case of Oltrepò Pavese is different due to the lack of a solid economic base and the scarce ability to mobilize territorial capital by the local community which question the role of innovation in generating economic growth. In this case, policy documents and local informants emphasize the need to promote more effectively the policy integration (“In low density territories, I see more need for integration between mobility, welfare and health-care services than in the high-density areas”, NAB member GC) and to create greater proximity between existing services and local settlements, also through the crucial contribution of the social actors in reducing the physical distance between existing services and local inhabitants.

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