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Metropolisation, Regionalisation
and Rural Intermunicipal Cooperation.
What impact on Local, Regional
and National Governments in Europe?

Métropolisation, régionalisation
et intercommunalité rurale.
Quel impact sur les autorités locales,
régionales et centrales en Europe ?



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Municipalities Co-Operating to Face Metropolitan Challenges: A Proposal for the *Area Vasta Veronese* (Italy)

Mario PARIS, Arnaldo VECCHIETTI and Antonio CASELLA

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Abstract – This paper is aimed at discussing the result of a change of attitude of municipalities belonging to the metropolitan area of Verona (Italy), which, in a spirit of voluntariness and grasping opportunities, set up a body focused on the governance of the “*Area Vasta*”. Following this process as consultants, we had the opportunity to appreciate the potential of this territorial arrangement, in which the variable geometry of actions and projects takes place according to contingent objectives and long-term strategies.

Keywords – Metropolitan areas; Governance; Intermunicipal cooperation.

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Over the last years and even more between 2010-2016, several attempts to reform the institutional architecture of Italy required a reflection on the dimension of the “*Area Vasta*” and, especially, on its future after the downsizing of the role of *Province*. At the same time, European and national examples encouraged of a re-consideration for the

role of spatial planning and its approaches, that should become closer to local conditions. Those forces all underlined the relevance of intermunicipal scale in the current debate. Furthermore, it is of even more interest for those areas affected by mature processes of metropolisation, in which the scale and the effects of urban transformations over the last three decades exceed consolidated administrative boundaries.

The aim of this paper is to reflect on the lack of effective tools for the governance of several fields (mobility, logistics, settlement of strategic functions, recovering of brownfields, etc.) at consolidated institutional levels and the need for alternative figures to produce new opportunities for these spaces, based on local demands and potentials.

We support the analysis with the case of the *Intesa Programmatica d'Area Veronese*. We use this example to show the value of voluntary co-operation between municipalities and the potential role of the intermunicipal level as space for the confrontation of strategic planning and directed actions, especially if also implemented in heterogeneous areas. Therefore, in the first part of the paper we present an overview of intermunicipal co-operation, focusing on current trends, needs and opportunities related to this issue. In the second part, we discuss the specific Italian situation, underlining the relevance of bottom-up approaches to this topic. The third part shows our approach and how we apply it in the case of the central portion of Verona province, in Italy.

I. INTERMUNICIPAL CO-OPERATION: TRENDS, NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The intermunicipal level is one of the dimensions useful and effective for an understanding of contemporary urban and metropolitan dynamics and, for this reason, it could also be applied to set up new forms of governance for the territories. The urgency of this is a need pointed out both from academia and by public entities themselves; especially when they seek to update consolidated tools and practices to support proposals for planning metropolitan territories.

A. Towards an Alternative Dimension for Spatial Planning

During the 1970s, H. Lefebvre emphasized the need of a different reciprocity between urban phenomena and words, between conceptual tools

and things, in order to fill the vacuum within planning as a discipline.¹ Recent changes in the way that we live and move in spaces, we produce goods, services and knowledge and that we consume made it harder to recognize the city as a self-evident phenomenon and to understand its territorial pattern. The operation of the city was quite easy up to the industrial revolution, when *polis* and *urbs* were located in the same place, and in an environment profoundly different from the surrounding rural land. This conventional view, based on the critical antithesis between the ‘figure’ (the city) and the ‘background’ (rural territory) and the pre-eminence of the built realm, involves the idea that the city is a finite object, clearly differentiated from its context. This is not only a morphological vision; scholars identify this difference by specific forms of economy, production, capital accumulation, interactions, sense of freedom, etc. Moreover, this view has been transferred – essentially unchanged – to the administrative model, shaping policies and actions adapted to administrative subdivisions (European Union, Nation, Region, County and Municipality). This rigid scheme is the basis for the consolidated interpretation of territory and, especially, for the territorial role of cities. At the same time, those subdivisions underpin the traditional statistical analysis of space.

Despite this consistent and consolidated paradigm, contemporary urban dynamics have changed the existing settlement principles and created a new environment, the so-called post-metropolitan territory.² The contemporary city exceeds administrative boundaries and its complex configuration depends on logics adapted to local constraints and to other geographical, social and economic conditions.³ The result is a territory where fragments, materials, figures and dynamics of the consolidated city are sprawled across a larger space. This situation, in addition to the traditionally high diversification of the European territory forced to move towards new dimensions in which to read and design this space. And, among them, the sub-regional or

1 Henri LEFEBVRE, *La révolution urbaine*, Gallimard, 1970, 248 p.

2 Edward W. SOJA, “Regional urbanization and the end of the metropolis era”, in Gary BRIDGE and Sophie WATSON (eds.), *The new Blackwell companion to the city*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, p. 679-689.

3 For a specific focus on the debate about this topic, see: Nuno PORTAS, Alvaro DOMINGUES and Joao CABRAL, *Políticas Urbanas 2. Transformações, regulação e projectos*, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2011, 335 p.; Antonio FONT (ed.), *La explosión de la ciudad: transformaciones territoriales en las regiones urbanas de la Europa Meridional*, Ministerio de Vivienda, 2007, 408 p.; Arnaldo BAGNASCO, *Società fuori squadra. Come cambia l'organizzazione sociale*, Il Mulino, 2003, 246 p.; Oriol NEL-LO, *Cataluña, ciudad de ciudades*, Milenio, 2002, 159 p.; Ash AMIN and Nigel THRIFT, *Cities: Reimagining the urban*, Polity Press, 2002, 184 p.; Shane GRAHAM and Simon MARVIN, *Splintering urbanism: Networked infrastructures, technological mobilities and the urban condition*, Routledge, 2001, 512 p.; Francisco J. MONCLÚS, *La ciudad dispersa: suburbanización y nuevas periferias*, CCCB, 1998, 223 p.; François ASCHER, *Métapolis: Ou l'avenir des villes*, Éditions Odile Jacob, 1995, 345 p.

intermunicipal scale is a reference useful and effective to local development. It represents an alternative dimension, closer to current socio-economic and spatial dynamics than the traditional administrative boundaries, and it involves an inclusive/collaborative approach between local authorities and public actors, which overlaps the previous competitive ones.⁴

B. The Intermunicipal Level as a Field for EU Policies

During the last 12-15 years, according to C. Panara and M. Varney,⁵ one of the most important issues in the field of EU policies is the increase of interest in multilevel governance, and the manifestations are: (i) the multiplication of academic studies, conference and publications on this topic, (ii) the appearance of several official EU documents about this issue and (iii) the increasing number of experiences and pilot schemes around Europe.

Amongst different documents, starting with the Commission White Paper on European Governance⁶ and the Committee of the Regions' White Paper on Multilevel Governance,⁷ the EU has urged the establishment of a more inclusive dialogue between different levels of governments because this is a way to take account of regional and local conditions (EU Commission, 2001; p. 4). At the same time, it has introduced a strong interest in finding the "right scale" to improve policies, programmes and actions in the EU, and in the issue of co-operation between institutions, both vertical (belonging to different levels) and horizontal (same level). This topic is important especially from an urban and regional planning point of view, because recent transformations in Europe have influenced spatial behaviours and settlement strategies of EU citizens and, nowadays, planners and local authorities need new tools to govern this reality, which confirms and underlines the heterogeneous and complex nature of the EU territory.

At the trans-national and macro-regional level, the role of intermunicipal co-operation became central and the debate about this level is, nowadays, one of the richest and most active between scholars, policy-makers and institutional actors. Several studies and publications have underlined the existing research about this topic in the EU, and the recent introduction of new laws about "*città metropolitane*" in Italy

⁴ Claudia TUBERTINI, "Area vasta e non solo: il sistema locale alla prova delle riforme", *Istituzioni del federalismo*, No. 2, 2014, p. 215-249.

⁵ Carlo PANARA and Michael R. VARNEY (eds.), *Local government in Europe: the "fourth level" in the EU multi-layered system of governance*, Routledge, 2013, 448 p.

⁶ Eu Commission, *European Governance – A White Paper*, EU Commission, 2001.

⁷ Committee of the Regions, *White paper on Multilevel Governance*, Committee of the Regions, 2009.

(L. 56/2014, also called “*Riforma Delrio*”), or “*métropoles*” in France (*loi du 27 janvier 2014 de modernisation de l'action publique territoriale et d'affirmation des métropoles*) marks the urgency of this new task for planners and public authorities. At the same time, the experiences developed as voluntary experiments/informal practices in several different countries, for instance, the *mancomunidades* in Spain, have shown that the creation of partnerships could be a key factor in a series of sectors. A report of the European Committee on Local and Regional Democracy,⁸ entitled “Good practices in intermunicipal co-operation in Europe” underlines trends, needs and opportunities for this field of work, through a powerful comparison between different experiences in Europe, and we present some outputs of this publication in the following paragraphs.

C. Trends, Needs and Opportunities

According to the CDLR (2007; p. 9), in order to describe the complexity of intermunicipal co-operation, we should fix on two different aspects: the institutional and the functional. It is a comparison about existing bodies and experiences and can represent a basis on which to insert innovations and alternative experiences developed in the last years (2007-2016). Studying the institutional aspects of intermunicipal co-operation, contributors focused on the reasons to create intermunicipal bodies, their structures, their nature (public, private, hybrid), their competences, their internal organization and autonomy and processes of internal democracy. Focusing on the functional aspects of intermunicipal co-operation, authors reflected on the role played by intermunicipal bodies, their competences, their fields of work, their economic sustainability and some attempts at evaluation of their results and performance.

In general, the comparison between European countries showed a heterogeneous system of experiences and varying degrees of complexity, but, among them, we can underline some trends. Among others, the report focused on the reason for the growth of intermunicipal bodies and it underlined two principal points: on the one hand, the need to enlarge the means of action of local authorities and their democratic legitimacy – needed more from the public point of view – and on the other hand, to re-set several different policies and actions, currently developed at country or regional level, which are far from – or indifferent – to the real vocations and the socio-economic realities of specific territory (CDLR, 2007; p. 9).

⁸ CDLR, *Good practices in intermunicipal co-operation in Europe*, EU Council Press, 2007.

The result is a set of situations, marked by the different nature and numbers of actors involved and by different levels of solidarity: from informal agreement – created for specific functions, in which the competences exercised are limited, and so also are the means of exercising them (CDLR, 2007; p. 10) – to real institutional bodies. In the latter case, intermunicipal cooperation is performed by a specific entity, formed by public and – sometimes – private actors, which centralize a large number of key competences and enjoy significant resources and wide decision-making powers (CDLR, 2007; p. 9). Perhaps, the key factor in this case, is the integration of these bodies in the institutional and functional pattern of each country. Sometimes, as in France and Portugal, the stimuli for the development of these bodies is driven by the central government, which set up rules and the forms of co-operation.

The aim of the report was not the comparison of the different approaches used in the European countries, but, from the institutional point of view, was an important reminder that the issues related to intermunicipal cooperation involve debates about the degree of freedom of those entities to set up strategies and plans (autonomy) and the definition of the areas of influence (spatial selection). This is something that can adversely affect the result and the effectiveness of the policies and the actions implemented by those bodies. At the same time, other needs of intermunicipal co-operation rely on pointing out a specific competence – or competences – in order to avoid overlap with other existing institutions (as the provinces, or counties). This aim is something that identifies the role and the relevance of the intermunicipal scale: only through this dimension can public entities comprehend -in the double meaning of “understand” and “take together” of this word – the contemporary dynamics that mark the European territories. In this case, the comparison between different countries often showed that intermunicipal bodies act only in specific sectors (like water management, transportation and infrastructures, services, tourism, etc.) which solved compelling urgencies or fulfilled legal obligations, without any attempt at innovating processes and methodologies in spatial governance. In this case, the role of Council of Europe or EU could be a dual one: as drivers, to enrich agendas of the intermunicipal bodies and with several different sectors in which to experiment with the role of cooperation and, as engine, to push bodies to integrate their efforts and work together.

To summarize, European local authorities have been pushed by the EU Commission and several EU states themselves to set up alternative forms of local cooperation, based on the intermunicipal scale. At the same time, several local authorities have experimented with associations which involve public and private actors to solve sectoral problems or share human or material resources. Often, the result is a useful and effective way to reach

shared goals and to foreshadow scenarios but nowadays we should rethink the role of those bodies, and consider them as an opportunity for larger and more complex challenges, such as the implementation of strategies and visions for specific territories, the proper field for the production and the provision of services. According to several studies, this could be one of the ways to give new impetus to economic development and to address the challenges of sustainable and inclusive growth.⁹ Especially because, in our opinion, the dimension of the intermunicipal scale allows planners and local authorities to have: (i) the critical mass and the means to implement policies and actions and (ii) a strong knowledge on the needs and the opportunities related to the places and a strict control of the resources.

II. INTERMUNICIPALITY VS METROPOLITAN LEVEL: A RIGID ITALIAN TOP-DOWN APPROACH

In 2014, the Italian government, implemented a general reform of the Italian constitution (*titolo V*, art. 114-133). This new act¹⁰ included several innovations in institutional architecture, in which the abolition of *Province* (NUTS 3 level, in EU statistical classification) permitted the introduction of new bodies, aimed at governing the '*area vasta*'. They should work with – and have the same competences and political weight of – the *città metropolitana*, already recognized by the government¹¹ (through a controversial top-down approach). The setting up of this original institutional pattern is still ongoing but, in parallel, several recent laws and acts inserted a gradual – and transitional – institutional re-organization and their effects have influenced current policies and actions in several Italian territories. This unusual situation represents the changeable framework in which institutional bodies, local administrators, public servants and citizens live and work.

⁹ OECD, *France. Structural reforms: impact on growth and options for the future*, OCDE France, 2010, p. 12.

¹⁰ LEGGE n. 56, "*Disposizioni sulle città metropolitane, sulle province, sulle unioni e fusioni di comuni*" approved by the Italian Parliament on 7 April 2014, published on Gazzetta Ufficiale Serie Generale n.81 on 7-4-2014.

¹¹ The Law No. 56, approved by Italian Parliament in April 3rd, 2014 indicated the cities of Turin, Milan, Venice, Genoa, Bologna, Florence, Bari, Naples and Reggio Calabria as recognized *città metropolitane* and it invited the Autonomic Regions (Sicily, Sardinia and Friuli-Venezia Giulia) to do the same in their own territories. The city of Rome was recognized as città metropolitana through a different process (D.Lgs. Sept. 17th 2010, n. 156; D.Lgs. April 18th 2012, n. 61; and D.Lgs. April, 26th 2013, n. 51) and it was equated to the new ones.

A. The Governance of the Area Vasta in the Recent Institutional Reforms

Despite the law 56 was adopted more than two years ago, the debate about the results of the Italian institutional reform, as well about the timetable for the process of transposition into regional and local statutes is still going on. M. Pompilio, in his comment about the bill for the *Soppressione degli enti intermedi* (Abolition of intermediate bodies)¹² the first draft of this institutional reorganization, underlined the need for deep reflection on the territorial costs – not only the economic costs – of the reform. According to him, the new institutional pattern involved several risks for the governance of intermediate level between municipalities and region, especially for specific sectors, such as infrastructure, networks, landscape management, etc. and other matters (strategic visions, territorial marketing, socio-economic development). These key elements of spatial planning exceeded the scale of individual municipalities and had a scale too distant from the regional one. For this reason, the author argued that the reform, over and above introducing an uncertain transitional phase in between two different institutional architectures, sidestepped the role of territorial coordinator played by the provincial level and did not mention any reference for the inter-municipal level, except for a few established metropolitan areas. M. Pompilio asserted instead a focus, within the law, on governance forms and processes for the *area vasta*. This has become even more important today, because (i) the complexity of socio-economic issues imposes on local government the need to adapt to an innovative approach that includes the spatial dimensions and (ii) the double pressure to which they are subject: the increasing needs of subsidiarity for obtaining resources and of autonomy in decision-making processes.¹³

However, the law 56/2014 did not solve this transitional phase, and it directly transformed provinces into “*enti di area vasta*”, without a strong decision-making power or operational autonomy. Actually, the attention from the lawgiver, as claimed by the EU documents,¹⁴ underlines the need for governance based on a scale that is larger than the municipal one and smaller than the regional one. The aim of the law is to transform the existing Provinces into this kind of body, as well as taking advantage from the linkages between these new institutions and the existing municipalities and implementing a close relation of interdependence among these two

¹² Marco POMPILIO, “Area vasta, ente intermedio ed adeguatezza nel governo del territorio”, *EyesReg*, No. 4, 2011, p. 92-95.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

¹⁴ i.e. EU, *Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities*, 2007.

entities.¹⁵ Within this process of institutional transformation, national and regional governments should provide, in parallel, a number of opportunities for developing innovative forms of governance. According to Cittalia,¹⁶ it could be a way to improve the cooperation between different kind of bodies and institutions, to involve other actors and stakeholders in decision-making processes and, in our opinion, to stimulate the process of policy learning and adaptation.¹⁷ There emerged a double need, aimed at reviving the intermunicipal dimension, both for the governance and the management of the territory. This push, mainly bottom-up, concerns not only the municipalities, but also the third sector, and other institutional actors that nowadays, play a relevant role in the everyday life of Italian territories. In this case, the approach of the law, in which the intermunicipal scale overlaps with the territory of provinces, is too rigid and it shows a strong insensitivity. Ignoring the opportunity of re-thinking this dimension and selecting new points of reference according to the specificities of local situations, the law disregards those sub-regional territorial systems, that coexist with, overlap with – and often exceed – consolidated institutional borders. In this regard, a recent study from Censis¹⁸ underlines the rich heterogeneity of the current Italian reality, which do not fit with a simple division between *Province* (Provinces) -or in EU lexicon, Inner peripheries - and *Città Metropolitane* (Urban areas), especially in those cases, as in Brescia, Bergamo, and other medium cities, in which the settlement relies on a multipolar pattern, avoiding the modern – and outdated – centre-periphery relationship.¹⁹ During the last three decades, the spread of urban ingredients (population, companies, infrastructures, services, etc.) across larger and larger spaces has contributed to the diversification of the territories and to the need for innovative tools and models of spatial

15 Provincia Di Torino, *Le funzioni della Provincia di Torino nella transizione verso la Città Metropolitana*, Consiglio Provinciale di Torino, 2014.

16 CITTALIA (ed.), *Guida per gli amministratori locali*, Fondazione ANCI ricerche, 2014, 376 p.

17 Among the intense debate about this point, please see Ron BOSCHMA, “Towards an Evolutionary Perspective on Regional Resilience”, *Regional Studies*, No. 49, 2015, p. 733-751; Rachel M. KRAUSE, “Policy Innovation, Intergovernmental Relations, and the Adoption of Climate Protection Initiatives by U.S. Cities”, *Journal of Urban Affairs*, No. 33, 2010, p. 45-60; Eneko GARMENDIA, Sigrid STAGL, “Public participation for sustainability and social learning: Concepts and lessons from three case studies in Europe”, *Ecological Economics*, No. 69, 2010, p. 1712-1722; Derek ARMITAGE, “Governance and the Commons in a Multi-Level World”, *Journal of the Commons*, No. 2, 2007, p. 7-32.

18 CENSIS (ed.), *Rileggere i territori per dare identità e governo all'area vasta*. Report di ricerca, Censis, 2013, 74 p.

19 Several authors described this processes in Italy and, among other, three of them are references on this topic: Bernardo SECCHI, “Città moderna, città contemporanea e loro futuri”, in AA.VV., *I futuri della città. Tesi a confronto*, Franco Angeli, 1999, p. 41-70; Giuseppe DEMATTEIS, “Suburbanización y periurbanización. Ciudades anglosajonas y ciudades latinas”, in Francisco J. MONCLÚS, *La ciudad dispersa: suburbanización y nuevas periferias*, CCCB, 1998, p. 17-32; Francesco INDOVINA (ed.), *La città diffusa*, DAEST, 1990, p. 19-43.

planning. According to C. Tubertini,²⁰ the Italian situation can be a testing ground for the implementation of a sub-regional level of governance as a key factor to support local development. The use of an intermediate level, as an alternative to the consolidated institutions should provide a territorial vision more coherent with the reality, and should introduce a vision – not competitive, but inclusive, or, in terms of EU policies, cohesive – of the relationship between local authorities and between them and supra-local bodies. When the *Città Metropolitane* have been recognized, it is clear that they have led planning processes and the law has entrusted those institutions with competences in urban and local planning, in social and economic issues, covering several different sectoral fields and including the role of suggesting scenarios and sharing strategies for the future. At the same time, the law 56/2014 cancelled all the other infra-regional bodies which carry out some of these functions, so as to give an even more central role to the new entities. For medium cities or those territories marked by a variable density and mature processes of metropolisation,²¹ the obvious question is how to organize those functions in a flexible and differentiated way, open to the interaction and the composition of the different territorial interests?

In our opinion, the intermunicipal scale can be a privileged space of action and innovation: a sort of living laboratory in which actors – institutional and non-institutional – interact and create new opportunities of social and economic growth for citizens. For this reason, it is important that the law allows municipalities to build up associations with each other. This is an opportunity to give more value to the role of local autonomies, implementing the different demands from the EU, from national government, from the Association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI), etc. and exceeding some phenomena of regional neo-centralism²² which have emerged in several areas of Italy. Moreover, these volunteer aggregations represent a potential driver of innovation in the Italian institutional pattern, because they involve an original approach to the issues of territorial planning and management, and they push municipalities to shape systems²³ aimed at forming synergies, sharing visions, human and material resources, increasing their territorial values and, finally, pursuing common targets.

For this reason, we emphasise that intermunicipal co-operation is something different from the promotion of the union of small municipalities

20 Claudia TUBERTINI, art. cit. (n. 4), p. 202.

21 Francesco INDOVINA, “The metropolisation of the territory: New territorial Hierarchies”, in Antonio FONT (ed.), *La explosión de la ciudad: transformaciones territoriales en las regiones urbanas de la Europa Meridional*, Ministerio de Vivienda, 2007, p. 20-47.

22 Stelio MANGIAMELLI, *Le Regioni italiane tra crisi globale e neocentralismo*, Giuffrè Editore, 2013, 210 p.

23 Marco POMPILIO, art. cit. (n. 12), p. 94.

– also, included in the same law – or the shared management of services and functions introduced due to the recent spending review. In this paper, we are working with those municipalities which have decided to create voluntary associations as a support for local government, deeply related to their needs. At the same time, these institutions offer a common vision, far from the municipal perspective, which remains too subject to contingent transformations and to local pressures.²⁴

B. A Voluntary, Flexible and Oriented Process of Recognition

Borrowing the words of F. Merloni, working on the *area vasta* means combining in a dynamic way local values, competences and skills of bodies and actors, because they provide the strategic reference points and answers closer to the origin of the problems.²⁵ This operation needs, both for innovation and implementation, consolidated planning tools, that should be adapted and sensitive to the opportunities related to the future institutional arrangements of Italy. At the same time, the new institutional architecture needs a reflection on which kinds of interaction should develop between different actors (public entities, private companies and third sector) and bodies at this level. We propose an approach based on a self-recognition in which different actors work with a maximum degree of flexibility, defined at three different levels: that related to the number in the partnership, that related to their targets and competences and, finally, that related to the role of the actors within the association.

1. Dimension of the associations

The *area vasta* is a flexible concept, and its physical dimension – and therefore, the number of municipalities involved – for each association depend on the precise territorial dynamics and specific sectoral aspects. Furthermore, both of them rely on the aims and the targets shared by the members of the partnership that follow particular wishes and interests. When the establishment of these new bodies is a voluntary bottom-up process, in our opinion, different actors (public and private) should create a forum in which they can (i) recognize themselves as an entity and (ii) build up a system for structuring strategies, policies and actions. This forum should

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

²⁵ Francesco MERLONI, “Sul destino delle funzioni di area vasta nella prospettiva di una riforma costituzionale del Titolo V”, *Istituzioni del federalismo*, No. 2, 2014, p. 215-249.

involve a wider set of actors based on a complex – so, non-heterogeneous – territory, in which there exist several different environments and patterns of potentials and constraints. According to the political and strategic agenda, if necessary, this open field of work will allow the building up of specific sub-areas, according to the features of each part of the system.

2. *Targets And Aims of the Associations*

During the self-recognition process, and through confrontations and debates, members of the partnerships define the aims of the association, but also the strategies to achieve them. For this reason, it is important to work in two directions: one, related to the perspective, in which members take account of emergent demands of the area, as well as its contingent needs, often related to a framework based on increasing requirements but cuts in resources. In this case, the work draws on the existing character of the territory, but also its aims and its potentials in a dimension in which management and design come together. The second direction relies on the harmonization of the needs and strengths of each territorial unit and is oriented towards anticipated targets. For this reason, the level of the decisions that affects the goals of the associations is the intermunicipal one, but it is something more than a simple coordination of interests and positions of the members. Decisions and strategies rely on a shared vision for the territory, based on common needs.²⁶ Furthermore, the goals of the partnership should be the key driver in implementing regional strategies – often detached from the everyday reality of local dimension – and to exceeding the myopic solipsism of single municipalities.

3. *Set of Involved Actors*

Nowadays, there are two principal debates about the intermunicipal dimension: on one hand, politicians adopt unrehearsed associations, often following electoral opportunisms and contingencies. On the other hand, public servants (the technical component) pursue the problems and issues related to the management of services. These dimensions, necessary but incomplete when taken individually, leave in the background the issues of the social, economic and territorial planning of *area vasta*. For this reason, the intermunicipal scale represents an opportunity for innovation in the forms of governance and one of the most interesting aspects relies on the involvement of several kinds of actors, both from private and public sphere, which operate in the same territory at different levels. This threefold dimension of flexibility

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

underlines the prominent role for municipalities and the third sector, which, through self-organized processes, define arrangements, aims and targets of the associations. The variable geometry of projects and policies allows the shaping of actions in response to the needs and requirements of the territory, and according to the strategic principles shared among the partners of the association.

This paper is aimed at showing a case study developed within the Italian framework as an example of innovation in governance and in the relevance of the phase of self-recognition during the process. Starting from the input of a small number of municipalities, a complex set of different stakeholders decided voluntarily to define a partnership in which to present and discuss projects and policies, trying to interact with other bodies within the area (other municipalities, private subjects, local associations, etc.) and to improve their effectiveness, their efficiency and their viability.

III. A PROPOSAL FOR THE *AREA VASTA VERONESE*

Since 2014, we have worked together supporting the Municipality of Valeggio sul Mincio and the *Istituto Commercio e Servizi – ICS*, which acts as technical coordinator, within the process of building up the *Intesa Programmatica d'Area* Veronese, a rich and complex territory around the city of Verona, in Italy.

A. Regulatory Framework and Proposed Approach

In a number of programmes, European, national and regional entities pushed municipalities to co-operate, share services and save resources. Municipalities have been invited to self-organize and define development strategies coherent with these targets. Called as consultants by a municipality located in the Veneto Region, we suggested following a place-based approach, relying on local identities, features and needs.

In its recent policies,²⁷ the Regional Council of Veneto allows the setting up of the *Intese Programmatiche d'Area* (or IPAs). They are political bodies with light structures, regulated by voluntary agreements between partners and by internal bylaws, which create “confrontation forums” headed by a lead municipality. According to the regional law, these institutions work

²⁷ D.G.R. No. 2796, adopted in Sept. 12th 2006, Programmazione decentrata – Intese Programmatiche d'Area (IPA). (Art. 25 l.r. 35/2001), published on BUR No. 86, Oct. 10th 2006.

with a “co-decisional” approach, and for this reason they propose actions or policies that influence both, the regional agenda and the decisions of local bodies involved. One of the most important aspects of IPAs is that when local authorities have been involved in this kind of partnership, they decide to link their policies and their planning tools to shared goals and strategies, using part of their resources to co-finance common actions and projects. It is a consolidated practice, so that only a few areas in the Region have been left out of IPAs. In the Verona Province (98 municip.), the IPA of *Montagna Veronese* involved 28 municipalities and the IPA of *Basso Veronese e Colognese*, 27. In both of them, the Provincia di Verona took part in the partnership as a member. At the same time, the municipalities of the central portion of the Province, marked by the presence of the urban/metropolitan area of the city of Verona, were not included in any institutional association due to reasons related to differing political and strategic visions.

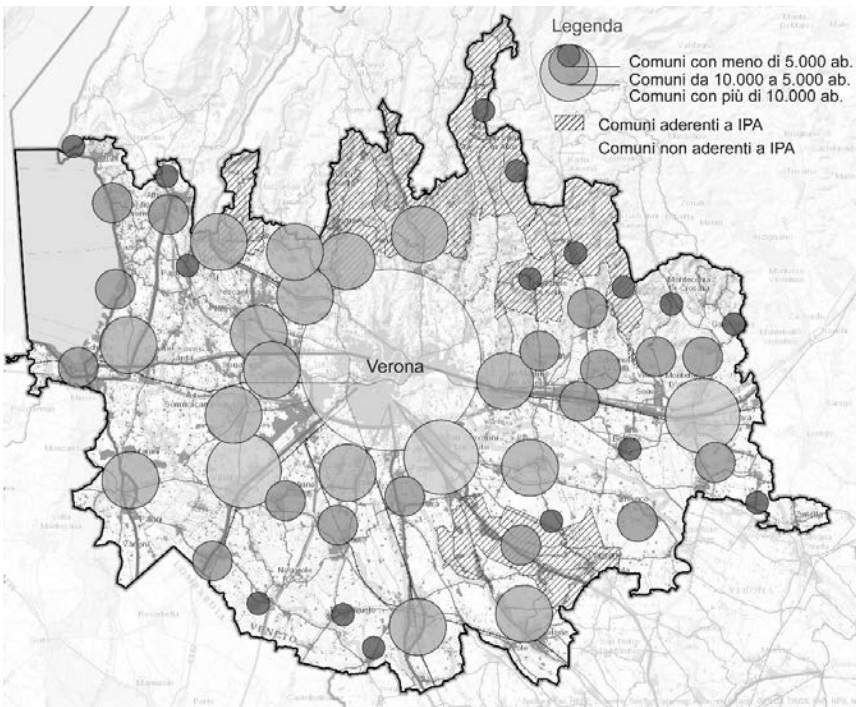


Figure No. I. The central portion of the provincia di Verona and its polinuclear pattern

Since 2014, local authorities, private companies and social partners have expressed a need for clear strategies for this area, aimed at taking advantage of existing economic, social, cultural resources, and based on local identities and vocations. Our work results from this demand.

B. A Rich and Complex Context, a Need for Coordination

We support the municipalities of Valeggio sul Mincio and Verona that are leading the process of setting up this intermunicipal association as experts and spatial analysts. Through our work, developed in several documents presented to the Regional Council,²⁸ we emphasised the heterogeneous richness of the space – the Area Vasta Veronese – marked by a strong diversity due to its morphology, its economic and social conditions, and its history. According to a former Regional Plan,²⁹ the settlement pattern in this area relies on a set of poles, marked different degrees of hierarchy and strong differences between the urban realities, in which, together with the city of Verona, there co-exist several small and medium urban centres, sprawled urban areas and vast agricultural spaces. This variety has been one of the key factors for the development of a high level of quality of life for inhabitants and of competitiveness for economic and productive activities.

We identified a wider area of analysis which comprehends 52 municipalities,³⁰ marked by the presence of several important infrastructures: the crossroads of two European corridors (V-Lisbon-Kiev and XI-Naples-Helsinki) with high-speed trains and motorways (A4/E70 Milan-Venice and A22/E45 *Autostrada del Brennero*). Therefore, the area has become a strategic hub for the region, the north part of Italy and, in general for the flows of goods and people that go from the Mediterranean to northern Europe. Due to this strategic role, this portion of the territory represents the hinge between different relevant productive spaces, and it developed during the years several specific vocations, closely related to its spatial characteristics. Together with the agri-food sector, marked by the high quality and productivity of its output, industrial development relies on both large industries and small and medium-sized enterprises. At the same time, tourism related to the cultural, natural and historical heritage (with cities, the Garda lake, theme parks, etc.) represents an important asset for the present and future development of the area. According to the PTCP of Verona,³¹ the area developed through random evolution, based on the accumulation of isolated and detached items, without the support

28 Regional Council requires three documents during the process of approval of new IPAs: an Agreement, signed by the members of the associations, a Statute and a Planning document. We supported the secretariat of the IPA, developing these documents for the IPA Veronese and in this paper, we focus especially on the *Documento programmatico d'area* (planning document) presented in its final version in December, 2016 to the Regione Veneto.

29 Regione del Veneto, Giunta Regionale – Segreteria Regionale per il Territorio, *Piano Territoriale Regionale di Coordinamento*, 1992, p. 22.

30 A territory of 1,650 km² with 720,000 inhabitants.

31 Provincia di Verona, *Piano Territoriale al Coordinamento Provinciale – Documento Preliminare*, 2007, p. 25-26.

of an organic vision. This lack of coordination influences, for example, the crisis of the transportation system which works well for international and national flows, but fails at the local and neighbourhood level. The wishes of politicians and public servants of the area, as well as the first signals of a needed spending review from regional and national level, imposes a change of approach, in which it seems important to push municipalities to face up to territorial planning and/or engage them with the continuous and progressive setting up of a strategic long-term vision for the territory. In this sense, the figure of the IPA could represent an opportunity to systematize the different economic, social, productive, and environmental vocations of the area.

C. First Outputs

Within the wider space of analysis of the central portion of the *provincia* di Verona,³² we involved 14 municipalities³³ and a set of other partners,³⁴

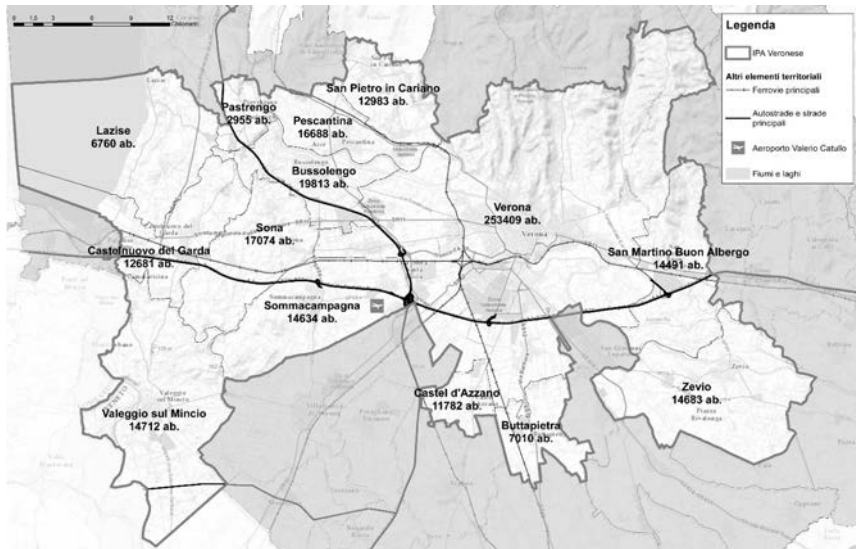


Figure No. 2. The IPA Veronese

32 We suggested to leave the wider area of analysis as a framework to read trends and spatial dynamics and as potential target to achieve involving other municipalities as partner of the IPA in the future **33** Verona, San Martino Buon Albergo, Sommacampagna, Bussolengo, Sona, Castelnuovo del Garda, Lazise, Pastrengo, San Pietro in Cairano, Pescantina, Castel d'Azzano, Zevio, Buttapietra and Valeggio sul Mincio, for a surface of 632,2 km² (3,5% of the Regione Veneto) where live 419.675 inhabitants (8,5% of regional population), and with a density of 664,8 inhab./km².

34 Camera di Commercio IAA di Verona, Apindustria, Casartigiani, Dipartimento di Informatica dell'Università degli Studi di Verona

to form a forum, different from the other consolidated bodies – such as the existing *Provincia* – and different from the other IPAs of the region. The key difference is the role of device and interface that we suggest as one of the main aims of the future IPA Veronese.

1. *The Role of Device*

The work for the IPA Veronese became a sort of pilot to study the intermediate scale of needs and effects of recent transformations related to the processes of metropolisation in north Italy. We noticed that this dimension allowed an interesting focus on (i) current work markets, (ii) interactions between local mobility and global flows, (iii) processes of settlement for companies, central functions and housing, (iv) the growth of new kinds of tourism, etc.

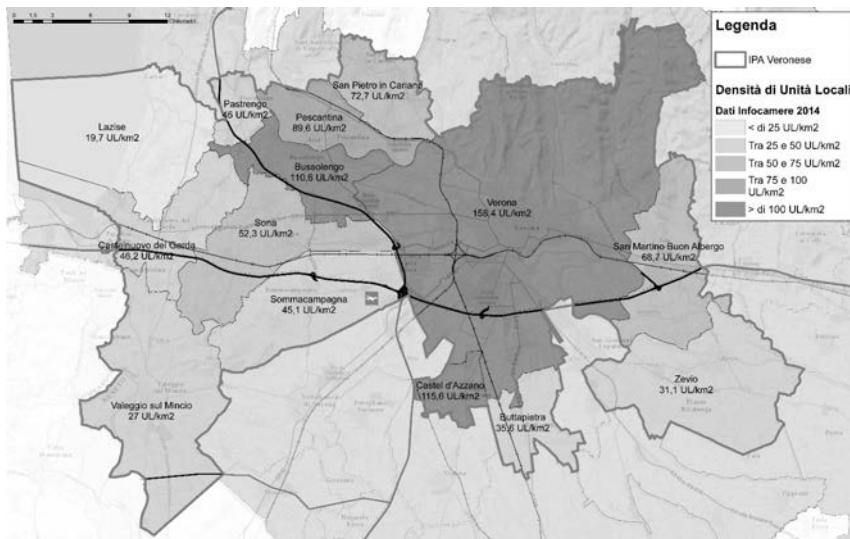


Figure No. 3. An example of the spatial analysis: Private companies in the IPA (Units/km²), 2014

The infra-regional scale contains these phenomena and it is the most adequate space to interpret and in which to act. For this reason, we suggest the use of the IPA as a public arena, in which to share strategies and scenarios for the territory deeply related to local constraints and potentials. In this sense, the intermunicipal associations are devices that promote co-operation and interaction between stakeholders and their local contexts. However, through the first phase dedicated to the collection of projects and ongoing

experiences, we established, thanks to the RFSC tools,³⁵ a process of assessment of existing actions and a strategic agenda, related to the principles of sustainable urban growth, developed by the EU and refined according to local potentials (see Fig. No. 4).

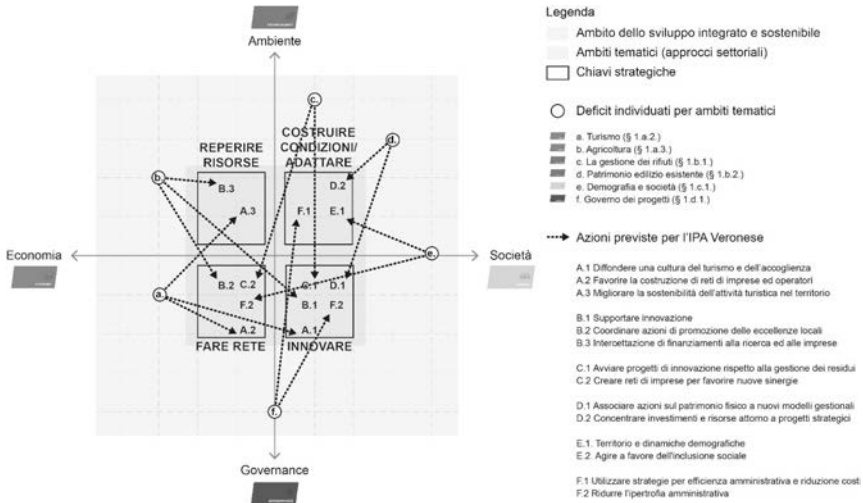


Figure No. 4. Deficits and Resources for the IPA Veronese

2. The Role of Interface

The first result of the IPA Veronese, during its first months of activity, was the creation of a new dialogue between local politicians and public servants. Here, it is important that, since the establishment of this institution, we noticed a change of approach in several municipalities, that abandoned recent experiences based on selfish contingent policies (spending reviews, linear cuts on services, etc.) and ad hoc projects aimed at following regional or EU tenders, detached from their own ongoing strategies. Moreover, the IPA worked as federative tool, where single actors design targets and guidelines for the partnership. Single members then used this material as a background to set up their own specific actions and policies, but, when needed, they have a framework in which to create their own projects. In other cases, the IPA has been the leader of a project and partners are free to join the group of participants deciding, from time to time, the degree of their involvement. The IPA is an interface that works as space of confrontation and mediation

³⁵ The official website of the EU Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities is available on <http://rfsc.eu/>.

for a complex and diverse area, in which partners share visions, coordinate ideas and policies, and where they develop actions through variable partnerships. Therefore, the IPA figure in this *area vasta* acts as a pivot and as a service provider for local communities, municipalities and other institutional bodies. In this sense, all the different actors involved can assume the role of leader for specific proposals or act as territorial animators or local developers. At the same time, the whole portion of the *provincia* di Verona takes advantage of their own knowledge about the place and their sense of belonging to a specific policy community. In addition, we underlined the role of public servants within this kind of associations, in that, together with politicians, they influence the public agenda and the territorial long-term strategy and their role inspires decision-making processes and local actions.

CONCLUSION

This paper has focused on the potential role of local actors and institutions for acting within intermunicipal bodies, different from outdated *Province* and based on voluntary associations or partnerships, aimed at the governance of the *area vasta* level. We have used the case study of the Intesa Programmatica d'Area Veronese to show that nowadays stakeholders need to break out from the current institutional inertia and to take on new challenges, based on medium to long-term visions, marked by strong resolve, shared strategies, and bottom-up approaches. These innovative institutions act as “federator” and “partnership” of projects designed to consider local demands and economic, technical and human resources. This approach is an alternative to the one developed by companies and consultancy agencies which offer services to single municipalities or support for specific tenders or EU programmes. Instead, this group of public and private actors, local associations and institutions should activate latent territorial potentialities and innovative strategies for the governance of those metropolitan areas where today consolidated tools and administrative boundaries are ineffective. We are still involved in this process and we would like to keep focusing on the role of innovation and policy learning in decision-making processes, as well as on the effects of this change of approach and, finally, on the results of several ongoing projects designed within the partnership.

Note: Although this paper should be considered a result of the common work of the three authors, M. Paris took primary responsibility for the sections I. and III. and A. Casella for the section II. A. Vecchietti supported authors for the elaboration of Introduction and Conclusions, that are products of shared reflections.