

## THE RESILIENCE PERSPECTIVE FOR BETTER DEALING WITH TERRITORIAL PLANNING POLICIES IN NON-METROPOLITAN AREAS<sup>1</sup> (1123)

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**Abstract.** The contribution adopts a resilience perspective to reassess the research findings on two territorial planning tools and policies, the SNAI-Italian National Strategy and the River Contract, implemented in a non-metropolitan area of the Lazio Region. Although these policies aimed to address crucial territorial challenges through multi-stakeholder practices, they faced considerable difficulties and limitations. In light of these challenges, the resilience perspective suggests alternative approaches that prioritise the collaborative sharing of responsibilities, knowledge, and competencies. By doing so, it aims to overcome the inherent limitations and rigidity often observed in significant territorial planning policies implemented in non-metropolitan areas.

**Keywords:** territorial planning, resilience, non-metropolitan areas, inner areas, river contract.

### 1. Introduction

Inspired by the AESOP conference track 'Planning for Resilience: Territories, Communities and Environment', the contribution rethinks the findings of research on two innovative territorial planning tools in a non-metropolitan area in the Lazio Region in terms of resilience.

The research extensively examined the processes of the SNAI-National Strategy for Inner Areas 'Alta Tuscia-Antica Città di Castro' and the 'Marta-Bolsena-Tarquinia' Lake, River, and Coast Contract. As also explained in the other contribution of the authors in this book of proceedings, the national policy SNAI intended to achieve its goals of development facilitating the collective production of an area strategy through mandatory multi-stakeholder and multilevel processes (Barca, 2013). Similarly, the River Contract aimed to revitalise and protect the water basin through multi-stakeholder and

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<sup>1</sup> The paper is the result of shared research work. However, for practical reasons, it is possible to attribute to Daniela De Leo, §1, §2, §4 e §5; and to Sara Altamore §2, §3, §4, §5.

multilevel processes (Barbanente and Monno, 2005).

The two policies invested in multi-level and multi-stakeholder approaches considered promising to achieve ambitious goals (Healey, 1998; Innes and Booher, 2004; 2018). However, the research has shown that both policies and tools were unable to promote new development processes and protect the water basin. Therefore, by adopting the resilience perspective, the paper aims to explore ways to improve multi-stakeholder and multilevel processes to effectively achieve important goals in non-metropolitan areas.

The paper is structured as follows: first, a brief description of the methodology used for this paper and, more importantly, the research on the two policies is provided. Next, a selected theoretical framework on resilience is built to offer useful insight for reframing the research findings. Finally, the research findings are integrated with the theoretical framework to provide recommendations for improving multi-stakeholder practices.

## 2. Methodological Notes

The research spanned a period of more than two years, starting from the end of 2020. It employed a qualitative methodological approach, which encompassed desk analysis, informal conversations, semi-structured interviews, project manager shadowing, and participatory observations. The desk analysis involved nationally available data, guidelines produced at the regional level, and local documents of the two policies. Moreover, the fieldwork aimed to examine the progression of processes, the relationships among participants, the connection between the produced documents, and the expected outcomes. Specifically, participatory observation focused on stakeholder involvement and relationships, while attending at public meetings and events provided insights for a better understanding of dynamics among stakeholders, both local and institutional. Informal conversations and semi-structured interviews involved different stakeholders and actors, such as the project manager, technical and administrative staff, decision-makers, local experts, and members of the steering committee. The interviews were conducted to deepen stakeholders' perceptions of territorial needs, critical issues in the implementation processes, and potential areas for improvement. The shadowing of the project manager, who was involved in both policies, was carried out to observe the network of actors and their dynamics.

At the end of the research<sup>2</sup> about the processes of the two policies, it appeared that *multi-stakeholder practices did not work* (De Leo, Altamore, 2023a) in their aim to renew the shared practices for better achieving the important goals. The relevance of these

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<sup>2</sup> Research Agreement signed by PDTA (Sapienza University) in 2020 has been renewed and extended for supporting the policies implementation in the Area.

processes suggests participating in this Conference Track to reframe the findings of the research in relation to the concept of resilience.

Over the past fifteen years, the concept of resilience has been introduced in territorial planning discourse to provide a better understanding and approach to significant challenges. In the description of this Track, keywords such as *connectivity*, *awareness*, *knowledge*, *flexibility*, and *persistence* appear to be valuable in reconsidering the critical issues that emerged during the research on the multi-stakeholder processes of the two policies. By examining these processes through the lens of the Track's keywords and the concept of resilience, a new interpretation of the failures and an opportunity for their needed success.

### **3. The Selected Resilience Perspective**

Different interpretations of resilience are significantly shaped by various worldviews and approaches (Davoudi, 2012). The emergence of resilience thinking is connected to a fundamental shift in managing natural resources and ecological systems. These shifts challenged traditional assumptions regarding natural resource management, such as stability, predictability, and equilibrium (Wilkinson et al., 2010). This narrative also led to the evolution of new approaches for governing changes in human and natural systems, which moved away from modernist and normative paradigms (ibid.).

In this paper, the ecological definition of resilience proposed by Simin Davoudi (Davoudi et al., 2012) has been taken into account. It supposes a parallel between natural and social science interpretations that, although stimulating, carries the risk of significant misunderstandings. In this regard, Swanstrom argues that 'applying the framework of ecological resilience to human institutions and governance processes generates paths to greater understanding, as well as dead ends' (Swanstrom, 2008, p. 6). Nonetheless, in the article 'Resilience: a bridging concept or a dead end?', in *Planning theory & practice*, Davoudi et alii (2012) offers a 'more optimistic' (for their admission) point of view. In that contribution, the evolutionary resilience perspective is selected as a valuable framework for comprehending complex socio-ecological dynamics.

In general, Davoudi's work presents promising parallels between evolutionary resilience and the interpretative (or communicative) planning approach<sup>3</sup>, as both emphasise

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<sup>3</sup> from here onward, the text will refer to collaborative planning, as both communicative and collaborative approaches recognise the importance of inclusive dialogue, active stakeholder participation, and effective communication in the planning process. For further information on the different theoretical foundations and practical applications of collaborative and communicative planning see the works of Healey, 1997; Forester, 1999; Innes & Booher, 2004.

characteristics such as contingency, connectivity, multiplicity, and reflexivity (Davoudi & Strange, 2009, p. 37). Both resilience thinkers and collaborative planners acknowledge the inevitability of change and uncertainties. Evolutionary resilience fosters an understanding of places not as isolated and neutral entities, but as interconnected systems that are complex and unpredictable. It discourages fixed and rigid perspectives, much like the modernist approaches in planning are often discouraged for dealing with territorial complexities (Davoudi, 2011). This interpretation of resilience proposes a relational understanding of spatiality which well matches collaborative planning theory and practice (Massey, 2005). Other aspects proper to evolutionary resilience relate to rejecting equilibrium, acknowledging inherent uncertainty, and recognizing the interplay of persistence, adaptability, and transformability (Davoudi et al., 2012). Moreover, it has the potential to foster interdisciplinary dialogues and collaborations.

Moreover, in translating resilience from the natural to the social domain, Davoudi (2012) suggests four very important critical issues:

- human agency and intentionality,
- desired/intended outcomes,
- system's boundary,
- power dynamics.

According to the first issue, natural cycles seem extremely deterministic compared with human actions, while human 'interventions in processes can indeed diminish, sustain, or enhance resilience' (ibid.: 305). This relates to the idea of self-organisation, which the author directly links to resilience thinking. However, 'while the existence of engaged social networks helps foster adaptive capacity and enhance transformative resilience, it is not a substitute for responsive and accountable governance' (ibid.).

The second issue regards the outcomes and final purpose of resilience. In the social context, normative judgments play a significant role in defining what are the desirable outcomes and what not. Thus, 'if the outcomes depart from the perceived desirable, reaching an alternative outcome may not be seen as a sign of resilience' (ibid.).

In the third issue, the act of defining a boundary needs to be taken into account as it leads to exclusionary practices. Indeed, 'in a particular ecosystem, the analysis of resilience has to determine the 'resilience of what to what'. This means that analysts inevitably focus on some things and discount others' (ibid.).

Lastly, the fourth issue regards power and, thus, the question 'resilience for whom? In the ecological literature, resilience is almost power-blind and a-political (...). This may be true, but in society there are always rewards and punishments: some people gain while others lose in the process of resilience-building' (ibid.).

In other words, by carefully applying the ecological perspective to the social context, resilience must consider more and more both the adaptive capacities of social systems and the power dynamics that influence societal outcomes.

#### 4. The Main Research Findings

Two innovative policies and tools regarding the same area in the north of the Lazio Region have been analysed and supported by the authors: the 'Alta Tuscia-Antica città di Castro' Inner Area within the SNAI (Italian National Strategy for the Inner Area) and the 'Marta-Bolsena-Tarquinia'' River, Lake, and Coastal Contract. The interest in these two policies is related to their important goals for such kinds of non-metropolitan areas aimed at tackling the main challenges of the non-metropolitan areas: socio-economic decline and environmental risks.



Figure 1. The landscape of the area

Source: the authors.

In particular, the SNAI aims to face the local decline by reducing service access inequalities in marginalised territories (De Leo and Altamore, 2023b). The

implementation process<sup>4</sup> involves the participation of social partners, civil society organizations, and citizens in policy definition and implementation. Within this national framework, the process of 'Alta Tuscia-Antica Città di Castro' Inner Area began in 2018 and involved the participation of municipalities, experts, and various territorial stakeholders. Participatory practices were employed to collect data and outline interventions aligned with the SNAI mission.

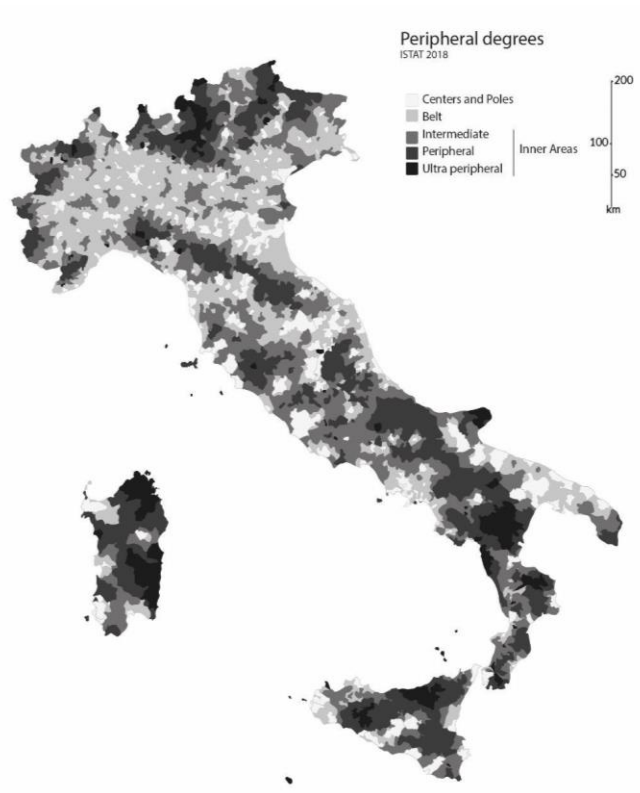


Figure 2. The classification of the peripheral degrees. The darker shapes are the most peripheral areas analysed and elaborated by the SNAI  
Source: Italian Cohesion Agency, elaborated by the authors.

The River Contracts are used to address the management of water basins. They involve

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<sup>4</sup> Participatory methodologies are promoted in the formal documents. The analysis of local strategies shows that consultative practices, such as thematic tables, public meetings, and focus groups, are more prevalent than deliberative practices. Each phase of the process generates a corresponding document, including Draft Strategy, Preliminary Strategy, Area Strategy, and the Framework Program Agreement, which requires collaboration between the Technical Committee for Inner Areas, regional working groups, and local administrations. The Framework Program Agreement signifies the commitment to further implementation.

multiple stakeholders, including government entities, local communities, NGOs, and other relevant actors, in a joint effort to develop strategies and actions for water resource protection. In the case of the 'Bolsena-Marta-Tarquinia' River, River, Lake, and Coastal Contract<sup>5</sup>, the participatory process aimed at encompassed environmental protection, water management, sewage collector monitoring and maintenance, water quality, and the development of agriculture and tourism.

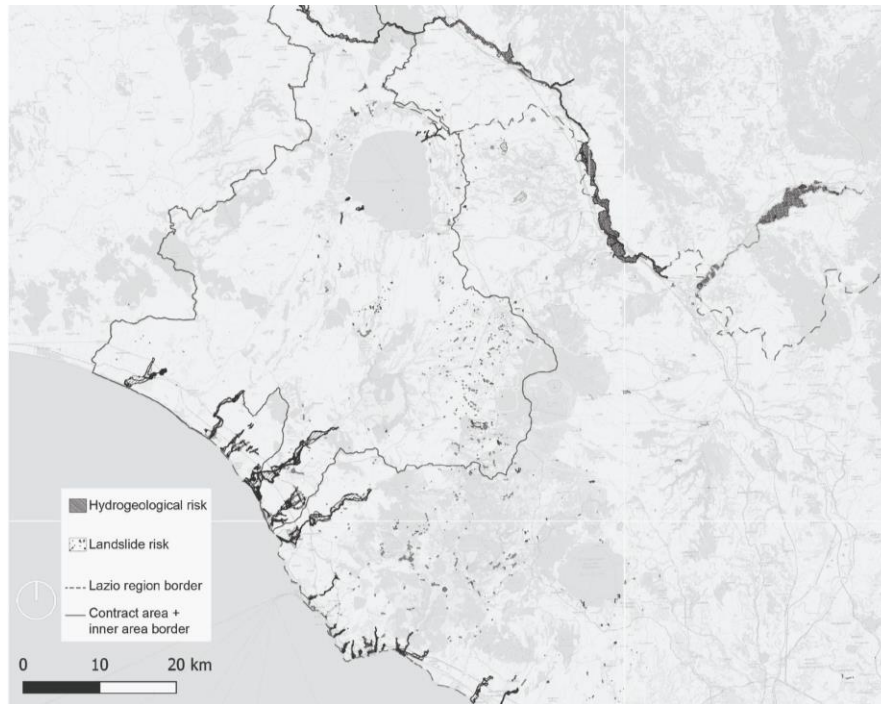


Figure 3. Hydrogeological risk and landslide risk in the area of both policies in the Northern Lazio Region

Source: data from the province of Viterbo, elaborated by the authors.

In summary, from the research on the two different policies' processes, similar problems emerged:

- limitations in cognitive resources and skills and the inability to exchange knowledge: the participatory processes have not created room for enhancing capabilities to work together; as related consequences, knowledge and expertise remained centralised among a selected few individuals or actors, limiting its distribution among a broader range of stakeholders,

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<sup>5</sup> The River Contract aims at producing a final Action Plan.

- lack of ordinary planning practices: institutional and non-institutional actors are not used to planning and even worse to planning together, then they suffered the lack of the capacity and expertise to effectively plan on a broader scale,
- difficulties in sharing responsibilities: mayors tend to not delegate and share their own power on urban and planning issues, making the processes to plan together more difficult.

Indeed, the fieldwork of the two policy processes reveals a long-standing absence, often spanning 20 years or more, of any established ordinary planning practices. This is evident from the prevalent lack of up-to-date or recent plans. As a consequence, administrations face significant limitations, lacking not only the essential tools and methodologies at the individual municipality level but also the capacity to effectively engage in planning on a broader scale. Furthermore, the interviews revealed that the main obstacle to associate planning is the belief among mayors and local coalitions that it is a crucial element of their power, which they are unwilling to share.

From the shadowing of the project manager, communication difficulties emerged and showed cognitive asymmetries among public administration officers, mayors, and the project manager. These hindered the effective exchange of information and contributed to misunderstandings.

The process encountered a significant deficiency in facilitating the exchange of knowledge and skills. Consequently, expertise remained concentrated within a limited group of individuals or actors. Specifically, the analysis of local documents highlighted that the participatory process was organized around three thematic tables focusing on services, specifically education, health, and local development. However, through participatory observations and the project manager's shadowing, it became evident that public participation was minimal and primarily characterized by a one-way collaboration led by the state. Paradoxically, there was a lack of institutional commitment, resulting in frequent absences of administrators and office staff. Furthermore, the understaffed offices exacerbated the limitations of resource-intensive processes.

## **5. Conclusion**

In conclusion, the application of the theoretical framework of resilience to the research findings has provided valuable insights and suggestions for enhancing similar processes in the specific non-metropolitan area under study. The concept of resilience proves to be highly beneficial as it takes into account crucial factors such as agency, outcomes, boundaries, and power dynamics. By considering these critical issues, improvements can be made to address the challenges faced and create more effective and inclusive processes.

Certainly, the research findings highlight the importance of empowering different actors involved in the processes. This entails enhancing the collaborative capacity of stakeholders across various levels and fostering engagement with both organized and unorganized civil society. A key aspect is aligning the intended outcomes of these multi-stakeholder processes to ensure a more shared and directed effort, moving beyond the formal and mandatory outputs such as Strategy Documents (SNAI) or Action Plans (River Contract). In addition, addressing the issue of boundaries can facilitate cooperation and coordination among diverse stakeholders. This involves redefining the boundaries of responsibilities by reallocating public roles and responsibilities between institutional and non-institutional actors, thereby promoting more effective and efficient governance arrangements.

Furthermore, power dynamics play a crucial role. Establishing permanent and collaborative processes can facilitate the development of shared practices among mayors and stakeholders, i.e. among Mayors, without the fear of losing control over their respective domains. Thus, within a different availability of knowledge, appropriate skills, and new abilities, multi-stakeholder processes could finally be able to support innovative policies and tools in dealing with the important territorial challenges for which they have been settled up.

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