AESOP

TRANS ACTIONS

OF THE ASSOCIATION OF EUROPEAN SCHOOLS OF PLANNING

VOLUME 6, ISSUE 1, DECEMBER 2022
SPECIAL ISSUE: LEFT BEHIND REGIONS IN EUROPE AND BEYOND

TRANSACTIONS OF THE ASSOCIATION OF EUROPEAN SCHOOLS OF PLANNING

Transactions of the Association of European Schools of Planning is an international, bi-annual, peer-reviewed, open-access journal, produced and owned by the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP, www.aesop-planning.eu).

It is free of charge to submit a paper and to publish in the *Transactions of the Association of European Schools of Planning*. Accepted papers are accessible online, to everyone, for free.

All papers are subject to a double-blind peer-review process.

ISSN: 2566-2147

Journal Website

https://transactions-journal.aesop-planning.eu

Journal Cover Design

Cinzia Ferrara / ferrarastudio design.

Journal Layout Design

Kırmızı Tasarım, www.kirmizitasarim.com

Journal Copyeditor

Bertie Dockerill, Department of Geography and Planning, University of Liverpool.

For All Correspondence

transactionsaesop@gmail.com

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

Left Behind Regions in Europe and Beyond

The causes and impacts of new and enduring regional inequalities have been much debated in many regions and countries around the globe over the past decade. This has been reflected in public and political discourse with references to and imaginaries of so-called ‘forgotten’ or ‘left behind’ regions and peripheral territories. Discourses and movements of political discontent have sparked off renewed debates on uneven development and the experience of left-behind places, which struggle with persistent social and economic challenges and might appear to be seen as ‘places that don’t matter’ (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018).

Interregional spatial inequality and policies which seek to address this are of course nothing new and have formed part of spatial planning approaches in countries and regions which have adopted the ‘regional economic’ model of planning (CEC, 1997). The UN meanwhile promotes the aspiration to ‘Leave no one behind’ (LNOB) as ‘the central, transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)’. It is also stated that ‘LNOB not only entails reaching the poorest of the poor, but requires combating discrimination and rising inequalities within and amongst countries, and their root causes’ (UN, n.d.). The EU too has long pursued a Cohesion Policy supported by structural investment funds which seek to address regional disparities and unlock the territorial and human development potential of places across its Member States. As well as interregional patterns of disparities, recent years have also seen a widening of intraregional gaps, for example, between regenerating and reurbanising regional cities (Dembski et al. 2020) and smaller towns or villages (Dorling and Thomas, 2004; OECD, 2017; Tomaney et al., 2019; Veltz,1996). This is a phenomenon which has been observable in both developed and developing countries across the world. The disruption and uncertainties brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic have also overlaid existing intraregional inequalities creating new dynamics which have interacted with existing marginalisation tendencies. The ability of places to adapt and be resilient through processes of territorial transition is conditioned by several factors which vary across different localities. These include planning and developmental policies and strategies and processes of local adaptation and innovation, participation, and governance. This provides scope for comparative perspectives and research to develop understandings of policy approaches which can foster resilient and inclusive regions.

Informed by the context outlined above, this issue of *Transactions of AESOP* explores ‘Left-behind Regions in Europe and Beyond’. It presents papers arising from two events and one project which have explored policy debates surrounding and responses to ‘left behind regions. The first event was organised by the AESOP French and British Planning Studies Thematic Group in June 2021 as part of the joint Regional Studies Association (RSA) and AESOP tracks at the Regions in Recovery Building Sustainable Futures - Global E-Festival (June 2–18, 2021). The session was convened by Olivier Sykes (University of Liverpool), Xavier Desjardins (Sorbonne Université) and Philippe Estèbe (CNAM). The participants from different states and regions were asked to explore: 1) the framing of the issue of forgotten, left behind and peripheral regions in public debates; 2) the criteria used to define priority regions for policy intervention; and, 3) the policy aims and tools of new or reformed regional policies which are seeking to address the challenges of such territories. The papers by Desjardins and Estèbe (Sorbonne Université and Coopérative Acadie), Agim Kërçuku (Politecnico di Milano) and Abigail Taylor (City-REDI, University of Birmingham) were presented at this session. The second event which has fed into this issue was a workshop on the theme of ‘Beyond Intra-regional inequalities: Understanding the dynamism of resilient and inclusive regions’. This was organised as part of a research network project jointly funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and Taiwanese Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST) and took place within the Asialics - Beyond Intra-regional Inequality conference held on 29-30 June 2022. The paper by Chang (National Chen Kung University, Tainan) was first presented at this event. Finally, the paper by Arnold and Hickson arises from work conducted by the authors at the Heseltine Institute for Public Policy, Practice and Place, at the University of Liverpool, an interdisciplinary research institute focusing on the development of sustainable and inclusive cities and city regions.

The paper from Arnold and Hickson addresses the UK government's 'Levelling Up' agenda which represents the latest attempt to address long-standing interregional socio-economic disparities. It assesses how the *Levelling Up the UK* White Paper, published in early 2022, frames the problem of interregional inequality and the potential of the proposed solutions contained within it to address the problem. It argues that the White Paper represents a welcome attempt to embed and elevate regional policy into central government activity, but that if regional policy is to mean anything, it cannot be about everything. The paper argues that a more targeted spatial focus, with emphasis on key policy levers, needs to be developed to meaningfully tackle interregional inequality in England, and that 'second-tier' city-regions represent the most obvious building blocks of an agenda focused on improving economic performance outside London and the South East. Using the Liverpool City Region as a case study area, the paper highlights three policy areas where further work is required to build on the *Levelling Up the UK* White Paper.

The paper from Chang focuses on a region of southern Taiwan and argues that though left-behind places are a global phenomenon, they are sited in different development contexts that require customized, place-based solutions. The paper discusses a possible approach to working with left-behind areas through leveraging the capacities of universities as institutional resources to engage people and places in regional regeneration. Using the Collaborative Badlands project in Zuojhen, Taiwan, as an example, it describes the learning journey of developing solutions and companionship between a research university and communities in a left behind rural region. Adopting a hybrid approach of an asset-based approach to community development and collaborative planning for regional development, the case demonstrates a potential levelling-up strategy for sustainable development in a lagging region.

The paper from Desjardins and Estèbe presents comparative research on place-based policies which address 'forgotten territories' in Europe. It shows the variety of trajectories through which the territorial question is placed on the agenda and the ways of defining what constitute 'forgotten' territories within the different countries considered. This variety reveals specific processes linked to short- and long-term debates about the different nations and their development. The tools used to help these territories tend to converge, under the influence of methods coming from the European Union. However, the functions of these territories are still unclear in national planning strategies, particularly because their possible contributions to processes such as ecological transition and its associated economic models are only imperfectly defined.

The paper from Kërçuku on 'forgotten Italian territories' shows how these have primarily been understood as compact physical and conceptual spaces. Whilst the terms used to describe their boundaries and the key issues that they face have changed over time, they have been defined through homogeneous images: *Mezzogiorno* (Southern Italy), peripheries, and Inner Areas. Such representation affects conceptualization as well as the measures taken to close the gaps between the forgotten territories and dynamic areas. In recent years, the numerous crises of the 21st century have shattered this representation and brought about a new geography of forgotten Italy, the *Italia di mezzo* (in-between Italy). The new geography is not linked only to the North-South dichotomy and does not concern only the metropolitan peripheries and inner areas.

The final paper from Taylor notes that addressing issues of regional inequalities and supporting 'left behind' regions is a global issue, but that analysis of regions that have successfully levelled up is limited. It argues too that developing and implementing effective place-based policies is critical for recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic but remains an under-explored issue. The paper provides insights into different policies and tools used to support left-behind places. Comparing the experiences of addressing socio-economic challenges in Greater Lille, Nantes, the Ruhr region, San Antonio, and Estonia, it discusses what ingredients are required to successfully address inequalities, what has worked well, and future challenges. It identifies seven "foundations" for levelling up and stresses the importance of levelling up "within" regions and not just the levelling up "of" regions. In particular, it debates opportunities to support levelling up through financial management and governance tools.

As a collection the papers therefore address the features of left behind places in a variety of settings in Europe and other global regions. They provide valuable insights into how this phenomen on manifests and is perceived in different places and the planning and development strategies adopted in response to the issues faced by places, that may be 'left behind', but matter to those living there, the policymakers working to address their challenges, and the wider development prospects of the states within which they are situated.

Dr. Olivier Sykes

Department of Geography and Planning, University of Liverpool, UK,
Editor in Chief of Transactions of AESOP

Dr. Chia-Lin Chen

Department of Geography and Planning, University of Liverpool, UK,
Guest Editor

References

CEC (1997) *The Compendium of European Spatial Planning Systems and Policies*, Commission of the European Communities, Luxembourg.

Dembski, S., Sykes, O., Couch, C., Desjardins, X., Evers, D., Osterhage, F., Siedentop, S. and Zimmermann, K. (2020), Reurbanisation and suburbia in Northwest Europe: A comparative perspective on spatial trends and policy approaches. *Progress in Planning*. 100462 - 100462.

Dorling, D. & Thomas, B. (2004). *People and Place 2001: A Census Atlas*. Bristol: Policy Press.

OECD (2017) *The Governance of Land Use in OECD Countries. Policy Analysis and Recommendations.* Paris: OECD.

Tomaney, J. Pike, A., & Natarajan, L. (2019). Land use planning, inequality and the problem of 'left-behind-places'. Written submission to the UK 270 Commission.

Townsend, A. & Champion, T. (2020). Core cities' strong growth in the 2010s: Were they 'leaving behind' the rest of their regions? *Local Economy*, 35 (6), 566-585.

UN, (n.d.) Universal Values - Principle Two: Leave No One Behind

Veltz, P. (1996). *Mondialisation, Villes et Territoires. L'econome Archipel.* Paris: Press Universitaries de France.

Transactions of the Association of European Schools of Planning • 6 (2022)
doi: 10.24306/TrAESOP.2022.01.001

'LEVELLING UP' POST-INDUSTRIAL CITY-REGIONS IN ENGLAND

Tom Arnold[a], James Hickson[b]

(Received 16 May 2022; revised version received 25 May 2022; final version accepted 11 November 2022)

Abstract

The UK government's 'Levelling Up' agenda represents the latest attempt to address long-standing interregional socio-economic disparities in England. This paper assesses how the *Levelling Up the UK* White Paper, published in early 2022, frames the problem of interregional inequality and the potential of the proposed solutions contained within the paper to address the problem. We argue that the White Paper represents a welcome attempt to embed and elevate regional policy into central government activity but that if regional policy is to mean anything, it cannot be about everything. A more acute spatial focus, with emphasis on key policy levers, needs to be developed to meaningfully tackle interregional inequality in England. We suggest that England's 'second-tier' city-regions represent the most obvious cornerstone of an agenda focused on improving economic performance outside London and the South East. Using the Liverpool City Region as a case study area, we highlight three policy areas where further work is required to build on the *Levelling Up the UK* White Paper.

Keywords

Levelling Up; regional; devolution; city-region; urban

a (Corresponding author) Heseltine Institute for Public Policy, Practice and Place, University of Liverpool, 1-7 Abercromby Square, Liverpool, L69 7WY. E-Mail: t.arnold@liverpool.ac.uk

b Heseltine Institute for Public Policy, Practice and Place, University of Liverpool, 1-7 Abercromby Square, Liverpool, L69 7WY. E-Mail: james.hickson@liverpool.ac.uk

1. Introduction

The long-awaited *Levelling Up the UK* White Paper was published in February 2022, over two years after Prime Minister Boris Johnson coined the phrase during the 2019 General Election campaign. Having been used as both a campaigning slogan and, following the election, as an overarching description of the government's policy programme (Newman, 2021), the White Paper represents the first comprehensive attempt to flesh out the Levelling Up agenda. The description of Levelling Up by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Michael Gove, as 'a mission – part economic, part social, part moral' (HM Government, 2022, p.x) reflects not only the ambiguity of the phrase but its development in the context of geographical discontent; exemplified in recent years by the EU referendum of 2016 and, to some extent, the General Election of 2019 (McCann and Ortega-Argilés, 2021). Implicit within the White Paper is an acknowledgement that levels of interregional inequality in the UK are restricting prosperity in the nation as a whole, and a rejection of previous approaches focused primarily on fiscal transfers from the 'growth engine' of London to the rest of the country. Beyond this, however, the spatial focus of the White Paper 's analysis varies extensively between regional, urban, and local.

This article assesses the Levelling Up White Paper's analysis of the UK's spatial inequality problem, the proposed solutions contained within it, and the spatial scope of the Levelling Up agenda. Due to the devolved structures in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as their differing local and regional governance arrangements, the paper primarily focuses on matters concerning England. Using the Liverpool City Region (LCR - a metropolitan area in North West England with a population of around 1.5 million) as a case study, we argue that addressing the wide socio-economic gaps between different English regions must include a comprehensive plan to improve the economic performances of post-industrial, 'second-tier' city-regions such as the LCR. We discuss the key policy levers identified in the White Paper and whether these are sufficient to transform the fortunes of these city-regions.

2. Levelling Up: Where and How?

The White Paper extensively details a number of spatial and economic inequalities, both inter-regional and intra-regional. It acknowledges that the UK faces what Philip McCann (2016) describes as a 'regional-national economic problem'. Over the last 100 years, the UK economy has bifurcated between a handful of high-growth, high-productivity regions (namely London, the South East, and North East Scotland), and the rest of the country. Illustrating the severity of interregional disparities, McCann has demonstrated that the UK is more spatially unequal at the regional level than 28 of the 34 OECD nations (McCann, 2020); a point recognised in the White Paper, which notes that the gap in productivity between the highest performing region (London) and the lowest (Northern Ireland) is around 60 percent.

The White Paper also accepts that, in contrast to larger nations such as the USA, the economic performance of towns and rural areas in the UK are not uniformly lower than in cities and notes, as an example, that Darlington (a town located in the North East of England with a population of around 100,000) has similar levels of productivity to central Manchester (the core of a Greater Manchester city-region with a population of around three million). The regional character of these disparities are illustrated in Figure 1, which shows that Gross Value Added (GVA) per hour worked is higher on average in London and the South East than in other regions (see Figure 1).

In its analysis of inter-regional inequalities, the White Paper acknowledges the underperformance of the UK's 'second-tier' cities compared to similarly sized cities in other comparable nations. Core to this observation is a recognition of the size and centrality of London to the UK's economy. There is some evidence that, London aside, UK cities perform poorly in economic terms compared to cities in Western Europe, as illustrated in Figure 2. English cities in the North and Midlands in particular, have long lagged behind European counterparts and this gap has grown in recent years (Parkinson et al., 2004; Parkinson, 2022).

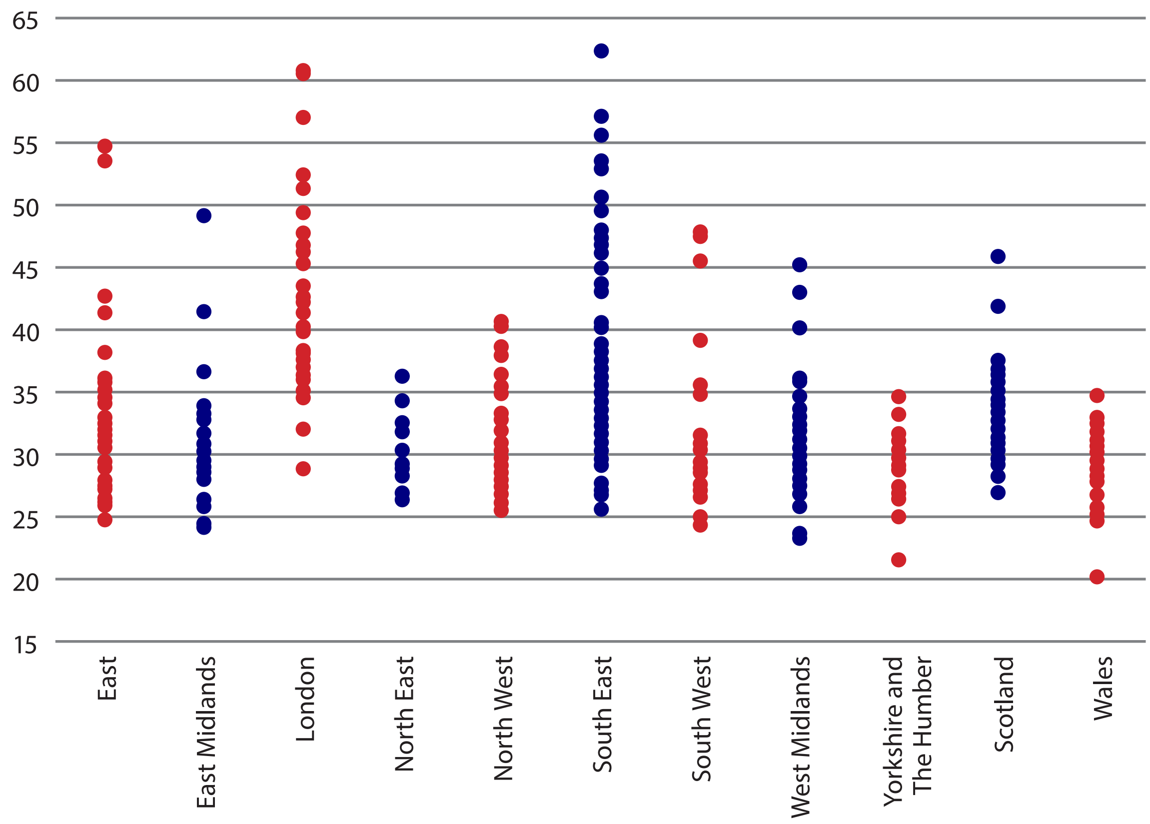

Figure 1 - Distribution of GVA per hour worked (£), local authorities by GB countries and regions, 2019 (HM Government, 2022, p.7)

The White Paper recognises that the economic underperformance of English cities is central to the UK's interregional inequality problem. There are numerous references to the importance of 'globally competitive' cities, along with a diversion into the history of cities and extensive discussion of the Medici dynasty of 16th century Florence. A key proposal included in the paper is a commitment to increase public investment in research and development outside the South East, and to open three new Innovation Accelerators in Greater Manchester, the West Midlands, and Glasgow. However, beyond this there is little in the way of distinctively urban policy.

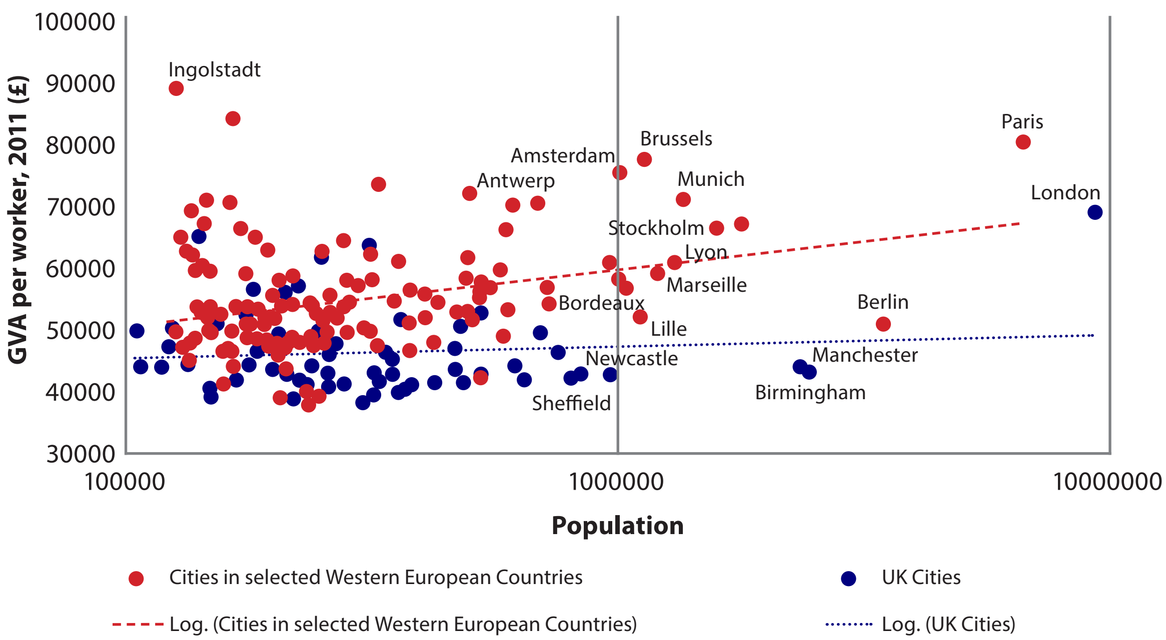

Figure 2 - GVA per hour vs population size, selected Western European Cities, 2011 (HM Government, 2022, p.33)

The White Paper also identifies various intra-regional inequalities, acknowledging that socio-economic disparities within regions and city-regions are often larger than between regions. Many of the most discussed inequalities in the White Paper relate to quality of life issues.

To address these spatial inequalities, the White Paper identifies 12 'missions', covering four broad policy areas: productivity, pay, jobs and living standards; spreading opportunity and improving public services; restoring a sense of community, local pride and belonging; and empowering local leaders and communities. The missions vary in their spatial focus. Some, such as the aspiration for 90% of children under 11 to achieve the expected standard of reading, writing and maths, are led at the national scale, within government departments. Other missions focus on inter-regional issues, such as the commitment to increase spending on research and development outside the South East of England by 40%. Others, meanwhile, seek to address intra-regional inequalities, such as reducing the gap in Healthy Life Expectancy between the best and worst performing areas.

The White Paper seeks to embed the aims of levelling up across government, and to encourage government departments to consider the place-based impacts of policies. While presented as a radical departure from previous attempts at addressing spatial inequalities, in many respects it represents continuity of regional policy over the last 20 years. In its discussion of the 'Medici effect' and its emphasis on the importance of globally competitive cities, the paper reflects New Economic Geography arguments about the importance of city size and agglomeration. The Northern Powerhouse concept, developed during the mid-2010s, was based largely on the idea that transport connectivity and political devolution would help boost productivity in Northern England's largest cities (Lee, 2017; Mackinnon, 2020; Parr, 2017;). However, in its emphasis on quality of life issues, and discussion of intra-regional inequalities, the White Paper reflects a growing perception amongst policymakers that the most significant economic divides are between cities and towns. This is potentially problematic as there is limited evidence that this view fairly represents the reality of spatial inequality in the UK, with imbalances being more significant between regions (particularly the Greater South East and the rest of the country) than within them (McCann 2016; McCann 2020).

3. Post-industrial City-regions: The Case of Liverpool City Region

The challenge of 'levelling up' is closely linked to the need to improve productivity and standards of living in the UK's city-regions. England, in particular, is a densely populated and highly urbanised nation with extensive economic linkages between cities and their hinterlands (Fothergill and Houston, 2016). While recent political debates have focused on the need to address social discontent in so-called 'left behind' towns and rural areas (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018; Leyshon, 2021; Mackinnon et al., 2022), and the purported economic and political disconnect that exists between thriving large cities and declining smaller conurbations (Jennings and Stoker, 2016), it is evident that policy will need to address underperformance in city-regions if interregional inequalities are to be reduced.

The economic underperformance of English second-tier city-regions has been a central theme of UK regional policy analysis for the last 25 years. This group is comprised of the largest cities outside London, with notable members including Greater Manchester, Newcastle, and Liverpool City Region. The 'urban renaissance' strategy of the New Labour governments (1997-2010) sought to regenerate and repopulate city centres through property-led investment and via growth of the knowledge and service sectors (Colomb, 2007). The 2007 Review of Sub-National Development and Regeneration formalised the concept of city-regions, providing new powers (particularly over public transport) to metropolitan regions (HM Treasury 2007). Following the abolition of regional structures by the Coalition government (2010-2015), a series of interventions highlighted the need to improve the economic performance of cities outside the Greater South East, notably IPPR North's Northern Economic Futures Commission (2012), the RSA City Growth Commission (2014), the One North report delivered by Northern England's largest local authorities (2014). The rollout of sub-national devolution in the mid-2010s, manifested most visibly in the introduction of 'metro' mayors in some English city-regions, reflects this focus. The importance of improving the performance of city-regions, in relation to the overall health of the UK economy, is well understood (Parkinson 2016).

The Liverpool City Region is an exemplar of England's second-tier city-regions. A metropolitan area in the North West of England comprised of six districts with a total population of around 1.5 million, the LCR faces a number of long-standing and deep-rooted social and economic performance gaps with the rest of the country. In this regard, the LCR represents something of a paradigmatic, if not critical, case through which to interrogate the current levelling up agenda and its prospects for England's underperforming post-industrial city-regions more generally (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

Figure 3 - Map of Liverpool City Region (Thompson et al., 2020)

In common with other English city-regions, the LCR's economic position has been challenged by deindustrialisation and shifts in global trade over the last century. Employment in the city-region's core maritime and manufacturing industries fell rapidly during the depression of the 1930s and again from the 1960s onwards. For example, between 1966 and 1978, 20 percent of Liverpool's jobs were lost and 350 plants and factories closed or transferred production elsewhere (Parkinson, 2019). The population, in many areas of the city-region contracted markedly in response to this economic decline. The City of Liverpool (one of the six constituent districts of the LCR), experienced a decline in population of almost 50 percent from its peak in the early 1930s to the turn of the millennium (City Monitor, 2017). During the late 1980s and 1990s, areas of LCR (most notably Liverpool City Centre) witnessed extensive physical regeneration, with tentative repopulation beginning during this period and accelerating during the 2000s. The local economy has transitioned from one primarily focused on the port and related industries to a service, knowledge, and culture-based economy. The City Centre has a strong visitor economy, a large public sector, and a wide range of professional services firms, while the wider city-region has complementary strengths in chemical manufacturing, automotive engineering, transport and logistics, and health and life sciences. The LCR economy has grown by £2 billion in the last decade, and now stands at £33 billion GVA (LCRCA, 2022a).

However, despite significant economic progress over the last two decades, productivity in the LCR remains lower than the average in both England and the North West region, at around £21,500 GVA per head in 2019 compared to England's average of £30,000. Low business and job density, as well as high rates of economic inactivity, contribute to significant deprivation across many areas of the city-region. A third of Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in the LCR are amongst the most deprived decile in England (MHCLG, 2019). This suggests that the physical regeneration of the city centre and associated increase in economic activity has not been sufficient to address the causes and consequences of long-standing deprivation. The LCR also exemplifies the vicious cycle of underperformance of England's post-industrial city-regions. Health inequalities, poor housing quality, weak transport, and low skills attainment hinder productivity in LCR (Heseltine Institute, 2021). In common with other English city-regions, there are wide socio-economic disparities within relatively small areas. In the Wirral district (see Figure 3), for example, there is an 18-year gap in healthy life expectancy between the best and worst performing wards. A similar picture is evident in education outcomes: three of the six LCR local authority areas register average GCSE results above the England average (St Helens, Sefton and Wirral), while Knowsley has some of the poorest GCSE outcomes in the country (Shaping Futures, 2022).

With a view to addressing these entrenched inequalities, the LCR has recently become a focal point for city-region devolution in England. A devolution deal with government was signed in 2015, granting the newly-created Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) a limited range of powers, responsibilities, and control over regional funding (see Figure 4). The first Metro Mayor of LCR, Steve Rotheram, was elected in 2017, and subsequently re-elected for a second term in 2021. Exemplifying the scale and severity of the socio-economic inequalities that typify England's second-tier city-regions, as well as demonstrating the journey from deindustrialisation to partial regeneration and devolution that is shared with similar areas, the LCR provides us with a useful perspective from which to evaluate the current levelling up agenda.

Table 1: Devolved powers in Liverpool City Region.

Transport	• Devolved, consolidated transport budget • Bus franchising • Joint working with highways England and NR • Local roads network
Skills, Employment, Health	• Joint working with UTI • Business support services • Adult education budget • Work and health
Land and Housing	• Public land commission / joint assets board • Compulsory purchase orders • Mayoral development corporations • Planning call-in powers • Consultation on strategic planning applications • Spatial strategy
Finances	• Investment fund (£30m per year) • 100% business rates revenue retention • Business rates supplement

Source: Authors, adapted from Sandford (2022)

4. Three Dimensions to Levelling Up Post-industrial City-regions

In order to effectively address the multiple inequalities impacting the Liverpool City Region, and similar post-industrial, second-tier city-regions in England, the Levelling Up policy agenda must itself be multidimensional; strategically addressing disparities in productivity, prosperity, and power. Together, these three elements highlight the complexity of regional inequalities and the extent to which addressing them is simultaneously an economic, social and political challenge.

4.1. Productivity

The White Paper presents the problem of spatial inequality in the UK as primarily one of uneven economic geography. Increased interlinkages in global trade and technological innovation have positively impacted certain places and hollowed out others, with London and its hinterlands in the South East of England being particular beneficiaries. In contrast, coastal areas and former industrial centres have suffered from declining populations and reduced presence in the UK's economic and trading framework. Addressing this uneven geography, we are told, 'needs to begin by improving economic dynamism and innovation to drive growth across the whole country, unleashing the power of the private sector to unlock jobs and opportunity for all' (HM Government, 2022, p.xii). The White Paper highlights the need to address these disparities from a macro perspective, as well as addressing political and social discontent:

> The economic prize from levelling up is potentially enormous. If underperforming places were levelled up towards the UK average, unlocking their potential, this could boost aggregate UK GDP by tens of billions of pounds each year. (HM Government 2022., p.xiv).

In its analysis, if not in the policies proposed to address the identified challenges, the White Paper is concerned primarily with improving productivity and prosperity in places that have experienced decline in both over the last 40 years. It is clear from the White Paper that the UK Government views 'globally competitive' cities and city regions as the primary focal point for this economic reorientation, unlocking the untapped potential of the UK's second-tier cities relative to international comparators. But, in order to meaningfully narrow existing productivity and prosperity gaps, post-industrial cities and regions such as LCR will not only need to compete with successful national and international comparators, but also outperform them for a sustained period of time (Martin et al., 2021).

To achieve this, LCR and other second-tier UK city-regions will need to find ways to create, attract, and maintain stable sources of value creation that will help to close productivity and employment gaps over the long-term. This means identifying new industries, trades, jobs and products, promoting economic strengths and addressing underpinning weaknesses. It will also mean navigating and overcoming current economic headwinds, both domestically generated (such as the UK's exit from the European Union, single market, and customs union, or the consequences of economic policymaking during Liz Truss' short premiership) and external shocks (such as the recent rapid increase in energy prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine). Only by securing more sources of good quality, stable employment can places such as the LCR develop long-term and meaningful prosperity for their residents.

The White Paper points primarily to the knowledge economy – that is, knowledge-intensive activities and the rapid advancement of technical and scientific innovation (Powell and Snellman, 2004) – as the likely route to achieving this goal across the UK, with a mission to increase public investment in R&D outside the South East by at least 40 percent by 2030 (HM Government, 2022, p.xvii). The LCR appears well-placed to deliver on this priority, with a number of emerging strengths identified in innovative areas of the economy such as high performance computing and AI; infection control, materials chemistry, low carbon technologies, culture and creative industries, and the social economy. The city region has also adopted an ambitious target that R&D investment should be equivalent to 5 percent of its GVA by 2030 (LCRCA, 2022, pp.15-21).

However, growing the knowledge economy in second-tier cities has long been an ambition of regional policy in the United Kingdom. Under the New Labour governments of the 1990s and 2000s, for example, emphasis was placed on developing "knowledge assets" and stimulating "knowledge-based industries", with Regional Development Agencies tasked with identifying potential local clusters of knowledge-economy activity through the publication of Regional Economic Strategies (Peck and McGuinness, 2003). Technology-intensive industries were identified as the drivers of urban growth, particularly where they could help to capitalise on local university research capacity (Dalingwater, 2011). Nevertheless, it appears that these knowledge economy interventions at the urban scale did little to significantly disrupt the competitive advantages of London and the South East, or to close performance gaps at the regional scale. Critics have suggested that a siloed approach to growing particular knowledge-based industries failed to exploit the potential for deeper multi- and cross-sectoral innovation within cities, or to deal more fundamentally with the underlying causes of uneven R&D investment in the regions (Dalingwater, 2011). In this regard, the approach outlined in the White Paper risks repeating the past. It presents investment in the knowledge economy as central to reversing the relative decline of productivity in second-tier cities, whilst falling short of the kind of comprehensive and coordinated industrial strategy that is required to unlock the full potential of the knowledge economy outside of London and the South East.

There are further practical barriers to adopting a place-based approach to growing the knowledge economy. In addition to its inherent vulnerability to disruption and devaluation (think of the decline of Nokia and Blackberry after the introduction of the iPhone), knowledge economy activity also tends towards intense concentration: a few monopolistic firms (e.g. Google, Apple, Amazon) operating in a few geographic locations (London, New York, Silicon Valley) (Unger et al., 2019). Unlike previous transformations in production, such as that associated with the first industrial revolution, the knowledge economy 'cannot be reduced to a stock of readily transportable machines and procedures and easily acquired abilities' (Unger et al., p.12). This makes it much more difficult for firms and places outside existing concentrations of knowledge economy activity to compete for talent, develop ideas, and attract investment in high-innovation opportunities. This leaves behind a rear-guard of stagnating 'zombie firms' outside existing concentrations of knowledge economy activity which are less able to expand or invest in the technologies, talent, or processes that could help to improve the productivity of their local economies (Unger et al., p.18).

The uneven geography of knowledge economy activity is apparent in LCR where, despite the development of an increasingly significant innovation ecosystem over recent decades, the majority of employment growth has been in less productive sectors (Heseltine Institute, 2021). Moreover, the challenge of diffusing knowledge economy activity beyond existing concentrations is further compounded by the extent to which many firms across the economy are disincentivised from investing in innovative technologies while labour remains cheap and flexible. Currently, one in five jobs in Liverpool City Region pays below the Real Living Wage (LCRCA, 2022b), with many of these jobs characterised by increasingly precarious contracts. The high concentration of these jobs in LCR entrenches inequality and hinders the transition to a more innovative, high-skill, high-productivity, economy.

4.2. Prosperity

Alongside identifying new sources of value creation and shared prosperity, city-regions such as LCR face the equally important task of strengthening the foundations upon which prosperity can be built and sustained. Improving the quality of local assets, infrastructure, and institutions – from schools and public transport systems, to housing stock and public spaces – is not just a necessary precondition for developing a high productivity economy, it is also fundamental to creating a more meaningful sense of shared prosperity. After all, prosperity is measured not only in GVA growth, but in the health, wealth, and wellbeing of people, communities, and the curation of an environment that can support future generations.

The White Paper recognises that many places are caught in vicious cycles, where entrenched challenges undermine local foundations for economic prosperity and lead to persistently poor outcomes across a range of social and economic metrics (HM Government, 2022). This acknowledgement is particularly relevant for LCR, where (as already highlighted) there are long-standing, deep-rooted, and interconnected challenges associated with deprivation, low skills, and poor health. The Government has set itself a number of specific missions that directly address the foundations of economic prosperity, including: bringing local public transport services closer to the standards of London, delivering nationwide gigabit broadband coverage, improving educational outcomes, increasing skills training, improving housing quality for renters, tackling crime, and closing gaps in Healthy Life Expectancy. However, it will be vital that continued emphasis is placed on disrupting entrenched socioeconomic challenges as the Levelling Up agenda develops further, particularly as much of the detail explaining how the Government plans to tackle these issues was absent from the White Paper.

The White Paper recognises both the urgency of such challenges and the state's role in solving them. This represents a tacit acknowledgement that austerity and the retrenchment of (local and national) state spending over the last 12 years has been detrimental to prosperity. Local authorities in the LCR saw on average a 28 percent reduction in their core spending power in the decade 2010/11 to 2019/20 (LCRCA, 2020b), reducing their capacity to arrest critical social and economic challenges in local communities, undermining the local public services that support people to thrive, and weakening the architecture around which shared prosperity can be developed. More detail is needed from the Government to explain how austerity-era cuts to public spending and public services will now be meaningfully reversed and rectified to support levelling up.

In addition, the long-term success of the levelling up agenda will require underperforming places to break the relationships of dependence which mean that their future prosperity is determined by the good will or indifference of national policymakers. Achieving this will require a significant redistribution of fiscal and political power to the local level, enabling places to develop alternative economic models that meet the needs of local citizens. A resurgent interest in municipalism – or 'the democratic autonomy of municipalities (from town parishes to metropolitan boroughs to city-regions) over political and economic life vis-à-vis the nation-state' (Thompson, 2021, p.317) – reflects this. Community Wealth Building (CWB) has, for example, become an increasingly influential model of municipalism that aims to establish:

> 'collaborative, inclusive, sustainable, and democratically controlled local economies' through the promotion of 'worker cooperatives, community land trusts, community development financial institutions, so-called "anchor institution" procurement strategies, municipal and local public enterprises, and public and community banking' (Guinan and O'Neill, 2020, p.2).

This approach seeks to nurture the local economic policies and institutions that provide for local citizens first and foremost, so as to develop the foundational economy upon which most people rely, and ensure that prosperity is more evenly distributed to help improve quality of life. The so-called 'Preston Model' provides one example of how CWB principles have been adopted to support economic development in an English city (see Brown and Jones, 2021); the Liverpool City Region has similarly committed to ensure these principles are central to its economic development policies and practices (LCRCA, 2022a).

Increasing local ownership and control over local policies will be even more critical in the context of accelerating climate emergency. As the birthplaces of the first industrial revolution, there is both an ethical and economic imperative that England's post-industrial cities now lead the transition towards zero carbon ways of living, working, and getting around. A changing climate, and the race to meet decarbonisation goals, will present systemic challenges to the resilience and effectiveness of the infrastructures that cities and their populations need to thrive. Rapid investment is now required to build resource efficiency and climate adaptation into the forms and functions of urban spaces, supporting the long-term sustainability, and prosperity, of local communities.

4.3. Power

The White Paper represents an acknowledgement of the limitations of centralised power and governance in England, and includes a welcome commitment to extend the devolution to city-regions that has taken place over recent years. As the White Paper notes, local actors have too rarely been empowered to design and deliver policies necessary to drive growth due to a centralised model that 'under-utilises local knowledge, fails to cultivate local leadership and has often meant anchor institutions in local government have lacked powers, capacity and capability' (HM Government, 2022, p.112).

Over the last decade, England has experienced an exceptionally high degree of institutional churn at the sub-national scale. Following the abolition of the Regional Development Agencies and Government Offices for the Regions in 2011, new regional and city-regional institutions introduced in the period since include:

- Local Enterprise Partnerships representing a wide spectrum of geographies including city-regions, single counties and multi-county areas, some of which are overlapping.
- Police & Crime Commissioners, some of which have been subsumed into combined authority structures.
- NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups.
- Combined Authorities, mainly covering metropolitan areas but also including the non-metro area of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, and the partial metro area of North of the Tyne.
- Elected 'Metro' Mayors representing these combined authority areas.
- Pan-Regional Transport Bodies: Seven pan-regional bodies, including Transport for the North, Midlands Connect, and Transport for the South East.

Devolution arrangements have tended to be organised through 'contract-style agreements between central government and local public bodies, to pursue agreed outcomes in discrete policy areas where a common interest can be identified' (Sandford, 2017, p.64), with a menu of policy options in which a number of devolved powers are available as standard to most areas, but with each deal also containing some unique elements (Sandford, 2020). Powers devolved to all or most combined authorities in England include: adult education; aligning business support (e.g. growth hubs); spatial planning and some powers over housing; public transport, including bus franchising in some areas; and transport infrastructure through the Transforming Cities Fund. Bespoke deals have been agreed with the West Midlands CA, the GMCA, and the West of England CA on funding for affordable housing. Two devolution deals (Greater Manchester and Cornwall) include significant powers and funding for health and social care.

Despite these recent advances towards decentralising some powers, sub-national government in England has little ability to raise revenue itself, leaving the UK as one of the OECD's most centralised nations (McCann, 2020). In Germany, over 30 percent of tax revenue is raised at the sub-national level compared to under 5 percent in the UK. In Spain, local and regional taxes account for 23.6 percent of total tax income, and in Italy the figure is 16.5 percent. Even in France, historically regarded as a highly centralised state, 13 percent of tax revenue is raised locally (OECD, 2020). While London has more extensive income generating powers than other English cities, particularly through the operation of its public transport network, 70 percent of its revenue comes from central government compared to 26 percent in New York, 16.3 percent in Paris, and 5.6 percent in Tokyo.

The devolution framework set out in the White Paper provides welcome clarification as to the direction of travel for the rescaling of powers to the sub-national scale in England. It outlines four principles for devolution: provision of effective local leadership, with a preference for directly elected mayors; 'sensible' geographies, emphasising the need for devolved bodies to be based on functional economic areas; flexibility, noting that devolved powers will be tailored to each individual area; and accountability, highlighting the need for sub-national bodies to be transparent, accountable and open to working with other local partners in both private and public sectors. However, there is little in the way of detail about the potential for future fiscal devolution. As a result, sub-national governmental bodies will continue to rely on redistribution directed by central government to fund local priorities. Furthermore, following the UK's exit from the European Union, new sources of regional investment funding such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) look likely to be aligned with national political priorities, leaving local and city-regional leaders with limited autonomy over policy design and spending decisions. Local and sub-national governments remain principally a delivery vehicle for public services based on nationally-set entitlements (John, 2014; Sandford, 2016). There are also concerns that the level of funding for UKSPF falls short of what was previously provided by EU Structural Funds. Liverpool City Region, for example, will receive £10.2m less from UKSPF per year between 2022 and 2025 than it did from EU Structural Funds between 2014 and 2020 (LCRCA, 2022c).

The implications of this are of interest not only in terms of central-local relations and the distribution of power in a multi-level system, but also with regards to the potential to develop long-term, sustainable policy solutions to address regional inequalities. The ability of national governments to privilege certain places over others in policy and funding is one of the defining characteristics of modern governance (Jessop, 2001; Jessop and Morgan, 2021). However, in the case of regional policy in England this has led to a high turnover in policy priorities which has arguably damaged attempts to focus on the types of long-term structural changes required to reverse decades of bifurcation between regions. More sustainable and locally generated sources of funding will be required to ensure local and sub-national leaders have sufficient tools at their disposal to address specific local policy priorities.

5. Conclusion

While the Levelling Up the UK White Paper is often insightful in its diagnosis of the UK's spatial inequality challenges, the policies proposed to address these inequalities – and crucially the levels of funding required to meet its objectives – are insufficiently ambitious. Comparisons have been made to Germany's success, since reunification, in investing heavily in the physical and social infrastructure of Eastern cities such as Berlin, Leipzig, and Dresden (Enenkel, 2021; Fischer, 2019), and the levels of public funding required to achieve necessary economic transformation. Perhaps more pertinent to the situation in England is the experience of France which, despite its long lineage of centralised government since the 19th century, devolved a range of fiscal and policy powers to the regions in the early 1980s, while also investing extensively in rail infrastructure to improve connectivity between its largest cities. Lessons may also be drawn from the Netherlands, which has adopted a holistic view of regional policy across government, incorporating strategies on housing, industry and the environment into its approach to regional development (OECD 2019). Funding committed to the Levelling Up agenda does not come close to the 7.5 percent 'solidarity' tax levy on all employers and employees in Germany after reunification (5.5% after 1998), nor is there any clear pathway for local leaders in England to enjoy the kinds of political powers held by their peers in many European nations.

If Levelling Up is to be truly impactful for post-industrial cities and city-regions such as the Liverpool City Region, more power must be distributed to allow places to design, deliver, and fund the regeneration and renewal of their own local economies. The mainstreaming of 'place' in government policies is promoted through the White Paper, and it acknowledges that all government departments have a role to play in reducing regional inequalities. However, there is a risk that the Levelling Up agenda as it stands is insufficiently spatially focused to achieve change, especially given the levels of funding likely to be available over coming years. Recent comments from government ministers have suggested that Levelling Up incorporates policy areas as diverse as schools, crime and defence (IfG, 2022). The White Paper 's 12 'missions' cover a range of geographies and socio-economic objectives. If regional policy is to mean something, it cannot be everything. Difficult political decisions will need to be made about where funding and focus should be prioritised. While we do not suggest that spatial policy should solely focus on second-tier English city-regions such as the Liverpool City Region, we argue that they represent the most fertile ground upon which to sow the seeds for a rebalanced and renewed UK economy, with communities empowered to meaningfully identify local needs and promote local opportunities. Crucially, a focus on second-tier city-regions would build on regional policies of the last 20 years, and particularly moves since the mid-2010s to provide more visible, accountable local leadership in the form of 'metro' mayors.

Analysis of the challenges facing the Liverpool City Region and other English city-regions contained within this paper is not new. As discussed in Section 3, acknowledgement of the UK's interregional inequalities, and the contribution of second-tier city underperformance towards them, is long-standing (Martin et al., 2016). The Levelling Up the UK White Paper represents a welcome, high-profile assessment of the problem. What has been lacking in regional policy over the last two decades is consistency, and a long-term commitment to both a deep and robust devolution of powers and funding to the sub-national scale. Genuine levelling up will require significant investment in infrastructure and public services, alongside fundamental restructuring of the UK's overly centralised system of governance. Success of the agenda should, in large part, be measured by the extent to which local leaders and communities feel that they have sufficient powers and funding to affect change and determine their own futures.

References

Brown, Matthew. and Jones, Rhian E. (2021) *Paint Your Town Red: How Preston Took Back Control and Your Town Can Too.* London: Repeater.

City Monitor (2017) Was the decline in Liverpool's historic population really that unusual? *City Monitor.* 17 November. Available from: https://citymonitor.ai/government/was-decline-liverpool-s-historic-population-really-unusual-3490

Colomb, Claire (2007) Unpacking New Labour's 'urban renaissance' agenda: towards a socially sustainable reurbanization of British cities? *Planning Practice & Research,* 22(1), 1-24.

Dalingwater, Louise (2011) Regional Performance in the UK under New Labour. *Observatoire de la société britannique,* 10 (1), 115-136.

Dajnak, David., Walton, Heather. and Beevers, Sean. (2020) Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Health and Economic Impact Assessment Study. *Imperial College London.* Available at: http://www.erg.ic.ac.uk/research/home/projects/liverpool.html

Enenkel, Kathrin. (2021) What can German reunification teach the UK about levelling up?. *Centre for Cities.* 4 October. Available from: https://www.centreforcities.org/blog/what-can-german-reunification-teach-the-uk-about-levelling-up/

Fischer, Thomas B. (2019) The use of infrastructure and regeneration investment to support the stabilisation of Eastern Germany during the period of post-unification transition – summary and lessons learned. *UK2070 Commission Think Piece.* Available from: http://uk2070.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/UK2070_Fischer_Rebuilding_Of_The_GDR.pdf

Flyvbjerg, Bent. (2006) Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research. *Qualitative Inquiry,* 12 (2), 219–245.

Fothergill, Steve. and Houston, Donald. (2016) Are big cities really the motor of UK regional economic growth? *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society,* 9 (2), 319–334.

Guinan, Joe. and O'Neill, Martin. (2020) *The Case for Community Wealth Building.* Cambridge: Polity.

Heseltine Institute (2021) Submission to The Productivity Commission's first evidence session: 'Sizing the productivity problem: international, national, regional and sectoral aspects. Available from https://www.niesr.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Heseltine-Institute-for-Public-Policy.pdf

HM Government (2022) *Levelling Up the United Kingdom.* London: HMSO.

HM Treasury (2007) *Review of sub-national economic development and regeneration.* London: HM Treasury.

Institute for Government (2022) Levelling up: what is it and will it work? In conversation with Neil O'Brien and Sebastian Payne. 29 March. Available from: https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/events/levelling-up

Jennings, Will. and Stoker, Gerry. (2016) The Bifurcation of Politics: Two Englands. *The Political Quarterly,* 87 (3), 372–382.

Jessop, Bob. (1990) *State Theory: Putting the Capitalist State in Its Place.* Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.

Jessop, Bob. and Morgan, Jamie. (2022) The strategic-relational approach, realism and the state: from regulation theory to neoliberalism via Marx and Poulantzas, an interview with Bob Jessop. *Journal of Critical Realism,* 21 (1), 83–118.

John, Peter. (2014) The Great Survivor: The Persistence and Resilience of English Local Government. *Local Government Studies,* 40 (5), 687–704.

Lee, Neil. (2017) Powerhouse of cards? Understanding the 'Northern Powerhouse'. *Regional Studies* 51(3): 478–489.

Leyshon, Andrew. (2021) Economic geography I: Uneven development, 'left behind places' and 'levelling up' in a time of crisis. *Progress in Human Geography,* 45 (6), 1678–1691.

Liverpool City Region All Party Parliamentary Group (2021) Level up, recover and deliver clean, green and inclusive growth: The final report of the Liverpool City Region APPG Build Back Better Inquiry. https://appglcr.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/LIVERPOOL-APPG-Build-Back-Better-Inquiry-Report-v3.pdf

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (2019) Our housing ambitions for the Liverpool City Region 2019-2024. Available from: https://www.liverpoolcityregion-ca.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/LCRCA-HOUSING-STATEMENT-2019.pdf

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (2020a) Draft Local Industrial Strategy. Available from: https://www.liverpoolcityregion-ca.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/LCRCA_LIS_March_2020.pdf

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (2020b) The Case for the Liverpool City Region. Available from https://www.liverpoolcityregion-ca.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/The-Case-for-the-Liverpool-City-Region.pdf

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (2021a) Liverpool City Region Local Skills Action Plan 2021-22. Available from: https://www.liverpoolcityregion-ca.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/Local-Skills-Action-Plan-2021-22.pdf

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (2021b) News: The three big reasons to ditch the car in favour of walking and cycling for short journeys. Available from: https://www.liverpoolcityregion-ca.gov.uk/the-three-big-reasons-to-ditch-the-car-in-favour-of-walking-and-cycling-for-short-journeys/

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (2022a) Plan for Prosperity. Available from https://www.liverpoolcityregion-ca.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/Plan-for-Prosperity-2022-1.pdf

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (2022b) Liverpool City Region Plan for Prosperity Evidence Base. Available from https://www.liverpoolcityregion-ca.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/Plan-for-Prosperity-Full-Evidence-Base.pdf

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (2022c) The UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Available from: https://www.liverpoolcityregion-ca.gov.uk/growing-our-economy/uk-shared-prosperity-fund/

Mackinnon, Danny (2020) Governing uneven development: the Northern Powerhouse as a 'state spatial strategy'. *Territory, Politics, Governance* 9 (5): 613-635.

MacKinnon, Danny., Kempton, Louise., O'Brien, Peter., Ormerod, Emma., Pike, Andy. and Tomaney, John. (2022) Reframing urban and regional 'development' for 'left behind' places. *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society,* 15 (1), 39–56.

Martin, Ron., Pike, Andy., Tyler, Peter. and Gardiner, Ben. (2016) Spatially rebalancing the UK economy: towards a new policy model? *Regional Studies,* 50 (2), 342-357.

Martin, Ron., Gardiner, Ben., Pike, Andy., Sunley, Peter., and Tyler, Peter. (2021) *Levelling up Left Behind Places: The Scale and Nature of the Economic and Policy Challenge.* London: Routledge.

McCann, Philip. (2016) *The UK Regional-National Economic Problem: Geography, globalisation and governance.* London: Routledge.

McCann, Philip. (2020) Perceptions of regional inequality and the geography of discontent: insights from the UK. *Regional Studies,* 54 (2), 256–267.

McCann, Philip. and Ortega-Argilés, Raquel. (2021) The UK 'geography of discontent': narratives, Brexit and inter-regional 'levelling up'. *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society,* 14 (3), 545–564.

Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (2019) English indices of deprivation 2019. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019

Newman, Jack. (2021) The Ambiguous Ideology of Levelling Up. *The Political Quarterly,* 92 (2), 312–320.

O'Brien, Chris. (2019) Surviving Nokia: How Oulu, Finland rebounded from the collapse of its largest employer. Available from: https://venturebeat.com/2019/05/10/surviving-nokia-how-oulu-finland-rebounded-from-the-collapse-of-its-largest-employer/

OECD (2019) *Regional Outlook 2019.* Paris: OECD. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/publications/oecd-regional-outlook-2019-9789264312838-en.htm

OECD (2020) OECD Fiscal Decentralisation Database. Available from: https://www.oecd.org/tax/federalism/fiscal-decentralisation-database/#A_Title

Parkinson, Michael. (2016) UK city regions: policies, performance and prospects. *Town Planning Review,* 87, 629-653.

Parkinson, Michael. (2019) *Liverpool Beyond the Brink: The Remaking of a Post Imperial City.* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Parkinson, Michael. (2022) Levelling up: why UK cities are less competitive than their European counterparts. *The Conversation.* Available from: http://theconversation.com/levelling-up-why-uk-cities-are-less-competitive-than-their-european-counterparts-177382

Parkinson, Michael., Hutchins, Mary., Simmie, James. and Verdonk, Hans. (2004) Competitive European Cities: Where do the Core Cities Stand?. London: ODPM.

Parr, John. (2017) The Northern Powerhouse: a commentary. *Regional Studies* 51 (3), 490–500.

Peck, Frank. and McGuinness, David. (2003) Regional Development Agencies and Cluster Strategies: Engaging the Knowledge-base in the North of England. *Local Economy,* 18 (1), 49-62.

Public Health England (2022) Public Health Profiles. Available from: https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/media/livacuk/publicpolicyamppractice/consultationresponses/Productivity,Commission,-,Heseltine,Institute,Evidence,Submission,-,Final,Draft.pdf

Powell, Walter W. and Snellman, Kaisa. (2004) The Knowledge Economy, *Annual Review of Sociology,* 30 (0), 199-220.

Rodríguez-Pose, Andrés. (2018) The revenge of the places that don't matter (and what to do about it). *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society,* 11 (1), 189–209.

Sandford, Mark. (2016) Public services and local government: the end of the principle of 'funding following duties'. *Local Government Studies,* 42 (4), 637–656.

Sandford, Mark. (2017) Signing up to devolution: the prevalence of contract over governance in English devolution policy. *Regional & Federal Studies,* 27 (1), 63–82.

Sandford, Mark. (2020) Giving power away? The 'de-words' and the downward transfer of power in mid-2010s England. *Regional & Federal Studies,* 30 (1), 25–46.

Sandford, Mark. (2022) *Devolution to local government in England.* House of Commons Library Briefing Paper no. CBP07029. London: House of Commons Library.

Shaping Futures (2021) *The demographics and educational disadvantage in the Liverpool City Region.* Liverpool: University of Liverpool.

Thompson, Matthew., Nowak, Vicky., Southern, Alan., Davies, Jackie., Furmedge, Peter. (2020) 'Re-grounding the city with Polanyi: from urban entrepreneurialism to entrepreneurial municipalism'. *Economy and Space A,* 0(0), 1-24.

Thompson, Matthew. (2021) What's so new about New Municipalism? *Progress in Human Geography,* 45 (2), 317-342.

Unger, Roberto Mangabeira., Stanley, Isaac., Gabriel, Madeleine., and Mulgan, Geoff. (2019) *Imagination Unleashed: Democratising the Knowledge Economy.* Available from https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/imagination-unleashed/

Transactions of the Association of European Schools of Planning • 6 (2022)
doi: 10.24306/TrAESOP.2022.01.002

DEVELOPING COMPANIONSHIP WITH THE LEFT-BEHINDS

UNIVERSITY SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO RURAL REGENERATION IN THE BADLANDS REGION OF TAIWAN

Hsiutzu Betty Chang[a]

(Received 28 May 2022; revised version received 23 October 2022; final version accepted 18 December 2022)

Abstract

The subject of regional inequality has garnered scholars' attention over the past decade and has generated debates on those territories forgotten by mainstream economic activities. Though left-behind places are a global phenomenon, they are sited in different development contexts that require customized, place-based solutions. This paper discusses a possible approach to working with the left-behinds: leveraging the university as an institutional resource to engage people and places in regional regeneration. Using the Collaborative Badlands project as an example, we describe the learning journey of developing ground solutions and companionship between a research university and the left-behind communities in a rural badlands region. Adopting a hybrid approach of an asset-based approach to community development and collaborative planning for regional development, this case demonstrates a potential levelling-up strategy for sustainable development for the lagging region.

Keywords

Left-behind, university social responsibility, place-based, asset-based, collaborative planning

a (Corresponding author) Associate Professor, Department of Urban Planning National Chen Kung University, Tainan, Taiwan No.1, University Road., East Dist., Tainan City 701, Taiwan (R.O.C.) E-Mail: hsiutzuchang@mail.ncku.edu.tw

1. Introduction

1.1. Left-Behind as a Global Phenomenon

The term 'left-behind' has often been brought up in the policy arena over the past few years. It refers to those places that are forgotten by mainstream economic activities. National economic policies often emphasise agglomeration and investments in large cities or targeted geographic areas to make such places competitive globally. The rationale behind such concentration of investment is based on a strong belief that the economic benefits will trickle down to other areas, including those that are less prosperous (Bolton *et al.*, 2019). These areas, including former industrial regions, second-order cities, towns, and rural areas, do not experience the benefits from premier cities or regions; rather, they often suffer through supporting such growth without reaping its benefits. This approach to economic growth often neglects middle- and low-paid workers in non-targeted sectors as well as the infrastructure that supports the upgrades and innovations that benefit the whole economy (Reeves, 2018). If being left behind describes the consequence, then being held back is the cause; the policy neglect of such areas is quite evident (Bolton *et al.*, 2019).

Disconnected from development opportunities, such places continue to experience increases in geographical inequalities, resulting in social, economic, and even political costs. At the individual level, fewer job opportunities, lower levels of educational attainment and mobility, and poor health are common attributes among residents in left-behind places. A lack of social or civic infrastructure and low levels of community activity that promote connectedness and participation are seen at the community level. This lack of connectedness includes both physical and digital connectivity (Bolton *et al.*, 2019). At a national level, these inequalities contribute to the slow growth of the overall economy (Cigano, 2014; IMF, 2017; Ostry *et al.*, 2016; Stiglitz, 2015; as cited in Tomaney *et al.*, 2021), and generate a greater wealth gap between those who have benefited and the rest of the population (McKay, 2019). Politically, places that lag behind 'may hold back collective growth and threaten the social fabric on which a healthy democracy depends' (Berube and Murray, 2018, p. 2). As a result, the increasing gap between the 'growth spurt' and the 'left behind' (Jennings, Stoker and Twyman, 2016) causes greater intra-regional inequalities and may prompt political backlash in a nation.

Particularly within developed countries in the northern hemisphere, the election results of 2016-2017 demonstrated a sentiment of exclusion. For example, England and Wales voted to leave the European Union in the Brexit referendum (Tomaney and Pike, 2018; Townsend and Champion, 2020); rural populations voted for Donald Trump to restore working-class America (Ulrich-Schad and Duncan, 2018); and Marine Le Pen ran a divisive campaign for the French presidential election (Tomaney, Pike and Natarajan, 2021). These political incidents all demonstrate that there is a growing gap between those who have benefited and those who are left behind. The political backlash from areas (whether rural or urban) missing out on the economic prosperity of a nation has made the notion of the 'left-behind' region emerge as a critical subject and placed a new emphasis on taking into account regional geography in public policy.

1.2. Place-Based Approaches to Level Up Left-Behinds

How to 'level up' the left-behinds has become an important national policy arena beyond economic considerations. As traditional top-down policy frameworks have largely failed left-behind regions, fresh thinking on future development strategies and a new politics of redistribution are required to make a difference (Tomaney *et al.*, 2021). Academics have called for a 'less centred' spatial policy structure and have looked for place-based approaches to be remedies by which to level up left-behind places (Martin *et al.*, 2019; Pike, 2018; as cited in Townsend and Champion, 2020). There are some common features among current proposals that work with left-behind areas, including addressing the fundamental issues and taking a customised and targeted approach which is often place-based and asset-based to make institutional and capability improvements (Iammarino, Rodriguez-Pose and Storper, 2019; Bolton *et al.*, 2019; Tomaney *et al.*, 2021).

The World Bank has called for individual regions to act as the architects and implementers of programmes to address their locally unique capabilities and challenges. In turn, this will provide customised, on-the-ground support, both at regional and local levels (Farole, Goga and Ionescu-Heriou, 2017). At the same time, by working on the ground and connecting to local issues, it is possible to call for institutional and regulatory reforms that will improve policies at a national level (Tomaney *et al.*, 2021). Rather than waiting and competing for top-down national policies, 'left-behind' regions would be better served by policies that seek to secure their foundational economies and which invest in high-quality infrastructure to improve their underlying social problems.

To address the multidimensional nature of the problems faced in these left-behind places, Bolton *et al.* (2019) emphasise the value and importance of civic infrastructure, connectivity, and community engagement as important in seeking to protect them from a downward spiral. They address the importance of creating strategies that are flexible and community-led, as well as the importance of making connections to opportunities that lie beyond the given community. To initiate sustainable, positive changes, they argue that any funding initiative that seeks to level up left-behind neighbourhoods should be invested at the neighbourhood level, long-term, and be led by resident decision-making. Rebuilding community confidence and capacity, and improving the quality of life are as important as improving economic conditions.

Given the geographical differentiation of socio-economic conditions in left-behind regions, Tomaney *et al.* (2021) call for a place-based approach to local and regional economic development. On the demand side, place-based approaches can aim to (re)build and enhance the everyday and foundational economy of the place (Reeves, 2018), improve basic infrastructures, and stimulate demand-side policies that respond to the immediacy of the place. On the supply side, such approaches take an appreciative, positive view of the place by maximising local assets and empowering local stakeholders to maximise their skills, talent, and capabilities (Barca, McCann and Rodríguez-Pose, 2012) to release untapped local potential. Such policies aim to increase and broaden capital ownership to anchor jobs locally and to place local infrastructure back under local control (Cumbers, 2016; Centre for Local Economic Strategies, 2017). As a result, place-based approaches require more participatory, multistakeholder, and deliberative models of decision-making to bring in customised resources and enhance untapped local potentials at the same time.

The suggested place-based approach for left-behind areas is similar to asset-based community development (abbreviated as ABCD), an alternative community development approach initiated in North America as an innovative strategy for community-driven development (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003). Initiated by Kretzmann and McKnight (1993), this approach recognises the capacities of local people and their associations to build powerful communities, particularly in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and rural communities. The process of recognising these capacities begins with constructing a new lens through which communities can 'begin to assemble their strengths into new combinations, new structures of opportunity, new sources of income and control, and new possibilities for production' (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993, p. 6). Contrary to a needs-based approach, the appeal of ABCD lies in its emphasis on local assets and seeing people in communities as capable of organising the development process themselves by identifying and mobilising unrecognised assets to create local economic opportunities. By mobilising these hidden assets, including informal social networks, formal institutional resources can be activated to leverage additional support and entitlement, especially through local associations. ABCD can be understood as a set of methods for community mobilisation, and as a strategy for sustainable community-driven development (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003). In the next section, we discuss universities as local institutions and potential assets for left-behind places under the concept of university social responsibility.

2. University Social Responsibility as a Place-Based Approach

The call for increased community engagement in the higher education sector is not new but has received more attention under the term university social responsibility (USR). USR stemmed from the spirit of corporate social responsibility (CRS). In the European Union and globally, the concept of social responsibility has become increasingly important and popular with regard to sustainable development as the ideas of competitiveness and sustainability have gradually become more closely related. Integrating social and environmental concerns into business strategies and operations has become an indicator of competitiveness in the context of globalisation (Vasilescu, Barna, Epure and Baicu, 2010). The environment of corporatisation is ever-changing, and higher education has gone through a process of privatisation. The narrow perspective on knowledge (e.g., technical rationality) in academic ivory towers has made universities further distanced from solving real-world problems (Shek and Hollister, 2017). It is in such a context that USR emerged to form a partnership with local stakeholders to allocate the resources to help address issues in the community and help their businesses and institutions achieve a balance of social, environmental, and economic dimensions.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, USR has received much global attention. It has become a global movement of institutional transformation in higher education. Gomez's (2014) analysis of the concept of USR began in 2001 when Chile extended the concept of social responsibility to domestic universities. The Romanian government has also stressed the importance of developing USR as a public policy to guide university engagement in solving domestic social problems and has emphasised the need for coexistence between universities and their environment (Vasilescua *et al.*, 2010; Yang, 2019). Developed countries such as the United States and Canada, and the European Union began to promote measures related to the social responsibility of universities (especially for environmental issues and sustainable development) as early as the 2010s. The European Framework for University Social Responsibility (EU-USR) calls for transparency of governance, active responses to societal demands, effective information to be accessible, and strategies to exert universities' social influence (EU-USR, 2018; as cited in Lin and Chen, 2020). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) urges the participation of universities in local economies in the era of globalisation and highlights the role that regional universities have in promoting regional development and economic linkages (Yang, 2019; Lin and Chen, 2020). The concept of 'regional learning economy', combined with 'learning regions' and 'learning cities', was put forward by the OECD to highlight the significance of regional universities in driving the learning economy (Yang, 2019). Universities worldwide have begun to embrace a new paradigm of learning and contribution by engaging their staff and students in their local communities to engage in different learning opportunities and by providing proactive solutions to societal and environmental changes.

In addition to their economic functions in the global economy, universities have always held a special place and a public role in society. They provide services related to the transfer of knowledge to their customers, ranging from individuals to public and private organisations, as well as to society as a whole (Gourova, Todorova and Gourov, 2009). Universities preserve and extend their knowledge through education and research via intellectual, scientific, creative, and artistic activities. More importantly, they play an important role in public discussions on social problems and facilitate mutual understanding of civil society and cultural diversity (Tetřevová and Sabolova, 2010). Their roles are multi-dimensional and are integrated into the scientific, cultural, social, and economic development of society. Through different programmes, whether acting individually by faculty interests or collectively through university policies, universities have become active stakeholders in problem-solving, social innovation, and economic development.

3. University Social Responsibility in Taiwan

Following this new paradigm, the Ministry of Education in Taiwan launched the University Social Responsibility Programme in 2017 as one of its high-profile national education policies. Based on individual universities' strengths and expertise, 220 projects were funded in 116 universities across the country to promote innovative education and research activities between campuses and their local communities. The policy aims to encourage higher education institutions in Taiwan to 'invest their intellectual assets and human resources in solving local social and economic problems, as well as to construct a think tank and proactive ecosystem for regional innovation and development' (Centre for University Social Responsibility, 2022). With over 75 percent of the universities in the country engaging in these educational experiments, it is evident that the nation is attempting to make higher education knowledge and human resources essential components of local affairs.

According to Wu's (2018) definition of USR, 'In addition to fulfilling its teaching and research responsibilities, universities should do their best to shoulder the responsibility of serving the society and educating students with a social mind, with a sense of mission to drive the progress and development of society, to fulfil the function of the university in promoting sustainable development.' (p.1) Following this argument, the Centre for University Social Responsibility in Taiwan pointed out that the core mission of the University Social Responsibility Practice Plan is to take local connections and talent cultivation seriously. To make higher education facilities people-oriented and locally responsive institutions, the goal of USR is to solve regional problems, fulfil social responsibilities with a humanistic approach, and promote the application and diffusion of innovative knowledge to drive local success (Yang, 2019; Centre for University Social Responsibility, 2022). As important local, regional, and national institutions, universities are expected to serve as active and responsible contributors to society and local communities. The concept of USR thus throws the door of these ivory towers wide open and creates opportunities for connections between higher education and communities (i.e., left-behind places) and for the development of the regions in which the individual universities are sited.

Taiwan's efforts in cultivating students with social responsivity and connecting universities with communities did not start with the launch of the USR programme. The Ministry of Education promulgated the University and College Service-Learning Project to promote service-learning as an integral part of citizen education in higher education in 2007 (Hu, 2015; Fang, 2016). Service learning, as a type of experiential learning, merges community service and classroom learning and involves teachers and students in meeting societal needs through formal curricula. For many universities, service learning plays an important role in establishing university-community engagement (Fang, 2016). However, its impact on university culture is limited to individual faculty members due to its course-based nature (Chen, 2021). There have been other Ministry of Education programmes that have also emphasised the importance of citizenship and social responsibility of the students, such as the Mid-term Framework Plan for General Education (2007-2010) and the Competence Development for Modern Citizen (2011-2014). Additionally, programmes such as the Trans-disciplinary Education on Society-Humanity-Science (the SHS Programme, 2012-2015) and the University Learning Ecosystem for Taiwan (2015-2017) focused on the development of innovations or trans-disciplinary curriculum activities in higher education to step outside the university to make connections with society for problem-solving and create a network of co-creation (Wu, 2016). The Humanity Innovation and Social Practice (HISP) Project (2013-current), funded by the Ministry of Science and Technology takes a step further. It integrates academic research and innovation with social practices and encourages the formation of partnerships with local communities to address local demands and problems (Dai and Wu, 2013). Compared with the scale of USR funding, the grants from these education and research programmes are often implemented by a smaller pool of experimental universities. Nevertheless, these endeavours have initiated a place-based, incremental, and learning-by-doing approach for university-wide transformations and created co-learning platforms for trans-disciplinary instructors, students, and local stakeholders. Thus, these endeavours have laid a foundation for USR to take place in Taiwan as a national policy.

On the community side, policy and historical contexts have also reduced the learning curve of university-community partnerships in Taiwan. The Ministry of Culture initiated the Community Empowerment Program (shequ zongti yíngzao) in 1994 to promote citizen participation to rebuild local culture and nurture senses of belonging. This policy made community participation a trend in Taiwan, activated social energy in civil society, and promoted community-building (a common term by which the government promotes grassroots participation in different public spheres) (Liao, 2008; Wang, 2008). The catastrophic event of the "921 Earthquake" in 1999 made the government fully recognize the importance of community participation in disaster reconstruction. The bottom-up approach of the Community Empowerment Program has been incorporated into national disaster planning and policies ever since (Huang, 2016). Another rural policy, Rural Regeneration (nongcun zaisheng), which was launched by the Council of Agriculture of the Executive Yuan in 2012, puts a stronger emphasis on community economic development by integrating physical, cultural, and ecological assets and engaging different professional disciplines in rural communities. These policies were originally designed to address different issues in the community development history of Taiwan, but they have also been essential levelling-up strategies which have promoted decision-making and empowerment at a community level. By building capacities at a local level, these policies paved a solid foundation for university-community engagements in different parts of Taiwan.

The following sections present a case study called 'Collaborative Badlands'. It is a project that the author directed and participated in while at the National Cheng Kung University (NCKU) in Taiwan between 2016 and 2022. The case illustrates how two programmes, HISP and USR, combined the concepts of social practice, social innovation, social enterprise (Pratono and Wong, 2019), entrepreneurship education (Fang, 2018), and social responsibility to address the left-behind conditions of a rural region in southwestern Taiwan nick-named the 'Badlands' and proposed levelling-up solutions for this territory.

4. Badlands: Zuojhen and the Left-Behind Rural Region

4.1. Zuojhen as a Site for Social Innovations

The Collaborative Badlands project was first called The Taskforce of Gongguan Community. It was part of the HISP programme launched by the Ministry of Science and Technology, the largest research funding institution in Taiwan. The Research Centre for Humanities and Social Sciences in NCKU implemented the HISP programme in 2014 in Tainan City under the core concept of 'Together with a Good Society'. As the city annexed its nearby country areas to form a metropolitan region in 2010, the overall goals of the HISP project were sustainability and to respond to the various injustices and development dilemmas that then existed in the political, social, and economic development of the region (Dai and Wu, 2013; Dai, 2015). Three types of 'communities for action' were selected in the HISP to address aging conditions in the central city, practice sustainable farming in the rural communities, and assist the disadvantaged regional area through social innovations. The Gongguan community in Zoujhen was selected to represent the third category in hopes of revealing the needs of the area and initiating NCKU's systematic participation in communities via an innovative service journey (the Taskforce of Gongguan Community, 2016; Pratono and Wong, 2019).

4.2. The Left-Behind Conditions of Zuojhen

Zuojhen, about 75 square kilometres in size, is an administrative district located in the southeastern part of the Tainan metropolitan region. Whilst it is only 20 minutes (by car) from the Tainan Science Park (the southern Silicon Valley of Taiwan), Zuojhen is perceived to be one of the most depopulated rural communities in Taiwan. The population decreased by more than 17 percent between 2010 and 2020, and the current total population is comprised of fewer than 4,500 people (Tainan City Government, 2022). With a birth rate of 0 percent and the second-highest mortality rate in the metropolitan, Zuojhen has been labelled as an 'extreme village' and was selected as the pilot area for the Regional Regeneration Policy (difang chuang sheng) in 2020. Yet historically, the town was the gateway from the city to the mountain area and was also a significant transportation and commercial hub for agricultural goods. With the construction of Route 20, the traffic bypasses the town centre to the north; this has accelerated the deterioration of the high street. The town centre has now become one of the few commercial areas in Taiwan where no convenience stores or home delivery services are available.

Gongguan, located in the southern hilly part of Zuojhen, fits the description of a left-behind place in many regards. It is economically disadvantaged due to its natural environment and land regulations. This is an area with a unique geological condition, 'Badlands'. The main features of the badlands are its hilly terrain, lime mudstone, and highly alkaline soil. The topology and soil conditions make large-scale machine farming impossible and less competitive than conventional market practices. Institutionally, the establishment of water quality protection zones has limited the industrial development of the area. Restrictions on large-scale ranching activities have further reduced employment opportunities in the region. In addition, the lack of public services has made the left-behind situation worse. With continued out-migration, public services such as public transportation, schools, clinics, and police stations have gradually closed or been downsized. Socially, Zuojhen has the highest percentage of Siraya, one of the Taiwanese Plains Tribes, whose indigenous status has not been recognised by the state. As an indigenous tribe that has historically lived alongside the Han (Chinese) population, their ethnic identity as aboriginals has historically been hidden and shied away from. Social identity and local confidence have further deteriorated due to outmigration and the lack of employment opportunities. As a result, the community faces complex social-economic problems including unemployment, lack of commercial service delivery, inconvenient medical treatments, lack of social interactions, intergenerational parenting, and so on (Dai, 2015; Lin, 2017; Pratono and Wong, 2019).

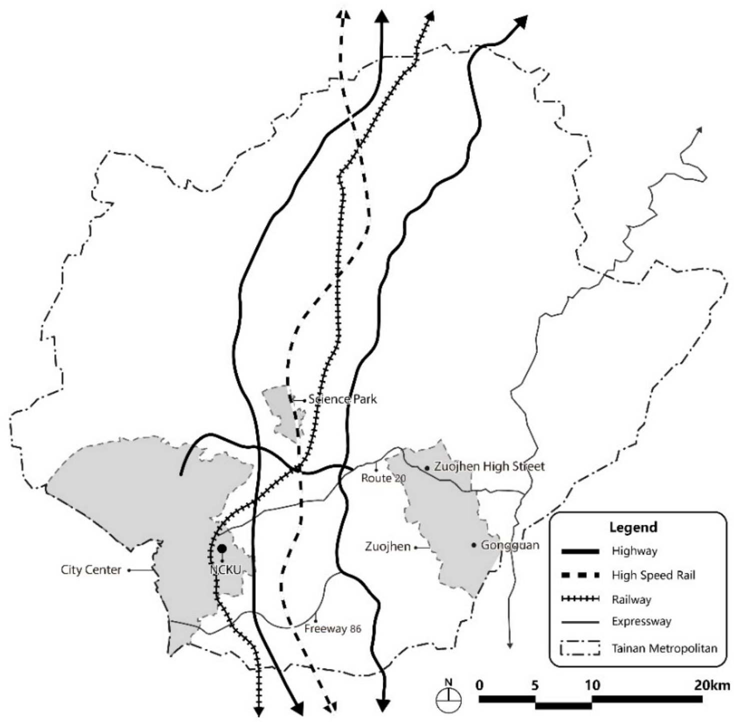

Figure 1 - Location of Zoujhen in relation to the city centre and science park

4.3. The Rich Assets of Zuojhen

Despite the complex conditions which contribute to the left-behind nature of Zuojhen, the town is a rural area rich in historical, cultural, and natural assets. The archaeological finding of the Zuojhen people confirmed the existence of one of the earliest prehistoric humans in Taiwan. The fossil and archaeological sites near the Cailiao River were once popular destinations for fossil diggers. Zuojhen was also one of the settlements that accepted the western missionary James Laidlaw Maxwell and thereby Christianity to spread quickly in southern Taiwan during the 19th century. Culturally, Zuojhen was one of the early settlement areas for the Siraya people before the Han people arrived; it still has the highest percentage of Siraya persons in Tainan. Siraya cultural activities such as hunting, music, and religion can still be found in the area. Environmentally, the unique topography and geology of the badlands have also contributed to the development of unique agriculture and animal husbandry. The lack of large-scale arable land and the sodium compounds in the badlands soil have made agricultural production small in quantity but diverse and unique in both texture and flavour. The unique topography also makes Zuojhen a famous destination; it is known for its beautiful sunrises and the low-altitude 'sea of clouds' effect under certain meteorological conditions. These assets have attracted the government's attention with regard to tourist infrastructure development over the past decade, which included the Fossil Park in the north of the area and the Erliao Sunrise Pavilion in the south (Figure 2). The Fossil Park attracted over one million tourists in the two years after its reopening in 2019. The Sunrise Pavilion has been the official New Year's event destination for Tainan City since 2013. However, the economic benefits of these tourism sites have not yet trickled down in such a way as to improve the basic service provisions and retail development of the high street or nearby communities (Figures 3 and 4).

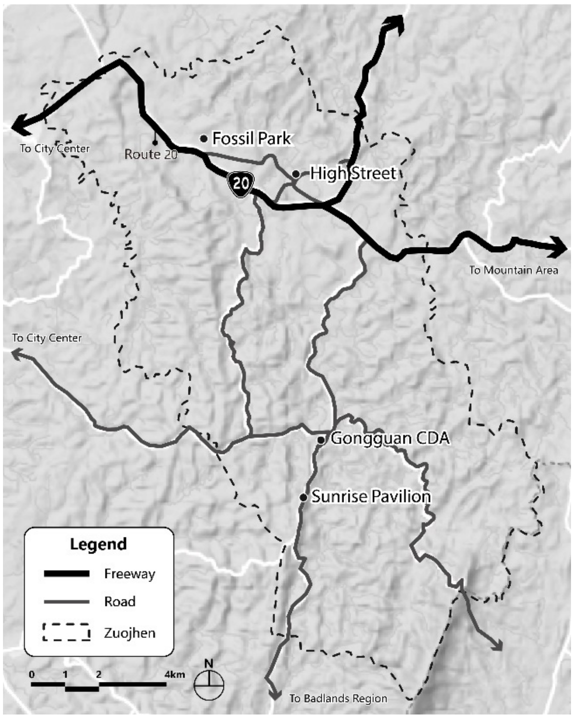

Figure 2 - Map of Zoujhen showing the topography, major routes, local sites, and tourist facilities

Figure 3 - The badlands landscape in Zuojhen

Figure 4 - The high street of Zuojhen

5. HISP: Levelling-Up through Equality and Empowerment

5.1. The Challenging Beginning of University-Community Partnership

The causes of Zoujhen being left-behind are mixed and include institutional constraints and cultural biases. The overall national economic policy is pro-urban and pro-industrial; structurally, this leaves rural areas behind. In addition, continued out-migration has caused a sense of hopelessness in the place, which is intertwined with the historical taboos that exist with regard to plain-aboriginal identity. With its main focus of 'health equality and community empowerment', the HISP programme tried, in 2014, to bring faculty and students into the town through service-learning to meet the needs of the community. However, the limited number of local organisations and staff created fundamental challenges for the university. In the beginning, it did not know where to start, and at the end of the first year, HISP even considered removing Gongguan from its list of social experiment sites.

5.2. The Critical Step: The After-School Program

Through the continuous efforts of the post-doctoral researchers in the team and with the help of the Gougguan Community Development Association (hereafter, GCDA), an after-school programme was implemented in 2015; it became a possible site for social intervention and partnership. In the beginning, the demand mainly came from the lack of tutors for after-school tutoring at a local church. HISP's assistance started with the concept of distance tutoring and developed a digital buddy programme to connect local children with university students. In terms of providing necessary equipment and facilities, HISP procured second-hand computers from the local elementary school and the university, asked a non-profit team to take care of technical aspects, and found a room in which to run the buddy programme. The volunteers were recruited from the university's general education and service-learning courses, as well as external organisations. In addition, English distance learning, an English camp, and technology courses and camps were also gradually added to serve the local junior high school. Service-learning from the international students at NCKU and Hong Kong Polytechnic University opened the eyes of local students and raised community education to a higher level than that which had hitherto existed. The distance learning partnership first started in the local church building in 2015, expanded to the junior high school in 2016, and then progressed to other disadvantaged areas two years later. This innovative after-school programme brought several critical benefits. It utilised the assets of local institutions and leveraged services outside the community to solve an immediate need. It also promoted the participation of community members in public affairs, such as education. Most importantly, it gradually developed trust between the university and community organisations, including schools, churches, and the GCDA.

5.3. Developing Partnership: The Elderly Care Service

Aside from supporting education in the community, HISP also worked on issues pertaining to the care of the elderly. The elderly population size in Zuojhen is amongst the top three in the country. Due to limited medical resources and the inconvenient nature of transport in this remote village, the GCDA had gradually become a local centre for elderly care. To address the needs of the community, HISP teamed up with professors at the Department of Geriatrics at the university, cooperated with the Taiwan Elderly Care and Education Association, and combined the medical services of nearby hospitals to form a health care service model for the elderly population in the village. In addition to medical services, HISP invited faculty and students to provide services in preventive medicine, including health promotion activities and home improvements. Student-elderly interactions (e.g. the collection of life stories) and the elderly's participation in student course activities (e.g. guiding local tours, presentations, and workshops) enhanced their social interactions. By linking medical services and promoting health care activities for the elderly, HISP gradually established an integrated long-term care model and support system for the elderly in remote villages. This method of enhancing community welfare through elderly care was also important in developing the partnership between the university and the GCDA.

5.4. Place Making: Students' Hands-on Projects

In addition to service provision, HISP began to focus on community assets, including local historical, agricultural, and ecological features. To align with faculty's and students' interests, field trips with guided tours were developed to provide basic information about the place. With the assistance of GCDA, local leaders, farmers, and elderlies were invited to guide the tours and share their local knowledge. In addition, camps were organised by HISP for several cross-disciplinary courses. Usually held in the middle of the semester, they enabled the collection of first-hand data through interviews, field visits, and surveys for course projects. Through these course activities, documents were made about the place. Student projects, including documenting farming practices, local maps, videos, and models of historical buildings, became a medium by which to create a dialogue among residents and make local assets more tangible. Externally, the touring routes, documents, and exhibitions developed through the university activities helped to make this left-behind place more accessible to faculty and students, as well as outsiders. These social practices are critical to enhancing local capacity in community-based tourism development. Internally, these community projects also helped the students develop their social design and problem-solving skills. At the same time, the university's relationship with locals grew beyond the GCDA and to a much deeper level. As a result, an incrementally developed action-oriented culture between the university and the GCDA was established.

5.5. Envisioning the Future: Community Planning Proposals

Through the aforementioned efforts, community planning with the locals was undertaken which systematically assessed their needs and assets. From this, envisioning a future for them became possible. HISP invited the Institute of Cultural Affairs, Taiwan (an expert organisation specialised in community development in developing countries), to collaborate with faculty in the planning department. The planning themes included the development of elementary education, community agriculture, and various types of community-based tourism. The university conducted workshops to explore local assets in the planning process, to promote communication among the teachers, students, and residents, and to induce actions by developing a vision for the place. For example, in one strategic visioning workshop, the group came up with the analogy of 'gluing people together' as the vision for community development and the short-term action plan of fundraising for a local van to expand the area's elderly care network. Through various participatory workshops, community planning initiated public discussions on community affairs. It was important that both the university and community stakeholders had a systematic way of thinking about the social, economic, and environmental capacities and issues of the place. This was also a critical step in bringing the next phase of the university-community partnership - Collaborative Badlands - to the forefront of USR and enabled the application of Zuojhen's experience to the entire badlands region.

6. Collaborative Badlands: Levelling- Up Through Regional Collaboration

6.1. From HISP to USR

By 2020, six years of work had built trust, social networks, and social capital in the community, and enabled an opportunity to integrate the resources from the USR policy in Taiwan. Facing the ending of HISP funding, the Taskforce of Gongguan Community was restructured and applied for USR funding under the project name 'Collaborative Badlands'. The goal of this USR project is to expand the learning experience of HISP from Zoujhen to three nearby municipalities which possess the same badland geological features and similar left-behind conditions (Figure 5). The project seeks to overcome the challenges of the badlands communities while generating synergy with local assets through enhancing multiple stakeholders' involvement, synergistic partnerships, and co-creation in the changing economy (Brand and Gaffikin, 2007).

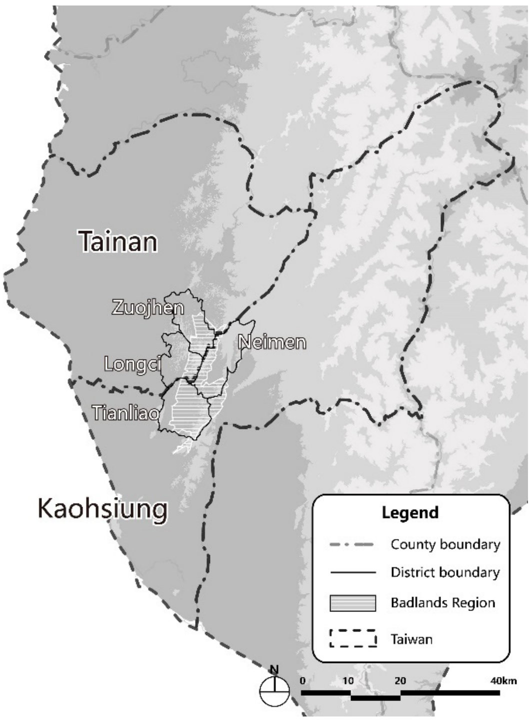

Figure 5 - The badlands region in relation to nearby Tainan and Kaohsiung metropolitan areas

6.2. Collaborative Planning and Network Power

The design of Collaborative Badlands is based on the ideology of collaborative governance and sees the community as a stakeholder and an equal participant in regional sustainable development. The new project is led by a group of NCKU faculty members who participated in HISP from 2015 onwards and continue to be interested in collaborative theories and methods. They see USR as an opportunity to practice collaborative planning (Healey, 1997; Innes and Booher, 1999) in combination with the asset-based approach to community development. More importantly, they are interested in the institutional design of developing place-based professional education beyond local service provision.

The Network Power Model, developed by collaborative planning scholars Booher and Innes (2002), has been adopted by the team as a means by which to systematically structure teaching, research, and service activities. The model possesses a unique flow of power; it is shared by all participants in the networked society, and the sharing of power in this manner is an indicator of successful collaboration. The critical conditions that enable network power among the agents are diversity, interdependence, and authentic dialogue. The collaborative planning process would become a complex adaptive learning system in the badlands, in which diverse and independent stakeholders from the university and regional communities could generate dialogue, form collaborations, find shared meanings, and develop shared heuristics and norms to enable cooperative actions to be undertaken. The ultimate goal of the Collaborative Badlands project is to engender a self-organizing process that brings together agents, enables information to flow, builds trust and reciprocity, represents interests, connects networks, and mobilizes actions' (Booher and Innes, 2002, p. 232).

6.3. Network Power and Project Design

The Collaborative Badlands project uses the network power model to guide the design and evaluation of the actions implemented in the university and the badlands. In Figure 6, one of the network loops represents the university's activities at different stages and levels. By visiting the community, the faculty and students began to create dialogues between stakeholders through local tour guiding. Participation and collaboration were gradually formed through student projects. Shared meanings were, in turn, developed through course presentations, workshops, and public meetings with the stakeholders. Shared heuristics and norms were formed through evaluation interviews and focus groups between faculty, student, and community stakeholders. The network loop on the right represents the USR-initiated activities for the badlands stakeholders, such as lectures, workshops, and field trips on particular topics. From there, the team helped stimulate project-based collaborations between the different stakeholders through small actions. Through reflective activities and discussions, shared meanings, heuristics, and norms were developed among the stakeholders which prompted future cooperative actions. Together, the two loops constituted the network power of collaboration in place-based education and illustrated the new relationship that emerged between the university and regional stakeholders at different stages of practicing collaborative governance.

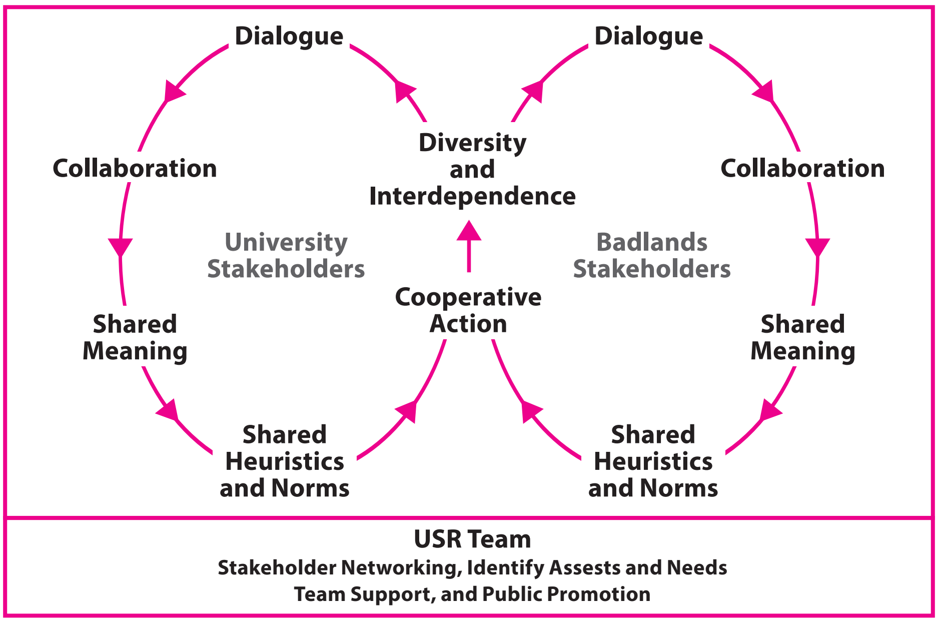

Figure 6 - The Network Power Model for the badlands modified from Booher and Innes (2002), p. 232

6.4 Three Action Areas: New Experience, New Industries, and New Information

In addition to adopting the network power model to design activities for engagement and collaboration, three core action areas for collaboration were designed based on reflections on current regional development issues to maximise the synergy of the university's actions: new experiences, new industries, and new information. 'New experience' refers to strengthening the meaning of existing tourism activities to the local economy. By emphasising local natural and cultural heritage, the university proposed different ways to extend the length of tourists' stays and maximise their spending through itinerary and activity design. After a series of university-community cooperative actions, a regional heritage tourism route was recognised by Taiwan's Ministry of Culture as one of the national designated cultural routes in 2021. The 'new industries' strategy focuses on existing local agricultural resources (e.g. bamboo forests and agricultural products) and seeks to create added value through a circular economy. By acting as a platform for information sharing and a space for dialogue, the Collaborative Badlands team has gradually become an intermediary that has helped to establish a regional coalition of the bamboo industry which has become an active participant in policy change. Finally, the third action area, 'new information', was motivated by the lack of secondary information available in Taiwan's rural areas. The challenge was to systematically accumulate the outcomes of university participation, make the information accessible for new faculty and students, and attract a diversity of agents for collaboration. A database incorporating the concept of digital humanities is under construction, which will serve as a reservoir of USR activities and a gateway of knowledge to reduce the learning barriers faced by those who reside in the left-behind region.

Echoing the policy directions of USR in connecting higher education institutions, communities, and the development of the region, Collaborative Badlands places a strong focus on linking academic and local knowledge, bridging the gap between theory and practice, and leveraging local assets for regional sustainable development by systematically engaging university teaching, research, and service actions. Using 'Collaborative Badlands' as a new regional identity and brand name, the team has gradually expanded the social networks and social capital of a single community to an entire region, turning the negative perception of the badlands into a positive image of resilience. By engaging the students and faculty in working closely with the region through different types of activities, a sense of belonging was formed between the university and the badlands communities. Thirteen faculty members from nine departments have continued to adopt the badlands as their sites of teaching and research and delivered 52 courses engaging 540 students in the past three years (Chang *et al.*, 2021). Five out of thirteen faculties have participated in the badlands since HISP. In addition to these devoted faculty members, a self-organised student group named BEST (Badlands Empowerment Sustainability Taskforce) has initiated several cooperative projects with different stakeholders in the region since 2020. Projects such as the Maxwell-Thompson Grand Tour and the Moon World Feast reflect the practice of 'the economics of belonging' (Sandbu, 2018), which values the students' (customers') relationships with the badlands and creates new forms of economic activities for tourists based on local assets (Tomaney *et al.*, 2021). It should also be noted that, through the USR project, regional collaboration has also expanded, overall, to 34 different institutions and organizations in the Badlands.

7. Discussion: Bottom-Up vs. Top-Down Approach for Levelling Up

NCKU's experience in the Badlands has, to date, consisted of two stages of levelling up. With HISP, the focus was to level up through service provision and community empowerment. The primary strategy was to bring human resources from the community, university, and beyond together to meet/address the needs of the community. The site for action took place at a community level and took a comprehensive approach to addressing different social and economic needs. In contrast, the primary focus of Collaborative Badlands is to utilise the assets of the badlands for sustainable regional development and to scale up its problems so as to draw the attention of the university and policies to the area, whilst also encouraging stakeholder participation. An approach that targets the topics that interest both community leaders and university faculty is required to sustain the commitment from both sides. Although Collaborative Badlands is the effective extension of HISP and a number of the participants involved in both schemes have overlapped, their approaches are different. HISP was more bottom-up and placed grounded efforts on local needs and university-community relationships. Collaborative Badlands, on the other hand, addresses regional issues and needs more systematically while working on the institutional design of place-based education at the university level. USR policy has become a publicity platform that seeks to engage people's attention at a regional and national level and to advocate for the needs and assets of the badlands (and the hilly areas of Taiwan in general). Both approaches are deemed necessary if communities at different stages of being 'left behind' are to be levelled up.

The customised, grounded approach of both HISP and Collaborative Badlands echoes those of place-based advocators for left-behind communities and meets the principles they addressed, including neighbourhood funding, resident-led decision-making, and long-term commitments (Farole *et al.*, 2017; Iammarino *et al.*, 2018; Bolton *et al.*, 2019; Tomaney *et al.*, 2021). HISP was founded first and leveraged resources at the neighbourhood level. Through the community planning of HISP and collaborative planning of Collaborative Badlands, residents and local-led decision-making have been emphasised and implemented. The long-term commitment of HISP and USR has not only channelled human resources and social capital through faculty and students during the past eight years but has also gradually nurtured a sense of belonging. More importantly, being treated as equal partners and sites for learning has enabled residents to rebuild their community's ' self-confidence.

NCKU, as the local and regional anchoring institution, has gradually acted more like the architect and implementer of USR-related projects to address the locally unique capabilities and challenges of the badlands, whilst also providing customised, on-the-ground, targeted supports for fundamental service provision and development opportunities. HISP sought to improve basic infrastructures and service provision in response to the immediate needs of the place. Collaborative Badlands has continued the community-making and planning aspects of HISP and sees local aboriginal wisdom as a key to sustainable development, whilst also taking an appreciative, positive view of the place by maximising locally-owned assets and empowering regional stakeholders to optimise their skills, talents, and capabilities (Barca *et al.*, 2012). Based on the collaborative planning model, the team takes participatory and deliberative models of the decision-making process seriously, leverages customised resources, and enhances non-revealed local potential. Emphasising community engagement, the university's teaching and research activities have the potential to be flexible enough to create solutions and strategies that are local-led, whilst also enhancing local connectivity to networks and opportunities beyond the left-behind community. The asset-based approach of NCKU's experience has resulted in capability and institutional improvements in the university-community partnership and place-based education in higher education.

Besides providing customised solutions to addressing the left-behind, the soft outcomes of expanding social capital have probably been the most important achievement of the university that has arisen from its working with the left-behind communities in the badlands. Various aspects of social capital, including bridging, linking, and bonding capital (Woolcock,1998; Putnam, 2000; Woolcock and Sweetser, 2002) have all been found in NCKU's experience. Agger and Jensen's (2015) research on area-based initiatives that facilitated networking in deprived neighbourhoods had similar findings. Expanding and bridging capital was first found in HISP's community education work through its leveraging of resources from local schools and organisations for the after-school programme. Linking capital was gradually developed through community education and community welfare under HISP by its securing of external resources from non-government organisations, university faculty, students, and hospitals. Collaborative Badlands has further expanded the linking capital to regional stakeholders by focusing on the three action areas and diversifying the stakeholders involved including local businesses, local universities, and regional and national government agencies. By expanding the scale to the entire region, the communities in the badlands have been able to discover their bonding capital by sharing their ethnic identities and development issues. More importantly, bonding capital has also developed between university faculty, students, and community stakeholders, creating a sense of belonging toward the badlands. The companionship for learning, working, and growing together has become the new rhetoric of Collaborative Badlands and has transformed the badlands' negative image of being a left-behind place.

8. Prospects: the University as a Panacea or Placebo

Despite current successes, several structural and agency issues that are embedded in the university-community partnership approach as a levelling-up strategy have brought to the surface some uncertainties in working with left-behind areas. Just like any policy, the funding sources of the projects and their institutional designs may alter a project's direction considerably. For HISP, a research grant with a strong emphasis on knowledge production through practices of social innovations, the production of academic publications was a more prominent key performance indicator, especially for the post-doctoral researchers. HISP was designed specifically to engage post-doctoral researchers and focus their grounded experiences in the community. However, their non-tenured positions put the sustainability of the project into question. Collaborative Badlands, funded by the USR policy through the Ministry of Education, brought the university out of its ivory tower and changed its practices with social responsibility becoming a goal. Rather than academic publications, the key dimensions for project evaluation are the extent to which local needs have been integrated into professional courses, the team-making between faculty and students, the institutionalisation of university support, and the overall reputation of the project within the university and beyond. It follows, that the benefits for faculty, students, and the university need to be balanced with the immediate needs of the community. While HISP focused on generating knowledge of social innovation and nurturing social entrepreneurship (Fang 2018; Pratono and Wong, 2019) through actual field operation, Collaborative Badlands has been more focused on changing the university's culture around teaching and research. At the same time, both see the community as a site of learning, and both practice innovation when dealing with the needs of the community. From the community's perspective, potential constraints for both sides are related to the project's goals and the grant's time scale.

Despite the noted structural issues, agency also makes a difference. The ideologies and professional backgrounds that the players bring to the table to fulfil their social responsibilities can change the direction of projects. For HISP, the main actors' backgrounds in sociology and adult education brought social equality and empowerment perspectives to the community. For Collaborative Badlands, the core team consisted of faculty members who shared an interest in collaboration theories and methods, so practicing collaboration was key to their participation. This lens guided their actions and how they viewed the project's achievements. Because the extent to which the academic frameworks of the university actors match the community's current needs may substantially influence the effectiveness of the university's engagement, balancing the needs of the community and the university faculty is a continuous learning journey necessary to make USR an effective policy and sustainable solution in the long run.

Central government cannot escape from its leading role in designing place-based policies and institutional frameworks to address issues of inequality. The on-the-ground knowledge of USR forms a great reservoir of knowledge that could be used to identify and respond to diverse local and regional conditions. The talents from the university have the potential to develop place-based solutions as well as providing a space for trial and error. The university has the potential to serve as a platform between government, businesses, and civil society by leading a multi-stakeholder joint task force. Its public role in society places it in a position that facilitates public discussions on social problems, promotes mutual understanding of civil society, and contributes to the diversity of customized solutions. For the university to become an active agent, partner, and companion to the left-behind communities, it will need to take social responsivity seriously as a new culture in higher education and make it an integral part of its activities and management rather than just being a programme funding alternative.

Acknowledgment

The author is indebted to the Research Center for Humanities and Social Sciences in NCKU for their invitation to join the HISP project. In particular, I am grateful to Yu-Feng Wong and Ya-Hui Fang for their solid field work and innovative social practices in both the university and the communities. Additional thanks go to Sheng-Fen Chien, and Wei-Ju Huang, as well as to all faculty, students, and team members who have joined the Collaborative Badlands project since 2016. This action research could not be possible without the continuous support of Liu-Tsu Chen from GCDA and all the community members of Zuojhen.

The funding of this research is supported by the Humanity Innovation and Social Practice Program by the Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST), Taiwan, R.O.C. under Grant No. MOST104-2420-H-006-001-HS3, MOST105-2420-H-006-009-HS1, MOST106-2420-H-006-001-HS2, MOST107-2420-H-006-001-HS3, and the University of Social Responsibility Practice Program Phase II by the Ministry of Education. The article and its shortcomings remain the sole responsibility of the author.

References

Agger, Annika and Jesper Ole Jensen (2015) Area-based initiatives-and their work in bonding, bridging and linking social capital. European Planning Studies 23(10), pp. 2045-2061.

Barca, Fabrizio, Philip McCann and Andrés Rodríguez-Pose (2012) The case for regional development intervention: place-based versus place-neutral approaches, Journal of Regional Science, 52(1): pp.134-152.

Berube, Alan, and Cecile Murray (2018). Renewing America's economic promise through older industrial cities. Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings.

Bolton, Margaret, Rob Day and Matt Leach (2019) England's overlooked neighbourhoods: Defining, understanding and regenerating 'left behind' communities." Journal of Urban Regeneration & Renewal 13(2), pp. 116-123.

Booher, David E., and Judith E. Innes (2002) Network power in collaborative planning. Journal of Planning Education and Research 21(3), pp. 221-236. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X0202100301. Accessed [27/05/2022]

Brand, Ralf, and Frank Gaffikin (2007) Collaborative planning in an uncollaborative world, Planning Theory, 6(3), pp. 282-313.

Chang, Hsiutzu Betty, Sheng-Fen Chien, Wei-Ju Huang, Shao-lin Peng and Pei-Je Lin (2021). *E de xiezuo: Qianshan diqu zhi quyu chuangxin yu kua yu shijian* [Collaborative Badlands: Rural Regeneration and Transdisciplinary Co-creation in the Southwestern Badlands Region]. Annual Report, University Social Responsibility Practice Project, Ministry of Education, Taiwan.

Chen, Shi-Ming (2021), *Yong xu chengxiang yingzao, zai di shijian gong xue gong zuo* [Sustainable urban and rural empowerment: Co-learning and co-working in local practices], in Research Center for Humanities and Social Sciences ed., *Shimmering Light,* Tainan: NCKU Press.

Cumbers, Andrew (2016) Economic democracy. Reclaiming public ownership as the pragmatic left alternative. Juncture, 22(4), pp. 324-28

Dai, Hua and Yu-Ting Wu (2013). The Humanity Innovation and Social Practice (HISP) Project, NCKU Magazine, 242, pp. 44-49.

Dai, Hua (2015). *Yingzao youli yu dai zhuanxing shequ jumin shixian zizhu shenghuo de shequ nengliang he zhichi tixi* [Create a community energy and support system conducive to the realization of sustainable life by community residents], Final Report, MOST 104-2420-H-006-001-HS3.

Fang, Yahui (2016). Engaging and empowering academic staff to promote service-learning curriculum in research-intensive universities. Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement 20(4), pp. 57-78.

Fang, Yahui (2018). Entrepreneuring for transition: A participatory action research on community-engaged curriculum design in higher education. Entrepreneurship Education 1(1), pp. 85-104.

Farole, Thomas, Soraya Goga and Marcel Ionescu-Heroiu (2018). Rethinking Lagging Regions: Using Cohesion Policy to Deliver on the Potential of Europe's Regions. World Bank, Washington, DC.

Gourova, Elissaveta, Yanka Todorova and Nikolay Gourov (2009). Skills for future engineers: Challenges for universities in Bulgaria, WSEAS Transactions on Business and Economics, 6(7), pp. 385-399.

Healey, Healey. (1997) Collaborative Planning: Shaping Places in Fragmented Societies. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.

Hu, Yih-Pei (2015). *Shi nian qian kan bu dao de huamian-daxuesheng de shehui canyu* [A picture not seen ten years ago - social participation of college students], Taiwan Educational Review Monthly, 4(1), pp. 17-20

Huang, Li-Ling (2016). *Shequ yingzao zai Taiwān: Shehui bianqian yu zhidu chuangxin de shijiao* [Community empowerment in Taiwan: The perspective of social change and institutional innovation], in Spreading branches and spreading leaves: A dream catcher created by the Taiwanese community empowerment. Tangshan: Taipei

Iammarino, Simona, Andrés Rodriguez-Pose, and Michael Storper (2018) Regional inequality in Europe: evidence, theory and policy implications. Journal of Economic Geography 19 (2), pp. 273-298.

Innes, Judith E., and David E. Booher (2010). Planning with complexity: An introduction to collaborative rationality for public policy. London, UK: Routledge, 2010.

Jennings, Will, Gerry Stoker and Joe Twyman (2016) The dimensions and impact of political discontent in Britain. Parliamentary Affairs 69 (4), pp. 876–900.

Kang, Le (2012), Daxue shehui zeren de xianshuang, tiaozhan yu fansi [Current Situation, Challenge and Reflection of University Social Responsibility], Modern Education Management, 5, pp. 32-35.

Kretzmann, John. P. and John L. McKnight (1993). Building communities from the inside out. Evanston, IL: Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Neighbourhood Innovations Network.

Liao, Chun-Sung (2008). *Sheq zongiti yingzao zhi huigu yu zhanwang* [Review and prospect of community empowerment program], IGR NewsLetter, 3, pp. 4-6

Lin, Chung-I (2017). *Mai xiang li huo Tainan: Jiangou daxue yu shequ gong xue gong zuo gong chuang shehui li de xingdong wang* [Towards green living Metropolitan Tainan: Building an action network of social power between university and community for co-learning, co-working, and co-creation], Mid-term report, MOST 106-2420-H-006-001-HS2.

Lin, Jing-Hui and Ji-Cheng Chen (2020). *Yi xiao wu yanjiu tuidong daxue shehui zeren shijan* [Promoting university social responsibility practice with school affairs research], Taiwan Educational Review Monthly, 9(2), pp. 18-21.

Liu, Xiu-Xi (2019). *Cong daxue he qiye de shehui zeren guandian tan rencai peiyuan zhengce* [Talent cultivation policy from the perspective of social responsibility of universities and enterprises], Taiwan Educational Review Monthly, 8(1), pp. 43-47.

Mathie, Alison and Gord Cunningham (2003) From clients to citizens: Asset-based community development as a strategy for community-driven development. Development in Practice, 13(5), pp. 474-486.

McKay, Lawrence (2019) 'Left behind' people, or places? The role of local economies in perceived community representation. Electoral Studies, 60, 102046. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2019.04.010 Accessed [27/05/2022].

NCKU Team (2019). The Humanity Innovation and Social Practice Project in National Cheng Kung University, Humanities and Social Sciences Newsletter Quarterly, 20(3), pp. 24-35.

Pratono, Aluisius Hery and Yu-Feng Wong (2019). Social enterprise for rural community development: lessons from two case studies in Indonesia and Taiwan. In Eric Bidet and Jacques Defourny (Eds.). Social Enterprise in Asia: Theory, Models and Practice. London, UK: Routledge.

Putnam, Robert D (2000). Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

Reeves, Rachel (2018) The Everyday Economy. Available from: https://www.scribd.com/document/374425087/Rachel-Reeves-The-Everyday-Economy Accessed [27/05/2022].

Sandbu, Martin (2018) 'We need an economics of belonging', Financial Times, 20 March.

Shek, Daniel TL, and Robert M. Hollister (2017). University social responsibility and quality of life. Singapore: Springer Nature.

Tainan City Government. (2002). *Renkou zilao* [Demographics]. Bureau of Civil Affairs, Tainan City Government. Retrieved from https://bca.tainan.gov.tw/News_Content.aspx?n=1134&s=8156 Accessed [25/01/2022].

Tetřevová, L., & Sabolova, V. (2010). University stakeholder management and university social responsibility. WSEAS Transactions on Advances in Engineering Education, 7(7), pp. 224-233.

The Taskforce of Gongguan Community (2016). *Shan jin shehui zeren de daxue: Gongguan shequ gongzuo xiaozu gongzuo huigu* [An university of social responsibility: A review of the work of the Taskforce of Gongguan Community]. Retrieved from https://heccbsouth.blogspot.com/2016/11/blog-post.html/ Accessed [25/01/2022].

Tomaney, John, and Andy Pike (2018) Brexit, devolution and economic development in 'left-behind' regions. Welsh Economic Review 26, pp. 29-37.

Tomaney, John, Andy Pike, and Lucy Natarajan (2021) Land Use Planning, Inequality and the Problem of 'Left-behind-places' - A 'provocation' for the UK2070 Commission. The UK2070 Papers: The Working Paper Series of the UK2070 Commission 3. Sheffield, UK: Sheffield University:

Townsend, Alan, and Tony Champion (2020) Core cities' strong growth in the 2010s: Were they 'leaving behind' the rest of their regions? Local Economy 35(6), pp. 566-585.

Vasilescu, Ruxandra, Cristina Barna, and Manuela Epure (2010). Developing university social responsibility: A model for the challenges of the new civil society. Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 2(2), pp. 4177-4182.

Wang, Ben-Chaung (2008). *Sheq zongiti yingzao zhi huigu yu zhanwang* [Review and prospect of community empowerment program], IGR NewsLetter, 3, pp. 18-21

Woolcock, Michael (1998) Social capital and economic development: Toward a theoretical synthesis and policy framework. Theory and Society 27(2): pp. 151-208.

Woolcock, Michael, and Anne T. Sweetser (2002) Bright ideas: social capital-the bonds that connect. ADB review 34(2). pp. 26-27.

Wu, Qing-Shan (2018). *Jiaoyu mingci: daxue shehui zeren* [Education term: University social responsibility], Pulse of Education, p. 5.

Wu, Ming-Qi. (2016). *Wu bianjie daxue zai Taiwan jiujing yiweizhe sheme?* [What does University without Borders mean in Taiwan?]. Taiwan Educational Review Monthly, 5(9), pp. 155-157.

Yang, Zheng-Cheng (2019). *Daxue shehui zeren fazhan de guonei wai qushi. axue shehui zeren fazhan de guonei wai qushì* [Domestic and foreign trends in the development of university social responsibility], Evaluation Bimonthly, 79, pp. 32-36.

Transactions of the Association of European Schools of Planning • 6 (2022)
doi: 10.24306/TrAESOP.2022.01.003

"FORGOTTEN TERRITORIES" IN EUROPE: LESSONS FROM ITALY, SPAIN AND POLAND

Xavier Desjardins[a], Philippe Estèbe[b]

(Received 26 October 2022; revised version received 1 November 2022; final version accepted 14 December 2022)

Abstract

This paper presents comparative research on place-based policies which address "forgotten territories" in Europe. It shows the variety of trajectories through which the territorial question is placed on the agenda and the ways of defining what constitute 'forgotten' territories within the different countries considered. This variety reveals specific processes linked to short- and long-term debates about the different nations and their development. The tools used to help these territories tend to converge, under the influence of methods coming from the European Union. However, the functions of these territories are still unclear in national planning strategies, particularly because their possible contributions to processes such as ecological transition and its associated economic models are only imperfectly defined.

Keywords

Regional inequalities, place-based strategy, Europe, Nation

a (Corresponding author) Sorbonne Université, Professor of Urban and Regional Planning.
E-Mail: xavier.desjardins@sorbonne-universite.fr

b Philippe Estèbe: Coopérative Acadie

1. Introduction

The regional question is coming back in Europe. During the 2000s, numerous secessionist movements emerged from wealthy regions such as Northern Italy, Flanders, and Catalonia (Davezies, 2015). In the following decade, 'left-behind' regions became the focus of political debate in many states. Following the UK's 'Brexit' referendum in 2016, the presidential elections in France in 2017 and 2022, and in Austria in 2016, some argued that populist votes might be explained by the feeling that the inhabitants of disadvantaged regions are losing out (Dijkstra et al., 2020). A geographical interpretation of such electoral results became dominant in some analyses and media accounts of such political developments (Sykes, 2018). In this context, the theme of forgotten, peripheral, or left-behind regions has risen to prominence in public discourse and in academic reflection. The aim of this paper is not to evaluate the accuracy of such interpretations of social or political geographies and movements. Many scholars have already critiqued their approximate, analytically inadequate, and political nature (Delpirou, 2018). Rather, this article seeks to understand, through case studies in three European countries, what public policies exist to address the issues of these so-called 'forgotten territories' and the effects of such policies.

Our main argument is that though vigorous territorial public policies exist in different European countries to promote local developments, and that these policies are justified by the desire to 'upgrade' these territories, these policies do not succeed in erasing or mitigating the feelings of 'territorial decline' in these areas. They fail to do so not only because they are insufficiently generous in terms of the funding they offer (which may well be the case), but above all because they are neither designed to allow 'autonomous' development in these territories, nor define what the effective territorial functions of these areas within Europe might be. We also contend that the ecological transition, which could have been an opportunity to redefine the functions of these territories in their national and European contexts - in particular by reinforcing their role as places of food and energy production and provision of other ecosystem services - is an opportunity that has still not been seized.

To explore these issues, we address three research themes and related questions in three European states; Italy, Spain, and Poland. First, we explore the criteria for defining problem regions asking questions such as: How are the 'forgotten' territories in Italy, Poland and Spain defined in public policies? Which categories are used to define them? Can we identify an influence of political, scientific or media debates on this production of public policies? Secondly, we compare the main public policy instruments used to help them, and pose questions such as - Are they increasingly similar? What is the influence of EU policies in driving any convergence? Thirdly, and finally, we explore ecological transition asking - How does the ecological transition lead to a redefinition of the ways and means of developing these peripheral territories? Before addressing these questions, the following section reviews existent academic literature on regional development and the 'return' to prominence of the 'regional question' in political and academic debates over the past decade.

2. Literature Review: The Return of the Regional Question

The resurgence of territorial and interregional debates in many European countries has been reflected in academic literature. The return to prominence of these issues was perhaps, in some ways, surprising from an academic perspective. Economists, for example, could point to the fact that strong increases in interregional inequalities were hardly ubiquitous. Although Williamson's hypothesis (Williamson, 1965) of a gradual reduction in inter-regional inequalities no longer seems to hold true in every context, the fact remains that development gaps are not systematically increasing. Lessmann and Seidel (2017) have shown, for example, that inter-regional inequalities decreased in two thirds of the world's countries between 1992 and 2012. Moreover, beyond development gaps, income gaps are even smaller in Europe, as welfare states play a powerful territorial equalising role (Davezies, 2021; Rodríguez-Pose, 2018). Evidence shows that there are 'negative slopes in the relationship between net fiscal balances by states or regions, when classified according to their level of development per capita' which 'signal a territorially progressive fiscal system using public funds aimed at maintaining welfare in the worst/off areas' (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018, 203). It follows, that territorial debate is not directly indexed or correlated to the "real" development or income gap. Indeed, since Tocqueville (1997) if not before, the feeling of inequality is never as strong as in societies of 'near equals'.

The 'return' of the regional question was also a surprise for some political scientists. For example, observers such as Lipset and Rokkan (1967), had predicted that debates about values and wealth-sharing were set to supplant territorial debates as organisers of national politics. Such forecasts now seem to have been overtaken by developments over the past decade. Meanwhile, in the 2000s, geographers had highlighted the increase in 'intra-regional' (and intra-metropolitan) inequalities, and particularly those that had arisen as a result of the new dynamics of capital accumulation and changing lifestyles (Brenner, 2004). Inter-regional inequalities had, in contrast, taken a back seat in their territorial analyses (Lévy, 2007).

The revived attention given to issues of regional development and inequality, and notably assertions that some places had been 'forgotten', also came as a surprise for regional planners; for policies to support declining regions had never really died out. It was true that a discourse critical of territorial policies had been spreading since the beginning of the century among through the work of authors such as Duranton (2015). Their main argument has been that the best way to help the disadvantaged is not to help poor territories but to help individuals adapt, possibly by migrating to areas of greater opportunity. However, despite such arguments, place-based policies have continued to be promoted and delivered by governments. Meanwhile, within the European Union, a broad debate on the future of regional policy did take place after the accession of ten new states in 2004. However, the Barca report of 2008 marked the end of this debate in favour of maintaining a territorial policy of redistribution (Barca, 2008). Given the academic and policy contexts outlined above, the question therefore arises of why the inter-regional debate is resurfacing?

The first element is that territorial redistribution through welfare states is not without complications and disillusions. Though it remains important and still plays a powerful role across the EU, the 'weight' of individual welfare states may be changing. After the 2008 crisis, for example, in Italy and Spain, there was a decline in public spending. Such fluctuating budgetary cycles can make some territories fear an "abandonment" and loss of support. Even where there is a more constant level of budgetary support, evolutions in networks of public services can be unfavourable to low-density areas. For example, in health or policing, the evolution of technologies can lead to a reduction in the (given) network. This means that a certain number of access points - police stations, maternity wards, etc., may be closed on grounds of cost, or 'rationalisation' of service provision. This can contribute to difficulties for some territories and to feelings of abandonment (Courcelle et al., 2017; Taulelle, 2012).

Moreover, there may be feeling of a symbolic, social, or cultural division. The British journalist David Goodhart has contrasted people from somewhere with people from anywhere (Goodhart, 2017). In a similar vein, the French essayist Christophe Guilluy contrasts a 'peripheral France' with a France of metropolises that concentrate both immigrants and employees who are in the most buoyant economic and cultural sectors (Guilluy, 2015). The feeling of socio-cultural divides is spreading. Moreover, the actors in the 'forgotten' areas can also 'turn the stigma around' and define themselves politically and culturally in opposition to big cities. In short, attention to the issues of the so-called forgotten or left behind regions has grown. Informed by this context this paper asks - how have public policies reacted to the emergence of these territorial debates and claims; have new regional aid policies been put in place; and what have been their results? The methodological approach adopted to respond to these questions is outlined in the next section.

3. Research Methodology

The paper adopts a comparative research approach to explore the cases of Italy, Spain, and Poland. The main issues explored in each of these states are: what are places which are considered to be "forgotten"? Has this geography evolved and, if so, how and why? Are issues of regional disparity and development matters of public discussion? What are the policies implemented to address these issues? How are local, national, international actors and institutions involved?

The study is based on three series of research stages:

- A survey of academic literature and public reports on categories of territory that have to be supported;

- Field interviews with actors in so-called forgotten territories. In each country, an average of ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with mayors, members of parliaments, public or private actors of local economic development;
- Interviews with politicians, civil servants, and academics at the national level, to discuss our findings and interpretations.

The study areas within the three states were chosen according to national issues and illustrate the polysemic meaning of "being forgotten" in different settings.

In northern Italy, the medium-sized town of Vercelli, was once the prosperous centre of a rich industrial and agricultural province. The province of Vercelli has around 180,000 inhabitants, with a density of 86 inhabitants per km². Vercelli has about 45,000 inhabitants. The town of Vercelli is losing its role and rank because of globalization and metropolisation. The weight of Milan and Turin, some 80 kilometres away, have contributed to emptying Vercelli of its key functions (trade, banking, higher education and higher education facilities and training), while the main activities of the province (rice production, industrial plumbing, and mountain tourism) are becoming globalised and there is no longer need for its services.

The Spanish region of Aragon has, for a long time, been losing its population, today it has a density close to Lapland, of under 5 inhabitants per km² in rural areas. As a result of a long-term rural exodus, reinforced by planning policies favouring cities, its situation has become a national issue that has raised the issue of what can be done with such empty spaces? Our field study in the region focused on the *comarcas* of Jiloca and Gallocanta, respectively in the provinces of Zaragoza and Teruel. These two intermunicipal bodies gather around 15,000 inhabitants, with an average density of around 5 inhabitants per kilometre. We met members of parliaments, representatives of the autonomous community and the mayors of Gallocanta, Daroca and Anento.

In Poland, the case study is in Podlasie, near the Belarussian and Lithuanian borders, more precisely, the *powiats* of Hajnówka and of Bielski-Podlaski. These two *powiats* gather 45,000 inhabitants (with a population density of 29 inhabitants per km²) for Hajnówka, and 58,225 inhabitants (42 inhabitants per km²) for Bielski-Podlaski. We met local members of parliaments, representatives of the *voivodies* (region), and conducted interviews with the mayors of Orla and Hajnówka - two small villages, close to Belarussian border in an area with has a long history of wars and destruction. Today it is losing its population and, because of its location, does not attract investors. Questions for the area include whether heritage (the Yiddishland memory) and natural wealth (the Białowieża forest) can become assets for a new development.

The following sections explore three key themes – the definition of a 'problem' region in each case study state; what instruments are mobilized by public policies to deal with these spaces; and, how can local actors redraw paths for development?

4. How Territories Can Be Forgotten: Three Case Studies

Our first question concerns the way in which the categories of problem territories are constructed in the different countries. For each country, firstly some key data on the territorial debate in the country is presented, followed by a brief overview of the main regional zoning proposed by the State.

4.1. In Italy, from North-South to a 'Leopard Skin' Intervention

In Italy, the southern question remains almost an obsession (Donolo, 1999; Pescosolido, 2019; Trigilia, 1992). It was the basis of the largest post-war national experiment in spatial planning with the creation of the *Casa Per Il Mezzogiorno*. For more than three decades between 1950 and 1984, vast policy was carried out to develop agriculture (after an agrarian reform), industry (notably through direct investments by state companies) and reduce the infrastructure gap (through the development of new infrastructure, notably investment in transport etc.). This policy, despite its obvious successes, did not resolve the north-south contrast, which has been accentuated since the Italian unification of 1860. The causes of this failure have been analysed by abundant scientific and operational literature (Faraoni, 2013; Lieutaud, 1992; Putnam et al., 1993). They include the absence of brakes on development in the north, the weak knock-on effect of industries located in the south on the rest of the economic fabric, and corruption. This literature has also challenged the analysis of a homogeneous south, as some successes have also been observed in the area (Viesti, 2021).

However, more recently the Italian State seems to have 'forgotten' the South. Though, this is not strictly the case, the state has transferred to European policies the task of carrying out territorialised monetary transfers to the South on the one hand and deepened decentralisation on the other. Thus, the Italian state has moved towards providing more 'methodological' than 'substantive' support to territories in difficulty and has proposed a multitude of schemes to assist local development. This shift has been facilitated by the long Italian intellectual tradition which emphasizes the importance of social capital to foster local development; following the seminal work of Arnaldo Bagnasco and his colleagues on the *Third Italy*, the region between the North (Turino, Milano and Genova) and the Mezzogiorno, whose development, based on small and medium-sized firms, is account for as being a result of the quality of the social relations between entrepreneurs, local administration and civil society (Bagnasco, 1977).

The most recent major experiment is the policy of support for *aree interne* (Inner Areas)[1], which mainly aims to assist 72 territories marked by their distance from employment and service centres. These are areas affected by physical geography such as isolated mountainous areas, which can be found in both the north and the south. This Inner Areas programme was launched in 2013. Two kinds of funds are mobilised under this programme: funds for the improvement of existing public services (such as education and health) to make these more efficient, and funds to finance local development projects defined by local actors.

This method of territorial categorisation cleverly involves going beyond a north/south divide while maintaining a role for the State. Even if, ultimately 95 percent of the funding still goes to the South[2]. In this context, many researchers have pointed out that this division is imperfect for identifying social, ecological, and cultural difficulties. Italian geographers have proposed an alternative interpretation, for example that of an *Italia di Mezzo* (Lanzani and Curci, 2018). But the way in which the State defines territories in difficulty will never be able to satisfy these academic geographies as its objective is to propose a geography that shows concern for territories in difficulty, without forgetting any region or highlighting too much the imbalances which exist between the North and the South.

4.2. The Empty Spain

In Spain, the geography of public intervention is very different. Since the return of democracy in Spain after 1975, the place of the various Nations within the state has been the subject of continuous debate (Baron, 2010). The fairness of the territorial redistribution of public money is the subject of much analysis and political debate (Baron, 2016). Since the 2010s, the territorial debate is no longer only between the different regions and autonomous communities, it is also about the place to be given to the Spain of very low densities, and identifying an 'empty' or 'depopulated' Spain. The essayist Sergio de Molino has emphasised this theme, claiming that this is a Spanish singularity (Molino, 2016). In academic circles, however, many have sought to moderate this idea of Spanish exceptionalism, arguing that if densities are lower in Spain, it is not because of the intensity of the rural exodus, but simply because the rural population has always been smaller (Collantes and Pinilla Navarro, 2019). Nevertheless, since 2010, these territories have come to the forefront of the media and political scene.

A local development association founded in the early 2000s, *Teruel Existe!* (Teruel Exists!), decided in 2019 to go beyond the conduct of small tourism projects, and to present candidates in the legislative elections. In the province of Teruel, the list presented by *Teruel Existe!* saw one deputy out of two and two senators out

1 See https://www.agenziacoesione.gov.it/strategia-nazionale-aree-interne/

2 https://www.ministroperilsud.gov.it/it/comunicazione/notizie/dpcm-comuni-marginali/

of four elected. It was the deputy for Teruel, Tomás Guitarte, who made it possible for Pedro Sanchez of the PSOE (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español* - Spanish Socialist Workers' Party) to be nominated as Prime Minister by giving him his vote and so, a majority. Since then, Guitarte has obtained almost everything he has asked for to support the development of his province. This success has instilled the idea that if the empty territories coordinate to present localist candidates in elections, they could potentially secure about twenty deputies; a decisive number in terms of becoming a 'pivotal party' (or 'Kingmaker') in the outcome of elections.

Given this, the government seems to take the problem of empty territories seriously. It has created a *Delegation for the Demographic Challenge* (Ministerio para la Transición Ecológica y el Reto Demográfico, 2019), lobbied the European Union to obtain specific funds for the interregional empty Spain area, and begun a policy of locating national agencies in small towns within it. As an example, the national cybersecurity centre has moved to Leon, thus contributing to the installation of civil servants and the start of a digital ecosystem in this small city. Thanks to this new local corporatism - which some denounce as a form of depoliticization - Spain could perhaps rediscover its countryside. This rediscovery also shifts the political debate from the regional level – where the secessionist question is still present – towards support for local development programmes.

4.3. In Poland, Muted Territorial Inequalities in the Name of a "Finally Recovered" Nation.

On the eastern border of Poland, Podlasie is today a testimony of what was once the Polish-Lithuanian multi-ethnic and multicultural space. This region, the poorest in Poland, has not always been a land of borders. Until the end of the 18th century, it was at the heart of the Polish-Lithuanian Republic, where Jews, Poles, Balts, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Russians, Tatars, Gypsies, and other groups mingled (Snyder, 2002) .

The legacy of Poland's troubled history since the beginning of the 19th century is clearly visible in Podlasie. Like all 'Russian' parts of pre-1914 Poland, it is still marked by more than a century of underinvestment in infrastructure and a delay in agricultural modernisation (Mackré, 2011). The First and Second World Wars transformed the characteristics of the population through mass killings and deportations. Locally, there is no shared interpretation of this turbulent past among its various communities and political actors. There is no consensus on how to deal with memorialising how the Jewish population has been treated, how to evaluate the role of the Red Army during the Second World War, or the role of the resistance movements to the establishment of the communist regime in the late 1940s.

Poland's accession to the European Union (in 2004) and NATO (in 2003) changed the situation for Podlasie. Notably the region started to receive European manna and these floods of Euros led to a rapid modernisation of agriculture, with the size of farms increasing, and mechanisation intensifying. The regional development funds brought their share of infrastructure, equipment, and community services. However, Podlasie's situation has not really been fully transformed. The opening of access to the European labour market accelerated mass emigration. Adult men left for London or Berlin, leaving behind "Euro-orphans". Poland is replacing Germany as the "eastern flank" of the Atlantic alliance, which has once again become a zone of potential conflict in the face of an increasingly aggressive Russia. Since the summer of 2021 the region has been a zone of maximum tension with Belarus with plans to build a wall along the 400 km border.

Finally, EU membership has widened the gap between western Poland, which has benefited most from investment by western European firms, and eastern Poland, which includes Podlasie (Coudroy de Lille, 2007). However, Polish governments refuse to adopt macro-regional policies that discriminate in favour of the development of the country's poorest regions. This is undoubtedly an effect of the metropolitan preference (Geppert and Pielesiak, 2017) in polices. But this reluctance also stems from a more political issue that is internal to Poland. Podlasie is one of the last multi-ethnic regions in a country that was 'purified' by the shift to the West in 1945. Her Poles cohabit with people of Ukrainian and Belorussian origin, Catholics with Orthodox (and some Tatars). Although Polish laws are formally protective of minorities, it is not easy to claim to be Belorussian and Orthodox; for some conservative circles such declarations are a form of allegiance with the 'enemy'. National and cultural minorities therefore keep a low profile, while trying to save their memories, their languages, and their cultures.

The question of East-West imbalances is only rarely mentioned in contemporary political debates in Poland (Bański et al., 2018). On the government side, the current conservative and nationalist majority government, whose strong electoral base is in the East, prefers to insist on the unity of this (still) young nation (Ory, 2020; see also Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy, 2020). Moreover, support for individuals (especially via families) is considered more ideologically promising than support for territories as a means of strengthening its political base. Meanwhile, academic work focuses more on the internal imbalances of cities than on interregional imbalances (Koszewska, 2020).

In the three states considered above, we can see that the mapping of 'territorial problems to be solved' follows different logics. None of the countries has adopted the EU approach of considering 'GDP gradients' – e.g. the level of GDP per capita in different regions compared to state-wide or EU averages. The place of these regions is always linked, in one way or another, to national unity in each state. Southern Italy, for example, is durably marked by the impact of Italian unity. The massive regional policy carried out between 1950 and 1985 can be read as an attempt to make up for the failures of unity. Likewise, the silence that is now being maintained on the issue of the South's relatively lower development levels is linked to the secessionist threat from the more prosperous northern regions of Lombardy and Veneto. The recent revival of interest in Spain in the 'empty' part of the country has a double political purpose. On the one hand, this space overarches the geography of several autonomies and creates a common issue beyond the claims of autonomy or independence of some territories. On the other hand, it gives Castile - the object of all regionalist resentments - an argument with which to better access European funds. Meanwhile, Podlasie is a landmark, a concentrate of Polish history and more generally of Eastern European spaces. However, due to its cultural complexity and its location on Poland's eastern borders, it embodies a political problem in a state which does not wish to highlight its internal differences, but seeks rather to promote its overall homogeneity. In these three examples, the territorial mapping from the (respective) State is designed to solve political more than territorial problems. As a result the individual state's public interventions are more designed to address many localized discontents than to tackle macro-regional imbalances.

5. What are The Action Levers for Local Actors?

This section describes the tools put in place to support individual local developments and how they are activated at a local level. In the three states under consideration we find three main categories of action: negotiating for redistribution through the public finance system, fostering local development potential, and situating a territory within the context of ecological transition.

5.1. Negotiating a Territory's Place in the Welfare State System

The first lever is to negotiate a better place in the system of redistributive public spending. In all states considered, local elected representatives are seeking to gain a better understanding of how to maximise the benefits of this system, particularly in terms of infrastructure and/or facilities, and with regard to specific grants. In terms of facilities, all the local elected representatives told us about their 'fights' to keep existing facilities operational, or to develop new ones. In Vercelli in Italy, for example, the issue faced was one of preserving training facilities. In Spain, Daroca has "*obtained*" a prison which has generated more than 500 jobs in a town of 2,000 inhabitants. However, the pace of investment in infrastructure is very irregular. In Spain, while the introduction in 2004 of high-speed rail services to the station in the town of Calatayud, with a population of around 20,000, marked the peak of public investment in infrastructure, the cuts in investment after 2008 were brutal and massive (Fauchard, 2017). It seems that such contradictions can fuel a discourse amongst local actors which is rather suspicious as regards the support being received, with feelings that things are better elsewhere and were better in the past; processes which, cumulatively, distil the very essence of feeling left behind.

Discourses on the need for public funding are sometimes more nuanced. In Spain, it is possible to open a school with as few as 5 pupils (Lorenzo Lacruz et al., 2019). This is, however, criticised at a regional level, with it begin argued that this can lead to a scattering of facilities and resources with effects on public spending. More surprisingly, this possibility is also criticised by a few local elected representatives – for example, the Mayor of Anento has not taken-up this option in the name of the quality of teaching and school life for children.

Each time, local actors try to justify a more favourable position in the redistribution system. The classic arguments (specific needs of low density) are sometimes coupled with cultural arguments. In Poland, arguments for more resources are also justified by the presence of cultural minorities. Keeping services running is justified because it is a way to limit the scattering of these populations within Poland, and more widely within the European Union, which would lead to the disappearance of their cultural specificities. In Spain, there is a party movement, Teruel Existe! (*Teruel Exists!*), that claims to be the defender of the forgotten territories. Its position in parliament has enabled it to obtain a specific national investment fund. This fund allows the financing of 'big' projects, not only smaller scale local initiatives. Recent major projects include a motorbike track, a dinosaur museum, and an airport. The new airport has been an unexpected success and was used as a storage and repair facility for grounded aircraft during the acute COVID crisis of 2020 and 2021.

5.2. Supporting Development Projects

In seeking to foster development, local actors play a double strategy (Halbert, 2013). The first element is to be in a position to attract investments thanks to the qualities of the amenities, the infrastructures and the labour availability. This approach is reflected by the attraction of investors such as Ikea in Orla (Podlasie) and Amazon in Vercelli (Italy). Even if this strategy could be criticized, it is quite impossible for a locality to unilaterally give up the "paradigm of attractivity". The second development path is that of local development. This involves activating territorial resources - heritage, agricultural production, know-how, social capital and so on. – as levers of development in the region. In Italy, there are many examples of this in a country which was one the first to develop this approach (Italian national network of young researchers for inner areas committee, 2021). European models of development are also used in the three states. These result in relatively "standardised" projects such as greenways, tourist accommodation, cultural centres, and support for companies that develop products of the soil, agriculture, and forestry. The local and regional development models supported by the European Union thus play a certain standardisation role here.

We also explored the ingredients for success of these models and identified two main factors: integration into multiple networks and "porosity" between the economic, political, and technical actors of local development. Orla is quite a "success story" of local development in the Polish context. The municipality is not very populated, with just over 2,500 inhabitants within its present boundaries, but there are many projects. The 18th century synagogue miraculously survived the massacres of the Second World War. Protected during the Communist period because it was used as an agricultural shed, the question arose of whether this half-Baroque, half-Classical building could now become a tourist attraction? The London-based Jewish Heritage Foundation has owned the site since 2010 and the municipality is trying to obtain from them a rapid rehabilitation of the building, to unlock the potential of using the synagogue for cultural and festive events. To welcome tourists, the central square of the village also needs to be rehabilitated and the mayor has called on architecture students from Warsaw to work on ideas for this project. The mayor also wants to transform a former slaughterhouse into a small local production unit for local products which could be offered to tourists. Orla thus provides a good example of a local development project that has started from the territory, is part of its history, has made links with multiple networks in Poland and abroad, and is making a cross-cutting approach to agricultural, heritage, cultural, economic and tourist issues. The same kind of approach can be found in Italy and Spain. Aniento, in Aragon, is a village that was almost abandoned in the early 1980s. Today, its success in attracting visitors can be gauged by the fact 40,000 cars per year use the local car park. This tourist development was facilitated by a commitment in the 1980s from young people, initially volunteers, to restore the village's local heritage. The town council then adopted a selective policy of focussing on public services which, in the long term, were seen as most favourable to the village's tourist development – for example it chose to share the school with a neighbouring village, and it invested in the quality of its public spaces, the development of a car park, and the construction of a place where people could eat.

In both villages, local development stories are not only based on local capacity. In both countries, the Common Agricultural Policy has helped the modernisation of agriculture. Beyond the new tractors and sheds, the effects of the European Structural Funds can also be discerned in the landscape - here an expressway, there a bicycle path, and signs acknowledging the support of the European Union on social centres and cultural sites. In short, these territories are not forgotten by national or European redistribution mechanisms. Each time, effective local development is a product of a good 'match' between local initiatives embedded in social networks, top-down policies, and global economic processes.

5.3. Inventing a New Path Thanks to Ecological Transition?

Ecology can play different roles in local development projects. It can be used normatively as a form of positive image generation for local development projects, for example, to promote organic farming, “green” tourism, crafts, and city-countryside complementarities on water. But ecological transition can also play a deeper transformative role in territorial development.

In the three states considered in this paper, there are many conflicts or controversies relating to environmental issues. In Aragon, the predominance of agricultural jobs in rural areas explains the desire to strengthen the sector with a policy aimed at the industrialisation of production (intensive livestock farming, plot concentration) which is supported by the Autonomous Community of Aragon, and based on the Common Agricultural Policy. This conflicts with the desire to diversify economic activities, particularly through tourism, which is largely based on the attractiveness of a remarkable natural heritage (particularly the fauna of Lake Gallocanta), which is in danger due to agricultural activities. At the same time, the development of renewable energies raises different debates, being positive for the environment on a national and global scale, but seen by some as harmful at a local level. In Spain, wind turbines are developed in a very confused way, without planning or firm public control. They generate very little economic benefit in the areas in which they are installed; creating very little employment and damaging the landscape and its tourist appeal (Luque, 2015). So, although the very low population density of some of the ‘empty’ areas may seem ideal for the development of renewable energy this view, and the practical realisation of policies to the same effect, are not without issue.

A few kilometres from Orla lies what is often called the “last primary forest in Europe”, the Białowieża Forest, where bison were reintroduced in the 1930s. This area has been protected since the end of the First World War and the forest is a World Heritage Site. For several years, a conservation controversy has been engaging certain foresters, environmental associations, the Polish government, and some residents (Bieńkowska et al., 2019). Spruce trees, which make up 30% of the forest, are being attacked by bark beetles. For some - foresters, residents, and administrators - the felling of infested trees is a necessity to protect the rest of the forest. For environmentalists and officials from UNESCO and the European Union, this is simply a pretext for commercial exploitation of the forest. In 2017, the European Court of Justice asked the Polish government to stop the felling. This raised issues such as whether local residents should be forced to use charcoal for heating because they cannot use the wood from diseased trees near their homes? Beyond this kind of argument, used locally by the defenders of the right to cut down trees, there are also wider issues such as how to try and ensure that the inhabitants of sparsely populated areas benefit from internationally justified protection.

The last major lesson, for the reasons noted above in the cases of Span and Poland, is the paradoxical situation of these territories regarding the challenges of ecological transition. The Polish and Spanish examples illustrate a considerable challenge that will only increase in the coming years and is derived from the fact that these territories are becoming both coveted sources of renewable energy and hyper-protected ‘tanks’ of biodiversity. Beyond the tensions that may arise between these two dimensions, the main issue is that of the development of these resources and the economic benefits for these territories and their inhabitants. These territories are no longer forgotten, but their place is still poorly defined in the territorial system that ecological transition implies.

6. Conclusion

Three main conclusions can be drawn from the comparative research presented in this paper.

First, what is seen as constituting a problem territory differs greatly from one state to another, despite the fact that each of the regions and states considered here is in the European Union. The findings reveal that “left-behind regions” and “territorial inequalities” are perceived very differently in different countries. These territorial inequalities take on meaning according to the socio-history of the construction of individual States and Nations. Moreover, the vigour of the debates on these inequalities is not linked to their intensity.

Second, the return of territory into public debate is notable, even if it seems less strong in Poland. As a result it cannot be concluded - as some have argued (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967) - that conflicts over territory are gradually being replaced by conflicts over value or the social sharing of resources. On the contrary, the Welfare State/s is subject to endless territorial negotiations and the creation of 'territorial' parties may lead to post-political discussions.

Third, ecological transition appears both as a threat or an opportunity for 'forgotten' or 'left behind' territories. Which trend emerges will depend in many ways on the capitalist and organisational form of the operators of the transition. If guided by distant political bodies and large international companies, transition may well result in a situation which sees the domination of a periphery of sparsely populated areas. The capacity of such territories to obtain dividends in terms of money, qualified jobs, or favourable policy, through the framework of the ecological transition looks set to be the major challenge of the coming decades, and might offer a way to reinvent the approach used to tackle problems of poor regions.

Acknowledgments

This research was funded by the French National Agency for Territorial Cohesion and the Ministry of Territorial Cohesion (ANCT, PUCA and DGALN). The authors would like to thank the partners of these institutions, notably the participants of the seminar organized by Ariella Masboungi as well as all the researchers involved in this project: Adrián Pablo Mañas Gomez, Agim Kerçuku Joanna Koszewska and Louna Villain. The two referees provided valuable comments for which the authors are grateful.

References

Bagnasco, A., 1977. Tre Italia: la problematica territoriale dello sviluppo italiano. Il Mulino, Bologna, Italie.

Bański, J., Degórski, M., Komornicki, T., Śleszyński, P., 2018. The delimitation of areas of strategic intervention in Poland: A methodological trial and its results. Moravian Geographical Reports 26, 84–94. https://doi.org/10.2478/mgr-2018-0007

Barca, F., 2008. An Agenda for a Reformed Cohesion Policy A place-based approach to meeting European Union challenges and expectations.

Baron, N., 2016. Inégalités territoriales et conflits sur le financement régional en Espagne : le système est-il réformable ? Pyramides. Revue du Centre d'études et de recherches en administration publique 147–164.

Baron, N., 2010. « Etat composé » ou décomposé ? L'Espace Politique. https://doi.org/10.4000/espacepolitique.1687

Bieńkowska, M., Faszcza, Ł., Wołyniec, Ł., 2019. Movement to Defend the Białowieża-The Problem of the Białowieża Forest Protection as an Example of a Values Conflict, in: Methi, J.S., Sergeev, A., Bieńkowska, M., Nikiforova, B. (Eds.), Borderology: Cross-Disciplinary Insights from the Border Zone: Along the Green Belt, Springer Geography. Springer International Publishing, Cham, pp. 31–40. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-99392-8_3

Brenner, N., 2004. New State Spaces: Urban Governance and the Rescaling of Statehood, Oxford University Press. ed. Oxford.

Collantes, F., Pinilla Navarro, V., 2019. ¿Lugares que no importan?: la despoblación de la España rural desde 1900 hasta el presente. Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza, Zaragoza, Espagne.

Coudroy de Lille, L., 2007. Les zones économiques spéciales en Pologne : un tremplin pour l'emploi régional ou des miettes de la mondialisation ? Annales de géographie 658, 645–666. https://doi.org/10.3917/ag.658.0645

Courcelle, T., Fijalkow, Y., Taulelle, F. (Eds.), 2017. Services publics et territoires: adaptations, innovations et réactions. Presses universitaires de Rennes, Rennes, France.

Davezies, L., 2021. L'Etat a toujours soutenu ses territoires. Éditions du Seuil, Paris, France.

Davezies, L., 2015. Le nouvel égoïsme territorial: le grand malaise des nations. Seuil, Paris, France.

Delpirou, A., 2018. La couleur des gilets jaunes -. La vie des idées.

de Tocqueville A., (1997, First edition 1835), De la démocratie en Amérique, Flammarion, France.

Dijkstra, L., Poelman, H., Rodríguez-Pose, A., 2020. The geography of EU discontent. Regional Studies 54, 737–753. https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2019.1654603

Donolo, C., 1999. Questioni meridionali: ventuno appunti sul sud a venire. L'Ancora, Napoli, Italie.

Duranton, G., 2015. Growing through Cities in Developing Countries. World Bank Research Observer. https://doi.org/10.1093/wbro/lku006

Faraoni, N., 2013. Mezzogiorno autonome et Mezzogiorno dépendant: parcours de développement dans le sud de l'Italie. Pôle Sud 87–101.

Fauchard, G., 2017. Le secteur du transport et de la logistique en Espagne : Handicaps, perspectives et enjeux. Cahiers de civilisation espagnole contemporaine. De 1808 au temps présent. https://doi.org/10.4000/ccec.6821

Geppert, A., Pielesiak, I., 2017. Les transformations de l'industrie et ses conséquences spatiales en Pologne (1989-2016). Revue Géographique de l'Est 57. https://doi.org/10.4000/rge.6260

Goodhart, D., 2017. The road to somewhere: the populist revolt and the future of politics. Hurst & Company, London, UK.

Guilluy, C., 2015. La France périphérique: comment on a sacrifié les classes populaires. Flammarion, Paris, France.

Halbert, L., 2013. Les deux options métropolitaines des politiques de développement territorial. Annales de géographie 689, 108–121.

Italian national network of young researchers for inner areas committee, 2021. Inner areas in Italy.

Koszewska, J., 2020. Dobro wspólne w przestrzeni miasta : analiza porównawcza w Polsce i we Francji na przykładach wybranych dzielnic Warszawy i Paryża (Thèse de doctorat). Sorbonne Université.

Lanzani, A., Curci, F., 2018. Le Italie in contrazione, tra crisi e opportunità.

Lessmann, C., Seidel, A., 2017. Regional inequality, convergence, and its determinants - A view from outer space. European Economic Review 92, 110–132.

Lévy, J., 2007. Regarder, voir. Un discours informé par la cartographie. Les Annales de la Recherche Urbaine 102, 131–140. https://doi.org/10.3406/aru.2007.2702

Lieutaud, J., 1992. La permanence du problème du Mezzogiorno italien. Méditerranée 76, 3–12.

Lipset, S.M., Rokkan, S., 1967. Party systems and voter alignments: cross-national perspectives. Free Press, New York.

Lorenzo Lacruz, J., Cebrián, V.D., Nolasco Hernández, A., Olivares, P.A., 2019. Analysis of educational leadership at rural early-childhood and primary schools: a case study in Teruel (Aragon, Spain). International Journal of Leadership in Education 22, 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2019.1657590

Luque, D.H., 2015. Nouvelles énergies, nouveaux paysages. L'essor éolien et photovoltaïque en Espagne. Rives méditerranéennes 135–147. https://doi.org/10.4000/rives.4965

Mackré, Q., 2011. Rémanence d'anciennes frontières dans l'espace rural polonais. L'Espace Politique. https://doi.org/10.4000/espacepolitique.1998

Ministerio para la Transición Ecológica y el Reto Demográfico, 2019. Estrategia nacional frente al reto demográfico. Madrid.

Molino, S. del, 2016. La Espanã vaciá: viaje por un país que nunca fue. Turner, Madrid, Espagne.

Ory, P., 2020. Qu'est-ce qu'une nation ? Une histoire mondiale. Gallimard, Paris, France.

Pescosolido, G., 2019. Italy's Southern Question: long-standing thorny issues and current problems. Journal of Modern Italian Studies 24, 441–455. https://doi.org/10.1080/1354571X.2019.1605726

Putnam, R.D., Leonardi, R., Nanetti, R.Y., 1993. Making democracy work: civic traditions in modern Italy. Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., Etats-Unis d'Amérique.

Rodríguez-Pose, A., 2018. The revenge of the places that don't matter (and what to do about it). Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society 11, 189–209. https://doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rsx024

Snyder, T., 2002. The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999. Yale University Press.

Sykes, O., 2018. Post-geography worlds, new dominions, left behind regions, and 'other' places: unpacking some spatial imaginaries of the UK's 'Brexit' debate. Space and Polity 22, 137–161. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562576.2018.1531699

Taulelle, F. (Ed.), 2012. Le délaissement du territoire: quelles adaptations des services publics dans les territoires ruraux ? Presses universitaires du Mirail, Toulouse, France.

Trigilia, C., 1992. Sviluppo senza autonomia: effetti perversi delle politiche nel Mezzogiorno. il Mulino, Bologna.

Viesti, G., 2021. Centri e periferie: Europa, Italia, Mezzogiorno dal XX al XXI secolo. Gius. Laterza & Figli Spa, Bari.

Williamson, J.G., 1965. Regional Inequality and the Process of National Development: A Description of the Patterns. Economic Development and Cultural Change 13, 1–84.

Transactions of the Association of European Schools of Planning • 6 (2022)
doi: 10.24306/TrAESOP.2022.01.004

FORGOTTEN ITALY

SPACES AND IDENTITIES OF A CHANGING GEOGRAPHY

Agim Kërçuku[a]

(Received 2 February 2022; revised version received 22 November 2022; final version accepted 16 December 2022)

Abstract

Forgotten Italian territories have primarily been understood as compact physical and conceptual spaces. Whilst the terms used to describe their boundaries and the key issues that they face have changed over time, they have been defined through homogeneous images: *Mezzogiorno (Southern Italy), peripheries,* and *Inner Areas*. Such representation affects conceptualization as well as the measures taken to close the gaps between the forgotten territories and dynamic areas. In recent years, the numerous crises of the 21st century have shattered this representation and brought about a new geography of forgotten Italy, the *Italia di mezzo*. The new geography is not linked only to the North-South dichotomy and does not concern only the metropolitan peripheries and inland areas. The paper aims to show how being forgotten now is also a piece of Italy that has long been on the margins of public policy, undervalued by scientific research, but at the centre of the twentieth-century urbanization process.

Keywords

Mezzogiorno (Southern Italy), peripheries, Inner Areas, Italia di mezzo, marginality

a (Corresponding author) Politecnico di Milano, DAStU - Dipartimento di Architettura e Studi Urbani, Milano, Via Bonardi, 3 - 20133 Milano Italia. E-Mail: agim.kercuku@polimi.it

1. Resistance and Changes in the Geography of Forgotten Italy

The geography of the forgotten territories has changed cyclically. This paper argues that, over time it has included some regions and populations and excluded others. The geography of forgotten Italy has expanded and contracted constantly. Being forgotten territories means that the areas live on the margins of public policies, are excluded from plans and projects, have been bypassed by the development model, remain overlooked by research and studies, and have been neglected by cultural institutions and public opinion in general. The perception of 'forgotteness' also concerns territorial and social stigmatization processes, both exogenous and endogenous, to the territories in question. An area can be a forgotten territory if socio-economic and cultural development processes are always within a top-down governance model. One can also feel forgotten and a second-class citizen while being at the centre of the public debate. Being forgotten is a complex and not obvious condition with substantial social, economic, political, and spatial implications for societies and territories. This paper retraces the spaces and identities of forgotten Italian territories and describes their transition and modification over the years. Furthermore, the paper emphasizes the emergence of a new geography of forgetfulness today. It describes the fragility and potential of this part of the Italian territory concerning the rest of the country.

In the long history of the modern Italian state, the North-South dichotomy and the relative marginalization of the South (*Mezzogiorno*) have regularly characterized national debates. For a long time, a third of the country was understood as a forgotten homogeneous area. Research and studies have been periodically produced, and various public policies have been undertaken, with different timings and intensity, to reduce the gaps that such areas have with the rest of the country.

After the Second World War, some studies tried to escape the cages of the North-South dichotomy and the perception of the South as a single compact area. The reality of the *Mezzogiorno* is described through the metaphor of the *leopard skin* (De Rita, 2020), in which, alongside stationary areas there are others where it is possible to observe the dust of the dynamism of entrepreneurial, cultural, political, and civil bases. It is against this background of detachment from the idea of a compactly fragile and immobile *Mezzogiorno*, that in the 1950s, Manlio Rossi-Doria described *la polpa e l'osso* (the flesh and bone) of the South; with active coastal territories and a more marginal hinterland.

In the seventies, some scholars described another part of Italy that is no longer linked only to the borders of southern Italy. From this there emerged the geography of a *Terza Italia* (third Italy); the territories in the northeast and along the Adriatic coast. In these parts of Italy small-scale entrepreneurship emerged, creating a network among itself, with the representatives of interests in the territory, and general civil society. The *Terza Italia* of industrial districts become the new Italian industrial model.

Since the 2000s, the forgotten peripheries of the country's large metropolitan areas have been at the core of national and community public policies. But the geography of the forgotten places changed again in 2014 with the introduction of the National Strategy for Inner Areas, which was aimed at defining peripheral areas recognized through endowment and accessibility indicators for essential services, such as education, health, and transport.

The forgotten Italian territories have been broadly understood as a closed system. While changing from time to time; name, borders, and issues, have always been issued through a compact and homogeneous image: the *Mezzogiorno, peripheries,* and *Inner Areas*. This uniform image has affected the actions taken to close the gaps between the forgotten territories and the more active parts of the country. Yet, in recent years, the numerous crises of the first twenty years of the 21st century, have shattered this compact representation and have brought out a new geography of forgotten Italy. It is a new geography that is not linked only to the North-South dichotomy and does not affect only Italy's metropolitan peripheries and inland areas. The new geography highlights how to be forgotten and fragile is now also a piece of Italy that has long been on the margins of public policies and plans, underestimated by scientific research, and neglected by public and institutional debate: the *Italia di mezzo* (In-between Italy). *Italia di mezzo* includes half of the national surface; the area in which about half of the Italian population lives. This part of Italy includes coastal settlements, industrial districts, the *città difusa* (urban sprawl), medium-sized cities, metropolitan belts, and rural areas.

The following sections of this paper explore the transition of forgotten regions in Italy in detail. The second part of the text traces the long history of the *questione meridionale* (the problem of the South) and the *Mezzogiorno* as a forgotten territory. The third part describes attempts to deliver a different representation of Italy, far from the north-south dichotomy, with the geography of *la polpa e l'osso* (the flesh and bone), of Terza Italia (third Italy), and the peripheries of Italy. The *National Strategy for Inner Areas* is at the centre of the fourth part of the text, which focuses on the progressive process of marginalization of some parts of Italian territory. The fifth part of the paper discusses the need to refer to *Italia di mezzo* as today's new forgotten Italy. This section illustrates the criteria for defining and mapping the *Italia di mezzo*. It observes its articulation and analyses some indicators that display its social, economic, cultural, and environmental condition. The sixth part situates the paper in the global context and describes the relevance of in-between territories in the international debate. The last part of the text focuses on the need to break down the geography of forgotten Italy and advance approaches capable of understanding *Italia di mezzo* (In-between Italy), not as a closed system but as an intermediate space between metropolitan and inland areas. In recent years this part of Italy has entered a process of delicate decline, and precisely because of its being intermediate, its destiny is a vital question for the future functioning of the entire Italian system.

2. The *Mezzogiorno* as an Extensive Depressed Area

The Italian territory, from unification onwards, has been characterized by a succession of exceptional expansionary phases as well as periods of profound decline. In the last 160 years, the alternation of growth and contraction processes has emphasized the profound differences between the different parts of Italy.

At the time of unification, regional disparities were relatively small, although structural differences were already present, especially in terms of education, infrastructure, and urbanization (Viesti, 2021). The diversity of the Mezzogiorno and the deep rift North-South had already initiated reflection on the presence of two Italies at time of reunification (Barbagallo, 2013). Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the volume *Condizioni economiche e amministrative delle province napoletane* (Economic and administrative conditions of the Neapolitan provinces) by Leopoldo Franchetti and *Le lettere meridionali* (Southern Letters) by Pasquale Villari called the southern problems to public attention as a national question. At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Giustino Fortunato fixed that current of heterogeneous thought and political action named *meridionalismo* (Fortunato, 1927) on the conditions of the southern Italian provinces and highlighted the contradictions and delays in the process of national unification. The unbalanced interdependence between the two Italies has represented the fundamental constant of the Italian model of social and economic development ever since (Villari, 1976). It is a constant that has initiated intense political and cultural confrontation that lasted throughout the entire twentieth century.

To try to settle national territorial imbalances there have been, since 1902, a series of differentiated state interventions, parliamentary inquiry commissions, and special legislations introduced for some areas of the South. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the structure of the Apulian aqueduct, the construction of the railway section Naples-Rome, the hydraulic-forest arrangement, and the hydrogeological reorganization of some areas of the South began. In 1904, Francesco Saverio Nitti, the economist and politician who served as Prime Minister between 1919 and 1920, worked on a special law for Naples that provided industrial development integrated with mechanization and agricultural production as well as public energy management for industrialization. It was a set of interventions and structural renewal programs that had broken the bleak legislative uniformity of Italy (Nitti, 1903) with legislation calibrated to the specific needs of Naples and the South (Barbagallo, 2013). However, the vision of modernization was not entirely fulfilled due to the beginning of the First World War and the national and international crises that thereafter followed.

From the 1910s to the 1950s, the southern question no longer seemed to be at the centre of the national agenda. Fascism sacrificed the economic interests of the South for the industrial development of industrial areas in the Northeast (Davis, 1999). The *Mezzogiorno* was reduced to a colonial market that consumed artifacts from the North (Dorso, 1925; Gramsci, 1966); it was an agricultural and migration basin. The South became the regime's great reserve of arms and grain, stuck in subsistence agriculture (Viesti, 2021). In the thirty years between the two wars, a rift between the two parts of the country opened which fatal for the South (Rossi-Doria, 1982).

It was only in 1946 that the national importance of the southern question and its industrialization re-emerged through the construction of the *Associazione per lo sviluppo dell'Industria nel Mezzogiorno* (Svimes) (Association for the Development of Industry in the South). In 1948, Svimes presented an extensive study on the conditions of the South, defined it as a *backward and depressed area*, placed it within the theory of *depressed areas,* and envisioned Keynesian-style development policies to favour the Mezzogiorno expansion (Molinari, 1948). In the 1950s, the *Cassa per il Mezzogiorno* was established. Together with some actions for southern agriculture, the *Cassa* launched the season of extraordinary interventions for the South. Through a financial commitment by the Italian State of a thousand billion lire over a period of ten years, the *Cassa* pursued the development of the depressed areas of the South through an inter-sectoral programmatic intervention based on agriculture public works and tourism. It mainly involved infrastructure, mountain, and agricultural transformation through a fundamental irrigation and reclamation program. Interventions that supported the southern industrialization process, (as alternatively advocated by *Svimez*), were excluded. Some scholars have identified precisely this exclusion among the main causes of the inability of the *Cassa* to reduce the gap between North and South (Saraceno, 1982). Between 1955 and 1964, 2.4 million people emigrated from the South, of which three quarters moved to the regions of the Center-North (Signorelli, 1995). Emigration from the South became the secret weapon of Italian capitalism and strongly contributed to the intense development of the North (Barbagallo, 2013). These were the years of the the sociological discovery of the South (Galasso 1977). Carlo Levi, Renato Gattuso, Tommaso Fiore, Rocco Scotellaro, and Ernesto De Martino are just some of the many intellectuals, politicians, scholars, and artists who contributed to the description of the southern condition.

The much-desired industrialization of the South did not happen until the mid-1950s. In 1957, the *Cassa per il Mezzogiorno* was extended until 1965, with new measures envisaged to support industrialization by expanding state holdings in primary industries and the use of public enterprises as a privileged instrument of industrial policy (Bruno, 1994). In these years, the economic miracle of the *Les Trente Glorieuses* (The Glorious Thirty) (Fourastié, 1979) also affected the South. Between 1951-1971 the per capita income of the South grew at an average annual rate of about 6%; one of the best performances in the world (Viesti, 2021). This growth also generated substantial development in construction. Between the 1960s and 1970s, half a million new homes were built, of which almost half still existed at the end of the century (Svimez, 2011). These were also the years described in the movie *Le mani sulla città* (Hands on the city), by Francesco Rosi which, in1963, suggested that some southern cities had favoured the strengthening of organized crime because of the weight of land rent and related interests (Viesti, 2021). The process of building expansion and, above all, the industrialization process carried out between the sixties and the mid-seventies has been told by many critical voices, coining expressions such as *cattedrali nel deserto* (cathedrals in the desert) or *industrializzazione senza sviluppo* (industrialization without development) (De Rita et al. 1966; Hytten and Marchioni, 1970).

Between 1957 and 1973, the *Mezzogiorno* was at the centre of Italian industrial policies. Since the Unification, a process of convergence between the southern economy and national averages took place for the first time (Del Monte and Giannola, 1978). Nevertheless, it was still not possible, despite this convergence, to structurally modify the development model of the South (Barbagallo, 2013). Social and political resistance to change, and an inability to involve the local population, (De Rita, 2020) brought the decade of significant economic expansion to an end, and the gap started to grow again (Saraceno, 1982).

At the end of the 1970s, economic and technological conditions changed on a global scale, and the priorities of Italian public policies switched. With the energy crisis and exchange rate instability, the attention of Italian industrial policy for the South shifted towards the need to reconvert and restructure the existing production system of the North (Barbagallo, 2013). Around the mid-1980s, the decree of the *Cassa per il Mezzogiorno* was not extended. Interventions for the South were no longer linked with the extraordinary intervention mechanisms of the *Cassa*. However, in November 1980, an earthquake in Campania and Basilicata initiated a new development model because of the economic and political impacts of the catastrophe (Becchi, 1988). It temporarily enabled new interventions and special procedures to be initiated which were exempt from administrative controls.

During the eighties, the southern question appeared to have been resolved. This was mainly thanks to the expansion of small and medium-sized enterprises from the centre-north along the Adriatic axis towards the South. However, in the 1990s due to the competitive problems of the Italian economy, containment of state spending, and the need to reduce public debt, conditions in the South worsened. In 1996, the unemployment index reached 22%, and the gap between the Centre-North and the South began to grow again (Svimez, 1997). Once at the centre of national and European agenda, the *Mezzogiorno* went through a period of great recession mainly due to a lack of state intervention. The convergence process stopped, and from the nineties, public policies supported income rather than favouring long-term economic development (Viesti, 2021). Since the nineties, development policies for the Mezzogiorno have not delivered significant growth. Not even the *Patti territoriali* of 1995 (an agreement between municipalities, provinces, regions, and the social and private actors of a specific area), or the other forms of intervention envisaged have managed to build a coherent framework for the development of the South. New policies and efforts have progressively lost depth and incisiveness.

3. The Different Representations of the Forgotten Territories of Italy

After the Second World War, some scholars provided new themes and representations of the South. Among the most significant is Manlio Rossi-Doria's work, which describes a more articulated *Mezzogiorno* than the image of a compact depressed area. For Rossi-Doria the South was divided into two; *la polpa e l'osso* (the flesh and bone). The *bone* was that backward territory in which a large peasant estate still dominated and was concentrated in the inland regions of the South, whilst the *flesh* was represented by more dynamic coastal territories (Rossi-Doria, 1958).

Around the seventies, a new interpretative model of the Italian territory emerged, it divided the territory into three. The first large territorial area identified was the North-West; marked by large enterprise that have driven and imposed the national development model and its essential characteristics (Bagnasco, 1977). The second large area, the South, was identified as relative underdevelopment; a disintegrated economy and dependent on external conditions. Finally, third Italy, that of the central-north-eastern regions, was characterized by small enterprises which experienced development in different and particular forms (Bagnasco, 1977). The third Italy of the North-East and the Centre is also marked by a strengthening of industrial districts that will be the essential feature of the prolonged success of Italian capitalism (Viesti, 2021). A feature that will permit third Italy to withstand the economic turbulence of the seventies and eighties, unlike what happened with the extensive industry planted in the South and deriving from the North West (Calafati, 2012).

To cope with the effects of the significant turbulence of the 1970s and 1980s, the 1988 reform of the Structural Funds and the 1993 additions to Italian regional policies redefined the geography of Italian depressed areas and planned a new system of ordinary interventions. Law 488 of 1992 introduced new policies for newly depressed areas throughout the country (Viesti, 2021). It provided incentives for promoting development for those areas defined as *Objective 1* and regarded as underdeveloped regions. In Italy this corresponded to all the southern regions; home to a population of 20 million inhabitants. *Objective 2* was the areas severely affected by industrial decline, and *Objective 3* was the rural areas where development and structural adjustment were planned. In 1994-1995 a radical reversal took place. The territory between Milan and Varese, numerous intensely developed Veneto municipalities, and some Turin, Genoa, Trieste, and Reggio Emilia neighborhoods were defined as *depressed areas*. The new geography of the Italian *depressed areas* allowed one of the wealthiest and most industrialized areas of Europe in crisis to profit from economic and fiscal benefits (Barbagallo, 2013). According to this new geography, about 56% of the entire national population lived in officially depressed territories (Barbagallo, 2013).

In 2002, the *Fondo per le Aree Sottoutilizzate (FAS)* (Fund for underutilized areas) was established to encourage the competitiveness of areas whose potential was underutilized, with particular attention being given the South (Ministero dell'Economia e delle Finanze – Dipartimento per le Politiche di sviluppo, 2003). But the economic crisis, the lack of a general plan for the country's development, and the scarcity of investments in the South increased the gap between North and South. The *Quadro strategico nazionale (Qsn)* (National Strategic Framework) with a 2007-2013 programming integrated the financial instruments of the cohesion and development policy (European structural funds, national co-financing, additional national resources) and increased the funds for the FAS. In 2008 the FAS were diverted to the numerous emergencies produced by the crisis and were no longer linked to the *Mezzogiorno*.

In Italy, during the seventies, we witnessed a substantial slowdown and contraction of the metropolitan regions and the growth of the so-called *città difusa* (urban sprawl) (Indovina, 1990), as well as small and medium-sized cities and rural areas. The severe crisis of the large manufacturing industries, the insufficient role of tertiarization, the real estate, tax and environmental crisis, the urban conflict and the problems of metropolitan government, as well as the spread of an anti-urban ideology were just some of the factors that justified the general metropolitan crisis (Dematteris, 1986). The Italian urban crisis lasted a long time, but only at the turn of the 21st century did specific policies towards these areas begin to be identified. In the last fifteen years, European resources for cohesion, such as *URBAN, PON Metropolitan cities, and Bando Periferie,* have been allocated to various fragile areas, including, significantly, the peripheral neighbourhoods located within metropolitan areas. (Di Matteo, Kërçuku, and Pessina, 2020).

4. *Strategia Nazionale Per Le Aree Interne* and Inner Areas

For about ten years, books and essays, seminars and conferences, networks, and associations have multiplied with their primary objective being the directing of research practices, and suggesting actions, and policies on the theme of inner areas. The last ten years have produced an ever-expanding body of inquiries, research, and literature. A cluster of reflections have described a renewed relationship between the territorial studies and the inner areas. Attempts are being made to put the issues of marginality and the demographic crisis of inner areas at the centre of public policies. The inner areas are an essential fragment of the Italian territory, account for 60% of the national surface and is an area home to about 15 million people. The explosion of research and studies was justified by the launch in 2013 of the *Strategia nazionale per le aree interne (SNAI* - National Strategy for Inner Areas which was promoted by the *Agenzia per la coesione territoriale* (Agency for Territorial Cohesion).

In 2014, a new season of public policies was launched in Italy towards some fragile peninsula areas, including mountain areas, areas that had suffered from depopulation, and localities that are sited far from essential services. SNAI intends to overcome territorial imbalances, give centrality to inner areas in policies and the public sphere, and present inner areas as an alternative model. The experience of the SNAI has been characterized by a place-sensitive approach in which, although there is a government direction at the national level, there is more attention given to local dimensions and the specificity of the contexts in which it operates. SNAI was launched with the help of European Territorial Cohesion policies 2014-2020 and developed by the *Unità di valutazione degli investimenti pubblici,* (Uval - Public Investment Evaluation Unit) within the *Dipartimento per lo Sviluppo e la Coesione Economica* (Department for Development and Economic Cohesion). This strategy follows the European objectives of territorial cohesion, and intends to guarantee every citizen, regardless of where they live, a minimum level of service provision (Carrosio, Faccini, 2018).

SNAI initially developed the geography of the Italian territory through a classification which was based on the different levels of spatial periphery and the presence or absence of essential services. The municipalities provided with those services that are considered crucial for citizens were defined as *poli* (poles): a hospital equipped with at least an emergency department, secondary schools, and a railway station. The inner areas were, in turn, divided into three typologies dependent upon how far away they were from these centres of essential services: ie. *aree intermedie -intermediate areas* (distance from the poles between 20 and 40 minutes), *aree periferiche - peripheral areas* (distance from the poles between 40 and 75 minutes), and *aree ultra-periferiche - Ultra-peripheral areas* (Distance more significant than 75 minutes) (Italian National Network of Young Researchers for Inner Areas committee, 2021). SNAI produced the geography of inland Italian areas and selected 72 Project Areas that would be allocated European cohesion funds and national funding. It was intended that the interventions would be guided to ensure that they were capable of improving essential services and developing new local development projects capable of systematizing unexpressed territorial capital.

One of the possible ways to describe the numerous studies on inner areas is by reconstructing three aspects. The first aspect describes the fragile nature of the inner areas within Italy. The last few years have shown even more clearly the territorial inequalities that exist in Italy today. The first months of the Covid-19 emergency showed how the distance from essential services (school, health, and mobility), the inadequacy of domestic spaces in the face of the crisis (Teti, 2020), and the delay in digitization (Monaco, 2020) had generated greater complexities and criticalities for those who live in inner areas.

The second aspect shows how the numerous studies converge in a shared call to consider inner areas as opportunities. The internal areas are places where there are already clear clues about the presence of subjects and actions undergoing a paradigm shift (De Rossi, 2018). Inner areas are places of social, economic, and political innovation, in which it is possible to recognize the vital capacity for reaction, resistance, and adaptation (Carrosio, 2019). The inner areas can articulate an Italian proximity model that contains great diversity (Cucinella, 2018). The inner areas are strategic places for national recognition, and they can play an essential role in the country's system because they contain significant social, economic, productive, environmental, cultural, spatial end energy capital (Cersosimo and Donzelli, 2020). Understanding inner areas as areas of opportunity means anticipating and accelerating the trends and significant changes that are already underway today (Boeri, 2021).

Finally, the third, more latent aspect concerns the studies' ability to register active places in inner areas comprehensively. A map allows us to reconstruct the geography of landscapes, stories, narration, ecologies, heritages, material cultures, and populations. The outcomes in inland areas show evidence of activism that deserves to be encouraged (De Rossi, 2018; Cersosimo and Donzelli, 2020).

5. The New Geography of *Italia di Mezzo* (In-between Italy)

We can also consider another portion of the Italian territory to be forgotten. It is a part that, over the years, has been the limited subject of public policies and studies. As highlighted in the reconstruction of earlier periods, in recent years – and having set aside the southern question - community and national policies have paid attention only to the marginality of the internal areas of the country and the dynamism of the metropolitan areas and their peripheries. Such a mindset has produced a clear gap in national territory. This paper tries to fill this gap and puts the question of *Italia di mezzo* at the centre of academic debate.

Italia di mezzo has recently been conceptualized by a group of researchers, composed of Francesco Curci, Arturo Lanzani, Federico Zanfi, and the author of this paper, on the occasion of a public conference Ricomporre i divari. Politiche e progetti territoriali contro le disuguaglianze (Recomposing the gaps. Territorial policies and projects against inequalities), held at Politecnico di Milano in February 2020. Its conceptualization was possible through the definition of its spatial articulation and the use of 39 indicators that showed its socio-economic, socio-demographic, real estate, and environmental conditions.

Italia di mezzo is a portion of Italian territory that has long remained in the middle of the dualism of metropolitan cities and internal areas. The ultra-peripheral, peripheral, and intermediate entirely mountainous areas, according to the classification of the SNAI (National strategy for internal areas), are not included in the geography of *Italia di mezzo* proposed. The *de jure* and *de facto* metropolitan cities of Milan, Turin, Rome, and Naples, with the perimeter municipalities, are also excluded. The central municipalities of some functional metropolitan areas (as indicated by OECD) are not included, for instance, Brescia, Padua, Parma, Reggio Emilia, Modena, Prato, Pescara, and Taranto. *De jure* and non *de facto* metropolitan cities are also excluded, as in the case of Messina and Reggio Calabria (Curci et al. 2022).

L'Italia di mezzo takes on a decisive role if we consider its importance at a national scale: 57% of the Italian population lives here and it comprises 50% of the entire national area. However, it is a very articulated reality from a spatial point of view. It is possible to identify at least three different settlements. The first is characterized by *metropolitan fringes*; the second by *medium-sized cities* which are inserted in contexts of widespread urbanization and with various centrality levels; whilst the third type of territory consists of the *peri-urban and the urban-rural continuum* of minor polycentric urban systems: coastal settlements, valley and foothill conurbations, and agro-industrial territories in the plains and hills. If we observe the morphological and environmental aspects, we obtain an image that is far from the metropolitan polarities and depopulated mountain territories of Internal Italy. Three settlement patterns characterize *Italia di mezzo*. The first pattern concerns those parts of the national environment where it is possible to recognize a "Christallerian" geography of urban nuclei, medium-sized cities, small centres, and urban-rural filaments. The second pattern concerns complex linear urbanizations encompassing several medium-sized coastal centres, while the third is related to territories of widespread urbanization outside the metropolitan areas (Curci et al. 2022).

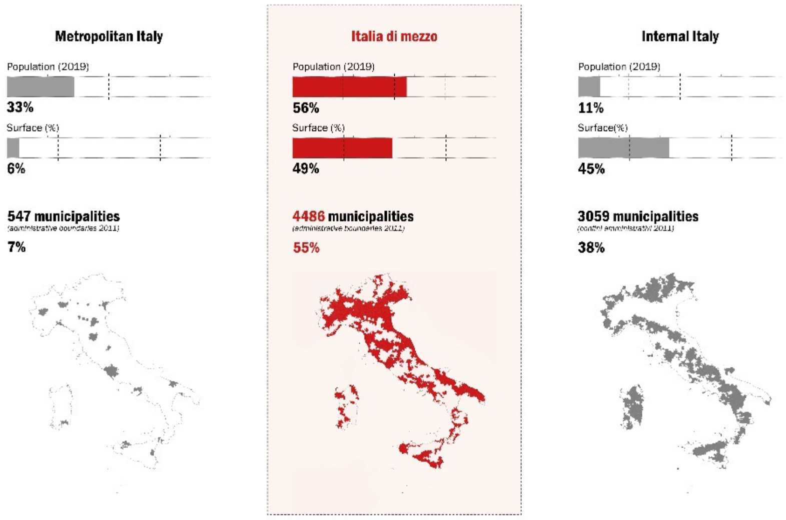

Figure 1 - *Italia di mezzo* in comparison with Metropolitan Italy and Internal Italy (Source: Curci et al. 2020).

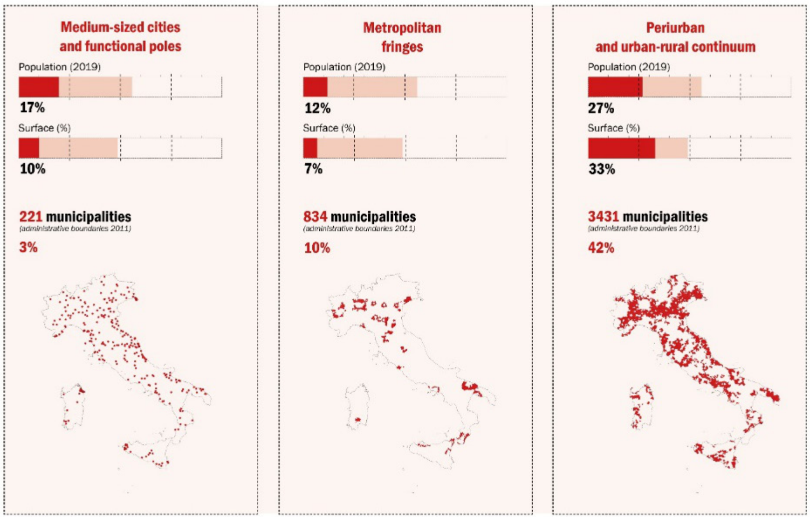

Figure 2 - The three different settlements composing Italia di mezzo are metropolitan fringes, medium-sized cities, peri-urban, and the urban-rural continuum (Source: Curci et al. 2020).

In *Italia di mezzo*, two combined dynamics increment the present gaps: social polarization, and demographic and urban shrinkage. Although present in metropolitan Italy and internal Italy, each of these dynamics in *Italia di mezzo* takes on its specificity.

From a socio-economic point of view, a stable manufacturing and agricultural profile emerges and a significant presence of services suitable for people and firms. *Italia di mezzo* is the territory with the most municipalities in the *de jure* industrial districts. We can observe a considerable presence of immigrants, strongly linked to the employment of medium-low labour offered by the manufacturing and agricultural industries, as well as via social and welfare care.

Italia di mezzo presents a trend in keeping with national averages with regard to in the social hardship profiles, such as the index of families in need of assistance, single-income families with children under six, and the old age index. However, there is still a difference between the North and South, with social hardship being more concentrated in the South. This also difference becomes evident if we look at Gross income per capita. However, there are some pockets of disadvantage and fragility in northern Italy with regard to socio-economic indicators.

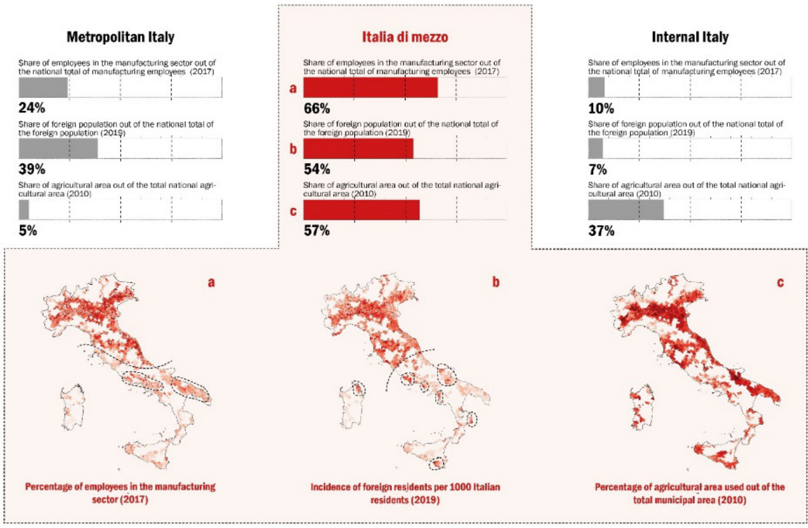

Figure 3 - Common features of the Italia di Mezzo (Source: Curci et al. 2020).

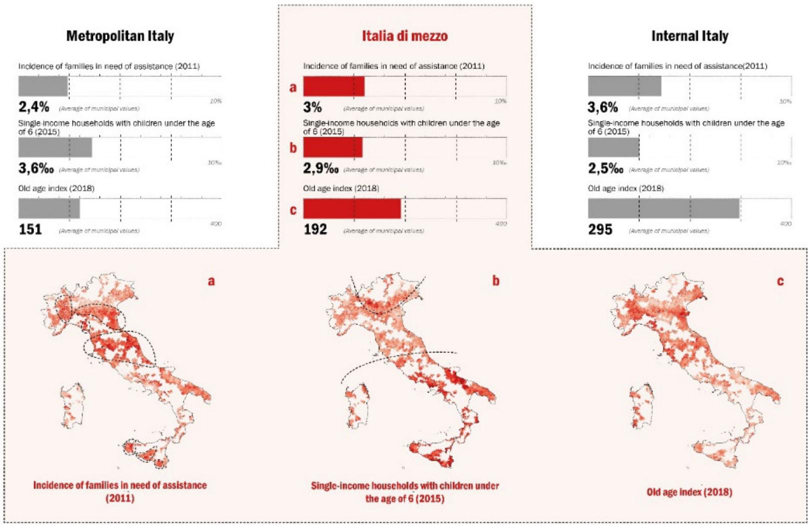

Figure 4 - Italia di mezzo “in the middle” for some social hardships (Source: Curci et al. 2020).

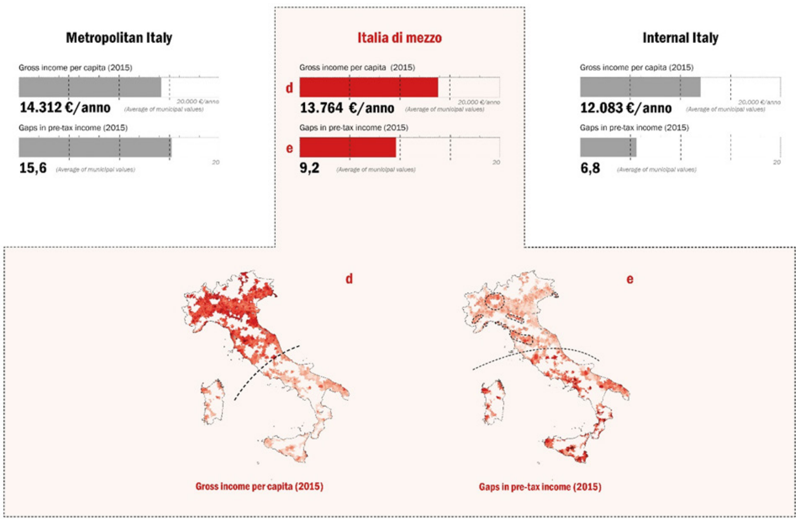

Figure 5 - Italia di mezzo “in the middle” for some social hardships (Source: Curci et al. 2020).

Considering long-term demographic trends, a recent phase of shrinking has occurred. Italia di mezzo has benefited from a long period of population and urban growth, which from 1960 to 2011 affected the metropolitan belt and fringe areas to the detriment of metropolitan and medium-sized cities. After 2011 this process has reversed, with a return to the city centre effect. Most of the peri-urban and urban-rural continuum brings its tendencies closer to Inner Italy. In these parts of Italy, it is possible to notice a new demographic, employee value, and real estate market shrinkage (Curci et al. 2020; Curci et al. 2022). This shrinking process is undoubtedly linked to a re-centralization of employment itself and is also partly related to the residential preferences of municipal markets. It is not a homogeneous tendency, as there are different situations in Italia di mezzo where it is possible to notice demographic and urban growth mostly related to tourist densification, residential replacement, and repopulation (Curci et al. 2020).

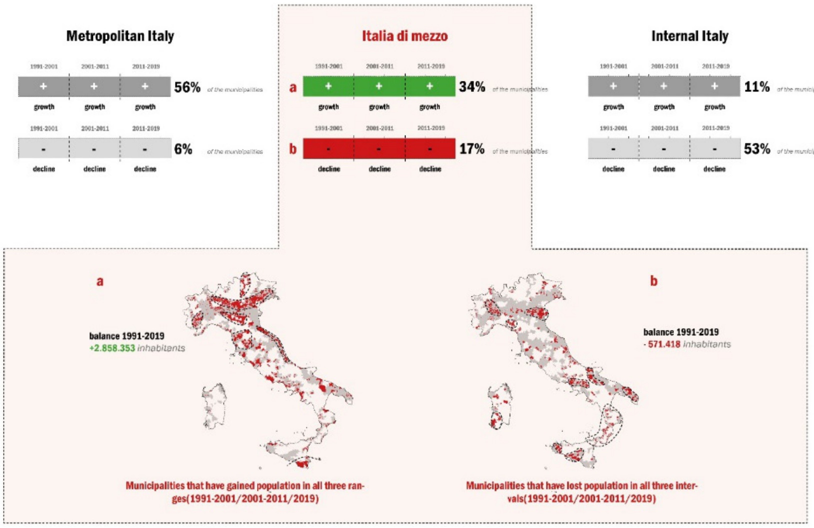

Figure 6 - An Italy that in many of its parts is entering in contraction processes, after growing. (Source: Curci et al. 2020)

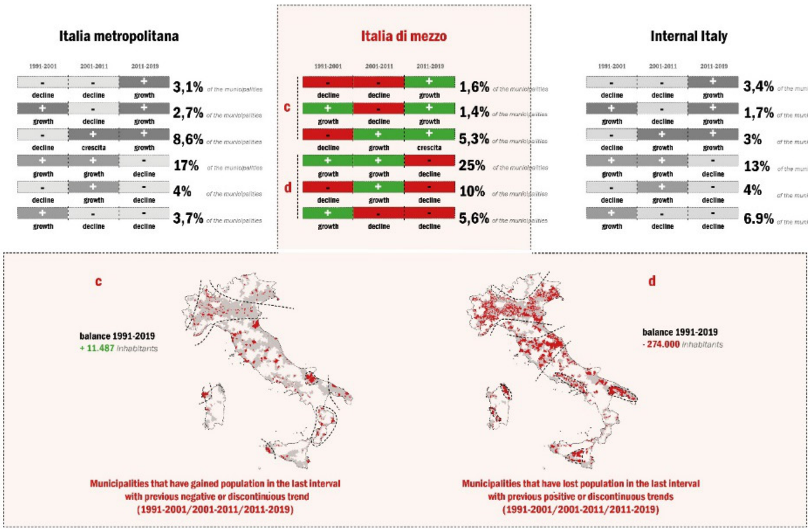

Figure 7 - Contraction in non-homogeneous behaviours. (Source: Curci et al. 2020)

Within the new geography of Italia di mezzo, a significant presence of environmental criticalities and settlement malfunctions can be recognized. In Italia di mezzo, the highest percentage of surface occupied by polluted sites of ecological interest and the highest number of industrial plants at risk of major accident hazards (RIR) have been identified. The PM10 pollution values reach very high indices, sometimes similar to those of the metropolitan cities of the Po Valley. Furthermore, it is possible to identify high artificial land cover per capita and a high dependence on the car for mobility, which also has significant consequences upon the daily life of residents within these places.

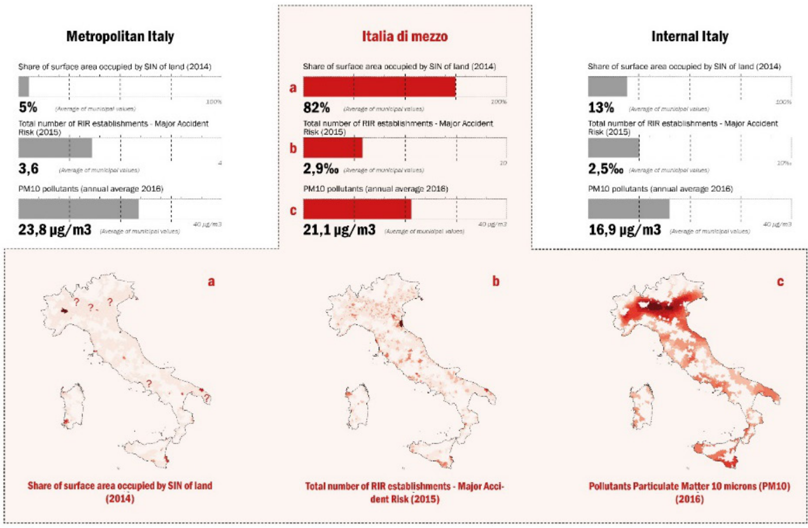

Figure 8 - Italia di mezzo with strong environmental problems, sometimes higher than metropolitan Italy (Source: Curci et al. 2020)

However, these critical issues fail to bring out this part of Italy in public, academic, and institutional discourses; defrauding its absolute central position in the national context. As a result, it remains 'forgotten'.

6. The National and International Debate on "In-between Territories"

In Italian literature, except for the work of Bruno Menegatti and the l'Associazione dei geografi italiani (AGEI - Association of Italian Geographers) (Menegatti, 1986), the topic of Italia di mezzo has never been investigated in its entirety. Recently, however, some scholars, including the author of this paper, have proposed its first comprehensive description. Five clusters of studies can be identified which have described disconnected parts of the geography of *Italia di mezzo* defined in the last sections of this paper. The first cluster reflects on industrial districts and their subsequent evolution (Fuà and Zacchia 1983; Calafati 2009; Bianchetti 2019). The forms of widespread urbanization and their recent transformation are at the centre of the second research group (Indovina 1990; Clementi et al. 1995; Fabian et al. 2012). The third strand of research concerns the roles of medium-sized cities' spatial, social and economic structure (Camagni 1993; Dematteis and Bonavero 1997; Mascarucci 2020). The fourth research group concerns the environmental impact in the intensive agriculture regions (Cannata 1989; Basile and Cecchi 2003; Bevilacqua 2018). The latest and most recent family of research concerning the Italian context discusses the geography of discontent (Di Matteo and Mariotti 2020; Carrosio 2020). In current international literature, the geography of discontent is intertwined with territorial perspectives upon some national elections. A growing literature is investigating the correlations between the geography of discontent and places where the perception of social and regional disparities is more acute (McCann 2020). Rodríguez-Pose talks about the revenge of places and people that "don't matter" (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018). Other scholars have reported on unemployment, immigration, and the crisis of the welfare system as the main determinants of discontent (Dijkstra et al. 2020; van Leeuwen et. al, 2021), whilst Florida instead underlines the role of urban density as an explicit factor that describes the geography of discontent (Florida, 2021). Even in this case, however, there is no reference to a physical and conceptual space that can be considered to be an in-between territory.

Nevertheless, a cluster of studies can be traced within international literature that have explored the in-between territories. Although different from the Italian context, this group of studies permits introducing a new physical and conceptual space d in the middle of the centre-periphery dualism. In France, the debate on the forms of intercommunal in rural territories has allowed the concept of *Tiers espace* to emerge (Vanier 2000).

In Switzerland, outside the urban agglomerations, there are the territoires intermédiaires (Ruegg Deschenaux 2003). According to the Dutch National Agency for the Environment, the *Tussenland* (middle land) can be found in the Netherlands (Wandl et al., 2014). In Germany, the term *Zwischenstadt* (middle city) describes the new form of landscape city between the city and the countryside (Sieverts, 2003). Recently in the Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography, the research group coordinated by Thilo Lang has also investigated the impacts of political debates and regulatory considerations of metropolisation within the complex centre-periphery dualism and has elaborated further upon the concept of peripheralization. For Lang, peripheralization is a socio-spatial process linked to territorial stigmatization and suggests a need to conceive the continuous contraction of the regions of East Germany as a form of peripherality (Lang, 2012). Furthermore, articulating the concept of peripheralization makes it possible to withhold the various spatial categorizations based on structural distances. These somewhat vague categorizations do not capture the local realities of the territories considered in-between or non-core regions (Leick and Lang, 2017).

A debate with different intensities has tried to expose the dynamics, the places, the nature, and the capabilities of the in-between territories, and has further tired to place the same at the centre of the political, academic, and administrative debates. This is a debate that introduces the theme of the relational nature of intermediary territories, as in the case of *Italia di mezzo*.

7. *Italia di Mezzo* as a Relational Space

The territories within *Italia di mezzo* require more thematization by policies and programs. There is scarce attention on mitigating the conditions of social and spatial discomfort. At the same time, introducing infrastructural projects and logistics hubs indifferent to the territory is systematic. Even if it is possible to find in the parts of *Italia di mezzo* a discreet presence of socio-economic programs for local development, the latter often remain trapped in a unilateral perspective of economic growth. It is a run-up to the growth paradigm that remains detached from considering social inequalities, especially the one linked to urban and environmental crise.

The long history of Italian public policies has understood the forgotten territories as homogeneous physical and conceptual spaces. An oppositional and dichotomy logic prevailed in the representation of Italy, north-south, and metropolitan areas-inner areas. However, tracing the long history of changes in the geography of forgotten Italy, the need to understand forgotten territories no longer only as homogeneous spaces with rigid boundaries emerges. Moreover, it is necessary to consider *forgotten territories* as intermediate spaces between other parts of the Italian territory.

There is a need to both dismiss competition between territories and to increase cooperation and coexistence. A new pact between territories is needed. A new alliance is required; analliance capable of emphasizing the polycentric character of Italy, thinking of *Italia di mezzo* as a connector, not an opposition. It is necessary to configure *Italia di mezzo* no longer only as "average" or "in the middle" but an "intermediary" between metropolitan areas and internal areas.

This is for two primary reasons. First, they can provide support and help to the less densely populated inner areas. Secondly, by exploiting their infrastructural and social capital, they can offer opportunities for decongesting denser metropolitan areas. It is necessary to represent this forgotten *Italia di mezzo* as a relational space, recognize its fragility and potential, and transform its oblivion into a national issue because its future affects the whole of Italy.

References

Barbagallo, Francesco (2013) *La questione italiana. Il nord e il sud dal 1860 a oggi.* Bari: Laterza

Basile, Elisabetta and Cecchi, Claudio (2003) *Le trasformazioni postindustriali della campagna.* Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier

Becchi, Ada (1988) Catastrofi, sviluppo e politiche del territorio: alcune riflessioni sull'esperienza italiana. *Archivio di studi urbani e regionali,* 31: 3-36

Bevilacqua, Piero (2018) *Il cibo e la terra.* Roma: Donzelli

Bianchetti, Cristina (ed) (2019) *Territorio e produzione.* Macerata: Quodlibet

Boeri, Stefano (2021) *Urbania.* Roma-Bari: Laterza

Bruno, Giovanni (1994) Le imprese industriali nel processo di sviluppo (1953-75). In F. Barbagallo (ed), *Storia dell'Italia repubblicana,* Torino, Einaudi, vol. II (1994), tomo I, 1994-1997:353-418

Calafati, Antonio (2009) *Economie in cerca di città.* Roma: Donzelli

Calafati, Antonio (ed) (2012) *Le città della terza Italia. Evoluzione strutturale e sviluppo economico.* Milano: Franco Angeli

Camagni, Roberto (1993) *Reti di città.* Milano: Franco Angeli

Cannata, Giovanni (ed) (1989) *I sistemi agricoli italiani.* Milano: Franco Angeli

Carrosio, Giovanni (2020) Nuovo populismo e domanda di riconoscimento nelle aree rurali italiane, in *Studi di sociologia,* LVIII, 1: 45-61

Carrosio, Giovanni (2019) *I margini al centro. L'Italia delle aree interne tra fragilità e innovazione.* Roma: Donzelli

Castells, Manuel (1998) *End of Millennium, The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture, Vol. III.* Cambridge, and Oxford: Blackwell

Cersosimo, Domenico and Donzelli, Carmine (eds) (2020) *Manifesto per riabitare l'Italia,* Roma: Donzelli

Clementi, Alessandro, Dematteis, Giuseppe and Palermo Pier Carlo (1995) *Le Forme del territorio italiano.* Bari: Laterza

Cucinella, Mario (2018) *Arcipelago Italia. Progetti per il futuro dei territori interni del Paese. Padiglione Italia alla Biennale Architettura 2018.* Macerata: Quodlibet

Curci, Francesco, Kërçuku, Agim and Lanzani, Arturo (2020) Le geografie emergenti della contrazione insediativa in Italia. Analisi interpretative e segnali per le politiche. *CRIOS,* 19-20: 8-19

Curci, Francesco, Kërçuku, Agim, Lanzani, Arturo and Federico, Zanfi (2022) Italia di mezzo. The emerging marginality of intermediate territories between metropolises and inner areas, in *Region* Vol. 9 No. 2 (accepted paper is pending publication)

Curci Francesco, Lanzani, Arturo, Curci Francesco, Kërçuku Agim, Lanzani Arturo, and De Leo Daniela (2020) *L'Italia di mezzo.* Report presented at the Conference: Ricomporre i divari. Politecnico di Milano, February 17, 2020

Davis, John A. (1999) *Mutamenti di prospettiva sul cammino dell'Italia verso il XX secolo,* in Ciocca Pierluigi and Toniolo Gianni (eds), Storia economica d'Italia, 1, Interpretazioni. Roma-Bari: Laterza, 218-220

De Rita, Giuseppe (2020) *Il lungo Mezzogiorno.* Roma-Bari: Laterza

De Rossi, Antonio (ed) (2018) *Riabitare l'Italia. Le aree interne tra abbandoni e riconquiste.* Roma: Donzelli

Del Monte, Alfredo and Giannola, Adriano (1978), *Il Mezzogiorno Nell'economia italiana.* Bologna: il Mulino

Dematteis, Giuseppe and Bonavero, Piero (eds) (1997) *Il sistema urbano italiano nello spazio unificato europeo.* Bologna: Il Mulino

Dematteis, Giuseppe (1986) *Deconcentrazione metropolitana, crescita periferica e ripopolamento di aree marginali: il caso dell'Italia,* in Cencini, Carlo, Dematteis Giuseppe and Menegatti Bruno (eds) *L'Italia emergente. Indagine geo-demografica sullo sviluppo periferico.* Milano: Franco Angeli,105-142

Di Matteo, Dante and Mariotti, Ilaria (2021) Italian discontent and right-wing populism: determinants, geographies, patterns, in *Regional Science Policy & Practice,* 13(2): 371 - 396

Di Matteo, Dante, Kërçuku, Agim and Pessina, Gloria (2021) Descrizioni complesse per nuove politiche territoriali anti-fragili, in *TF | GIORNALE,* settembre 2021, pp 8-9

Dijkstra, Lewis, Poelman, Hugo and Rodríguez-Pose, Andrés (2020). The geography of EU discontent, in *Regional Studies,* 54(6): 737–753, https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2019.1654603

Fabian, Lorenzo, Giannotti, Emanuel and Viganò Paola (eds) (2012) *Recycling city. Lifecycles, ebodied energy, inclusion.* Pordenone: Giavedoni

Fortunato, Giustino (1927) *Pagine e ricordi parlamentari.* Firenze: Vallecchi

Fourastié, Jean (1979) *Les Trente Glorieuses, ou la révolution invisible de 1946 à 1975.* Paris: Fayard

Franchetti, Leopoldo (1875) *Condizioni economiche ed amministrative delle province napoletane: Abruzzi e Molise-Calabrie e Basilicata / appunti di viaggio di Leopoldo Franchetti per Sidney Sonnino.* Firenze: Tip. della Gazzetta d'Italia

Fua, Giorgio (ed) (1991) *Orientamenti per la politica del territorio.* Bologna: Il Mulino

Galasso, Giuseppe (2005) *Il Mezzogiorno da questione" a "problema aperto.* Manduria: Lacaita

Gramsci, Antonio (1966) *La questione meridionale.* Roma, Riuniti

Indovina, Francesco (1990) *La città diffusa.* Daest-Iuav

Italian National Network of Young Researchers for Inner Areas committee (2021) *Inner areas in Italy. A testbed for interpreting and designing marginal territories.* Trento: LIStLab

Lang, Thilo (2012). Shrinkage, metropolization and peripheralization in East Germany, in *European Planning Studies,* 20: 1747–1754, https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2012.713336

Leick, Birgit and Lang, Thilo (2018) Re-thinking non-core regions: planning strategies and practices beyond growth, in *European Planning Studies,* 26(2): 213-228, https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2017.1363398

Mascarucci, Roberto (ed) (2020) *Città medie e metropoli regionali.* Roma: INU Edizioni.

McCann, Philip (2020) Perceptions of regional inequality and the geography of discontent: insights from the UK, in *Regional Studies,* 54(2): 256-267, https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2019.1619928

Menegatti, Bruno (1986) *Regionalizzazione dello sviluppo e rivalorizzazione delle aree marginali dell'Italia di Mezzo: il caso dell'Emilia-Romagna,* in Cencini C, Dematteis G. Menegatti B (a cura di) *L'italia mergente. Indagine geo-demografica sullo sviluppo periferico.* Milano: Franco Angeli

Ministero dell'Economia e delle Finanze – Dipartimento per le Politiche di sviluppo (2003) *Il fondo per le Aree Sottoutilizzate. Elementi informativi sull'attuazione nel 2003*

Molinari, Alessandro (1988) *Il Mezzogiorno d'Italia.* In Negri, Zampagni, Vera, Sanfilippo Mario (eds) *Nuovo meridionalismo e intervento straordinario. La Svimez dal 1946 al 1950.* Bologna: Il Mulino

Monaco, Francesco (2020) *La strategia delle aree interne fra innovazione e ricostruzione post Covid-19.* In Nicolò Fenu (ed) *Aree interne e covid.* Siracusa: LetteraVentidue, 176-215

Nitti, F, Saverio (1903) *Napoli e la questione meridionale.* Napoli: Pierro.

Polidori, Elena (2009) Draghi: mafia infiltrata nello Stato. *la Repubblica,* 27 novembre 2009

Florida, Richard (2021) Discontent and its geographies, in *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society,* 14(3): 619–624, https://doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rsab014

Rodríguez-Pose, Andrés (2018) The revenge of the places that don't matter (and what to do about it), in *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society,* 11(1): 189–209, https://doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rsx024

Rossi-Doria, Manlio (1958) *Dieci anni di politica agraria nel Mezzogiorno.* Bari: Laterza.

Ruegg, Jean and Deschenaux, Chantal (2003) Territoiresintermédiaires et espaces ruraux, in *Politik des ländlichenRaumes.* Suisse, 11

Saraceno, Pasquale (1982) *Gli anni dello Schema Vanoni (1953-1959).* Roma: S.v.i.m.e.z. collana monografie

Sieverts, Thomas (2003) *Cities without cities: An interpretation of the Zwischenstadt.* London: Routledge

Signorelli, Amalia (1995) *Movimenti di popolazione e trasformazioni culturali, in Storia dell'Italia repubblicana, II, La trasformazione dell'Italia, sviluppo e squilibri.* Torino: Einaudi

SVIMEZ (1997) *Rapporto Svimez 1997 sull'economia del Mezzogiorno.* Bologna: Il Mulino

SVIMEZ (2011) *150 anni di statistiche italiane: Nord e Sud 1861-2011.* Bologna: Il Mulino

Teti, Vito (2020) *Prevedere l'imprevedibile. Presente, passato e futuro in tempo di coronavirus.* Roma: Donzelli

van Leeuwen, Eveline S., Halleck Vega, Solmaria and Hogenboom, Vera (2021) Does population decline lead to a "populist voting mark-up"? A case study of the Netherlands, in *Regional Science Policy & Practice,*13(2), https://doi.org/10.1111/rsp3.12361

Vanier, Martin (2000) Qu'est-ce que le tiers espace? Territorialités complexes et construction politique, in *Revue de Géographie Alpine,* 88(1): 105-113

Viesti, Gianfranco (2021) *Centri e periferie. Europa, Italia, Mezzogiorno dal XX al XXI secolo.* Roma-Bari: Laterza

Villari, Pasquale (1878) *Le lettere meridionali ed altri scritti sulla questione sociale in Italia.* Firenze: Le Monnier. (Ri-print: Villari, Pasquale (1953) *Le lettere meridionali e altri scritti sulla questione sociale in Italia.* Ragusa: Ediz. Storia e Studi Sociali)

Villari, Roberto (1976) L'interdipendenza tra nord e sud. *Studi Storici,* 18, 1976/2: 5-20

Wandl, Alexander, Nadin, Vincent, Zonneveld, Wil and Rooij, Remon (2014). Beyond urban–rural classifications: Characterising and mapping territories-in-between across Europe, in *Landscape and Urban Planning,* 130: 50–63, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2014.06.010

Transactions of the Association of European Schools of Planning • 6 (2022)
doi: 10.24306/TrAESOP.2022.01.005

HOW CAN CHALLENGES IN LEFT BEHIND PLACES BE ADDRESSED?

LEARNING FROM GREATER LILLE, NANTES, THE RUHR REGION, SAN ANTONIO, AND ESTONIA

Abigail Taylor[a]

(Received 20 December 2021; revised version received 8 November 2022; final version accepted 15 December 2022)

Abstract

Addressing issues of regional inequalities and supporting 'left behind' regions is a global issue, but analysis of international regions that have successfully levelled up is limited. Developing and implementing effective place-based policies is critical for recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic but remains an under-explored issue. This paper provides insights into different policies and tools used to support left-behind places. Comparing the experiences of addressing socio-economic challenges in Greater Lille, Nantes, the Ruhr region, San Antonio, and Estonia it discusses what ingredients are required for successfully addressing inequalities, what has worked well, and future challenges. It identifies seven "foundations" for levelling up and stresses the importance of levelling up "within" regions and not just the levelling up "of" regions. In particular, it debates opportunities to support levelling up through financial management and governance tools.

Keywords

Left behind places, levelling up, regional inequalities

a (Corresponding author) City-REDI, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK. E-Mail: a.taylor.7@bham.ac.uk

1. Introduction

1.1. Policy Context

Addressing regional inequalities and supporting 'left behind' regions is a global issue. Factors driving regional inequalities are 'longstanding and complex' (Stuart and Shutt, 2021, p.45). Growing social and spatial inequalities, persistent rates of poverty, limited opportunities, and high levels of discontent have all been linked to the issue of rising populism in so-called 'left behind' places across the world (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018). But areas considered 'left behind' 'vary greatly' in size and geography, (Davenport and Zaranko, 2020, p.325).

The merits of governance reforms, particularly devolution, to address regional and spatial development challenges are contested (Regan et al, 2021). 'Powerful, scale-changing modifications are affecting local governments in Europe and across the world' (Desjardins and Geppert, 2020, p.121). To make regions more dynamic and better suited to modern economic needs there is interest in reforming governance arrangements, including the number of local government areas. For example, the number of French regions was reduced from 22 to 13 in 2015 to decrease waste and make the regions better adapted to modern economic needs.

A longstanding and ongoing debate concerns the merits of people and place-based policies. The International Monetary Fund endorses a 'spatially blind, people-based' approach to development targeting underperforming population groups (Floerkemeier et al, 2021, p.19). Globally, there appears to be a move to industrial policies and a place-based approach to regional policies that are designed to improve well-being and reduce disparities. Global institutions, including the European Commission and the OECD, have emphasised opportunities to use industrial policies to support the delivery of macro- and micro-economic policy goals (Barca, 2009; Hildreth and Bailey, 2014). The Covid-19 crisis has accentuated the need for effective (and different) place-based policies to enable recovery from the pandemic as a consequence of the the differing impacts felt by individual regions and city-regions globally (Beer et al, 2020).

1.2. Aim

This paper responds to this uncertainty and urgency by analysing the policies used by selected international city-regions to address both new and enduring regional inequalities. It explores what can be learnt from how these places have designed and implemented place-based policies to support policy design in other 'left behind' places.

The research questions are:

- Which policy tools have been used internationally to support left-behind places?
- What are the roles of governance and financial structures?

The paper analyses policies addressing regional inequalities in Greater Lille, Greater Nantes, the Ruhr region, San Antonio (Texas) and Estonia. Selected from Europe and the USA, the list draws together examples from countries with centralised and federal systems of government. Estonia, rather than a specific city-region, was chosen because of Estonia's total population of 1.3 million (OECD, 2020a). Figure 1 provides key socio-economic data (population, key industries historically and now, economic development policies, governance structures and progress with levelling up) about each case study place to contextualise the findings.

The paper seeks to identify learning for the UK, and also offers lessons for places across western democracies which are seeking to address regional inequalities. Whilst variations in productivity exist in other countries including France and Germany (Holt and Lyne, 2020), learning from best practice elsewhere is particularly pertinent to the UK as one of the world's most geographically unequal developed countries (Davenport and Zaranko, 2020). Supporting 'left behind' places in the UK is enshrined in 'levelling up' - an ambiguous term used to refer to policies designed to improve productivity across the UK through investment in infrastructure, skills, and innovation. The UK government published a White Paper in February 2022 outlining policy priorities (DLUHC, 2022). Questions remain regarding the role of central, regional, and local government in delivering levelling up and how a focus on 'people' and 'place' can be combined (Shearer et al, 2021).

Table 1 - Socio-economic profile of case study places

	Population (city and wider region)	Key industries historically	Key industries now	Evidence of levelling up	Economic development policies	Governance structure
Greater Lille, France	• Lille: 233,000 • Métropole Européenne de Lille (MEL): 1,174,000 • Hauts-de-France: 6,004,000	• Textiles. • Mining. • Nord-Pas-de-Calais produced 8.3% of French GDP in 1960, 5.6% in 1995.	• Mail order, business services, retail, industry.	• Unemployment in MEL 15.1% in 2000, 9% in 2020. • Extensive tertiary sector development. • Health and agribusiness stimulated.	• City centre redevelopment • International, national, regional and city transport. • Clusters. • Arts and culture	• Nord-Pas-de-Calais, merged in 2016 with Picardie, to form Hauts-de-France. • Lille & 94 neighbouring *communes* (municipalities) formed MEL in 2014.
Nantes, France	• Nantes: 314,000 • Nantes Métropole: 656,000	• Shipbuilding, sugar refining, fishing from 18th century.	• Aerospace, marine/ renew-able energy manufacturing & high-end shipbuilding, digital, financial & business services.	• Unemployment 9.5% in 2000, 7% in 2020. • Nantes Métropole's population increased nearly 60% 1968–2018. • 2019 European Capital of Innovation. • Digital sector grew faster than nationally 2009-2019.	• Cultural initiatives. • Technical innovation (advanced manufacturing/ digital) • Public procurement.	• Pays de la Loire was one of the few regions not subject to a merger process in 2016. • Nantes Métropole comprises 24 *communes*, building on cooperation from 1960s onwards.
Ruhr Region, Germany	• Dortmund: 586,000 • Essen: 580,000 • Duisberg: 495,000 • Ruhr region: 5,116,000	• Coal/steel manufacturing	• Service and knowledge-based industries. • Service sector employment rose 77% 1970-2009.	• 52% increase in GDP per capita 1991- 2017. • Strong decline in unemployment in Essen since 2008 but remains above national average.	• Structural policies to develop regional ecological/ cultural landscape and entrepreneurial activity • Re-skilling through ALMP. • University expansion. • Clusters.	• Polycentric region. • *Regionalverband Ruhr* –planning institution financed and politically controlled by cities. • First regional parliament directly elected in 2020.
San Antonio, US	• San Antonio city: 1,547,000 • San Antonio metropolitan area: 2,611,000		• Health/bio-sciences, federal government, military, advanced manufacturing, tourism, education	• Among fastest growing metropolitan areas in the US. • Considerable fall in unemployment and strong GVA per worker growth compared to Texas and US	• QUEST sector-focused training programme. • Regional transport. • Sector-targeted education, re-skilling, internship programmes • Arts and culture	• Council-Manager system • SAEDF (public-private economic development foundation)
Estonia	• 1.3 million	• Oil production.	• ICT, oil.	• Employment rose >20% 2010-2020. • GDP increased by >800% 1995-2000. • Improving digital skills.	• ICT/IT infrastructure development. • Digitalisation of government services. • Sector-targeted education/re-skilling.	• Small, centralised country. • E-Estonia 1996-2000. • e-Estonia Council established 2014.

Source: (AURAN, 2020; Castaños, 2018; Eurostat, 2021; INSEE, 2021a; INSEE, 2021b; Keil and Wetterau, 2012; Landesdatesbank Nordrhein-Westfalen, 2020; Provan, 2015; OECD, 2020a; OECD, 2021a; RegionalVerbandRuhr, n.d.; Schwarze-Rodrian, 2016; USCB, 2020).

2. Literature Review

This section summarises insights from existing studies regarding how challenges in 'left behind places' have been addressed. It draws on explicit studies of 'left behind' places before explaining the relevance of comparative city, city-regional and regional growth; devolution; and reurbanisation studies. Focus is placed on these topics due to their relevance for the case study places.

2.1. Insights from 'Left Behind' Places Literature

Traditionally, urban and regional studies have focused to a limited extent on declining and economically trailing places. However, more recent papers have examined regional inequalities in 'left behind' places. The recent rise in populist discontent across Europe and North America has foregrounded the need to address social and spatial inequalities (MacKinnon et al, 2021). 'Left behind' places are regions, particularly post-industrial regions and rural areas that are experiencing challenges associated with disadvantage and discontent (Florida, 2021; Rodríguez-Pose, 2018). Such places have returned to mainstream discourses (especially in the UK) following the 2016 EU referendum and have been contrasted with 'metropolitan cores' and 'metropolitan elites' (Sykes, 2018). Mackinnon et al (2021) call for 'an expanded neo-endogenous development approach' which is focused on the foundational economy, income and livelihoods, social infrastructure, and social innovation.

2.2. Insights from comparative international studies

Innovation, investment, human capital, economic structure, connectivity, quality of life and decision-making structures have been identified as key drivers of competitive performance in UK urban areas (Parkinson et al, 2006). Drawing on case studies from North and South America and western Europe, Polèse (2020) identifies four categories of factors which influence the wealth and poverty of cities: institutions, people, centrality, and luck. Evidence from international cities that have adopted an inclusive growth agenda indicates that local powers and responsibilities are more limited in UK cities than many international cities. Priorities identified include focusing more on the demand side of the labour market, de-risking transitions into and within employment, and expanding connectivity (Green et al, 2017).

Analysis of experiences in international city-regions that have successfully levelled up is more limited although Taylor et al. (2020) identify six "foundations" for levelling up: collaboration and strong leadership, sustained and appropriate investment in skills and training, infrastructure and culture and tourism, strategic planning to support economic diversification, the need for transparency and accountability in public policy. However, limited attention has been paid to the role of public finance and the tools used by local and regional leaders to bring about change in 'left behind' places. Taylor et al. (2022) examine addressing inequalities through four further international case studies, focusing on the role of differing financial structures. This paper combines findings from Taylor et al (2020) and Taylor et al (2022) to extend analysis of how varying governance structures and public finance tools enable policymakers to address regional inequalities, and connects this research with academic debates regarding 'left behind' places.

2.3. Insights from literature on devolution

A wide existing literature has analysed the benefits and challenges of devolution. For an overview, see Regan et al (2021). Evidence on the impact of fiscal devolution is mixed (Iimi, 2005; Rodríguez-Pose and Ezcurra 2010). However, studies frequently do not consider whether subnational governments benefit from autonomy over their spending, or function in practice as extensions of central government (Davoodi and Zou, 1998). Devolution can have negative effects if not implemented appropriately. Research indicates the importance of justifying differences in power between places (Regan et al, 2021).

2.4. Insights from reurbanisation literature

A rich literature has examined debates on reurbanisation. There is no single agreed definition, but key dimensions include: demographic revival; gentrification, studentification, regeneration; spatial cycle models; the suburbanisation of poverty, and suburban densification. This work provides insights into policies that have helped regenerate urban regions. For example, central government investment in public transport, universities, and urban regeneration projects has supported reurbanisation in some French cities (Dembski et al, 2021). Research in Switzerland on reurbanisation found that it should be understood in the context of housing consumption trends, and the inward migration of international migrants, young adults, non-family households, and parts of the middle to upper class (Rérat, 2011). However, this literature tends to focus on population and spatial trends and urban planning policies rather than the wider policy tools available at the city-regional/regional level to address inequalities.

3. Methodology

This paper develops interlinked research produced for the Industrial Strategy Council and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) using a three-step approach:

1. Evidence reviews of academic and grey literature.
2. Inventory of key socio-economic indicators for each case study place.
3. Interviewing academic experts and relevant policy officials within the case study places. 32 interviews were conducted between August 2020 and October 2021 and analysed thematically. Interviews included discussions with selected local and regional government officials in each case study place and with representatives from wider institutions which contribute to regional economic development; such as regional development agencies and Chambers of Commerce. The interview guide explored the importance of different factors identified in the evidence review as being important in addressing regional inequalities, and probed interviewees to discuss the roles of additional factors which have supported regional growth, remaining challenges, and the strengths and weaknesses of governance structures

The case studies were selected to cover a range of international examples with different governance systems but sufficient commonality to offer insightful comparison:

- San Antonio: a city within a federal system
- Estonia: a centralised state
- Greater Lille and Greater Nantes: intercommunal structures (comprising big cities and towns) within, respectively, the Hauts-de-France and Pays de la Loire regions. France has a centralised model of governance.
- The Ruhr region: polycentric region in North-Rheine Westphalia composed of 53 cities and four counties (*Landkreise*) each made up of smaller towns. Germany has a federal state system.

Greater Lille and Greater Nantes were chosen to enable insight into how approaches can differ within the same national context and different sized intercommunal structures.

This paper uses cross-national comparisons to identify a broader canvas of learning points regarding how common regional economic development issues are addressed across different places, and the different levers that are available and utilised to tackle these challenges. Conducting and analysing cross-national comparative research creates challenges relating to implicit and explicit comparability, 'symmetry' and incorporating differing 'socio-economic, political and cultural structures' (Dembski et al, 2021; Williams, 1984 and Reimer et al, 2014). In line with Sharpe (1975), this research adopts the principles of '*maximum similarity*' and '*maximum discreteness of focus*' when selecting the case studies. All the case study places are located within western economies which have experienced similar economic development challenges. The following section presents the research findings and contrasts the experiences of addressing regional inequalities in the case study places.

4. Findings

4.1. Foundations Driving Local Economic Growth

Based on thematic analysis of evidence reviews and stakeholder interviews, this section argues that seven foundations (cross-cutting themes) have played an important role in driving local economic growth in the case study places. It is structured along the foundations in Figure 2. In so doing it extends existing work (e.g. Taylor et al, 2021) by incorporating the role of financial management in supporting 'left behind' places. For each, experiences are contrasted in two case study places as exemplars of that foundation. The role of each foundation differed by place but was central in all; suggesting that it is necessary for policymakers to combine these varying types of policy to support progress in 'left behind' regions.

Table 2 - Seven Foundations

Scale & Longevity of Investment	Financial management	Collaboration	Attractive Place to Live	Universities, clusters and Innovation	Transport and Digital Infrastructure	Skills and Future Sectors
Ruhr Region	Nantes & Greater Lille	Greater Lille	Nantes	Greater Lille	Greater Lille	Ruhr Region
Estonia	San Antonio	Ruhr Region	San Antonio	Ruhr Region	Estonia	San Antonio

4.2. Scale and Longevity of Investment

Long-term, high-level investment was crucial to both the Ruhr region and Estonia in redeveloping their economies.

With regard to the Ruhr region, substantial long-term funding has been provided by the EU, the Federal Republic of Germany, and the state of North-Rheine Westphalia. Investment totalling €4 billion was delivered between 1989 and 2011 through EU Structural Funding. Regional government invested in, and supported, urban development and addressing social and environmental issues. The state supported the environmental clean-up necessitated by the region's history of steel and coal production (Schwarze-Rodrian, 2016). The success of the approach adopted is demonstrated by Essen becoming the 2017 European Green Capital in recognition of the city's creation of blue and green corridors, new rail links, and improved green infrastructure.

Focusing on digital infrastructure is important in Estonia given how the country is recognised globally for its success in adopting digital technology within the public sector. The evidence review identified the importance of the government's long-term investment in digital infrastructure as a key factor supporting economic growth. The e-Estonia initiative which aims to improve the efficiency and transparency of the Estonian government, boost economic growth, and increase wellbeing, has been running for over 20 years. No official estimation of the overall budget exists; however, between 1994 and 2004 around 1% of the Estonian budget was allocated to ICT development. Estonia has benefited from EU Structural and Cohesion Fund investment; spending on developing the information society totalled €95.4 million between 2004 and 2013. Funding from the EU and Estonian government for implementing the digital agenda between 2014-2020 is estimated at €200 million (Castaños, 2018). Public and private sector funding and large investment in IT infrastructure has also influenced the success of the digital programme. Estonia's IT start-up sector now has a turnover of €3.6 billion (E-Estonia, n.d.).

Despite these high levels of investment, interviews conducted indicated that challenges remain in the Ruhr region and Estonia; emphasising the need for continual high-scale investment. Growth across the Ruhr region has been uneven. Poverty remains an issue; 21% of residents were in poverty in 2019[1] (DW, 2019). Deprivation is concentrated in former coalmining areas. Interviewees pointed to a North-South divide, suggesting the north of the region, where employment was traditionally less skilled, has struggled most to transition to a knowledge-based service economy. Continuing challenges in Estonia include the need to improve digital transformation among firms in non-ICT sectors. This is hindered by limited SME support for technology adoption and change management (OECD, 2019; European Commission, 2020).

4.3. Financial Management

Nantes and San Antonio illustrate three different ways in which regional policymakers can use financial management tools to promote local and regional development.

As identified in the evidence review, Nantes Métropole has focused on public procurement, including professional integration clauses in its municipal contracts, clauses relating to daytime working in its cleaning services contracts, carbon clauses in its road contracts, and Corporate Social Responsibility clauses for service

1 Germany adopts a relative measure of poverty. A household is 'poor' if it earns below 50 or 60% of the median household income.

delivery. This is innovative in the context of links to contemporary agendas on 'the quality of work', 'good jobs', and environmental issues. The Métropole views procurement as an important lever for supporting local economic activity and stimulating changes in behaviour among local firms (Nantes Métropole, 2020). Learning from the Métropole's experiences of using responsible purchasing to address inequalities has included recognising priorities, defining parameters, and establishing a framework of actions which incorporate feasibility and measurability; internal organisation and dedicated resources for managing public procurement; and acknowledging the time required to verify and define criteria for inclusion in public procurement policy (European Commission, 2017).

Nantes Métropole and the MEL (the inter-communal authority in Greater Lille) have shown how funds can be redistributed across local authorities within *métropoles* through two mechanisms.[2] The French state redistributes funds between local authorities through the *Dotation globale de fonctionnement* (DGF), the main state allocation to regional and local authorities in France. It aims to provide authorities with stable and predictable resourcing, and to implement vertical equalising by supporting authorities confronted by costs which they are unable to cover. It is made up of a block grant and an equalisation component that responds to the challenges faced by different types of *communes* (i.e. rural, urban). The equalisation component takes account of the potential fiscal revenue[3] of *métropoles*. Nantes contributes to the equalisation component (almost €4 million in 2021) as it is comparatively richer than other areas such as the MEL which does not. Nantes Métropole and the MEL raise household and economic taxes. Firms pay a transport supplement to their Métropole based on payroll expenditure. Local tax powers have been criticised for not going far enough (Desjardins and Estèbe, 2018). High levels of funding are redistributed to local authorities within Nantes Métropole and the MEL through operating expenditure. The way in which state equalisation policies incorporate potential fiscal revenue at the local level is an example of how devolving tax powers to sub-regional authorities can seek to prevent entrenching inequalities in low tax areas. The increase in horizontal redistribution mechanisms has been identified as important in limiting fiscal capacity gaps and increasing local autonomy (Desjardins and Estèbe, 2018).

San Antonio provides an example of an interesting financial model which involves both public and private sector funding. The San Antonio Economic Development Foundation (SAEDF), recently renamed the Greater:SATX Regional Economic Partnership, is a private non-profit organisation which was established over fifty years ago. Interviewees identified SAEDF as one of the factors that supports the addressing of regional inequalities in San Antonio. Greater:SATX focuses on job creation and promoting long-term economic growth in the region through supporting business growth, start-up creations, and attracting new businesses. It is funded by government, utilities partners, and over 160 local businesses. In 2021, Greater:SATX launched a new regional economic development strategy focused on Jobs, People, and Place. To implement the plan, Greater:SATX is seeking to raise $38.5 million, having already raised over $1 million, from the regional business community. Interviewees emphasised how the Foundation's status as a non-profit organisation facilitates how it brings together regional partners from public and private sectors.

4.4. Collaboration

Formal and informal collaborations emerged from the stakeholder interviews as being central to promoting economic growth in the case study areas. Greater Lille and the Ruhr region provide contrasting examples of how collaborations at a local and regional level can be facilitated in 'left behind' areas. They also show how governance developments can be counterproductive and how collaboration requires clear governance structures and opportunities for informal collaboration.

In Lille, strong collaboration from the 1970s to the 2000s between the elected Mayor and regional government provided a platform of stability and longevity to drive recovery as regional government made decisions which supported the elected Mayor's agenda (Power, 2018). Pierre Mauroy was Mayor of Lille from 1973-2001 and President of the *Communité urbaine de Lille* (Lille Metropolitan Community), a predecessor of the MEL, from 1989-2008.

2 For detail on the development of intercommunal *métropoles* and decentralisation debates in France, see Desjardins and Estèbe (2018).

3

Interviewees emphasised Mauroy's influence in building local consensus and securing flagship projects such as Euralille but also indicated that more recent experiences suggest that effective collaboration requires more than strong local leadership and consensus. Governance arrangements in Lille have become more complicated over recent decades with the establishment of the MEL in 2016, an expansion of the number of *Communes* it covers in 2017, and the establishment of the larger Hauts-de-France region in 2015. Interviewees contrasted the ability of Mauroy to drive major projects relatively quickly in a simple and more-directed decision-making context with the competing interests and complexity of current governance arrangements. They suggested that it now takes longer to gain approval for, let alone implement, major projects. The wider region now includes areas with contrasting economic histories and priorities.

Lille also evidences the importance of informal collaboration. In 1993 stakeholders established the *Comité Grand Lille*, an informal think-tank promoting discussion and developing shared solutions to economic issues. The network, which does not have a formal juridical or administrative structure, holds bi-monthly meetings. Membership is diverse, including financial institutions, the Chamber of Commerce, civil servants, elected politicians, local businesses, and social partners. Several interviewees argued that the network was important in fostering ideas for innovative projects including Lille's successful bid to be 2004 European Capital of Culture. Its informal structure has been cited as vital to overcoming institutional barriers that then enabled the area to 'think globally' and 'act locally' (Brachet, 1998). Interviewees suggested that the network has struggled somewhat recently due to greater reluctance to collaborate across party and sectoral lines, and Lille's increasingly complex governance arrangements. One participant argued for a regional version of the network to strengthen relationships and break down barriers across the region.

In the Ruhr region, tripartite, cooperative governance between leading companies, trade unions and local government has reduced political fragmentation which could occur given the polycentric nature of the region (*Landkreise*) (Rehfeld and Nordhause-Janz, 2017). Interviewees associated cooperation with the success of projects including the International Building Exhibition Emscher Park (an innovative management and governance laboratory), Essen becoming the 2010 European Capital of Culture, and Innovation City Ruhr (a 10-year project to revitalise urban areas and promote sustainability).

Some interviewees indicated that, since 2010, there has been a move towards greater independence at the city level in the Ruhr region, with cities establishing city-specific development strategies. Although this has enabled tailored strategy development and implementation in some places, some evidence exists that it has also resulted in the duplication of some industries and projects; hindering the region from maximising its economic potential (Oei et al, 2019). This shows how some governance developments may be counterproductive to redeveloping 'left behind' places. An interviewee pointed to the significance of the establishment in 2020 of the directly elected Ruhr Parliament. They argued that the region pushed for the Parliament to be established "*to coordinate better the activities […] of the cities of the Ruhr region, because the cities of the region are aware that they will have no chance neither in Germany, nor in the European context, when acting alone […]. But as a region, there's a certain momentum of power of GDP, of people, etc, of universities*".

4.5. Place Attractiveness

Making places attractive is important from a local/regional economic development perspective in terms of attracting and retaining high-skilled workers. Nantes Métropole and San Antonio demonstrate how investing in arts and culture can help transform 'left behind' places, attract new residents and tourists, and contribute. to economic growth. However, it can also create new issues whilst not addressing pre-existing challenges.

Following the closure of Nantes' shipyards in the 1970s and 1980s, unemployment rose considerably. As stressed by the interviewees, several cultural initiatives were established in abandoned former industrial areas. These include the *Voyage à Nantes* (Journey to Nantes), an 8.5km artistic trail connecting key attractions in the centre of Nantes, and the *Machines de l'île*, a contemporary art gallery located along the Loire estuary. The interviewees stressed how publicly funded cultural initiatives were vital in changing the image of Nantes locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally; encouraging firms to relocate there. Nantes became one of the most sought-after French cities for rental office space. It came top amongst French cities in the 2018 and 2019 Express magazine rankings for employment. Visitors to Nantes Métropole increased by over 285% between 2006 and 2014, bringing an estimated direct economic benefit of €43million in 2014 (AURAN, 2015, Eurocities, n.d.).

Although Nantes was the 2013 European Green Capital as a consequence of its sustainable urban development and climate change mitigation policies, high population growth and increased tourism have created challenges. Interviewees emphasised increased pressure on transport services, housing, childcare and schools and questioned how Nantes can continue to promote itself as green whilst welcoming increasing numbers of tourists through its airport. Griggs and Howarth (2020) contrasted the metropolitanisation and urbanisation of Nantes as methods for sustainable development with a counter movement for slower living and the protection of farmland, - as symbolised by the battle over the construction of a new airport outside Nantes. The economic development model in Nantes Métropole appears to be challenged by two alternative models. Within the city of Nantes sustainability issues are coming more to the fore. Outside of the core urban area, a movement is emerging that seeks an alternative lifestyle.

San Antonio has taken a community-focused approach to arts and cultural investment. In 2005, the city launched the Cultural Collaborative; a 10-year plan for developing San Antonio's creative economy. Interviewees identified Cultural Collaborative as one of the key factors behind San Antonio's recent socio-economic development. The plan, which followed almost two years of research and community outreach, aimed to increase creative community resources, expand access to the arts, and strengthen San Antonio's diverse culture. Between 2010 and 2020, public investment in arts and culture increased by 38% (SA2020, n.d.). San Antonio's creative economy exceeded the US national average, prior to, during and post the 2008 recession, outperforming larger regions (Semen and Carroll, 2017).

Despite this community-centred approach, economic segregation is a key outstanding issue that needs to be addressed in San Antonio. Interviewees highlighted how poverty in minority communities stems from centuries of structural discrimination and that change is a long-term process. In terms of supporting 'left behind' places, this emphasises the importance of holistic, long-term policy that seeks to benefit diverse communities.

4.6. Universities, Clusters, and Innovation

The Ruhr region and Greater Lille exemplify how 'left behind' places can invest in universities, clusters, and innovation to achieve economic growth. However, the Ruhr indicates that the levelling up of university provision nationally can distort widening gaps between large university cities and cities without universities.

Many interviewees identified how the regional knowledge base in the Ruhr has developed considerably over the last four decades. Prior to the 1970s, only mining engineering courses were available at post-secondary level in the region. Between 1965 and 1972 universities opened in the cities of Duisberg, Essen, and Bochum, whilst public and private research facilities were founded in the 1980s to aid the transition to a service and technology-based knowledge economy. The expansion of higher education in the region resulted in a 78% increase in student numbers between 1985 and 2014 (Schwarze-Rodrian, 2016). Today 22 universities operate in the region. The development of the regional knowledge base through the Technical University of Dortmund and the Fraunhofer Institute for Logistics has been 'crucial' to the development of the logistics sector (Rehfeld and Nordhause-Janz, 2017). Interviewees stressed how establishing new universities has improved the attractiveness of the region for individuals and companies, with research contributing to the rise in the number of SMEs. An interviewee argued that public authorities through the Regional Verband Ruhr have played a key role in establishing regional development plans and clusters but stressed "*I think more important was to just build up a critical mass of universities of knowledge, etc, for spin offs*".

The 'Univercity' concept promotes shared learning and working between local and regional authorities, the private sector, universities, and citizens. Several cities within the Ruhr established technology centres and business incubators in the 1980s and the 1990s. An interviewee explained that adopting this concept led to local and municipal authorities completely changing their perceptions of universities.

Nonetheless, some have criticised the universities for focusing on supporting SMEs rather than achieving broader socio-economic outcomes regionally (Oei et al, 2019; Schwarze-Rodrian, 2016). Another critique mentioned by some of the interviewees concerned how only smaller universities of applied sciences have been established in the northern part of the Ruhr which has historically been more disadvantaged. Although cities in the Ruhr with large universities are slowly catching up with the national average with regard to the percentage share of university graduates in the workforce, cities with smaller universities are falling further behind (Kiese, 2021).

Greater Lille has a much longer history of tertiary level academic institutions. What is particularly interesting is how, over the past three decades, the MEL and its predecessors have established eight *Sites d'excellence* (Centres of Excellence) on former industrial sites, developing clusters of firms in similar sectors to foster innovative product development. They received €30 million of funding between 2008 and 2012, and achieved 'considerable growth' in their industries. Six *Pôles de competitivité* (competition clusters) have been established to promote technical and creative innovation, investment, and local employment. Whilst the number of firms and jobs in each cluster declined over the 2008-2012 period, overall, they increased 'significantly' compared to 2008 (Kuklowsky and Provan, 2011; Provan, 2015). Interviewees pointed to the role of the clusters in transforming the city-region, and identified the health and ICT clusters as having performed strongest. Eurasanté is the third largest healthcare cluster in France. Part of the largest university-hospital campus in Europe, it comprises 170 companies which employ 16,000 health professionals, working in eight hospitals, 20,000 students and 1,800 researchers (Eurasanté, 2021). Several interviewees pointed to the clusters as examples of effective cooperation between national, regional, and metropolitan authorities to support innovation. National government, which subsidises the clusters, sets the focus; regional government incorporated the clusters into a regional development plan; and the MEL provides practical support.

4.7. Transport and Digital Infrastructure

The experiences in Greater Lille and Estonia point to how investing in transport and digital infrastructure in 'left behind' places can have wider economic development benefits, but this is dependent on the continued maintenance of services.

The important transformative role played by investment in transport infrastructure in Lille was frequently mentioned by interviewees. In 1994, a new train station housing high-speed international (Eurostar) and national services opened in Lille. The French state and TGV paid 50% of the development costs, with two-thirds of the remaining 50% paid for by the regional government, and the rest covered by the city (Kuklowsky and Provan, 2011). Redevelopment of the wider neighbourhood included constructing a major commercial/business centre. Establishing a national and international transport hub shifted perceptions of Lille. Power (2018) identifies Lille as one of several cities where investment in high-speed rail infrastructure led to opportunities including employment creation, skills development, and innovation. An interviewee explained that the opening of the TGV and Eurostar lines meant that Lille moved from being a city "*on the edge of France to at the heart of Europe*". Interviewees highlighted how constructing an underground in the 1980s facilitated employment across the Metropole. Nonetheless, the recent reduction in Eurostar services serving Lille, particularly during rush hour, risks hindering cross-border travel and limiting the attractiveness of the city as a strategic link between London, Paris, Brussels, Germany, and north west Europe.

According to interviewees, specialisation in ICT and developing e-services has played a fundamental role in transforming Estonia since its independence in 1991. Policies including the Tiger Leap programme, launched in the late 1990s, provided Estonian schools with IT infrastructure, and developed skills among teachers and pupils. Estonia's digital economy continues to build on the infrastructure and skills created through these policies. Continued innovation is demonstrated by how Estonia has digitalised education materials including Higher Education. It remains the top-ranked country in Europe in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment.

Another key aspect of policy cited by interviewees is developing the use of ICT in public administration. Within Estonia, digital ID cards were introduced in 2002 as a trailblazer for subsequent digitalisation of voting, public healthcare, and other public services. Key benefits of using ICT identified in Estonia's 2020 Digital Strategy include enabling taxpayers' money to be used to address 'substantial issues' rather than administrative tasks, and improving communication between public agencies, individuals, and private companies. Estimations suggest that digital signatures permit Estonia to save 2% of GDP per year (EESC, 2017). Accelerating the digital transformation of firms has been identified as having important productivity potential. Cross-country analysis suggests that boosting high-speed Internet connections (30Mbit/s) by 10% would directly increase productivity by 2%, while indirect effects associated with increased adoption of cloud computing, would add 1.5% (Sorbe et al., 2019 cited in Azzopardi et al, 2020).

4.8. Skills and Future Sectors

Experiences in the Ruhr region and San Antonio point to the importance of investing in agile skills policies and developing adaptive training programmes to address skills mismatches and support residents to gain employment in new and emerging sectors.

As the Ruhr sought to transition from the coal industry, active labour market policies (ALMP), including specialist employment promotion and retraining initiatives helped support residents to move into high productivity sectors and skilled jobs. Adaptive training programmes were developed to respond to new market opportunities (LIPSIT, 2020). Over the period 1996-2014, 40,880 individuals employed in the coal mining industry took early retirement, 26,560 undertook retraining obtaining new qualifications, and 2,210 were redeployed (Wodopia, cited in Rehfeld and Nordhause-Janz, 2017). A key successful feature in this approach was how ALMPs complemented other regional employment policies (e.g. attracting new corporations, investing in education and research, and so on).

The Ruhr region has achieved success in developing future sectors without losing its collective past. One interviewee suggested that a key factor in economic redevelopment in the Ruhr has been building on previous expertise for the future "*it's not losing and forgetting what was before, but it's looking at how to learn how to use the knowledge of former times for inventing new things*". Interviewees pointed to how skilled engineers have been able to effectively move from working in the multinational telecommunications/consumer electronics sector (e.g., Nokia and Blackberry) to the automotive sector (e.g., Volkswagen) as firms moved in and out of the region. They cited the agility of young graduates as important in maintaining this dynamism.

San Antonio has introduced sector-targeted education, re-skilling, and internship programmes. Interviewees suggested that these programmes were one of the key factors in how San Antonio has addressed regional inequalities. SA Worxs, an industry-led strategic workforce development programme, aims to prepare students for good quality employment through apprenticeships, internships, and career events, and raise employer productivity. It has had an estimated $1.2 million impact on entry-level salaries through internships (GreaterSATX, n.d.). San Antonio also shows how economic prosperity can be promoted through building on the skills needs of anchor institutions, such as military bases, universities, and medical centres (Green et al., 2017). Interviews revealed how investment in R&D in the military sector had spilled over into the private sector.

Another longstanding policy is the Project QUEST (Quality Employment through Skills Training) programme. Established in 1993 principally by Communities Organized for Public Service and Metro Alliance to respond to the shift from manufacturing to service and technology industries, it focuses on sectors which reflect the needs of local businesses, training individuals for in demand, living wage sectors, principally healthcare, manufacturing and trade, and IT and cybersecurity. When these roles were created, the local workforce lacked the digital skills required. Funded through public and private investment, QUEST has an annual budget of $5 million (Biediger, 2020). 3,472 students graduated from the programme between 1993 and 2017, of whom 1,381 were not in employment when they joined. The programme generated $19.32 for every dollar invested through increased graduate earnings, the economic impact of increased graduate spending, and welfare savings (estimated at $326.4million over the period) (Project Quest, n.d.). The increased income of graduates of the programme has been found to transfer across generations playing 'a significant role in moving people out of poverty' (Project Quest (n.d.),p.12).

The final section looks across the foundations identified, and summarises the key contributions of this paper, whilst also considering implications for further research.

5. Conclusion

This paper has responded to the need for greater insight into effective place-based policies to support recovery from the pandemic by analysing the tools, especially governance and financial structures, used in four 'left-behind' places that demonstrate evidence of levelling up.

The analysis indicates that supporting 'left-behind' places cannot be achieved through a one-size-fits-all policy. Instead, a range of policies are required to respond to the specific challenges and strengths of each place. This paper has identified seven foundations driving local economic growth:

- scale and longevity of investment,
- financial management
- collaboration,
- place attractiveness,
- universities, clusters and innovation
- transport and digital infrastructure
- skills and future sectors.

Within each foundation, the paper emphasised key stakeholder tools used in each of the four case study areas. In terms of governance, collaboration is fundamental in securing progress under each foundation. The case studies highlight the importance of facilitating 'informal' alongside 'formal' collaboration to support innovative policy across policy, business, culture, academic and third sector stakeholders. Creating and maintaining clear and lean governance structures appears vital in supporting the crucial role of vision and leadership at national, regional, and local levels. Transparency helps ensure public support and engagement. The experiences noted in Greater Lille indicate that whilst creating new governance structures can stimulate new ideas and collaborations (e.g. uniting stakeholders in urban areas around Lille), it can also generate challenges for existing relationships and complicate policy design and implementation. When creating new structures consideration should be given to how the geography of institutional structures relates to economic needs. The case studies indicate that universities have a broad role to play in regional economic development beyond start-up support and incubators.

In relation to financial management, this paper stresses the need for sustained high levels of investment to support progress in 'left behind' places. In the case study places, this came primarily from the public sector, but San Antonio illustrates the role that the private sector can play in maintaining funding, as well as how R&D investment in anchor institutions can spill over into the private sector. The French *métropoles* demonstrate how central government funds can be redistributed across local authorities with an equalisation component incorporating potential fiscal revenue. Procurement is an increasingly important way in which public sector organisations can support local economies. However, to be effective, sufficient resourcing is important to effectively identify the parameters of public procurement and manage contracts.

While this paper has identified seven foundations for addressing challenges in left behind places across the case study areas, not all foundations were emphasised directly in both the evidence reviews and the interviews. The evidence reviews and interviews conducted point to the role played by collaboration, the attractiveness of place, transport and digital infrastructure, and universities, clusters, and innovation. The evidence reviews demonstrated the importance of high levels of long-term funding. This was rarely emphasised directly by interviewees, perhaps reflecting how it had become established in the case study places. Financial management was generally only cited by interviewees who occupy roles directly related to local and regional government funding, possibly due to the complexity of local government finance.

Some of these foundations correspond to factors that were identified as determinant in existing literature. The importance placed on transport and digital infrastructure by interviewees reflects the concepts of connectivity and centrality identified by Parkinson (2006) and Polèse (2020). The role of skills is also demonstrated by Parkinson and Polèse, however their work focuses on current demands for skills, whereas the evidence reviews and interviews analysed in this paper pointed to the importance of policy being designed to support future skills development.

Scale and longevity of investment, financial management, and collaboration are not identified as key elements in Parkinson or Polèse's frameworks. Parkinson recognises the role of investment, but focuses on the role of private investment, rather than broader public investment. Polèse emphasises the importance of the 'wise parent' institution (202020, p.9). This includes sound macro-economic management but does not stress the role of financial management as a tool to promote regional development. Parkinson suggests that development can be aided by devolving decision making powers to cities. This paper extended this analysis by demonstrating how informal and formal collaboration can be transformative.

The analysis suggests that there is a need to level up 'within', and not just 'between', regions. Whilst policy has focused on overall progress compared to national averages (or the EU average for Estonia), certain groups within each case study place remain 'left behind', exemplified by disparities in poverty levels across the Ruhr region. This paper draws attention to the importance of understanding the challenges facing people in different place contexts. The continued existence of structural discrimination towards certain communities in San Antonio emphasises the value, when designing economic growth policies, of adopting an holistic approach which addresses whether people can share in economic growth. Experiences in Nantes point to the need to balance economic growth from tourism with ecological considerations.

When conducting cross-national policy analysis there is a danger of overgeneralisation (Brenner, 2009, cited in Nurse, 2017). Nonetheless, this paper offers opportunities for policy learning as the UK defines and implements Levelling Up. The range of policies required to achieve economic growth in the case study places indicates the importance of adopting a flexible and holistic, rather than purely infrastructure-focused, approach to respond to regional and sub-regional inequalities. Blanket regional public spending targets are unlikely to significantly drive levelling up unless places are given more freedom to flexibly invest in their relative strengths and areas of need. 'A revolving door of competitive bidding funds' over recent years has limited the ability of local authorities in the UK to 'prioritise and bid for funds' (Forbes et al, 2022, p.5). The continued use of competitive bidding models in the UK's levelling up agenda (for example in allocating the 'Levelling Up Fund' and the 'Towns Fund') creates 'major problems at the local and national level' by engendering 'short-term rather than long-term planning, competitive rather than collaborative relations, and fragmented rather than cross-sector policymaking' (Newman et al, 2021, p.5). To enable places to effectively bid and invest money, local institutions need to be given longevity, stability, and fair funding for their own operation. Levelling up will not be possible without levelling up of local institutions (Romaniuk, et al. 2020).

Several future research avenues are important. We need to better understand the potential to expand the use of the tools identified in this paper in different policy contexts. For example, what are the challenges to public sector organisations expanding the use of their public procurement processes to support local workers? Further insight into the need to level up 'within' regions could be developed through analysing the extent to which the existing populations in the case study places feel that recent policy directions have worked for them. How do feelings of inclusion and civic pride differ according to the extent to which mayoral authorities have pursued citizen engagement policies? There is also a need for reflection on how stronger evaluation cultures can be developed both regionally and nationally. A lack of robust longitudinal evaluation studies of economic development policies in 'left behind' places presently hinders assessment of whether interventions achieve their objectives and why.

References

AURAN (2020) *Le numérique reste un marqueur fort de l'emploi dans la métropole nantaise.* [Online] Available from: https://www.auran.org/chiffres-cles/le-numerique-reste-un-marqueur-fort-de-lemploi-dans-la-metropole-nantaise [Accessed 30/08/2021]

AURAN (2015) *540 000 visiteurs au cours de l'été 2014 à Nantes Métropole.* [Online] Available from: https://www.auran.org/dossiers/540-000-visiteurs-au-cours-de-lete-2014-nantes-metropole [Accessed 30/08/2021]

Azzopardi, Damien, Patrick Lenain, Margit Molnar, Natia Mosiashvili. and Jon Pareliussen. (2020) *Seizing the productive potential of digital change in Estonia.*

Barca, Fabrizio (2009) *An Agenda for a Reformed Cohesion Policy: A Place-based Approach to Meeting European Union Challenges and Expectations.* Brussels: EC.

Beer, Andrew, Fiona McKenzie, Jiří Blažek, J. Markku Sotarauta and Sarah Ayres (2020) *Every Place Matters: towards effective place-based policy.* RSA. London: Routledge.

Biediger, Shari (2020). *With workforce measure on ballot, Project Quest read to help mend economic wounds.* San Antonio Report. [Online] Available from: https://sanantonioreport.org/with-workforce-measure-on-ballot-project-quest-ready-to-help-mend-economic-wounds/ [Accessed 28/11/2021]

Castañios, Virginia (2018) *Case Study Report e-Estonia.* EC.

Davenport, Alex and Ben Zaranko (2020) *Levelling-up: where and how?* Institute for Fiscal Studies.

Davoodi, Hamdid and Heng-fu Zou (1998) Fiscal decentralization and economic growth: a cross-country study, *Journal of Urban Economics,* 43(2), pp.244-257.

Dembski, Sebastian, Sykes, O., Couch, C., Desjardins, X., Evers, D., Osterhage, F., Siedentp, S. and Zimmermann, K.(2021) Reurbanisation and suburbia in Northwest Europe: A comparative perspective on spatial trends and policy approaches. *Progress in Planning,* 150, pp.1-47.

Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2022) *Levelling Up the United Kingdom (high-res version).* Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-the-united-kingdom [Accessed 07/11/22]

Desjardins, Xavier and Philippe Estèbe (2018) La décentralisation : comment faire revivre le projet émancipateur ? *Revue d'économie financière,* 132(4), pp.21-37.

Desjardins Xavier and Anna Geppert (2020) Governance Rescaling and Regional Planning in France: Is Big Really Beautiful? In Lingua Valeria and Balz Verena. (eds) *Shaping Regional Futures.* Springer, Cham, pp.121-132.

DW (2019). *Germany: Poverty gap widens between rich and poor regions.* [Online] Available from: www.dw.com/en/germany-poverty-gap-widens-between-rich-and-poor-regions/a-51637957 [Accessed 15/09/2020]

EESC (2017) *Advantages of digital society.* [Online]. Available from: https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/qe-06-17-193-en-n.pdf [Accessed 28/11/2021].

E-Estonia (n.d.) *E-Estonia guide.* [Online] Available from: https://e-estonia.com/wp-content/uploads/easeestonia-vihik-a5-180404-view.pdf [Accessed 21/09/2020]

Eurocities (n.d.) *From a wasteland to a triple-helix creative cluster at the heart of Nantes.* http://www.cultureforcitiesandregions.eu/culture/resources/Case-study-Nantes-Quartier-de-la-Creation-WSWE-9XZHT2 [Accessed 25/09/2021]

European Commission (2020) *The Digital Economy and Society Index.* [Online] Available from: https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/digital-economy-and-society-index-desi [Accessed 22/09/2020]

European Commission (2017) *Promoting responsible purchasing in Nantes.* [Online] Available from: https://ec.europa.eu/environment/gpp/pdf/news_alert/Issue74_Case_Study_148_Nantes.pdf [Accessed 14/09/2021]

Eurasanté (2021) *Le parc Eurasanté.* [Online] Available from: https://www.eurasante.com/parc-eurasante/presentation/ [Accessed 05/01/2023].

Eurostat (2021) *Main GDP aggregates per capita.* [Online] Available from: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/NAMQ_10_PC__custom_1621809/default/table?lang=en [Accessed 22/11/2021]

Florida, Richard (2021) Discontent and its geographies, *Cambridge Journal of Regions,* Economy and Society, 14, pp.619–624.

Forbes, Cameron, Liddle. J. and Shutt, J. (2022). *Levelling-Up in the North East Region. What has been achieved in the last three years? An Assessment.* Northumbria University Newcastle. Available at: https://northumbria-cdn.azureedge.net/-/media/news_duplicate/documents/pdf/working-paper-final.pdf?modified=20220928032148 [Accessed 05/01/2023].

Greater:SATX (2021) *SA WORX* [Online] Available at: https://greatersatx.com/workforce/programs/ [Accessed 28/11/2021]

Green, Anne, Francesca Froy, Erika Kispeter and Paul Sissons (2017) *How do cities lead and inclusive growth agenda?* [Online] Available from: https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/files-research/international_cities_nantes.pdf [Accessed 02/06/2020].

Griggs, Steven and David Howarth (2020) Two images of Nantes as a 'Green Model' of Urban Planning and Governance: The 'Collaborative City' Versus the 'Slow City'. *Town Planning Review,* 91(4), pp.415-436.

Hildreth, Paul and David Bailey (2014) Place-based economic development strategy in England: filling the missing space. *Local Economy,* 29(4-5), pp.363–377.

Holt, Richard. and Tim Lyne (2020). *Why levelling-up is unlikely to solve regional disparities.* [Online]. Available from: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/1468-0319.12478 [Accessed 28/11/2021]

Iimi, Atsushi. (2005) Decentralization and economic growth revisited: an empirical note, *Journal of Urban Economics,* 57(3), pp.449-461.

INSEE (2021a) *Comparateur de territoire. Commune de Nantes (44109)* [Online] Available from: https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/zones/1405599 [Accessed 22/11/ 2021]

INSEE (2021b) *Dossier complet. Intercommunalité-Métropole de Nantes Métropole (244400404).* [Online] Available from: https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/2011101?geo=EPCI-244400404#tableau-POP_G2 [Accessed 30/09/2021]

Keil, Andreas and Burkhard Wetterau (2012) *Metropolis Ruhr A Regional Study of the New Ruhr.* [Online] Available from: www.geographie.uni-wuppertal.de/uploads/media/Metropolis_Ruhr-1_02.pdf [Accessed 24/09/2020]

Kiese, Matthias (2021) *Levelling Up in the Knowledge Economy: Can the Ruhr Shake off its Rust?* [Online] Available from: https://blog.bham.ac.uk/cityredi/levelling-up-in-the-knowledge-economy-can-the-ruhr-shake-off-its-rust/ [Accessed 28/11/2021]

Kuklowsky, Céline and Bert Provan, (2011) *Lille City Report.* CASE Report 71: LSE.

Landesdatesbank Nordrhein-Westfalen (2021) *Bevölkerungsstand nach Geschlecht - Gemeinden* [Online] Available from: https://www.landesdatenbank.nrw.de/ldbnrw/online;jsessionid=FBC481AAC50656B8CA9E933111BC242A.ldb2?sequenz=tabelleErgebnis&selectionname=12411-31iz#abreadcrumb [Accessed 22/11/2021]

LIPSIT (2020) *Ruhr Valley Case Study.* LIPSIT working paper.

MacKinnon, Danny, Kempton, Louise. O'Brien, Peter, Emma Ormerod, Andy Pike and John Tomaney (2021) Reframing urban and regional 'development' for 'left behind' places, *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society.*

Nantes Métropole. (n.d) *Nantes Innovative City By And For All.* [Online] Available from: https://nws.eurocities.eu/MediaShell/media/ICapital_Awards_2019_-_synthesis_Nantes__application.pdf [Accessed 24/11/2021]

Nurse, Alexander, Chia-Lin Chen, and Xavier Desjardins (2017) *The Northern Powerhouse: a comparative perspective.* Town Planning Review, 88(4), pp.383-400.

OECD (2021a) *Regions and Cities Data Visualisation.* [Online] Available from: https://regions-cities-atlas.oecd.org/metroregional/FUA/FRA/FR009/UNEM_RA_15_64/2020/1 [Accessed 22/11/2021]

OECD (2020a) *Population.* [Online] Available from: https://data.oecd.org/pop/population.htm [Accessed 22/11/2021]

OECD (2019). *OECD Economic Surveys: Estonia.* [Online] Available from: www.oecd.org/economy/estonia-economic-snapshot/ [Accessed 22/09/2020]

Oei, Pao-Yu, Hanna Brauers. and Philipp Herpich (2019) Lessons from Germany's hard coal mining phase-out: policies and transition from 1950 to 2018. *Climate Policy,* 20(8), pp.963-979.

Parkinson, Michael, Tony Champion, James Simmie, Ivan Turok, Martin Crookston, Bruce Katz and Alison Park (2006) *State of the English Cities. A Research Study.* Volume 1. Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Polèse, M. (2020). *The Wealth of Poverty and Cities. Why Nations Matter.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Power, Anne (2018) Regional politics of an urban age: Can Europe's former industrial cities create a new industrial economy to combat climate change and social unravelling? *Palgrave Commun,* 97(4).

Project Quest (n.d.) *25-Year Economic Impact Report.* [Online]. Available at: https://questsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/QUEST25YearEconomicImpactStudy.pdf [Accessed 22/11/2021]

Provan, Bert (2015) *Lille City Story.* CASE Report 104: LSE.

Regan, Amy, Quinn, Martin, Romaniuk, Anna Skye Sampson, Tom Stratton, Ben Brittain and Abigail Taylor (2021) *Devolution and Governance Structures in the UK.* ISC.

RegionalVerbandRuhr (n.d.) *Wirtschaftsleistung und innovative Branchen im blick.* [Online] Available from: https://www.rvr.ruhr/daten-digitales/regionalstatistik/wirtschaft-und-innovation/ [Accessed 24/09/2020]

Rehfeld, Dieter and Juergen Nordhause-Janz (2017) 'Integration—fragmentation—reintegration? Studying cluster evolution, regional path development and cluster policies in the Ruhr Area' in Fornahl, Dirk and Hassink, Robert. *The Life Cycle of Clusters.* A Policy Perspective. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Reimer, Mario, Panagiotis Getimis and Hans Blotevogel (2014) Spatial planning systems and practices in Europe: A comparative perspective. In Mario Reimer, Panagiotis Getimis, and Hans Blotevogel (Eds.) *Spatial planning systems and practices in Europe: A comparative perspective on continuity and changes* (pp.1-20). Abingdon: Routledge.

Rérat, Patrick (2011) The New Demographic Growth of Cities: The case of Reurbanisation in Switzerland. *Urban Studies* 49(5), pp.1107-1125.

Rodríguez-Pose, Andrés (2018) The revenge of the places that don't matter (and what to do about it), *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society,* 11(1), pp.189–209.

Rodríguez-Pose, Andrés and Roberto Ezcurra (2010) 'Does decentralization matter for regional disparities? A cross-country analysis', *Journal of Economic Geography,* 10(5), pp.619-644.

Romaniuk, Anna, Catherine Osbourne, Emily Rainsford, and Abigail Taylor (2020) *Understanding the policy-making processes behind local growth strategies in England.* ISC.

Schwarze-Rodrian, Michael (2016) 'Ruhr Region Case Study' in Carter, Donald . K. (ed.) *Remaking PostIndustrial Cities. Lessons from North America and Europe.* New York: Routledge.

Semen, Michael and Michael Carroll (2017) The Creative Economies of Texas Metropolitan Regions: A Comparative Analysis Before, During, and After the Recession. *Growth and Change,* 48(4), pp.831-852.

Sharpe, L. J. (1975) Comparative planning policy: Some problems. In M. J. Breakell (Ed.), *Problems of Comparative Planning* (pp.26-32). Oxford: Oxford Polytechnic.

Shearer, Eleanor, Paul Shepley, and Teresa Soter (2021) *Levelling up Five questions about what the government means by the phrase.* [Online] Available from: https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/levelling-up.pdf [Accessed 28 November 2021]

Stuart, Mary and Liz Shutt (2021) *Catching the wave: harnessing regional research and development to level up.* Higher Education Policy Institute.

Sykes, Olivier (2018) Post-geography worlds, new dominions, left behind regions, and 'other' places: unpacking some spatial imaginaries of the UK's 'Brexit' debate, *Space and Policy,* 22(2), pp.137-161.

Taylor, Abigail, Anna Romaniuk and Skye Sampson (2021) *What does it take to "level up" places?* ISC.

USCB (2020) *QuickFacts* [Online] Available from: https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/sanantoniocitytexas,US/PST120219 [Accessed 24/09/ 2020]

Williams, R. (1984) Cross-national research: Translating theory into practice. *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design,* 11(2), pp.149-161.

Acknowledgements

The author is grateful to the ESRC for funding the original project through the Impact Accelerator Scheme. CIPFA funded the second stage of the research that this paper draws on.

The author would also like to express thanks to Professor Anne Green for reviewing drafts of this paper, to Liam O'Farrell and Ben Brittain for their support with the CIPFA project literature review, and Skye Sampson for help in conducting interviews in Estonia and San Antonio.