



Doctoral Dissertation.
Interuniversity Doctoral Program in
Urban and Regional Development (XVI Cycle)

Characters in search of an author. Unfolding the territorial governance of Italian Metropolitan Cities.

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Summary

The governance of the metropolitan dimension constitutes one of the most relevant and complex challenges that countries and regions in the world are presently facing. Metropolitan areas have always represented new paradigms for interpreting the development processes of territorial policies. Their relevance is also supported by the fact that more and more people live in metropolitan areas, with the share of urban population that has overcome its rural counterpart in 2007 and is expected to reach almost 70% by 2050 (EUROSTAT, 2022). In this line, metropolitan areas are presently responsible to produce almost 70% of the total EU GDP (EUROSTAT, 2016). Acknowledging this growing concentration of people and economic activities, various European countries have since some decades started to experiment several institutional reforms that aims at delivering effective metropolitan development policies and to establish governance models that allow to manage metropolitan functional dynamics. At the same time, as many attempts have emerged in different European regions from the bottom up, in the form of more or less voluntary forms of supralocal visions and strategies as well as of other forms of intermunicipal cooperation that try to overcome the rigidity of the existing administrative structures.

In Italy, after various attempts of this kind that have been taking place during the 1990s and 2000s, a metropolitan level of government has been instituted in 2014, when the so-called Delrio reform (Law 56/2014) finally provided practical execution to the introduction of the *Città Metropolitane* in the Title V of the Italian Constitution (2001). Since their institution, however, the governance of the Italian Metropolitan Cities has encountered several of challenges. On the one hand, these challenges may derive from their relatively young institutional age and the need of additional time to get acquainted with the powers and responsibilities that were attributed to them by the reform. On the other hand, however, those challenges may be intrinsic to the reform itself, and the way the latter has instated the new entities from the top-down (Crivello & Staricco, 2017; Vinci, 2019).

Aiming at shedding light on the above, the present doctoral thesis focuses on the governance of metropolitan areas within the Italian context. It investigates the characteristics and dynamics of the multi-level territorial governance model that has been instituted through the Delrio reform, to reflect on its actual strength and limitation with reference to the promotion of effective metropolitan development strategies, policies and plans.

To achieve this overarching objective, the research will try to answer a number of research questions, concerning (i) the actual fit between the newly instituted administrative configurations and the functional dimension of the territorial dynamics that should govern and (ii) the nature of the powers and competences that the Delrio legal framework attribute to the Metropolitan cities and the way they are (or not) practiced. While doing this, particular attention will be dedicated to (iii) the peculiar role that the Metropolitan cities play – or should play – within the territorial development policies promoted by the European Union.

These questions will be answered through both a comprehensive overview of the territorial and institutional characteristics of the 14 Italian Metropolitan Cities, and a more in-depth analysis of the territorial development and governance dynamics that characterise three case studies pivoted on the Metropolitan Cities of Torino, Bologna, and Bari. Through these activities, the study aims to deliver sound and coherent knowledge concerning the results of the Delrio reform after some years of its implementation, upon which to develop evidence-based policy advice aiming at more effective metropolitan governance and policy. At the same time, it will provide a timely contribution to the ongoing academic debate concerning the governance of metropolitan regions in Europe, and their engagement with EU territorial development policies.