Interuniversity Doctoral Program in

Urban and Regional Development (XVIII Cycle)

Uneven Ethnographies of Territorial Development:

SNAI and LEADER Experiences in the Northwestern Italian Alps

Abstract

Drawing on ethnography and qualitative methods, this research offers a qualitative comparative analysis of two participatory development approaches: the Italian National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI) and the LEADER program. While both aim to address development challenges in rural and marginal areas, they differ in how they engage local communities and stakeholders: SNAI promotes co-design with local actors to develop interventions tackling socio-economic issues, whereas LEADER follows a bottom up model that mobilises local actors through public-private partnerships forming Local Action Groups in charge of animation activities. The analysis evaluates the strengths and limitations of each approach, particularly in terms of participatory mechanisms and stakeholder involvement, while also exploring broader participatory dynamics in the two territories. The ethnographic approach made it possible to observe how participatory processes are deeply shaped by territorial experiences, institutional arrangements, and relational infrastructures, rather than by policy architecture alone. The title *Uneven Ethnographies* reflects both the asymmetric nature of the fieldwork and the uneven geographies it sought to understand: participation as a lived and situated practice rather than a neutral technical tool, whose transformative potential depends on time, continuity, and the presence of dedicated animation and facilitation capacities.