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Case study. The city of Saluzzo and the Monviso territory.

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ANALYTICAL REPORT //

Small and medium sized towns and cities in Italy

Case study. The city of Saluzzo and the Monviso territory

Policies strengthening their role in achieving active, inclusive and functional territories

Final report // December 2023

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The final version of the report will be published as soon as approved.

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Abbreviations

EAFRD: European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development

LAG: Local Action Groups

NRRP: National Recovery and Resilience Plan

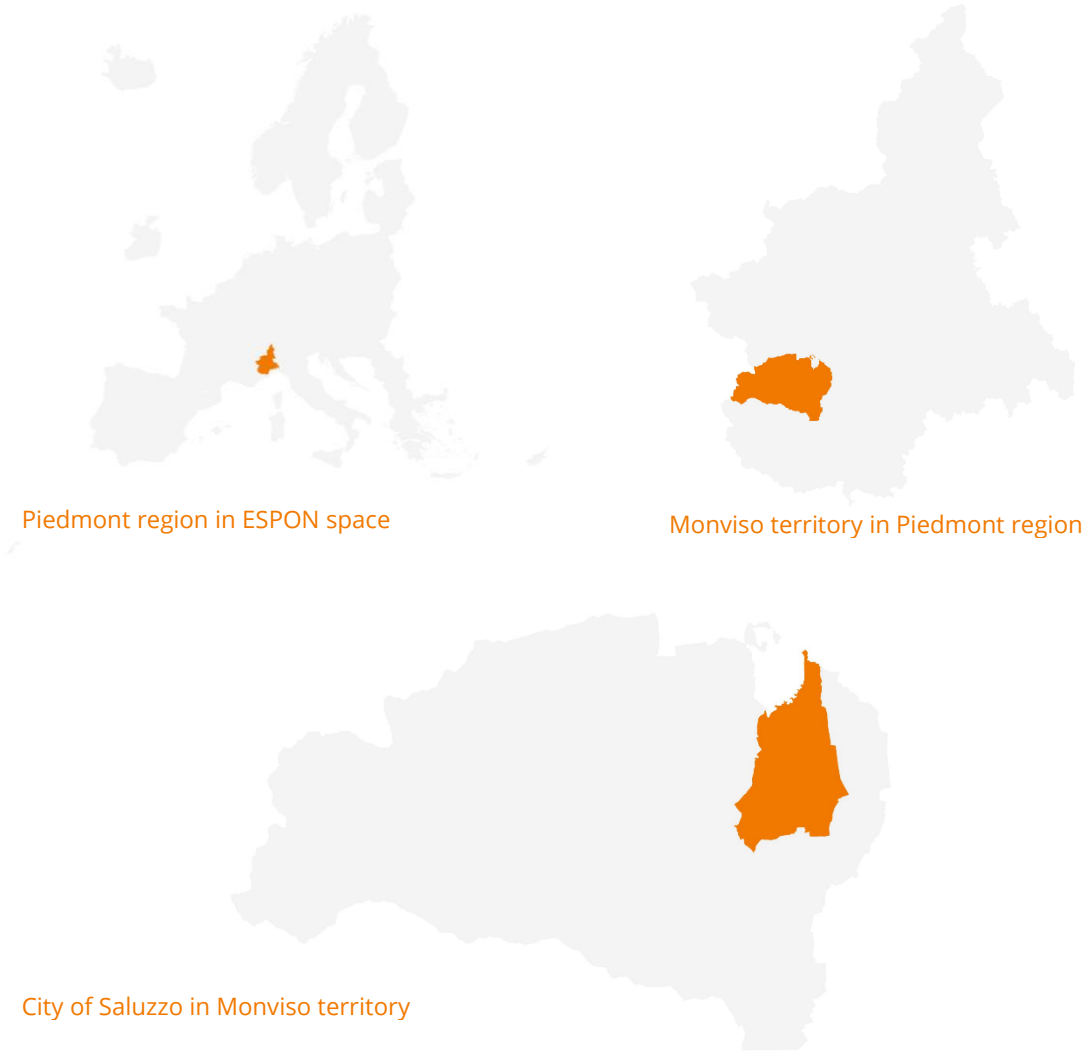
NSIA: National Strategy for Inner Areas

UNCEM: National Union of Municipalities, Communities, and Mountain Authorities

Introduction

The Italian case study concerns the city of Saluzzo, located in north-western Italy, in the Piedmont region, in the province of Cuneo, not far from the borders with France. The territory of Saluzzo has a population of 17,464 inhabitants and is characterized by varied topography, with the Padan Flatland (Pianura Padana) extending to the east of the city and the mountain ranges of the Cottian Alps to the west. In line with the Italian polycentric tradition, it plays a role as a reference hub for the surrounding territory. The territory that refers to the city of Saluzzo is called "Monviso territory" derived from the name of the mountain "Monviso," the highest of the Cottian Alps and the homonymous mountain group, a representative element of the region.

Figure 1 Territorial framework



Source: Authors' own design

The case study of the city of Saluzzo represents a peculiar case in relation to its geography. The city serves as a pivotal point of connection and territorial reference between a system of mountain valleys and the flatland. In the Italian cultural debate, the perspective related to mountain areas and their respective systems of valleys and foothills has been theorized as “metro-mountain” relationships. This concept embodies a spatial imagination in line with the Italian debate on the territorial development of inner and mountainous areas, capable of reconciling two contrasting geographic images within a single geographic dimension. The concept of 'metro-mountain' aims to deconstruct the dichotomy between the urban and the non-urban, introducing a vertical dimension of the territory, and its mountainous characteristics.

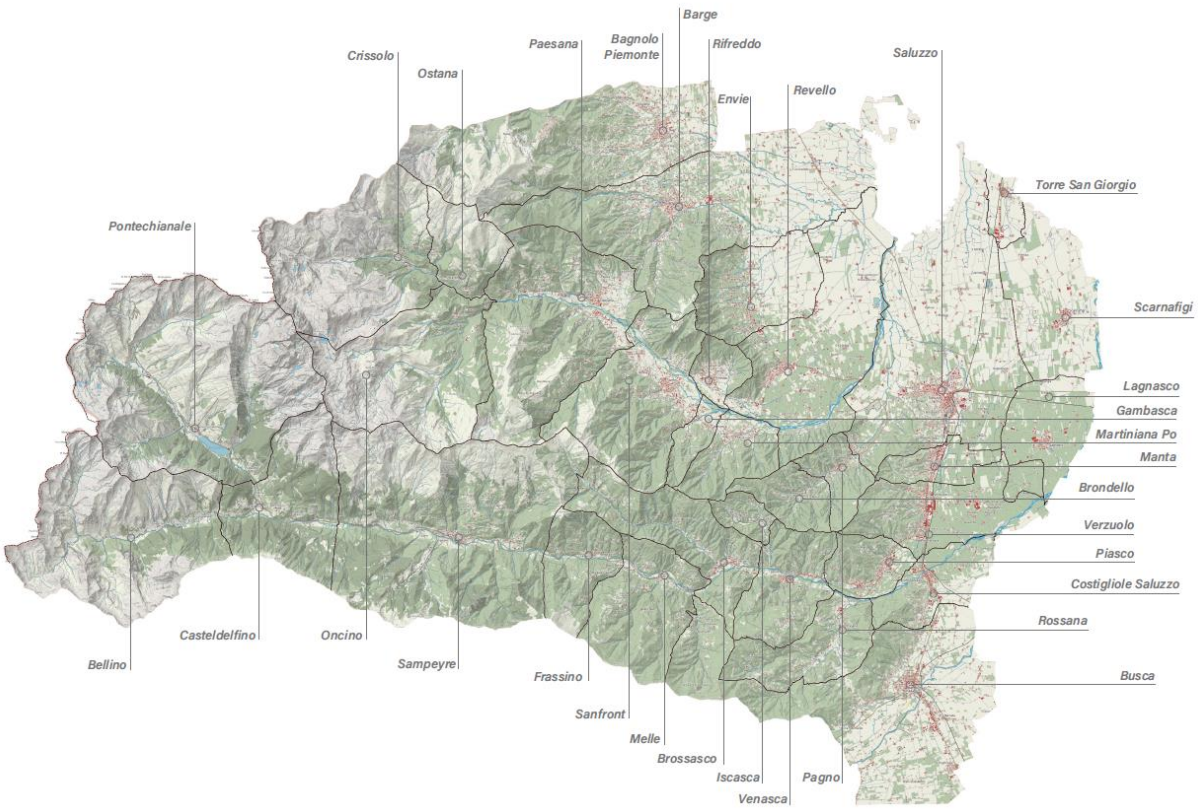
Several demographic and social dynamics representative of SMSTCs (Small and medium-sized towns and cities) located in mountainous and marginalized regions are evident in the case study of the city of Saluzzo and the “Monviso territory”. Demographic urban dynamics in recent decades have witnessed a population shift towards the plain, this has resulted in a significant abandonment of mountain areas with substantial social, economic, and cultural consequences. To address these adverse evolving dynamics, institutions have made territorial cooperation a cornerstone of their approach. This is evident through numerous forms of cooperation implemented in recent years. The region has been nationally recognized as an exemplary case in the application of European and national funds for the creation of integrated territorial frameworks.

For this reason, the city of Saluzzo and the Monviso Territory are representative case studies in which to investigate the role of SMSTCs in a broader territorial context, where opposing dynamics such as the weakening of supra-local cooperation structures on one hand, and the visionary capacity to build common projects with the surrounding area on the other collide.

1 The city and its territory

Due to the strategic location and strong historical significance, the city of Saluzzo plays a significant role in the nearby mountain valleys. The city has a long tradition as an administrative, commercial, and cultural centre for the region. It houses public institutions, offices, schools, and services that serve the local population and the communities of the surrounding valleys. The city of Saluzzo serves as a reference point for the neighbouring valleys in terms of services and opportunities, providing balanced services for a population of approximately 80,000 inhabitants valleys (Figure 2).

Figure 2 The Monviso territory

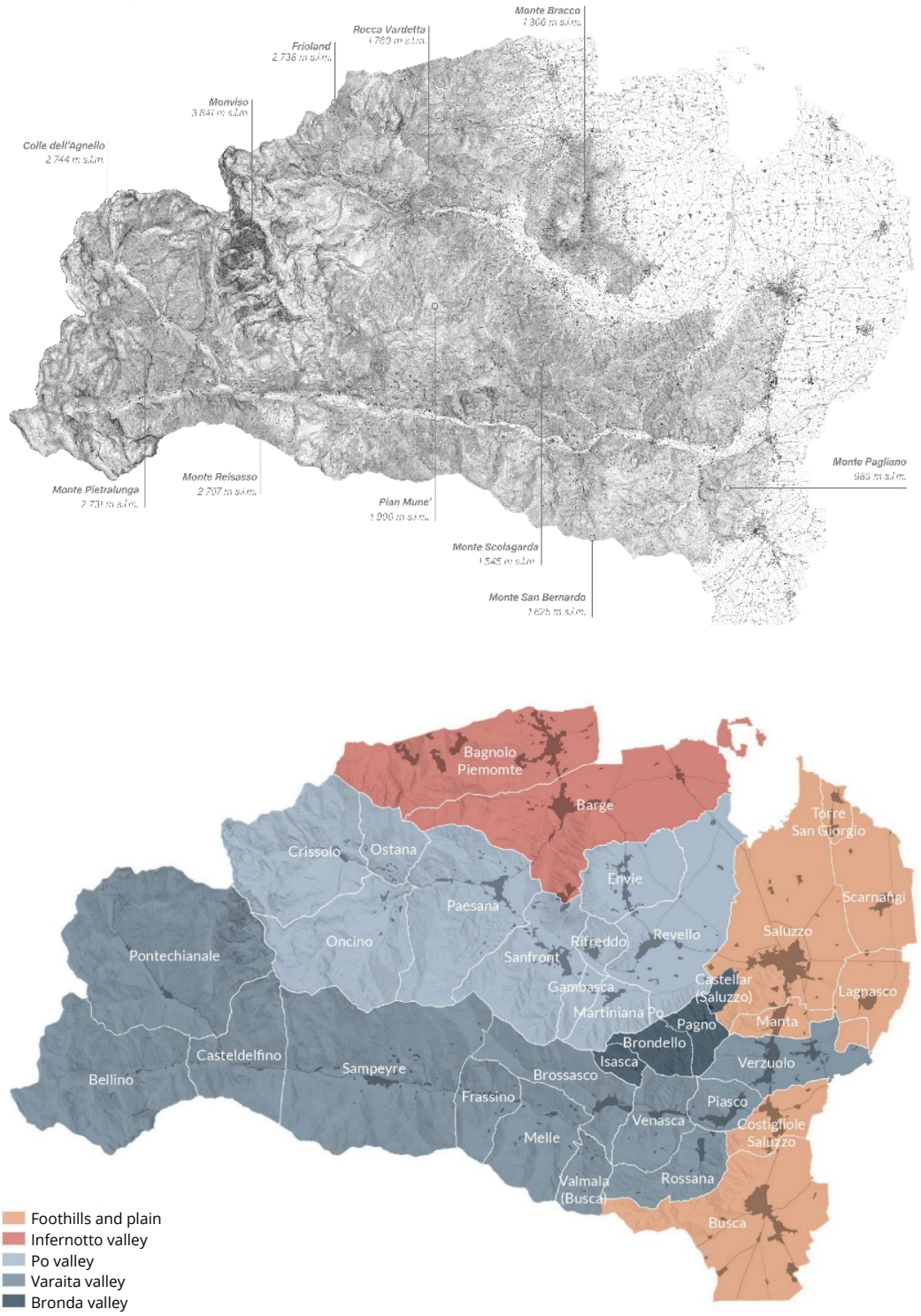


Source: Authors' own design

The territorial morphology of the "Monviso territory" (Figure 3) is characterized by alternating mountainous, hilly, and flat areas. The northern part of the territory is dominated by the Cottian Alps. The mountain range is characterized by high elevations, such as Monviso Mountain, which reaches an altitude of 3,841 meters. The morphology of these mountains is characterized by deep and steep valleys, with rocky ridges and glaciers in the higher areas. Numerous mountain valleys open from the mountain areas towards the plains. The river valleys have varied topography, with steep slopes in the upper parts and wider floodplains in the lower parts. The foothills part of the territory, on which the city of Saluzzo stands, is characterized by a hilly area with gentle relief. In the southern part of the "Monviso territory" lies a vast plain (part of the Padan Plain). This part of the territory is suitable for intensive agriculture for grains, vegetables, and fruits.

The territory includes 33 municipalities (Figure 3). The administrative organisation includes 5 main areas. There are 4 mountain valleys and an area defined as foothill and lowland. This administrative-geographical organisation deeply characterises the institutional organisation of the territory (Figure 13).

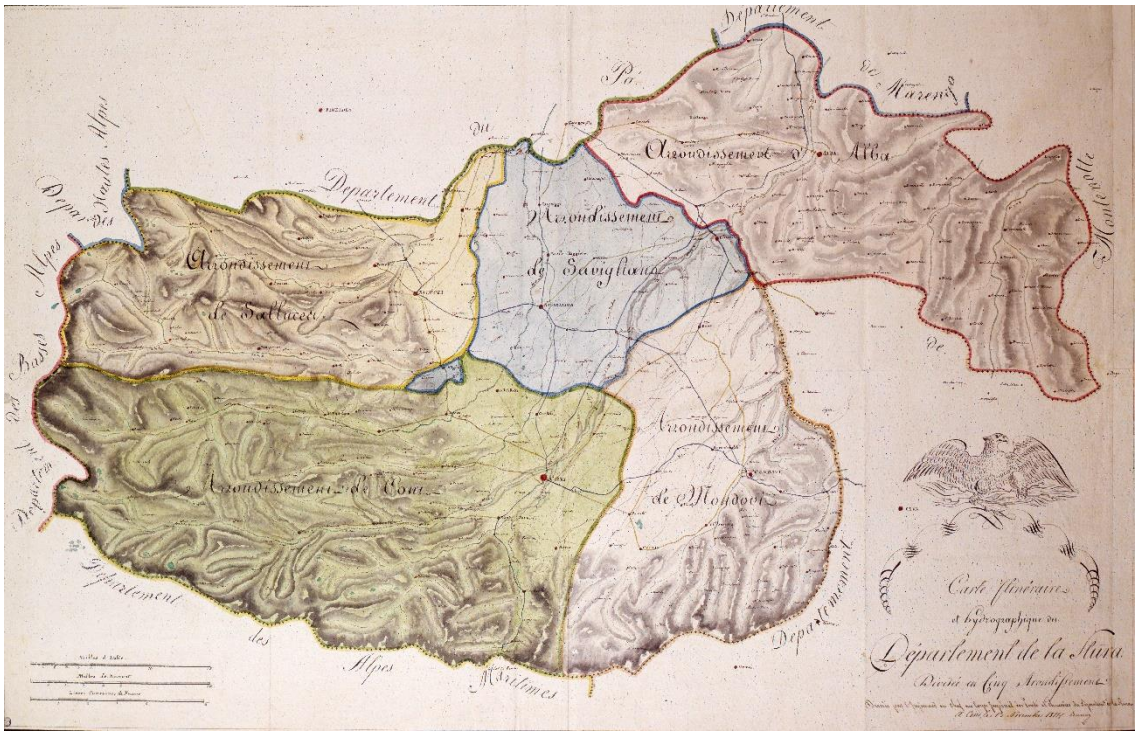
Figure 3 Morphological and administrative map



Source: Authors' own design

The area has a strong historical tradition, being the former Marquisate of Saluzzo, who lasted for more than 400 years, until mid of the 16th century (Figure 4). Therefore, its choice as a case study is particularly relevant because it combines a double size: a municipal dimension of almost 20.000 inhabitants, and at the same time a gravitational role of about four time its size, with a territory that is mostly characterised by mountain valleys, but a strong social, cultural, and functional interrelation.

Figure 4 Historical map



Source: 1803, Louis Brion, Piemonte: Departement du Po, Departement du Tanaro, Departement de la Stura, Departement de Marengo, Departement de la Sesia.

Land of active cooperation for over a century, the Monviso territory represents an interesting area from a strategic and spatial planning perspective. Since the early 1990s, the territory has embarked on a path of implementing projects that have contributed to social and economic improvement. In recent decades, the vitality of the territory has successfully mobilized significant resources from regional, national, and European funding sources, employing diverse administrative and operational approaches. Numerous funds have been implemented through integrated approaches. These initiatives have not only provided resources but also project management expertise. Furthermore, various projects conducted by public and private entities within the territory have mobilized substantial resources in areas such as energy consumption reduction, business internationalization, research and innovation, and value chain development.

2 Quantitative analysis

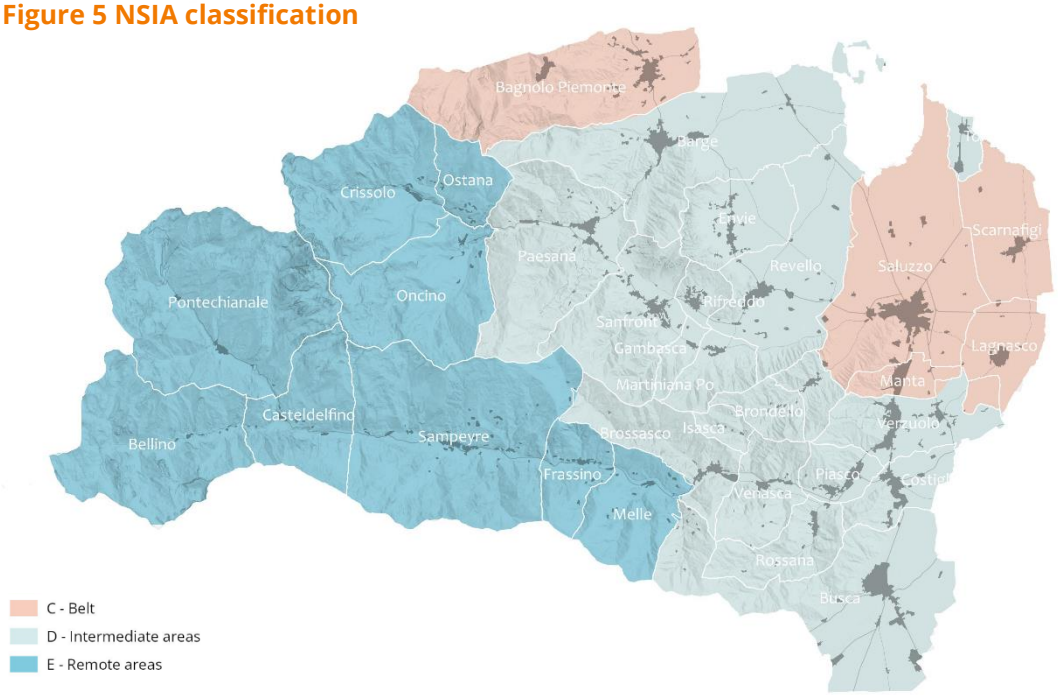
2.1 Saluzzo city and the necessity of a broader perspective

The territory of the city of Saluzzo has an irregular geometric profile with pronounced variations in elevation. The town is set against a hilly terrain, at the confluence of the Varaita and Po valleys, sloping eastward from Monviso toward the plain. The historic centre is arranged in terraces on the hill, with houses descending from the castle towards the modern part, developed on the flat land. The topography retains a medieval layout in the form of streets and squares. The city's economy is heterogeneous, the primary sector is characterised by the cultivation of cereals, wheat, vegetables, fodder, grapes, and other fruits, as well as cattle farming. The secondary economic sector encompasses various industries, ranging from food to textiles, from more traditional to technologically advanced productions. In addition to tourism-related activities, traditional tertiary sector services are also prevalent. Serving as a reference point for neighbouring municipalities, thanks to the presence of numerous and functional infrastructures, the city of Saluzzo records a significant influx of tourists attracted by the natural beauty of the surroundings and the rich artistic heritage.

Table 1 Saluzzo demographic indices

Year	Resident population	Absolute variation	Percentage change	Aging index	Average age
2001	15635	-	-	181,7	44,8
2011	16934	1299	8%	174	45
2021	17433	499	3%	187,5	46

Figure 5 NSIA classification



Analysing the case study by focusing only on the city of Saluzzo would not allow us to understand the complexity of a supra-local system, which represents the functional area of the city within a larger territory. Figure 5., which displays the NSIA 2014-2020 classification, illustrates how Saluzzo and the neighbouring municipalities are the location where essential services

for the population are concentrated or are closest in proximity. This shows that on the issue of services, there is a functional area revolving around the municipalities of the foothills.

In order to understand its functional relationship with the surrounding territory, the city of Saluzzo will be analysed taking into consideration the reference area.

From the interview with the Mayor of the City of Saluzzo, Mauro Calderoni, emerges a clear description of the City's leading role in the larger territory. According to the Mayor, Saluzzo is in a special condition, namely, to be the small capital of a very large territory. Saluzzo has been since the year 1000 an autonomous marquisate, since then the territory has maintained very strong historical, family, historical-cultural, economic, and social relations. Today, the city has maintained a prominent role in the territory, and it performs a function vis-à-vis neighbouring municipalities (the justice offices, land registry offices, social services, the territorial hospital, high schools, the territory's public transportation hub, a whole series of private and commercial services that nonetheless benefit this large territory). However, the city has neither the expertise nor the financial resources to be able to organize regards to the area outside its municipal boundaries.

According to the Mayor: “the global crisis of 2008, a crisis that was first financial and then economic, meant a drastic reduction in financial transfers from the central state. In June 2009, the state reduced 7 million out of 35 in the annual municipal budget. In addition to the reduction in public funding, the city suffers from an understaffing of technicians and officials. Saluzzo should have a staff of 140 employees, but there are only 100”. From the awareness of the lack of funds and staff, the area began to experiment with new forms of governance over the vast area, through best practices and continuous comparisons with other stakeholders. In this context, European funds, particularly those dedicated to cross-border programming, proved essential. The change in state-municipal financial activity made it necessary to imagine a new way of administration. A planning office was built to intercept all possible extraordinary funds (bank foundations, national funds, and European funds).

2.2 Socio – Demography

About 81,000 people live in the territory, two-thirds of them in the piedmont and plain area. The most populous municipalities are those located in the foothills, with Saluzzo (17,496 inhabitants) and Busca (10,146 inhabitants). The least populous communes are arranged in the mountainous area. The least populous municipality is Isasca (72 inhab.). Over the past two decades, the trend of the area's resident population follows regional and national trends. Since 2003 a general decrease is seen with a positive peak in 2008 and one in 2020. In general, it is an aging population. The old-age index over the past two decades shows a general growth, with some significant exceptions in some mountain municipalities. Foreigners, which have increased sharply in the last two decades, mainly inhabit the foothills and flat areas, but as a percentage of inhabitants, they affect the Infernotto valley the most. Analyses of average per capita income show an important difference between foothill and flat areas on the one hand and mountain territories on the other, with some exceptions, as in the case of the municipality of Crissolo.

Map 1 Total population 2021

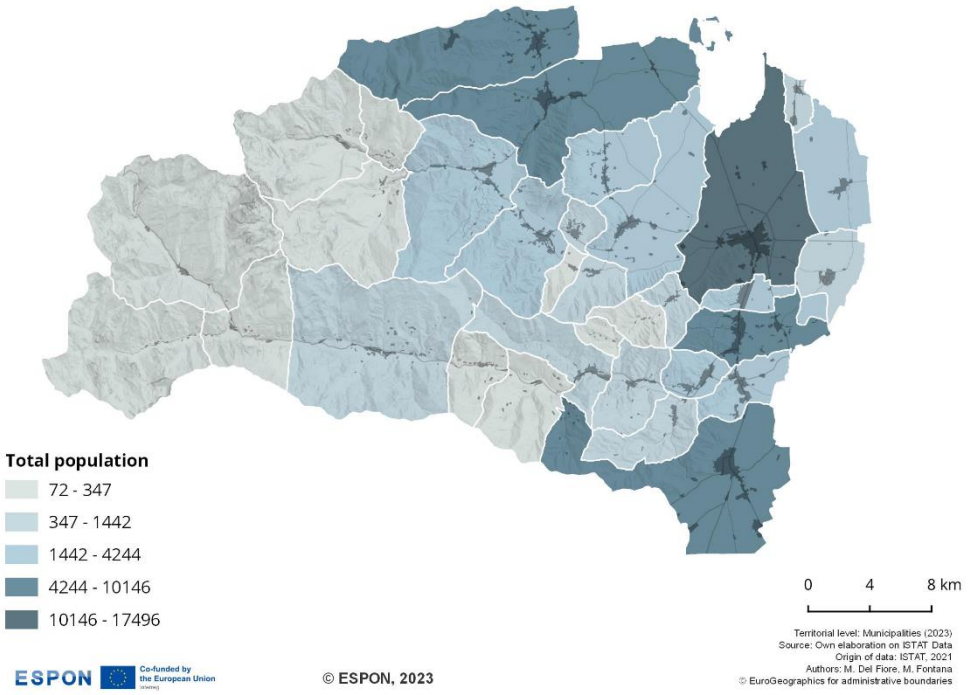
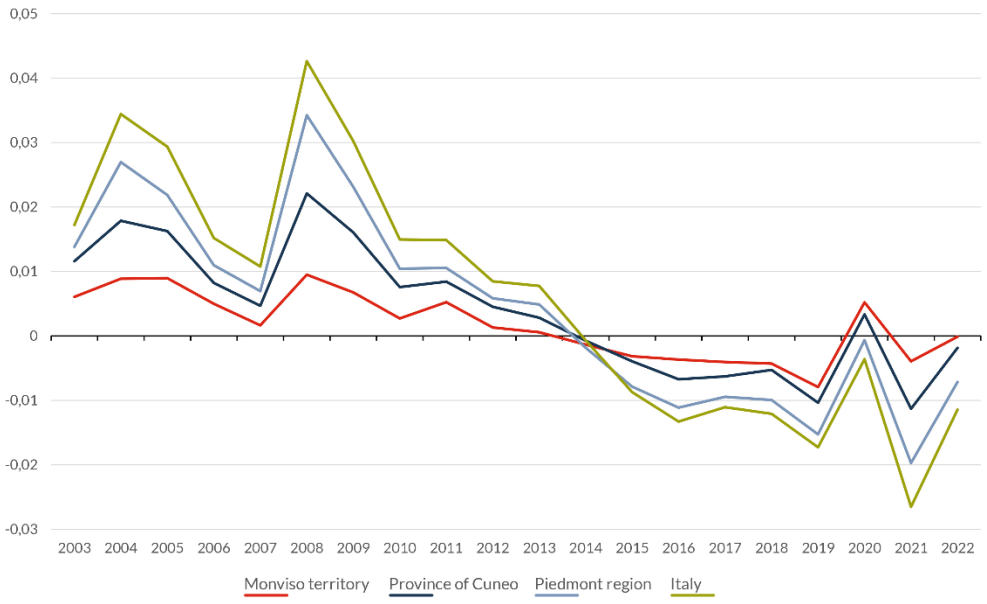
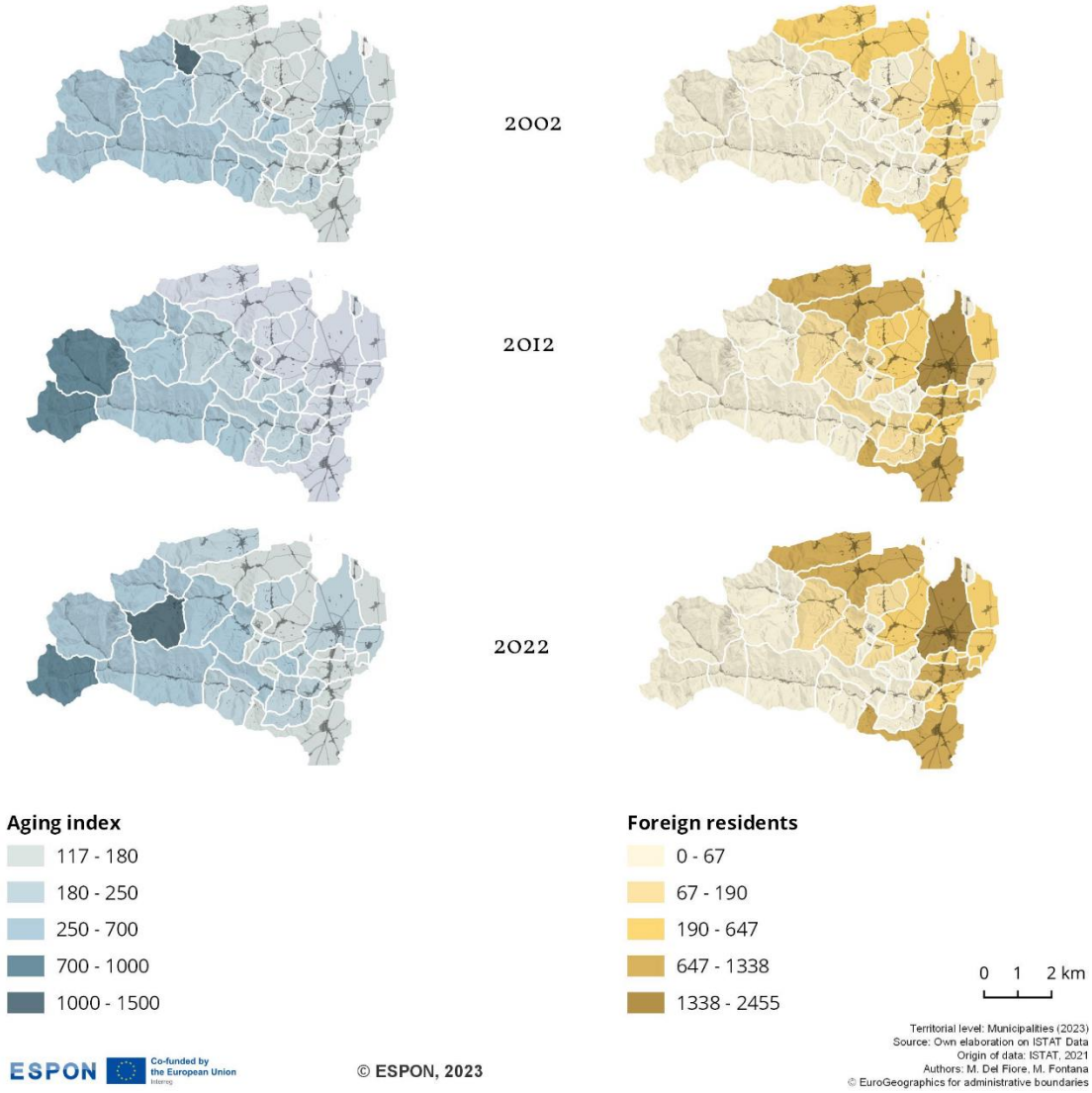


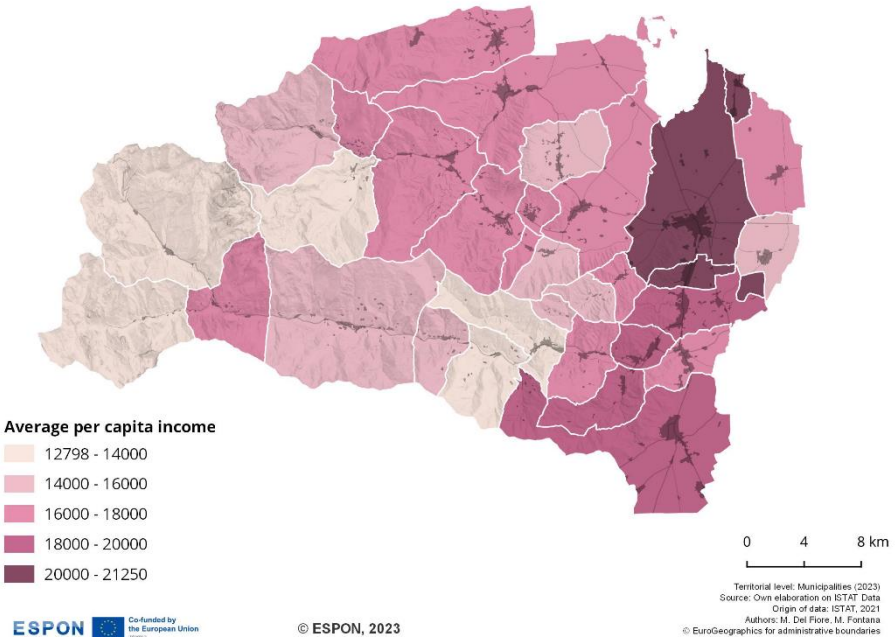
Figure 6 Demographic trends



Map 3 Aging index and foreign residents



Map 2 Average per capita income 2021

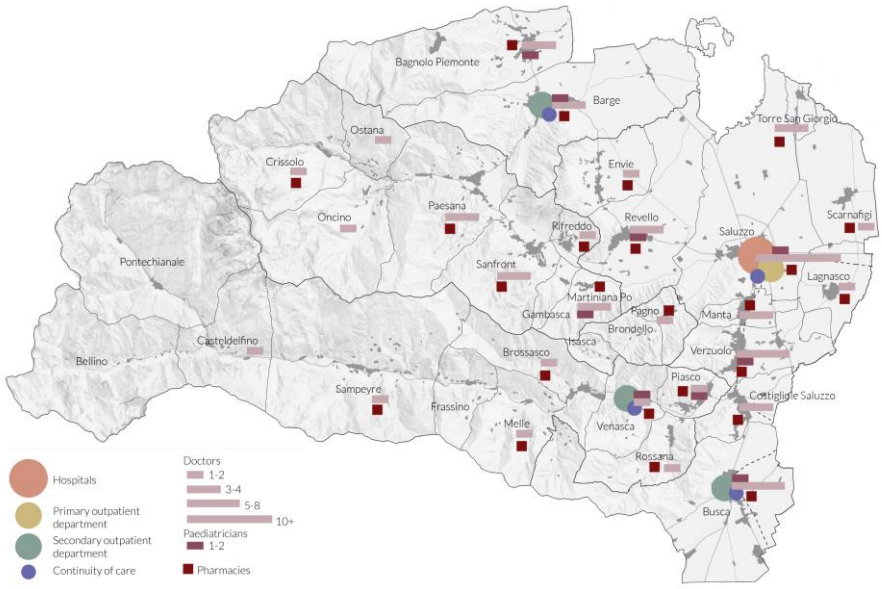


2.3 Welfare

Social and health services in the area are mainly located along the foothill's axis of the three main cities (Barge - Saluzzo - Busca), while they tend to become rarer in the valley areas. The same dynamic can be seen in the positioning of educational institutions in the area and in the coverage of the Internet network. These findings show the general gap in terms of access to basic services that characterizes mountainous areas from piedmont and plain areas, confirming a national trend.

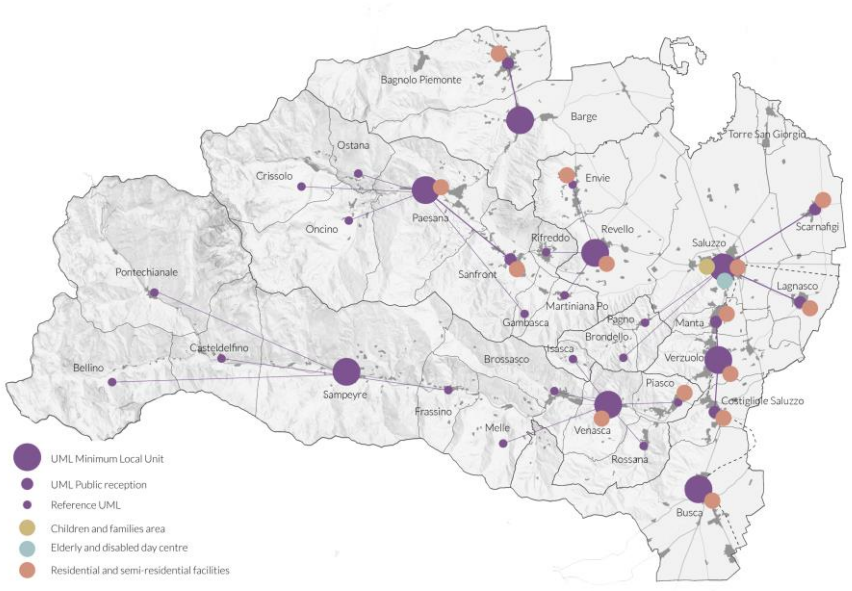
More widespread is the infrastructure related to waste, which shows a widespread presence throughout the territory.

Figure 7 Social and health services



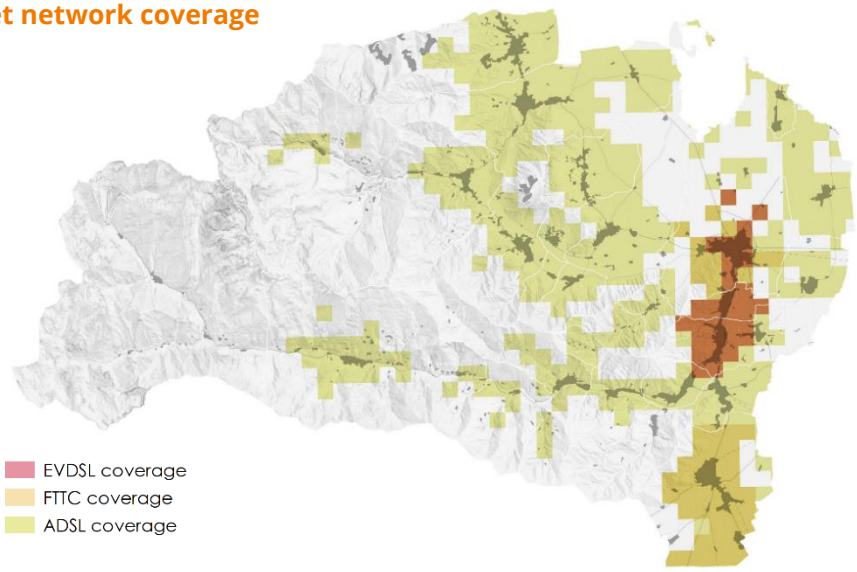
Source: Authors' own design

Figure 8 Educational institutions



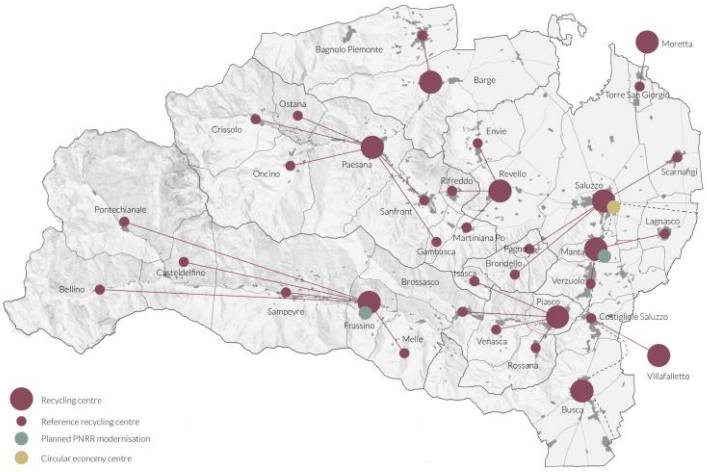
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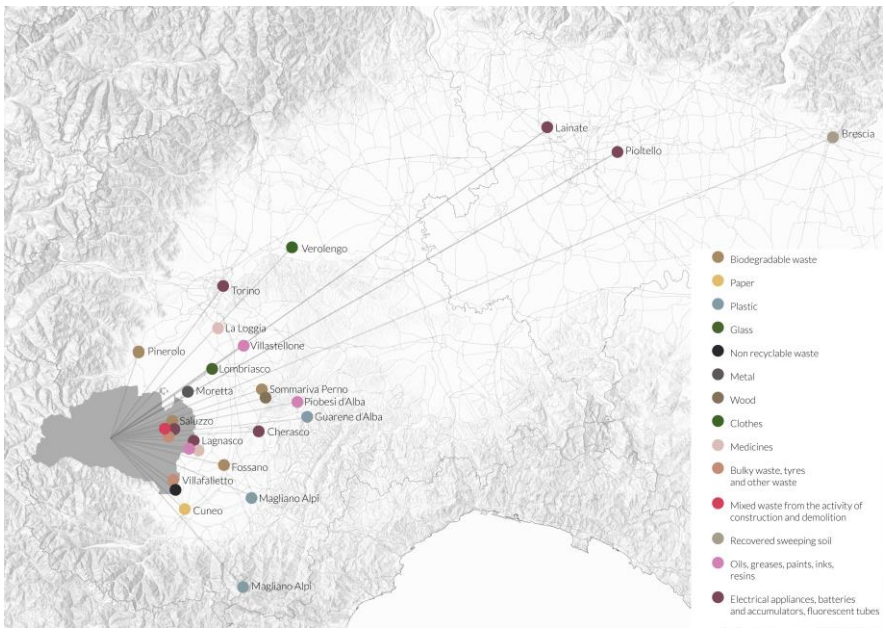
Figure 9 Internet network coverage



Source: Authors' own design

Figure 10 Waste infrastructure



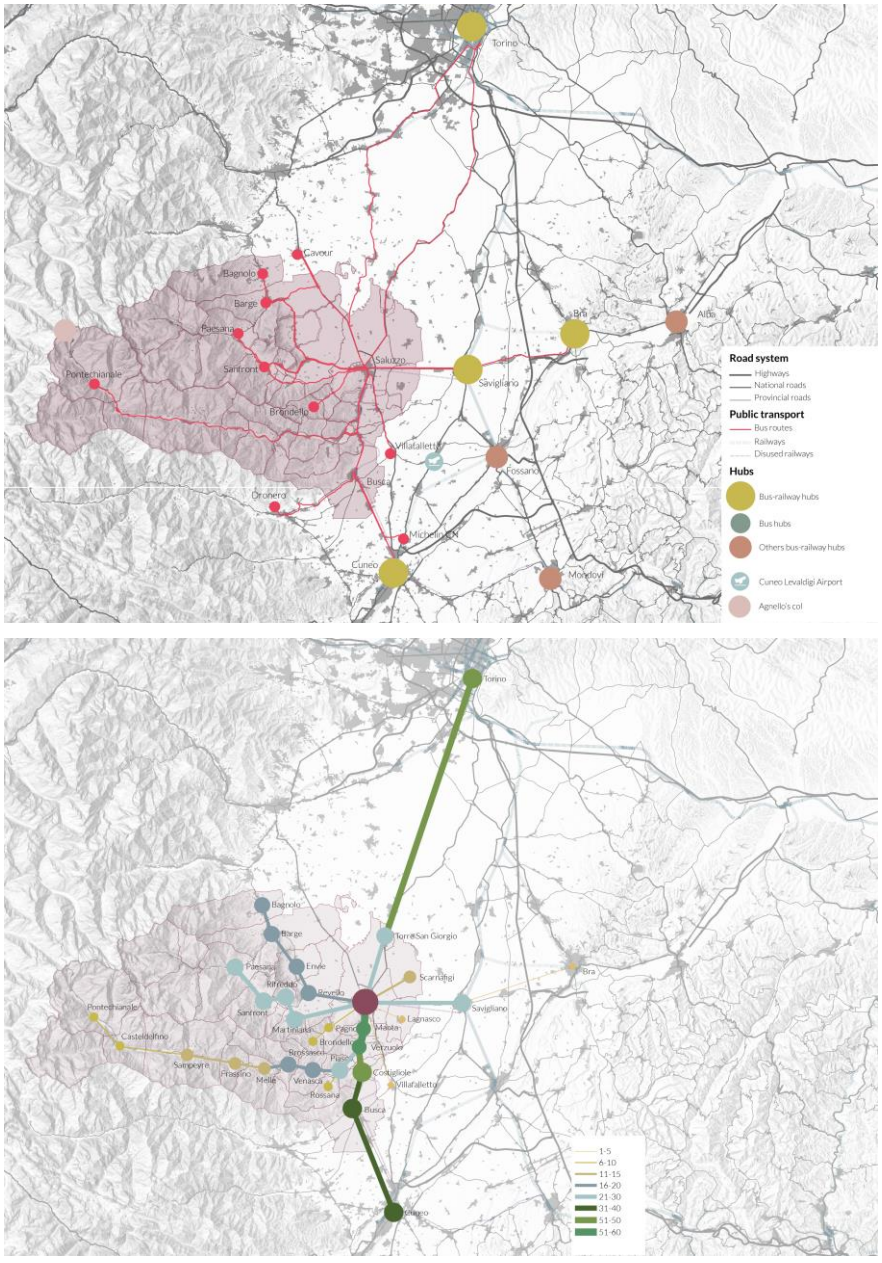


2.4 Mobility

The lack of intermodal rail-road exchange nodes, the absence of a comprehensive rail mobility system, and the absence of an overall public transport project at the territorial scale are evident issues.

Public mobility is primarily supported by the presence of bus lines that traverse the mountain valleys. However, the main hubs for distributing public mobility remain in the foothill and plain areas. In general, analyses of infrastructure and mobility reveal that the territory positions the city of Saluzzo as a fundamental hub for major movements via both private and public transportation. Travel to and from this destination provides balanced accessibility throughout the entire region. Nevertheless, the automobile remains the most used mode of transportation, particularly in the mountainous regions, largely due to the lack of public transportation infrastructure.

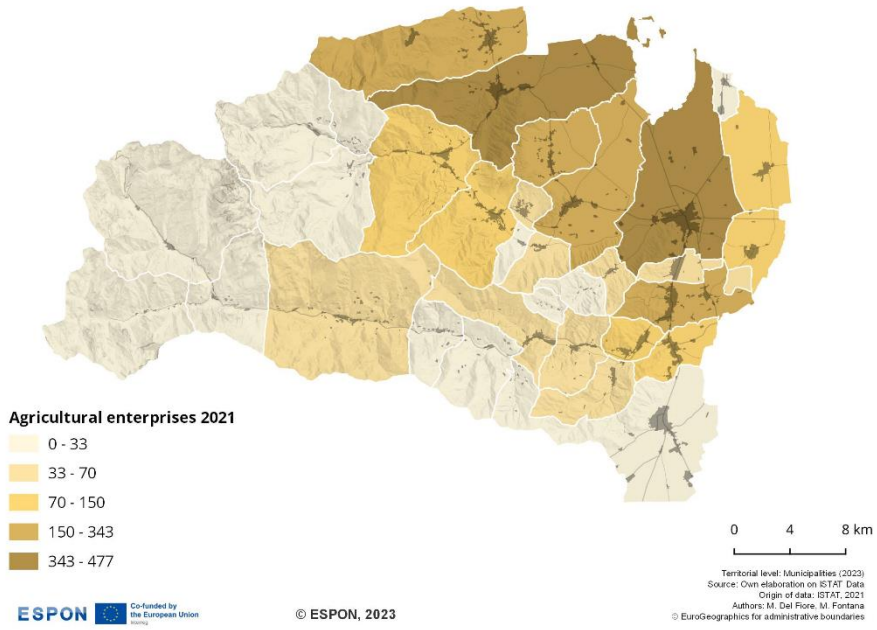
Figure 11 Road network and Local Public Transport in workdays winter and school hours



2.5 Agriculture and enterprises

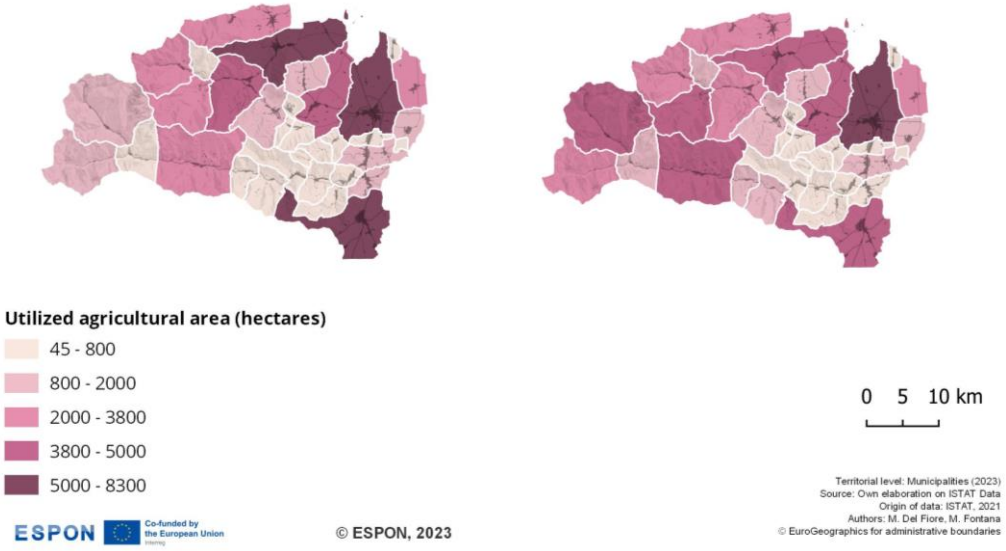
Over the past decade, agricultural enterprises have declined significantly, with a negative peak in the low mountain area. The only exception appears to be the municipality of Crissolo, where new agricultural enterprises have been registered. In absolute values, businesses in the sector are found most in the plain area.

Map 4 Agricultural enterprises 2021



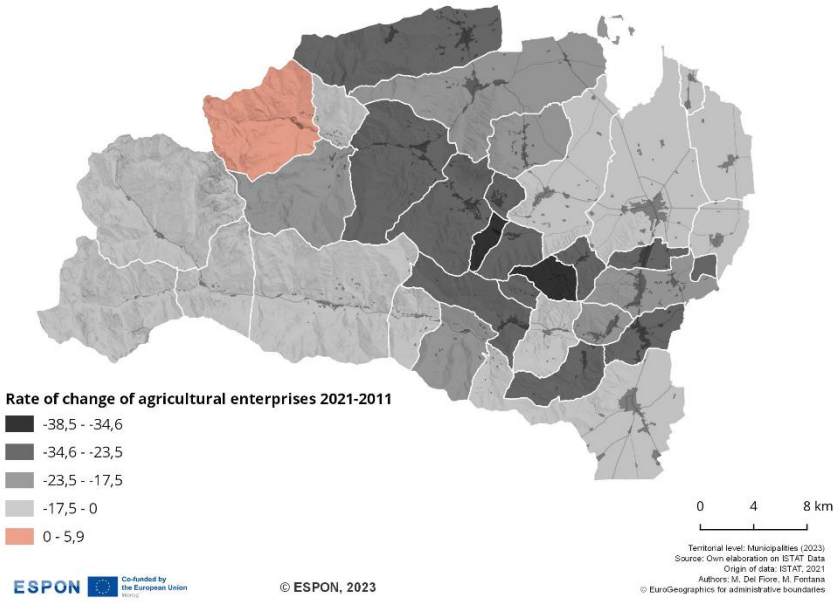
Source: Authors' own design

Map 5 Utilized agricultural areas 2010-2020



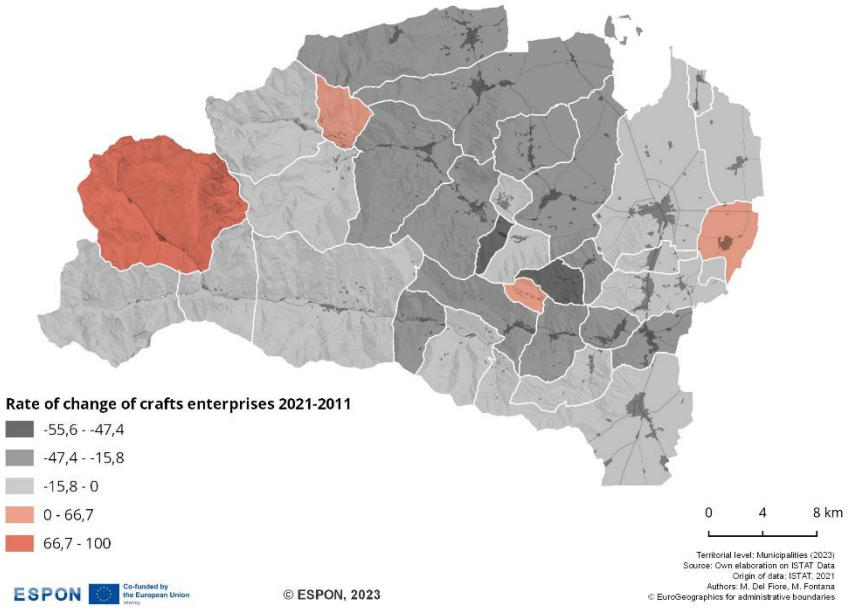
Over the past decade, the utilized agricultural area has declined sharply in the lowlands, foothills and lower mountains, while it is characterized with a positive sign the municipalities of Frassino, Melle and Pontechianale. Widespread decreases also for artisan enterprises, with only a few municipalities in the positive, such as Pontechianale, Ostana, Isasca and Lagnasco. The most widespread type of these activities remains construction, followed by manufacturing activities.

Map 6 Rate of change of agricultural enterprises 2021-2011

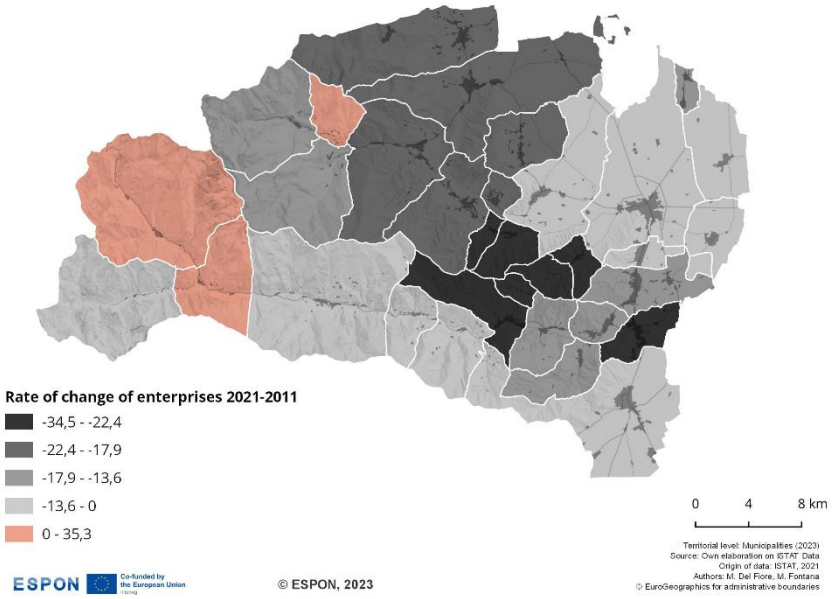


Relative to the entrepreneurial network in general, the last decade has entailed negative downsizing, which has particularly affected the geographical area of the lower mountains (municipalities of Gambasca, Martiniana Po, Brondello, Isasca, Brossasco and Pagno).

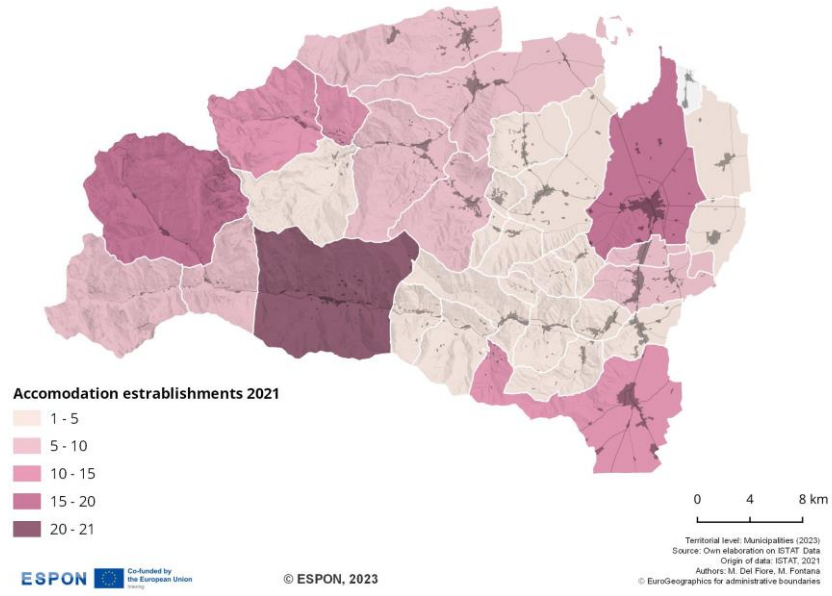
Map 7 Rate of change of crafts enterprises



Map 8 Rate of change of enterprises 2021-2011



Map 9 Accomodation estrablishments 2021



2.6 Tourism

The number of tourist establishments highlights the presence of two distinct tourist attraction centres within the region. The first centre includes the municipalities of foothill, along with Saluzzo and Busca, while the second centre encompasses the high mountain municipalities of Sampeyre and Pontechianale. Tourist arrivals substantiate the data related to accommodation establishments. The mountain municipalities, as well as the network of small

to medium-sized winter resorts, are, on average, in line with the wider regional trends, while data for the low mountain municipalities are not available.

Related to the topic of the Airbnb platform, there is a noticeable overall increase in the number of properties listed on the web platform, along with a consistent growth in monthly occupancy rates. This trend is also reflected in an uptick in the average monthly revenue per property. These data illustrate a tourism pattern characterised by peaks during the summer seasons, in contrast to mountain areas with ski resorts.

Map 10 Touristic attendance 2021

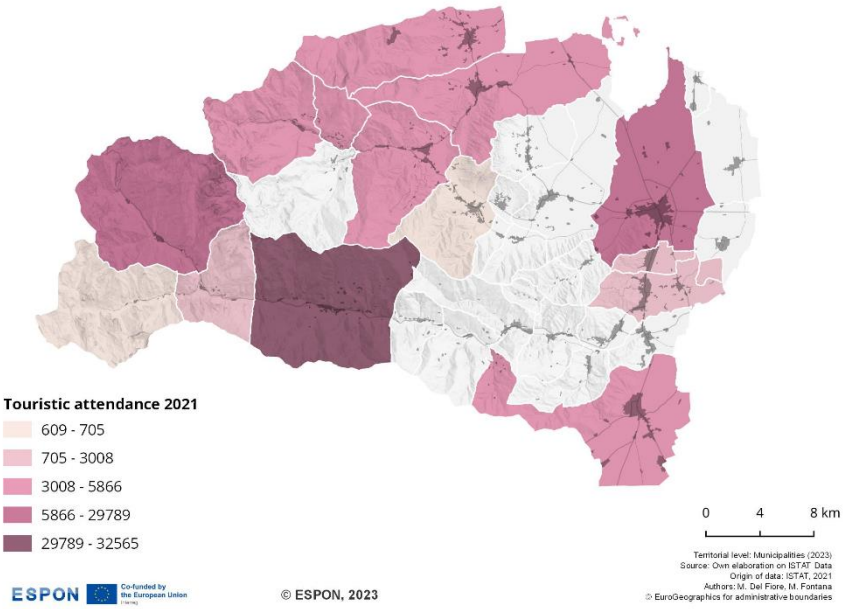
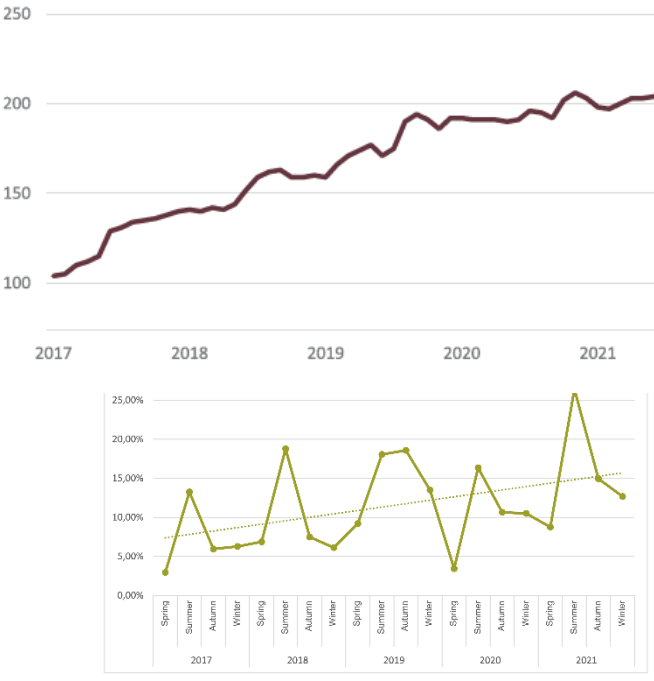


Figure 12 Active Airbnb and occupancy rate



2.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, quantitative analyses conducted on the Monviso territory revealed a complex and multidimensional situation. From an economic perspective, there is a general condition of wealth that can be attributed to the economic model adopted in the region. This model is characterized by a diversification of activities ranging from agriculture to businesses, from services to tourism. Overall, the flat part of the region drives the economy and housing, while the mountainous part stands for its tourism and cultural dimensions.

It is important to recognise that the economic wealth is not uniformly distributed throughout the entire territory, creating a problem of depopulation and socio-demographic weakening in the urban centres located in the mountain valleys. Over the past few decades, there has been a migration process towards the lower areas of the valley by the resident population. Concurrently, the territory is affected by the concentration of services primarily along the foothill area, leaving the more peripheral and marginalized areas underserved. This arrangement of key services such as schools, hospitals, and transportation, has been partly influenced by the strong connection of the city of Saluzzo with the urban centres in the surrounding plains. This has allowed the creation of larger catchment areas, improving the effectiveness and concentration of services.

The decline in housing and socio-economic conditions in the mountainous areas, combined with the concentration of population in the foothills, presents a multifaceted situation where economic wealth coexists with socio-demographic challenges and issues related to service accessibility across different areas within the Monviso territory.

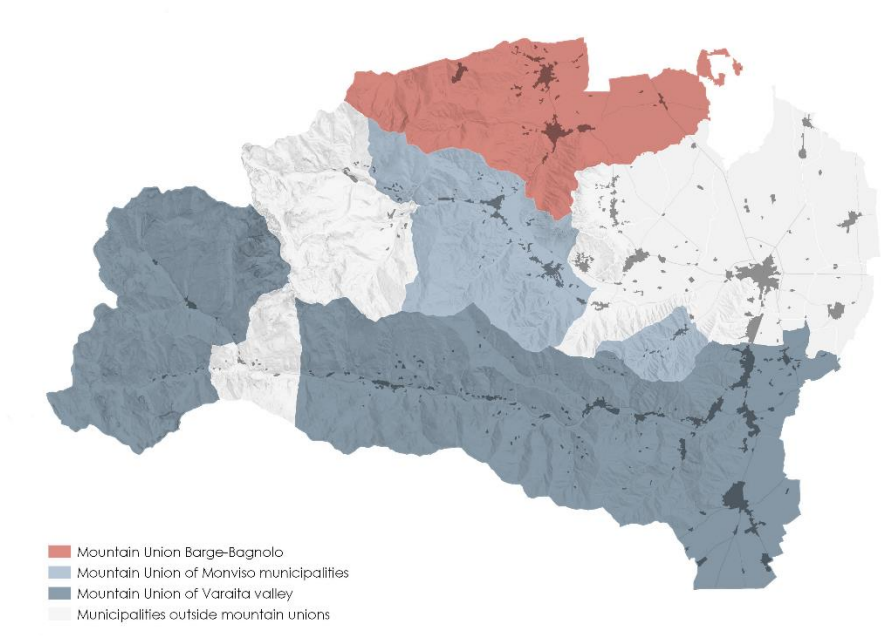
3 Territorial design and governance

3.1 The limit of the supra-local cooperation

The establishment of a supra-local territorial framework in Saluzzo faces numerous challenges. The most evident is the institutional weakness and lack of political and technical tools. In Piedmont Region, the issue of the high number of municipalities and their small sizes is apparent. There are 1181 municipalities in the region. Almost 90% of the municipalities have less than 5,000 inhabitants and over 80% do not exceed 3,000 inhabitants (IRES, 2023). Furthermore, half of the municipalities in Piedmont have populations below 1,000 inhabitants (Poggi et al, 2010). In this context of administrative fragmentation, the lack of a supra-local entity capable of coordinating planning and programming becomes evident.

The experience of Mountain Communities, a supra-local administrative entity that operated in mountainous areas, had provided a response to this issue. The gradual abolition of Mountain Communities and the establishment of Mountain Unions in 2010 led to the fragmentation of supra-local administrative organization. The voluntary and participatory nature of municipal involvement in Unions did not make them stable intermunicipal entities on which to build long-term strategies. This dynamic also occurred in the territory of 'Monviso territory' (Figure 13), where there are currently 3 non-contiguous Mountain Unions with numerous municipalities not represented by any supra-local entity.

Figure 13 Mountain Unions



Source: Authors' own design

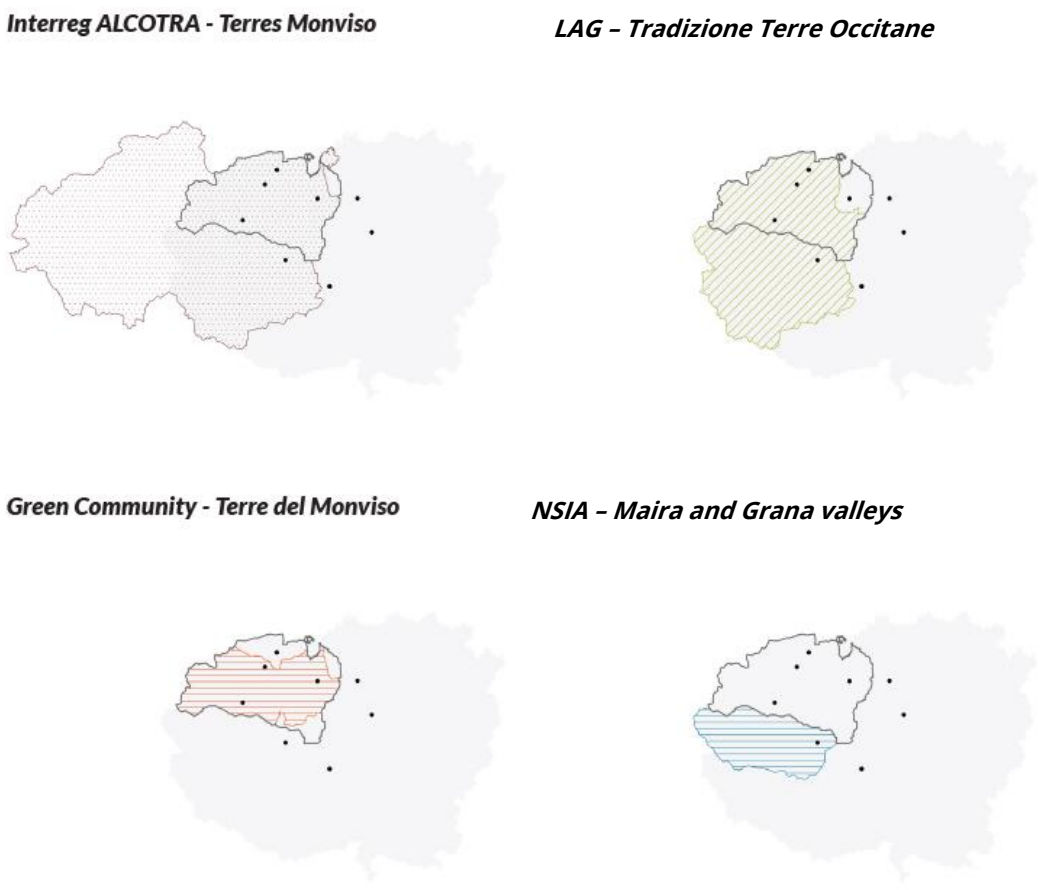
To investigate the lack of supra-local structures in mountainous and marginal areas, we interviewed Roberto Colombero, president of the Association of Mountain Municipalities of Piedmont. The president emphasizes that marginalized territories need a new pact for development. A new vision that brings together objectives, public institutions (which are fundamental, with all the tools available, such as financial instruments), but also brings together

a new form of entrepreneurship and new entrepreneurial initiatives of the territory, small and widespread. According to Colombero: "mobilizing internal economic-human resources is not enough. External resources are also needed for the territory: public resources, private resources, and the academic contributions, to co-design a new development path". So as already pointed out by the Mayor of Saluzzo, according to the UNCEM, the level of funding and human resources in the territory is less than what is required. This factor increases the complexity of proceeding with development initiatives when there are very small municipalities with very few resources. Therefore, the answer can only be the link between a larger, structured city leading an entire territory to which it refers. The prospects and sources of funding in this regard are many. With the Next Generation EU-funded strategy, energy, environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable development plans will be financed. According to UNCEM, for communities in mountain territories, sustainable development is a great opportunity to make a change in the development path, a cultural change in approach. Sustainable development really means trying to cultivate a forward-looking vision by investing in the future, trying to secure the heritage from the cultural, environmental, cultural, and historical point of view, for future generations.

3.2 Territorial design through cooperation

The territory of Saluzzo represents an interesting platform to investigate transformative processes related to spatial planning and development. Numerous projects stemming from European, national, and local initiatives converge in the area (Figure 14).

Figure 14 Cooperation projects



Source: Authors' own design

Among these, the transboundary project linked to Interreg ALCOTRA programming, the experimental Green Community project, and the candidacy of Saluzzo Monviso 2024 for the Italian Capital of Culture stand out. Additionally, there is a LAG in the vicinity of the city (LAG Tradizione Terre Occitane) – with the hypothesis of extending its area and embedding the city of Saluzzo in the new programming period - and an NSIA area recognized by the National Strategy for Inner Areas

Cross-border cooperation has been implemented in the territory through an Integrated Territorial Plan (PITER) called "Terres Monviso" during the 2014-2020 programming period and will continue into the 2021-2027 programming period. This is a multi-thematic plan consisting of a set of cooperation projects covering different sectors and themes but which, based on a common strategy shared in advance, pursue a common goal of economic, social, and environmental development of a specific cross-border territory. To investigate the important role of European funds in the development of territorial projects, we interviewed Dr. Silvia Agnello, head of the European policy office of the province of Cuneo. According to the expert: “the application of the Integrated Territorial Plan "Terres Monviso" was essential for the definition of a homogeneous and integrated territorial planning scope. Through these plans, the territories also pursue the objective of increasing the effectiveness of interventions as well as the intensity and quality of cooperation through a multi-partnership approach and the creation of stable networks between different actors”. In particular, the "Terres Monviso" project involves the territory around the Monviso massif, led as lead partner by the Communauté de communes du Guillestrois et du Queyras, in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Agriculture and Craftsmen of Cuneo, Communauté de communes Serre-Ponçon, Communauté de communes Ubaye Serre-Ponçon, Municipality of Saluzzo, Consortium Monviso Solidale, Département des Hautes-Alpes, Monviso Protected Areas Management Authority, Parc naturel régional du Queyras, and Piedmont Region. The main focuses of PITER, declined into four simple projects are:

- the establishment of permanent and operational governance;
- the support for the emergence of Green Economies that enhance the territory:
- the securing of cross-border mobility;
- promotion in the international tourism scene with the creation of a cross-border tourist destination around a symbol such as Monviso mountain;
- a policy of home support and the reorganization of social and health services for the elderly.

One of the major projects with territorial implications within PITER was the “Gates of the Valley” project. The “Valley Gates” are places where public and private collaborate actively to promote the territory with its touristic and cultural excellences. The Interreg ALCOTRA Terres Monviso project envisaged the creation of seven “Valley Gates”. Seven multi-service centres capable of combining tourist information with other activities (product showcase, meeting space, bike, or outdoor equipment rental), to be modulated according to the locations. The management model devised for these places’ fits into a broader framework of specific and operational goals that the area intends to pursue. These include strengthening the territory's capacity to welcome visitors and endowing the territory's tourism system with greater flexibility and reconnaissance.

Figure 15 Gates of valleys



Source: Nomination dossier Saluzzo Monviso 2024 Capital of Italian culture

The Monviso territory, along with two other areas in central Italy, has also been selected as the first areas chosen by the government to launch the experimental project of "Green Communities". Green communities are local communities made up of rural and mountain territories that intend to make balanced use of all the main resources available to them. The choice by the central government shows how the territory is nationally recognized as an exemplary case study of integrated and comprehensive planning capabilities. The "Terre del Monviso" Green Community project has been funded through an initial 2 million euro call for proposals. Among the main activities of the project are the creation of a social housing project, combining the tourist nature of the mountains with a new approach of permanent or rather deseasonalized habitability; the building-energy upgrading of public buildings; the implementation of a local public-private energy community; and the development of sustainable tourism involving all the rural territories of the community.

There are also two projects that do not directly affect the city of Saluzzo. The first project refers to the LAG "Tradition Terre Occitane". The LAG affects a larger portion of territory than the Monviso territory. The territory of the LAG affects a resident population of 107.000 and is entirely within the administrative boundaries of the Province of Cuneo. It corresponds to the territory of the Stura, Grana, Maira, Varaita, Po, Bronda, and Infernotto Valleys, covering a total area of 2,434.60 sq. km. The LAG has never covered the city of Saluzzo, because set up with a mono-fund strategy. It only implements the EAFRD (European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development) on rural territories. Despite this, the new 21-27 programming of the LAG allows the most rural part of Saluzzo municipality to be included, directing a more integrated programming of the territory.

The second project that does not directly affect either the city of Saluzzo or the Monviso area is the NSIA area "Maira and Grana Valleys. The Piedmont Region has identified the Maira and Grana Valleys as regional pilot areas for the application of the National Inland Areas Strategy. In order to improve the quality of citizen services and economic opportunities, the project focused on providing services to the population and businesses, to attract inhabitants and to encourage the establishment of craft activities.

Although these projects do not directly concern the city of Saluzzo and its territories, they should be taken into consideration for their synergistic and integrated factor in territorial

planning. This demonstrates, on one hand, the strong interaction between Saluzzo and those territories, and, on the other, the lack of capacity to leverage these opportunities.

Integrated spatial planning experiences have placed the city of Saluzzo at the centre of several spatial policy agendas. For this reason, we interviewed Paola Romero, Director of the private local development agency “Chintana”, which has followed the Monviso territory in the construction of LAG strategies, Green Communities, and in the integrated cross-border project. Regarding the issue of territorial cooperation, Dr. Romero notes “how on the case study area, a heritage of territorial alliance is taken for granted, which facilitates the integrated planning. The context of collaboration created is the result of a long process of political and cultural co-building. The territory had always reasoned by individual municipalities and single valleys, losing sight of a unified conception of territory”. The more properly "metro-montane" dynamic, thus the alliance between mountain and city, on the other hand is a path that came after creating a condition of cooperation between political actors.

This new territorial vision succeeded thanks to the role of some administrators, such as the mayor of Saluzzo, who understood that the dynamics of development did not end in the exclusively urban-rural sphere, but necessarily included points of contact from one and the other, in an integrated vision. A final aspect that Dr. Romero said is important to consider is the difficulty that entities have in co-financing instruments. Not all entities have this capacity. Sometimes development is conditioned by whether the entity has the resources to co-finance certain instruments. And this is also the reason why certain instruments are used more than others. The economic aspect, the expert reminds, is essential for the development of an area. That is why the work on community programs started with a purely economic meaning, with business development, development of the tourism system.

However, the gradual contraction of national resources to support services, health, transportation, waste collection has brought the focus of projects to these issues as well. It is therefore by working on services, transportation, and culture that city-mountain links have become more necessary, even in a logic of community planning.

3.3 Strategies and projects

Overall, over the past 8 years, from the beginning of the 2014-2020 community programming cycle to 2022, the City of Saluzzo has raised 46 million 829 thousand 705 euros in public funding. Through the two instrumental entities "Bertoni" Foundation and "Apm" Foundation, it has collected through calls and funding lines from third-party entities, that is, resources that otherwise would not have entered the municipal budget, placing them for the benefit of the entire supra-local area, the so-called "Monviso territory." Five major sources of funding.

The main contributor is the European Union, with 14 million 70 thousand euros from 2014 to 2022, through the ALCOTRA calls and with other projects, of NRRP funds, from the Piedmont Region, those obtained from banking foundations and ministries. In the same time frame, in second place among those who granted the most funding to the Municipality of Saluzzo was the Piedmont Region with 12 million 101 thousand 84 euros, of which 9 million 488 thousand 885 euros were for capital expenditures, that is, for investments, and 2 million 612 thousand 199 to cover current expenses. The third factor that brought the most money to municipal coffers was the NRRP, which has brought in nearly 10 million euros in recent years. The various Italian ministries contributed 7 million 283 thousand 222 euros to the total. Finally, since 2014, 1 million 819 thousand 858 euros have come in from bank foundations in the area.

According to Emilio Sidoli, Head of Mayor office and contact person for European funds and relations with the wider area, the funding has been used for five main strands of investment in order to revitalise the territory. This are: urban regeneration, redevelopment of schools, parks and gardens, green community, and reception of seasonal workers.

Table 2 Economic funds

Europe	14.070.000,00 €
Piedmont Region	12.101.084,00 €
NRRP	9.813.959,00 €
Ministries	7.283.222,00 €
Bertoni Foundation	943.549,00 €
CRS Foundation	806.400,00 €
APM Foundation	798.033,00 €
Company of San Paolo	519.000,00 €
CRC Foundation	308.458,00 €
CRT Foundation	186.000,00 €
TOTAL	**46.829.705,00 €**

3.4 List of the most important urban projects carried out during the last 10 years

1. Saluzzo Monviso 2024

Saluzzo with the Monviso territory was the first alpine territory nominated for Italian Capital of Culture 2024. The ancient capital of the Marquisate, straddling Italy and France, particularly wants to turn the spotlight on the mountains, understood not only as a destination for leisure and loisir but as a place of innovation and culture.

2. MaB UNESCO Monviso

In June 2014 UNESCO approved Italy's first cross-border reserve, which includes the Monviso and Queyras Parks. With an area of about 400,000 hectares, it involves more than 300,000 inhabitants distributed among 86 Italian and 20 French municipalities.

3. The Quarter

Within Saluzzo's historic center, "The Quarter" is a building dating back to the 1700s that has been transformed from a barracks into the city's socio-cultural hub. An architectural, cultural, and social operation that has led to re-inhabiting premises that had been abandoned for decades, transforming it into a center of reference for the entire territory.

4. Valley gates

Territorial hubs that combine tourist information with other activities (product showcase, meeting space, bike, or outdoor equipment rental). The Interreg ALCOTRA Terres Monviso project, has provided for the creation of 7 valley gates.

5. Ostana regeneration

Ostana is a municipality located 1,282 m a.s.l. in the upper Po Valley. From the 1990s to the present, through major physical and cultural regeneration projects, the municipality has grown from 5 inhabitants to 41, becoming a reference in Italy and in the entire European alpine region of mountain land re-inhabitation.

6. Saluzzo historical and landscape city

The project was designed in 2014 to strengthen and implement in the community the value of the urban landscape of the historic cente. The Project has led to the pedestrianization of the main streets in the historic centre and the restoration of the facades of historic buildings.

7. APM School

In 2008 in Saluzzo, the High School Foundation was established to promote and enhance musical culture and contribute to the development of the cultural network in its host territory. The Project started in 1986 on a pilot project of the European Union.

8. East Saluzzo bypass

The first lot of the East Saluzzo bypass was built to define a direct connection with the city of Turin. In 2018, the Project of the last lot was approved, which is useful to avoid heavy traffic in the historic centre of Saluzzo.

9. Diffuse District of Commerce

Approved in 2019, the project pays attention to the overall qualification of local commercial offerings, with a view to typicality, sustainability, and service to the territory. The Project involved twenty-five municipalities with about 45,000 inhabitants.

3.5 List of the most important projects currently underway or planned for the immediate future (next 10 years)

1. Renewable Energy Communities (RECs)

RECs are voluntary associations of users who, through membership in a legal entity, cooperate with the goal of producing, consuming, and managing energy through one or more local energy facilities.

2. Spatial plan water reservoirs for water collection

Small and medium-sized reservoirs can serve multiple functions in the service of agriculture and contribute to the positive synergy between water, food, and ecosystems. A Spatial Plan for water storage reservoirs allow planning and control at a supra-local and supra-municipal scale, facilitating exchanges between mountain and lowland areas.

3. New hospital

Health care facilities represent one of the keys "territorial resources" capable of triggering processes with positive demographic and employment effects. Action is planned to strengthen health care provision through the construction of a new hospital health hub in the lowlands.

4. Monviso Cycleway

Through Green Communities funds, it is intended to build two cycleways connecting the Eurovelo 6 route with the mountainous area of the territory. The two cycleways, in the Varaita Valley and the Po Valley, will constitute important cycling tourism routes.

5. Reception and settlement of people with migrant backgrounds

The action concerns the experimentation of ways to include and consolidate the socio-economic, socio-work and housing conditions of people with a migratory background in situations of strong fragility or at risk of marginality, through the implementation of the social protection network already active in the territory.

6. Social housing and temporary housing units

A social housing network, and the creation of temporary housing units in general, is an opportunity to increase the residential attractiveness of small towns and counter the demographic exodus by implementing environmentally friendly, efficient, and affordable housing solutions that bring people back to live in marginal areas.

7. Multi-service centres

The action involves the creation and networking of physical spaces in which one or more businesses that perform multiple functions and offer multiple services to the citizenry are included.

8. Agricultural bio-district of Monviso

The Bio-district® is a geographic area naturally suited to organic farming, in which the different actors of the territories (farmers, private citizens, associations, tour operators and public administrations) enter into an agreement that provides for the sustainable management of resources, focusing on organic and sustainable production and supply chains.

9. Plans for the management and innovation of pasture areas.

The action includes the development of pastoral plans of directions for the management and innovation of pasture areas through the revision of regulations and boundaries of communal pasture plots and entrustment procedures, and the recovery of lost pastures.

10. Saluzzo-Cavour District of Taste

The Food District will constitute a new development model for the area's agribusiness. The district will also have to ensure food safety, decrease environmental impact, and reduce food waste.

4 Conclusions

The case study addresses the major hub of a polycentric sub-region, inscribed in a larger regional polycentric structure. As highlighted in Chapter 3.2, the Monviso regions have been actively working in recent years to construct a new and revitalized territorial identity. Initiatives such as the cross-border European project ALCOTRA "Terres Monviso," the collective and widespread effort to secure the designation as the Italian Capital of Culture for 2024, the successful attainment of funding for Green Communities, are contribute to the same sense of purpose and objective, fostering territorial cohesion and cooperation. This effort holds even greater significance when viewed in the broader context, considering the gradual weakening of intermediate organizational structures between the State and Regions on one side and individual Municipalities on the other.

The problems of the city and the territory such as the availability of water resources for agriculture as a result of climate change, the possibility of holding on to the major collective services offered by the main urban centres to the entire territorial community, the reactivation and reconfiguration of the public infrastructure assets for the purpose of efficient and multimodal transportation, require political, planning and governance action at the scale not of the individual city, but of the entire territory. In this context, the strategic dynamism and sociopolitical activism of the Monviso territory is an exemplary subject on the Italian and European scene. According to Antonio De Rossi, professor at the Politecnico di Torino, the Monviso territory “is building a new territorial political culture that is active to the regions and capable of establishing relationships that can mediate global interests with local ones, interpreting them in positive and productive terms”. The current policies are "enhancing the polycentric nature of the territory through connectivity policies among regions, capable of generating new markets, building networks of services and infrastructure, and mitigating the vulnerabilities and impacts of climate change”.

The case study shows how SMSTCs play a role as a point of reference for a larger territory, particularly in the context of marginalized and mountainous territories. The city of Saluzzo, in its role as the political, administrative, and cultural centre, is tending to unhinge an opposing vision between city/country and flatland/mountain valley. From the territory emerges a clear political perspective that intends to develop new interactions between city and territory, both material (ecosystem services, productive resources, food chains, labour and services, infrastructure networks) and intangible, such as spatial imaginaries and cultural hybridizations. The city of Saluzzo and the Monviso territory have demonstrated the ability to reach a critical territorial mass sufficient to ensure the effectiveness of local development strategies, enhancing the polycentric structure of less urbanized areas through the spatial concept of “Metro-mountain” deconstructing the opposition and alterity between cities and mountains.

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