

The planning system in Italy and how it addresses tourism–related issues

*Original*

The planning system in Italy and how it addresses tourism–related issues / Cotella, Giancarlo - In: Contemporary challenges of spatial planning in tourism destinations / Tomaz Naperaia, Kasia Lesniewska-Napierala, Giancarlo Cotella. - ELETTRONICO. - [s.l.] : Lodz University Press, 2022. - ISBN 9788383311494. - pp. 17-43 [10.18778/8331-149-4.02]

*Availability:*

This version is available at: 11583/2984535 since: 2024-02-15T10:54:58Z

*Publisher:*

Lodz University Press

*Published*

DOI:10.18778/8331-149-4.02

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# The planning system in Italy and how it addresses tourism-related issues

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## Country profile

Italy is located in the southern part of Europe, and consists of a peninsula extending into the Mediterranean Sea and delimited on its northern side by the Alpine Arch. The country covers a surface of 301,34 km<sup>2</sup> and shares land borders (from the western to the eastern side of the Alpine arch) with France, Switzerland, Austria and Slovenia. Moreover, the country includes the two enclaved microstates of Vatican City and San Marino. Due to its peninsular character, Italy has a coastline border of almost 8,000 km on four different seas: the Adriatic on the east, the Ionian on the south and the Tyrrhenian and the Ligurian on the west. It features over 800 islands, among which are Sicily and Sardinia, the two largest islands of the Mediterranean.

The country is characterised by a variety of landscapes that mirror the relationships between man, nature and cultural values, both tangible and intangible. As such, it vaunts the presence of extraordinary landscapes included in UNESCO World Heritage List, and the Italian landscape is protected by the art. 9 of Italian Constitution. More in particular, Italy is the country in the world that includes the higher number of UNESCO sites in the world (58), among them featuring 8 cultural landscape sites: the Amalfi Coast, Portovenere, the Cinque Terre and the islands of Palmaria Tino and Tinetto, the National Park of Cilento and the Vallo di Diano (with the archaeological sites of Paestum, Velia and the Certosa di Padula), the Sacred Mountains of Piedmont and Lombardy, the Val d'Orcia, the 12 Villas and 2 Medici Gardens in Tuscany, the Wine-growing Landscapes of Piedmont: Langhe-Roero and Monferrato, and The Prosecco Hills of Conegliano and Valdobbiadene.

Over 35% of the country's territory is mountainous, featuring the Alps on the northern boundary and the Apennine mountains that run throughout the peninsula backbone. The rivers are numerous due to the relative abundance of rain

(mainly in the north) and the presence of the Alpine snowfields and glaciers. The fundamental watershed follows the ridge of the Alps and the Apennines and delimits four main slopes, corresponding to the seas into which the rivers flow. Most of the rivers drain either into the Adriatic Sea (Po, Piave, Adige, Brenta, Tagliamento, and Reno) or into the Tyrrhenian (Arno, Tiber, and Volturno). The longest river is the Po, which originates in the Western Alps and flows for 652 km, generating a vast valley called the Padan Plain (Pianura Padana), which accounts for over the 70% of the plain areas of the country. Overall, the country hosts over 1000 lakes, mostly of subalpine origin, of which the largest are Garda (370 km<sup>2</sup>) Maggiore (212.5 km<sup>2</sup>) and Como (146 km<sup>2</sup>). Other notable lakes are located throughout the peninsula (Trasimeno, Bolsena, Bracciano, Vico). Because of the longitudinal extension and the mountainous conformation, the climate is heterogeneous. In particular, the climate of the Po valley is mostly continental, while the coastal areas of Liguria, Tuscany and most of the south generally fit the Mediterranean climate stereotype. Conditions in peninsular coastal areas can be very different from the interior's higher ground and valleys, particularly during the winter months.

With over 60 million inhabitants, the country is the third most populous state of the EU (Eurostat, 2021). However, the distribution of the population is uneven. The most densely populated areas are the Po Valley (hosting almost half of the national population) and the metropolitan areas of Rome and Naples, while the Alps and Apennines highlands are sparsely populated. The population of Italy almost doubled during the 20th century, but the pattern of growth was extremely uneven because of large-scale internal migration from the rural south to the industrial north. High birth rates persisted until the 1970s, after which the population rapidly aged; the country currently has the fifth oldest population in the world (median age of 45.8 years) (See Table 1 for additional information).

The north–south divide, which dates back to the country's unification in 1861, is Italy's major socio-economic weakness. The unemployment rate (10.6% in 2018) stands slightly above the eurozone average, but the disaggregated figure is 6.6% in the north and 19.2% in the south. The youth unemployment rate (31.7% in 2018) is extremely high compared to EU standards. After a strong GDP growth of 5–6% per year from the 1950s to the early 1970s, and a progressive slowdown in the 1980–90s, the country virtually stagnated in the 2000s. The political efforts to revive growth with massive government spending eventually produced a severe rise in public debt. Moreover, the country has been severely hit by the 2008 global financial crisis, which exacerbated structural disparities.

Italy's economy ranks as the third largest in the eurozone and the eighth largest in the world. It is the world's sixth largest manufacturing country and is characterised by many dynamic small and medium-sized enterprises, famously clustered in industrial districts, which are the backbone of the Italian economy. The characteristics of its economy are: a large and competitive agricultural sector (with the world's largest wine production), its influential and high-quality

automobile (contributing 8.5% to the Italian GDP), food, design and fashion industries – often focused on the export of niche market and luxury products that is capable of facing the competition from Asian economies. Tourism occupies an important role in the country economy. According to estimates by the Bank of Italy of 2018, the tourism sector directly generates more than 5% of the national GDP (13% considering also the indirectly generated GDP) and represents over 6% of the employed. These data have been largely downsized during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, but are increasing again and are expected to return to prepandemic values.

**Table 1.** General country information

<b>Name of country</b>	Italy
<b>Capital, population of the capital</b>	Rome 2,819,751 (2020 – municipality) 4,353,738 (2020 – metro area)
<b>Surface area</b>	301,340 km <sup>2</sup>
<b>Total population</b>	59,433,744 (2011 census) 60,550,075 (2019 estimate)
<b>Population density</b>	201.3 inhabitants/km <sup>2</sup>
<b>Population growth rate</b>	–0.13% (2019); –0.08 (2018); 0.02 (2017)
<b>Degree of urbanisation</b>	70.74% (2019); 70.44% (2018); 70.14 (2017)
<b>Human development index</b>	0.883 (2018)
<b>GDP</b>	EUR 1,771.5 billion (2019)
<b>GDP per capita</b>	EUR 29,116 (2019)
<b>GDP growth</b>	–9.6% (2020); 0.1% (2019); 0.9% (2018); 1.5% (2017)
<b>Unemployment rate</b>	12.7% (2020); 10.7% (2019); 10.6% (2018); 11.3% (2017)
<b>Land use</b> (CLC 2018, data concerns 2017)	52.18% forest and scrubland 1.47% inland waters 38.7% agricultural land 7.65% built-up land
<b>Sectoral structure</b>	(2017 estimate) 73.9% services and administration 23.9% industry and construction 2.1% agriculture and forestry

**Source:** author's own elaboration.

According to the 2001 reform of Article 114 of Title V of the Constitution of the Italian Republic, 'the Republic is composed of the **Municipalities** [*Comuni* – LAU 2], the **Provinces** [*Province* – NUTS 3], the **Metropolitan cities** [*Città*

*Metropolitane* – NUTS 3], the **Regions** [*Regioni* – NUTS 2] and the **State** [*Stato* – NUTS 1]. Municipalities, provinces, metropolitan cities and regions are recognised as autonomous entities provided with their own statutes, powers and functions in accordance with the principles of the Constitution’ (Figure 1).



\* ROMA HAS A SPECIAL STATUS (CAPITAL CITY)

**Figure 1.** Italy's administrative subdivision into regions, provinces and metropolitan cities  
**Source:** author's own elaboration.

Article 131 of the Constitution identifies 20 **regions**: Piedmont, Valle d'Aosta, Lombardy, Trentino-Alto Adige, Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Liguria, Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany, Umbria, Marche, Lazio, Abruzzo, Molise, Campania, Apulia, Basilicata, Calabria, Sicily, and Sardinia. The Constitution grants autonomous status to the regions Valle d'Aosta, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Sardinia, Sicily, and Trentino-Alto Adige, granting them additional powers in relation to legislation, administration and finance.

**Provinces** have existed since the unification of the country, although their power and competences have changed through time. Their number has also varied: it remained between 92 and 95 units between 1927 and 1992, then jumped to 103 as a consequence of a reorganisation of the provincial authorities. Other units were then added in the 2000s, taking the total up to 110. Importantly, the two autonomous provinces of Trentino-Alto Adige (Trento and Bolzano) enjoy stronger autonomy, being *de facto* equivalent to autonomous regions.

**Metropolitan cities** were instituted only recently with Law no. 56/2014, replacing the ten provinces of Rome, Turin, Milan, Venice, Genova, Bologna, Florence, Bari, Naples, and Reggio Calabria. In the same year, three additional metropolitan cities (Palermo, Catania, and Messina) were instituted through a Sicilian regional law, which also turned its other six provinces into Free Consortiums of Municipalities. In 2016 the Friuli Venezia Giulia region relabelled its four provinces as Regional Decentralised Entities. Finally, in 2017 the Sardinia region turned the province of Cagliari into a metropolitan city, and re-joined four of the remaining seven provinces in the province of South Sardinia. As a result of these changes, the sub-regional level is now composed of 14 metropolitan cities and 93 provinces (of which the six units in Sicily are referred to as the Free Consortium of Municipalities, and the four units in Friuli-Venezia-Giulia are Regional Decentralised Entities).

**Table 2.** Italian municipalities by population

	Municipality		Population	
	n.	%	inhabitants	%
	1	2	3	4
<b>500,000+</b> inhab.	6	0.08	7,311,109	12.11
<b>250,000 – 499,999</b> inhab.	6	0.08	1,920,434	3.18
<b>100,000 – 249,999</b> inhab.	33	0.42	4,912,857	8.14
<b>60,000 – 99,999</b> inhab.	61	0.77	4,668,937	7.74
<b>20,000 – 59,999</b> inhab.	418	5.29	13,637,496	22.59
<b>10,000 – 19,999</b> inhab.	706	8.93	9,719,812	16.10
<b>5,000 – 9,999</b> inhab.	1,186	15.01	8,373,668	13.87
<b>3,000 – 4,999</b> inhab.	1,088	13.77	4,235,557	7.02

**Table 2** (cont.)

	1	2	3	4
<b>2,000 – 2,999</b> inhab.	942	11.92	2,316,015	3.84
<b>1,000 – 1,999</b> inhab.	1,518	19.21	2,210,349	3.66
<b>500 – 999</b> inhab.	1,093	13.83	805,606	1.33
<b>&lt; 500</b> inhab.	847	10.72	247,706	0.41
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,904</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>60,359,546</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Source:** authors' elaboration of ISTAT data 2019 (available at <http://dati.istat.it/>).

When it comes to **municipalities** the country is characterised by almost 8,000 units, of which 70% are small towns accounting for less than 5,000 inhabitants (Table 2). This number has varied over time, and especially in the last ten years, when the state put in place a number of incentives for municipalities to merge.

In accordance with the Constitution, the Italian Republic is unitary, while recognising the principles of local autonomy and decentralisation. Regions were effectively instituted only in 1970, even though the Italian Constitution mentions them as early as 1948, as the ruling Christian Democracy party did not want the opposition Italian Communist Party to gain power in the regions where it was historically rooted (the red belt of Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany, Umbria, and Marche). As of today, Italy is considered a 'regionalised' country, with regional functions and responsibilities that were broadened especially during the 1990s via the so-called 'Bassanini' laws (in particular Law no. 59/1997), which propelled the modernisation of sub-national institutions and governance. In addition, regional statutory autonomy was enlarged by a constitutional reform in 2001, when a major change modified the division of legislative competences between the state and the regions, by distinguishing between exclusive competences of the state, concurrent competences, and exclusive competences of the regions.

In particular, the Constitution gives the **state** exclusive legislative power in matters of foreign policy and international relations and defence, public order and security, finance and taxation, electoral and administrative legislation, jurisdiction, education and social security, the protection of natural and cultural heritage, and the coordination of state, regional and local statistical data.

Concurrent legislation between the **state and the regions** applies to the following: the international and EU relations of the regions, **land-use planning**, transport (including civil ports, airports and navigation networks), the energy supply, disaster relief, the enhancement of cultural and environmental property, job protection and safety, health and education, supplementary social security, and the coordination of public finances and taxation. In these areas, legislative powers are vested in the regions, except for the fundamental principles laid down in state legislation.

The **regions** then have legislative powers in all matters not expressly covered by state legislation. Moreover, they take part in the preparatory decision-making

processes for EU legislative acts in the areas that fall within their responsibilities, and are also responsible for the implementation of international agreements and European measures within the limits established by the law.

The **provinces** and **metropolitan cities** have regulatory powers for the organisation and implementation of the functions allocated to them. The competences of provinces were reduced by the 2014 administrative reform, which transferred some competences back to the regions. The remaining competences concern the **coordination of spatial planning** as well as environmental protection, transport planning, construction and management within the provincial remit, data gathering and analysis in support of local bodies, employment discrimination and equal opportunities. Alongside the competences of the provinces, the **metropolitan cities** are also responsible for **strategic metropolitan development, general spatial planning** (including communications, services and infrastructure networks), the compatibility and coherence of municipal urban planning at metropolitan level, the promotion and coordination of economic and social development activities in line with the metropolitan plan, the coordination and supervision of municipalities' integrated services management, institutional relations with the EU, the state and other metropolitan cities, as well as the promotion and coordination of digital information systems at metropolitan level.

The administrative functions that are not allocated to the provinces, metropolitan cities and regions or to the state are allocated to the **municipalities**, following the principles of subsidiarity. More specifically, municipalities are responsible for social welfare, primary education, culture and recreation, **urban planning, housing, the land registry**, local transport and roads, local economic development, waste management, and the local police. Municipalities can provide their services alone or in unions of municipalities, as stipulated by National Law no. 267/2000 and subsequently by specific regional laws.

When it comes to finances, the Constitution grants municipalities, provinces, metropolitan cities and regions autonomy in relation to revenue and expenditure, although this is subject to the obligation of a balanced budget and compliance with EU law, as well as in relation to independent financial resources, setting and levying taxes and collecting revenues of their own, in compliance with the Constitution and according to the principles of the coordination of state finances and the tax system, and to share in the tax revenues related to their respective territories. State legislation provides for an equalisation fund for the territories having lower per-capita taxable capacity. Revenues raised from the above-mentioned sources shall enable municipalities, provinces, metropolitan cities and regions to fully finance the public functions allocated to them. The state allocates supplementary resources and adopts special measures in favour of specific municipalities, provinces, metropolitan cities and regions to promote economic development along with social cohesion and solidarity, to reduce economic and social imbalances, to foster the exercise of the rights of the individual or to achieve goals other than those pursued through their ordinary functions.



## Legal regulations of spatial planning in Italy

Spatial planning in Italy is based on a traditional urban and physical land use planning approach. The EU Compendium of spatial planning systems and policies lists the Mediterranean states, including Italy, under the so-called ‘urbanism’ approach, characterised by ‘a strong architectural flavour’, ‘urban design, townscape and building control’ and regulation ‘undertaken through rigid zoning and codes’ (CEC, 1997, p. 37). The urban historian Guido Zucconi (1989) describes the origins of Italian spatial planning as the result of a struggle between different disciplines to control urban planning, which architects finally won in the 1930s. It would not be misleading to summarise the evolution of Italian planning culture as a permanent oscillation of planners’ attention between the administrative duty of land use regulation (Campos Venuti, 1967) and the search for a new poetics for urban design (Secchi, 1989). However, as will be further detailed below, the Italian spatial planning system has evolved through time into a fairly complex configuration, characterised by a high regional heterogeneity and by numerous experimental, innovative episodes, often triggered by the influence of the European Union (Janin Rivolin, 2003; Cotella & Janin Rivolin, 2011).

### Constitutional and legal framework of spatial planning

The 1948 Constitution identifies spatial planning competences under *urbanistica* as defined in Article 80 of Presidential Decree 616/1977, which concerns the regulation of the use of the territory, including all conceptual, regulatory and management aspects relating to safeguarding and transforming the land as well as protecting the environment. More recently, the 2001 reform of Title V of the Constitution changed the wording from *urbanistica* to *governo del territorio*, indicating a wider approach to spatial dynamics that, broadly speaking, may be translated as ‘territorial governance’ (although the word *governo* has a more hierarchical flavour and is usually translated as ‘government’). According to Article 131 of the Constitution, the latter is a shared competence between the state and the region, whereby regions are entitled to approve their own spatial planning laws within the general framework law defined at the central level.

The Italian planning system is still based on Law no. 1150/1942, which was approved during the Second World War when the country was still a monarchy. At the centre of the system is the **Municipal General Regulatory Plan** (*Piano Regolatore Generale Comunale*, PRGC). According to the law, the PRGC is produced by municipalities (alone or in unions), is based on the concept of zoning and allocates particular uses and characteristics to all areas of land that it covers. It is comprehensive in its proposals and prescriptions. Demands for comprehensive reform of the national framework for spatial planning have been

a recurring leitmotiv since the post-war period. Parametric coefficients for the quantitative determination of public spaces and services (the so-called *standards*) were introduced in 1967 together with further detailing of the zoning procedures in response to the growing threat of speculative processes. At the same time, several proposals were advanced towards a reform of the legal framework for the distribution of building rights (Campos Venuti, 1967; Astengo, 1969). These attempts aimed to introduce principles of equity in economic gains and to reduce backstage pressures in the decision making process concerning the elaboration of land-use plans. Despite these efforts to introduce more equitable practices in the distribution of building rights, either through radical legislative reforms in the 1970s (Campos Venuti & Oliva, 1993) or through articulated legal/economic procedures called *processi perequativi* (equalisation of land transformation gains), this remains a controversial issue (Urbani, 2011), although several pieces of legislation (in particular at regional level) have tried to define operative legal frameworks.

Through time, the national framework law was also enriched with new local planning instruments. First, the recovery plan (*piano di recupero*) was introduced at the end of the 1970s (Law 457/1978), which aimed at addressing the management of the transformation of existing built-up areas, as a reaction against uncontrolled urban growth and change. Then, during the 1990s, the consolidation of the EU sustainable and integrated urban development paradigm (Cotella, 2019) led to additional legislative innovation that brought in new and more effective procedures to enable the renovation of cities and their deprived suburbs. Laws no. 179/1991 and no. 493/1993 introduced integrated programmes (*programmi integrati*) and urban regeneration programmes (*programmi di recupero urbano*) as an attempt to complement rigid zoning and regulations with more flexible tools, building on public-private collaboration.

During the 1980s, and also as a partial consequence of EU influence, the legislative framework was amended with the approval of new laws concerning the environment and landscape. Law no. 431/1985 introduced landscape plans (*piani paesistici*) and Law no. 183/1989 instituted instruments dedicated to the protection and management of water basins (*piani di bacino*). This process eventually led to the introduction (2004) of the 'regional landscape plan' (*Piano Paesaggistico Regionale*), which awarded the regions a leading role in landscape planning. Not all the regions, however, have produced their regional landscape plan yet. Only a number of pioneering regions undertook the task (e.g. Toscana, Sardegna, Piemonte) and were then followed in recent times by others (De Montis, 2016).

Despite the abovementioned innovations and a number of proposals for new spatial planning framework laws, the last of which dates back to the mid-2000s, no comprehensive reform of the national spatial planning framework has hitherto been approved at the central level.

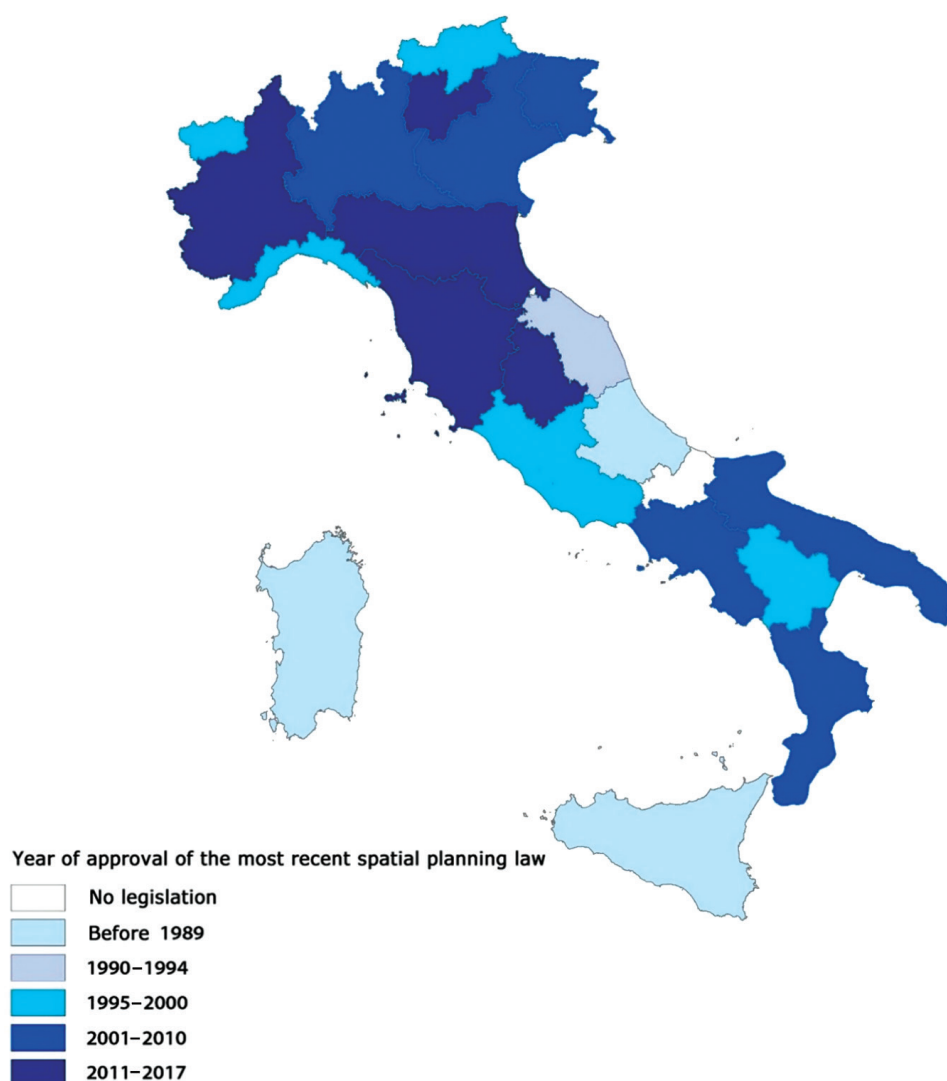
## Regionalisation

The Italian spatial planning system has experienced increasing regionalisation since the 1970s, when regions were created and provided with related competences. All regions started to approve their own spatial planning laws, leading to an increasing heterogeneity and divergence of regional spatial planning systems and practices (Vettoretto, 2009, p. 190; Gelli, 2001). More specifically, most of the regional laws on territorial governance that have been adopted in the last 20 years, albeit with different interpretations, have sought to address topical issues such as:

- the normalisation of innovative renewal and regeneration programmes at local level;
- the introduction of communicative and participatory processes in planning;
- the involvement of private stakeholders in territorial transformations and service provision (through a widespread use of contractual approaches and procedures);
- the systematisation of various local *processi perequativi* (equalisation of land transformation gains) at a local and supra-local level;
- the introduction of ex-ante and ex-post evaluation of plans and programmes with various processes, from environmental assessment to integrative approaches, which aim to assess the impact of spatial transformation on the territorial system.

These themes have been relevant to almost all the new regional laws, but the way they are dealt with varies considerably as a consequence of the heterogeneity of norms and spatial planning approaches. Nevertheless, common trends can be highlighted, in particular with regard to two main aspects: (i) a shift from 'urban planning' to 'territorial governance', with the remit of spatial planning expanded from the compliance-oriented control of land uses towards the integration of territorially-relevant policies and the introduction of public-private collaboration; (ii) growing adoption of strategic spatial planning approaches and techniques, in particular in urban planning, leading to the more or less formal subdivision of the PRGC into two different instruments, one of a more strategic nature and the other devoted to regulating land use (*piano strutturale* and *piano operativo*).

Overall, the various regions present significant differences in terms of instruments and their names, procedures, objectives and functions, which also depends on the time when each law was developed and approved. The lack of a coherent national legal framework and the delegation of new planning laws to the regional authorities have led to those reforming trends that have animated the national spatial planning discourse over time impacting the various regions in different ways. The cohabitation of 21 regional spatial planning systems in the country can be seen in the varying timeline of regional legislation in this sphere (Figure 2).



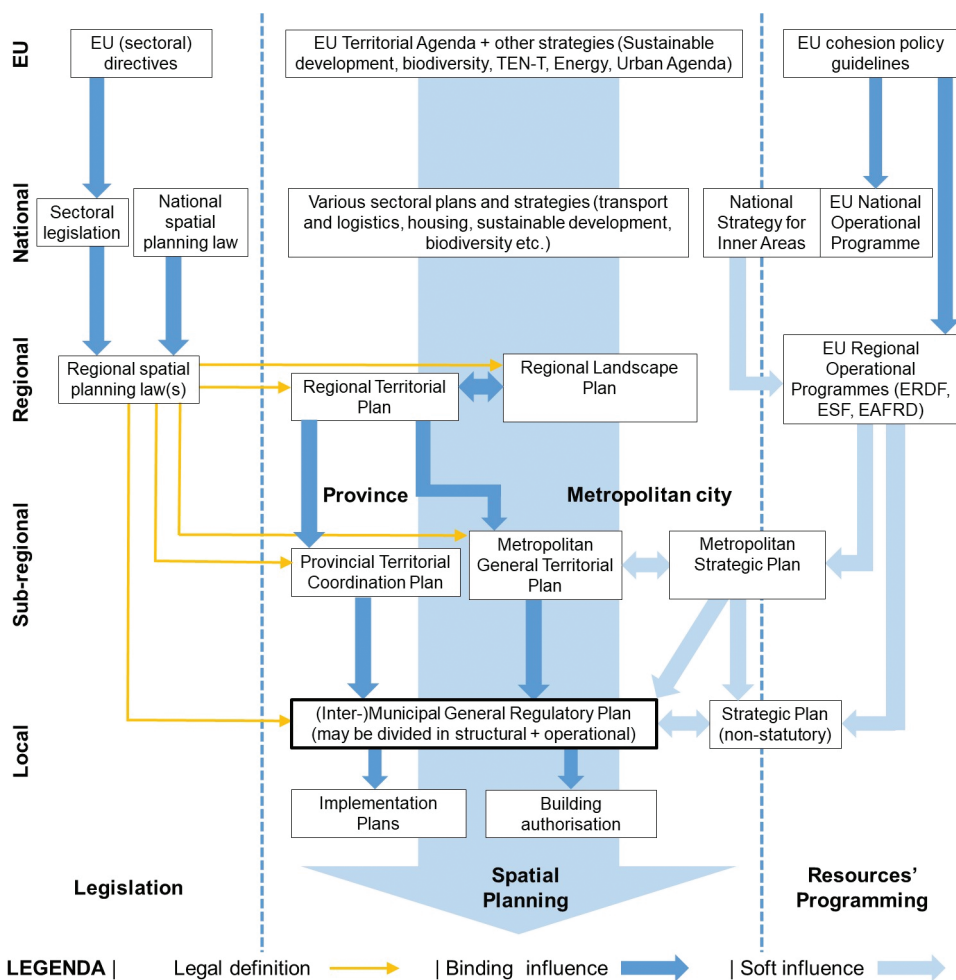
**Figure 2.** Chronological evolution of regional spatial planning legislation

**Source:** personal elaboration on INU, 2016.

## Subdivision of competences and the main spatial planning instruments

Spatial planning competences are assigned to different levels of government (state, regions, provinces, metropolitan cities and municipalities), which are tasked with defining regulations and instruments, organised in a mostly hierarchical way. The production of spatial planning tools is, however, solely a competence of regions,

provinces and metropolitan cities, which are supposed to define orientations for the territorial transformation of their respective territories, and of the municipalities, which prepare the main spatial planning instrument around which the system pivots – the PRGC (Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** The spatial governance and planning system in Italy. Legislation, plans and programmes  
**Source:** author's own elaboration.

In the light of the shared legislative competences between the state and the regions, the state should define the general guidelines for planning activity and specify land-use guidelines through deliberative acts for which there are no corresponding planning instruments of direct relevance. More specifically, the Ministry of Infrastructures and Transport (*Ministero delle Infrastrutture e dei Trasporti*) owns

the formal national competences for spatial planning. Through time, the ministry has also been responsible for producing a number of sectoral plans, such as the National Housing Plan (*Piano per la Casa*) and the General Plan for Transport and Logistics (*Piano Generale dei Trasporti e della Logistica*). Within this ministry, the National Council of Public Works is a technical advisory body supporting the ministry and the regions concerning all relevant spatial planning matters and especially those related to the provision of public interventions. The Ministry for Southern Italy and Territorial Cohesion (*Ministero per il mezzogiorno e la coesione territoriale*) manages the development funds for the Italian regions, with particular attention to the EU funds and the relations with the sub-national levels (first and foremost regions and metropolitan cities). Within this framework, particularly relevant is the National Strategy for Inner Areas (*Strategia Nazionale per le Aree Interne*), which was introduced in parallel to the 2014–2020 programming period and which is currently being overhauled (more information in the section below) (Cotella & Vitale Brovarone, 2020). Other ministries are responsible for managing sectoral strategies and policies, such as those related to environmental protection, biodiversity, water, energy, etc., which may potentially have a more or less direct impact on spatial planning activities at the lower levels. Importantly, between 1950 and 1992 a special body called *Cassa del Mezzogiorno* was responsible for financing the infrastructural and industrial development of the southern regions of the country (Felice & Lepore, 2017). However, at the central level no comprehensive spatial plan or spatial orientations were ever produced, if one excludes sporadic initiatives throughout the 1970s (the *Progetto '80*. Renzoni & Ruffolo, 2012) and the 2010s (the *Piattaforme Territoriali*) (Fabbro & Mesolella, 2010).

The regions must produce a Regional Territorial Plan (*Piano territoriale regionale*) for their own territory, taking into consideration any relevant state-level guideline. This instrument presents the main orientation for socio-economic and spatial development, addressing the issues of environmental protection and infrastructures. It indicates objectives, methods and norms, which are, however, scarcely prescriptive. However, this plan is legally binding for the sub-regional levels, which themselves have to establish coherent plans. Due to the abovementioned varied evolution of the heterogeneous regional laws, regional territorial plans are nowadays different in form, functions, procedures and even denominations (*Piano urbanistico territoriale* in Umbria, *Piano territoriale regionale generale* in Lazio, *Piano territoriale regionale* in Emilia Romagna, Piedmont, and Veneto, etc.). However, recent reforms have been united in the attempt to overcome the traditional approach to spatial planning through the introduction of more strategic-oriented instruments.

Provinces and metropolitan cities are responsible for the coordination of municipal planning activities, and they pursue this function through the Provincial Territorial Coordination Plan (*Piano territoriale di coordinamento provinciale*) and the Metropolitan General Territorial Plan (*Piano territoriale generale metropolitano*) respectively. This instrument contains prescriptions and indications for land



use, to which local authorities must conform in the exercise of their respective competences. It determines guidelines for the different zonings according to the predominant use, and may also issue prescriptions limiting land consumption on the basis of the existing building density. It also defines the sites for major infrastructure and lines of communication, the areas for erosion prevention and water flow control, and the areas for nature reserves or parks. The plan covers the whole provincial/metropolitan territory and has no time limit. The provinces/metropolitan cities can also issue comments regarding local PRGCs (supervisory competence), which are, however, neither mandatory nor binding. Overall, the procedure for the making and approval of the provincial plan may vary according to the different regional legislative frameworks. In addition to the above, all metropolitan cities must design and implement a Strategic Metropolitan Plan (*Piano strategico metropolitano*, lasting for three years) to coordinate and orient spatial development. In doing so, each metropolitan city is allowed to specify a sub-division of its territory and design a statute in order to organise and specify its competences and spatial tools. Each region can assign other competences to the metropolitan city. Metropolitan Strategic Plans should be consistent with the development vision promoted by the Regional Territorial Plan, and constitute a reference for the plans produced by the municipalities.

Municipalities (alone or joined in unions) are obliged to prepare the (Inter-) Municipal General Regulatory Plan. This instrument defines land use for the whole territory of the municipality(ies) it concerns. While PRGCs are usually provided with one or more implementation tools, they also allow for direct implementation by owners through building permits. It has no time limit and its provisions are in force until they are varied or replaced by a new plan. Monitoring is not formally envisaged, however regional regulations usually require municipalities to submit the plan to periodic reviews. The plan regulates land use and indicates the main communication routes, public areas, areas for public buildings, protection for the environment and landscape, etc., and prescribes, through implementation regulations, the physical and functional status of the individual zones of the territory. The plan-making procedure is determined by regional law and the region (or the province acting on its behalf) traditionally assesses the plan.

The varying regional spatial planning legislation has led to considerable heterogeneity in how the PRGC looks in the different regions. Overall, the main distinction is between the traditional form and a reformed configuration, which divides the instrument into a structural/strategic plan and an operational plan. In terms of the formal orientation of the different regional systems (Properzi, 2003; Janin Rivolin, 2008), at least three planning models can be observed (De Luca & Lingua, 2012):

- a classical compliance-oriented model in regions that have not yet reformed their urban planning laws (Piedmont, Sicily, Sardinia, Marche, Umbria,

Valle d'Aosta) and that are still regulated by National Law no. 1150/1942 and its principles;

- a hybrid model, in which the distinction between the structural and operational levels is part of a hierarchical traditional system (Liguria, Emilia Romagna, Apulia, Veneto, Lazio, Friuli Venetia Giulia, Campania, Basilicata, Abruzzi, Calabria);
- a performance-oriented model, based on non-hierarchical and collaborative planning processes in which each institutional level approves its own instruments after activating contractual processes with the other institutions and stakeholders involved (e.g. Tuscany) and with strong interaction with private stakeholders (e.g. Lombardy).

## Long-term strategy for spatial planning

### **From the *Cassa del Mezzogiorno* to the National Strategy for Inner Areas: A renewed role for the Italian central government**

Since the country's unification in 1861, Italy's spatial, economic and social organisation has been characterised by a strong north-south divide. The so-called *questione meridionale* (southern issue) imposed itself on the attention of policy-makers, leading to the introduction of policies explicitly focusing on the development of the southern regions, one of which is the abovementioned *Cassa del Mezzogiorno*, which ran from 1950 to 1992. Despite this attention, regional economic planning was kept separate from spatial planning, and did not produce any impact on the system. Any attempt to establish a closer relation between spatial planning, economic programming and sectoral policies have usually proved unsuccessful. The 1988 reform of the Structural Funds eventually contributed to the termination of the *Cassa* and to a reorientation of the logic of Italian regional policy towards those governance principles and mechanisms that were brought in for the first time by the new cohesion policy. The unconditional, unmonitored distribution of resources to southern regional and local authorities had to come to terms with the exogenous conditions that the European Commission had attached to the distribution and use of the Structural Funds.

In 1996, the Department for Development and Cohesion Policies was created to plan and manage Structural Funds and the new regional policy tools that came with them, a procedure that constituted a radical innovation to Italian custom (Janin Rivolin, 2003). This shift has been further fuelled by the emergence of the

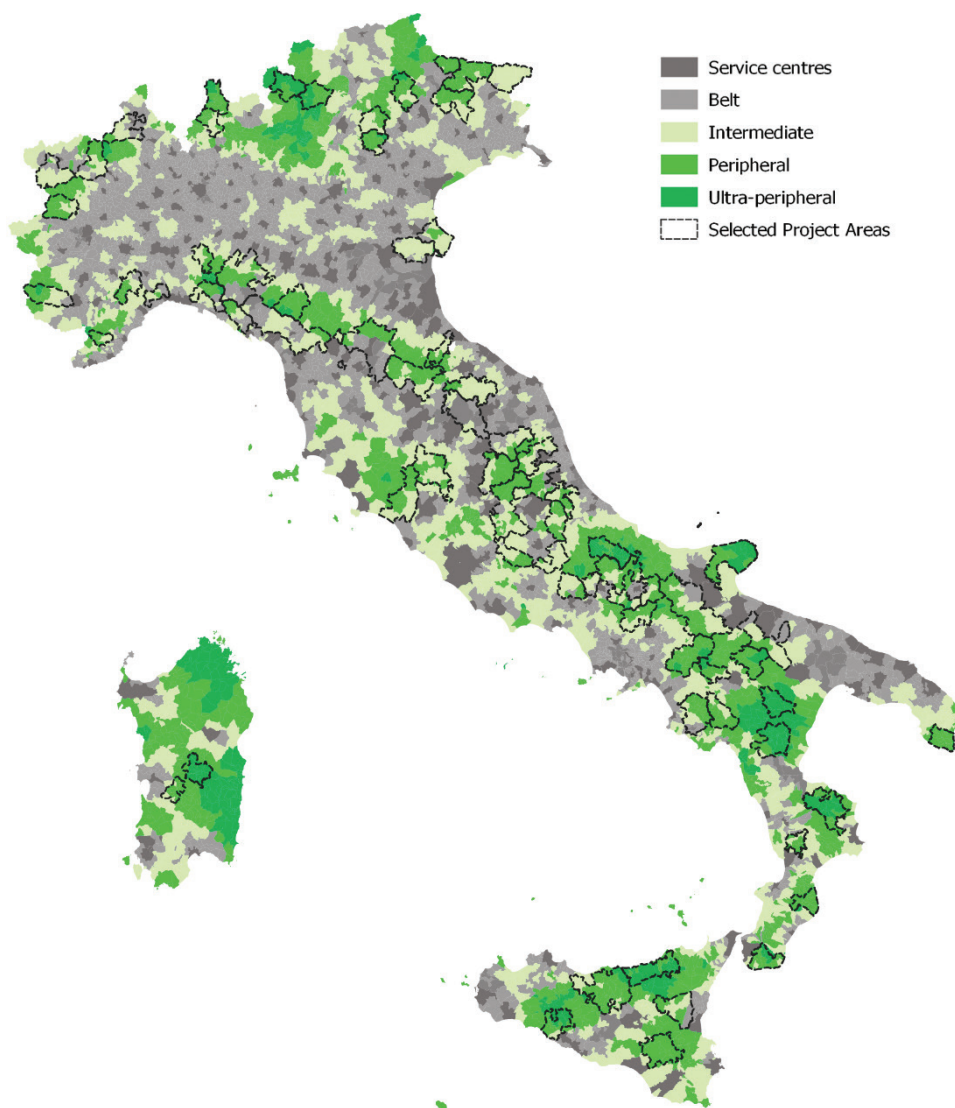


*place-based approach* at the EU level in the so-called Barca Report (Barca, 2009). The author of the report Fabrizio Barca, a renowned Italian regional economist, was invited to lead the newborn Ministry for Territorial Cohesion. He dedicated the first year of his mandate to conceive a national development strategy that could turn into practice the main concepts that he had detailed in the homonymous report. Launched in 2012, the National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI) targets those territories that are at a significant distance from centres with essential service provisions (Barca et al., 2014). Inner areas, typically small and sparsely populated, are affected by severe phenomena of ageing, depopulation and impoverishment. At the same time, they often feature important environmental and cultural resources. The overall objective of the SNAI is to reverse the decline of these areas, triggering a trend reversal of those processes that had led to their socio-economic and structural fragility. In so doing, the SNAI moves away from the traditional north–south dichotomy, acknowledging access to services throughout the country as an essential precondition for development. At the same time, it positions itself as a one-of-a-kind experience in Europe, thanks to the way it details the EU place-based approach into a national regional policy. For the first time, the potentials of the national polycentric settlements structure for fostering development are valorised also in rural and mountain remote areas. To fulfil these objective, the SNAI is grounded on a two-pronged action (Barca et al., 2014):

- improving essential services, to provide inner areas with the ‘prerequisites’ for development, namely, health, education and mobility;
- triggering local development processes, by supporting projects focused on environmental sustainability, promotion of local cultural and natural capital, agro-food systems, renewable energies, craftsmanship and traditional know-how.

According to the principle of concentration which underpins the EU cohesion policy (Barca, 2009), the SNAI does not act on all the municipalities classified as internal, but concentrates on project areas, appropriately selected. The selection of the areas is grounded on a thorough methodology defined by the Technical Committee for Inner Areas (CTAI). As the definition of inner areas applies to those territories that have limited or inadequate access to essential services, the first step was to map the ‘service centres’ on the basis of the presence of: (i) a full range of secondary education; (ii) at least one first-level emergency care hospital; and (iii) at least a medium-capacity railway station. After the service centres were identified, the remaining municipalities were classified in four categories, based on their distance from such centres: (i) outlying areas (less than 20’ away); (ii) intermediate areas (from 20’–40’ away); (iii) peripheral areas (from 40’–75’ away); and (iv) ultra-peripheral areas (more than 75’ away). All municipalities belonging to the last three categories (intermediate, peripheral and ultra-peripheral) were labelled as inner areas. They account for 53 per cent of Italian municipalities, 61 per cent of its territory, and host 23 per cent of the Italian population. To define a list of eligible

areas, the CTAI further investigated these areas through desk and field research. Then, each region was required to formally select the project areas to be involved in the SNAI (Figure 4). Overall, 72 project areas were selected (from two to five areas per region), interesting more than 1,000 municipalities, and accounting for over 2 million inhabitants.



**Figure 4.** Carachterisation of the Italian Territory through the SNAI methodology  
**Source:** author's own elaboration on Barca et al., 2014.

## **The rise of strategic planning at the municipal level**

Over the last three decades, as a consequence of the above stimuli and without any significant reform of the national legislative framework, dozens of Italian cities of large and medium size (such as Rome, Milan, Turin, Florence, and Genoa, but also La Spezia, Pesaro, Trento), as well as spontaneous aggregations of municipalities have started to adopt strategic plans, adding to or integrating statutory local plans. Strategic spatial planning activity at the (inter-)municipal level is not regulated by any specific law. Strategic plans are based on a voluntary cooperation process among various public and private subjects that together decide on a shared development trajectory, define some strategic objectives and engage in the realisation of a certain number of actions. In this way, local actors seek to address the problem of coordination between different public institutions and the need to integrate and reconcile economic interests, social and cultural representative organisations. The role of private subjects is crucial, not only for financial issues but even more for the knowledge and consensus needed to realise effective interventions requiring a high coordination capacity.

These experiences are interesting for two main reasons. The first concerns the rise of a so-called 'cities protagonism' (Bagnasco & Le Galès, 2000) deriving from the economic and political changes brought about by globalisation. In this context, many Italian cities adopted strategic planning as a tool to address the challenges of the crisis of the Fordist industrialisation model and to support the local economy and employment in the face of growing international competition. The second reason is a reaction to the (at least) partial erosion of the sovereignty of the nation state (Sassen, 1996) and to its reduced redistributive capacity, with cities that had to learn how to coordinate public and private 'actors, social groups and institutions in order to reach objectives which have been collectively discussed and defined in fragmented, even nebulous environments' (Bagnasco & Le Galès, 2000, p. 26).

## **Public participation in spatial planning**

The EU's key principles (subsidiarity, integration, partnership, sustainability, etc.) contributed to producing a remarkable impact on the technical and administrative culture of regional and local authorities, especially throughout the 1990s and 2000s. The Italian municipalities started to experiment with the EU URBAN programmes (Urban Pilot Projects, URBAN Community Initiative) and those regeneration programmes and instruments that have been introduced through

time by the Italian government in response (Janin Rivolin, 2003). This led to an increasingly fertile dissemination of good practices and to triggering additional innovation through emulation and dispersion. A growing and spreading awareness of the territorial governance possibilities offered by the EU has given a great impetus to the increasing sophistication of Italian spatial planning systems, with some regions (Piedmont, Tuscany, Puglia, Sicily, etc.) gradually introducing their own programmes and mechanisms for urban regeneration.

As a result, the sectoral and hierarchical orientation that traditionally characterised public policies was put into question through new forms of cooperation, collaborative and negotiated activities between the various sectors and levels of the public administration. In particular, the involvement and participation of voluntary committees, associations and citizens in the development of action programmes, allowing fuller use of the social resources available for urban policies and a strengthening of the legitimacy and effectiveness of the actions taken, has had significant implications. Furthermore, the urban programmes introduced by the EU in the 1990s have triggered a large set of innovative practices. For example, the emphasis on distinct areas of a city/territory (run-down neighbourhoods, deprived urban areas, places of excellence, etc.) progressively deconstructed monolithic concepts like 'urban system' or 'city planning' (Cremaschi, 2002). Other innovations concern the promotion of thematic networks and programmes, which has facilitated an increase in the number of actors involved in urban policies, with a strengthening of their capabilities of self-organisation into aggregations that are adaptable according to specific issues or situations.

Through time, new institutional and non-institutional actors and practices have come to populate Italian spatial planning and, although the termination of the URBAN Community Initiative seems to have reduced the national momentum, its legacy remains. The relation between the new instruments and the traditional ones in terms of timing and character remains rather problematic. As things are, the risk of confusion and distortion is counterbalanced by the chance for genuine product and process innovation in the methods and styles of urban and territorial governance. In this perspective, urban planners started to be progressively involved in the design and implementation of innovative 'plans', not only in the sense of a new interpretation of the urban planner's traditional work (Laino, 2002).

The above changes are recognised and generally welcome within the country's spatial planning debate. The new principles are seen, at least in general terms, as a redesign of the relationships between the state, the local authorities and civil society. Whereas the relevance of these changes varies from region to region and between local contexts, there is no doubt that some innovations have been introduced, which seem to recognise and validate the role of actors and resources traditionally excluded from decision-making processes, and resulting in an overall redefinition of political and administrative action. This is confirmed by the centrality

assumed by local authorities in a very wide range of policies and by the confirmation and consolidation of a number of regulatory institutions that are intended to simplify and streamline the work shared by public authorities at various levels and, eventually, to define a contractual model for interaction between public and private actors (Governa & Salone, 2005).

This occurred through a number of legislative changes throughout the 1990s, which redefined competences among central and local levels, and brought about cooperative modes among public subjects (vertically and horizontally) and between public administrations and private subjects. More specifically, these reforms introduced a number of institutional tools to carry out vertical and horizontal governance:

- the *Accordo di programma* (Programme Agreement; Law no. 142/1990, Art. 8), an instrument for coordinating inter-institutional partnerships, which was already used during the 1980s as an extraordinary measure to implement public works for which particularly rapid procedures were necessary and to enable automatic variation of the urban planning instruments in force;
- the *Conferenza dei servizi* (Conference of Services; Law no. 241/1990, Art. 14), a contractual procedure for coordinating public actors at various levels but which, in contrast to the *Accordo di programma*, binds the contracting administration only to a particular intervention;
- the *Intesa istituzionale di programma* (Programme Institutional Agreement; Law no. 662/1996, Art. 203), which involves negotiations to coordinate actions taken by administrations or agencies;
- the *Accordo di programma quadro* (Framework Programming Agreement; Law no. 662/1996, Art. 203), which is a contractual model for public-private partnerships.

Overall, the adopted provisions are an attempt to alter the institutional system, reforming the monitoring process and the division of competences and powers between the state, the regions and local authorities in pursuit of a simplification of administrative action and of higher levels of efficiency in public administration (Governa & Salone, 2005).

## Main challenges of spatial planning of tourism destinations

Italy boasts a long tradition in relation to Tourism, that dates back to the XVII<sup>th</sup> and XVIII<sup>th</sup> Centuries Grand Tours. Mass tourism in the country rose rapidly after WWII, following up an increasing trend that had characterised the XIX Century and that

has only been interrupted by the Economic crisis of the 1930s and the gloomy period under the Fascist Regime. The Italian economic miracle, raising living standards and media products as the movie *La Dolce Vita* helped raise Italy's international profile. Similarly, internal tourism was boosted by the higher incomes. Coastline resorts saw a soar in visitors and, since the late-1960s also mountain holidays and skiing chiefted mass-popularity, especially in the Alpine Area. Overall, with 94 million tourists per year (2018), Italy is the third most visited country in international tourism arrivals, with 217.7 million foreign visitors nights spent and a total of 432.6 million visitors (ISTAT, 2018). According to estimates by the Bank of Italy of 2018, the tourism sector directly generates more than 5% of the national GDP (13% considering also the indirectly generated GDP) and represents over 6% of the employed (Bank of Italy, 2019). People mainly visit Italy for its rich culture, cuisine, history, fashion and art, its coastline and beaches, its mountains, and priceless ancient monuments. Italy also contains more World Heritage Sites than any other country in the world. As of 2018, the Italian places of culture (which include museums, attractions, parks, archives and libraries) amounted to 6,610. Active hotel businesses are 33,000, while non-hotel businesses are 183,000. The tourist flow in the coastal resorts is 53%. Italy overall had 420.63 million visitor nights in 2017, of which 210.66 million were of foreign guests (50.08 percent) (Bank of Italy, 2019).

Due to the heterogeneous nature of tourism activities in the country, the challenges that spatial planning of tourism destinations has to face are various and multifaceted. Among them, it is worth listing:

- promotion of tourism-related development in the inner area of the country, characterised by a large share of natural and landscape resources but often featuring low level of accessibility and services and scarce institutional capacity due to their reduced size;
- overtourism phenomena in the most renowned coastal and mountain areas in the peak tourism period, that due to their seasonality do not justify the increase of basic services and their maintenance all-year-around. At the same time, they also endanger the natural and landscape value of these areas due to overexploitation;
- overtourism phenomena in the main touristic cities, that generates challenges in relation to services as well as to the emergence of short-term rental activities to the detriment of long-term rentals (and a rise in their prices). In addition, it also put at risk the preservation of cultural heritage.

Overall, traditional spatial planning activities appears ill-equipped to deal with these challenges. The land-use regulation approach that has characterised the country through time has mostly focused on the provision of increasing land-use and development rights, but does not seem able neither to promote tourism in those inner area that would benefit from increasing tourism dynamics as an engine for development, nor to strategically re-orient tourism activities in those areas that are interested by overtourism.



A number of activities exists that constitute a partial exception to this picture:

- **Landscape planning.** The country has a long tradition in landscape planning, that dates back to the 1940s and has been reinforced by the so-called Legge Galasso in 1985 (Law no. 431/1985). Since 2004, Italian regions are responsible for producing Regional Landscape Plans, introduced by national law to adapt to the European Landscape Convention (COE, 2000). Since 2004, Landscape planning became the essential compulsory step for the conservation, planning and management of the regional landscape, with its extension to the whole regional territory, with the provision of different degrees of protection in relation to the recognition of landscape values and the consequent assignment of landscape quality objectives, as well as recovery interventions in degraded areas, in obedience to the indications emerging from the European Landscape Convention. These objectives imply that the protection of the landscape should not be restricted to mere conservation and preservation, but should extend to the regulation of all human intervention intended to affect the landscape. In this perspective, the main instrument with which every intervention is correctly oriented with respect to landscape profiles is planning, which constitutes a direct instrument with which, consciously, the modalities through which certain modifications of the landscape must take place are prescribed. Landscape plans cover the entire regional territory and have two main purposes: (i) a cognitive purpose, focusing on the analysis of regional landscape features (natural, cultural, property) and transformation dynamics in order to identify the risk factors and vulnerabilities of the landscape, and to address other acts of programming, planning and land protection; (ii) a directive purpose with legally binding measures (*prescrizioni*), requirements for adaptation measures (*direttive*) and simple recommendations (*indirizzi*) for sub-regional plans and sectoral plans. Finally, regions play a supervisory role consisting of regulating and controlling sub-regional spatial planning activities (provinces, metropolitan city and municipalities).
- **The National Strategy for Inner Areas.** As already introduced above, the SNAI lays at the intersection between top-down and bottom-up logics, acknowledging the national level as the most suitable for the provision of prerequisites for development, and the local level as the best standpoint to identify the potentials for local development. In this light, the provision of prerequisites for development, in terms of education, health and mobility, is funded with national funds. Examples of such interventions are: the reorganisation of educational facilities with the creation of new facilities in barycentric positions within the areas, replacing inefficient facilities spread over the territory; the reorganisation of health provision to provide better access to diagnosis and emergency services; and the adjustment and improvement of transport services, including flexible solutions and

better access to rail networks (Barca et al., 2014). At the same time, local development projects are defined by local actors and funded with European funds. The regions play a key role in this respect, since they manage both the Regional Operational Programmes (ROP) and the Rural Development Programmes (RDP) and they decide on the amount of ESIF to be devoted to the SNAI through such programmes. Furthermore, the regions flag up the strategic objectives, the time-frames and the financial resources set aside, setting percentages, axis, etc. In this light, the regional level acts as the hinge of connection and mediation between the central level and the local actors, and the latter are responsible for defining development goals and directions according to each place's specificities. The methodology of the strategy foresees focus groups and meetings to involve all relevant stakeholders. The process of implementation of the SNAI begins with the definition of a draft strategy by all involved actors, which identifies the guiding principles for development. Then, the strategy is fine-tuned, translating ideas into targets, actions and procedural frameworks. In the selected areas, the SNAI acts as a coordination platform between domestic (mostly national and regional) and European resources. National programming funds (defined by the Italian Stability Law) are combined with all the European Structural and Investment funds (ESIF): European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund (ESF), European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF). When it comes to its governance, the SNAI brings local actors (public administrations, third sector and private actors) at the core of the process. The association of local actors is a prerequisite for project areas to be selected. More precisely, local authorities are asked to be organised in formal supralocal associated entities (i.e. for the management of services), as, for instance, Union of Municipalities. At the same time, the SNAI acknowledges the need for regional and national action, with actors at these levels that should play coordination and steering roles. This makes the SNAI a multilevel, multi-actor and multi-fund process.

- **Local strategic planning.** The central element of Italian strategic planning consists of a document with a vision for the city and its surrounding territory, pivoted around a number of strategic topic areas, that are then articulated into several thematic threads and projects. Strategic areas identified obviously vary in each situation, but some of the most common and recurrent fields are international and European integration, institutional cooperation, urban quality, local welfare, technological innovation, culture and tourism. The temporal horizon they consider is usually around 10–15 years. This is made potentially possible because strategic plans are not the product of a specific administration (bound to a 4 or 8 years life span) but of a city as a whole (which in principle,



remains). Despite not having any legal value, these instruments are in most case the product of a long process of interaction and concertation among all relevant stakeholders in the city territory, and the result is a vision that is shared among them. This guarantee a certain commitment to the vision from the actors that contributed to conceive it and, in turn, the fact that their action will follow suit. The first instrument of this kind has been introduced in Torino in 2000. A recent example in this concern is the Strategic Plan for Tourism in Rome 2019–2025 (Municipality of Rome, 2018). Interestingly, these types of strategies have been also used to catalyse the political action of public and private actors on joint vision with a specific goal, as for instance the presentation of the candidature of the Langhe-Roero and Monferrato wine area to UNESCO Landscape Heritage Site (World Heritage Committee, 2014).

## Summary

Summarizing, the main challenges of spatial planning for tourism destinations in Italy concerns:

- The fact that traditional land-use planning is ill-equipped to deal with the issue, as it is mostly conceived as an activity that provides (or deny) land-use rights.
- The fact that the challenges related to tourism are highly heterogeneous, ranging from the need to promote tourism activity in scarcely accessible inne areas to the mitigation of the negative externalities of overtourism in the main tourism destination, to the specific challenges of mountain and coastal areas.

At the same time, a number of oportunties seems to exists.

- The existence of a consolidated landscape planning system attached to spatial planning, that guarantee some sort of prescriptive power to the regions over landscape issues.
- The recent introduction of a regional development strategy that specifically focusing on valorising the specific development potentials of inner areas from a place based perspective.
- The progressive consolidation of a strategic planning activity that, albeit non-statutory, allows the development of virtuous public-private partnership as well ad virtuous multi-level governance dynamics, aiming at the production of joint development visions and at their implementation.

## Additional reading

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