

Thesis Abstract

Climate Change Response and the Reshaping of Urban Governance

-

Implementing Next Generation Europe in Genoa and Lisbon

--

Niccolò AIMO

This publication is part of the project PNRR-NGEU which has received funding from the MUR – DM 351/2022

Abstract

This monograph inquires how local policymakers manage the relation between international climate goals and place-based priorities. This issue is grounded in an established debate around climate and environmental policy, in which the interconnection between international and local agendas emerges with lights and shades. The recent introduction of Next Generation EU (NGEU) offers an opportunity to observe similar dynamics. The research inquires the local implementation of NGEU with a particular focus on how the environmental component of the programme (stemming from the EU Green Deal) has been integrated in local expenditure.

At the core of the research, is the questions of whether and how local actors have used NGEU funds to integrate environmental actions into local investments. These questions are linked to policy integration theory, which studies how different policy sectors interact when facing intersectoral issues. The existence of frequent implementation gaps between integrated policy designs and their realization is the theoretical aspect to which this research contributes more strongly.

Methodologically, the research is positioned within a critical realist paradigm of social inquiry, guiding the translation of ontological and epistemological beliefs into methodological choices and techniques. Using a qualitative case-study methodology, the research analyses the cases of Genoa and Lisbon, focusing on an in-depth reconstruction of local causal patterns.

Empirical findings show that municipalities played a central role in implementing NGEU, and that their actions largely followed pre-existing path-dependent trajectories. In this context, results also show that NGEU gave little stimulus to environmental integration, either substantively or procedurally. Three causal mechanisms explain why: tokenism, the nominal compliance with environmental requirements; budgeting, the centrality of money distribution in reproducing sectoral boundaries; and deprioritization, the subordination of environmental integration to other priorities. Together, these mechanisms reveal how institutional constraints shape actor's choices, incentivising the reproduction of policy fragmentation.