

*The Strategy for Inland Areas Serving as a New Local Development Model for Italy*

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This paper illustrates the innovative features of the National Strategy for Inland Areas (Italian SNAI), a territorial public policy intervention tested in Italy in the context of the European cohesion policy. Launched in 2013, it has passed through the screening of six successive governments and has been included in the National Reform Plan as well as in the 2014-2020 Partnership Agreement.

SNAI aim is to reverse the depopulation trend in the «inland areas» of our country, identified through a national map that classifies the municipalities based on «distance indices» with respect to the territorial centres (both municipal and intermunicipal) where the supply of the main citizenship services – i.e., education, health and (railway) mobility – is organized. Such trial involves 1,077 Municipalities (13% of Italian municipalities), re-articulated in 72 project areas distributed in all Italian regions, totalling 2,072,718 inhabitants (3.4% of the population) who live on a territory 51,366 sq km wide (16.7% of the Italian territory). This Strategy works with an open method, promoting an «experimentalist approach» and «coplanning » techniques capable of encouraging a collective learning process of all the central, regional and local administrations involved as well as stimulating the broader participation of citizens in the local development. Municipalities, as the institutional level closest to citizens, are placed at the centre of the planning process.

They represent «the basic unit of the political decision-making process» and, in the form of contiguous aggregation (through the creation of «permanent territorial systems» where functions and services are exercised in association), they offer «the institutional area» for the contextual implementation of public services and promotion of investment projects for local development. This is a first and radical method innovation promoted by the Strategy. Nonetheless, profound innovations are registered in the field of the management of educational services in small schools, in the organization of the local welfare of social and health services, in the field of mobility, of interventions in agriculture, in the protection and sustainable use of the territory, etc. The Strategy, through the Framework Programme Agreements signed to date, has mobilized financial resources (both national and Eu) up to approximately 700 million euros. At full speed, in the 72 areas concerned, the investment volume will exceed one billion euros.