



Integrated territorial development under ‘Toscana Diffusa’

Anchoring rural areas in the National and Regional Partnership Plans

Brussels, 3 June 2026



An invisible inequality in territorial access

A territorial inequality generated not by a lack of funding, but by the unequal capacity of territories and local **actors to access and combine policy instruments at local level** (“second-level inequalities”)



2014–2020

Opening and Initial Response

UE — opened the possibility for multi-funded CLLD (Reg. 1303/2013), extending LEADER logic across cohesion funds.

Italy — implemented the framework only partially, with a few regional experiments (Sicily, Puglia).

Result — fragmented instruments operating in parallel (SNAI, FLAG, LEADER); integration is achieved only by those territories that are locally capable of doing so.



2021–2027 · EARDF from 2023

The national framework moves backwards

UE — regulatory framework broadly unchanged.

Italy — National framework moved backwards: CLLD marginalised, LEADER reduced to EARDF only, integration weakened, integration confined to declaratory intentions

Regions and Territories — seek their own solutions: framework mechanisms, ranking criteria, and implementation entrusted to LAGs.



2028–2034

The danger of repeating past shortcomings

For CLLD and LAGs, the framework may appear unchanged, but the underlying differences are significant (for example, LEADER without ringfencing and reframed within a sectoral diversification approach).

The risk is that the same mechanisms may be reproduced **under less favourable conditions**.

Italy is a unique “policy laboratory”

This multiplicity is not accidental — it reflects a **public policy choice** to interpret needs through specialised instruments

EU INSTRUMENTS

- NSIA (inner/peripheral areas)
- FLAG/EMFAF (coastal)
- LEADER (rural)

NATIONAL/REGIONAL SECTORAL LAWS

- Planning · Health · Mobility
- Education · Agriculture · Culture
- Commons, ...

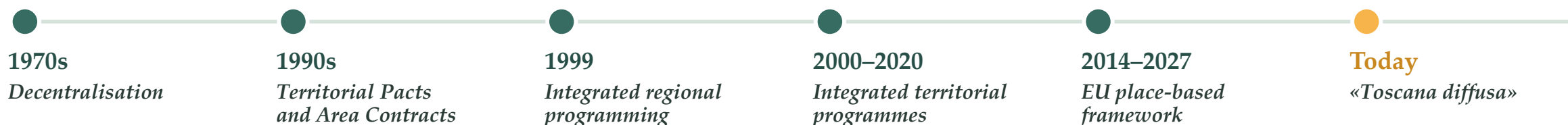
SPECIAL FRAMEWORKS

- Food Districts
- Organic Farming Districts
- Smart Villages

In this framework, LEADER has often filled the space originally intended for multi-fund CLLD

Tuscany as a useful model

A mature ecosystem of integrated territorial planning dating back to mid 1970's, where participation is an embedded infrastructure



Comparable to many Member States

- Population and territorial size similar to several EU countries.
- Offers a realistic model for policy integration at regional level.

An integrated territorial governance ecosystem

- A consolidated bottom-up participatory approach to policy design
- Focus on social capital accumulation, community regeneration, and innovative models for local development

Toscana diffusa (Regional law n.11/2025)

A holistic, cross-cutting framework to **fine-tune** regional policies

- 
Coordination Device: a pragmatic mechanism of integration without institutional overhaul:
 → not a "single fund" but a strong coordination device.
- 
Flexible Perimeters: boundaries are not set in stone; they are update based on technical criteria (density, peripherality, geomorphological constraints).
- 
Horizontal Integration: encompasses all policies and actors (regional offices, agencies).
- 
Vertical Integration: explicitly aligns NSIA, CAP, EU Cohesion policy 21-27, and National funds.
 Foresees multi-level cooperation agreements
- 
No Duplication: designed to channel national and European instruments, not compete with them.

An overarching umbrella

Themes



Public services provision (digitalisation, transports, health and education)



Territory enhancement (urban regeneration, energy resilience, ecosystem good and services, rural and natural capital protection)



(Re)Location of new economic activities and residents



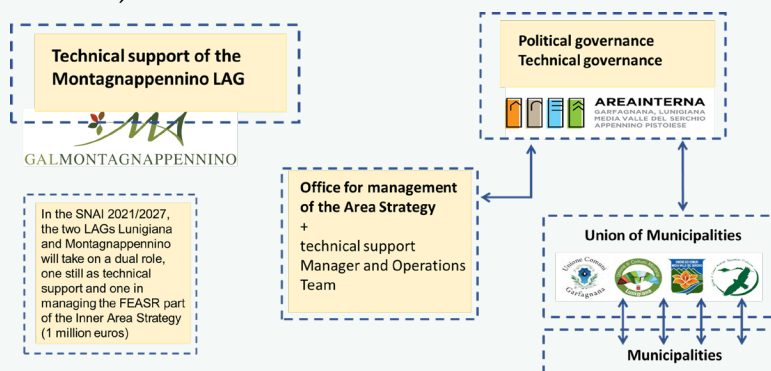
Identity (preservation of cultural and historical heritage, agrobiodiversity, commons)

Tools

- Financial incentives, by introducing specific **selection criteria or dedicated resources** in general call for proposals
- Compensatory or fiscal measures, e.g. for newly established general practitioner (**GP**) or paediatricians, or commercial activities; for natural mineral **water spring towns**
- Shared **multi-level (regional/local) projects**

Integrated territorial strategies

- Same territory many instruments – an opportunity for synergic actions to maximise impacts.
 - one multi-fund strategy (EAFRD, ERDF, ESF+, national and regional resources)



- two specifically-designed calls launched by the LAG directly targeting regional law's specific territories and objectives
 - Non-productive investments in rural areas - INVEST(73-74)
 - Aid for non-agricultural productive investments in rural areas - INVEST(73-74)



Community re-generation project

Multisectoral policy integration to transcend traditional, **low-efficacy sectoral interventions**

Active stakeholder mobilisation by engaging a **diverse array** of civil society actors in co-designing local initiatives

Community-led aggregation to develop **tangible initiatives** to enhance public service accessibility and stimulate small-scale rural economic activities

Accumulation of social capital as a **demographic countermeasure** by fostering local relationship networks as the primary vehicle to mitigate the effects of shrinking populations and preserve territorial vitality



San Giovanni delle Contee

- Creation of **Sorano's** first hostel through the renovation of the former primary school.
- Redevelopment of the village square, public spaces, and street furniture to support events and festivals.
- New visitor rest areas along thematic walking routes.
- Support for traditional local businesses:
 - Maglificio Cecconi (knitwear workshop)
 - Historic barber/hairdresser
 - La Sciornaia winery
- Guided visits, heritage storytelling, and displays of historical photographs.
- Permanent exhibition of traditional barbering tools dating from the early 1900s.
- Expansion of community services through the Community Cooperative.
- An innovative way to promote tourism, local traditions, and regional products.



Lessons learnt — what integration actually requires

Helps



Existing local fabric: mature local partnerships and inter-municipal cooperation

Long-term collective learning, experience with multi-funding and common projects

Strong regional mediation through formal strategic arenas to combine public, private, and civic interests



Hinders

Administrative complexity and delays

Lack of stable networks and trust, instruments remain parallel rather than genuinely integrated

Fragmented local governance and weak institutional thickness

The lesson is simple: funds do not integrate territories by themselves — actors do

Towards the 2028–2034: tips for the future

Local capacity

Regional mediation

National architecture

The factors shaping outcomes are ranked in descending order of importance

WHY

Without enabling mechanisms, integration tends to remain concentrated in already well-equipped territories.



1 Reward substantial integration



2 Enable multi-sector local development strategies



3 Strengthen territorial innovation brokers and intermediaries



4 Support cooperation within and between territories



5 Guarantee preparatory support and ringfencing

Thank you for your attention!

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CLOCKWORK GOVERNANCE

50 YEARS OF PLACE-BASED INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT IN TUSCANY

A trajectory of institutional innovation from the 1970s to today

“The Tuscan model has progressively transformed territorial planning from a sectoral administrative function into an integrated, participatory and place-based governance ecosystem.”



ARCHAEOLOGY OF TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE

PARTICIPATION AS INFRASTRUCTURE



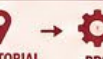
L.R. 69/2007
Norme sulla promozione della partecipazione

- Participation as a democratic right
- Deliberative democracy
- Experimental law (sunset clause until 2012)
- Innovative governance model in Italy
- Participatory construction of public policies



L.R. 46/2013
Dibattito pubblico regionale

- Public debate for strategic projects
- Institutionalized civic engagement
- Participatory support mechanisms
- Authority for Participation
- PartecipaToscana platform



Participation becomes: ordinary administrative practice, governance technology, territorial co-production mechanism

1 1970s DECENTRALIZATION & INTERMUNICIPAL PLANNING



COMPENSORI – L.R. 81/1975

- Infra-regional governance units
- Coordinated location of services and industrial zones
- Proto place-based governance

PIANI INTERCOMUNALI

- Voluntary cooperation among municipalities
- Management of demographic growth and industrial development
- Integration of transport, environment and social services
- Examples: Florence metropolitan area, Prato textile district



PISL / PASL
(2000–2006)

- First generation integrated local development programs
- Territorial partnerships
- Strategic coherence with PRS
- Local integrated projects



PIUSS → PIU
(2007–2020)

- Urban innovation and regeneration
- Urban redevelopment
- Public building retrofitting
- Digital infrastructure
- Social inclusion
- Urban resilience
- Examples: Prato al Futuro, Cecina

2 1990s NEGOTIATED PROGRAMMING



L.R. 26/1992
Programming +
Territorial Concertation

- First systematic linkage between economic programming and territorial planning (PTR)
- Concertation with municipalities, provinces and social partners
- Transition from sectoral planning to integrated governance

PATTI TERRITORIALI

- Local development agreements
- Public-private partnerships
- Revitalization of rural and district areas
- Examples: Maremma, Lunigiana

CONTRATTI DI AREA

- For areas in industrial crisis
- Targeted investments, incentives and flexibility
- Example: Piombino (steel crisis reconversion, logistics-port diversification)

PRS

PROGRAMMA REGIONALE DI SVILUPPO

From regional planning to integrated territorial governance

Supreme political-economic planning instrument of Tuscany. It coordinates regional strategy, budget, EU cohesion policy and territorial implementation.

MULTIFUND ARCHITECTURE
“Progetti regionali multifondo”



SPATIAL
PLANNING

ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT

WELFARE &
SOCIAL POLICY

ENVIRONMENT
& CLIMATE

INNOVATION &
DIGITALIZATION

PARTICIPATION &
INCLUSION

EVOLUTION PATH

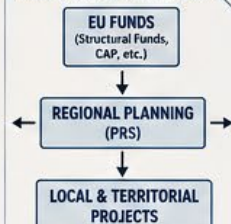


3 1999 STRUCTURAL TURN INTEGRATED REGIONAL PROGRAMMING

L.R. 49/1999
Norme in materia di
programmazione regionale

- PRS becomes the operational governance framework
- Integration of regional budget, EU funds and territorial programs
- Integrated territorial-economic programming
- Multifund governance
- Strategic coherence
- Performance orientation
- Multilevel governance

A NEW INTEGRATED ARCHITECTURE



Adapted to EU Structural Funds cycle 2000–2006 and beyond

Simplified by:
• L.R. 14/2012
• L.R. 67/2021
Aligned with DEFR



CONTRATTI DI FIUME
(2000s–today)
Environmental negotiated
governance

- Hydraulic risk mitigation
- Landscape enhancement
- Participatory watershed governance
- Climate adaptation
- Examples: Arno basin (Pesa, Era), Serchio basin



PID / PIT
(RURAL DEVELOPMENT)
(2007–today)

- Integrated agricultural and district governance
- Water management
- Emissions reduction
- Agro-environmental innovation
- Territorial supply chains
- Examples: Chianti wine district, Pistoia floriculture district

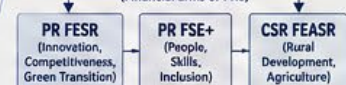


CURRENT PROGRAMMING CYCLES

2014–2020 2021–2027

PRS
(Regional Strategy)

EU PROGRAMMES
(Financial arms of PRS)



The PRS acts as:
• strategic macro-framework
• territorial coordination mechanism
• synchronization device between EU funding and local development systems

FROM REGIONAL PLANNING TO EU PLACE-BASED COHESION

GUIDING PRINCIPLES



PLACE-BASED APPROACH



BOTTOM-UP GOVERNANCE



TERRITORIAL COHESION



MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE



INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT



ADAPTIVE REGIONALISM

TOSCANA DIFFUSA

REGIONAL LAW N.11/2025

A NEW TERRITORIAL PARADIGM FOR
POLYCENTRIC AND PLACE-BASED
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Regional Law n.11/2025
Valorizzazione della Toscana Diffusa

Establishes a strategic framework to enhance fragile, inland and mountainous territories as fundamental assets for territorial cohesion, demographic resilience and sustainable development.

The law promotes integrated policies, innovative governance and targeted incentives to reduce territorial imbalances and ensure equal opportunities for all citizens.

KEY PRINCIPLES

- Place-based approach
- Polycentric regionalism
- Bottom-up governance
- Territorial justice
- Ecological transition
- Demographic resilience
- Integrated governance
- Rural-urban balance

WHY THE LAW WAS CREATED

STRUCTURAL TERRITORIAL IMBALANCES



TOSCANA DIFFUSA

REGIONAL LAW N.11/2025

From marginal areas to strategic territorial capital

Toscana Diffusa recognises fragile, and mountainous territories as strategic assets for regional cohesion, demographic resilience and sustainable development.



TERRITORIAL COHESION



EQUAL CITIZENSHIP



ACCESSIBILITY



REGENERATION



LOCAL IDENTITY



ECOLOGICAL TRANSITION



DIGITAL INCLUSION



PROXIMITY SERVICES



DEMOGRAPHIC REVITALISATION

THE GOVERNANCE ARCHITECTURE

TOSCANA DIFFUSA BECOMES A TRANSVERSAL STRATEGIC PRIORITY



FROM STRATEGY TO TERRITORIAL ACTION – IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS



PATTI PER LA TOSCANA DIFFUSA

Negotiated agreements between the Region and local authorities.

- Coordinated territorial investment
- Integrated local projects
- Multi-actor governance



INCENTIVE MECHANISMS

- Preferential access to funding
- Public realm improvement
- Territorial reward systems
- Strategic project prioritisation



REGENERATION PROGRAMMES

- Village regeneration
- Public realm improvement
- Reuse of abandoned buildings
- Enhancement of cultural heritage



RESIDENTIALITY POLICIES

"RESIDENZIALITÀ TOSCANA DIFFUSA"

- Demographic revitalisation
- Incentives for repopulation
- Support for mountain communities



LOCAL COMMERCE SUPPORT

- Anti-desertification measures
- Neighbourhood retail support
- Essential service preservation

THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW

To promote a new territorial model based on cohesion, proximity, sustainability and the enhancement of local identity and resources.



TERRITORIAL TYPOLOGIES

The law adopts a functional and systemic approach, focusing on places, not administrative boundaries.

- Mountain municipalities
- Inner areas
- Partially mountainous municipalities
- Dispersed rural settlements
- Fragile territorial systems



A TUSCAN INTERPRETATION OF TERRITORIAL COHESION



ALIGNMENT WITH



1970s
Intermunicipal planning



1990s
Negotiated territorial programming



1999
Integrated regional programming



2000s
Place-based territorial governance



2025
TOSCANA DIFFUSA LAW
A territorial cohesion framework for fragile areas

“ The future competitiveness of Tuscany depends not only on metropolitan growth, but on the regeneration and connectivity of its diffused territories ”

Institutional Thickness & Territorial Governance

How relational ecosystems shape development capacity in peripheral and remote territories

WHY IT MATTERS

Development in peripheral territories does not depend only on financial resources, but on the quality of relationships, institutions and collective capacity to transform them into sustainable change.



4. WHAT MAKES GOVERNANCE EFFECTIVE?

COOPERATION DRIVERS

Build capacity and opportunities

- ✓ Local Action Groups (LAGs)
- ✓ Place-based strategies
- ✓ Agricultural cooperatives
- ✓ Civic engagement & third places
- ✓ Collaborative planning
- ✓ Institutional thickness
- ✓ Trust & long-term partnerships



GOVERNANCE FRICTIONS

Weaken capacity and outcomes

- ✗ Fragmented cooperation
- ✗ Weak intermunicipal coordination
- ✗ Institutional distrust
- ✗ Populist alienation
- ✗ Conflictual governance
- ✗ Short-termism & project logic

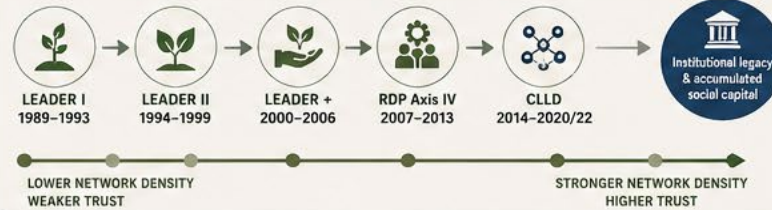


Constructive local conflict can refine and legitimise territorial projects.

2. TEMPORAL ACCUMULATION OF GOVERNANCE

LEARNING BY INTERACTING

The longer actors cooperate through shared projects, the stronger territorial governance becomes.



Longer participation in LEADER/CLLD periods → higher probability of successful project selection.

1. THE RELATIONAL ECOSYSTEM



KEY MESSAGE

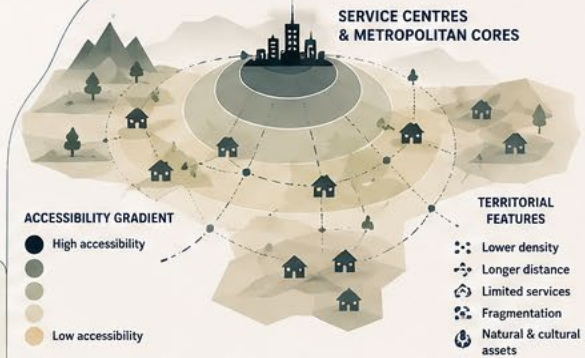


Resilient peripheral territories emerge from long-term relational governance, not only from financial investment.

3. PERIPHERALITY & TERRITORIAL REMOTENESS

PERIPHERAL AREAS

Peripheral territories characterised by structural distance from major service centres, lower accessibility and fragmented settlement patterns, yet often endowed with strong relational and community capital.



Inspired by:
• Degree of Urbanisation with remoteness classification (EU)
• European Commission – Long-Term vision for Rural Areas

5. THE FUTURE OF EU TERRITORIAL COHESION

TOP-DOWN CENTRALISATION

Risk of place-neutral uniform policies



- Centralised design
- Limited regional ownership
- Project-based logic
- Short-term outcomes

PLACE-BASED TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE

Leverages local knowledge, networks and assets



- Regional & local involvement
- Long-term partnerships
- Relational ecosystems
- Resilient development

VS.

Place-neutral governance risks dismantling long-term territorial institutional capacity.

REFERENCES

- European Commission – Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas
- LEADER / CLLD approach
- Territorial Governance literature
- Institutional Thickness (Amin & Thrift, 1995)
- Social Capital framework (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000)

THE EVOLUTION OF TERRITORIAL POLICY & GOVERNANCE



1970s
Territorial Planning
Top-down planning and sectoral policies



1990s
Negotiated Governance
Rise of decentralisation and territorial pacts



2000s
LEADER & Place-Based Development
Territorial experiments and local partnerships



2010s
Territorial Cohesion
Integrated strategies for peripheral and rural regions



2020s
Relational Governance Ecosystems
Institutional thickness and social capital



POST-2027
Debate: Re-centralisation vs. Territorial Autonomy
Safeguarding place-based policy and regional ownership

“ Territorial development is not only a matter of resources, but of the institutional and relational capacity to collectively transform them into shared futures. ”