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**EXPLAINING CROSS-REGIONAL VARIATION IN TERRITORIAL
GOVERNANCE: THE CASE OF THE ITALIAN REGIONS**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

POLITICS

by

Alberto Ganis

June 2024

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Abstract

Explaining Cross-regional Variation in Territorial Governance: The Case of the
Italian Regions

by

Alberto Ganis

Following the 2008 economic crisis, the European Central Bank communicated to the Italian Prime Minister the 'need for a strong commitment to abolish or consolidate some intermediary administrative layers' (Trichet and Draghi, 2011). The pressure to 'restore the confidence of investors' in Italian bonds and the rising influence of anti-establishment rhetoric fueled by the growing populist Five-Star Movement pushed the government to design and pass the Delrio territorial reform (law 56/2014). This law failed to go past the necessary constitutional referendum, allowing each region freedom to reform its territorial institutions. Asking what explains territorial differentiation among regions, this study examines the mechanisms behind the legislation on territorial governance between 2014 and 2021 across four Italian regions. Through the analysis of 104 expert interviews, 300+ newspaper articles, and eight regional laws, I argue that determining the scale for institutional borders and functions is socially and politically constructed and subject to contestation. It is inherently historical and political and dependent on the desired goals. Regions perpetuate socio-political regulatory modes rooted in institutional legacies dating back to Italian unification. To a lesser degree, territorial policies are also affected by the organization of the party governing the region. My theoretical contribution expects regions with legacies of strong representation of local interest to implement fragmented systems of governance with multiple places of power. Regions with legacies of concertation organize their governance, consolidating functions and fostering the association of interests. This

study has broad implications beyond the Italian case. Understanding governance systems is crucial to shed light on the mechanisms of distribution of resources and power within societies. It provides valuable insights into the role of institutional legacies and party structures in shaping territorial policies, which can be applied to other contexts and countries facing similar challenges.

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A big thank you to the archival staff at the regional archives in Cagliari, your patience and availability won't be forgotten.

I am genuinely thankful to the Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation for supporting my project.

In Italy, nothing is more definitive than the transitory.

(Giuseppe Prezzolini, 1921)

Chapter 1

Introduction

Following the 2008 economic crisis, the European Central Bank communicated to Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi the 'need for a strong commitment to abolish or consolidate some intermediary administrative layers (such as the provinces). Actions aimed at exploiting economies of scale in local public services should be strengthened' (Trichet and Draghi, 2011). The pressure to 'restore the confidence of investors' in Italian bonds and the rising influence of anti-establishment rhetoric fueled by the growing populist Five-Star Movement pushed the center-left government (established in 2013) to design and pass the Delrio reform ¹ (law 56/2014). Its goal was to increase institutional efficiency ² in the Italian regions via territorial and functional changes focusing on the proposed elimination of the second institutional level – the province ³. Yet, in December 2016, this law failed to go past the necessary popular constitutional referendum. Without the constitutional change, each region had the freedom to interpret the reform, which led to various levels of rescaling of institutional functions among its

¹Named after Minister Graziano Delrio, the main proponent of the reform

²Throughout this manuscript, I am **not** making any arguments based on measured efficiency and its relationship to the different forms of territorial governance. I am discussing efficiency in terms of political and administrative goals (perceived vs actual).

³Territorial institution between the Municipality (Enti Locali) and the Region.

territorial units. In this context, rescaling refers to reorganizing social, economic, and political systems to different spatial levels, including going above, below, or across state borders [Keating, 2021]. This situation created many different governance outcomes, further complicating the already administratively cumbersome and financially inefficient Italian governmental landscape to the point where the National Association of Italian Municipalities called it a 'state of institutional calamity' (Leoluca Orlando, 2021).

Italy is not the only state going through these tumultuous changes. Countries across the globe are experiencing a wave of territorial redistribution of authority and institutional functions, moving away from central states and towards regional and supranational governments. The study of regional decision-making has become increasingly important over time, as the notion that territory matters was initially overshadowed by other approaches such as behaviorist, functionalist, and modernist. Additionally, methodological nationalism limited data collection efforts to the nation-state level. However, in recent years, the significance of territory, particularly at the regional level, has become more apparent, with regions evolving from being viewed as just a "space" to becoming an "actor." (Tatham in [Detterbeck and Hepburn, 2018]) This shift has been gradual but mainly unidirectional, starting in the 1970s with decentralization reforms in some Western European countries (France, Italy, Spain, Germany, Belgium, and the United Kingdom) [Keating, 2014], but spanning throughout the globe since (India, Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia) [Eaton, 2022, Harmes, 2021, Hooghe et al., 2016].

The power of regions has been consistently growing, attracting scholarly interest from across subfields. Studying regional governments is highly consequential in terms of who gets resources, who gets represented, and what dictates the power relations between levels of government [Eaton, 2004, Elias and Mees, 2017, Hepburn, 2010, Hooghe et al., 2016]. The literature on territorial politics tells us

that it is a complex and dynamic phenomenon shaped by a range of historical, economic, and cultural factors. This field of study acknowledges that territorial divisions significantly impact various aspects of a nation's political landscape. These divisions determine political representation and resource allocation, influencing governance effectiveness and addressing (or ignoring) citizens' needs in different regions. For example, the 'botched' ⁴ Delrio's reform had real repercussions on the daily lives of Italian citizens. Some Regions decided to absorb the majority of the functions of their Provinces, causing an exodus of public employees to the region's capital city. This decision put several services beyond citizens' physical (and functional) reach, like building permits and registry services. A citizen needing a building permit must drive to the regional capital, often several hours away from their residence. With the rescaling of governance, many provinces were hollowed of all their functions, and their money transfer from the state was cut. However, in some regions, provincial road and school responsibilities remained at the provincial level, causing a considerable gap between de jure responsibilities and de facto execution of services. On the ground, this translates into old and perilous roads with crumbling asphalt and no guardrail, leaving entire communities isolated (Sardinian Regional Councilor, 2022). If this was not enough, a 2023 study from the Italian Union of Provinces found that the Delrio reform produced only 26 cents of savings per citizen, equal to 0.001% of the total public expenditure.

Not only did the Delrio reform's goals to make the Italian system more efficient have uneven and limited results, but it also negatively impacted the representative and democratic nature of the provinces [Benetazzo, 2019] in a context of increased democratic representation at the subnational level. To cut the costs of politics further, law 56/2014 (Delrio) replaced the direct elections of the provincial government in favor of indirect, second-level elections. This means that the provincial

⁴Several interviewees defined it as 'halfway across the ford' (river crossing) or 'an abomination.'

representatives are now selected among and by elected officials at the municipal level. In this system, the votes of the representatives of larger municipalities have more weight, further contributing to democratic imbalances along the urban-rural divide. Unsurprisingly, this system raised questions about the constitutional principles of autonomy for local governments, which can be strengthened through direct forms of appointment. The calamitous effects of this botched reform made the application of the principle of autonomy, as stated in Article 5 of the Italian Constitution, more complex. Many critics of the reform argued that the citizens, who hold sovereignty, should directly choose the governing bodies responsible for setting the entity's political and administrative direction.

Studying the dynamics behind subnational territorial rescaling is fundamental for several reasons. Firstly, the contested and continued Italian unification process offers a unique perspective on regional representation and minority rights, highlighting the impact of historical processes of democratization and identity-building on policy outcomes. Secondly, it contributes significantly to the literature on multilevel governance systems, providing a nuanced understanding of the interactions between different levels of government and how they impact territorial policies regarding who gets resources, who gets represented, and what dictates the power relations between levels of government. Thirdly, it adds the analysis of a recent set of policies (2014-2021) to an otherwise outdated data pool, focusing on a novel selection of regional cases like Sardinia and Friuli Venezia Giulia. Finally, my project contributes to the ongoing debate on the European Union's role in promoting regional integration and decentralization and the resulting impact on the member states' governance structures.

1.1 Why Territorial Politics?

The shift from regions as spaces to regions as politicized policy and polity subsystems reflects the importance of studying regional decision-making. The increasing emphasis on the regional level has been observable in wider European and OECD contexts, with functional pressures arising from the expansion of government portfolios [Marks et al., 2008]. In fact, institutional reforms have become more common across Europe since 1958, when the European Community started to promote a transfer of power and a pooling of sovereignty from the member-states to the supranational level and their regional peripheries. One of the EU founders' long-term goals for the union was to foster an integrated Europe of Regions that would transcend contending nationalistic sentiments, soften the power of nation-states, and increase the representation of ethnic and linguist minorities across the continent. As a result, the regional level has been empowered, with greater decentralization of central government in some policy areas being the initial expression of this empowerment. Gradually, this empowerment expanded, driven by the expansion of regional policy competencies, the emancipation of regional institutions, and the ability to self-finance through independent taxation and borrowing [Keating and Wilson, 2009]. The direct election of regional representatives has further politicized the regional level and sealed the shift from policy to politics and polity dimensions of the regionalization process [Keating, 2014].

Studies analyzing the structure of regional institutions have shown its importance vis-à-vis a whole series of political outcomes, including political participation, accountability, ethnic and territorial conflict, policy innovation, corruption, government spending, democratic stability, and the incidence of human rights abuse [Hooghe et al., 2016, Elias, 2011, Hepburn, 2010]. According to Ebinger et al., territorial and functional reforms, if addressing the actual needs of the territory,

can translate into county-level gains in substance and organizational capacity. This seems to be the case for the federal states in the East of Germany, where many territorial reforms have succeeded since the fall of the Berlin Wall during the early 1990s. The five Eastern Länders repeatedly changed their territorial assets, impacting the municipalities and the counties (comparable to the Italian provinces). After the reunification, the newly established eastern municipalities were organized into small-scale units. The local decision-makers recognized the need to consolidate the territorial system to positively affect most functional performance indicators of municipal services [Ebinger et al., 2019].

The study of territorial politics provides valuable insights into these outcomes and how political, economic, and cultural forces shape them. A great example of the relationship between territorial reforms and their effect on society is the implementation of the 2015 NOTRE and MAPTAM laws in France, which reformed the intermunicipalities, reduced the number of Regions from 22 to 14 with new competencies, and adapted financial resources. Hollande's government designed these policies with several aims, including simplifying administration, achieving economies of scale, boosting territorial competitiveness, placing the territorial issue and local stakeholders at the center of public policies, and expanding the French-style decentralization process [Bourdin and Torre, 2021]. Yet, the authors demonstrate the failure of the 2015 territorial reform, highlighting that instead of advancing a new phase of decentralization, it primarily favored the pursuit of economies of scale and the development of large structures.

The German and the French examples of territorial rescaling have been taking place in a context of 'rising regional authority' [Marks et al., 2008] or 'rising of the meso-level' [Keating, 2014], which reflects a growing interest in the local conditions for exercising governance. Both studies mention that local contextual variables should be accounted for when studying policy implementation, but they fall short

of including them in an explanatory framework. This gap presents an opportunity to advance our understanding by considering the intertwined influence of historical institutional legacies and party organization on governance structures at the subnational level. Drawing upon this, my argument posits that structural changes do not solely determine the scale and scope of governance rescaling efforts but are profoundly shaped by socio-political dynamics rooted in historical legacies and contemporary party politics. By integrating place-based institutional legacies, such as historical collaboration patterns and public management, with party organization, we gain a more nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between formal institutions and informal norms in shaping policy outcomes. This approach not only fills the identified gap in the literature but also offers a holistic framework for analyzing governance rescaling processes, elucidating the historical and political contingencies that underpin the allocation of authority and resources at the subnational level.

This study has broad implications beyond the Italian case. Understanding multilevel governance systems is crucial to illuminating the distribution mechanisms of resources and power within societies. It provides valuable insights into the role of institutional legacies and party structures in shaping territorial policies, which can be applied to other contexts and countries facing similar challenges. In my argument, the scope conditions revolve around territorial rescaling within countries where subnational units possess a significant degree of autonomy in shaping their territorial organization. This encompasses a diverse range of political systems, including federal states such as Germany and the USA, as well as unitary states with territories endowed with special autonomy status like Italy's Special Regions and specific regions in France such as Alsace and Corsica. Within these contexts, the scope conditions dictate the boundaries within which the proposed framework for governance rescaling is expected to hold true. By focusing on countries with

subnational units endowed with autonomy in territorial governance, the analysis accounts for the unique dynamics and complexities inherent in rescaling processes. These scope conditions allow for a more nuanced understanding of how historical institutional legacies, party organization dynamics, and territorial restructuring efforts interact to shape policy outcomes at the subnational level. Furthermore, by encompassing a diverse array of political contexts, the scope conditions ensure the applicability and relevance of the analytical framework across different territorial settings, enriching our understanding of governance rescaling processes worldwide.

1.2 Between Legacies and Party Organization

Asking what explains territorial rescaling variation among regions, this study examines the mechanisms behind the legislation on territorial governance between 2014 and 2021 across four Italian regions. I use the most similar cross-case method to select four regions based on their different categorization of the dependent variable and the two different types of regional statutes, Ordinary and Special. I choose two regions with Ordinary Statute (Veneto and Emilia-Romagna) and two regions with Special Statute (Friuli Venezia Giulia and Sardinia)⁵. [Seawright and Gerring, 2008].

For data collection, the study includes interviews with 104 politicians and experts in territorial politics across Italy, selected based on their official roles or expertise in local institutions and politics. The interviews lasted between 20 and 90 minutes, covering topics pertaining to the decision-making processes, the political

⁵The special autonomous regions are identified by Article 116, paragraph 1, of the Constitution. The regions of Friuli Venezia Giulia, Sardinia, Sicilia, Trentino-Alto Adige, and Valle d'Aosta have specific forms and conditions of autonomy according to their respective special statutes adopted by constitutional law. According to paragraph 2, the region of Trentino-Alto Adige is composed of the autonomous provinces of Trento and Bolzano. More on the constitutional differences in chapter 3

discourse, and the implementation of the territorial policies under study. The semi-structured interviews allowed for in-depth exploration of the subjects' experiences and perspectives through predetermined questions and follow-up inquiries. This method provided nuanced insights into complex social issues. The research focuses on the period from 2014 to 2021, examining nine territorial reforms and considering historical laws and events that have shaped the current institutional landscapes of various regions. In addition to national law 56/2014, the study analyzes specific regional laws from Emilia-Romagna, Veneto, Friuli Venezia Giulia, and Sardinia. To supplement the interview data, the study also analyzes over 300 newspaper articles from major newspapers in Friuli Venezia Giulia and Sardinia. These articles, selected based on their relevance to major reforms and referendums from 2011 to 2021, provide additional context on local entities and decision-making processes. Given the pre-existing literature discussing the political ecosystems of Veneto and Emilia-Romagna [Almagisti, 2015, Messina, 2012, Putnam et al., 1993, Diamanti, 2009], I focused more resources on triangulating the less studied and more complex cases of the two Special regions.

The analysis employs Qualitative Content Analysis [Schreier, 2012]⁶, which involves systematically coding and identifying themes and patterns in the textual data. This approach allows for a subjective interpretation of the data, emphasizing the context and meaning of the information. The coding process combines deductive and inductive methods with an initial codebook derived from literature on historical constitutionalism, party organization, economic interests, and ethnic cleavages. Inductively, the study identifies sub-themes and patterns to capture the nuanced information provided by interviews, newspaper articles, and council meeting transcripts. Dedoose software was used to facilitate the qualitative data analysis, streamlining the coding process and ensuring accurate and reliable results. This

⁶Not QCA, Qualitative Comparative Analysis

mixed-method approach, which triangulates interviews with newspaper articles and regional council transcripts, aims to minimize issues of external validity common in small-n research. It captures the complexity of the cases studied and contributes to broader theoretical insights that can be applied beyond the Italian context.

I build an argument that combines place-based institutional legacies [Agnew et al., 2002, Putnam et al., 1993, Almagisti, 2015, Messina, 2017] with party organization effects [Katz and Mair, 1995, Pasquino and Valbruzzi, 2017, Panebianco, 1988]. Regions perpetuate socio-political regulatory modes rooted in historical legacies of collaboration, public management, and identities dating back to Italian unification. These institutions encompass formal rules, such as laws and regulations, and informal norms, customs, and beliefs that guide human behavior within a society. They play a critical role in shaping incentives, interests, and policymaking [North, 1991]. The main contribution of my argument is to account for variation in governance rescaling through a combination of institutional legacies and, to a lesser extent, political party organization. Determining the scale for specific services is, in reality, socially and politically constructed and subject to contestation. It is inherently historical and political and dependent on the desired goals [Keating, 2021].

I find that the four cases display two different types of institutional legacies: localist and concerted. Regions with localist legacies of strong representation of local interest are expected to implement fragmented governance systems with multiple places of power. On the other hand, regions with concerted legacies organize their governance, have high institutional trust, consolidate functions, and foster the association of interests. Another critical variable is the type of organization of the main governmental party. When a governing party has a catch-all organization, the policy-making drive shifts from members to leadership. Voters are seen as free-floating and uncommitted, and the party relies on experience and

track record for accountability (Kirchheimer in [Pasquino and Valbruzzi, 2017]). Seeking broad support, the party becomes 'generalist' by welcoming technocrats and politicians who pursue programmatic politics. When dealing with territorial rescaling reform, a catch-all party tends to consolidate territorial governance due to its generalist and competitive character [Katz and Mair, 1995]. Conversely, mass parties are accountable to their members through community presence and prioritize representative capacity. They are characterized by bottom-up relations between members and the elite and, therefore, are likely to seek territorial fragmentation to maintain local support and focus on representing their collectivities [Katz and Mair, 1995, Keating, 2021].

The argumentative leverage lies in analyzing the cases of Friuli Venezia Giulia and Sardinia. These regions alternated between mass party and catch-all governments, which, according to the party organization hypothesis, should have resulted in territorial fragmentation and consolidation, respectively. However, the data indicates that regional institutional legacies effectively outweighed the influence of party organization on the legislation and implementation of territorial rescaling. In both instances, localist legacies constrained the catch-all party in power, which, despite efforts to implement consolidating reforms, failed to significantly impact territorial rescaling. This confirms that while the party model influences policy outcomes, institutional legacies are a stronger predictor of territorial differentiation. In other words, any party governing a region must adapt to the contextual and institutional specificities of the territory.

1.3 Dissertation Overview

This dissertation project is divided into six chapters. After this introduction, chapter two presents the theoretical framework. I start by offering a review of the

extant literature on territorial politics. I then introduce a detailed explanation of the dependent variable, Territorial Rescaling, along with its categorization and operational dimensions. In the following sections, I describe the two independent variables, Party Organization and Institutional Legacies. I define their respective categorizations before I conclude the chapter explaining my argument. I argue that understanding the organization of governing parties, along with the institutional legacies of a territory, can predict policy-making outcomes in territorial rescaling. I propose that governing parties tailor territorial policy-making to appeal to specific electorates. However, the Institutional Legacies, whether localist or concerted, are the strongest influence on decisions and policy-making affecting territorial rescaling.

Chapter three examines the research design and the context. It first discusses the subnational approach to the case selection of this study. The following section describes the Delrio reform (Law 56/2014), framing how and why it provided a fitting natural case to compare variation in territorial governance. Then, the chapter elaborates on the selection of the four regional cases. As discussed, in Italy, regional statutes delineate the legal frameworks governing the regions' powers, responsibilities, and organization. Italy's 20 regions operate under two types of statutes: Ordinary Statutes and Special Statutes. Regions governed by Ordinary Statutes had to adhere to the principles of reform 56/2014 and rescale (or not) their functions. Special Statutes regions with constitutionally granted autonomy, rescaled institutional functions and reorganized the borders of their subregional units. The next section describes the methodology and why it is conducive to analyzing the mechanisms behind territorial rescaling. Finally, the chapter presents the sociopolitical contextual background for the study, including the histories of Italian territorial reforms, its provinces, and the political party context in which the reforms unfolded.

Chapters four, five, and six provide empirical evidence for the argument that guides this project. Chapter four delves into how the organization [Katz and Mair, 1995, Panebianco, 1988, Pasquino and Valbruzzi, 2017] of regional governing parties impacts territorial governance reforms. It highlights that political parties have established a presence and actively shaped local society through regulatory mechanisms. It starts by defining the organization and how the governing parties can be categorized as mass or catch-all. It then explains how each region's policy-making can be connected to the type of party organization of the party in government. The empirical evidence is organized by region, and it includes a brief description of the political context of each case.

Chapters five and six offer an in-depth empirical analysis of how institutional legacies concretely affect territorial rescaling. Considering socio-cultural history and former territorial patterns, it examines how a region's institutional legacies influence its approach to territorial governance reforms. The chapters categorize regional cases as having either concerted or localist legacies, reflecting varying levels of community trust in institutions. Concerted legacies entail strong, collaborative public intervention, fostering territorial governance consolidation, while localist legacies favor limited state involvement and fragmented governmental entities, hindering consolidation efforts. These legacies, rooted in regional historical paths, impact current political developments and shape approaches to institutional collaboration and public management. I am dedicating a chapter to each of the two regional statutes in Italy because the prerogative of legislating on local reforms allowed Special Regions more flexibility and breadth of change. Chapter five analyzes Emilia-Romagna and Veneto, showing several examples of how their application of the Delrio reform fits with their well-studied histories of concerted and localist legacies. Chapter six focuses on Friuli Venezia Giulia and Sardinia, showing how their institutional and historical legacies influenced the modification

of their institutional frameworks toward fragmentation. The case of Friuli Venezia Giulia, in particular, shows the crucial role of institutional legacies over party organization because its localist approach to institutional decision-making created attrition between the politically initiated *de jure* rescaling of governance and its *de facto* implementation at the local level.

Finally, the seventh and concluding chapter brings together the main findings. It reflects on the generalizability of the argument to any country in which subnational governments have a role in determining the organization of their local institutions. The chapter also articulates the policy and theory implications of the theoretical framework, setting a new agenda for future research to analyze the various aspects of territorial politics.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents the theoretical framework. It begins with a comprehensive review of the existing literature on territorial politics, laying the groundwork for subsequent analysis. Following this, I thoroughly explain the dependent variable, *territorial rescaling*, elucidating its categorization and operational dimensions to provide clarity and context. Moving forward, attention is directed toward the two independent variables: *party organization* and *institutional legacies*. Each variable is defined and categorized to establish a solid conceptual framework. The chapter culminates in formulating my argument, asserting that a profound understanding of governing parties' organization and the institutional legacies within a territory is crucial for predicting policy-making outcomes in territorial rescaling. I contend that governing parties adeptly tailor their territorial policy-making to align with the preferences of specific electorates. However, I posit that the enduring influence of *institutional legacies*, whether leaning towards localist or concerted tendencies, ultimately exerts the most significant impact on policy decisions concerning territorial rescaling.

2.1 The Territorial Politics Literature

The literature on regionalism, institutional change, and European politics has grown to account for the shift in power dynamics between levels of government [Hooghe et al., 2016, Elias and Mees, 2017, Hepburn, 2010]. Several studies analyzing the structure of regional institutions have shown its importance viz-a-viz a whole series of political outcomes, including political participation, accountability, ethnic and territorial conflict, policy innovation, corruption, government spending, democratic stability, and the incidence of human rights abuse [Marks et al., 2008]. Within this perspective, the variation among regional governments is highly consequential in terms of who gets resources, who gets represented, and what dictates the power relations between levels of government. Studying regional governments is paramount because 'democracy, economic growth, crime, and many other things that people care about, vary within as well as among countries' [Snyder, 2001, Giraudy et al., 2019, Marks et al., 2008]. Analyzing subnational cases "spurs theoretical innovation by offering new data and political units to build, test, and refine theories" [Giraudy et al., 2019]. Subnational research increasingly contributes to scholarly progress in comparative politics, offering new cases and theoretical and methodological perspectives.

The changing European and state structures have created uncertainty around political, economic, and cultural boundaries, leading to new opportunities for political strategy and a shift in the nature of autonomy. Territorial actors are now exploring new forms of autonomy in contested political spaces that are less clear-cut than independent statehood. The local construction and reconstruction of territory (rescaling) have led to new political spaces and systems of action that offer opportunities for various territorial political strategies [Keating, 2021]. Regions are now functional, economic, social, and cultural spaces that challenge

the central state's monopoly over territorial power. They are significant for the political mobilization of cultural identity and serve as the basis for economic growth, all of which are central themes in the discourse of territorial political movements [Hepburn, 2010]. These movements can use regional-specific economic and cultural resources to defend unique territorial identities and take advantage of changing spaces for political action and authority at different levels. For example, the Irish experience of territorial rescaling indicates that pressures to adapt to Europeanization, whether from top-down or bottom-up approaches, are influenced by domestic traditions and norms [Callanan, 2020], while a study of territorial rescaling in Germany showed how the federal state should collaborate with the Landers in regionalization processes aimed at producing scale specific policy approaches [Gualini, 2004].

The relationship between institutional landscapes and shifting notions of identity has been relevant in the scholarly discourse on territorial politics. As the influence of the nation-state diminishes, identities undergo a complex transformation, becoming more diverse and multifaceted. This shift is not merely a transfer from state to supra-state or sub-state levels but signifies a broader pluralization of identities. Concurrently, territorial movements are experiencing a resurgence, challenging the traditional dominance of the nation-state. Territory emerges as a central battleground for political contestation, establishing new territorial scales at supranational, regional, and local levels, where identity and institutional structures intersect in intricate ways [Keating, 2021].

Territorial politics is an interdisciplinary field rooted in comparative politics, spreading the concept across various avenues with differing theoretical, methodological, and empirical interests. Territorial politics generally refers to the distribution of political power and influence within a geographic region and the study of territorial structures and their variations, namely, territorial cleavages

[Rokkan and Urwin, 1983]. Territorial politics in Europe refers to the territorial construction of the state, national integration and disintegration, and the regional level [Keating, 2008]. It is a complex concept encompassing how local actors, such as political parties, civil society groups, and government agencies, interact to shape and reshape political landscapes over time. However, historically, territorial politics share the common origin of being highly critical of studies based on methodological nationalism' whole nation' from the 1970s and 1980s.

Rokkan's work marked the transition from a 'whole nation' approach to a more 'territorially-focused.' His analytical framework proposed that a primary focus of territorial politics should be on the relationships between central governments and their peripheries, characterized by a structure of constantly evolving territorial divisions. Based on this premise, Rokkan and Urwin attempted to create a typology of such territorial divisions. In their typology, the center-periphery dichotomy results in four possible territorial structures centered on the degree of historical strain sources and unification strategies [Rokkan and Urwin, 1983]. These structures formed a classification system that emphasized the leading role of two types of spaces: 1) territorial space and 2) membership space. These spaces were less congruent since they related to the process of nation-building or state-building, respectively. Their analysis offered minimal attention to the conceptualization of territorial politics. Still, it implied that, according to their classification based on two-dimensional axes of nation-building or state-building, there existed "the potential for varying kinds of territorial politics" [Rokkan and Urwin, 1983].

Studying territorial politics is essential for several reasons. Firstly, territorial politics is a critical factor in shaping the distribution of political power and influence within a given region. By understanding the dynamics of territorial politics, we can gain insights into how political actors interact and compete and how these interactions shape the political landscape. This knowledge is

essential for understanding the functioning of political systems and how political decisions are made and implemented. Furthermore, territorial politics has essential repercussions for society. The distribution of political power and influence within a region can impact various social and economic outcomes, including state formation, democratization, economic development, and public goods and services.

This relationship between localities, regions, states, and the European Union is the subject of study of the growing literature on the multilevel governance model (MLG), which is a "meta-level approach to policy, polity, and politics analysis that denotes a diverse set of arrangements, a panoply of systems of coordination and negotiation among formally independent but functionally interdependent entities" [Hooghe et al., 2016]. Hooghe and Marks describe this model in opposition to the state-centric model, granting different levels of authority and policy-making influence beyond the nation-state. This mix of group solidarities and institutional constraints feeds the variation among regional movements. In fact, "demands for different degrees of self-rule on the part of distinct [regional] communities affect not just their homelands, but shape the structure of government in the states and arguably also the transnational government, of which they are part" (p 18) [Marks et al., 2008].

As explored in Sidney Tarrow et al., territorial politics play a critical role in economic development, wealth distribution, and inequality. Central governments continue to rely on local regions to carry out new policies. Inequalities in central funding distribution to localities, often linked to political affiliations, typically persist. As national governments undertake geographically targeted actions to achieve broader economic goals, fresh disparities between localities arise. Initiatives such as growth poles, new towns, regional plans, and development zones generate unique challenges and opportunities specific to each locality [Tarrow et al., 1978]. Regions with more political power often receive a larger share of investments,

resulting in economic growth and disparities between territories. Simultaneously, territorial politics contribute to policy variations driven by diverse regional interests and priorities. This can lead to the development of innovative solutions to common problems or, conversely, exacerbate existing tensions and inequalities. Looking at the reform processes at work in countries such as France, Portugal, Spain, and the Netherlands, we can see that regions and metro areas are on the rise everywhere, while intermediate territorial levels, such as departments, provinces, etc., seem to be called into question. This is also seen in the systematized transfer of competencies to the regions in many countries. For example, the Belgian government allocated 17 billion euros to its three regions, reflecting the transfer of newly acquired responsibilities in health and employment.(De Ceuninck, Steyvers, and Valcke 2016 in[Bourdin and Torre, 2021])

Furthermore, territorial politics shape regional identities, affecting political mobilization and fostering either cooperation or conflict within a nation. Keating explores the rise of regionalism and how it has influenced political change in the region. His work examines the emergence of new regional identities, the resurgence of old ones, and the impact of European integration on territorial politics [Keating, 2021]. Tarrow and Keating's works reveal the complex interplay between territorial politics, regionalism, and nationalism. They show how territorial divisions affect political representation, resource allocation, and governance while influencing regional identity development and political mobilization. Both authors acknowledge the significance of territorial politics in shaping economic development, policy variation, and political stability. As mentioned, territorial politics have also been studied outside the field of political science. The work of political geographer John Agnew has contributed to the literature by emphasizing the role of territorial borders and identities in shaping political processes. He argues that several factors, including the historical legacy of political power and influence,

economic structures, and cultural traditions, shape the territorial politics of a region [Agnew and Shin, 2017].

Territorial politics are a crucial component of state formation and democratization, as political actors must distribute power and influence within a geographic region to establish the state's legitimacy and authority [Keating, 2021] and promote or undermine democratic values and practices [Mazzoleni, 2009]. Patrizia Messina and Gianfranco Baldini have also contributed significantly to our understanding of territorial politics, focusing on the relationship between territorial politics and economic development. They argue that territorial politics plays a crucial role in shaping economic outcomes, and they have explored how territorial politics can promote or hinder economic development in a given region [Messina, 2020, Baldini and Baldi, 2014]. Brunetta Baldi and Robert Putnam are two additional authors who contribute to our understanding of territorial politics. Baldi has focused on the role of territorial politics in shaping the distribution of public goods and services. With his pivotal comparative study, Putnam has explored the relationship between territorial politics and social capital, arguing that developing social networks and civic engagement can play a key role in promoting or undermining territorial governance in a given region. In this section, I gave a brief overview of the literature on territorial politics and its importance within political science. In the following section, I will lay out the existing theoretical approaches that seek to explain variation in territorial outcomes.

2.2 Existing Theories

The literature on territorial politics points to four main theoretical perspectives: the economic, the political partisanship, the historical institutionalist, and the ethnocultural. These approaches offer distinct lenses through which to understand

the dynamics of territorial change and shed light on what can explain variation in territorial rescaling among regions.

The economic approach to territorial change is grounded in efficiency and economic development principles. The economic approach to government is utilitarian, premised on the idea that a central planner can frame jurisdictions to achieve administrative efficiency considering a country's heterogeneity – in other words, employing the principle of subsidiarity. This means that tasks should be handled by the lowest governmental level possible. From this perspective, the government seeks to provide public goods at the lowest cost to every individual across its jurisdiction [Marks et al., 2008]. In the European Union, this principle 'was introduced formally at the EU level with the Maastricht Treaty and penetrated the juridical order of member states, producing a revitalization of the constitutional position of subnational government' ([Longo and Mobilio, 2016] p. 522). The economic approach is also essential when considering access to European funds. Chalmers suggests that regional authority significantly impacts allocating structural funds in the European Union, with large, powerful regions lobbying to effect financial transfers in their favor (Wallace, 1977; Blom-Hansen, 2005, in [Chalmers, 2013]).

The hypothesis is that regions would develop a system of territorial governance that is best suited to apply for and administer European Structural Funds and/or funds disbursed by the Italian state (e.g., PNRR). My research tests this approach in the Italian regions by analyzing regional sources and the expenditures of regional budgets to see to what extent subsidiarity and potential access to EU structural funds might have influenced the institutional outcomes. The data underlines that territorial rescaling is scarcely affected by financial foresight to create institutions that can better access European Union funds. In fact, the interviewees explained how, during the decision-making processes behind the territorial reforms, there was little to no discussion on how to rescale the local governance to best apply for

and manage funding.

The political party perspective emphasizes the role of political parties in shaping institutional and territorial reforms. Parties act as rational agents, strategically pursuing their objectives, including seeking votes, holding office, or influencing public policy [Strom, 1990]. Depending on the specific objectives of political parties, different models of party behavior emerge, such as vote-seeking, office-seeking, or policy-seeking models. These models guide the parties' choices and actions, ultimately impacting the governance structures. Lowndes and Roberts highlight that rational choice scholars have been the foremost proponents of the concept of political design [Lowndes and Roberts, 2013], emphasizing the importance of establishing control structures capable of monitoring reforms for efficacy and adjusting as needed. In contrast, Thelen stresses the inherent flaws in many top-down political designs. They argue that institutional designers operating in this manner can never fully regulate how their creations are utilized, leaving room for less influential actors to undermine them by exploiting gaps and ambiguities in institutional rules, often engaging in their own redesign efforts [Thelen, 2009].

Elinor Ostrom, on the other hand, places particular emphasis on the empowering nature of institutions, enabling rule-takers to exercise flexibility in implementing institutional rules. Ostrom focuses on how local actors develop their own rules from the grassroots level. Regarding design, she observes that "a series of relatively autonomous, self-organized resource governance systems may do a much better job in policy experimentation than a single central authority" ([Ostrom, 2005] p. 18). Consequently, institutional design can be viewed as a positive-sum game, yielding significant benefits for both rule-takers and makers [Lowndes and Roberts, 2013]. Therefore, this perspective predicts that institutional changes will reflect the ideology and objectives of the ruling party. Additionally, it suggests that party dominance may entrench certain territorial arrangements that align with their

political agenda. My study shows that party strategy, specifically its party organization, can explain which type of territorial rescaling policies a ruling party is willing to pursue.

The political party approach would suggest that congruence between regional and local parties facilitates programmatic, efficiency-driven efforts in territorial governance. However, empirical evidence from Veneto contradicts this notion. As discussed in chapters four and five, despite significant party congruence in Veneto, the outcome was fragmentation rather than consolidation. This evidence demonstrates that party congruence does not necessarily affect territorial rescaling. Instead, it highlights the complexity of political dynamics and suggests that other factors are at play in determining territorial outcomes.

While clientelism has received significant attention in the political party literature as a strong explanatory variable in the Italian context, my argument posits a different understanding. In my view, clientelism functions as a mode of aggregation for various territorial interests. It represents localist legacies operating both within and outside legal frameworks. This perspective shifts the focus from individual patron-client relationships to the broader mechanisms through which localized interests are mobilized and coordinated, reflecting the intricate interplay of formal and informal political practices in shaping governance.

Historical institutionalism offers insights into the importance of critical junctures and path dependence in institutional change. The concept of path dependence highlights the importance of timing and sequence in shaping social outcomes. It suggests that even starting from similar conditions, societies can experience a wide range of different results due to the impact of relatively minor or contingent events and decisions. Once certain actions are initiated, they often become difficult to reverse, leading to significant long-term consequences. This perspective also emphasizes that political development is frequently influenced by critical moments

or junctures that shape the fundamental characteristics of social life. [Collier and Collier 1991; Ikenberry 1994; Krasner 1989 in [Pierson, 2000].

Institutions are shaped by long historical processes and individual choices with unintended outcomes (Collier & Collier, 1991, in [Eaton, 2004]). Political actors seek to design institutions that serve their interests or achieve specific policy goals. However, their choices are constrained by the existing institutional options, leading to a path-dependent trajectory [Pierson, 2000]. The literature on state formation also features examples of the power of institutional designs, which offers another useful perspective to make sense of the effects of historical legacies on modern policy outcomes. According to this approach, preferences, and decisions are not simply individualistic or exogenous but rather are artifacts of institutions [Immergut, 1998]. Historical institutionalism emphasizes the significance of contextual factors, such as preexisting institutional arrangements and power dynamics, which shape the development and reform of institutions. As a result, the predicted outcome of this perspective is that preexisting institutions and historic dynamics influence institutional change. Furthermore, institutional inertia may hinder significant territorial reforms without substantial external pressure or critical events.

In this project, I focus on institutional legacies representing residual influence of past decisions, actions, and socio-political contexts that persistently shape and influence institutions over time, even amidst changing circumstances (like the Delrio reform). This enduring impact is characterized by its longevity beyond the initial establishment period, leaving a lasting imprint on the institutional landscape. Institutional legacies shape current behaviors, norms, and practices, serving as a foundation upon which new institutional arrangements are built or modified. Rooted in historical contexts, these legacies reflect the social, political, economic, and cultural conditions of their time, carrying with them the values, ideologies, and power dynamics of previous eras. They provide insights into the

interconnectedness of past and present institutional arrangements, highlighting the continuity and evolution of societal and organizational structures [Thelen, 2009].

It is apparent that clearly establishing what is and is not a legacy isn't an easy feat. This is why I analyze the data using an ecosystemic approach to elucidate policymaking processes through a thorough "contextual comparison" inspired by Rokkan's methodology. This approach entails examining institutional and social variables concurrently, integrating data into a framework of significance that is shaped by historical and geographical contexts [Messina, 2012]. My argument corroborates the importance of these legacies, explaining the diversity in governance rescaling by considering both institutional legacies and, to a lesser degree, the organization of political parties. My findings show that even with external pressure (from the European Bank) and critical events (Delrio reform), preexisting approaches to territorial governance have significant influence on rescaling dynamics.

The literature on institutionalism examines another potential explanation for variation in territorial rescaling: state capacity. In his research comparing the diverging outcomes of state formation between Germany and Italy in the nineteenth-hundreds, Daniel Ziblatt (2004) finds a strong link between institutional outcomes and preexisting infrastructural capacity [Ziblatt, 2004]. Both state-building endeavors were initiated by two strong local dynasties that sought to 'unify' the territory under their local leadership. Both unifying efforts faced a fragmented and diverse region, initially prompting the plan to institute a federal arrangement to pacify localized claims. Ziblatt's research shows that if "state makers seek federalism but absorb infrastructurally underdeveloped states, they may find themselves constrained by the domestic governance structures of the very states they incorporate in the project of national unification" (2004, p. 3). For example, in Italy, since the unified states were without the personnel,

institutions, or institutionalized practices of modern government, the unifying leaders found themselves tempted—at each stage of national unification—to adopt a centralizing pattern of national unification. The opposite was true for Germany, which established a more representative federal system due to its unified states’ infrastructural capacity.

Gerring et al. have further explored the relationship between infrastructural capacity and power relationships between territorial units [Gerring et al., 2011]. They assist Ziblatt’s argument by showing how indirect forms of rule are more likely to be established where the weaker unit has a functioning state. The stronger unit in the relationship might benefit from preserving preexisting political institutions in the weaker unit, while the opportunity costs of destroying them may be quite high (2011). These two studies highlight a potential alternative explanation, where state capacity can influence territorial rescaling. While acknowledging the contextual role of state capacity in affecting institutional dynamics, my argument rejects the centrality of capacity because of the case of Friuli Venezia Giulia. This Special Statute region was the second best in Italy (after Trentino-Alto Adige) on the Institutional Quality Index (IQI), a composite index that measures the quality of public institutions across various Italian provinces [Casamonti and Liaci, 2021]¹. Yet, it developed a fragmented territorial governance structure rather than implementing consolidation.

The ethnocultural approach focuses on the role of ethnic identity politics in institutional change. It suggests that ethnocultural communities are crucial in generating diverse territorial and institutional jurisdictions based on their relationship with the national state [Lluch, 2014, Van Cott, 2005]. Communities with strong ethnic identities may seek to preserve their distinct cultural characteristics

¹Index 2004-2019 - Out of 20 regions, Veneto was third, Emilia-Romagna sixth, and Sardinia 17th

Table 2.1: Summary of Theoretical Perspectives on Territorial Change

Perspectives	Causal Mechanism	Predicted Outcome
Economic	Access to European funds	Territorial System suited for accessing EU funds and providing public goods efficiently
Political Party	Rational Party behavior: vote-seeking, office-seeking, and policy-seeking models	Territorial system aligned with the ideology and objectives of the ruling party
Historical Institutionalism	Critical junctures and path dependence; Constraints on institutional change	Territorial System influenced by historical legacies; Gradual institutional change due to path dependence
Ethnocultural	Socio-cultural dynamics and identity politics; Relationship of ethnocultural communities with the central state	Territorial system based on territorial claims of ethnocultural groups; Alignment of territorial governance with local identities and interests

and resist assimilation into the national state. Works from the field of ethnic and identity politics center institutional change around the role of socio-cultural dynamics within the regions. "The continued vitality of identities and allegiances in the world at large. Several scholars have underscored the importance of identities in the study of politics" and, more specifically, in the development of territorial grievances (Laitin, 1998; Smith, 2004 in [Lluch, 2012] p. 180). Communities that coalesce based on ethnocultural characteristics can be expected to produce diverse territorial and institutional jurisdictions, depending on their relationship with the central state. Simultaneously, the purposive content of a group identity shapes its interests and goals, intimately connecting its political desires and its self-understanding [Lluch, 2014]. For example, peripheral regions with cultural groups that identify as communities must have the institutional and territorial resources to resist being swallowed by the national state [Rokkan and Urwin, 1983].

This approach argues that regions with ethnocultural communities often gen-

erate institutional differentiation in ways that have little to do with functional efficiency and a lot to do with the strategic location of a regional community to the national center and other regions in the country (ibid). What Anwen Elias calls minority nationalist movements have been present in the peripheral regions of many Western European states for a long time. Still, in the latter half of the 20th century, these parties have become significant players in regional and statewide politics. Some old parties have revived their electoral fortunes, while new ones have been established to protect historic nations' cultural, linguistic, and political rights within larger sovereign states. The main aim of these parties is to alter the distribution of political power between the center and the periphery in favor of the latter [Elias, 2011].

As minority nationalist parties have gained more political and electoral success, state authorities have had to decentralize or devolve new policy-making responsibilities to the sub-state level. In Belgium, for example, these parties played a vital role in transforming the country from a unitary state to a strongly federal one. In Spain, the creation of a "state of autonomies" that granted significant policy responsibilities to autonomous communities below the state was a concession to the demands of Catalan and Basque nationalists. Therefore, regions that host ethnic minorities are likely to establish institutional arrangements that reflect the territorial claims and interests of the local ethnocultural group. The ethnocultural approach predicts institutional rescaling beyond functional efficiency, driven by regional communities' strategic location and self-understanding. Additionally, it posits that conflicts arising from divergent ethnocultural identities may hinder efforts to create unified territorial governance structures.

It would make sense to expect the Italian minority movements to have a central role in the decision-making of their respective regional governance. My work studies how variables like the presence of linguistic and cultural minority groups

and the electoral support for regional-ethnic parties might affect the choices of the Italian regional governments. The expectation is that in regions with strong sub-regional/local identities ², like Friuli Venezia Giulia and Sardinia, we would expect to see responses that reassign provincial authority to the institutional level that best matches the territorial claims of the local ethnocultural group. We would also expect that regions without defined minorities would tend towards institutional consolidation under the direction of the national government.

Yet, the results show that ethnonational identity does not directly influence institutional decision-making; interviewees have often addressed the importance of local interests but seldom connected it to specific subnational identities. Furthermore, the Veneto region has pursued territorial fragmentation even without defined and organized ethnic and linguistic minority groups, showing how this variable cannot fully explain territorial rescaling outcomes. In other words, territorial grievances are not explicitly articulated regarding ethnic identity but are discussed as connected to *local representation of political and economic specificities*. For example, in the Sardinian case, several interviewees discussed the role of the subregion of Gallura in pushing for decentralization and territorial fragmentation (more on this in chapter six). Their unique Gallurese dialect is mentioned as representative of their identity, but their territorial grievances were articulated in economic and institutional terms. Economically, they wanted more autonomy due to their burgeoning tourist and commercial sectors; institutionally, they experienced a more autonomous system of governance in the past and wanted it back.

Furthermore, the presence of a strong and organized civil society along identity

²Law No. 482/1999, under Art. 6 of the Constitution, is aimed at protecting the 12 historical linguistic minorities recognized in the Italian national territory (Catalan (15 k), Ladin (30 k), Greek, Germanic (350k), Croatian, Sardinian (1 mil), Occitan, Franco-Provençal, French, Albanian, Slovenian (60k) and Friulian (600k))

and labor lines at the local level is often considered a significant factor in explaining fragmentation outcomes. However, this alternative explanation does not hold in the cases of Friuli Venezia Giulia and Sardinia. Interview data reveal that civil society in these regions is neither well organized nor integrated. In Friuli Venezia Giulia, the Friulian community lacks unity (more on this in chapter four), while the industrial confederation is marked by division and competition. In Sardinia, there is a general lack of civic engagement and cohesion. These findings indicate that the fragmentation observed in these regions cannot be attributed to a robust civil society, thus invalidating this alternative explanation. Instead, it underscores the need to explore other factors, such as localist legacies and the interplay of political practices, to account for the observed outcomes.

Below, I define the dependent variable, *territorial rescaling*. Then, I delineate the two theoretical perspectives ("the party organization approach" and "institutional legacy approach") utilized to explain differences in territorial rescaling between regions.

2.3 Territorial Rescaling

The dependent variable I seek to explain is variation in territorial governance rescaling. It considers the institutional organization of regions and how each entity took different legislative steps to govern the territory [Vergne and Baudelle, 2021]. The DV can be categorized into two approaches that capture how the regions have rescaled their territorial governance. Rescaling refers to reorganizing social, economic, and political systems to different spatial levels, which can include going above, below, or across state borders [Keating, 2021]. Leveraging the categorization of rescaling from Keating and Hooghe and Marks, the variable's two governance outcomes are consolidation and fragmentation [Keating, 2021, Hooghe et al., 2016].

This categorization is modeled after policy outcomes that the European Central Bank wanted the Italian State to implement to address the debts that arose from the 2008 economic crisis. It asked for the 'need for a strong commitment to abolish or **consolidate** some intermediary administrative layers (such as the provinces). Actions to exploit economies of scale in local public services should be strengthened' (Trichet and Draghi, 2011). Consolidation refers to policy outcomes that redistribute institutional functions among governmental and non-governmental entities to increase efficiency and redistribution by proposing the amalgamation of multiple overlapping jurisdictions into a reduced number of municipal governments [Downs, 1957, Hooghe and Marks, 2003].

Fragmentation refers to scenarios where power is dispersed into numerous hands and centers of authority [Hooghe and Marks, 2003]. This translates into high numbers of institutional entities across a territory. Fragmentation refers to policy outcomes that minimally redistribute function among institutional levels, adhering to the principle of subsidiarity by keeping territorial functions close to the citizenry and developing a complex territorial system in which several sources of authority coexist. It is important to note that fragmentation does not merely refer to the subdivision of the territory into smaller jurisdictions, it describes both the horizontal and vertical splintering of centers of decision-making. Fragmentation can be described as the 'myriad ways in which political power today is effectively dispersed among many political parties, organized groups, non-organized groups, and independent political figures, including both governmental and non-governmental actors' ([Pildes, 2021] p. 3). In other words, rescaling happens through the multiplication of institutional places of power rather than through the reassignment of functions within fewer entities.

I operationalize the dependent variable by considering two dimensions reflecting territorial variation from a functional and community/jurisdiction outlook. A long-

standing tradition exists in interpreting the political and institutional ramifications of scale changes through two distinct frameworks: one centered on community and the other on functional logic [Hooghe et al., 2016, Keating, 2021]. I include both dimensions because Ordinary Regions can constitutionally only rescale functions, consolidating or fragmenting the governance by reassigning such functions across their institutions. Special Statute Regions also have the statutory prerogative of creating, eliminating, and changing the geographic jurisdiction of their territorial entities. Theoretically, there is one dependent variable, but it manifests (almost exclusively)³ as functional rescaling in the Ordinary Regions, and mainly⁴ as community rescaling in the Special Regions.

2.3.1 DV Functional Dimension

This dimension seeks to capture the expectations concerning the functionalist perspective deeply ingrained within scholarly discourse. This perspective conceptualizes the ideal decision-making scale as a careful equilibrium between centralized control's efficiency and the advantages of decentralized governance [Alesina and Spolaore, 2005]. According to this view, the design of governance structures, the delineation of jurisdictional boundaries, and the distribution of authority within states are all contingent upon optimizing efficiency at varying scales. The functionalist lens prioritizes rational calculations of utility and purpose, aiming to minimize transaction costs and maximize collective welfare through a pragmatic analysis of governance mechanisms [Hooghe et al., 2016].

Functionally, the categorization represents the different levels of regional central-

³In chapters four and five, I will show how Veneto developed a hybrid territorial community, the Programmatic Area Agreements

⁴Special Regions can and do rescale their functions, but my cases have mainly focused on changing their governance at the community level, the rescaling of functions came along with the new communities/jurisdictions

ization of institutional functions relative to the status of the pre-reform (regional implementation of the Delrio reform). The functions under consideration include local police, public transport, environmental protection, tourism, schools, etc. For this dimension, I rely on the analysis of the Impact Assessment Office of the Italian Senate (2017), which studied how ordinary statute Regions implemented Law No. 56, highlighting the principal updates affecting the organization of Regions and local entities. It focused on analyzing regional legislation concerning the restructuring of non-core functions, with the objective of identifying the primary trends in the reorganization process and proposing a comparison among different models.

The report sorted the changes through quantitative and qualitative lenses, producing a categorization that included four different types of redistribution of functions: strong regionalization (centralization to the Region), moderate regionalization, uniform distribution (little to no redistribution), and multilevel governance (major redistribution among all local institutions) [Fucito and Frati, 2017]. I have simplified the categorization to focus on the qualitative appraisal of the functions redistributed. Simply counting the number of functions moved within the institutional levels of a region would minimize the crucial role of the legislative and political ecosystem where the Delrio was implemented. The report highlights how there are two regions (Veneto and Molise)⁵ that "present a regulation that tends to confirm the allocation of functions existing prior to Law No. 56, with many non-essential functions assigned to the Provinces." [Fucito and Frati, 2017] pg 34].

The resulting dichotomy sees regions that maintained the *status quo*, and regions that sought consolidation along a continuum of *functional redistribution*. Redistribution indicates functional consolidation because the region has sought to fulfill the consolidating mission of law 56/2014, moving functions to the institutional

⁵I will further discuss the case selection in the next chapter

level that is considered best suited to accomplish them efficiently. Maintaining the status quo would signal that the government has decided against the implementation of the Delrio (within the limits of the law), limiting the consolidation of territorial rescaling, in favor of a more fragmented governance structure. The Impact Assessment Office of the Italian Senate studied only the Ordinary Regions, so to include the Special Statute Regions, I developed the community dimension I discuss below.

2.3.2 DV Community Dimension

The community dimension of territorial rescaling considers the community approach to rescaling, which delves into the intricate fabric of territorial communities shaping governance dynamics [Hooghe et al., 2016, Keating, 2021]. Communities are depicted not merely as settings for public goods provision but as crucibles where individuals forge their preferences, values, and allegiances. These social frameworks foster norms of reciprocity, distinctions between insiders and outsiders, and skepticism towards external authority. The community-centric view emphasizes how rescaling is related to functional concerns and the existence of territorially bounded groups. In this paradigm, governance structures are directly affected by changes in the institutional entities present on the territory. As Keating (2013) puts it, territory is intimately associated with boundaries, delineating a specific physical area with fixed lines. This constructivist perspective of rescaling emphasizes the dynamic interplay of temporal and spatial connections within social processes. In other words, governance systems have a territorial reach and are molded by spatial contexts.

I operationalize it by considering the number of different levels (typologies) of Vast Area (Area Vasta) institutions, which are the governance level between the Municipality and the Region. Vast Area institutions include: Metropolitan

City, Province, Urban Network, Union of Municipalities, Metropolitan Network, and Intermunicipal Territorial Union (UTI). I am only considering institutions formally recognized by the Italian Constitution and the Regional statute. I focus on the number of different types of governance entities and not on the sheer number of total units because the total number is dependent on the size of the region, while the type is not. In other words, It is about the number of levels of governance in which power resides, rather than the number of entities. My focus on governance levels is informed by the work on the Regional Authority Index (RAI) [Hooghe et al., 2016], which argues for the consideration of the formal role of the intermediate level of subnational governments in territorial reforms. Sub-regional jurisdictions represent the most diverse aspects of territorial governance within a nation-state and are often subject to contention [Hooghe et al., 2016].

Special Statute Region	Delrio Implementation Year - Types of Community	Post Delrio Reform Year - Types of Community
Friuli Venezia Giulia*	2014 Simple- 1 (Intermunicipal Territorial Unions)	2019 Complex - 4 (Mountainous Communities, Community of the Hills, Communities, EDR)
Sardinia	2016 Complex - 7 (Unions of Municipalities, Metropolitan Networks, Urban Networks, Medium Cities, Metropolitan City, Provinces, Homogeneous Areas)	2021 Complex - 4 (Unions of Municipalities, Provinces, Unions of Provinces, Metropolitan Cities)

Table 2.2: DV Community Dimension Table - Special Statute Regions

The operationalization of this dimension is informed by the empirical analysis of the cases, focusing on the relative change of complexity compared to the territorial arrangements before the implementation of the Delrio reform. In both Friuli Venezia

Giulia and Sardinia, there were three types of community: Unions of Municipalities, Mountainous Communities, and Provinces. The community dimension captures the rescaling of governance by recognizing that the multiplication of several different levels of Vast Area institutions produces high *complexity* and fragmentation of loci of power. A lower number of vast area typologies is connected to institutional *simplicity* and consolidation of governance. Table 2.2 shows the variation in the complexity of communities within the two Special Statute regions. Friuli Venezia Giulia, with law 26/2014, aimed to consolidate the region's governance structure (from thereto one type of community). However, the results of my fieldwork show that the region's localist traditions hindered the complete execution of the reform, as local actors advocated for numerous amendments and resisted its implementation. De jure, the region consolidated its territorial governance, but de facto, it resisted it, pushing for fragmentation. I will further discuss this important argumentative lever in this chapter and chapter six. To understand what influences the fragmentation and consolidation of territorial rescaling, I'm focusing on two key explanatory factors: party organization and institutional legacies.

2.4 Party Organization

Theories centered on the role of partisanship and political parties argue that these agents are responsible for shaping institutional and territorial reforms to their benefit. They influence the salience of territorial issues in the political theater and the timing and substance of changes that have engendered the movement of authority between institutions [Toubeau and Massetti, 2013]. This understanding is based on rational choice theory, which postulates that parties are rational agents capable of understanding what would benefit them and acting accordingly [Downs, 1957] In this scenario, the relationship between central and local

governments becomes increasingly politicized. Opposition parties utilize their local electoral influence to resist national policies and establish strongholds for pursuing national political power. Localities negatively impacted by state interventions driven by partisan or planning factors politicize their connection to central government based on territorial identities. Those interests excluded from a highly centralized national political stage leverage the central-local relationship to compensate for their lack of representation at the political core. This cycle comes full circle: the national exclusion of territorial political organization lays the groundwork for the central government to weaken local power, while the central government's intrusion rekindles territorial politics [Tarrow et al., 1978], making regions the battleground for political competition.

The works of Kirchheimer (1966), Panebianco (1988), and Katz and Mair (1995) have stressed the importance of political party models in competitive liberal democracies, focusing on mobilizing electoral support in changing Western societies. Initially, the organizational model featured two types: Cadre parties, rooted in a small elite group, evolved from parliamentary origins, transitioning from social leaders to organizers for expanding electorates. Loosely organized, with low memberships, and lacking ideological programs, these parties were common among conservatives and right-of-center groups. In contrast, mass parties originated from late nineteenth-century working-class protests, adopting formal organization, full-time officials, mass membership, and systematic political programs, typically leaning towards social democracy or democratic socialism and emphasizing internal party democracy. The broadening franchise pressured both cadre and mass parties to develop professional organization and extensive memberships while staying pragmatic for electoral success. Otto Kirchheimer's catch-all model de-emphasizes the original social base, downplaying specific ideologies, strengthening central leadership, sacrificing internal party democracy for unity, broadening social group

links for funding, and shifting from membership to leadership campaigning through the media [Katz and Mair, 1995].

Mass parties organize focusing on the mobilization of the population and dividing the electorate into distinct constituencies, as noted by Lipset and Rokkan in their concept of "narrowing the support market." [Lipset and Rokkan, 1967] Through this approach, individual electoral choice is constrained by the encapsulation of the mass of the electorate into one of the sub-cultural groups that the parties represent, so that electoral politics is less about differential rates of conversion than it is about differential rates of mobilization' ([Katz and Mair, 1995] p. 19). With its reliance on ideology, the mass party appeals to the voters by providing for prospective popular control over policy, in that the electorate is supporting a well-defined program, and the party (or coalition of parties) with a majority of the votes gets to rule[Katz and Mair, 1995].

In the classic mass-party model of politics, society is organized into well-defined social groups, with individuals' lives closely intertwined with these groups [Katz and Mair, 1995]. Politics centers around the competition, conflict, and cooperation of these groups, and political parties act as the conduits through which these groups and their members engage in the political process, assert their demands, and vie for control of the state by placing their representatives in key roles. Each social group has distinct interests, which are articulated through the party it supports. This party platform is not just a collection of policies; it represents a coherent and logically interconnected whole. As a result, party unity and discipline are both practically advantageous and morally justifiable. This moral foundation relies on the direct involvement of the public in shaping the party's agenda, which, from an organizational perspective, requires a robust network of branches or cells to facilitate broad participation in policy-making [Katz and Mair, 1995].

Individual voter choices are shaped by their alignment with one of the social groups represented by the parties, prioritizing mobilization over persuasion in electoral politics. Nonetheless, at the systemic level, the mass-party model offers the potential for popular control over policy, with the party (or coalition) that secures the majority of votes assuming governance (Lawson in [Katz and Mair, 1995]). Parties are viewed as the essential link between citizens and the state. A successful party's effectiveness is contingent on deepening the commitment of its existing supporters, specifically those within its 'natural' social constituency [Katz and Mair, 1995]. This model underscores the importance of public engagement in the political process and the strong connection between social groups, political parties, and governance. Mass parties are accountable to their members and focus on representative capacity rather than policy effectiveness.

The literature on party models has consistently declared the obsolescence of the mass party. They find political, sociological, and technological changes as factors contributing to its apparent decline, notably the erosion of traditional social structures and the transition from local canvassing to mass media campaigning for political messaging dissemination [Katz and Mair, 1995, Panebianco, 1988, Kirchheimer, 1966]. Yet, more recent studies have found that the mass party model of party organization is still present in today's political landscape. Albertazzi (2016) lists the examples of the Swiss Schweizerische Volkspartei (Swiss People's Party, SVP), the Finnish Perussuomalaiset (the Finns Party, PS), and the Italian *La Lega* (the Northern League, LN) [Albertazzi, 2016, Zulianello, 2021].

The literature on the catch-all party explains that by the 1990s, many parties in Europe further embraced centrist/generalist positions, influenced by factors such as the neoliberal direction of EU economic policies and globalization. This approach is often associated with efforts to broaden the party's appeal beyond its traditional base and to win elections by appealing to swing voters and moderates.

Under the Catch-All party model, elections shift their focus from the selection of policies or programs to the choice of leaders, with the responsibility for shaping these policies or programs transferring from party membership to party leadership. This transition altered the dynamics of electoral behavior, where voters were once molded by predispositions but now actively exercise their choice (Rose and McAllister in [Katz and Mair, 1995]). The prior emphasis on mobilizing and converting voters has waned as both processes assumed an ability to foster effective loyalty. Instead, voters are now viewed as free-floating and uncommitted, susceptible to the appeals of any of the competing parties [Katz and Mair, 1995]. Consequently, the catch-all party model underscores the retrospective aspect of popular control and accountability, which relies on experience and track record, in contrast to the prospective approach based on clearly defined alternatives.

This shift towards broadening the electoral platform was exemplified by parties like New Labour in the UK, the socialist-led alliance in France, Neue Mitte in Germany, and the Olive Tree coalition in Italy, which successfully secured electoral victories [Allen, 2009]. Even the traditionally left-leaning Swedish Social Democrats followed suit in 1994 upon joining the EU, although they attempted to revert to leftist positions after a poor electoral performance in 1998. By the late 1990s, the majority of EU countries were governed by parties or coalitions led by the democratic left, indicating the perceived success of this second-generation catch-all strategy for social democracy [Allen, 2009].

While most of the mentioned moderate political victories proved short-lived, many European parties seemed inclined towards maintaining a post-ideological political agenda and a catch-all approach. For example, during the early 2010s, the new Leader of the Italian Democratic Party, Matteo Renzi further emptied its party ideology, emphasizing vague terms like 'innovation', 'education', and 'culture' [Bordignon, 2014]. As a result, observers and journalists quickly drew parallels

between Renzi's initiative and Tony Blair's 'third way', a comparison that Renzi himself didn't shy away from, recognizing Blair as "one of the world's few instances of a successful and persuasive left-wing leader" (Renzi 2011 in [Bordignon, 2014]). According to Somer Topcu's (2015) study of nine European states, political parties that appeal broadly attract different groups of voters who perceive them to be closer to their own positions. The catch-all approach is still been employed because it has been shown to be a winning strategy to increase the electoral base, at least in the short term [Somer-Topcu, 2015], since the parties have to keep persuading voters of their suitability.

Although this type of organization and electoral appeal has seen its fortunes in Europe, it has also been employed in other continents. A 2011 study by Thachil, shows how catch-all parties attract votes through policy-making by offering comprehensive benefits that cater to the material interests of specific groups of voters. An exemplary illustration of this party organization is how the Indian BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) implemented programmatic social assistance to cultivate electoral support from lower-caste voters. Lower castes were perceived as especially challenging to attract, as the Brahminical ideology promoted by the BJP has traditionally appealed to Hindu elites rather than those experiencing the daily indignities of caste discrimination or those whose spiritual beliefs have been marginalized as inappropriate or even uncultured [Thachil, 2011].

In this study, I will focus on the organization of the party expressing the President of the Regional Government of each region. I do so because Constitutional Law No. 1/1999 significantly altered the power dynamics among key regional bodies, notably the Regional Council, the Regional Government, and the President of the Regional Government. It elevated the President to a central authority within the regional governance framework. Unlike the previous system, where the President and Government members were chosen by the Regional Council,

the new law mandates direct election of the President by universal suffrage. Consequently, the President (and its party) now plays multiple pivotal roles in regional affairs, including external representation, issuing regulations, calling for regional referendums, and, importantly for my study, enacting regional legislation. Focusing on how the party expressing the President seeks to garner electoral support can highlight how the ruling party's interests can influence the regional government's territorial legislation.

My research shows that territorial outcomes are affected by the organization of the party in government. Within the framework of this variable, parties can be categorized as employing either a mass or a catch-all party organization [Katz and Mair, 1995, Panebianco, 1988, Duverger, 1951, Kirchheimer, 1966] to mobilize the electorate. The mechanisms behind the relationship between a party's party organization and territorial rescaling have to do with how the party seeks electoral support (Table 2.3). The following two subsections will further explain the categorization of the organization in relation to territorial rescaling outcomes.

Party Organization	Mass Party ↓	Catch-all ↓
Territorial Rescaling	Fragmentation	Consolidation

Table 2.3: Party Organization - Expected Territorial Outcomes

2.4.1 Mass Party

A mass party has a well-defined ideology and depends on its members' financial and electoral support. To maintain their appeal to their voter base, they seek to sustain collective identities through their ideological stances [Panebianco, 1988]. Since mass parties seek electoral support by emphasizing their representative roles of ideological collective identities, a government led by a mass party would

approach territorial changes by upholding its ideological stance towards rescaling. As discussed above, the mass party seeks to attract voters by offering the promise of potential popular influence over policy decisions as voters endorse a clearly defined program. This type of organization underscores the importance of public engagement in the political process and the strong connection between social groups, political parties, and governance. Mass parties are accountable to their members through their strong presence on the territory, prioritizing representative capacity. As a result, governmental mass parties can be expected to be either opposed or neutral towards sweeping territorial consolidating efforts, like the Delrio reform. These parties are likely to be attentive to *issues of identity and representation of their electorate*.

2.4.2 Catch-All Party

A catch-all party is a political party that attempts to appeal to a wide range of voters by adopting a centrist or moderate ideological position [Kirchheimer, 1966]. These parties often eschew strict adherence to a particular ideology and instead prioritize pragmatic policies to attract a broad spectrum of voters from different backgrounds and viewpoints. Catch-all parties typically seek to maximize electoral support by appealing to the largest possible segment of the electorate, sometimes at the cost of clear ideological coherence. Because of this electoral fluidity, the catch-all party is focused on its efficacy in policy-making. By having a generalist approach, this type of party seeks to win over voters by investing in policy implementation and (perceived) effectiveness [Katz and Mair, 1995].

As the catch-all party prioritizes appealing to a broader electorate through its effectiveness in policy-making, we expect it to be in *favor of reforming the territorial governance structures*. This is particularly relevant considering that the Delrio reform (law 56/2014) was a symptom of widespread popular discontent

towards potentially superfluous institutions. A catch-all party would be expected to take a programmatic approach, leveraging the opportunity to expand its voter base. Moreover, the reform aimed to reduce institutional complexity and cut costs by eliminating territorial entities, a central issue for the electorate after the 2008 crisis. Not supporting cuts to the political machine was considered extremely risky in an electoral sense [De Donno, 2019].

The party organization of the governing party is an important consideration when studying variation in territorial rescaling. Yet, My research shows that this variable needs to be understood in a larger context of institutional legacies.

2.5 Institutional Legacies

As introduced above, the literature on territorial politics discusses the impact of institutional legacies that set new institutions into place (Collier & Collier, 1991, in [Eaton, 2004]). Social context and history profoundly condition institutions' development and capacities, subject to a 'logic of path dependence'. From this perspective, institutions are understood as the result of long historical processes and of individual choices mixed with unintended outcomes [Spruyt, 2002]. While political agents seek to design institutions to serve their interests best, increase their chances at reelection, achieve cherished policy goals, or enhance welfare gains, their choices are constrained by the available options (Thelen & Steinmo 1992 in [Spruyt, 2002])[Ziblatt, 2006, Messina, 2012]. To put it differently, the costs of changing the institutional trajectory of the subnational governments increase [Pierson, 2000]. This concept has become crucial in explaining why political institutions do not change as much as one might anticipate. Path dependence implies that policymakers operate within a narrow set of assumptions about their environment, and often fail to learn from past experiences prioritizing caution in

their decision-making processes.

This framework highlights the importance of contextual effects such as the polity's preexisting institutional and power arrangements [Gerring et al., 2011] and the influence of time in territorial restructuring, evident in the different moments of territorial reforms and the occurrence of feedback effects between them. Because of the importance of context, I employ North's definition of institutions as "the rules of the game" that encompass not only formal rules, such as laws and regulations, but also informal norms, customs, and beliefs that guide human behavior within a society. These institutions play a critical role in shaping incentives, interests, and policy-making [North, 1991]. The policy effects of local legacies have also been shown to shape how communities think about political power and territorial boundaries. The set of shared beliefs and understandings about territorial relations within a given society influence the development of physical boundaries [Agnew and Shin, 2017]. In other words, these contextual legacies (what Agnew calls 'geopolitical imaginaries') are a form of collective mental mapping that defines how individuals understand the world, influencing how power is exercised over territory and the geopolitical landscape.

Leveraging this literature, I argue that institutional legacies are essential in understanding territorial politics dynamics and how political power is exercised over space. I define institutional legacies as the specific fundamental modes of coordinating social and institutional life [Harmes, 2021] that, regardless of the territorial level at which they are constituted, exist in all territories. The contextual explanation for this variable is rooted in the understanding that local context matters; local politicians and decision-makers are socially embedded, and thus, their political choices are shaped by the dense social worlds they inhabit [Wilfahrt, 2018].

The categorization of the institutional legacies variable is informed by the

works of March and Olsen (2010) and Messina (2012), which delineate two types of institutional mechanisms: aggregative and integrative, each representing distinct interpretative models concerning the nexus between institutions and society. These models are mirrored in public policies, with aggregative institutions striving to secure support for specific groups, while integrative institutions aim for widespread support for shared preferences. Consequently, institutions are not merely shaped by public policies targeting the entire community or specific segments but also act as catalysts and outcomes of interactions among involved actors. Aggregative institutions prioritize particular interests, maintain political order through institutions that aggregate private preferences and alternative endowments, and function on principles of exchange and mediation. Conversely, integrative institutions prioritize shared values and a sense of belonging to the political community, maintaining political order by subordinating private interests to the public interest and shared preferences, thereby fostering mutual understanding and adherence to established rules [March et al., 1989, Messina, 2012].

The mechanisms affecting territorial rescaling stem from the distinct aggregative and integrative approaches to institutional cooperation and public administration, which have gradually become embedded in their respective regions' historical trajectories and contemporary political landscapes [Messina, 2012]. In other words, these mechanisms translate into territorial legacies that are rooted in decentralized, localized grievances or collaborative, holistic ones. Therefore, I categorize the institutional legacies of the cases as either localist or concerted. In regions characterized by concerted legacies, where political actors exercise extensive local and regional administrative powers with a strong inclination toward collaborative public intervention, I anticipate the consolidation of territorial governance, both functionally and institutionally. On the contrary, regions with localist legacies tend to limit involvement from state authorities, preferring ad hoc initiatives and

spontaneous solutions. Rooted in parochialism, the administrative and business sectors resist intergovernmental cooperation agreements, thereby perpetuating fragmented governmental structures better suited to address local concerns.

Institutional Legacy		
	Localist ↓	Concerted ↓
Territorial Rescaling	Fragmentation	Consolidation

Table 2.4: Institutional Legacies - Expected Territorial Outcomes

This paradigm draws attention to the institutional and political contexts in which each region exists and analyzes the regional constitutions and the effects of previous reforms, as well as the past and present regional relationships with institutions at the subnational, national, and supranational levels. As illustrated below, the logic of path dependence would see regions with a history of *strong local interests* (localism) seeking fragmented territorial arrangements that focus on representing such interests. Regions with a history of *robust municipalities and state involvement (concertation)* would likely consolidate functions and territorial institutions focusing on the goal of increasing efficiency rather than local interests (Table 2.4).

2.5.1 Localist Legacies

The term localist denotes a clear valorization of the local dimension in politics, often in opposition to the state’s power and/or to the impact of globalization [Harmes, 2021]. The principle of localism prioritizes local allegiances and identities over national, regional, or ethnic affiliations. It is grounded in specific associational networks within tangible, familiar spaces [Fanning et al., 2010]. In general, localism conveys a preference for bottom-up approaches to governmental and economic coordination rather than top-down ones (Pratchett, 2004 in [Harmes, 2021]). In

localist legacies, institutional decision makers involve mediating between coalitions and interests. This type of decision-making is characterized by its focus on managing various groups or stakeholders' competing demands and interests (Figure 2.1). Areas with localist legacies are characterized by complex political landscapes with factions having conflicting agendas and priorities. Decision-makers are focused on achieving consensus and compromise, often through negotiation and coalition-building. Localist legacies affect policy decisions by seeking to balance divergent viewpoints and interests within a political or organizational context [March et al., 1989].

The localist approach is connected to strong identities and interest groups intertwined with the territory. The sociopolitical cleavages are rooted in the places and are usually addressed with ad hoc solutions. The localist legacies limit planning as a regulatory tool, preferring distributive policies and thus producing a model of political institution characterized by aggregation of separate local grievances (Figure 2.1). This model is oriented towards defending particularistic local interests and promotes politics as a venue of exchange [Messina, 2012] between interest groups. Regions with localist legacies are expected to resist swooping reforms aimed at simplifying governance like the Delrio, pushing for more fragmented territorial outcomes more adapt to particularist dynamics.

2.5.2 Concerted Legacies

The concerted approach derives from a general high trust in the regional state actors whose centralized and cooperative decision-making has become reliable and efficient. This institutional approach sees the systematic incorporation of groups bringing in representatives of affected interests to discuss and propose amendments to legislative proposals from the regional government (Figure 2.1) [Keating, 2014]. In concerted legacies, institutional decision-makers imply a fiduciary administration

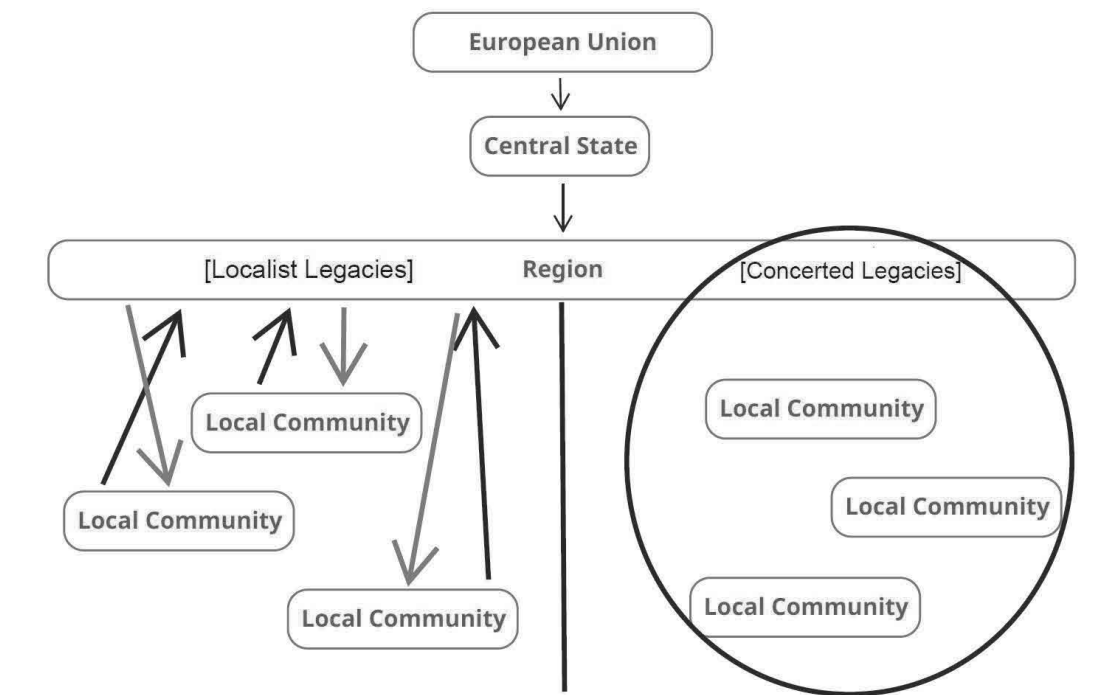


Figure 2.1: Visual Representation of Multilevel Relations in Regions with a Localist [Left] and a Concerted [Right] Legacy

of social traditions and future needs, which further entails an educational role. This institutional approach emphasizes the cultivation of shared purposes and values within a political system. It fosters territorial cohesion and unity, aiming to integrate diverse interests and perspectives into a cohesive whole. Institutional decision makers in concerted processes are tasked with addressing immediate concerns and envisioning and nurturing the long-term development and stability of the community or organization they serve [March et al., 1989].

The institution-building process is further reinforced by actively involving and incorporating social actors across the regional territory, a practice legitimized through the partnership ideology. In countries like France and Spain, governments have provided subsidies to regional groups and, in some cases, established such groups where they were absent. These formal mechanisms have elevated the significance of regional engagement, bolstered these groups' institutional standing and resources, and exerted influence on policy trajectories [Keating, 2014]. Meso-level governments with concerted legacies focus on integrating various groups into policy-making, aiming to acquire information, secure consent, and streamline implementation. Therefore, regions with concerted legacies are expected to implement reforms aimed at making territorial governance more efficient and less fragmented, like the Delrio. ⁶ Because of their collaborative approach, these legacies should also corral several local and social actors to integrate the decision process and the implementation of the reforms.

In the upcoming section, I will unify the independent variables previously discussed to elucidate their collective influence on territorial rescaling.

⁶It is crucial to remind the reader that the concerted legacies are connected to perceived efficiency, not actual efficiency.

2.6 Argumentative Framework

I build an argument that combines place-based institutional legacies [Agnew et al., 2002, Messina, 2017, Tarrow et al., 1978, Putnam et al., 1993, Almagisti, 2015] with party organization effects [Katz and Mair, 1995, Pasquino and Valbruzzi, 2017, Panebianco, 1988]. Regions perpetuate approaches to territorial rescaling rooted in historical legacies of collaboration, public management, and identities. My argument is in conversation with the works of decentralization and federalism scholars, who have long emphasized the importance of considering regional institutional histories in the design of intergovernmental relations. Institutional legacies have been found to affect the approach to local policy-making [Messina, 2017] and play a key role in promoting or undermining territorial governance in a given region [Putnam et al., 1993].

I contend that the organization of the governing party, coupled with the institutional legacies of a territory, can predict policy-making outcomes in matters of territorial rescaling. Consequently, I propose that governing parties use territorial policy-making to appeal to the electorate according to their specific organization. In doing so, they must consider the peculiar institutional legacies of the territory they seek to reform and appeal to. This hypothesis is rooted in the notion that political actors endeavor to shape institutions to align with their interests, bolster their reelection prospects, realize policy objectives, or elevate welfare outcomes. However, their decisions are limited by the array of available institutional venues [Spruyt, 2002]. Indeed, if governing parties can successfully understand historical institutional dynamics, they may find it advantageous to better engage with the local electorate.

In this framework, institutional legacies are essential in understanding territorial politics dynamics and how political power is exercised over space. I categorize

the institutional legacies of the cases as either localist or concerted. The localist approach is connected to strong identities and interest groups intertwined with the territory. The sociopolitical cleavages are intertwined with the places and are usually addressed with ad hoc solutions. The concerted approach derives from a general high trust in the regional state actors whose centralized decision-making has become reliable and efficient. These legacies affect territorial rescaling because localist approaches push for decentralization and multiplication of institutional units, while programmatic, efficiency goals usually drive concerted approaches.

The regional approaches to decision-making have historical roots but have also changed as the region's economies and political complexions have developed. My argument differs from Putnam's perspective because I do **not** overstate the fixity of regional "institutional legacies" when these are dynamic and related to political variables. In fact, territorial outcomes are also affected by the governing party's party organization. As I will further explain in chapter four, if the ruling party features catch-all electoral approaches featuring a significant reduction of its ideological baggage, an appeal to a broader segment of the population as potential voters, and a deliberate effort to establish connections with various interest groups [Pasquino and Valbruzzi, 2017]; we would expect territorial governance consolidation efforts due to its appeal to a broad audience. Since the early 2000s, the main Italian parties that employed such strategy have been Berlusconi's *Forza Italia* (FI), the *Five Star Movement* (5S) and the *Democratic Party* (PD) [Bordignon, 2014].

If the regional government features a mass party defined by an party organization based on an extensive territorial footprint promoting social integration among its members and on preserving 'collective identities through ideology' [Albertazzi et al., 2018a, Zulianello, 2021]; we should expect territorial fragmentation because of its appeal to specific collectivities. Since the early 2000s,

the main Italian parties that employed such approach have been *La Lega* (LN) [Albertazzi et al., 2018a], and at the regional level *Sardinian Action Party* (PSdAz) [Hepburn, 2010]. The right-wing party *Brothers of Italy* (FdI) has some traits of the mass party model to show themselves as an active presence available to citizens, but this transformation 'remains partial and half-hearted, and largely driven by a desire to signal a "closeness to the people" (2021, p. 366) [Albertazzi et al., 2018a]. Because of this complexity and because during the timeline of analysis, no regional government was led by *Brothers of Italy*, I refrain from categorizing it as a mass party.

Institutional Legacies	Ruling Party Organization	
	Mass Party	Catch-All Party
Localist Legacies	Fragmentation (Veneto 2015 + Friuli Venezia Giulia 2020 + Sardinia 2021)	Consolidation (Friuli Venezia Giulia 2014*) Fragmentation (Sardinia 2016)
Concerted Legacies		Consolidation (Emilia-Romagna 2015)

Table 2.5: Argumentative Framework

As will be elaborated in chapters five and six, I categorize Veneto, Friuli Venezia Giulia, and Sardinia as having localist legacies, where the state/Region responds to the grievances of the territory rather than engage in concentration to make integrated decisions including all the interested players. Due to their specific histories and subnational dynamics, their localism typologies differ. Veneto's ecosystem is characterized by antistate localism rooted in its parochial culture of diffidence towards state institutions [Messina, 2012, Almagisti and Zanellato, 2021]. *Friuli Venezia Giulia has arguably the most complex political ecosystem, which is influenced by being a border region with language minorities and a history

of dis-homogeneity. With law 26/2014, catch-all Democratic Party sought to consolidate the territorial governance structure of the region. Yet, the localist legacies did not allow the full implementation of the reform - local actors pushed for numerous amendments and refused to implement the reform on the territory. Sardinia features a particular localist politics deriving from its historic subnational identities and a network of personal relations attached to the territory. The remoteness that comes with its insularity, and the subaltern relation with the Italian state have fueled these dynamics where policy decisions depend on the grievances of the territory.

Emilia-Romagna has a concerted political ecosystem where the institutions function well and are generally appreciated by the citizenry. This reality allows for territorial reforms that are programmatic in nature. Its history of strong civic culture has seeped into the relationship between all regional actors, from the labor unions to the industrial guilds, from the smallest municipality to the regional government [Putnam et al., 1993, Messina, 2012]. This trust has proven successful in developing a relatively efficient system of territorial governance, where the institutions have a central role in coordinating the players for the benefit of the territory.

The argumentative leverage lies in the analysis of the cases of Friuli Venezia Giulia and Sardinia. These two regions alternated mass party and catch-all governments, which, according to the party organization hypothesis, should have yielded territorial fragmentation and consolidation, respectively. Yet, the data shows that the regional institutional legacies de facto trumped party organization effects on the legislation and implementation of territorial rescaling. In both cases, the localist legacies forced the hand of the catch-all party in government, which, while trying to implement consolidating reforms, ended up not truly affecting the rescaling of the territory. This confirms that, while the party model of party

organization influences the policy outcomes, the institutional legacies are the stronger predictor of territorial differentiation; in other words, any party governing a region would have to adapt to the contextual and institutional specificities of the territory.

It is important to note that in my argument, I rule out the ethnocultural perspective, not because minorities (ethnic, linguistic, racial, etc.) lack significance, but because their impact is often channeled through localized historical legacies rather than solely their minority status. While the presence of sizable linguistic minorities ⁷ undoubtedly influences territorial rescaling outcomes, the influence of entrenched institutional histories prevails. It's not merely the presence of minorities that shapes outcomes, but rather their history of political organization and its enduring effect on institutional frameworks. This phenomenon embodies path dependency, wherein the trajectory of a region's development is heavily influenced by its past. Take the case of Veneto, for instance, where the absence of linguistic minorities doesn't preclude the pursuit of fragmentation. Instead, its territorial rescaling is rooted in a complex tapestry of historical factors, including the legacy of the Venetian Republic, management by the Demochristian Party, a pervasive small business culture, and anti-state localism [Messina, 2012, Almagisti and Zanellato, 2021]. These historical intricacies underscore the nuanced interplay between minority presence, institutional legacies, and territorial outcomes, highlighting the need for a comprehensive understanding of local dynamics beyond surface-level demographics.

⁷Law No. 482/1999, under Art. 6 of the Constitution, is aimed at protecting the 12 historical linguistic minorities recognized in the Italian national territory (Catalan (15 k), Ladin (30 k), Greek, Germanic (350k), Croatian, Sardinian (1 mil), Occitan, Franco-Provençal, French, Albanian, Slovenian (60k) and Friulian (600k)).

Chapter 3

Cases and Context

This chapter describes the research design employed in this study. Initially, it delves into the rationale behind adopting a subnational approach for selecting cases. Following this, it elucidates the methodology used to measure and analyze the variation in the dependent variable across the chosen cases. Subsequently, it explains the research design's suitability in unraveling the intricate mechanisms driving territorial rescaling. Lastly, the chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the sociopolitical contextual background essential for understanding the study's framework.

3.1 Subnational Approach

Subnational research plays a significant role in contemporary agenda-setting works within comparative politics. Gyraudy et al. define subnational research as a 'strategy of social science inquiry that focuses on actors, organizations, institutions, structures, and processes located in territorial units inside countries, that is, below the national and international levels' (p. 7)[Gyraudy et al., 2019]. Unveiling the considerable disparities within nations, a subnational viewpoint

explores new research inquiries, elucidating the irregular distribution of phenomena that captivate both scholars and the general public. It also focuses on an array of stakeholders (such as city mayors, regional governors, community organizations, provincial lawmakers, and indigenous groups), structures (comprising subnational government bodies, local judiciary branches, and regional legislative assemblies), and analytical units that are commonly neglected by comparative politics, which primarily concentrates on the national scope. Subnational research fosters theoretical advancement by supplying novel data and political entities to formulate, examine, and refine theories [Giraudy et al., 2019].

Subnational units are crucial to expanding our understanding of the broad range of 'polity preferences' of local actors who aim to influence the governance structures within countries [Eaton et al., 2019]. At first glance, the disputes between community and scale regarding the design of subnational institutions, as described by Hooghe and Marks (2016), may appear as primarily domestic conflicts. However, it is increasingly important to move beyond the national constraints of the community versus scale conflict and consider how international and local actors and forces engage in and impact this conflict.

In the case under study, the European Union has had an important role in pressuring the Italian state to legislate in favor of territorial rescaling to decrease government spending. Sub-state territorial entities serve as more feasible analytical units to study the factors affecting the varied implementations of territorial reforms based on three primary reasons. Firstly, these units facilitate the examination of multifaceted historical explanations rather than solely mono-causal ones. Secondly, these units contribute to broadening and adapting the territorial scope of analysis (either scaling up or down as required) instead of presuming that the national state and its sovereign territory are the sole factors influencing and constraining political processes [Rokkan and Urwin, 1983]. Finally, these units

enable effective utilization of paired comparisons, which reveal the distinctions and parallels between analogous cases, as opposed to single-case study research methods [Tarrow et al., 1978].

The subnational nature of the project allows for control for national factors, building a stronger explanation of variation against a background of commonality [Putnam et al., 1993, Hooghe et al., 2016], leading to better causal inference. I focus on aggregate patterns in political decision-making instead of individual-level explanations. Following Lipset and Rokkan's approach, I emphasize the need to study aggregate patterns of territorial cleavages to understand the impact of social relations on policy outcomes [Rokkan and Urwin, 1983]. Much like Putnam's landmark study on Italian civic culture, I study sub-national units to provide a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between political institutions and local contexts, as regional differences in political and cultural conditions can affect how institutions function and pass laws [Putnam et al., 1993].

3.2 The Delrio Reform

This project takes advantage of a failed constitutional reform in Italy and studies regional variation in implementing territorial governance rescaling. Following the 2008 economic crisis and the pressures from the European Central Bank, the Italian central government passed Law 56/2014. It was informally called the Delrio reform, after Graziano Delrio (Democratic Party), the then Minister for Regional Affairs and Autonomies, was the leading proponent of the reform.

According to the government, law 56/2014 was part of a broader effort to make territorial governance simpler, cheaper, and more effective. This top-to-bottom imposition of a new institutional asset planned the annulment of the intermediary local government, the relative reinforcement of the municipalities and/or the

regions, and the change from direct into indirect elections of the representatives of the intermediary units [Mazzoleni, 2016]. The official text reads, 'the principles of the law apply as principles of great economic and social reform, in accordance with their respective statutes, the regions of Sardinia, Sicily, and Friuli-Venezia Giulia (Art. 1, paragraph 5, of Law no. 56/2014), are required to adapt their internal regulations (Art. 1, paragraph 145, Law no. 56/2014). In this regard, in sentence no. 168 of 2018, the Court clarified that the provisions on the indirect election of territorial bodies contained in Law No. 56 of 2014 and other related provisions are included in great economic and social reform principles. According to the Court, "the expected mechanisms of indirect election of the top bodies of the new 'wide area entities' are, in fact, functional to the pursued objective of simplifying the organization of territorial entities, within the framework of the redesigned institutional geography, and at the same time respond to a physiological purpose of saving costs associated with direct election." Consequently, while respecting their autonomy, special statute regions cannot derogate from it. This means that all 15 Ordinary Regions and three Special Regions that had provinces had to reform their institutions according to their statutes. Yet, law 56/2014 did not precisely define the principles, allowing the regions some flexibility in implementing the law.

Four Ordinary Regions (Lombardia, Veneto, Campania, and Puglia) challenged 'the Delrio Act before the Italian Constitutional Court as it was allegedly interfering with regional competences and were therefore violating the constitutional framework; [the Court] rejected the arguments of the petitioners and ruled that [...] the Delrio Act does not infringe any of those constitutional principles which the regions claimed had been encroached' ([Longo and Mobilio, 2016], p 524). However, the law did not abolish the provinces; it defunded them to the point of bare survival, transforming them into new "Aree Vaste" (broad areas) entities managed by mayors and municipal councilors, expressing a democratic logic characterized

by greater horizontal dynamics and reduced vertical structures.

The definitive abolition of the Provinces was intended to be part of the constitutional reform proposed by Minister Boschi but failed to go through a double reading and approval by both houses of parliament, a requirement for constitutional amendments, Minister Boschi and Prime Minister Renzi (Democratic Party) called for a referendum. According to Pasquino and Valbruzzi, 'the Prime Minister fully personalized his electoral campaign and in practice was asking for a vote on his person/role, in fact looking for a plebiscite' ([Pasquino and Valbruzzi, 2017] p 153), rather than focusing on the 'content' of the referendum itself. The final tally was 59.1 percent for the No vote and 40.9 percent for Yes. The No vote had won in all Italian regions but three – Toscana and Emilia-Romagna, where the Democratic Party is deeply entrenched in society, and Trentino-Alto Adige, where the *Südtiroler Volkspartei* had established a special relationship with Renzi's government. The 2016 constitutional referendum had a strong connection to the socio-economic dynamics of the country, meaning that the electorate punished the government because of the state of the economy and their conditions of employment insecurity or vulnerability (*ibid*). Again, it seems that the referendum was more about PM Renzi and his government rather than Italy's provinces and territorial landscape.

Despite surviving the referendum, the provinces emerged weakened in political, institutional, functional, organizational, and financial terms [Napolitano, 2018]. Deprived of resources and functions, the provinces thus faced a legislative stalemate, compromised their functioning, and severely worsened regional governance problems[Fucito and Frati, 2017], leaving the country in institutional disarray. According to a report developed by the Italian Senate on the institutional status quo after the reform, three critical issues have since affected the territory. First, the indirect elections of the President and the provincial council have affected the

democratic and representative process. Second, the cuts embedded in the reform have exacerbated the financial uncertainty and lack of funding that has affected the provinces for decades. Finally, the reform has highlighted great difficulties in subdividing the institutional capacities among the different sub-national territorial institutions [Fucito and Frati, 2017].

The 2014 Delrio Law offered a set of normative directions that the regions had to implement by their regional statutes. This resulted in the regional governments acting in various ways, redistributing functions across the three institutional levels. The 15 regions with ordinary statutes could only change the capacities/attributions of their territorial institutions. The five Special Regions could use their autonomy to interpret the principles of the reform with the prerogative of changing their territorial structure along with the redistribution of functions (Art. 5, Law 56/2014).

My project addresses the developments of deep-seated contestations over regional governance that go back to Italian national unification, underlining the historical centrality of the relationship between the center and its peripheries. The nationalization practices of the Italian state sought to keep together the fragmented polities and cultures that were unified through war (1848–1871). Yet, parochialism from localized cultural, ethnic, and political interests has endured, nested in the relationship between regions and the central state. With this in mind, this project analyzes the changes brought about by reforms in the institutional structures that govern citizens' lives within government-defined territorial boundaries at the sub-state level. The boundaries themselves do not have a clear and distinct functional logic or represent distinct identity-based groups. Instead, they are tools of power that shape the distribution of citizens within them by including some and excluding others, ultimately impacting the social forces within these territories [Keating, 2021].

3.3 Case Selection

I employ a most similar cross-case method of case selection, choosing four regions based on their different categorization of the dependent variable (see table 3.1) [Seawright and Gerring, 2008]. The selected cases are as similar as possible across a range of parameters (size, GDP, etc) while exhibiting variation in the dependent variable(s) of interest. The rationale behind this approach is to control for potential confounding factors and to identify the key factors or mechanisms that may be responsible for the differences in the outcome variable. The most similar approach is based on John Stuart Mill's method of agreement, which is a technique for identifying causal relationships. In this method, if two or more cases share an expected outcome and have only one factor in common, it is assumed that this factor is the cause of the outcome. Most similar cases broadly representative of the population provide the strongest basis for generalization (ibid, p. 301).

To control for the potential influences of the type of regional statute on territorial rescaling approaches, I selected two regions for each type of regional statute, Ordinary and Special (or Autonomous). The Italian state has 15 regions with ordinary statutes. The Regions are autonomous entities and cannot be considered sovereign entities in any way: they can politically self-determine (Autonomy, Constitutional Law), defining their political direction alongside that of the national state. However, they are constrained by the principle of unity and indivisibility of the Republic (Article 5 of the Constitution), which prevents them from taking specific actions, primarily seceding from the national territory. In other words, despite enjoying considerable autonomy, the regions are subordinate to the national state. They cannot be regarded as entities superior to it, as reaffirmed by the Constitutional Court. Specifically, the constitutional court has repeatedly stated that the Regions are not subjects of international law [Treccani, 2024].

The regions with special status (Valle d'Aosta/Vallée d'Aoste, Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Sicily, and Sardinia) are established by the Constitution to address unique historical and geographical circumstances, granting them specific levels of autonomy. Each region has its laws and regulations governing legislative powers, administrative functions, and financial matters. It's important to note that the distinctive feature of the economic systems in these regions and autonomous provinces is that the State collaboratively determines measures to support public finance objectives, allocate new responsibilities, adjust state tax rates, and address specific challenges [Treccani, 2024].

Because of their subordination to the Italian state, the Ordinary Regions had to implement the principles of the reform 56/2014 (Delrio); on the other end, the five Special Statute Regions were not directly subject to the policies established by the Delrio reform due to their constitutionally granted autonomous status. Trentino-Alto Adige and Valle D'Aosta's regional constitutions have the most autonomy, which insulated them from the influence of the Delrio reform. On the other hand, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Sardinia, and Sicily have statutes with less autonomy relative to the central state and partially implemented the general principles of the reform. In particular, likely energized by the discourse on decentralization brought by the reform, Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Sardinia decided to change their institutional assets, redistribute functions, and change the territorial organizations at the second and third levels. As discussed, the categorization of the Ordinary Regions offered by the Impact Assessment Office of the Italian Senate and the territorial changes in the Special regions inform my case selection (table 3.1).

Given the above-mentioned parameters, I selected four regions: Veneto, Emilia-Romagna, Friuli Venezia Giulia, and Sardinia. Of the 15 Ordinary Regions, I chose Veneto and Emilia Romagna because they have similar economies ¹ and populations

¹PIL 2019 Tot. in mln € 157862 Emilia Romagna and 159984 Veneto



Figure 3.1: Case Selection Map (Open Source)

² but have decided to redistribute the functions at the antipodes. Veneto has a relatively fragmented territory and is one of the six regions that changed the least, and one of the two that maintained a distribution of the functions very similar to the status before the reform ³. Emilia-Romagna went full steam ahead, creating an institutional network that fostered collaboration between governmental levels while centralizing decision-making at the regional level.

Table 3.1 shows that Veneto limited the redistribution between levels of government, de facto maintaining a governance structure close to the status quo before the Delrio reform. The ISSIRFA study notes that Veneto is the only Italian region that, despite centralizing some of the competencies previously held by provinces, the latter effectively retained the exercise of these competencies. In other words, Veneto's already minor redistribution of functions was de facto even more limited [Napolitano, 2018]⁴. The other Ordinary Region, Emilia-Romagna, reformed its institutional landscape by redistributing the functions among its levels, embarking on a path to redefine administrative functions in coherence with the institutional role of direction, planning, and control of the Region [Napolitano, 2018]. Some functions, like forest management and social services, were divided into specific sub-functions and allocated to the territorial level that could better manage that particular assignment. This reform process sought to decrease territorial multiplication and foster the association of smaller municipalities to deliver services that interest the larger area.

Studying the drivers of regional decision-making in the Special Regions allows for analyzing more tangible variation in territorial governance due to their prerogative

²4445000 Emilia Romagna and 4852000 Veneto

³The other region, Molise, is the second smallest by area in Italy, making it a poor choice for comparison with the other cases

⁴*In chapters four and five, I will discuss the case of the Programmatic Area Agreements (IPA), which are hybrid associations of municipalities and civil society. These entities are not covered by the Italian Constitution, but offer an example of how Veneto's localist legacies manifest themselves beyond the lack of functional redistribution.

to organize the local institutions. I chose Friuli Venezia Giulia and Sardinia because they have similar economies ⁵ and populations ⁶ while deciding to extensively rearrange their institutions, unlike Trentino Alto Adige, Sicily, and Valle D'Aosta, which did not reform their territorial structure ⁷. Sicily is not included in the cases for three reasons: 1) it has renamed its provinces, reallocating 100% of their functions de facto, not changing anything; 2) the Sicily local government's reform is still waiting for the right (indeed unclear) completion after long and troubled processing and attrition with the central state. It is difficult to categorize the Sicily case because the Italian Central State has juridically stopped the Sicily government from implementing the reforms while appointing a non-elected commissioner to run the Provinces [Spataro, 2018], 3) Sicilian GDP (87952 million €) and population size (4802016) are not commensurable with Sardinia's and Friuli Venezia Giulia's.

Thanks to their autonomous statutes, Sardinia and Friuli Venezia Giulia reformed their functional distribution along with the structure of their local institutions. Sardinia focused on establishing new types of institutions across the territory and kept the majority of functions intact, not moving them to other entities. Friuli Venezia Giulia eliminated the provinces, created Intermunicipal Territorial Unions (Unioni Territoriali Intercomunali - UTI), and simplified the institutional structure redistributing functions between the UTIs and the Region itself. According to ISSIRFA's study, Friuli Venezia Giulia redistributed 100% of the provincial functions (it eliminated the provinces altogether - 13% to the Region and 87% to Area Vasta), while Sardinia reassigned only 36% of the provincial functions (12% to the Region and 24% to Area Vasta) [Napolitano, 2018]. Table 3.1 shows that institutionally, Friuli Venezia Giulia has low fragmentation and

⁵GDP 2019 Tot. in mln € 37509 Friuli Venezia Giulia and 33724 Sardinia

⁶1198000 Friuli Venezia Giulia and 1598000 Sardinia

⁷It has to be noted that the GDP per person and the population density of Friuli Venezia Giulia are much higher than Sardinia

low complexity since the reform ⁸, while Sardinia has been highly fragmented and became more complex after the reform.

Ordinary Statute		Special Statute	
Veneto	Emilia-Romagna	Sardinia	Friuli Venezia Giulia
Functional Dimension			
Status Quo	Redistribution	Community Focus	Community Focus
Community Dimension			
Constitutionally Inapplicable*	Constitutionally Inapplicable	Complex	Simple
Territorial Rescaling Outcome			
Fragmentation	Consolidation	Fragmentation	Consolidation (See Footnote 7)

Table 3.1: Territorial Rescaling by Region

3.4 Methodology

I employ a qualitative multilevel approach using policy, newspaper, and interview data to critically explore how regional sociopolitical contexts impact variations in local, territorial policies. The work of Patrizia Messina (2006) describes this procedure as an ecosystemic analysis of local politics, which can explain the policy-making processes through a deep 'contextual comparison' inspired by Rokkan's approach; it simultaneously analyses institutional and cultural variables, plugging the data in a system of meaning that is historically and territorially constructed [Messina, 2012]. To capture the complex data necessary to engage in such rich

⁸In Friuli Venezia Giulia, law 26/2014 on paper consolidated the territorial governance structure of the region compared to the previous organization. Yet, according to my data, the localist legacies did not allow the full implementation of the reform; local actors pushed for numerous amendments and refused to implement the reform on the territory

comparative work, I interviewed 104 politicians and experts in territorial politics in Italy (Fig. Appendix 1). The participants were contacted if they held an official position in the subnational government or were experts (professors, researchers, journalists, etc.) in local institutions and politics. I developed a set of predetermined questions that led to my follow-up on interesting points raised by the interviewee, probing deeper into specific areas of interest. This approach allows for a more natural and flexible conversation and can result in a wealth of rich and detailed information. A key advantage of semi-structured interviews is that they allow for in-depth exploration of the experiences and perspectives of the interviewee. While time-consuming and labor-intensive, they allow for a more nuanced understanding of complex social issues and can provide insight into the motivations and experiences of individuals. The interviews took place in-person and remotely during a 15-months span (2021-2022), eight of which were spent in the field between the four selected regions. The interviews lasted between 20 and 90 minutes, covering topics pertaining to the decision-making processes, the political discourse, and the implementation of the territorial policies under study.

The time frame under analysis formally includes the institutional status of the regions from 2014 to 2021. I analyzed a total of nine territorial reforms and, considering the historical influence on each region's institutional legacy, I also considered past laws and events that impacted today's institutional environments. Beyond national law 56/2014 (Delrio), I have studied regional laws 13/2015 and 15/2016 (Emilia-Romagna), 19/2015 and 30/2016 (Veneto), 26/2014 and 21/2019 (Friuli Venezia Giulia), and 2/2016 and 7/2021 (Sardinia). This policy analysis informed the categorization of the dependent variable for the four cases and supported the interview guide(s) of the semi-structured interviews. Additionally, I have selected more than 300 newspaper articles from the two main newspapers

of Friuli Venezia Giulia and Sardinia ⁹. The articles from the two Friuli Venezia Giulia's publications were accessible online, but the ones from Sardinia were not. During my month-long stay in the Sardinian capital of Cagliari, I visited the regional archives multiple times, reading, selecting, and scanning the articles that matched my search criteria. Given the pre-existing literature discussing the 'political culture' of Veneto and Emilia-Romagna [Almagisti, 2015, Messina, 2012, Putnam et al., 1993, Diamanti, 2009], I focused more resources in triangulating the less studied and more complex cases of the two Special regions. The parameters of selection included articles published one month before and one month after each major reform and referendum concerning territorial reforms from 2011 to 2022. I searched for all the articles that discussed 'Enti Locali' (local entities) and the decision-making processes that brought about the reforms. I employed Qualitative Content Analysis, systematically coding and identifying themes and patterns to analyze textual sources and interview transcriptions. I used Dedoose, a software that simplified the coding process and streamlined the analysis.

I analyzed primary textual sources and transcribed interviews using Qualitative Content Analysis. This method facilitates the subjective interpretation of textual data by systematically categorizing and identifying themes or patterns. It offers a structured yet flexible approach, allowing for comparing contextualized content from written sources [Schreier, 2012]. Through coding, this methodology aids in identifying patterns across multiple sources while considering the surrounding context, which is particularly important in the study of culture and politics. Coding involves systematically categorizing, organizing, and examining texts to uncover underlying patterns. This process took a qualitative approach, emphasizing interpretation and context over counting occurrences. This project's qualitative

⁹Friuli Venezia Giulia = 'Il Messaggero Veneto' and 'Il Piccolo'; Sardinia = 'La Nuova Sardinia' and 'L'Unione Sarda')

analysis used inductive and deductive approaches to better make sense of the 'story' that the interviews were telling. An initial deductive codebook was developed from the explanatory variables that emerged from the literature: historical constitutionalism, party organization, economic interests, and ethnic cleavages. These approaches became the 'mother codes.' The material was analyzed by applying this structure while also inductively considering the themes arising from the text. Several sub-themes and patterns were collected to create 'child codes' that captured the essential contextual nuances provided by the information-rich interviews, newspaper articles, and council meeting transcripts.

I processed the data content with the mixed methods data analysis software Dedoose, a web-based program for qualitative data coding that offers easy integration with quantitative data. One of the critical advantages of Dedoose as a tool for qualitative data analysis is its ability to streamline and simplify the coding process. With its intuitive interface and user-friendly tools, Dedoose can help researchers to save time and effort and to produce more accurate and reliable results. Ultimately, the research plan's mixed-method approach, which triangulates interviews with newspaper articles and transcripts of regional council meetings (available online), is devised to minimize issues of external validity that come with small-n research, capturing the cases' breadth and complexity while developing contributions applicable beyond the Italian context.

3.5 The Italian Context

The analysis of the Italian regions offers a tailor-made comparative study of the dynamics and ecology of institutional development and regional decision-making. The Italian case is particularly interesting because contestations over regional governance go back to Italian national unification, underlining the historical

centrality of the relationship between the center and its peripheries. It has endured as a divisive issue while remaining unresolved. According to Anna Trono, in the course of the reform of Italian local government from 1945 to 2016, three salient phases can be identified: the period 1946–1948 saw the institution of the regions with Special Statute, which addressed grievances of a historical, geographical and cultural nature, and pressing demands for autonomy. The 1960s and 1970s saw the creation of the ordinary regions, which was completed in 1977. The law (DPR 616) prevented them from collecting their taxes, creating continuous conflicts over the central state and periphery budget. The 1990s saw the start of the third phase, which decentralized many functions while increasing organizational duplication and redundancy [Nunes Silva and Trono, 2020]. As of 2022, the Italian state is subdivided into twenty regions (1st level territorial units), 110' vast areas' (2nd level territorial units such as provinces, metropolitan cities, free municipal consortia, ...), and 7,903 municipalities (3rd level territorial units). These numbers do not include other forms of institutional collaboration, which is very nuanced and Region-specific. Fifteen Italian Regions have Ordinary Statutes with limited autonomy relative to the central state. These regions have exclusive legislative power concerning matters not expressly reserved to state law (Article 117 of the Constitution); examples are healthcare and education. The other five have Special Statutes because their historical, geographic, and cultural characteristics grant them greater autonomy and decision-making power on legislative, administrative, and financial matters. Until the 2014 reform, provinces were generally in charge of secondary schools, public transportation, infrastructures, environment, equal opportunity policies, and a few other functions that each Region could delegate to them. The municipalities were in charge of several administrative functions such as urban development, environment, primary instruction, cultural services, and sports.

3.5.1 History of territorial reforms before the Delrio

At the outbreak of the Second War of Independence in 1859, the Italian states were politically fragmented, and only the Kingdom of Sardinia had a proper constitutional framework based on the Albertine Statute granted in 1848. Other rulers, including the Pope, had also granted constitutional charters, called "Statutes", and there had been experiences of constituent power, such as the Statute of the Kingdom of Sicily and the Constitution of the Roman Republic, but these failed to lead to a confederal national state. Instead, the Albertine Statute became the basis of the Italian constitutional monarchy model. In the Kingdom of Sardinia, a science of constitutional law developed, along with collections of constitutional charters and books to disseminate citizens' duties and rights. The other pre-unification states (Gran Ducato di Toscana, Lucca, Modena, Parma), although diverse, remained absolute monarchies where the monarch held personal legislative and executive power. They were influenced by the eighteenth-century reformist tradition and the Napoleonic experience and maintained some of their institutions, practices, and legal principles, such as simplification, equality before the law, protection of property, and some individual rights. They also experimented with consultative bodies at the local or central level, such as the General Congregations of Milan and Venice in the Lombardo-Veneto Kingdom, as a substitute for the lack of representative bodies [Ziblatt, 2006].

The multinational context of pre-unification Italy has contributed to deep-seated territorial cleavages lasting throughout Italy's history, but the unitary architecture has never been displaced. The institutional weakness of pre-unitary kingdoms and concerns about centrifugal tendencies led to a preservation of unitarism, which hindered the development of decentralization and federalism in the founding phase. According to Ziblatt, first unified Italy had a lack of strong institutionalization within the potential subunits, pushing Piedmontese state builders to seek solutions

that promoted unity. The central political power assimilated all preexisting sub-units of the potential Italian federation to establish a single, centralized state [Ziblatt, 2006]. The trend towards centralization started during the Liberal Age, when Piedmontese centralism was extended to Italy. Despite this centralization, forms of decentralization increased over time, except during Fascism and the brief period of fiscal centralization in the 1970s. Only the collapse of the traditional party system and the emergence of the *Lega Nord* in the 1990s brought the federal idea back to the forefront, leading to a season of reforms that strengthened decentralization and the local government [Baldini and Baldi, 2014].

After World War two, the 1948 Italian republican Constitution aimed to increase veto powers and address territorial issues that could undermine the legitimacy of centralism. The main goal of the constituent assembly was to prevent the resurgence of fascism and the concentration of powers. As a result, parliament was emphasized as the key institution, rather than the executive as in other democracies of the time. This veto-ridden structure was later complicated by the emergence of the ideological cleavage between communism and anti-communism, which hindered political alternation and reinforced central-local party patronage.

With the arrival of democracy, regionalist movements and ethnolinguistic minorities in the northern regions, as well as separatist pressures from Sicily and Sardinia, heightened the significance of the territorial dimension and the North-South economic divide [Trigilia and Ewing, 1991]. Despite this, support for federalism remained limited, and a compromise was reached on political regionalism as a new form of decentralization. The constitution added a regional state with devolved legislative power, but it was still more unitary than federal, lacking fiscal autonomy, territorial representation, and regional participation in constitutional amendments. The main parties agreed on this change, while still preserving the idea of centralism that was more consistent with their political beliefs and strategies.

The PCI and PSI, among other left-wing parties, favored centralism for its guarantee of nationwide homogeneous welfare provisions. On the other hand, the DC could benefit from preserving its traditional alliance with localism, given its role as a political broker in patron-client relations, especially in Southern Italy Macry, in [Baldini and Baldi, 2014]). This introduces an intriguing tension and potential contradiction that needs clarification. The PSI and PCI were mass parties, but their successor, the PD, is a catch-all party. Thus, regions like Emilia-Romagna transitioned from being governed by mass parties to being governed by a catch-all party. Conversely, the Christian Democrats were a catch-all party, but the Lega, which inherited much of their electorate, is a mass party. Consequently, regions like Veneto maintained a similar ideological orientation but shifted from a catch-all party to a mass party. This inversion is particularly significant as it highlights the changing dynamics of party organization and governance while maintaining similar left-right political spectrums. Emphasizing this inversion, while noting the overall ideological continuity, makes my argument stand out against Putnam's rigid understanding of the role of civicness in affecting institutional capacity and policy change. This contrast underscores how institutional legacies and party models interact in dynamic, complex ways, shaping the territorial and political landscape in distinct regions.

The architecture of local government was also preserved, controlled directly by the central government and not the regions, replicating the existent institutional culture based on layering rather than moving functions to a different institutional level [Baldini and Baldi, 2014]. The constitution established asymmetrical regionalism, with five special regions — the two big islands (Sicily and Sardinia) and the three regions with ethno-linguistic minorities (Aosta Valley, Trentino Alto-Adige and Friuli Venezia Giulia) — were granted significant self-rule powers and the immediate creation of elective regional assemblies. The remaining 15 'ordinary'

regions had limited competencies [Masseti, 2012]. This asymmetry aimed to balance the bottom-up dynamic of pluralism in mobilized territories with a top-down effort to create a more democratic and efficient government, while also supporting underdeveloped areas in the South. The implementation of ordinary regions was delayed until the 1970s and was influenced by the coalition agreement between political parties.

The DC party initially advocated for wide regional autonomy due to the belief that the left was about to take over the national parliament and that autonomous regional bodies could prevent communism from taking control of the country [Mazzoleni, 2009]. After the outbreak of the Cold War in 1948, the DC became the dominant party and the anti-systemic attitudes of the PCI ruled out political alternation. To address the North/South divide, the center implemented financial transfers and established state agencies: the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno, 1950, and the Ministry of State Participation, 1956, which by statute had to invest at least 40% of its funds in the South. The implementation of the new Ordinary Regions started to materialize when it was included in the coalition agreement of the center-left government. The PCI became more regionalist, hoping to gain electoral support in the regions of the center of Italy. The Ordinary Regions became operational in 1977 and sub-state shares in public spending increased, but regions soon lost their room for maneuver with regard to constitutional design and their finances became entirely dependent on state transfers. Moreover, parliament continued to legislate in matters devolved to regions, depriving Italian regionalism of one of its key prerogatives [Putnam et al., 1993]. The regions never gained power over local government and remained ambiguous in their role in center-periphery relations. They did not become important in representing territorially-based interests, which still preferred the old informal party mechanisms based on the centralism-localism alliance [Baldini and Baldi, 2014].

The federal idea experienced a resurgence in the 1990s after being disregarded for over a century. The political party Lega Nord (LN), a league of regionalist movements, was a key factor in bringing federalism back into political discourse. The party was formed in 1991 and gained popularity during the crisis of the traditional political system brought on by the Tangentopoli corruption investigation. In the 1992 general elections, the Lega Nord received 8.7% of the vote and even more in the regions of Lombardy and Veneto (more than 20%). With the collapse of the DC, which had traditionally acted as a mediator in center-periphery relations, new issues arose and the North-South territorial divide was brought to the forefront, leading to questions about Italy's unitary structure [Diamanti, 2009]. The LN criticized the political class in Rome and the assistentialist policies towards the South, which they felt had neglected the development of the North. This resulted in a new "northern question" that further entrenched the federal idea in the Italian political debate. The LN aimed to build a new Northern identity and advocated for devolution of more legislative powers to the regions, including fiscal federalism, and even threatened secession. They sought a constitutional reform that would transform Italy into a federal state [Fabbrini and Brunazzo, 2003]. Although the South was not receptive to these ideas, they resonated with the general public. Territorial politics gained more importance, and almost all parties began to support federalism. This opened a window of opportunity for institutional reforms, including a major constitutional reform in 2001, to meet the EU's requirements for increased political and fiscal accountability of sub-state governments [Fabbrini and Brunazzo, 2003].

Many reforms were approved, leading to greater decentralization and steps toward federalism. Political decentralization was increased through direct elections of sub-state executives and the transfer of many competencies and responsibilities. Sub-state shares of public spending rose from 26.8% in 1980 to 31.6% in 2008, and fiscal revenues increased from 3.2% in 1980 to 22.5% in 2007 [Baldi, 2020].

Changing direction from the past, both constitutional and ordinary legislation significantly strengthened regional autonomy, much like federalization by devolution implemented by other European countries: Belgium, Spain, and, to some extent, the UK. Despite these reforms, federalization has been largely incomplete and inconsistent. The reforms have decentralized power, but the predominant centralistic culture has not changed. The Bassanini reforms in 1997 introduced administrative decentralization but not legislative devolution. Regions are not represented in national law-making or constitutional amendment processes, and fiscal federalism is still in progress, focusing primarily on cuts in public spending. The reforms have also strengthened local governments, leading to the constitution referring to the Italian state as a "republic of autonomies." However, the state still has control over local authorities and regions are struggling to define their role in territorial governance [Baldi, 2020].

The regional-unitary nature of Italy can be partly explained by the fact that the Lega Nord's alignment with the center-right coalition made them generally supportive of federal reform, but the internal divisions within the Berlusconi-led camp and the inconsistent stance of the *Lega Nord* (switching from supporting macroregions, to localism, and then to secession) made it difficult to form a coherent plan for a federal system. The first challenge was the heterogeneous territorial base of the center-right coalition, which made it hard to reach a consensus on federalism. The 2005 constitutional reform project was not successful as it failed to be a true federal reform, being only a compromise between the AN and UDC's centralist stance and the *Lega Nord*'s focus on territorial competitiveness. Secondly, the Lega Nord itself was an ambiguous agent, favoring simulated politics over genuine commitment to federalism, as shown by their opposition to the center-left 2001 constitutional reform [Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2010]. Additionally, the lack of agreement between the two coalitions was exacerbated by Berlusconi's

polarizing figure and his mobilization in support of an uncompromising defense of the 1948 constitution; (Cheli in [Baldini and Baldi, 2014]). Ultimately, the notion of equality as sameness is widespread among politicians and the general population, with many believing that centralized governance ensures uniformity in living conditions and bridges the socio-economic gap between the North and South of Italy. This prevailing view is evident in Italian political culture, which remains resistant to the concept of rescaling in rules, standards, and policies that is integral to the idea of federalism, as noted Piretti(in [Baldini and Baldi, 2014]).

The first significant change to the Italian institutional structure in the new millennium was the reform of the Title V of the Constitution of Italy actuated by Law No. 3/2001, fully recognizing local autonomy as entities that pre-exist the formation of the Republic. This included the municipalities, metropolitan cities, provinces, and regions, which are responsible for representing and meeting the needs of their respective territories. Regions, provinces, metropolitan cities, and municipalities have the same level of authority and legitimacy according to the Italian Constitution. There is no hierarchy, and all have financial autonomy, allowing them to have their own resources, impose and collect taxes, manage their own budget, and manage their own assets [Petrone, 2012]. Governance takes place at the lowest level and as close to citizens as possible, except in cases where the higher level of government must step in due to inability or non-compliance with the vertical subsidiarity principle. This reform was necessary to fully implement the "Federalism with unchanged Constitution" reform (Law No. 59/1997). With this reform, Regions have been granted legislative autonomy, allowing them to dictate primary law in three levels of competence: exclusive or full (the regions have the same power as the state to legislate), concurrent or shared (the regions legislate with laws bound by the respect of fundamental principles determined by the national state's laws in specific subjects), and implementation of state laws

(the regions legislate in accordance with both principles and details contained in state laws, adapting them to local needs). The national state only has full and exclusive power in the subjects listed in the second paragraph of Article 117¹⁰ of the Constitution. For all other subjects, the regions have full legislative power, allowing them to 'interpret' the implementation of Law 56/2014, which created the different territorial outcomes that are the object of my study [Petroni, 2012].

The reform described the features and functions of the other territorial entities that constitute the Italian institutional landscape. The Municipalities (Comuni) are defined as basic territorial entities with statutory, organizational, administrative, tax, and financial autonomy. They represent and promote the development of the local community and are the main recipients of administrative functions as they are closer to citizens and considered more suitable for carrying out administrative tasks. Provinces (Province), which became the main object of reform 56/2014, are intermediate entities between municipalities and regions, representing their own communities and caring for interests while also programming the activities of local communities within their territory. Metropolitan cities (Città Metropolitane) are a special type of province with much more extensive powers, similar to those of municipalities, especially in urban planning. They were planned in metropolitan areas, including cities like Torino, Milano, Venezia, Bologna, and others, and were formally established in 2014, after years of lagging. Finally, Mountain communities (Comunità Montane) are unions of mountainous and partially mountainous municipalities, even from different provinces, with the function of valorizing mountain areas, for the exercise of their own and joint exercise of municipal functions.

¹⁰The legislative power is exercised by the national state and the regions in accordance with the Constitution, as well as the constraints arising from the community system and international obligations.

3.5.2 The History of the Province

The history of territorial institutions in Italy is influenced by the various socio-political actors that have ruled over the peninsula throughout the centuries. I argue that understanding the territorial organization of the most influential actors in the peninsula pre-unification, the Kingdom of Sardinia and the Kingdom of Sicily, helps us contextualize the development of the province. In the Kingdom of Savoy¹¹, the 1723 Royal constitutions provided a more organized framework for the role of the Intendants of the Provinces in the Piedmontese centralization attempts. The Intendant became an indispensable means of bureaucratic-administrative centralization and was configured as the "forerunner of the modern prefect." In the late eighteenth century, the administrative systems of the ancient states were revolutionized by the Cisalpine Republic and the annexation of Piedmont to France, which inaugurated the institution of the Prefect. The Napoleonic administrative organization maintained the distinction between Departments and Municipalities, but placed the Prefect at the head of the former as the sole holder of public authority in local civil administration and directly responsible to the government. The Prefect of the 1800s did not differ much from the Intendant of the Piedmontese administration, which had shared the model of the Ancien Régime of pre-revolutionary France throughout the eighteenth century [Bolgherini, 2011].

Once again independent, the Regno di Sardinia reformed its identity through the Statuto Albertino, which transformed the monarchy from absolute to constitutional and reforming the territorial organization of the kingdom, officially instituting the Provinces. It wasn't until 1859 that the more modern understanding of Province became mainstream in Italy. The so-called "Rattazzi decree," is considered a cornerstone of the Italian local administrative system. The decree aimed to address conflicts between provincial government bodies that had arisen after a law passed

¹¹Current Valle D'Aosta, Piemonte, Liguria, some areas that now belong to France

in 1848. It transformed the previous divisions into provinces and the previous provinces into districts. The decree established two government bodies with legal personality at the local level: provinces and municipalities. The province was conceived as a large association of municipalities, and its administrative body was called the Provincial Deputation. The decree also introduced the position of Governor, appointed by the central government, with political and administrative control over the province. The Provincial Council was established as an elected representative body with deliberative functions, and its members were elected by mandate based on a certain tax payment [Bolgherini, 2011].

The importance of local organization during the Bourbon era, between the 18th and 19th centuries, is significant because it was here, before Piedmont, that the "province" appeared as the first of the four levels into which the kingdom was divided administratively. In the southern part of the peninsula, the provincial administration developed following the criteria and forms that were most suitable for strengthening the relationship between the center and the periphery, based on a centuries-old tradition of centralization dating back to the Norman conquest. However, the local institutional experience of the South presents two dominant characteristics: the power of the Barons and the Church, as well as the many remnants of feudalism in the organization of the territory and the widespread and compelling privileges of the past. On the other hand, the power of the crown is seriously threatened by feudal privileges and jurisdictions. In this context, the central power also uses the role of the communes, which are born and developed as demesne cities, but have little autonomy and little influence on the various powers. The second characteristic is the dense set of rules and provisions of every kind and jurisprudence on local administrations that creates an adequate climate of discretion to regulate power balances at the local level, guaranteeing sufficient social peace in the kingdom. However, during the Bourbon era, there seemed to be

little interest in simplifying the surplus normative of the time [Bolgherini, 2011].

Bolgherini and Messina note that, throughout the fascist regime's twenty-year reign, the Prefect's power, established during the unification of Italy, remained unchallenged. The Prefect was initially seen as an advocate for bureaucratic decentralization, which was considered the sole form of decentralization compatible with political and administrative centralization (Ragionieri 1967, p.104 in [Bolgherini, 2011]), and this function continued to define their role. Regarded as a member of the political elite, the Prefect was also responsible for promoting Italianization within the administration. During the general atmosphere of rejection towards the experience of the fascist twenty-year period, it was natural for the issue of local autonomy to be among the cornerstones of the constitutional framework of the new republican Italy. However, the uncertainty and the compromising nature of the solutions adopted by the drafters failed to solve the tangle of role and function ambiguities that had accompanied the organs tasked with governing the province since the 18th century, mostly resulting from being "cut out" from those of the state and municipalities. Many voices have pointed out the limitations of the Constitution, especially with regard to the regions, but also concerning the provinces. Despite this, the Constituent Assembly held firm in maintaining that some services, such as health, hygiene, and transportation, would be better provided to the community if delivered directly by the provincial authority. Moreover, the province, deemed indispensable by the drafters, saw its functions enhanced and was placed in a de facto superior position to municipalities (Article 128 of the Constitution). The past centrality of the provinces highlights how remarkable is that the Delrio reform sought to eliminate them altogether, showing how highly contextual territorial preferences and reforms can be.

3.5.3 Party Decline

The trajectory of territorial rescaling within the Italian state has to be considered in the context of a general decline in participation and institutionalization of the Italian party system's since the First Republic's collapse in the early 1990s. Like many other European countries in the past decades, with the erosion of traditional divides and a lack of a clear political vision, political parties have experienced a decline in their ability to represent their constituents. This has made it increasingly challenging for parties to secure loyal support from voters. Furthermore, national parties have encountered difficulties in maintaining internal cohesion and discipline, particularly when the interests and competition of sub-national party units differ. Essentially, if there is not a strong bond between the two layers of the party, such as hierarchy, social solidarity, or party ideology, a subnational party may not be inclined to support an unpopular national party line. Unfortunately, these bonds have deteriorated in many parties over the past few decades [Hepburn, 2010, Detterbeck and Hepburn, 2018].

In Italy, the 'Mani Pulite' or 'Clean Hands' investigation, which exposed widespread corruption among political parties, businessmen, and public officials, was the catalyst for this decline. The investigation revealed the extent to which political parties were intertwined with the business community and exposed the corrupt practices that had characterized Italian politics for decades. The Italian party system in the post-World War II era was characterized by a high degree of stability and predictability. The Christian Democratic Party (DC) was the dominant political force, and it controlled the government from 1948 to 1992 [Newell, 2010]. The DC was a catch-all party that represented a broad range of interests, from the conservative Catholic Church to the left-wing trade unions. It was able to maintain its dominance by building alliances with other parties, including the Socialist Party and the Liberal Party. However, by the 1980s, the

DC was showing signs of weakness. Its traditional base of support, the Catholic Church, was declining in influence, and the party was losing ground to new parties that were emerging on the left and the right. A growing disillusionment also fueled the DC's decline among voters who were becoming increasingly frustrated with the party's corrupt practices and failure to address the country's economic problems. Against this backdrop, the 'Mani Pulite' investigation was launched in 1992. Initially, the investigation focused on the illicit financing of political parties, but it quickly uncovered a web of corruption involving politicians, businessmen, and public officials. The investigation led to the arrest of hundreds of people, including prominent politicians such as the DC's leader, Giulio Andreotti. The investigation had a profound impact on Italian politics, as it exposed the extent of corruption and clientelism that had characterized the political system. The investigation revealed that political parties were deeply intertwined with the business community and that politicians were using their positions to enrich themselves and their allies. This led to a crisis of confidence in the political system and a widespread sense of disillusionment among voters [Newell, 2010].

Newell (2010) explains that the collapse of the DC and the other major political parties that had dominated Italian politics since the end of World War II marked the end of the First Republic. The collapse of the old party system created a vacuum that new parties filled, such as the *Lega Nord* and later the Five Star Movement. These parties were characterized by their anti-establishment rhetoric and their willingness to challenge the traditional political class. The emergence of new parties and the decline of the old party system led to a period of political instability in Italy. It became increasingly difficult to form stable governments, and the country went through a period of frequent changes in government. This instability contributed to a sense of disillusionment and cynicism among voters, who felt that their voices were not being heard. In fact, the decline of the Italian

party system has had a significant impact on political participation and party institutionalization. The fragmentation of the party system and the emergence of new parties has led to a decrease in voter turnout and a weakening of party identification, which has made it more difficult for voters to identify with a particular party or ideology [Newell, 2010].

The decline of the Italian party system has also had implications for party institutionalization. First, it has made it more difficult for parties to maintain a stable support base and to develop coherent policy platforms. This has contributed to the frequent changes of government that have characterized Italian politics in recent years. Second, it has made it more difficult for parties to negotiate and build coalitions, contributing to the party system's fragmentation. Finally, it has contributed to the rise of anti-establishment parties, which have been successful in mobilizing voters who are disenchanted with the political class [Chiaramonte and Emanuele, 2022]. The traditional parties had been able to maintain a high degree of institutionalization by building alliances with other parties and establishing a strong presence in civil society. For example, the Five Star Movement has rejected the traditional left-right divide and advocated for direct democracy and anti-corruption measures. These new anti-establishment parties have been successful in mobilizing voters who are disenchanted with the political system, but they have not established a strong institutional presence. This has made it difficult for them to maintain their electoral support and develop long-term strategies for governing. The new political actors have exacerbated the volatility of the electorate and the political sphere, increasing the reliance on populist claims rather than truly programmatic efforts. This is particularly noticeable in the case of law 56/2014, where pressure to 'restore the confidence of investors' in Italian bonds and the rising influence of anti-establishment rhetoric fueled by the growing Five-Star Movement pushed the center-left government to design and pass the

Delrio reform. The current discourse around the reform describes it as a policy that sought to appease the electorate and the European Union, which, unfortunately, did not capitalize on its promise of improving and simplifying territorial governance.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter describes the research design employed in this study. Initially, it delved into the rationale behind adopting a subnational approach for selecting cases. Following this, it elucidated the methodology used to measure and analyze the variation in the dependent variable across the chosen cases. Subsequently, it explained the research design's suitability in unraveling the intricate mechanisms driving territorial rescaling. Lastly, the chapter provided a comprehensive overview of the sociopolitical contextual background essential for understanding the study's framework.

The following three chapters present the empirical findings supporting the central argument of this project. Chapter four explores the impact of regional governing parties' organization on territorial governance reforms. It underscores the active role of political parties in shaping local society through regulatory mechanisms, beginning with the delineation of party strategies and their classification as mass or catch-all. Chapters five and six conduct a detailed empirical examination of how institutional legacies directly influence territorial rescaling. By considering socio-cultural history and past territorial configurations, these chapters analyze how a region's institutional heritage shapes its approach to territorial governance reforms.

Chapter 4

Party organization Effects on Territorial Rescaling

4.1 Overview of the chapter

This chapter analyzes the effects of the organization of the regional governing party on its approach to territorial governance reforms. The variable focuses on the structures and procedures for mobilizing electoral support by political parties [Katz and Mair, 1995, Panebianco, 1988]. It considers the party expressing the President of the Regional Government of each region. From this perspective, political parties have not merely established a presence but have actively orchestrated the organization of local society. They achieved this through overseeing local political institutions and actively participating in local society. Political parties have played a pivotal role in implementing various regulatory mechanisms to garner electoral support mainly in Emilia-Romagna and Veneto. Through strategic control of local political institutions, they have influenced and shaped the governance landscape.

My study focuses on the organization of parties expressing the President of

the Regional Government (Fig. 4.1). I do so because Constitutional Law No. 1/1999 has brought significant changes to the dynamics among the key bodies of the Region outlined in Article 121 of the Constitution: the Regional Council, the Regional Government, and the President of the Regional Government. This legislation has elevated the President of the Regional Government to the central authority in the regional governance structure. Unlike the previous provision in Article 122, where the Regional Council elected the President and Government members from its members, the "new" Article 122 mandates the direct election of the President of the Regional Government by universal suffrage. Consequently, the pivotal role in driving regional affairs has shifted from the Regional Council to the President of the Regional Government. The President now holds a dual role, assuming responsibilities akin to those of the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister at the national level. Regarding external representation, the President of the Regional Government acts as the face of the Region, issues regulations, calls for regional referendums, and, most importantly for my research, enacts regional legislation.

When the governing party adopts a catch-all organization that involves a significant reduction in their ideological stance, outreach to a broader spectrum of potential voters, and actively seeking connections with various interest groups (Kirchheneimer in [Pasquino and Valbruzzi, 2017]), we can anticipate efforts to consolidate territorial governance due to their broad appeal and programmatic focus. Conversely, when the regional government is led by a mass party based on grassroots activism and has an extensive territorial presence, promoting social integration among its members while preserving collective identities through ideology, in that case, we should expect territorial fragmentation because of the appeal to specific groups and their grievances.

Two of the four cases offer variation in governmental turnover, allowing me to

consider the party organization effects on policy-making controlling for regional institutional legacies. According to Giraudy, turnover refers to the rotation of members of different political organizations in the exercise of power. Incumbents and oppositions have different policies and electoral preferences, and policies that benefit incumbents may not benefit oppositions [Leiras et al., 2015]. Figure 4.1 shows that Friuli Venezia Giulia and Sardinia have seen regular turnover, where catch-all and mass party-led governments alternated. Within the time frame under study, both regions saw a change from governing parties with catch-all organization to governments with mass party approaches.

Turnover is also important because the two regional cases with the Special Statute have changed the design of their institutions of secondary levels a second time since the initial reform (law 21/2019 in Friuli Venezia Giulia and law 7/2021 in Sardinia). This change in territorial governance offers another sample to understand the mechanisms of regional decision-making. The autonomy statutes give these regions more legislative flexibility and a quicker turnaround than laws put forward by ordinary regions, where change is subordinate to their close relationship with the central state. The same party coalitions have governed Veneto and Emilia-Romagna since direct elections were instituted for the regional executive in 2001 (Fig. 4.1). In these two Ordinary Regions, the institutional trajectory and the main political party have developed in synergy throughout the decades. This means that the line between the two variables is hazier compared to the two regions with high turnover.

In this chapter, I will start by defining the models and how the governing parties can be categorized as mass parties or catch-all. I will then explain how the policy-making of each region can be connected to the type of party in government. The empirical evidence is organized by region and includes a brief description of the political context of each case. Emilia-Romagna shows how the redistribution

Year (since direct elections)	Regional President	Partisanship	Electoral Strategy	Party
Friuli Venezia Giulia				
2003	Illy	Center Left	Catch-All	Indep/PD
2008	Tondo	Center Right	Catch-All	PDL
2013	Serracchiani	Center Left	Catch-All	PD
2018	Fedriga	Center Right	Mass Party	Lega
Sardegna				
2004	Soru	Center Left	Catch-All	Ulivo
2009	Cappellacci	Center Right	Catch-All	PDL
2014	Pigliaru	Center Left	Catch-All	PD
2019	Solinas	Center Right	Mass Party	PSdA/Lega
Veneto				
2005	Galan	Center Right	Catch-All	FI
2010	Zaia	Center Right	Mass Party	Lega
2015	Zaia	Center Right	Mass Party	Lega
2020	Zaia	Center Right	Mass Party	Lega
Emilia-Romagna				
2005	Errani	Center Left	Catch-All	DS
2010	Errani	Center Left	Catch-All	PD
2015	Bonaccini	Center Left	Catch-All	PD
2020	Bonaccini	Center Left	Catch-All	PD

Figure 4.1: Political Turnover by Region - This study considers only the 2014/2021 timeframe (last two governments); previous governments provided for context.

of provincial function and the consolidation of territorial entities result from the substantial presence of the *Democratic Party* (PD). With its catch-all electoral appeal centered on policymaking, the *Democratic Party* significantly influences governance across various institutional levels, making it a prominent force in regional leadership. In Veneto, changes to provincial power were minimal, and existing provinces were adjusted to suit local needs. This approach aligns with mass party characteristics, where success depends on deepening support, particularly within its core social base. The response to the Delrio reform highlights a strong connection between Veneto's social fabric, small entrepreneurs with localized interests, *La Lega*, and regional governance.

In Friuli Venezia Giulia, the *Democratic Party* government passed law 2/2014 inspired by the municipal unions in Emilia-Romagna. Following the approach characteristic of a catch-all party, the reform was developed at the regional level with limited input from local stakeholders. The following *La Lega* government applied its mass party approach with law 21/2019, shifting power back to the localities, allowing them to decide whether to pursue specific territorial arrangements. In Sardinia, the *Democratic Party*, a catch-all party, imposed a top-down reform (2/2016) with the goal of consolidating the territorial institutions with policy-making goals to establish retrospective accountability, relying on experience and track record. The following territorial reform (7/2021) developed by the mass parties *Partito Sardo d'Azione* and *La Lega* backtracked and fragmented the territory distributing resources without a clear agenda, focusing more on providing benefits to everyone rather than pursuing consolidation outcomes. It is crucial to point out that in both Sardinia And Friuli Venezia Giulia, the catch-all parties initiated the reform process with consolidation in mind, but their legislative efforts encountered the resistance of the localist legacies of the region (more detail in chapters five and six). Table 4.1 shows the expected outcomes based on party

organization alone, without the influence of the institutional legacies variable. Party organization affects territorial rescaling, but it needs to be considered together with institutional legacies.

Ruling Party Organization	
Mass Party	Catch-all Party
Fragmentation (VE 2015 + FVG 2020 + SAR 2021)	Consolidation (ER 2015 + FVG 2014* + SAR 2016*)

Table 4.1: Party Organization - Expected Outcomes

4.2 Party Organization and Territorial Outcomes

4.2.1 The Mass Party Organization

In the classic mass-party model of politics, society is structured around well-defined social groups, where individuals' lives are closely intertwined with these groups (Neumann, in [Katz and Mair, 1995]). Politics are *organized* around competition, conflict, and cooperation of these groups, and political parties serve as conduits through which these groups and their members engage in the political process, assert their demands, and vie for control of the state by placing their representatives in key roles. Each social group has distinct interests articulated through the party they support. This party platform is not merely a collection of policies but represents a coherent and logically interconnected whole. Consequently, party unity and discipline are both practically advantageous and morally justifiable. This moral foundation is rooted in the public's direct involvement in shaping the party's agenda, necessitating a robust network of branches or cells to facilitate broad participation in policy-making [Katz and Mair, 1995].

Individual voter choices are influenced by their alignment with one of the social groups represented by the parties, prioritizing mobilization over persuasion in electoral politics. At the systemic level, the mass-party model offers the potential for popular control over policy, with the party (or coalition) that secures the majority of votes assuming governance (Lawson, in [Katz and Mair, 1995]). Parties are seen as the essential link between citizens and the state. The success of a party depends on deepening the commitment of its existing supporters, particularly those within its 'natural' social constituency [Katz and Mair, 1995] This model underscores the importance of public engagement in the political process and the strong connection between social groups, political parties, and governance. Mass parties are accountable to their members through their strong presence on the territory, prioritizing representative capacity. As a result, governmental mass parties can be expected to be either opposed or neutral towards sweeping territorial consolidating efforts, like the Delrio reform. These parties are likely to be attentive to issues of identity and representation of their electorate.

If the regional government is characterized by a mass party model relying on bottom-up relations between the members and the party elite [Katz and Mair, 1995], the territorial rescaling outcome is fragmentation due to the focus on maintaining the support of their locally tied electorate. The primary Italian party employing such an approach in modern times has been *Lega Nord* now *La Lega* (LN) [Diamanti, 1993, Albertazzi et al., 2018a]. Albertazzi (2018) and Zulianello (2021) explain that *La Lega* employs a mass party organization because it leverages populist and localist ideologies to garner support from established collectivities [Albertazzi et al., 2018a, Zulianello, 2021]. The right-wing party *Brothers of Italy* (FdI) exhibits many traits of the mass party model, particularly in terms of presenting themselves as an active presence for citizens [Puleo and Piccolino, 2022]. The *National Alliance* (AN), the predecessor of FdI,

managed to activate and maintain significant recruitment channels by connecting with new sectors of civil society while largely retaining those of traditional reference [Giansante, 2022]. However, this transformation is described as "partial and half-hearted" and is largely driven by a desire to signal "closeness to the people" ([Albertazzi and Van Kessel, 2021] p 366).

In 1991, under the leadership of the boisterous head of the Lombard League, Umberto Bossi, six regional parties of northern and north-central Italy established the *Lega Nord* (Northern League) party. After its foundation, the party forced two issues to the top of the national political agenda: the growing economic and social gap between a wealthy North and a much less developed South of Italy and the resentment towards the traditional political class [Albertazzi et al., 2018a]. Based on these two political tenets, *La Lega* advocated for the transformation of Italy into a federal state, unifying previously scattered regionalist parties and addressing the lingering territorial tensions initiated by the unification of the Italian peninsula in 1861. Interestingly the 'federal' goals of *La Lega* were never specifically spelled out in the program or by the leaders [Albertazzi et al., 2018a], in a way that can be easily categorized by the literature, where a federation is a (a)-symmetrical transfer of exclusive law-making powers, based on a constitution, to entities at the sub-state level (Elazar, Suksi in [Keating, 2021]). What distinguishes the ideal federations from Italian decentralized unitary systems would be the scope of decentralized responsibilities and "the constitutional guarantee of autonomy for the constituent governments in the responsibilities they perform" ([Watts, 1998] p 123). Far from this clear programmatic goal, *La Lega* did not formulate a clear scenario for its federal idea nor actualized requests for constitutional changes, often calling for a diverse range of territorial solutions going from fiscal regional autonomy to outright secession from the rest of Italy. Nevertheless, the focus of *La Lega* is on the richer northern regions to benefit from fiscal federalism, regionalism, and greater regional

autonomy.

The focus on territorial politics of *La Lega* is strictly linked to its focus on creating and fostering members' identity politics rooted in the idea of the northern land of "Padania" and consequently, the development of a Padanian nationalism based on the othering of migrants, Roma, and principally the Italian southerners. Cramereri discusses how *La Lega Nord* invents the territorially defined region of Padania and adds to it a particular national identity where there wasn't one before (in [Rembold and Carrier, 2011]). The idea of Padania itself is construed on a common long-distant past, but in reality, this is a new idea, loosely based on the network of a league of Lombard and Venetian cities that, in the Middle Ages, fought together against the expansion of the Germanic Sacred Roman Empire. Even the figure of Alberto da Giussano—legendary warrior of the Lombard League—which is part of the mythology and the party logo, seems to be fictional, since historical research does not confirm the existence of this character. The party effectively countered the trend of political disengagement among voters that has been a hallmark of many political organizations in recent years, as observed in Mair's 2013 study (in [Albertazzi et al., 2018b]). In return, committed activists embraced the party's ideology and set of values, willingly relying on 'Bossi's Lega' for insights into political and societal developments. They also found satisfaction in the empowerment and sense of belonging that activism within the party offered. In essence, the adoption of the mass-party model by 'Bossi's Lega' seems to have been successful in shaping collective identities and fostering strong emotional connections with its members [Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2010].

The current national iteration of the party *La Lega* has effectively developed a contemporary interpretation of the mass-party concept, incorporating both physical and digital activism. This demonstrates that a traditional organizational framework can be enhanced through the utilization of modern technologies. Notably, the *La*

Lega activism is particularly well-established and cultivated in Northern regions, enabling the party to fulfill the conventional roles of a mass-party model in a swifter, more efficient, and immediate manner [Zulianello, 2021]. The new *Lega* maintains a high degree of organization and structural articulation, as well as vertical linkages, all of which are fundamental attributes of mass-parties [Panebianco, 1988]. *La Lega* serves as a compelling example of how a mass party can evolve and adapt to the demands of the contemporary political landscape. The transformation of the League into a national party was counterbalanced by the regional leaderships of the party, which maintained a general propensity towards autonomy and decentralization [Almagisti and Zanellato, 2021]. Having established that *La Lega* is a mass party both in its national and regional emanations, I will use the case studies to explain how this party organization is expected to yield fragmented territorial outcomes. The following subsection describes how the catch-all party organization is applied in the Italian context.

4.2.2 The Catch-all Party Organization

In the catch-all party model, the responsibility for shaping policies or programs shifts from party membership to party leadership (Rose and McAllister, in [Katz and Mair, 1995]). The mass party emphasis on mobilizing and converting voters has diminished, voters are now seen as free-floating and uncommitted, susceptible to the appeals of any of the competing parties [Katz and Mair, 1995]. Consequently, the catch-all party emphasizes the retrospective aspect of popular control and accountability, relying on experience and track record, as opposed to the prospective approach based on clearly defined alternatives. Seeking wide support, the party becomes a 'generalist', welcoming technocratic forces and politicians that seek programmatic politics as a way to appeal to the voter. Given these characteristics, a governing catch-all party would seek approval from the general

population through policy-making, supporting sweeping territorial changes like the Delrio reform. The reform aimed to reduce institutional complexity and cut costs by eliminating territorial entities, a central issue for the electorate following the 2008 crisis. Given the magnitude of the matter, the catch-all party had to support cuts to the political machine, as doing otherwise was considered extremely risky from an electoral perspective [De Donno, 2019].

Therefore, when the ruling party has a catch-all organizational approach that includes a significant reduction in its ideological stance, outreach to a broader segment of the population, and a deliberate effort to establish connections with various interest groups (though notably less with trade unions) [Pasquino and Valbruzzi, 2017], it tends to consolidate territorial governance due to its generalist and competitive character [Katz and Mair, 1995]. This approach has been notably employed by Italian political parties such as Berlusconi's *Forza Italia* (FI), the *Five Star Movement* (5S) and the *Democratic Party* (PD) [Bordignon, 2014].

Berlusconi's politics during the early 1990s brought about a significant departure from the existing mass model in various ways. As the leader of the new center-right movement, he introduced a novel color into the political landscape: sky blue, a hue symbolizing the entirety of Italy, including the national football team, the azzurri ¹. This choice underlined a clear shift towards a catch-all perspective, emphasizing a post-ideological leadership. Berlusconi declared himself as transcending ideologies and rising above traditional political categorizations, including those of the right and left. His programmatic proposals were tailored to appeal to the entire electorate, following a catch-all rationale that characterized the various iterations of his party, predominantly *Forza Italia* (FI) [Bordignon, 2014]. Berlusconi's move was the first one in the Italian political landscape, but not the last.

¹Before, the de facto bipartisan Italian political landscape featured white - Christian Democracy, and red-Socialist Movement

The *Five Star Movement* (5S) is a product of Italy's Second Republic and the cultural transformations driven by reactions to Silvio Berlusconi's political agenda [Benasaglio Berlucchi, 2022]. The M5S's catch-all organization, consistent with the very definition of populism as a thin-centered ideology, strategically adopts a flexible ideological repertoire. The party's programmatic appeals are constantly adjusted to the current socio-political circumstances, leading to inconsistent and often contradictory positions on various issues. This adaptability is made possible because, like many other populists, the core of the M5S's message revolves around popular sovereignty and the democratic legitimacy of political power, rather than specific policy prescriptions. The distance from the party system is further emphasized by rejecting any attempt at political categorization. In the words of his founder and former leader, "The Movimento 5 Stelle doesn't adhere to specific ideologies but is driven by ideas" (PC33, 2010 in [Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2013]). Most importantly, he steadfastly refuses to position the movement along conventional political spectrums; the M5S doesn't fit within the traditional left or right paradigm but is positioned as something "beyond" or "above" it [Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2013]. Consequently, the party constructs its narrative based on the morality of democratic governance and venerates the people as the sole legitimate source of power. The party embodies a new brand of populism, catering to all tastes and sizes, offering representation to a range of dissatisfied voters, regardless of their value backgrounds. The Five Star phenomenon is indeed puzzling, with its unique blend of vague populist appeals and cherry-picked ideology.

Yet, today's main catch-all party, and the one that governed the four regional cases is the *Democratic Party*. It occupies a center-left position. According to the literature, unlike its predecessors on the political spectrum, which were once mass parties, the *Democratic Party* cannot be neatly classified into traditional political science categories [Pasquino and Valbruzzi, 2017, Bordignon, 2014]. Yet, according

to Pasquino and Valbruzzi (2017), *Democratic Party* primarily functions as a catch-all party in the vein described by Kirchheimer [Pasquino and Valbruzzi, 2017]. To be more specific, it serves as a political organization driven by the pursuit of votes and office, embodying all the characteristic elements associated with catch-all parties within its structure, leadership, and policies. Since its creation in 2007 from a merger between the Left Democrats (mostly former Communists) and the Daisy (mostly former Christian Democrats) the *Democratic Party* has notably:

- a) Undergone a significant reduction in its ideological stance, if it ever had one.
- b) Strengthened its top leadership groups.
- c) Reduced the role of individual party members.
- d) De-emphasized the influence of traditional power brokers and intermediate groups, focusing instead on reaching out to the general population.
- e) Established connections with various interest groups, with the exception of trade unions, which it engages with less frequently.

The catch-all approach was especially embodied by the party leader Matteo Renzi during his tenure as Italian Prime Minister between 2014 and 2016, the years when the Delrio Reform took place. According to Bordignon (2014), "the 'leader of scrapping' appeared interested in developing a post-ideological political proposal and a catch-all organization, insisting on keywords such as 'innovation', 'education', 'culture'" ([Bordignon, 2014], p 9). The above discussion on the emanations of catch-all and mass party organizations in the Italian political landscape has provided the basis for a more nuanced analysis of the relationship between electoral appeal and territorial rescaling within the four regional cases.

4.3 Emilia-Romagna - Party Organization

The model of party organization in Emilia-Romagna matters for territorial rescaling because of the extensive influence of the Democratic Party, a catch-all

party known for its inclusive policy approach, in various levels of governance, including city and regional councils, making it a key player in regional leadership. In practice, it has been employing an integrated territorial governance that seeks to redistribute provincial functions and strengthen territorial entities.

The support for the *Democratic Party* is rooted in the history of the area, and it is crucial to understand how the present catch-all approach of the party differs from its roots as a mass party. Much like the rest of central Italy, Emilia-Romagna has been a bastion of leftist parties since Italy became a democracy. For example, from 1946 to 1991, around half of the members of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) originated from Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany, and Umbria. This political propensity derives from centuries of agricultural economy based on a sharecropping system. In central Italy, the farming families lived in a subservient relationship to the landowners, which can be either obedient to them [...], or in conflict (as will happen later with the activation of the capital-labor cleavage) [Almagisti and Zanellato, 2021]. The origins of what several Italian academics call the "red" subculture in Emilia-Romagna can be traced back to the first wave of peasant mobilization following the agricultural crisis of the 19th century [Diamanti, 2009, Trigilia and Ewing, 1991, Messina, 2020, Almagisti and Zanellato, 2021]. This active mobilization saw the emergence of a robust socialist movement, along with the development of vital administrative initiatives at the municipal level and the establishment of a substantial and enduring organizational structure. The Communist Party later inherited this legacy. In the post-World War II era, these regions also fostered a dynamic industrial growth, primarily centered around small businesses (Caciagli in [Almagisti, 2015]).

The Italian Communist Party (PCI) served as a source of inspiration for workers and particularly sharecroppers, especially in the early years of the republic when the marginalized classes faced challenging circumstances. During this era, the

”red” regions considered themselves a resilient stronghold, resisting the influence of capital and central governments, preserving their autonomy, and anticipating a rejuvenation that was expected to come from the USSR. The regional subculture evolved into a robust identity that was internally focused, without any ambition to dominate the rest of the country, primarily because they believed the promised land was elsewhere. The PCI adjusted its strategy and policies to integrate the masses into the national democratic system, emphasizing its historical roots in the Resistance as a defining moment and an enduring symbol of the values of the ”red” subculture (Caciagli in [Almagisti, 2015]).

Francesco Ramella [Ramella, 1998] identifies three phases in the history of the PCI: establishment, growth, and decline. The establishment phase began with the 1946 Constituent Assembly elections and concluded with the 1958 political elections. The PCI took over and expanded upon the socialist foothold, focusing on building the ”new party” by strengthening its functions related to socialization and political mobilization. The growth phase, spanning from 1958 to the 1976 political elections, witnessed the PCI gaining support across central Italy, nearly achieving an overall majority. This period coincided with an economic upswing, during which the PCI, through local governments, played a crucial role in supporting small businesses, mediating social conflicts, and implementing infrastructure policies and social services that promoted social harmony among different classes [Ramella, 1998]. Simultaneously, the target electorate underwent changes, with a growing presence of industrial and middle-class voters and opinion-based voting. The trade union gained autonomy from the party, and the role of local administration became more influential. This period also witnessed the establishment of regions, enabling the PCI to position itself as a ”governing party,” at least at the regional level.

In the third phase, the decline period (from 1976 to 1992), the PCI, while containing the erosion of electoral support in the ”red” areas compared to the national

level, grappled with unresolved fundamental issues tied to its political culture and organization. The PCI was unable to fully embrace a social-democratic identity before the fall of the Berlin Wall. In a rushed attempt to change its name and symbolic references, the post-communist political leadership established a left-wing reformist party. The more radical faction, which later formed the Communist Refoundation Party, left this party, ultimately resulting in the formation of the *Democratic Party* in 2007 following a merger with left-wing Catholics [Almagisti and Zanellato, 2021]. As discussed before, the modern *Democratic Party* primarily operates as a catch-all party (Kirckenheimer in [Katz and Mair, 1995]) holding a center-left position but differs from its predecessors on the political spectrum, which were mass parties [Pasquino and Valbruzzi, 2017].

The 'new' approach is partly due to the general erosion of the party system and the weakening of the relationship between civil society and political parties. In Emilia-Romagna, this can be seen in the electoral trends of the past decade. The main party of the center-left had been experiencing a general decline in popularity, which affected even this region. In 2018 National elections, the *5 Star Movement* became the region's leading party, and in 2019 European elections, it was *La Lega*. However, in the 2020 regional elections, the *Democratic Party* has regained its position as the top party, surpassing *la Lega* by 2.7 percentage points (34.7% to 32%), even though this is still a significant result [Vittori, 2020]. Both a mayor (*Democratic Party*) of a large city in Emilia Romagna, and a member of the regional executive (*Democratic Party*) explain that, specifically the rural areas, have now settled into a stable governance under the leadership of *La Lega* or the broader center-right coalition. In the recent regional elections in Emilia Romagna, it was no clandestine fact that the region was poised for a competitive political tussle for the first time. Stefano Bonaccini, the *Democratic Party* nominee for the gubernatorial race, conducted a remarkably well-crafted electoral campaign, and it must be

acknowledged that his rival exhibited a palpable vulnerability. As the electoral campaign unfolded, the fortunes of the center-left steadily improved, yet the initial momentum strongly favored *La Lega*. There was a prevailing sentiment that the region could indeed become a battleground. In his view, these developments signify significant indicators of a political shift currently coursing through Italy.

Yet, since 2007, the *Democratic Party* has governed Emilia-Romagna. In accordance with Law 56/2014 (Delrio), the government passed L.R. 13/2015 "Reform of the Regional and Local Government System and Provisions on the Metropolitan City of Bologna, Provinces, Municipalities, and their Unions". It laid the groundwork for a new model of territorial governance specifying responsibilities within particular subject areas, assigning them to each level of territorial government. These responsibilities are as follows: The Region is tasked with activities related to planning, guidance, and, in certain cases, oversight. The Vast Areas (EAV) have roles in planning and coordination within their respective areas of competence, ensuring alignment with the framework established by the Region. Municipalities are responsible for administrative functions outlined by current legislation, focusing on management functions not exclusive to other levels of government. In terms of territorial rescaling, the regional government implemented major redistribution on the functional dimension, and simplified the community dimension, consolidating the territorial governance structure within the regional borders (Table 2.2).

Embracing and building on the directives of the central government, the *Democratic Party* regional government developed a governance plan with the goal of ameliorating the life of the citizen through policy-making rather than representing the grievances of specific groups, like labor or business owners [Katz and Mair, 1995]. It is crucial to point out that the engagement with the commercial and entrepreneurial interest groups shows the catch-all approach implemented by the modern *Democratic Party*. It no longer relies on the support of the working

class as its political forefathers; it now actively seeks to increase its voter base by developing territorial policies that include all players. This strategy is integrative [March et al., 1989, Messina, 2012] as it fosters collaboration and mutual understanding rather than dealing with separate grievances in a fragmented way. The cooperation among various political stakeholders and civil society is exemplified by the Pact for Work and for the Climate, as highlighted by eight of the 18 interviewees from Emilia-Romagna. In 2020, the Region, along with local authorities, trade unions, businesses, educational institutions, environmental organizations, the third sector, voluntary organizations, professional bodies, chambers of commerce, and financial institutions, signed this pact. It represents a programmatic initiative to revitalize and advance Emilia-Romagna through environmental, economic, and social sustainability goals (Official Website). The *Democratic Party* appeals to the broader electorate through policy-making aimed at benefiting the collectivity rather than a few targeted groups.

The representation of political parties and the alignment of interests with territorial structures have historically revolved around the province. This is primarily owing to the province's status as a more expansive entity relative to the municipal level. Notably, the establishment of regions occurred with a considerable delay, emerging only in the 1970s, and ushering in a host of challenges. As a former Component of the Commission on Asymmetric Autonomy within the Ministry for Regional Affairs and Autonomies explains,

”in the current context, it becomes imperative to fathom the enduring influence of the province from a party organization perspective. Notably, the Northern League, for instance, has intricately woven its organizational fabric around provincial lines. This strategic choice has notably eased the conduct of electoral campaigns and the selection of candidates. Conversely, in the region of Emilia-Romagna, the *Democratic Party* has undertaken significant strides [in working outside the Provincial system].” (April 2022)

This quote shows that the *Democratic Party* actively transcends the traditional provincial-based framework. Its catch-all approach to garner support seeks to separate itself from tying campaigning to the provincial level, therefore distancing itself from needing to appeal to localized interests. The *Democratic Party* in Emilia-Romagna has been navigating a nuanced shift of power towards the regional echelon, characterized by an accrual of authority over decision-making. This transition is partially attributable to the region's pronounced institutional robustness and economic significance, factors that have bolstered its role over time.

The integrated territorial governance aimed at redistributing the functions of the provinces and consolidating territorial entities derives from the fact that the *Democratic Party*, with its catch-all approach to policy making, has a massive presence in the areas of governance, in city councils and regional councils, represents the highest expression of regional leadership. It indicates that, beyond being a structured political party in the country, the *Democratic Party* possesses a strong organizational structure in Emilia-Romagna. It has a rooted presence that, for example, is visible in every municipality in the region through constructive engagement with its administrators. In fact, according to one of the regional leaders of the party, out of the 50 largest cities in Emilia-Romagna, 41 are governed by the *Democratic Party*.

An administrative employee of the territorial office of the Metropolitan City of Bologna brings the example of the Unions of Municipalities as a petri dish for political dynamics in the region. She says,

'the Reno Galliera Union, works because there has been a political continuity. Essentially, there has been political continuity from the beginning. [...] Terre d'Acqua Union doesn't work due to changes in leadership. The main municipality, San Giovanni in Persiceto, switched to the right-wing [and mass-party], and as a result, it withdrew. "' (November 2022)

These inter-municipal dynamics show how the party appeal affects territorial organization also at the local level. According to the local publication of 'Il Resto del Carlino' newspaper, the mayor of San Giovanni Persiceto (Metropolitan City of Bologna) is supported by *La Lega* (2021). A municipality is more likely not to be part of a consolidated union if it is led by a mayor backed by *La Lega* rather than the *Democratic Party*. In terms of my argument, a municipality led by a mayor affiliated with a mass party is less likely to join territorial rescaling endeavors that consolidate governance. On the contrary, if a catch-all party backs the mayor, it's more likely for the municipality to join consolidation efforts. Yet, this example shows just part of the story. As discussed in chapter two, the strong institutional legacies that characterize the political decision-making in Emilia-Romagna also affect the territorial dynamics within the Unioni di Comuni, in fact, several interviewees report collaboration between territorial actors affiliated with parties with different organization models. The next subsection will cover how the strong presence of a mass party has affected Veneto's territorial rescaling efforts.

4.4 Veneto - Party Organization

Veneto's political leadership responded to the Delrio reform by limiting the rescaling of institutional functions while multiplying the seats of power in the region. According to the party organization explanation, this is because its government is led by a mass party (*La Lega*), therefore focusing on accountability to its members and prioritizing interested representation over sweeping structural reforms. Before showing how the data supports this assertion, I will briefly describe Veneto's political arch to contextualize the results better.

The support for mass parties in Veneto has historical roots in the post-World War II era. As explained by an interviewee working for a local newspaper and

specializing in politics, after the demise of fascism, the Christian Democracy (Democrazia Cristiana) assumed immediate and comprehensive control, a development facilitated, in part, through the intervention of the Church. This historical juncture was characterized by a climate wherein individuals who cast their votes in favor of the Communist Party openly professed their political affiliation and were susceptible to ecclesiastical excommunication. This contextualizes the prevailing ethos of the epoch. The Christian Democracy adeptly discerned and steered through the complexities of political pluralism and regional heterogeneity. Within the Veneto region, its dominion endured for approximately five decades, with an unassailable majority persisting until the 1980s, when the political party system experienced a crisis.

Paradoxically, notwithstanding the Venetian Christian Democracy's electoral preeminence within the party structure, its influence at the national level, centered in Rome, remained conspicuously limited. This became palpable when Bisaglia, during a renowned interview with Ilvo Diamanti in the early 1980s [Diamanti, 1993], discussed the notion of a federated Venetian Christian Democracy alongside the national entity, mirroring the analogous relationship between the Bavarian CSU and the CDU in Germany. A language associated with the *Lega Nord* before it entered the political stage. Bisaglia led the "Dorotei," a faction that prioritized local interests in their representation. This role was later assumed by regionalist leagues and, starting from the 1990s, by the *Lega Nord*, albeit with different language and means. However, they shared a similar "mission": the assertion of demands against Rome, the center of the central state, and centralism. Concurrently, there was a protest against the assisted South. They represented not just Veneto or individual regions, but the entire North transformed into the Padanian Homeland. This concept failed to materialize within the Roman political milieu [Diamanti, 1993].

Subsequently, the Venetian League astounded observers by gaining parliamen-

tary representation in 1983. The demise of the Christian Democracy in the 1990s, culminating in its effective dissolution in 1992-93, yielded limited inheritance of its electoral support by the center-left coalition. Instead, the bulk of this transferred allegiance primarily gravitated toward *Forza Italia* initially and, subsequently to the *La Lega*. This shift ultimately merged into the phenomenon referred to as "forza leghismo." [Diamanti, 1993] In the initial stage, a distinct predominance of *Forza Italia* is observed, characterized by the reelection of Galan for three consecutive terms. During this period, *La Lega* remains a marginal political force. However, as *Forza Italia* begins to wane in influence, the *La Lega* gradually gains prominence, with Zaia emerging as a formidable figure, ultimately achieving a remarkable 70% electoral support—a development colloquially referred to as "Zaiastan". One of the reasons for this success is Zaia's ability to interpret Veneto's vision of autonomy as a constitutive element from a historical perspective separated from Italy. One noteworthy aspect of the Veneto electorate's behavior is its tendency to shift to a unified bloc during regional elections. This political consistency, from 1995 to the present day, reveals a unique and significant feature of the region's voting dynamics (Interview with Journalist Expert on Veneto Politics) ².

This study focuses on regional territorial reforms from 2014 to 2021, but it's important to note the political context preceding the Delrio reform. *Forza Italia* (FI), which held the regional presidency for 15 years starting in 1995, introduced IPAs (Area Programmatic Agreements) as an alternative to provincial governance due to the influence of other parties. However, IPAs didn't become effective actors due to a lack of coordination, which led to institutional fragmentation. The issue was a lack of vertical and horizontal integration at the local level. According to my party organization argument, since *Forza Italia* can be categorized as a catch-all party, we should not have expected policies that created territorial fragmentation. This

²This will be further explored in chapter 5

can be explained by the fact that Veneto's localist legacies trumped the tendency of a catch-all party towards effective policy-making. This, paired with the electoral drive to diminish the power of political opponents in the Provinces, pushed the *Forza Italia* regional government of the time to pass a reform that fragmented the territory.³ The political decision fostering fragmentation has continued with Zaia's *Lega*, and its reaction to Italy's law 26/2014 is the prime example. The so-called Delrio law wanted to decommission provinces to foster territorial efficiency. Instead, Veneto made limited changes, partially maintaining provincial power and diversifying the existing provinces according to local needs. This aligns with the features of a mass party whose success depends on deepening the commitment of its existing supporters, particularly those within its 'natural' social constituency [Katz and Mair, 1995]. The response to the Delrio reform underlines a strong connection between Veneto's social fabric of small entrepreneurs with localized interest, *La Lega*, and the governance of the territory.

The preference for fragmentation was apparent before the implementation of Law 56/2014 when Veneto had challenged 58 sections (out of a total of 151) of the single-article law before the Constitutional Court due to concerns related to regional autonomy, the distribution of powers between central and regional governments, and potential conflicts between regional and national laws. By challenging these sections before the Constitutional Court, the regional government led by *La Lega* signaled that they prioritize their local institutions and the interests of their constituents over implementing reforms proposed by the central government. This reflects a commitment to protecting the unique characteristics and needs of the territory. Yet, according to Longo and Mobilio (2016), the Court dismissed the petitioners' arguments and concluded that the Delrio Act did not contravene any of the constitutional principles that the regions had asserted had been encroached

³I will further discuss this point in chapter five

upon [Longo and Mobilio, 2016].

In line with the mass party accountability to its members and representative priority, Zaia's government legislated in favor of differentiated functions according to the local features of the existing provinces. Protecting local interests from centrally imposed reforms is a sign of commitment to the electoral base of *La Lega*, who seeks to stay in government by not upsetting the status quo. This strategy paid off, during the year of the reform, Zaia was the most-voted candidate for the role of Regional President. As briefly discussed above, Zaia and *La Lega* have maintained electoral support, remaining in power since then. Two examples illustrate how the mass party government fostered fragmented and differentiated governance: the Metropolitan City of Venice and the Province of Belluno.

The Metropolitan City of Venice (CM di Venezia) was granted specific urban planning competencies. Following the approval of the strategic and general territorial plans, the Regional Council, within sixty days from the publication of the approval of the last of these plans, governs the transfer of urban planning functions to the Metropolitan City of Venice (Article 3, Paragraph 4, Regional Law No. 30 of 2016). More broadly, Regional Law No. 19/2015 (Paragraph 3) establishes that further functions can be conferred upon it through regional law, following consultation with the Regional Observatory and obtaining the opinion of the Council of Local Autonomies (Article 3).

The region also assigned special functions to the mountainous Province of Belluno that were distinct from other provinces. In particular, Belluno retains functions that other Provinces had to relinquish to the Region, acknowledging non-core functions in the following areas: cross-border policies, linguistic minorities, land management and landscape preservation, water and energy resources, transportation, forests, support and promotion of economic activities, agriculture, and tourism. A differentiated treatment was also granted to the Province of Rovigo

due to its economic reliance on the fishing industry. Even though its territory is neither mountainous nor bordering foreign countries, it retains exclusive fishing rights functions.

Veneto, along with the region of Molise, was the only one to substantially confirm the entire set of functions previously exercised by the Provinces. Regional Law No. 19 of 2015 initially assigned the same functions that the former Provinces held to the new Provinces and the Metropolitan City of Venice. However, with the subsequent Regional Law No. 30 of 2016, significant functions (such as hunting and fishing, tourism, agritourism, economic and mountain development, energy, industry, craftsmanship and trade, social matters, labor market, soil defense, and public works) were transferred to the Region ⁴. Nevertheless, the Veneto legislation remains among those where the trend toward regionalization of competencies remains relatively limited. Indeed, after partially implementing the Delrio reform, Veneto's local governance appears to be characterized by multiple elements of functional overlap and incongruity in management and programming areas [Messina, 2017], which align with the *modus operandi* of the governing mass party.

An expert of local governance currently involved in an Area Programmatic Agreements (IPA) spells out how *La Lega* mass party approach directly affects the territory's organization and its related functions. He illustrates the management of the issue of water and droughts in Veneto. He points out that it's challenging to find comprehensive documentation when inquiring about the Veneto Region's plans for rainwater management to prevent wastage. There's a noticeable absence of detailed programming documents. However, he highlights that if one were to examine the small villages along the Piave riverbank, where many have likely submitted requests

⁴It is important to note this as indicative of Veneto's institutional legacies of institutional disconnect between layers of government - I will explore this in-depth in the next chapter.

to the region to address embankment issues and install hydroelectric plants to enhance local conditions, "it becomes apparent that the region operates on an incremental approach rather than a detailed programming one. In essence, *the region prioritizes requests based on the potential for consensus*" (Local Governance Expert). Zaia leads a regional government that follows an electoral and policy strategy seeking the support of defined collectivities, rather than a collaborative one.

The interviews also describe how the organization of *La Lega*, centered on the representation of aggregate interests, is developing subaltern territorial dynamics within the party silos. Since the regional government led by Zaia is not taking a holistic, integrative, and programmatic approach to governance rescaling, localities need to make their grievances known through vertical organizational ties, which are another characteristic of the mass party [Duverger, 1951, Panebianco, 1988]. As a regional councillor *Democratic Party* explains,

the mayor probably goes to Zaia, who is from his own party, and says, 'Luca (Zaia), give me a hand with this issue because it's in our interest. [...] it goes beyond institutional channels and enters hierarchical relationship channels within the party. It's like within an integrated company. You don't have contractual relationships, but you have relationships between hierarchical levels of the company, so the manager of that area, the CEO, says, 'Look, we need to fix it. I don't need a contract to perform maintenance on that production line.'"

Through a highly siloed power structure, *La Lega* successfully navigated critical phases without significant repercussions. In Veneto, *La Lega* wins because it focuses on a strategy that revolves around local administrators, mayors, councilors, and the concept of territoriality, creating a predominantly informal organization that relies on personal, partisan networks rather than institutional channels [Diamanti, 1993]. The strong political homogeneity and structural informality within the party create a decisional system where the mayor relies on the regional president or, in terms

of institutional governance, the locality relies on the Region for financial and functional support rather than being part of an integrated system of governance. The same local, informal, party organization is the reason why mass parties like *La Lega* prefer territorial fragmentation over territorial consolidation. Fragmentation allows the governing party to appease the grievances of their electorate, which has interests connected to the territory. It also functions as a way to maintain a strong grip over the territory by multiplying communities and places of power for its politicians. The following subsection will show how the ruling party organization affects territorial rescaling in Friuli Venezia Giulia.

4.5 Friuli Venezia Giulia - Party Organization

The political landscape of the Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG) region is complex and connected to its diverse history and multitude of identities. As shown in Table 4.1, this region has had high political turnover between center-left and center-right parties. During the timeframe under analysis, Friuli Venezia Giulia has been governed by a catch-all party (*Democratic Party*) and then by a mass party (*La Lega*). My research shows that the party organization influenced the legislation on paper, but on the ground, the institutional legacies have affected the policies to a greater extent.

To understand the relationship between politics and institutions, it is crucial to look at the past. In 1947, the Italian state constituted the region of Friuli Venezia Giulia, uniting Friuli with the territory of Trieste in the east and culturally Venetian areas in the west. In Friuli, the population speaks a Romance language of the Rhaeto-Romance family, variously referred to as *furlan*, *lenghe furlane* or *marilenghe* (It. *friulano*, Eng. *Friulian*), which is attested to in written texts since 1150, and has been in literary use since the fourteenth century). According

to data from 2016, there are 600,000 total speakers of Friulano, of which about 420,000 are regular speakers, and a further 180,000 use Friulano on a periodic basis. Milan Bufon describes Friuli Venezia Giulia as the only region in Europe, where individuals from Romance, Germanic, and Slavic backgrounds coexist as minorities within a truly lasting multicultural setting. This unique dynamic has transformed the region into a "minority-rich region," where the locally dominant Friulians, the Slovene national minority, and various Germanic ethno-linguistic communities intersect [Bufon, 2016]. Slovene linguistic minority has roughly 85,000 speakers residing in Friuli Venezia Giulia. Slovene, like Friulian, is protected by national Law 482/1999 addressing historical linguistic minorities. Sharing the status quo of linguistic minorities has brought the two communities together also in their efforts to increase autonomy from the Italian nation-state. In fact, the Slovenian minority political party, Slovenska Skupnost (1,16% of regional votes in the 2018 elections), had often partnered up with Friulian parties in order to push for legislation on minority rights.

The political role of the largest regional minority has a peculiar relation to the territorial organization of Friuli Venezia Giulia. The Friulian identifying people are not politically well-organized, and to illustrate this, I use the example of the 2018 regional election because it was the only one that happened during the time frame under study 2014-2021 ⁵ featured four Friulian regional players: Progetto FVG (FVG Project), Autonomia Responsabile (Responsible Autonomy), Open Sinistra FVG (Open Left FVG), and Patto per l'Autonomia (Pact for Autonomy). The regional parties obtained 17% of votes combined. Being a regional election, three of the four autonomist players ran in a civic list (*lista civica*) rather than a structured party. These lists of representatives coalesce around a manifesto of ideals and

⁵The previous one was in 2013 won by Serracchiani (*Democratic Party*). The latest one in 2023 was won by Fedriga (*Lega*) and saw a decrease for autonomist lists/parties (9.77%)

intents that seeks to tackle and resolve local problems, usually autonomously, from traditional parties.

The analysis of the four programs shows a lack of a united Friulian movement. Progetto FVG and Autonomia Responsabile joined the right-wing coalition with *La Lega* and stood by classically conservative ideas like neoliberal economic policies and anti-immigrant discourses and measures. Open Sinistra FVG proposes leftist policies, mainly focusing on revamping the economy through wealth redistribution and upholding the fundamental human rights for immigrants and residents alike in an apparent effort to push against the rhetoric of the right. This electoral list seems not to leverage the Friulian identity and does not directly speak about autonomy or specific policies addressing the territorial organization of the region. By presenting itself as staunchly pro-European integration, O.S. further distances itself from Progetto FVG and Autonomia Responsabile.

Finally, Patto per l'Autonomia states its regional roots through non-affiliation with national parties and offers a manifesto that 'truly' represents the interests of all residents of Friuli Venezia Giulia, borrowing from liberal ideas of territorial taxation and leftist ones of valuing ethnolinguistic diversity. Patto per l'Autonomia is the only political actor with a relatively clear vision of how the region should look, both in its relationship with the Italian state and its internal organization. It is the only party that covertly centered its manifesto on Friulian identity. For these reasons, we can say that Friuli Venezia Giulia does not have a coherent Friulian movement with specific weight in regional politics, partially contributing to the electoral support for *La Lega*, which is able to speak to the needs and wants of the localities.

4.5.1 Friuli Venezia Giulia - Catch-All organization

Between 2013 and 2018, the Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia was governed by a center-left coalition led by the *Democratic Party* (PD) expressing the Regional President Debora Serracchiani. As discussed, the *Democratic Party* has a catch-all organization aiming to garner support through policy-making and implementation. At the time, President Serracchiani, was among the national leaders of the *Democratic Party* and a prominent supporter and proponent territorial governance reform. Multiple local politicians have discussed the institutional moment in Italy during the center-left government of Prime Minister Renzi. A local municipal councilor (center-left) reminisces, '[it] was the moment where there was this, let's call it an opportunity, given by the arrival of Renzi. [With] these great expectations [...] this drive, to renew, to modernize, to revise structures that were a little ossified [from] the first Italian Republic'.

The *Democratic Party* government of Friuli Venezia Giulia passed regional law 26/2014, which implemented the principles of the Delrio reform. Leveraging the Special Statute of the region, it went full steam ahead and formally eliminated the Province as an institutional entity. According to 12 interviewees from Friuli Venezia Giulia, President Serracchiani aimed to claim credit and the national spotlight with a 'We did it first' approach. She was eager to accelerate progress, in a fashion that many interviewees described as wanting to be the 'Top of the Class' (Prima della Classe), even when it might have been prudent to take more time. She embraced the 'Renzi style' catch-all electoral approach while serving as the President of the Region. Observing the significant media attention and her leader's stance on local government reform, she aimed to be at the forefront. In late 2014, with the support of the national party, the regional executive introduced Law 26. This law was influenced by models from Emilia-Romagna and Veneto, specifically the municipal unions in Emilia-Romagna and the Area Programmatic

Agreements(IPA) of Camposampiero (Verona province) in Veneto.

With a policy focus approach typical of a catch-all party, the reform was elaborated at the regional level, without much input from local players. A former member of the Regional Council (2018-23) and mayor of a small town in Friuli Venezia Giulia during the Serracchiani reform (2013-2018) from *Forza Italia* (FI) recounts,

'At the time, I remember reading about this law in the newspapers, as neither us mayors nor the provinces were involved in this operation. [Serrachiani] backed Law 26, developing a system with inter-municipal territorial unions. This raised the question of provincial competencies. Simultaneously, she launched the abolition of provinces and successfully had the law approved by the Regional Council, garnering unanimous support from both my party's representatives (FI) and those of the center-right. Notably, only the League, represented by one regional councilor, abstained from voting.'

This quote encapsulates how the regional *Democratic Party* and *Forza Italia*, operated in true catch-all fashion by supporting the reform. In a sociopolitical period characterized by anti-politics and pro-efficiency discourse, the party leadership shaped policies and programs to appease the broader electorate to garner electoral support [Katz and Mair, 1995]. Only *La Lega*, due to its mass party approach to supporting local interest, refused to vote in support of the reform.

Moreover, according to an article from the regional newspaper *Il Piccolo* on 4/27/2014 and 4/28/2014, law 26/2014 was developed without the inclusion of important civil society players that used to be central to the electoral success of leftist parties under the mass party model, the labor unions [Katz and Mair, 1995]. The regional secretary of the CGIL (Italian General Confederation of Labour) ⁶ emphasized the desire to understand how the administration intended to utilize its personnel more effectively in light of the changes in institutional governance,

⁶According to the CGIL website, in 2017, they had roughly 5.5 million members in Italy, making it the second largest labor union in the EU

showing the lack of involvement in the decision-making process behind the territorial reform. A reform that, according to the CGIL leader, 'equally distributed only the choice of emptying the Provinces, without tackling the complexity of the issues.[...] All of this while workers find themselves in a situation where it is unclear whether they are being appreciated for their contributions within the public sector.' (Franco Belci in *Il Piccolo* 4/27/2014). The lack of relationship between the regional civil society (labor unions, artisan unions, commercial unions, etc.) and the political spheres has been discussed by three interviewees (a consultant, a former mayor of a major city *Democratic Party*, and a former regional councilor *Democratic Party*). They argued that civil society in Friuli Venezia Giulia has fallen into obscurity since the early 2000s and during Serracchiani's five-year tenure.⁷ The former mayor explains that,

there used to be a meaningful dialogue during the era of the Illy administration (2003-08), where a roundtable for consultations existed. I recall overseeing this due to the mandate I was given. It involved constructive conversations with social partners that transcended traditional affiliations and proximities, notably within the CGIL. However, a genuine dialogue, as witnessed in my previous role as Minister of Innovation, with the higher education and research sectors, no longer seems to exist today.

The issue of lack of strong relations between intermediary groups and politics appears to be pervasive. The *Democratic Party* efforts to relate to the wider electorate have consolidated governance, alienating the collectivities it once supported. Yet, according to the interviews, civil society groups have lost clout partly due to their own weaknesses. For example, the perpetual presidents of the industry chambers, such as those in Trieste and Udine, who have held their roles for roughly two decades. This extended tenure is partly a response to the

⁷this does not apply to the power dynamics inside the Slovenian community, where civil society has a strong relationship with the political parties.

significant challenges within Confindustria (industrial confederation), which does not represent the entirety of the industrial sector; it only speaks for a specific segment in evident internal conflict. On the other hand, the political establishment, particularly those in positions of power, often view civil society as unnecessary for substantive engagement. This reality is an exacerbation of the change in the political party model from the mass party, which is integral part of civil society, to the catch-all party, which is separate from and, at times, in direct competition with these intermediary players.

The broader electoral focus is corroborated by a former member of the regional executive (*Democratic Party*), who, during the interview, raised the question: 'What's the outcome of rushing a reform in the final year of one's term? Even without opposition, you may hoist a flag without ensuring its implementation. Political responsibility involves enacting and diligently pursuing reforms within one's tenure. Such a reform would require a decade to allow for idea assimilation, consensus building, and course correction' In practice, time and political stability are essential for achieving results, but in a catch-all logic based on competition to become brokers between society and the state [Katz and Mair, 1995], the reform could not be fully implemented because of the localist resistance of the Friuli Venezia Giulia system ⁸, and the lack of time since the following elections, the regional electorate handed the mandate to a governing coalition led by *La Lega*, a mass party.

4.5.2 Friuli Venezia Giulia - Mass Party organization

Since 2018, Friuli Venezia Giulia has been governed by *La Lega*, a mass party led by current Regional President Massimiliano Fedriga. As indicated by several interviewees, the territorial reform actuated by the catch-all government led by

⁸further discussed in chapter five

Serracchiani, became one of the main pivot points of the electoral campaign in the following 2018 elections. The center-left coalition led by Bolzonello doubled down on the Intermunicipal Territorial Unions (UTI), proposing more funding and resources to optimize the system. On the other end, the center-right coalition led by Fedriga, pushed against the reform altogether, proposing the re-institution of the provinces. A Friulian Regional Councilor explains that 'the political opposition has also produced a political debate in the elections. [...] One of the most important programmatic elements has been addressed by the debate on the Intermunicipal Territorial Unions. So much so that the new administration put the repeal [of law 26/2014] first in their political agenda. *La Lega* focused its campaign and following policy-making efforts on the rehabilitation of the provinces and the multiplication of places of power.

The 2018 elections were the endpoint of a four-year-long political battle over the territorial organization of the region. A *Forza Italia* regional councilor and former mayor describes how in December 2014, the time when the Intermunicipal Territorial Unions reform was about to be approved, more than 100 administrators out of 206 in the province of Udine convened a meeting at Palazzo Belgrado (the seat of the Province to start discussing this law. The majority of mayors were critical of the law and began a process of resistance to its implementation. Interestingly, the interviewee discusses how some center-left mayors conformed to party orders and left the resistance, finally joining their respective Intermunicipal Territorial Unions. However, a core group of mayors, primarily center-right (*La Lega* and *Forza Italia*), continued to challenge the law, even in the face of pressures and contributions from the region, and pursued legal actions to contest the law's legislative aspects.

The intense political rivalry that strongly impacted the reform process essentially resulted in a situation of "us against them," with the center-right in

opposition to the center-left. Consequently, when the former assumed control of the region, it was compelled to uphold its election pledges, leading to the complete dismantling of the framework that had been developed just a few years earlier. During the 2018 regional council elections, *La Lega*, garnered the majority of the votes (35%) within the coalition (63% of total votes), running against the format of the Intermunicipal Territorial Unions and for a governance structure focused on representing the needs of the localities.

In a 2019 newspaper interview, Roberti, *La Lega* regional executive member in charge of territorial reform, argued that throughout the implementation of the 2014 UTI reform, "many administrations have joined the UTIs to obtain the funds needed from the Region to close their budgets. It was not a real choice, but rather an obligation based on the threat of administrative takeover. Furthermore, in most cases, the Unions have never been truly operational, but have only existed on paper to allow the Municipalities to benefit from regional contributions" [Trieste Prima, 2019]. With the 2019 reform devised by *La Lega*, the municipalities have the option to come together to form legally recognized Communities with a statute that outlines the shared functions they can manage. The management of these defined functions will be initiated through agreements. "We've taken existing legal frameworks while preserving the positive aspects of UTIs and introducing new elements, the most significant being the choice for municipalities whether to join these Communities or not, which remains fully at the discretion of mayors. Just two or more municipalities will suffice to establish a Community," explained Roberti. This 'laissez-faire' approach aligns with the mass party's tendency to prioritize fragmented representative capacity over top-down policy-making.

In true mass party form, with the Roberti reform of 2019, the power has returned to the choice of municipalities, whether they wish to proceed with certain actions. A *La Lega* mayor from a town in lower Friuli asserts that now, municipalities are

required to collaboratively determine which functions they wish to amalgamate. In the mayor's view, this reform represents a significant form of representative decentralization, as it places the authority to make these decisions in the hands of the municipalities. However, there may be instances where a municipality is reluctant to undertake these responsibilities for various reasons. The mayor also highlights another parallel significant reform actuated by the *La Lega* government, specifically an alteration to regional law 18, which pertains to personnel matters. The mayor emphasizes that the success of such reforms hinges not only on the decisions of administrators but also on the effectiveness of the organizational structure in place. For the first time, there is a shift towards the concept of an expenditure system that relies on ad hoc relationships with the localities.

Under this new system, the region guarantees financial support for personnel-related expenditures. This transition marks a departure from the previous containment-focused approach emphasizing efficiency, passed by the catch-all party *Democratic Party*. In this new framework, municipalities can prove their ability to sustain an increase in personnel through slight tax hikes or cost-saving measures, whereas previously, such flexibility did not exist. This reform de facto implements fiscal fragmentation at the municipality level in Friuli Venezia Giulia, another example of how mass party appeal focuses on local interests, rather than holistic programmatic endeavors. In this subsection, I have shown how the organization of the governing party in Friuli Venezia Giulia has affected the territorial reforms of the region since 2014. This case supports my argument, as the data underlines how the *Democratic Party* and *La Lega* have respectively consolidated and fragmented the territorial organization. The next subsection will discuss how Sardinia presents similar outcomes while being defined by a unique political history.

4.6 Sardinia Party Organization

The political dynamics within Sardinia are intricate, intertwined with its rich history and diverse array of identities. As depicted in Table 4.1, there has been notable fluctuation between center-left and center-right parties in governance. Over the period examined, the region saw the ascendancy of a catch-all party (*Democratic Party*) followed by a mass party (Sardinian Action Party). Through my investigation, it becomes evident that while party organization has impacts on legislative decisions, the deeper institutional legacies wield a greater influence on policy implementation at the grassroots level.

Much like Friuli Venezia Giulia, Sardinia's diverse history and linguistic identity have a strong influence on territorial governance, but unlike Friuli Venezia Giulia, its political arena features well-organized local parties coalescing around a defined Sardinian identity. Many Sardinian parties grew and fell in popularity, but they affected the region's political trajectory, along with its territorial institutions. To contextualize the Sardinian case, I briefly describe the trajectory of its main (sub)nationalist party, the *Sardinian Action Party*. The major Italian political parties find widespread support on the island, but the unique relationship between politics and identity is central to understanding the Sardinian case.

Between the years 1919 and 1921, a political party known as *Partito Sardo d'Azione or Sardinian Action Party (PSdAz)* was established by WWI veterans, with autonomy as its primary goal, aimed at addressing various issues on the island of Sardinia, including poverty, insufficient infrastructure, isolation, and underdevelopment. Although this party did not explicitly advocate for separatism or nationalism, their rallying cry was "Sardinians first; then Italians," a slogan that often led many of their supporters to conflate autonomy with full independence [Farinelli, 2017]. In 1922, when Benito Mussolini came to power, he attempted to

negotiate with the Sardists, effectively splitting the party into two factions: one aligned with Fascism and another that remained independent. The anti-fascist branch of *Sardinian Action Party* was disbanded by Mussolini's regime in 1926, but it was re-established in 1943, playing a significant role in the formation of the Italian Republic [Farinelli, 2017].

In the 1960s, a separatist movement arose in Sardinia due to factors such as the Rebirth Plan's negative environmental impacts, the imposition of the Italian language, and the island's militarization. Separatist groups emerged within and outside the *Sardinian Action Party* party but failed to gain widespread support from the island's population. The *Sardinian Action Party* party eventually shifted from autonomism to independentism in 1981 and scored 13.8% in the 1984 elections [Farinelli, 2017].

Nationalist rhetoric remained an essential aspect of Sardinian politics, and the Sardinian Parliament approved laws to promote and enhance Sardinian culture and language in 1997 and declared the sovereignty of the Sardinian people over Sardinia in 1999. Yet, Sardinian nationalist movements are keen to find allies amongst mainstream Italian political forces, specifically with the regional divisions of national political parties, which have experienced a process referred to as "territorialization," characterized by several key aspects. First, these regional divisions have developed a more pronounced regional identity, often pledging to represent the interests of the specific nation or region and making commitments to advocate for regional concerns. Second, national parties have presented constitutional alternatives to independence in an effort to mitigate support for nationalist parties. Regional branches of parties that typically have centralizing agendas at the national level, such as *Forza Italia Sarda (FI)*, *Alleanza Nazionale (AN)*, and *Partito della Rifondazione Comunista della Sardegna (PRC)*, have adopted stances that lean towards autonomy or federalism [Hepburn, 2010]. In 2009, the *Sardinian*

Action Party party joined Silvio Berlusconi's center-right coalition, and further attempts to improve the island's self-government were proposed but did not yield significant results.

In the 2014 Sardinian elections, an alliance between the independentist party ProGres and two electoral lists supporting candidate-writer Michela Murgia, obtained 10.3% of the vote, indicating increased public interest in self-government. However, the coalition was excluded from the Sardinian Parliament, and a center-left coalition was formed in the regional government. The nationalist vote reached a historic 27.8%, but it remained divided among seven organizations, and only nine out of sixty regional councilors were independentists. In 2018, *Sardinian Action Party* became the Sardinian main partner of *La Lega*, with their coalition winning the 2019 polls, with the leader of PSdAz, Christian Solinas, elected President. Today, the PSdA defines itself as a secular, anti-fascist, and liberal-inspired party. This ideology is reflected in their statute, particularly in Article Three, which is built upon the principles of liberty, fraternity, and equality.

According to one of the current leaders of *Sardinian Action Party*, they entered into an alliance with *La Lega* due to its natural affinity and standing as the sole federalist party at the national level, having directly borrowed the Partito Sardo d'Azione's statute. The interviewee describes the political connection between the two parties as tracing back to *La Lega* early days, sharing a vision of creating a federal republic and acknowledging supranational powers. In this context, foreign policy and defense were to be centralized, while all other matters would be significantly delegated to the regions or states of the federal republic. The *Sardinian Action Party* employs a mass party organization not only due to its alliance with *La Lega*, as it can be classified as a mass party on its own merits. Since its inception (1921), it appealed to well-defined collectivities of Sardinian nationalists and farm workers, who made the *Sardinian Action Party* the most-

voted mass party on the island [Official Website, Partito Sardo d’Azione 2024]. With an improved understanding of the political actors at play in Sardinia, the following two subsections will illuminate how the organization of the governing party has affected the territorial rescaling of Sardinia.

4.6.1 Sardinia Catch All

In 2012, riding the anti-politics wave that took over Italy after the 2008 crisis, the regional party *Riformatori Sardi* (the Sardinian Reformers) created The Referendum Movement, which promoted the ten questions on the abolition of the new provinces, the boards of public entities, and the reduction of regional councilors. The referendum was a clear emanation of a catch-all organization aimed at riding the antistate expenditure wave put in motion by the 2008 crisis. The Referendum Movement, along with the association “The Practicals,” presented on the theatrical stage “The Honorable Spendthrift,” a fictional character representing a politician who wants Sardinia to remain as it is, institutionally inefficient. A real show with real actors on stage who toured the entire island to secure victory in the referendums and, above all, to convince the voters to go to the polls on May 6 to reach the quorum [La Nuova Sardegna, April, 15 2012]. This referendum was also supported by Governor Cappellacci (2009-2014), the leader of the Sardinian *Forza Italia*, in an effort to transcend ideologies and garner political support by embracing the institutional change wanted by a disillusioned electorate [La Nuova Sardegna, April 21 2015]. This party can be characterized as following the catch-all model, and according to my argument, its support for a referendum seeking to implement territorial policies that simplify governance does not come as a surprise.

On May 6, 2012,⁹ Sardinia witnessed the conduction of 10 regional referendums,

⁹The previous territorial reform was regional law 9/2001, operational since 2005, which fragmented the territorial governance establishing the provinces of Medio Campidano, Sulcis

consisting of five abrogative and five consultative referendums. Among these, there was a consultative referendum concerning the repeal of the four historical provinces of the region (Cagliari, Sassari, Nuoro, and Oristano) and some abrogative referendums aimed at abolishing the new provinces (Carbonia-Iglesias, Medio Campidano, Ogliastra, and Olbia-Tempio) established by a regional law in 2005. Both referendums yielded positive results, setting in motion a complex reform process of *territorial consolidation*.

A former member of the regional executive (*Democratic Party*) notes that in the wake of the referendum, the center-right led by *Forza Italia* and *Riformatori Sardi*, despite its support for it, failed to transform its results into a viable political project because it was interested only in getting the support of the electorate. He continues by saying that in Sardinia, tampering with local identities and meddling in well-established governance models and local power dynamics is an intricate endeavor¹⁰. Thus, a lack of consistency within the center-right is evident from this standpoint. Driven primarily by catch-all considerations, the center-right pushed in a specific direction without de facto assuming responsibility for guiding the choices. Instead of passing risky legislation towards the end of the mandate, it waited on the intervention of the following technical government led by the *Democratic Party*, another catch-all party. The executive cabinet selected by Regional President Pigliaru (an economics professor) included most experts not officially affiliated with any political party or political coalition. Six of 12 members held tenured professor positions in the two regional universities, a characterizing feature of the generalist, technocratic tendencies of the catch-all party¹¹

The focal point of this entire journey is the regional law of February 4, 2016, Iglesiente, Ogliastra, and Gallura. The governing party was *Forza Italia*, a catch-all party.

¹⁰The centrality of institutional legacies will be discussed in the following chapter

¹¹In chapter 5, I will discuss how the technical executive made the reform possible in a political, institutional, and cultural environment that discourages territorial reforms, pushing the parties to conservative policy-making regardless of their party type

No. 2, titled "Reorganization of the System of Local Autonomy in Sardinia," which approved the new arrangement of the local government entities, de jure consolidating the territorial governance of the region. The number of provinces went from eight to four, plus the Metropolitan City of Cagliari. The 2016 law was also supposed to simplify the governance on a functional level ¹². The governing coalitions at the time were led by the *Democratic Party*, a catch-all party with policy-making goals aimed at establishing retrospective accountability, relying on experience and track record. These actions were initiated due to what we refer to as the general phenomenon of crisis legislation, responding to the need for expense cuts, but mainly to the electoral pressure that arises from the crises. At the central level, there was a process aimed at addressing the international need to ensure the continuous guarantee of Italy's debt service payment by downsizing a portion of the institutional framework, particularly at the provincial level. This response was prompted by external sources, whether from Europe, the international context, or international investors. Instead of structurally reducing the costs of the public apparatus, the Italian government opted to alter a segment of the institutional system (Sardinian Regional Councilor, *Democratic Party*), and the *Democratic Party* government of Sardinia followed suit.

Concerning the reorganization and the governing bodies of the provinces, the aforementioned regional law initially establishes that until the final transition from the provinces is completed, the region's territory, except for that of the metropolitan city of Cagliari established by Article 17 of the same law, would be divided into provinces recognized by the regional statute and state law. This reform started with a 'predefined optimality dictated from above' (Sardinian Regional Councilor from *La Lega*). The corresponding territorial districts are identified by Article 25

¹²in chapter six, I will show how the institutional legacies de facto resisted these consolidating efforts

of the same law: the metropolitan city of Cagliari and the provinces of Sassari, Nuoro, Oristano, and South Sardinia. Waiting for the national referendum that would have eliminated the provinces tout court, the management of the Sardinian territorial system continued to rest in the hands of commissioners, representing an intermediary system that lacked adequate planning and managerial capabilities. This is because an extraordinary commissioner is tasked with overseeing routine administration during a period of heightened activity in managing additional resources, planning, European funds, and other aspects, all while excluding the local government's active involvement. Indeed, with law 2/2016, the *Democratic Party* tried to garner electoral appeal without engaging with the localities, setting their grievances aside in favor of catch-all programmatic efforts. The reform of local authorities was met with resistance from municipal administrations and territories, as evidenced by various stances and protests over the months. A new mobilization emerged, stretching from Gallura to Sulcis, united by a common goal: the restoration of Provinces. This cross-cutting movement persisted for about a year, and in the end, a "new reorganization" was developed by the new regional mass party government led by *Partito Sardo d'Azione* and *La Lega*.

4.6.2 Sardinia Mass Party

The main players of the coalition governing Sardinia are both mass parties structured around well-defined social groups [Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2010]. In this case, individuals' lives are closely intertwined with the Sardinian identity and its autonomous tendencies, and it's in the interest of these parties to respond to their target electorate [Katz and Mair, 1995]. In line with my argument, the mass party organization translated into legislation that sought to represent local interest aggregatively [March et al., 1989], rescaling the territory in a fragmented way. As a *La Lega* regional councilor explains,

A fundamental aspect that I'd like to draw your attention to is the concept of recognition rather than imposition. At that time, I was the president of the first committee of the Regional Council, which is responsible for matters related to local authorities. During that period, we launched an initiative to consult with mayors from various territories. Each mayor, representing their respective area, requested recognition for the intermediate entity (province) closer to them.

So, from a political perspective, the majority that won the 2019 elections had committed to listening to the territories that were seeking recognition or the power to self-administer. Furthermore, once the council was convened and work had commenced, the mayors made the same request. This approach contrasts with the 2016 law developed by the *Democratic Party*, [we] established a system of local autonomies that originates from the grassroots. In other words, we did what the community representatives in Sardinia had requested us to do.

The Regional Council passed Regional Law No. 7 of April 12, 2021. This law establishes the Metropolitan City of Sassari, modifies the territorial jurisdiction of the Metropolitan City of Cagliari by expanding it, establishes the Provinces of North-East Sardinia, Ogliastra, Sulcis Iglesiente, and Medio Campidano, modifies the territorial jurisdiction of the Province of Nuoro, and finally abolishes the Provinces of Sassari and South Sardinia. The territorial jurisdiction of the Province of Oristano, however, remains unchanged. In revisiting the establishment of provinces, there seems to be a desire to recreate centers of power and to appoint individuals to positions of authority. However, what appears to be happening is that these positions of authority are established without ensuring that the appointed individuals can effectively implement policies to address citizens' needs. Since both the electoral and functional aspects are critical when governing, it seems this maneuver is more for electoral purposes than practical solutions to citizens' problems (Regional Councilor from *Liberi e Uguali*, Free and Equal. A now defunct left-wing electoral list). This isn't something connected to being the right or the left but related to the current regional government being led by

mass parties more interested in maintaining their core electorate than legislating effective governance.

Fourteen interviewees discussed how, within the Regional Council, a cascading effect occurred because the only territory that arguably deserved to become a province, Gallura, played a pivotal role in the fragmentation of the territory. Gallura had all the necessary attributes to be recognized as a province, but it couldn't secure a sufficient majority in the Regional Council without the support of other territories. This situation resulted in a form of logrolling within the Council. The basic premise was, "I'll support your cause if you support mine." As part of this arrangement, Gallura supported the establishment of a metropolitan city, a long-standing demand in the Sassari area, emphasizing that they were no less significant than Cagliari and deserving of the opportunity to access funding for metropolitan cities (Expert/Consultant to Sardinian executive)

In light of the discussed reform, the new landscape of intermediate authorities features the two metropolitan cities, Cagliari (with over half a million inhabitants) and Sassari (with over 300,000 inhabitants), as well as six provinces. Sulcis Iglesiente (with Carbonia and Iglesias), Medio Campidano (with Sanluri and Villacidro), Ogliastra (with Lanusei and Tortolì), and Gallura (Olbia and Tempio) have two administrative centers each. Notably, the scenario no longer includes South Sardinia. This governmental approach from *Partito Sardo d'Azione* and *La Lega* appears to distribute resources without a clear agenda, focusing more on providing benefits to everyone rather than pursuing meaningful reforms (member of the Regional executive affiliated with the *Democratic Party*). In the best-case scenario, it tends to enact measures that oppose reform, an established trait of mass parties [Katz and Mair, 1995]. This approach is chosen as it can help garner support through scattered and disorganized resource allocation. One striking aspect of this new administrative setup is that all the provinces now have two

”capitals.” This unique feature exemplifies the government’s approach to cater to various interests and please a wide range of stakeholders, further fragmenting territorial governance. While this may be seen as a means to maintain political support, it also raises questions about the effectiveness and efficiency of such a system and whether it truly serves the best interests of the citizens.

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I’ve explored the impact of different party organizations on territorial governance reforms in the four regional cases. The organizational structure and approach of the ruling party significantly influence the outcomes. When a governing party adopts a catch-all organization, reducing its ideological stances and reaching out to a broader voter base, it tends to consolidate territorial governance due to its broad appeal. Conversely, regions governed by mass parties, deeply rooted in their local electorate, promote representation and tend to lead to territorial fragmentation.

The studied cases have varying levels of governmental turnover, allowing me to control for regional institutional legacies. Turnover, or the rotation of power between political organizations, plays a crucial role in shaping policies. The regions with special statutes have also witnessed changes in their institutional design, providing insights into the mechanisms of regional decision-making. In Emilia-Romagna, the dominance of the *Democratic Party* with its catch-all approach has led to the redistribution of provincial functions and the consolidation of territorial entities. In Veneto, *La Lega*, -aligning with the mass party model, implemented minor changes to its territorial organization, focusing on deepening support within its core local base. Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG) experienced a shift from catch-all to mass party governance, going from a consolidated territorial organization based on

the UTIs to an institutional order rooted in local decision-making. In Sardinia, the *Democratic Party* initially imposed a top-down reform, while later, mass parties, *Partito Sardo d'Azione* and *La Lega*, introduced a more fragmented approach, distributing resources broadly. As mentioned in this chapter, the results of this research have highlighted the role of institutional legacies as trumping the effects of party organization on territorial rescaling. The following two chapters will present the evidence from the four regions under study.

Chapter 5

Institutional Legacies - Ordinary Regions

5.1 Overview of the Chapter

In chapter four, I have shown that we can learn a lot about territorial outcomes from the type of organization of the party leading the regional government, but my contribution shows that we must also consider institutional legacies. This chapter analyzes the effects of the type of institutional legacies of a region on its approach to territorial governance reforms. The interviews highlight the role of historical institutional arrangements and culture in shaping local grievances tied to place-based politics, influencing the institutional trajectory of political entities in present-day Italy.

This study reveals the interconnection between institutional arrangements and local grievances dating back to pre-unified Italy, emphasizing the significance of place-based identities in shaping institutional legacies. In this perspective, socio-cultural history and former territorial patterns have deeply affected the organization of local society. These legacies directly, and indirectly inform the priorities of local

actors and regional decision-makers, ultimately impacting territorial reforms. I argue that the four regional cases can be categorized as either having concerted or localist legacies (explained in chapter two); these terms describe the patterns in which society and politics are organized and regulated [Messina, 2012].

The two legacies reflect varying degrees of community trust in their respective public and private institutions, highlighting the diverse political and sub-cultural matrices. These are based on different approaches to institutional collaboration and public management that overtime, have become ingrained in their respective regional historical paths and current political developments. When a region is characterized by concerted legacies, where the political actor fully exercises their local and regional administrative faculties based on a strong, collaborative, "public intervention" vocation, we can expect a consolidation of territorial governance, both at the functional (major redistribution) and institutional (simplicity) level. Instead, regions with localist legacies promote ad hoc initiatives and spontaneous solutions to the grievances of the various subregional communities. Rooted in parochialism, the administrative and entrepreneurial sectors resist agreements for intergovernmental cooperation and, therefore, recreate fragmented (minor redistribution and complex institutional arrangements) governmental entities better suited to respond to local grievances [Messina, 2012].

This chapter presents the findings pertaining to the two regions with Ordinary Statute. As discussed in chapters one and three, this type of statute does not allow the regional government to change the nature and borders of its local institutions. This is why the rescaling happened mainly in terms of movement of functions within the existing institutions within each region. The redistribution of functions is characterized by two aspects: firstly, the identification of the so-called fundamental functions (Article 1, paragraph 85); secondly, the absolute discretion exercised by the Regions in allocating the so-called "non-fundamental" functions. It's worth

noting that the significance of this distinction among regions, particularly within the provincial framework, is emphasized by the fact that the wide-area entity operates exclusively within the realm of regional competencies, both concurrent and residual. The only state competency relinquished by Provinces to the State pertains to linguistic minorities.

In the following sections, I will further define the legacies and their relationship to territorial rescaling. I will then present three empirical examples for each region, showing how territorial outcomes are affected by institutional legacies. The evidence is organized by region, and it includes a brief description of the institutional context of each case. I will introduce the case of Emilia-Romagna, the only one that can be characterized by concerted legacies, a political ecosystem where institutions are integrated and enjoy general appreciation from the citizenry. This institutional environment allows for programmatic territorial reforms. The region's history of a robust civic culture permeates relationships among all regional actors, fostering trust from labor unions to industrial guilds and from the smallest municipality to the regional government. This trust has proven successful in developing a relatively efficient system of territorial governance, wherein institutions play a central role in coordinating stakeholders for the benefit of the territory. I will then present Veneto, which I classify as regions with localist legacies, wherein the region responds to separate territorial grievances rather than engaging in holistic, programmatic politics. The localism typologies of these regions vary due to their distinct histories and subnational dynamics. Veneto's ecosystem is marked by a localism rooted in its parochial culture, fostering mistrust toward state institutions.

5.2 Institutional Legacies and Territorial Outcomes

In the Italian context, the politically and territorially significant identities, known in the Italian political science literature as territorial political subcultures [Diamanti, 1992, Trigilia and Ewing, 1991, Messina, 2012, Almagisti and Zanellato, 2021], are intricately tied to the fault lines created during the processes of state and nation-building. Carlo Trigilia (1981) emphasizes the deep connection to a specific region and suggests using the term subculture not just to describe a particular type of political culture but also to encompass the overall features of a local political system within the national context, along with the kind of integration it establishes. The redefined concept of territorial political subculture refers to a distinct local political system marked by strong support for a specific entity and a considerable ability to bring together and mediate interests at the local level. This is manifested through a dense institutional framework, including the dominant force's coordination of various entities such as political parties, the Church, interest groups, welfare organizations, as well as cultural and recreational associations. The historical origins of the white and red territorial political subcultures are traced back to the agrarian crisis of 1880. In white areas, characterized by small peasant ownership and the widespread presence of priests in rural areas, the crisis was addressed with the support of the Catholic Church. In red areas, characterized by agricultural labor and sharecropping, the crisis was tackled with the support of trade unions and the Socialist Party [Diamanti, 2009].

With a holistic review of the literature on the matter, Almagisti explains that in the northeastern regions of Italy (Veneto, Friuli Venice Giulia, Trentino), the division between the center and periphery intersected with the State-Church dynamic. The Italian state grappled with challenges in assimilating the former

territories of the Republic of Venice, exacerbated by social disruptions in the initial decades following the unification of Italy. Intense conflicts, both preceding and following the rise of fascism, contributed to a robust association between this region and the Church. The Church often became the singular reference point for local society in the face of recurrent traumatic events. The profound connection between this area and the Church was not arbitrary. Since the sixteenth century, the Church had identified northeastern Italy as a critical area for cultural reclamation and a stronghold against potential destabilizing influences from nearby regions influenced by the Lutheran Reformation and the periodic resurgence of ancient pagan practices [Almagisti, 2015], specifically in Friuli ¹. The organized presence of the Church in northeastern Italy became the primary support base for the Catholic party founded by Alcide De Gasperi (1881-1954) in the post-World War II era, known as the Christian Democracy (DC).

Almagisti continues by describing how central Italy (Emilia-Romagna, Marche, Toscana, and Umbria) featured a less widespread influence of religious organizations in rural areas, the prevalence of sharecropping in agriculture (harshly impacted by fascist agrarian reforms) rather than small family-owned farms, and the recollection of social movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries led by left-wing groups, resulted in the convergence of the center-periphery divide with the capital-labor cleavage. This accumulation of social capital, emphasizing social justice in a more egalitarian sense than the 'white' area, constituted the primary social reference for the Socialist Party in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It served as the key backdrop for the establishment of Palmiro Togliatti's (1893-1964) Communist Party in post-World War II Italy [Almagisti, 2015].²

The in-depth research of Patrizia Messina (2012) bridges the relationship

¹Carlo Ginzburg, *I benandanti. Ricerche sulla stregoneria e sui culti agrari tra Cinquecento e Seicento*, Torino, Einaudi, 1996, ISBN 88-06-16188-1.

²The party developments are described in chapter 4

between the cultural types and the institutional legacies, specifically in Veneto and Emilia-Romagna. Through a comparative contextual analysis of the two regions, the 'red' areas are characterized by integrative institutions, and the 'white' areas with aggregative institutions exhibit profoundly different local administrative styles and governance strategies [March et al., 1989, Messina, 2012].

In the zones of municipal socialism, interventionist approaches are prominent, while the white areas adopt a non-interventionist stance. This diversity has contributed to the formation of two distinct types of (political) local communities. In the red zones, a politically relevant community emerges, primarily due to the emphasis on the dimension of political planning, which involves the pursuit of common integration objectives. On the other hand, in areas with a 'white' political subculture, the weakening of the Catholic cultural influence brings forth significant challenges to maintaining territorial cohesion. These challenges include increased territorial fragmentation, a growing divide between urban and industrialized rural areas, a notable absence of references guiding toward a notion of 'general interest' in a civic sense, and a lack of a robust sense of belonging to the political community. This occurs precisely at a time when it is crucial to redefine a (post-)modern project of civil coexistence and develop a local political community capable of addressing the challenges posed by rapid economic development and the associated risks of deregulation [Messina, 2012].

By examining the cases of Veneto and Emilia-Romagna, my research builds on Messina's work, corroborating her findings. By including Friuli Venezia Giulia and Sardinia, I expand the study to two regions that do not have a 'relatively' monolithic cultural history linked to the 'red' and 'white' subcultures. All four regions, regardless of variation in subprovincial governance cultures ³, exhibit

³It is worth noting that, zooming in the territory of the two regions, certain areas, such as Rovigo in Veneto and the Piacenza in Emilia-Romagna, differ significantly from the respective regional distinctive characteristics.

distinct sociopolitical legacies compared to each other. These processes have shaped significantly different institutional models and approaches to regulating local development. The comparison emphasizes the distinctiveness in the evolution of the two models of institutional legacies (concerted and vocalist), without aiming to declare superior one over another. I make sense of the Italian subcultures in terms of historical and institutional legacies that produce specific socio-political dynamics and approaches to decision-making. My classification of localist and concerted legacies is less dependent on Italy specific historical features, allowing for more generalizability and applicability to other regions and states.

5.3 Emilia-Romagna - Institutional Legacies

Emilia-Romagna is located in central Italy. It 'fully' implemented the principles of the Delrio reform, rescaling the territorial functions to consolidate governance. With regional law 13/2015, it assigned specific duties within determined functions to each institutional level. In other words, given a function, for example, protecting the environment, each level will have an interconnected role that sees the Region as the center of the network. The Impact Assessment Office of the Italian Senate aptly named this approach Multilevel Governance. In this system, the Region programs, directs, and controls the functions, the Provinces (eight plus the Metropolitan City of Bologna)(Figure 5.1) coordinate (and at times program depending on the specific function), and the Municipalities in their Unions (44) administrate and manage the services related to the function [Fucito and Frati, 2017]. Unlike Veneto, Emilia-Romagna has not instituted hybrid entities like the Area Programmatic Agreements (IPA) and kept the governance structure relatively simple and streamlined. Emilia-Romagna's approach to territorial decision-making seems to be affected by their history and political culture. However, unlike the other regions under study,

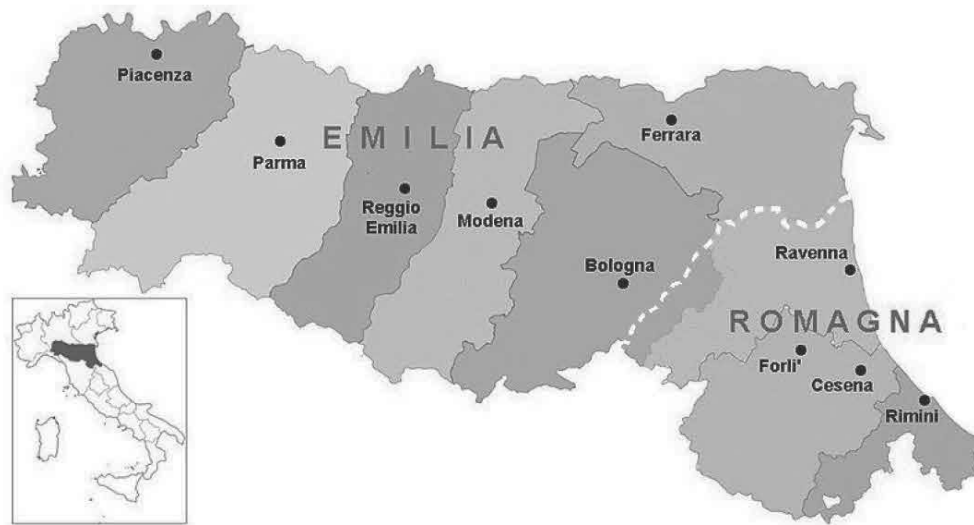


Figure 5.1: Emilia-Romagna - Map of Provinces with their Capital Cities (Open Source)

Emilia-Romagna's political actors seem to approach the decision in a collaborative manner, driven by the public/civic interest. Corporatism and pragmatism drive institutional design that considers the needs of industries, entrepreneurs, labor unions, NGOs, universities, etc. This is related to high trust in the institutions and the strength of the regional organs [Messina, 2012]. This political aspect involves the practices of consultation among various representative and economic-social categories, such as trade unions, cooperatives, and associations of middle sectors. Their participation is woven into the political decision-making processes, creating a complex network of relationships that is intricately structured and consistently upheld, echoing the legacies discussed earlier.

The historical roots of Emilia-Romagna's "concerted legacies" extend back to the autonomous and decentralized socialism of the late 1800s. During this era, the emancipation movement created opportunities for an inclusive and participatory civic engagement that contrasted the class-based nature characterizing the patriotic

cause during the Risorgimento. The so-called popular municipalism in the early 1900s injected new life into institutions established with the Unification of the Italian Peninsula. This fusion of fresh energies, rooted in the local context aligns with the establishment of "concerted legacies," thriving on continuous interaction between municipal administrations and society [Maria, 2011]. The socialist "laboratories" in Imola and Reggio Emilia (Figure 5.1) marked the genesis of a cultural, political, and administrative model marked by a robust associative fabric, civic virtues, organizational capabilities, and a focus on social citizenship, fostering advanced forms of local welfare. Today, these historical approaches significantly influence contemporary institutional strategies for territorial rescaling. The enduring impact of "concerted legacies" is evident in how past models of inclusive governance, civic participation, and local welfare continue to shape the current approach to revitalizing and reorganizing territories. The echoes of historical practices resonate in present-day efforts to navigate and address the challenges of territorial development. I will illustrate how the concerted legacies affect territorial governance rescaling in Emilia-Romagna with three examples: the Pact for Work and for the Climate, the institution of the Metropolitan City of Bologna, and the institutional dynamics within the regional Municipal Unions.

5.3.1 Pact for Work and for the Climate

The legacies of concertation between different political players and civil society is best represented by the 'Patto per il Lavoro e per il Clima' (Pact for Work and for the Climate), which was discussed by eight out of 18 interviewees from Emilia-Romagna. In 2020, the Region signed this pact together with local authorities, trade unions, businesses, schools, universities, environmental associations, the third sector, and the voluntary sector, professions, chambers of commerce, and banks. This was a shared project for the revitalization and development of Emilia-Romagna

based on environmental, economic, and social sustainability (Official Website). In terms of territorial rescaling, this 'pact' directly affects the redistribution of function between institutional and non-institutional players, streamlining and consolidating the governance within the region. This sort of integrated, collaborative project is unique to Emilia-Romagna. The origin of the "Pact" can be traced back to the legacies of collaborative efforts between public territorial institutions and various players in the regional economy. Engaged in a model of "governance with social participation," they have distinctly outlined primary objectives focused on reducing unemployment by "creating quality employment." A secondary set of goals aims at enhancing the regional productive landscape in alignment with the strategy of "generating added value."

A member of the regional executive office for territorial reforms explains that to achieve the objectives of the "Pact," the signatories initially established multiple action guidelines and a series of intervention commitments, some of which carry legislative and administrative implications. According to Verdolini (2021), the Emilia-Romagna Region has linked the "Pact" to the utilization of available resources, drawing from European structural funds associated with three distinct Operational Programs (European Regional Development Fund, European Development Fund, and European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development). This approach guides the allocation of these resources in accordance with the principles established through consultation [Verdolini, 2021]. This method of steering economic and employment matters, characteristic of the Emilia-Romagna Region, serves as an illustrative example of regional social concertation. The Regional Statute of Emilia-Romagna explicitly cites, in Article 4, paragraph 1, letter d), the role of consultation as a method for labor policies, contributing to the promotion of social cohesion. Various articles within the Statute underscore the valuable contribution of social formations in shaping the region's political-

programmatic guidelines, which establish a "right to participation" for associations in defining the fundamental political decisions of regional entities.

In fact, a member of the regional legislature (Courageous, Ecologist, and Progressive Emilia-Romagna) explains how the region is distinguished by a notable blend of solidarity and a discernible degree of pragmatism. Thus, despite internal competition and localized perspectives prevalent within its territories, it is paramount to acknowledge Emilia-Romagna's integral position within Italy — a nation characterized by a myriad of municipalities. This inherent dynamism is nonetheless tempered by a shared sense of pride in being Emiliano Romagnoli, an attribute that profoundly influences the collective approach to addressing and resolving challenges. For instance, in response to the economic downturn commencing in 2008, Emilia-Romagna formulated the Pact for Employment, a regional initiative initially conceived in 2015, subsequently renewed, and further evolved in 2020 to encompass both employment and climate considerations.

This initiative entails the convergence of diverse stakeholders around a common table, including representatives from the union sector, manifestations of the entrepreneurial sphere such as CNA Confindustria, encompassing the entirety of the business milieu, the union sector, the realms of academia and research, the cooperative sector, and others. Significantly, beginning in 2022, the environmentalist sector, represented by organizations such as Legambiente (Environmental League), has also been included in these deliberations. The objective is to collaboratively delineate fundamental parameters aimed at collectively addressing crises. As another member of the regional council (*Democratic Party*) adds,

The approach we've taken revolves around the document, a key element in both the previous and current legislature. [...]It's endorsed by over 50 entities, ranging from universities to the third sector, industry associations, unions, and collaborative associations. Together, we decide on strategies for the upcoming years, acknowledging that while there may be disagreements on some points, the shared direction reduces

conflicts. This logic extends to institutional management, fostering close ties with municipalities and provinces, emphasizing collaboration and widespread sharing of strategic lines.

This cooperative ethos is further underscored by a pronounced level of recognition and credibility accorded to institutions by private entities, societal bodies, and intermediary institutions. These entities perceive the region, in this context, as assuming a leadership role and playing a pivotal role in facilitating dialogue. Both councilors separately underline how, while regionalism and territorial challenges persist, Emilia-Romagna, in times of adversity, endeavors to navigate solutions collectively rather than pursuing isolated paths. This collaborative spirit extends to intermediary bodies as well. The historical legacy of this region, where the concept of cooperation originated, significantly influences this collective mindset, serving as the culminating outcome of its history.

5.3.2 The Metropolitan City of Bologna

Another example of how Emilia-Romagna's concerted legacies affected territorial rescaling can be seen in the way the Region approached the development of the Metropolitan City of Bologna in the territory of the former Province of Bologna (Figure 5.1). The birth of the entity of the metropolitan cities stems from a constitutional reform (2001) and its implementation law, the 56/2014 (Delrio). However, according to a member of the executive of the Metropolitan City of Bologna, the reform was incomplete as metropolitan cities have evolved into second-tier entities. The issue lies in the absence of effective executive discipline. Despite having laws, the fiscal tax collection of metropolitan cities, encompassing taxes and automobile-related revenues, is handed over to the state. Notably, regions retain control over agriculture and labor, leaving programming as a responsibility. Consequently, each metropolitan city operates as an entity with a mayor elected

directly by citizens. While facing resource constraints, the metropolitan mayor shoulders greater political responsibilities and expectations from the population, particularly in areas like road maintenance and school upkeep. These are practical challenges that directly impact people's lives. This results in significant challenges in their relationship with regional and state levels due to their economic fragility.

In terms of delegations and functions, each metropolitan city negotiates relationships within its region by establishing its own statutes and mission. This 'freedom' of negotiation has created a porous legislation where the concerted legacies could be identified. Confirming the importance of its integrative institutional legacies, the newly instituted Metropolitan City (CM) of Bologna uniquely initiated a metropolitan conference to formulate its statute. This conference, acting as a kind of constituent assembly, resulted in the creation of the metropolitan city's statute in 2016. A representative of Bologna's office of territorial reforms (November 2022) explains that the aim was to identify institutional levels that could effectively represent the territories. In addition to the Metropolitan Council and the Mayor, as stipulated by the Delrio reform, they created a unique metropolitan conference comprising all the mayors of the municipalities comprising the CM. Additionally, there is a Presidency Office represented by presidents of municipal unions, which are intermediary units grouping various municipalities in the territory. This special office shows how the legacies of concertation push the decision-makers to create institutionalized opportunities for confrontation and dialogue among the representatives of different territorial institutions, rather than have to deal with individual local grievances

Moreover, the integrated decision-making in Emilia-Romagna created a unique (among Italian Metropolitan Cities) position known as the delegated councilor. In Bologna, the Metropolitan Mayor delegates certain councilors to handle specific matters. These delegated councilors, alongside the mayor, convene regularly to

review and approve the mayor's acts. Despite being essentially unilateral decisions signed by the mayor without a council, there is a designated moment in the process, as outlined in the statute, for political collaboration. This collaboration, including a potential power of veto, serves as a forum for political discussion, preventing excessive centralization of powers. Notably, collaborative projects have been successfully undertaken between the metropolitan city, the municipalities, and the region. For instance, the Municipality of Bologna concurrently devised the metropolitan territorial plan, achieving a level of technical and functional convergence with several territorial players. The Mayor of Bologna explains that this concertation is unique in Italy due to the institutional legacies of the territory:

In Bologna, we decided to start a self-reform process, obviously more based on the political push of our territory. Thanks also to a certain political coherence of the various 55 municipalities (within the CM). It's not many compared to other metropolitan areas, and therefore, we have less fragmentation, we manage to be the first metropolitan city in Italy to adopt a statute and strategic plans for metropolitan mobility. So, we are satisfied with our path, but the relationship with higher authorities is always very complicated. Let's say that in Emilia-Romagna, there is a very strong and shared political-institutional culture that has allowed us to face the institutional weaknesses of the relationship between metropolitan cities, provinces, and regions in a more cohesive way. So, we compensate for the unresolved completion of the reform with strong political cohesion and the construction of innovative consultation tools."

In this context, the Metropolitan City of Bologna plays a strategic role not only for the Bologna area but for the entire regional territory (the Emilia-Romagna hub). The Region and the Metropolitan City jointly establish an official forum for shaping legislative initiatives and programmatic-political objectives that are in harmony with the metropolitan strategic plan. This process involves prior consultation with the Provinces and is based on a comprehensive general agreement. This forum is entrusted with the task of identifying specific additional functions to be assigned

to the Metropolitan City of Bologna through subsequent agreements.

One of the regional leaders of the *Democratic Party* supervising the relations between the party members in institutional positions across levels of governance, explains that the transformation of the province of Bologna into the Metropolitan City of Bologna and the corresponding institutional framework has fostered a renewed sense of coexistence. This involves a dynamic interaction between the regional capital, the metropolitan area, and the surrounding territories. He attributes the collaborative success of this transformation to strategic choices made at the regional level, where Bologna has effectively achieved a new equilibrium as a key infrastructural hub and with a recognized attractiveness within the regional system. Rather than seeking individual gains, Bologna's significance lies in its inclusive role, supporting and encompassing others. The interviewee brings the example of the sustained growth of Bologna's airport over the last 15 years, which significantly impacted the region's appeal, from the northern castles region to the art cities and the Romagna Riviera coast. This institutional connectivity positively influences regional tourism as a whole.

The speaker underscores the importance of achieving a delicate balance. Bologna's role is not seen as competing against the rest of the region but rather as a supportive force for a strengthened and consolidated regional system. The success is attributed to avoiding excessive centralization of resources and power in the regional capital and steering clear of undue standardization in relation to its role. The speaker notes that the culture of participation and consultation has effectively utilized the metropolitan city instrument, distinguishing it from situations in other regions where such efforts have led to a concentration of power in the capital, at the expense of other provinces, without bolstering the overall regional system.

5.3.3 Municipal Unions

The impact of the concerted legacies is clear at the local level, where several interviewees underlined the collaborative efforts consolidating the governance of the territory. The Municipal Unions are present throughout Italy, but seem to have higher success rates in Emilia-Romagna. Yet again, this relative success seems to be connected to the regional legislation detailing its role within the regional governance environment. Regional Law 13/2015 affirms the essential roles of Municipal Unions as governing bodies and key partners for the Region. It also recognized the role of mountain Municipal Unions in promoting and coordinating mountain policies, providing local services to citizens, and serves as governing bodies for optimal territorial areas. It also encourages municipal mergers to reduce their number and optimize the use of public resources while strengthening their unions as the core of local service organization for citizens. Following this, Regional Law 15/2016, "Promotion of Associative Pathways: Optimal Areas, Unions, Mergers, and Municipal Incorporations," introduces measures to support the union and merger of municipalities and remove obstacles that hinder associative processes. To achieve this, the Regional Observatory on Municipal Unions has been established with the aim of monitoring the effects of the shared management of services for citizens by Municipal Unions. Additionally, the Regional Observatory on Municipal Mergers has been set up to oversee the merger processes.

I argue that Emilia-Romagna focus on consolidating places of power into Municipal Unions is due to the different regional social capital and trust towards public institutions arose from their experience as independent city-states during the twelfth century developing an early form of democracy, which created a sense of civic community, and insured public good provisions and protection from aggression [Putnam et al., 1993, Choi and Storr, 2019]. This historically rooted approach is discussed by many Regional Councilors when talking about how in

Emilia -Romagna makes critical strategic choices for the territory. As one member of the *Democratic Party* puts it:

Emilia-Romagna Regional Councilor: The logic remains that there is still a great institutional responsibility on the great strategic choices. We can say it. Here [Emilia-Romagna], there is a relatively high quality of institutional responsibility, I believe that this is however a figure that is perhaps also the result of history[y], this is a land where an element of political continuity helped a little. Interviewer: The 'Red Italy'? Emilia-Romagna Regional Councilor: Exactly! Pink now since we [are less certain of the electoral results], but even that is an element that certainly has been more in the past, now much, much less. But it is an element of culture, isn't it? [...] In a certain phase of history, there was no doubt as to who would win the elections. It is no longer true now.

In other words, in Emilia-Romagna, the political actor makes their decisions in a network of local governance that produces a 'public good' [Messina, 2012] that benefits the whole system rather than a specialized one like in Veneto. Due to the sociopolitical history of the Region, the regional institutions seem to be intertwined with the local communities and socio-economic actors, which fosters the coordination of beneficial territorial policies in an integrative model.

The last quote introduced the idea of a 'Pink' region, where the historically 'Red' (Socialist) electoral trend has been influenced by 'white' tendencies⁴. Over the last decade in Emilia-Romagna, much like in the broader Northern region, a distinct voting pattern has emerged, particularly between urban areas and smaller towns. Cities tend to favor the *Democratic Party* (PD) and the center-left, whereas smaller towns lean towards the *La Lega* and the center-right. In the 2019 European elections in Emilia-Romagna, the center-right parties secured 44.7% compared to their opponents' 38.7%. Interestingly, in the capital municipalities, the *Democratic Party* and affiliated parties garnered 43.8%, surpassing the center-right's 40.3%.

⁴Perhaps more 'Green' given the success of *La Lega* in 2019 and 2020

Conversely, in smaller towns, the ratio was 36% to 47% in favor of the center-right [D'Alimonte, 2020].

The recent political diversification in the region brought some attrition between institutions led by opposing sides ⁵. A member of the regional executive brings the example of a Union of Municipalities in the Province of Forlì, featuring the central city, Forlì, alongside several other municipalities within its periphery, notably extending toward the Apennines mountains. The advent of the center-right (*La Lega* - mass party) in one of the members marked the dissolution of this collaborative association and severed connections with certain center-right administrators. Nevertheless, this discord is rare, and does not manifest at the regional level or in the majority of the territory.

In fact, when considering Provinces with heightened political intricacy like Piacenza (Figure 5.1), there is a commendable history of collaborations between the center-left and center-right, particularly in the mayor's dual capacity as both mayor and president of the province, and in navigating the challenges posed by the pandemic. Two interviewees explain that, Piacenza, being the initial province impacted due to its proximity to the Covid-19 outbreak, benefited from a seamlessly supportive institutional framework. This collaborative approach proved instrumental in averting the problems witnessed in Lombardy, where municipalities just miles away could not react to the emergency in an organized manner, fostering discord between mayors and the regional administration. Lombardy had a higher concentration of private healthcare facilities and chose to treat chronic patients in hospitals and socio-healthcare structures, rather than emphasizing collaborative community medicine, like Emilia-Romagna [Labini, 2020].

Due to Emilia-Romagna's integrative institutional approach, in the Province

⁵This does not happen in the Metropolitan Cities because they are de facto a monocratic entity under the leadership of the Mayor of the capital city

of Piacenza, the collaborative effort yielded dividends by compelling the regional administration to intensify attention, allocate resources, and exert additional efforts specifically within that territorial domain, devoid of any distinctions rooted in political or partisan affiliations. Party organization effects on governance seem to be trumped by the regional history of collaboration also in the Province of Modena (Figure 5.1). The mayor of a Modenese municipality, and member of a Union of Municipalities, discusses this,

Even before being right-wing or left-wing politicians, we are citizens who have grown up in a context that, like for all living beings, has influenced us in the development of our relationships. Therefore, it is impossible that identifying with a political party would shield you from any element that is part of your growth, your formation, even in relation to these issues. [...] I have always said that governing the people of Emilia is quite easy. Why? Because there is a heritage, a civic sense that was born and permeates our region, which, in my opinion, would benefit and influence anyone who governs a territory, regardless of their political affiliation, whether right or left.”

We can see how the concerted approach to decision-making is intertwined with society. The political actors embrace this *modus operandi* both in their actions and vernacular. The legacies permeated the bureaucratic spheres, where collaboration among different players has been institutionalized. The implementation of the Delrio reform is a great example of a policy initiated by the Emilia-Romagna Region to mitigate the negative effects. As an expert and member of the regional office of territorial reforms puts it, the region consistently operates as a hub of reform, a characteristic distinct from certain political orientations. In fact, Regional Law 13 achieved innovation and good governance, which was the result of extensive work behind the scenes and within the regional institution to ensure broad horizontal consensus. Before activating the network of public inter-institutional support, unions and other members of civil society were engaged to meticulously work out specific agreements. This proactive approach gained strength from the fact that all

structures involved reflected on areas for improvement, leading to the establishment of agencies and centers of competence that consolidate territorial governance. This case underscores how the dynamics between political and technical decisions are bound to intertwine, pushing party electoral preferences in the background to legislate according to the needs of the territory. The centrality of institutional legacies is also palpable in Veneto, whose history has developed a localist approach that prioritizes ad hoc territorial solutions rather than collaborative governance structures.

5.4 Veneto - Institutional Legacies

The northeastern Region of Veneto presented a significant uniformity in the redistribution of provincial functions between the Region and the municipalities (uniform distribution). According to the Impact Assessment Office of the Italian Senate, Veneto (law 19/2015) and one other region confirmed the allocation of the function assigned to the province before the Delrio reform, in other words, maintaining the status quo and abiding by the principle of the reform minimally [Fucito and Frati, 2017]. With the regional law 30/2016, the Veneto's regional government decided to transfer some provincial functions to the region (tourism, energy, public works, etc). However, it remained one of the most moderate regionalization efforts among the Italian Regions. Of the seven provinces (Figure 5.2), Belluno is the only one that fully retained all its functions throughout the reform process because of the autonomy granted by its mountainous status (56/2014 commas 51-57,85-97).

As discussed in the introduction of the chapter, the literature on Italian political cultures describes Veneto as a region as 'white' [Putnam et al., 1993, Messina, 2012, Almagisti, 2015]. However, a more in-depth exploration is needed



Figure 5.2: Veneto - Map of Provinces (Open Source)

to fully understand the concept of the "White Veneto." While it may have served as the prevailing political color in the region, it is essential to recognize that this political landscape wasn't evenly distributed throughout the territory. At the sub-regional level, there is a notable lack of homogeneity, and the electoral geography reveals significant variations with different party dynamics across various zones. The region can be categorized into at least three primary areas: firstly, the "white area" encompasses the entire province of Vicenza and significant portions of the provinces of Padua, Treviso, and Verona (Figure 5.2). In these areas, the support for the DC (Christian Democracy) remained notably higher compared to the regional average. Secondly, we have the provinces of Venice and Rovigo, the southeastern segment of the region, where support for the PCI (Italian Communist Party) is more pronounced. Lastly, there is the Belluno area, with stronger historical tradition of socialism and social democracy. This diversity is rooted in historical and social factors, such as the role of the Church in providing cultural and organizational support to the local DC, as well as economic and industrial development in these regions, which has been extensively studied in other works [Diamanti, 1993].

Territorially speaking, Veneto is currently fragmented into six Provinces, one Metropolitan City, 46 Unioni di Comuni (according to ANCI), and 25 Area Programmatic Agreements (IPA) (more on this later in the subsection). Many Unioni di Comuni and IPA exist only de jure, and their associated functions are very limited or non-existent. According to several interviewees, this is due to the strong localism that, once the Region stopped funding institutional collaboration, caused each municipality to go back to tending their 'own garden'. I argue that Veneto's highly fragmented governance can be explained by the behaviors of public and private entities that act in an localist way, rooted in parochial and conservative-Catholic values, which consist in the centrality of small-business networks, the

family nucleus, and an approach rooted in a strong work-ethic and rural tradition [Messina, 2012, Princivalli, 2020]. This social fabric results in limited local government intervention and reliance on ad hoc, privately driven solutions on the territory. A Regional Executive member (*La Lega*) explained that the Region undertook a series of initiatives, participating in a total of 23 engagements dispersed across the territory. The chosen approach involved interfacing with local administrators through a bottom-up approach to understand the needs of each locality. This initiative yielded a plethora of ideas and exposed diverse sensitivities inherent in each locality. As previously alluded to, traversing the region north to south, one encounters a profound dichotomy, showcasing the starkly contrasting nature of Veneto's territory. The overarching aim was to listen to the needs of the territory and ensure that the territorial restructuring plan initiated by the Delrio would find a tangible realization in the realm of governance. The difference between the aggregation, localist approach of Veneto's executive and the integrative, institutional path of Emilia-Romagna is stark.

The 'optimistic' perspective of the Region on its governance approach is in juxtaposition with the point of view of local administrators. As Venetian municipal politician puts it

we [in Veneto] have a sort of tradition/ambition of relying on our intermediary institutions [the Provinces], those organs closer to the people, and this is a cultural thing, I do not know how to say it, there is a heritage that we bring with us from the '70s [...] [the province] is still highly recognized by the local mayors, who do not find the same capacity and interlocution when they go to the Region [where] you become crazy, whereas there [in the province] you have a centralized place that gives you answers on the problem [road maintenance]

The localized, private, and rural approach to decision-making is a well-known fact in the Veneto's political class. At the local level, we can perceive a general distrust in the region as an institution. It is distant and unorganized, so much

to 'make you crazy.' This aggregative way of dealing with problem-solving is not lost to the Region, which has partially decided to keep the provinces for their established relationship with the local institution in the territory and their experience in handling complex functions like the road infrastructure and school building. In general, Veneto is characterized by a vision of politics as an exchange or mediation rather than a tool to pursue the common good. This is connected to a low level of trust in the institutions and a relative weakness of the regional organs compared to the local ones, what Messina and Almagisti call anti-state localism [Messina, 2012, Almagisti, 2015].

This is also corroborated by the high approval rates of the current President of the Region, Luca Zaia. His populist and charming political approach has the electorate infatuated with his persona rather than the institutions he represents. In 2020, 75% of poll respondents believed that Zaia is doing a good job, ranking 1st in Italy [Demopolis, 2020] This positive perception of the President goes hand in hand with a sense of distrust toward the state apparatus. In 2019, 72% of people polled said that they worked and contributed much more than what the state gave back to them, a figure that has been consistently growing. In 2017, the relationship with the national state received 20% approval in Italy but dropped to 16% in Veneto, Friuli Venezia Giulia, and the province of Trento (all with localist legacies).

In line with my argument, the dynamic appears reversed when looking at the Municipality and the Region. The approval rating of Italians towards the latter, in fact, stops at 27%, while in the Northeast, it reaches 36%. The observed gap for trust in the Municipality is of the same magnitude: the local authority closest to the citizens enjoys the support of 39% of Italians, but among those in the northeast, trust rises to 48% (poll from Demos.com) ⁶. These polls show that institutional

⁶<https://www.demos.it/a01365.php>

legacies do not only exist in the political realm, they encompass the whole regional society. They tell a story where the society in areas defined by localist legacies has low trust in the state and regional institutions, and high trust in the institutional entities closer to the territory and specific, relatable individuals like Governor Zaia. My analysis has brought to light three main examples of how Veneto's localist legacies have influenced its territorial outcomes: the Area Programmatic Agreements (IPA), the Metropolitan City of Venice, and the Province of Belluno with the sub-territory of Cadore.

5.4.1 Area Programmatic Agreements(IPA)

The centrality of the local institutional legacies on territorial rescaling is exemplified by the way the region has governed the association of municipalities on the territory. Whilst Emilia-Romagna fosters the creation and the maintenance of *Unioni di Comuni* (Municipal Unions) both through top-down incentives and the shared legacy of prioritizing the collective interest rather than political ideology, Veneto's legislation generates institutionally fragmented territories with the goal of appeasing the interests of each locality. With this approach, the regional government assists the local institutions without focusing on the big picture. The paramount example of how institutional legacies affect institutional collaboration is the entity of the Area Programmatic Agreements (IPA).

My study focuses on the regional territorial reforms between 2014 and 2021, but it is important to consider the political context preceding the Delrio reform. With the inception of direct election of the regional executive in 1995, *Forza Italia* became the most-voted party, expressing the president of the region for 15 years. The most representative piece of legislation was Regional Law 35/2001, where President Giancarlo Galan and his executive created the *IPA* (Area Programmatic Agreements), a tool for decentralized planning and regional development through

which the Region offers the opportunity for local public entities and economic and social stakeholders to participate in regional planning (Regione Veneto Website). IPAs were created for a political reason, because the presence of *La Lega*, the *Democratic Party*, and other left-wing parties were a strong influence in the provinces. Consequently, *Forza Italia* wanted to do away with the provinces by establishing the IPAs as their direct competitor for the governance of the territory, removing a level that was politically difficult to control. Yet, these IPAs never became true and reliable de facto actors on the territory. there has never been a balanced plan that considered how the municipalities connect with those at the regional level through IPAs, having confusing guidelines on their functions, the personnel, and the financial resources needed to bring them to fruition. This move fostered institutional fragmentation as the IPAs became yet another place of territorial power in a complex governance system. According to the director of an IPA in western Veneto, the problem is that everyone goes their own way, so there is a problem of both vertical institutional integration and horizontal connection at the local level, a clear indication of the lack of concertation within the various community players.

When someone doesn't know what to do, they have meetings. So, the proliferation of meeting venues results from the fact that there is a tourism assessor who holds meetings about tourism. In a certain territory, the water assessor holds meetings with all the organizations and mayors, etc., who deal with water. The territory, has been populated with concertation tables, meeting tables, etc., which, on the one hand, serve the politicians to get an idea of where to go because they don't know. They [need] to get ideas to save their souls, [through] a concertation table.[...] There is a weakness in the political system, the governance system. They have multiplied the discussion tables from 2003 with Galan, with the Christian Democrats.”

My initial results confirm that this logic is still driving regional decision-making, and the uniqueness of the IPAs are further proof of that. Veneto's IPAs (Intese

Programmatiche d'Area, Areas's Programming Agreements) are a decentralized instrument for territorial development that includes local public institutions like Municipalities and privately run economic and social entities. These grassroots agreements embody Veneto's aggregative regulatory mode as they are unique to the Region. The few IPA that appear to be functional (according to the interviewees, 3-4 out of 25) are drivers of change. An IPA manager tells me:

I noticed that this thing here of being able [...] to include inside the working group, shall we say, public, private, third sector, schools and foundations, banks, banking institutions. Has created a dynamism where you can talk with different sectors. You are not all from the public administrations and therefore there is an openness, a vision on the same problem that is difficult to have in the association of services, to tell the truth. Then the other thing is that there is a large participation of the private world, usually as a trade association, interest groups. It makes a big difference because in planning choices, we try not only to look at the efficiency of spending, which is the criterion that haunts the administrators, but also at the far-sightedness of the operation we set up. Which must be useful to the companies [...]. A lot of very famous companies [...] have realized that their value does also depend on the value of the territory in which they are located, and they have also begun to seek a dialogue with these territorial systems, but they do not find it easily [...] with the municipalities, even the big ones. They find it more easily in these IPAs which are planning centers that bring together public and private.

This public/private hybrid allows one to 'escape' the regional regulations, which are considered limiting. Not being bound to the budgetary restraints of the public sector leaves room to hire more personnel, increase efficiency, and therefore access more funds to push for inter-municipal goals that the other institutional level cannot or will not address. A regional councilor from Lega Zaia describes the Region's intervention as 'supportive' rather than programmatic. Veneto provides some financial and bureaucratic tools to local institutions that organize from the bottom up, but it does not program the governance of the territory.

In summary, the IPA's are the symptom of Veneto's institutional legacies of distrust towards top-down, integrative systems of governance. The interviewees highlighted that they could be an institutional way to leverage the fragmented interests of the territory, coalescing specific local grievances through a dynamic system of governance that engages the different territorial actors. Yet, Veneto's localism seems to also hinder widespread efforts of grassroots associative governance. A journalist and expert on Veneto's history and politics explains how the region is defined by its legacies of parochialism. In the heart of the Veneto region, a distinctive and robust localism prevails, coupled with a profound sense of municipal identity. A phenomenon notably surpassing the one observed in many other regions of Italy. This unique local flavor is exemplified by internal conflicts within the province, where tensions between neighboring towns persist, such as the strained relationship between Bassano and Vicenza, Feltre and Belluno, Conegliano and Treviso, and Adria and Rovigo. Astonishingly, even diminutive hamlets, denoted as 'di sotto' and 'di sopra' (below and above), engage in disputes, their populations numbering only a few dozen souls. Another noteworthy aspect pertains to the gathering of municipalities, an undertaking that, save for the commendable exception of Camposampiero, has met with substantial disappointment. Camposampiero itself now grapples with a decline. This setback mirrors a broader challenge in the realm of interest representation. According to the journalist, present-day interests are marked by fragmentation, precipitating a crisis in representation.

5.4.2 The Metropolitan City of Venice

The importance of institutional legacies in Veneto is also exemplified by how the region handled the establishment of the Metropolitan City of Venice (CM di Venice). The interview data shows that parochialism and low institutional planning by the region have resulted in a missed opportunity. Rather than systematically

develop a Metropolitan City to leverage the functional strengths of the territory, Veneto sought to maintain the de facto status quo by meeting the minimum parameters instituted by Law 56/2014. This fostered an institutional environment where territorial outcomes are dictated by local grievances.

Following the Delrio law guidelines, the Metropolitan City took the place of the former Province of Venice. The region endowed the CM with specific responsibilities in the realm of urban planning (as stipulated in Article 3, Paragraph 4, Regional Law No. 30 of 2016). On a broader scale, Regional Law No. 19/2015 (Paragraph 3) stipulates that additional functions can be assigned to the Metropolitan City through regional legislation, subject to consultation with the Regional Observatory and obtaining the viewpoint of the Council of Local Autonomies (as articulated in Article 3). As designated by law, the CM of Venice emerges as an entity in a region where the amalgamation of citizens from the former province of Venice scarcely surpasses the 900,000 mark. This stark demographic reality underscores a pronounced imposition, compelling the metropolis to inhabit an administrative demarcation that encompasses more countryside than city. According to several interviewees, the regional authorities seem to have missed a pivotal juncture in determining the CM, opting instead for an administrative boundary that subtly marginalizes urban landscapes in favor of rural expanses. Notably, this has stirred debate, particularly concerning the allocation and recognition of responsibilities in the realms of urban planning and related domains. The Mayor of a Municipality within the Metropolitan City of Venice (*Democratic Party*) explains,

From a more optimistic perspective, there were initial aspirations for a visionary strategy encompassing economic, urban, and human development. Alas, reality has not conformed to these lofty ambitions, leading to a palpable sense of disenchantment. This sentiment is compounded by the inherent challenges faced by mayors, especially in intricate urban settings such as provincial capitals, with the added intricacies stemming from the unique vulnerabilities of a city like Venice.

The metropolitan mayor, in this context, has exhibited a discernible disparity in commitment compared to counterparts in cities like Bologna or Turin. This manifests as a lack of collaborative synergy, hindering the comprehensive oversight that a metropolitan city necessitates. Regrettably, these constraints persist, constituting the burdens that we continue to grapple with today.

By comparing the CM of Venice with Bologna and Turin, the mayor underlines how efficiency and collaboration are not central to the territorial and institutional design of the CM of Venice. Instead, in line with its approach to the IPAs and the Special Province of Belluno, the regional decision-makers have taken a passive stance to maintain the status quo and let the localities find solutions on their own. In line with the localist, ad hoc approach to territorial management, a member of the executive cabinet of the CM of Venice (center-right coalition, Mayor and cabinet member of the CM) shares how the interests of the municipalities within the borders of the Metropolitan City are heard through personal, non-institutional channels (this is not unique to Veneto, but its ubiquitous presence is very defined relatively to the other regions). He discusses how, in terms of his operational dynamics, the personal aspect is crucial. He observes a strong sense of cohesion within the municipal executive, which he finds very encouraging. With a well-defined governance structure led by the mayor, his relationships with colleagues and administrators are built on mutual respect and effective communication. The representation of the interests his municipality and the neighboring municipalities of Eastern Veneto relies on personal interactions, rather than seeking institutional opportunities for interest integration. Despite the formalities of governance, there's a human element that shouldn't be overlooked.

Regardless of political views, all interviewees from Veneto agree that Venice is historically and currently defined by a unique set of strengths and weaknesses due to its economic and geographical predispositions. As a member of the Regional

Executive (*La Lega*) puts it, Venice stands as a singular entity, deserving of a regulatory framework befitting a city-state, one that transcends current conventions. The intricacies inherent in managing a city as unique as Venice defy a reductionist characterization as a mere metropolitan entity. The CM electoral law instituted by the Delrio centralizes power in the mayor of the main city, which also becomes the governor of the whole metropolitan territory (formerly the province). Beyond creating a democratic imbalance in interest representation, it fails to serve the genuine interests of the metropolitan entity where the former provincial rural territory assumes a metropolitan semblance. The experience of local politicians who have been experiencing the governance of the territory suggests that the province was better suited to comprehend the diverse needs stretching from Chioggia to Annone Veneto—the extremities of the territory now under the leadership of the Metropolitan City of Venice.

Another sign of the strength of the localist legacies and the status quo is the institutional resistance to proposed changes in the governance structure of the region. According to several interviewees and the work of Patrizia Messina (2020) there is a proposed plan to rethink the outdated administrative boundaries, be they municipal or provincial, which no longer adequately define the scope of the vast metropolitan area [Messina, 2020]. Instead, emphasis would be placed on a more efficient territorial arrangement that prioritizes functions such as mobility and logistics, aiming to govern the extensive flows within the conglomerate that has emerged in these contemporary urban-metropolitan contexts. This approach seeks to overcome the limitations of traditional administrative borders, acknowledging the competitive disadvantage in Veneto and recognizing the mismatch between the coastal area where the Metropolitan City of Venice operates and the dispersed urban landscape in central Veneto, connecting cities like Venice-Mestre, Padova, Treviso, and Vicenza through initiatives like the new Pedemontana high speed

freeway. In fact, the central Veneto area displays all the hallmarks of a functional metropolitan region, operating as a polycentric conglomeration. It features high population density, substantial daily commuter flows of both people and goods, a notable concentration of small and medium-sized enterprises, and essential hubs for logistics and advanced tertiary services, including significant universities. A provincial executive member from Padova explains that there has been an extended discourse about forming the "Patreve" (Padua, Treviso, Venice) metropolitan scenario, which is required as a functional metropolitan city rather than the currently institutionalized one. Unfortunately, this vision has struggled to gain momentum, likely due to the legacies of provincialism and parochialism. Indeed, the landscape is characterized by marked administrative fragmentation (with four provinces and over 200 municipalities) and by distinct localisms and a notable absence of a cooperative institutional network culture among public and private stakeholders. In other words, this proposal seeks to reform the Metropolitan City structure, consolidating functions based on socioeconomic rationale. Unsurprisingly, the majority of the political and institutional actors of Veneto are against this proposed top-down, integrated approach to territorial governance because it would go against the legacies that characterized the territory for several decades.

5.4.3 The Province of Belluno and the Magnifica Comunità of Cadore

I have shown that localist legacies affect functional redistribution and institutional dynamics within the territorial entities of the Area Programmatic Agreements and the Metropolitan City of Venice. In this subsection, I will explain how they also affect special status grievances in the Province of Belluno (Figure 5.2). This historically remote and autonomous area of Veneto has maintained a

thirst for relative autonomy, lobbying the regional government for more resources. The input of two interviewees highlighted the unique history of the Magnifica Comunità of Cadore, a vast area institution in existence since the 14th century. The background research I summarize in this subsection underlines how the history of autonomous status enables institutional legacies to affect today's territorial rescaling.

In examining the territorial and political context, it is crucial to underscore the distinctiveness of the province of Belluno compared to the broader Veneto region. Belluno stands out as the sole Italian province characterized by an entirely mountainous and transboundary topography, a feature unique to its geographical setting. Another unique feature of this province is the lack of autonomy afforded to other mountainous regions like Trentino Alto Adige, despite sharing certain similarities with other regions, such as Valle d'Aosta, Trentino (comprising Trento and Bolzano provinces), and Friuli Venezia Giulia, which enjoy some degree of autonomy. Drawing a parallel with Trentino reveals that Belluno experiences a comparatively less privileged status, lacking similar institutional autonomy and creating a systemic imbalance in representation and resource allocation. A former mayor of Belluno explains how this issue is central to the local grievance for more autonomy:

From an institutional perspective, the average Belluno resident certainly feels subjected to an inadequate treatment. For example, relatively to the province of Trento, there is a significant disparity in per capita resources. The municipality of Trento has 26 times the per capita resources for current expenditure and 33 times the per capita resources for investments compared to Belluno. This difference raises the question of whether Trento is using the money more efficiently or if it is simply allocated to functions that require additional resources.

The former mayor of Belluno is not alone in his desire to gain more representative and executive autonomy. On October 22, 2017, a dual referendum was held: one

concerning the Veneto Region on the differentiated regionalism specified in Article 116, third paragraph, of the Constitution, and the other specific to the Province of Belluno. In the latter, 52.25% of the electorate participated, overwhelmingly approving the proposed question: "Do you want the specificity of the Province of Belluno to be further strengthened with the recognition of additional functions and related financial resources, and that this be included in the framework of State-Region agreements for greater autonomy of Veneto, pursuant to Article 116 of the Constitution?". Ivan Minella, a provincial councilor affiliated with the "Councilors and Mayors for Autonomy" group, underscores the already charted path toward provincial autonomy. Drawing inspiration from successful models in other autonomous regions such as Trentino-Alto Adige, Friuli Venezia Giulia, and Valle d'Aosta, the province seeks to emulate their practices. This emulation is seen as a crucial step for authentic development policies specifically tailored for the mountainous terrain.

The autonomous drive of the Province of Belluno is connected to its peculiar mountainous identity, intertwined with its historical location as a crossroad of multiple cultures and languages. In fact, much like the other regions under study, the province itself is not a monolith, featuring a multitude of sub-areas with their own historical legacies. The Magnifica Comunità di Cadore - 'Outstanding Community of Cadore' is the paramount example of how past institutions affect the localist grievances of today. One of the current leaders of the Comunità describes it as a distinctive administrative entity rooted in a historical continuum spanning seven centuries. Its origins, dating back to 1338 with the formulation of the inaugural official statutes, underscored a nuanced interplay between localized governance and overarching community management. A recurring point of contention arises when contemplating the precedence between the Magnifica Comunità and the individual local communities, colloquially referred to as "regole," both of which wielded direct



Figure 5.3: Cadore, inside the Province of Belluno (Open Source)

authority over territorial affairs. Regrettably, historical documentation fails to elucidate whether the establishment of the Magnifica Comunità or the regole predates the other. The assembly of representatives from the regole, convened within the more expansive framework of "centenari," served as a pivotal organizational structure, integrating diverse perspectives into the overarching governance of the Magnifica Comunità [Website Magnifica Comunita di Cadore] ⁷.

Amidst these historical dynamics, Cadore's interaction with the German-speaking world is evident in their diplomatic exchanges but also culturally, as reflected in the artistic heritage adorning local churches. The fluidity of cultural and economic exchanges persisted, challenging any notion of a closed border despite strategic alliances and geopolitical shifts. The Republic of Venice, cognizant of the unique socio-political fabric in Cadore, granted the region substantial autonomy, recognizing its statutes and endowing it with certain privileges, such as exemption from taxation and military conscription. This state of affairs persisted until the

⁷<https://www..it/cadore/index.html>

waning years of the 18th century, when the Napoleonic conquest precipitated the downfall of the Venetian Republic, resulting in the dissolution of the Magnifica Comunità. This transformative juncture culminated in the imposition of the French administrative model, establishing a network of communes and eclipsing the long-standing governance structure of the Magnifica Comunità.

The 1338 official statutes bear witness to the community's deliberate pursuit of autonomy, distinguishing itself from the dominion of the Counts from Camino, who were subjects of the Patriarch of Aquileia. This narrative resonates not only within the confines of the Dolomite region but extends its reach across various mountainous landscapes, transcending national borders to include the entire Alpine region, notably Switzerland. In a broader historical context, alpine populations, commencing from the conclusion of the Middle Ages, strategically organized themselves into autonomous communities. This strategic arrangement was a bestowed privilege, acknowledged by rulers overseeing cities or lowland areas who recognized the unique challenges of mountain living. This recognition underscored the necessity for localized decision-making. This historical trajectory continues to influence the present, exemplifying the evolution of a concept into a lived reality.

Today, the Magnifica Comunità does not hold an administrative role, meaning it is not a municipality, nor is it formally recognized as a community or mountain union by any regulation. In essence, it exists as a hybrid entity struggling to fit neatly into the current Italian administrative system. It no longer serves an administrative function but rather assumes a cultural role in managing an ancient, undivided heritage. This represents the formal perspective; however, substantively, it remains a moment in which the people of Cadore strongly identify with their territory and its inhabitants (leadership member of the Magnifica Comunità di Cadore).

The area of Cadore, along with its neighboring communities comprising the Province of Belluno have long-standing autonomist struggles starting from the initial secessionist referendum (discussed above). According to the newspaper 'The Adige', in 2005, the Municipality of Lamon, situated in the southwestern region of Bellunese and bordering the Trentine areas of Vanoi and Tesino, led the way in a series of constitutional-based votes. These were primarily driven by the Bard movement (Belluno Autonomous Region Dolomites), with the aim of finally bringing attention from the national legislature to the issue of this alpine region, which has been significantly lacking in institutional resources. The goal of the advocates behind the numerous referendums that ultimately stalled within Rome's institutional framework was to expose the lack of representation and local authority experienced in the province of Belluno. Concurrently, their aim was to present remedies for restoring self-governance to the Dolomite valleys, seen as essential for disengaging from Veneto's regional policies. These policies often prioritize the localist needs of flatland areas, where the majority of the population lives, and regard the mountains primarily as sources of resources like water and energy [Sovilla, 2024].

Finally, with law 19/2015, the region approved the specificity of the province of Belluno, incorporating in one article the possibility that the Magnifica Comunità may also be delegated to manage certain functions. In practice, however, this provision has never been implemented, even for the province of Belluno. I argue that the *de jure* recognition of territorial particularism and the *de facto* lack of implementation of such recognition encapsulates Veneto's institutional trajectory. It is localist because (on paper) it listens to the needs of the territories, legislating in ways that aggregate local interests. Yet, this localism is rooted in the historical centrality of small-business networks [Messina, 2012] limiting local government intervention and reliance on ad hoc, privately driven solutions on the territory. In

other words, *de facto* granting more representative and executive power to the Province of Belluno and the Magnifica Comunità, would require high trust in regional decision-making and a great deal of institutional intervention, which, as I showed in the previous analysis, is not central to Veneto's history.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has delved into the intricate effect of institutional legacies in shaping territorial outcomes in the Ordinary Regions of Emilia-Romagna and Veneto. The analysis presented empirical examples, from the development of Metropolitan Cities to the lasting effects of past autonomous governments, demonstrating how institutional legacies profoundly influence a region's approach to territorial governance reforms. By categorizing the regional cases as either having concerted or localist legacies, I have elucidated the patterns of territorial decision-making. The exploration of these legacies unveiled varying degrees of community trust in public and private institutions, underscoring the diverse political and sub-cultural matrices. The distinction between concerted and localist legacies is rooted in different approaches to institutional collaboration and public management, deeply ingrained in the historical paths and current political developments of each region.

When a region possesses concerted legacies, characterized by a collaborative "public intervention" vocation, it tends to consolidate territorial governance at both functional and institutional levels. This is exemplified by the case of Emilia-Romagna, where institutions function well, enjoying widespread appreciation, and fostering a robust civic culture that facilitates efficient territorial governance. On the other hand, Veneto, with its localist legacies favors limited involvement from state authorities, preferring ad hoc initiatives and spontaneous solutions. The study of these two regions provides a basis for inferring that the institutional mechanisms

operating in the cases may also be active in the other Ordinary Regions in Italy, and other countries. The next chapter will show how institutional legacies affect territorial rescaling in the two Autonomous Regions under study.

Chapter 6

Institutional Legacies - Special Regions

6.1 Overview of the Chapter

In chapter five, I have shown the effects of the type of institutional legacies of an Ordinary Region on its approach to territorial governance reforms. The interviews emphasize how history shapes local grievances in place-based politics, molding the institutional paths of political entities in modern Italy. This study reveals the intertwining of institutional frameworks and local grievances dating back to pre-unified Italy, underscoring the importance of place-based identities in shaping institutional legacies. Yet, territorial grievances aren't directly linked to ethnic identity but rather to the local representation of political and economic factors. For instance, in the context of Sardinia, many interviewees talked about how the Gallura subregion advocated for decentralization and territorial division. While their distinct Gallurese dialect symbolized their identity, their concerns about representation were expressed in economic and institutional terms. Economically, they sought greater autonomy because of their growing tourism and commerce;

institutionally, they desired a return to a more autonomous governance system they had in the past.

Socio-cultural history and former territorial patterns have deeply affected the organization of governmental functions after the Delrio reform (and somewhat right before in Sardinia, more on this later in the chapter). These legacies directly, and indirectly inform the priorities of local actors and regional decision-makers, ultimately impacting territorial reforms. I argue that concerted and localist legacies in regional governance can be used to analyze Spacial Regions. These legacies reflect differing levels of engagement of local communities with public and private institutions and are shaped by diverse political and sub-cultural contexts. My study shows that the 'special' history of Friuli Venezia Giulia and Sardinia has developed institutional legacies that can be categorized as localist. In the following sections, I will present three empirical examples for each Special Region, showing how territorial outcomes are the effect of specific institutional legacies.

The Regions with Special Statutes have approached the issue of territorial reorganization and implemented the provision, as outlined in Article 1, paragraph 5, of Law 56/2014, stating that the principles of the Delrio Law "serve as principles of significant economic and social reform for the regulation of cities and metropolitan areas," [Fabrizzi, 2012] It's important to note that the residual autonomy retained by these Special Regions regarding the regulation of territorial entities has been extensively utilized, both by Sardinia and Friuli Venezia Giulia. Notably, the Sardinian legislature has fully embraced the directives of the Delrio Law, even incorporating the reference in Article 24 of the law titled "Reorganization of provincial districts," to the anticipation of the definitive abolition of provinces. Unlike the Ordinary Regions discussed in chapter five, regional autonomy has been employed in terms of organizational structure and functions and in the delimitation of new institutional perimeters.

Friuli Venezia Giulia, with its border region status, language minorities, and historical heterogeneity, possesses arguably the most intricate political ecosystem. Despite the programmatic approach of the Democratic Party's law 26/2014 to consolidate regional governance, localist legacies hindered its full implementation, as local actors pushed for amendments and resisted its application. Sardinia exhibits localist politics stemming from historical subnational identities and a network of personal relations tied to the territory. The island's remoteness and subaltern relationship with the Italian state further fuel these dynamics, resulting in policy decisions contingent on their impact on each territory and, consequently, the electoral fortunes of the political decision-makers.

As a reminder, during the time frame under analysis, Sardinia and Friuli Venezia Giulia legislated twice on territorial governance: Friuli Venezia Giulia reformed their system in 2014 under a center-left government (catch-all party) and in 2019 under a center-right government (mass party). Sardinia reformed its institutions in 2016 under a center-left government (catch-all party), and in 2021, under a center-right government (mass party). This provided another set of cases where the party strategy of the regional government changed while maintaining the legacies of each region constant. This variable control enabled me to better compare the territorial outcomes and gain a deeper understanding of the role of each variable.

These Special Regions are characterized by competitive electoral cycles, which have seen an alternance between center-left and center-right governments. In 2014/16, both regions were governed by *Democratic Party* led center-left coalitions. Due to their alignment with the Democratic Party government in Italy, they spearheaded and even anticipated the reform by eliminating and decreasing the number of provinces. At the end of both legislatures, the electorate supported a change of government electing a center-right coalition led by *La Lega* in both

regions. Within months, Friuli Venezia Giulia and Sardinia re-established the secondary units that were eliminated with the Delrio. According to the interviewees, this quick (in legislative terms) change did not allow the new institutional design to take root and show benefits to the population, becoming a central focus of the following regional electoral cycle. Yet, the interviews also show that, despite the apparent change in territorial governance structures, the decisions of the regional governments can be traced primarily to the institutional legacies of each regional ecosystem and secondarily to the organization of the party in government.

6.2 Friuli Venezia Giulia - Institutional Legacies

The Friuli Venezia Giulia region is located in Northeastern Italy. It has a special autonomous status recognized in the Italian constitution, and it is the home to the sub-state nation of Friuli, as well as Slovenian and German-speaking minorities. Being and feeling Friulian has a strong tie with the Friulian language [Ganis, 2019], Friulano, which is related to other "languages with pre-Roman substrate (Gallic and Venetian) with contributions from the languages of populations with which Friuli (roughly defined by the jurisdiction of the former Udine Province - Figure 6.1) shared moments of its history (Germanic languages, such as Gothic, Lombard, German, and the Slavic dialects to the east of the region). We can talk about Friulano as a neo-Latin language with well-defined characteristics starting from about 1000 A.D." (ARLeF, 2018). According to data from 2016, there are 600,000 total speakers of Friulano, of which about 420,000 are regular speakers, and a further 180,000 use Friulano periodically. Some 900,000 people in Friuli Venezia Giulia understand Friulano [Bufon, 2016].

As mentioned in chapter four, Friuli Venezia Giulia and its identities, anchored in language, political and territorial ties, and a rich cultural tapestry, shares a

complex relationship with the historical dynamics of the State-Church connection. Within the intricate weave of Friuli's collective identity, language serves as one of its foundations, underscoring a nuanced sense of belonging rooted more in political and territorial dimensions than linguistic ones. This complexity is further accentuated by the historical division between the center and periphery, intersecting with the State-Church dynamic. As the Italian state grappled with assimilating the former territories of the Republic of Venezia, Friuli faced challenges exacerbated by social disruptions in the aftermath of Italy's unification. Intense conflicts, both preceding and following the rise of fascism, forged a robust association between the region and the Church. In times of recurrent traumatic events, the Church emerged as a singular reference point for local society.

The profound connection between Friuli and the Church was not arbitrary. Since the sixteenth century, the Church identified northeastern Italy, particularly Friuli, as a critical area for cultural reclamation—a stronghold against potential destabilizing influences from neighboring regions influenced by the Lutheran Reformation and periodic resurgence of ancient pagan practices [Almagisti, 2015]. The Church played a pivotal role in shaping the region's identity. The organized presence of the Church in northeastern Italy became the primary support base for the post-World War II Catholic party, Christian Democracy (DC), founded by Alcide De Gasperi (1881-1954). Thus, the Friulian identity, deeply rooted in language, territory, and culture, intertwines with the broader narrative of the State-Church relationship, reflecting the intricate tapestry of historical and cultural forces that have shaped this unique region. Because of its multiculturalism and historical relationship with the Church, Friuli Venezia Giulia maintains the legacy of localism embedded in the 'white' subculture. This has resulted in a longstanding connection between the representation of the interests of small and medium-sized entrepreneurs and that of private wage labor. Like in Veneto, the careful attention given to the 'local'

dimension has affected the territorial organization of the region.

Its institutional evolution began in the 1960s, when Italy embarked on a process of constitutional reform and administrative decentralization. In 1963, the region was formally recognized as a "Special Statute Region," which gave it greater autonomy compared to other regions of Italy. The enabling legislation established that the region would have a regional council elected by the citizens, a president elected by the council, and a regional executive. In 1970, the enabling legislation for the region was amended to expand further its competence in social, economic, and cultural policies. The region was also authorized to enter into collaboration agreements with the national government and with other regions. In the following years, the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region continued developing its competencies and consolidating its regional administration role.

In 1975, with the establishment of the province of Trieste, the city and its surrounding areas gained a higher degree of autonomy in terms of decision-making and management of local policies. Trieste's history exemplifies the dis-homogeneous nature of Friuli Venezia Giulia. After World War II, Trieste became a Free Territory under the protection of the United Nations, administered by the military government of the Allied Occupation forces. In 1954, the Free Territory of Trieste was dissolved, and the city and its surrounding areas were divided between Italy and Yugoslavia. Trieste became part of the region of Friuli Venezia Giulia, Italy. Over the following decades, Trieste experienced a period of economic growth and prosperity, largely due to its strategic location at the crossroads of trade routes and its position as a major port city. Despite this, Trieste also faced challenges, including high unemployment and a declining population. During the 1980s and 1990s, the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region continued to develop its competencies, focusing on economic, social, and cultural development policies [Zilli, 2015]. It also developed programs for environmental protection and the promotion of tourism.



Figure 6.1: Friuli Venezia Giulia - Map of Provinces before the 2014 reform. The 2021 reform has instituted the Regional Decentralization Entities along the same jurisdictions of the pre-2014 Provinces (Open Source)

In 1999, the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region adopted a new Statute that further expanded its competencies and established greater autonomy in fiscal, social, and cultural policies.

I argue that the case of Friuli Venezia Giulia is the strongest example of how institutional legacies are predictors of territorial rescaling. The localist legacies created insurmountable resistance to the territorial consolidation efforts conjured by the catch-all party government. They also informed the electoral and policy approach of the mass party government that followed, implementing *laissez-faire* reforms that contributed to territorial fragmentation. I will support my claims by offering examples of how institutional legacies affected institutional collaboration in the Intermunicipal Territorial Unions, the (almost) Metropolitan City of Trieste, and the territorial developments in Carnia.

6.2.1 Intermunicipal Territorial Unions - UTI

Before the reform, Friuli Venezia Giulia was divided into four provinces: Gorizia, Pordenone, Trieste, and Udine (Figure 6.1). With regional law 26/2014, the first three were abolished on September 2017, while the Province of Udine remained active until April 2018. To replace the provinces and create a more 'efficient' system, the Regional Council (*Democratic Party*) created 18 Intermunicipal Territorial Unions (Unioni Territoriali Intercomunali - UTI). The UTIs took on local services affecting networks of municipalities, including some responsibilities previously managed by the provinces; this handling of "wide area local development policies" by the Intermunicipal Territorial Unions was conceived as a way to allow more focused planning and budgeting for the 215 municipalities present in Friuli Venezia Giulia. In a nutshell, the *de jure* path taken by Friuli Venezia Giulia was coherent with and substantially anticipated the Delrio reform, consolidating territorial governance through an integrated redistribution of functions and the elimination of

the provinces. Yet, according to my findings, the localist legacies did not allow the full implementation of the reform, local actors pushed for numerous amendments and refused to implement the reform on the territory in a political ecosystem that is extremely diverse, where identity grievances are not unitary nor efficiently politicized [Stolfo, 2014].

The 2014 Friuli Venezia Giulia reform eliminating the provinces and consolidating territorial governance in 18 Intermunicipal Territorial Unions saw a significant amount of resistance both during the legislative process (media coverage, amendments, the 'rebellion of mayors' discussed in chapter four, etc.) and after (the electorate chose *La Lega* who campaigned against the 2015 reform). The localist legacies fomented political opposition that sparked a significant political discourse during the 2018 elections. One crucial aspect discussed in this debate is the UTI, with the new administration prioritizing the repeal of law 26/2014 in their political agenda. *La Lega* concentrated its campaign and subsequent policy initiatives on the revitalization of provinces and the fragmentation of centers of authority to appease the grievances of the localities. The regional history of multiculturalism and territorial autonomy developed localist legacies that resisted the forceful top-down reform, ultimately preventing its de facto implementation.

The case of Friuli Venezia Giulia shows that when the catch-all party ignores institutional legacies, there is sociopolitical resistance that stifles reforms and seeks to maintain the status quo. A local leader of Udine's *Democratic Party* explains how the goal of consolidating the territory juxtaposed the parochial tendencies of the territory, which ultimately derailed the implementation of the UTIs.

"In 2014, the administration of President Serracchiani had the goal of bringing the [reform] project to overcome the [local] identity issue. In other words, the idea was that the more significant [the intermunicipal local entities] are, the more resources they can have, and the better they can manage resources. I'm putting it in a very crude manner. That was the message. However, it is evident that that did not work

out”

President’s Serracchiani top-down efforts to consolidate local governance became part of a larger narrative about issues of representation and identity within the region. The narrative attacked the regional executive, arguing that law 26/2014 forced together municipalities with different socioeconomic prerogatives at best, and municipalities with atavistic competition and bad blood. All 32 interviewees from Friuli Venezia Giulia, regardless of their political identification and institutional level, described the localist resistance to the reform. Unsurprisingly, interviewees identifying as part of the opposition used stronger words compared to people affiliated with the *Democratic Party*, but all could agree on the centrality of politics and local grievances.

One of the richest accounts of the events comes from a former member of the *Democratic Party* executive behind the reform. Without much probing, the interviewee gives examples of how the initial draft of Regional Law 26/2014 faced enormous resistance both inside and outside the regional council. Informed by pre-existing governance models adopted in Trentino and Emilia-Romagna, the territorial changes proposed could not be ‘transplanted’ in a region with localist institutional legacies.

”Another anecdote: three mayors from three municipalities vehemently opposed our reform, two from the League and one from Forza Italia, if I’m not mistaken.[...] They developed the plan to create a UTI [...] practically, they embraced the reform. But they wanted to do something different [from the law] and smaller that could work. I told them, ‘Look, it’s not inherently a bad idea, but you represent two municipalities that are in a specific area [...]this forces us to rethink the entire rest of the system, if everyone does this, we’ll never get out of it, [...] No exemptions.

[...] in the face of this pressure implemented against this somewhat top-down [territorial organization], the first draft of the law (26/2014) provided a very strong system of penalties and rewards, [because]

in the end, it's always the wallet that commands. And, for better or worse, with this method of rewarding those who, to some extent, allowed themselves to be involved in this reform process and vice versa, penalizing those who did not embrace it, we would have been able to implement the reform. This was seen as restricting the freedom of the local authority, becoming the dominant theme of the subsequent years. [...] Ours is a region where there is a motto, the famous 'Fasin di Besoi.' They [local actors] also applied it in this situation, that is, they have to manage themselves!

The Friulian motto translates into 'We do it on our own'; this is emblematic of the local institutional culture, centered on self-reliance and self-interest, rather than collaboration. The interviewee explained that, to his astonishment, the reward/punishment operational method had been implemented in the Trentino region without encountering protests. There, economic penalties were imposed on the ordinary transfer component, a matter not to be taken lightly for those unwilling to comply. In addition, numerous mergers were effectively instigated through this approach. Like Emilia-Romagna, Trentino might have a much stronger cooperative vision, oriented towards working together and less focused on individual/local grievances, like in Friuli Venezia Giulia. In line with the reflection of the former regional executive member, I argue that the nuances of differing institutional legacies and peculiar regional approaches play a role in how the region has reacted to territorial reforms seeking to consolidate the localities.

As mentioned, the attrition around territorial governance framed, along with immigration issues, the electoral campaign for the 2018 regional elections. It was a resounding success for the center-right coalition led by *Lega*, which sought to preserve the heritage of localism embedded in the 'white' subculture. The party leadership successfully understood and heightened protests against the gradually advancing fiscal and consolidation policies across the entire Northeast [Almagisti, 2015]. Through this approach, *Lega* has effectively united the repre-

sentation of the interests of municipalities with those of small and medium-sized entrepreneurs. The new regional government moved to implement their campaign promises by eliminating the Intermunicipal Territorial Unions, initiating the long and hard process of reintroducing the Provinces ¹, and liberalizing the association of municipalities. The 2019 reform (21/2019) introduced by *La Lega* empowers municipalities with the opportunity to unite and establish legally recognized Communities (Comunità), complete with a statute delineating their jointly managed functions. The administration of these specified functions will commence through agreements. The authority now rests with municipalities to decide whether they want to pursue specific actions or not.

The rationale behind the new reform is explained by a member of the *Lega* regional executive that developed it. The localist legacies transpire as the main driver for reform. It is a matter of representation of territorial interests, that the previous reform overlooked to pursue efficiency through institutional consolidation.

The issue of identity is certainly a significant element, but not, as far as I personally am concerned, the main element. For me, the main element is realizing that some functions transferred to other bodies have not worked properly, but they have not worked properly due to objective limitations. [It is an issue of representation] When I elect a [provincial] councilor, I entrust my will, my representativeness to that councilor, and I entrust to him the ability to choose whether it is more important to renovate one school rather than another, if necessary, one project rather than another. The moment I no longer have that representation, I lose control of my territory. I no longer have any representative to speak for me, to carry forward my identity, my territory, my portion of the territory. I have nothing left. We found ourselves in a situation where all of this suddenly disappeared [with law 26/2014]. So, in a simple way, even the mayor of the small municipality who once had the possibility of having a say or that voice has lost it.”

¹The previous *Democratic Party* government brought the removal of the Province as an institution to the Italian Parliament for approval twice. The same would be needed to reintroduce them. The interviewees think that this is unlikely given the priorities of the current composition of the Italian government

Given the narrative that representation should be privileged over systematic and forced consolidation of governance, the *Lega* removed several top-down impositions, giving more decisional freedom to the localities. In fact, once the association of municipalities became voluntary ², only three out of 11 Comunità decided to keep working together on some functions (Fig. 6.).

The question is, where did the localist legacies originate? According to a current member of the regional council and former local mayor affiliated with a Friulian regional party, the historical roots of local communities in Friuli originate from the tradition of *vicìnie* – the self-governing bodies where heads of households gathered under the lime tree to determine the fate of common goods. The Regional Institute for the History of the Resistance and Contemporary Era in Friuli Venezia Giulia explains that when the Republic of Venice incorporated Friuli into the Terraferma dominion, it retained the ancient institution of *vicìnia* for local administration. After all, as I discussed in the section about Veneto, the Republic of Venice allowed a lot of governing autonomy throughout its territories, so it makes sense that Veneto and Friuli Venezia Giulia share similar legacies of localism. This assembly, regulated in the 14th century, involved the participation of household heads in the village. The assembly, signaled by a bell, traditionally convened in the village square, often under a lime or walnut tree. Presided over by a dean ('decano') with assistance from a 'massaro' ('meriga') and two jurors, it executed decisions. Participation in the *vicìnia* was crucial for enjoying communal assets, with discussions covering agriculture, trade, roads, borders, and more [RegioneStoriaFVG, 2024]. The appointment of the parish priest was entrusted to the assembly and later ratified by the Curia. This resonates with the features of the 'white culture' that is intertwined with the institutional legacies of the territory

²Law 21/2019 made the Mountain and Hills Communities mandatory due to their geographic peculiarities

- in Friuli Venezia Giulia the role of the Church has always been central in society generally, and in governance specifically.

Throughout the modern era, rural communities enjoyed this form of self-government, providing autonomy compared to towns under noble or ecclesiastical control. In the Friulian reality, with scattered settlements in small villages, the village community served as the fundamental reference structure for peasant society. Its jurisdiction, governed by customary or statutory rules, regulated the rights and obligations of inhabitants. The material foundation of village unity layed in the collective use of communal resources. This implied shared responsibility and participation in the village's needs, both fiscally and legally. Only in the late 18th century did the *vicinia* exhibit signs of decline. With the Napoleonic laws, it was abolished and replaced by the Municipality (decree of November 25, 1806, no. 225), which, according to the interviews, seems to lack a strong representative role to this day.

The legacy of the *vicinie* reflects a deep, participatory democracy inherent in the region's history, tied to communities rather than common administrative entities. The speaker emphasizes a strong connection to his local community, which is even smaller than the administrative municipal borders (2.513 inhabitants) in which it exists. The bell tower and Pro Loco ³ symbolize their identity, and the collective land ownership prompts a call to rediscover that sense of belonging. I find that this explanation highlights the centrality of parochialism in the definition of localist legacies. In a region where the territorial interests revolve around the 'bell tower', a successful top-down move to force together several distinct municipalities becomes unlikely. In discussing the dichotomy between the municipal

³The Pro Loco is a non-profit association comprised of volunteers dedicated to promoting the locality, discovering and preserving local traditions, improving the quality of life for residents, and enhancing the value of products and beauty within the area. The Pro Loco organizes events in the fields of tourism, culture, history, environment, folklore, gastronomy, and sports. It serves as a reference point for both residents and visitors to a locality. Source: UNPLI

executive and community entities, the speaker points out a significant contemporary contradiction. The identity and community often diverge from administrative structures, challenging the role of the slow-moving municipal administration. The interviewee suggests that the municipality should relieve itself of the responsibility of representing local identity and instead focus on ensuring efficient and effective administration.

6.2.2 The Subregion of Carnia

Much like the Magnifica Comunità di Cadore in Veneto, the mountainous area of Carnia is a paramount example of how historical legacies affect the current dynamics of territorial rescaling. In fact, my study underlines how a defined identity based on local collective governance structures (*vicinie*) has influenced the current institutional organization of Carnia: collaborative at the local level [Daici, 2021] and autonomous at the regional one. The opening of the new re-drafted constitution of the Mountainous Community of Carnia ⁴ spells out the importance of history:

The Mountain Community of Carnia continues a forward-looking history of territorial cooperation initiated in 1947 by the Carnic Community, when the municipalities spontaneously adopted a form of local government to achieve economic improvement and social and civil progress in this territory. The Carnic Community had its roots in the principles of freedom, democracy, and participation inherent in the Free Zone of Carnia in 1944 and later evolved into the Mountain Community of Carnia. Recognizing themselves as part of a homogeneous mountain territory, despite the peculiarity and identity of its components, the municipalities intend to adopt the following statute so that the Mountain Community of Carnia is more than just the sum of individual municipalities and represents a shared mode of governance and administration capable of providing uniformity in the quality of

⁴Instituted by regional decree with law 21/2019 - legislated by *La Lega* and discussed in the previous subsections

services and equal opportunities for citizens, workers, businesses, and guests.

The Community was established with the aim of creating a Carnia that builds its territorial identity on a shared historical heritage. Within this community, the specificities and vocations of each territory are considered a wealth and an added value for balanced development. Three interviewees holding institutional positions in Carnia's municipalities discussed the unique features of the area compared to the rest of Friuli Venezia Giulia. A center-left mayor explained that Carnia has a distinctive history of 28 municipalities being pioneers in autonomy, formulating a management and perspective strategy immediately after the war. In the rest of the region, the development of the Intermunicipal Territorial Unions' first (2014) and the Communities after (2019) has been much rockier due to the strong localist legacies. For example, The Municipality of Udine, with its extensive area, encountered challenges that led to many municipalities resisting consolidation efforts. Consequently, the municipal connections within the Intermunicipal Territorial Unions exhibited significant variation across the region. Yet, in Carnia, the configuration ultimately remained unchanged thanks to its cohesive identity and history of local collective governance.

The Carnia area has been recognized as a territorial entity for centuries, having a rich history dating back to the 2nd century B.C. Initially inhabited by the Celtic tribes known as the Carni, from whom the region gets its name, Carnia witnessed successive conquests by the Romans and Lombards. In 1077, the Patriarchate of Aquileia was established, marking a significant historical milestone. The medieval era left behind parish churches that served not only as religious centers but also as crucial hubs for community life, strategically positioned across the region. Under the rule of the Patriarchate and later Venice, Carnia was divided into "vicinie." Each community was led by a "meriga," elected by the heads of families



Figure 6.2: Carnia Territory within the Province of Udine (Open Source)

in individual villages. The French invasion of 1797 marked the end of established orders. In the early 20th centuries, the entire Carnia region endured hardships during the First and Second World Wars, experiencing occupation by German and Cossack forces [RegioneStoriaFVG, 2024].

As mentioned in its Constitution, the existence of the Free Zone of Carnia in 1944 still plays a major role in the governance structures of today. In the spring of 1944, partisan resistance against the Nazi-Fascist regime in Carnia and the Right Bank of the Tagliamento region gained momentum. By the end of July, the Free Zone of Carnia and Upper Friuli, excluding Tolmezzo, was effectively liberated from German control, covering an area of 2,580 square kilometers with around 90,000 inhabitants [UniUD, 2024] (similar to the territory of today's Carnia ' Figure 6.2). In August 1944, a provisional government was established through free elections in the liberated municipalities. The National Liberation Committee

(C.L.N.) organized various governance structures, including inspectorates and commissions, to address key areas such as politics, education, forestry, justice, internal affairs, and finances. The provisional government aimed to embody values of freedom and democracy, anticipating constitutional changes in 1946.

According to a study developed by the University of Udine, the governance activities included separating political and military powers, conducting free municipal elections (with women participating), addressing population nutrition, controlling prices of essential goods, implementing educational reforms, establishing a People's Tribunal, abolishing the death penalty for common crimes, administering justice without charge, reforming property taxes, defending the forest heritage, establishing a civil police force, and ensuring administrative autonomy for the mountainous territory. Despite German efforts to eliminate the Free Zone in October 1944, the provisional government continued its work until December 20, 1944, when the Free Zone officially ceased to exist. The governance efforts during this period left a lasting impact on local administration, emphasizing democratic values and constitutional principles [UniUD, 2024].

Another example of the centrality of institutional legacies in Carnia is the 2004 autonomy referendum. Leveraging the shared mountainous identity and the (brief) experience as an independent republic, local actors took advantage of a fertile political environment to advance their autonomous claims. This marked a significant historical moment for the Friulian mountains, which had long aspired for autonomy since the Republic of Carnia and Upper Friuli in 1944. The desire for self-governance emerged again in 1968 with the creation of the province of Pordenone and resurfaced in 2004 with the failed referendum. Residents from 43 out of 135 municipalities in the province of Udine were invited to vote on whether to separate and establish the Regional Province of Alto Friuli. However, the majority voted against it. Consequently, the initiative to add the "fifth star"

to the Friuli Venezia Giulia Eagle, as symbolized by then-president Riccardo Illy in the Intesa Democratica coalition, dissolved.

The plan to unite the diverse territories of Carnia, Tarvisiano, and Gemonese (mountainous areas east of Carnia) faced challenges due to internal political rivalries leading up to the vote. I argue that the localist institutional legacies surfaced in the municipalities of Carnia (Figure 6.2), which overwhelmingly voted in favor of a new mountainous province (YES 72%). The lack of a shared history of collective governance in the Tarvisio and Gemona areas did not spark the same interest in more self-governance (NO 83%). The proposal to designate Venzone (closer to Tarvisio and Gemona, and therefore further from the center of Carnia) as the capital could not reconcile the mountainous and foothill regions ⁵.

Reflecting on the past, Mario Gollino, who led the delegation of Industrialists of Alto Friuli and the Yes Committee, suggests they may have been ahead of their time. In recent years, Carnia has seen the closure of the courthouse, various services, and constant depopulation, losing more than 2,000 inhabitants. Gollino believes they failed to articulate their position effectively at that time, allowing the established powers to prevail. From the autonomist group that emerged in 2000, after the diocesan conference in Tolmezzo, only a few members remain today. Some have passed away, while others withdrew after attempting to create the Province of Carnia in 2005 [Il Gazzettino, 2014]. Franco D'Orlando, a current minority councilor in Tolmezzo, expresses their efforts to convey that having this entity could have radically improved the governance of the territory. Unfortunately, the referendum results went against them, and now Carnia is using the limited ⁶ institutional tool of the Community to govern its territory.

⁵<http://elezionistorico.regione.fvg.it/referendum2004/>

⁶relatively to a Province - which would have been removed by regional law 26/2014 anyways

6.2.3 The Almost Metropolitan City of Trieste and the Slovenian Minority

The centrality of institutional legacies in territorial outcomes is also evident in the sociopolitical processes behind the decision not to create the Metropolitan City of Trieste. As discussed in depth in chapter three, National Law 56/2014 establishes the creation of metropolitan cities exclusively in regions with ordinary statutes. As for regions with special statutes, the principles of the law apply as principles of significant economic and social reform (in accordance with their respective statutes) for the regulation of cities and metropolitan areas in the regions of Sardinia, Sicily, and Friuli Venezia Giulia (Article 1, paragraph 5, of Law No. 56/2014). These regions are required to adjust their internal regulations to comply with the principles of the law (Article 1, paragraph 145, Law No. 56/2014). In Friuli Venezia Giulia, a modification to the statute has introduced the new entity of the Metropolitan City (CM), equated with the level of municipal government, yet, no Metropolitan City has been implemented in the region. I argue that the lack of this implementation can be explained by the localist legacies of the region, which is defined by the presence of minority groups and their search for institutional representation.

The Slovenian-speaking minority in the territory of Trieste is comprised of roughly 60,000 speakers (2008) [Benacchio, 2011]. A former regional councilor identifying with the Slovenian-Italian minority explains that politically, two predominant groups stand out — *Slovenska Snukpnost* (Slovene Union) and the *Democratic Party*. The latter, with roots tracing back to the erstwhile Communist Party, embraces an interethnic perspective, aspiring to be a representative force for the entire populace of the region, encompassing both Slovenian and Italian speakers. Notably, a Slovenian representative has consistently held a seat in the

Italian Parliament, from the erstwhile Communist Party through the Democratic Party's evolution. Historically, this political faction has aligned itself with a reformist left ideology. Conversely, *Slovenska Snukpnost* operates as an ethnically grounded party, positioned somewhat centrally with nuanced factions, including a more Catholic, secular, and right-leaning faction, the latter closely intertwined with Slovenia's political right. Internal pluralism characterizes this ethnic party, primarily focusing on matters pertinent to the Slovenian community. In contrast, Slovenes aligned with the Democratic Party, organized under a specific coordination, advocate for a more intercultural dialogue, consciously steering away from nationalist undertones, opting for a more inclusive approach (Interviewee from Slovenian Minority).

Electorates exhibit a certain fluidity, casting their votes across the political spectrum — from the *Five Star Movement* to the *La Lega*. Recent elections witnessed the election of a Slovenian-speaking regional councilor under the *La Lega*, despite potential detachment from the minority. Furthermore, a left-leaning faction, succeeding the Communist Party's dissolution, endures with the presence of the Communist Refoundation and Italian Communists. Amidst the proliferation of acronyms, even for those closely following these developments, a steadfast core within the minority continues to secure representation in various municipal councils. The interviewee highlights the role of local civil society, whose impact on minority decisions remains profound owing to the community's meticulous organization. A robust cultural and sports scene, Slovenian language schools, and theatrical pursuits characterize this well-structured community. The local civil society is governed by two key associations mandated by regional law, wielding considerable influence, particularly in allocating funds to individual initiatives, thereby serving as potent instruments in shaping the trajectory of the minority's collective existence. Unlike the Friulian community, the Slovenian one elaborates

its grievances through the political and civil channels, directly affecting local governance, like the case of the (almost) Metropolitan City of Trieste.

According to a report developed by the International Institute of Sociology of Gorizia in 2010 [Gasparini, 2010] and commissioned by the Friuli Venezia Giulia Regional Council, Trieste is the only Friuli Venezia Giulia city with the main features to become a Metropolitan City. Since the early 1700s, the city has been demographically significant due to its involvement in complex activities that required a large workforce. International trade, shipbuilding, administration of the free port, and insurance for major products like ships and goods have been among these activities. The city has developed a modern elite focused on international economic development, a cosmopolitan culture, and a new civil society to replace the outdated traditional one.

A member of the regional executive (*La Lega*), discussed how the allure of the metropolitan city concept is undeniably captivating. Yet, conversations regarding its essence have regrettably skirted around the essential question of what functions a potential metropolitan city should fulfill. Moreover, the genesis of the metropolitan city idea originates at the national central level, offering an opportunity to municipalities even within regions governed by an ordinary statute. In contrast, regions governed by a special statute hold sway over the organization of local entities. Consequently, there is the flexibility to shape functions and structures where the nomenclature is of secondary concern. Hence, the autonomy bestowed upon local entities does not inherently lead to the establishment of a Metropolitan City, for it demands distinct considerations. In fact, Friuli Venezia Giulia would have imposed distinct criteria for metropolitan cities compared to those under ordinary statutes. This bespoke approach is designed to create opportunities tailored to the regional landscape. The interviewee continues by arguing that when vested with authority over the organization of local entities, the government retains the prerogative to

chart a distinct course, diverging from the conventional metropolitan city model. Trieste, in particular, grapples with a distinctive challenge, primarily attributable to the presence of remarkably diverse linguistic communities.

With regional law 26/2014, the Serracchiani government had to recognize the unique features of the territory of the Province of Trieste. The envisioned structure of a metropolitan city, particularly for Trieste, would have been challenging to accept without due compensation for the broader regional landscape. This would have entailed engaging in substantial efforts without addressing the root issues. The notion of a Metropolitan City, ultimately, was perceived as a dilution of certain identities, notably within the municipalities of the Triestine Karst, where Slovenian prevails. It becomes evident that amalgamating a municipality like Sgonico (Figure 6.3), with less than 1000 inhabitants, and Monrupino, with around 2000 inhabitants, with a regional capital boasting 200,000 inhabitants, carries an inherent risk of diminishing representativeness. A current member of the executive of the city of Trieste (Forza Italia) richly describes how the legacies of the two great wars of the twentieth century have created divisive borders in an area historically characterized by multiculturalism:

Let me explain this story to you. The law [56/2014 Delrio] at that time stipulated that mayors of the [municipalities] comprising the 13 metropolitan cities, had to be removed. Our concern was with the Slovenian community, where the mayors of Sgonico, Monrupino, Duino Aurisina, and San Dorligo della Valle were Slovenes, meaning Italians but with Slovenian as their mother tongue. If we removed them and created the metropolitan area, it would have sparked the third world war, so to speak. Do you follow our reasoning? Why would we have created a situation like that?

In 2001, there was a deep divide between the Italian community and the Slovenian community. I recall that, in 2010, we brought together the [Presidents of Italy and Slovenia]. I apologize for the digression, but it's crucial and important. In 2020, we did it again, they shook hands in front of the foiba and, naturally, in front of the graves of

executed Slovenians ⁷. If we had activated the metropolitan area, it would have been a political disaster. What I mean is that removing the mayors of these communities, which are Slovenian, even if they have 800 inhabitants, but 94% of whom are native Slovenian speakers, would have been perceived as an affront.

The relatively recent history of ethnic violence, paired with newly established trans-border collaborations, became a hot topic during the discussion about the establishment of the Metropolitan City of Trieste. The concern that a metropolitan city might overshadow the smaller linguistic communities was voiced at the local level by the slovenian-speaking mayors and in the regional council by two representatives (Figure 6.3) ⁸. Municipalities are institutions that play a pivotal role in representing the population and the territory, particularly the Slovenian community. A former regional councilor identifying with the slovenian-speaking minority underlines how this territory is inherently restricted, partly due to its geographical limitations, bordered by the sea on one side and, on the other, by the national border.

Maintaining a delicate equilibrium is essential, a balance that hasn't always been upheld historically. Post-World War II, numerous infrastructures and settlements were established for Istrian refugees on this territory, driven partly by the geographical constraints of Trieste, which lacks expansive outlets. The region is relatively compact, causing all major infrastructures to traverse the Karst region (Figure 6.3 - Sgonico, Monrupino, Duino Aurisina), which is predominantly inhabited by the minority. Consequently, the genuine risk was in the potential inability to govern and oversee one's own territory, a concern that has consistently taken precedence alongside the preservation of linguistic peculiarities. In a sprawling

⁷Foibe (singular foiba) is the catchword used to refer to the persecutions suffered by (mainly) Italians at the hands of (mainly) Yugoslavs between 1943. and 1945 in the easternmost Italian region of Venezia Giulia, which included. territories now part of Slovenia or Croatia. [Baracetti, 2009]

⁸along with many other councilors from both the left and the right



Figure 6.3: Municipalities in Trieste Province by Majority Language: Light Grey = Italian and Dark Grey = Slovenian (Open Source)

'Metropolitan' city, these distinctive features would be eroded. While Slovenian language use is a routine administrative practice in municipalities, it would gradually disappear in larger entities with a majority of Italian speakers. At higher institutional levels, the political representation of the minority would lack the same prominence and strength that Slovenes have in their municipalities.

The case of the territory of Trieste further supports my framework because, after being denied the CM, it lobbied for special status as a Intermunicipal Territorial Unions (UTI). Avoiding the establishment of a Metropolitan City was not enough to accommodate the local needs of the former province. Reform 26/2014 aimed to address the comprehensive situation of the region's territorial organization, but it did not harmonize well with the specific characteristics of the area, defined by its rugged terrain and multiethnic communities. Trieste's Intermunicipal Territorial Union, would have produced a scenario where one municipality held 87% of

the population, while the remaining five municipalities collectively represented only 13%, including the Slovenian minority. According to a former member of the executive of the city of Trieste and regional councilor (*Democratic Party*), efforts were made to address this issue primarily at the governance level, despite facing opposition from Serracchiani's executive, which sought to create 18 equal Intermunicipal Territorial Unions. Trieste's political, economic, and industrial clout forced the hand of the regional executive. Four interviewees describe how Trieste and their neighboring municipalities did not want to be joined together under one UTI. Beyond the major issue of representation of ethno-linguistic minorities, Trieste felt that its power would have been watered down by the reform-imposed need to take on more institutional functions in the territory. From a strictly governance-based perspective, it was important not to blend the needs of Monrupino with those of Trieste (Figure 6.3), as Igor Gabrovec of the *Slovenska Skupnost* emphasized (Newspaper Article - Il Piccolo - Dec 14th 2014).

Trieste's resistance to the reform⁹ would have created a precedent that would have caused the all Intermunicipal Territorial Union system to crumble under the other localist pressures. To avoid this, after months of heated dialogues on the floor of the regional council, the text of Regional Law 26/2014 was amended. A mechanism was implemented wherein the City of Trieste could not unilaterally impose decisions, and conversely, all other municipalities together could not impose decisions on the City of Trieste. This was achieved through a nuanced play of qualified majorities within the governance body. Despite encountering criticism, the Intermunicipal Territorial Unions system was endorsed by the regional assembly. The amendment saw that in Unions of Municipalities surpassing 100,000 inhabitants, the most populous municipality within it—specifically, Trieste—may

⁹Let's remember that this reform was pushed by Serracchiani (*Democratic Party*) in an effort to consolidate territories and functions to make governance more efficient

independently undertake certain functions (ranging from educational services to local police and waste management) that are otherwise collectively managed by the other municipalities within the Union. However, it is worth noting a crucial detail in the law: in municipalities where the minority protection law is applicable, the Union can be established irrespective of territorial contiguity and, more importantly, without meeting the minimum requirement of 40,000 inhabitants. This opens the possibility of forming a Union limited to five (or fewer) smaller municipalities, leaving Trieste as an independent entity (Newspaper Article - *Il Piccolo* - Dec 14th 2014).

As previously discussed, the *La Lega* regional government promptly eliminated the UTIs once it rose to power in 2018. Given its special status, the city of Trieste and its surrounding municipalities did not experience major changes in their governance structure. De jure, the institutional names changed, de facto, the territory benefited from enhanced authority through the reform process. This is due to the presence of the slovenian-speaking minority and the strong localist grievances that stem from their need for representation and self-governance. Yet again, institutional and historical legacies cast a long shadow in the implementation of territorial rescaling reforms in Friuli Venezia Giulia. The next section will illustrate how localist legacies rooted in the island's history have been affecting territorial rescaling.

6.3 Sardinia - Institutional Legacies

Sardinia is a large island west of mainland Italy, which, due to its insular status and history of autonomous identity, has a regional Special Statute. The autonomy granted by such status allowed Sardinia more flexibility in implementing the Delrio reform, presenting a rich and complex case of change in subregional

institutional borders. In many ways, in 2012, this Region preceded law 56/2014 by putting forward a popular referendum to make local governance more efficient by decreasing the number of provinces and cutting administrative costs. The referendum passed, and the eight provinces (Figure 6.4) became four (Sassari, Nuoro, Oristano e Sud Sardinia) plus the institution of the Metropolitan City of Cagliari [Federica Fabrizzi, 2017], the Rete Metropolitana of Sassari, three Rete Urbana, and the Aree Omogenee. This new, complex, and fragmented governance system became finalized and inscribed in the regional constitution with law 2/2016.

Like for the other three cases, I argue that Sardinia's legislative efforts to rescale its territorial governance system ¹⁰, can be linked to its institutional legacies rooted in its past of independent rule and local identities. Unlike the other three regions under study, Sardinia's culture cannot be categorized as being either 'white' or 'red', due to its insularity and subaltern relation with the Italian state. In fact, Sardinia's historical trajectory diverged from the rest of Italy. Its history has been defined by its insularity and a generally skeptical relationship with other civilizations.

In discussing Sardinia and its rich history, eight of the 30 Sardinian interviewees introduced Marcello Serra's book titled "Sardegna, Quasi un Continente" (Sardinia, Almost a Continent), emphasizing the vast diversity within the island, meaning that Sardinia has its own real history where geography plays a significant role. Sardinia is a very large island - as large as Sicily, practically an extremely heterogeneous territory. As an expert on Sardinian regionalism explains, being an island, maritime routes have always been the easiest and fastest way for the circulation of information, goods, etc. However, it has always been difficult for something to leave the island and reach the rest of Europe. Sardinia is a mysterious object in European history

¹⁰In partial response to the Delrio national law (56/2014). Some changes were brewing in 2011/12 already.



Figure 6.4: Sardinia - Map of the Provinces before 2016 and after 2022, when reform 2021 was implemented to re-institute the provincial jurisdictions. Cagliari and Sassari are now Metropolitan Cities (Open Source)

in many respects. It has its own language, which has always been used at the institutional legal level, a role usually held by Latin. Sardinian was the first vernacular language used in public documents, acts, laws, royal communications, etc., from the 1000s in legal texts. Sardinia's historical development is characterized by its insularity, but got entangled with Italian history due to its relative vicinity and strategic location in the Mediterranean. The expert elaborates on Sardinia's relationship with Italy and the rest of the Mediterranean:

Let's put it this way - [Sardinia has] always been in a position like: 'are they part of Italy or not?' Gianni Brera, the great sports journalist, when Gigi Riva's Cagliari won the soccer league ¹¹, wrote in 1970, "Today Sardinia enters Italy." Like until that moment, it hadn't been. I mean, Sardinia shares many phenomena with the Italian South, Spanish Galicia, or Andalusia. For example, I feel at home in North Africa. I've been to Algeria, and there were moments when it felt like I was in Cagliari [the capital of Sardinia]. It's the same thing, I arrive in Barcelona and say, 'Well, I'm at home.'

From the Ancient Romans to the Genoese, Sardinia has always fought to maintain its autonomy and identity against foreign domination. It also experienced four centuries of independent local rule with the creation of four Sardinian Giudicati: Cagliari, Arborea, Torres (or Logudoro), and Gallura. These self-governing divisions gradually became hereditary principalities under lifelong Giudici ("judges") and developed impressive legal codes and gubernatorial practices for the time. These entities began localized cultural and institutional traditions that affect the identity of the Sardinian people today. This can be seen through the existence of different dialects, customs, and social regulations. The giudicati fell apart under the pressure of the developing marine powers of Genoa and Pisa, and later on, fell under Catalan and then Spanish rule (1323). The Sardinian language is still heavily influenced by Spanish and Catalan, and has been used in printed texts

¹¹Soccer is Italy's main sport, and strong element of national identity

since the 18th century, with the elites adopting Italian during the 19th century. In 1720, Sardinia was ceded to the Kingdom of Savoy, falling under the sphere of the influence of the Italians. In 1861, after the first war efforts of unifying the Italian peninsula Victor Emmanuel II of Savoy was declared the King of Italy, and the island subsequently became a part of the unified Italian nation [Farinelli, 2017, Besta, 1933].

The decades between the 'unification' of Italy and World War One saw the development of a subaltern relationship between Italy's north, and the southern part, including Sardinia. Gramsci, a Sardinian, identified a plurality of individual issues in Southern Italy (continental Southern Italy, Sicily, Sardinia) within a given historical-social reality of territorial fragmentation and underdevelopment [Mattone, 1976]. In Mattone's interpretation of Gramsci's work, the estrangement of the Southern, especially Sardinian, rural masses from the State and their relative independence from ruling groups gave rise to a vaguely "subversive" sentiment. It is evident that this relationship between the masses and the state was very different from the civically engaged society that developed from labor organization in the 'Red Italy' (Emilia-Romagna). The lack of a class of small entrepreneurs and land-owners and the relatively moderate intervention of the Church institutions in the organization of society did not create a fertile environment for the development of a 'white culture' like in the Northeast of Italy (Veneto, Friuli Venezia Giulia). Gramsci also differentiated Sardinia from other southern regions: unlike the homogeneous "large agricultural bloc" typical of the South, Sardinia's social unrest following the war significantly influenced class relationships. As he wrote in '26 in *Some Themes of the Southern Question*, the pressure from the lower classes of peasants and shepherds did not encounter stifling opposition from the upper stratum of large landowners [Mattone, 1976].

Gramsci linked the background of "autonomist consciousness" to territorial

imbalances, where the entire southern and island area economically and politically functions as a vast countryside, in contrast to Northern Italy, which operates like a massive city. This situation leads to the emergence and growth of certain aspects of a national question in Southern Italy. This dynamic became a characterizing feature of Sardinian society, affecting its identity and political trajectory. Sardinia's geographical separation from the Italian mainland led to it being somewhat overlooked by Italy as a territory. Throughout the years, several local intellectuals and politicians criticized the administrative and economic relationship with mainland Italy, calling for self-government and giving rise to the "Sardinian Question", which, according to Gramsci, is not equal to the issues of mainland Southern Italy. Although these aspects did not immediately manifest as an explicit form of the national question, they involved a vibrant struggle with a regionalist nature and strong tendencies toward decentralization and local autonomy [Mattone, 1976]. These tendencies are still present today, as the localist legacies of the island are affecting territorial rescaling to this day.

As discussed in depth in chapter four, the regionalist and autonomous grievances quickly organized politically. Between 1919-1921, WWI veterans founded the *Sardinia Action Party*, with autonomy as its main objective to address the island's issues, such as poverty, lack of infrastructure, isolation, and backwardness. Although the party did not endorse separatism or nationalism, their slogan was "Sardinians first; then Italians," and many supporters conflated autonomy with independence [Farinelli, 2017]. When Mussolini seized power in 1922, he attempted to make a deal with the Sardists, dividing the party into two factions: one that joined Fascism and one that did not. The anti-fascist *Sardinia Action Party* was dissolved by Mussolini's regime in 1926 but was re-founded in 1943, participating in the birth of the Italian Republic. Following the Allies' arrival in Sicily in 1943, Fascism fell, Germany invaded the Peninsula, and the Kingdom of Italy dissolved.

Amidst this backdrop, antifascist parties created an interim government, with the Communists, Socialists, and Christian-Democrats as the main players. However, in Sardinia, the *Sardinia Action Party* was the dominant political force, joining the temporary government and electing two members to the Constituent Assembly in 1946.

That same year, autonomy was granted to Sicily to counteract the separatist movement that emerged after the Allies' landing. Sardinian nationalists in the Constituent Assembly, backed by other Sardinian delegates not affiliated with the *Sardinia Action Party*, also sought autonomous status for their island. However, not all Sardinian political factions supported autonomy. Communists and Socialists opposed it, fearing potential isolation from the anticipated social revolution on the mainland. Additionally, landowners lacked the influence or support found in Sicily [Farinelli, 2017]. While the middle class supported autonomy, their reliance on state employment and subsidies prevented them from advocating for robust self-governance. Ultimately, the adopted arrangement offered fewer powers than those granted to Sicily, including control over territorial administration and economic planning, but limited authority over education, culture, and finance. Sardinia, along with Sud Tyrol, Friuli Venezia Giulia, and Aosta Valley, were designated Special Statute Autonomous Regions by the Italian Constitution, with Sicily receiving autonomy in 1946.

The most significant aspect of Sardinia's autonomy was the regional government's ability to create and manage a state-funded "Rebirth" economic plan. Focused on promoting economic growth and modernization, this plan was executed during the 1960s to address emigration and banditry. These two phenomena were a direct symptom of the underdevelopment deriving from Italian 'internal colonialism'. In this exploitative dynamic, the ruling elite of the mainland regions (Central and Northern Italy) gained control over the entire Italian territory and

utilized it to promote an economic growth model centered on industrializing their own areas. They also designated peripheral regions (the South and the Islands) as suppliers of raw materials and labor, and as markets to sell their finished goods without facing competition [Mattu, 2013]¹²

Before presenting three main examples of how Sardinian localist legacies affected territorial rescaling between 2014 and 2021, I will show how the relationship between Sardinia and the Italian state has developed the existing tendencies to fragmentation and decentralization. Throughout its history as an Italian region, Sardinia concentrated more on creating political ties with the central government and benefiting from the considerable financial aid granted by the central authority rather than taking advantage of the potential of their institutional autonomy [Arban et al., 2021]. In doing so, the regional parties developed a relationship with the territory based on particularistic ¹³practices that distribute jobs and money on the territory in exchange for electoral support. It is nothing more than a specific mechanism of localist legacies that derives from the Region's history of subnational identity and its subaltern relationship with the Italian state. In the words of a Regional Councilor, who directly worked on the territorial reforms,

Sardinian Regional Councilor: The reality as I see it [is] that it is not the issue of the number of entities or becomes the [provincial] capital. The problem is that we are talking about territories with a serious infrastructural deficit and also the preparation of their own inhabitants. That is, there was an escape of the most prepared people, and in the end who is left? [...] Today we do not have the requisites to create development in those territories. Parasitic spending has increased, even though there have been important changes at the EU level - at the national level, there is still the idea that having [...] the province or

¹²The the Italian colonization of its 'own' southern regions is part of the larger colonial project that affected North and Eastern Africa, with contested and lasting legacies on the concept of Italianness and belonging.

¹³Particularism refers to targeted efforts by politicians to cultivate the support of specific citizens or groups of citizens (aka clients), and the allegiance of those citizens to their leader (aka patron)[Gerring, 2020]

those pockets of public spending can bring development, where perhaps there is no business, there no preconditions. So here, in fact, this is the situation.

Interviewer: So, let's say, the institution has become almost a scapegoat for the problems of the territory.

Sardinian Regional Councilor: Yes, more than anything else there is a vision of the good old days, when, let's say from the 60s to the 90s, more or less public spending in Southern Italy above all, made it possible to keep jobs and political clientele because there was [...] the Region taking care of it, so that you have many unemployed in Central Sardinia the Region activates forestry sites, you have many unemployed in the post-industrial sector, after the reconversions, then the Region guarantees supplementary funds or bonuses for those who do not work, perhaps even for 10 years. Obviously, with the cut in spending in the Region, local authorities no longer have those answers. But people look for them all the same, because politicians tend to wave that banner, that [says] 'we are not poor, we are not weak - the problem is that we do not have the province!'

The councilor explains that he finds a strong link between institutional outcomes, preexisting infrastructural capacity, and economic stability. The historical interrelation between political class alliances, state formation, and economic development dates back to the alliance between the northern bourgeoisie and southern rentiers that sustained the stagnant agrarian structure in the first decades after Italian unification. The Risorgimento, or national revolution, comprised a collaboration between the northern bourgeoisie and the southern rentier classes. The rentier class needed local political power to counteract the barons from whom they had seized land and the peasants who were now working that land for them. This partnership allowed the rentier class to subdue the peasantry, impede industrialization, and block the rise of a politically organized working class. As a result, national political parties, particularly the political left in the latter half of the 19th century (when it was a mass party, and therefore tending towards fragmentation), relied on particularism to secure electoral support in the south of Italy. Potential political

conflicts were transformed into personal disagreements and neutralized through individual co-optation and distributional aspects.

The central state's frailty was both a product and a contributor to the particularistic nature of central-local connections in Italy. Consequently, the institutional boundary between the state and the party remains delicate (Graziano in [Tarrow et al., 1978]). This hindered the commercialization of agriculture and industrialization, as well as the political organization of the peasantry or working class. The low level of economic development and the absence of a class-based opposition party in Sardinia enabled particularist politics to become the primary mode of state formation. The ensuing bloated, unproductive state further obstructed economic development. Given the higher wages, more stable employment, and shorter working hours in the public sector relative to the private sector, a potent class of state employees emerged with a vested interest in the continuous unproductive utilization of public funds. As such, the partisan manipulation of the state through particularism is linked to the class politics pattern that facilitates it and the economic development pattern it perpetuates. Sardinia is still the poorest and least developed of the four regions under analysis. The particularistic tendencies of the system and its politicians seem to disregard party affiliation and focus on legislation that can keep historic localist interest alive. This logic can explain the trajectory of the Sardinian Provinces and the lack of institutional collaboration, the special case of the Gallura territory, and the development of the Metropolitan Cities of Cagliari and Sassari.

6.3.1 The Provinces and the Lack of Institutional Collaboration

According to the newspaper article of the time, the discourse around the regional reforms made it seem like they applied the principles of efficiency and consolidation promoted by the national reform 56/2014, but the data collected in the interviews tell a more complex story. The institutional design of the region is influenced by regulatory modes entrenched in the institutional history of the island, and the provinces became the institutional signpost for representing the various local interests in the region. The provincial system's reform process commenced in 2012, marked by the successful outcomes of two regional referendums aimed at surpassing the provinces. The three "historical" provinces of Sardinia, as stated in Article 43 of the statute, Cagliari, Nuoro, and Sassari, were first joined by the province of Oristano, established by state law (no. 306/1974). Subsequently, four additional provinces were established through regional laws in 2005: Olbia-Tempio, Ogliastra, Medio Campidano, and Carbonia-Iglesias (Figure 6.4).

On May 6, 2012, a total of 10 regional referendums took place in Sardinia (five abrogative and five consultative). These included a consultative referendum concerning the repeal of the region's four historical provinces (Cagliari, Sassari, Nuoro, and Oristano) and several abrogative referendums aimed at abolishing the new provinces (Carbonia-Iglesias, Medio Campidano, Ogliastra, and Olbia-Tempio) established by regional law in 2005 (Figure 6.4). The positive results of both referendums initiated a multifaceted reform process. The Sardinian interviewees discussing the matter (29 out of 30), and the newspapers covering the issue at the time, agree that the results of the referendum were a symptom of the reigning anti-politics discourse that characterized Italy and the whole European Union in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis. In other words, the Sardinian electorate

saw the referendum as an opportunity to hit the 'inefficient' political cadres rather than considering the effective purpose of the Provincial institution. An article (*La Nuova Sardegna*, May 6th, 2012) from the day of the referendum describes it as an anti-establishment event coming at a crucial time during the parties' crisis. It holds various political implications gauging the citizens' sentiments towards the government, both locally and regionally.

The pivotal element throughout this process was the regional law of February 4, 2016, no. 2, titled "Restructuring of Sardinia's local autonomy system," which approved the new configuration of wide-area entities preempted with the 2012 referendum. In relation to the provincial bodies' reorganization, the cited regional law initially establishes that, until the final elimination of the provinces (expected with law 56/2014 and the following constitutional referendum), the region's territory, with the exception of the Metropolitan City of Cagliari created by Article 17 of the same law, is divided into provinces acknowledged by the statute and state law. Article 25 of the same law identifies the corresponding territorial districts, including the Metropolitan City of Cagliari and the provinces of Sassari, Nuoro, Oristano, and South Sardinia. Concerning the Metropolitan City of Cagliari, Article 21 specifies the bodies and governs their second-degree election, primarily referring to the regulations contained in law no. 56 of 2014. Additionally, the regional law outlines the provinces' bodies, their composition, and the election methods as second-degree elective bodies. For the latter, the law only addresses certain aspects and explicitly defers to the regulations established by law 56/2014.

The law sought consolidation of governance, giving more power to the Unions of Municipalities, with the goal of dealing with governance issues that needed to be addressed holistically, beyond municipal borders. The Unions with at least 10,000 inhabitants were able to approve their own statute and manage various functions jointly, such as waste collection and road maintenance. In addition to the specified

functions, each municipality could choose to delegate additional functions to the Union. The rationale was to empower these vast area entities to prepare them for a higher governance load once the provinces disappeared under Delrio's vision of reform. A member of the regional executive (*Sardinia Action Party*) shares that the Unions of Municipalities were created to optimize services, but in about 85% of cases, they have proven to be a real failure. This is because municipalities had to provide personnel to the Union of Municipalities, resulting in ineffective functioning in both the Unions and the individual municipalities. Three unions were among the few exceptions that worked very well, managing a few (about four or five) entities in a virtuous manner and achieving exceptionally good results. However, the majority have not been successful. The assessorate of territorial governance had to take over the administration of many municipalities because they were unable to function within a Union, not even being able to present a budget, neither forecast nor productive.

Beyond the technical issues that the majority of the Unions encountered in establishing inter-municipal collaborative governance, the widespread failure of municipal institutional collaboration can be once again linked to the strong particularistic tendencies of the Sardinian territories. Unlike the localist legacies in the Italian Northeast, which developed from the societal organization around the parish, Sardinia's municipalities exist in a scarcity mindset due to the subaltern relationship with the Italian State. The priority is to fulfill the local interest first, because there is the risk that a neighboring town might get more resources. In fact, an executive administrator working for the Regional Executive explains that setting up a Union of Municipalities requires a considerable organizational effort. The municipalities that are part of the Union of Municipalities must establish a supra-municipal entity themselves, and it's evident that this process creates numerous challenges. Sardinia is a region with strong local loyalties, a place where

the pride in one's town is strong. Neighboring towns sometimes harbor animosities toward each other. He says that Sardinians are a relatively anarchic people in regards to governance. Therefore, despite the money spent and associations created to encourage communal projects and promote these aggregations, the Unions have never really taken off.

The new asset revealed itself to be unpopular, sparking protests and statements from local administrations and territories. A movement emerged with the goal of restoring the Provinces, and it has spread from Gallura to Sulcis (Figure 6.4). The cross-cutting movement, which included actors from both the left and the right, lasted about a year, and eventually, approval was granted for the "new rearrangement." The reform attempting to consolidate the territory by decreasing the number of vast area entity from eight to four, while promoting the association of municipalities in Unions found a lot of resistance, indicating the relevance of local grievances over political alignment. A former mayor and Regional Councilor (*Democratic Party*) describes how, within the unions of municipalities, the presence of mayors with diverse political affiliations tends to downplay their political differences. An example is provided from the interviewee's local area, where Guspini is center-left, Villacidro recently shifted from center-right to center-left, and other towns remain center-right (both towns were located in the province of Medio Campidano - Figure 6.4).

Despite these variations, the President of the Union of Municipalities, originating from Guspini, exemplifies a prevailing trend where local interests precedence over political affiliations. This rotational approach is observed regionally, with the leading position rotating among mayors from different municipalities. The interviewee emphasizes that the current regional perspective prioritizes practical considerations over political differences. This perspective extends to other territories, revealing a rotational approach rather than one based on political

colors. While political preferences exist in Sardinia, the partisan distinction is less pronounced, as noted by the interviewee. They suggest a trend within the Union of Municipalities, where political connotations are less important than localized grievances.

Localist legacies continued to affect territorial rescaling with law 2/2021, developed by the new regional government led by *Sardinia Action Party* and *La Lega*. Seeking to alleviate the pressure from the Sardinian localities (Gallura in primis), the new territorial arrangement substantially reproduces that which was in effect from 2005 until 2015, with the exception of the different characterization of the two metropolitan cities. As previously mentioned, the new configuration of intermediate bodies included the two metropolitan cities of Cagliari (with over half a million inhabitants) and Sassari (with over 300 thousand inhabitants) and six provinces: Sulcis Iglesiente with Carbonia and Iglesias as the capitals, Medio Campidano with Sanluri and Villacidro as the capitals, Ogliastra with Lanusei and Tortolì as the capitals, and Gallura with Olbia and Tempio as the capitals (Fig. 6.4). As a result of these changes, the provinces of Sassari and Sud Sardinia are abolished. This reform has fragmented the Sardinian territory. It re-established the provinces, while also fragmenting local governance by creating two capital cities per province.

The possibility of selecting multiple provincial capitals started in 2005, but it was not implemented until 2021. Finding a consensus for a single capital proved to be extremely challenging due to the localist interests at play. A local mayor and high-ranking member of *Sardinia Action Party* brings the example of the Medio Campidano province, where the selection of the capital seemed uncertain. Initially, it appeared that Sanluri should be the sole capital, then, it seemed like Sanluri and San Gavino might be chosen. Ultimately, the decision was made to have Sanluri and Villacidro as dual capitals. This choice was influenced by a rather 'mundane'

reason - Villacidro happened to elect a majority of provincial councilors. This decision-making process extended to the executive, where the vote on the capital became a bargaining chip for positions. It was unexpected that Villacidro, despite being the most populous municipality, would become a capital. This was primarily because it lacked the essential characteristics to serve as the province's capital, both in terms of centrality and other critical aspects. Nonetheless, efficiency was trumped by the need to appease local interests.

The central role of local interest affecting political outcomes can be seen also at the regional level. Many interviewees explain that regional politicians have never managed to define their position in partisan terms because the influence of the territories is very strong. The regional councilors, representing their respective territories, face the challenge of being elected by those territories. When considering the feasibility of establishing a province with 50,000 inhabitants, like Ogliastra, the question of putting common sense first arises. Is it more important to give representation to a territory with only 50,000 people, or to consolidate governance to save money on politics and bureaucracy? The councilors explain that it becomes politically and personally unwise to resist the interests of the territory that voted a representative in the Regional Council, even if this goes against economic and managerial principles. In Sardinia, this is true regardless of political party affiliation and organization. In the words of a Regional Councilor belonging to the *Democratic Party*, which usually seeks to garner support through programmatic actions, the strength of the territory seem unwavering:

I have to say, jokingly, that no councilor from the center-right or center-left, whether in the majority or opposition, could have entered the Gallura, Medio Campidano, or Ogliastra upon their return [after law 7/2021 reintroduced them], knowing that they voted against the reconstruction of the provinces. Therefore, the territory influenced those choices, beyond political affiliation.

In fact, the Regional Council voted on the 2021 territorial reform not following party lines (nor party organization model). The law passed with 34 yes, seven no, and two abstained. The measure was supported by the mass party majority guided by *La Lega* and *PSdAz* plus four opposition councilors (catch-all *Democratic Party*). Interestingly, the four councilors from *Democratic Party* are the representatives from the localities that would benefit the most from being reinstated as provinces.

6.3.2 The Province of Gallura

The previous subsection elaborated on the findings connecting the two Sardinian institutional reforms to its localist legacy. This subsection will focus on one of the regional territories that best exemplifies the relationship between history, identity, and territorial rescaling, the sub-region of Gallura (Figure 6.4, formally called Olbia-Tempio). This area occupies the northeastern corner of the island, and its institutional existence as a recognized entity dates back to the late 9th century when it became an independent Giudicato. The four Sardinian giudicati emerged during the Middle Ages and were named after the cities of Cagliari and Torres (current province of Sassari) and the regions of Arborea (current province of Oristano) and Gallura.

The giudicati had their administrative structures and were governed by "iudices de logu," who later assumed the title of "reges" (kings). The division into giudicati was likely a result of local forces reorganizing as Byzantine influence waned. The giudices considered the powers delegated by Byzantium as their own rights, especially since these powers were hereditarily linked to specific families. External influences, particularly from the Roman Curia and the rivalry between giudici wanting independence, led to the downfall of the giudicati system (13th-14th century). The interference of Pisa and Genoa further constrained the political independence of the giudicati [Besta, 1933]. In fact, the territory of the Giudicato

of Gallura was conquered by the Republic of Pisa, which ruled it for roughly a century, deeply influencing the development of the Gallurese dialect. Hailing from Gallura, a former member of the regional executive (*Democratic Party*) intimately understands how the language affects the uniqueness of the area. The Gallurese community speaks a language distinct from Sardinian—specifically Corsican, which carries nuances reminiscent of Tuscan influences. The defined difference between Gallurese and Sardinian plays a big role in defining the identity of Gallura, a territory that has been fighting for more autonomy for decades.

In the legislative process, the representation of the instances from the territory began almost thirty years ago. Sardinia began to see a strong need for autonomy from a historically, geographically, and linguistically recognizable Gallura, which has been also called Olbia Tempio (institutionally) and Costa Smeralda (mundanely for tourism). For example, in the 2012 referendum to abolish the four regional provinces, Gallura was the only territory that expressed support for the provinces. An article from *La Nuova Sardegna* (May 8th, 2012), the day after the referendum, captures the sentiment,

Gallura in revolt: "They have cut our independence."

Waking up one morning and finding oneself once again in the embrace of the stepmother Sassari. The 30-year struggle for autonomy was erased with a stroke of the pen. In Gallura, there is a revolt against the results of the referendums, which no one dares to label as anti-establishment. More than the cut in bureaucracy, people are concerned about the cut in independence.

The excerpt from the article is representative of the general sentiment towards the loss of the Province of Olbia-Tempio and the relative loss of autonomy of Gallura. Unsurprisingly, the local politicians were among the most outspoken critics of the referendum and its results. In an interview for the Italian investigative show, *Report*, both the Mayor of Olbia, Settimo Nizzi, and the Subcommissioner of the province of

Sassari, Pietro Carzedda, exemplify the strong autonomous spirit of Olbia Tempio. Mayor Nizzi underscores that, despite the formal inclusion of Olbia in the province of Sassari, the local community continues to identify itself with Olbia Tempio. Subcommissioner Carzedda acknowledges the formal dissolution of Olbia Tempio but emphasizes its continued operational existence as a "homogeneous zone." The rejection of this new administrative designation by the local population reflects a deep-seated attachment to Olbia Tempio's autonomy. Carzedda's assertion that they refuse to be administered by Sassari further underscores the resilient spirit of autonomy in Olbia Tempio, even in the face of political decisions and referendums that have impacted the region ¹⁴.

The strong cultural and institutional legacies of the area have fostered a strong autonomous drive, along with the recent economic and social growth. The five interviewees from Gallura explain that it possesses a set of characteristics that deserve more autonomy. The territory developed what is perhaps the main port system in Sardinia, the port of Olbia, the main connection with a foreign country through the link with Corsica. It also has one of the three airports on the island, seeing great traffic due to the vicinity to the Costa Smeralda. It is a productive economic system in both tourism and other imposing aspects. Over these twenty years, for example, the population of the city of Olbia has experienced a tremendous increase. One of the interviewees from Gallura explains that 25 years ago, Olbia had fewer inhabitants than, for example, Nuoro and Oristano. Today, it has twice the population of Oristano, showing that Olbia is one of the very few centers that has experienced such demographic growth. The councilor continues,

I don't want to speak like a Gallurese, but in terms of demographic growth, GDP, Gallura was ahead of everyone. If there was a province that, according to everyone, among the new regional ones, should definitely survive, it would be Gallura, not the others. In other territories,

¹⁴I attempted to interview Nizzi and Carzedda to no avail.

either because the population is sparse, or because they don't have a linguistic, economic, and identity reality of their own, the province issue is probably not felt. Except in terms of claiming it like, "Since Gallura has it, then we want it too", rather than a true claim of a right of self-determination.

Along with economic and political interests, identity has had a significant impact, greatly contributing to the push to reconstitute the provinces. Because Sardinia is a highly identity-driven region where territories and territorial belonging somehow influence the political choices of representatives in the regional council. 25 interviewees from Sardinia agree with the previous quote, saying that the fragmentation of the territory to re-create the Provinces was a domino effect. Once the grievances of the seven councilors from Gallura were recognized, the domino effect pushed the regional representatives from Ogliastra, Sulcis, and Medio Campidano to push for their own provinces. In the words of a representative from *Sardinia Action Party*

With that regional law, Gallura, Medio Campidano, Ogliastra, and Sulcis Iglesiente, which later became the province of Carbonia Iglesias, were born. Because, once you start in a legislative assembly [to give a province to] Gallura, there are others who say, "Well, then, I also want it" even if perhaps [the autonomy] is less felt. Do you want to recreate Gallura? Well, then, since we're at it, let's also create Sulcis, let's create Medio Campidano, etc.

In the territory of Gallura, particularly, there is a strong push for the recognition of a province that was claimed and obtained in the past, then taken away, and is now being claimed again. As a regional councilor from *La Lega* puts it, the system of local autonomies in Sardinia adapts, in a sense, in response to the strength of political demands coming from Gallura. This happens for the first time with the reform that recognizes Gallura as a province (2001), and it repeats in this legislature (2021), where the engine of the reform of the system of local autonomies

and their territorial organization originates from the claim of Gallura. When asked if this is motivated economically, especially concerning the Costa Smeralda, the councilor explains that the need arises from the communities' necessity to determine administrative choices at the local level, starting from an entity they perceive as genuinely close. It is essentially the political recognition of an economic condition. In contrast, other territories like Ogliastra, while also claiming their autonomy, do not do so based on a political projection of their economic strength but rather on the necessity for their territory, acknowledged as homogeneous both physically and culturally, to have its own seat for self-administration.

The localist grievances of Ogliastra are supported by statements from the mayors of the two capitals of the newly formed province of Ogliastra. In an interview for the local online news outlet *Vistanet.it* (September 2022), both mayors focus on the right of self-administration, rather than on having a separate language or a history of autonomy. The Mayor of Lanusei sees the restoration of the provinces as a tremendous opportunity for the entire region, emphasizing the substantial restoration of crucial recognition for Ogliastra at the regional level. He points out that the importance doesn't solely lie in the concept of the province itself; rather, these concepts may be surpassed, or it is justifiable for their territory to have its own. Mayor Cannas from Tortolì echoes this sentiment, emphasizing the significance of providing Ogliastra with a missing tool. He underscores that areas like theirs, with cultural identity and economic homogeneity, can now self-determine through an intermediate entity, a facet that has been lacking in recent years. Cannas further emphasizes the general principle of self-determination that needs defending within constitutional limits. With municipal unions proving ineffective, he advocates for the need for another intermediate entity. He concludes by stressing the necessity of political responsibility to ensure the province functions effectively, avoiding its transformation into a bureaucratic structure.

6.3.3 The Metropolitan City of Cagliari and the Quasi Metropolitan City of Sassari

Along with the province of Gallura discussed in the previous subsection, the resistance to the reform aimed at consolidating functions and rescaling the territory has also been fueled by the city of Sassari. History and geography produced a very diverse region, creating ripe conditions for the development of two centers of power: Cagliari in the South and Sassari in the North. At the end of the sixteenth century, irreconcilable contrasts ignited between the cities of Cagliari and Sassari, with historical roots tracing back to the turbulent medieval period of the Sardinian Giudicati (discussed above). The division of the island into two zones of influence (Pisa in the south and Genoa in the north) during this time intensified conflicts characterized by changing alliances among cities, judges, and local lords with Italian and Hispanic powers overseas. This political disunity persisted into the Catalan period, significantly shaping the institutional structure of the island. The establishment of two major administrative divisions, Cagliari and Gallura in the south and Sassari and Logudoro in the north, marked a long-lasting territorial bipartition. Municipalities structured on the Catalan model were formed between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, solidifying a polycentric structure. These Sardinian municipalities, distinct from royal administration, held autonomous institutions with legal and economic privileges [Manconi, 2008].

The first signs of enduring competition between the two cities in northern Sardinia emerged in the early sixteenth century. The quality of the port, a crucial factor in determining economic hierarchies, played a decisive role. Cities lacking efficient ports, such as Sassari, Bosa, and Oristano, faced economic decline. The difficulties of Sassari and its port persisted in the seventeenth century due to financial constraints and trade blockades. Comparing demographic trends between

the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries reveals the divergent paths of Cagliari and Sassari. Cagliari experienced constant growth, while Sassari's demographic decline began with the plague of 1652, leading to a population stagnation by the late sixteenth century. Cagliari's ability to quickly replenish its workforce from the surrounding villages after the plague contributed to its economic resilience. In contrast, Sassari struggled to attract inhabitants and lost demographic ground to Alghero (just few kilometers away). The historical competition between the major cities of the Kingdom has a centuries-old history, intensifying during the parliamentary debates of the Kingdom's "cortes." During these political confrontations, the defense of prerogatives and preeminence becomes fervent, reflecting the consistent disunity of the Kingdom despite its municipal autonomy [Manconi, 2008].

All interviewees acknowledge the significant differences between the features and needs of Cagliari and Sassari, highlighting the need for a territorial articulation of power in Sardinia. A member of the executive of the Metropolitan City of Cagliari (Fratelli di Italia) underscores how the historical legacies are affecting the present efforts of territorial rescaling. Referencing the island's administrative self-governance during the judicial period, and the clear Catalan North-South division of the island, he emphasizes the crucial necessity for a bipolar articulation in Sardinia. Noting that over time, local populations must identify with a nearby governing authority. The reasoning presented is deeply rooted in the island's history, shaping a perspective that calls attention to the need for a nuanced and tailored approach to governance. The crucial role of localist legacies can be seen in both territorial reforms (2016 & 2021). Whilst partially influenced by the type of party organization of the regional government (as explained in chapter four), the two executives developed a vision of the territory that sought to appease (in 2016) and enable (in 2021) the local grievances. With regional law 2/2016, the *Democratic Party* led executive sought to consolidate the regional territory to meet



Figure 6.5: "The Metropolitan City will have a 'Super-Mayor'" (Sardinian Language: *And so it was Carnival* - play on words: the reform happened during Carnival + Carnasciali also means power change) [Unione Sarda January 22nd 2016]

the efficiency goals proposed by national law 56/2014. As presented above, the regional executive decreased the number of provinces from eight to four. Observers commended the creation of the Metropolitan City of Cagliari within boundaries distinct from the pre-existing province. Incorporating a cluster of 16 municipalities around the capital, the legislator created a unique Metropolitan City in Italy, where the institutional borders matched the functional ones.

Yet, the localist interests of other Sardinian territories resisted the creation of the Metropolitan City of Cagliari seeing it as a centralization of power negatively

affecting the rest of the region. The social and political discourses were critical of the electoral structure of the Metropolitan City (CM), which saw the mayor of Cagliari also becoming the leader of the CM. Figure 6.5 is one of many examples of the satirical narrative that the Sardinian newspapers published in response to the widespread discontent towards the perceived centralization of power in Cagliari. The effort against the so-called 'Cagliari-Centrism' has been particularly strong in Sassari. The Sassaressi lamented that if Cagliari was to be made a Metropolitan City, receiving the related institutional and economic benefits, then Sassari should have become one as well due to its illustrious history and large population. They also wanted to be differentiated institutionally from Olbia, Nuoro, and Oristano, deemed secondary players in the political and economic fabric of the region. In fact, under the regional reform, these three cities became 'Urban Network', de facto union of municipalities including a town with more than 30,000 inhabitants (basically maintaining the same jurisdictions as before - Figure 6.4).

A former member of the city executive of Sassari (*Democratic Party*) highlights how the historical legacies of competition between the cities of Sassari and Cagliari transpired in the rescaling negotiations:

”Among all the issues, the one that has been most bothersome for our city and territory is the lack of bipolarity between the metropolitan city of Cagliari. After a lengthy political negotiation with the then-president Pigliaru and the municipal administration, a new territorial entity was created—a kind of intermunicipal municipal union that was a hybrid between a true metropolitan city, constitutionally speaking, and a union of municipalities. This hybrid has been termed the Metropolitan Network.”

In fact, after months of pressuring the regional executive through its representatives in Cagliari, the legislator created an amendment that turned Sassari into a true additional Metropolitan City, but with a different nomenclature since the institution was created thanks to Sardinia's special statute, which allowed

it control of over matters of local institutions. The so-called "Rete" (Network) was equated with that of Cagliari, both in terms of resource allocation and in the promotion of development. The new amendment birthed the Metropolitan Network, described as a collaborative initiative involving neighboring towns, with a combined population exceeding 150,000 and essential national transportation hubs. Sassari, along with its surrounding areas, is the only Sardinian territory that perfectly fits this model. The leadership of this network is entrusted to the mayor of the most populous participating city, which, in this context, is Sassari itself. The primary responsibilities of these networks encompass adopting a shared strategic plan, collectively managing public services and technology systems, coordinating transportation plans, and fostering economic and social development.

A mayor from the Campidano area discusses how the regional executive development of the Metropolitan Network was a direct response to a political claim for the territory of Sassari. It's akin to how the de-jure establishment of the so-called medium-sized cities, which, in essence, finds no parallel elsewhere in Europe. Even there, it's just a form of political balancing by the regional decision-makers to appease the pressure from the localities. In other words, the *Democratic Party* effort to consolidate Sardinian territorial institution has been derailed by localist legacies that led to de-facto multiplication and fragmentation of territorial entities. *While the number of Provinces decreased under the leadership of the Democratic Party (catch-all party), the number of different types of institutions increased (Metropolitan Networks, Urban Networks), effectively furthering the fragmentation of the territory.*

Given the way localist legacies affected the reform (Regional Law 2/2016) of a catch-all party interested in consolidating and making governance more efficient, it is no surprise that with the following government composed by *Lega* and *Sardinian Action Party*, both mass parties, the local grievances would renovate the territorial

asset once more. Along with Gallura (Olbia-Tempio), the City of Sassari was again at the forefront to gain more power and autonomy relatively to the City of Cagliari. An expert on territorial politics recalls that even though the region responded to Sassari's claims during the Pigliaru era, granting Sassari the same functions and funding as a metropolitan city, not a euro less. However, for Sassari this fell short, as they sought more than just financial parity; they sought recognition and dignity. The political actors from Sassari supported the autonomous claims of Gallura in the regional council, in a 'I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine' type of agreement. This helped creating critical mass to sway the government towards recreating the provinces and 'upgrading' the Metropolitan Network of Sassari into a Metropolitan City like Cagliari (see Fig. 6.4).

During the days in which the Regional Council was voting on the latest territorial rescaling reform (Regional Law 7/2021). the newspaper *La Nuova Sardegna* reported that all the regional councilors of the center-right and a good portion of the opposition (*Democratic Party*) supported the Metropolitan City of Sassari. According to the majority's rapporteur, Antonello Peru, from the *UDC-Cambiamo* group, elected two years ago in the Sassari district, "the birth of the new Metropolitan City, which administers all 66 municipalities of the former Province, is a fundamental first step towards the territorial rebalancing of Sardinia" (La Nuova Sardinia, March 5th 2021). The localist pressures seem to have finally come to fruition for Sassari in September 2023, when the Regional Council gave the green light to the six Provinces and the Metropolitan City of Sassari. The local government reform was adopted in 2021 but remained on hold for two years due to a constitutional irregularity that had to be adjusted to get the approval from the Italian government.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the effects of localist institutional legacies in shaping territorial rescaling in the two Special Regions under study. The examination of case studies of Friuli Venezia Giulia and Sardinia provided insights into the relationship between present territorial rescaling decisions and the legacies of the past, offering concrete examples of how localist legacies breed fragmented territories. The analysis presented empirical examples, from the development of Metropolitan Cities to the lasting effects of past autonomous governments, demonstrating how institutional legacies profoundly influence a region's approach to territorial governance reforms. The exploration of these legacies unveiled varying degrees of community trust in public and private institutions, underscoring the diverse political and sub-cultural matrices. The localist legacies are rooted in different approaches to institutional collaboration and public management, deeply ingrained in the historical paths and current political developments of each region. Yet, the comparison shows that the theoretical framework can be applicable to very different territories, as the typologies of localism in Friuli Venezia Giulia and Sardinia differ due to their unique histories and subnational dynamics, but express a similar approach to rescaling. These regions resist integrated governance, creating fragmented entities better suited to address local grievances. The pattern of interaction between socio-cultural legacies and territorial decision-making might contribute to understanding reforms in other countries with similar region-state constitutional arrangements, like Spain.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

Seeking to explain what affects territorial rescaling variation among regions, this project examined the mechanisms behind the legislation on territorial governance between 2014 and 2021 across four Italian regions. This study has shown that an explanation of the patterns of territorial rescaling has to consider political, institutional, and cultural networks, emphasizing the negotiation and collaboration among actors across various levels of government. By blending place-based institutional legacies with party organization effects, the argument illustrates how regions perpetuate socio-political regulatory modes rooted in historical collaborations, public management, and identities dating back to Italian unification.

Drawing on North's concept of institutions as "the rules of the game," [North, 1991] the study underscores the pivotal role of legacies, encompassing formal rules and informal (cultural) norms, in shaping incentives, interests, and policymaking. Engaging with decentralization and federalism scholars, the research highlights the significance of regional institutional histories in designing intergovernmental relations. Central to the argument is the categorization of institutional legacies into localist and concerted approaches, which respectively advocate for fragmented and consolidated structures of governance. Contrary

to Putnam's static perspective, the study emphasizes the evolving and dynamic nature of regional institutional legacies. It asserts that while party electoral appeal influences policy outcomes, institutional legacies emerge as the stronger predictor of territorial differentiation, necessitating an adaptation to contextual specificities regardless of the governing party. These contextualized legacies are rooted in the past, but develop in time and are sensible to changes from within and from without.

Chapter one opens situating the project within the territorial politics literature. In chapter two, the theoretical framework defined the independent and the dependent variables along with their operationalization. It then presented my argument underscoring the pivotal role of institutional legacies and party organization in comprehending territorial dynamics. It elucidated how regions led by parties with catch-all strategies tend to consolidate governance due to their goal of gathering electoral support through programmatic politics aimed at making governance more efficient. Regions led by mass parties prefer territorial fragmentation because their organization relies on fostering representation of the collectivities already part of their electoral base. These mechanisms are secondary to the institutional legacies at work in each region. The data shows that regions with a concerted legacy focused on integrated, collaborative decision-making within the various territorial levels tend towards territorial consolidation. Regions with a localist legacy of independent local interest representation tend towards fragmented governance systems. Chapter three meticulously outlined the research design, discussing the subnational approach to case selection and elucidating the methodology conducive to explaining territorial rescaling mechanisms. Furthermore, it provided an essential sociopolitical background crucial for understanding the study.

Chapters four, five, and six presented empirical evidence bolstering the central argument. Chapter four explored the influence of regional governing party organiza-

tion on territorial governance reforms, discussing their role in shaping local society and fostering development through strategic regulatory mechanisms. In Emilia-Romagna, the dominance of the *Democratic Party* has led to significant changes in provincial functions and territorial consolidation, reflecting its catch-all approach to policymaking. The *Democratic Party*'s broad influence spans various institutional levels, cementing its position in regional leadership. Conversely, Veneto's response to provincial power shifts has been minimal, with adjustments made to existing provinces to suit local needs, aligning with mass party characteristics focused on deepening support within its core social base. The connection between Veneto's social fabric, small entrepreneurs, *La Lega*, and regional governance is evident in its response to the Delrio reform. In Friuli Venezia Giulia, the *Democratic Party* government enacted law 2/2014 inspired by Emilia-Romagna's municipal unions, demonstrating a catch-all party approach with limited local stakeholder input. Subsequently, a *La Lega* government applied a mass party strategy with law 21/2019, devolving power to localities for decision-making. Sardinia saw a top-down reform imposed by the *Democratic Party* in 2016 (law 2/2016), focusing on retrospective accountability and leveraging experience. However, a subsequent territorial reform (law 7/2021) by the mass parties *Partito Sardo d'Azione* and *La Lega* fragmented the territory, responding to the local grievances of the territory.

Chapters five and six offered a nuanced analysis of how institutional legacies impact territorial rescaling, categorizing regions into concerted or localist legacies and delineating their influence on current political developments and strategies in public management. I started with Emilia-Romagna, the only region characterized by concerted legacies. Here, institutions functioned well and enjoyed widespread appreciation from the citizenry, creating an environment conducive to programmatic territorial reforms. The region's strong civic culture fostered trust among all regional actors, from labor unions to industrial guilds and from municipalities

to the regional government. This trust led to the development of a relatively efficient system of territorial governance, with institutions playing a central role in coordinating stakeholders for the benefit of the territory. Next, I discussed Veneto, a region with localist legacies. The interviews showed that the regional responses to territorial issues tended to be more reactive, focusing on addressing grievances rather than engaging in programmatic politics. Veneto's localism is deeply rooted in its parochial culture, leading to a general mistrust of state institutions.

In chapter six, I showed how Friuli Venezia Giulia's complex political landscape, shaped by its border region status, language minorities, and historical heterogeneity, presents challenges to the consolidation of governance. Despite the *Democratic Party's* programmatic efforts through law 26/2014 to consolidate regional governance, localist legacies hindered its full implementation. Local actors pushed for amendments and resisted institutional cooperation forced from above, reflecting the region's intricate political dynamics, which ultimately developed fragmented rescaling of governance. Sardinia's political scene is characterized by unique localist politics rooted in historical subnational identities and personal networks tied to the territory. The island's remoteness and subaltern relationship with the Italian state amplify these dynamics, resulting in territorial fragmentation to appease individual territories and protect the electability of decision-makers.

7.1 Scope of the Argument

This study significantly advances our understanding of territorial politics with a comprehensive analysis of how institutional legacies and the organization of governing political parties contribute to territorial rescaling. By scrutinizing the formal rules and informal norms governing behavior, this research offers valuable insights into the intricate dynamics of regional governance, responding

to the dynamic challenges posed by shifting European and state structures. By interrogating how territorial actors navigate the contested political terrain, I shed light on the adaptive strategies employed in response to evolving geopolitical landscapes. Grounding the relevance of institutional and socio-cultural legacies, my argument underlines the power of local interests over sweeping central state-mandated reforms. In fact, the quest for varying degrees of self-governance among distinct regional communities not only influences their respective territories but also shapes the governmental structure within states and, arguably, the transnational governance to which they belong.

Italy is not alone in experiencing these transformative shifts. Nation-states worldwide are witnessing a wave of territorial reorganization, with authority and institutional functions being redistributed from central states to regional and supranational governments. The study of regional decision-making has gained prominence over time, initially overshadowed by alternative approaches such as behaviorist, functionalist, and modernist perspectives. Additionally, methodological nationalism previously restricted data collection efforts to the nation-state level. However, in recent years, the significance of territory, particularly at the regional level, has become increasingly evident, with regions transitioning from being perceived as mere "spaces" to active "actors" (Tatham in [Detterbeck and Hepburn, 2018]). This shift has been gradual but largely unidirectional, commencing in the 1970s with decentralization reforms in select Western European countries like France, Italy, Spain, Germany, Belgium, and the United Kingdom [Keating, 2014], and subsequently spreading globally [Eaton, 2022, Harmes, 2021, Hooghe et al., 2016].

The study's implications extend beyond the Italian context. Understanding multilevel governance systems is crucial for illuminating the mechanisms of resource and power distribution within societies. It offers valuable insights into how institutional legacies and party structures shape territorial policies, which can be applied

to other countries facing similar challenges. For instance, due to the remarkable similarities with the Italian case (formally unitary nation-state implementing major territorial reforms in reaction to the 2008 economic crisis), the French contexts may unveil unique historical collaboration patterns, public management traditions, and party organizational dynamics, which, when juxtaposed with formal institutions, could contribute to a nuanced understanding of the territorial effects of the MAP-TAM and NOTRE reforms [Bourdin and Torre, 2021]. Drawing inferences from these shadow cases could enrich the explanatory framework, offering a broader empirical foundation for comprehensively analyzing governance rescaling processes. To better accomplish the goal that they set out to achieve, territorial reforms should be elaborated with an understanding of the socio-political ecosystem of each region. While top-down, uniform reforms might be quicker and appease the pressures of national and supranational actors, they are less successful depending on the legacies of each territory.

Explaining how contextual variables drive specific territorial designs at the local level can inform policy recommendations that foster efficient and representative governance models to improve citizens' lives in Italy and beyond. To achieve their intended goals, territorial reforms should be tailored to the socio-political context of each region. While top-down, uniform reforms may satisfy national and supranational pressures, they are often less effective due to the diverse legacies of each territory. Understanding how contextual variables drive specific territorial designs at the local level can inform policy recommendations that promote efficient and representative governance models to enhance citizens' well-being in Italy and beyond.

7.2 Comparative and Policy Implications

As seen in the empirical chapters, territorial rescaling plays a pivotal role in democratic representation, wealth distribution, and the perpetuation of inequality. As central governments pursue geographically targeted interventions to achieve broader economic objectives, new disparities between localities emerge. Considering the importance of institutional legacies could reframe the way decision-makers develop initiatives like growth poles, new towns, regional plans, and development zones. Regions endowed with greater political power often garner a larger share of investments, thereby fostering economic growth, but also exacerbating territorial disparities. Concurrently, territorial politics study policy divergences driven by diverse regional interests and priorities, potentially fostering innovative problem-solving approaches or exacerbating preexisting tensions and inequalities. This trend is evident in reform processes observed in various countries such as France, Portugal, Spain, and the Netherlands, where regions and metropolitan areas are increasingly gaining prominence, while intermediate territorial levels like departments and provinces face scrutiny.

This dissertation contributes significantly to the analysis of subnational/regional political regimes. The proposed analytical framework offers a significant advantage by comparatively elucidating regional variation within a country over time. This study enhances previous static theoretical models [Putnam et al., 1993] by adopting a dynamic approach, considering temporal shifts (in Sardinia and Friuli Venezia Giulia), and integrating spatial dimensions at the local level. Furthermore, this dissertation contributes to the broader discussion of endogenous political institutions. While political scientists recognize the significant impact of institutional frameworks on various aspects of governance, there is often a failure to acknowledge that these institutions are not fixed. Recognizing the dynamic nature of political

institutions can enhance our understanding of political systems' operation and resilience globally.

Beyond its theoretical implications, this research holds several practical significances. Firstly, it provides valuable insights into the contested and ongoing process of Italian unification, offering a unique perspective on regional representation and minority rights and highlighting the influence of historical democratization and identity-building processes on policy outcomes. Secondly, it contributes to the literature on multilevel governance systems, offering a nuanced understanding of the interactions between different levels of government and their impact on territorial policies regarding resource allocation, representation, and power dynamics. Thirdly, it updates existing data by analyzing recent policies (2014-2021) and injects fresh insights into the study of institutional legacies by focusing on a novel selection of regional cases, such as Sardinia and Friuli Venezia Giulia. Previous research has focused on regions with ordinary statute, and much analysis has included the well-established cases of Veneto and Emilia-Romagna [Putnam et al., 1993, Diamanti, 1992, Messina, 2012, Almagisti and Zanellato, 2021]. Including two autonomous regions, with their cultural and linguistic features, underlined how different histories and constitutional rights can lead to comparable governance approaches. Lastly, this project adds to the discourse on the European Union's role in promoting regional integration and decentralization and its implications for member states' governance structures.

The results of this study have important policy implications for regional decision-makers. The role of localized institutional legacies underlined the necessity to redefine intergovernmental relationships based on specific policy approaches at different scales within established institutional frameworks. In other words, it underscores the need for institutional innovation across all levels of the national multi-level system. While the efficiency-driven approach of concerted realities like

Emilia-Romagna might indicate the need to foster territorial consolidation, the truth of the matter is that policy-makers should gain a deeper understanding of the historical and socio-political dynamics that characterize each community within a region or state. There is no silver bullet, and this research project has shown that (Friuli Venezia Giulia and Sardinia above all), 'copy-and-paste' territorial rescaling risks to create societal attrition if the needs of the territory are not fully understood. At the national level, this involves creating new opportunities for local experimentation and policy exchange. Within socio-economic regions (like Veneto's de facto Metropolitan City), it entails forming projected spaces, new territorial arenas for fostering local commitments to scale-specific development strategies. This results in a variety of grassroots initiatives and competition among state structures to establish new regulatory scales in response to pressures from both the European Union and local demands, necessitating new forms of institutional action.

7.3 Issues for Future Research

While focusing on institutional legacies, my theoretical framework considers how rescaling is partially affected by the governing party's organization, more specifically, the party of the President of the Regional Government (see chapter four). The President plays multiple pivotal roles in regional affairs, including external representation, issuing regulations, calling for regional referendums, and more importantly, enacting regional legislation. A potential limitation of this study could be the minimal consideration given to the party electoral appeals of other political actors. In other words, there could be unexplored institutional dynamics between coalition members, and between governmental parties and opposition parties. Future research could further consider political and institutional dynamics

within each regional case, to shed light on their potential influence on the way regional governments legislate territorial rescaling.

A potential avenue for future research involves expanding the theoretical framework developed in this study to other policy areas beyond the scope of the current research. While this study focuses on territorial rescaling, there are numerous other policy domains that could benefit from a similar analytical approach. By applying the theoretical framework to diverse policy contexts such as healthcare, education, environmental policy, immigration policy, or economic development, future research could explore how institutional legacies shape policy outcomes across a range of sectors. The potential focus on healthcare already arose from the interviewees' discussions of how their respective regional governments reacted to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the data collection happened over a span of 15 months in 2021 and 2022, the social and political repercussions of particular healthcare-related legislation were quite palpable. Indeed, an initial look at the way the interviewees described these decisions suggests that localist and concerted legacies might explain how regions organized their institutional responses to the pandemic. This expansion would enhance our understanding of regional governance and provide valuable insights into the broader implications of histories in various policy domains.

Another important direction for future research is to apply the theoretical framework developed in this study to other regionalized countries, such as Spain, the United Kingdom, or other federal countries, like the USA, Germany, or India. These countries present unique contexts with distinct historical, social, and political dynamics, offering rich opportunities for comparative analysis. By examining how my theoretical framework applies in different national contexts, we can further assess the generalizability and robustness of the framework across diverse settings. This comparative approach can shed light on the factors that shape territorial

governance structures and dynamics in different regions and contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities of regional politics and policymaking.

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Appendix A

Appendix

A.1 Interview Guide

Thank you for the time you have given me. This interview will be recorded and your responses will be anonymized. I ask you to answer the questions with as much detail as possible; examples that illuminate your perspective are particularly appreciated. For comments, clarifications, and questions, you can contact me via email.

Regional context to introduce the topic.

a) In your opinion, why did the regional government reform local entities with the regional law of [enter regional details]?

b) What influenced the choice implemented by [enter regional details]? How do you interpret the fact that the regional reform came before the national law [enter regional details]?

c) How would you describe the 'historical/political moment' of that time? Both in the region and in Italy?

d) In general, how would you describe the dynamics of partisanship in the region? Is there cohesion between institutional levels within the parties? e) What

territorial vision led to this new reform?

f) What role did territorial demands play in influencing this new structure? In other words, what were the pressures from the various institutional levels? And from the parties?

After this chronological excursus, could you consider these questions holistically:

g) In your opinion, do the decisions made by the regional governments ([enter regional details]) have an identity, linguistic, cultural imprint? Should the provinces be understood as a territorial representation of identities ([enter regional details])? What can you tell me about the potential influence of parochialism on regional territorial reforms?

h) What are the unique characteristics of [enter regional details] compared to other regions (autonomous and non-autonomous)? In general, how would you explain the peculiar trajectory of the territorial structure of [enter regional details] from 2014 to today?

Conclusion

i) Do you have any other ideas, comments? Who else can I talk to at the national/regional/large area/municipal level? Do you have their contacts?

Thank you very much!

A.2 Interviewee Information

Region	Interviewees
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	32
Sardegna	30
Emilia-Romagna	18
Veneto	22
General Experts	2
TOT	104

Institutional Role	Primary	Secondary
Regional Legislative	25	3
Regional Executive	13	2
Municipal Executive	3	8
Municipal Legislative	3	17
Vast Area Legislative	2	5
Vast Area Executive	3	12
Expert - Admin	27	15
Mayor	23	11
Academic	4	5

Party Affiliation - Interviewees	
Lega Zaia	2
Lega Salvini	4
Partito Democratico	32
Lista Civica Dx	4
Lista Civica Sx	10
Lista Civica Cx	4
Riformatori Sardi	2
E'-R Coraggiosa, Ecologista e Progressista	1
Patto per L'Autonomia F'-VG	1
Open FVG	1
Progetto FVG	1
Forza Italia	2
Movimento 5 Stelle	1
Progressisti ²⁵⁶	2
Partito Sardo d'Azione	2

Figure A.1: Interviewee Information