

# RURAL ACCESSIBILITY IN EUROPEAN REGIONS

Edited by  
**Elisabetta Vitale Brovarone,**  
**Giancarlo Cotella** and  
**Luca Staricco**

# RURAL ACCESSIBILITY IN EUROPEAN REGIONS

*Rural Accessibility in European Regions* explores concepts, methodologies, and case studies dealing with accessibility in European rural areas, embracing cultural, socioeconomic, and governance aspects that play a key role for accessibility policies in rural and peripheral areas.

In the first part, the chapters introduce rural accessibility challenges, present a methodology to support policymaking for enhancing accessibility in rural areas and apply it to case studies in the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, and Sweden. In the second part, additional cases from Poland, Germany, Greece, and France provide alternative approaches to the topic, and a research agenda is proposed. Overall, the book contributes to a conceptualisation of rural accessibility, addressing challenges and potentials for rural accessibility and urban–rural relationships in European regions.

The book fills a gap in the existing bodies of literature on accessibility and on rural planning, bridging the two spheres with an interdisciplinary approach to rural accessibility for mobility, planning, and regional studies.

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# FOREWORD

## **Addressing the Rural Gap and Accessibility**

The European integration project has once again come to terms with the rural question. In the mid-1980s the transformation of the Common Agricultural Policy and the enacting of rural development policies meant a radical turn for rural territories. On the one hand, agricultural activities were incorporated into the global value chains. On the other hand, development policies allowed for the modernisation and improvements in the quality of rural life. However, this process of rural restructuring has not prevented the rural issue from reappearing three decades later on the agenda of social concerns under the reality of depopulation and demographic decline.

The politics of modernisation and rural development assume that the rural decline is rooted in economic backwardness and productive disconnection from the big markets. It was considered that the impetus for development would, by means of improvements in incomes, determine the improvement in living conditions. This argument failed to appreciate that the surge in European well-being during the second half of the twentieth century was brought about by a collective project that entrusted its success in state policies. This lack of understanding has contributed to the logic of redistribution and the process of social protection failing to take differences between territories and habitats into account.

The rural restructuring has meant changes in the productive organisation, by means of a wide diversification of activities and the extension of multifunctionality; however, it also has brought about an increase in mobility and daily commuting. The growth of the European economies has continued to follow the urban concentration model which is based on economies of scale. Rural–urban commuting has allowed the rural population to remain stable and permitted its connection with the urban job markets. The generalisation and intensification of rural mobility promote a territorial interconnection that diminishes the urban–rural frontiers (Champion, Coombes and Brown 2008).

This increase in rural mobility has several consequences. In the first place, it generates important social inequalities due to the different mobility capacities and resources that rural inhabitants have. Compared to highly mobile groups, such as middle-aged men and professionals, others remain immobilised, as women with family responsibilities and low-income immigrants are. In terms of accessibility to services and opportunities, these groups are progressively relegated to secondary positions. Furthermore, rural mobility is made up almost exclusively of private motoring. In areas of low density and high dispersion, privately owned cars constitute the main transportation option. The centrality that the automobile has acquired represents an important challenge in territorial planning and transport organisation. Furthermore, it increases the exclusion of certain groups, such as the elderly, those with reduced capacities to have a motorised daily life, and those who cannot afford the significant costs involved. As a result, mobility, which is crucial for the sustainability of rural areas, represents a new source of social exclusion.

European rural areas are located on the edges of economic growth and innovation because both processes are dependent on the concentration of capital, resources, labour, capacity to consume, and knowledge. Similarly, social policies have favoured the concentration in the provision of services according to demographic density criteria. The offer of healthcare, education, and cultural services have been developed without consideration for the spatial friction and the cost of mobility, thus reinforcing the urban–rural divide concerning social conditions. The difficulties to access services have determined a slow process of liveliness decline. For example, in Europe, as a whole fecundity has become concentrated in suburban areas (Kulu and Boye 2009), places where there is a better connection to educational opportunities and caring services cost less in terms of time and money. Young rural couples end up moving to optimise their residence place between labour supply and healthcare demand. The rural gap is principally producing the lack of accessibility to welfare, which may be considered as a form of exclusion from citizenship rights.

While Europe ages, the rural areas are over-ageing and they have lower birth rates along with persistent youth emigration. The ageing society has a very special incidence in rural territories whereby higher demand for related healthcare and assistance services combines with their being less accessible. This lack of accessibility is compensated for by the middle-aged population through increased mobility. Nevertheless, opportunities for mobility among the older citizens are reduced, and this state of dependence means added costs in terms of time, dedication, and money for the intermediate generations.

This complex challenge of rural accessibility is derived from the way the geographic problems, such as dispersion and distance, and social dimensions, such as ageing and the digital divide, combine. The geographic definitions of accessibility are distorted by demographic and social conditions. The rural social composition is changing and also determines how the challenges of accessibility and new demands of public policies define. The interrelationships between accessibility, mobility, and the urban–rural divide require new focuses that facilitate the understanding of how the different rural and social panoramas are configured; these may be residential, tourist, commuting districts, remote regions, and so forth (Camarero and Oliva 2019).

It is crucial to incorporate the new paradigms of digital, remote, and assisted accessibility in order to reduce social inequality, as well as including forms of shared mobility and on-demand transport systems. These must be understood as public commons, and not merely technological advances, and their socio-technical configuration must be incorporated into forms of governance (Oliva and Camarero 2019). Their potential makes the territory porous; favouring equitable accessibility to the opportunities and services will determine the welfare of the rural areas, their capacity to attract resources and residents and to avoid social decapitalisation, as well as reinforce rural resilience when facing changes.

Rural issues, such as health services, transport, agriculture, and tourism, are being addressed by several administrative departments, but policies inspired by urban visions are not able to adjust themselves to the complex reality of rurality (Sherry and Shortall 2019). This need for specialised attention has given an impetus to rural proofing [European Parliament Resolution 2018/2720 (RSP)]. Thus, the rural policies are evolving towards ways of thinking about planning that are different from the standardised policy recipes for a world that requires an effective hybridisation with urban and technological processes.

With the goal of advancing European rural–urban connectivity the book *Rural Accessibility in Non-Metropolitan Regions. Concepts, Methodologies and Policies*, edited by Elisabetta Vitale Brovarone, Giancarlo Cotella, and Luca Staricco, offers particularly relevant findings to understand the role of accessibility and mobility in rural sustainability. The powerful analysis based on scientific evidence from case studies developed in eight countries across Europe is highly valuable and a unique contribution to reflect on the perspectives and the analytical and conceptual issues that are required, as well as to policy design that considers the conversation between planning and local needs.

The decline of rural areas cannot be understood in terms of economic development, but rather in terms of accessibility. Definitively, it must be interpreted in terms of equality, social justice, and citizenship (Sheller 2018). The consideration of a just and egalitarian society in terms of mobility, as suggested by Cass, Shove and Urry (2005), is crucial when broaching the rural–urban divide. Comprehension of accessibility as a matter of citizenship is the starting point for removing the rural issue from the socioterritorial problems' agenda, as well as for advancing the construction of a socially sustainable Europe.

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# EDITORS' PREFACE

The intention of writing a book on rural accessibility in European regions arose in our minds in 2019, while working on the ESPON URRUC project – *Urban–rural connections in non-metropolitan areas* ([www.espon.eu/urruc](http://www.espon.eu/urruc)). The initial idea was to disseminate the results of the project through a collection of the four case studies of the project and its conceptual and methodological approach. The URRUC project allowed us to enter the field of accessibility in rural areas, which we had till then only touched upon with tangential research lines and experiences, either focusing on mobility and accessibility or dealing with the development of rural areas. While working on the project, we became progressively aware of the knowledge and policy gaps that characterise rural accessibility. Therefore, we decided to develop more in depth our understanding of rural accessibility challenges and of how these may be addressed. As a consequence, our editorial project expanded its boundaries incrementally, to complement the URRUC findings with other perspectives. In so doing, it turned into a more ambitious project, that aims to make a significant contribution to the advancement of rural accessibility research and policymaking.

Whereas accessibility challenges of rural areas are generally acknowledged, they have never been at the top of the research, policy, and planning agenda, due to a number of mainstream paradigms that consider rural areas as a “weak” spot for territorial development, hence deserving less attention by academics and policymakers. Moreover, attempts to deal with the topic got often trapped in the evanescence of the boundaries of the concept of “rural”, which have been defined and classified in several different ways, with reference to rural areas’ production structures, their distance from urban centres, and so on. To a similar extent, also the concept of accessibility, although increasingly present in the academic debate, is characterised by various meanings and its application in the planning practice is still rather limited. What are rural areas? Which type of rural areas are we talking about? Why not rather talking about peripheral instead of rural areas? Why talking about

accessibility instead of mobility or connectivity in rural areas? These questions and many others have come to our mind, also as a consequence of the solicitations received by the various colleagues we have engaged with.

Being aware of the challenges that surround any attempt to define rurality and rural accessibility more precisely, this book acknowledges the need to address this too-often overlooked issue. Its main aim is to contribute to filling the gap in the existing bodies of literature on accessibility and rural planning, to improving knowledge on rural accessibility and, more in general, to fostering the consolidation of rural accessibility as a stand-alone research subject. To this aim, the book adopts an interdisciplinary approach, that goes beyond transportation planning research, to embrace those socioeconomic, cultural, and governance aspects that are crucial to the understanding of rural accessibility. In the 12 chapters collected in this volume, the reader will discover a number of different conceptual and methodological approaches to rural accessibility, and the way these have been applied to empirical case studies across European rural regions. Altogether, these contributions suggest that a more holistic approach to rural accessibility is required, if the challenges it raises are to be tackled to their very core.

Since we as editors and most of the contributors were approaching rural accessibility issues and the proposed case studies from our urban-centric perspective, we were aware that there was a risk of falling into the cliché of nostalgic interpretations of the rural world; we did our best not to fall into this trap, and it will be up to the readers to judge if we succeeded or not. As the approaches and methods presented in the various chapters are the results of fieldwork and ongoing and direct dialogue with stakeholders living in these areas, our hope is that this has contributed to enhance our understating of the issues at stake. In addition, some of the contributors are living or working in the rural areas targeted by the study, hence offering an expert point of view from the inside and challenging urban perspectives.

To conclude, we genuinely admit that, in some ways, the process has generated as many questions as answers. However, if the book provides an insight into the debates surrounding rural accessibility in European regions, and generates additional engagement and critical reflections, then this will be enough of a reward for our work and we will consider our goal achieved.

*The editors*

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*The editors*



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# 1

## RURAL ACCESSIBILITY IN EUROPEAN REGIONS

### Exploring Uncharted Territory

*Elisabetta Vitale Brovarone, Giancarlo Cotella,  
and Luca Staricco*

#### Introduction

European rural areas are very heterogeneous and may differ much from each other. At the same time, they are characterised by rather similar accessibility challenges, that mostly depend on their low density, scattered demand, and distance from service provision centres (Moseley 1979; Klaassen 1985; Küpper *et al.* 2018). The accessibility of rural areas is not only related to site-specific situations but also to their socio-economic contexts, policy environments, and cultural attitudes (Camarero *et al.* 2020; Vitale Brovarone and Cotella 2020). As a consequence of the urban-centred approach that generally characterises policy and research in Europe (Harrison and Heley 2015; Cotella 2019; Urso 2021), researches and policies on rural accessibility are not abundant and often lack appropriate interpretive paradigms. Rural accessibility is generally addressed in the literature from two main perspectives: one focusing on rural planning and devoting some interest to mobility and accessibility issues (Gallent *et al.* 2015; Küpper *et al.* 2018; Scott *et al.* 2019b), and the other centred on transport and mobility, which (more sporadically) gives some attention to rural and mountain communities. The latter mainly shows a mobility-oriented approach, often focusing on demand responsive transport as a means to cope with the inadequacy of traditional public transport and social exclusion (Farrington and Farrington 2005; Alonso-González *et al.* 2018; Avermann and Schlüter 2020), while however disregarding other relevant components of rural accessibility.

Recognising this knowledge gap, this book positions at the intersection of the aforementioned perspectives, focusing more explicitly on the accessibility of rural areas in the European regions. In so doing, it unfolds the main paradigms and concepts that are useful to further understand the topic, while at the same time presenting different approaches and methodologies in support of policymaking that derive from a number of empirical case studies focused on rural accessibility and

urban–rural connectivity challenges. In so doing, it aims to contribute to filling the gap in the existing bodies of literature on accessibility and rural planning, bridging these two spheres with an interdisciplinary approach to rural accessibility. As a consequence, the proposed perspective is not limited to transportation planning but embraces more holistically those cultural, socioeconomic, and governance aspects that, in remote areas, play a key role in accessibility policies. More precisely, the conceptual and methodological issues that form the basis for this book stem from the assumption that the accessibility of rural areas is key to the well-being of their communities, and that, in turn, this is related to several aspects, among which are territorial cohesion and the preservation of territorial capital. Another key assumption is the need to deal with rural accessibility from a wide-ranging perspective, applying different analytical categories and potential solutions from those that are usually applied to urban contexts.

In the context of the book, this chapter serves as an introduction, as it sketches out its main rationale and introduces the different issues that will be dealt with in more detail in the following chapters. First, it introduces the main elements that characterise and affect accessibility in rural areas, also with respect to the COVID-19 emergency and to the challenges and the opportunities that the latter raises. Then, it provides an overview of how rural areas, and more in detail their accessibility, are addressed within the European Union’s (EU’s) strategy and policymaking. Particular attention is dedicated to the main research activities recently implemented on the matter, and among them to the project ESPON URRUC,<sup>1</sup> from which the intention to develop a book devoted to these issues originated. Finally, the chapter offers the readers a roadmap that introduces the various parts and chapters composing the book, in so doing helping them to navigate its contents.

## Preliminary Conceptual Coordinates

Rural areas, and the “rural” in general, can be observed, analysed, and conceptualised from various angles. Since the second half of the last century, rural studies have tried to define and conceptualise the rural, with functional positivist attempts of delimitation of rural areas, as well as attempts to capture the social and cultural dimensions of rurality (Gray 2000; Woods 2009; Gallent and Gkartzios 2019). Beyond popular imagination of rural archetypes, the conceptual appropriateness of the notion of rural itself has been even questioned (Hoggart 1990), while others suggested more nuanced consideration of rural spaces, proposing notions and labels, such as the rural–urban continuum (Pahl 1966), rurban, non-urban, shadow landscapes (Bryant *et al.* 2011), and so on.

The OECD identifies in its overview of regional and rural planning three key phases in the evolution of approaches to the rural: (i) the old paradigm, in which the rural was everything that is non-urban; (ii) the new rural paradigm, from 2006 onwards, a more nuanced phase in which the idea of rural comprised a variety of distinct types of places; and (iii) the “rural policy 3.0”, that distinguishes three types of rural areas depending on their relation with functional urban areas (either being

within, close, or far from) [OECD 2016, cited in Tomaney *et al.* (2019)]. For the sake of simplicity, and following the path paved by scholars who acknowledge the rural as an ontological category rather than a residual part of the urban (Scott *et al.* 2019a; Urso 2021), or a constitutive outside (Roy 2016; Vanolo 2019), this volume refers to the “rural” in the broadest sense, comprising various “rurals”, from near-urban hinterlands to remote wilderness (Gallent and Gkartzios 2019). Despite the specificities of each area and context, different rural areas have been affected to varying degrees by the processes and phenomena mentioned in the following.

Many European rural areas have undergone intense processes of marginalisation. Active population groups, in particular, have been attracted by urban poles; hence, these areas have been progressively emptied and the ageing index has increased. Depopulation and ageing are the most evident phenomena of the marginalisation of rural areas. However, several other factors of marginalisation make the situation far more complex. In the last century, urban–rural relations have evolved into a complex system of interactions and, as a matter of fact, also as a consequence of the increasing globalisation, the urban society has taken root and permeated the rural society. This process has had material and immaterial implications: for example, on the one hand, the proliferation of second homes and accommodation facilities, for the tourist and leisure exploitation of rural assets by urban dwellers; on the other hand, the permeation of urban economic, political, and cultural models, influencing and contaminating local values, identities, and ambitions. The value of rural areas as places of production has progressively given way to their attractiveness as places for tourism and leisure, and hence for consumption (Gallent and Gkartzios 2019). These processes induced a rarefaction of the rural *civitas*, “that set of social ties, functions, services and institutions capable of offering citizens the advantages of a civilized life” (Dematteis 2016: 15, translation by the authors). Services and amenities have progressively decreased since the second half of the last century, as the number of potential users needed to ensure their provision went away (Küpper *et al.* 2018; Camarero and Oliva 2019). This socioeconomic dismantling became part of a spiral of decline, where the dependence of rural dwellers on urban nodes is both the cause and the consequence.

Altogether, these phenomena and processes raise a number of accessibility issues that see rural areas at the centre, at the same time pointing out how accessibility and mobility are key aspects that anyone aiming at understanding and addressing the marginalisation of rural areas needs to consider. Due to their geographical connotation and settlement pattern, rural areas feature low accessibility in comparison to urban contexts. Low density and scattered small towns and villages make traditional public transport services inadequate and inefficient (Daniels and Mulley 2012; Davison *et al.* 2012). Therefore, it is not surprising that the people who live, work, or come to these areas for leisure mostly travel by car. Car dependence and scarcely efficient public transport services are mutually influencing, and the most affected by this situation are those who do not have access to a car (Shergold *et al.* 2012; Mattioli 2017; Binder and Matern 2019). Moreover, although rural areas are in the popular imagination places of slowness



and stillness, on the contrary, the lack of essential services and distance between activities also implies greater mobility. Whereas digitalisation can contribute to improving rural accessibility reducing the need to travel, at the same time, peripheral areas very often lack adequate digital infrastructures and competences (Philip *et al.* 2017).

### **The COVID-19 Pandemic: A Window of Opportunity?**

Since the beginning of 2020, the outburst of the COVID-19 virus contributed to add further complexity to the ongoing territorial development trajectories, and even more so to the development of strategies and policies to address the latter. Whereas, until recently, all previsions agreed that the growing urbanisation trends were unstoppable as well as desirable (United Nation 2011; Zhang 2016; Schmal 1981), the pandemic has abruptly put this perspective into crisis: cities started to be perceived as environments presenting a higher risk of infection, due to the close proximity among residents and the potential to amplify the pandemic through high mobility rates and increased human contact (Biglieri *et al.* 2020; Connolly *et al.* 2020; Faburel and Astier 2020; OECD 2020).

Also rural areas have been challenged by the COVID-19 emergency in many ways, to a large extent exacerbating existing criticalities, such as higher exposure to severe illness due to high old-age index, digital divide, limited access to health services, lack of local services and opportunities, etc. (Phillipson *et al.* 2020; Mueller *et al.* 2021). At the same time, they progressively regained a role in the political debate, thanks to the arguments brought forward by experts coming from various disciplinary fields, that started to look at the rural as a “safe haven” where health is easier to preserve while at the same time enjoying a higher quality of life (Giovara 2020; Nathan and Overman 2020). As a matter of fact, numerous rural areas around Europe have since then seen an increasing relocation of urban dwellers that, thanks to the home-working possibilities, decided to move away from those denser areas that they perceived as more dangerous, towards places that could provide larger spaces, easier access to nature and, most importantly, less physical proximity.

It is important to stress that, besides some immediate effects on local consumption, these processes are likely to raise both short- and long-term criticalities and will not necessarily contribute to improving rural conditions (Gallent 2020). Life in rural areas remains problematic and constellated by numerous challenges for those who resisted and keep struggling to live there, and the general idea of migration of urban dwellers in rural areas as of today sounds rather naïve, if not for selected privileged categories of workers or relatively well-off citizens aiming at implementing a “rural turn” to their lives (Cotella and Vitale Brovarone 2020a, 2021). A similar conclusion has been recently reached by the European Committee of Regions that, together with the European Parliament Intergroup on Rural, Mountainous and Remote Areas and other pan-European institutions, has argued in favour of the development of a rural agenda after the COVID-19 crisis.<sup>2</sup> In this light, further

investigation of the reasons why rural areas have been undergoing intense and tough marginalisation processes for some time is needed, together with thorough considerations on how and what type of policies and actions may contribute to invert these trends.

Far from passively accepting the recent claims towards a return to the rural *tout court*, we argue that, as with every crisis, the pandemic emergency that our societies are currently facing also brought along with it the opportunity to rethink rural areas and urban–rural relations (Cotella and Vitale Brovarone 2020a, 2021; Luca *et al.* 2020; OECD 2020). This calls for exploring once more and further unveiling the complex interrelations linking the several factors at play, in order to allow for the development of more comprehensive action on the roots of rural marginalisation. In particular, the asymmetric impact of the crisis between urban and rural areas (in relation to both health and socioeconomic dynamics) calls for a shift from urban–centric development paradigms to policies that explicitly focus on urban–rural interdependences and acknowledge the reasons that led to the progressive marginalisation of rural areas in the first place. While the urban has dominated until now the policy discourse and, even when addressed, rural areas have been subject to urban–centred interpretations and ambitions, the rural cannot be simply considered as an extension of it and deserves specific focus and policies (Scott *et al.* 2019b; Vitale Brovarone 2021).

In sum, the current situation, even if forced and temporary, opens a “window of opportunity” (Kingdon and Stano 1984), a specific moment in time where contextual conditions let us experiment with innovative policies. Academics and policymakers are called to a joint effort for an in-depth understanding of and action on rurality, with place-sensitive, multilevel approaches and strategies, in so doing supporting regional and local actors in seizing this unprecedented chance for the adoption of policies and actions that are tailored on the actual characteristics of each territory. A systemic intervention to make rural areas liveable can turn them into a truly complementary dimension of the urban. Beyond the rhetoric and the COVID-19 pandemic, a renewed centrality of the rural synergising with the urban would be a milestone towards the enhancement of the resilience of the whole territorial system.

## Rural Accessibility in European Research and Policy

The relevance of the aforementioned issues for the overall economic, social, and territorial cohesion of the European Continent is certainly acknowledged by the EU Institutions that, through time, have commissioned the development of an increasing number of pan-European research projects on the matter. The knowledge and evidence collected through this activity contributed to the consolidation of a number of dedicated policy objectives within the main EU spatial development strategies. However, further bridges between research, policy, and practice need to be built, an activity that the research project ESPON URRUC has attempted to contribute to.

## ***The State of the Art of European Research***

In the last decade, the issue of accessibility and connectivity in non-metropolitan and low-demand areas has been investigated by a number of European research projects, in particular in the framework of the Interreg European territorial cooperation programme.<sup>3</sup> Some of these projects adopted a comprehensive approach to the theme of rural accessibility. The Interreg IVC MOVE ON GREEN – *Improving Sustainable Transport in Rural Areas* (2012–2014) aimed to improve the design and effectiveness of regional policies on sustainable transport in rural and mountain areas, by providing a set of policy guidelines and a collection of good practices. The ESPON PRO-FECY – *Inner Peripheries: National Territories Facing Challenges of Access to Basic Services of General Interest* (2016–2017), which will be presented in more detail in Chapter 2, focused on the development of strategies for inner peripheries at the European level, aiming to overcome their marginalisation through the increase of accessibility to services of general interest. The Interreg Central Europe RUMOBIL (2016–2019) tested a number of innovative applications to better link sparsely populated peripheral areas to a primary, secondary, or tertiary transport node of the European and national passenger transport networks; pilot actions, strategies, and implementation solutions were suggested in order to improve transport plans. Another Interreg Central Europe project, PERIPHERAL ACCESS – *Transnational Cooperation and Partnership for Better Public Transport in Peripheral and Cross-Border Regions* (2017–2020), proposed concrete action plans and innovative pilot actions for multimodal integrated transport, enhanced use of information and communication technologies (ICT), and better cooperation through transport associations and cross-border marketing. The project SMARTA – *Smart rural transport areas* (2018–2020) focused on how to exploit existing mobility policies and practices in European rural areas and explored ways to support sustainable shared mobility interconnected with public transport. The Interreg Europe OPTITRANS – *Optimisation of Public Transport Policies for Green Mobility* (2017–2021) sought to improve public transport policies in order to reduce the carbon footprint of mobility in peripheral and rural areas, by promoting better integration of low-carbon modes, ticketing and timetables, use of ICT, higher passenger comfort, and better image of public transport.

Other research projects were more focused on specific issues concerning rural accessibility. In particular, the implications of tourism on mobility patterns in rural areas were analysed by three transnational projects. The South-East Europe ACCESS2MOUNTAIN – *Sustainable Mobility and Tourism in Sensitive Areas of the Alps and the Carpathians* (2011–2014) – aimed to achieve environmentally friendly tourism and to ensure accessibility and connection to, between, and in sensitive regions of the Alps and the Carpathians, by improving railway and multimodal connections. In the case of the Intelligent Energy Europe STARTER – *Sustainable Transport for Areas With Tourism Through Energy Reduction* (2012–2014), the main objective was to shift tourists from private cars to more sustainable mobility options, by the implementation of “Local Travel Plan Networks” aimed at providing residents and tourists with alternative solutions for transport and increasing

their awareness regarding energy and environmental impacts. Similarly, the Interreg Baltic Sea Region MARA – *Mobility and Accessibility in Rural Areas* (2019–2021) developed several mobility mapping tools and alternative mobility pilot cases in its partner regions to improve the accessibility and mobility in touristic remote areas.

The role of ICT in improving rural accessibility was the main focus of the Med LIMIT4WEDA – *Light Mobility and Information Technology for Weak Demand Areas* (2010–2013), which was aimed to enhance mobility between rural and urban areas, test technologies for innovative transport solutions. The Interreg North Sea Region ITRACT – *Improving Transport and Accessibility Through New Communication Technologies* (2012–2014) bridged innovative technological applications (ICT, satellite, wireless broadband, and sensor technology) and socioeconomic experts for improving the virtual and physical modes of transport in rural areas. Other projects were more interested in analysing the main issues of the transport demand in rural areas and collecting passenger feedbacks to mobility consulting campaigns (Intelligent Energy Europe SMARTMOVE – *Promoting Public Transport Use in Rural Areas*, 2014–2016), or transferring best practices of flexible transport solutions to increase the social inclusion of disadvantaged areas (Interreg IVC FLIPPER – *Flexible Transport Services and ICT Platform for Eco-Mobility in Urban and Rural European Areas*, 2008–2011).

Despite the great variety of approaches, objectives, and proposed solutions, the reviewed projects feature some recurring elements, that represent as many key issues in relation to the topic of this book. Most projects are policy oriented, and the transferability of good practices and the development of toolboxes is a frequent focus. This, on the one hand, lets emerge that theoretical research aimed at conceptualising and understanding rural accessibility challenges is still needed. On the other hand, the policy-oriented nature of research on rural accessibility reflects the fact that accessibility problems are a widespread challenge in many rural areas, urging action. Whereas actions aimed to tackle this challenge have been extensively developed, they need to be tailored case by case according to local institutional, socioeconomic, and territorial conditions. It is not a case if a number of projects propose sets of indicators to assess these conditions, in line with a place-based approach (Barca 2009). Infrastructure provision is not the only challenge, and traditional transport services are clearly not appropriate to secure rural accessibility; on the contrary, flexible transport solutions are requested, as well as ICT platforms to detect the existing and latent mobility demand in these areas, and to adapt the flexible offer to it. Moreover, participation and involvement of local stakeholders in the analysis of the challenges and in the identification of solutions are acknowledged as crucial.

### ***Rural Accessibility Within EU Strategies and Policies***

The EU had an implicit spatial agenda since its inception and, since the end of the 1980s, addresses the territorial development of its regions through a growing number of dedicated strategies and funding instruments (Cotella and Janin Rivolin 2015;

Cotella 2020; Dühr *et al.* 2010). This action is legitimised by the inclusion of the objective of economic and social cohesion in the Single European Act in 1987, and by the addition of a territorial dimension to the latter with the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009.

The strategic documents that have been developed through time to set the main coordinates that territorial development and, more in particular, the distribution of funding should have followed, all stress the importance to tackle economic, social, and territorial disparities. In particular, the European Spatial Development Perspective (CEC 1999) explicitly includes “polycentric spatial development and new urban–rural relations” as one of its three overarching objectives. More importantly, the latter includes two policy aims that address rural areas in detail, one focusing on “indigenous development, diverse and productive rural areas” and the second calling for a renewed “urban–rural partnership” (*ibid.*, pp. 23–26). These objectives and aims were then consolidated in the documents that followed up (i.e. the Territorial Agendas of the European Union 2020 and 2020+, respectively, DE Presidency 2007 and HU Presidency 2011), all the way until the recently approved Territorial agenda 2030 (DE Presidency 2020).

At the same time, however, the same documents argue that the objective of economic, social, and territorial cohesion should be pursued with in mind the enhancement of the overall competitiveness of the European territory. The apparent equivalence of the two goals of cohesion and competitiveness in the EU discourse is a clear indication of the mechanisms that stand behind the formulation of the latter, that evolves and consolidates as a consequence of the juxtaposition of different (and often partially conflicting) storylines that are underpinned by variable coalitions of national and regional actors (Waterhout 2008; Adams *et al.* 2011). At the same time, this equivalence is only virtual, as it is true that, when it comes to investing resources, to target more developed areas (as for instance cities and their hinterlands) can provide a higher economic turnout than investing the same amount of resources in more remote regions. Hence a political choice is required, whether to invest in pulling areas and wait for development to trickle down from there to the rest of the territory, or to focus on less performing areas, to the detriment of a maximisation of the economic benefits.

This tension between the storylines of a more competitive *versus* a more cohesive Europe seems to have resolved with the prevalence of the former, as it is partially testified by the growingly urban–centric rationale that underpins the recent developments of the EU spatial agenda.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, further evidence is detectable when examining the logics according to which through time the EU has been distributing resources to its territories through the cohesion policy, and the results achieved through the latter. Whereas researchers have long speculated on the extent to which the Cohesion Policy has delivered the expected results in terms of convergence among EU territories, it has mostly generated an added value for the development of the main urban nodes and of the rural areas nearby, that had the possibility to exploit the benefits of agglomeration economies by integrating with cities (Dijkstra *et al.* 2013, 2015). On the contrary, more

isolated or remote rural areas present very limited capabilities to attract valuable economic actors, and this undermines the impact of the EU support therein. As a result, whereas the EU cohesion policy certainly contributed to enhancing convergence between countries and regions, at the same time it triggered a number of processes that had in various cases worsened intra-regional disparities (Gagliardi and Percoco 2017).

One of the main reasons behind this outcome is inherent to the mechanism according to which the Structural Funds are distributed. The adoption of NUTS2 regions as the main scale to assess the level of development of a territory does not allow for further reasoning on the actual development trajectories therein, *de facto* ignoring that also the most developed regions may include underdeveloped territories. Also the emergence of the so-called place-based approach (Barca 2009), as an attempt to critically reassess the EU cohesion policy and to reformulate its rationale in “territorialist” terms, did not produce the expected results. More in detail, the idea to combine bottom-up and top-down elements towards greater local experimentalism, innovation, and actor mobilisation that ensure flexibility in programming to capitalise on place-specific assets, did not take roots if not in specific domestic cases.<sup>5</sup> The Commission’s proposals for the period 2014–2020 felt short of a coherent place-based approach, “owing to deep-rooted ideational, interest-driven and organizational tensions relating to the territorial dimension of cohesion, the co-ordination, governance and financing of different cohesion policy funds” (Mendez 2013: 654).

All the aforementioned contributed to reinforce a storyline in which cities (and their close hinterlands) are represented as the main engines for the economic growth of the continent, whereas isolated rural areas are less competitive and to be targeted with subsidies for rural development and the preservation of ecosystem services. As a consequence, until now the territorial development of rural areas has been dealt with by the EU institutions mostly as a sectoral issue, to be managed through dedicated funding and under the competence of a dedicated Directorate-General.<sup>6</sup> More in detail, within the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) has been instituted in 2005 to support the development and implementation of rural development strategies and projects. Its overall budget (around M€100 for the 2014–2020 programming period) is distributed to European regions through dedicated Rural Development Programmes. Within this framework, the most interesting results were achieved through the implementation of the so-called LEADER approach, which aimed at triggering endogenous development of identified areas through the mobilisation of institutions and local actors, encouraging cooperation between the public, private, and civil society sectors that would convey in local partnerships in charge of designing and implementing integrated development strategies. Moreover, since 2014, the European Commission introduced the Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) approach that, building on the LEADER experience, extends its potential operational capacity to a wider range of territories and eligible measures and to the integration of other funds (Servillo and de Bruijn 2018).

Whereas this last experience provided a number of highly interesting results, and it will be further enhanced in the programming period 2021–2027, one could safely say that, until now, the EU Cohesion Policy did not prove able to tackle rural development and accessibility challenges to a full extent. On the one hand, its contribution to the reduction of socioeconomic disparities between countries is recognised by most studies. On the other hand, the impact on intra-regional disparities is more controversial, highlighting once more the multi-scalar tensions implicit in the cohesion objective. This situation has been recently acknowledged by the European Parliament that, through its resolution of October 3, 2018 on addressing the specific needs of rural, mountainous, and remote areas, it has stressed the importance of the latter for the balanced territorial development in Europe and the need to strengthen them by addressing their specific needs, hence calling for investments directed at integrating rural, mountainous, and remote areas into EU policies (EP 2018).

### ***Bridging Research and Policymaking: The URRUC Project***

The existence of multiple gaps between the evidence collected through the research activities financed by the EU, the objectives included in the EU strategies and guidelines documents, and the actual policies that are then put in place to achieve these objectives on the ground is a rather known problem, that often depends on the different rationales that animate the development of knowledge resources and their employment in policymaking arenas permeated by asymmetric power relations (Peterson 1995; Adams *et al.* 2011; Block 2011; Cotella and Stead 2011). In order to attempt to bridge these gaps, the EU has been financing through time a number of research programmes whose goal is to facilitate the uptake of knowledge and research results by policymakers at the different territorial levels, in a way that they may be able to develop policies that are evidence informed (Davoudi 2006; Faludi 2008). As mentioned previously, this mostly occurs within the framework of the European Territorial Cooperation objective, that contributes to the development and consolidation of platform aiming at knowledge sharing between actors from different contexts (Svensson 2013; Blake *et al.* 2020).

Also funded under the European Territorial Cooperation objective, the European Territorial Observatory Network (ESPON, from the acronym of its former label)<sup>7</sup> plays a particularly relevant role in relation to territorial matters, as it finances Targeted Analyses that are specifically dedicated to transfer knowledge, share experience, and facilitate the use of European territorial evidence rooted in real place-based policy development processes.<sup>8</sup> Among the 30 Targeted Analysis financed by ESPON in the programming period 2014–2020, the URRUC – *Urban Rural Connectivity in Non-Metropolitan Regions* project was tendered after the input received from a number of regional and local stakeholders, and then implemented in the period 2018–2019. The main objective of the project was to contribute to understanding and improving connectivity and accessibility related to urban–rural linkages. To this aim, the project analysed with a typical case-study

approach four case studies located in European non-metropolitan areas: (i) Scarborough Borough (United Kingdom); (ii) Marina Alta (Spain); (iii) Valle Arroscia and the Province of Imperia (Italy); and (iv) Region Västerbotten (Sweden).<sup>9</sup> Central to the URRUC project was the concept of functional regions, viewing the internal functioning dynamics of a region as being best perceived as the social, economic, and spatial linkages across a territory, connecting urban and rural areas in terms of governance, service provision, employment, leisure, and lifestyle. The research team started from the assumption that, by optimising transport solutions, these urban-rural linkages would be strengthened, improving access and movement across this urban-rural divide. At the same time, it also acknowledged that accessibility could be improved by other measures, as well as acting upon other spheres that do not directly relate to transport (ESPON 2019).

The analysis was developed through the continuous dialogue with a large number of stakeholders in the four territories involved, combined with an in-depth analysis of socioeconomic indicators, transport offer and demand, and policy documents. Through these activities, the research team reached a deep understanding of the conditions and challenges of urban-rural linkages, mobility, and accessibility in each case. Then, building on these findings, and through the application of a methodology developed ad hoc (that will be further detailed in Chapter 3 of this book), four integrated policy packages aiming at improving rural accessibility in the case studies were composed, taking into account not only operational solutions directly related to transport provision but also more general recommendations that address connectivity issues from a wider perspective and at different levels. As transferability was a core component of the project, general policy recommendations for improving transport connectivity and accessibility in comparable non-metropolitan regions were also developed, together with a number of policy recommendations targeting EU policy officials and how their action could improve and optimise interactions with stakeholders in non-metropolitan regions, as well as informing about potential gaps in policy coverage and how to address them (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000; Cotella *et al.* 2015).

Conceived at first as the occasion to present the results of the ESPON URRUC project, and its contribution to a further understanding of rural accessibility challenges and of the policies and actions that may be adopted to face them, this book has progressively expanded its boundaries to include other experiences, that intend to complement the URRUC approach while at the same time enriching it with a number of centrifugal standpoints and perspectives. In so doing, it turned into a more ambitious project, that aims to make a significant contribution to the advancement of knowledge on rural accessibility.

## **A Roadmap for the Reader**

The final section of this introductory chapter provides an overview of the book, its sections, and the individual contributions. The book is composed of 12 chapters from a combination of academics and practitioners with expertise in accessibility



and mobility research, with a particular focus on rural regions and territories. To organise and give an account of the richness and heterogeneity of the material it includes, the volume is organised into two complementary sections, that are preceded by two chapters that are meant to introduce the book rationale and further set its context, and followed by a concluding chapter that summarises its messages and paves the way for future research on the matter. More in particular, Part I focuses on the activities and results of the ESPON URRUC project, presenting its methodological approach and the results of its application in the four contexts at stake. A set of additional European case studies are presented in Part II, bringing forward many different policy approaches and solutions to solve rural accessibility challenges.

After this introduction, Chapter 2 sets the context for the rest of the volume, conceptualising marginalisation, connectivity, and accessibility issues in rural areas and identifying the main challenges. First rural areas and their marginalisation processes are addressed conceptually; then, the chapter provides some figures on shrinkage in European rural regions. Next, the concept of accessibility and the related challenges in rural areas are discussed. Marginalisation processes of European rural areas and their increasing dependence on urban nodes, where services and opportunities are concentrated, are reflected upon. The relation between such processes and accessibility challenges is discussed, calling for wider perspectives than mobility-centred ones, to understand and address these challenges, embracing the societal, economic, and spatial components and implications of accessibility. Finally, some points for reflection are proposed, which may be adopted by the readers as entry points from which to approach the issues and experiences proposed in the remaining chapters of the book.

Drawing on the results of the ESPON URRUC project (ESPON 2019), *Part I – Rural Accessibility and Connectivity: Understanding Phenomena, Framing Policies*, sketches out a multilayer approach to understanding and addressing accessibility and connectivity issues, aimed to support policymaking for enhancing accessibility in rural areas, and presents four case studies in non-metropolitan regions across EU in which this methodology was applied. Chapter 3 presents the methodology adopted to develop guidelines and recommendations for the stakeholder territories involved in the URRUC project. The multilayer approach to rural accessibility is meant to support European non-metropolitan regions affected by similar accessibility challenges in understanding the multiple issues that come into play and that have to be taken into consideration to enhance rural connectivity and accessibility. More in detail, the contribution describes the complementary inductive and deductive steps that characterised the project's activity, from literature review and desk research to the identification of successful practices and their assessment against case-specific territorial conditions and challenges. The output is a methodological framework, whose application in real cases is intended to allow for the provision of differential guidance, respectively, concerning operational solutions as well as recommendations for the specific and the general context surrounding rural connectivity. The chapter also discusses a number of empirical insights deriving from its application to the URRUC case studies, presented in detail in Chapters 4–7.

In particular, in Chapter 4, Staricco *et al.* deal with *Accessibility and Urban–Rural Connectivity in Marina Alta*, a Spanish county better known for its capital and reference tourist settlement Dénia. Marina Alta features the rural–urban connectivity challenges of similar coastal territories all over Spain. Some features recur when discussing rural–urban connectivity in coastal tourist areas, either in the North, South, West, or East of the country. These are: poor transport infrastructure, significant changes in population density during the year (with very high population density in tourism season), high-density urban settlements, and concentration of SGI provision along the coast, with dispersed, ageing, and depopulated rural inlands, increasingly dependent on the tourism sector. The chapter highlights the main challenges related to urban–rural linkages, which are also related to the orography, with flat coastal lines and scattered hill settlements in the inland. Based on the URRUC methodology, policy recommendations are provided, to cope with such challenges and with the complex institutional framework involved in or influencing transport and accessibility. In Chapter 5, Begley *et al.* discuss *Accessibility and Social Exclusion in Peripheral Territories: The Case of Scarborough, United Kingdom*. The chapter aims to demonstrate the challenges facing a remote, non-metropolitan region in the United Kingdom, in terms of improving transport and accessibility for households. It uses the case of Scarborough Borough, North Yorkshire, to provide an example of a predominantly rural, remote territory with transport and accessibility challenges associated with its peripheral location. In particular, it focuses on the problem of social exclusion that afflicts certain residents in the region, who struggle to access key health and education services, employment opportunities, and leisure activities due to an overburdened transport network. By analysing the socioeconomic profile, as well as the institutional and infrastructural problems of Scarborough Borough, it establishes the constraints under which the municipal authority operates. Further, it demonstrates how these challenges inhibit long-term infrastructural planning and the establishment of efficient, inexpensive public transport by local and regional transport policymakers. Finally, the chapter outlines recommendations on how these areas can be improved by transport planners at a range of levels: municipal, regional, and national. In doing so, it offers insights for comparable regions facing similar problems across Europe, and further afield. In Chapter 6, Cotella *et al.* discuss the main condition and challenges for *Improving Accessibility to Reverse Marginalisation Processes in Valle Arroscia, Italy*, a small valley in the Maritime Alps suffering from rural-to-urban migration and marginalisation. Valle Arroscia is a typical example of the Italian historical network of cities and villages. Its towns and hamlets are dispersed over a wide mountainous territory, often far away from the main valley road. In a large part of the territory, people’s quality of life is negatively affected by the distance from services of general interest, with a very high car dependence and the public transport system fails to meet the need of the few who rely on it. While car users are not in search of alternatives, some social groups suffer from a lack of alternatives to travelling by car, raising equity and social exclusion issues. Addressing the accessibility conditions and challenges in Valle Arroscia, the chapter also reflects upon the fragmentation of competences and the lack of vertical coordination

between the stakeholders involved in public transport planning and implementation, and on the scarce influence of local stakeholders on upper-level authorities. In Chapter 7, Kristensen and Grunfelder deal with *Commuting and Labour Market Challenges in Swedish Sparsely Populated Areas*, through the analysis of accessibility challenges of rural-to-urban commuting in Västerbotten, one of Sweden's most sparsely populated areas. By employing the case study approach, the chapter aims to obtain a comprehensive understanding of how the improved governance of public transport might contribute to bridging the rural-urban gap. It considers institutional conditions for the realisation of transport solutions, indicating the importance of streamlining mandates between institutions involved in the transport planning process. The chapter concludes with a discussion on how a holistic and coordinated approach to regional transport planning may contribute to urban-rural labour market development and combat the lack of highly skilled workers in accessible rural areas through the introduction of more attractive inter-municipal transport solutions.

*Part II— Taking Up the Challenge: Experiences Across the EU* presents four case studies – respectively located in Poland, Greece, Germany, and France – that constitute as many examples of how to understand and address accessibility in rural areas, from different perspectives. In Chapter 8 – *Accessibility Dimensions and Changes in North-Eastern Poland: The Case of Podlaskie Region*, Komornicki *et al.* explore the rural accessibility issue from the road potential accessibility perspective, focusing on the effect of national and regional road infrastructure investments on accessibility. The chapter is based on a study of the national and regional dimensions of road potential accessibility, undertaken in the Podlaskie Voivodeship (North-eastern Poland). Using potential accessibility indicators calculated at the intra-national level and regional level, it analyses the changes in accessibility that have occurred in the 2014–2020 programming period, with particular attention to the effects of the road transport policy implemented at the regional level. The analysis shows that the large transport projects of national or even European importance (part of the TEN-T network) do not fully solve problems of low spatial accessibility in rural and peripheral areas, pointing out the importance of complementarity of investments undertaken at the national and regional levels. The study's conclusions indirectly demonstrate the need for a flexible transport policy in peripheral areas, both at the EU and the member state levels. A different perspective on mobility and accessibility issues is proposed by Skayannis and Duquenne, in Chapter 9 – *Production Modes, Urban–Rural Relations and Rural Transport: North Pelion vis-à-vis Volos, Greece*. The chapter tries to infer the possible transport needs of a non-metropolitan rural area of three villages of North Mount Pelion through their production structure and their relations with the nearby city of Volos, a non-metropolitan urban centre in Thessaly, Central Greece. Analysing the evolving production structure of the rural space – the archaic pre-capitalist production modes becoming subordinate to capitalism via various mechanisms – the chapter discusses the mobility and accessibility implications of this transition. These settlements are becoming transitory hybrid spaces, developing still close but novel types of relationships with the main town, especially in the socioeconomic sphere. These changes are already happening and are bound to challenge local transport futures. The chapter investigates the behavioural

patterns of people, emerging during this transitional period, and develops a number of proposals of possible realistic ways to face the upcoming challenges. Chapters 10 and 11 offer two different perspectives on community involvement and bottom-up policies to address rural accessibility. In particular, in Chapter 10 – “*Bottom-up*” *Mobility Services: Experiences with Community Transport in Germany*, Schiefelbusch focuses on ways to adapt public transport to rural accessibility challenges by means of differentiated, small-scale service concepts. To this aim, it presents the concept of community-based transport and discusses its potential contribution to more sustainable collective transport and better accessibility in rural areas. One way of serving the small-scale and dispersed mobility needs typical of countryside settings is giving more space to locally planned and operated services, to achieve better-tailored solutions and more cost-efficient ways of service provision. In the English-speaking world, this approach is known as “Community Transport” (CT) and has been known for several decades. In Germany, “Gemeinschaftsverkehr” (as a loose translation of “Community Transport”) is a much more recent concept, although certain elements of CT have been in use for some time. The chapter presents and discusses how CT has evolved and been in part reinterpreted in Germany over the last years, in particular in the state of Baden-Württemberg. The chapter, which is based on dedicated research activities and on the author’s direct involvement as consultant and policy advisor, proposes an overview of service models and discusses some more general questions linked to the idea of CT, such as the potential tensions between “top-down” and “bottom-up” views on planning, formal/regulatory challenges and the implications of a more heterogeneous set of stakeholders. In Chapter 11 – *Bridging Tactics and Strategies for Mobility in Mountain Areas: The Example of Briançon, France*, Serre and Salvia offer a different perspective on bottom-up initiatives, exploring citizen initiatives that are emerging in a small mountain town in France. The aim of the chapter is to explore the tools and spaces of cooperation that can be mobilised to create links between top-down and bottom-up approaches. Furthermore, the chapter addresses the relations that can be established between tourist and year-round mobility and activities, and the potential of tourism diversification induced by climate change to enrich these relationships and play a role in defining new socioeconomic models. The findings highlight the possible overlaps between citizen tactics and institutional strategies to improve accessibility and show the emergence of alternative governance models. On a more general note, small mountain towns and villages are questioned as a scale conducive to local democracy and citizen empowerment.

Finally, as editors, in Chapter 12 – *Learning From Experience: Towards a Research Agenda*, we provide our reflections on the insights and outcomes of the methodologies and experiences emerging from the individual contributions, first presenting and comparing in a detailed manner the outcomes and the lessons learnt and then rounding off the volume by sketching out new boundaries for future research on the matter. Building on the considerations of the different authors, we try to shed some light on the complexity that surrounds rural accessibility and the related challenges and on how it may be possible to further unfold this complexity through research and policy in the future.

## Notes

1. The research project URRUC – Urban–Rural Connections in Non–Metropolitan Areas is a Targeted Analysis financed by the European Territorial Observatory Network (ESPON) in the period 2018–2019. Detailed information about the project is available here: [www.espon.eu/URRUC](http://www.espon.eu/URRUC).
2. In this concern, see the outcomes of the conference “A European Rural Agenda is urgently needed for rural areas after COVID crisis”, held in Brussels (Belgium) in October 2020 (<https://cor.europa.eu/en/events/Pages/NAT-Commission-Webinar-A-European-rural-agenda-is-urgently-needed-for-rural-areas-after-COVID-crisis-.aspx>).
3. The review of European research projects that is proposed here does not claim to be exhaustive. In particular, it is limited to the last 10 years and it does not include projects that addressed the topic of shrinking rural and non-metropolitan areas in general terms, without a specific focus on accessibility and mobility challenges (e.g. the ESPON project ESCAPE, 2019–2020). Moreover, it does not reference projects that were centred on accessibility challenges and solutions in general and dealt with rural areas only in a specific case study or pilot action (e.g. the Interreg project LAST MILE, 2016–2020 and DENTI-SMAR, 2018–2022).
4. For a comprehensive overview see: Cotella (2019).
5. An interesting example in this concern is the introduction, in the Italian context, of a National Strategy for Inner Areas, in parallel to the EU cohesion policy programming period 2021–2027, as an explicit test-bed application of the place-based approach (Bacci *et al.* 2020; Cotella and Vitale Brovarone 2020b, 2020c; Cotella *et al.* 2021).
6. Whereas the EU Cohesion policy and, more in general, the supervision of the development of the EU spatial planning discourse lies under the responsibility of the DG REGIO (Directorate–General for Regional and Urban Policy), rural development resides among the competences of DG AGRI (Directorate–General for Agriculture and Rural Development).
7. For more information concerning the ESPON Programme see: [www.espon.eu/](http://www.espon.eu/)
8. For additional considerations on how the ESPON programme contributes to the transfer and diffusion of policies and practices in Europe see: Bulmer (2005), Prezioso (2014), Cotella *et al.* (2015).
9. The analysis and the outcomes of the four case studies are presented in more detail in Chapters 4–7 of this volume.

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