

# SUPER – Sustainable Urbanisation and Land Use Practices in European Regions

Applied Research

**Annex 3.8: Case study IT - Bassa Romagna**

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## Abbreviations

AESOP	Association of European Schools of Planning
ARTS	ESPON Assessment of Regional and Territorial Sensitivity
CEMAT	Council of Europe Conference of Ministers Responsible for Spatial/Regional Planning
CLC	Corine Land Cover
COMPASS	ESPON Comparative Analysis of Territorial Governance and Spatial Planning Systems in Europe
EC	European Commission
ECP	ESPON Contact Point
ECTP	European Council of Town Planners
EEA	European Environmental Agency
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESPON	European Territorial Observatory Network
ESPON EGTC	ESPON European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation
EU-LUPA	ESPON European Land Use Patterns
EU	European Union
GVA	Gross Value Added
ISOCARP	International Society of City and Regional Planners
ITI	Integrated Territorial Investments
JRC	EU Joint Research Centre
LCC	(Corine) Land Cover Change
LUE	Land Use Efficiency
MCA	Multi-Criteria Assessment
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
POLITO	Politecnico di Torino
PCG	Project Coordination Group
SCBA	Societal Cost Benefit Analysis
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SPIMA	ESPON Spatial Dynamics and Strategic Planning in Metropolitan Areas
SUPER	ESPON Sustainable Urbanisation and Land Use Practices in European Regions
TANGO	ESPON Territorial Approaches for New Governance
TIA	Territorial Impact Assessment

## General introduction

In ESPON SUPER, the case studies contribute to the objective of unravelling how different interventions in diverse social, environmental and economic settings have transformed land-use development practices. In particular, the aim is to analyse, understand and learn from the successes and failures of practitioners and decision makers over the last three decades in their search for more sustainable land use. All case studies are based on close observation and direct contact with each territory and with the people involved in the design and implementation of each intervention. To this end, each case study was assigned to the project team with the greatest local knowledge of the territory, institutions and language.

The methodological framework used for all case studies consisted of three groups or basic sources of information and knowledge.

1. **Context:** each intervention addressed or influenced a particular land-use development practice which had emerged within a specific territorial and institutional context, which is crucial for understanding and interpreting the results. It was also important to know the objectives related to the sustainability of land use that had been set for each territory, albeit on paper, at the regulatory level. These tasks were based on desk research, even though, in some cases, local stakeholder support was valuable to locate the most relevant pieces of information.
2. **Developments:** the second source of data was the quantitative land use changes in the form of maps and graphs. This allowed each case study team to consider to what extent the underlying contextual factors and the studied interventions had transformed the territory and the rates of urbanization. This information was essential for evaluating the effects that each intervention had on land-use sustainability and, more indirectly, on culture and spatial planning practices.
3. **Stakeholder interviews:** each case study held over ten in-depth interviews with stakeholders involved in one way or another with the intervention. At these meetings, they were asked about the reasons for and the perceived urgency of the intervention, how its objectives were defined and by whom, the experience of implementing each intervention, the pitfalls encountered, as well as the benefits it had brought in terms of improving the three thematic dimensions of land-use sustainability: ecological, economic and social equity. In addition, stakeholder maps were produced that present the type and intensity of the relationships that some stakeholders had with the rest in a visual way.

This report on the case study of IT-Bassa Romagna presents a synthesis of all three outputs in order. It is structured as follows. This introductory section provides a summary of the main characteristics of the case study (Section 1.1), the scale of analysis (Section 1.2) and geographical scope (Section 1.3). Section 2 contextualizes how urbanization occurs in the case study area. It contains descriptions of typical urban developments, how this is regulated,

who promotes it, how it is implemented and emerging challenges regarding land-use development. Keeping with this contextual approach, Section 3 discusses how the studied intervention addresses the challenge of sustainability in its three thematic dimensions (Section 3.1) as well as in its temporal dimension (Section 3.2).

Section 4 presents the main results of the case study research in three parts. Section 4.1 analyses how the priorities of the intervention were configured based on information collected from the interviewed stakeholders. In particular, it seeks to know how a perceived problem was identified or constructed to justify the intervention, the extent to which land use sustainability was a consideration, and whether these elements tended to unite the community in favour of a collective interest or whether, on the contrary, they were a source of tension and conflict. Section 4.2 discusses in more detail how seven organizational and institutional aspects may have influenced the relative successes and failures of the intervention. Section 4.3 combines the analysis of land use changes, the opinions of the consulted stakeholders and, where relevant, the stakeholder maps, to make an assessment of the actual results of the intervention on the planning and development culture and the different thematic dimensions of sustainability. Finally, Section 4.5 explicitly answers questions posed to the ESPON SUPER team, thus reflecting the direct contribution of each case study to the project's objectives.

While each individual case study contributes to answering the questions posed, its true value lies in the possibility of combining and contrasting the outputs of the eleven cases. This choral work is presented in Annex 3.13. The triangulation of results allows for the formulation of generalizable conclusions and recommendations that can contribute to the design of new plans and policies better aligned with the objectives of sustainability and land take abatement at the European level. In this way, the case study presented in this report also contributes to this other broader objective.

## **1.1 Case study IT-Bassa Romagna**

Until the end of the '90s, urbanisation in Emilia Romagna has been seen as a mere pro-growth action based on regulative plans. Municipalities often competed to attract private capitals, thus making their territory more attractive for investment. In so doing, many hectares of agriculture land have been transformed making the Emilia Romagna one of the most urbanised regions in Italy. Bearing that in mind, Italian law no. 20 of the year 2000 overcame the logic of regulative plans by introducing strategic instruments like the Municipal Structural Plan (*PSC-Piano Strutturale Comunale*), as well as supporting the adoption of joint local plans within each Union of Municipality. This case study explores the experience of the Municipal Structural Plan that has been jointly adopted by the Union of Municipality of Bassa Romagna, in 2009. The Plan has two main objectives: to manage urbanization and to promote sustainable development.

Map 1.1: Location of case study “IT-Bassa Romagna”



## 1.2 Scale/s of analysis

The rationale underpinning the selection follows the logic of spatial planning responsibility and administrative subdivisions (Table 1.1). Spatial planning (or *governo del territorio*) in Italy is a shared competence in the hands of the central (NUTS0) and the regional level (NUTS2) (Art.117 of the Italian Constitution). This is why both levels are considered important for the case study (IT22). Furthermore, since its adoption (2009) the Inter-Municipal Structural Plan of the Union of Municipalities of *Bassa Romagna* (2008) has also been influenced by the 2006 Provincial<sup>1</sup> (NUTS3) Territorial Coordination Plan (PTCP), because it is one of the reference points to conform to during the process of drafting. This is why the provincial scale and planning instruments are also important for a better understating of the case study. Finally, the operative level of the Structural Plan of the Union of Municipalities remains the LAU1 that includes 9 municipalities as part of the Union of Municipality of “Bassa Romagna”.

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<sup>1</sup> Provinces have been recently reformed by the Del Rio Law No. 57/2014 concerning the “Disposition on Metropolitan Cities, Provinces and the Union and Merging of Municipalities (in Italian *Disposizioni sulle città metropolitane, sulle province, sulle unioni e fusioni di comuni*)”.

Table 1.1: IT - Bassa Romagna scales

Scales	Main scale	Other scales
<b>Supra/Trans-national</b>		
<b>NUTS 0</b>	Italy (IT)	
<b>NUTS 1</b>		
<b>NUTS 2</b>	Emilia Romagna (ITH5)	
<b>NUTS 3</b>		Ravenna (ITH57)
<b>LAU1 – NUTS 4</b>	Alfonsine , Bagnacavallo, Bagnara di Romagna, Conselice, Cotignola, Fusignano, Lugo, Massa Lombarda e Sant'Agata sul Santerno.	
<b>LAU2- NUTS 5</b>		

### 1.3 Geographical scope

Emilia Romagna, the region within which the Union Bassa Romagna is located, is part of the Pianura Padana situated in north of Italy. The Pianura Padana is the main urbanized area of the country, which includes regions like Piedmont, Lombardy, Veneto and part of the Friuli Venezia Giulia. The case study is located in the province of Ravenna, The province of Ravenna has 18 municipalities, accounting for a total of 391,414 inhabitants and featuring very diverse densities per sq km - from 31 inhabitants/sq km of Casal Val Senio to 350 inhabitants/sq km of Cervia<sup>2</sup>. The province of Ravenna features two Unions of Municipalities – Bassa Romagna and the Unioni dei Comuni dell Romagna Faentina. As regards the conformity of the Bassa Romagna to the EU nomenclature, it is not a proper administrative level thus it should be considered at the same level as municipalities (LAU1).

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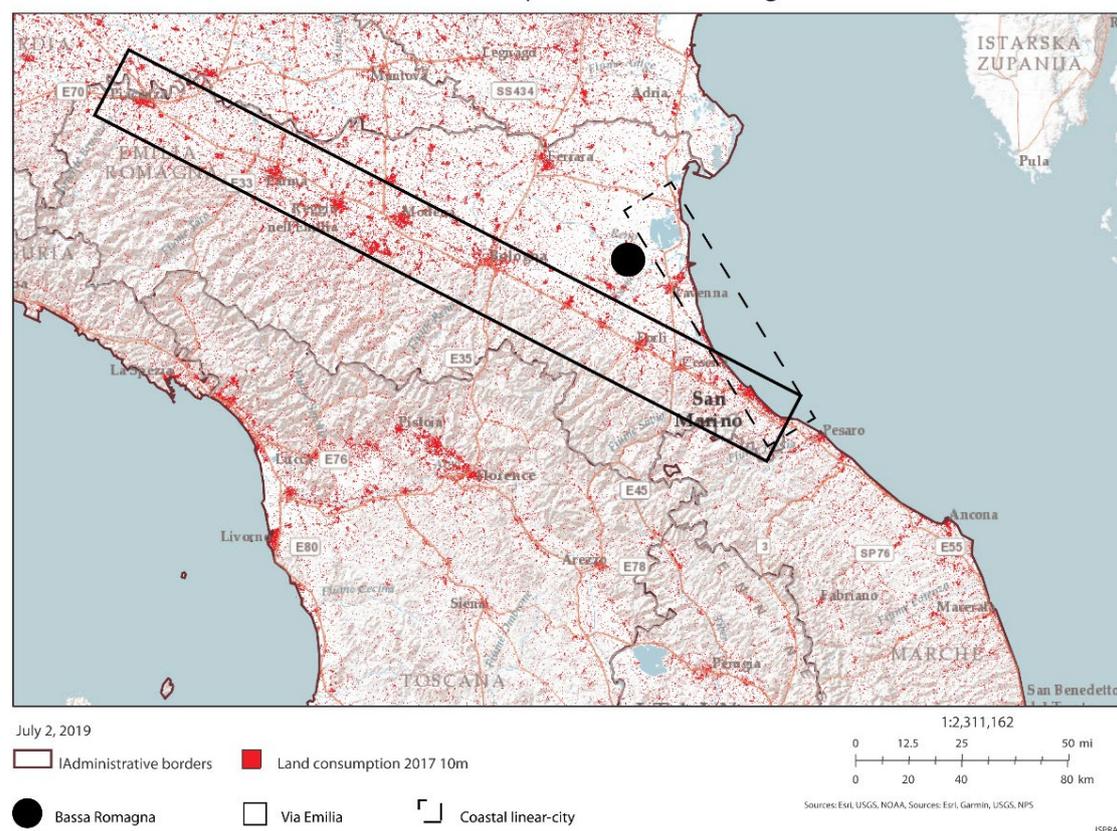
<sup>2</sup> For more details see <http://www.comuni-italiani.it/039/lista.html>

## 2 Contextual analysis

### 2.1 Typical urban development

In the years, in Emilia Romagna, the agricultural land in particular has been transformed in industrial sites, speculative developments (e.g. second homes on the seacoast), large infrastructure development, commercial facilities etc. Within the *Pianura Padana* area, the development of the *Emilia Romagna* region followed two different axes (Figure 2.1). The main urbanization axis coincides with the consolidation of the so-called “smart city from Piacenza to Rimini” – a linear city of 280 km that follows the ancient roman *via Emilia* (Ave, 2014). A second, highly dense axis of development is located along the Adriatic coast, the longest coastal linear city of the country (measuring more than 100 km), whose economy is based on seasonal tourism, health care and maritime activities. For these and other reasons, Emilia Romagna’s covered surface accounts for almost 10% of the total, making it the fourth most urbanised region in Italy after Lombardy, Veneto and Campania (ISPRA, 2018) and a rapidly growing percentage of land consumption (see Table 1.1).

Figure 2.1: Main spatial development trajectories in the Emilia Romagna region



Source: authors' own elaboration based on ISPRA

Table 2.1: Soil consumption in Emilia Romagna provinces (ISPRA 2018: 125)

Province	Soil consumption (%)	Soil consumption (% water bodies excluded)	Soil consumption (km <sup>2</sup> )	Soil consumption per capita (m <sup>2</sup> /capita)	Soil consumption (increase in %)	Soil consumption (increase in hectares)	Soil consumption (increase in m <sup>2</sup> /capita/year)
	2017	2017	2017	2017	2016-2017	2016-2017	2016-2017
<b>Bologna</b>	9.4	9.4	346	343	0.23	81	0.8
<b>Ferrara</b>	7.7	8.0	204	585	0.13	27	0.8
<b>Forlì-Cesena</b>	8.0	8.0	189	480	0.20	38	1.0
<b>Modena</b>	11.8	11.9	318	453	0.19	60	0.9
<b>Parma</b>	9.4	9.5	325	724	0.42	135	3.0
<b>Piacenza</b>	9.3	9.3	240	836	0.20	47	1.6
<b>Ravenna</b>	10.5	10.8	194	497	0.16	31	0.8
<b>R. Emilia</b>	12.3	12.4	282	530	0.09	24	0.5
<b>Rimini</b>	13.7	13.7	118	351	0.11	13	0.4
<b>Region</b>	9.9	10.0	2.216	498	0.21	456	1.0

The spatial development of Bassa Romagna follows trends similar to those in the rest of the region. It mainly occurs through small, spatially diffused interventions (houses, retail and small industrial areas, etc.). This polycentric and rather diffuse territorial structure is one of the reasons why 23% of the regional building soil is located in non-urban areas (i.e. scattered) (Regione Emilia Romagna, 2015), making this area an example of “diffuse urbanisation” model according to the analytical categories identified by ESPON SUPER (i.e. compact, polycentric and diffuse).

## 2.2 Basic institutional conditions

Generally speaking, urban development in the area occurred in accordance to the planning system. In some cases, it is the consequence of illegal building activity that has then been tolerated by the State (usually giving amnesty afterwards)<sup>3</sup>. In the case of *Emilia Romagna*, nevertheless, illegal developments account for a very small share of the soil consumed.

According to the Constitutional reform passed in 2001, spatial governance and planning (*governo del territorio*) is a shared competence between the central (national) and regional level. Each region has a large autonomy in developing its own regional spatial governance and planning law, in accordance with the national law 1150/1942 and subsequent amendments. Given the fact that each region features its own spatial governance and

<sup>3</sup> In the last thirty-five years, the Italian government has introduced three main building amnesties: (i) the law No.47/1985; the No. 724/1994 and; the law No. 326/2003.

planning law, and that these laws have been approved at different times in history (there are very recent laws as well as laws that were approved in the 1980s), spatial governance and planning is a highly heterogeneous activity that varies from region to region, including the spatial planning tools developed at the lower levels by the provinces, the metropolitan cities and the municipalities.

It is in this context that the Emilia Romagna region adopted a spatial governance and planning law in 2000 (law n.20 “General Regulation on the Protection and Use of the Territory”). The Municipal Structural Plan of the Union of Municipalities of Bassa Romagna, which is the focus of this case study, has been drafted on the basis of this law.

### Recent developments

Though the cases study is based on the law 20/2000, it is also relevant to inform the reader that a new law on spatial governance and planning has been recently adopted at the regional level, substituting the previous one (law Regional Regulation on the Protection and Use of the Territory 24/2017). The new law was introduced to address territorial development towards more sustainable land use practices (i.e. planning without expansion, urban regeneration and reduction of land consumption) in line with the EU ambition of zero soil consumption for 2050. For Bonetti (2017), the global economic crisis was a key factor behind changing the law. In particular, additional flexibility was deemed needed to facilitate urban regeneration. According to the new law, the General Urbanistic Plan (GUP) (which combines the Municipal Structural Plan and the Building Regulation defined by the previous law) should define (among other aspects): the municipal jurisdiction over the use and transformation of the territory, with particular concern for urban regeneration. It serves as a general framework for the definition of ‘transformation possibilities’. Unlike previous instruments, the GUP cannot issue development rights; the latter are issued with operational agreements and public implementation plans (art. 38 of the law 24/2017). For plans that are already in place (such as the inter-municipal Structural Plan under scrutiny), it is still possible to issue variances (*varianti*) prior to approval of the new GUP (each local municipality or union of municipalities has three years to adopt a new GUP). Variances are important procedures for expediting development and allows municipalities to change the planning permission, in terms of both functions as well as building quantities. This occurs through legally codified procedures that are progressively being simplified, and are usually triggered by a request from private sector parties to the public authority.

Besides exploring the importance of how the Structural Plan addresses sustainable land use, it is also important to understand how spatial governance and planning activity (at the local level) might be influenced by the new legislative framework and how local authorities and stakeholders are dealing with it. This is particularly important in relation to sustainable urbanization and land use since regional spatial planning is slowly but incrementally moving from a purely regulative model to more strategic and discretionary model.

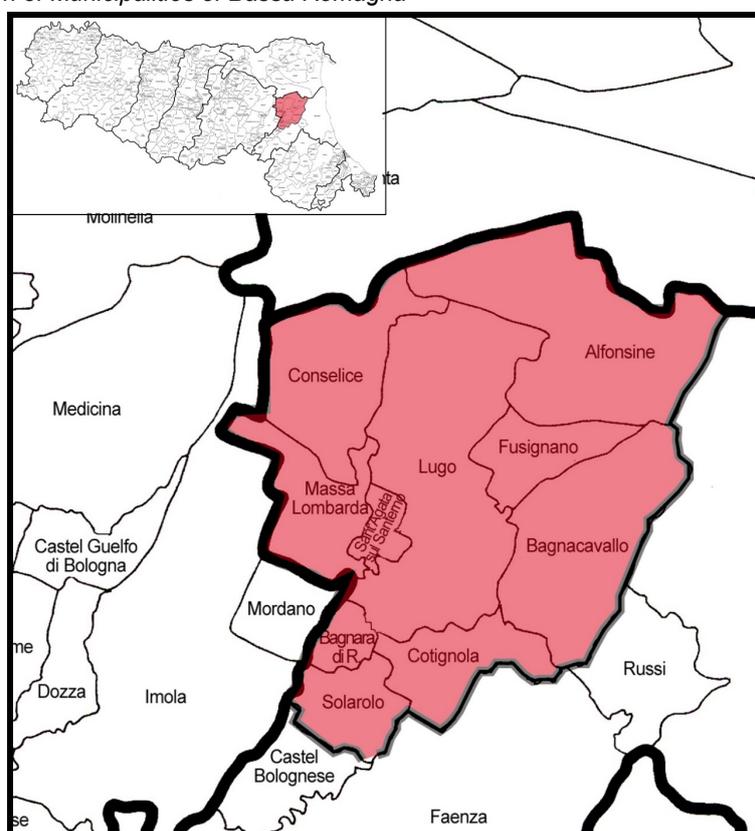
## 2.3 Initiative

Legally, both private and public authorities can take the initiative for land-use change. In some cases, groups of private actors join forces either spontaneously or at the request of the public sector. In all cases, this should lead to the presentation of a development project to the municipality, which evaluates the initiative for conformity with the structural plan. During the drafting of the development project, private parties may negotiate with the municipality to change the plan (in order to benefit from better conditions in terms of functions and/or buildable volumes). This may happen by using variances (law 20/2000).

The system does not prevent land speculation. Sometimes private developers try to increase land values by controlling supply-side market mechanisms, such as by maintaining stable prices for houses/apartments even during the market crises. Municipalities can also exacerbate land speculation when they compete with each other to attract private developers (e.g. through tax breaks, increasing the buildable quantities per area or other financial incentives).

This also one of the reasons why, in 2009, the Union of Bassa Romagna Municipalities decided to adopt joint spatial planning instruments (i.e. Municipal Structural Plan of the Union, Municipal Operative Plans and Building Regulations). In so doing, they aimed to transform inter-municipal competition into cooperation. The involved municipalities are: Alfonsine, Bagnacavallo, Bagnara di Romagna, Conselice, Cotignola, Fusignano, Lugo, Massa Lombarda and Sant'Agata sul Santerno (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2: Union of Municipalities of Bassa Romagna



## 2.4 Planning permission

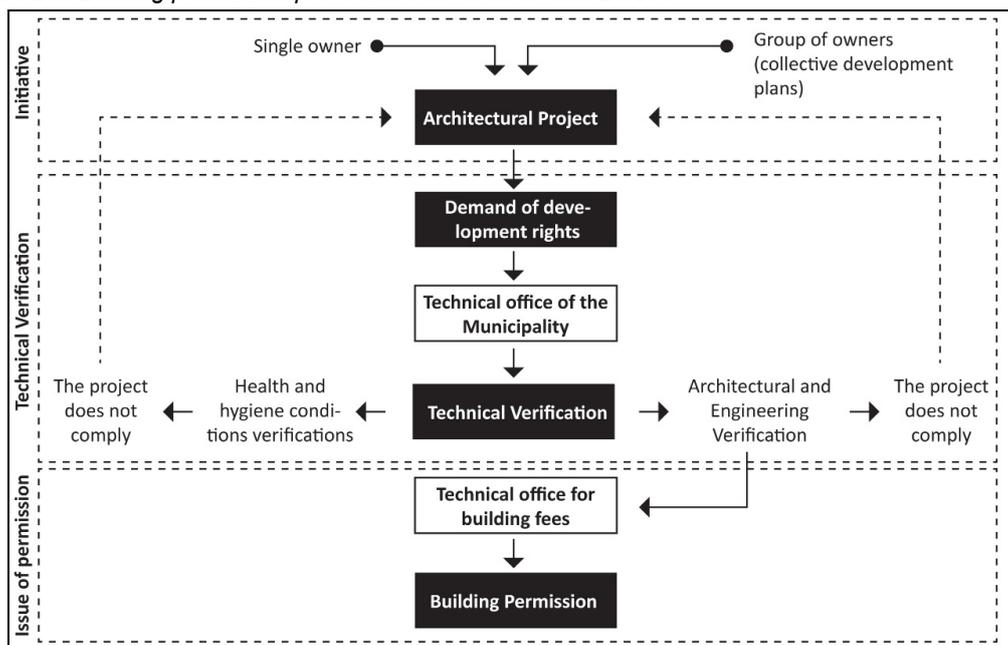
As mentioned, the allocation of development rights used to take place through the final approval of the (inter)municipal regulatory plans while the effective building permit and project implementation are subject to additional evaluation phases (Figure 2.3).

While the previous law from 2000, and the Structural Municipal Plan that follows it, has been perceived as relatively rigid, the new regional law foresees two different moments where private actors can establish operational agreements. This can occur *ex-ante* (i.e. before the adoption of the plan) when the public authority, with the involvement of different stakeholders, collects development proposals and desiderata and signs operational agreements. This also may happen *ex-post*, after the plan is adopted, in order to match public interests with private needs. As mentioned above, these agreements are the way development rights are allocated; once signed, they constrain private and public actors in the process of planning implementation.

This level of flexibility has been criticised that it may open the door to an excessive presence of private interests in land-use development decision-making as local municipalities may not be powerful enough to negotiate with market actors. Other experts (e.g. Bonetti, 2017) argue that this gives local authorities to the power to adapt their local plans according to spatial and economic contingencies

Despite the above-mentioned possibilities of *ex-ante* and *ex-post* agreements, once land use rights are assigned (or modified through a plan variance), the formal process that should be followed in order to obtain the development permissions is relatively straightforward and similar in all Italian regions.

Figure 2.3: Building permission procedure based on the law 20/2000



Source: ESPON, 2018

## 2.5 Development process

As already pointed out, in the great majority of cases urban development in Emilia Romagna occurs within the described spatial governance and planning framework; illegal development is very limited. It is largely the consequence of private initiatives, generally mediated by the presence of local authorities as a guarantor of public interests. Even where the initiative is entirely in private hands, they should cover some public costs (e.g. infrastructure and public services). These costs are recovered both when agricultural land is urbanized as well as when abandoned built-up areas are converted to new uses. Urbanisation costs are usually lower in the case of greenfield development. To rebalance this, the last regional resolution No. 186/2018 doubles urbanisation fees (*oneri di urbanizzazione*) for projects that convert agricultural land into built up area and, on the other hand, decreases these by at least 35% (local administration are allowed to reduced it to 100% if necessary) for projects that rehabilitate abandoned areas<sup>4</sup>. Private actors can decide to either create infrastructures and/or services by themselves (providing them for the community) or to pay a contribution to the municipality, that the local administration will use to build them according to the plan provision. On its side, the municipality, after collecting the *oneri di urbanizzazione* from the private developer, is legally bound (paragraph 460 of law no. 232/2016) to use them for the development of public facilities and services for the community. However, until 2016, as a consequence of the local public budget cuts implemented throughout the second half of the 2000s, and especially after the financial crisis, municipalities often use these resources to carry out ordinary tasks which not necessarily resulted in additional public services for the community. Due to the financial crises, often municipalities have been constraint to sell public land for development or to increase the development rights provided on their territory (i.e. the amount of buildable volumes), in order to maximise the economic income through the *oneri di urbanizzazione* which still represents one of the main sources for local budget. One of the consequences of this practice is the emergence of competition logics between municipalities that - in order to benefit from an increasing volume of *oneri di urbanizzazione* – proactively attempt to attract developers, in so doing facilitating soil consumption.

## 2.6 Current issues

As recognized by the recent law of 2017, Bassa Romagna and the rest of the region are facing with a number of challenges:

- reduce as much as possible the conversion of agricultural land into building land (this is also one of the objectives of the Municipal Structural Plan under scrutiny);
- invest further resources in the requalification/rehabilitation/regeneration of abandoned built-up areas. The new law establishes that each municipality is allowed to consume

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<sup>4</sup>According to the resolution, interventions subject to a reduction of urbanisation fees are: 1) urban and building renovation; 2) urban consolidation or replacement, and 3) recovery or re-use of abandoned or dismissed buildings

new soil for building activities for an amount that cannot exceed the 3% of the existing urbanisation surface. The ambition of the law is to achieve zero soil consumption by 2050, in line with the EU Commission target. However, the law foresees some flexibility, by taking out from the calculation of the total amount those interventions that consistence in rehabilitation of existing built-up areas or interventions that have been classified as interesting for the development of the municipality/ region<sup>5</sup>;

- update plans to conform to the provisions of the new law;
- respect and implement sustainable development and quality of life goals (art. 1 law 24/2017).

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<sup>5</sup> According to the law 24/2017, art.6 comma 5, the following activities have been excluded in the calculation of the 3% (among others): construction of public services with supra-municipal importance or those interventions that have been identified as of public interest; new regional strategic productive sites; social housing interventions etc.

## 3 Sustainability of objectives

### 3.1 Thematic dimensions

The complexity of the spatial planning system in Italy means that the analytical considerations should be applied not only to the Municipal Structural Plan of the Union of Municipalities itself, but also to the territorial governance and spatial planning framework defined by upper levels laws and documents. Among them, a particularly relevant role is played by: a) the national law n.1150 of 1942 and further amendments; b) the regional spatial planning law of n.20 of 2000 (as well as the recently approved spatial planning legal framework 24/2017); and the Provincial Territorial Coordination Plan of Ravenna passed in 2006. Altogether, these documents frame the boundaries of sustainability towards which the Plan should comply.

In this sense, the original draft of the law 1150/1942 never mentions “sustainability” but it considers some aspects linked to the use of soil and in particular: the law establishes that “the constraints to be observed in historical, environmental and landscape areas” (Art. 7, comma 5). This prescriptive approach has been at the base of the *carta dei vincoli* which is now included as part of each regional or local plan.

However, in general, the national law has no particular indication for the lower planning levels, which, especially in the Emilia Romagna region, have been very pro-active in promoting the issue of sustainability. This is the case of the regional law n.20/2000, which, for the first time, introduces the notion of sustainability. Accordingly, the law aims at “creating an effective and efficient territorial planning and planning system that works to preserve territorial, *environmental* and energy resources for the *economic, social* and civil well-being of the regional population, *without prejudice to the quality of life of the future generations*” (art.1, section 1a). This all-encompassing definition is further detailed according to each constitutive aspect such as environmental, economic, social and temporal dimensions. In particular, one of the objectives of the law is “to promote an appropriate use of environmental, natural, territorial and cultural resources” (art.1, section 1b), in order to “reduce the pressure of settlements on the natural and environmental system through appropriate measures to lessen and mitigate impacts” (art.2, section 2d). To make it possible, the law establishes that: “the consumption of new soil should happen only when there are no alternatives deriving from the replacement of existing settlement buildings or their reorganization and redevelopment” (art.2, section 2f). In this sense, each plan (i.e. regional, provincial or municipal) should be subject to a *ex-ante* Assessment of Environmental and Territorial Sustainability (in Italian *Valsat - Valutazione Preventiva della Sostenibilità Ambientale e Territoriale*) according to the 2001/42/EU directive.

In addition, since 2017, the Region has adopted the new law on spatial planning according to which each planning level (including municipalities) has three years to adapt its planning instruments to the provisions of said law. In this respect, the new law has the merit of being much more goal-oriented (i.e. identifying measurable objectives) than the past. In particular, it

aligns the regional planning system to EU objectives and explicitly to the zero-soil consumption target for 2050 (art.5, section1)<sup>6</sup>.

From a social/equity perspective, in this process of urban regeneration a particular attention should be paid to the question of “social housing interventions and other actions to satisfy housing rights” (art.1, section 2a), which still remains one of the declared objectives of spatial planning intended as an instrument of regulating spatial equality (art.1, section 2).

Sustainability has also been addressed by the Provincial Territorial Coordination Plan of Ravenna (2006) which affirms that the scope these kinds of plans is to “coordinate and concert a wide range of topics, controlling their overall time and space sustainability aspects” (Section 1.1, p. 8). The plan addresses the “concept of sustainability understood as a set of *environmental, social, economic and institutional sustainability*” (Section 1.1, p. 9). It also affirms that the plan should be an instrument for the coordination and implementation of a “set of welfare and services policies” to guarantee the social sustainability of public activity.

According to the hierarchical principle, the Inter-Municipal Structural Plan of Bassa Romagna spatializes what has been established by the upper planning laws and documents in terms of sustainability. In particular, the plan is very specific and operational as it explicitly addresses the main sustainable dimensions. By recognizing the importance of polycentrism and polycentric development as one of the distinctive aspects of the territory, the plan however affirms that: “its development is leading to excessive consumption of land that generates environmental impact problems and social costs” (Section 1.2.2, p. 25). To avoid that, the plan promotes: a) compactness as a principle of urban development (Section 1.2.2, p. 25); b) the containment of urban expansion/growth (Section 1.2.2, p. 26); c) the environmental rehabilitation of existing brownfields (Section 2.4.3, p. 100).

Overall, this case study shows that sustainability is a very “regional-centric” notion since the national law does not prioritize it. It is also important to note that plans are coherently addressing the issue of sustainability (at least on paper). What would be interesting to further investigate is the question of “institutional sustainability”, which appears at both provincial and municipal levels but still remains a bit vague.

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<sup>6</sup> To achieve it, the law establishes that: for each planning document, the law identifies a limit of 3 per cent of land consumption for the validity of the entire plan (10 years) (art.6, section 1); the reuse and regeneration of urbanised territory is promoted (art.5, section 1). In a break from the past, the new law identified what kind of interventions are allowed to prevent land consumption such as: building rehabilitation (art.7, section 4a); urban restructuring (art.7, section4b); urban densification or replacement (art.7, section 4c).

### **3.2 Temporal balance**

Concerning the temporal dimension of sustainability, each planning level - except the national one – takes into consideration time aspects in the planning activity. Although in very generic way each document shows a “temporal sensitivity” allocating to spatial planning – as a future oriented activity – the responsibility to spatialize any kind of measure and initiatives to guarantee territorial development “without prejudice to the quality of life of the future generations” (Regional Law, 2000, art.1, section 1a). However, what seems to be absent is how to explicitly include unexpressed needs of future generations within the planning activity. Indeed, there are no measurable targets and objectives that can show a good adherence with short, medium or long-term strategy. This is also demonstrated in the Provincial Territorial Coordination Plan, which generically affirms the need to “coordinate and concert a wide range of topics, controlling their overall time and space sustainability aspects” (Section 1.1, p. 8). This has been echoed also in the Inter-Municipal plan that despite very specific objectives (infrastructure projects, mainly) has no particular or specific short/medium or long-term objectives in terms of sustainability, which makes it very broad and generic in terms of temporal balance. That said, it also worth mentioning that law n. 24/2017 has taken a step forward in this sense. Differently from the past, indeed, it identifies important targets to achieve. In particular, two are important to consider: a) the zero soil consumption until 2050 as a long-term objective (art.5, section 1) and; (b) the 3 per cent of soil consumption target as a short/medium-term objective (art.6, section 1). According to the law, the combination of the two will allow the region to gradually achieve the zero-soil target for 2050.

Since this law is a planning instrument that should be complied with, it will be important to monitor how the new targets influence the implementation of the existing plans and which kinds of provisions will be included in the Inter-Municipality Plan.

## 4 Impact assessment

### 4.1 Pre-intervention

The analysis of the period preceding the introduction of the intervention was based on desk research as well as interviews with a number of key stakeholders. In this regard, 13 key actors have been interviewed coming from different sectors: (i) 3 are decision makers (i.e. mayors); (ii) 2 are policy makers (i.e. planning experts within administrations); (iii) 5 are key stakeholders (i.e. professional associations and civic lobbies); (iv) 3 are citizens/experts on the field. Interviewees have been carefully selected in order to guarantee a certain level of representativeness, transparency and diversity of opinions. All interviews were conducted in the summer and autumn of 2019.

#### 4.1.1 Identification of the problem

In the Pianura Padana and the Emilia Romagna region the use of land has been object of market pressure. In particular, in the Emilia Romagna region 9.9 % of the territory is already consumed, making it one of the most urbanised Italian regions (ISPRA, 2019). To limit this urbanization process, in 2000 the regional law no. 20 was introduced, which invited all municipalities to adopt new planning instruments to deal with land use and territorial planning in a more sustainable way. Since then, individual or collections of municipalities have been encouraged to adopt plans and regulations. According to the stakeholders' opinions, the Municipal Structural Plan of the Union of Municipalities of Bassa Romagna (hereafter the Plan), has the merit of introducing a series of instrumental, procedural and theoretical innovations that have tried to respond to territorial challenges (see Table 4.1). In particular, interviewees recognised the fact that the Plan has adopted an *integrated spatial vision*, which also allowed for the development of more efficient *governance and coordination* mechanisms in order to reduce *soil consumption*. Indeed, one of the problems identified by the stakeholders was the lack of a long-term spatial vision and lacking horizontal (among municipalities and sectors) and vertical coordination (with the province and region), which together have determined the excessive use of soil.

Another important question posed by the territory was spatial fragmentation and competitiveness among municipalities. To overcome that, the Plan has adopted spatial planning coherence procedures for all municipalities involved in the Union. Having a common planning framework paved the way for better spatial coordination, which was important to limit municipalities from using instrument like land taxes and zoning to compete for private investment.

The need to have a common vision of the territory was perceived by all the actors involved. This convergence has been shown by the fact that the majority of the administrative levels (from regional to local) and main stakeholders (from private to environmental interests) have been involved in the plan-making process. This inclusive approach has allowed a wide

institutional consensus to be achieved, facilitating the planning approval procedure (just one municipality decided to abandon the agreement process due to political reasons). Indeed, barring a few exceptions, we can confirm that the plan was supported by both institutions and private organisations. However, it should be mentioned that this level of convergence was possible thanks to an administrative reform, which allowed those municipalities to move from an “association” to a “union” of municipalities – thus from a soft to a more integrated organisation of common services (including the spatial planning sector).

*Table 4.1: The main focal issues according to interviewed stakeholders*

<b>Main issues</b>	<b># instances</b>
Integrated Spatial Vision	8
Governance and Coordination	6
Soil Consumption	5
Territorial Competitiveness	4
Spatial Planning Coherence Procedure	4
Sustainable Development	1
Participation	1

Thematically speaking, all the actors agreed on the importance of preserving natural resources and in particular of focusing more on the environmental (zero-soil consumption, protecting on the environment, etc.) and economic (territorial competitiveness) aspects of the sustainability, less on the social dimension. These aspects will be also reflected in the impact of the Plan on these three dimensions. Nevertheless, the main efforts of the Plan focus on the institutional dimension of sustainability, which shows the importance of using spatial planning instruments to achieve political consensus among different municipalities and administrative levels.

#### **4.1.2 Inception of goals/action**

In general, it can be affirmed that the set of policy options developed by the Plan are in line with the main problems/challenges perceived by the majority of actors. Apart from few exceptions, all the actors attributed positive factors to the implementation of the Plan, such as the capability of prioritizing some questions like:

- a better spatial planning organisation, which has been solved by centralizing/delegating the spatial planning activity to the Union of Bassa Romagna;
- a more effective planning control, which has been partially solved by the introduction of spatial measures for promoting densification, regeneration, rehabilitation, etc.;
- a more integrated approach leads for a better integration of spatial challenges (environmental, economic and social);
- a more future-oriented approach, adopting a strategic vision has increased the territorial aptitude to improve economic competitiveness outside the Union.

However, there are some critical aspects to note. Some actors pointed out that the plan was not entirely able to effectively promote a coherent territorial development because of external interferences like the economic crisis and its main territorial and social consequences. For

some actors this has led to two consequences: (i) it increases the distance between plan's objectives and the achievement of its goals; (ii) often the plan was out of date since its provisions were not fully related with the new territorial contingencies.

Finally, there have been some disagreements concerning the timing of the Plan. While some institutional actors consider the Plan relatively on time and coherent with the challenges of the territory (admitting some delays in adopting regulation and operative plans), private stakeholders argue that the Plan arrived later than what they would have expected. They also felt that the plan arrived too late concerning the question of the excessive urbanization process that characterized the early 2000s.

### **4.1.3 Pre-intervention conclusions**

As it has been pointed out, the Structural Plan of Bassa Romagna is an instrument that responds to a series of territorial and socio-economic challenges. At the time of its adoption (from 2006 to 2009) it was considered strategic in terms of spatial and institutional reorganisation.

In order to develop a more sustainable use of soil, the intervention shows that there are some territorial and institutional preconditions that should be taken into account, such as: a shared territorial awareness, an administrative arrangement, an actor's attitude of cooperation and political vision. However, the administrative fragmentation did not help the adopting of effective spatial policies capable of reducing soil consumption. Indeed, all the actors recognised that one of the problems was the multiplicity of plans and the difficulty to address them in the same perspective. This why they all agreed on the importance of having common spatial planning instruments that respond to common territorial challenges. Another important precondition is the aptitude of actors to take decisions in a cooperative setting. Indeed, despite some exceptions, institutional actors and private stakeholders have agreed on the main trajectory of the Plan. This has been facilitated, of course, by the fact that the majority of municipalities have been administrated by the same political party for a long time, which has guaranteed a strong and stable political will.

## **4.2 Implementation**

### **4.2.1 Technical capability**

As regards the quality of technical capability, the majority of the interviewees are relatively satisfied despite some minor detractors. According to them, the introduction of the Plan was the way for a profound updating of municipal experts in terms of sustainable development and strategic approach as well as for actors and private stakeholders which had the chance to update their understanding of the complexity of the spatial planning procedure, while others pointed out some operative problems. In this respect, one of the institutional actors criticized the role of the private planning company commissioned with the drafting of the plan, by

underlining the lack of flexibility in changing the plan or the attitude to incorporating new issues/policies. Differently to what might be expected, the majority of the interviewees were positively surprised by the capability of the administrative experts in addressing the Plan while some have been unsatisfied by the planning capability of private experts who often were unprepared and short on specific knowledge. For few of them, indeed, was the Plan perceived as a technical barrier. This technical barrier was not observed only by private actors (associations and private citizens), but also by important stakeholders that have not always been conscious of the real nature of the Plan. Some of them admit that not all of the actors involved were totally aware of the nature/importance of the Plan and thus their contribution was relatively insignificant.

#### **4.2.2 Data and information**

The data and information used during the preparation of the Plan was sufficient and well organized. Indeed, as has been commonly recognized, the Plan is well linked to the territorial dynamics in terms of understanding the natural and ecological resources and less in respect of the economic and social impact of the crisis. Methodologically speaking, the data and information have been gathered in various ways (i.e. arranging existing data, updating them or elaborating new information). In this regard, the interviewees recognised the importance of the reorganization of all the data coherently to the level that the Union of Bassa Romagna required. Initially, the majority of data prepared on each municipality and province while the new Plan has required the organisation of a new territorial intermediary database. As pointed out by some interlocutors, this was an institutional and technical challenge but very useful for creating a common and complete database.

While having a database for the Union was seen positively by all, some actors have been critical in relation of the quality of data and its interpretation. Indeed, it has been pointed out that the data were, in some cases, too general and not always representative of the reality by failing to really catch the impact of the crisis, for example. In addition, sometimes the interpretation has been a bit confused and often not clear for everybody (usually the interpretation of the data was done by public actors). To solve this kind of data management problem, some actors suggested adding to the existing Informative Territorial System (ITS)<sup>7</sup> - which uses the ArcGIS technology to store and represent territorial data – open data access that mainly concerns economic, social and environmental performance which can be interactively used by all.

To conclude, for this kind of intervention where the draft of the Plan was accompanied by institutional reorganisation, having a common database is necessary but not sufficient. To avoid any misinterpretation of data, the clarification should be done in a participatory way by

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<sup>7</sup> [http://sit.labassaromagna.it/apps/webgis/sit/map\\_default.phtml](http://sit.labassaromagna.it/apps/webgis/sit/map_default.phtml)

including expert stakeholders and civil society organisation representatives. Another point is the accessibility of data and their updating/management. While the first is easily achievable by using GIS systems, the second requires some experience in using big data and open access technology. The combination of GIS and big data would help to have an integrated and data-documentable tool, which is easily accessible and more representative of the reality.

### **4.2.3 Participation**

Based on the opinion of stakeholders, the participation process and involvement of citizens has been relative low and not fully inclusive. Indeed, 9 out of 13 interviewees consider participation a weakness by underlining a series of critical aspects that concern both decision mechanisms and the level of the stakeholders' involvement. Accordingly, participation has been considered in the way of public presentation and / or simply consultation. In this regard, actors report that there was no initiative moving from public hearing to a more real public involvement in the decision-making process. Indeed, the participation process has not always been successful for citizen inclusion and, in some cases, also for the stakeholders' involvement. As observed by a few interviewees, it is also worth mentioning that the Plan is technically very complicated and private citizens are not always in a position to understand it or advance proposals for modification. At the time, some stakeholders asked for an ex-ante involvement, rather than being informed only after the main political/technical decision were made.

In this regard, something is changing. In the last years, the Union is experimenting with new methods for public involvement. This is the case of the activating of the permanent "table of simplification", which is a non-codified measure to involve actors without creating additional complexity and to be more inclusive in identifying territorial challenges. This attitude was translated into practice during the recent revision of the Plan which passed in 2019. In this case, participation of stakeholders was much more effective as it has been reported by some respondents.

As is widely recognised also by the interviewees, participation processes should be much more than a series of public hearing episodes concentrated mainly during the drafting phases. What, however, seems to be interesting is the introduction of the permanent table of simplification. Compared to the traditional participation mechanism, this kind of informal experience is not strictly oriented and time-compressed allowing room for experimentations. This experience in terms of public participation mechanisms suggests the need to adopt a double perspective: a more institutionalised perspective, according to the normative provisions, and a more informally conducted one – a sort of permanent observatory of territorial development – that will facilitate the community to reflect on the present/future territorial perspectives.

#### **4.2.4 Strategic vision**

Interviewees show a strong convergence as far as strategic vision is concerned. Indeed, there is a general agreement on the importance of having both a strategic vision approach and the identification of the main territorial priorities. In this regard, 12 out of 13 interviewees underline that – compared to the past – having a common vision is one of the biggest achievements of the Plan. They also underline that the question of the strategic vision should be seen in two different perspectives: (i) the first concerning the nature of plan, which is very future-oriented according to the law 20/2000; (ii) the second, referring to the modality of how the strategy has been drafted comparing to the old planning instrument. Differently from the past, all the actors involved (institutional or not) have been forced to think as a single entity in the strategic making process. This new methodological approach also paved the way to better addressing some crucial territorial challenges like: drawing a common infrastructure network; identifying some commercial development areas; establishing common measures for sprawl containment and urban regeneration, etc.

From a cultural perspective, preparing strategies and guidelines for a large territory also changed the actors' perspective. Now, there is a better awareness of the territorial potentialities than before. According to a few of them, this way of visioning has also facilitated the increasing of the territorial competitiveness of the Union.

Finally, as emerged from the case study: having a common territorial vision reduces spatial fragmentation. Moreover, acting as a single spatial entity can avoid all the territorial competitiveness that hinders a coherent territorial development and being an obstacle for the implementation of measures that can have cross-municipal impacts (environmental policies, for example).

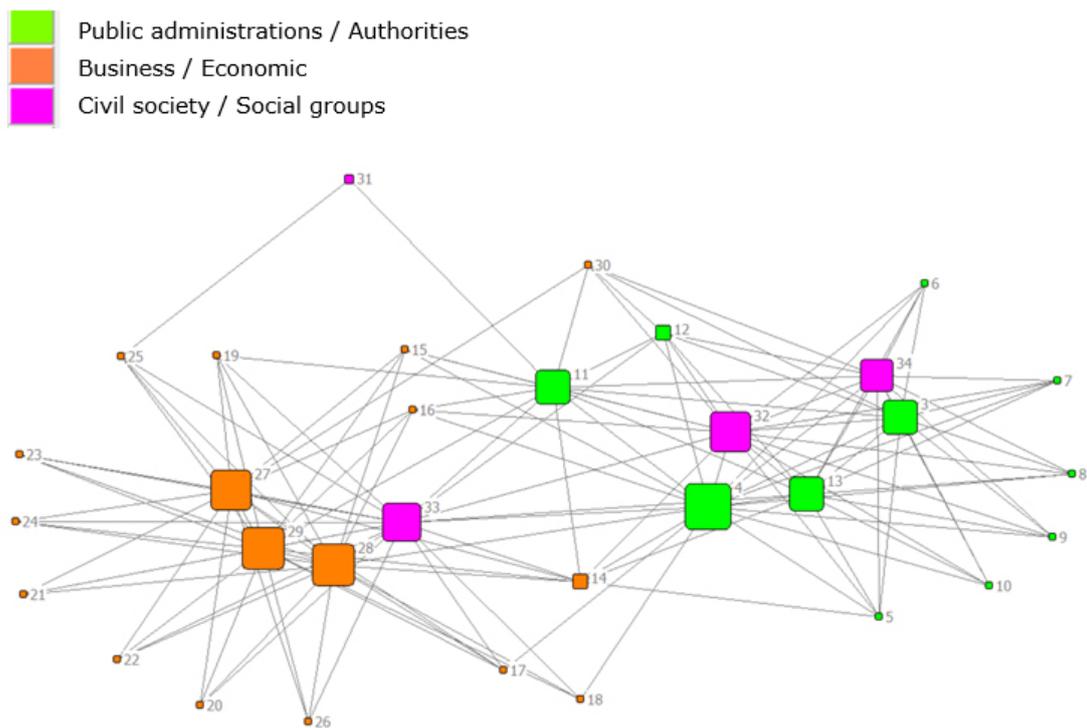
#### **4.2.5 Institutional coordination**

As far as concerns the capability of institutions to coordinate planning activity is concerned, interviewees' opinions are very positive - all of them consider this a strength. According to interviewees' opinions, this Plan would have not been possible without effective institutional coordination. Of the 10 municipalities that launched the initiative, 9 of them have adopted the final version. The only one that has refused to adopt the Plan did so because of some political contrasts and a divergent spatial vision. Apart from this, all the actors consider coordination mechanisms to have been implemented very effectively and functional to achieve the final objective. This was possible thanks to a general political convergence and the relatively stability of the political environment. Some of the interviewees consider it an important step towards better institutional coordination of the institutionalisation of the Union of Bassa Romagna, which has allowed a further integration of the public services. According to one of the interviewees, one of the decisions made was to delegate the Union everything concerning territorial management – currently the Union of Bassa Romagna is responsible for both drafting the Structural Plan (or similar plans) and issuing building permits.

It should be remembered that this territory has a long tradition in terms of institutional coordination based on a cooperative approach; it is easier to achieve this kind of objective in a relatively stable political condition. In addition to that, the institutionalisation of the Union has facilitated a better coordination both in terms of procedures and of functions.

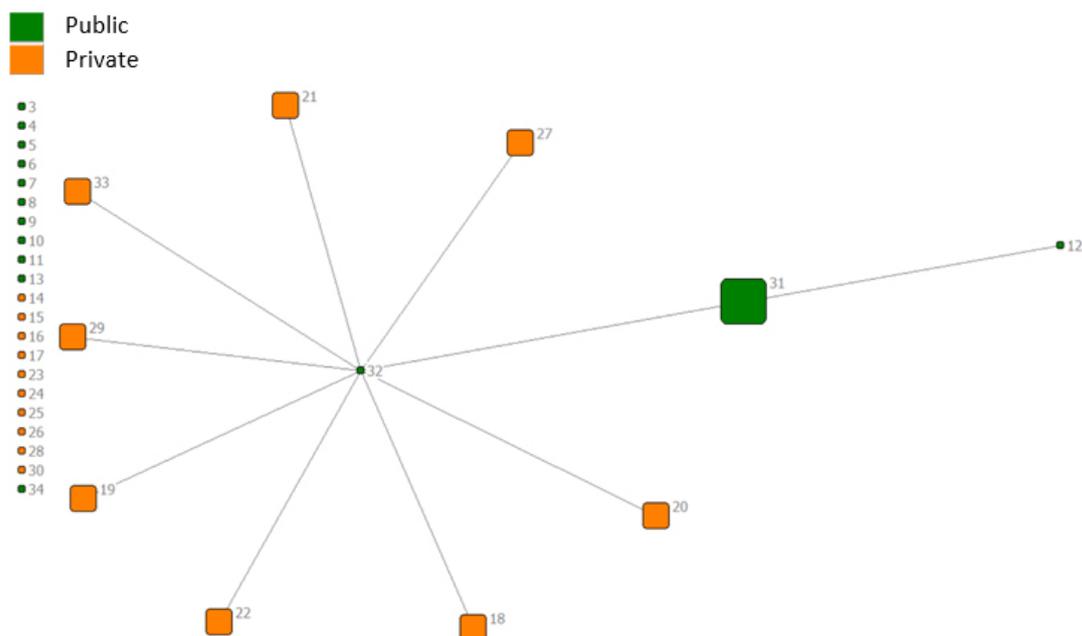
The social network analysis based on the interviewees' opinions confirms this. More in detail, the diagram below (Figure 4.1) shows the cooperative relational mechanisms that have been at the basis of the implementation of the plan. In particular, by looking at the node size, their position, the distance between nodes, and colours, the diagram highlights the level of cooperation stated by the interviewees. Methodologically, larger nodes indicate stakeholders with whom many have stated a cooperative relationship, while the smaller nodes represent more isolated stakeholders. In this respect, it is interesting to note that the diagram also demonstrates that all the categories of actors (public, business and representatives of civil society) have confirmed the existence of a cooperative-based environment where different actors have been involved.

Figure 4.1: Network of cooperation



The same analysis has also been conducted in order to understand if stakeholders have reported other type of relationships like pressure and conflict (see Figure 4.2). In this sense, there are very few cases where there relational mechanisms have been perceived as conflictual, as the diagram below shows.

Figure 4.2: Network of pressure/conflict



#### 4.2.6 Institutional leadership

According to all the interviewees, institutional actors were at the forefront of the introduction of the Plan. In particular, municipalities and the President of the Union have been leading the process by establishing the main steps, political trajectories and the spatial vision (at least at the beginning). A strong and resolute leadership accompanied the implementation of the Plan. In addition to that, there was a strong cooperative approach in involving also upper institutional levels like the Province and the Region as the main interlocutors, which was very positive and fruitful for the entire process.

On one side, this strong leadership was perceived by stakeholders as a very top-down approach, which did not facilitate their involvement. On the other side, having a strong and identifiable leadership has facilitated the way of taking decisions and achieving the institutional purposes.

It can be concluded that, for the success of any intervention, it is important to have a strong institutional leadership, but this is no guarantee for success. In parallel, alternative mechanisms of leadership should be implemented in order not to be perceived as a top-down process by private stakeholders.

#### 4.2.7 Political will

Except for a few interviewees, the majority of the actors recognised the existence of a strong political will in addressing the intervention at stake. Due to a relative political stability in the last decades – almost all the municipalities have been governed by the same party - there has been political support towards the implementation of the Plan. In this respect, the Plan

has been always sustained by politicians since it was considered as a way of coordinating not only planning activity, but also the political environment and public debate. Apart from natural confrontations and mediations, there was no particular political competition to shift the Plan in one direction or in the other. When it was necessary, a series of economic and territorial compensations have been adopted in order to counterbalance the main political interests. For example, some small municipalities were sceptical and afraid of losing their autonomy. As observed by one of the actors, these divergences were easily overcome due to a clear vision of the territorial features and the ability to address its power-mechanisms.

However, a few actors (3 out of 13) pointed out that the political will has been enough to become radical concerning the Plan's content. They pointed out that, at the time the plan was introduced, there was a need for a more radical approach in order to really benefit from the nature of the Plan as envisaged by the law. According to them, part of the Plan's potentialities has been left out.

Political will means also the emerging of political interests. As regards explicit political and personal interests, none of the interviewees expressed particular examples or relevant considerations but they also did not exclude it.

To conclude, in a time of uncertainty like the present, no one can guarantee the kind of political stability as they have had during the all phases of this intervention. Pursuing the same objective for ten or more years facilitated the effectiveness and capability of the Plan to impact on the territory.

What we can learn from this intervention is:

- political will is one of the key factors of the success of such kinds of interventions;
- clear vision – it is important to have a clear and stable idea of the future that can be pursued by the society as a whole rather than only by politicians;
- mediation – when divergences come up it is important to adopt compensation measures.

In particular, according to the stakeholder analysis, the diagram below shows the actors' distribution based on relevance (influence), their capacity of being influenced by the plan (affectedness) and main interests on the process.

More in general, the relevance of public actors is also confirmed by the diagram below, which clearly shows that public actors and interests played an important role in addressing the implementation of plan (see Figure 4.3). The majority of public actors are on the right part of the diagram showing that they have been (perceived) as the main influential players.



#### 4.2.8 Implementation conclusions

As far as the implementation of the plan is concerned, a series of institutional, technical and political questions were addressed. As emerged from the interview campaign, institutional actors, stakeholders and private actors have recognised that the implementation of the Plan has been facilitated by a certain quality of data (despite some criticism), technical capacity and administrative support which have played an important role in increasing territorial awareness in terms of economic, social and environmental richness. However, data availability and technical capability have not been sufficient to guarantee a certain degree of success for the Plan. Indeed, it is fundamental to rely on a strong political will able to develop a common strategically based and future-oriented territorial vision in order to create an alternative narration of the territorial features. In this respect, as regards this case study, the political will has been supported by a strong institutional leadership and cooperation, which has historically characterised these territories.

There are some aspects that require a better management. In this respect, the participation process – which has been rather criticized – has been considered the main weakness of the entire process underlying the lack of a full and effective process of stakeholders and private involvement.

### 4.3 Sustainability assessment

#### 4.3.1 Planning and development culture

According to the majority of the interviewees, the introduction of the Plan caused a paradigmatic shift from a very regulative oriented to a more strategic and integrated spatial planning activity. This impacted several aspects of the planning culture such as the planning approach, content, procedures and governance models. Accordingly, its main impacts on territorial development have been:

- The definition of a *common spatial vision*: above all, all the interviewees agreed on the importance of adopting the same approach when defining and developing shared spatial strategies. This was a radical change compared to the previous planning practice when each municipality acted autonomously;
- The introduction of the *strategic future-oriented approach*: until then, territorial development was addressed by the political decision exclusively based on the local and contingent needs. After the introduction of the Plan, private organisations started to be much more interested about spatial planning as a long-term and strategic process;
- The introduction of a *pro-environmental approach*: the majority of the interviewees recognised the importance of the Plan in introducing environmental policies concerning soil protection, promoting major density, introducing mitigation of natural hazards/risks mechanisms, protection of natural resources, etc.
- The implementation of various *governance and coordination mechanisms*: in line with the interviewees' opinions, the Plan enhanced governance capacity by concentrating planning activity in the hand of the Union making the process more transparent and simple. This improvement influenced also coordination mechanisms among municipalities (horizontal institutional coordination), stakeholders (horizontal private

coordination), planning sectors (horizontal sectoral coordination) and administrative levels allowing for a better involvement of the Province and the Region (institutional vertical coordination).

- The emergence of a diverse *planning culture*: most stakeholders recognize that without the Plan some issues would have never been addressed (municipalities would continue to draft their own plans and compete as usual, for example). Indeed, in those reports the importance is highlighted of removing competitive mechanisms among municipalities; overcoming some geographical/cultural/technical and political barriers, etc.; changing the mind of planners concerning issues like participation and soil consumption, etc.

On the other hand, interviewees see also some negative aspects that go beyond the Plan and relate to structural problems of the planning system. In particular, they pointed out:

- A general *slowdown of the planning process*s, which has been confirmed by 7 out of 13 interviewees. This may depend on the complexity introduced by the law 20/2000 that could be solved by the new law of 24/2017;
- The presence of *bureaucracy as usual*. The Plan failed to streamline the planning process;
- The *rigidity* of the instrument. The law does not envisage elements of planning flexibility except the option of plan variation, which usually takes a lot of time.

To conclude, it is undeniable that the territorial development of the Union of Bassa Romagna benefitted from the introduction of the Plan. This is clear when it comes to comparing the current territorial development with the previous period. Before, the situation was rather chaotic and not easy to be managed in terms of sustainable development. According to the opinion of all the interviewees, if never implemented, territorial development would have continued in a very unsustainable way (diffuse urbanization, soil consumption, overexploitation of natural resources, etc.). Moreover, stakeholders – even those who were a bit sceptical - affirmed that there are no credible alternatives to the Plan. Nevertheless, the general perception is that the territorial development of Bassa Romagna, even if it has improved considerably in the last ten years, requires additional efforts in completing its transformation from an urbanistic approach to a more integrated one.

### **4.3.2 Economy**

As stated, the Plan has the ambition to guide economic development of Union of Bassa Romagna in a way that mitigates existing economic and territorial disparities. To this end, it establishes a series of measures in terms of industrial and agriculture development by promoting investments simultaneously on the diversification of the economy, focusing on sectors like tourism, services and commercial activities. In this regard, a series of measure have been taken like the introduction of the “Ecologically Equipped Production Areas” (APEA) which are seen as the way to implement sustainable economic development initiatives in all the municipalities (14 APEAs have been introduced but only one has been really implemented).

In general, the stakeholders (9 out of 13) agreed on the capacity of the Plan to effectively address the economic development of the territory, or at the very least, not obstruct economic initiatives. In particular, they acknowledged the capacity of the Plan to channel the scarce private investments (mainly in the field of commercial investments) by facilitating the intervention of territorial regeneration or allowing some forms of derogating of plans provision to facilitate the expansion of industrial/productive areas. This form of flexibility has been seen as the way to adapt decisions taken before the beginning of the crisis.

In contrast to this general opinion, few actors consider the Plan irrelevant or in the worst cases they affirmed that the Plan has been compromised by following investors' needs rather than addressing them – which means delegating in part its technical and political role.

Apart from these divergent considerations, all stakeholders agreed - as regards the effect of the Plan in terms of territorial development – on the fact that its impact is not easy to measure. Indeed, according to the opinion of the stakeholders, it seems impossible to clearly discern the impact of the crisis from the capability of the plan to influence, in one way or another, the economic development of the Union of Bassa Romagna. In this regard, it is widely agreed that the crisis rapidly changed the economic context by reducing private investments and hence limiting the Plan's potential to achieve its ambitious economic objectives.

To conclude, it seems that the Plan, despite its intention, has not produced documentable and identifiable effects (whether positive or negative) in terms of economic development. In this sense, it could be useful to consider the introduction of a periodic economic ex-post assessment that can facilitate the implementation and/or the reorientation of planning priorities.

### 4.3.3 Ecology

The Plan has contributed to the preservation of natural resources in the Union of Bassa Romagna. Indeed, 13 out of 13 interviewees affirm that the Plan – in one way or another – changed the territorial perspective regarding the use of soil, natural resources and ecological corridors. This has been done:

- By promoting a new *cultural approach*. The introduction of the zero-soil consumption as one of the targets of the Plan played an important role;
- By introducing a new *awareness* concerning not only the use of the soil but also towards pro-active environmental interventions like strategic massive hydraulic projects in order to guarantee territorial security (reduction of periodic flooding); waste management and attention of seismic characteristic of the territory, etc.
- By implementing environmental *assessment* measures like the VALSAT, which is based on the European Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA);
- By changing the Plan in order to reduce the amount of buildable areas. Last year (2019), a variant of the Plan subtracted almost 600 buildable hectares - which represents almost

50% of the potential buildable areas envisaged by the version of 2009 - in favour of preserving agricultural land.

In this sense, it should be remembered that, even where the plan envisages expansion areas, developers must guarantee a certain level of environmental measures to reduce or mitigate the impact of developments. Some interviewees attribute to the Plan the new attitude of the administration to be more pro-active in addressing environmental issue like renewable energy production and/or improving green energy solutions by implementing several initiatives like the Bassa Romagna Green project etc.

Despite recognising its positive effects, some interviewees suggest that more can be done to enhance the environmental quality of the Union. In particular, there is a need for a better harmonisation of Plan's initiatives in order to be much more effective. According to the interviewees, a multi-modal transport system should be implemented, which can effectively connect rural areas with the urban centres through pedestrian and ecological transport systems.

To conclude, the Plan has definitively changed local attitudes towards the environmental and natural preservation of the territory. It does not only limit the reduction of soil consumption but also focuses on the management of natural and environmental risks in order to guarantee a certain degree of territorial resilience.

#### **4.3.4 Equity**

In contrast to the responses obtained by the interviewees concerning the economic and environmental dimension of sustainability, the impact of Plan on social aspects are quite contested. Six of the 13 interviewees considered the contribution of the Plan in terms of social sustainability negatively. Accordingly, the Plan has not contributed to solving issues like social exclusion or the abandonment of city centres. Indeed, the lack of investments dedicated to recovering parts of city centres has contributed to socially depriving some areas of public and private services and facilities. In these terms, one of the interviewees affirms that some municipal centres are characterized by ethnic segregation. In some municipalities, the average of immigrants is around 40% of the total of population, which potentially can become a social problem. According to the interviewee, this has been possible because of the scarce investments dedicated to city centres and the excessive restrictions<sup>8</sup> in these urban areas by reducing the capacity of private investments to take place. Social housing projects have been very few and have not resolved the affordable housing issue.

The rest of the interviewees considered the impact positively and structural. According to their opinion, the Plan has adopted a series of measures to deal with important social impacts like:

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<sup>8</sup> As in all Italian cities, city centres are subject to restrictive regulations in order to maintain certain spatial and architectural features. This has often frozen the development of city centres.

- It obliged private investors to dedicate 20% of their development volume to affordable housing. According to the initiatives, private investors can build social housing apartments in situ (if foreseen by the plan) or contribute the equivalent economic value of this 20% to other areas identified in the Plan.
- It supports public initiatives for providing public services in inner areas;
- It obliges private investors to dedicate part of their investments to fund public facilities (urbanization, taxis), etc.

All interviewed stakeholders agreed that the economic crisis has had a far greater impact than the Plan on the social dimension. In particular, because of the reduction of private investments, some initiatives foreseen in the plan were hardly implemented (e.g. social housing projects). Secondly, the crisis also reduced the economic and political capacity of public action to socially address the territorial development in the absence of resources.

#### 4.3.5 Balance

The interviews revealed that the Plan of the Union of Bassa Romagna has proven to be very innovative compared to existing planning tools. Its innovation can be understood both in terms of the legal provisions (what and how the normative framework has been set up) and in terms of how the intervention has been implemented in practice. According to the former, the main innovations have been:

- The introduction of an 'urbanistic equalisation' instrument (*perequazione urbanistica*). This tool aims at reducing imbalances among landowners (as the logic of zoning brings up) and facilitating local administrations to equip themselves with public facilities and services<sup>9</sup>;
- The adoption of a strategic-oriented approach, which means overcoming the logic of a pure normative and legal framework of the previous regulative plan (in Italian *piano regolatore*);
- The introduction of an environmental approach in terms of not only soil consumption but also environmental risks.

In addition, the implementation of the Plan itself has innovated the way in which the planning is conducted. The Plan has different merits, such as:

- It applied the strategic and future-oriented approach not only to a single municipality but involved 9 different local units;
- It has made planning activities uniform. In addition to the Plan, municipalities decided to adopt all planning instruments together including the building and urbanistic regulations

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<sup>9</sup> According to art. 7 of the law no. 20/2000, the Structural Plan recognises the same buildable potentialities to all "homogenous area". By so doing, owners of a plot of land in any homogenous area have the same rights and possibility to benefit for an eventual land transformation. This was introduced in order to limit development negative externalities like the differences that come up between those who have the right to develop according to the logic of the market (high economic benefit) and those who instead are subject to public expropriation of buildable land (low economic benefit).

(in Italian, *Regolamento Urbanistico Edilizio*) and the municipal operative plans (in Italian, *Piano Operativo Comunale*);

- It gives a decisive boost to sustainable development not only in terms of soil consumption but also of mitigating environmental risks due to unpredictable events and climate change;
- It reduces existing competitive mechanisms among local units in terms of economic, sectorial and spatial competition.

Apart from these important achievements, according to some stakeholders, the Plan failed in some aspects. In particular:

- The Plan still presents some normative/regulative/conformative aspects that should be overcome as for example regarding the possibility of the Plan to identify areas with “buildable vocation” (*vocazione di edificabilità*) which means that some specific parts are more subject to construction instead of agricultural use . This is a typical legacy of the former planning practice based on pre-defined normative prescription.
- The Plan, at the beginning, was too generous or overambitious in terms of buildable potentialities. There are two main reasons for it, namely deriving from the political and cultural interpretations of the norm. Politically speaking, it was necessary to accept and coordinate the need of each administration (in terms of buildable areas) in order to reach the agreement on a common strategy. In so doing, the plan has been exposed to an over-estimation of the buildable capacity of the territory as a whole (often political request where too ambitious). The second concerns the practice to include all buildable areas established by the previous plan into the new plan. In so doing, each new plan is exposed to this “incremental” process of over-estimation of its buildable capacity..
- It failed to anticipate or reorient the impact of the economic crisis.

In addition to that, the main challenges identified are:

- Introduction of flexible measures/procedures in order to be much more adaptive to external stimuli;
- Be more ambitious in terms of soil consumption;
- Increase inclusiveness in terms of public participation (*ex-ante*).

Overall, stakeholders are generally satisfied with the Plan. According to 10 out of 13, the Plan meets their expectations while just a few aspects were criticized. The principal criticisms concern the need for a better involvement in all planning phases.

#### **4.3.6 Multi-stakeholder assessment conclusions**

As far as the stakeholder assessment of the Plan is concerned, it is interesting to notice that – despite some divergent opinions – there is a substantial convergence. Since the beginning, the Plan has been perceived as highly innovative in terms of the planning activity (tools and procedures), planning discourse (ideas, value, etc.) and governance models (coordination mechanisms). After ten years since the Plan’s implementation, almost all interviewees agreed that the introduction of the Plan has radically changed the way of how the planning activity

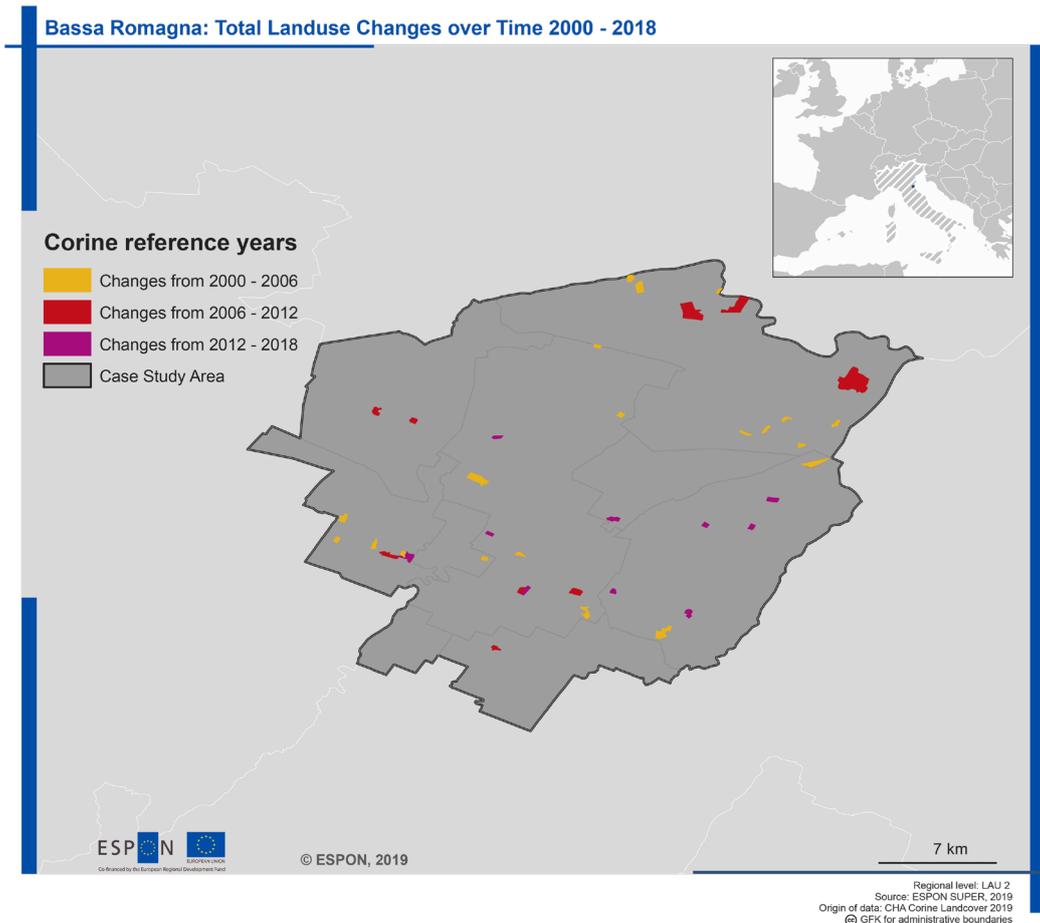
has been conducted in these territories. This sparked technical and cultural innovations (urbanistic equalisation, for example) which has contributed to have a more future-oriented and integrated planning system than before. Themes like environmental protection, natural conservation and zero-soil consumption are now part of a daily planning activity conversely to what was beforehand. In this sense, stakeholders consider these aspects structural since now they are part of their culture and there is no chance to back to the previous territorial (mis)management. However, it should be also recognized that the Plan failed to address some aspects that necessarily should be taken into account (i.e. little attention to social issues, lack of flexibility and few public involvement procedures).

Overall, this case study shows how in some contexts, where the planning activity is very fragmented, it is necessary to adopt a series of measures and incentives to create territorial synergies by working on different levels (administrative, spatial planning and sectorial policies). In this case, this was greatly facilitated by a context where cooperation and collaboration are part of their tradition and where there is a good institutional leadership based on a clear political vision.

#### **4.4 Conclusions**

Land in Bassa Romagna has been historically under great development pressure. As Map 4.1 shows, the period from 2000 to 2012 has been one of the most pervasive in terms of soil consumption. On the other hand, from 2012 to 2018 soil consumption has been less prevalent than before. The reason could be the implementation of the plan which starts from 2009 and the emerging of the economic crisis of 2008. It may be impossible to disentangle the two factors.

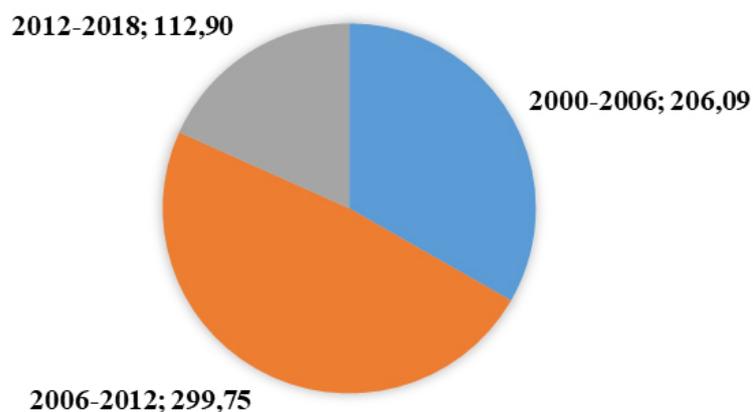
Map 4.1: Land use changes 2000-2018 in Bassa Romagna, Italy



As the data elaborated by the ESPON SUPER project shows, the use of land has been particularly unsustainable due to market speculation mechanisms. From 2000 to 2012, hundreds of hectares of land, 506 ha according to the ESPON SUPER database, have been transformed, putting under pressure the agriculture sector and the environmental ecosystem (see Figure 4.5). This trend has concerned the Emilia Romagna Region as a whole. Indeed, according to several reports on the issue, the region is one of the top of the Italian regions in terms of land use rate – according to ISPRA (2018), almost 9.9% of the regional territory is already covered.

Figure 4.5: Land use change from 2000-2018.

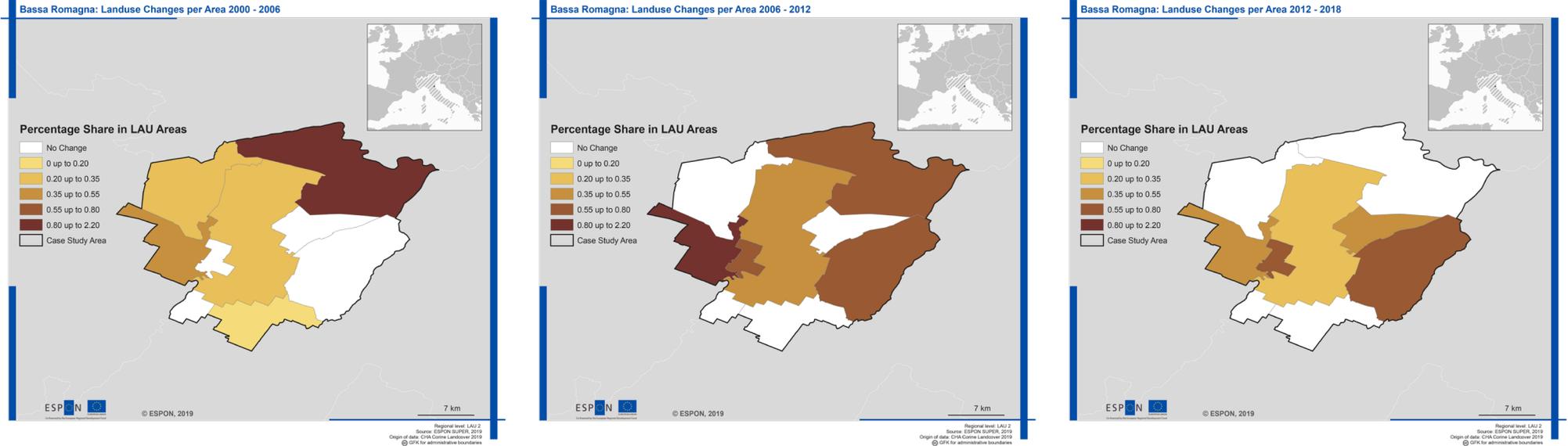
## LAND USE CHANGE (in Ha)



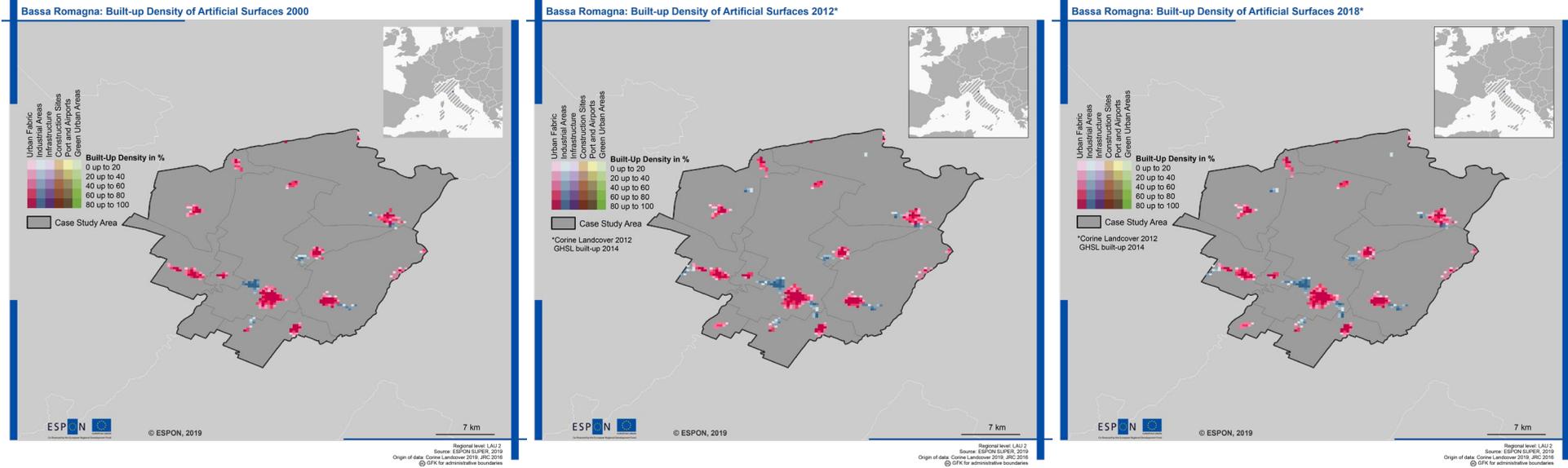
Due to this negative land use performance, since the beginning of the 2000s, the Region to reform its spatial planning system by introducing a series of innovative approaches in terms of planning tools and procedures. One of the outcomes of this law is the Structural Plan of the Union of Municipalities of Bassa Romagna, which, once adopted, has been entitled to address the territorial development of nine municipalities of the Union. This is also confirmed by data shown in Map 4.2, which presents the trend of land use change compared with the total area of each municipality. Accordingly, in the period from 2012 to 2018 only two municipalities increased their soil consumption by over 0.50% while in the previous period 5 out of 9 did for a total of 112,9 ha (almost one third of the 2006-2012 period).

Comparing the Built-up Density of Artificial Areas results developed by the ESPON SUPER project (Map 4.3) and the opinion given by the stakeholders and institutional actors, the land use in the Union of Bassa Romagna has encountered important transformations both in terms of quantity and of quality.

Map 4.2: Land use changes per area



Map 4.3: Built-up Density of Artificial Areas for 2000, 2012, 2018



Indeed, according to the data collected and the stakeholders' opinions:

- Since the introduction of the Plan the rate of soil consumption has decreased during the period from 2012 to 2018;
- Commercial and industrial areas have been growing much more than residential areas as Map 4.3 shows;

However, what the data cannot show are the driving forces behind the diminishing soil consumption rate. The impact of the economic crisis should also be seen as an indirect factor that has contributed to reduce market pressure on land. However, it is undeniable that the introduction of the Plan has contributed to better territorial development mechanisms. In particular, it should be recognised that the Plan has:

- Contributed to reducing spatial/planning fragmentation (instead of having 9 plans now they only have one);
- Introduced the zero soil consumption approach;
- Increased territorial competitiveness of the Union as a whole, and reduced competition among the municipalities of the Union;
- Introduced a visionary/strategic approach instead of a regulative and normative one;
- Created a paradigm shift for planners/administrators/policymakers;
- Increased cooperation and coordination (horizontal, vertical, sectoral) and optimized the use of public resources;
- Positively impacted the ecological and institutional dimensions of sustainability and less in terms of the economic and social dimensions;
- Introduced forms of compensation (territorial/economic), that however were not yet implemented in the practice to a full extent.

It also should be noted that there are some tasks the Plan has not tackled:

- Accelerating the planning procedures by simplifying the planning process and its bureaucracy;
- Introducing elements of flexibility in order to be allow the plan and its goals to be more easily adaptable *vis-à-vis* rapidly changing contextual conditions;
- Introducing more effective and comprehensive participatory mechanisms.

To conclude, the case of Structural Plan of the Union of Municipalities of Bassa Romagna is very site-specific and is based on a path-dependency logic. Indeed, the territorial and governance mechanisms that have been applied in this case study are strictly related to the local territorial tradition, culture and social value. However, there are some general lessons that can be extrapolated from it and presented as good practices that may constitute as many sources of inspiration for other contexts in Europe.

Firstly, **territorial integration matters**. This study highlight the importance of reducing territorial fragmentation. As experienced in this context, territorial fragmentation has allowed the development of territorial, economic and social competitiveness practices at the expense of natural and agricultural ecosystems. This has been also at the basis of adopting uncoordinated development measures and increasing mismanagement of territorial challenges. On the contrary, the use of soil seems to benefit from reducing spatial fragmentation and enhancing adopting common spatial and development tools.

Secondly, **territorial scale matters**. In an increasing globalised world, local units should (re)think about their territorial and economic size in order to be competitive with similar contexts. After the introduction of the Plan, stakeholders affirmed that the level of competitiveness changed forcing territorial actors to find their place in the new context. This concerns not only the administrative subdivision (which of course matters) but also the territorial attitude to think beyond borders.

Thirdly, a **cooperative-based approach matters**. As recognised by the majority of interviewees, good cooperation among institutional actors was fundamental to the good performance of the Plan. However, more should be done in terms of inclusion of private actors, mainly citizens, who have been not fully considered. Interesting in this regard, is the informal permanent table of involvement that has been introduced in the last years, which is positively influencing the participation of citizens and the effectiveness of the administration decision.

Fourthly, the **holistic sustainability approach matters**. As shown by this case study, the Plan has made significant strides in addressing the issue of sustainability. This, however, has been in the institutional, ecological and economic dimensions and less in terms of the social dimension. A competitive sustainable land use development should be able, to find measures and mechanisms that can easily be adaptive to territorial challenges. This can be also accompanied by a series of economic incentives and tax (dis)incentive mechanisms. Even if not directly dealing with planning, the implementation of the Plan has been influenced by a series of taxations that are indirectly driving the territorial development in a more sustainable way (see the effect of the Italian TASI on buildable areas).

Finally, fifthly, the **institutional dimension matters**. In order to assure a good level of efficacy of a given planning instrument, it is necessary to have developed efficient institutional mechanisms. In this regard, nothing would have been possible without the Union of Bassa Romagna, which has played a crucial role in the new centralised planning process by facilitating horizontal (between municipalities and sectors) and vertical coordination (within the province and the region). This new institutional configuration has allowed the reduction to a minimum of the impact of divergent interests (whatever kind, institutional and/or private).

#### **4.5 Implications for sustainable urbanization and land use**

This case study sought to illuminate the black box of development practices within a particular territory in Europe, focusing on a particular intervention which changed, or attempted to change, these practice to more sustainable ends. The primary source material was in-depth interviews with stakeholders directly involved in decision-making on spatial development, on crafting or applying the intervention, or both. Through their candid explanations, it was possible to provide a nuanced, and often critical, account of the origins, mechanisms and

impacts of the intervention. As can be read above, the results show stakeholders in agreement on some issues and disagreeing on others.

The purpose of this final section is to give voice to the case study researchers by asking them to specifically reflect on the key questions posed to the project at its inception. The ideas and opinions expressed in this final section – printed in italics – are, therefore, solely those of the authors.

**To what extent can the observed land-use changes in the case be considered sustainable?**

*In the case of the Union of Municipalities of Bassa Romagna, the major activity of land transformation has been concentrated in the decades up to 2008. Since then, there is no particular soil-consumption activity mainly due to the introduction of the Municipal Structural Plan (which was much more sensitive to the zero-soil consumption approach) and the territorial effects of the economic crisis. However, it is not easy to discern to what extent the diminishing of soil consumption was due to the Plan or the economic crisis.*

**To what extent did short-term thinking weigh up against concerns of long-term economic, ecological and social vitality?**

*The Plan introduced strategic long-term objectives. This new approach has been important in identifying territorial challenges and priorities. In particular, it introduces the sustainability concept in a very holistic manner – according to the Plan sustainability has been understood in terms of the economic, social, environmental and institutional dimensions.*

**To what extent were trade-offs avoided between economic, ecological and social values (e.g. urban green spaces in densifying areas)?**

*In order to address eventual negative trade-offs, the plan introduces a series of compensatory mechanisms (i.e. economic, territorial and development measures). One of them obliges developers to dedicate at least 20% of buildable area (or the equivalent economic value) for social housing projects, for example.*

**Was there a tension between sustainability at different levels of scale (e.g. a locally sustainable development having unsustainable attributes at the regional level)?**

*As the intervention has been developed, there is a certain coherence among the planning levels in terms of the sustainable use of soil. In order to increase its positive impacts on the territory, the Plan has reduced the spatial fragmentation and territorial*

*competitiveness by harmonizing spatial strategies, including those dealing with one or more dimensions of sustainability. The fact of having a common territorial risk perception and mitigation measure is an example of connecting regional/provincial priorities with local needs.*

**To what extent is there a correlation between urban form (e.g. high-density contiguous urbanization versus low-density scattered development) and sustainability?**

*According to the Plan's objectives, zero-soil consumption was one of the main inspiring elements. Indeed, one of the variants of the Plan has reduced the buildable areas by about 600 hectares by suggesting/addressing investments on the brownfield areas etc. This has contributed to the urban densification and maintenance/preservation of highly valuable agriculture land.*

**Do they produce economic benefits?**

*This is a tricky issue since the potential economic benefits have been drastically influenced by the economic crisis. The level of development envisaged by the Plan has been realistic once the crisis started to produce territorial impacts. Apart from this, the Plan increases territorial awareness by encouraging Bassa Romagna to compete with similar or higher territorial competitors instead of limiting competition between municipalities in the Union.*

**To what extent do they effectively internalize external costs?**

*By centralizing the public services (including spatial planning) and the management structure, the Union of Municipality of Bassa Romagna has been able to minimize the internal competitive costs and maximise the use of public resources. As an example, the infrastructure development efficiency has increased. Before the introduction of the Plan, each municipality was in charge of managing local infrastructure with a very limited budget. With the Plan, the Union can optimise public resources on the basis of a common infrastructure network guaranteeing territorial connectivity, which was not always guaranteed before.*

**To what extent do they enjoy popular support or consensus among stakeholders?**

*As has emerged from this case study, the stakeholders' consensus has been very important. Apart some comments, the level of stakeholder acceptance of the plan is relatively high. This has been possible because there was a good level of institutional leadership, which relies on political stability. On the other hand, stakeholders criticized*

*how the participation process has been conducted since it was more public hearing rather than effective public participation.*

**How can urban sprawl be contained and which instruments can be used to do that?**

*There is no single answer. As recognised by some stakeholders, in order to properly address territorial development (and hence urbanization) it is necessary to adopt both strategic and normative instruments. In our case, the Plan provides the framework in order to address a sustainable territorial development while operative plans and regulations effectively implement it. In addition to these tools, a series of economic incentive or disincentive measures should be taken into consideration.*

**How can the impacts of land take/soil sealing be limited?**

*Even if not directly introduced by the Plan, there is a regional resolution (No. 186/2018), which has introduced interesting mechanisms to reduce soil sealing. In particular, the resolution doubles urbanization fees (oneri di urbanizzazione) for projects that convert agricultural land into built up area and, on the other hand, decrease these by at least 35% (local administrations are allowed to reduce it to 100% if necessary) for projects that rehabilitate abandoned areas.*

**How can financial, fiscal and economic mechanisms be used to limit urban sprawl?**

*In our case, the Plan has been indirectly influenced by the national law 147/2013 (and its amendments) which establishes that buildable areas are subject to taxation measures (called in Italian the TASI - tributo per i servizi indivisibili) that can vary from one municipality to another. Despite having a taxation objective, this law has influenced spatial planning to the extent of the owners asking to reconvert buildable areas to agriculture land in order to avoid the TASI. As can be seen, even if indirectly, some taxation mechanisms can be proactive and steer a more sustainable use of land. In this sense, the last variant of the Municipal Structural Plan has reduced its buildable areas by about 600 hectares that were previously considered buildable areas.*

**How you transfer from one land use to another? Is buildable right permanent or temporary?**

*Due to the tradition of the Italian planning system, building/development rights are transferred permanently once the regulatory plan is adopted. When a new plan is approved, rights may be changed. However, this occurs VERY seldom, as owners pay*

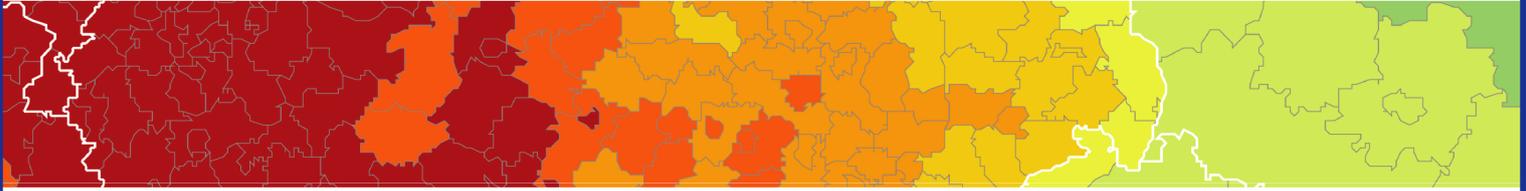
*higher taxes on buildable land, and could sue the municipality for the loss if the rights are taken away by the new plan.*

*The fact that taxes are higher for buildable land led, as a consequence of the 2008 global economic crisis, to people going to municipalities asking for their land to be zoned again as agricultural (they had no interest in building, hence they wanted rights to be changed in order to save on taxes). In this condition, rights can be taken away/changed upon the owners' request.*

*Overall, in the country, as each region features its own spatial planning law, there are regions in which the rights are temporary (because the plans have a time-limited life-span).*

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