



# Local Migration Governance in European Shrinking Areas: a German and an Italian Case

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## Abstract

Governance represents the dynamics related to a society more densely integrated into flows and not one-dimensional hierarchy relations and embodies a more cooperative mode where state and non-state actors participate in mixed public/private networks. This research explores innovative perspectives in local governance, based on two case studies in rural, shrinking areas in Germany and Italy in quest of revitalisation and the emplacement of asylum seekers and refugees in their territories. Based on empirical situations inherent in the category of “shrinking areas,” the article aims to bring out points of tangency, useful for providing recommendations and future research directions that can relate local territorial realities, united by similar processes, belonging to a larger European scale. Methodologically, this is qualitative research, based on literature and document review, interviews with key actors, group discussion, and observant participation. We conclude that although the German and Italian realities are quite diverse in terms of their shrinking trajectory, the present challenges for the emplacement of migrants are similar, such as housing and employment hardship, and that governance follows diverse parameters: while in Germany, it is more structured and coordinated, with a clear distribution of roles (civil society actors follow the leadership of the political actors), in the Italian case, the leadership is sometimes contested mainly due to political instability at the national level and the consequent effects on the reception system, which is reduced in its operation.

**Keywords** Local governance · Shrinking areas · Migration governance · Migrants’ inclusion · German migration governance · Italian migration governance

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## Introduction

Governance has gained space and prestige in the research of social fields and has gained primary interest in public administration, especially in multi-level and local contexts. The change in the public administration paradigm has entailed changes in public service delivery, which involves various forms of partnership in its interactive process. For some, in this context, governance seeks legitimacy and efficiency (Considine & Afzal, 2011; Stoker, 1998), while for others, governance is a new form of government (Rhodes, 1996), something broader than government (Bevir, 2010; Jordan, 2008; Kjaer, 2004) or interestingly put by Sellers (2011), an alternative empirical approach to state-society relations.

As a first insight, governance can be defined as the “relationships, processes, rules, practices, and structures (both institutional and discursive) through which power and control are exercised and decisions are made” (Andrée et al., 2019: 5). The mode of governance and their trajectories pay tribute to the study of institutions and institutional change to understand the role and impact on different societal fields (Capano et al., 2015; Norman & Vasström, 2012; Peters, 2013; Sorensen & Torfing, 2007), as it represents the dynamics related to a society more and more integrated into flows and not one-dimensional hierarchy relations. Thus, governance complements the institutional perspective of government studies and indicates “a new mode of governing that is distinct to hierarchical control mode, a more cooperative mode where state and non-state actors participate in mixed public/private networks” (Mayntz, 1998: 7).

The coordination of policies and actors is one of the oldest problems for governments, yet it has expanded considerably with the complexification of the state apparatus after administrative reforms with the introduction of the New Public Management (NPM)<sup>1</sup> concepts. New actors became part of the co-designing, co-production, and/or solely implementers of policies. These new challenges demand new competencies from local leaders, new skills from local administrations (Teles, 2016), and new institutional arrangements for governance (Bouckaert et al., 2010; Stoker, 2006). In this context, local governance is about steering partnerships and intentionally creating and orienting strategies for its success (Stoker, 2000a).

Today, towns, cities, and districts are encountering numerous challenges related to the climate crisis, social inequality, ageing populations, loss of demographic and economic dynamicity, hardships to maintain the welfare state services, digitalisation inclusion, and migration inclusion, to mention a few. It is particularly declining and lagging-behind areas, the so-called places that don't matter (Rodríguez-Pose, 2017), characterised by persistent poverty, economic decay, and lack of opportunities, that are particularly affected by the effects of these phenomena. These long-lasting

<sup>1</sup> NPM aimed to break with the traditional model of Public Administration, which was based on the Weberian bureaucracy model, while the premises of the NPM were the market economy and the introduction of private administration principles into the public sector. These principles resulted in the creation of regulatory agencies, executive agencies, management contracts, and terms of partnership celebrated with the private and third sector and public-private partnerships.

challenges are interconnected and cannot be tackled by one stakeholder only with a simple answer. It has become a common understanding that to successfully address these “wicked problems,” a local administration has to bring in more actors from varied sectors in a collective problem-solving approach, thus requiring the exchange of resources and knowledge (Eneqvist, 2022). In the last few years, we have seen the emergence of multi-actor partnerships and co-creative forms of action as trendy governance arrangements (Bianchi et al., 2021; Osborne, 2017). In this context of innovation, new capacities are demanded, as local administrations perform the roles of facilitators, enablers, and orchestrators of collaborative processes (Eneqvist, 2022; Hölscher et al., 2018).

In order to facilitate the transition of those territories that verge in a condition of marginality, social and symbolic, towards a new political and economic centrality with a view to redevelopment and contrasting the decades-long processes of abandonment and depopulation, it is necessary to emphasise the relevance of coordinated action between levels of government relating to different policy areas (labour, education, housing, and social/healthcare) and between local actors. From this perspective, such coordinated action can also facilitate the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in these territories — a presence that has been consolidating particularly since the years of the so-called migration crisis. The same integration of migrants can facilitate, in shrinking areas, programs of territorial development and social cohesion.

Our migrants’ and refugees’ emplacement approach emphasises the capital they bring and their contribution to innovation and revitalisation to overcome the conflicts and the stigma and its attributes that are deeply discrediting (Goffman, 1963). They are very often portrayed as a burden to the welfare state (Lutz & Knotz, 2022) or as security and emergency issues consolidated by the media representation. Indeed, by representing them as illegal immigrants, migrants, refugees, or asylum seekers — more generally, as “invaders” or as “victims” following the security frame or the humanitarian one — the media have influenced openness or closure towards newcomers, orienting collective perceptions of migratory phenomena (Musarò & Parmiggiani, 2022).

In opposition to the dominant paradigm which sees migration and shrinking areas only in terms of “problems to be solved” (Avelino et al., 2017), there are therefore increasing representations focused on the role of migration flows for the acquisition of a new centrality for rural and mountain areas (for Italy: Membretti et al., 2017; Carrosio & Lo Presti, 2018; Dematteis et al., 2018; Ponzio, 2020; for Germany: Bernt, 2018; Wolff & Wiechmann, 2017; Wiechmann & Bontje, 2015; Schemschat, 2021), however, still marginal or limited to academic discourse. Inserting itself into this strand of studies, the article specifically adopts the lens of governance to analyse the phenomenon in two different European contexts. It shows how governmental and nongovernmental entities, from national directives, act and react together within a local scale.

By presenting two different case studies in one mid-sized and one small town in shrinking rural areas in Germany and Italy capable of restoring the heterogeneity of conditions and situations of “shrinking areas,” the article aims to bring out points of tangency, useful for providing recommendations and future research directions that

can relate local territorial realities, united by similar processes, belonging to a larger European scale.

Methodologically, this research is classified as a qualitative one, based on literature and document review, interviews, and a few key statistical numbers related to local demography, economy, and political realities. This is ongoing research in the frame of the Horizon2020 Welcoming Spaces project, which is a consortium of five universities and five organisations of civil society (in five countries: Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, and Spain) that explore new analytical-empirical possibilities to combine two policy challenges relevant to the European Union: how to contribute to the revitalisation of shrinking areas in the EU while also offering a welcoming space for non-EU migrants to pursue their life projects. The cases of Germany and Italy were chosen because the authors are connected to the empirical research in these countries respectively. Some preliminary, limited findings of interviews with key actors, group discussion, and observant participation were brought in.

Besides this introduction, the article comprises three more sections: the second presents the state-of-the-art literature about local governance, shrinking regions, and role of policies in these regions. In the third section, we present our cases and our preliminary findings and discuss these findings. In the fourth section, we present our conclusions, notes, and pathways for future developments.

## Local Governance and the Emplacement of Migrants in Shrinking Areas Nexus

The investigation of governance is central to understanding processes and practices through which power and control are exercised in general, and the dynamics of shrinking regions processes, social and urban policies, and the emplacement of migrants in particular. Regarding the latter process, the term “migrants” refers to international migrants: “those who have crossed international borders” and hold different statuses in the host society (Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2018: 5). Following Glick Schiller and Çağlar (2018), the concept of emplacement/displacement of migrants offers not only an alternative to the normative concept of “integration,” but it also allows for exploring the relationship between modes of governance to certain characteristics of places. These authors define “emplacement as the relationship between the (...) restructuring of place within multiscalar networks of power and (...) a person’s efforts, within the barriers and opportunities that (...) local place-making offer, to build a life within networks of local, national, (...) and global interconnections” (Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2018: 20-21).

Referring to this idea of a multiscalar network of power, towns and cities and their institutions have unequal means and capital at their disposal. About this idea of a multiscalar network of power, large and small cities and their institutions have unequal means and capital at their disposal (Hollander et al., 2009). Therefore, for migrants (and their locals) to have access to resources and services, it also depends on the kind of cities they reside in. To explore this correlation in more detail, it is needed to deal with the relationship between shrinking small towns and modes

of governance for migrants' pathways of emplacement (Caponio & Borkert, 2010; Dimitriadis et al., 2019; Ferreira, 2019; Lavenex et al., 2015; Meier, 2018; Zapata-Barrero et al., 2017).

## Local Government and Local Governance

Local governments are political-administrative institutions or entities created by the central government to “deliver a range of specified services to a relatively small geographically delineated area” (Boadway & Shah, 2010: 242). Local governments formulate and implement, among others, migration integration policies (Alexander, 2003; Bruzelius, 2020; Scholten, 2013). These policies designed by local governments are pragmatic and tend to reflect the specific local reality, political arrangements, and local policy legacies (Caponio & Borkert, 2010; Schiller & Çağlar, 2009) and they may widely vary among territorial units within the same country (Zuber, 2020). In Germany, for example, local integration plans fulfil not only a political role but also a function in evaluating the outcome of integration processes among different local actors (Schammann et al., 2021).

In its turn, local governance is a broader concept and is defined as the formulation and execution of collective action at the local level. Local governance refers to the arrangements made by local actors, following their specificities, their stakeholders, and capacities in terms of resources and social and political capital (Denters, 2011; Stoker, 2000b). Denters defines local governance as the “contemporary patterns of collective decision-making and collective action in the local public domain” (2011: 313).

Local governance reinforces the demand for the capacity to coordinate the networking among diverse actors, civil society organisations, local-local public administration cooperation, and private-public collaborations. This process may facilitate the development of supra-local expertise and collaborations that make resources available beyond the administrative unit itself (Semprebon et al., 2022). These trends were made bold in local administrations, and as “place and identity play a relevant role in public policy” (Teles, 2016: vii), it justifies that local governance innovation and capacity in dealing with migrant emplacement need to be further investigated.

There is not one local governance pattern, but a myriad of styles. The theoretical-empirical challenge is to compare the different practices of governance in the selected shrinking area cases and evaluate what they have in common (which are the common characteristics), what differentiates them, and the challenges they face. Denters and Rose scrutinised and compared twelve Western countries on the basis of their commonality regarding local governance. From these cases, the authors revealed that “a widespread adoption of NPM and public-private partnerships; involvement of local associations, interest groups and private actors in policy partnership; and introduction of new forms of citizen involvement” (Denters & Rose, 2005: 261). The localities where the shift from local government to local governance has happened have evidenced the existence of a more democratic government through wider participation, especially by social organisations and NGOs in the public sphere. Dense public participation renders a local government more democratic

(Denters, 2011: 315) with greater opportunities for an active political role for citizens, for the third and the private sectors. In this sense, public decision-making concerning local issues increasingly takes place in the context of multi-agency networks that cross traditional jurisdictional boundaries (Denters, 2011: 315). Interestingly, this happens at the vertical level (across levels of government), horizontal level (between different local governments), and cut across the public-private divide (*idem*).

Good local governance is not just about providing a range of local services but also about preserving the life and liberty of residents, creating space for democratic participation and civic dialogue, supporting social and market-led and environmentally sustainable local development, and facilitating outcomes that enrich the quality of life of residents (Boadway & Shah, 2010).

The role of local, district, and regional governments is preponderant, as they are management and leadership instruments, and they have proximity and legitimacy to drive migrants' emplacement, sustainable development, and the engagement of multiple stakeholders. The governance at this level consists of harmonising and incorporating new forms of popular and social participation, employing mechanisms and praxis such as deliberative democracy, besides promoting successful partnerships between the state, civil society, private sector, and local communities (Frey et al., 2011). Another dimension of local governance is that it is formed by interdependent systems that transcend the local to reach the global level. Even rural areas are confronted with the local-global divide, the migrants are an important nexus in this equation.

### Shrinking Regions and the Role of Policies

The concept of “shrinking areas” is an empirical conceptual category that describes regions with population loss, economic decline, and social transformation processes (Bernt, 2018; Mallach, 2017; Mallach et al., 2017; Wiechmann & Bontje, 2015; Wolff & Wiechmann, 2017). A shrinking area is also defined as a “broader structural crisis of economic and labour market decline, peripheralization and a deepening urban-rural divide – intensifying the inherent disadvantages of rural areas” (ESPON, 2017: 3). On top of that, it is still possible to add the erosion of rural infrastructure, service provision, access to healthcare, social services and education, limited transport and digital connectivity, and to postal and banking services (European Commission, 2020).

Scholars and policymakers are busy answering questions about this phenomenon: What drives shrinkage? How can the phenomenon of shrinkage be understood and measured? How can migrants be agents and contribute to the re-dynamizing of shrinking areas? It is possible to appoint a few causes of shrinkage (in urban and rural dimensions), such as job-related out-migration; demographic changes: negative natural growth, ageing, downsizing of households; selectivity of population loss: young people (especially young women); loss of specific economic function (ex. Ports, industrial hub, higher education hub); less labour-intensive agriculture; suburbanisation: transfer to suburbs of business and commerce (shopping centres)

and changing of housing preferences for living in the suburbs; poor innovation capacity and poor governance, based on the dependence of external resources and the lack of necessary capacities (financial, institutional, expertise, technical, among others). The result is that shrinkage leads to an impact on settlement structures, land use patterns, and population composition (ESPON, 2017; Friedrichs, 1993).

Governance arrangements for the shrinkage of rural areas face further challenges: two-thirds of migrants settle in metropolitan areas (OECD, 2018). The already established migrant communities (the diasporas) are the main *pull factor* for migration, besides, metropolitan areas offer better access to jobs and public services.

To address the shrinkage phenomenon and its governance, the *EU New Pact on Migration and Asylum* (2020) recommends bolder institutional responsibilities, a better-coordinated relationship between the public, third sector and private stakeholders, and interaction of local, regional, national, and supra-national levels of governments, and the creation of timeline policies and programmes. However, rural areas most of the time experiment lack good governance, and especially capacities, to tackle shrinkage.

Policy design capacity at the top is one thing, and implementation capacity and achieving results at the bottom are different. That is why our broader research focuses on governance and the emplacement of migrants in rural areas at the local level, based on a governance best practice focus. The territorial policies by the EU (including urban as well as rural ones) seek and aim at new forms of economic dynamics, especially through innovation, having a focus on a sustainable, innovative economy (EU-Regional Policy, 2019; Albrizio et al., 2017; Dietz et al., 2013; Kotzebue, 2016; Batker, 2020; European Commission, 2020).

## Preliminary Findings and Discussion

This is ongoing research and we anticipate some findings on governance related to the emplacement of migrants in two shrinking areas under scrutiny: one in the German state of Thuringia and the other in the Italian region of Lombardy. The interviews realised in Germany and Italy were conducted in their respective languages; however, in this article, citations of the interviews were translated into English by the authors.

From a historical point of view, Italy and Germany have different situations regarding the immigration issue. Italy, a country of emigration, only became a country of immigration in the mid-1980s, unlike Germany, a country of immigration since the 1960s with the establishment of the guest worker regime set up to manage the immigration of foreign workforce. From a numerical point of view, Italy has an average of one municipality for every 7599 inhabitants, and in Germany, one for every 6665 inhabitants (Borghi, 2017). An important administrative difference concerns unions of municipalities or consortia of municipalities (in Germany *Gemeindeverbände* and *Kreise*), which are particularly relevant in the context of reception and emplacement of refugees and migrants: unlike Italy where they are not entities provided for at the state level, in Germany they do, and thus are legal entities, with functions established at the regional level that are at a higher administrative level

than municipalities. However, what the two countries have in common is the dispersal policy for refugees and asylum seekers, which involves the random assignment of beneficiaries to reception centres along the national territories, thus disengaged from the social, economic, and territorial conditions of the municipalities themselves.

## German Migration Governance

In the case of shrinking regions in East Germany, after the obsolescence of “old” industries in these areas, and the misguided reunification of the two parts of Germany (Hölscher, 2007; Jüger, 2021), they have lost economic power and almost one-third of their population. This emigration flow was highly damaging to the economy and the demography: they were mostly young people, and female, employable age, and well-trained (Meier & Foelske, 2020). More specifically, in areas where our research is being conducted, indeed, they have lost economic dynamism, are facing demographic changes, and hence social welfare stress. Thus, the need for migration to compensate for the demographic downturn is present. Next, we briefly address the governance of migration policies in Germany.

At the national level, key migration policies and the legal framework are designed. Responsible for these tasks are the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community (*Bundesministerium des Innern, für Bau und Heimat — BMI*), which is the main actor for migration matters, and the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (*Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales — BMAS*).

Concerning the implementation of migration policies, other institutions are responsible for it: the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (*Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge — BAMF*) and the Federal Employment Agency (*Bundesagentur für Arbeit — BA*) and its regional agencies. At the state level (*Länder*), there is room for interpretation through executive guidelines and laws. At the local level, districts (*Kreise* or *Gemeindeverbände*) and municipalities are the main ones responsible for the implementation of national and state migration policies at the local level. The integration manager (present in most districts and sometimes also at the municipal level) has a legitimate role in coordinating all actors (political and civil society). He or she oversees and represents the public interest in implementing migration integration policies at the local level.

A special role in overseeing the implementation of migration policy is the position of the Advisory/Ombudsman. At the national level, this position goes to the Commissary for Migration, Refugees and Integration (*Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Migration, Flüchtlinge und Integration*), which has the ombudsman function on integration policy designing and implementation. The Prime Minister or the area minister listens to his/her recommendations. At the state level, there is a similar position and sometimes at the communal level too.

Germany has a particular welfare system that denotes the strong role of the social organisations’ institutions dating from the Second World War. They are Non-Statutory Welfare Organisations (“*Freie Wohlfahrtspflege*”) that play a preponderant role in migrants’ reception and integration, as well as in the German welfare system.



These are Diakonie, Caritas, AWO (Workers Welfare Organisation), Paritätische Welfare, German Red Cross, and Jewish Welfare Organisation. They are social service providers (such as health services, including hospitals, education, kindergarten, and counselling), based on contracts or funding agreements by local and/or state or national governments. As some of these organisations are affiliated with religious institutions, they are, to a minor extent, also financed by their mother organisation. Which service provider is more relevant depends on the local traditions, social milieu, and development path. In a very typical catholic region, Caritas is preeminent; in a protestant one, it is Diakonie; in an industrialised and strong worker organisation area, AWO is the most important one, and in a mixed area, it is Paritätische, as this one is composed of a parity system that assembles different organisations. These voluntary welfare organisations are non-statutory actors, and there is a mutual dependence relation between municipalities/districts and these actors.

Related to migrants, these non-statutory welfare organisations give all kinds of counselling and support to get access to the health system, education, language course, employment, housing, and so on.

Additionally, there is also migrant self-organisation, such as the Migrants Association in Altenburg, Innova Sozialwerk, and NPO, to mention a few that contribute to the inclusion of migrants and integration in the education system and labour market. It is also worth noting the citizen initiatives relevant to migration inclusion, based on voluntary engagement, linking, and complementing the public policies. Examples of this are Futura and the Migrants' association in Altenburg.

### **The Case of the Altenburger Land District**

The Altenburger Land district, located in the state of Thuringia, has its administrative seat in Altenburg, a small-medium-sized rural town of 30,792 inhabitants in a peripheral region of Thuringia that loses population, capital, and resources. It is located 100 km from Erfurt (221,896 inhabitants), the capital of Thuringia (TLS, 2021), and 40 km from Leipzig (605,00 inhabitants, and 1.1 million in the metropolitan area) in the state of Saxony. Leipzig is a magnetic centre for most migrants living in Altenburg: it is a major diaspora centre, a place for shopping, and for Muslims, a place for prayers and for burying their loved ones (Altenburg does not allow them to have their mosque and cemetery).

Altenburg is one of Germany's most rapidly shrinking cities: its population fell from 56,000 in 1980 to 31,000 in the present days. In the previous socialist era (until the unification into West Germany in 1990), there were three higher education institutions in Altenburg, today there are none. Talent-resourced young men and women leave the city to study in Gera (36 km away) or Erfurt, the capital of the state of Thuringia. Once young people go away to studying and establish social and professional links (especially through the internship during their studies), it fades the perspective for them to re-establish in the district of Altenburg. So, the city and the district have been losing their youth, talents, and population, severed by a negative growth rate, and negative outflow/inflow rate. This is not an exclusive phenomenon of the district of Altenburg but of the whole former German Democratic Republic

**Table 1** Socio-economics figures in the district of Altenburg and Germany

Areas	Altenburg district	Germany	Year
<b>Demography</b>			
Total population	88,000	83.2 Mi.	2020
Foreign population (percentage of total pop.)	3.7	12.5	2019
Average age/population	50.3	44.5	2019
Births (per 10,000 inhab.)	63.2	93.6	2019
Deaths (per 10,000 inhab.)	153.4	113.1	2019
Deficit births/deaths (per 10,000 inhab.)	-90.2	-19.4	2019
Net migration (per 10,000 inhab.)	13	39.4	2019
<b>Economy</b>			
Gross domestic product per capita/€	22,510	41,508	2019
Gross compensation per employee/€	30,400	50,000	2019
Change in GDP/previous year (percentage)	1.2	2.8	2019
Unemployment — men/women (percentage)	7.6/5.5	6.3/5.5	2020

Source: compilation by the authors, based on information from the Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder (2022)

area. Old, obsolete industries were closed and replaced by high-tech, automatised ones.

Nonetheless, efforts have been made, utilising fomenting entrepreneurship, to attract newcomers and make young locals come back after their studies in other cities — although with little public support. FACKtory die Zukunftsfabrik (the factory of the Future) is an example that aims to foster the social, creative entrepreneurial spirit of locals and migrants alike.

Table 1 shows some major demographics and economic factors of the district of Altenburg and summarises the above discussion in comparison with Germany as a whole. It shows how this district is behind in the main indicators compared to the average situation of the country.

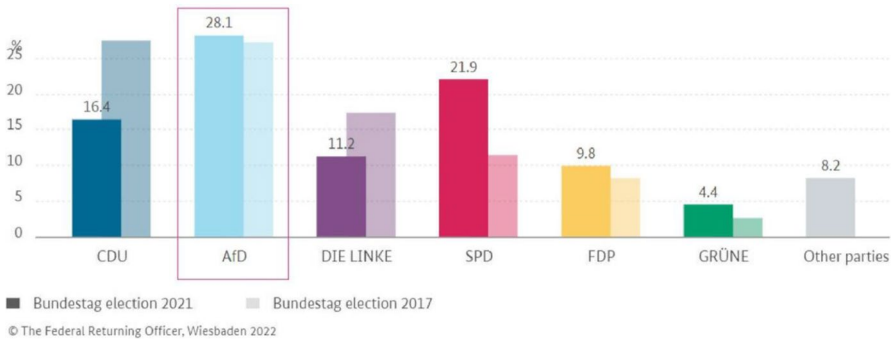
### Political Climate

Scattered bitter sentiments, xenophobic discourses, and prejudice exist in the region and are translated into votes. The feeling of having been “robbed” (west-German businessmen have bought cheaply their companies) and the sentiment of having been “left behind” due to new, automatised technology, many lost their employment and had hardship or impossibility to find a new one, mainly because of lack of training in the new technologies. These sentiments have been translated into the political climate and votes in East Germany as a whole and Altenburg in particular. Figure 1 illustrates the votes according to each party for the representatives of the national parliament in the circumscription that Altenburg makes part of in the last two elections, 2017 and 2021.

In an interview, the leader of an NGO appointed the level of interest in politics by the migrants and refugees:

## Percentage of second votes

Bundestag election 2021, Gera – Greiz – Altenburger Land  
Final result



**Fig. 1** Parties' representativeness in federal Parliament per votes percentage in Altenburger Land

*Migrants are interested in politics, especially because their future is at stake. Although they are not allowed to vote, they take part in civic engagement we promote, such as debates or even manifestations in the central square. [...] They are very connected in politics and are aware of politics all over the world because their families are dispersed in different countries. They are able to compare. (Interviewee AL\_F, 13 Sept. 2021)*

The far-right party Alternative for Germany (AfD) has increased its voting base and become the number one party in the state of Thuringia, as well as in the local constituency, and the number one party in the district parliament. However, because the coalition is made up of other parties, they are neither ruling the state nor the district.

The immediate result of this legislative right-wing force, traditionally against immigration and inclusion policies, has been translated into less funding for not-for-profit organisations/integration of migrants. As a result of the lack of funding, the NGO mentioned above that promoted civic engagement had to end its activities in 2022. Further, it deepens a mismatched comprehension of the role of migrants, as profiteers and as a burden to society, instead of seeing them as active agents for the revitalisation of the area, with creative and entrepreneurial potentials. Nonetheless, for far-right groups, preserving the German identity comes before the challenge of shrinking demographics and revitalisation.

From a broader perspective, it is seen also a mismatch between European fundamental values of humanitarianism and the securitised EU's most recent emphasis on "apprehend, detain, deport" (Bender, 2022).

## Governance

The integration managers at the city and district levels are the coordinators of the welcoming and inclusion of migrants. Different secretariats, offices, and welfare

organisations carry out different activities, according to their speciality, being housing, education, health, counselling, language training, and so on. Caritas, for example, supports the migrants to get doctor and labour agency appointments, among others, besides supporting them in translations and filling in documents.

The district integration manager defines his tasks based on three pillars:

*conception, networking, and counselling. [...] Advice both from the integration actors and from individuals who have questions about integration, as well as advice from in-house, i.e. management level and the political representation, i.e. members of the district council. (Interviewee AL\_AS, 29 Nov. 2021)*

And he explains how migration governance is in the daily life among the different actors of the district of Altenburger Land:

*They are independent organisations, mainly. That means something like Caritas, Diakonie, and Lukasstift, but also associations like the Integrative Centre [Futura e.V.]. [...] They are actors who either deal only with the topic, like the Integrative Centre, or they are actors who have a very broad spectrum in the field of social counselling, like Caritas and Diakonie, for example, where the topic is one of several. [...] If you want to extend the framework even further, then, of course, all the authorities are also actors, starting with the Youth Welfare Office, to the Job Centre / Employment Agency. Actors can be housing associations if we are talking about housing. Other actors are kindergartens and schools. [...] So it is a cross-sectional task and in this respect, it is only logical that all those who work in different areas of society can ultimately be actors in integration work. Theatres, museums, libraries. (Interviewee AL\_AS, 29 Nov. 2021)*

It was found trust among the actors. Trust is the strong element between governance and policy implementation in the Altenburg district. Regarding networks, we observed three in one interconnected network: political (district-scope), political (city-scope), and social actors (NGOs and welfare organisations). In the network context, the integration manager positions himself:

*I actually see myself as a moderator of interests. [...] Of course, I have my own attitude, my own opinion, but in my work, I actually try to see: OK what is the point of view, what are the different points of view that we have? And how can we integrate the points of view into a discourse process and ideally find a solution that everyone can support? (Interviewee AL\_AS, 29 Nov. 2021)*

A high level of governance capacity is translated by the sound relationship and actors' capacity to cooperate to solve issues related to migrants and refugees.

## Policies

High policy capacity was also found: the capacity to understand the problem and adapt the state and/or national policies and implement them locally. Different actors, political and social ones, complement and sometimes supplement each other:

implementers, counselling, and cultural mediators are in place. It was seen, on one hand, a decentralised policy implementation, and a lack of formal policy evaluation on the other hand.

More specifically, concerning Education, migrants (regardless of their status) have the same rights and obligations as citizens for public primary and secondary education. All migrants who have residence documents are entitled to social security. However, in practice, there are limitations on the level of protection offered, as there is no stable employment for temporary residence holders. Permanent residence is obtained after 5 years of legal and continuous residence. On top of that, some conditions are added: having a secure livelihood with long-term employment, no criminal records, language knowledge, etc. After 8 years of “lawful habitual” residence, permanent residents can apply for naturalisation (IOM, 2019).

Employment hardship is still a fact, whereas there is a mismatch between the randomised policy of emplacement, whereas refugees are treated as numbers and sent to any location randomly, and skills and job opportunities. On top of that comes difficulties in proving experience or diplomas. This hardship was expressed by one participant in a discussion group:

*That's always very difficult with us because the companies always take Germans first and then European people and then if they need more people or something, they take foreigners last. That's usually a big problem for us, too. We want to work in Germany or something, but we don't have many possibilities. (Interviewee B3, 28 Sept. 2021)*

The contradictory fact is that there are employment openings that are not fulfilled, but in most cases, there is migrant labour available. Language skills (usually required B1 level), difficulty in proving experience or formal qualification for that specific position, and equivalence of diplomas are the main hindrance factors for the inclusion of migrants in the labour market, according to our interviewees. Hence, it denotes too rigid requirements to access the labour market and less opportunity for in-place training and learning. As the “labour black market” or the parallel market does not have this rigidity in hiring and offers opportunities for training and learning in place, it is very often the solution for migrants. Finally, at the district level, no special role for migrants was found in the economic and development plans.

### **Conflicting Functions and Precarious Policy Delivery**

Integration is a conflicting process, as it involves cultural differences between newcomers and locals, as well as the social environment for public and civil society actors, which is contradictory. Further, if we consider that there is no explicit municipal migration policy, yet there is an established structure to manage and support integration based on trustful cooperation between public and civil society actors. Concerning the public actors, the key person is the district integration manager with the function of bridging interests and coordinating actors. Regarding the civil society actors, the traditional welfare organisations provide services for migrants and claim advocacy functions (there is a “double mandate”). The “double mandate” of

traditional welfare organisations can conflict with the interest in the self-representation of migrants and the interest in the autonomy of private philanthropic initiatives.

Governmental programmes from the state and local governments are used to set up support services for migrants. It is noticeable the New Public Management philosophy in place (to reduce “the size of the state,” as it is one of the NPM principles) related to the migrants’ support services are mostly not delivered by state agents, but by civil society organisations (including the non-statutory welfare organisations) on a temporary contract basis. Most of the services are limited in time and on precarious (i.e., temporary) professional employment. There is no certainty that the employment and the delivery of service are going to be continued the following semester or year. These concerns have been shared by social welfare and NGO organisations in Altenburg, and we have seen activities being terminated.

Still related to policy capacity, the goals are not set clearly in a measurable manner. It is tacit knowledge that the goals are a good integration of refugees and migrants. Again, here there are no qualitative measurements for any evaluation, but there is a common-tacit-premisses — and this transits horizontally and vertically among the different actors — that a good refugee and migrant integration relies on the fact that they receive housing support (preferably free housing for the first months), medical assistance, a school for the kids, preferably language and professional (short) training course. In the second level of this tacit integration concept comes employment (i.e., refugees and migrants should be working) and thereafter, contributing with social security, paying taxes, and finally holding clean police records, being fluent in German, engaged in the local social and civic activities, which are considered demonstrations that the refugee or migrant is well “integrated” into the country.

## Italian Migration Governance

Spatial development policies aimed at redeveloping shrinking areas, in Italy the so-called inland areas due to their prevalent location along the Apennine and Alpine ridges, are intended to counter the effects of the processes of emigration and depopulation caused by the crisis of mountain grain production before 1880, the national agrarian crisis of 1880, and the country’s uneven economic growth after World War II (Barbagallo, 1973; Giustiniani, 1981). Nowadays, 73% of Italian municipalities involved in the system of second reception of migrants and asylum seekers are concentrated in disadvantaged and very disadvantaged rural areas (Rete Rurale Nazionale, 2020), and 40% fall within inland areas (Ministero dell’Interno, 2021).

The need to overcome territorial gaps gave rise in 2014 to a national cohesion and development policy, *Strategia Nazionale Aree Interne* [The National Strategy for Inland Areas] (SNAI) addressed the 60% of the national territory made up of areas significantly distant from the centres of supply of essential services (education, healthcare, mobility) and subject to a process of strong marginalisation caused by a decline in the local population and its ageing, reduction in employment, and poor provision of essential public services (Accordo di Partenariato, 2014).

SNAI represents the only intervention model on marginal territories in the EU. It can be understood as “a laboratory for integrated rural development and institutional innovation” (OECD, 2022) and an innovative experiment in the territorial concentration of policies and the construction of new modes of multi-level governance in which local governments together with the central state identified priorities, areas, and modes of intervention (Lucatelli & Tantillo, 2018).

SNAI acts as a point of tangency between national and local perspectives and consequently between localised objectives and national-systemic objectives. SNAI is part of the National Reform Plans and is one of the strategic lines of intervention of the European Structural Funds of the 2014–2020 programming cycle. Since 2014, the Strategy has involved 72 project areas, through specific “Area Strategies,” for a total of 1061 municipalities organised into associations of municipalities (CIPE, 2019). Rather than promoting projects based on generic potentials of the area, obstacles to existing or tested promising experiences are enhanced and removed by giving trust to ordinary citizens, companies, or institutions by defining spaces of collaborative governance aimed at the co-production of services through the collaboration of different actors in the drafting of Area Strategies. Such a process makes local practices and policies more effective and allows collectively agreed goals to be achieved also by developing multiscale relationships from local to regional and national (Moralli, 2019).

Since the early 2000s, inland areas have mitigated population loss through the presence of foreign populations (Membretti et al., 2017; Membretti & Ravazzoli, 2018), including through forms of “ethnicization of housing and employment opportunities” understood as the almost exclusive presence of certain communities in certain sectors (Luisi & Nori, 2016). In continuing with a phenomenon that began in 2014, following the intensification of migratory flows and the Unified Conference State-Regions-Local Authorities — that promoted a more balanced distribution of reception facilities throughout with the consequent entry of rural and mountain municipalities mainly into the first reception system, the number of migrants — asylum seekers and protection holders hosted by first and even second reception facilities in inland areas have grown in recent years. Although integration is not among the objectives of SNAI, some Area Strategies have included the migration issue in their territorial development strategy (e.g., the Grecanica and the Casentino-Valtiberina Area Strategies) or, following SNAI’s method, parallel initiatives of cooperation in the reception system were created between different actors at the local level already networked through the Strategy — the case of Fontanigorda (Legambiente, 2018; Martini & Bartolini, 2020).

Italy’s reception system is bipartite. The ordinary bottom-up system, the current *Sistema Accoglienza Integrazione* [System Reception Integration] (SAI, formerly SIPROIMI, SPRAR), originated by Ministry of the Interior, the UN Refugee Agency, and the National Association of Italian Municipalities in 2000 to establish the first National Asylum Program — based on widespread reception projects at the instigation of voluntary participation of municipalities and local associations (municipalities frequently delegate management directly to civil society organisations). The top-down emergency system is managed directly by the central government.

Through consultative working groups, the National and Regional Coordinating Groups on Asylum designed for exchange among key stakeholders — groups that have lost their clout as of 2017 due to government instabilities and whose consultations are generally not binding on the Ministry of the Interior — local authorities along with civil society organisations meet with central government entities to increase the quality of services provided (Ponzo et al., 2022). By participating in the Groups, members of civil society, particularly Caritas and ARCI, have improved the horizontal dimension of reception governance and helped strengthen its vertical dimension as they operate in different places around the country. Overall, civil society organisations play a key role in migration and reception cooperation. Despite the delegitimisation campaigns that began in 2017 in relation to these two areas, and linked to the political rise of nationalist and right-wing populist parties, the economic budget of these organisations has followed a continuous growth (Openpolis, 2021), although the decline in public funding allocated to these organisations just starting in 2018 (OpenAid, 2021).

SAI is in theory understood as a set of opportunities for strengthening territorial services for the benefit of the entire community, local and migrant (Ministero dell’Interno, 2018), but in practice often generates welfare of a parallel type to the generalist one: indeed, “synergies with general policies depend on the willingness and capacity to cooperate of both the organisations managing reception centres and the public entities responsible for the delivery of welfare services” (Ponzo et al., 2022: 61).

## The Case of Breno and K-Pax Cooperative<sup>2</sup>

Breno is a municipality in Camonica Valley, in the province of Brescia, located within the Adamello National Park, classified as a peripheral area according to SNAI and as an intermediate rural area.<sup>3</sup> It is 68 km from Brescia, with which there is a rail link and 116 km from Milan. The population amounts to 5014 inhabitants and is characterised by a negative natural growth rate for the last two decades (Istat, 2020) offset by a positive foreign migration balance (Istat, 2020). Figure 2 shows the population dynamics in Breno.

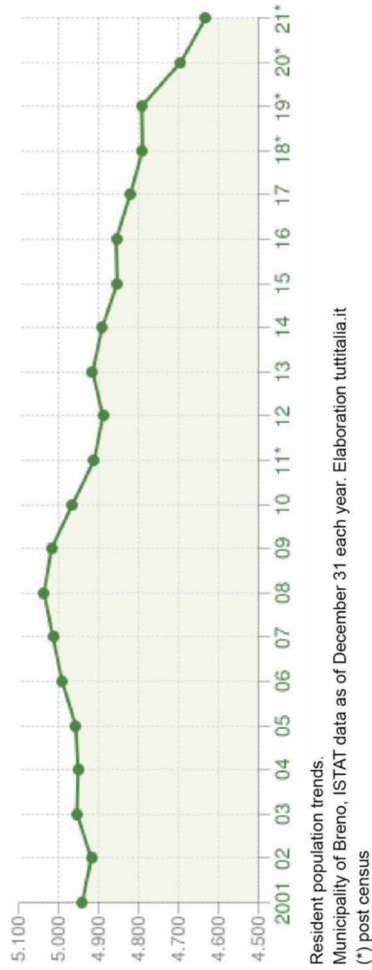
The K-Pax social cooperative was founded in 2008 in Breno with the aim to

*support individuals and families in socio-economic and relational difficulties through different transversal actions developed synergistically by the cooperative and other actors of the territory [...] while promoting the integration of people in fragile conditions, asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection, single women and those with minors, and low-income families. (K-Pax, 2021)*

<sup>2</sup> The interviews referred to in the paragraph were conducted by Melissa Moralli in June 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Classification adopted by the Ministry of Agriculture together with the Regions in 2007–2013 and 2014–2020 EU fund programming phase, which identifies four types of areas in order to territorialise rural development interventions.





Resident population trends.  
Municipality of Breno, ISTAT data as of December 31 each year. Elaboration tuttitalia.it  
(\*) post census

Fig. 2 Resident population trends in Breno

The cooperative is currently an executing entity of three SAI projects together with other entities among church and association entities (as well as through innovative collaborations between psychologists and the Fatebenefratelli psychiatric department) (K-Pax, 2021). The reception centre located in the municipality of Breno currently welcomes 67 beneficiaries among asylum seekers and refugees. What has always characterised the cooperative's approach is the intention to provide widespread micro reception, initially designed to stem the problems that emerged from what was instead taking hold in the area in 2011 with a high concentration of people in a single building located near ski facilities and therefore particularly unsuitable for reception (K-Pax, 2018); and also the will to systematise the training of beneficiaries with the construction of networks of local actors in an innovative key of ecological and productive land management.

### Political Climate

From the analysis of the interviews emerges how political changes at the national scale affect the operational framework of the cooperative and, consequently, the governance of migration management at the local scale. Following the change of government in 2018, with the new populist Movimento 5 Stelle and Lega coalition in government, and the subsequent entry into force of the so-called Salvini Decree (dl n.113 /2018), later converted into Law 132/2018, the K-Pax cooperative, decided to give up collaborating with the Prefecture of Brescia in the management of services for asylum seekers to choose to refocus on SPRAR (now SAI) programs and develop self-funded forms of nongovernmental assistance and reception of asylum seekers otherwise excluded from governmental reception — with the #primalepersone [#peoplefirst] project, which provides counter services also open to people outside the reception network (K-Pax, 2020, 2021).

It becomes clear that the smooth functioning of reception, especially in situations of political uncertainty, depends on the willingness of the entities involved to pursue their goals, their degree of socio-territorial consolidation in the area in which they operate, and the networks to which they belong. In a provincial context whose political line-up is predominantly in favour of the populist and anti-immigrant Lega party, as reflected in the provincial results of the 2019 European and 2018 political elections,<sup>4</sup> the interviews highlighted how it is direct human relationships and personal connections in the community level that re-balance a situation otherwise totally marked by closure towards the other than oneself, and how, in addition, the cooperative itself is a medium in sewing and holding together the different parts of the inhabiting community.

*In small communities like ours [...] personal knowledge is important. We're all a bit racist, maybe you vote for the Lega, however, he's a good guy [...] and so I help him, if he's looking for housing I put in a good word [...] It's ugly to say*

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.comune.brescia.it/comune/indaginistatistiche/Pagine/statistiche-elettorali.aspx> (last accessed August 8, 2022)

(last

*but even personal knowledge in our circles and the credibility of people still do so much [K-Pax cooperative worker].*

## Governance and Policies

Similar to the German case, it emerges — also from an interview with a city councillor — that trust and cooperation are extremely relevant elements among the actors and entities involved, as it emerged also from at local and inter-municipal scales, not only in the area of reception but also in other projects that benefit the entire community. These projects include the Hotel Giardino, a project to reactivate a hotel facility through the employment of both employees and users of the Cooperative; the project “Rivestiamoci” [“Let’s get dressed”] whose proceeds enabled the activation, according to a project mode that is being experimented but is close to becoming a new innovative mode of co-construction of local welfare, of a self-financed welfare project for work grants and economic reintegration paths for unemployed women and shelters for women victims of violence.

Of particular note, is the project born in 2019 aimed at the creation of a representative body of foreign citizens in Val Camonica, designed to involve not only those who have settled for a long time but also refugees and asylum seekers, some Italian citizens, migrant organisations, and some associative entities. A project that “*homogenises the burden of responsibility, the participation*” [K-Pax cooperative worker] between old and newcomers but nevertheless raises doubts about the actual institutional and political interest, thus raising the need for a stronger stance by local institutions: “*is it a project that you really care to implement or not? It makes sense if it then becomes something that even outside of the project, the funding, the facilitation on our part remains as a political representation*” [K-Pax cooperative worker].

From a policy perspective, special attention should be paid to the housing issue, which emerges as a persistent problem on the part of the cooperative’s users and operators, lacking a comprehensive set of regulations.

*It is much more difficult to find housing than a job today [...] [Among the] advantages that maybe with the municipal administration you have a relationship sometimes even personal, of acquaintance. The disadvantage is that being small municipalities, settlements in an apartment of five African boys you can see immediately, it jumps out and some people turn their noses up. Some people, other administrations, have told us no. [K-Pax cooperative worker]*

As previous analysis has shown, it is therefore personal relationships, trust, and credibility that facilitate housing placement, which is otherwise extremely problematic as a function of the prejudice attached to the figure of the immigrant. “*When the [reception] project ended I went to rent and my boss Andrea helped me look for a house, I live near the church downtown*” [former K-Pax cooperative beneficiary].

Within this framework, the social housing project launched by K-Pax, in collaboration with another local association, is inscribed, with the primary goal of being able to establish a positive relationship between the property and the guests, based

on “mutual trust,” allowing the user to continue the tenancy directly in the first person (K-Pax, 2021).

### Conflicting Functions

In a context defined by the operators of the cooperative as particularly culturally closed, the case of Breno and the K-Px cooperative represents a virtuous example of good practices of socio-territorial interaction between historical and new inhabitants, also recognised internationally (K-Pax, 2021). Reasoning on a national scale and comparing the case of Breno with other Italian realities, it becomes evident how the degree of effectiveness of support services for beneficiaries of the reception system is particularly tied to the capacities of the implementing entity, in this case particularly solid, with the possibility of generating experiences that are also very different from them from centre to centre and with consequent forms of inclusion or marginalisation. Mostly when the provision of support is tied to a particularly limited period, in this case, 6 or 8 months. Communication of projects and activities, while necessary for the promotion of forms of dialogue and encounters for mutual interpersonal knowledge, turns out to be a particularly contentious issue.

*We [K-Pax] communicate more out of a need that is [...] ours, because actually all these things that we do concerning integration and inclusion these guys don't care [... ] And this creates great reflections and questioning, [...] because you ask yourself what is right and what is not, for whom you do it [...] You promote dialogue because anyway this thing forces you to sit at the table with local administrators, ask for economic collaboration and the use of spaces, of the town square. [K-Pax cooperative worker]*

In general, it emerges how the willingness to work not on an emergency but on planning, even anchored in innovative forms of relationship with local actors and territory, and to provide tools for later living outside of reception, moves away from the risk of welfarism, a particularly contradictory aspect not only for the personal autonomy interests attached to each migration project but also for the collective imaginary of reception.

### Conclusion Notes and Pathways for Further Development

This *tour d'horizon* over the literature and empirical cases allows us to draw a few conclusions and appoint some avenues for further developments. Governance encompasses the different administrative, political, economic, social, environmental, and legal structures, and when it works properly, it helps to achieve the intended results planned by the stakeholders. Often, governance is presented as an end in itself, rather than a means to accomplish mainly policy capacity.

Citizens and politicians alike try to maximise their interests in the short term; with citizens privileging the welfare policies that bring benefits to them as individuals. On the other hand, as rational actors, politicians try to maximise their electoral

gains in the short term too (given the next election) by promoting policies that would get votes.

Migrants do not necessarily make a part of this equation and interests. In several regions, migrants are stigmatised and labelled as those who drain social welfare resources and do not have a place in the political campaign agenda or find it when needed to get votes. However, in shrinking areas, migrants are needed, and therefore are an asset to local and regional revitalisation.

Additionally, there is a gap in the scientific literature and the political agenda in exploring the role of advocacy groups and the construction of a favourable discourse towards migrants as an asset to the revigorating of shrinking areas. In this respect, the researchers, and social and political activists should draw attention and ink to successful cases of migrants' entrepreneurship and the positive contribution of migrants to local and regional development.

Although the German and Italian realities are quite diverse in terms of their shrinking trajectory, as the reasons are different, the present challenges for the emplacement of migrants are similar, such as housing and employment hardship. It is also noticeable that governance follows diverse parameters: while in Germany, it is more structured and coordinated, with a clear distribution of roles, whereas civil society actors follow the leadership of the political actors, in the Italian case, the leadership is sometimes contested mainly due to political instability at the national level and the consequent effects on the reception system, which is reduced in its operation. Although they belong to two different territorial scales, in both contexts, trust emerges as an indispensable element between governance and the implementation of innovative policies and projects, limiting possible marginalisation from solid relations between local communities and actors.

Precisely to overcome marginalisation and also for an effective transition from integration to emplacement, it is crucial to overcome shared vulnerabilities between residents and newcomers, based on the marginality itself of shrinking areas, by guaranteeing equal citizenship rights between urban and rural-mountainous territories. The need to intensify infrastructures, services, and sociality enables territories to attract new inhabitants in a broader sense, thus counteracting depopulation and fostering social dynamism — as shown by the returns to rural territories triggered by the reception initiatives.

In the German case, it is patent that the powerful non-statutory welfare organisations (“*Freie Wohlfahrtspflege*”) participating in the co-production and co-delivery of social welfare play a significant role in the local governance and governance capacity perspective and framework. Similarly, the Italian case, it emerges how social cooperatives, primarily involved in the management of the local migrant reception system, play a significant role not only at the level of local governance, weaving networks with local and provincial governments, associations and other cooperatives, private entities, and the local community but also in increasing local welfare for the benefit of the entire community.

Nevertheless, in small contexts such as those of the two case studies, there emerge, on the one hand, easy access to public actors by associations and civil society organisations and, on the other, the evident limits on migrants' concrete opportunities for autonomous action within these same contexts. Divergent

political orientations may limit such action, through either an exclusionary and anti-migrant orientation or an apparently inclusive attitude — actually cosmetic — that seems to open, for example, channels for the political engagement of the newcomers but which in reality has no concrete feedback in the long term. As the experience of the creation of a representative body of foreign citizens in Val Camonica shows.

The authors assume that welcoming initiatives can open spaces of involvement and redistribution of power for the whole community (new and old inhabitants) when carried out by local governance through cross-actions involving political, social, cultural, and economic aspects. However, although welcoming initiatives function as local connectors at the local level and sometimes at a larger scale, there are few relations between them at the national level. This, thus, limits the possibilities for an exchange of knowledge and experience useful to balance what are otherwise obvious gaps between welcoming territories on a national scale and which translate, in practice, with the lesser or greater involvement of migrants in local contexts and their consequent development.

Overall, with regard to migration governance, the replacement of a randomised quota system with a matching approach based on integrated systems between different government departments to improve the distribution of migrants on the territory and, more generally, the transition of the migratory phenomenon from a securitarian approach to one aimed at the development of new social policies, also through new narratives and forms of self-representation in the political discourse capable of overcoming the utilitarian approach in the main labour sphere with which integration is still understood, is necessary.

In the context of our distinct research, a few recommendations emerge from the local case studies regarding the emplacement of migrants:

1. Change the temporary for a long-term relationship of the civil-society actors and welfare organisations that render supportive services to migrants to create a more sustainable frame in welfare delivery;
2. Foster the confluence of innovative initiatives to support asylum seekers and protection holders and those for local welfare, through the construction of new networks of actors, is a useful tool for cultural change;
3. Incorporate in the EU lexicon (as well as in all levels) a new concept: emplacement instead of integration. Migrants are human beings of full capacities, highly motivated, that are seeking a new opportunity to start a new life and are able to have an active role in the revitalisation of shrinking areas.

It should be noted that governance is constantly being adapted to a new context, which is why it is central to our research as a tool to analyse the social coordination among the public, private, and third-sector actors in cross-sectoral areas, such as political, economic, educational, social policies, and cultural, in which the migrants' emplacement in shrinking areas is all about. As (public) governance in shrinking areas and the process of emplacement of migrants is greatly concerned with public policy implementation and public service management, new

research would concern policy implementation and public service delivery not from the individual organisation but from a system point of view. In this respect, it is opportune to ask what are the ways by which governance can continually be innovative.

Navigating from the empirical reality to the theory, and faced with the diversity of conceptualisations of governance, a structured approach to governance that encompasses all its facets is needed. We advocate a methodological unified concept to make it possible to understand governance in a structured form and, at the same time, it would encompass all forms of its stretched conceptualisations. Exploring governance in three dimensions — politics, polity, and policy — has the potential to be a good pathway for governance studies. Their meaning and contours will be transcended and amplified to be operationalised in the specific empirical context of governance in shrinking regions which are emplacing non-EU migrants.

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## Declarations

**Ethics Approval** This article follows the ethical procedures of both institutions.

**Conflict of Interest** The authors declare no competing interests.

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