Participatory and Integrated Governance for Rural Tuscany

Connecting territorial dialogue, policy sectors and local action



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‘THE EVOLUTION OF TUSCAN MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE: CONNECTING URBAN & RURAL REALITIES’

MEDIEVAL FOUNDATIONS (11th-15th C.)



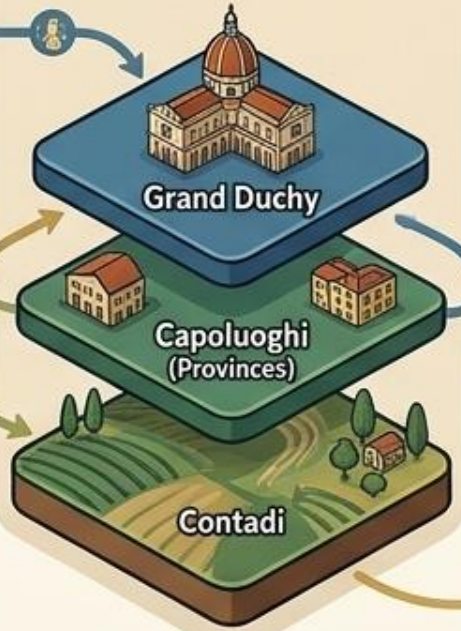
Rooted in City-States (Comuni)
& Countryside (Contado)
Negotiated autonomy and rural dependencies
Trade links and guild systems
Conflict and integration



MEDICI REGIONALISM (15th-17th C.)



Centralised Duchy structure under Medici family
Florence as the strategic, central hub
Consolidation of rural territory
Patronage and managed connections
Regional ties established



THE LEOPOLDINE REFORMS (18th-19th C.)



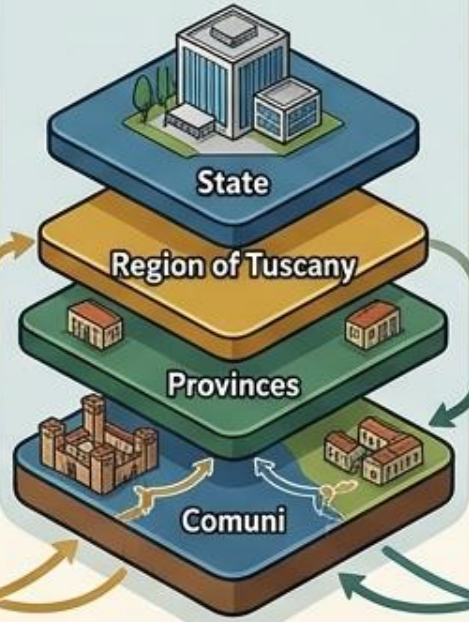
Administrative streamlining & enlightenment reforms
Modernised municipal framework (Comuni)
Improved urban-rural connections (road, transport)
Fiscal centralisation & local administration
Secular control of services



POST-WWII & REGIONAL AUTONOMY (Mid-20th C.)



A rise in regional-level governance
Decentralisation of key powers (Health, Transport)
Specialised urban-rural development plans
Cooperation between regional and municipal levels
Modern administrative efficiency



CONTEMPORARY GOVERNANCE & INTEGRATION (21st C. - Today)



A complex multi-level framework
Active EU funds and regulations (e.g., ESI Funds)
Inter-municipal cooperation & regional synergy
Focus on cohesion and smart connections
Pacts with territories



A PATHWAY TO SUSTAINABLE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT & COHESION

Long-standing tables inside and outside the Region

Two complementary dimensions to help connecting objectives, implementation responsibilities and resources across different programmes

IN-HOUSE COORDINATION

Cross-directorate technical working groups are routine. They connect policy objectives, administrative responsibilities and resources.

Helps connecting objectives, implementation responsibilities and resources across different programmes.

EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIP

Institutions, social and economic partners, civil society and local communities contribute territorial knowledge and help define priorities.

Supports Regional government to identify and translate territorial priorities into integrated action.

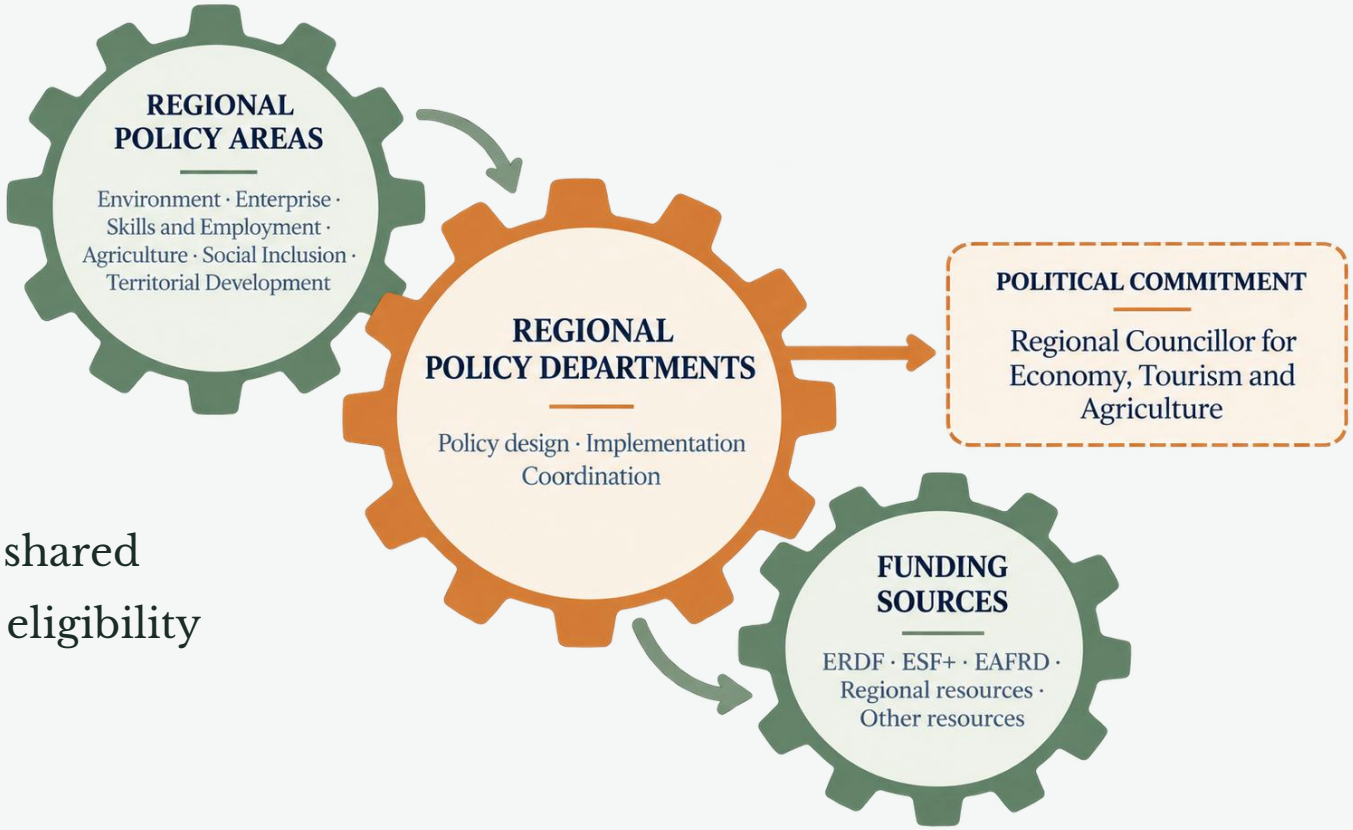
Message: Territorial dialogue needs internal coordination to be translated into integrated action.

Governance is not a funding architecture

Policy sectors are the organisational anchor. Funding programmes are the financial instruments.

In Tuscany, responsibility for policy objectives remains with the relevant regional departments irrespective of the funding programme involved.

Different funding programmes can contribute to shared policy objectives, while retaining their own rules, eligibility criteria and responsibilities.



Message: The starting point is the territorial policy objective — not the funding instrument.

Partnership extends into programme governance

Although operating within different EU funds, Monitoring committees share a partnership logic that connects programme implementation with territorial knowledge.

A recurring partnership architecture

- **Regional and programme authorities**
- **Institutional representatives**
- **Economic and social partners**
- **Civil society and other relevant stakeholders**
- **Local development actors, including Local Action Groups (LAGs)**

LAGs are not only responsible for delivering local projects.
Their experience in community-led development and their relationships with local actors provide territorial knowledge that can inform wider programming processes.

The presence of LAGs matters: LEADER and the LAGs connect local partnerships with the governance of rural development programmes.

Rural services: governance examples from Toscana diffusa

EU funded Integrated strategies

Territorial strategies build on a long Tuscan tradition relying on negotiated, place-based and multilevel instruments, from territorial pacts and industrial districts to today's PO5 strategies and beyond.

Connectivity

A human-centered Tuscan Charter of Digital Rights. Official recognition of digital helpers as a professional figure and creation of digital literacy & assistance centers.

Rural health

Health districts are drawn by the Regional Council after the Conference of Mayors, with mountain zones in mind. Municipalities and the health authority share a Società della Salute. Incentives for GPs in disadvantaged areas agreed with unions.

Mobility

One a single regional contract governing local public transport since 2021; weak-demand networks and services are organized by local authorities but supported by regional funding based on service kilometres; yearly adjustments agreed with provinces and unions of municipalities.

Governance in action: connecting local partnerships and regional policies

Territorial strategies require resources beyond investments-only

Multi-level governance arrangements where different actors sit together around shared **priorities**:

- Regional and local authorities
- Local partnerships and communities
- Local Action Groups and LEADER (when rural matters)
- Different policy sectors and funding instruments

Support processes through which priorities are defined and partnerships are built.

ESF+ can support:

- Participation and stakeholder engagement
- Mobilisation of local actors
- Capacity-building
- Co-design of territorial strategies

ERDF, EAFRD/LEADER and other resources can contribute to implementation, according to their respective objectives and eligibility rules.

LAGs are not simply another funding channel, but bearers of local knowledge, established partnerships and the capacity to mobilise territorial actors.

One territorial strategy can draw on different funding instruments — while participation and capacity-building remain essential to the process.

Tuscany's digital frontier



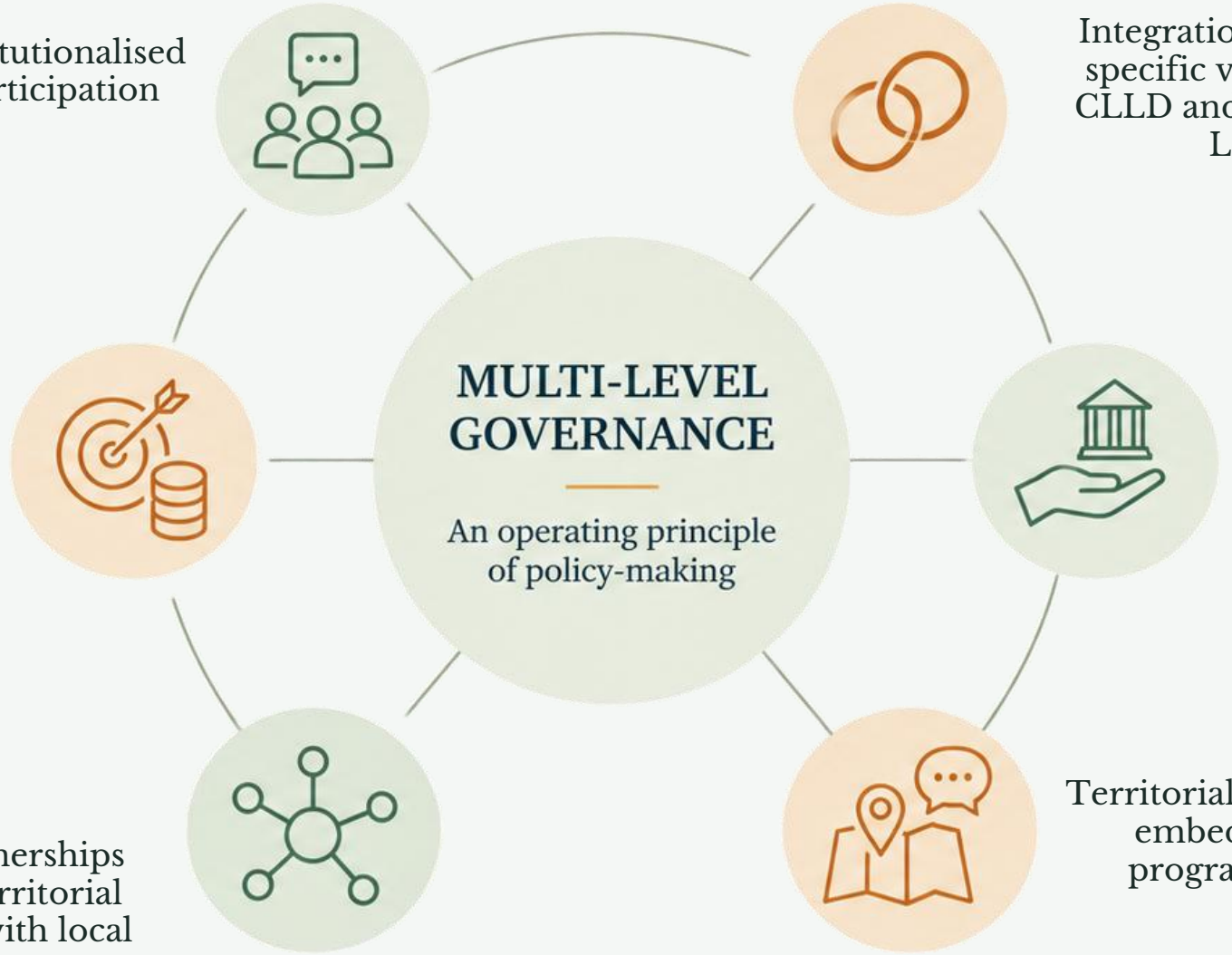
The Right to Connectivity as a tool for rural resilience

- Tuscany amended its regional Statute to establish internet access as an **inalienable human right**, legally targeting the digital divide in marginalized areas.
- Originally proposed by the **Tuscan Youth Parliament**, this reform aims to eradicate the digital divide and guarantee equal access to public services, education, and employment.
- Drives the "Toscana Diffusa" policy: public funding is **prioritised** for digital infrastructure in *rural, mountain, and low-density* "white areas" where private telcos underinvest.
- Enables *essential rural services*: unlocks remote working, smart agriculture, and local economic regeneration while securing essential access to digital healthcare via telemedicine.

Beyond access: tackling multi-level digital divides

- From infrastructure to literacy: Policy shifts focus from a **first-level digital divide** (basic internet access) to **secondary and tertiary divides**, addressing how rural citizens and workers actually leverage digital tools.
- Human capital & Digital helpers: Deployment of over **550 certified** digital facilitators and helpers across **170+ physical hubs** (*Punti Digitale Facile*). They act as a *regional digital ecosystem* involving local authorities, trade unions and third-sector organisations to support citizens in using digital identity, health, payments, public-administration services, privacy and online safety.
- Dual-Target Upskilling:
  - *For Citizens:* One-on-one training based on the EU framework, enabling remote populations to securely manage digital identity, e-health, and online civic participation.
  - *For Workers & Local Businesses:* Dedicated training programs to foster economic resilience in rural and mountain areas, supporting local businesses, smart agriculture, and remote workers to prevent brain drain and territorial depopulation.

What makes the Tuscany model work?



Institutionalised participation

Integration is given a specific vehicle (ITI, CLLD and a Regional Law)

Funding organised around policy objectives , not around funding silos

Capacity to deliver is specifically supported (ESF+ for participation, and regional resources-not only financial-for small municipalities)

Local partnerships connect territorial strategies with local action

Territorial dialogue is embedded in programming

How can Tuscany contribute to the post-2027 debate?

Institutionalise territorial dialogue

Make participation part of the programming cycle, not only of individual projects.

Keep policy responsibilities clear

Coordinate funding instruments around shared territorial priorities, without obscuring their distinct rules and responsibilities.

Recognise the role of local partnerships

LEADER and LAGs provide territorial knowledge, relationships and capacity to mobilise local actors.

Support participation and implementation capacity

Integrated strategies require time, administrative capacity and resources beyond investment costs.

Open challenge: Integration takes time. Simplification should reduce administrative burdens without weakening territorial dialogue or partnership.


Grazie
Danke
Thank You
Kiitos
Obrigado
Chokrane
Juspaxar
Spasibo
Arigato
Multumesc
Grazie
Mochchakkeram
Nirringrazzjak
Dankon
Cam on ban
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Kiitos
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Kiitos
Matur Nuwun
Merci
Kia Ora
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Mamana
Terma Kasih
Raibh Maith Agat
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Obrigado
Salamat
Matondo
Salamat

Programming and participation are set in the law

L.R. 1/2015 – programming

A regional development programme (PRS) at the start of each legislature, updated every year by the economic and financial document (DEFR); sector plans approved by the Regional Council.

L.R. 46/2013 – participation

An independent Participation Authority, regional public debate on major projects and protocols between the Region and local authorities.

Consultation before decisions

Programming acts go through the general concertation table (social partners) and the institutional table or, where the law says so, the Regional Conference of Mayors.

L.R. 11/2025 – Toscana diffusa

Territorial priorities are reviewed yearly; Pacts with local authorities; premiums and reserves in calls; an Observatory as a participation channel.

Message: Territorial dialogue is not an optional consultation. It is embedded in the regional programming cycle, from the political Regional Development programme to the annual Regional Economic and Financial document.

Territorial dialogue is built into policy-making

Tuscany has progressively institutionalised consultation as a method for regional governance.

Table	Who sits at it	Basis
General concertation table	Economic and social partners	L.R. 1/2015
Institutional table	Municipalities and their associations	L.R. 1/2015; L.R. 40/2005
Regional Tripartite Commission	Institutions and social partners on training and labour	L.R. 32/2002
Third Sector Council (Consulta)	Third-sector bodies; co-programming and co-design	L.R. 65/2020
Thematic tables	Green Table (agriculture); Roma, Sinti and Travellers; and others	Sector policies

A broader institutional commitment: In September 2026, the Regional Council established a cross-cutting commission dedicated to Toscana diffusa, inner, mountain and island areas.

Access to healthcare is also a territorial governance issue

Tuscany's health and social-health services are organised through **zone-districts**, defined with attention to territorial characteristics, including mountain, island and disadvantaged areas.

Società della Salute, or **intermunicipal arrangements** with local health authorities, provide a framework for coordinating health and social services.

Transport for people experiencing socioeconomic vulnerability illustrates how access to healthcare may require coordination among:

- Health authorities and local services.
- Municipalities and territorial institutions.
- Società della Salute or zone-district structures, where applicable.
- Voluntary organisations and third-sector actors involved in service provision.



***Governance lesson**: Access to essential services depends not only on the provision of healthcare, but also on the organisation of the territorial and social conditions that make access possible.*

Demand-responsive transport: adapting services to rural demand

From demand-responsive transport to integrated transport arrangements, Tuscany offers examples of how mobility services can be adapted to dispersed settlements and low-density territories.

Through flexible provision and coordination across municipal boundaries and transport functions, local service arrangements can help connect public transport provision with the needs of residents in rural communities.

The operational logic

- Passengers book in advance.
- Services respond to requests within the operating arrangements.
- The model offers an alternative to relying exclusively on fixed routes, single-purpose use of (school) vehicles and frequencies.



***Governance lesson**: Rural mobility requires coordination between public service planning, local needs and operational delivery.*