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Socio-territorial inequalities and integrated programming: 20 years of cohesion policy in Basilicata*

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Abstract. The paper reconstructs the processes of integrated territorial programming within the broader framework of European Structural Funds programming, focusing on the case study of Basilicata within the context of Southern Italy. The paper aims to achieve two objectives: to describe the prevalent dynamics in the formulation and implementation of Regional Operational Programs (ROPs) over the twenty-year period between 2000 and 2020; to identify the transformations in local development policies through the analysis of integrated territorial programming as a tool for implementing the operational programs analyzed. The research employed a multimethod approach. First, a desk analysis was conducted to reconstruct the complex EU, national, and regional regulatory framework of cohesion policy and integrated territorial programming in Basilicata. Subsequently, a critical analysis of the decision-making and implementation processes of ROPs and territorial programmes was carried out through a qualitative focus involving semi-structured interviews with local stakeholders in the political and administrative sphere and economic and social partnerships. The analysis shows that the quality of local administrative structures and political leadership plays a crucial role in the implementation processes of European fund programming and territorial interventions. Basilicata stands out among the Southern regions, especially in comparison to Calabria, in terms of efficiency in expenditure and institutional performance. Additionally, the research highlights that national strategies supporting local development play a crucial role in territorial dynamics. The optimal dimension of integrated local development planning within a framework of territoriality that does not become fixed over time remains an unresolved issue in the analyzed context.

Keywords: EU cohesion policy, South of Italy, Place-based local development policies.

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