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Enhancing food-based touristic flows in rural areas:
do interactions matter?
The case of Milan and Oltrepò Pavese

Supervisor

Prof. Francesco Pagliacci

Submitted by

Micol Rossetti

Student n. 2058468

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1. Introduction

In the landscape of contemporary global challenges, rural development emerges as a multifaceted and dynamic process, encompassing a broad spectrum of economic, social, and environmental dimensions. At its core lies the profound aspiration of fostering sustainability and long-term prosperity for rural communities, echoing the eloquent words of Raveena Tandon, who aptly notes that to nurture a nation, we must “*first strengthen its roots, and all our roots are our country's interiors, rural areas, and villages*”. This master's thesis embarks on a journey, venturing into the intricacies of rural development. The focus remains fixed on the distinctive dynamics of the Oltrepò Pavese region in northern Italy, set against the backdrop of the dynamic metropolis, Milan. This research aspires to illuminate the intricate relationship between rural and urban domains, promising to unravel the complexities that drive the sustainable progress of both.

The challenges faced by rural areas worldwide often revolve around the dual burden of declining populations and stagnant economies, a challenge that is equally significant in Oltrepò Pavese. The allure of urban areas, offering better employment prospects and an improved quality of life, has resulted in a continuous outmigration of the region's younger population, thereby exacerbating demographic decline. Additionally, the aging population in these regions necessitates additional care and support services. Oltrepò Pavese, like many rural areas, relies predominantly on a limited spectrum of sectors, notably agriculture and tourism. While these sectors have their intrinsic merits, they are often vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks. The fragility of these economic foundations, combined with the challenges of depopulation and an aging population, emphasizes the need for innovative and sustainable strategies.

This master's thesis is underpinned by the motivation to illustrate how Oltrepò Pavese can leverage its proximity to Milan as a catalyst for economic development. In the contemporary landscape, the synergy between urban and rural areas offers a promising avenue for enhancing the quality of life for rural communities and promoting economic sustainability. Just as the Napa Valley region in California has harnessed its proximity to San Francisco to become renowned for its winemaking (Jones et al., 2015), Oltrepò Pavese possesses the potential to carve its unique niche in the vicinity of Milan, capitalizing on its geographical traits and the array of opportunities presented by the metropolis. The primary objective of this research is to provide empirical evidence supporting the claim that the proximity to a major metropolis like Milan can indeed stimulate the development of adjacent rural areas. Anchored by the case study of Oltrepò Pavese and Milan, this research aims to provide useful information for those stakeholders and policymakers who are interested in more sustainable rural development, in addition to adding important new perspectives to the academic debate on this topics.

This research attempts to give future generations a comprehensive perspective by exploring the strengths and challenges inherent in the Oltrepò Pavese region. It aims to call attention to the unique advantages that can be used to promote sustainable development as well as any potential disadvantages that could get in the way.

This issue holds particular relevance in the modern context due to its potential advantages. Proximity to a metropolis usually offers rural regions access to a larger market for their products and services, fuelling economic growth and job creation within the rural community. Additionally, access to resources and services not locally available can significantly enhance the quality of life for rural residents, easing access to healthcare, education, and other essential services. Furthermore, this proximity fosters collaboration and synergies between rural and urban areas, leading to joint projects and initiatives that benefit both sides, creating a win-win situation. While highlighting these benefits, this study also aims to shed light on challenges that could impede Oltrepò Pavese's development. These issues include potential skills gaps in the local labour force to support emerging industries, poor transportation infrastructure, and potential barriers to capital access for businesses in Oltrepò Pavese. This research seeks to provide a thorough understanding of the dynamics between major metropolises and their rural counterparts by addressing these challenges. It offers valuable perspectives for enhancing the socio-economic landscape through future policies and strategies, with a special focus on Oltrepò Pavese. Recognizing the multifaceted challenges is crucial for policymakers in order to comprehend the potential adverse effects of proximity to a major metropolis on rural areas. This understanding lays the foundation for developing strategies to mitigate challenges and foster more sustainable paths of growth. Addressing concerns such as over-reliance on the metropolis, loss of cultural identity, and environmental strain allows policymakers to formulate targeted interventions for balanced and equitable development. As part of this research, the aim is not just to identify challenges but also to pinpoint policies and measures that can effectively promote and sustain rural development, especially in regions like Oltrepò Pavese. Government policies play a pivotal role in nurturing businesses and creating employment opportunities in rural areas. By acknowledging and addressing challenges such as inadequate transportation infrastructure, potential labour shortages, and barriers to accessing capital, policymakers can craft informed and effective strategies.

Secondly, the analysis of this theme not only seeks to highlight the positive aspects of the proximity between Milan and Oltrepò Pavese and the benefits that arise from this closeness, but also aims to illuminate the challenges that rural areas, such as Oltrepò Pavese, might confront as a result of their gradual development. The proximity to a metropolis, can impose demographic and environmental pressures on these regions. Issues like inadequate transportation infrastructure, potential labour

force deficiencies, and difficulties in accessing capital further accentuate these challenges. Recognizing these multifaceted challenges is of paramount importance. It is crucial for policymakers to comprehend the potential adverse effects of proximity to a major metropolis on rural areas. This understanding lays the foundation for the development of strategies to mitigate these challenges and foster sustainable growth. Addressing concerns such as over-reliance on the metropolis, loss of cultural identity, and environmental strain, policymakers can formulate targeted interventions to ensure balanced and equitable development. Furthermore, as part of this research, the aim is not just to identify challenges but also to pinpoint policies and measures that can effectively promote and sustain rural development, especially in regions like Oltrepò Pavese. Government policies play a pivotal role in nurturing businesses and creating employment opportunities in rural areas. By acknowledging and addressing challenges such as inadequate transportation infrastructure, a potential shortage of skilled labour, and barriers to accessing capital, policymakers can craft informed and effective strategies.

In essence, the primary focus of this master's thesis lies in conducting a comprehensive exploration and in-depth analysis of the emerging economic development opportunities within rural areas neighbouring major metropolitan regions. This fundamental objective forms the crux of the research, aiming to unveil the multifaceted implications of this economic proximity. The case study of Oltrepò Pavese and its proximity to Milan serves as an exemplary model for comprehending these intricate dynamics. By delving into this specific case, the study strives to provide valuable insights and recommendations, not only to enhance the quality of life for residents in these regions but also to make a significant contribution to the broader discourse on sustainable rural development. This research embarks on a mission that transcends the analysis of one single case; it aspires to elucidate the underlying principles and factors driving rural development adjacent to metropolitan areas. Furthermore, the study critically evaluates the local development strategies and policies that are indispensable for fully harnessing the potential offered by these urban connections. To achieve these objectives, this research adopts a mixed-method approach that effectively combines qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. In-depth interviews with key stakeholders from both rural and urban domains provide qualitative insights that enrich the analysis, offering a pragmatic viewpoint on the region's challenges and opportunities. Simultaneously, quantitative data, sourced from secondary resources such as government statistics and academic research studies, supports the qualitative analysis, ensuring a robust and comprehensive examination of emerging economic opportunities in rural areas adjacent to major cities and metropolises.

More specifically, chapter 2 of the thesis extensively explores the significance of economic growth models in the context of economic development. It provides an in-depth review of various growth

models, including the Solow Model, which underscores the role of capital formation and technological advancement in driving economic growth. It also highlights the Endogenous Growth Model, which emphasizes the importance of innovation, research and development, and human capital in long-term economic growth. The Export-Base Model is introduced to underscore the significance of exports and foreign demand, especially in regions heavily reliant on exports. Furthermore, Chapter 2 delves into economic localization theories, such as Marshall's agglomeration theory and Weber's minimum-cost theory. These theories explain why economic activities tend to cluster in specific areas due to agglomeration advantages and cost efficiencies in transportation. Myrdal's Theory is examined to underscore how regional disparities can persist due to cumulative causation processes, emphasizing the risk of a vicious cycle of underdevelopment in disadvantaged regions. The Krugman Model, known as the "new economic geography," highlights the importance of agglomeration economies in urban regions and their role as drivers of economic growth. The chapter also discusses the diffusion effect and its opposite, which can impact the economic development of regions. It emphasizes the crucial role of regional development policies in determining how the economy grows. These policies include public investments and human capital development.

In Chapter 3, the study provides a comprehensive overview of the Oltrepò Pavese region, considering its distinctive geographical traits and socioeconomic components. The region's geographical significance, demographic composition, and economic landscape are all carefully examined. The study highlights the main features of the region: aging population, high unemployment rates, and economic disparities, which all contribute to depopulation trends. The prominent role of the agrifood sector and the significance of tourism, hospitality, and business sectors in the local economy are also emphasized. Chapter 3 delves into the Rural Development Program (RDP) and the Local Development Plan (LDP) customized for Oltrepò Pavese. These initiatives align with broader EU priorities, with a focus on economic development, environmental preservation, and social inclusion. In particular, the study highlights Measure 19, "Support for Rural Development-LEADER", which is one of the essential components of the 2021-2027 RDP that prioritises digitization and the green transition. The RDP tailored for Oltrepò Pavese aligns seamlessly with these priorities, focusing on economic development, sustainable agriculture, environmental conservation, and social inclusion. Each Local Action Group (LAG) is responsible for implementing LEADER-based strategies for local development through LDPs. The study highlights the S.T.A.R. Oltrepò LDP, designed to address regional challenges and promote sustainable rural development through various actions, including the establishment of agroforestry supply chains and eco-friendly rural tourism infrastructure.

The applied research methodologies, participant profiles, theoretical analyses, and methodological tools are covered in detail in the fourth chapter of this master's thesis. A qualitative technique has been used with the goal of exploring prospective developmental pathways between Milan and Oltrepò Pavese region. Semi-structured interviews with different stakeholders, Oltrepò Pavese and Milan public administration operators, and Oltrepò Pavese producers is the principal technique used. This method makes it easier to understand the beliefs, attitudes, and inclinations of various economic actors. Semi-structured interviews provide structure and flexibility while enabling participants to freely express themselves within predetermined themes. The chapter uses economic theories like Myrdal's Cumulative Causation and Krugman's New Economic Geography to understand economic differences between Oltrepò Pavese and Milan. It also examines tourism dynamics in Oltrepò Pavese, focusing on Milan's development and sustainable tourism strategies. The chapter describes the semi-structured questionnaire, which is divided into seven theme sections that correspond to the theoretical ideas that are covered. The purpose of the questions is to collect information about Oltrepò Pavese and Milan's existing situation, investment perspectives, viability, and the structural relationship between rural and urban areas. The responses offer details on how to foster cooperation, how competitive local goods are, and possible improvements. It also recognises the specificity of the findings for the chosen subjects and highlights the limits when it comes to the results' generalisation. To summarise, Chapter 4 provides an in-depth assessment of the research methodologies, employed instruments, and integrated theoretical analyses, setting the stage for a more in-depth investigation of the dynamics of development between Oltrepò Pavese and Milan.

Chapter 5 represents the section dedicated to presenting the study's findings. The responses gathered from structured interviews with key stakeholders, Public Administration (PA), Protected Geographical Indication and Protected Designation of Origin (PGI/PDO) Producers, and Other Stakeholders (ST), are thoroughly revealed in this chapter. It provides an in-depth examination of urban-rural dynamics, issues, possibilities, and strategies. The analysis, which employs a comparative method, highlights the similarities, contrasts, and distinctive contributions of each stakeholder type, providing a full knowledge of the delicate link between Oltrepò Pavese and Milan. The respondents' perspectives demonstrate a shared conviction about the significant advantages that structured urban-rural relationships can provide, including enhanced market accessibility, regional development, and cultural enrichment. The results underscore a collective acknowledgment of the benefits inherent in structured urban-rural relationships, such as improved market access, infrastructural development, and cultural enrichment. Simultaneously, identified challenges point to the necessity for enhanced communication, promotion, and collaboration. This chapter unfolds as a dynamic discussion of the outcomes, shedding light on the similarities, differences, and distinctive contributions of each stakeholder category. From influential figures in Oltrepò Pavese emphasizing

the competitiveness of local products in the Milanese market to proposed strategies for strengthening this relationship, the detailed presentation ensures a comprehensive exploration. A bidirectional flow of interactions between Milan and Oltrepò Pavese is envisioned, emphasizing cultural exchange, economic growth, and a balanced urban-rural interaction. Stakeholder perspectives are eventually organised in categories, hence contributing to a multifaceted framework for future strategies. The master's thesis culminates in Chapter 6, which presents a comprehensive analysis of the conclusions reached from the investigation of rural development dynamics. The study highlights the potential benefits of fostering a structural relationship between Oltrepò Pavese and Milan, emphasizing the synergy between urban and rural areas. It suggests strategic infrastructure development, funding access for local entrepreneurs, and cultivating synergy among rural communities, businesses, and governmental bodies. In addition to drawing investments, protecting cultural assets, and fostering environmental sustainability, tourism has a profoundly positive impact on economic diversification.

The policy implications observed in this thesis and in the Oltrepò Pavese case study provide useful insights that can be applied to comparable rural areas in Italy and around the world. Future initiatives could involve infrastructure development, with a focus on energy, communication, and transportation networks to link rural and urban areas and promote economic growth. In addition, creating an embracing environment for local entrepreneurs by providing them access to funding, mentorship, and training, will be essential. Collaboration between rural communities, enterprises, and government agencies is essential for sharing information, resources, and best practises, while tourist promotion acts as a strategic avenue for diversifying economies and creating job possibilities. Furthermore, incorporating strategic branding into tourism activities helps highlight the distinctive characteristics of places, enticing new investments. Looking forward, this approach could guide the development of specific strategies for other Lombardy regions as well as in other international contexts.

In summary, this thesis seeks to contribute to a better understanding of often-overlooked economic opportunities in rural areas adjacent to major cities and metropolises through a detailed examination of various economic models, an evaluation of regional theories, and an in-depth review of relevant policy initiatives. These findings support a deeper approach to rural development, emphasising the importance of region-specific solutions that correspond with local strengths and constraints. As rural areas evolve, attentive implementation of these policy suggestions can contribute to long-term growth and improved well-being in a variety of locations. This approach fosters an adaptable framework for addressing the dynamic terrain of rural development in many circumstances, and it encourages a larger application beyond the scope of this thesis.

2. Territorial Development and Beyond: Theories, Models, and Strategies - A Literature Review

2.1 The issue of economic growth: from endogenous growth model to spatial and regional models

Territorial development is a multifaceted and dynamic process that has captivated the attention of scholars and policymakers for decades. As regions, cities, and rural areas undergo transformation, an array of theories and models have emerged to shed light on the intricacies of this development journey. These models offer valuable insights into the factors that influence territorial evolution and the strategies that can foster sustainable growth and prosperity and the progress of rural and urban areas. Particularly significant are the exogenous and endogenous growth models, which serve as foundational frameworks for comprehending the driving forces behind economic growth (Lucas, 1988). The examination of models and theories, like Myrdal's theory of cumulative causation and Krugman's economic geography, among others, enriches our comprehension of territorial dynamics.

Exogenous growth models posit that external factors play a substantial role in shaping a country's economic growth. These models identify a range of critical external determinants that exert influence over the trajectory of economic development. The presence of abundant natural resources, such as oil, natural gas, and minerals, has long been acknowledged as a catalyst for driving economic growth (Mankiw, Romer, & Weil, 1992). Effectively harnessing and leveraging these resources not only stimulates domestic production but also fosters international trade, thereby bolstering overall economic progress. However, it is not solely the availability of resources that fuels growth. The strategic allocation and management of these resources are equally crucial. Properly invested, these resources contribute to the accumulation of physical capital, encompassing machinery, infrastructure, and facilities, which emerges as a linchpin for enhancing labour productivity and, consequently, spurring economic growth. This emphasis on sustained investment underscores its pivotal role in propelling economic advancement. Moreover, advancements in labour productivity, driven by technological innovations, education, and training, stand as pivotal drivers of economic growth (Solow, 1956). The cultivation of a skilled and efficient workforce translates into heightened output and prosperity for the nation.

Central to the exogenous growth theory is the Solow Model, simplifies the dynamics of economic growth and assumes constant labour productivity and emphasizes the dominant role of capital accumulation in propelling economic growth. It underscores the significance of capital accumulation as a driver of economic progress, wherein investment in physical assets like machinery and infrastructure leads to enhanced labour productivity and subsequent growth. However, the model acknowledges that technological innovation is equally vital. Without ongoing

innovation, economies can face diminishing returns to capital and labour inputs, potentially resulting in a gradual slowdown of growth. Thus, the model emphasizes the essential role of continuous technological advancement in propelling economies beyond the constraints of mere capital accumulation and it highlights a dual importance in sustaining economic growth: while capital accumulation contributes to increased productivity, technological innovation acts as the catalyst that prevents stagnation by enabling economies to consistently generate more output with existing resources (Solow, 1956). This interconnected relationship demonstrates that an economy's long-term growth trajectory depends not only on investment in physical assets but also on its capacity to innovate and adopt new technologies, ensuring sustained prosperity and progress over time.

In contrast to exogenous growth theories, the endogenous development model stands out as a guiding framework that emphasizes the significance of fostering internal capabilities for sustained and inclusive territorial development (Romer, 1990). By understanding and integrating these theories into policymaking and planning, policymakers can foster balanced and resilient development, promoting vibrant and sustainable territories. This approach complements the foundational principles of endogenous growth models, which posit that the internal factors intrinsic to an economic system wield substantial influence over growth dynamics, highlighting essential elements that foster sustained economic development (Chirwa & Odhiambo, 2018). Central to these models is the recognition of technological innovation as an endogenous factor. It is propelled by strategic investments in research and development, active knowledge sharing, and the ongoing cultivation of human capital. These multifaceted contributors drive the advancement of technology, which in turn elevates labour productivity and fuels economic growth (Romer, 1990). By enabling efficiency gains and expanding the horizons of production, novel technologies play a transformative role in reshaping industries and economies.

Furthermore, these advanced frameworks also treat human capital as an endogenous variable. They acknowledge that policies directed at education, skill enhancement, and training have a profound influence on the accumulation of human capital, which goes beyond a mere enhancement of labor productivity. A skilled workforce becomes a wellspring of innovation and technological progress, thus driving comprehensive economic advancement (Lucas, 1988). A defining characteristic of contemporary endogenous growth models is their perspective on entrepreneurship. Unlike traditional views that treated entrepreneurship as an exogenous factor, these models understand it as an outcome shaped by intricate economic and institutional forces. Entrepreneurial activities are now identified as crucial catalysts for both innovation and growth, as they stimulate market expansion,

drive job creation, and foster disruptive innovations that contribute significantly to overall economic vibrancy (Aghion & Howitt, 1992).

The endogenous growth models and the export-base model both emphasize the importance of internal factors, such as human capital and entrepreneurship, in driving economic growth. (Lucas, 1988). The export-base model also highlights the importance of external demand, which can serve as a powerful catalyst for growth for regions that are able to produce and export competitive goods and services in global markets (Tiebout, 1956). Introduced by Charles North (1955), this model explains the growth patterns of regions and their economic interdependence on external markets (Baldwin & Krugman, 2004). By focusing on a region's ability to produce and export goods and services, this model highlights the significance of external demand in driving economic growth. It underlines the importance of identifying and promoting sectors in which a region possesses a comparative advantage, as these sectors can serve as engines of growth, attracting investments and creating employment opportunities (Head & Mayer, 2014). This perspective remains relevant in contemporary regional development strategies, providing valuable insights for policymakers seeking to enhance a region's competitiveness in global markets and foster sustainable economic growth through export-oriented initiatives (Fujita, Krugman, & Venables, 1999). By leveraging the export capacity of a region, policymakers can catalyze economic activity and stimulate a positive economic feedback loop, contributing to the overall development and prosperity of the territory.

The endogenous growth model has significantly shaped our understanding of regional development by emphasizing the importance of human capital and innovation in driving economic progress (Lucas, 1988). Unlike traditional growth models that focus on external factors such as capital accumulation or technological transfers, the endogenous growth model highlights the crucial role of internal resources and investments in fostering long-term economic development (Romer, 1990). This perspective is particularly relevant for policymakers seeking to promote inclusive and sustainable development, as it underscores the need to invest in education, research, and technology to enhance a region's capacity for innovation and adaptation (Acemoglu, 2009). By nurturing a skilled and knowledgeable workforce and encouraging a culture of innovation, regions can position themselves to seize opportunities, overcome challenges, and sustain economic growth in the face of global economic transformations. The endogenous growth model continues to guide policymakers in formulating strategies that foster human capital development and promote an environment conducive to continuous learning and creativity, ultimately contributing to the overall well-being and prosperity of the territory (Mankiw, Romer, & Weil, 1992).

Economic geography, specifically the examination of the geographic aspects of economic activities (Malecki, 2002), plays a crucial role in taking economic models and situating them within the spatial context to analyse their effects. It offers valuable perspectives into how economic activities are distributed across space and how this distribution impacts productivity, innovation, and overall economic growth. This multidisciplinary field of study explores how geographical factors impact diverse economic processes, including production, trade, innovation, and growth (Fujita & Thisse, 2002). It highlights agglomeration economies, where spatial proximity leads to enhanced interactions and economic benefits (Krugman, 1991). Moreover, economic geography investigates the relationships between location, accessibility, and economic outcomes, shedding light on agglomeration effects, regional disparities, and the role of institutions in shaping territorial development. This comprehensive understanding of spatial dynamics and internal factors serves as a foundational link that connects discussions on location theories, regional growth theories, and their combined impact on unravelling intricate mechanisms driving regional disparities and overall economic progress.

Location theories delve into the spatial distribution of economic activities within territories, exemplified by Alfred Marshall's industrial location theory (Marshall, 1920), emphasizing agglomeration economies, and Weber's cost location theory emphasizing cost minimization (Weber, 1909). Agglomeration economies, a cornerstone of Marshall's theory, propose that firms and industries benefit from spatial proximity, leading to increased efficiency, knowledge spillovers, and resource sharing. These dynamics result in enhanced productivity and innovation, ultimately fostering economic growth within regions (Fujita & Thisse, 2002). Weber's least-cost location theory, on the other hand, focuses on the concept of minimizing transportation costs in determining the optimal location for industries. This theory posits that firms seek to minimize the expenses associated with transporting raw materials to the production site and finished products to consumers. By strategically locating industries closer to the source of inputs or consumer markets, transportation costs can be reduced, thereby contributing to cost-efficiency and competitive advantage. This consideration of transportation costs highlights the intricate relationship between geographic positioning and economic decision-making, which is further explored by economic geography in its analysis of firms' location choices (Weber, 1909).

These theories guide strategies for regional development and economic growth by recognizing firms' location decisions and the benefits of agglomeration (Alcacer & Chung, 2010). Economic geography's comprehensive approach integrates insights from location theories, such as Marshall's agglomeration economies and Weber's least-cost location theory, shedding light on how these theories collectively shape regional development and economic growth in a dynamic spatial context.

For instance, economic geography refines concepts like Weber's theory by analysing variables such as transportation costs and resource availability in firms' location choices (Weber, 1909). Moreover, economic geography aligns with regional development theories, which underline regional attributes, policies, and institutions influencing varying growth rates among areas (Rodriguez-Pose & Crescenzi, 2008). This comprehensive approach integrates insights from economic geography, location theories, and regional growth analyses, yielding a holistic understanding of how spatial dynamics and internal factors jointly shape economic development.

The foundational insights provided by location theories, which delve into the spatial distribution of economic activities and their influences, establish a crucial understanding that intricately links with the exploration and significance of regional growth theories.

In the realm of regional economics, Myrdal's seminal work holds profound significance and offers invaluable insights into the intricate dynamics of regional disparities and their underlying drivers (Myrdal, 1957). His theory notably underscores a multitude of factors that contribute to the genesis and perpetuation of regional disparities over time. Myrdal's theory delineates the economic landscape into two crucial regions: a core and a periphery. The core, an advanced area typically centered around a major city, burgeons due to inherent natural advantages. It becomes the epicentre of economic activities within a region, while the periphery, encircling the core, remains underdeveloped, providing essential resources such as raw materials, labour, and agricultural produce to the core. Central to Myrdal's theory is the concept of cumulative causation, wherein an initial action or stimulus leads to an amplified intensification of subsequent actions. Cumulative causation, as proposed by Myrdal, refers to a self-reinforcing process where initial actions or stimuli trigger a sequence of events that amplify their impact over time. In the context of regional development, it describes how an initial economic push, such as an investment or growth in a core area, leads to a cycle of increasing economic activities, creating positive feedback loops that drive ongoing growth and disparities within regions (Myrdal, 1957).

The cumulative causation process engenders an agglomeration effect, concentrating economic activities in the core. The agglomeration effect refers to the phenomenon in which economic activities and industries cluster together in a specific geographic area, typically a city or urban centre. This clustering is driven by factors such as the availability of skilled labour, knowledge spillovers, infrastructure, and market accessibility. Agglomeration leads to increased efficiency, collaboration, and innovation among firms, resulting in enhanced productivity and economic growth within the clustered region (Fujita & Thisse, 2002). The core evolves into a hub for not only economic endeavours but also social, cultural, and political activities. Myrdal's theory emphasizes the role of both internal and external economies in this phenomenon (Myrdal, 1957). Internal

economies stem from innovation-driven benefits that individual firms accrue within the core. External economies, on the other hand, confer advantages to all enterprises within the core, including access to skilled labour, advanced infrastructure, and investment opportunities. The interaction between the core and periphery, as described by Myrdal's theory, gives rise to two significant effects: the spread effect and the backwash effect. These effects play a crucial role in shaping the development dynamics between regions (Sai-wing Ho, 2004). The spread effect refers to the positive influence that the core's growth and development have on the surrounding periphery. As the core experiences economic expansion and increased prosperity, it generates a demand for goods and services. This demand extends beyond the core itself and reaches into the periphery. As a result, businesses in the periphery find opportunities to supply the core with the required goods and services. This increased trade and interaction lead to economic growth in the periphery, as it becomes integrated into the economic activities of the core (Myrdal, 1957). Conversely, the backwash effect involves the movement of resources, including labour, capital, and even skilled individuals, from the periphery to the core. This movement is driven by the allure of better opportunities, higher wages, and access to advanced amenities available in the core. As resources flow from the periphery to the core, the periphery can experience a drain of vital assets, potentially hindering its own development prospects. The backwash effect could lead to a concentration of economic power and resources in the core, contributing to further disparities between the two regions (Myrdal, 1957).

These effects illustrate the interconnectedness of regions within a spatial context and emphasize the role of economic activities in shaping the development trajectories of both the core and periphery. This dynamic interaction underscores the complexity of regional disparities and the need to consider these effects when formulating policies for balanced and inclusive regional development. Myrdal's work sheds light on the complex issue of terms of trade imbalances between core and peripheral regions, which can be influenced by a variety of factors, including government policies (Myrdal, 1957). He argues that these trade terms consistently favour the core due to deliberate policy choices that sustain this asymmetry. The core, with its concentration of high-end industrial outputs, seeks to secure low-cost inputs while commanding high prices for its products. Unfortunately, this pursuit of advantageous trade terms often comes at the expense of producers in the periphery, who may struggle to attain fair returns for their goods (Myrdal, 1957).

A significant implication of Myrdal's theory is the understanding that as economic growth takes hold within the core, regional disparities tend to widen, challenging the conventional notion of income convergence. The expansion of economic activities in the core can outpace the periphery's capacity to keep up, leading to an intensified gap in terms of overall economic development and

well-being. Myrdal's advocacy for government intervention stems from his concern about these disparities. He proposes that governments should play a proactive role in addressing the challenges posed by market-driven mechanisms that often amplify regional inequalities. By implementing policies that aim to ensure a more even distribution of resources and opportunities, governments can help mitigate the negative effects of growing disparities between the core and periphery. However, Myrdal also acknowledges the complexities inherent in achieving balanced growth, as market forces might resist external interventions (Myrdal, 1957).

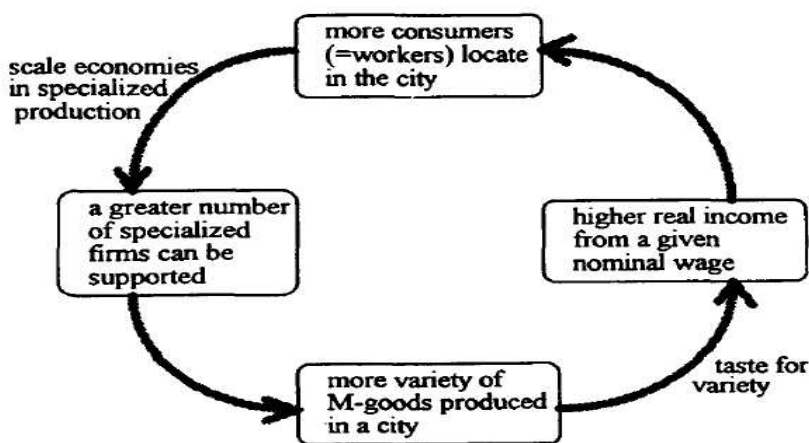
Transitioning from Myrdal's exploration of regional disparities and cumulative causation, the theory proposed by Krugman adds another layer of understanding to the dynamics of regional economic development (Krugman, 1991). His endogenous development model, the new economic geography, introduces a novel perspective to regional growth theories. Rather than relying solely on external factors or industries, this model recognizes the crucial role of a region's internal capabilities in driving sustainable development. By harnessing their local resources, fostering human capital, and promoting innovation, regions can take charge of their growth trajectory. This approach emphasizes the need for tailored strategies that capitalize on each region's unique strengths, paving the way for long-term economic prosperity and resilience. In essence, this approach acknowledges the uniqueness of each region and highlights the significance of tailored strategies that capitalize on internal strengths to drive long-term economic prosperity.

Krugman's (year) New Economic Geography model is crucial for understanding the spatial distribution of economic activity and its implications for regional growth and development. Introduced in the early 1990s, the model revolutionized the field by shaping economists and policymakers' perceptions of economic activity and territorial development dynamics.

Krugman's model bridges the gap between location theories and regional growth theories, offering a comprehensive understanding of how spatial factors influence economic development. By integrating location and regional growth theories, Krugman's model offers a comprehensive framework for addressing territorial development challenges and devising inclusive policies that promote vibrant and balanced territories. As a location theory, it emphasizes the importance of agglomeration economies, which arise when firms and industries cluster together in proximity, leading to shared resources, knowledge spillovers, and improved market access. As a regional growth theory, it explains the development of regions, showcasing the positive feedback loops created by the concentration of economic activity in specific locations, which fosters regional economic expansion (Krugman, 1991). It focuses on agglomeration economies, which contribute to the growth of vibrant economic hubs, promoting innovation, productivity, and job opportunities (Fujita, Krugman, & Venables, 1999).

Krugman’s economic geography model holds paramount significance in shaping informed economic policies and strategies to cultivate sustainable regional development. The model zeroes in on the concept of increasing returns to scale and its implications for the spatial distribution of economic activities. As firms and industries experience growth, their operational efficiency improves, leading to cost reductions and heightened productivity. This growth process engenders agglomeration effects, wherein economic activities cluster in specific geographical locations, resulting in the formation of dynamic urban centres and industrial clusters (Krugman, 1991). A foundational aspect of Krugman’s model revolves around agglomeration economies, wherein firms and industries benefit from a multitude of advantages facilitated by spatial proximity. These benefits encompass knowledge spillovers, streamlined access to skilled labour, diminished transportation costs, and expanded market access. This clustering phenomenon generates a reinforcing cycle of economic growth and increased attractiveness for further investments and activities, as shown in Figure 1. (Fujita, Krugman, & Venables, 1995).

Figure 2.1: Circular causality in spatial agglomeration of firms and workers. (Source: Fujita, Krugman, & Venables, 1995)



Furthermore, the model holds a wealth of insights pertaining to the growth dynamics of cities and urban areas, underscoring their pivotal roles as centres of economic activity, innovation, and employment opportunities. Urban areas draw populations seeking improved livelihoods due to the concentration of industries and services, ultimately bolstering productivity and operational efficiency (Glaeser, 2011). The model’s impact extends to the realm of trade patterns and regional development. It elucidates the mechanisms driving certain regions to become export-oriented and sheds light on how spatial concentration of industries catalyses regional specialization. Regions endowed with comparative advantages in specific sectors experience organic growth and development, capitalizing on the enhanced returns to scale (Baldwin & Krugman, 2004).

This model is crucial for policymakers and scholars in fostering sustainable regional growth and development in an interconnected global economy (Glaeser, 2011). Policymakers worldwide rely

on this multifaceted approach to ensure sustainable economic progress and cultivate resilient and adaptive regions for the benefit of present and future generations (Head & Mayer, 2014). This understanding, in turn, informs decisions related to spatial planning and strategic infrastructure investments, enabling the targeted allocation of resources to foster region-specific growth and sustainable urban development. Krugman's new economic geography model has also been instrumental in understanding the spatial effects of globalization (Krugman, 1991). It provides valuable insights into how the interconnected global economy influences regional growth and competitiveness. The model highlights the role of global trade patterns in shaping regional disparities and demonstrates how regions with comparative advantages in certain industries tend to concentrate economic activity, leading to varying levels of development (Head & Mayer, 2014). Likewise, the model emphasizes the importance of transportation and communication costs in driving global trade and economic activity between regions. As these costs decrease, firms can access global markets more easily, bridging regional gaps and creating opportunities for participation in the global economy. Myrdal's theory of cumulative causation is grounded on the idea of interconnected economic and social factors. It proposes that changes in one factor initiate a chain reaction, influencing other factors in a cumulative manner.

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the different regional growth theories, a comparative analysis can be presented in Table 2.1, highlighting the main characteristics and key principles of each model. This tabulated overview will provide a valuable visual aid for identifying the distinctive features and contributions of Weber's least-cost location theory, Marshall's industrial location theory, the export-base model, the endogenous growth model, the endogenous development model, Myrdal's theory and Krugman's new geography.

Table 2.1: Comparative Analysis of Regional Growth Theories - Key Characteristics and Principles

Feature	Focus	Driving Force	Levels of analysis	Policy implications	Author/References
Endogenous Growth Model	Knowledge and technology	Sustained economic growth	Microeconomic	Focus on policies that promote knowledge creation and diffusion	Romer, P. M. (1986) & Lucas, R. E. (1988)
Endogenous Development Model	Institutions and policies	Economic growth that is sustainable and inclusive	Macroeconomic	Focus on policies that promote good governance and market-friendly institutions	Taylor, L. (1991)
Export-Base Model	Exports	Export demand	Macroeconomic	Focus on policies that promote exports	North, C. D. (1955)
Marshall's Industrial Location Theory	Agglomeration economies	Benefits of being located near other firms in the same industry	Microeconomic	Focus on policies that promote agglomeration economies	Marshall, A. (1920).
Weber's Least-Cost Location Theory	Transportation costs	Minimizing transportation costs	Microeconomic	Focus on policies that minimize transportation costs	Weber, A. (1909).
Myrdal's Theory of Cumulative Causation	Positive feedback loops and self-reinforcing processes	Positive feedback loops and self-reinforcing processes	Macroeconomic	Focus on policies that address positive feedback loops and self-reinforcing processes	Myrdal, G. (1957).
Krugman Model	Agglomeration economies	Benefits of being located near other firms in the same industry	Microeconomic	Focus on policies that promote agglomeration economies	Krugman, P. (1991).

In conclusion, the exploration of various theories and models of territorial development provides valuable insights into this complex process (Iammarino, Rodríguez-Pose & Storper, 2018). Despite some criticism for simplicity, these theories collectively contribute to understanding territorial evolution. The cumulative causation model underscores the impact of initial conditions on growth, reflecting the region's historical foundations. The new economic geography emphasizes government policy's role in fostering growth through investments in infrastructure, education, and research. Both models highlight cooperation's importance between businesses and governments, aligning with the thesis's exploration of collaborative strategies to bolster economic progress. The knowledge gained from this exploration of territorial development theories and models offers a foundation for devising effective policies and strategies that can nurture vibrant and balanced territories, contributing to inclusive and sustainable development for the benefit of present and future generations. In essence, these models offer a lens through which the complex dynamics between rural and urban areas can be understood. They spotlight the influence of historical legacies, the power of effective policies, and the value of collaborative efforts in the pursuit of sustainable development for Oltrepò Pavese. By intertwining these concepts, the thesis navigates a path to propose strategies that leverage the

region's strengths while harmonizing with Milan's urban pull, shaping a holistic approach to regional growth.

2.2 Rural regions and rural policies

The exploration of territorial development theories and models provides a valuable framework for comprehending the challenges and opportunities faced by rural regions, exemplified by Oltrepò Pavese. This exploration underscores the significance of collaboration between private actors (e.g., businesses) and governments in facilitating regional development, highlighting the pivotal role rural regions play in the global economy and their potential contributions to sustainable development.

In the broader debate about economic development and the existence of territorial imbalances, rural areas actually deserve significant attention in such a discussion for several compelling reasons. According to the United Nations (UN, 2021), more than 40% of the global population, around 3.4 billion people, live in rural regions. This demographic magnitude underscores their pivotal role as a wellspring of human resources and potential drivers of economic growth. By producing essential goods and services such as food, water, and energy, rural areas contribute indispensable resources to the global economy (FAO, 2020).

Rural regions play also a crucial role in addressing global challenges like food security and environmental concerns (OECD, 2022). They are centers of innovation in key sectors like agriculture, energy, and the environment, and their resilience is essential to addressing economic and climatic shocks. Rural development can mitigate vulnerability, enhance local communities' resilience, and elevate the quality of life for inhabitants (Hallegatte et al., 2019). The spotlight on rural areas as pivotal agents of economic development is vital, reflecting a substantial population, essential production, innovative potential, and the need to mitigate vulnerabilities. Within the analysis of rural-urban interactions, this perspective offers fertile ground to comprehend how the balance between these two contexts can synergistically contribute to sustainable growth (Suttie & Hussein, 2015) and recognizing the cultural importance of these areas is vital for understanding the connection between the environment and local food products, contributing to the preservation of culinary heritage and sustainable agri-food practices.

However, despite the aforementioned strengths, rural regions also face specific challenges, such as depopulation, limited access to essential services, and economic disparities that can undermine territorial cohesion. They also hold some sort of untapped economic potential through abundant natural resources, cultural heritage, and traditional knowledge that can create new economic opportunities and foster sustainable growth (Mergos & Patsavos, 2016). Focusing on rural areas becomes imperative for achieving a balanced and inclusive approach to national development and

their development alleviates pressures on urban centres by offering alternative avenues for economic activity, encouraging regional diversification. To address the unique challenges and potentials of rural regions comprehensively, a coordinated and integrated policy approach is necessary (OECD, 2013). Rural areas exhibit heterogeneity, requiring tailored strategies to tackle diverse needs and opportunities in different contexts. By implementing targeted policies that account for positive and negative externalities impacting rural areas and the broader economy, policymakers can unlock latent opportunities and overcome obstacles hindering rural development. Embracing the diversity of geographical flavours in rural contexts offers a pathway towards promoting equitable and thriving rural development. The harmonious interplay of nature and culture fosters resilience and sustainability for local communities and global agri-food systems. By understanding this nexus, we can support sustainable agri-food practices, bolster rural development strategies, and ensure the preservation and celebration of geographical flavour in rural regions. This understanding contributes to a more cohesive and prosperous nation that values and harnesses the unique agricultural assets of its rural areas.

Rural space is commonly understood as non-urban space, with the term “rural” derived from the Latin word “rus,” meaning “cultivated countryside”, and is juxtaposed with “urbs,” signifying the city. While the dichotomy between these two areas seems clear, concretely defining the boundaries and characteristics of rural space remains challenging. This complexity arises, in part, from the historical perception of rural territories as marginalized, underdeveloped, and economically unprofitable areas, predominantly assessed based on crop productivity or the presence of industrial structures rather than the unique features of the region (Shucksmith & Brown, 2016).

Over time, the definition of rural areas has undergone significant transformations. In the 1950s and 1960s, rural areas were primarily defined by agrarian rurality, which emphasized the percentage of people engaged in agriculture as the key determinant (Sotte, Esposti, & Giachini, 2012). This reflected the dominant role of the agricultural sector in the economy during that period (Cloke, Marsden, & Mooney, 2006). During the following decades, from the 1970s to the 1990s, industrial rurality became prominent as the manufacturing sector experienced rapid expansion (Sotte, Esposti, & Giachini, 2012). In this phase, rural areas were often defined based on population density, reflecting the increasing urbanization and concentration of population in certain areas (Halfacree, 2009). However, since the 2000s, the concept of post-industrial rurality has gained traction (Sotte, Esposti, & Giachini, 2012). This approach recognizes that rural areas are no longer solely defined by agricultural or industrial activities, but also by a range of multifunctional indicators. These indicators encompass various aspects such as cultural heritage, natural resources, environmental sustainability, tourism, and quality of life (Che, 2003). The shift towards post-industrial rurality

reflects a broader understanding of the diverse functions and characteristics of rural areas, acknowledging the importance of their unique features beyond the traditional economic factors (Hall & Müller, 2004).

The definition of rural areas has evolved from agrarian to industrial and post-industrial, acknowledging the multifaceted nature of rural spaces and the need to consider indicators beyond agriculture or population density. Each country has developed its own definition of rural space, resulting in a highly diverse world-wide landscape. Common parameters used to determine the size and extent of rural territories often include population density calculated by area. However, this method presents challenges when comparing results across different countries due to territorial subdivisions and measurements conducted at various levels.

The classification of rural areas is a complex and multifaceted endeavour that varies across countries, contributing to a globally diverse landscape. This classification process often hinges on common parameters, with population density calculations over a specific area frequently used as a basis for categorization. However, the challenge emerges when attempting international comparisons due to variations in territorial subdivisions and measurements conducted at different levels. Despite the common characteristic of being situated away from urban centres, rural areas exhibit a remarkable array of diversity, shaped by a multitude of factors. This intricate diversity underscores the necessity for a comprehensive classification system capable of capturing the subtleties and intricacies inherent in these regions (Copus et al., 2008). The classification of rural areas assumes a pivotal role in interpreting their dynamics, planning targeted policies, and effectively addressing their distinctive challenges.

Population stands as a pivotal criterion in the classification of rural areas. Rural regions typically exhibit lower population numbers compared to their urban counterparts. This factor serves as the foundation for categorizing rural areas into distinctive groups, including low-population, medium-population, and high-population rural areas. An established methodology for this categorization is the OECD's Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS), which further subdivides member states' economic territories into hierarchical levels, encompassing NUTS 1, NUTS 2, and NUTS 3, all based on population metrics. This classification system is shown in Table 2.2 (Eurostat, 2021). Classifications based on population offer valuable insights into the distribution and concentration of people within rural areas. However, it is crucial to underline that the NUTS classification primarily functions to divide regions into “homogeneous” areas for statistical purposes. It does not inherently address the finer nuances of rural classifications.

Table 2.2: Thresholds for Population Size in NUTS Classification

Level	Min	Max
NUTS 1:	3 million	7 million
NUTS 2:	800 000	3 million
NUTS 3	150 000	800 000

For a comprehensive exploration of rural classifications based on the OECD/Eurostat methodology, an additional layer of analysis is imperative. This entails delving into the utilization of NUTS 3 regions to classify areas based on an urban-rural typology. Such a typology considers not only population. By doing so, it provides a more sophisticated rural classification that better captures the multifaceted nature of rural regions. This classification considers population density and the presence of urban clusters. The urban-rural typology adds depth to the broader population-based categorization, enabling a more insightful and multifaceted perspective on rural and urban distinctions within a given territory.

The process commences by categorizing 1km² population grid cells into rural grid cells and moderate-density urban clusters. Rural grid cells typically manifest a population density of fewer than 300 inhabitants per km² and contain fewer than 5,000 residents. In contrast, moderate-density urban clusters comprise contiguous grid cells with a population density of at least 300 inhabitants per km² and a minimum population of 5,000 inhabitants. The subsequent step entails harmonizing these grid cell classifications with NUTS 3 regions. This alignment is achieved by calculating the total population within the grid for each NUTS 3 region (A) and the population residing in moderate-density urban clusters (B). The percentage of the population living in moderate-density urban clusters is then calculated for each NUTS 3 region ($B/A*100$). This initial percentage-based classification assigns regions to one of three categories: Predominantly rural for regions where the population living in rural areas is over 50%, intermediate for regions where the population living in rural areas is between 20% and 50%, and Predominantly Urban for regions where the population living in rural areas is less than 20%. Moreover, adjustments are made to this urban-rural typology to adapt small NUTS 3 regions and the presence of major cities. Small NUTS 3 regions (less than 500 km²) are combined with neighbouring regions to reduce classification distortions caused by size differences. In the case of major cities, the most recent population grid census is used to determine whether or not an adjustment is acceptable. For instance, if a predominantly rural NUTS 3 region incorporates a city with over 200,000 inhabitants, representing at least 25% of the total population, it may be reclassified as intermediate. Similarly, if an intermediate region encompasses a city with more than 500,000 inhabitants, representing at least 25% of the total population, it could be reclassified as predominantly urban (Eurostat, 2020).

The urban-rural typology stands as a valuable instrument for obtaining a comprehensive understanding of population distribution and concentration within rural areas. This nuanced classification system informs the development of targeted policies and programs aimed at supporting the development of rural areas and improving the quality of life for rural residents.

Italy's National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) adopts a method with a focus on a distinct factor: population density within rural areas. The system categorizes rural areas into low, medium, and high population density categories. Low-density areas have extensive open spaces and sparse human settlements. Medium-density areas have a balance between open landscapes and moderate human presence, indicating communal settlement and activity. High-density areas have more concentrated settlements, a pronounced human impact on the environment, and a higher degree of communal interaction. These categories are based on the density of their population and are categorized according to their characteristics (ISTAT, 2000). The classification of rural areas based on population density, economic activities, economic development, and proximity to urban centres offers valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of these regions. These classifications not only help us understand the unique characteristics of each rural area but also guide the formulation of tailored development policies that can effectively address their specific challenges and harness their potential.

Furthermore, the classification process of rural areas is profoundly influenced by their predominant economic activities, which shape their identities. Each region can thrive on a distinctive economic foundation, such as agriculture, forestry, tourism, or industry. This method provides valuable insights into the intricate economic patterns interwoven throughout rural landscapes. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) categorizes rural areas into specific economic activity domains, such as Agricultural Rural Areas, Forestry Rural Areas, and Pastoral Rural Areas. These areas emphasize the importance of agriculture, forestry, and livestock farming in shaping livelihoods and economic frameworks (FAO, 2022). These classifications provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the diverse economic tapestries that adorn rural landscapes and the multifaceted ways in which economic activities intertwine with local cultures and ways of life.

Rural policies play a crucial role in promoting the development of rural areas, encompassing various dimensions such as economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental preservation. Public intervention in rural areas is justified by the presence of market failures, where the market may not efficiently provide goods and services due to factors like limited business competition or inadequate public transportation systems. Additionally, rural areas possess unique resources, such as natural amenities and cultural heritage, which require government intervention to fully exploit their potential for economic development. The emerging "new rural paradigm" shifts the focus of rural

policies from sectors to individual communities, tailoring interventions to address specific needs and opportunities in different rural contexts (OECD, 2006). This paradigm emphasizes the importance of rural amenities, non-economic benefits that rural residents derive from living in these areas, such as clean air, community spirit, and access to nature. To meet the increasing demand for amenities while preserving the environment, policies have been designed to promote rural development sustainably.

Agricultural policy has evolved significantly over the years, driven by global dynamics, technological advancements, environmental concerns, and changing societal needs. From its historical focus on ensuring food security and supporting farmers' incomes, over the years, agricultural policy has undergone significant transformations driven by global dynamics, technological advancements, environmental concerns, and changing societal needs (Swinnen, 2015). Rural development policies encompass a set of measures aimed at enhancing the quality of life in rural areas. One of the primary instruments for rural development policy within the EU is the CAP.

Established in 1962, the CAP holds a pivotal position as one of the EU's most significant policies, initially designed to ensure food security for European citizens, provide fair income for farmers, and stabilize agricultural product prices (European Commission, 2023). During its early stages, the CAP mainly focused on supporting agricultural product prices through the establishment of Common Market Organizations (CMOs). These organizations guaranteed minimum prices for agricultural products and allowed European governments to purchase these products when market prices fell below a certain level. As societal and environmental priorities shifted, the CAP underwent reforms to align with changing needs. The MacSharry reform of 1992 was a turning point, introducing direct payments that transcended traditional price support mechanisms. These payments aimed to provide farmers with a stable income regardless of their production levels, alleviating the dependency on production output. This reform not only brought financial security to farmers but also initiated a paradigm shift toward more sustainable agricultural practices (European Commission, 2023).

The Fischler reform of 1999 marked another pivotal moment by introducing the concept of rural development to the CAP. Recognizing the multifaceted challenges faced by rural areas, this reform sought to promote economic diversification, improve social conditions, and enhance environmental sustainability in rural regions. Investments in infrastructure, innovation, and public services were earmarked to bolster rural communities and provide them with the tools for economic growth and resilience. The CAP's reform in 2013 further underscored its commitment to rural development. By allocating more resources to this area and encouraging a strategic approach, the CAP fostered greater flexibility and adaptability at the member state level. This shift allowed countries to tailor their rural

development plans (RDPs) according to their specific needs and opportunities, aligning with broader EU objectives (European Commission, 2023). In particular, RDPs are strategic plans developed by EU member states to outline their rural development priorities and how they will use CAP funding to achieve them. RDPs are required to be aligned with the broader objectives of the CAP, which include promoting sustainable agriculture, supporting rural communities, and creating jobs in rural areas (European Commission, 2023). The function of RDPs in assisting rural development has been further increased as a result of the latest CAP change in 2023. The new CAP (2023 – 2027) allows member states more freedom in creating and executing their RDPs and places a greater emphasis on strategic planning. By doing this, nations will be able to better adapt their rural development plans to their unique requirements and difficulties.

The new CAP, in force since 2023, represents an important milestone for rural development in the EU agricultural policy. It revolves around two fundamental pillars: Pillar 1, which disburses direct payments to farmers, and Pillar 2, dedicated to supporting rural development initiatives. Pillar 1 constitutes the majority of the CAP budget, approximately 70%, and is primarily allocated to farmers based on their utilized agricultural area (UAA), whether owned or leased, contingent upon their adherence to Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs). On the other hand, Pillar 2, funded through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), accounts for about 30% of the CAP budget and encompasses a diverse range of rural development activities aimed at bolstering agriculture, rural enterprises, and overall rural community well-being across various sectors. One of the central changes in the new CAP is the restructuring of Pillar 2, placing a strong emphasis on strategic planning. Member States are now required to develop comprehensive RDPs grounded in detailed analyses of the unique requirements and aspirations of their rural regions. This strategic shift empowers Member States with increased flexibility in crafting and executing their RDPs, allowing for closer alignment with local demands (European Commission, 2023). Moreover, the new CAP delineates specific objectives for rural development, prominently featuring the promotion of sustainable agriculture, innovation, and job creation in rural areas. These alterations have been orchestrated to enhance the CAP's effectiveness and efficiency in advancing rural development within the European Union, aligning its policies more closely with the evolving dynamics of rural Europe.

This revamped CAP introduces substantial reforms across key policy areas to promote fairness, sustainability, and competitiveness in the European Union's agriculture and forestry sectors. At the core of these reforms lies a dedication to ensuring equitable treatment for all farmers and workers, irrespective of the size of their operations, the crop types they cultivate, or the geographical location of their farms. The new CAP promotes fairness for farmers and workers through a range of

measures, including rebalancing income support through mandatory direct payments and strengthening farmers' bargaining power. The CAP places a strong emphasis on redistributing income support, with a compulsory mechanism covering at least 10% of the direct payment envelope (European Commission, 2023). EU countries are encouraged to cap and reduce direct payments for larger farms to address the income needs of small and medium-sized family farms, reinforcing support for smaller operations and enhancing overall fairness within the agricultural sector. Additionally, the new CAP significantly intensifies its focus on environmental sustainability and climate action. It introduces a more ambitious green architecture that combines both pillars into a single strategic plan, aligning funding and policy instruments with environmental and climate objectives. Eco-schemes, made mandatory for EU countries, allocate 25% of direct payments to farmers and are a set of measures that incentivize farmers to adopt climate- and environmentally friendly farming practices. Furthermore, a substantial portion of rural development funds is allocated to support various important initiatives. These include agri-environment management commitments, which encourage environmentally friendly farming practices. Funds are also dedicated to Natura 2000, which designates protected areas for conserving Europe's biodiversity, and to the Water Framework Directive, focused on the management and protection of surface waters. These investments cover a range of environmental and climate-related projects, alongside efforts to enhance animal welfare (European Commission, 2023). These financial allocations demonstrate a heightened dedication to addressing environmental and climate challenges within the agricultural sector, aligning with the objectives of the European Green Deal.

Concrete instances serve to vividly portray the tangible support that the CAP provides for rural development. One compelling facet of this support is evident through its investment in crucial infrastructure projects across rural areas. These encompass vital elements such as roads, bridges, schools, and hospitals, leading to tangible enhancements in public service accessibility. Moreover, these initiatives have been instrumental in bridging the gap between rural and urban regions, fostering a more connected and equitable society. Another striking dimension of the CAP's impact is observed through its nurturing of rural innovation ventures. The policy's allocation of resources to research and development projects, vocational training, and the promotion of novel technologies has empowered rural communities to embrace innovation (European Commission, 2023). By fostering a culture of advancement, these initiatives have been instrumental in raising the competitive edge of agricultural and rural businesses. In turn, this not only strengthens the economic landscape but also positions rural areas at the forefront of technological progress (OECD, 2022).

A cornerstone of the CAP's effectiveness in driving rural development lies in its endorsement of local development programs (FAO, 2022). The CAP's Rural Development Policy (RDP) has been

instrumental in promoting economic diversification in rural areas, supporting rural infrastructure, small and medium-sized enterprises, and non-agricultural activities (Boulanger et al., 2017). In fact, the RDP plays a crucial role as the second pillar of the CAP, complementing and enhancing the CAP's objectives in promoting sustainable rural development within the European Union (EU). While the first pillar of the CAP primarily focuses on providing direct support to farmers and ensuring food security, the RDP addresses the broader socio-economic and environmental aspects of rural areas (MiPAAF, 2014). One of the key objectives of the RDP is to enhance the socio-economic fabric of rural regions by supporting a diversified and resilient rural economy.

The RDP recognizes that rural areas offer opportunities beyond traditional agricultural activities and aims to promote non-agricultural sectors, such as tourism, small businesses, and cultural heritage preservation. By doing so, the RDP seeks to reduce economic dependency on agriculture, stimulate job creation, and foster sustainable rural livelihoods (European Commission, n.d.). Moreover, the RDP places a strong emphasis on environmental sustainability and natural resource management. It incorporates various agri-environmental schemes and conservation measures to incentivize farmers and rural communities to adopt eco-friendly practices and protect biodiversity, water quality, and soil health. These initiatives align with the broader EU commitments to sustainable development and contribute to the overall environmental objectives of the CAP. The RDP adopts a fundamental bottom-up approach, empowering local communities to actively participate in designing and implementing rural development strategies.

The LEADER program, as part of the RDP, has also played a key role in empowering local communities to design and implement tailor-made development strategies. By recognizing the unique potential of each rural community and tailoring interventions to their specific needs, the CAP has been able to contribute to the holistic growth and flourishing of these areas. Thanks to this policy the CAP acknowledges the importance of promoting rural development beyond agricultural activities. In particular, the LEADER program fosters LAGs comprising stakeholders, citizens, and local authorities, collaboratively identifying region-specific needs and opportunities. This participatory process ensures tailor-made solutions for each rural area, promoting a sense of ownership and engagement among rural residents (European Network for Rural Development, n.d.).

In conclusion, the CAP, RDP, and LEADER program collectively represent a comprehensive and integrated approach to agricultural and rural development in the European Union. These policies aim to create thriving and sustainable rural communities while effectively balancing economic viability, environmental protection, and social inclusivity. Through the RDP, the EU strives to harmoniously coexist agriculture, environment, and socio-economic development in rural areas by investing in rural infrastructure, supporting entrepreneurship, preserving cultural heritage, and

enhancing overall quality of life. The transformation towards market-oriented and sustainable agricultural policies reflects the evolving challenges and objectives of rural development. Policymakers recognize the importance of implementing effective and adaptive policies like the CAP, RDP, and LEADER, which contribute to ensuring food security, enhancing rural livelihoods, and fostering environmental stewardship. By recognizing the dynamic nature of rural areas and their needs, policymakers can design agricultural policies that effectively promote vibrant and inclusive rural communities worldwide, contributing to a resilient and prosperous future for European agriculture and rural areas (MiPAAF, 2014).

2.3 A new approach to address territorial divides: Italian inner areas

In this context, the CAP, RDP, and LEADER program collectively represent a comprehensive and integrated approach to agricultural and rural development in the European Union, and their significance extends beyond national borders. While these policies are designed to create thriving and sustainable rural communities throughout the EU, their principles resonate with the challenges faced by specific regions within member states. Italy's inner areas, for instance, are instrumental in shaping the nation's socio-economic landscape, with a particular focus on improving the quality of life for residents in remote regions (Basile & Cavallo, 2020). Despite their geographical expanse, these regions confront a complex set of challenges, including marginalization and depopulation. The distance from essential service hubs, such as education, health facilities, and transportation networks, presents unique obstacles. This isolation, stemming from their remote geographical positioning, often restricts residents' access to critical services and hampers their connectivity to broader economic opportunities. Therefore, understanding the broader European context of rural development policies is essential in crafting strategies that can effectively address the specific needs of Italy's inner areas and similar regions across the EU.

The characterization of "*aree interne*" in Italy can be outlined as follows (MiPAAF, 2014):

- These areas are significantly distant from the main centres that provide essential services such as education, health, and mobility.
- They possess valuable environmental resources, including water resources, agricultural systems, forests, and diverse natural and human landscapes.
- Inner areas represent a diverse territory shaped by various natural systems and long-standing processes of anthropization.

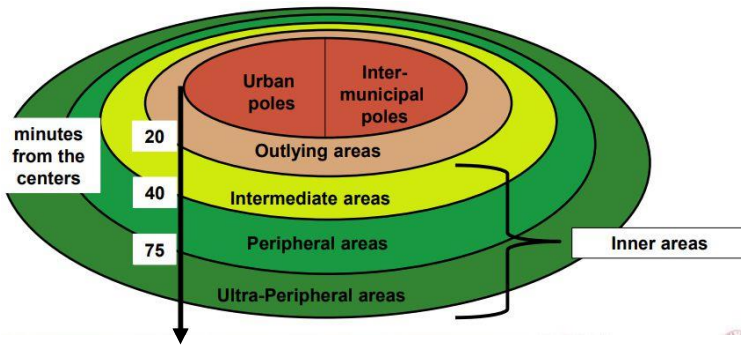
The classification of inner areas according to their proximity to essential service centres emerges as a crucial instrument for the formulation and execution of effective policies and development programs. This approach enables the identification of areas requiring targeted support and the design of interventions aimed at bridging the gap between rural and urban regions. The process of

classifying inner areas involves a well-structured and methodical approach. It begins with the identification of service centres, often referred to as ‘poles,’ that are responsible for providing essential services (namely, offering the comprehensive upper secondary school systems, at least one hospital with D.E.A. Level I services, and a medium-small Silver-type railway station for transportation) (MiPAAF, 2014). The concept of ‘poles’ refers to municipalities. They can be either single Urban poles (Poles), or groups of municipalities (Inter-municipality poles). Inter-municipality poles are a specific type of pole that is formed by two or more neighbouring municipalities that provide essential services to their residents only in joint combination (e.g., in one municipality is located an hospital, while the set of upper secondary school systems and the railway station locate in the neighbouring municipality). Despite often being situated in rural or peripheral areas, these centres provide equivalent services to urban counterparts and remain vital in upholding citizens’ quality of life.

Once these service centres are identified, the next crucial step is to calculate the distances between each municipality and the nearest service centre. This calculation is done with a focus on car travel time, as it provides a practical measure of accessibility. Accurate distance measurements help in understanding how far each area is from the essential services, giving a clear perspective on the level of convenience for the residents. In particular, according to the distance from the closest urban pole/inter-municipality poles, four types of municipalities are eventually identified. The first category encompasses Outlying or Belt Areas, which comprise regions situated within a 20-minute car journey from essential service centres. These areas boast robust accessibility to services and display relatively dynamic economic activities. The interplay between urban amenities and rural settings in these areas creates opportunities for sustainable growth. The second category pertains to Intermediate Areas, encompassing regions within a 20 to 40-minute car travel radius from service centres. This classification represents a delicate balance between service accessibility and economic stability. While service availability remains at a reasonable level, the economic landscape is more fragile, necessitating the implementation of specific measures to bolster development. The third category covers Peripheral Areas, which include regions located beyond a 41 to 75-minute car travel distance from service centres. These areas encounter challenges stemming from limited-service accessibility and contend with fragile economies. The combination of geographic remoteness and economic vulnerability underscores the imperative need for targeted interventions to address these disparities. The last category represents ultra-peripheral areas which are identified as those beyond 75 minutes of travel time (MiPAAF, 2014).

The categorization of inner areas, as described earlier, encompasses exclusively the last three categories: intermediate areas, peripheral areas, and ultra-peripheral areas, as presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2.2: Defining inner areas (Source: Pagliacci 2022)



The challenges of marginalization and depopulation in inner areas are deeply intertwined with a range of complex factors that collectively shape the socio-economic landscape of these regions. Firstly, the geographical location of inner areas, characterized by remoteness and distance from urban centres, poses significant obstacles to accessing essential services and employment opportunities. The lack of proximity to educational institutions, healthcare facilities, and economic hubs can hinder individuals' access to education, healthcare, and job markets. This isolation can lead to reduced mobility and limited interaction with external economic networks, thereby limiting the potential for economic growth and personal development (Agency for Territorial Cohesion, 2022). Secondly, the limited presence of infrastructure and public services in inner areas compounds the challenges faced by residents. Inadequate road networks, insufficient public transportation, and subpar digital connectivity can isolate these areas even further. The absence of critical infrastructure can hinder economic activities, discourage investment, and make it less attractive for businesses to establish operations in these regions. This, in turn, perpetuates the cycle of job scarcity and outmigration (Ministry of Economic Development, 2023). Constrained job opportunities represent another significant hurdle. Economic diversification is often constrained due to the predominant reliance on traditional industries such as agriculture or natural resource extraction. This limited economic base can result in a lack of diverse job opportunities, particularly for younger generations. The absence of varied employment prospects can contribute to brain drain, as skilled individuals seek better opportunities in urban areas or abroad, exacerbating the depopulation issue (Agency for Territorial Cohesion, 2022). Demographic decline is a multifaceted challenge that exacerbates the issues faced by inner areas. An aging population and a low birth rate can lead to a shrinking workforce, affecting the sustainability of local economies. As young people leave in search of better opportunities, the demographic imbalance further weakens the social fabric and community vitality. This can lead to a reduction in local demand for goods and services, creating a cycle of economic decline.

The cumulative impact of these factors results in a lower quality of life for residents in inner areas, hindering upward mobility and eroding the socio-economic fabric of these regions. Addressing these challenges requires holistic strategies that encompass targeted investments in infrastructure, fostering diverse economic opportunities, incentivizing businesses to operate locally, and implementing policies that retain and attract residents. Collaborative efforts between different levels of government, local communities, and relevant stakeholders are essential to reverse the trajectory of marginalization and depopulation, ensuring a more sustainable and inclusive future for inner areas.

The National Strategy for Inner Areas (NSIA), initiated during the 2014-2020 programming period, represents a significant step towards addressing the unique challenges that inner regions in Italy confront (MiPAAF, 2014). This comprehensive strategy functions as a collaborative initiative engaging all levels of governance, from the national scale down to the local level. Notably, the NSIA identifies 72 distinct pilot inner areas within Italy. What sets the NSIA apart is its recognition of the distinctive circumstances that these inner regions face. It acknowledges the complex interplay of factors such as geographical remoteness, limited-service accessibility, and fragile economies that often hinder development in these areas. In response, the NSIA outlines a set of strategic measures aimed at catalysing economic, social, and environmental growth.

One of the key strengths of the NSIA is its alignment with the CAP, that emerges as a potential catalyst for driving positive change and sustainable development in these areas (Agency for Territorial Cohesion, 2022). By harmonizing the objectives of the CAP's rural development measures with the goals of the NSIA, Italy can leverage a synergistic approach to tackle the multifaceted challenges these regions encounter. This coordinated effort allows for the allocation of funds to support rural development projects and initiatives specifically designed to bolster economic, social, and environmental progress within inner areas. Infrastructure deficiencies pose a significant barrier to accessibility for inner regions, impacting their residents' access to essential services, markets, and employment opportunities. The CAP can play a crucial role in addressing this issue by directing resources towards infrastructure projects that enhance connectivity, thereby mitigating geographical isolation and fostering socio-economic growth. Innovation is another powerful tool for transforming the economic landscape of inner regions. The CAP's provisions for funding research and development projects in agriculture empower local farmers with the knowledge and technology needed to increase productivity and sustainability. This has the potential to reshape the agricultural sectors of inner areas, making them more competitive and environmentally conscious. Furthermore, the CAP actively supports sustainable tourism and the development of artisanal businesses. These initiatives create new employment opportunities and

contribute to economic growth. This diversification of the economic base in these regions leverages their unique cultural and natural assets to attract visitors and generate revenue (European Commission, 2023). The coordinated efforts of the CAP and NSIA offer a comprehensive strategy to enhance the vitality and resilience of Italy's inner regions, addressing the challenges they face while promoting sustainable development.

In conclusion, it is evident that addressing the multifaceted challenges confronting Italy's inner regions, including issues of marginalization, depopulation, and the delicate equilibrium between preserving cultural heritage and promoting sustainable development, necessitates a holistic and multifaceted approach. The NSIA and initiatives like the CAP emerge as indispensable components of this comprehensive strategy. Through strategic investments, the cultivation of economic diversity, the support of local businesses, and the formulation of policies aimed at both retaining and attracting residents, these initiatives collectively contribute significantly to the ongoing effort to shape a more sustainable and inclusive future for Italy's inner regions.

2.4 Adding value to rural activities

“Adding value” in the context of rural areas refers to a multifaceted process aimed at enhancing the economic, environmental, and social benefits derived from rural resources. One approach involves developing new and innovative products and services, which can include diversifying agricultural offerings, creating immersive agritourism experiences, or organizing educational programs to promote rural culture (Rijswijk et al., 2021). Another aspect of adding value centres on improving the quality of rural products and enhancing marketing techniques to expand their reach and competitiveness. Additionally, safeguarding the environment is a crucial component of adding value, involving measures to reduce pollution, conserve natural resources, and adopt sustainable agricultural practices (Borras & Franco, 2013). Moreover, enhancing social well-being in rural areas plays a significant role, encompassing initiatives to provide essential social services, foster community development, and support local businesses (Ribeiro Palacios et al., 2013).

The importance of adding value to rural areas is underscored by its multifaceted impact on various aspects of these communities. Economically, adding value can stimulate job creation, boost the local economy, and attract vital investments that contribute to the overall prosperity of rural regions (Shen et al., 2021). Environmentally, it plays a crucial role in safeguarding natural resources and promoting sustainable land use practices, ensuring the preservation of rural landscapes for future generations (Wrachien, 2003). Socially, adding value can enhance the quality of life for rural residents, promote community cohesion, and foster a sense of pride in local traditions and heritage (Signes-Pont et al., 2022). Preserving rural culture and heritage is an important aspect of adding value, as rural areas often encompass unique and valuable cultural assets that warrant protection. By investing in the

development and promotion of rural resources, one can ensure that these treasured traditions and customs continue to thrive and enrich the fabric of rural communities.

Defining “adding value” in the context of rural areas involves a multifaceted process aimed at enhancing the economic, environmental, and social benefits derived from rural resources (Rijswijk et al., 2021). One strategy for adding value is farm diversification, which can be achieved through horizontal and vertical business strategies, leading to diffusing revenue streams, and minimizing income volatility (van der Ploeg & Roep, 2003). Farm diversification can encompass three distinct trends: deepening, which involves vertical integration of processing, short supply chains, and marketing; broadening, which entails diversifying activities not directly connected to agricultural production but linked to agricultural resources, such as tourism services and nature conservation; and re-grounding, which involves economic activities and employment outside the farm that are not connected to farming.

2.4.1 Deepening

In the pursuit of adding value to rural areas, the deepening approach plays a pivotal role, focusing on product diversification and vertical integration to optimize value and quality. This strategy involves exploring new and innovative products, expanding market reach, and controlling various stages of production to ensure superior outcomes. By diversifying their product offerings and embracing vertical integration, rural areas can enhance their economic resilience and competitiveness, catering to diverse consumer demands while achieving economies of scale. Deepening strategies empower rural businesses to adapt to market fluctuations and changing consumer preferences, ensuring a more stable and sustainable economic future.

One of the primary benefits of product diversification is the reduction of dependency on a specific product or market, mitigating the risks associated with market fluctuations and ensuring a more stable income for rural communities. Additionally, the creation of new products and services can stimulate job creation, bolstering the local economy and fostering a dynamic rural workforce (Kurdyś-Kujawska et al., 2021). Furthermore, product diversification attracts tourists and investors to rural areas, promoting sustainable economic growth and supporting local development (Ribeiro Palacios et al., 2013). Tourists are drawn to these regions by the promise of authentic experiences and products they can't find elsewhere. The introduction of novel offerings, such as agri-tourism activities, hands-on workshops, or unique gastronomic experiences, entices travellers seeking a departure from mainstream tourist destinations. Likewise, investors are attracted to the potential growth and innovation that product diversification brings. The expansion into new markets and the creation of unique products can open doors to increased revenues and profitability.

Despite the numerous advantages, there are challenges to overcome in the process of product diversification. Developing new competitive products demands substantial market research, innovation, and investment and expanding into new markets requires effective marketing strategies and distribution networks, which can be financially demanding. Additionally, improving the quality of existing products without increasing costs necessitates efficient production processes and adherence to quality standards (Bardají et al., 2022). Nevertheless, product diversification remains a valuable strategy for adding value to rural areas. By embracing innovation, exploring new markets, and ensuring product excellence, rural regions can pave the way for sustainable development and prosperity (Aprile et al., 2012). Effective marketing strategies play a crucial role in enhancing the value of rural products and empowering rural areas for sustainable economic growth. By crafting compelling marketing campaigns that highlight the unique features and cultural heritage of their offerings, rural producers can create a strong brand identity that appeals to consumers seeking authentic and distinctive products. Collaborating with retailers and distributors expands the market reach and accessibility of rural products, enabling producers to connect with a broader consumer base beyond their local region. Utilizing social media and digital marketing further enhances product promotion, evoking emotions and creating a sense of authenticity that resonates with consumers. Participating in regional and international food fairs also provides opportunities for direct engagement with potential buyers and industry professionals, fostering valuable business partnerships. By coupling effective marketing strategies with the protection of Geographical Indications (GIs) and the production of organic goods, rural areas can not only preserve the authenticity and reputation of their products but also capitalize on sustainable and health-conscious consumer demands, thus fostering a prosperous and distinctive position in the market.

In fact, GIs, which are governed by Regulation (EU) No. 1151/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of November 21, 2012 on protected designations of origin and protected geographical indications, play a pivotal role in safeguarding the reputation and authenticity of rural products, ensuring their unique ties to specific geographical regions (Aprile et al., 2012). GIs are a type of intellectual property that identify a product as originating from a specific geographical area, protecting its unique qualities and characteristics tied to that region (WIPO, n.d.). They play a crucial role in safeguarding the reputation and authenticity of products, preventing misrepresentation and misleading consumers about the product's origin. GIs are particularly important for rural areas as they help promote traditional production methods, preserve cultural heritage, and enhance economic opportunities (Singhal, 2008). In Europe, GIs are harmonized and regulated by the European Union (EU) to ensure consistency and quality across member states (European Commission, 2019). This harmonization not only supports local economies but also facilitates cross-border trade and enhances consumer confidence in the products' authenticity (WIPO, n.d.). GIs are categorized into

several types, each serving a distinct purpose. The most prominent categories include Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographical Indication (PGI), while Special Traditionality Guaranteed (STG) and Products of Mountain Areas are distinct from GIs, they still play a noteworthy role within the broader framework of European Union regulations.

For instance, the PDO status granted to products like Parmigiano Reggiano and Chianti Classico in Italy guarantees that these renowned goods are produced following traditional methods within specific regions, with raw materials sourced locally. The term “Parmigiano Reggiano” is exclusively reserved for the famous hard cheese produced in the Emilia-Romagna and Lombardia regions of Italy. By linking products to their geographical origins, GIs protect traditional production methods and unique terroir attributes, ensuring consumers receive genuine, high-quality products. The PDO status granted to Parmigiano Reggiano certifies that the cheese is made using only raw milk from cows fed with local forage and follows traditional production methods passed down for centuries. The recognition of Parmigiano Reggiano as a GI not only ensures its quality and authenticity but also celebrates the rich cultural heritage and expertise of the local cheese producers. GIs’ strict regulations ensure product integrity, guaranteeing that only producers following traditional methods can use the prestigious name *Parmigiano Reggiano*. This builds consumer trust in the authenticity and exceptional quality of the product, reflecting the cultural heritage of rural areas. GIs protect rural identities, fostering economic growth and sustainable development while preserving unique traditions. As we delve into the significance of Geographical Indications (GIs) and their categorization, it becomes apparent that PDOs hold a distinct position within the realm of GIs. A PDO is a specialized and stringent form of GI that holds immense importance in safeguarding and promoting the authenticity of products originating from specific regions. A PDO not only signifies the geographical origin of a product but also highlights its close association with the unique terroir, traditional methods, and local expertise of the region (European Commission, 2019). This recognition ensures that the product’s distinct qualities and characteristics are attributed to its place of origin, preserving traditional production practices and reinforcing consumer trust in its authenticity.

In addition to PDO, the PGI label emphasize a strong connection between products and their geographical origins. Unlike PDOs, PGIs acknowledge products associated with a specific area, even if not entirely produced there. This label preserves traditional expertise, regional identity, and consumer assurance. In my thesis focusing on rural-urban dynamics, PGIs are essential in understanding how products enhance both areas’ growth and recognition, aligning with my goal of promoting rural development through local product enhancement. Moreover, Special Traditionality Guaranteed (STG) marks highlight products whose traditional production methods have been

preserved and respected over time. Furthermore, certain products from mountainous areas can receive specific recognition under the label “Produced in Mountainous Areas”, which acknowledges the distinct characteristics of products produced in challenging regions, emphasizing their traditional and environmentally sustainable practices (European Commission, 2021). In Italy, the PAT (*Prodotti Agroalimentari Tradizionali*) designation acknowledges traditional food products with specific cultural and historical significance. This label serves to promote and protect regional culinary heritage while preserving traditional production methods (MiPAAF, n.d.).

GIs, STGs, together with Mountain Products, and other related designations such as PATs, playing a multifaceted role in shaping local cultures, identities, and economic prospects. By emphasizing distinctive geographical and cultural elements, GIs enhance product value, grant competitive advantages to rural areas, and increase market visibility. These designations also safeguard traditional knowledge and practices, ensuring the continuity of rural heritage and empowering local communities. Significantly contributing to rural development, GIs add value to products, preserve identities, and reinforce rural areas’ distinct position in the global market, fostering sustainable growth and prosperity for future generations. Investigating how products carrying these labels can bridge the rural-urban gap, with the aim to uncover their contributions to economic growth, regional recognition, and the mutual development of both areas.

In the quest for economic viability and sustainable development, rural areas are finding ways to enhance the value of their products through innovative strategies. Among these strategies, the cultivation of organic goods has gained considerable attention. Organic products are cultivated without the use of synthetic pesticides, herbicides, or fertilizers, positioning them as healthier and more environmentally friendly alternatives to conventional goods. This production approach not only resonates with the growing consumer demand for sustainable and eco-friendly choices but also underscores rural communities’ commitment to environmental conservation and responsible agricultural practices (Aprile et al., 2012). By adhering to organic standards, rural areas can carve a unique niche for themselves and cater to health-conscious and environmentally aware consumers. This strategic move can provide rural regions with a competitive edge in the market. The combination of Geographical Indication (GI) status, discussed earlier, and organic certification exemplifies how rural areas can not only preserve their cultural heritage and natural resources but also meet contemporary consumer demands. This dual approach serves as a testament to the multifaceted nature of rural development, where traditional practices intersect with modern market dynamics to create sustainable economic growth.

As rural areas strive to harness value-added strategies like Geographical Indications and organic production, they can further elevate their economic prospects by embracing vertical integration.

Vertical integration is a strategic approach that rural areas are increasingly adopting to enhance the value of agricultural products. This strategy involves consolidating various stages of the production process under the control of a single entity or company (Bardají et al., 2022). By taking ownership and management of farming, processing, and distribution, rural businesses gain comprehensive control over the supply chain. This control translates into consistent product quality, streamlined operations, and standardized practices throughout the production process. Vertical integration also allows for greater efficiency and economies of scale. This strategic coordination enables rural businesses to optimize costs and enhance their competitiveness in the market. However, it's important to note that implementing vertical integration requires careful consideration of challenges related to capital investment and flexibility. Successfully navigating these challenges is essential to ensuring sustainable growth and resilience in the market. By adopting vertical integration, rural areas can develop robust and self-sufficient economic ecosystems that empower local communities while fostering economic progress.

2.4.2 Broadening

In addition to deepening, which focuses on product differentiation and vertical integration, also broadening activities represent an effective strategy for rural activities. It also reflects a shift towards a more comprehensive approach to rural development. While deepening strategies emphasize optimizing the value of rural products and ensuring quality through vertical integration (van der Ploeg & Roep, 2003), broadening strategies recognize the potential of rural areas to serve multiple functions, encompassing environmental protection and social well-being (OECD, 2010). These strategies revolve around multifunctionality, acknowledging the diverse potential of rural regions beyond traditional agricultural production. By embracing multifunctional activities such as providing ecosystem services, engaging in social agriculture, establishing educational farms, and promoting agritourism, rural areas can contribute to sustainable development and social well-being. These initiatives not only create economic opportunities but also foster environmental protection and community engagement, making rural areas more attractive and vibrant places to live and visit. Emphasizing both deepening and broadening strategies allows for a comprehensive and inclusive approach to rural development, promoting economic prosperity alongside environmental stewardship and social cohesion. By combining these approaches, rural areas can unlock their full potential for growth and development, ensuring a holistic and sustainable path towards economic prosperity and well-being.

Multifunctionality is a fundamental concept that underpins the diverse roles rural areas can play in society. Emphasizing multifunctionality in rural development is seen as a strategic approach to add value to these regions by diversifying their economic base. One of the keyways to achieve

multifunctionality is by providing ecosystem services and marketable services. Ecosystem services, such as water purification and pollination, contribute to environmental preservation, safeguarding natural resources, and mitigating ecological challenges (EEA, 2015). Marketable services, such as social agriculture, educational farms, and agritourism, not only create economic opportunities but also enhance social engagement and offer educational benefits (Ribeiro Palacios et al., 2013). The multifunctionality of rural areas brings forth numerous benefits. Economically, diversifying the economic base makes these regions more resilient to economic shocks, while creating new employment opportunities and boosting the local economy. Environmentally, multifunctionality aids in safeguarding natural resources and mitigating environmental degradation, exemplified by agricultural practices that prevent soil erosion and water pollution (Kurdyś -Kujawska et al., 2021). Socially, multifunctionality improves the quality of life for rural residents through opportunities for social interaction and education, exemplified by social agriculture and educational farms (Shen et al., 2021).

Broadening multifunctionality involves expanding income-producing activities beyond traditional agricultural production, exploring entrepreneurial ventures in rural contexts. This broader perspective of multifunctionality recognizes that agriculture can offer functions beyond producing food and fibre, such as shaping landscapes, providing environmental benefits, and contributing to the socio-economic viability of rural areas (Bardaji et al., 2022). It encompasses new functions related to production, territories, and social aspects, all of which contribute to reinforcing socio-economic cohesion and reducing disparities (Van Huylenbroeck et al., 2007).

The concept of multifunctionality emerged from the Earth Summit in Rio and the MacSharry Reform of the CAP in 1992, leading to changes in the primary sector's role in the world economy. Agenda 2000 recognized multifunctionality as an essential element of the EU agricultural model, legitimizing public funding for services beyond traditional product quantity. Additionally, the OECD systematically defined the concept of multifunctionality and analysed various countries' positions regarding its use (OECD, 1998, 2001, 2005). Beyond its primary function of producing food and fibre, agricultural activity can also shape the landscape, provide environmental benefits such as land conservation, sustainable management of renewable natural resources, the preservation of biodiversity, and contribute to the socio-economic viability of many rural areas. Agriculture is multifunctional when it provides one or several functions in addition to its primary role of producing food and fibre (OECD, 2001). From the demand for ecosystem services expressed by consumers and citizens, the primary sector has seen a need for reorganization towards these new functions, resulting in the relocation of inputs from agricultural production to other functions.

The concept of multifunctionality recognizes that agriculture is not limited to food production but extends to environmental protection, social well-being, and economic development. It emphasizes rural areas' potential to serve diverse purposes and contribute to sustainable development. The Earth Summit and the MacSharry Reform were pivotal in shifting perspectives towards multifunctionality and legitimizing its inclusion in public policies and funding. The OECD's analyses provided valuable insights into different countries' multifunctional approaches to agriculture. The rise of multifunctionality was driven by increasing consumer and citizen demand for ecosystem services, prompting a reallocation of inputs towards environmental preservation and sustainable practices. Overall, multifunctionality has emerged as a strategic approach to rural development, promoting resilience, sustainability, and prosperity in rural areas. Through multifunctionality, agriculture can play a multifaceted role, benefiting not only food production but also the environment, society, and rural economies (Van Huylenbroeck et al., 2007).

To successfully achieve multifunctionality, rural areas must address challenges in economic, social, and environmental dimensions. Economically, implementing multifunctional strategies can be costly, especially when developing new marketable services or providing ecosystem services (Borras & Franco, 2013). Socially, cooperation among stakeholders, including farmers, businesses, and government agencies, can be challenging to achieve, hindering the effective delivery of ecosystem services (Rijswijk et al., 2021). Environmentally, a lack of careful planning and management can lead to negative impacts, such as potential water pollution resulting from unregulated agricultural production. However, embracing these multifunctional activities can contribute to the resilience and prosperity of rural areas, transforming them into dynamic and sustainable communities (Murray et al., 2019). Rural crafts, renewable energy production, parks and gardens management, care farming, teaching farms, agritourism, and farm stays are all vital components of broadening multifunctionality. These initiatives not only diversify income sources but also preserve cultural heritage, provide recreational opportunities, and enhance the quality of life for rural residents (Nilsson 2002).

The influence of public policies in nurturing multifunctionality within rural landscapes is a key determinant. These policies encompass a range of strategic interventions aimed at fostering multifaceted rural progress. A cornerstone of this approach is the provision of financial incentives tailored to stimulate agricultural diversification. Programs like the European Union's rural development initiatives exemplify this strategy (European Commission, n.d.). By offering economic support to projects that underscore multifunctionality, these programs encourage farmers to expand their activities beyond traditional agricultural confines. The resulting diversification injects dynamism into the rural economy, bolstering its resilience. Moreover, the embrace of robust

environmental and landscape protection regulations represents a pivotal stride toward multifunctionality. Stringent policies geared at safeguarding ecological integrity can inspire farmers to adopt sustainable practices that not only mitigate their impact on the environment but also ensure its long-term health. Preserving rural landscapes goes hand in hand with this, often achieved through judicious spatial planning and land management regulations that curb unbridled urban expansion within rural areas.

Skill development and knowledge dissemination are crucial for farmers to effectively utilize multifunctionality opportunities. This involves expanding their horizons beyond traditional agricultural practices, embracing activities like agritourism, environmental stewardship, and cultural preservation. This requires acquiring new skills and knowledge, including marketing strategies and management techniques. Training programs and consultation services provide targeted insights into agritourism management, sustainable agricultural practices, and responsible rural landscape stewardship. These initiatives help farmers understand the concept of multifunctionality, identify potential diversification opportunities, develop essential skills for efficient activity management, stay updated on market trends and environmental regulations, and build connections with fellow farmers and stakeholders in multifunctional agriculture. By nurturing these skills and knowledge, these initiatives enable farmers to seize multifunctionality's opportunities and contribute to the development of resilient and sustainable rural communities (Rainero & Mordarelli, 2020).

In Italy, multifunctionality has garnered formal acknowledgment as an integral facet of rural development and can help to preserve the unique rural heritage and ensure that the rural areas continue to thrive. This is evident in the National Strategic Plan for the 2014-2020 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Under its ambit, financial backing was directed toward projects emblematic of multifunctionality's essence. From the support of high-quality agri-food production to the promotion of agritourism and the preservation of rural landscapes, the plan exemplified a comprehensive approach that underscored the multifaceted potential of Italy's rural landscapes.

In conclusion, broadening multifunctionality represents a transformative path for rural areas to achieve sustainable development and prosperity. By embracing a wide range of activities beyond traditional agriculture, such as rural crafts, renewable energy production, parks and gardens management, care farming, teaching farms, agritourism, and farm stays, rural communities can unlock their full potential. These multifunctional initiatives not only diversify income sources but also preserve cultural heritage, provide recreational opportunities, and enhance the quality of life for rural residents. Through strategic planning and collaboration among stakeholders, rural areas can successfully harness the benefits of multifunctionality while navigating challenges related to

economic, social, and environmental dimensions. By broadening their scope to include both marketable and non-marketable services, rural areas can create a sustainable and dynamic future, fostering economic resilience and preserving their unique identities and traditions (Van Huylenbroeck et al., 2007). This comprehensive approach to rural development paves the way for a thriving and inclusive future, where rural communities flourish in harmony with their natural and cultural surroundings.

2.4.3 The role of Tourism

Tourism is a dynamic and evolving industry that plays a significant role in the global economy, fostering cultural exchange, economic growth, and regional development. It involves the movement of people from one place to another for various purposes, such as leisure, business, education, health, and cultural exploration (UNWTO, n.d.). The tourism sector encompasses a wide range of activities, from visiting iconic landmarks and natural landscapes to engaging in local traditions, festivities, and culinary experiences. It has a significant impact on both the global and local economies, generating employment opportunities and income for businesses and communities (Sharma et al., 2012). One of the key benefits of tourism is its ability to foster cultural exchange and understanding between different regions and societies. As tourists interact with local communities and experience their way of life, they gain insights into diverse cultures, customs, and traditions, promoting cross-cultural awareness and tolerance (Hjalager & Richards, 2002). Moreover, tourism can play a crucial role in preserving and promoting cultural heritage, as visitors are drawn to historical sites, museums, and traditional events (McKercher & Du Cros, 2002). This not only enhances the sense of pride and identity within the local community but also contributes to the conservation and maintenance of cultural assets. Furthermore, the economic impact of tourism is substantial, with the industry accounting for a significant share of global GDP and employment (UNWTO, n.d.). In many developing countries, tourism plays a pivotal role in generating foreign currency income, thereby boosting the national economy and supporting various sectors, including transportation, accommodation, and food services (Arru et al., 2021). Additionally, tourism can drive regional development by encouraging investments in infrastructure and facilities, improving the overall quality of life for residents.

Rural tourism is a specific type of tourism that takes place in rural areas, “in which the visitor’s experience is related to a wide range of products generally linked to nature-based activities, agriculture, rural lifestyle / culture, angling and sightseeing” (UNWTO, n.d.). This type of tourism offers travellers a distinct travel experience that facilitates interaction with nature, local traditions, and rural life. Such engagements foster cultural exchange and understanding, paralleling the broader impacts of tourism. The immersive quality of rural tourism allows tourists to connect with the

authenticity of rural communities, leading to a sense of serenity and a deeper appreciation for nature. Rural tourism also plays a crucial role in rural development and sustainability, aligning with economic, cultural, and environmental dimensions. Economically, it generates income and employment opportunities in rural areas, contributing to local economies while enhancing the preservation of cultural heritage and traditional practices. Furthermore, the phenomenon promotes conservation efforts and sustainable practices that support the preservation of natural resources and biodiversity (Lane et al., 2013). As tourists engage with local customs and traditions, they gain insights into diverse rural cultures, promoting cross-cultural awareness and tolerance, similar to the benefits seen in broader tourism (Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Roberts & Hall, 2001). Various factors influence the development of rural tourism, with demographic shifts like population aging and the growth of the middle class being paramount. Economic shifts, including globalization and increased consumer spending, play a significant role, as do social changes like heightened environmental consciousness and a quest for authentic experiences. Together, these factors shape the landscape of rural tourism, influencing its growth, sustainability, and impact.

There are a number of theories and tourist models that have been developed to explain the relationship between tourism and regional development (Cohen, 1972; Williams, 1998). These theories, grounded in spatial analysis and geographical concepts, offer a comprehensive framework to understand the complex interactions shaping tourism patterns, involving physical landscapes, cultural attractions, socio-economic factors, and human behavior (Hall, 2008). They have significantly contributed to formulating effective tourism strategies, sustainable destination management, and informed decision-making (Faulkner, 2001), offering a deeper appreciation of the multifaceted relationships between tourism and its environments (Getz, 2000). Additionally, these theories find practical application in the domain of agri-food tourism, centered on local food and wine experiences.

Geographical theories have played a pivotal role in unravelling the complex dynamics that shape the spatial intricacies and developmental trajectories of tourism destinations. Within this realm, two notable models, the Lundgren model (1984) and the Lozato-Giotart model (2008), stand out as significant contributors, providing insightful perspectives on the orchestration of tourist flows within spatial dimensions. These models not only contribute to our understanding of tourist movement but also offer frameworks to comprehend the spatial organization of tourism destinations.

The Lundgren model presents a hierarchical framework for comprehending the dynamics of tourist flows, categorizing them into four distinct types based on their spatial characteristics (Lundgren, 1984). Within this model, tourist flows are structured in a hierarchical manner, with major destinations attracting a higher volume of visitors compared to minor ones. The four principal types

of flows delineated by the model include long-distance flows spanning countries and continents, metropolitan or urban flows confined within city areas, suburban flows connecting cities with their surrounding suburbs, and rural peripheral flows extending between cities and their rural hinterlands. The concentration of attractions emerges as a critical determinant, as tourists are more likely to gravitate towards destinations boasting a surplus of historical sites, natural wonders, and cultural experiences. Furthermore, the quality of infrastructure, encompassing well-developed roadways and airports, also shapes tourist flows, with destinations boasting superior infrastructure witnessing increased tourist traffic (Cooper et al. 2008). The utility of the Lundgren model lies in its capacity to provide a holistic understanding of the structural underpinnings of tourist flows to a variety of destinations, including national parks, cities, and beach resorts (Hall & Page, 2006). Nonetheless, it may offer limited insights into the intricate factors that specifically influence tourist flows to individual destinations. Criticisms directed at the model highlight its oversimplification, as it does not consider the diversity of motivations driving tourists nor the intricate interplay between various influencing elements. Its application extends to identifying potential tourism hotspots, predicting future trends in tourist movements, and formulating effective tourism policies and strategies. While acknowledging its shortcomings, the model's capacity to offer macroscopic insights into tourist flows reinforces its significance in the realm of tourism analysis and planning.

The Lozato-Giotart model, in contrast to the Lundgren model, serves the primary purpose of offering a more sophisticated framework for comprehensively analysing tourist flows. This model takes into consideration a broader spectrum of factors, including travel costs, accommodation availability, and the quality of infrastructure. However, its intricacy makes it more challenging to apply and interpret (Hall & Page, 2006). The main goal of the model is to offer a deeper and more thorough knowledge of the underlying variables affecting visitor flows. It aims to clarify why tourists favour particular locations over others and how different variables interact to affect their choices. The model's primary goal is to offer a more in-depth and complex perspective on the motives influencing tourist flows. It takes into account a number of factors, including travel costs, hotel alternatives, infrastructure quality, danger perceptions, destination environmental value, destination configurations, diversity of attractions, and culinary experiences. This in-depth investigation helps clarify how a complicated web of interrelated elements affects travellers' choices. It supports academic tourism research as well as tactical decision-making in the tourism industry.

The Lozato-Giotart model recognizes that tourist flows are not solely determined by attractions but may be influenced by other considerations such as perceived risks of crime or terrorism. Additionally, the model takes into account the environmental value of tourism, in fact, areas with notable environmental significance, like national parks and protected regions, tend to draw a higher

number of tourists due to their appeal. The configuration and characteristics of tourist destinations significantly impact the inflow of visitors. Multi-purpose destinations, those serving both tourism and other activities like business and recreation, tend to attract a greater number of tourists due to their versatile offerings. Similarly, the structure of localities matters, where mononuclear localities with a single centre of activity may draw fewer tourists compared to polynuclear counterparts with multiple activity centres. Additionally, the diversity of attractions also plays a pivotal role. Destinations with a single major tourist resource or attraction might garner fewer tourists than those offering a plethora of attractions. This aligns with the notion that multi-attraction destinations tend to be more appealing to tourists than those centered around a singular major draw. Gastronomic experiences also contribute; nonproductive gastronomic destinations with limited culinary offerings may attract fewer visitors, while poly-productive gastronomic destinations offering a diverse range of food experiences are likely to capture the interest of a larger tourist influx (Lozato-Giotart, 2008).

Both the Lundgren and Lozato-Giotart models are oriented towards the examination of tourist flows, centring on the analysis of tourism demand dynamics. These models dissect the array of factors that exert influence on the patterns of tourist movements, encompassing elements such as the concentration of attractions, travel expenditures, the accessibility of lodging facilities, and the quality of infrastructure. Conversely, the Butler and Miossec models pivot towards the study of the developing routes of tourist destinations, shedding light on the supply-side dynamics of tourism. These models articulate the distinct developmental phases that destinations can undergo over time, encompassing stages spanning from initial exploration and engagement to full-fledged development, consolidation, and eventual phases of decline.

Miossec's (1977) theory offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the developmental trajectory of tourist destinations. This theory outlines four distinct stages that characterize the evolution of destinations. The Miossec theory serves as a valuable tool for comprehending the gradual evolution of tourist destinations, aiding in identifying their current stage of development and assessing potential impacts related to tourism (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003; Smith, 2009). In his theory, Miossec (1977) highlights the non-homogeneous nature of tourism, shaped by variables like age, profession, nationality, and income. These variables collectively compose the *touristic budget*, influencing destination choices and activities. This budget is guided by two key factors: travel and accommodation costs, along with the duration of the stay. For instance, those with limited resources opt for nearby destinations, short stays, and economical accommodations. In contrast, affluent travellers explore farther locales, enjoy longer stays in *virgin territories*, or indulge in luxurious stays if they opt for more touristy areas.

Considering these budgetary variables, Miossec identifies five distinct destination sets:

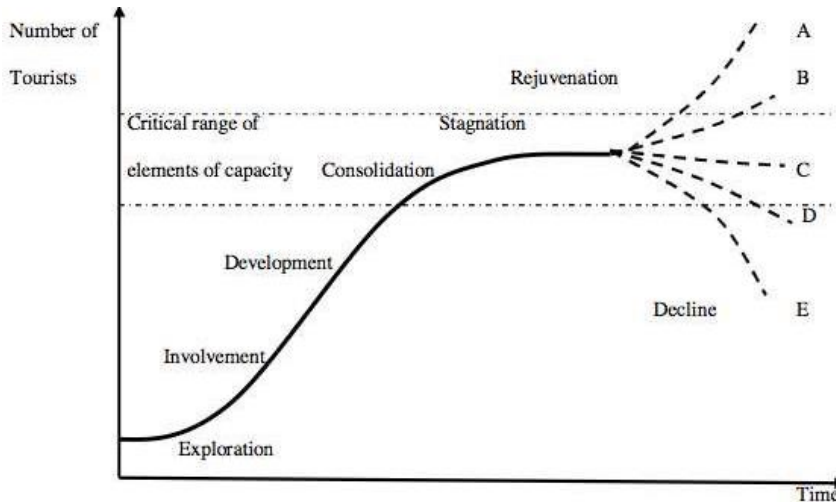
- Local: destinations close to home that appeal to budget-conscious tourists.
- Neighbouring countries: swift getaways to nearby nations that offer convenience.
- Well-known attractive countries: reputable places with a relatively higher price tag for travel.
- New attractive countries: emerging localities that balance moderate travel expenses.
- Unexplored territories/ non-Touristic areas: uncharted domains, predominantly attracting discerning pioneers with the means to engage in untamed environments.

It's noteworthy that this categorization is not rigid; nuanced factors including income differentials and historical affinities intersect to impact tourist traffic. By emphasizing the intricate nexus between financial considerations and the complex tapestry of destination choices, Miossec's model enriches our comprehension of the multi-dimensional interplay that melds the contours of tourism patterns and individual preferences. Due to these patterns and individual preferences, tourist areas can also be hierarchically classified based on the four stages of tourist development they are undergoing. The pre-tourist stage represents a phase untouched by tourism, outside the awareness of potential travellers. As the destination moves into the tourist awakening stage, it begins to attract interest from tourists, often spurred by improved transportation infrastructure or the emergence of new attractions. Subsequently, the tourist boom stage witnesses a rapid surge in tourist arrivals, often attributed to positive media coverage or enthusiastic word-of-mouth recommendations. However, as the destination progresses further, it enters the tourist saturation stage, indicating a point of maximum capacity where concerns such as environmental strain and overcrowding become prominent. Phase 4, considered the most pivotal stage in Miossec's framework, signifies the onset of saturation within a tourist destination. Alternatively, public intervention emerges as a potent tool, involving concerted efforts by authorities to shield the destination from further saturation, thereby ensuring its sustainability and allure (Miossec, 1977). Lastly, the introduction of innovative tourist approaches stands as a viable solution, provided they uphold the destination's vibrancy, uphold local traditions, and actively involve the resident population (Smith 2009). These multifaceted strategies underscore the model's inherent adaptability and highlight the proactive role that various stakeholders can play in steering the trajectory of tourism development towards a sustainable and harmonious course.

In contrast, Butler's model conceptualizes tourist destinations as dynamic *industrial products* shaped by the changes in touristic preference and in the attractions of the overall area. This model presents a comprehensive five-stage framework, traversing from the initial exploratory phase to involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation, and finally, the potential for subsequent decline or rejuvenation. Central to each stage is a threshold of resilience, embodying a nuanced

equilibrium between preserving the environment and advancing planning objectives. Figure 2.3 shows the evolution phases of a touristic area according to Butler's model, based on the *Product cycle concept*.

Figure 2.3: evolution of a touristic area, (Source: Butler, 1980)



At the beginning, the Exploration stage marks the initial encounter between tourists and the destination. It is characterized by the spark of nascent interest and curiosity, as visitors begin to explore the uncharted territory. This phase often embodies a period of low-volume tourism, accompanied by underdeveloped infrastructure and amenities. As interest grows, the Involvement stage takes hold, accompanied by an upsurge in tourism popularity. In response, infrastructure is expanded and improved to accommodate the increasing number of visitors seeking comfort and ease. This stage symbolizes the destination's initial steps toward more comprehensive tourism development. The path of growth continues into the stage of Development, which is frequently seen as the apex of a place's development. In this stage, tourism reaches its full maturity and competition to attract tourists' interest and money increases. The destination becomes a hub of activity, with an abundance of attractions competing for travellers' attention. However, it must now deal with potential difficulties including congestion and environmental worries as the Consolidation stage begins after this point of maximum expansion (Butler, 1980). These problems could cause it to lose some of its appeal, leading travellers to look for more unaltered locations.

Consequently, the Stagnation stage unfolds as the destination crosses its carrying capacity. This phase can be precarious, driven by an influx of foreign investments that transform the destination into an artificial attraction. Its perception becomes mainstream, causing travellers to seek for other locations. While this occurs, mass tourism prevails, which could result in the overcrowding of original locations. Butler offers two possible outcomes for this narrative, both of which provide insightful possibilities. A region can approach the Decline stage (D), this happens if it has lost some of its appeal and is now more of a day-trip location. Often combined by price drops and a greater

emphasis on engagement with the community, a decline in tourist arrivals gradually causes the area's focus to shift away from tourism. In contrast, the Rejuvenation phase (A) offers a different story that emphasizes an original point of view. Here, rethinking attractions and restoring tourist flows are key to the destination's transformation. Employing underutilized natural resources through community-driven activities that serve to tourist demographics is a key technique. Beyond the pivotal Rejuvenation and Decline stages, there exist intermediate phases that shed light on the destination's journey. Reduced Growth (B) denotes a stage where the destination experiences a slowdown in tourism growth, often due to factors like overexposure, environmental concerns, or shifting traveler preferences. It prompts the need for diversification and sustainable management. Stabilization (C) follows, signifying a period of equilibrium and maturity as the destination successfully manages the challenges of reduced growth, focusing on sustainability and visitor experience enhancement. Below these stages lies Immediate Decline (E), a phase marked by abrupt deterioration caused by crises such as natural disasters or economic downturns, necessitating rapid recovery efforts. These intermediate stages collectively contribute to a comprehensive understanding of destination evolution, guiding effective management and decision-making for long-term destination resilience and success in the dynamic realm of global tourism (Butler, 1980). This strategy may restore interest and reinvent the destination's identity, opening the door for authentic growth.

2.4.4 Geographical flavour: the role of food and wine tourism

Food and wine tourism, also known as culinary tourism, is a specialized form of tourism that revolves around the exploration and appreciation of local gastronomy and viticulture (Hall & Sharples, 2003). It offers travellers the opportunity to immerse themselves in the diverse flavours, traditional dishes, and unique wines that a destination has to offer. Beyond mere consumption, food and wine tourism delves into the entire production process, including visiting vineyards, farms, and food markets, and participating in cooking classes and wine tastings (Hall, 2000). This intimate and authentic experience allows travellers to savour the culture and history behind the food and wine, making it a deeply enriching and memorable journey. The fusion of culinary delights, breathtaking landscapes, and cultural insights makes food and wine tourism an all-encompassing and captivating experience for travellers seeking more than just a mere taste of a destination. In this context, it becomes essential to examine the main economic agents and touristic solutions created by the cooperation between public and private sectors, that contribute to the success of food and wine tourism, including accommodation and hospitality businesses, eating establishments, tourist information bureaus, tour operators, wine routes, rural crafts, care farming, teaching farms, and agritourism and farm stays. Understanding their roles and significance allows for the exploration of

strategies to harness their potential for adding value to rural areas, enhancing their economic prospects, and preserving their unique cultural identity and heritage. The concept of geographical flavour underscores the importance of these economic agents in shaping the distinct character and appeal of a destination's culinary and wine offerings.

The geographical flavour of a destination, characterized by a fusion of local and international influences, stands as a pivotal element that contributes to its appeal as a tourist attraction. The concept of geographical flavour embodies the essence of regions and spaces, representing the culmination of various elements that define and differentiate a particular area and it is shaped by the intricate interplay of terroir, milieu, territory/region, and landscape, highlighting the uniqueness of each product's origin. For example, a wine producer might use the concept of terroir to promote their wines as being produced in a unique and special place. The analysis of a place must include all of these elements in order to understand the geographical flavour of a product. This is because the several factors interact with each other to create the unique flavour of a product. For example, the soil in a particular region might be well-suited for growing a certain type of grape, but the climate might not be ideal. The milieu, such as the traditions and practices of the people who produce the wine, can also play a role in shaping the flavour of the wine. The concept of geographical flavour is a complex one, but it is an important concept for understanding the quality of agri-food and wine products.

Understanding the concepts of terroir, milieu, territory/region, and landscape is crucial for comprehending the diverse geographical flavour of agri-food and wine products. These elements, encompassing environmental conditions, cultural practices, geographical boundaries, and natural surroundings, intricately shape the distinct tastes and aromas that define each region's culinary identity. Embracing these concepts allows us to appreciate the profound interplay between nature, culture, and geography, uncovering the fascinating stories of regions told through their delectable delights. Ultimately, grasping these concepts deepens our appreciation for the complexities and interconnectedness that contribute to the uniqueness of agri-food and wine products in different territories, celebrating the rich diversity of our planet's spatial organization.

- Terroir, a French term meaning "land", embodies the intricate interplay of environmental factors that profoundly impact agri-food production. Elements like soil composition, climate, topography, and biodiversity collectively contribute to the distinct characteristics of products, enriching the concept of geographical flavour. Understanding terroir is crucial for both producers and consumers, enabling a deeper appreciation of the diverse spatial attributes shaping product quality and identity (Jackson, 2000). Embracing the complexities of terroir empowers producers to make informed decisions on cultivation techniques, crop

selection, and processing methods, emphasizing the unique attributes of their region's terroir, and promoting local distinctiveness (Van Leeuwen & Seguin, 2006). For consumers, comprehending terroir elevates sensory experiences and fosters a profound connection to the landscapes and cultures of regions, enriching the appreciation of diverse flavours in agri-food products (Lenglet, 2014). The concept of terroir celebrates the remarkable diversity of tastes arising from the harmonious interplay of nature and culture across regions. Recognizing terroir's relevance in shaping culinary identities empowers societies to preserve and promote local food traditions, fostering a deeper sense of place and cultural appreciation (Hall & Mitchell, 2004). Moreover, terroir plays a vital role in geographical indications, safeguarding the authenticity and reputation of agri-food products associated with specific regions (WIPO, n.d.). Embracing terroir and its relationship with geographical indications ensures the preservation of culinary heritage and supports sustainable regional development, reinforcing the significance of geographical flavour in the agri-food sector (FAO, 2023).

- The milieu, a fundamental aspect of geographical flavour in agri-food production, encompasses cultural, social, and traditional practices intricately linked to the local environment. These practices reflect the collective wisdom and craftsmanship of communities involved in food production. Preserving traditional culinary techniques and recipes passed down through generations contributes to the distinct sense of place found in agri-food products. For instance, in cheese-making, specific artisanal practices, like the use of bacteria cultures and aging methods, define unique flavour profiles for cheeses from different regions. Emphasizing locally sourced ingredients further strengthens the terroir effect, connecting food to its geographical origin and supporting sustainable agriculture (Hall & Sharples, 2003). The milieu fosters pride and cultural identity among local communities and enhances the authenticity of agri-food products, attracting enthusiasts seeking genuine gastronomic experiences. Overall, the milieu plays a vital role in shaping the geographical flavour of diverse agri-food products, intertwining human practices with the natural elements to create authentic regional culinary identities.
- The territory or region significantly contributes to the geographical flavour of agri-food products through its distinct geographical boundaries and environmental attributes. These factors play a pivotal role in shaping the crops that can be cultivated and the availability of raw materials, ultimately influencing the flavour profile of the final product. The geographical region sets the stage for the agri-food production process, with its unique combination of soil composition, climate, topography, and biodiversity impacting the growth and development of crops. For example, the fertile soil in a specific region may be ideal for cultivating a particular variety of grapes used in wine production, leading to wines with

distinct aroma and taste characteristics (Robinson, 2012). Moreover, the geographical boundaries of a region can also define the scope and regulations of food production, impacting the traditional practices and techniques used. These practices, shaped by the region's history and cultural heritage, further contribute to the specific flavours associated with the products originating from that area (Hall & Mitchell, 2004). For instance, the renowned Parmigiano Reggiano cheese is deeply rooted in the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy, where specific dairy farming practices and aging processes have been honed over centuries, resulting in its unique savoury flavour profile.

- The landscape serves as a significant influencer of the geographical flavour in agri-food production, leaving an indelible mark on the taste profile of various products. The natural surroundings and overall environmental context of a region play a crucial role in shaping the flavours of agri-food and wine products. For instance, the presence of nearby water bodies can create a microclimate that fosters the growth of specific crops, contributing to the unique taste characteristics of the products (van Leeuwen & Darriet, 2020). Similarly, the existence of diverse flora and fauna in the surrounding environment can impart subtle nuances to the flavours of agri-food products, adding complexity and depth to their taste (Hall & Sharples, 2003). Moreover, the human-made features of the landscape, such as the design and layout of farms and vineyards, can also influence the flavours of agri-food products. The careful arrangement of crops or grapevines in response to the topography and sun exposure can impact the ripening process, thereby affecting the taste profile of the final products (Robinson, 2012). Additionally, the architectural elements of food processing facilities and wineries may influence factors such as temperature and humidity during production, further contributing to the distinctive flavours of agri-food products.

Geographical flavour holds particular significance within the realms of culinary and wine tourism. These burgeoning forms of tourism have witnessed robust growth globally, with travellers increasingly inclined to delve into the local cuisine and wines of a destination. The geographical flavour of a region becomes an important attraction for food and wine enthusiasts. Destinations that can provide genuine gastronomic and oenological experiences therefore have a significant chance of attracting travellers who have a keen interest in these fields. These locations can highlight their regional peculiarities and actively involve local populations in their tourism initiatives by presenting their unique geographic flavour in a sustainable way. This aligns perfectly with the changing tastes of contemporary tourists, who seek out immersive experiences that capture the spirit of a place's history and tradition in addition to stunning surroundings. The fusion of geographical features with regional gastronomic and viticultural traditions creates a captivating narrative that appeals to discriminating travellers, enriching their experiences while also promoting the socioeconomic

development of the area. As a result, the local flavour turns into a key asset, allowing locations to establish out a unique niche in the competitive arena of international tourism.

In the world of rural tourism and food and wine tourism, a diverse array of operators and touristic solutions play a pivotal role in creating immersive and enriching experiences for travellers seeking to explore the charm and authenticity of rural landscapes. These, ranging from wine route organizers and rural crafts artisans to care farms and agritourism providers, contribute to the economic and cultural vitality of rural communities. Wine routes, for example, are a significant aspect of food and wine tourism, providing travellers with specialized and immersive experiences centered around culinary delights and viticultural treasures. These carefully designed routes lead tourists through various wineries, restaurants, and attractions, allowing them to Savor the distinct wines and gastronomic offerings of specific regions. As visitors indulge in the local wines and delicacies, they actively contribute to the economic growth of the communities, supporting local producers and elevating the area's reputation as a unique culinary destination. Events like *Cantine Aperte* and the *Movimento del Turismo del Vino* in Italy have further exemplified the impact of wine tourism by fostering direct interactions between producers and enthusiasts, promoting regional wines, and sharing cultural knowledge. Wine tourism encompasses a spectrum of activities related to wine knowledge, ranging from vineyard visits and tastings at the production site to engaging with cultivation techniques, tool exposure, and educational initiatives within wineries (Dixit et al., 2022). These experiences are often complemented by opportunities for the tasting and purchase of the company's wine productions, frequently accompanied by the pairing of foods, particularly those linked to geographical indications, mountain products, and traditional culinary offerings. Wine tourism in Italy has been positively influenced by regulatory frameworks, such as the Law 205/2017 and the D.M. 2779/2019. These regulations define and support wine tourism activities, providing clear guidelines for the industry's operation and enhancing the quality and safety of visitor experiences. Law 205/2017 established rules that govern wine tourism, while D.M. 2779/2019 introduced guidelines for the classification and recognition of wine tourism destinations, facilitating the development of well-organized wine routes. Legislative measures and strategic initiatives have played a pivotal role in fostering the growth of wine tourism, resulting in the flourishing of rural economies and the heightened appreciation for regional wines and culinary traditions. What was once regarded as a form of *elite tourism* has undergone a transformative shift, now accommodating a diverse spectrum of tourist profiles. Among these are occasional wine tourists enticed by comprehensive offerings, classic wine enthusiasts intrigued by both viticulture and gourmet dining, wine lovers actively seeking immersive winery experiences, and luxury aficionados pursuing exclusive encounters in the wine world, even without an expert background (Nella & Christou, 2021).

Alongside the appeal of wine routes, rural crafts stand as time-honoured traditions, serving as captivating windows into the region's rich cultural heritage. These crafts not only preserve traditional skills and knowledge but also become popular souvenirs, contributing to the continuation of artisanal practices and the preservation of cultural identities. Additionally, care farms and teaching farms play multifunctional roles, addressing social and environmental needs while offering therapeutic experiences and hands-on learning opportunities related to agriculture and environmental conservation. By nurturing environmentally conscious professionals and fostering social inclusion, these farms significantly contribute to the future sustainability of rural communities (Murray et al., 2019). Care farming provides therapeutic and rehabilitative services for individuals facing physical or mental health challenges, giving them the chance to engage in agricultural activities and experience the healing benefits of nature. This contributes to improved well-being and social inclusion, making care farming an asset to rural areas. Moreover, many care farms implement sustainable and eco-friendly practices, promoting environmental preservation and fostering a deeper connection between people and nature. Teaching farms represent another valuable component of adding value to rural areas (Petroman et al., 2016). These educational facilities offer hands-on learning experiences related to agriculture, food production, and environmental conservation, contributing to raising awareness about sustainable farming practices. By nurturing a new generation of environmentally conscious and skilled professionals, teaching farms play a vital role in building the future sustainability of rural communities. Through practical education and engagement with agricultural activities, visitors to teaching farms gain insights into the intricacies of rural life and the significance of sustainable practices in ensuring the long-term viability of rural areas. This knowledge transfer improves rural heritage appreciation and sustainable practices, contributing to economic and environmental resilience. Integrating care farming and teaching farms in rural tourism enhances visitor experiences and contributes to the region's overall sustainability and ecological balance.

Lastly, agritourism and farm stays allow tourists to experience rural life firsthand, engaging in agricultural activities and immersing themselves in local culture. Not only do these initiatives generate additional income for farmers, but they also promote cultural exchange, fostering a deeper understanding of rural traditions and customs (Nilsson, 2002). Together, these diverse operators enrich the world of rural tourism and food and wine tourism, showcasing the unique offerings of rural areas and contributing to their long-term prosperity and cultural preservation. Agri-tourism provides visitors with a unique opportunity to connect with nature, gain hands-on knowledge of farming practices, and enjoy farm-fresh produce (Van Huylenbroeck et al., 2007). By generating additional income for farmers and rural communities, agritourism contributes to the economic growth of the region. Moreover, tourists' spending on local products and services stimulates the

local economy, benefiting various sectors such as agriculture, crafts, and local businesses. Additionally, agritourism fosters cultural exchange and appreciation, as tourists gain a deeper understanding of rural traditions and customs, promoting a stronger sense of connection and appreciation for the countryside. Furthermore, to enhance the quality and recognition of agritourism facilities, some countries have established national trademarks to identify those agritourism that comply with the national regulations. For instance, in Italy, there is a national trademark “*Agriturismo*” to distinguish accommodations that meet specific criteria and provide an authentic rural experience. In addition, Italy’s agritourism sector operates under the guidance of various laws, with one of the most significant being the 2006 Law n. 96/2006. This legislation is aimed at safeguarding and promoting specific territorial resources, traditional/local food, human activities in rural areas, multifunctional agriculture, farm income diversification, and improving the quality of life. It seeks also to recover rural agricultural heritage in terms of buildings and landscape, promote rural culture and nutritional education, and facilitate sustainable agriculture and forestry practices. These legislative efforts reflect the country’s commitment to fostering a harmonious relationship between tourism and agriculture within the agritourism sector. Similarly, other countries have their own systems to promote and regulate agritourism establishments, ensuring visitors have authentic and enjoyable experiences while supporting local communities. Farm stays are an integral part of rural tourism, allowing travellers to experience life on working farms. This has resulted in a diverse range of farm accommodation options, providing unique and immersive rural experiences. Moreover, farm stays have received financial support through EU-member countries’ co-funded Rural Development Programmes since 2000, encouraging their growth. In 2013, many countries implemented new rules and classification systems to further enhance the quality and streamline farm stays across the region.

In conclusion, food tourism and wine tourism are two dynamic sectors that weave a captivating tapestry within the realm of travel experiences. While all offer immersive journeys into a destination’s cultural and gastronomic landscapes, they each highlight distinct facets of culinary exploration. Food tourism, often referred to as gastronomic tourism, encompasses a wide range of culinary experiences that extend beyond beverages. It entices travellers with a rich array of local flavours, traditional dishes, and culinary heritage. This form of tourism delves into the core of a region’s culinary identity, celebrating its food markets, street food culture, farm-to-table practices, and traditional cooking methods. The essence of food tourism lies in its authentic connection to a destination’s culture through the universal language of food, stimulating all senses, from the aroma of street food stalls to the visual appeal of artfully presented dishes (Garibaldi et al., 2018). In contrast, wine tourism focuses on the world of wine and the intricate facets of viticulture. It immerses travellers in the winemaking process, from cultivating vineyards to the delicate art of wine

tasting. Wine tourists visit vineyards, wineries, and cellars to gain insights into grape cultivation and the alchemical transformation of grapes into fine wines. This form of tourism bridges heritage, terroir, and craftsmanship, as visitors not only taste wines but also learn about the history, culture, and traditions intertwined with wine production (Sharples et al., 2010).

An exemplary illustration of a destination that epitomizes enogastronomic tourism is the Oltrepò Pavese region in Italy, renowned for its wine production. From Pinot Noir to Barbera and Riesling, the region showcases a diverse wine portfolio that attracts wine enthusiasts and curious travellers alike. Moreover, local restaurants and eating establishments introduce visitors to authentic regional dishes, adding a flavourful dimension to their journey. From wine tasting in local cellars to vineyard tours, cooking classes, and leisurely picnics with local produce, the Oltrepò Pavese encapsulates the essence of enogastronomic tourism. This captivating destination offers an unparalleled opportunity to embrace wine culture, savour regional delicacies, and engage in a holistic sensory exploration. Moreover, the potential for further implementation, enhancement, and exploration of these enogastronomic offerings remains abundant, promising continued growth and deeper engagement for both visitors and the local community.

In essence, while both food and wine tourism celebrate the sensory richness of a destination's culinary offerings, they differ in their focal points. Food tourism encapsulates the entirety of a region's culinary culture, while wine tourism zeroes in on the intricate world of wine, fostering a deep appreciation for the complexities within each glass. These distinct yet interconnected forms of exploration together enrich the travel experience, offering a comprehensive understanding of a destination's geographical flavour. It becomes evident that these distinct yet interconnected forms of culinary exploration contribute to the broader narrative of experiencing a destination's culture through its gastronomic offerings. Their richness not only enhances travellers' experiences but also sustains cultural heritage, fosters economic growth, and fosters a more interconnected and sustainable global society.

Chapter 3: The case study: The Oltrepò Pavese

Nestled in the northern part of Italy, the Oltrepò Pavese region is a captivating area within the southern part of the Lombardy, one of Italy's twenty administrative regions (in the Northern part of the country). This region is known for its diverse landscapes, vibrant cities, and rich history, as well as highly-competitive economy. At the heart of Lombardy is Milan, the dynamic and bustling capital city, which holds a prominent position not only within the region but also on the global stage. Milan is celebrated for its contributions to various fields, including fashion, finance, and industry, making it a vital economic and cultural hub in Italy.

The name “*Oltrepò Pavese*” finds its roots in both geographical and historical contexts. Geographically, it signifies the region's position “*on the other side*” (to the south) of the Po River, stretching across the vast Po Valley that lies between the Alps and the northern Apennines of Italy. The term “*Pavese*” establishes an historical and cultural connection with the neighbouring provincial city of Pavia. The Oltrepò Pavese region is examined with a particular focus on the area's geographical specifics, demographic and socioeconomic data, as well as the relationship between Milan and the Oltrepò Pavese, looking into possible synergies and promoting the growth of agri-food products.

3.1 The territory

The Oltrepò Pavese is a distinctive geographical region within the province of Pavia, encompassing an area of approximately 1,097 square kilometres. Its name derives from its location south of the Po River, situated in the southern part of Lombardy, nestled between *Emilia-Romagna's* province of Piacenza to the east and the *Tortonese* region of Alessandria to the west. Furthermore, to the south lies its boundary with Liguria. The landscape of the Oltrepò Pavese is characterized by a diverse topography, featuring flat plains, rolling hills adorned with vineyards, verdant woodlands, and meandering watercourses. The territory encompasses a spectrum of altitudinal variations, ranging from the elevated municipality of *Brallo di Pregola* at 1,690 meters above sea level to the low-lying *Arena Po* at 55 meters above sea level. The Oltrepò Pavese's territory is marked by a blend of distinctive features, including hills, vine landscapes, intricate waterways and dense forests that cover approximately 20% of the area. These forests play a crucial role in shaping the region's hillside scenery, and a significant portion is integrated into the Oltrepò Pavese National Park. The landscape's composition is influenced by its primary valleys, the western boundary formed by the *Valle Staffora* and the eastern confine by the upper *Val Tidone*, interspersed with a network of smaller valleys and gentle hills that populate the area between the two main valleys. Among these settlements are Voghera, with a population of approximately 30,000 residents, situated within the

basin of the *Staffora* River. Casteggio, with a population of 5,300, thrives in the basin of the *Coppa* River. Additionally, Broni, home to around 6,600 inhabitants, and Stradella, accommodating approximately 9,000 residents, stand as prominent towns in the *Scuripasso* and *Versa* River basins, respectively (ISTAT, n.d.). These settlements not only encapsulate historical significance but also underscore the symbiotic relationship between geography, commerce, and community in the Oltrepò Pavese region.

Situated approximately 60 kilometres southwest of the Province of Milan, the Oltrepò Pavese holds a strategic position within the industrial triangle of Genoa-Milan-Turin. This geographical context has historically led to its significance as a pivotal transportation nexus, subject to historical contention and a range of dominations due to its pivotal connectivity. The region's rich and varied landscape, interwoven with its historical and strategic importance, renders the Oltrepò Pavese a truly unique and compelling destination for exploration and study.

3.2 Socioeconomic characteristics of the region

To acquire a comprehensive understanding of the Oltrepò Pavese region, particularly its level of rurality and development potential, it is essential to delve into its demographic and socioeconomic data. According to the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), the Oltrepò Pavese region was home to 140,177 residents in 2018 (ISTAT, 2018). This population figure represents only 1.40% of the total population of the Lombardy region and constitutes 25.68% of the province of Pavia's inhabitants. It is noteworthy that this population is predominantly elderly, with an aging index of 252.5 (Benzi et al., 2019). This index indicates that there are 252 elderly individuals (over 65) for every 100 young individuals (under 15) (ISTAT, 2023). Spanning an area of 1,097 square kilometers, the region's population density stands at approximately 128 individuals per square kilometer, effectively underscoring its distinctively rural nature. The demographic and socioeconomic data of the Oltrepò Pavese region reveal its classification as a rural region with a relatively small population. Consequently, it is categorized as a sub-region of the province of Pavia, following the NUTS3 classification (Regione Lombardia, 2022).

Additional indicators reflecting the underdevelopment of the Oltrepò Pavese region encompass the GDP (Gross Domestic Product), which serves as a measure of the economic output of a country or area within a specific time. Furthermore, the unemployment rate and the aging index also contribute to this assessment. These metrics, in turn, shed light on the extent to which young individuals migrate from the area in pursuit of better job prospects and quality of life in urban centers, contributing to depopulation trends in the Oltrepò Pavese region. The GDP is calculated as the sum of the monetary values of all final goods and services produced within the region during that period

of time. In 2021, the average GDP across various municipalities in the Oltrepò Pavese region was recorded at €14,928.2, signifying a substantial disparity when compared to the average per capita GDP of the two major cities near the region. Pavia, in fact, exhibited a GDP of €27,842.41, while Milan demonstrated a considerably higher figure of €33,703 (MEF, 2022). As a further point of comparison, the overall per capita GDP for Italy stands at €20,745, and for the Lombardy region, it reaches €24,572. These figures underscore the marked economic discrepancy within the Oltrepò Pavese area, pointing towards a lower level of development in contrast to the nearby urban centers and even the broader Italian and regional contexts.

The active population comprises individuals within the working-age range, typically between 15 and 64 years old, who are either employed or actively seeking employment. Unemployed individuals are those who are currently searching for work and are available for employment. The unemployment rate, a key indicator, is determined by dividing the number of unemployed individuals by the active population, then multiplying by 100 (ILO, 2023). This metric serves as a crucial gauge for identifying regions where access to employment opportunities is limited. In the context of Oltrepò Pavese, an economically less developed area, the unemployment rate stands at 25.7% (SISTAL, 2022). The unemployment rate in Oltrepò Pavese is more than double the national average, around 9.0%, highlighting the region's economic challenges as unemployment can lead to poverty, social exclusion, and other negative consequences. Furthermore, the youth unemployment rate reached 28.4%, the highest in both Lombardy and Italy, underscoring the specific challenges faced by the younger population in the Oltrepò Pavese area. These data, when combined with the aging index, representing 27.6% of the local population, have resulted in a significant population decline of 41.6% over the past two decades (Fondazione Cariplo, 2023), this phenomenon has led to a marked depopulation trend in the region.

These data have a negative impact on the economy of Oltrepò Pavese: a high unemployment rate leads to decreased spending and investment, while an aging population requires more services and assistance. In this context, it is crucial to analyse the various aspects of the economic sectors in Oltrepò Pavese. However, they can provide valuable insights to pinpoint areas that require intervention for improving the employment situation. To foster economic growth and employment in Oltrepò Pavese, it is imperative to channel investments into the region's pivotal sectors, notably manufacturing, agriculture, and tourism. Moreover, nurturing innovation and enhancing business competitiveness stand as critical imperatives to fortify the region's economic resilience.

The economic landscape of Oltrepò Pavese exhibits a pronounced agrifood orientation, with 14.68% of the workforce finding employment in this sector. This statistic starkly contrasts with the data for

the province of Pavia (8,59%) and the broader Lombardy region which counts around 2%. Additionally, the tourism and restaurant sector (11,9%) carries a substantial weight and is intricately linked within the supply chain with commerce (20,24%) (Zani, 2022). To delve more deeply into the analysis of the various economic sectors, the data from tables 3.1 and 3.2, representing the Number of Employees by Economic Sectors (2019) and the Number of Active Companies (including all units and branches) by Economic Sectors (2019) in Oltrepò Pavese, along with their significance within the province of Pavia, provide valuable insights. These datasets offer a comprehensive snapshot of the economic landscape and can be used to identify trends, strengths, weaknesses, and potential areas for improvement within each sector.

Tab. 3.1: Number of Employees by Economic Sectors (Source, Unioncamere, 2019)

Sector	Oltrepò Pavese	Weight on province (%)
Commerce	7,353	34.6
Services	6,483	24.1
Agriculture*	4,275	51.0
Tourism	4,065	31.3
Construction	3,900	24.9
Manufacturing	7,126	23.2
Food*	810	29.8
Beverages*	248	95.4
Agri-food (*union of the 3)	5,333	47.0
Total Economy	36,323	27.5

Tab. 3.2: Number of Active Companies by Economic Sectors (Source, Unioncamere, 2019)

Sector	Oltrepò Pavese	Weight on province (%)
Commerce	2,688	28.7
Services	2,384	24.7
Agriculture*	3,375	55.6
Tourism	1,018	28.8
Construction	1,971	25.7
Manufacturing	1,068	25.4
Food*	134	39.2
Beverages*	21	67.7
Agri-food (*union of the 3)	3,530	54.7
Total Economy	12,727	30.8

Precisely, the agri-food supply chain, tourism, hospitality, and commerce are the sectors where the municipalities of Oltrepò Pavese contribute a higher share of employment to the provincial total, accounting for 47.0%, 31.3%, and 34.6% respectively. Between 2013 and 2019, a transformative shift in Oltrepò Pavese's production structure transpired, favouring agri-food, tourism, and service sectors. The agri-food sector witnessed an increase in employment, with an additional 474 individuals (Intesa Sanpaolo, 2021). A significant portion of the value added by the agricultural sector is derived from the production of high-quality products. Notably, Lombardy hosts 81 PDO/PGI productions, 30 of which pertain to the territory of the Pavia province. This encompasses 15 in the Food category, including *Gorgonzola* PDO, *Mantuan pear*, *Taleggio* PDO, and *Salame di Varzi* PDO, inherent to Oltrepò Pavese. Continuing, there are 12 in the WINE category, featuring *Bonarda dell'Oltrepò Pavese* PDO, *Buttafuoco dell'Oltrepò Pavese* PDO, *Oltrepò Pavese Metodo Classico* PDO, *Oltrepò Pavese Pinot Grigio* PDO, *Pinot Nero dell'Oltrepò Pavese* PDO, and *Provincia di Pavia* PGI. Pavia ranks among the top 20 Italian provinces for the economic value of

PDO/PGI wines, with €133 million in 2020, largely attributed to the Oltrepò Pavese area, a major producer within the province (Zani, 2022).

Continuing, the Oltrepò Pavese is a captivating destination offering a diverse range of attractions that cater to various interests. The region's rich historical and cultural heritage is showcased through its impressive castles, like *Zavattarello* Castle, and its picturesque medieval villages such as *Fortunago*. Adding to the allure of the region are its numerous churches and museums, which hold treasures of art and historical significance, like the Church of *San Giorgio in Varzi*, and the Archaeological Museum of Casteggio (In-Lombardia.it). Oltrepò Pavese provides a variety of engaging activities such as birdwatching, hiking, rowing, and mountain biking offer avenues for visitors to intimately engage with the region's diverse natural landscapes. Furthermore, involvement in local gastronomic tastings introduces an additional dimension to the experience, facilitating a comprehensive sensory immersion in the essence of the area.

The tourism sector in Oltrepò Pavese has also strengthened, witnessing a rise of 619 employees between 2013 and 2019, particularly within restaurant and recreational activities (Intesa Sanpaolo, 2021). This growth is due in part to the region's diverse range of attractions, which cater to a wide variety of interests. Agritourism is a cornerstone of Oltrepò Pavese's tourism landscape, significantly bolstering the region's tourism sector in recent years. Agritourism is defined by the provisions of the law 96/2006, which stipulates that "agritourism is the hospitality activity conducted by agricultural entrepreneurs, including in the form of capital or personal partnerships, or associations among them, through the utilization of their own enterprise in relation to activities connected with land cultivation, forestry, and animal husbandry". This distinctive form of tourism encapsulates the fusion of agricultural practices with hospitality services, allowing visitors to partake in the immersive experience of rural life while engaging with activities that are intricately linked to the land's cultivation, forestry endeavours, and animal rearing. The province of Pavia ranks third in Lombardy for the number of agritourism establishments, boasting around 230, over half of which offer accommodation (123) or dining services (130). An additional 30 establishments provide tasting experiences (Intesa Sanpaolo, 2021). In the province of Pavia, the concept of agritourism is practically synonymous with Oltrepò Pavese, as over 73% of bed capacity in Pavia's agritourism establishments is concentrated in this area, boasting a density of 0.97 beds per square kilometre (higher than the national average) compared to a provision of 0.21 for the rest of the province (ISTAT, 2018).

3.3 The RDP and LAG in the Oltrepò Pavese area

The socio-economic data of Oltrepò Pavese highlights both the development prospects within the region, particularly in the fields of tourism and agri-food, as well as the challenges that need to be addressed, such as the imperative to diversify the economy and narrow the socio-economic disparities between urban and rural areas. The Rural Development Plan (RDP) and the LDP for Oltrepò Pavese represent pivotal instruments that can aid in surmounting these challenges by fostering sustainable territorial growth.

The RDP in Lombardy is a significant initiative spanning seven years, funded through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), a critical structural fund under the European Union (European Parliament & Council, 2013). The Rural Development Program (RDP) for the Lombardy region in the 2021-2027 period boasts a budget of €6.5 billion, with 33.8% allocated to general rural development measures and 66.2% earmarked for thematic rural development measures. The measures are organized into nine priorities, including economic development (Priority 1), environment and biodiversity (Priority 2), social inclusion and quality of life (Priority 3), sustainable agriculture (Priority 4), forests and forest resources (Priority 5), rural tourism (Priority 6), cultural and rural heritage (Priority 7), innovation and research (Priority 8), and territorial cooperation (Priority 9). The Economic Development priority holds the highest importance, with a percentage value of 33.8%. This priority includes measures aimed at supporting investments in productive activities, economic development in rural areas, and the promotion of rural tourism. The Environment and Biodiversity priority is the second most significant, with a percentage value of 27.7%. This priority encompasses measures aimed at environmental and biodiversity conservation, including sustainable forest resource management and the promotion of rural culture and heritage. The “Social Inclusion” and “Quality of Life” priority ranks third in importance, with a percentage value of 20.0%. Measures within this priority focus on supporting social inclusion and enhancing the quality of life in rural areas, including the promotion of training and career guidance activities and efforts to combat poverty. The remaining priorities each have a percentage value lower than 10% (Regione Lombardia, 2021).

This program reflects a shift in the European Union’s priorities for rural development, with a heightened emphasis on strengthening the rural economy. While cooperation remains a vital component, it receives less attention compared to the 2014-2020 RDP. The preservation of the rural environment and landscape and the enhancement of the quality of life in rural areas remain fundamental priorities, though with their significance somewhat reduced compared to the 2014-2020 RDP. More in detail, within the framework of the 2014-2020 Rural Development Program for

Lombardy, a substantial allocation of €66 million has been earmarked for Measure 19, denominated as “Support for Rural Development-Leader” (Regione Lombardia, 2015). The above-mentioned funds are designated for a variety of uses, including assistance with preparatory technical support (Measure 19.1), plan activation (Measure 19.2), funding for Local Action Groups (LAGs) management, information dissemination, and animation (Measure 19.4), and cooperative initiatives (Measure 19.3). Specifically, Measure 19.3 actively promotes collaboration and cooperative initiatives among various Local Action Groups (LAGs), placing a strong emphasis on enhancing competitiveness, sustainability, and integration within the agri-food, forestry, and agricultural sectors. The encouragement spans across key areas such as market access, diversification, technical innovation, and environmental sustainability. Cooperation between LAGs is a crucial aspect of these initiatives. Regarding the LAG in the Oltrepò Pavese area, it is actively engaged in collaboration efforts with LAG *Risorsa Lomellina* and LAG *Terre del Pò*, two groups from nearby rural areas, on two major projects: “*Dimore e Borghi*” and “*C.E.R. Chiamo Energia*”. This joint venture falls under Operation 19.3.01, which is centred around Interterritorial and Transnational Cooperation.

Looking ahead, the 2021-2027 RDP for Lombardy maintains its commitment to rural development through the continuation of Measure 19. This revised Measure 19 aligns with the evolving priorities set by the European Union for rural development, with a heightened emphasis on the green transition and digitalization. Within the 2021-2027 RDP, a budget of €64 million is designated for Measure 19. These funds play a pivotal role in supporting LAGs in the implementation of projects aimed at: reinforcing the rural economy, safeguarding the rural environment and landscape and enhancing the quality of life in rural areas. The 2021-2027 RDP presents a significant opportunity for the rural areas in Lombardy to sustain their growth and development in a sustainable manner. Potential projects eligible for funding under Measure 19 include the establishment of new agricultural and agri-food businesses, the promotion of rural and agritourism, the conservation of biodiversity and rural ecosystems, the improvement of rural services and infrastructure, and the facilitation of digitalization in agricultural and rural enterprises. LAGs are encouraged to submit their projects for consideration under Measure 19, adhering to the deadlines set by the Lombardy region. A dedicated committee, comprising representatives from the Lombardy region, LAGs, and other stakeholders, evaluates these projects. Funding is allocated to projects based on their assessment scores and the availability of resources.

In addition to the measure outlined, it is also worth mentioning that the 2021-2027 RDP in Lombardy encompasses various other measures designed to support sustainable and inclusive rural development, with a specific focus on the most vulnerable rural areas. These measures are categorized into two groups:

- Measures 1-10: they encompass general rural development measures aimed at supporting investments in productive activities, fostering economic development in rural regions, preserving the environment, and promoting rural tourism.
- Measures 11-26: they are thematic rural development measures, focused on specific aspects of rural development, including biodiversity conservation, the promotion of rural culture and heritage, and social inclusion.

Table 3.3 provides an overview of all the measures included in the program and their allocation.

Table 3.3: Values of the various measures of the RDP 2021-2027 for the Lombardy region

Measure	Fund	Economic Support (Million)	Priority
1	Investments in productive activities	€2,200	Priority 1: Economic development
3	Support for the economic development of rural areas	€1,200	Priority 1: Economic development
4	Support for rural development in natural and mountain areas	€1,100	Priority 1: Economic development
6	Development of organic farming	€200	Priority 4: Sustainable agriculture
8	Investments in rural infrastructure	€1,100	Priority 1: Economic development
9	Investments in research and development	€100	Priority 8: Innovation and research
10	Territorial cooperation	€100	Priority 9: Territorial cooperation
11	Support for young farmers	€100	Priority 4: Sustainable agriculture
12	Support for the establishment of new businesses	€100	Priority 1: Economic development
13	Support for training and professional guidance	€100	Priority 3: Social inclusion and quality of life
14	Support for the creation of service activities	€100	Priority 1: Economic development
15	Support for the sustainable management of forest resources	€100	Priority 2: Environment and biodiversity
16	Support for the promotion of organic farming	€100	Priority 4: Sustainable agriculture
17	Support for the promotion of short supply chains	€100	Priority 1: Economic development
18	Support for the promotion of rural tourism	€100	Priority 6: Rural tourism

19	Support for local development Leader	€64	Priority 1: Economic development
20	Support for the conservation and enhancement of areas at risk of desertification	€100	Priority 2: Environment and biodiversity
21	Support for the prevention and fight against forest fires	€100	Priority 2: Environment and biodiversity
22	Support for the sustainable management of waste	€100	Priority 2: Environment and biodiversity
23	Support for the promotion of biodiversity and rural landscape	€100	Priority 2: Environment and biodiversity
24	Support for the promotion of culture and rural heritage	€100	Priority 7: Cultural and rural heritage
25	Support for social inclusion and poverty reduction	€100	Priority 3: Social inclusion and quality of life
26	Support for the implementation of pilot and innovative projects	€100	Priority 8: Innovation and research

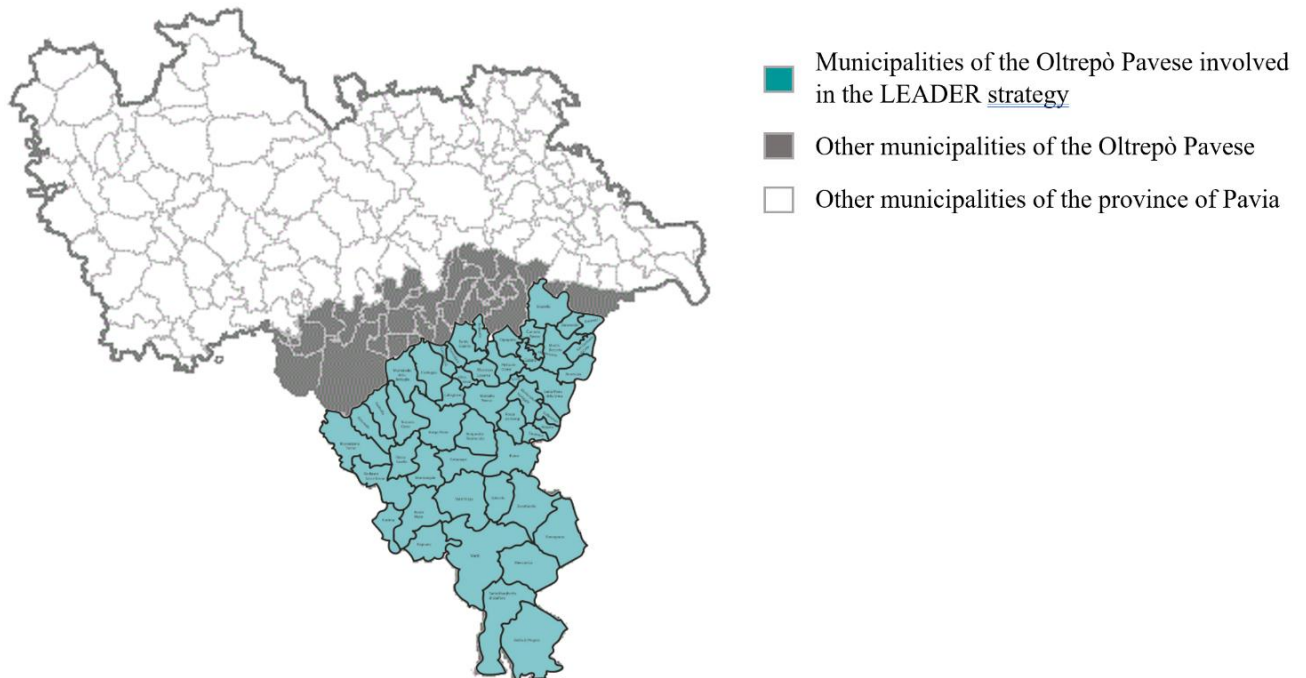
The strategic objectives of the RDP for Oltrepò Pavese reflect the overall priorities of the 2021-2027 RDP for the Lombardy region, with a heightened emphasis on promoting economic development and sustainable development. By emphasizing the enhancement of the agricultural sector's competitiveness through targeted investments, innovation, and the facilitation of short supply chains, the plan acknowledges the significance of agriculture as a foundational economic driver. This approach not only boosts local farming businesses but also aligns with the broader movement towards sustainable and localized food systems. Furthermore, the promotion of rural economy growth by accentuating tourism, craftsmanship, and cultural activities is poised to generate a ripple effect. By capitalizing on the region's historical and cultural richness, this objective stimulates economic activities, creates job opportunities, and bolsters the local identity. It also effectively leverages Oltrepò Pavese's distinctive attributes, providing visitors with an immersive experience that encapsulates its unique heritage. The commitment to environmental preservation and landscape protection, exemplified by measures to reduce pollution and endorse renewable energy, reflects an acute awareness of the need for sustainable development. Oltrepò Pavese's breathtaking natural landscapes are not only an economic asset but also a critical part of its identity. Through these initiatives, the plan ensures the preservation of these valuable resources for future generations. Lastly, the goal of promoting social development and inclusion encapsulates a comprehensive commitment to equitable growth. By creating avenues for employment, offering training opportunities, and fostering gender equality, the PSR addresses both the economic and social dimensions of development. This approach not only revitalizes the region's workforce but also engenders a sense of community empowerment and cohesion (Regione Lombardia, 2014).

In pursuit of the RDP's objectives, each LAG formulates and implements LEADER-based strategies for local development along with a corresponding LDP. These mechanisms are employed to

effectively manage European contributions allocated through the dedicated fund. The strategic approach of the LDP is strategically aligned with fostering a more competitive economic landscape within the region. This involves the cultivation of productive systems capable of both harnessing and generating innovative solutions. Additionally, it underscores the significance of social cohesion and sustainability, underpinned by a robust collaborative framework among relevant stakeholders (LAG Oltrepò, 2016). The strategy of the LDP pursues various goals; primarily, it seeks to identify and harness available resources while concurrently fostering the emergence of new economic avenues. What distinguishes this strategy is its emphasis on innovation, a concept interpreted not solely as the pursuit of novelty, but rather to refine and enhance the existing assets within the territorial framework. This approach ultimately contributes to the amelioration of achieved outcomes and the sustainable growth of the region.

The LDP, known as S.T.A.R. Oltrepò (*Sviluppo, Territorio, Ambiente, Ruralità*, in English: D.T.E.R., an acronym for Development, Territory, Environment, and Rurality), stands out as one of the ten initiatives selected for funding by the Lombardy Region under Measure 19, Support for Local Development Leaders within the PSR 2014-2020 framework. This notable achievement can be attributed to the dedicated efforts of the Foundation for the Development of Oltrepò Pavese (the LAG of the Oltrepò Region), which has gained recognition for its comprehensive rural development strategy. Throughout Lombardy, there exist a total of twelve LAGs and the LAG of Oltrepò Pavese is one of the smallest entities. In terms of financial allocation, the LAG of Oltrepò Pavese has been granted a budget of €10 million for the period spanning from 2021 to 2027, which aligns with the average budget allotment for Lombard LAGs (Regione Lombardia, n.d.). Furthermore, the LAG of Oltrepò Pavese has garnered recognition from the European Commission as a noteworthy success story in the realm of sustainable rural development. The collective impact of these endeavours assumes significant implications for the inner regions of Oltrepò Pavese, encompassing a total of 50 municipalities. This initiative contributes vital resources aimed at mitigating the pronounced negative trends that have plagued the area: a decline in essential service provisions, diminishing employment opportunities, waning appeal, and population attrition. The achievement of the S.T.A.R. Oltrepò plan in this context underscores the pivotal role of rural development strategies in addressing these multifaceted challenges, a theme that my thesis will delve into further. Figure 3.1 provides a visual representation of the 50 municipalities within the Oltrepò Pavese region that are involved in the LEADER strategy.

Fig. 3.1: Map of the province of Pavia, with a focus on LEADER municipalities. (Source: S.t.a.r. Oltrepò)



The Oltrepò Pavese Development Foundation is set to allocate over €6.3 million of public resources through upcoming funding opportunities over the span of the next six years. This allocation requires a significant co-financing commitment from the local territory, amounting to approximately €2 million. This funding initiative aims to benefit a diverse range of stakeholders, including Local Authorities, Agricultural Enterprises, Forestry Companies, Associations, Third Sector Organizations, Producer Consortia, Forestry Consortia, and individual stakeholders. The allocated resources will be strategically channelled into four pivotal actions, collectively shaping the trajectory of development: Action 1 focuses on establishing a multifunctional agroforestry supply chain; Action 2 targets the enhancement of local production chains and markets, particularly within the Oltrepò Pavese region; Action 3 seeks to create a pervasive and comprehensive tourism system, revitalizing Oltrepò Pavese; and Action 4, centred on social agriculture, forms a commitment to enhancing the quality of life in Oltrepò Pavese by harmonizing environmental ethics and sustainability principles. (Fondazione per lo Sviluppo dell'Oltrepò Pavese, 2016).

The array of Interventions that the Foundation aims to stimulate within the territory is both intricate and profoundly oriented towards collaborative efforts, project quality, innovation, and economic as well as environmental sustainability, principles that should underpin every initiative. Among these interventions, specific emphasis will be placed on enhancing the role of forests, encompassing aspects of conservation, education, and environmentally compatible utilization. Likewise, the pursuit of innovation within the agricultural sector will be driven by a strong commitment to product quality. Additionally, a decentralized and networked model for the tourism sector will be

encouraged to establish competitiveness. Notably, a social covenant will be established between farmers and the third sector, focusing on providing essential services to the rural community.

The proposed intervention framework is characterized by its holistic approach, fostering collaboration and synergy among diverse stakeholders. Quality assurance will be prioritized in project implementation, ensuring that each initiative aligns with the highest standards of innovation and environmental sustainability. The strategy for enhancing the role of forests encompasses multiple dimensions, including conservation efforts, educational initiatives, and a balanced utilization that respects ecological imperatives. In agriculture, a focus on innovation will underscore the quest for superior production quality. By promoting innovative practices and emphasizing product excellence, this intervention aims to uplift the agricultural sector and bolster its contributions to the region's economy. Furthermore, a novel approach to tourism will be cultivated, one that is decentralized, interconnected, and competitive. This tourism model seeks to leverage the region's cultural and natural assets while ensuring that development is harmonious and sustainable. Lastly, the establishment of a social agreement between farmers and the third sector attests to the commitment to community well-being. By forging a collaborative alliance, this intervention aims to ensure the provision of essential services to rural populations, thereby fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment. (LAG Oltrepò Pavese, 2016)

Some of the most interesting sub-actions of the S.T.A.R. Oltrepò LDP include (Fondazione per lo Sviluppo dell'Oltrepò Pavese, 2016)

- Sub-action 1.5: NATURE OLTREPÒ ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTERS – Initiatives for Enhancing the Natural and Rural Heritage of the Territory: Within the framework of this sub-action, the total operation value amounts to €100,000. Out of this sum, €70,000 will be allocated to investments, as outlined in Operation 7.5.01 (Incentives for the development of tourism-related infrastructure and services), a component of Sub-action 1.5. The eligible expenditure support rate for this allocation is 90%. The remaining €30,000 will be directed towards environmental information and dissemination activities as outlined in the Forest Contract, a part of Operation 1.2.01 (Demonstrative projects and information actions), which also falls under Sub-action 1.5. The eligible expenditure support rate for this allocation is 80%.

This sub-action seeks to promote initiatives that enhance the natural and rural heritage of the territory. It strives to achieve this by encouraging greater awareness and responsibility towards environmental concerns and the implementation of sustainable land management practices. This approach is primarily centered around the improvement and sustainable use of forest resources, as well as the protection of the environment in cases of emergencies. The

sub-action is facilitated through Dispersed Environmental Education Centers, acting as ‘cultural’ hubs committed to enhancing both the environmental and cultural quality of the region. Furthermore, this initiative aims to heighten awareness of the interconnectedness between the region’s social and economic dynamics and its environmental aspects. Ultimately, it aspires to initiate a process of sustainable development within the region.

- Sub-action 2.4: MADE IN OLTREPO – A Quality Brand for the Territory: This initiative focuses on promoting product communication and ethical value within the Oltrepò Pavese region. It aims to emphasize local biodiversity and foster a culture of ‘good, clean, and just’ practices. The overarching objective is to nurture a recognized regional identity and stimulate self-renewal while championing sustainable development strategies tailored to the region’s unique attributes. Within the framework of this sub-action, the total operation value amounts to €600,000. Out of this sum, €450,000 will be allocated to investments, aligning with the goals outlined in Operation 3.2.01 (Information and Promotion of Quality Products). The eligible expenditure support rate for these investments is 70%. The remaining €150,000 will be directed towards Operation 7.5.01 (Infrastructure and Tourist Services), specifically for the development of enogastronomic routes highlighting quality productions and the creation of informative materials. The eligible expenditure support rate for this allocation is 90%. Both Operation 7.5.01 and Operation 3.2.01 are integral parts of Sub-action 2.4, and together they aim to further enhance the product communication and ethical values of the Oltrepò Pavese region. This sub-action envisions a culture that values local biodiversity and embraces ethical practices, contributing to a sustainable and recognized regional identity. The collaborative efforts of public institutions, promotion-focused entities, and producer consortia are vital in achieving these objectives and maximizing the value of the agri-food sector in Oltrepò Pavese. Notably, products like Varzi wine and salami play a prominent role in this initiative, reflecting the region’s commitment to quality and sustainability.
- Sub-action 3.2 ESPERIENZA OLTREPO – Touristic Infrastructure Development: With a budget of €700,000, this initiative facilitates the development of a rural eco-friendly tourism infrastructure, including tourist and hiking road systems. Activities like hiking, outdoor cultural, sports, and recreational pursuits are encouraged, anchored by projects like the Green Way and the highland hiking system. This infrastructure aims to promote year-round activities, establish historical, natural, and food and wine routes, including thematic options like the fruit and salami routes. Accessibility for all, including those with disabilities, is a paramount concern, recognizing the evolving importance of tourism as a primary social need. This initiative ensures that everyone, regardless of personal, social, or economic

constraints, can fully access the region's rich tourist offerings. Oltrepò Pavese acknowledges the significance of tourism but has yet to implement robust strategies. This operation builds on past experiences, demonstrating the need for suitable infrastructure and effective communication systems to generate measurable tourist flows.

- Sub-action 4.2: SOCIAL FARMS, A LABORATORY OF DIVERSIFICATION AND MULTIFUNCTIONALITY. The total budget allocated for this initiative amounts to €300,000, with an eligible expenditure support rate of 50%. It is important to note that this operation operates within the De Minimis regime. The primary objective of this action is to encourage the establishment of social farms, which can take on various forms such as privately-owned family or cooperative agricultural businesses, private-social entities, voluntary associations, or social and healthcare structures engaged in agricultural and rural activities. Social farming serves as an experimental platform where local entities and operators can enhance their capacity to address various forms of distress and marginalization, which have become increasingly prevalent, even in rural areas. Furthermore, within this sub-action, provisions are made to support the creation of the Rural Labor Bank cooperative (in Italian, *cooperativa "Banca del Lavoro Rurale"*). This cooperative is specifically designed to address the vulnerability and potential decline of agricultural activities, primarily due to generational turnover issues within the region. The Rural Labor Bank cooperative aims to provide solutions and support to ensure the continuity and sustainability of agricultural practices in the territory.

3.4 The Connection between Oltrepò Pavese area and Milan

Strategically positioned just 40 km away from Milan, a key Italian and European city, Oltrepò Pavese finds itself at the crossroads of a myriad of developmental opportunities. These opportunities encompass the potential to draw in tourists from both Milan and other international destinations, thereby invigorating the local tourism industry. In terms of competitiveness, in fact, Milan is consistently aligned with the top European benchmarks, potentially acting as a driving force and catalyst for the surrounding territories (Benzi et al. 2019). In parallel, this inclination translates into the creation of job prospects within the burgeoning tourism sector, consequently contributing to a strengthened employment landscape. The infusion of sustainable tourism has the potential to elevate the economic allure of Oltrepò Pavese, thereby fostering a more robust socio-economic environment.

Notably, the location's closeness to Milan provides a beneficial synergy that goes beyond simple proximity. This symbiotic relationship can be better understood by delving into the actionable

elements described in the previously mentioned PSL components. For instance, cooperation with educational institutions and associations in Milan could contribute to boost the discipline of environmental education. This sharing of information and skill-exchange could promote greater environmental consciousness and awareness, that reflect the sustainability principles. Additionally, bringing local product promotion to Milan's urban environment provides it growth. Oltrepò Pavese's offerings can reach a wider audience by using an array of cultural and gastronomic events as a dynamic platform. These activities not only promote economic development but also highlight the distinctive identity of the area, enhancing the history of regional heritage. Strategic alliances with Milan-based businesses and associations also provide fertile ground for the ideas of inclusive employment and social integration. This cooperative strategy might make it easier to coordinate social engagement and skill development initiatives, which would improve how well marginalised people are integrated into the workforce and society. To promote these aspects and reinforce the polycentric organization, cooperation among institutions is crucial, along with maintaining a balanced equilibrium among territories. This involves avoiding phenomena of excessive congestion in urban centres and depopulation in peripheral and marginal areas (Benzi et al. 2019).

Undoubtedly, the exploration of this interrelationship presents a compelling avenue for research, poised to catalyse the developmental trajectory of Oltrepò Pavese. Even at this nascent stage, noteworthy instances of collaboration between the diverse components of the Milan metropolitan area and Oltrepò Pavese have begun to surface. These initial examples not only highlight the potential but also underscore the practical viability of fostering cooperation between these two entities. Such collaborations, if further investigated and strategically harnessed, could serve as instrumental mechanisms for propelling the growth and sustainability of Oltrepò Pavese.

An example of leveraging Milan's events as resources to promote the development of Oltrepò Pavese dates back to October 2022. Intesa Sanpaolo, for instance, took part in the Milan Wine Week, hosting a conference that showcased the testimonies of "*Colline e Oltre*." This initiative, established the previous year by Intesa Sanpaolo and the Banca del Monte di Lombardia Foundation, aimed to rejuvenate and enhance the viticulture sector and promote the valorisation of Oltrepò Pavese's territory. Notably, "*Colline e Oltre*" launched the brand "*Tavole Oltrepò*," an association of sixteen local restaurateurs, working to revitalize tourism and emphasize culinary experiences within Oltrepò Pavese while celebrating its regional identity (Intesa Sanpaolo, 2022). The strategic alliance between "*Terre Oltrepò*," the largest organisation in the Oltrepò Pavese region, and the University of Milan is another noteworthy synergy to highlight. With investments in research to improve quality and traceability within this historic Italian wine region, which has been striving for definitive revitalization, they can achieve their shared ambitious goal of zoning the entire territory. The

leadership showed their dedication by introducing the Foss technology, which has been in use for a while and allows for meticulous analysis of grape quality during harvest. The commitment to this trajectory remains steadfast, exemplified by the expansion of the agrometeorological network to encompass the entire *Oltrepadano* territory, alongside the full-scale implementation of Foss technology across all three wineries, including *Casteggio* and *Santa Maria della Versa*. An integral facet of this initiative is the integration of Foss-derived data into the Enogis software platform, facilitating comprehensive and intricate monitoring of vineyards, production, and agrometeorological data. These organised and combined data will improve agronomic support, help cellar technicians and members plan production, and help members understand their vineyards. With planning, knowledge, and regional growth coming together in this way, businesses can maximize value throughout the entire supply chain (Barbieri, 2021).

Finally, a project started by the Lombardy Region, “*Riccagioia*”, one of the regional branches of the Regional Authority for Agriculture and Forestry Services (in Italian *ERSAF*), specialised in research activities and services for the viticulture sector and hilly agriculture, provides an outstanding example of cooperation and developmental promotion. This organisation spans more than 50 hectares and includes a variety of buildings, including offices, conference rooms, labs for learning, and analytical facilities. The initiative launches the Liea (Lombardy Innovation for the Agri-Food Ecosystem) project in partnership with Bayer Cropscience with the intention of restoring the historic “*Riccagioia*” complex in *Torrazza Coste* in the Oltrepò Pavese, which is intended to serve as the hub for the primary sector’s revitalization through digitization and new technologies. The project is achieved by establishing the “*Riccagioia* Agri 5.0 innovation hub”, which is administered by a private foundation and includes prominent companies from the agricultural and technological sectors as well as the public presence of *ERSAF*. For the foundation’s development, private partners will provide the essential initial and operational resources, with all profits going towards new initiatives. The involvement of the public partner emphasises the desire to innovate and simplify its role in governance and sector support. The foundation will be set for the development of systemic territorial projects as well as access to economic and financial resources from national and European programming within this cutting-edge public-private ecosystem and with the involvement of leading businesses from a variety of sectors (Agrifood.Tech, 2021). Moreover, from these examples of cooperation, it becomes evident that the connection and closeness between the Oltrepò Pavese and the metropolitan city of Milan not only offers an added value to such initiatives but also serves as a bridge for further exploration. Given its relatively unexplored status, the region emerges as a captivating and full of potential prospect for engaging in in-depth research and fostering innovative development initiatives.

Chapter 4: Methods

4.1 interviews and characteristics of participants

This study embraces a qualitative approach to explore potential pathways of development between Oltrepò Pavese region and the city of Milan, which might serve as a final market for most of the goods and services provided by the former region. Semi-structured interviews are employed as the primary method for data collection from various stakeholders and public administration operators in both the city of Milan and the Oltrepò Pavese region, as well as producers of specific products from the Oltrepò Pavese region. This approach was chosen to gain insights into the opinions, attitudes, and preferences of different economic agents. Semi-structured interviews represent a versatile qualitative research method that combines the benefits of both structured and unstructured interview approaches within the broader context of qualitative research. Qualitative research is an exploratory approach focused on understanding and interpreting complex phenomena through the collection and analysis of non-numerical data. It aims to uncover in-depth insights, perspectives, and meanings associated with a particular subject or research question. In this context, semi-structured interviews offer a systematic yet flexible means of data collection, allowing participants to express themselves openly while guiding the conversation around predefined themes or topics. (Flick, 2018). This approach is particularly valuable when in-depth data collection is required, as it permits participants to elaborate on their responses and share their perspectives, experiences, and emotions. Unlike structured interviews, which follow a predetermined set of questions, and unstructured interviews, which resemble open-ended conversations, semi-structured interviews maintain a careful balance. The researcher who is responsible for conducting the semi-structured interview prepares a list of key themes or topics they wish to explore along with a set of open-ended questions. This format ensures that critical areas of inquiry are addressed while still permitting participants to share their thoughts freely (Adams, 2015).

One of the primary advantages of semi-structured interviews is their capacity to delve deeply into participants' viewpoints and uncover subtle nuances, contradictions, and unique insights that might be overlooked in more structured formats. Researchers can adapt their questions and follow-up probes during the interview in response to participants' responses, enabling them to explore unexpected topics and issues. This adaptability fosters a collaborative and open relationship between the researcher and the participant, leading to more meaningful information exchange (Adams, 2015). Compared to completely unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews offer a degree of organization and focus that is crucial when researchers aim to address specific research questions or themes. The structured elements make data coding and analysis more manageable, as researchers can create a coding scheme based on the predetermined themes and refine it as new themes emerge

during analysis. Building on the advantages of semi-structured interviews, this study uses purposive sampling to recruit participants with relevant insights and expertise on the research topic. Subjective sampling methods, including purposive sampling, are those in which the selection of participants is based on the ultimate judgment of the researcher responsible for the survey. These methods are often used when the researcher is interested in a specific group of people or when the researcher wants to ensure that the sample covers a particular population. In particular, purposive sampling involves the researcher selecting participants based on their knowledge or expertise on the topic of the study (Etikan et al., 2016). In the context of this research, purposive sampling is employed to ensure that the interview participants possess relevant insights and expertise regarding the intricate dynamics between rural and urban areas, agri-food products, and tourist flows in Oltrepò Pavese and Milan.

For the purpose of data presentation and interpretation, the responses from the interview participants have been anonymized and organized in Table 3.4 to facilitate a more systematic analysis. Each participant is associated with a unique code, ensuring their anonymity while facilitating the analysis of responses. These codes will be used to refer to the participants throughout the thesis, allowing for a streamlined and confidential presentation of data. In the acknowledgments section, the participants will be thanked using their full names for their valuable contributions to the study. The table includes information about each participant’s role or affiliation and the primary location where their role is concentrated, providing context for their perspectives. This approach enhances both the confidentiality of participants and the clarity of data presentation in the thesis. Moreover, it is important to note that all interview participants received the initial set of guiding questions via email, and subsequent discussions were conducted either via video calls or via telephone conversations, based on their availability, between the months of September and October 2023.

Table 4.1: Characteristics of the interviewee

Interview ID *	Role / affiliation	Primary location
I01PA	President of the Province	Oltrepò Pavese
I02ST	Executive Director	Milan
I03PR	Producer of PGI&PDO wine	Oltrepò Pavese
I04ST	R&D	Oltrepò Pavese
I05PA	Municipal Councillor	Milan
I06PR	Producer of PDO food product	Oltrepò Pavese
I07ST	Chief Executive Officer	Milan
I08PA	Councillor for Economic Development and Tourism	Oltrepò Pavese

* Decoding of the Interview: I – Interviewee ; 01(...) - ID of interviewee ; PA – Public Administration ; PR – PGI/PDO Producer ; ST – Other stakeholder

Relevant theoretical frameworks emerge when we delve into the economic disparities between Oltrepò Pavese and the city of Milan. Oltrepò Pavese, primarily characterized by its agricultural economy, sharply contrasts with the urban economic diversity of Milan. Applying Myrdal's theory provides valuable insights into potential polarization dynamics. It highlights how Milan's growth is accentuated while Oltrepò Pavese grapples with challenges in its path to recovery. This theoretical viewpoint reveals how various elements, such as capital accumulation, population changes, and innovation, interact to shape the development trends. Another aspect is added when the focus shifts to Krugman's new economic geography theory. The theory emphasises how economies of scale lead to economic concentration. As we look into how Oltrepò Pavese and Milan have developed, this viewpoint becomes more important. Milan is attractive to businesses and investors because of its position as a major economic and logistical hub. Milan's economic concentration is explained by the theory's emphasis on the grouping of businesses within regions, which also sheds light on how spatial aggregation can lead to asymmetric development. The examination of Milan's appeal as an economic nucleus offers insights into the asymmetric development experiences of the two regions. The synthesis of these theories with real-world contexts enriches their applicability. Myrdal's theory of cumulative causation and Krugman's new trade theory offer valuable perspectives on the development trajectories of Oltrepò Pavese and Milan. The first highlights the difficulties faced by rural areas like Oltrepò Pavese by revealing the complex interplay of favourable and unfavourable factors that drive economic polarisation. This second example reveals how Milan's economic agglomeration contributes to growth disparities. These theories stress the necessity of regionally specific policies that consider their specific features.

In addition, tourism flow models and destination development models are instrumental in comprehending tourism in Oltrepò Pavese, particularly in its context alongside the metropolitan city of Milan. Tourism flow models, such as the Lundgren and Lozato-Giotart models, help us decipher what attracts tourists to the area, such as its natural beauty, cultural traditions, and culinary offerings. These models also offer predictive capabilities regarding future popular tourist destinations. The proximity between Milan and Oltrepò Pavese fosters collaborative tourism promotion, with Milan endorsing Oltrepò Pavese as a weekend or day-trip destination, reciprocated by Oltrepò Pavese endorsing Milan as a pre- or post-stay destination. On the other hand, tourism destination development models, exemplified by the Butler and Miossec models, provide insights into the policies and strategies that have propelled tourism growth in Oltrepò Pavese, including infrastructure investments and various marketing efforts. A comprehensive understanding of tourism dynamics, encompassing both demand and supply aspects, equips us to decode the complexities of tourism in Oltrepò Pavese and its relationship with Milan. These insights form the

foundation for the development of tailored policies and strategies aimed at promoting sustainable tourism in the region.

4.2 Questionnaire characteristics

In line with the theoretical frameworks discussed above, the research translates these concepts into specific questions within the semi-structured questionnaire. These questions encompass an array of topics and aim to provide valuable insights into the dynamics between Oltrepò Pavese and Milan. These questions were categorized into seven distinct thematic areas, providing a structured framework for a comprehensive examination of this unique urban-rural dynamic. Each thematic area is briefly introduced alongside its corresponding question number to create a user-friendly reference for readers. These areas include: the first area, “Potential for Development” (Question 1 and Question 10), focuses on uncovering opportunities for growth and development within the rural landscape. It explores participants' perspectives on the region's future prospects. The second area, “Current State of Affairs between Oltrepò Pavese and Milan” (Questions 2, 3, and 4), delves into participants' perceptions of the existing relationship between these two entities and investigates potential avenues for collaboration. The third area, “Interactions and Flows” (Question 5), examines the dynamics of activities and exchanges between the metropolis and the rural hills, aiming to determine the direction of these interactions. In the fourth segment, “Strategies for Enhancing the Relationship” (Question 6), we explore the concrete steps and initiatives needed to strengthen the bond between Oltrepò Pavese and Milan, collecting strategies and recommendations. The fifth category, “Public and Private Roles” (Question 7), shifts the focus to the roles and responsibilities of the public and private sectors in fostering collaboration and explores which sector should take the lead. The competitiveness of locally-sourced products from Oltrepò Pavese in Milan's market is the central focus of the sixth thematic area (Question 8), where we explore strategies for these products to thrive in a highly competitive urban environment. In the seventh and final segment, “Concrete Enhancements” (Question 9), specific recommendations for reinforcing relationships and enhancing the region's competitiveness are gathered.

The first question examines the potential benefits of a structural relationship between a rural area and an adjacent urban centre. It aligns with Myrdal's theory of cumulative causation, which suggests that more developed regions hold a competitive advantage over less developed ones. In another question, respondents are asked about their contemporary investment perspective in Oltrepò Pavese. This query delves into whether they would invest in the area's development today and the reasoning behind their decision. It resonates with both Myrdal's and Krugman's theories, probing the potential to reverse the economic polarization trend. The subsequent questions explore the feasibility and

current state of the relationship between Oltrepò Pavese and Milan. These inquiries are informed by Myrdal's theory of cumulative causation and Krugman's new economic geography theory, assessing factors that make the relationship possible or impossible and evaluating its present status in terms of flows of people, goods, information, and capital. Within this context, participants are further prompted to examine the impact of this relationship on the territory, delving into how it may influence the region positively or negatively. Another question explores the interaction flow between the two regions, inquiring whether this flow will be predominantly one-directional or two-directional and in which direction it is likely to develop further. This question takes inspiration from tourism flow and destination development models, aiming to grasp the nature and trajectory of interaction. Next, we delve into actions that respondents believe are essential to promote and enhance the relationship between Oltrepò Pavese and Milan. These responses align with Myrdal's theory of cumulative causation and address concrete steps to mitigate development disparities. Additionally, we ask about how local products from Oltrepò Pavese can compete successfully in the highly competitive Milanese market. This question is grounded in Krugman's theory of economic geography, focusing on the competitiveness of local products. Lastly, we seek suggestions for concrete improvements that can strengthen relationships and increase the area's competitiveness. These suggestions stem from responses to other questionnaire items and highlight actionable steps for enhancing the Oltrepò Pavese-Milan relationship.

4.3 Limitations of the study

When conducting interviews in a research context, it is essential to acknowledge and address potential challenges and issues that may arise. An important limitation of this study pertains to the generalizability of the results. It is crucial to emphasize that the findings may not be readily applicable to all stakeholders in the Oltrepò Pavese region and the city of Milan. The participants selected for these interviews were chosen using a subjective sampling method that involved stakeholders from both Oltrepò Pavese and Milan, as well as producers of specific products from the region. While these interviews offer valuable insights into the perspectives of specific groups, a larger sample size would have allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the range of views and experiences among a broader range of stakeholders.

Furthermore, qualitative research, including semi-structured interviews, can be influenced by the researcher's biases. Biases refer to systematic errors or deviations from the true findings in research that can occur due to various factors, including the researcher's personal beliefs, preferences, or preconceived notions. These biases may affect participant selection, question phrasing, data interpretation, and overall research design (Mehra, 2002). Researchers must adopt rigorous methods

to mitigate these biases, such as designing neutral questions, maintaining an open and reflexive stance, and involving participants in data validation. By addressing biases systematically and transparently, researchers can enhance the credibility and objectivity of the insights gathered through semi-structured interviews. Nonetheless, it is crucial to recognize that some degree of subjectivity may still be present in the research process. Biases may emerge in participant selection, question phrasing, and data interpretation, potentially impacting the validity of findings. Common biases include selection bias, confirmation bias, question wording bias, observer bias, and interpretation bias. Selection bias can affect the representativeness of the sample (Heckman, 1979), while confirmation bias may lead to interpreting data in a way that aligns with preconceived notions (Nickerson, 1998). Question wording bias can inadvertently sway participants' responses, and observer bias may influence data collection through the researcher's expectations. Furthermore, interpretation bias can shape how data are analysed and presented. Researchers must adopt rigorous methods to mitigate these biases, such as designing neutral questions, maintaining an open and reflexive stance, and involving participants in data validation. By addressing biases systematically and transparently, researchers can enhance the credibility and objectivity of the insights gathered through semi-structured interviews (Mehra, 2002).

Lack of longitudinal data, a common drawback in cross-sectional studies, is another study weakness. While it provides useful insights into the current condition, it falls short of capturing dynamic changes over time, which would have been critical in tracking perceptions and experiences. A longitudinal study could have involved interviewing the same participants at multiple points in time, allowing researchers to assess how their views on the relationship evolved (Hermanowicz, 2013). Surveys conducted at different intervals among a representative sample of the population in Oltrepò Pavese and Milan could have tracked changes in public opinion. Future research endeavours may benefit from employing longitudinal approaches to unravel the intricacies of the relationship between Oltrepò Pavese and Milan. Such studies could identify trends and patterns that inform policy decisions, particularly those geared towards promoting sustainable development in the region.

In summary, the questionnaire used in this study includes a variety of questions tailored to extract valuable insights into the relationship between Oltrepò Pavese and Milan. The next section will delve into the results of our data analysis obtained from interviews and examine them in the context of the theories discussed earlier. This analysis will contribute to a deeper understanding of Oltrepò Pavese's development dynamics, along with the challenges and opportunities it faces.

Chapter 5: Results and Discussion

5.1 Results

Within the context of this study, a series of structured interviews were thoughtfully conducted to delve into the intricate relationship between Oltrepò Pavese, a rural region, and the bustling metropolis of Milan. This chapter establishes the basis for a more in-depth examination of the answers and insights from each of the aforementioned theme categories, offering an in-depth look of the relationship between Milan and Oltrepò Pavese. In order to fully comprehend how the types of respondents, PA (Public Administration), PR (PGI/PDO Producers), and ST (Other Stakeholders), interact on different thematic areas, the analysis will also include a comparison of various answers divided by categories. By highlighting the similarities, differences, and distinctive viewpoints and contributions of each category, this comparative method will contribute to the investigation of relational dynamics.

The exploration of perspectives from key stakeholders in Milan's metropolitan area and Oltrepò Pavese's rural region, including influential figures in Oltrepò Pavese's development (I02ST and I07ST), reveals a shared belief in the substantial benefits that structured urban-rural relationships can yield. The expected benefits include improved access to markets for small and rural enterprises, made possible by Milan's prominence as a major economic hub. Regional development can be further aided by metropolitan entities making investments in rural infrastructure. For rural residents, urban environments located at a commuting distance (or even closer) can offer invaluable educational and training options that support skill development. Furthermore, there are opportunities for economic growth and job creation when rural areas are promoted as tourist attractions with the cooperation of urban areas. When taken as a whole, these observations demonstrate how well-thought-out urban-rural partnerships can promote shared prosperity and alleviate social gaps. Their opinions diverge regarding the region's current status, with I02ST expressing a more optimistic outlook and I07ST adopting a cautiously optimistic stance. In contrast, I04ST, deeply engaged in Oltrepò Pavese's regional development, echoes the endorsement of structured relationships between urban and rural territories. I04ST is actively involved in the “*Dimore e Borghi- Luoghi da riscoprire lentamente*”, involving the coordinated efforts of the three LAGs, LAG Oltrepò Pavese, LAG Risorsa Lomellina and LAG Terre del Pò, and aligning with the essential criteria outlined in Measure 19.3, as discussed in Section 3.3 of this thesis, within the current RDP. This initiative aims to enhance living standards in three LAG-administered territories by building networks, promoting locally produced goods, and optimizing services, focusing on efficient urban-rural partnerships.

Analysing the existing state of relations, I02ST and I07ST acknowledge the connection between Oltrepò Pavese and Milan. I02ST views it positively as a source of growth potential, while I07ST identifies challenges related to limited awareness of Oltrepò Pavese among Milan's residents. Both I02ST and I07ST converge on the view that interactions between Milan and Oltrepò Pavese will be mutually beneficial, particularly focusing on tourism and product exchange. I07ST anticipates the growth of tourism from Milan, driven by its global appeal. They also concur on the need to develop complementary sectors and emphasize the importance of public-private collaboration. I02ST advocates for the implementation of territorial marketing strategies, emphasizing the significance of cultivating a robust and recognizable brand for the region. Leveraging popular social media platforms such as YouTube and Instagram emerges as a key component in this endeavour, allowing for the creation of visually engaging content showcasing the landscapes, events, and activities of the Oltrepò Pavese. Drawing inspiration from the success of the *Val d'Orcia*, renowned for its brand built on the values of beauty, sustainability, and culture, the region could strategically utilize these platforms to establish a distinctive identity, while I07ST highlights the value of collaboration among Oltrepò Pavese businesses to enhance the visibility of local products and attractions. I04ST, on the other hand, champions bidirectional exchanges between urban and rural regions, advocating for further development towards urban areas and underscoring the significance of fostering collaboration. In the context of improving the relationship between the urban and rural areas, I04ST's insights emphasize the practical steps necessary to strengthen regional networks, expand service offerings, promote local products, and foster a distinctive regional identity. These proposed actions are closely aligned with the objectives of the “*Dimore e Borghi- Luoghi da riscoprire lentamente*” project, which underscores the importance of inclusive and sustainable tourism in reinforcing the connection between Oltrepò Pavese and Milan. Furthermore, I04ST highlights the shared responsibility of both the public and private sectors in this context, underscoring the need for active engagement and collaboration to achieve these goals.

The aforementioned stakeholders unanimously share a robust belief in the competence of Oltrepò Pavese's local products to excel in the challenging metropolitan market. Their collective conviction revolves around the significance of quality, authenticity, and tradition, all of which are deemed vital attributes to empower these products in a highly competitive arena. I02ST emphasizes the inherent potential in Oltrepò's products, driven by the growing demand for locally-sourced items in metropolitan areas. The DOC-designated *Bonarda dell'Oltrepò Pavese*, *Pinot Nero dell'Oltrepò*, *Oltrepò Pavese Pinot Grigio*, and *Oltrepò Pavese Metodo Classico DOCG* are among the few well-known wines that I02ST highlights. Additionally, it emphasises the value of smart marketing while highlighting their unique qualities, which include their local origin, rich traditional legacy, and

superior quality. In harmony with this view, I07ST underscores the significance of investing in promotional strategies while advocating for collaborative efforts among local businesses to create a shared regional brand that can effectively represent Oltrepò Pavese as a whole.

Through a collaborative lens, key stakeholders envision increased visibility and recognition for Oltrepò Pavese's products in the metropolitan market. Individuals such as I02ST and I07ST, in conjunction with I04ST, share a collective belief in the potential success of Oltrepò Pavese's local products within metropolitan settings. While I02ST advocates for strategic promotion, emphasizing targeted marketing campaigns, partnerships with metropolitan retailers, and collaborations with chefs in the metropolitan area, I07ST underscores the strength derived from cooperative efforts among local enterprises. I02ST proposes targeted marketing campaigns to engage consumers in the metropolitan area, highlighting the unique qualities and value propositions of Oltrepò Pavese's products. Partnerships with key retailers and renowned chefs will secure prime shelf space and create signature dishes featuring Oltrepò Pavese's products. I07ST suggests fostering collaboration among local enterprises through producer cooperatives, joint ventures, collective branding, labelling, and shared distribution networks. These initiatives will enhance production efficiency, create a unified identity, and streamline transportation and delivery of Oltrepò Pavese's products. I04ST focuses on tangible improvements to strengthen the connection between Milan and Oltrepò Pavese, including enhancing transportation infrastructure, expanding digital connectivity, and organizing joint cultural and tourism initiatives. This collective strategy combines strategic promotion, collaborative endeavours, and tangible improvements to promote Oltrepò Pavese's local products in metropolitan markets.

In analysing the responses of I04ST, there is a clear focus on tangible improvements to fortify the connection between Milan and Oltrepò Pavese. I04ST underscores the importance of concrete actions, exemplified by the national promotion of the territory through the “*Dimore e Borghi-Luoghi da riscoprire lentamente*” project. This project, conducted in collaboration with multiple LAGs, is seen as a strategic move towards enhancing the region's appeal, inclusivity, experiential tourism, and cooperation among local stakeholders. These actions emphasize the significance of hands-on initiatives that can bring about meaningful change and growth in the relationship between the two regions. Both I02ST and I07ST present valuable recommendations for strengthening the Milan-Oltrepò Pavese relationship. I02ST emphasizes the creation of a complementary relationship between the two regions and suggests investments in promotional and communication strategies. Concurrently, I07ST proposes promoting the Oltrepò Pavese brand and exploring the potential of immigration as a valuable resource. The diverse insights offered by these stakeholders serve as a multifaceted framework for comprehending the intricate dynamics between Milan and Oltrepò

Pavese. Their shared recognition of challenges, along with the proposed opportunities and solutions, provides a solid foundation for crafting future strategies to bolster the unique interconnection between these distinct territories.

After analysing the feedback from stakeholders I02ST, I04ST, and I07ST, we transition to explore the viewpoints of public administration respondents. This phase of our investigation delves into the insights offered by I05PA, who operates within the City Metropolitan Area of Milan, and I01PA and I08PA, representing the Public Administration of the Province of Pavia, which includes the Oltrepò Pavese region. The stakeholders collectively underscore the potential advantages of fostering structural relationships between urban and rural territories. I01PA, I08PA, and I05PA converge on the idea that rural areas can offer a unique value proposition for urban counterparts. Slow life services, as highlighted by I01PA, are increasingly coveted by city dwellers seeking respite from the frenetic urban lifestyle. Meanwhile, I08PA directs attention to the tourism sector as a potential driver of economic growth in rural regions. I05PA emphasizes the mutual benefits of such structural relationships, where cities provide services and infrastructure lacking in rural areas, while the rural regions offer their distinct natural and cultural assets. However, there are difficulties ahead. The I01PA highlights the need for protective measures by cautioning against the possible urban pressures that could erode the identity of rural areas. In order to take advantage of the opportunities provided by urban adjacency, I08PA emphasises the significance of stakeholders in rural areas working together. I05PA emphasises how important it is for the government to make investments in order to close infrastructure gaps and promote rural development. When evaluating the present state of relations between the Oltrepò Pavese and Milan, stakeholders express divergent opinions. I01PA characterizes the relationship as “complicated but less strenuous than in the past,” noting increased Milanese awareness of Oltrepò. Conversely, I08PA views it as “inadequate and sporadic, lacking structural depth,” while I05PA perceives it as “positive but with room for improvement.” These varying assessments reflect nuanced perceptions of the current relationship but collectively highlight the need for enhanced communication and promotion strategies. The stakeholders concur that bidirectional interactions between the metropolis and the hills of the Oltrepò Pavese are prepared to become the norm. They unanimously advocate for enhanced promotion and communication strategies to make the Oltrepò Pavese a recognizable tourist destination. Furthermore, they emphasise how crucial it is to promote cooperation across different tourism stakeholders. These stakeholders include a wide range of entities, such as local, regional, and government organisations in charge of economic planning and tourism development, tourism organisations marketing Oltrepò Pavese and Milan attractions, locally owned businesses that rely on tourism and cultural groups promoting the region's rich cultural legacy. The respondents agree

that if the obstacles are addressed, such as creating incentives for cooperation and building necessary services and infrastructure, both regions may have an opportunity for growth with sustainable tourist development at its core.

All three stakeholders emphasize the significance of integrated, collaborative approaches in strengthening relations between metropolises and rural territories. Their consensus converges on several key points, including communication and promotion strategies, public-private collaboration, and sustainable development. They assert the necessity of active engagement from both public and private actors to achieve favourable outcomes. The stakeholders collectively underscore the importance of adopting a holistic approach to address challenges and leverage opportunities effectively. I01PA and I08PA share a common perspective that the private sector should take the initiative to strengthen urban-rural relations. I01PA argues that the public sector can create essential infrastructure conditions, but the private sector must invest in projects it believes in. I08PA emphasizes the need for private entities to take proactive measures, such as forming consortia to drive public initiatives. In contrast, I05PA suggests a more integrated approach in which both public and private sectors have significant roles to play. These divergent perspectives reflect varying views on the roles of each sector in empowering urban-rural relations.

Stakeholders emphasise the region's rich agricultural and viticultural legacy as a crucial competitive advantage in metropolitan markets, and they uniformly endorse the commercial potential of Oltrepò Pavese products. In addition to traditional PDO cured meat varieties like *Salame di Varzi*, the Oltrepò Pavese region provides a wide range of wines, including well-known ones like the already mentioned, *Barbera*, *Bonarda*, *Pinot Nero*, *Riesling*, and *Metodo Classico*. The cheeses of the area, such as *Nisso*, *Stracchino*, and *Gorgonzola*, are renowned for their complex flavours and rich, creamy textures. Furthermore, the area produces a lot of honey, which includes wildflower, chestnut, and acacia honey, and has different tastes and nutritional advantages compared to the commercial ones that one can easily find in the big cities. Beyond these traditional products, Oltrepò Pavese presents a spectrum of artisanal goods, including jams, preserves, baked goods, and food that is produced locally. These offerings align with the growing consumer demand for authentic, high-quality, and locally sourced food experiences. Strategic markets for Oltrepò Pavese products include gourmet food stores, specialty shops, and fine dining restaurants, catering to consumers willing to pay a premium for distinctive and local offerings. Furthermore, participation in farmers' markets, like *Campagna Amica* and *Mercato Contadino di Pavia*, food festivals, and engagement with online retailers offers direct opportunities for consumer interaction, product showcasing, and brand building. By effectively targeting these markets and communicating the unique qualities and value propositions of Oltrepò Pavese products, the region stands poised to compete successfully in

metropolitan settings. This strategy not only guarantees the products' financial success but also positions Oltrepò Pavese as a representation of agricultural history and fine cuisine in the larger framework of sustainable development and regional identity. I01PA underlines the necessity of elucidating the unique features of these products, emphasizing the historical significance and distinct regional characteristics that make Oltrepò products stand out. I08PA advocates targeting niche markets due to limited production capacity, recognizing that while the quality is exceptional, the quantities are finite, making exclusivity a selling point. I05PA, on the other hand, underscores the cultural, territorial, and quality aspects of product development, emphasizing the role of tradition and sustainability in the creation of Oltrepò signature offerings. This unanimous consensus among stakeholders highlights the substantial potential of Oltrepò products to thrive and make a mark in the competitive landscape of metropolitan markets. The products from Oltrepò Pavese face competition from various regional counterparts, adding complexity to their market presence. In the realm of wines, Oltrepò Pavese contends with neighbouring wines from the *Piacenza* area, the prestigious *Langhe* and *Roero* in Piedmont, and the well-regarded *Chianti* in Tuscany. These wines, produced with high-quality indigenous grapes, have established strong international reputations. While the PDO *Salame di Varzi*, confronts competition from counterparts in the nearby *Piacenza* region, with its *Coppa Piacentina*, and *Pancetta Piacentina*, as well as other renowned salumi-producing areas in Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany. Similarly, the diverse cheeses of Oltrepò Pavese, contend not only with products from the aforementioned regions but also face competition from other Lombardian regions, including *Val Brembana* and *Valtellina*, such as PDO *Bitto* and *Formai de Mut*. This competitive landscape requires strategic positioning and effective communication to highlight the unique qualities of Oltrepò Pavese's products, establishing them as distinctive and desirable choices amid a broader array of regional offerings. Moreover, Oltrepò Pavese products face competition from other types of products, including processed foods such as snacks, packaged meats, and frozen meals, which are often marketed as more convenient and affordable alternatives.

In order to improve the relationship between urban centres and rural areas, the respondents, I05PA, I01PA, and I08PA, all agree that an even-more integrated strategy involving the public and private sectors is necessary. To improve the relationship between urban centres and rural areas, the respondents I05PA, I01PA, and I08PA all agree that an integrated strategy involving the public and private sectors is necessary. With a focus on the region's critical role in this process, I05PA emphasises digital innovation, multi-level governance, and rural revitalization. The public sector's role in infrastructure creation is highlighted by I01PA, whereas the private sector's I08PA emphasises the significance of private initiative and consortium formation. Despite acknowledging the different roles played by the public and private sectors in fostering ties between urban and rural

areas, these diverse perspectives all agree on the importance of integration. The agreement among the stakeholders emphasises how critical it is to bring the urban and rural domains together via cooperative endeavours. They provide an inclusive framework with a strong emphasis on the importance of integration, illuminating the opportunities and challenges that are present. As a crucial component of future urban-rural policy development, this multifaceted approach harmonises sector-specific recommendations into a cohesive strategy intended to strengthen the connections between bustling urban metropolises and tranquil rural regions. Despite recognizing the distinctive roles of the public and private sectors, these stakeholders collectively stress the vital role of integration. This shared understanding underscores the importance of collaborative endeavours in bringing urban and rural domains together. The integrated approach provides a comprehensive framework, aligning sector-specific recommendations into a cohesive strategy. This strategy aims to fortify connections between urban and rural areas, creating opportunities while addressing challenges. This multifaceted approach envisions specific examples of integration, such as economic integration through job creation and support for short supply chains. Infrastructure integration involves enhancing transportation and communication networks. Social integration includes promoting cultural exchange and volunteer programs. Environmental integration entails collaborating for sustainable resource management and promoting eco-friendly agricultural practices. With an emphasis on cooperation and integration, this approach seeks to establish a harmonious and integrated interaction between urban and rural communities. It sees potential and difficulties in promoting harmony between quiet rural areas and urban metropolises, providing a strong basis for future policy development.

Moving from the perspectives of public administration representatives, I05PA, I01PA, and I08PA, to those of local producers I03PR and I06PR, we transition to viewpoints deeply entrenched in the heart of Oltrepò Pavese. These local producers, holding certifications for PDO and PGI products, possess an unparalleled familiarity with the region's offerings, mirroring the prevailing circumstances for most Oltrepò producers. With this contextual shift, our focus turns to I03PR and I06PR, who embody the essence of Oltrepò Pavese's heritage and local expertise, offering invaluable insights into the opportunities and challenges within this exceptional territory. The potential for development within Oltrepò Pavese is a shared sentiment between I03PR and I06PR, both hailing the region's unique attributes. The outlook is promising, underpinned by a strong consensus that Oltrepò Pavese stands to benefit substantially from a structured relationship with its urban neighbour, Milan. I03PR unequivocally states, “absolutely yes,” while I06PR adds, “certainly yes”. Their responses underscore the shared vision of Oltrepò Pavese's growth potential, bolstered by its close proximity to Milan, distinguished wine production, and strategic location. Despite this

potential, both I03PR and I06PR concur that the current relationship between Oltrepò Pavese and Milan falls short. They believe that there's considerable room for improvement in strengthening these urban-rural ties. I03PR highlights enotourism and the rising desire to escape urban life, particularly in the post-COVID era, as factors that can help fortify this connection. I06PR echoes this sentiment, emphasizing the importance of Oltrepò's ability to effectively communicate its potential to Milan. Both interviewees recognize the unique distinctions that set Oltrepò Pavese apart from Milan, including geography and culture, making the region an enticing destination.

When considering the flow of interaction between Milan and Oltrepò Pavese, I03PR and I06PR anticipate a bidirectional flow that extends beyond mere transactions. This vision revolves around cultivating a mutual relationship where both regions derive substantial benefits. The essence of this interaction is multifaceted, encompassing cultural enrichment, tranquillity, an alternative lifestyle, and a direct connection to the territory. The bidirectional flow between Milan and Oltrepò Pavese can be achieved through various avenues, such as cultural exchange, eco-friendly tourism initiatives, and improved transportation options. Cultural exchange involves organizing events and festivals in Oltrepò Pavese that showcase the region's unique heritage, traditions, and artistic talents, drawing visitors from Milan and beyond. Collaborations between cultural institutions can facilitate exhibitions, joint programming, and shared experiences. Curated cultural tours connect Milanese audiences with Oltrepò Pavese's offerings, such as museum visits and historic site exploration. Oltrepò Pavese can position itself as a haven for relaxation and wellness, offering a serene escape from city life. Eco-friendly tourism initiatives, such as hiking trails and nature retreats, appeal to Milanese seeking outdoor experiences and a deeper connection with nature. User-friendly digital platforms and mobile applications can provide real-time information about events, attractions, and businesses in Oltrepò Pavese, facilitating seamless planning and engagement. By implementing these strategies, Oltrepò Pavese aims to attract Milanese seeking a tranquil escape, while Milan benefits from the region's cultural richness, natural allure, and locally produced goods. This bidirectional flow not only strengthens the ties between the two regions but also fosters mutual understanding, appreciation, and economic growth.

This envisioned interaction flow revolves around the pursuit of cultural environments, tranquillity, an alternative lifestyle, and a direct connection to the territory. In terms of actions to improve the relationship, both I03PR and I06PR propose strategies aimed at enhancing ties between Oltrepò Pavese and Milan. Promoting locally produced goods from Oltrepò Pavese in Milan is an important initiative for I03PR and I06PR. I03PR places a strong emphasis on promoting these products to Milanese professionals. To help them become acquainted with the distinct flavours and characteristics of Oltrepò Pavese products, workshops and tasting events for sommeliers, chefs, and

food bloggers should be hosted. Working together with neighbourhood pubs, restaurants, shops, influencers, and social media stars is also crucial. In order to generate a cohesive brand identity, Oltrepò Pavese producers should form a strong consortium, as part of a complete strategy that is supported by I06PR. It is suggested that public tourism boards collaborate with commercial producers to launch joint marketing initiatives that highlight the area's gastronomic attractions and draw tourists from Milan. Additionally digital initiatives, such as an online marketplace or platform, are essential for bringing producers and Milanese consumers together and facilitating online ordering and delivery. Trade exhibitions and festivals showcasing local products give producers with excellent networking opportunities with potential buyers and distributors. Local foods should be further included into educational curricula through partnerships between Oltrepò Pavese growers and Milanese cooking schools, giving students practical experience. Collaboration among stakeholders is deemed critical by both interviewees.

In delving deeper into the competitiveness of Oltrepò Pavese's local products in Milan's fiercely competitive market, both I03PR and I06PR emphasize the need for a compelling narrative that revolves around the products' local origin and exceptional quality. They recognize the heightened appeal of products hailing from nearby regions, as it resonates with customers seeking authenticity and a connection to the territory. This approach not only positions Oltrepò Pavese's products as desirable but also aligns with the growing trend of favouring locally sourced and artisanal items. Regarding concrete improvements, both stakeholders advocate for proactive measures that can solidify the bonds between Oltrepò Pavese and Milan. They propose the organization of promotional events and dedicated marketing campaigns within Milan, specifically focusing on the region's unique products. This strategic promotion would raise awareness among Milan's residents and visitors, encouraging them to explore and embrace the offerings from Oltrepò Pavese. Crucially, both interviewees underscore the pivotal role of professionals who serve as intermediaries between producers and consumers. This includes chefs, restaurateurs, sommeliers, and hospitality staff who can introduce Oltrepò Pavese's products to their patrons, providing insights, and creating an immersive experience. Training and collaboration with these professionals are regarded as essential components of the strategy, ensuring that they can effectively convey the story, quality, and distinctiveness of Oltrepò Pavese's offerings. The unifying principle in these recommendations is the need for comprehensive cooperation between the private and public sectors. By involving various stakeholders and forging strong partnerships, Oltrepò Pavese can implement well-coordinated strategies that leverage the strengths of each sector. This collective effort becomes the driving force behind systematic approaches aimed at enhancing the connection between Oltrepò

Pavese and Milan, further fortifying the competitiveness of the region's products in the metropolitan market.

5.2 Discussions

The respondents unanimously expressed a shared belief in the potential for development within Oltrepò Pavese through structured relationships with Milan. Key figures, including I02ST, I04ST, I03PR, and I06PR, were enthusiastic about the growth opportunities. Their optimism underscored the region's inherent potential for economic, cultural, and social development. However, they also acknowledged that the current state of relations between Oltrepò Pavese and Milan is less than ideal. This nuanced view is best represented by I07ST, I08PA, and I05PA, who highlighted challenges, limited awareness, and the need for enhanced communication. The consensus among interviewees is that there is room for improvement, and strategies must be employed to bridge the existing gaps. A bidirectional flow of interactions between Milan and Oltrepò Pavese is envisioned by various respondents. This dynamic interaction, as articulated by I03PR and I06PR, is seen as a mutual exchange where both regions benefit. It involves cultural enrichment, an escape from urban life, and a direct connection to the territory. The thesis reflects this vision of a balanced urban-rural interaction, promoting cultural exchange and economic growth. Interviewees, particularly I02ST, I07ST, I03PR, and I06PR, share a strong belief in the competitiveness of Oltrepò Pavese's local products in Milan's competitive market. Their views emphasize the significance of promoting the unique attributes of these products, such as their local origin, exceptional quality, and cultural heritage. The competitiveness of these products is seen as a strategic advantage for Oltrepò Pavese. They have offered various strategies for improving the relationship between Oltrepò Pavese and Milan. These strategies involve enhancing communication, promotion, and collaboration. Recommendations include targeted marketing campaigns, engagement with professionals in Milan, and the development of supporting infrastructure. A holistic, integrated approach that engages both the public and private sectors is a common thread among these recommendations.

Table 5.1 provides a general understanding of the aforementioned opinions collected from respondents to the interviews on urban-rural dynamics in the context of Oltrepò Pavese and Milan. The stakeholders, ST, PA, and PR have provided insightful information on the current obstacles, prospects, and tactics for promoting cooperation, elevating regional goods, and advancing territorial development. The categories for the table columns were carefully chosen to represent a wide range of perspectives given during the interviews. The inclusion of these categories provides an immediate general evaluation of the urban-rural relationship, including respondents' shared optimism for progress, recognition of current obstacles, and proposed measures for improvement.

Table 5.1: Impressions and proposals of respondents regarding the interaction between Oltrepò Pavese and Milan

	ST	PA	PR
Bidirectionality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on mutual benefits between Milan and Oltrepò Pavese. • Enhancing urban-rural cooperation, focusing on tourism and agri-food sectors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition of the unique value of rural areas for cities. • Emphasis on mutual benefits through collaboration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belief in enormous potential of Oltrepò Pavese. • Emphasizes the importance of effectively communicating with Milan.
Mutual Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognizes the value of collaboration between regions. • Highlights the benefits of an urbanization in Oltrepò Pavese linked to their proximity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlights the potential for economic growth through urban-rural partnerships. • Recognizes the importance of complementarity between regions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognizes the opportunity for growth through structured relations with Milan. • Emphasizes geographic proximity as an advantage.
Product Competitiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belief in the competitiveness of local products in Milan. • Proposes targeted marketing and inter-business collaboration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of the potential of local products. • Emphasizes the importance of public-private integration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belief in the competitiveness of local products in Milan. • Proposes promotional events and collaborations.
Improvement Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasizes the importance of promoting the territorial brand. • Specific proposals on social media marketing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides strategies for infrastructural improvement (i.e. roads and public services) and cooperation. • Recognizes the need to improve communication. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggests promotion and training strategies. • Emphasis on collaboration between the public and private sectors.
Public-Private Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stresses the need to involve both the public and private sectors. • Proposes collaboration strategies for infrastructural development (i.e. roads). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasizes synergy between the public and private sectors for development. • Proposes strategies to promote collaboration between regions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stresses the importance of collaboration among local agri-food producers. • Proposes the formation of a consortium for promotion.
Territorial marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotes the valorisation of local culture and traditions. • Suggests territorial marketing initiatives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotes the creation of a strong territorial identity. • Emphasizes the importance of cultural and tourism initiatives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotes the valorisation of the local gastronomic heritage. • Suggests initiatives to involve industry professionals.

In summary, this master's thesis illuminates the intricacies of the urban-rural dynamic between Oltrepò Pavese and Milan, drawing insights from structured interviews with public administration representatives, producers, and various stakeholders. These interviews provide a comprehensive

understanding of the challenges and opportunities in strengthening the relationship between these territories. The diverse perspectives of stakeholders collectively weave a rich tapestry of insights, offering valuable guidance for future endeavours aimed at enhancing the connections between Oltrepò Pavese and Milan. The transition from private stakeholders to the public sector adds depth to our comprehension of the urban-rural dynamic, providing valuable perspectives that bridge the public and private domains. This revelation exposes strategies for fostering sustainable relationships between urban and rural areas, with the viewpoints of public administration participants playing a crucial role in our broader narrative. It emphasizes the central role of aligning the interests of both sectors in shaping regional development. Furthermore, this study underscores the untapped potential for a symbiotic relationship between Oltrepò Pavese and Milan, leveraging the region's unique attributes and the active engagement of stakeholders from diverse backgrounds. Despite acknowledging existing challenges and differing perspectives, the research highlights the urgent need for enhanced communication, promotion, and collaboration to effectively bridge these gaps. The envisioned bidirectional urban-rural interactions hinge on the competitiveness of Oltrepò Pavese's local products within the dynamic metropolitan market. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the inherent challenges in this urban-rural collaboration. Proximity to a metropolis can impose demographic and environmental pressures on rural areas, potentially leading to issues such as inadequate transportation infrastructure, potential labour force deficiencies, and difficulties in accessing capital. Without careful management, rural areas may become overly dependent on the metropolis, risking a loss of cultural identity and environmental strain. Therefore, a balanced and nuanced approach is essential to address both the positive and negative aspects of this interconnected relationship, ensuring sustainable development and resilience for both regions.

Even considering the broader theoretical framework, the research findings align closely with Myrdal's Theory of Cumulative Causation, shedding light on the persistent challenges faced by rural areas like Oltrepò Pavese. Myrdal (1957) emphasized the struggle of such regions to attract investments, retain talent, and compete with metropolitan centres like Milan. The respondents' insights confirm this theory, pinpointing factors contributing to the cycle of cumulative causation. The concentration of economic activity in Milan, inadequate investment in Oltrepò Pavese, and the emigration of young people highlight the complex interplay of forces. Addressing these issues, the respondents advocate for a roadmap of policies aimed at breaking the cycle and fostering more balanced economic development, in line with Myrdal's recommendations. Similarly, Krugman's (1991) New Economic Geography Theory, emphasizing the clustering of businesses in urban areas, finds resonance in the research findings. Milan's role as a major economic and logistical hub attracts businesses and investors due to its central location, well-developed infrastructure, and a large

consumer base. The respondents echo Krugman's theory, recognizing Milan as an economic hub and calling for policies to help Oltrepò Pavese overcome its disadvantages and attract businesses and investors. The research thus aligns with Krugman's emphasis on addressing spatial imbalances in economic development.

The study's incorporation of tourism flow models, exemplified by the Lundgren and Lozato-Giotart models, provides a robust framework for comprehending the intricate factors influencing tourist demand and movement patterns. By leveraging these models, the research gains valuable insights into the dynamics shaping the tourism landscape between Oltrepò Pavese and Milan. The alignment of the respondents' identification of collaboration opportunities with these models underscores the strategic importance of understanding distance, travel costs, transportation options, destination attractiveness, and marketing efforts. This alignment, in turn, strengthens the foundation for proposed initiatives, emphasizing increased tourism promotion and improved marketing of Oltrepò Pavese as a tourist destination. Furthermore, the research findings, closely aligned with established destination development models such as Butler's tourist area lifecycle and Miossec's tourist circuit model, provide a comprehensive perspective on the challenges and opportunities for tourism development in Oltrepò Pavese. The respondents' call for a coordinated approach to tourism development resonates with Butler's model, emphasizing the necessity of managing the destination's growth across various stages to avoid detrimental effects like overcrowding and environmental degradation. Similarly, Miossec's model, focusing on collaboration among different actors in the tourism industry, supports the respondents' plea for coordination, stressing the importance of sustainable resource management through partnerships. The respondents' specific recommendations, including infrastructure investments, diversification of tourism products, and enhanced marketing efforts, harmonize with the principles outlined in destination development models. By adopting a coordinated strategy, Oltrepò Pavese can navigate the stages of tourism development, capitalize on its unique strengths, and address challenges, ultimately fostering a sustainable and prosperous tourism industry in the region.

In conclusion, this research contributes a nuanced perspective on current urban-rural dynamics, considering both strengths and weaknesses, and proposes a roadmap for future actions. The comprehensive comparison with theoretical frameworks and existing literature strengthens the findings, offering practical insights for policy development. This study aims to serve as a valuable resource for those invested in fostering a more sustainable and balanced future for Oltrepò Pavese and Milan.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

In the landscape of contemporary global challenges, rural development takes centre stage as a multifaceted and dynamic process, with deep-reaching implications for the sustainability and long-term prosperity of rural communities. Strengthening a nation begins with fortifying its roots, and, in our context, these roots extend deep into the heart of rural areas and villages. This master's thesis has dealt with intricacies of rural development, with a specific focus on the unique dynamics of the Oltrepò Pavese region in northern Italy, set against the backdrop of the vibrant metropolis, Milan. The primary objective was to illuminate the intricate relationship between rural and urban domains, promising to unravel the complexities that drive the sustainable progress of both. Rural areas, whether in Oltrepò Pavese or elsewhere, often face challenges associated with declining populations and stagnant economies. The allure of urban areas, offering better employment prospects and an improved quality of life, has led to a continuous outmigration of the region's younger population, exacerbating demographic decline. Moreover, the aging population in these regions requires additional care and support services. Oltrepò Pavese, much like other rural areas, relies predominantly on a limited spectrum of sectors, notably agriculture and tourism. These sectors have their intrinsic merits but are often vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks. The fragility of these economic foundations, combined with the challenges of depopulation and an aging population, emphasizes the need for innovative and sustainable strategies.

This master's thesis was motivated by the fundamental question of how Oltrepò Pavese can leverage its proximity to Milan as a catalyst for economic development. In the contemporary landscape, the synergy between urban and rural areas offers a promising avenue for enhancing the quality of life for rural communities and promoting economic sustainability. The research draws inspiration from influential theories, notably Myrdal's (1957) cumulative causation and Krugman's (1991) New economic geography, to explore the potential benefits of a structural relationship between Oltrepò Pavese and Milan. The study aligns with these frameworks, shedding light on intricate dynamics and offering insights into possibilities for collaboration and sustainable development. Structured interviews with key stakeholders further illuminate the urban-rural dynamics, unveiling untapped potential for a mutually beneficial relationship. Oltrepò Pavese's proximity to Milan offers opportunities based on its specific characteristics, local products, and support from stakeholders. However, obstacles like limited awareness and historical differences pose challenges, emphasizing the complexities discussed by Myrdal and Krugman. Respondents describe a two-way flow of exchanges, consistent with Krugman's two-way perspective on urban-rural relationships. This dynamic fosters cultural exchange and endorses balanced urban-rural collaboration, reflecting interviewees' views. Stakeholders emphasize the competitiveness of Oltrepò Pavese's local

products, aligning with Krugman's economic geography. These products, with distinct characteristics, provide a strategic advantage. Transitioning to tourism, the study incorporates Lundgren and Lozato-Giotart models, providing a framework for understanding tourist demand and movement patterns. The alignment of respondents' identification of collaboration opportunities with these models underscores the importance of factors like distance, travel costs, and destination attractiveness. This strengthens proposed initiatives, emphasizing increased tourism promotion and marketing of Oltrepò Pavese. Additionally, the research aligns with destination development models, including Butler's tourist area lifecycle and Miossec's tourist circuit model. Respondents' call for a coordinated approach resonates with Butler's model, emphasizing managing growth across stages. Miossec's model, focusing on collaboration in the tourism industry, supports respondents' plea for coordination and sustainable resource management. The integration of Myrdal and Krugman's theories, Lundgren and Lozato-Giotart models, and destination development models provides a comprehensive approach, offering insights into urban-rural dynamics and tourism development in Oltrepò Pavese.

This study on Oltrepò Pavese focuses on the unique challenges of rural development in this region, offering a template for addressing similar challenges globally. The policy recommendations emphasize the strategic development of infrastructure, including robust energy, communication, and transportation networks, which can narrow the divide between rural and urban areas and catalyse economic growth. The focus is on cultivating an enabling environment for local entrepreneurs, providing seamless access to funding, mentorship, and training. The synergy among rural communities, businesses, and governmental bodies is not just theoretical but practical, as the exchange of information and best practices forms the bedrock for successful initiatives. Tourism, identified as a transformative policy measure, is more than a means of economic diversification; it serves as a conduit for attracting new investments, bringing attention to the distinctive features of rural areas, and creating a positive feedback loop that reinforces the sustainable development agenda. Leveraging the allure of these regions for tourism contributes to economic growth, preserving cultural heritage, and environmental sustainability.

The Oltrepò Pavese case study has broad implications that can be felt on wider territorial level. The flexible policy model's concepts can be applied to various socioeconomic and geographic contexts, making it a useful guide for areas with comparable problems. The significance of adjusting interventions to the particular advantages and difficulties of each location is emphasised as regions struggle with the complexity of rural-urban dynamics. The policy model outlined for Oltrepò Pavese can function as a strategic guide for development in other Lombardy regions, such as *Val Brembana* and *Lomellina*. The significance of tailoring interventions to the specificities of each area is clearly

underscored. For instance, in *Val Brembana*, infrastructure investments might concentrate on enhancing sustainable tourism, supporting small agricultural and artisanal enterprises, and promoting sustainable agriculture. Broadening the perspective to the *Maremma* region south of Rome reveals unique challenges and opportunities. Policy interventions here should aim to promote local cultural and ecological heritage through sustainable tourism projects and environmental protection. Internationally, the Portuguese region of *Alentejo* provides valuable insights with investments in agricultural infrastructure, promotion of sustainable farming practices, and initiatives for tourism and cultural heritage conservation.

In conclusion, this research offers a comprehensive framework for discerning policy implications, transcending the boundaries of Oltrepò Pavese to inform strategies applicable to diverse rural regions. It underscores the imperative of tailoring interventions with a nuanced and personalized approach to foster sustainable growth. The study emphasizes adaptability, recognizing the unique characteristics of each locale. Within this expansive framework, key policy implications emerge. The research highlights the economic potential of rural-urban proximity, urging policymakers to facilitate interactions through transportation investments and economic partnerships. Addressing economic disparities, it advocates for supporting local businesses with access to capital, training, and mentorship. Infrastructure and public services are pivotal for economic development, emphasizing investment in roads, broadband, and healthcare. Cultural preservation measures include investments in heritage sites and support for local arts, while sustainable development policies focus on renewable energy, eco-friendly land practices, and eco-tourism. Lessons for different stakeholders from this thesis are significant. The public sector's role in creating enabling conditions for sustainable development is crucial, involving policies that promote collaboration, infrastructure investment, and support for local businesses. The private sector is vital in driving economic development through investments and job creation, while civil society plays a role in advocating for rural communities. Suggestions for future research include more in-depth studies of specific rural areas, the development of quantitative models to assess the economic impact of policy interventions, and comparative studies of rural development in different regions to identify best practices. In addition to policy implications and lessons for stakeholders, the thesis provides insights into rural development, emphasizing the importance of region-specific solutions, long-term planning, and adaptability to changing circumstances. This research contributes significantly to the field of rural development, offering valuable guidance for future studies and policy considerations.

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