

3rd conference on Governance in (post)transition
April 24th - 25th, 2014

In search of horizontal government: insights on joining up municipalities from a quasi-experiment in the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region (2004-2014)

Andrea Garlatti, Ph.D. (andrea.garlatti@uniud.it)
Luca Brusati, Ph.D. (luca.brusati@uniud.it)
Paolo Fedele, Ph.D. (paolo.fedele@uniud.it)
Mario Ianniello, Ph.D. (mario.ianniello@uniud.it)

Joined-up government and enhanced coordination are an evergreen in public management studies (Bogdanor 2005). As Pressman and Wildavsky (1984) put it: “no phrase expresses as frequent a complaint about the (federal) bureaucracy as does ‘lack of co-ordination’. No suggestion for reform is more common than ‘what we need is more co-ordination’” (p. 133). “New public management”-inspired reforms (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011) advocated for more decentralization (Fedele and Ongaro 2008), based on the assumption that it would bring “increased public sector efficiency and accountability” (World Bank 2000: 1), also as a consequence of the allegation that, according to the proponents of decentralization, “corruption is less pronounced at local than at national levels” (World Bank 2001: 2). A couple of decades of decentralization have made coordination an even hotter topic on the agenda of many governments.

Coordination among municipalities and joint service delivery have always been a “reform talk” subject in Italy. The Italian local government system, in fact, is highly fragmented, inasmuch more than 60% of its 8,000 municipalities count less than 5,000 inhabitants. Small and very small municipalities often struggle to perform their functions, in both financial and organizational terms. Nevertheless, most attempts to merge municipalities have been stymied by political resistance at local level; attempts to coordinate service delivery fared better, but usually with a piecemeal approach and unstable arrangements that did little to improve service quality, productivity and reliability. In the last few years, due to cuts in inter-governmental transfers and the impossibility to keep raising local charges, the issue is squarely back on the agenda.

This paper focuses on the policies implemented by Autonomous Region Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG) to promote the joint delivery of municipal services. FVG is one of the so-called “special statute” regions in the Italian sub-national government system: as such it enjoys a higher degree of law-making power than “ordinary statute” regions, due to socio-cultural, historical and geographic reasons. More specifically, FVG holds exclusive powers in defining the legal and financial framework where local governments operate. For this reason, a longitudinal analysis of the experience of FVG in dealing with the joint delivery of municipal services amounts to a “quasi-experiment”, relevant in its implications not only for other Italian regions but for other countries as well.

Using the analytical framework suggested by Bouckaert and Verhoest (2010) based on the inputs provided by Ouchi (1980), Thompson *et al.* (1991) and Peter (1998), the paper compares the policies adopted by the FVG Regional Government over time to trigger joint service delivery in municipalities. The framework proposes a classification of various coordination tools using market, hierarchy or network as the underlying device. The application of this framework to the case of FVG sheds light on how the Napoleonic tradition (Peters 2008; Ongaro 2010) and locality factors influence the implementation of joined up government initiatives.