

19-22 de Octubre 2022 | Granada

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON REGIONAL SCIENCE

Challenges, policies and governance of the territories in the post-covid era

Desafíos, políticas y gobernanza de los territorios en la era post-covid

XLVII REUNIÓN DE ESTUDIOS REGIONALES
XIV CONGRESO AACR



Premises of political discontent across Italian territories

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Abstract:

Globalisation, continuous economic integration, and experienced economic shocks such as Global Financial Crisis and Debt Crisis as well as the most recent Covid-19 pandemic, have contributed notably to the uneven economic development of regions and countries within the European Union (EU). Uncertainty about the future has fuelled the criticism regarding the national politics of member states and European integration followed by the diffusion of populist parties, which generates various risks on the national and subnational levels. Understanding the nature and geography of political discontent remains challenging due to the multiformity of the phenomenon and the complexity of the underlying factors that make people vote ‘against’.

In this respect, Italy is an interesting case study as it is characterized by a tendency to political radicalization and deep territorial inequalities that go beyond the historically rooted north-south divide. Using the detailed data on outcomes of the 2018 parliamentary elections and categorisation provided by the Chapel Hill Expert Survey we map and analyse the factors affecting the geography of discontent for more than 7,000 Italian municipalities, operationalised as the share of anti-EU or populist votes. In doing so we put particular attention in distinguishing between geographical, economic, and social factors. In particular, among the latter we consider the role of factors related to culture and social norms, such as the presence of theatres, museums, and bookshops, and offices of the Italian association for organ donation.