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Conflict or synergy? Understanding interaction between municipalities and village commons (*regole*) in polycentric governance of mountain areas in the Veneto Region, Italy

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Abstract: A particular challenge for mountainous areas in Italy is the definition of suitable governance models for local resources. Several solutions have been proposed over time, resulting in the co-existence of a number of decision-making centers. A crucial role is played by municipalities, but, in recent years, village commons – *regola* (singular) / *regole* (plural) in the local language – have been re-constituted as institutions with local power. In this dynamic context, little is known on how municipalities and *regole* interact. This paper aims at improving the understanding of local governance of mountain areas in the Veneto Region, from the viewpoint of municipalities, which represent the political, legal and administrative authority. The analysis is grounded in the polycentric governance literature, especially crucial in drawing attention to level and extent of cooperation, trustworthiness, mutual learning and effort for adaptation. Tensions, conflicts and conflict-resolution mechanisms were also assessed. We carried out a survey of

14 municipalities containing regole within their administrative jurisdictions. The results of our work provide evidence that this relationship is mostly a synergistic one. Municipalities showed adaptive capacity in mirroring values and views of the regole and proved willing to share responsibilities. Their decisions were formulated whilst taking into account the need for creating the appropriate linkages with local communities. Where conflicts or discontent have emerged, they have been mostly resolved, or considered as reflecting a need for greater coordination. This outcome can be looked upon as a local polycentric governance innovation that so far has only partially received policy support at the regional level. We conclude that municipalities will continue to play a central role in regulation of local-level socio-economic dynamics, remaining the institutional reference point for mountainous areas in the Veneto Region.

Keywords: Commons, common property, municipality, polycentric governance, forest management

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I. Introduction

1.1. Background

The definition of suitable governance models for mountainous areas in Italy is a challenge for policy makers (Pettenella 1994; Secco et al. 2011). Mountains cover 76.8% of the national land base and are very delicate systems, both from socio-economic and environmental standpoints. Hence, they need dedicated policies dealing with sustainable economic development, management and conservation of natural resources, urban planning and infrastructure, tourism and provision of social services. A particular concern was, and still is, identification of the appropriate institutional scale for governance in the broader context of the devolutionary trend that has progressively characterized the Italian political-administrative model since the 1970s (Saccone et al. 2013). Several solutions have been proposed over time, resulting in the co-existence of multiple decision-making centers with different competencies. A critical role at the local level is played by municipalities, which deal with most urban planning matters, land use changes authorization, building permits, as well as with provision of services to local communities.

Today, the existence of small municipalities in mountainous areas is jeopardized by a wave of reforms introduced under the logic of lowering public expenditures and directed at administrative simplification (Ongaro and Valotti 2008). Governmental actions aim at reducing the number of municipalities by

merging the smallest ones while simultaneously dismantling larger, supra-local administrative units. Though local trajectories may vary (Lippi 2000; Citroni and Di Giulio 2014), this radical change will affect the mechanisms that currently typify the administrative and institutional governance of mountain areas in Italy. Meanwhile, doubts have been raised about the capacity of such a simplified institutional scaffold to ensure subsidiarity in environmental and natural resource management, including forest and pasture land management, and to deal realistically with management issues at the local level (Gatto et al. 2012).

This top-down administrative reform is not the only course of institutional change in mountainous areas. Another parallel, more localized, bottom-up process is represented by the re-emergence, in some alpine areas, of local, traditional institutions based on common property regimes, called '*regola*' – plural: '*regole*' – in the local Venetian language. For over 600 years, *regole* were the sole local political institution and center of decision-making power in the majority of mountainous areas in Veneto, and catered for all the needs of local communities (Merlo et al. 1989). In the last two centuries, the *regole* experienced severe discontinuities as they lost legitimacy with the State and were replaced by municipalities in their role as local institution and owners/managers of resources. Today, a favorable political milieu is driving a shift in ownership regimes: full property rights to forests and pastures are being restituted from municipalities to *regole*, the latter being revitalized in their traditional role as managers of local resources.

In such an evolving institutional context, very little is known about how *regole* and municipalities are mutually interacting today as co-existing centers of local power on land and resources. Specifically, the perspective of municipalities appears to be rather neglected as compared with the growing attention received by *regole* both at local and broader geographical scales¹. To address this gap, we have focused on exploring the relationships between municipalities and *regole* by performing research on the perspective of the first. We have selected the Veneto region (Northeastern Italy) as our case study area. Our focus on municipalities rests on at least three points of reasoning. First, municipalities currently have full political and administrative authority with respect to local natural resources. Any change affecting them is bound to have a strong impact on local governance. Second, of the two counterparts in property right reform, municipalities are the losers in terms of transfer of rights and powers, hence their viewpoint is crucial in understanding the local impact of changes and adaptation efforts. Third, we feel that the underrepresentation of the municipalities' perspective may bias the current analysis of local governance in Veneto. The Veneto region is an interesting case for assessing dynamics of governance between municipalities and *regole*: here, the process of re-constitution of *regole* is particularly active (Cacciavillani and Gaz 2010). This process is coupled with rapid devolution and loss of power by local and provincial governments, increasing potential for institutional interplay

¹ See e.g. the research carried out at the Centro Studi e documentazione sui demani civici e le proprietà collettive at the University of Trento, which focuses on common properties.

and tensions between institutions at the local level. Hence, exploring how municipalities perceive these institutional changes in relation to *regole* – whether they promote collaboration, sharing and distribution of responsibilities and initiatives, negotiate gaps or overlaps in their respective areas of competence, and deal with conflicts and disputes – could improve understanding of reciprocal roles and outcomes of these institutional changes.

1.2. Land-based activities and institutional change in Veneto

The Veneto Region occupies a total land area of around 1.8 million hectares, of which 420,000 ha are forests and 162,000 ha are pastures (Regione del Veneto 2015), largely located in northern mountain areas of the region. Until the end of the 19th century, forestry and pastoral activities were economically very important in the Alps. However, over the last century, wars and post-war periods characterized by uneven rural development planning and ineffectual governmental policies for mountainous areas were important factors leading to emigration and abandonment of these activities in many mountain valleys. Today, the socio-economic situation in the Venetian alpine region is heterogeneous. The most attractive and accessible areas have developed substantial tourist industries, which bring employment and income but also drive infrastructure development, land use changes and pressure on natural resources. Conversely, the most remote valleys are characterized by poor infrastructure development, unemployment, depopulation and land abandonment, which lead to landscape degradation and soil stability problems. Local institutions, therefore, can play a crucial role in regulating use of resources, balancing needs for local economic development with those of conservation of natural resources and landscape values.

Changes in land ownership that have occurred in mountainous areas of the Veneto are of particular interest and strictly connected to the evolution of institutional arrangements. Since the 13th century, the *regole*, as self-governing, village-level institutions based on common property regimes (Bromley 1991), were not only been widespread in the region, but similar institutional arrangements were common throughout the Alps (Bravo and De Moor 2008)². All resources owned by the *regole*, including forests and pastures, were held in common and managed through a set of complex, written rules – indeed, the name given to these institutions, ‘*le regole*’ may be literally translated as, ‘the rules’. The *regole* also played an important role in many aspect of local community life. The advent of French domination at the beginning of the 19th century marked the beginning of institutional reform based on a centralized model, which forcibly deprived the *regole* of their political role and transferred ownership of forests and pastures to the municipalities across the majority of the Venetian Alps. Several *regole* were completely dissolved and ceased to function

² For further insights in the rich history and meaning of the *Regole* see, amongst others, Merlo et al. 1989; Pieraccini 2008.

while others, more strongly rooted in the local community, continued to exist informally (Gatto and Bogataj 2015). In 1927, surviving instances of collective land use and ownership throughout Italy came under attack by the Italian fascist government, which privatized common lands suitable for agriculture, while placing more marginal lands, including forests and pastures, under control of municipalities (Grossi 1977; Carletti 2005). These changes further affected surviving *regole* in the Veneto Region. With the fall of the fascist regime and the advent of the democratic republic after World War II, various legislative initiatives have progressively returned to commons their legal and social status and their rights. In 1994, the state (National Law 97/1994) transferred the power to define and reorganize the commons to the regional governments. The Veneto Region was first in line at a national level in legally recognizing the role of *regole* in protecting and sustainably managing mountain landscapes and giving way to a process of restitution of land ownership (Regional Law 26/1996). Despite the law having conferred the *regole* with private legal personhood, the law also assigned *regole* the formal capacity and responsibility to play an active role in local socio-economic development. To this extent, Gatto et al. (2012) have demonstrated commitment by *regole* to active management of forests and pastures, and to invest in improving or maintaining the quality of commonly-held assets. The Regional Law also stipulated the coordination between *regole* and local public institutions, including municipalities, suggesting that the latter should take steps to actively inform and involve the former in public initiatives and consultations concerning local territorial development.

This long history of institutional change, coupled with top-down reform of state administration, is responsible for a complex and unprecedented current state of affairs, characterized by co-existence of multiple centers of local power. In this situation, institutional space has been created for synergies but also conflicts between municipalities and *regole*. While municipalities continue in their role as the local public administration – albeit with reduced capacity and financial support – the *regole* have been newly entrusted with a semi-public role. In contrast to the public nature of municipalities, decision-making on the land controlled by the *regole* occurs within a community formed by the descendants of the founding families of the *regole*. As such, decisions taken by municipalities represent the political will of a larger – and often more heterogeneous – social group including, among others, the “new highlanders”, or new inhabitants of alpine areas (Löffler et al. 2014), whereas the *regole* represent a smaller community with historical familial ties. Potential overlaps in areas of competence have emerged between municipalities and *regole*. These may be problematic where there is a significant mismatch between the membership of the *regole* and the local population residing in the municipality, and when there is poor communication between these institutions. Values, perception of property rights and boundaries, understandings of reciprocal roles, expectations regarding land use, and views regarding territorial development trajectories by members of *regole* may not be echoed shared by municipal administrations.

Numerically speaking, the situation on the ground is as follows: in 2013, when this research was performed, there were 171 municipalities (Regione del Veneto 2015) and 53 regole, of which 18 were the result of reconstitution processes following the 1996 regional law in the mountain areas of Veneto. Other reconstitution processes are underway (Gatto et al. 2012), so the number of regole in Veneto is likely to increase somewhat over the next decades. These 53 regole lie within the administrative boundaries of 17 municipalities (Figure 1).

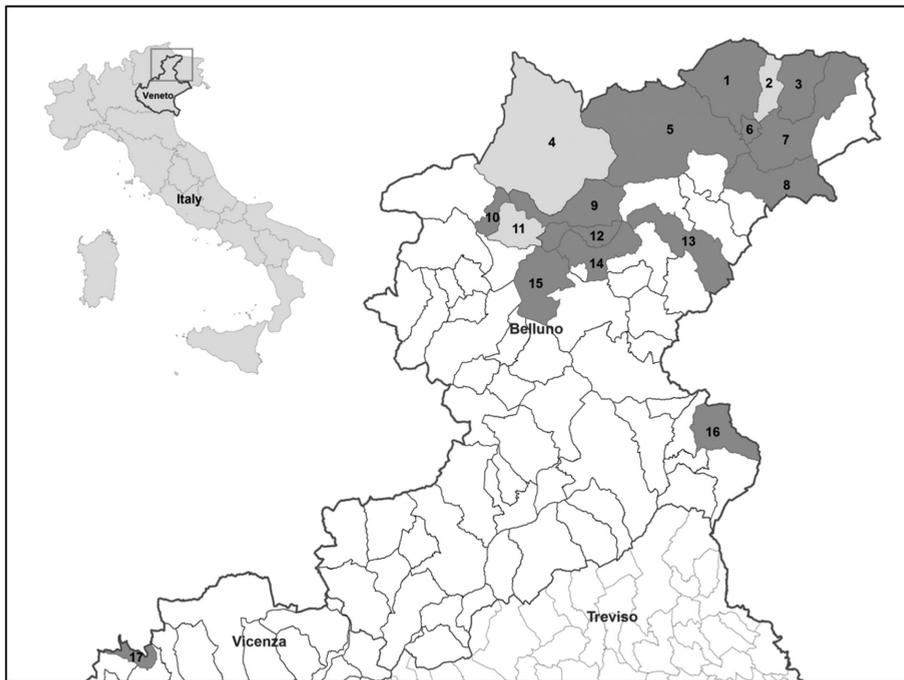


Figure 1: On the left corner: Italy, with marked regional borders. The Veneto Region is highlighted on the North-eastern part of the country. Main picture: focus on the Northern part of the Veneto Region (i.e. where regole exist), with marked municipal borders. Municipalities containing regole within their administrative boundaries are numbered with a progressive order (left to right, north to south) and grey colored. The administrations of light-grey colored municipalities were not interviewed; whereas dark-grey colored municipalities were. Municipality #1: Comelico Superiore (4 regole); municipality #2: San Nicolò di Comelico (2 regole); municipality #3 San Pietro di Cadore (4 regole); municipality #4: Cortina d'Ampezzo (11 regole); municipality #5: Auronzo di Cadore (2 regole); municipality #6: Danta di Cadore (2 regole); municipality #7: Santo Stefano di Cadore (4 regole); municipality #8: Vigo di Cadore (1 regola); municipality #9: San Vito di Cadore (3 regole); municipality #10: Colle Santa Lucia (3 regole); municipality #11: Selva di Cadore (3 regole); municipality #12: Borca di Cadore (1 regola); municipality #13: Pieve di Cadore (3 regole); municipality #14: Vodo di Cadore (2 regole); municipality #15: Zoldo Alto (2 regole); municipality #16: Chies d'Alpago (5 regole); municipality #17: Pedemonte (1 regola).

2. Conceptual framework: polycentric governance

The need to understand how management rights and responsibilities are coordinated between municipalities and regions calls for attention to theories and ideas of polycentric governance (Ostrom 2010; Nagendra and Ostrom 2012), as an appropriate conceptual approach to deal with situations of decentralized power and decision-making and to explore the interactions amongst different local-level institutions. Indeed, in complex social-ecological systems like the mountainous areas of Veneto Region, environmental management problems rarely manifest themselves at a single scale such that the division of management responsibility among different levels is perceived as desirable (Armitage 2008). This type of institutional arrangement, termed multi-level governance, is considered a key feature of adaptive resource governance and related concepts including network governance of the commons (Folke et al. 2005; Carlsson and Sandström 2007). Although desirable management practices may result from coordination of management powers across scales, outcomes are often unpredictable and analytical approaches to governance must incorporate themes of power relations and their mediation across scales (Armitage 2008).

Furthermore, increasing numbers and heterogeneity of actors holding different bundles of rights and powers, may exaggerate problems of excludability and subtractability characteristic of common pool resource management dilemmas (Mwangi and Wardell 2012). Growing attention to polycentric schemes in the commons literature may better capture these dynamics in situations featuring multiple levels of governance but also multiple centers of power (Andersson and Ostrom 2008). The commons literature points to the likelihood of positive outcomes in polycentric systems when users have decision-making power to modify rules, and when these local institutions are nested in hierarchical governance arrangements that can provide support for local needs and circumstances (Ostrom 1990). Ostrom makes special reference in her design principles for enduring common property-regimes to the necessity of organization in “multiple layers of nested enterprises” (Ostrom 2005, 269). Such nested systems can be considered polycentric when decision-making power is distributed among actors located at different levels. Institutional hierarchies, however, may not involve a clear multi-level structure nested in territorial jurisdictions (Poteete 2012). Poorly coordinated polycentric decision-making situations may feature contested authority, access regimes, and benefit sharing arrangements. In such situations, the polycentric governance literature might profitably support the assessment of local governance models like those of mountainous areas of Veneto, as it deals with interactions of overlapping networks of institutions rather than discreet territorial levels.

The division of territorial management responsibilities sets up a polycentric governance situation featuring cross-scale interaction and institutional interplay, described as the process by which potential synergies or conflicts come into being among different institutional layers (Young 2002; Marshall 2007). Gruby and Basurto (2014) argue that situations of institutional interplay may emerge as

actors gain or lose control over specific parts of decision-making processes, as linkages across organizational levels change, and with the relative autonomy of actors in polycentric governance arrangements. Coordination of decision-making and collaboration across polycentric systems requires actors to take decisions on how to coordinate governance tasks across levels. The governance principle of subsidiarity leaves some doubts as to how this might be done, especially in rapidly changing governance contexts, as multiple institutions with different aims at the local level are expected to resolve complex management dilemmas.

Our interest in the role of municipalities in the context of mountain natural resource management in the Veneto Region emerges out of several observations. There, indeed, governance re-structuring has not meant replacement of one governance level with others, but rather a process of governance negotiation, producing nested, polycentric governance scenarios. Recent complementary scholarship on common property regimes in the Veneto Region (Floriani 2004; Carestato 2008; Hampel 2012) insists that the co-existence of municipalities and regole rests on an unclear division of authority and power, and points to a need to improve coordination among these local-level institutions. Regole usually operate at a smaller geographical scale than municipalities, while their territories are not always wholly nested within municipalities. Thus it is not always appropriate to consider the relationship between municipalities and Regole in terms of multi-level, hierarchical or nested territorial jurisdictions. This further opens the scope for interplay of territorial actors which is worth exploring. Prior to the re-constitution of many regole, municipalities were responsible for several decades for managing forests and pastures, meaning that they have had to adapt to new governance dynamics once regole were re-constituted as landowners. If the decisions and actions of both municipalities and regole must be informed by a broad territorial vision that goes beyond sectorial or group interests to ensure sustainable territorial development, their effectiveness as institutions must also depend on the nature, extent and quality of cooperative efforts between them.

3. Methodology

3.1. Key-aspects investigated

Understanding the nature of the governance relationships between municipalities and regole implies exploring a number of areas on which positions and opinions are formed by actors on specific local governance issues. Given the scant number of specific local analyses, it was not easy to define the final set of areas to be investigated. For this reason, our methodological approach is blended. We began by basing our analysis on the polycentric governance literature, especially useful in drawing attention to level and extent of cooperation, trustworthiness, mutual learning and effort put into adaptation (Ostrom 2010). Tensions, conflicts and conflict-resolution mechanisms were also deemed important areas for exploration, given the unclear institutional context which held potential for contested

administrative claims over a specific task or role by both municipalities and regole. We then fine-tuned our set of key areas by complementing those found in the literature with a more grounded approach, based on informal exchanges with representatives of the public administration.

As a result, seven key areas were identified as reported below (more detail is given in Table 1):

1. the coordination mechanisms and patterns through which municipalities and regole interact, such as (i) who and how many persons in each municipality has the institutional task of interacting with regole; (ii) whether members of regole are also members of the town council; (iii) the formal or informal nature of the relationships and (iv) how interactions are mainly shaped, i.e. general patterns of communication and coordination between regole and municipalities;
2. the modes in which consultation processes occur, who usually initiates them, what are the most important reasons for starting consultation processes, how municipalities perceive the consultations they are legally obliged to hold with regole, especially on some particular territorial management decisions such as territorial development plans;
3. the fields of action, projects, activities and situations in which municipalities interact with regole, also beyond legal requirements. Four policy fields were considered, driven by the contents of the Regional Law: (i) environmental management and conservation, (ii) local economic development, (iii) town and territorial management and development and (iv) promotion of the local culture, customs and practices. Selection of these areas of interest was driven by wording in the Law encouraging municipalities to consult and involve regole in any initiative in these fields;
4. the financial impacts on municipalities' budgets linked to land restituted to regole, especially in the more marginalized valleys where traditional agro-forestry activities are still an important source of income;
5. the occurrence, frequency and severity, both in the past and at present, of legal disputes and institutional tensions. These usually arise when both municipalities and regole mutually claim administrative jurisdiction over a specific task or role;
6. the occurrence, frequency and severity of social conflicts linked to the exclusion of non-members of regole from resource use and benefits;
7. the assessment by municipalities of the effectiveness of local regole in fulfilling their role as catalysts of local development as stated by the law. The following relevant fields of actions were considered: (i) environmental conservation, (ii) social development, (iii) local economic development and (iv) tourism – the latter has been considered separately, given its major role in shaping economic development in the area.

Table 1. Explored key-aspects, sub-key-aspects and format of questions investigated during the interviews administered to municipalities' officers.

Key aspects	Sub-key aspects	Rationale	Format of questions
1. Coordination mechanisms and patterns	Institution usually/mostly taking the initiative in establishing/looking for municipality-regola relationship/coordination.	Explorative approach, aimed to evaluate municipality proactivity in establishing and keeping contacts with local regole, and <i>vice versa</i> .	Mc, (OEq)
	Roles and positions of interlocutors responsible for main formal and informal municipality-regola communications.	It's expected that collegial coordination and more articulated participatory processes lead to stronger institutional coordination. Hypothetically, the higher the role of the person responsible for the interlocution, the stronger the institutional relationship.	Mc
	Municipality-regola coordination patterns; prevalence of formal/informal contacts, existence of written memoranda: typologies and scopes (if any), etc.	It's expected that high levels of formalities correspond to lower degrees of real coordination and positive municipality-regola relationships.	Mc
	Double-representation of local leaders in municipality and regola administrative boards. If any, roles respectively covered both in regola and regola boards.	Overlapping representative roles in regole and municipalities boards may facilitate the informal communications. On the other side, they may generate various conflicts of interest.	If any: OEq Mc
2. Mutual administrative constraints	Institutional communication/coordination patterns among regole and municipality, where more than one regola stand in the same municipality.	Acknowledgement of the existence of multiple and/or nested layers/levels of municipality-regola coordination and joint interaction of different regole with municipalities.	OEq
	Dependence of municipal actions/activities/policies on regola actions/activities/policies, and <i>vice versa</i> .	Evaluation of municipality degrees of policy and administrative constraint/freedom, being affected by regole in various ways (e.g. territorial development policies to be applied on common lands; compulsory municipality-regola coordination mechanisms on local development predicted by law).	Mc, (OEq)

Table 1 (continued)

Key aspects	Sub-key aspects	Rationale	Format of questions
	Dependence of municipal policy processes on internal regola governance mechanisms.	Municipalities may need approval by regole for policies on territorial development to be applied on common lands (e.g. building of new facilities for winter tourism). Discussions will be likely processed by regole according their own governance mechanisms. It is to be acknowledged whether, how and to what extent, specific regola governance mechanisms impact on municipality decisions.	OEq
	Evaluation of actual and potential municipality-regola coordination, in terms of opportunities and threats.	Some strategic negative responses were expected with reference to the actual situation. Observations on potential situation were expected to mitigate former strategic answers, though some degrees of idealization of the relationship may be revealed as well.	Mc, Ls Opportunities and threats: OEq
3. Circumstances of active municipality-Regola interaction	Projects, activities, actions that municipalities proactively involved regole for, and <i>vice versa</i> , concerning (i) urban development and territorial strategies; (ii) economic development; (iii) forest and environmental management; (iv) social development.	Selection of relevant areas of interest has been driven by responsibilities that the regional law call upon municipalities and regole with, also in terms of mutual coordination – but the range of possible activities spans beyond the strict legal responsibilities.	Yes/No If any: OEq, Mc If no: Mc, (OEq)
	Fields of municipality-regola coordination, others than those previously identified; investigation on whether municipalities manage assets of the regole through particular agreements and/or mandates, and <i>vice versa</i> .	Municipality-regola interactions, partnerships, coordination may occur on areas and fields of interest other than those explicitly recalled by the regional law.	OEq

Table 1 (continued)

Key aspects	Sub-key aspects	Rationale	Format of questions
4. Financial effects on municipality balance sheets due to reconstitution of regole.	<p>Causes, magnitude, and patterns (positive or negative, direct or indirect consequences, continuous or <i>una tantum</i> effects) of impacts on municipality financial sheets, if any, following local reconstitutions of regole.</p> <p>How municipalities reacted – resilient mechanisms, or suffering permanent consequences – to financial impacts (if any) following reconstitution of local regola, and whether such adaptive actions had any impacts on the whole municipal community.</p>	<p>Relevant changes in tenure arrangements and land ownership come with reconstitution of regole, with valuable shifts in collection of forestry-related revenues. This may have affected municipality balance sheets, resulting in operative limitations for municipalities.</p> <p>Hypothesis: municipality financial impacts, and subsequent adaptations, might have indirectly impacted on local communities, either positively (e.g. rationalization of public expenditures) or negatively (e.g. higher tax pressure, lower social aids, etc.).</p>	<p>Mc</p> <p>OEq</p>
5. Occurrence of municipality-Regola legal disputes and/ or institutional tensions/ contrasts	<p>Assessment of former municipality reinvestment rates of timber-selling revenues in municipal forest assets, prior to reconstitution of regole.</p> <p>Occurrence of regola-municipality legal disputes, mainly but not solely related to the definition of property rights over some particular assets, either in the past or still in place. Triggering reasons and foreseeable evolutions/solutions have been investigated as well.</p> <p>Occurrence of regola-municipality institutional tensions, mainly but not solely linked with the allocation of administrative (and policy-making) competences over some particular assets, either in the past or still in place. Triggering reasons, magnitude of such contrasts and foreseeable evolutions/solutions have been investigated as well.</p>	<p>It is expected that municipalities mostly limited reinvestment rates to the minimum threshold defined by law, i.e. 10% of timber-selling revenues.</p> <p>Legal disputes may compromise the effectiveness of both municipalities and regole in managing forest landscapes and socio-economic local resources, as administrative and economic energies are dissipated in such conflicts.</p> <p>Even though less tough than legal disputes, administrative conflicts and institutional tensions may obstruct a fruitful cooperation between municipalities and regole, even beyond the terms of the specific issues under discussion.</p>	<p>Mc</p> <p>Yes/No</p> <p>If any: Mc, OEq</p> <p>Mc, Ls, OEq</p>

Table 1 (continued)

Key aspects	Sub-key aspects	Rationale	Format of questions
6. Occurrence of social conflicts, either directly or indirectly triggered by regole, within the municipal communities.	<p>Occurrence, reasons; magnitude of any social issues linked with regole, either in the past or still in place – in this case, foreseeable evolution.</p> <p>Evaluation of whether benefits from common membership and/or exploitation of regola lands are shared among right-holders only, or they are somehow shared/extended with/to non-rights-holders as well.</p> <p>Exploration of whether and how municipalities have ever been involved in the regola <i>internal life</i> and regola governance mechanisms.</p> <p>Positive and negative opinions/remarks by municipality representatives on regola activities and regola integration within the local social environment(s), as perceived by non-right-holders.</p>	<p>Social tensions may be triggered by claims over resources and rights by non-right-holders, discrimination of non-right-holders by commoners and/or no acceptance of new right-holders, etc.</p> <p>Nestedness of local communities (overlapping between regola and municipality community) is of particular interest here.</p> <p>The exclusion of non-right-holders from some benefits was expected to be one of the most contentious issues possibly triggering social conflicts (i.e. impair welfare conditions within the same municipality, due to understood privileges tied to ancient rights passed on only through inheritance). It also acts as a good indicator of regole's openness toward the external pressures for social change.</p> <p>Some regole may look for municipality involvement/suggestions on their internal life, <i>lato sensu</i>. For example, regole might want to coordinate their social aims and activities with municipalities so as to balance social conditions of right-holders and non-right-holders living in the same municipality.</p> <p>Question directly connected to the previous ones.</p>	<p>Mc, Ls, OEq</p> <p>Mc</p> <p>If any: OEq</p> <p>Mc</p> <p>If any: OEq</p> <p>Ls, OEq</p>

3.2. Data collection: sampling and procedures

Between Spring and Summer 2013, we administered a questionnaire to all 17 municipalities having one or more regole within their administrative jurisdiction (Figure 1). Three municipalities did not give permission for us to carry out the survey, leaving us with data on 14 municipalities (82.4% response rate). The investigated municipalities comprised 37 regole out of the 53 regole existing in the Veneto Region (69.8% coverage of regole). In our sample, the mean number of regole inside each municipality is 2.5, ranging from 1 regola in three cases (21.4%) to 5 regole in one case (7.1%) with the majority of municipalities having 2 regole within their administrative borders.

A structured questionnaire with both closed- and open-ended response types was used. Close-ended questions required either Yes/No, single or multiple choice answers, or value judgments on a Likert scale. Probing questions were occasionally used where outcomes of open-ended responses needed further exploration.

In order to solicit participation, each municipality's secretariat was reached by phone and email. During this phase, the research objectives and methodology were presented and availability for a face-to-face interview was ascertained. Informants were chosen based on a purposive sampling strategy, aimed at selecting the municipality's officers most responsible for – or well informed about – the range of formal and informal relationships between municipalities and regole. The final set of informants included individuals with different roles in the municipalities: ten mayors, two council members, a municipal secretary and an office manager. All interviews were carried out by the same researcher with the assistance of a student research assistant. Interviews lasted 1–1.5 h, during which informants were encouraged to highlight causes and motivations and to provide explanations of their statements. As such, narrative responses were sought to supplement closed-ended interview questions.

Interview audio was not recorded, as it was felt that this might have hindered respondents from answering freely. In order to limit the likelihood of strategic responses, interviewees were given assurances that all information collected would be processed in an aggregated form to mask identity.

The data collected were input into a database and simple percentage distributions were calculated for single and multiple choice responses. Judgments expressed on a numerical Likert-scale, e.g. those concerning severity of tensions and conflicts with regole, were later translated into qualitative terms, making use of terms such as “negligible”, “weak”, “reasonable” and “severe”.

4. Results and discussion

Questionnaire data on the relationship between municipalities and regole are interpreted in Table 2 and key results are discussed in detail below.

Table 2. Results summary.

Key-aspects	Main results from interview data
1. Coordination mechanisms and patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Almost all regole were represented in the local town council: often councilors, aldermen, and even mayors were also right-holders in regole. – Full overlap in institutional responsibilities, with representation of a single person on both town council and an administrative board of a regola is rare, partly due to statutory limitations. – In most cases, the mayor held the main institutional ties with local regole. Similarly, usually presidents of regole played an analogous role. – Multiple institutional ties between individuals of both institutions were rare: commonly, institutional coordination did not originate out of a collective effort. – Usually, informal arrangements between institutions paved the way for formal decisions. Highly formalized relationships between municipalities and regole were rare. – Total lack of municipality-regola coordination was rare. Either coordination patterns B, C, and B+C (see Figure 2) were common. – More stable institutional coordination mechanisms were seen as worth implementing.
2. Mutual administrative constraints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Municipality-regola consultation initiated either by municipalities or regole. – Qualitative differences in municipality-regola interaction: regole mainly asking for cooperation to solve administrative and bureaucratic issues, whereas municipalities mainly looking to involve regole in proposals and projects to be applied on common lands. – Usually, municipality representatives did not perceive their administrative roles to be seriously constrained on land restitution to regole. Main constraints related to the implementation of territorial strategies on the property of the regole. – Positive and negative evaluations were balanced on actual and potential coordination, in terms of opportunities and threats. Nonetheless, the current situation was generally judged less positively than potential scenarios of coordination. – Regole able to strongly influence local politics, policy processes and decisions. – Municipalities never involved in internal dynamics and governance mechanisms of regole.
3. Circumstances of active municipality-regola interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – High levels of municipality-regola coordination on matters concerning environmental management and conservation. Particularly, in relation to maintenance and building of local forest road networks (joint application to Rural Development Plan (RDP) funding possibilities), and local hydroelectric power plants, less for urban development and social events. – Often, multi-year and long-term strategic plans considered municipality-regola cooperation on local economic development matters.

Table 2. (Continued)

Key-aspects	Main results from interview data
4. Financial effects on municipality balance sheets due to reconstitution of regole	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – In compliance with regional policy prescription, municipalities often involved regole in projects or plans concerning urban and territorial development. Many other minor and/or local circumstances for municipality-regola cooperation have been found on the ground. – Promotion of local culture and traditions seemed to be the weakest field of municipality-regola interaction, as often regole carried out many activities (e.g. cultural, gastronomic and religious initiatives) autonomously. – Municipalities did not manage common assets through ad hoc mandate, and vice versa. – Impacts on municipality financial balance sheets due to reconstitution of regole ranged from 50,000 to 200,000 €/year/municipality. – Fewer negative effects on municipal balance sheets than expected: rarely severe shortages of municipal capital resources. – Often, no relevant consequences for the community as a whole in terms of number/quality of services provided by municipality administrations.
5. Occurrence of municipality-regola legal disputes and/or institutional tensions/contrasts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Size and quality of some forest assets returned to regole have sparked legal disputes with municipalities on tenure rights, often triggered by cadastral inaccuracies. – Recently, some pending legal issues were resolved with corresponding improvement of relationships. – Other institutional tensions exist, mainly concerning the allocation of institutional competencies, e.g. duty/right to issue access permits for forest roads. – Regole not always inclined to recognize the administrative role played by municipalities in their area.
6. Occurrence of social conflicts, either directly or indirectly triggered by regole, within the municipal communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Social conflicts linked with nestedness of regole within municipalities are more frequent and severe compared to institutional ones, possibly undermining the social cohesion within the local community. – Several reasons were provided for occurrence of social conflicts, including: (i) difficulty in being accepted as members of regole for those who are not descendants of local right-holders; (ii) the hostile attitude of some members of regole towards outsiders; (iii) male-dominated gender balance within regole; (iv) exclusion of non-members from enjoyment of some resource benefits. – It seems non-right-holders perceive regole as rather poorly, or not at all integrated, into the local, social environment.
7. Municipality assessment of local Regole's effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – From most positive to most negative evaluations, as follows – Forest management and environmental conservation. Pro: Forest management as one of regole's core areas, higher reinvestment rates in forest management compared to former municipal levels. Cons: traditional mentality precluding development of alternative forest-based enterprises and activities.

Key-aspects	Main results from interview data
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="489 286 1097 452">– Economic development. Pro: increase in timber prices and revenues, establishment of new local forest enterprises, application to RDP funding to maintain and further develop the forest road networks. Cons: “ordinary management”, rather than introducing innovative management options, reluctance to innovate by some regole. <li data-bbox="489 452 1097 637">– Tourism development. Pro: some regole directly involved in managing local ski facilities, renewed attention by regole toward pasture management, refurbishment of traditional alpine huts in modern agro-tourist buildings. Cons: some right-holders not in favor of supplying “new” complementary goods and services (incl. recreational services), hostile attitude toward non-rights holders. <li data-bbox="489 637 1097 831">– Social development. Pro: joint municipality-regola welfare opportunities. Cons: difficulties for non-right holders in being accepted as new members of regole, hostile attitude towards outsiders, male-dominated gender balance, exclusion of non-members from the possibility of enjoying some resource benefits, regole should commit themselves to more actively support municipalities in their welfare strategies.

4.1. Coordination mechanisms and patterns

Exploration of coordination mechanisms and patterns provided results pertaining to the strength, stability and nestedness of institutional interaction between municipalities and regole. Several aspects were considered in this regard, as reported in Table 1. To start with, we assessed how many persons on the municipalities side had the formal role of communicating/coordinating actions with regole, and what were their institutional position(s). We found that, in 42.9% of municipalities (six cases), the interface role was carried out by only one person: in five of these cases this person was the town mayor, the deputy mayor in the sixth case. In 29.5% of cases more persons were involved, as the deputy mayor or a council member reinforce the mayor’s role. Only in the remaining 21.4% of cases the institutional coordination is a real group effort, involving the entire town council. In our understanding, interactions dependent upon the action of one or a few persons – who could change with the ordinary turnover in local administrations – should be read as an indication of weaker and less mature relationships. On the other hand, empowerment to the highest positions in municipalities, such as the mayor or the deputy mayor, signals the importance attributed by municipalities to coordinating with regole.

A second aspect explored focused on the possible overlapping of roles between municipalities and regole: we assessed to what extent a person with an institutional role in municipalities would also belong to the regole. In all surveyed cases, at least one person with an institutional position in the municipality was also found to be a member of a local regola. In 64.2%, 22.4% and 14.2% of

cases, respectively, this person was the town mayor, an alderman³, or a town councilman. From the perspective of the outcomes on the ground, this overlap in roles appeared to represent a strength, as it facilitated mutual exchange of information and smoothed complex decision-making processes. However, it may carry a risk of conflicting interests, especially when a formal role is held in both institutions by a single person. In our case this was not frequent (only two cases were found where the president or a member of the board of directors of a *regola* also held a political role in the municipality): this can be explained with the fact that the *regole*, in general, are well aware of this risk, and some explicitly forbid dual roles through specific constitutional provisions.

Municipality representatives were also asked to indicate whether sharing of ideas, projects and strategies between them and *regole* occurred in a formal or informal fashion. Only in two cases (14.3%), relationships were characterized by high levels of formality, in which parties called for official written documents to provide evidence of meetings, proposals and mutual requests. According to the interviewees, such cases were linked to significant levels of tension between the two parties, and indicated lack of mutual trust. In two other cases (14.3%) only informal relationships prevail, as municipality's representatives stated they felt no need for formality. In one case, informality proved to underlie a lack of institutional interlinkages. In all other cases, interviewees claimed that preliminary informal arrangements usually prepared the way for formal decisions, following a balanced and constructive approach to develop good and stable relationships.

Finally, we focused on understanding the more general patterns of communication and coordination between municipalities and *regole*. We used four different schema to synthesize the situation of our case studies (A, B, C and B+C in Figure 2). In three cases (21.4%), municipality representatives perceived intermittent and weak institutional linkages, describing a substantial lack of coordination with *regole*, although in this case, collaboration may occur amongst *regole* located within a municipality (Pattern A). In five cases (35.7%), municipality representatives declare the existence of well-established institutional linkages, but occurring only individually between the municipality and each *regola* (Pattern B). In one case, local *regole* first coordinated their actions amongst themselves, then interacted with the municipality in order to be more effective (Pattern C). Finally, in five other cases (35.7%), *regole* coordinated amongst themselves before talking to municipalities but also kept bilateral and multilateral interactions depending on the scale of the issues under discussion (Pattern B+C). Nesting strategies represented by C or B+C schema show more durable and involved institutional coordination. These later strategies were also advocated by municipality's representatives,

³ In Italy, municipal aldermen are members of the Executive Board that oversees the main administrative and policy matters. Under certain conditions, the Town Council accepts, integrates or rejects policies undertaken by the Executive Board. Whereas the aldermen are directly nominated by the Mayor, councilmen – that constitute the town Council – need to be democratically elected. Thus, a single person might simultaneously cover the role of councilman (elected) and alderman (nominated).

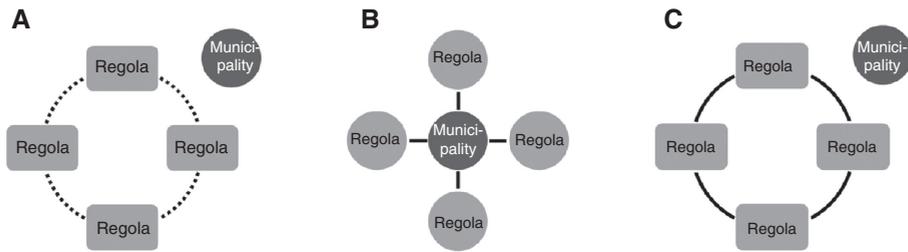


Figure 2: The coordination patterns possibly occurring between municipalities and regole within municipal boundaries. Pattern A: rare or weak institutional linkages between municipality and regole, regardless of the degree of cooperation among different regole; Pattern B: well-established institutional linkages between municipality and each single local regole; Pattern C: regole fully coordinating their representation in their relationship with the municipality. Case B+C exists as well in cases in which regole cooperate together with the municipality in addition to cooperating individually with the municipality.

especially for local territorial development where sharing of ideas, solutions and experiences both between municipalities and regole, and among regole was perceived as crucial.

4.2. Modes of consultation processes and related difficulties

Consultations between municipalities and regole can occur for different reasons and can be initiated either by municipalities or regole. According to the Regional Law, municipalities must consult regole when relevant territorial management decisions are at stake, such as approval of town planning acts. In other fields of planning and management, the Law only recommends holding consultations (see also next section on this). Consultations can be initiated either by municipalities or by regole. In six of our cases (42.9%) interactions were initiated by municipalities, while the opposite took place only in one case (7.1%). In the remaining 50.0% of cases, a balanced or irregular situation was reported in which both institutions were found to have initiated consultation with the other.

Municipalities turned to regole for obtaining their agreement on proposals and projects of local development requiring the use of regole-owned land, especially when transfer of ownership of the land back to the regole was recent. Regole, on the other hand, asked for cooperation mainly for administrative and bureaucratic issues, for example when they needed to be granted authorization for restoring alpine huts and converting them in agro-tourism facilities.

When asked to report on their perception of the difficulties connected with the consultation process, the majority of respondents declared negligible administrative burdens and weak constraints linked to the compliance with the legal requirement (Figure 3). Instead, municipalities stated that they encounter strong difficulties in interacting with regole beyond the legal requirements, especially

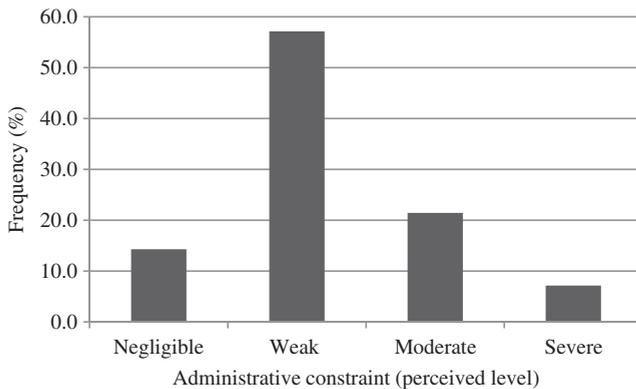


Figure 3: The regional law prescribes compulsory mechanisms of mutual administrative and policy interfacing between municipalities and regole, especially with regards to some particular policies concerning relevant territorial management decisions. It is shown to what extent municipalities rate these obliged relationships as constraining in administrative and policy terms.

when wider territorial development strategies and related actions needed to be decided upon (including various initiatives in rural tourism as reported in more detail below). These almost inevitably refer to land only recently returned under the full control of regole's members, a smaller community in respect to the municipality as a whole, often with different objectives and independent internal governance mechanisms.

4.3. Fields of institutional interaction

The Regional Law recommends that municipalities and regole interact in a wide range of initiatives, projects and activities in different fields, including environmental management and conservation, local economic development, urban and territorial management and development, and promotion of local culture and traditions. Through this section of the survey we focused on understanding whether collaboration works more effectively in some fields of activity than in others.

- (i) **Environmental management and conservation.** High levels of cooperation were found between municipalities and regole when dealing with forest management and environmental conservation. In this field, initiative was often taken by regole promoting joint projects, frequently co-funded by municipalities. Only in two cases (14.3%), regole acted fully independently from municipalities. Construction of new forest roads and maintenance of existing ones were the most frequent subject of discussion (eight cases, 57.1%), followed by initiatives of joint application to RDP funding (five cases, 35.7%), maintenance of existing buildings

(e.g. pasture huts), mowing of pasture land and controlling tree expansion on pasture land (five cases, 35.7%). In three cases (21.4%), forest owned by the municipalities and by regole were managed together under a common forest management plan, and in two of these cases, the two parties even stipulated agreements for jointly employing forest guards. All these actions are considered to be important in mountain areas for supporting forest activities, unifying landscape management under common objectives, countering land and forest abandonment, and ultimately ensuring sustainable environmental management.

- (ii) **Local development.** In this field, we counted four cases of interaction (28.6%) linked to projects for ski area development. Municipalities and regole were found to have disagreed on the final decision only in one case. Two other cases (14.3%) were connected to management of existing ski facilities. In eight cases (57.1%) discussions focused on whether to establish small hydroelectric power plants, an issue that is highly contentious in mountain areas of the Veneto Region at the moment. In four of these cases (28.6%) municipalities and Regole agreed on implementing the hydro project, while in a fifth case (7.1%) the preliminary project has been approved. In three other cases (21.4%), regole and municipalities successfully cooperated to impede the construction of an unwanted plant, collectively perceived as detrimental to the local environment. The possibility of building energy plants using local biomass was often discussed but never thus far implemented. In two cases (14.3%), municipalities promoted initiatives for a stable partnership among municipalities, regole, other local associations and private businesses. One initiative aimed at common management of local forests and joint forest certification, the other at improving local services and facilities for tourists. Only one respondent reported a total absence of cooperation with regole on local development matters.
- (iii) **Urban and territorial management and development.** Strategies and activities aimed at local economic development at a municipal scale are carried out by municipal administrations through “Ten-year Plans for Future Urban and Territorial Development”. Following guidance of the regional law, administrations activate participatory processes to consult regole prior to plan approval. In addition to this fundamental role, in five cases (35.7%), regole also co-fund maintenance and improvement of urban decor, including major activities like restoration of public spaces or re-paving the town square, along with minor ones such as providing the town’s Christmas trees. Lack of cooperation in the field of urban planning was reported in only one case (7.1%).
- (iv) **Promotion of local culture and customs.** This proved to be the weakest area of interaction but it was probably also less critical in terms territorial development. In three cases (21.4%) no relationships were found to have been built in this area within the last 5 years, whereas in seven

cases (50%) regole and municipalities cooperated only for minor events. In about 30% of the cases, cooperation was more active under diverse circumstances, ranging from the joint management of visitor centers to the promotion of the local dialect and the co-funding of school building maintenance. Nevertheless, according respondents in municipal administrations, regole often operate autonomously, promoting cultural, gastronomic and religious initiatives, particularly carnival and cultural events and initiatives for disseminating local traditions and knowledge of regole.

The results show that, despite some problems and difficulties, municipalities and regole collaborate on a wide range of initiatives, some of which are strategic for the rural environment and landscape, like forest management, environmental conservation, and investments in renewable energy.

4.4. Financial impacts of land restitution

Restitution of land to regole implies that revenues from the sale of timber, lease of pastures and alpine huts, and concessions for quarry sites and ski areas are now earned by regole and no longer flow to municipalities. According to our survey, these revenues are significant, averaging around 200,000 €/year per case, with extremes ranging from about 50,000 to 700,000 €/year depending on the size and quality of resources. Although we were expecting negative impacts on the services provided by municipalities because of this loss, interviewees provided a different perspective. In four cases (28.6%), representatives of administrations claim that no relevant changes have occurred in the services provided to citizens, explaining that the municipal budgets were robust enough to cope with lower revenues, and the necessary financial resources have simply been drawn from other non-essential balance items. In three cases (21.4%) they argued that lower incomes were paralleled by lower annual expenditures, again without serious consequences. In four other cases (28.6%), the municipalities had never received any financial benefits from forest ownership, thus no economic shortcomings were felt following the reconstitution process. Only two interviewees (14.3%) stated that municipalities had suffered a severe shortage of financial resources, and this had led to a lower level of services, higher tax pressure on citizens and even to the need to lay off a municipal worker.

4.5. Occurrence, frequency and severity of legal disputes and institutional tensions

Although major disputes were generally averted, in some cases the size and quality of the forest assets led to legal disputes on distribution of rights, often triggered by inaccurate cadastral records. The frequency of such disputes is reported in Figure 4. In seven cases (50%), no legal disputes had arisen, whereas in three cases (21.4%) they occurred but had been resolved. In the four remaining cases (28.6%), disputes had not yet been resolved.

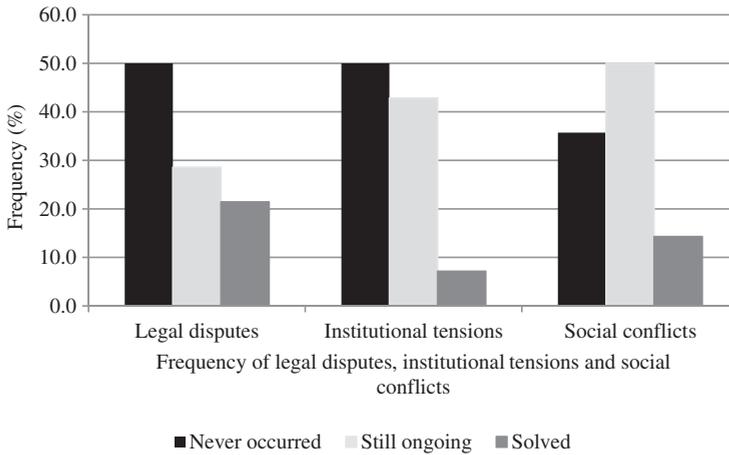


Figure 4: Occurrence (%) of either past and current legal disputes between municipalities and regole (often due to controversies regarding ownership rights over valuable natural assets), as well as of other less serious institutional tensions (mainly concerning the distribution of institutional areas of competence). Occurrence of social tensions due to the existence of regole and their relationships with broader communities of local inhabitants are also shown.

In addition to legal disputes, minor tensions may arise between municipalities and regole, due mostly to disagreements on how responsibilities should be distributed, or divergence on their reciprocal roles. Figure 4 shows that tensions have been detected in six cases (42.9%), the majority of which were considered moderately serious (Figure 5). Municipal representatives argued that tensions arise because of a “dominant attitude” displayed by some regole that are not willing to recognize the role of municipalities as a local authority. A typical example of these tensions relates to motor vehicle access to forest roads, which is possible with a permit issued only by the local authority – i.e. a municipal authority. Since forest roads often cross regola-owned lands, regole claim the right to decide autonomously who should or should not be granted an access permit in such cases. Institutional tensions were significantly more frequent than legal disputes, however, and there was no need for courts to resolve litigation in these cases. Generally, a small amount of help from legal professionals was enough to reach friendly agreements.

Our data show that, although conflicts and disagreements did arise, most of the time they were not severe and ultimately a solution was found. Noticeably, municipal representatives highlighted that, in most situations, both parties took a constructive approach to such conflicts, displaying willingness to reach friendly agreements. Municipalities pointed out that the resolution of legal issues often turns out to be a chance for final clarifications and definitive resolution of ongoing conflicts. Thus, there was a feeling that future relationships had been improved through engagement on such issues. This was an interesting outcome, especially

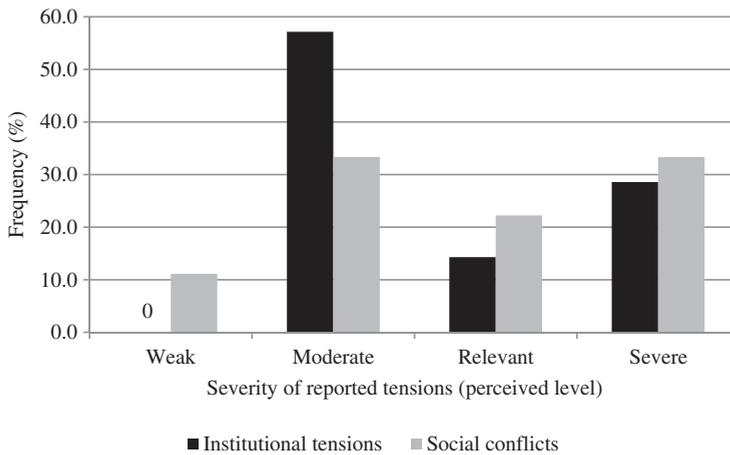


Figure 5: Severity of the institutional and social tensions reported in Figure 4, as perceived by local municipality representatives.

when compared with examples from other parts of the Veneto Region (Bortoli 2005), where chronic disputes, mostly regarding contested property boundaries, have exhausted energies and financial resources on both sides and have ultimately compromised the effectiveness of local institutions in managing natural resources and fostering local socio-economic development.

In light of their responses, respondents indicated whether and to what extent they considered the need for their administrations to interface with regole. The grey bars in Figure 6 represent their assessment of the present situation, whereas black bars refer to the ideal. In the latter case, a tendency of respondents to polarize responses to worst or best-case scenarios was noted. Positive evaluations counterbalanced negative ones, but the present situation was generally evaluated less positively than the ideal.

4.6. Occurrence, frequency and severity of social conflicts

With respect to institutional disputes, according to interviewees, social conflicts were more frequent and serious (Figures 4 and 5). Disputes occurred mostly because of a perceived discrimination by regole between their members and the broader community comprising the municipality. Several specific reasons for social conflicts were reported, including: (i) the extreme difficulty, near impossibility in some cases, of being accepted into the member of a regola for those who are not descendants of households with historical roots in the village; (ii) the sometimes hostile attitude of some regola members towards outsiders; (iii) the male dominated gender balance within regole – in some cases, women are not considered members with full rights because of persistent constitutional rules;

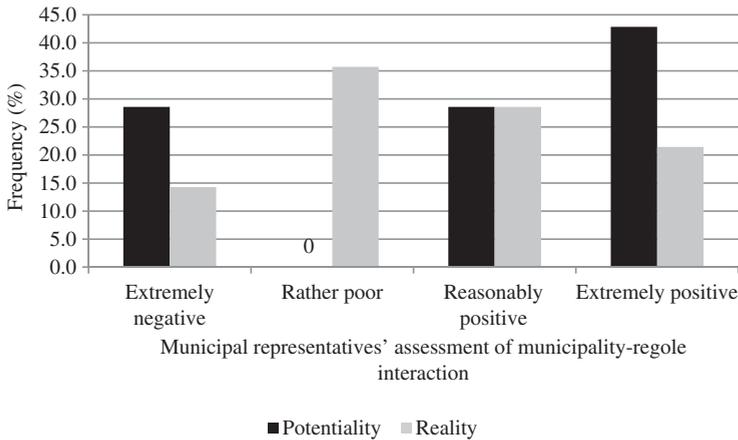


Figure 6: In the light of considerations and results shown in Figure 4, respondents indicated to what extent they considered positive or negative their necessity to interface with regole. Grey bars represent their evaluations of the present scenario, whereas black bars display assessments referring to an ideal point.

(iv) the exclusion of non-members from the possibility of enjoying typical benefits distributed by regole to their members, e.g. firewood, grants for newly married couples, scholarships for students, subsidies for construction or renovation of houses; (v) differences in opinion on institutional relationships between regole and municipalities. It was suggested that non-members of regole often have a poor opinion of regole as institutions, considering them scarcely or not at all integrated into the local social environment (Figure 7). Even if explicit protests rarely emerged, respondents claimed that these perceptions could in some cases undermine social cohesion within the community. In other situations, however, they could help drive change and adaptation.

4.7. Effectiveness of regole in promoting local development

Municipal representatives were asked to assess the effectiveness of local regole in pursuing the role assigned to them by the Regional Law, i.e. promoting sustainable management of resources, environmental, conservation and, in general, the socio-economic development of mountainous areas. Results are depicted in Figure 8.

- (i) **Forest management and environmental conservation.** Interviewees often observed that forest management has improved since regole have taken up management responsibilities. They highlighted that reinvestments of forest revenues in commonly held lands have increased since regole have taken over forest management. Indeed, municipalities were

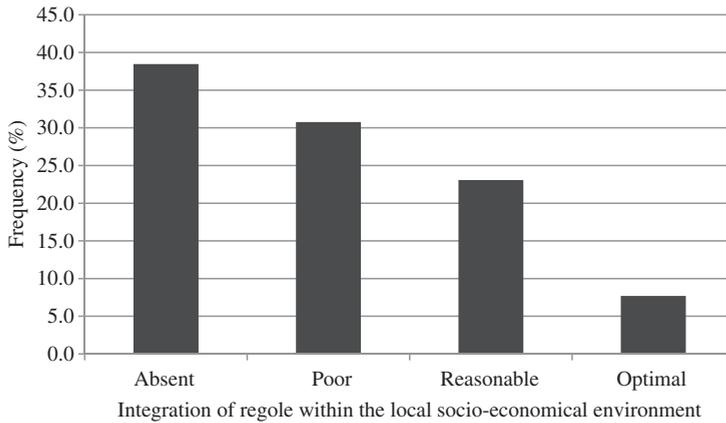


Figure 7: Interaction between the membership of regole and broader local community, including non-rights holders, may generate various social tensions of different nature and/or intensity. The figure shows respondents' evaluations of the integration of the local regole within the broader municipal social environment.

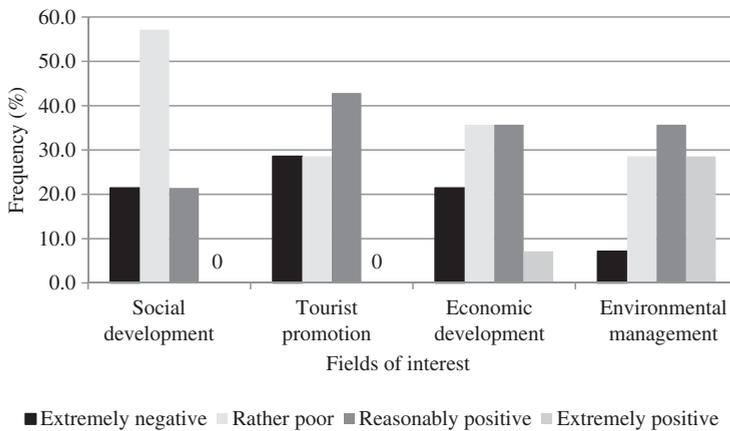


Figure 8: The figure shows the results of municipal representatives' assessments of the effectiveness of local regole in pursuing the objectives laid out by the Regional Law – i.e. environmental conservation and management and socio-economic development of mountain areas. Results are shown in ascending order, from the worst to the best overall evaluation.

obliged by the law to reinvest at least 10% of forest revenues, but this threshold was seldom exceeded. The statutes of the regole, on the other hand, identify forest management as a core responsibility and set much higher rates of reinvestment. Criticism of the approaches taken by regole to broader environmental management and conservation were raised

only twice by municipal representatives (14.3%). In one case, the State Forest Police levied fines on a regola because of unauthorized harvesting. This was explained as the outcome of the regola's intolerance towards the bureaucracy combined with a traditional practice-oriented mentality.

- (ii) **Social development.** In line with what has already been reported in section 4.6, 78.5% of respondents were critical of the action of regole in the area of social development. Reference was often made to the “close-mindedness” of some regola members, especially the elderly, who, as household heads, hold power to vote in the assembly of the regola and therefore have significant influence. Municipal representatives also claimed that regole should provide more support to the welfare strategies of municipalities, as these are targeted to the whole local community and not towards regola members only. Respondents observed that the general assembly of local regole exert high levels of control – due to right holders' attitudes – even concerning ordinary decisions regarding environmental matters undertaken by municipalities. From this perspective, the reported occurrence of some social tensions could be attributed to the increased participation of local people in municipal administrative life and local policy processes. Indeed, to validate particular decisions (i.e. land use changes), in some cases a regola's statutory rules call for high levels of consensus to be reached in the regola's assembly. Such a mechanism would encourage the adoption of shared policy decisions, though triggering heated debates and discussions throughout decision-making processes. Notably, regola members often represent a relevant share of the local population and as such, they can strongly influence local elections.
- (iii) **Local economic development.** Positive and negative evaluations were balanced regarding the interaction with regole on issues of local economic development. Interviewees expressed positive evaluations concerning regole's commitment to environmental management. Regole were regarded to have improved systems for the sales of timber. Particularly, they noted that regole increased timber revenues and stimulated the establishment of new local forest enterprises through more careful planning of timber sales and investments in maintenance and development of the forest road network required for forest harvesting. Nonetheless, administrative representatives claimed that regole were inclined to adopt “standard” management practices rather than innovative ones. For example, branches and harvesting waste were not extracted from the forest and no bioenergy investments have been made. They also observed that cooperation *between* regole is still largely missing in this field, as demonstrated by the lack of local sawmills. These limitations were attributed to a hesitant or even conservative attitude of regole in response to proposals launched by municipalities.
- (iv) **Tourism.** Interviewees positively reported cases of regole directly involved in tourism activities. Examples referred of Regole managing

local ski areas, restoring abandoned alpine pasture lands and huts, managing agricultural-tourism enterprises and producing local cheeses and other dairy products. However, negative evaluations of the attitude of regole towards local development were also given. A locally well-known case was reported of several regole that took a strong position against a ski area development project in open defiance of the intentions of the local municipalities. Interviewees claimed that, in this case, the membership of these regole were driven by a “traditional logic”, closely related to forestry and pasture management, and not oriented towards “new” complementary goods and services.

In general, our results give a multifaceted picture of the relationships between municipalities and regole, which, in the perception of the majority of municipalities, are characterized predominantly by positive evaluations. A relevant and unexpected outcome was that municipal representatives cited the need not only to coordinate between municipalities and regole, but also among different regole. Thus, the claim was asserted that broader cooperation between actors at the municipal level of governance, could lead to positive governance outcomes. The presence of regola members on the municipal administration was not a discriminating feature in either positive or negative institutional relationships: indeed, regola members were well represented on almost every town council. Rather, the results suggest that municipal representatives valued having multiple contact persons between these two bodies. To this end, mechanisms to enforce stable, robust and enduring cooperation were judged to be worthwhile. Where the institutional coordination of responsibilities was more extensive, that is, where joint action was undertaken more regularly with regards to forest management and other social and economic development matters, fewer social and institutional tensions emerged. As such, overlapping administrative activities in multiple policy arenas were indicative of higher levels of collaboration.

Interestingly, municipal representatives frequently stated that forest landscape management had improved since regole re-obtained ownership rights over former public forests, which sometimes also had the positive spin-off of relieving municipalities of a difficult and time-consuming administrative burden. Renewed control by regole over forest resources was also linked to confidence by interviewees that speculative actions with detrimental social and environmental consequences would be avoided in relation the local forest landscape.

Although tensions arose where both municipalities and regole claimed administrative jurisdiction over specific management roles or resources, this was not always the case, and problems in institutional coordination were not always the outcome. We noted that tensions were often borne out of disputes on changes in territorial jurisdictions, where administrative rights and duties in areas where territorial control has been returned to regole remained unclear. Sometimes, regole had a hostile attitude toward outsiders, driven by “feelings of power” with regard to their land, as if it were their own individual property. This result in particular

corroborates previous work in the area (Hampel 2012). These issues were still in the process of being addressed in the area concerned. Nonetheless, municipal representatives were often confident that relationships with *regole* would improve in the future, both in terms of overall frequency and quality of interaction. This conviction was based on progress towards resolution of pending legal disputes which contributed to overcoming past hostilities and tensions, and a feeling that municipalities and *regole* needed to cooperate more closely in order to better cope with the ongoing process of institutional re-organization, which was perceived to have otherwise unfavourable consequences in terms of local territorial development.

5. Conclusions

This paper aimed at exploring the institutional interplay between municipalities and *regole* in the mountainous areas of the Veneto Region. We chose to analyze the viewpoint of municipalities, which, while more empowered in institutional relationships than *regole*, are at the same time most at risk from the institutional reforms affecting the public sector. In this way, we feel we can offer insights into local governance in mountainous areas in Veneto while well aware that a complete picture of the situation will be achieved only when the perspective of the *regole* are also considered. The context of rapid institutional change and devolution in the Veneto Region, carried out under a policy of decentralization, has meant a shift of administrative rights and responsibilities to local actors, at the same time coupled with potentially debilitating changes in budgets, organizations and responsibilities. The polycentric governance literature has supported our exploration of the quality and degree of collaboration, power dynamics, coordination of responsibilities, and degree of decision-making autonomy of actors and institutions. We showed how municipalities have dealt with such changes in relation to *regole*, which, under the Regional Law, are also expected to fulfill new roles in relation to local territorial development and natural resource governance.

The results of our work provide evidence that relationships between municipalities and *regole* are for the most part synergistic. Municipalities have adapted to a new institutional context, demonstrating willingness to share responsibilities and support values of the *regole*. Despite the re-allocation of property rights, which was perceived to be a potential source of conflict, municipal decisions are formulated taking into account the need for creation of the appropriate linkages with local *regole*. As such, we found that the authority of municipalities is very seldom contested by *regole*. Where tensions or discontent have emerged, they have been mostly resolved or considered as reflecting a need for greater coordination between these two centers of local governance over and above what was called for in the 1996 legislation. Indeed, local administrators have indicated their willingness to broaden their collaboration with the *regole* within their municipal territory. This represents a local polycentric governance innovation that has only partially received policy support at the regional level, but which has been identified by municipalities as having potential positive impacts on local governance

and coordination. To the extent that they are seeking greater synergy with local regole, it appears that municipalities will continue to play a key role in shaping local-level socio-economic dynamics in the foreseeable future, maintaining their position as the local institutional reference point for mountain areas in the Veneto Region.

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