

Left-behind places in Europe: a multidimensional and relative concept

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The World Bank outlines five characteristics of the left-behind regions (or lagging regions): i) some are more dynamic than others, ii) there are “low income” and “low growth” regions, and both have the lowest social outcomes iii) demographic decline is a defining feature of lagging regions, with both fertility and net migration rates that fall below the national averages, iv) they are peripheral, but not necessarily sparse and v) jobs in lagging regions are concentrated in low value-added non-tradables.

In Europe, the present Cohesion Policy has changed the focus from traditional regions to places and people; thus it would be important to characterize and identify the left-behind “places” (and also the left-behind “people”). If following the World Bank criteria, very little can be said about the existence and persistence of these places basically due to the unavailability of GDP/income figures at a finer spatial scale than NUTS regions in the official European databases. As for the rest of socioeconomic variables mentioned by the World Bank (such as demographic, labour or geographic indicators). there is simply no comprehensive European database at local level (LAUs).

In the EXIT Project we estimated figures of average household income at local level and also collect country by country the socioeconomic variables existing at local level for years 2011 and 2021 in order to characterize, identify and illustrate the multidimensional and relative nature of the elusive left-behindness concept when applied at local level.

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