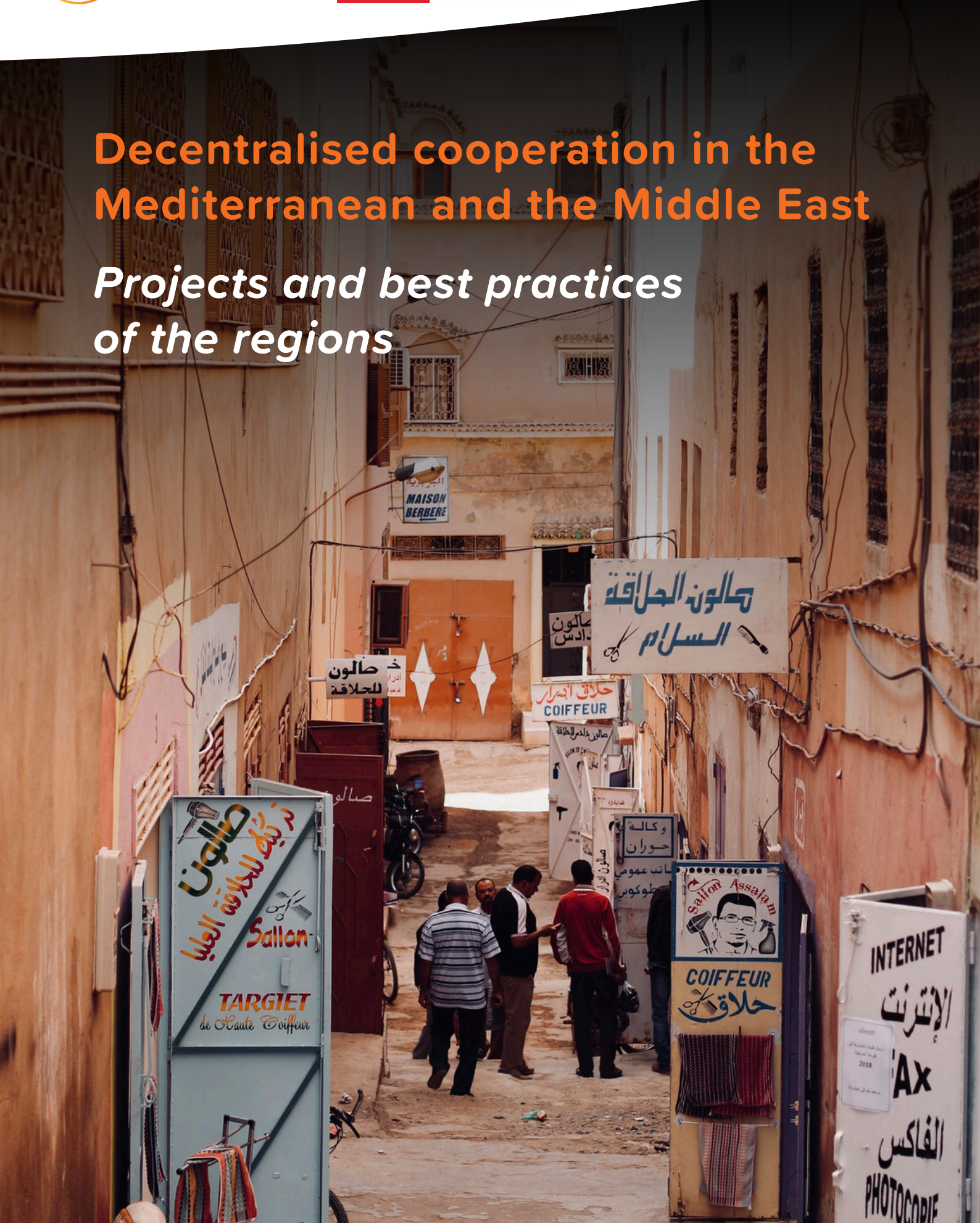


Decentralised cooperation in the Mediterranean and the Middle East

Projects and best practices of the regions



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research focused on decentralised cooperation in the Mediterranean by looking at the actions and experience of Italian regions (including the Autonomous Provinces of Trento and Bolzano) in the last few years.

The Italian context was first introduced by looking at its recent developments, in particular the National Law 125 of 11 August 2014, which reorganised the system of international cooperation in Italy and recognised the role of local and regional government.

Then, the decentralised cooperation of Italian regions in the Mediterranean was addressed by a quantitative analysis. Contrary to bilateral and multilateral international cooperation, we must bear in mind that the quantitative evidence on decentralised cooperation in general and for Italy in particular is relatively scarce and hardly systematic, but we were able to draw data from a previous survey on Italy's regions carried out by the Region of Sardinia and the Interregional Observatory on Development Cooperation (OICS)¹. Overall, **215 projects involving international cooperation from 2013 onwards were recorded in the Mediterranean**, most of which were promoted by the northern and central regions. Their role and involvement in these projects take various forms: most commonly, partner (83), followed by donor (50), and only in a minority of cases, leader (12), but in terms of funding, their contribution is very important and based on their own resources in more than 90% of actions.

The geographical distribution of mapped projects demonstrates that in recent years, there has been a greater commitment to the Middle East, although the Balkans and North Africa remain areas where Italian territorial systems for cooperation in development are important partners for local counterparts and

civil society. **40% of the projects concern countries in the Middle East, where in recent years, critical situations have been exacerbated (Palestine, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Iraq), new regional conflicts have arisen (Syria) and socio-economic conditions have deteriorated.** 33% of the projects were implemented in the Balkans. Here, decentralised cooperation initiatives intersect (in some cases integrating, in others overlapping) with policies of European territorial cooperation. The “resilience” of Italian regional cooperation in the Balkans more than twenty years after the war is of interest. Currently, decentralised cooperation as a whole has a lower priority, with countries affected by severe crises, emergencies or widespread absolute poverty. Also, in North Africa (21% of the 215 mapped projects), territorial partnerships are aimed at supporting the processes of capacity building in institutions and empowering civil society, the business world and associations.

In terms of sectors, the intervention areas identified by our investigation emphasise the consistency between the objectives of decentralised cooperation and the aims and guidelines laid down by Law 125/2014: sustainable development, the fight against hunger and poverty, rights and participation, equality and social inclusion, support for marginalised groups, the promotion of peace.

It is difficult to assess to what extent the sectors of intervention in Mediterranean projects by Italian regions differ from the general pattern in international decentralised cooperation (a pattern which is in turn not so evident, given the lack of detailed information).

The impression is that there are relatively few projects in specialist sectors such as agriculture and water, or in emergency and humanitarian aid, despite the many crises in the Mediterranean area. Conversely,

¹ Osservatorio Interregionale sulla Cooperazione allo Sviluppo <http://www.oics.it/>

SUMMARY

there is a greater focus on multi-sectoral intervention and human development (economy and inclusion, society and health, education, culture, rights, etc.) and on fostering change in a territory under different aspects, both material (socio-health and economic) and intangible (culture, empowerment, education, participation, democratisation). This reveals a strategic orientation of the interventions undertaken by the Italian regions, an orientation that also emerges from the best practices collected for our qualitative analysis, the core part of this study.

13 best practices have been selected (on the basis of six quality criteria: effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, innovation, strategic adequacy and consistency, transferability and replicability) and collected, of which 12 were submitted from Italian regions and one from Catalonia. They were grouped into three categories: empowerment and multi-sector interventions (3), transfer/exchange of knowledge and capacity building (both vertical and horizontal (7)), and partnerships and tools/implementation structures (3).

The fundamental role of the transfer or exchange of knowledge in many of the best practices is of interest.

In terms of replicability - and looking at the implications derived from an analysis of best practices - it is probably more appropriate to talk of lessons learnt rather than of proper action models ready to be applied. In particular, in the experiences reviewed, local and regional governments show their strengths in interventions aimed at fostering bottom-up development processes, also in difficult contexts and with a substantial degree of know-how transfer. Worthy of note are the experiences in which local authorities play a strategic role in socio-economic reconstruction and democratisation, and in which they attempt to establish territorial cooperation

by providing training aimed at transferring technical and managerial know-how to institutional, social and government entities. **The set of stakeholders and partners involved appears wide and diverse both in the beneficiary and donor territories**, including local governments, universities and research centres, communities, associations, health associations and organisations, credit institutions, social and cooperative organisations, enterprises, etc.

Overall, the prevalent and common characteristics of best practices confirm the territorial partnership as an approach or general model that can be extrapolated, a model built on partner participation and involvement on the one side, and on the know-how transfer as the major flow and change in the development process on the other. This model shows us that by involving local partners and stakeholders, regional governments may undertake significant and innovative cooperation actions.

At the same time, there is an apparent contradiction, as the regions exploit the relatively few skills available within the institution in projects. In many cases, management is through an implementer, which means moving away from the “everyday” of the project or intervention, and carving out a more limited role, which is focused on fundamental aspects of the approach, strategy and construction of the partnership. The regions generally tend to complement and integrate roles and responsibilities through the partnership, rather than use internal technical skills. This is not necessarily negative, but it highlights that decentralised cooperation of the regions and partnerships - specifically territorial partnerships - are closely linked. The future of decentralised cooperation, including the attempt to localise SDGs, rests on the quality of the latter and on the regions’ capacity to initiate these, recognised by the partners themselves.

1 Introduction

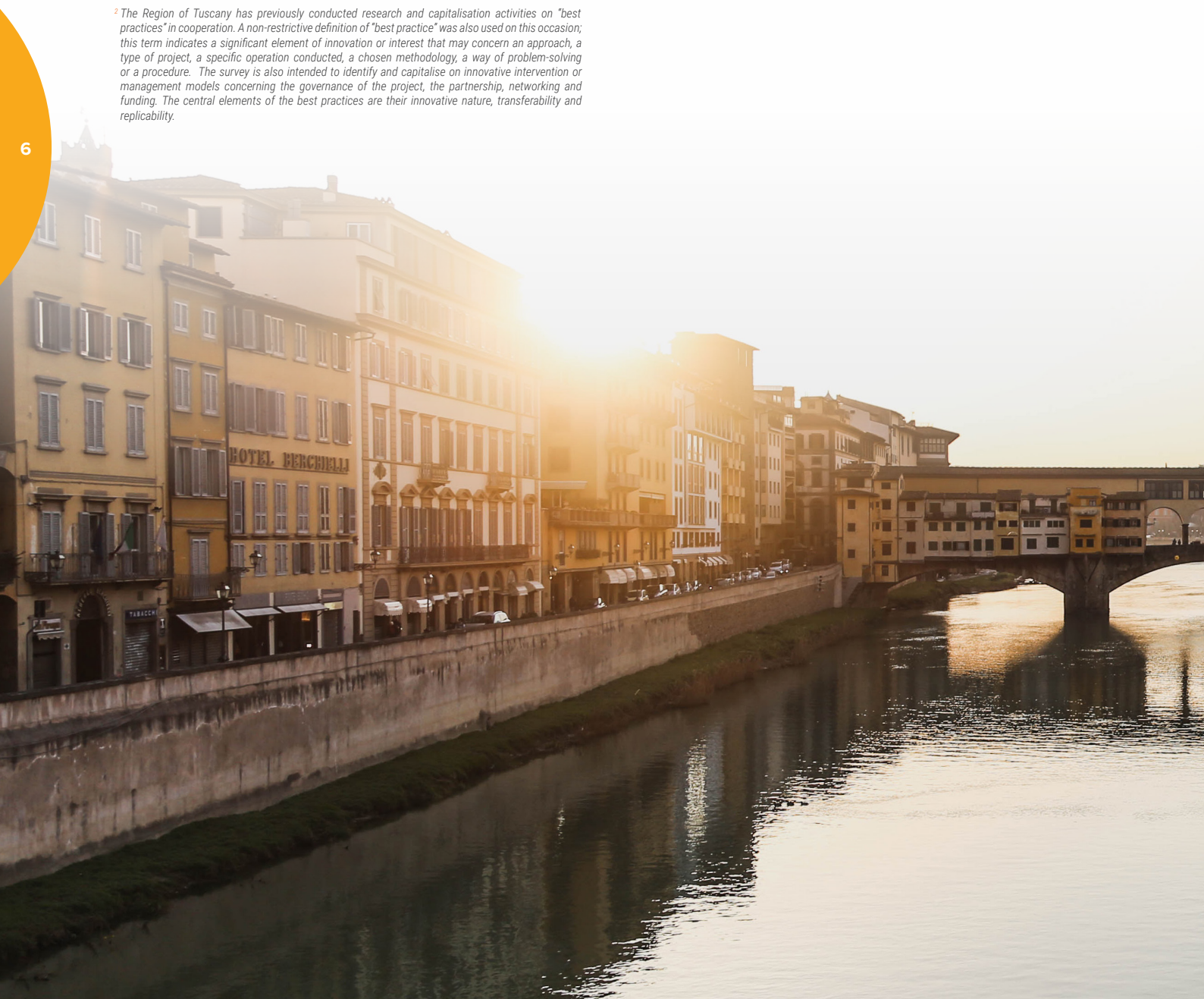
The “Mapping of Italian decentralised cooperation projects in the Mediterranean and in the Middle East” has a twin objective:

- to reconstruct a cognitive framework on cooperation initiatives promoted by the Italian Regions and Autonomous Provinces involved in the Balkans, the Middle East and North Africa, from 2013 to today;
- to identify certain “best practices” put in place by actors in Italian decentralised cooperation².

The survey and analysis activities are based on a previous survey conducted by the Region of Sardinia and OICS; the Italian regions willing to cooperate in this initiative were asked to complete and validate the data, and indicate their experiences of cooperation, which, from their viewpoint, could represent best practices worthy of being capitalised on and disseminated.

The working methodology adopted enabled us to first conduct a quantitative analysis on the data relating to all cooperation projects promoted in the Mediterranean basin and then to conduct a qualitative survey on some of the most significant

² The Region of Tuscany has previously conducted research and capitalisation activities on “best practices” in cooperation. A non-restrictive definition of “best practice” was also used on this occasion; this term indicates a significant element of innovation or interest that may concern an approach, a type of project, a specific operation conducted, a chosen methodology, a way of problem-solving or a procedure. The survey is also intended to identify and capitalise on innovative intervention or management models concerning the governance of the project, the partnership, networking and funding. The central elements of the best practices are their innovative nature, transferability and replicability.



experiences in this area, concentrating on the innovative elements that determined their success and on the factors that may affect future replicability, reproducibility and sustainability.

The final report is intended to provide an analytical contribution to a “forward” interpretation of decentralised cooperation based on concrete cases that shed light on the most interesting approaches and tools, taking into account changes in the external environment and critical issues affecting the Mediterranean region and current development priorities, as defined in the 2030 Development Goals.

The work in its current state is still wholly based on Italian experiences, with the exception of a best practice made available by the Region of Catalonia. This is a restricted focus, useful in the first phase of analysis, but the hope is that the survey will be extended to European level, incorporating other regions active in decentralised cooperation in the Mediterranean. This report consists of an introduction to decentralised cooperation in Italy, followed by the initial quantitative analysis, and then the qualitative analysis on best practices. It closes with some final thoughts.





PART 1

DECENTRALISED
COOPERATION IN ITALY:
CLASSIFICATION
AND PROSPECTS

DECENTRALISED COOPERATION IN ITALY: CLASSIFICATION AND PROSPECTS

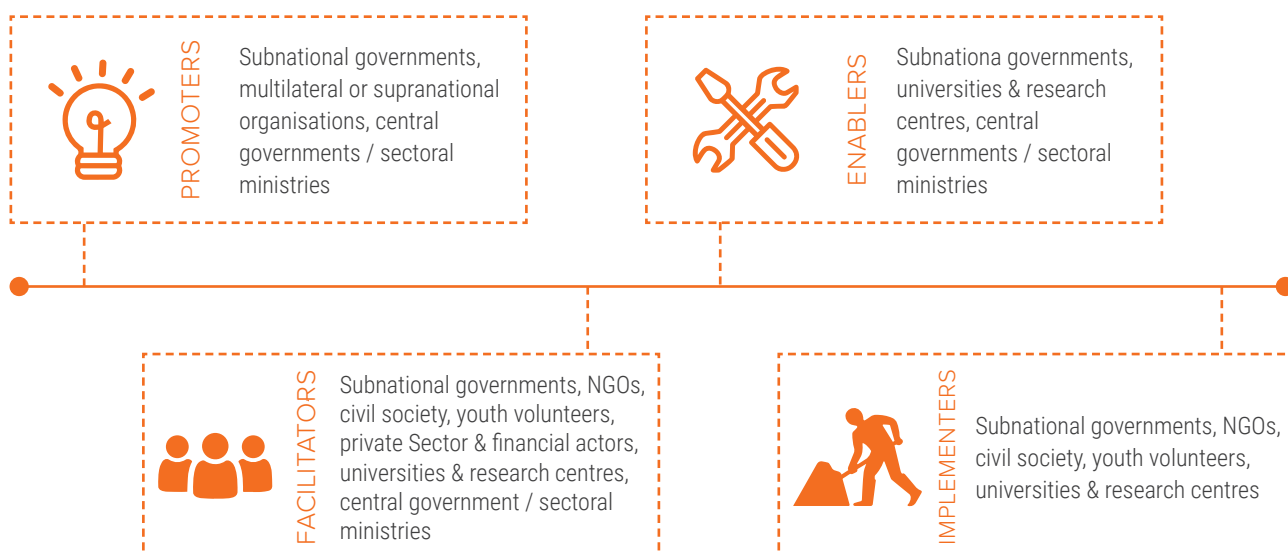
In Italy, the most commonly-used definition of “decentralised cooperation”³ is that set out in an official document from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of 2000⁴, which establishes four fundamental concepts:

- The role of Local Autonomous Authorities as promoters/managers of initiatives
- The territorial partnership, i.e. the partnership with similar local authorities in third countries
- Favours a “by process” approach to action rather than a “pro project” approach
- Involving civil society in the decision-making and operational phases

Since the 1990s, the role that decentralised cooperation can play in promoting growth and development processes in third world countries has been legitimised and strengthened: for around the last twenty years, local authorities (regions, provinces, municipalities) have taken on a growing role in policies aimed at tackling poverty and inequality and promoting an international environment of peace, rights and stability. Greater activism among institutions has corresponded to a gradual increase in resources allocated to support decentralised cooperation initiatives.

This process of expansion and consolidation in decentralised cooperation has not been without its problems, critical issues and weaknesses, which re-emerged with the economic and financial difficulties that exploded with the 2008 crisis⁵.

Role of the main actors involved in decentralised cooperation in Italy



> Source: OECD*

³ At European level, decentralised cooperation, which today plays a strategic role that complements the aid policies of the European Union and individual member states, is, all things considered, a relatively recent cooperation model that is still “in development”. In 1985, the Charte européenne de l’Autonomie locale enshrined the right of a country’s democratically-elected local authorities to cooperate amongst themselves and with similar entities in third countries. The European Union only formally recognised the concepts of decentralised cooperation in 1989 (in that year, the Commission decided for the first time to allocate a budget managed by the Development DG to finance projects promoted by peripheral government bodies).

⁴ In 2000, the Directorate General for Cooperation in Development of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (DGCS/MAE 2000) defined it as “the action of cooperating on development undertaken by the local Italian authorities, individually or as part of a consortium, also with the participation of the organised civil society in the area with the specific administrative competence, undertaken in a partnership relationship, preferentially with similar institutions of DCs, encouraging the active participation of the different actors of the civil society of partner countries in the decision-making process aimed at the sustainable development of their territory” (Guidelines and implementation procedures of Decentralised Cooperation, DGCS/MAE 2000)

⁵ In 2007, Andrea Stocchiero, in CeSPI Working Paper 30/2007, reflected on the “issues” of Italian decentralised cooperation and how it could have evolved. A number of the questions he addresses remain topical and relevant today (Development issues in Italian decentralised cooperation, A. Stocchiero, CeSPI, 2007). In particular, still today, there is no agreement on what role of the regions (and other centres of local government) should be in dealing with problems and critical issues that are global in nature, and which, now directly, concern Europe’s borders. Another open question concerns the procedures and tools for dialogue and communication between the various levels of government. And in addition: with the contraction in resources allocated to finance decentralised cooperation activities, what criteria must the regions adopt to give priority to and plan their actions to cooperate and promote peace? What is the added value that decentralised cooperation brings to the international system of cooperation in development? And what are the positive effects on Italian (or European) citizens?

* OECD (2018), Reshaping Decentralised Development Co-operation: The Key Role of Cities and Regions for the 2030 Agenda, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264302914-en>



Also, in Italy, as in many other EU member states, there are political and social phenomena unfolding that call into question the principles of reciprocity, solidarity and mutual aid, which investment in cooperation and reception policies must be based on (and justified)⁶. Furthermore, questions have been raised about the contribution decentralised cooperation can make in dealing with critical issues that are international in nature but require effective interventions at “territorial” and “local community” level.

At this time of new and more complex challenges, Italy has made a significant response, approving in 2014 the law “General Rules on International Cooperation for Development”, which reforms the rules relating to development cooperation. The new law specified the areas of intervention for development cooperation, and defined the main objectives: sustainable development, eradication of poverty, the advancement of human rights and equality, the promotion of peace and the reduction of conflict.

Moreover, Law 125 of 11 August 2014 redesigned the architecture of the entire national system of cooperation: (A) The Interministerial Committee for Cooperation in Development (CICS) is responsible for coordinating action among the various ministries involved in cooperation; (B) the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation

(MAECI) has a strategic guidance and coordination role for all national players; (C) the new Italian Agency for Cooperation in Development (AICS) is the technical management structure for cooperation initiatives, and acts under the political supervision and guidance of MAECI.

The law - awaited for many years - reaffirmed the right of local self-governing authorities to operate in partnership with similar players in order to implement cooperation initiatives and promote the adoption of public-private partnerships⁷.

Decentralised cooperation players could use the current structural reorganisation of the Italian cooperation system as an opportunity to conduct “a critical reflection of their principles, methods and objectives”, exploring the approaches, means of intervention, tools and resources for decentralised cooperation in Italy that may be of interest for Mediterranean countries as well as other European regions. In other words, we will look into the contribution that the experience gained in over 20 years of activities “in the field” could make and determine how capitalising on this would be relevant to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals; more generally, we can seek to define a shared reference framework for more effective action in European cooperation overall in the Mediterranean area.

⁶ The decline in the living conditions of the working and middle classes, the emergence of new forms of marginalisation and the increase in social inequality, the inability of institutions to guarantee minimum standards of services and effective policies to deal with emergencies and social crises; these are some of the factors feeding nationalist and populist positions that call for a more restrictive approach to receiving migrants and refugees, protectionist trade and manufacturing policies, and a reduction in spending on cooperation in favour of allocating greater resources to public spending locally. Although European citizens still believe that helping developing countries is a moral obligation for Europe and that reducing poverty also means combating immigration, significant differences remain between the various countries. In particular, Italy has recorded the biggest fall in consensus (-7%); furthermore, many people think that development aid should not be one of Europe's priorities (Eurobarometer 455- EU Citizen's views on development, cooperation and aid, European Commission, 2017)

⁷ The new law “General Rules on International Cooperation for Development” entered into force on 29 August 2014; it is intended to update the national legislative framework, without prejudice to the provisions of Law 40/1987 on development cooperation. As well as establishing new objectives, planning frameworks and competences, the new law establishes the creation of a new management structure, the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, bringing Italy into line with other European countries. The law reiterates that cooperation is an “integral and important part of foreign policy” and therefore falls under the responsibility of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MAECI - Ministry for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation); at the same time, it is recognised that the regions and other territorial organisations may launch development cooperation initiatives with similar organisations representing their territory, within the framework of territorial partnerships. (Annual report on the implementation of development cooperation policy in 2015, MAECI, 2016).



PART 2

MAPPING PROJECTS:
THE SURVEY AMONG
THE REGIONS

2 MAPPING PROJECTS: THE SURVEY AMONG THE REGIONS

The mapping work was based on information collected in previous research conducted by the Region of Sardinia and OICS, supplemented with work carried out by regional offices and direct communication with operators and experts, who interacted with the Local Global working group to check the data already on file, and update and harmonise it.

While not a comprehensive overview of all initiatives launched between 2013 and 2017, the work conducted made it possible to prepare a summary of the projects undertaken within the geographical area in question.

For each project, the regions provided information on:

- Type of funding
- Programme
- Year of project launch
- Sector of intervention
- Geographical area
- Beneficiary country/Partner
- Role of the Italian region
- Financial amounts



1. The parties: the regions and their role in projects

The desk activity and direct contacts with regional representatives enabled Local Global and the Region of Tuscany to construct a cognitive framework of projects in the Middle East and in the Mediterranean with reference to autonomous regions or provinces. This framework is fairly comprehensive but does not include all interventions of this type in the area, as not all regions responded to us or provided the data required by OICS. There are 215 projects in the Middle East and in the Mediterranean.

Tab. 1: Italian regions and projects in the Middle East and in the Mediterranean – %

REGIONS	NO. OF PROJECTS
Emilia-Romagna	25.8
APT (Aut. Prov. Trento)	25.8
APB (Aut. Prov. Bolzano)	16.9
Friuli Venezia Giulia	13.6
Tuscany	7.0
Puglia	2.8
Sardinia	2.8
Umbria	1.4
Veneto	1.4
Lombardy	0.9
Molise	0.9
Marche	0.5
TOTAL	100.0

> Source : OICS

A number of Italian regions, in the north east in particular (Emilia-Romagna, APT, APB and Friuli Venezia Giulia), confirmed they have a solid experience in cooperation, and have been able to maintain a significant presence, while others bemoan the fact that a lack of funding prevents them from planning financial requirements and supporting the activities of local players.

The regions that seem to be able to commit more resources are those that have a regional law and an integrated territorial system able to create synergies between institutional and political actors, profit and non-profit organisations, the world of research, the voluntary sector and NGOs, foundations and other external donors. These regions are mainly located in North Italy, which in some ways is a paradox, as the southern regions are ideally placed to focus more on the Mediterranean; this shows that, at least in these regions, there has been little decentralised cooperation and hence there is also little with other territorial integration and neighbourhood policies at Mediterranean level. Partial exceptions in this regard are Puglia (with its focus on the Balkans) and Sardinia.

The data collected through the mapping exercise shows us that in 11 projects, the Italian region/autonomous province leads the project, in 50 they fund it, and in 82 they are partners. In 51 cases, the regions did not respond or said they were neither partner nor leader.

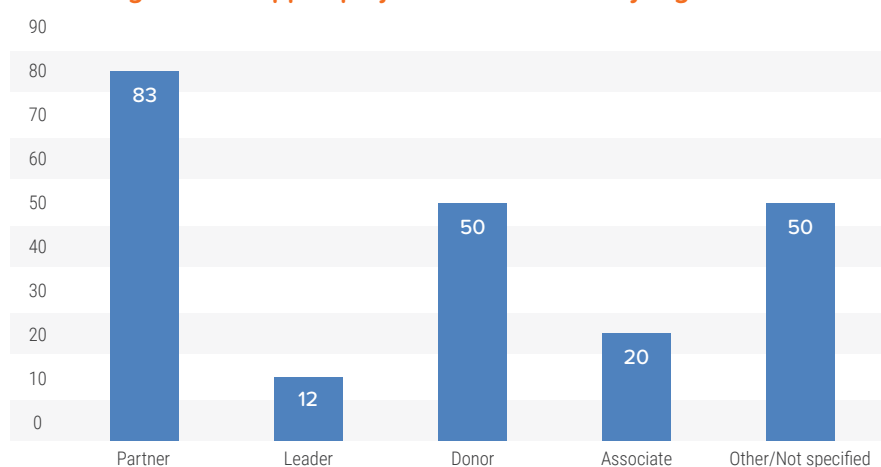
Over the years, Italian local authorities - and specifically the regions - have become increasingly geared towards taking an operational role in the projects, mostly as a partner, reducing their involvement as funders. There are various reasons for this change, including the fall in available financial resources, which has undoubtedly had an impact, but there is also a view that regions have become more deeply involved, not only steering projects in their role as donors, but also being directly involved in their management and implementation. In fact, decentralised cooperation players often stated that the "decentralised" aspect is not only a tool to pursue development objectives and create a more stable and egalitarian world but also represents an innovative and sustainable approach based on

cooperation between similar parties and on requests made by local institutions and civil society actors (universities, research centres, NGOs, associations, to name but a few).

The portion of projects in which the regions play the role of donor remains significant, however, as does their involvement in an "other/not specified" capacity, which covers a variety of projects, perhaps because the regions found it difficult to choose just one - and only one - of the four pre-defined categories (leader, partner, associate and donor).

The question of the regions' role in the projects is central: while, for institutions, a deep involvement in the projects would be fundamental, also so that they can draw on the lessons learnt from their experiences, it is also true that regions' operational capacity is at times effectively limited: this is evidenced by their recourse to implementers, which can compensate for the lack of internal human resources. In most cases, the best practices developed by the regions depend on their capacity to actively become involved - and, most importantly, in an integrated and synergic way - in a partnership that capitalises on the complementary nature of the parties involved. Hypothetically, it would be wrong to focus exclusively on the regions' net contribution to project activities as the only issue. Rather unexpectedly, the survey confirms that the regions' ability to involve themselves in partnerships and also to promote training is critical. It is the partnership as a whole that generates the best practices and not only the "net" contribution of the individual partners, including the regions. The *modus operandi* of the projects based on a partnership, particularly a territorial partnership, proves to be the dominant factor and is likely to remain so in the next few years⁸.

Fig. 1: The mapped projects: classification by regions' role



> Source: OICS

⁸ This aspect also emerges from the analysis of best practices, where the know-how transferred through the initiative is very important, but the regions make available relatively few human resources and internal technical competences, such that the value of the best practice, at knowledge transfer level, should be attributed to the partnership overall and therefore to the ability to properly integrate the roles and skills of the various partners.

2. The projects

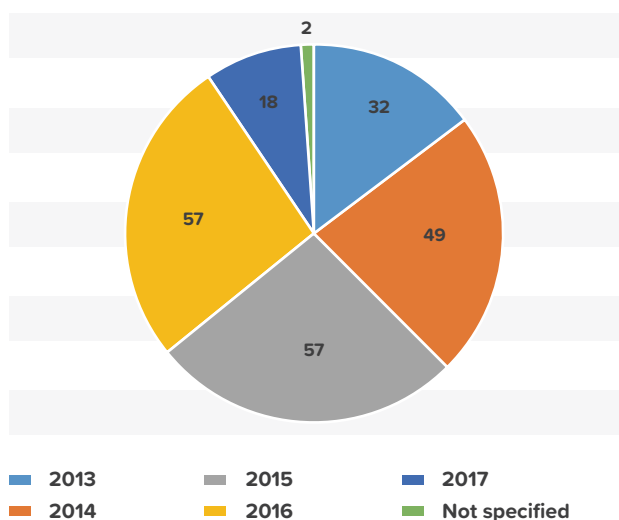
2.1. The implementation period

The survey asked for information on the projects launched from 2013 through decentralised cooperation funding channels. In fact, the responses of certain regions also referred to projects that, while involving the participation of the regional authority (or other territorial players), are ascribable to European territorial cooperation programmes; in other cases, the projects reported are under review.

Unfortunately, this mapping does not enable us to make time comparisons or to identify growth or contraction trends in international cooperation activity undertaken by the regions, although from the chronology observed, there seems to be a degree of stability in the number of projects, at least for the years recorded.

The survey concerned projects launched between 2013 and 2017.

Fig. 2: The mapped projects: classification by year or launch of project activities



Over 75% of the projects considered were launched in the three-year period 2014-2016, while a number of European territorial cooperation projects are still under review.

2.2. Funding channels

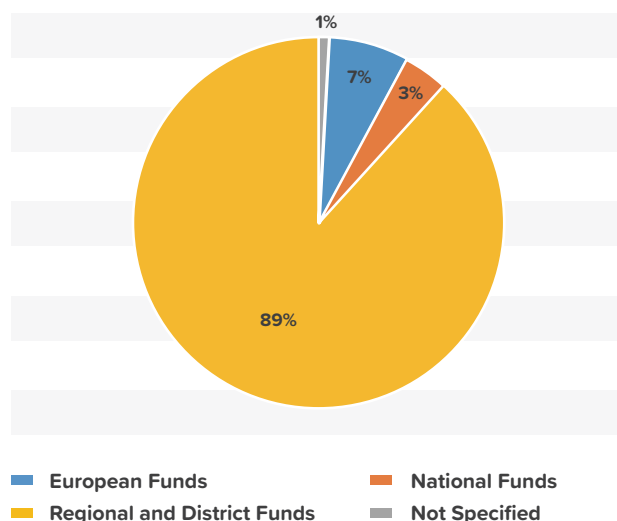
Almost 90% of the projects reported are financed by regional funds⁹.

On the one hand, this figure on the methods of funding the projects confirms that regional administrations are reference donors for territorial players active in development cooperation (local authorities, associations, NGOs, universities, public service management companies, etc.); in this sense, the regions may provide local players with planning and priority guidelines.

On the other, we can see that decentralised cooperation, even if implemented in the Mediterranean, is not too closely tied to European territorial cooperation, which rather represents a tool through which the regions may play a proactive operational role, either in supporting the action of local players or making human resources and internal technical expertise directly available.

For the period considered, the cooperation of the regions therefore largely seems to be self-financed. The use of national and European funds seems fairly limited, although this depends on the line drawn to define decentralised cooperation and distinguish it from other initiatives based on international partnership, such as territorial cooperation.

Fig. 3: The projects identified through mapping by funding channel – %



⁹ The projects financed with European/EU funds account for 7% of our sample. Specifically, 15 initiatives are financed by the IPA Adriatic programme, Interreg Adria and ENPI. This figure probably does not provide an accurate picture of the real situation, because the regions that followed a rigorous definition of decentralised cooperation may have excluded the projects included in cross-border cooperation and territorial cooperation programmes, and in neighbourhood policies.

After a contraction recorded in 2012, Italy's official development assistance (ODA) seems to have resumed a growth trend both in absolute terms and as a percentage of Gross National Income (GNI).

In 2015, Italy's ODA amounted to approximately EUR 3,599 million, equal to 0.22% of GNI. MAECI and MEF are the two main donors, while the regions, autonomous provinces and municipalities invested EUR 19.07 million¹⁰; the OECD's evaluation is however higher, as it is based on its own calculations, making them comparable with those of other countries active in international cooperation.

These are encouraging figures, but still far from the objective set for OECD countries to bring the ODA/GNI ratio up to 0.7%. Italy must therefore make a substantial effort, made even more difficult by the complex economic structure and limited room for manoeuvre on public finances. The funding tenders promoted by European programmes and development banks are fundamental tools in consolidating the activity of local authorities and territorial systems.

Looking for a moment at decentralised cooperation as a whole, from an international comparison viewpoint, according to OECD data¹¹ on decentralised development, it seems clear that it is not the financial dimension that sets Italy apart: its flows, reported below in USD million (2015), although growing, totalled EUR 27.7 million in 2015, an incomparably smaller amount than Germany and even Spain (albeit down sharply in 2015 versus 2010 and 2005), but also lower than relatively small countries like Austria (169.5), Belgium (85.6) and Switzerland (62.6), although the financial measure of decentralised cooperation, while necessary, does not fully reflect the scope of this type of cooperation, mainly immaterial and aimed at small and medium-sized initiatives, which is on a different, albeit integrated, level from international, bilateral or multilateral cooperation. This is the case in general in Europe and in Italy (tab. 3.3), where the ratio between transactions relating to decentralised cooperation and those of international cooperation is 1 to 6.

In any case, while it is generally not disputed that the spending of Italian regions and local authorities is fairly low overall (albeit with some notable exceptions), we should however maintain a degree of caution in interpreting the data, which is subject, for reasons intrinsic to the survey, to a degree of partiality. For this reason, the OECD reports in a detailed and transparent manner the individual primary sources, which, when incorporated, produces the overall OECD records on financial flows for decentralised cooperation.

Tab. 2: Overall financial flows for decentralised cooperation by country – USD million

	2005	2010	2015
Austria	36.8	22.7	169.5
Belgium	74	97.6	85.8
Canada		90.8	253.9
Czech Republic			0.3
France		69.6	63.6
Germany	1,012.9	933.4	975.5
Greece	0.8		
Italy	19.9	26.4	27.7
Japan	6.2	3.7	3.3
Portugal	4.7	0.6	0.3
Spain	473.6	570.1	209.5
Switzerland	43.4	48.9	62.6
UK			18.5
Total	1,672.3	1,863.8	1,870.5

> Source : OECD (2018)



¹⁰ Annual report on the implementation of the development cooperation policy in 2015, MAECI, 2016

¹¹ OECD (2018), Decentralised Development Co-operation: Financial Flows, Emerging Trends, and Innovative Paradigms, Draft Report, 23 March 2018, Paris.

Tab. 3: Size of decentralised cooperation transactions vs. other international cooperation transactions – 2010-15 – EUR thousand

	DECENTRALISED COOPERATION (A)	NON-DECENTRALISED COOPERATION (B)	(B)/(A)
Austria	32	202	6
Belgium	130	437	3
Canada	62	1,894	31
Czech Republic	48	71	1
France	43	584	14
Germany	67	661	10
Italy	31	82	6
Japan	75	1,469	20
Portugal	10	561	56
Spain	84	238	3
Switzerland	595	417	1
UK	232	1,429	6
Total	117	679	6

> Source : OECD (2018)

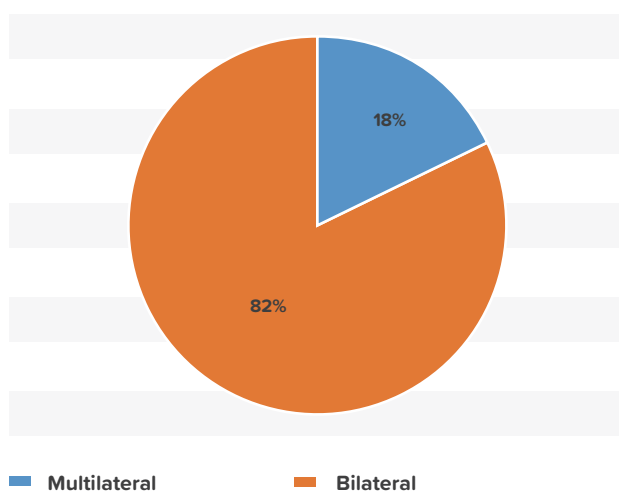


2.3. Geographical areas of intervention

The Mediterranean/Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa constitute the two areas in which Italian cooperation invests the most economic resources¹². Decentralised cooperation promoted by the Italian regions is also strongly focused on the Mediterranean area, both in the economic, social and environmental interconnections between the territories that border the various coasts and in the cross-cultural contamination and productive exchanges that historically link Mediterranean populations.

Our study surveyed more than 200 projects promoted in the territories of the Balkans, the Middle East and North Africa. Of these, around 82% are initiatives conducted in a single third country, while 18% concern broader partnerships that promote actions in two or more foreign countries.

Fig. 4: Breakdown of projects by type of partnership: “Bilateral” and “Multilateral” partnerships



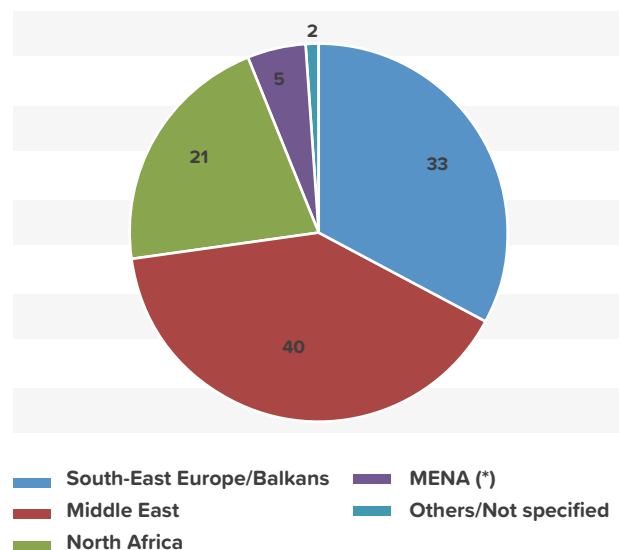
> Source: OICS

Traditionally, decentralised cooperation has been a useful tool in promoting bilateral relationships¹³. In detail, the data shows that the regions often act as co-donors or promoters: they tender the economic resources necessary to finance actions conducted by

local players (municipalities, local health authorities (ASLs), NGOs, universities, to name but a few), which themselves take leading roles in international relations processes and introduce innovative institutional and operational dynamics. In order to optimise the effectiveness of their interventions, as they are often forced to operate with limited resources, regions and operators in the cooperation sector tend to concentrate their efforts on promoting bilateral relationships, fostering “partnerships between territories” as an ideal tool with which to build stable and lasting relationships.

In contexts in which there is geographical or cultural continuity, which acts as a “glue” between foreign partners, Italian regions have experimented with “multilateral” cooperation initiatives. Specifically, we found similar projects in North Africa and in the Balkans, within the projects supported by the Ministry or in which a substantial budget was allocated to coordination and management tools.

Fig. 5: Breakdown of projects by geographical area of intervention (%)



(*) As the MENA area is identified as a generic identity, it is not possible to establish if the corresponding projects concern only the Middle East, only North Africa or both areas.

> Source: OICS

¹² Taking into account bilateral aid and development loans, in 2015, the ODA paid to Sub-Saharan Africa was EUR 213.46 million, while the Mediterranean/Middle East was paid EUR 234.29 million (MAECI data).

¹³ In 2005, during the expansionary phase for decentralised cooperation, the funds allocated by local administrations to promote development cooperation initiatives totalled EUR 50 million, equivalent to more than 10% of the total amount of Italian bilateral cooperation, net of debt cancellation (CeSPI, 2007).

The geographical distribution of the mapped projects shows that in the last few years, there has been a greater commitment in the Middle East, although the Balkans and North Africa remain areas where Italian territorial systems of development cooperation are important counterparties for similar bodies and for civil society.

40% of the projects reported concern Middle Eastern countries, where certain critical situations have deteriorated further in the last few years (Palestine, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Iraq), new regional conflicts have broken out (Syria) and socio-economic conditions have worsened.

33% of the projects were implemented in the Balkans: here, decentralised cooperation initiatives intersect (in some cases they are integrated, in others they overlap) with European territorial cooperation policies and are aimed at consolidating the process of democratisation and socio-economic development launched during the reconstruction that followed the Yugoslavian wars of the 1990s.



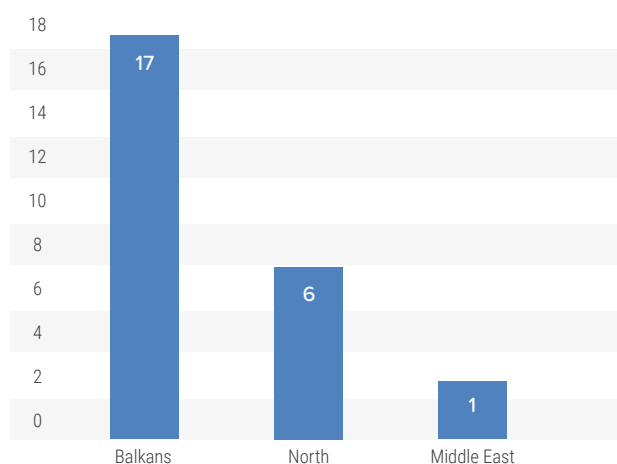
An interesting point to note is the “resilience”, after more than 20 years since the war, of the cooperation of Italian regions in the Balkans, currently less of a “priority” for decentralised cooperation overall, which tends to focus on countries affected by serious crises, emergencies or in any event, widespread absolute poverty.

Also, in North Africa (21% of the 215 mapped projects), territorial partnerships are intended to support institutions’ capacity building processes and the empowerment of civil society, the business world and associations.

A number of regions have chosen to support initiatives that involve more foreign partners or more geographical areas: these more complex partnerships are often tried in the Balkans, less so in North Africa and rarely in the Middle East. There may be various reasons for this non-homogeneity, but it is likely that more structured networks require a level of capacity building and accountability in the counterpart similar local authorities that is more easily verifiable in the states of the Balkan region, where we find an already “normalised” socio-political environment and networks of players that already know each other and cooperate through European cross-border and inter-regional cooperation programmes.

Among North African countries, the more pro-active multilateral networks are focused on Tunisia and Morocco.

Fig. 6: “Multilateral” projects: distribution by geographical area



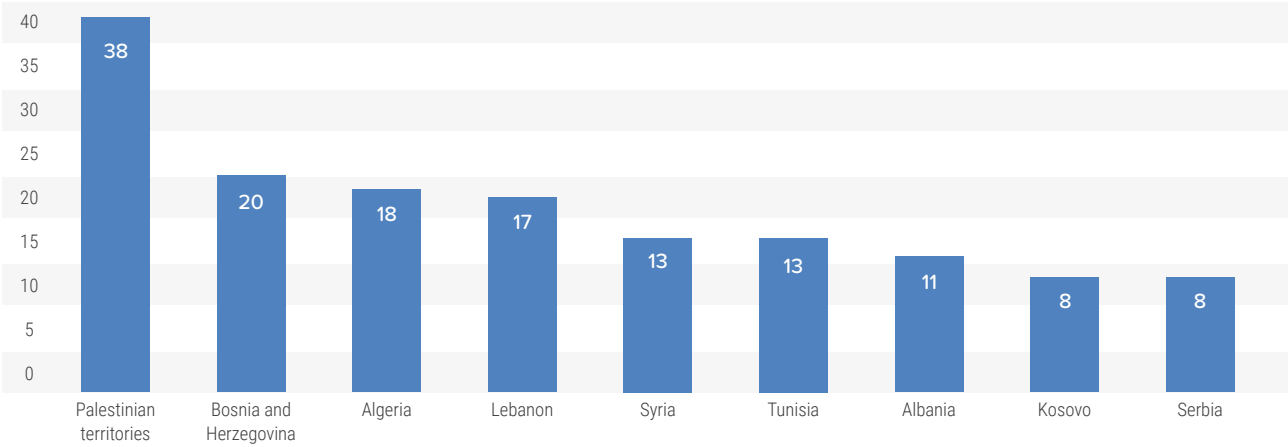
> Source: OICS

A final consideration: by observing the individual countries that are beneficiaries of cooperation initiatives, it is possible to reconstruct a more detailed picture of “geographical priorities”.

In fact, considering only “bilateral” initiatives, 36 projects concern Palestine, 20 Bosnia and Herzegovina, 17 Lebanon, 13 Syria and Tunisia. Furthermore, 15 projects relate to refugee camps for the Sahrawi people in Algeria.

In order to offer a key to interpreting this data, it is possible to subdivide the countries into two macro-groups: the countries affected by regional conflicts, repressive regimes and civil war (Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, the Sahrawi people in North Africa) and the countries in which growth and reconstruction of the local social and institutional fabric have begun (Tunisia, Morocco, the Balkans).

Fig. 7: Geographical priorities: number of “bilateral” projects per partner country



> Source : OICS



2.4. Sectors of intervention

Approximately 20% of the projects reported by the regions relate to socio-economic development (Tab. 8 on the right): either directly or through support provided to NGOs, associations and social entrepreneurs, the regions have supported growth processes intended to comply with the principles of social, economic and environmental sustainability. Depending on the context, the objectives may be: the restoration of safe and dignified living conditions; the activation of services and networks by local economic operators; combating the marginalisation of vulnerable segments of society.

From 2013 to today, decentralised cooperation has continued to support interventions aimed at promulgating the processes of democratisation, active participation and multilevel governance.

Working in partnership with NGOs, universities, SMEs, hospitals and health authorities, development agencies that operate in services (transport, tourism, etc.) and associations, Italian regions have contributed significantly to environmental protection, sustainable development, and the promotion of cultural and environmental heritage.

The sectors identified by our survey highlight that there is a certain coherence between the purposes of decentralised cooperation and the purposes and guidelines established by Law 125/2014: sustainable development, combating hunger and poverty, rights and participation, equality and social inclusion, support for marginalised groups and the promotion of peace.

It is difficult to assess to what extent the projects in the Mediterranean area undertaken by Italian regions differ in terms of sector of intervention from those of decentralised cooperation conducted at international level. We show the breakdown by sector of intervention of decentralised cooperation provided by the OECD, but the classification compiled by the OECD is highly aggregated compared with that of the OICS in our archive. The impression is, however, that there is a relatively low incidence of specialist sectors such as agriculture and water. The portion of projects relating to emergencies and humanitarian aid seems quite modest; although fuelled by numerous crises in the area, and despite the regions' significant competences in civil protection, they do not fall within the mission of Italian regions, which mainly act as donors in this type of initiative.

Conversely, we see a greater focus on multi-sectoral interventions and those relating to human development (economy and inclusion, socio-healthcare initiatives, education, culture, rights, etc.) and which focus on changes to a territory in various ways, both material (socio-healthcare and economic conditions) and immaterial (culture, empowerment, training, participation, democratisation).

Tab. 8: Priority issues: projects by macro-sector and sector of intervention

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	56
Empowerment of women	17
Socio-economic development	32
Human development	7
ECONOMY, SMEs, SERVICES	15
Competitiveness of SMEs	1
Support to the private sector	3
Economic development	8
Rural development	3
SOCIAL, HEALTH	60
Young people	3
Immigrants	1
Health	21
Social	26
Sport	2
Food safety	7
EDUCATION, RIGHTS	53
Culture	5
Rights and Governance	22
Education	8
Training	18
ENVIRONMENTAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE	11
Access to water	3
Environment	6
Blue economy	1
Promotion of natural and cultural resources	1
Emergency/humanitarian aid	18
Not specified	2

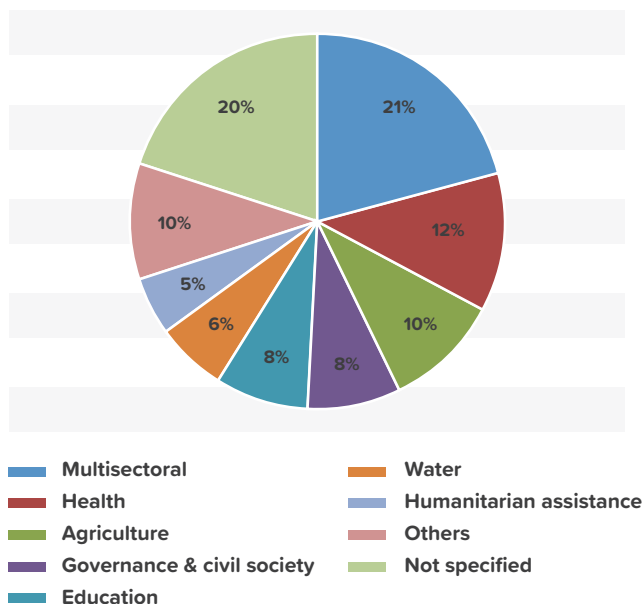
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Fig. 8: Sector breakdown of decentralised cooperation projects – 2015



> Source : OECD

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To conclude, Italy's regions have an established vocation for decentralised cooperation in integrated and multi-sector initiatives. Although it may change, we believe this tendency can also continue in the future, because it reflects the intervention capacity of the regions and their partnerships, both of which are subject to a moderate degree of path dependence. Looking again at the sectors in which the actions take place in light of the SDGs¹⁴, it seems that the regions often seek to achieve two, three or even more goals within the same project. Most projects are conducted with a strong partnership and participative approach (goal 17, "partnerships for the goals"), most also work on goals such as institution building (goal 16, "strong institutions"), "decent work and economic growth" (goal 8), "good health and well-being" (goal 3), "gender equality" (goal 5) and last but not least, "no poverty" (goal 1), through inclusion initiatives such as training and support for self-employment.

Although current intervention models are geared towards the SDGs, we cannot rule out - indeed it would be desirable - a rethink on decentralised cooperation, both in the Mediterranean and in general. We must consider whether to also target in a more consistent manner goals and sectors that are currently less "well frequented", creating the conditions for effective interventions also in less "typical" sectors for decentralised cooperation undertaken by the regions. In particular, we could think about investing more effort and resources in goals more closely linked to the environment (life on land, life below water, clean water and sanitation, clean energy, climate action, more sustainable cities and communities), as well as dealing with the problem of hunger and greater food self-sufficiency from the perspective of environmental sustainability. In reality, experiences in this field are already at decentralised cooperation level but could be significantly increased and systematised by looking at the specific added value that decentralised cooperation, with its territorial partnerships, could bring and which sets it clearly apart from bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

¹⁴ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org>



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PART 3

DECENTRALISED COOPERATION
MODELS AND BEST PRACTICES:
SOME CONSIDERATIONS
FROM THE SURVEY

3 DECENTRALISED COOPERATION MODELS AND BEST PRACTICES: SOME CONSIDERATIONS FROM THE SURVEY

In addition to the mapping of projects undertaken by Italian regions covered in the previous section, the research conducted on the cooperation initiatives promoted in the Mediterranean Basin by the regions also included a qualitative analysis to identify “best practices” worthy of being capitalised on and disseminated. As we will see, the research was focused more on the intervention models and tools seen as a whole, rather than exploring in depth the specific and technical content of each project.

From a methodological viewpoint, criteria (see on the right) were defined on the basis of which to assess the quality and worth of an initiative. A template (followed in the description of the individual best practices in the appendix¹⁵) was also produced with which to describe and illustrate the best practice itself. It was not possible, however, to identify in depth the actual quality of the practice, i.e. in the sense of going beyond that stated by the owner party (the region). In any case, it seems that the projects reported and transmitted by the regions offer elements of interest and foresight, which are in our view useful for the future of decentralised cooperation. As well as for their innovative nature and effectiveness, the “best practices” collected are also potentially replicable and transferable to other contexts and may constitute a source of inspiration for future cooperation initiatives conducted in the countries that border the Mediterranean. In addition, they provide a clear picture of how decentralised cooperation may provide its added value.

We have also seen how the contribution of Italian decentralised cooperation, both in general and in the Mediterranean, does not lie so much in the financial size of the initiatives launched, which, also compared with the size of Italy’s international government cooperation, is relatively small, but in the approach and tools of certain initiatives that may be considered typical of decentralised cooperation.

In this sense, we can state that Italian decentralised cooperation, albeit within its financial and organisational limits, offers some interesting considerations in terms of lessons learnt, notwithstanding that this principle applies in general terms to European decentralised cooperation, where precisely the diversity of local and national environments has led to a variety of models, at both

SIX ASSESSMENT CRITERIA FOR BEST PRACTICES

The best practices proposed by the regions were assessed by the working group based on six qualitative and quantitative criteria:

- **Effectiveness:** the capacity to produce satisfactory results in relation to the pre-established objectives and the expected effects.
- **Efficiency:** satisfactory ratio between the resources used and the results achieved.
- **Sustainability:** the capacity to produce effects even after the completion of the project.
- **Innovativeness:** the capacity to produce new solutions or ones that interpret in a creative manner those already tried, both in terms of product and process.
- **Adequacy and consistency** with the project approach and broader strategic guidelines, defined by both the issue tackled and the geographical area in question.
- **Transferability and replicability:** the possibility of replicating certain aspects of the model proposed in other contexts or applying them to the resolution of other problems.

structural and organisational level of the cooperation and specific intervention tools and approaches. The Italian case perhaps offers a paradox, in that in some cases, it seems to have been the weaknesses and limits of this cooperation, generally not particularly structured and with fairly tight restrictions on financial resources, that have played a positive and stimulating role on its development. Overcoming such limits led to original solutions and important best practices, above all by leveraging the local partnership and territory. Overall, the aspects that arouse the most interest in terms of practices are not technical or specialist in nature, but chiefly relate to the regions’ role as territorial institutions that take on the responsibility of promoting, mobilising and integrating the actions of stakeholders and local communities, fostering their participation, and launching and/or managing the partnership.

¹⁵ Appendix: <http://platforma-dev.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Appendix-decent-coop-in-Medit-and-ME-by-Tuscany-region.pdf>

In OECD case studies (2018), Italy, represented by Tuscany, is studied precisely in its territorial approach, described as integrated and participative, with a wide and varied range of specific competences, which are involved in initiatives and decision-making processes that start from the bottom up and are divided into a multilevel governance structure.

The practices collected and selected in this report (12 Italian and 1 Spanish (Catalan)) are therefore grouped into three categories: empowerment and multi-sectoral interventions (3), transfer/exchange of knowledge and capacity building (divided into vertical and horizontal, 7 in total), and partnerships and implementing tools/structures (3). In reality, the best practices analysed here do not produce a complete framework of decentralised cooperation initiatives, but one that is sufficient to identify highly characteristic intervention profiles and lessons learnt that will help guide decentralised cooperation over the next few years.

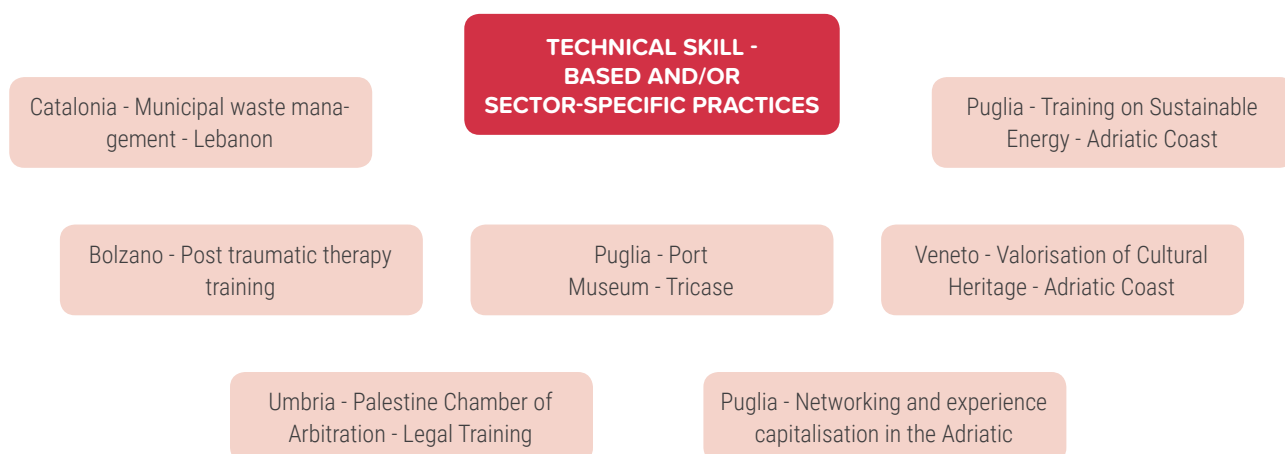
One interesting point is the significant role of knowledge transfer

or exchange, which we find is a fundamental component in many of the best practices collected. At the same time, there emerges an apparent contradiction, i.e. how the regions make relatively little use of their own competences within the institution. In many cases, they rely on an implementer for management, thereby moving away from the "everyday" of the project or the intervention, and carving out for themselves a more limited role, but one more focused on fundamental aspects such as the approach, strategy and construction of the partnership. Essentially, the regions tend, through the partnership, to complement and integrate roles and competences, rather than use their own internal technical skills, which, as we know, in Italy are highly concentrated in healthcare, an under-represented sector in the practices collected here. This is not necessarily a negative point, but makes us think about the fact that the decentralised cooperation of the regions and the partnership - the territorial partnership in particular - are closely linked, so the future of decentralised cooperation is being determined precisely on the quality of this partnership and on the capacity of the regions to increase it, and thus be recognised by their partners in this role.



Fig. 9. The framework of best practices in decentralised cooperation in the Mediterranean collected from the regions

KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE / TRANSFER



EMPOWERMENT AND MULTI-SECTOR INTERVENTIONS



PARTNERSHIPS AND IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS / STRUCTURES



1. Transfer / exchange of knowledge and capacity building

All best practices have an important knowledge transfer component, but for the best practices reported here, this component is the main one, and defines the whole system of the intervention at the level of objectives, results and activities.

There are however two models, the vertical and the horizontal¹⁶. The first corresponds to a transfer of know-how mainly in one direction, it is a more structured transfer, identifiable a priori and which thus responds to a specific requirement of a given territory and community, where there are serious critical issues and emergencies. The second is rather part of the recent development in cooperation between local cross-border entities, and precisely because of its multi-territoriality and simultaneous presence of many knowledge flows (which are often reciprocal (peer-to-peer) and bi- or multi-directional), is instead intended to stimulate growth of a shared wealth of knowledge to which all partner territories contribute and may also use.

An interesting case of capacity building and knowledge transfer in a more vertical framework, although open and able to mobilise competences in almost any part of the world, is that of the Autonomous Province of Bolzano, which provides significant experience for the content of the project and for the implemented partnership model. Firstly, art therapy is proposed as an effective and innovative tool to combat post-traumatic stress disorder and provide psychological

and therapeutic support to individuals who are victims of violence and oppression, with this technique applied in a complex conflict environment such as Iraqi Kurdistan. Second, as well as the parties located in the territory in which the project was implemented, a partner from a third country (Singapore) specialising in art therapy was also involved: this player was given responsibility for the planning and provision of training courses.

Focusing now on the area of the Middle East that is closest to the Mediterranean coast, there are two highly differing practices worthy of attention, both with a fundamental capacity building component: that of Umbria in Palestine and that of Catalonia in Lebanon. Through the transfer of legal and organisational know-how (provided by the University of Umbria), the former is intended to support the constitution of a local Chamber of Commerce. The latter is a more complex project aimed at addressing in a structural manner the disposal of municipal solid waste exacerbated by the refugee crisis, working in the local waste sector and at the Union of Municipalities, on the development of technical, management and planning competences and those relating to communication and awareness building.

Secondly, the regions proved to be pro-active and able to mobilise broad international networks with excellent planning capacity: these have the institutional credibility, the resources and capabilities to act as networking promoters among territorial players, which can carve out an important role for themselves in development cooperation projects.

UMBRIA - PALESTINE INTERNATIONAL ARBITRATION CHAMBER	
Areas of intervention	Description
Capacity building, local governance	<p>The Region of Umbria is the implementer of a project that led to the foundation of the Palestine International Arbitration Chamber (PIAC), the training of the Chamber's administration and management staff and qualified professionals specialising in disputes subject to arbitration (lawyers, arbitrators).</p> <p>Thanks to the involvement of the Department of Public Law at the University of Perugia, associations and local professional bodies, the Italian-Palestinian partnership supported the constitution of the Board of Directors and the governing structure of the PIAC in accordance with the regulations previously drawn up and enacted, ensuring the correct running and the assumption of professional liability.</p> <p>The project featured both a training component, targeting legal professionals and administrators, and a technical support component in the drafting of guidelines, procedures, legal deeds and certificates of incorporation. Furthermore, for the PIAC's first 12 months of activity, the Italian institutions involved provided financial support and assistance in resolving problems that could arise during this initial period of activity.</p>
Location	
Middle East	

¹⁶ For the evolution of decentralised cooperation and the emergence of 'horizontal' models, see Fernández de Losada Passols A. (2017), *Shaping a New Generation of Decentralised Cooperation for Enhanced Effectiveness and Accountability*, Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) & PLATFORMA, Brussels. <http://bit.ly/2FIEG0Z> The research provides an overall framework in which the models relating to the territorial partnership and networks are very clearly placed.

AUTONOMOUS PROVINCE OF BOLZANO - TRAINING FOR THERAPISTS SPECIALISING IN TRAUMA IN THE REGION OF KURDISTAN IN IRAQ

Areas of intervention	Description
Training, Art therapy, Psychological support and treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder	Art therapy techniques are considered an innovative and effective tool to provide support to traumatised people and victims of physical or psychological violence. The project enabled 20 therapists (including 12 women) to be trained, coming from nine different local centres of the Jiyan Foundation for Human Rights, an institution based in Erbil committed to promoting rights and freedom and specialising in the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder, transferring scientific knowledge and competences to them.
Location	A fundamental contribution was provided by Red Pencil International, an NGO based in Singapore and experts in art therapy, which planned the training courses and provided the teaching staff. The content of the courses, the techniques and rehabilitation and support tools were adapted to the context of Iraqi Kurdistan and the characteristics of the future beneficiaries, mainly women, children and refugees. The Jiyan Foundation provided a strategic contribution both through its own network of relationships with the local authorities and with representatives of civil society, and through its in-depth knowledge of the environment and needs of the local community.
Middle East	

CATALONIA - INTEGRATED MUNICIPAL SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT IN AL FAYHAA - ISWMF

Areas of intervention	Description
Local public services, Capacity building, local governance	The Region of Catalonia's project in Lebanon, Integrated Municipal Solid Waste Management in Al Fayhaa - ISWMF, is part of an agreement signed by five public Catalan institutions (the Municipality of Barcelona, the Provincial Government of Barcelona, the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona, the Catalan Fund for Development Cooperation and the Region of Catalonia) targeting a joint response in Lebanon to the humanitarian crisis caused by the war in Syria and the huge flow of refugees this has generated. The Catalan contribution aims in particular to strengthen the capacities of the municipalities belonging to the Union of Municipalities of Al Fayhaa (Tripoli, El Mina, El Beddawi and Qalamoun), enabling local authorities to increase their capacity to plan over the medium term and launch innovative solutions for the management of solid waste, the expense of which is becoming increasingly unsustainable for local governments. Specifically, the necessity to address the need for solid waste management should align humanitarian intervention with the public services and the development of infrastructure in national systems and programmes. Furthermore, with the contribution of UNDP, the project will focus on more environmentally sustainable solutions and practices based on sorting and recycling, and the creation of capacities for public bodies at national and local level in order to strengthen and harmonise systems.
Location	
Middle East	

Furthermore, decentralised cooperation initiatives show they can be integrated with the territorial cooperation policies promoted by the European Union. Puglia and Veneto may represent virtuous examples in this sense: through territorial cooperation, they have consolidated tools for dialogue and shared and participative management models for problems common to neighbouring areas.

These multi-location actions, such as those conducted within the Interreg programmes, have a widespread impact in all the territories concerned; by their nature, they are geared towards the exchange of knowledge and local experimentation with innovative actions that stimulate change. The best practice of Veneto is very interesting, in that it develops and disseminates knowledge and innovative and sustainable models in the management of historical heritage, involving private players in the management of fortified

structures belonging to the public authorities, reconvertng them for use for tourism and cultural services. Among the three identified by the Region of Puglia, the Alterenergy Project seems particularly worthy of mention. This represented a shared management model of the energy development policies of the Adriatic region, with a significant size and dissemination (involving 63 target communities of less than 10,000 inhabitants selected across the Adriatic Basin), producing two pilot schemes and seven demonstration projects, as well as a common platform of shared knowledge, contributing to the dissemination of operational procedures and best practices in energy planning. The awareness-raising activity on the issue of sustainable energy was especially successful, with the development of innovative approaches particularly for the initiatives targeting young people and schools.

PUGLIA - TRICASE PORT MUSEUM	
Areas of intervention	Description
Protection of the environmental and cultural heritage of coastal areas	<p>By nature, ports are points of departure, arrival and meeting. In the Mediterranean, they constitute the hub for the economy and the dissemination of culture and knowledge between Africa, the East and Europe; coastal cities have for centuries been examples of multi-culturalism and integration, places where habits and customs cross-contaminate.</p> <p>The Tricase Port Museum represents an innovative experience of promoting and communicating the identity of a small "Mediterranean" port based on a development model that can "safeguard and promote the knowledge and flavours of the cultural heritage of the coast and the sea" for tourism purposes, through the rediscovery and promotion of the cultural heritage of the small fishing communities of Tricase.</p> <p>The Port Museum is an economic and cultural centre, a space for dialogue between territories and one of the first experiences of the economic revival of the ancient local seafaring culture. In the Port Museum, local associations, institutions and partners find communication codes, physical spaces and tools to discuss common problems together and draw inspiration for shared solutions and new opportunities for sustainable growth.</p>
Location	
Puglia	

PUGLIA – ADRIAWEALTH	
Areas of intervention	Description
Networking, partnership facilitation, capitalisation	<p>The Adriawealth project promoted tools to facilitate relations between counterparts and territories, based not on financing opportunities but on real problems and common and shared requirements.</p> <p>The project is based on an intersectoral-clustering approach, through which it was possible to encourage operators and institutions from different sectors to work on a shared problem and support them in finding a shared outcome.</p> <p>The innovative element lies in the objective shared among the players, who choose to join a themed network: they are asked to interact not to present tender projects but to produce guidelines and discuss problems and shared priorities. When they are set up, the objective of the discussion groups is to draw up lines of action, share experiences and define methods of intervention.</p> <p>The project also included a major activity to disseminate the results of previous projects: a team of journalists and researchers analysed 77 projects in order to identify the principles, concepts and results in order to produce a database (the "results databank") in which it is possible to search by key word.</p>
Location	
Adriatic Coast	

PUGLIA – ALTERENERGY	
Areas of intervention	Description
Energy sustainability, production models, consumption models	<p>The Alterenergy Project represents a shared management model for energy development policies of the Adriatic region. The project involved 63 target communities of below 10,000 inhabitants selected from across the Adriatic Basin area.</p> <p>All partners and players directly involved in conducting the project activities developed knowledge and capacities, but also greater awareness regarding environmental issues and the energy efficiency measures promoted in every small local company.</p> <p>The Alterenergy Project organised training, information and territorial promotional activities on the issue of energy efficiency, always ensuring a multi-target and active dialogue approach with Adriatic communities covered by specific initiatives. Technicians and administrators were involved in capacity building programmes, which strengthened the competences of local players on the issue of energy efficiency of buildings, roads, public areas, etc.</p>
Location	
Adriatic Coast	



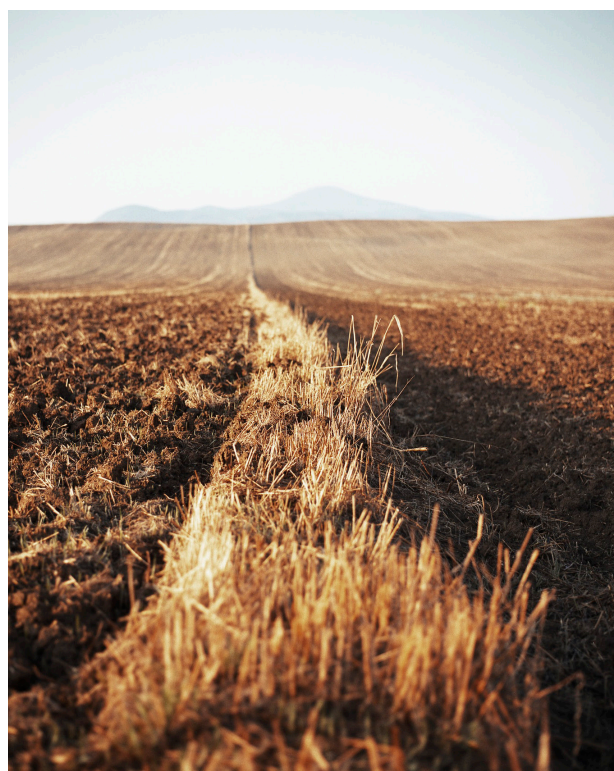
VENETO - ADRIFORT	
Area of intervention	Description
Promotion of the historical-cultural heritage of the Adriatic	<p>The Adrifort project arose from an awareness of the value represented by the area's fortified heritage (forts, fortifications, town walls, etc.) in the coastal area of the Adriatic, a resource that can provide economic and social benefits. The aim of the project was to create a new model of governance for cultural and social heritage, including via the involvement of private investors, and a network of public institutions to manage fortified heritage, with activities that would drive the economic growth of the surrounding areas. The project focused on capacity building by developing a common operating methodology that could assist institutions in managing and reusing fortified heritage in the Adriatic region.</p> <p>Through Adrifort, participative processes were promoted in the management of cultural assets, encouraging multi-level governance and public-private synergies. An important contribution was made by Cà Foscari University of Venice, which developed a "Feasibility study and impact assessment" model shared by all the partners: this tool enabled each territory to assess both the socio-economic potential of their local heritage and the feasibility and outcomes of initiatives to boost the value of their fortified places and public spaces for services for the public and for tourism.</p>
Location	
Adriatic Coast	

2. Empowerment and multi-sectoral interventions

One intervention model that emerges in the best practices collected and selected is that which specifies a community or territory as a target and perhaps works on several levels of intervention (e.g. social, healthcare, education, inclusion, etc.). These interventions, spread across various sectors to a greater or lesser extent, are incorporated in a common approach geared towards empowerment. Italian regions were able to structure lasting relationships of mutual trust with municipalities and/or territories. The projects of the Region of Emilia-Romagna in Algeria, and of Friuli Venezia Giulia in Syria and Tunisia show that the involvement of associations, stakeholders, local experts and communities make initiatives targeting empowerment and capacity building more effective and strengthen long-term effects.

Emilia-Romagna, for example, is a favoured partner of the Sahrawi people, with whom it launched a multi-project path based on criteria of reciprocity and exchange. Training and know-how transfer procedures were adopted that encouraged the local counterparty's participation both in the planning and management/implementation phases.

Friuli Venezia Giulia took a similar approach, albeit one applied in very different environments: on the one hand, an integrated and multi-sector empowerment intervention for Syrian refugees in Southern Turkey, centred on both rehabilitation from war traumas and women's socio-economic inclusion, and on the other, in Tunisia, support to associations and the establishment of the Agency for Local Democracy, using a best practice already tested in the Balkans (see next page).



To conclude, these were highly demanding initiatives, but also characterise and intensify the added value of decentralised cooperation: working in a continuous and integrated manner on intervention areas in specific communities and territories, supporting and encouraging them in change processes, without however interfering with endogenous mechanisms, they perhaps represent the type of action that best symbolises decentralised cooperation.

FRIULI VENEZIA GIULIA - DAWN IN SYRIA

Areas of intervention	Description
Women's empowerment - mediation - training	<p>The experience of the project "Dawn in Syria: professional training, mediation, reconciliation" provided integrated responses to the complex needs of Syrian refugees living in Turkey (mostly in the Gaziantep area and in the province of Hatay). The project mainly focused on women and children, the most vulnerable group.</p> <p>It promoted an integrated approach to the psychological support and social inclusion needs of Syrian refugee women.</p> <p>Female empowerment pathways were developed, through professional training courses and support to local micro-enterprises. Furthermore, an effective rehabilitation course for women and minors with post-traumatic stress disorder was launched, training qualified experts in the management of PTSD and mediation between ethnic communities. Finally, tools were introduced to raise awareness and directly involve the local authorities and civil society in political negotiation and cultural mediation processes between parties belonging to different ethnic-religious groups.</p>
Location	
Turkey	

FRIULI VENEZIA GIULIA - SUPPORT TO CIVIL ASSOCIATIONS IN TUNISIA

Areas of intervention	Description
Networking - democratic participation - local association empowerment	<p>The Region of FVG supports the network of associations belonging to Lam Echaml, including the "Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet", which was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2015. The initiatives to support democratisation processes and the participation of association groups were covered by the territorial relationship between Friuli Venezia Giulia and Tunisia, a country of strategic importance for the development of democratic processes in the Maghreb area.</p> <p>FVG chose to support associations with deep roots in Tunisian society, representing bodies organised by the people, committed to promoting rights, local development and consultation between institutions and representatives of Tunisian civil society. The projects implemented have a significant training component and are aimed at boosting the skills of administrative staff and civil society's capacity for action.</p> <p>In 2017, the Tunisian Local Democracy Agency was formed, with the project providing support for the preparatory work. This is a dialogue and intervention tool for civil society and institutions, which had previously been successfully tested in the Balkans. Its mission is to promote good governance and multi-level dialogue between citizens, local associations and institutions.</p>
Location	
North Africa	

EMILIA-ROMAGNA - INTERVENTIONS SUPPORTING THE SAHRAWI PEOPLE IN ALGERIA

Areas of intervention	Description
Cross-sector interventions supporting refugees and ethnic minorities	<p>The Region of Emilia-Romagna has for some years been conducting a multi-project programme supporting the Sahrawi people based on the criteria of reciprocity and exchange: regional Italian players (local authorities, NGOs, associations and groups of private citizens, healthcare units and unions, schools and universities) work with similar players, engineers and representatives of the Sahrawi people to ensure a fruitful cooperation of the Sahrawi institutional and technical counterparty on intervention proposals and strong links with all the components of the regional coordination panel, known as the Sahrawi country panel.</p> <p>In accordance with the principles of empowerment and accountability, regional planning promoted interventions with a training and know-how transfer component. Over the years, projects have been launched in various sectors, with particular attention to the healthcare and education environments. Some significant results were achieved in these two fields: the competences of healthcare, obstetrician and gynaecological staff were strengthened, as were those of the teaching staff in Sahrawi schools; medical and educational structures were improved, and the offer of educational and medical services and tools was expanded and strengthened.</p>
Location	
North Africa	

3. Partnership and implementation tools / structures

A fundamental part of best practices is the creation of what we have called “tools”, i.e. system initiatives or actions designed to structure decentralised cooperation at local level, which, in the case of the initiatives collected here, are based on partnerships with the private sector, other local authorities, universities and above all associations, in their various segments, and with the voluntary sector. Unlike other countries, no real cooperation agencies have been set up in Italy at local or regional level. However, there was felt to be a need to consolidate the organisation of cooperation on a local level, and, in so doing, try to work in close cooperation and in partnership with local stakeholders. For a more strategic and more systemic “structuring” or organisation of decentralised cooperation in the regions, it was decided to involve local civil society actors and private individuals, usually following the territorial partnership model.

In reality, it is the territorial partnership that characterises these tools identified as best practices by the regions. Many Italian regions took action by adopting the strategy of working on specific territories with the resources of those territories. A significant example in this regard is the Autonomous Province of Trento, which can boast very strong roots in the Balkans, thanks to its 20-year experience in the field and solid relationships with various levels of government, stakeholders and specialist agencies operating in the region. In this regard, the establishment of the Associazione Trentino per i Balcani (Trentino Association for the Balkans) represented a centre of excellence, which, by bringing together the contribution of parties in the territory, made available a structure that provided continuity and coordination to the various initiatives undertaken by local actors in the Balkans. This is a tool that, under a defined strategy, provided functionality and human and financial resources, in other words, “substance”, coordination, integration and continuity of action to a territorial partnership. Still in the Trento province, the Training Centre, which in turn is part of the Association itself, also proved strategic for the volume and characteristics of the training provided, an invaluable dissemination and sharing of know-how, which above all creates and consolidates relations with the “alumni”, i.e. the beneficiaries that over the years have taken part in the training, many of which are from the intervention territories, activating relations and processes instrumental to the development and consolidation of the translocal partnership.

A rather different best practice is that of the Region of Lombardy, which in 2012, launched a partnership with the Municipality of Milan and Fondazione Cariplo; this led to four important outcomes: i) the economic resources to be used in development cooperation projects increased; ii) the human resources involved became more

efficient; iii) selection procedures, the management of funding applications and reporting were improved; iv) private institutions and society accepted more responsibility on common issues. The Region of Lombardy's best practice brings us back to the question of the public-private partnership, an important principle, also a goal included in the SDGs (goal 17), undoubtedly to be sought and implemented more often also in international and decentralised cooperation. Bringing the financial resources of three parties, two public and one private, under one umbrella represents a significant innovation, as it implies the loss of direct and exclusive control of the resources by each of the three parties, in favour, however, of a broader initiative, which by definition, generates economies of scale and scope, avoiding duplication and increasing management efficiency.



AUTONOMOUS PROVINCE OF TRENTO - THE ASSOCIAZIONE TRENTO PER I BALCANI - ATB

Areas of intervention	Description
Local development; promotion of networking; technical support	<p>The Autonomous Province of Trento promoted the creation of a body dedicated to networking activities between parties (institutions, associations and private individuals) in Trento and the Balkans, committed to local development programmes. Non-profit organisation Associazione Trentino per i Balcani (ATB) was created by the merger of two organisations (Tavolo Trentino con Kraljevo and Tavolo Trentino con il Kosovo) active since the 1990s during the regional conflict in the Balkans.</p> <p>ATB has offices both in Trento (staff of eight people) and in the Balkans, and activities are divided into themed areas.</p> <p>Its roots in the territory and the solid relations it has built up over the years legitimised ATB's activities, and improved the effectiveness and efficiency of the projects financed. The Association promotes a programme of cooperation in the Balkans based on the principles of community, self-development and territorial partnership; it is an important example of the capacity to promote partnerships between the counterparts in both areas, to provide technical and financial continuity to territorial cooperation policies and support sustainable local development.</p>
Location	
Balkan Peninsula	

AUTONOMOUS PROVINCE OF TRENTO - THE TRAINING CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

Area of intervention	Description
Training	<p>The "Training Centre for International Solidarity" promotes the various activities in research and training for international solidarity, encourages the networking of various international relations and facilitates knowledge transfer between various players to ensure an integrated and systemic approach.</p> <p>Furthermore, it trains engineers and experts in the skills required to formulate, implement and manage financed projects, and conducts informative and communicate activities on these topics.</p> <p>The Centre cooperates with other institutional and association parties, such as the "Forum Trentino per la Pace e i Diritti Umani" (Trento Forum for Peace and Human Rights) and the "Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso" (the Balkan and Caucasus Observatory).</p>
Location	
Balkan Peninsula	

LOMBARDY - PUBLIC-PRIVATE FINANCIAL PARTNERSHIP

Areas of intervention	Description
Economic-financial partnership; Management of tenders and public funds	<p>Since 2012, the Region of Lombardy has been experimenting with the formula of economic-financial partnership between public (Municipality of Milan) and private (Fondazione Cariplo) players. These partnerships have enabled economic resources and technical competences (administration, management, assessment, etc.) to be pooled.</p> <p>The model enabled the partners to discuss the analysis carried out and the effectiveness of projects, as well as of the methods of examining and assessing accounting documents, which ensured that the grants to beneficiaries were efficiently audited.</p> <p>The result was an overall improvement in the processes of disbursing funding, tender procedures, relations between institutions and the territory, assessment and accounts management.</p> <p>This model therefore represents a tool that both increases the overall amount of funding (by bringing in private partners) and optimising the use of the available economic resources. Improved competences and greater resources can have positive effects on the planning, programming, implementation and management of cooperation projects.</p>
Location	
Lombardy	

4. Overview and description of recurring elements common to multiple sectors

In each of the experiences reported by the regions, for which a summary description has been included in the tables, important aspects can be identified to enable the likely strengths and added value of decentralised cooperation to be assessed.

The projects shown are examples of how certain key principles of decentralised cooperation have been put into concrete action. These principles are: the promotion of bottom-up approaches and administrative decentralisation; the adoption of tools and methodologies for transferring know-how and strengthening the accountability of local institutions; the empowerment of civil society and women by supporting the various forms of collaboration and social entrepreneurship, and the dissemination of multi-level dialogue and local governance models. The application of these principles has been developed over time.

Decentralised cooperation, which has been evolving in Italy since the 1980s, has seen a change in its most significant components, just as the international environment in which it operates has also changed dramatically.

Initially, local authorities were involved in humanitarian and emergency aid initiatives, based on the despatch of goods and equipment, and assistance with the supply of services on the ground; their role was restricted to “indirect” intervention, i.e. providing support to the projects of NGOs, associations and other specialised entities. Subsequently, these forms of assistance, although not abandoned, increasingly changed into “direct” and “participative” forms of decentralised cooperation: Italian local authorities promoted and managed cooperation initiatives with their counterparts in partner countries, making use of the technical and human resources of the relevant bodies in both territories¹⁷. However, this is not a purely Italian way of operating, as can be seen by the commonality of approach in the best practices followed by the Region of Catalonia.

As recognised in the recent Law 125/14, Italian decentralised cooperation has become one of the components of international relations with third countries: relationships between the Italian local authorities and their counterparts are structured via “territorial partnerships” while the stakeholders that are potentially affected by decentralised cooperation initiatives have risen in number and become more diverse, leading to an increase in public-private partnerships.

The survey of “best practices” would seem to confirm one of the most important principles of decentralised cooperation: the added value of this form of intervention compared with traditional forms of cooperation lies in its ability to promote “bottom-up” approaches at territorial level and to activate local development models that are truly participative, sustainable and inclusive.

In reality, the replicability, and more generally, the interest in capitalising on best practices must be understood at project approach level rather than the intervention in the strictest sense, which could be affected by the specific context. It is really about the “lessons learnt”, where great attention is paid to promoting bottom-up development processes and ensuring that local stakeholders play a proactive role in both the identification of needs and design phases, and in implementing activities and managing any services put in place. Moreover, compared with cooperation between countries, and non-governmental forms of cooperation, decentralised cooperation can mobilise more effective resources and competences to create spaces and tools for multi-level dialogue or improve existing ones.

The experiences in the Balkans, North Africa and Lebanon show that local authorities can play a strategic role in the processes of socio-economic reconstruction and democratisation. Specifically, cooperation between territories is virtuous and effective when it involves training initiatives for institutions, government bodies, associations and individual citizens designed to transfer technical and managerial know-how. Training courses can be provided on various subjects, such as managing public funds and tenders, public-private planning, territorial engagement, the promotion of local historic and cultural heritage, risk prevention and the strengthening of health and welfare services, the development of the social economy, and sustainable entrepreneurship.

The set of stakeholders that has played a direct or indirect role in project design and planning is large and varied: it is no longer made up of just the offices of the local administrations, NGOs and developmental associations, but also comprises SMEs, universities and research centres, community and migrant associations, health authorities and hospital services, credit institutions, and social groups and cooperatives.

Lastly, a thorough examination of the “best practices” confirms that the results achieved by individual projects may have a stronger and longer-lasting impact if the local authorities implement actions that are consistent with and pertinent to national and international guidelines, integrating local actions with more far-reaching and longer-term programmes.

¹⁷ *Decentralised cooperation - regional characteristics*, G. Baraldi (ed.), Development programmes series, 2014.



PART 4

THE CONTRIBUTION OF “LESSONS LEARNT”
AS A STEER FOR DECENTRALISED COOPERATION
IN LOCALISING THE SDGs

4 THE CONTRIBUTION OF “LESSONS LEARNT” AS A STEER FOR DECENTRALISED COOPERATION IN LOCALISING THE SDGs

Capitalising on previous experience provides an interpretation of the past that offers helpful suggestions and insights for defining future prospects. We are aware that this may only be a partial contribution, and that the debate on the role of the regions in future cooperation policies is complex and also concerns the political relationships between local authorities and national and supranational governments.

The “best practices” survey confirmed the added value of decentralised cooperation interventions funded and promoted by local and regional governments based on “bottom-up” approaches and with significant participation at territorial level.

In terms of replicability - and looking at the implications arising from an analysis of the best practices - it is probably more appropriate to talk about lessons learnt rather than models of action that can be readily and directly applied. Specifically, given the experiences reviewed, local and regional governments show their strengths in interventions aimed at fostering bottom-up development processes, including in difficult contexts, and with a significant degree of knowledge transfer. Of particular note are the experiences in which local authorities play a strategic role in reconstruction and socio-economic democratisation, and in which they seek to set up territorial cooperation that provides training on transferring technical and managerial know-how to institutional, social and government entities. Although the content varies across the initiatives studied (management of public funds and public tenders, public-private projects, territorial engagement, promotion of local historic and cultural heritage, risk prevention and the strengthening of health and welfare services, development of the social economy, and sustainable entrepreneurship), the intensity and weight of the training component and/or knowledge-transfer component is highly significant in the majority of cases.

The set of stakeholders and partners involved seems wide and diverse, both in the beneficiary and donor territories, including local authorities, universities and research centres, communities, associations, health bodies and organisations, credit institutions, social and cooperative organisations, companies, etc.

Overall, the common features predominant in the best practices show that territorial partnership is a model or general approach that can be extrapolated - a model built on both the participation and in-

volvement of partners, and the transfer and exchange of know-how as a main flow or component enabling change in the development process. This model shows how, by involving local partners and other stakeholders, regional governments can undertake significant and innovative cooperation actions. This model, which could be labelled as a “territorial partnership”, has shaped the regions’ modus operandi in decentralised cooperation to such a significant extent that nowadays it is difficult to see how Italian regional governments could manage this area of activity using only their own technical and managerial human resources and internal know-how. Here we have, in fact, highlighted a potential risk or weakness - that of relying too much on the territorial network. In other words, regional governments have limited involvement in some actions and do not make much use of their internal know-how, such that the transfer and exchange of know-how is mainly left to territorial partners; this means that the effectiveness of such actions depends more on the capacity of the territorial partners than that of the regions.

Although a territorial partnership may potentially present risks, it does seem to be a very important model for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals defined in the 2030 Agenda¹⁸.

The mapping and in-depth study of best practices seems to strengthen the position of those who maintain that the contribution of territorial partnerships is strategic to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals set by the 2030 Agenda.

More generally, the Italian regions have ploughed increasing resources and expectations into developing territorial partnerships and the virtuous synergies that could be generated between peripheral government bodies and local players in civil society and the social economy. At the same time, there has been cross-contamination between the “core” dimensions of cooperation and the actions designed to foster and consolidate the international outlook of a territory or whole region. The areas that have seen increasing territorial cooperation are many and varied: the internationalisation of companies, the promotion of trade partnerships, the attraction of investment and labour, the control of migration flows, the promotion of networks between immigrant communities and their home country, the shared management of natural resources and historical and cultural heritage, the integration of service networks in coastal and border areas, and the upgrade of urban services, to name but a few.

¹⁸ The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a plan of action for people, the planet and prosperity, signed in September 2015 by the governments of 193 UN member countries. The official launch of the Sustainable Development Goals took place at the start of 2016, providing a steer for the world on the way forward over the next 15 years. The countries are committed to achieve them by 2030. There are 17 Sustainable Development Goals: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

However, although the current models of intervention are geared towards the SDGs, we must evaluate whether they can also manage more consistently the areas of intervention corresponding to the SDGs on which less project activity is focused, e.g. in the environmental arena (life on land, life below water, clean water and sanitation, clean energy, climate action, sustainable cities and communities) and in self-sufficiency/food safety from an environmentally sustainable perspective.

In this context, the regions are in a position to seize opportunities to provide a fresh impetus to their international mission and support the change and innovation initiatives necessary to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

There are many factors that can strengthen the leading role played by the regions, but some issues are still unresolved and subject to debate. Apart from the issue of territorial partnerships, this survey gave us the opportunity to focus on another three aspects that, in our opinion, merit attention.

i) Focus on processes: The principles expounded by the 2030 Agenda are rooted in the foundations of Italian decentralised cooperation and, in practice, have been pursued via broad-based or cross-sector projects, which involve the sharing and recognition of individual diversity. These initiatives promote a process-based approach aimed at improving the capacity for action of local communities and the political, social and economic framework. In addition, the Italian regions can bring decades of experience to bear on the management of services, the protection and promotion of environmental and cultural heritage, the promotion of democratic participation, and territorial engagement, all of which are key issues in the international agenda.

ii) Territorial cooperation: The European Union supports, via both dedicated programmes (e.g. Urbal and Urbact) and regional and cross-border cooperation policies, the active involvement of the regions and large metropolitan cities by means of governance and multi-level dialogue processes. These are also areas in which the regions have tried out practices and tools via cooperation projects, particularly on issues and sectors that fall within their remit (public services, health, trade, management of parks and natural areas, etc.). Capitalising on experiences of decentralised development cooperation to replicate them in regional cooperation programmes and cross-border cooperation (or vice versa) is only one of the many possible ways to improve the effectiveness of aid and promote the role of territorial entities.

iii) Public-private partnerships: There is considerable scope for developing public-private partnerships, both in the planning and management of tenders and in the operational phases of project design and implementation.

Law 125/2014 identifies public-private partnerships as a fundamental pillar for future cooperation policies. The entry of new stakeholders into territorial partnerships and the adoption of innovative networking models may have positive effects, such as:

- introducing innovative methodologies for action and management;
- facilitating the exchange of know-how and knowledge;
- increasing communities' level of awareness about the issues of development, peace and inter-cultural dialogue;
- strengthening the planning capacity of network players;
- increasing economic resources and improving aid efficiency.

Our comments on the aspects that describe the regions' international role and the prospects for decentralised cooperation have even more weight if we take as the geographical benchmark the Mediterranean Sea and the countries that directly or indirectly affect the socio-economic and cultural process of this macro-region.

Today, as in the past, the Mediterranean Sea is the main gateway to Europe. The territories bordering on the Mediterranean Sea have to contend with complex phenomena to which international diplomacy does not always respond in a coordinated and effective manner.

In this context, with the support of their own territorial structures, the regions can promote processes for adopting shared solutions to joint problems. Building relationships between territories and sharing knowledge, skills and best practices improves the capacity of local government hubs to administer public services and foster active participation.

An overall improvement in living conditions in the countries bordering the Mediterranean Basin would help to bring normality to the areas struggling with social conflict, strengthen the external borders of the European Union, and also have positive repercussions on the competitiveness of the European regions and on social cohesion.

These are ambitious objectives but they cannot be postponed any longer: the experiences of decentralised cooperation, as promoted through territorial partnerships, are one of the strategic resources via which the regions can affirm their role as players able to affect international policies and sustainable development processes.

The 2030 Agenda requires a change in the way in which society and the productive and environmental system interact: the Mediterranean and its inter-connected territories are a space in which innovative change practices can be experimented with.

REGIONE TOSCANA

Tuscany is one of the twenty regions of Italy. The region, divided into 10 provinces and 287 municipalities, presents an advantageous geographical position: situated in central Italy, it is on one of the main trans-European axis of communication.

In the socio-economical scene, Tuscany embodies a dynamic region, with a highly competitive productive network, diversified, spread in a capillary manner throughout the entire territory. By tradition, the Tuscan economy is very prosperous and open to world trade.

The Region of Tuscany's international cooperation activities are based on a system of partnerships, articulated by the regions, through which a variety of actors are mobilised to carry out innovative and inclusive projects with partner regions.

Tuscany is also developing cooperation in cooperation with international organisations such as the United Nations Development Program, FAO, Unicef, the World Health Organization and the European Union.

www.regione.toscana.it



PLATFORMA

PLATFORMA is the pan-European coalition of local and regional governments – and their associations – active in city-to-city and region-to-region development cooperation. Since its creation in 2008, PLATFORMA has been representing more than 100,000 local and regional governments. All are key players in international cooperation for sustainable development.

The diversity of PLATFORMA's partners is what makes this network unique. PLATFORMA reflects the diversity of local and regional governments' realities in Europe and across the world.

The aim of PLATFORMA is to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and mutual learning, but also to strengthen the specific role of local and regional governments in development policies.

In 2015, PLATFORMA signed a Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) with the European Commission. Its signatories commit to take actions based on common values and objectives to tackle global poverty and inequalities, while promoting local democracy and sustainable development.

The Secretariat of PLATFORMA is hosted by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR).

www.platforma-dev.eu



This mapping of Italian decentralised cooperation projects in the Mediterranean and in the Middle East prepared by the Tuscany Region combines a quantitative analysis on the data relating to all cooperation projects promoted in the Mediterranean basin and a qualitative survey on some of the most significant experiences in this area.

It is a useful tool to all other European regions active in decentralised cooperation in the Mediterranean.



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