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Francesco Calabrò

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Networks, Markets & People

Communities, Institutions and
Enterprises Towards Post-humanism
Epistemologies and AI Challenges,
Volume 5



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**Policies and Practices of Cohesion
and Social Innovation for Inclusive
Cities**



Assessments and Reflections on Integrated Territorial Planning in Calabria in the 2000–2020 Programming Period. From the Experimental Phase to the Consolidated Method of Cooperation Between Territories

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Abstract. In the long experience of integrated territorial planning (ITP) implemented in Calabria, with the Leader Community Initiative, the Territorial Pacts and the Regional Operational Programming of the Structural Funds, there have been evolutionary dynamics that have produced important innovations in the local territories. This new modality of intervention has generated and spread in the territories, especially the marginal ones, positive effects in terms of policy making behaviour and practices, more so where Local Action Groups are active. Although in the three programming cycles (2000–2020) there has been an apparent weakening of the use of ITP instruments by the Region of Calabria, reading the documentation and acts produced and listening to the main actors involved at the regional and local levels reveal an evolution of the instruments, in terms of programming choices, from generalist to thematic. In this contribution, in addition to the analysis of the ITP instruments in the 3 Regional Operational Programmes (Calabria ROPs 2000–2006, 2007–2013 and 2014–2020), a series of evaluations and reflections on the experience of Integrated Territorial Planning in Calabria are reported, highlighting its criticalities and positive effects, especially in terms of method. In fact, the practice of dialogue, confrontation and thinking in collective terms has been acquired on a permanent basis, creating in some cases consolidated territorial identity networks and generating in local communities a widespread awareness of the heritage of local resources. In the evaluations, particular attention is paid to the ‘point of view of the actors’, in some cases different depending on the role played.

Keywords: Integrated Territorial Planning · Local Development · Cohesion policy

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1 Integrated Territorial Planning: Tools and Evolution

Integrated Territorial Planning (ITP) was born within the framework of the instruments of negotiated planning and local development that were introduced in 1992, with the dissolution of the national Agency for the Promotion and Development of the Mezzogiorno (which replaced the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno, abolished in 1984), in line with the evolution of legislation on administrative decentralisation and the need to coordinate national action for the financial support of depressed areas within the European Union's Cohesion policy. These instruments introduce new forms of intervention, based on territorial projects aimed at local development and based on agreements between public and private subjects operating in specific territorial contexts.

ITP applies the method and principles on which the local development paradigm is based, and in particular: 1) the method of dialogue, collaboration, participation and consultation; 2) the principles of: a) a bottom-up approach (defined by territorial, political and social actors); b) a territorial approach (territorial dimension - knowledge and valorisation of local resources); c) an integrated approach (project-based, multi-sectoral, networking, cooperation between different organisations - creation of links public - public/private - private); d) concentration of resources (critical mass of interventions/actions on a development idea); e) a decentralised and unitary management; f) a strategic vision ('*idea-forza*' and a leading concept for development) [1–5].

ITP, which was launched and experimented in Calabria in the 1990s with the Leader II Community Initiative and the Territorial Pacts, has been used, also in the implementation of the various Community guideline documents, as an important tool of the Regional Operational Programmes (ROPs), particularly in the 2000–2006 and 2007–2013 programming cycles, through different types of instruments.

In the ROP Calabria 2000–2006, for the growth and strengthening of local development systems, the *PIT-Progetti integrati territoriali* (Integrated Territorial Project) were foreseen, on a sub-provincial territorial basis, of a sectoral or multi-sectoral type, aimed at achieving socio-economic development objectives of specific territorial partitions, which were flanked by Integrated Projects for Rural Areas (PIAR), which contributed, together with the Leader Plus Plans, to rural development within the PIT areas.

The ROP Calabria 2007–2014 provided for the improvement of the quality of life, competitiveness and attractiveness of non-urban territorial systems through the *PISL-Progetti integrati di sviluppo locale* (Integrated Local Development Projects) and *PISR-Progetti integrati di sviluppo regionale* (Integrated Regional Development Projects), which involved different aggregations of territories within the provincial limits, with specific themes/objectives.

In the ROP Calabria 2014–2020, the *ITI-Investimenti integrati territoriali* (Integrated Territorial Investments) were foreseen for the development of Inland Areas, which, at the planning stage, concerned the territories included in the National Strategy for Inland Areas (SNAI) and in the Regional Strategy for Inland Areas (SRAI). The ITI for internal areas, however, were never implemented due to a subsequent revision of the ROP Calabria.

1.1 The Integrated Territorial Projects in the 2000–2006 Programming Cycle

The Calabria ROP 2000–2006, in accordance with the Community Support Framework, assumed integrated planning as an «operational tool for implementing the regional strategy» and instituted the *PIT-Progetti integrati territoriali* (Territorially Integrated Projects) for «supporting the rationalisation, growth and implementation of local development systems (...) in accordance with the real specificities and vocations of the area» with the idea of integrating and supporting current initiatives (Leader II and Territorial Pacts and) and promoting «new initiatives in the areas that express greater needs and/or opportunities in a logic of cohesion and cooperation between areas». The main idea was to bring to unity the diverse experiences of «local development carried out in a bottom-up programming logic and bring it back into the regional programming framework». The PITs were also given the function of implementation tools capable of creating functional and long-lasting cooperation networks between small municipalities (population < 15,000 inhabitants).

For the activation of the PITs, the Region of Calabria envisaged an innovative and complex governance model; the Integrated Territorial Projects were assigned 'institutional value' with a prevailing public participation. A direct involvement and empowerment of local institutions was activated, with an important leadership assigned to the Mayors. And moments of institutional discussion and dialogue were also promoted with the Provinces and the Mountain Communities. Furthermore, account was taken of the presence of the Development Agencies created in the 1990s within the Territorial Pacts or the Leader initiatives, on which the Region relied for the technical management of the PITs. In particular the Local Action Groups that had been set up to implement the Leader II were engaged, at the same time as the PITs, in the implementation of the Leader Plus, and the Management Companies set up to implement the Territorial Pacts. The governance and management activity of the PITs was articulated at two different levels: a) the central level carried out by the Region, through the Managing Authority (MA) with the coordination and control of all the PIT activities in the regulatory choices (programming, monitoring and control); b) the local level, PIT that had the task of constructing the PIT project proposal and guaranteeing the implementation of the actions and the achievement of the objectives. To this end, the local level was structured in three different functions: political function (Conference of Mayors and Management Committees); technical function (Project Manager and Technical Management Unit); partnership and concertation function (Economic and Social Councils) [6]. The functioning of the technical level was ensured through funding for the preparation of PIT project proposals and for the management and implementation of the approved Project (technical assistance).

Through the PITs, about 22% of the public expenditure of the ROP is planned to be implemented, equal to about 566.40 Mln euro, with interventions that intercept 22 Measures of the ROP, distributed over the different Axes, and the four EU Structural funds (ERDF - EAGGF - ESF - FIFG). Within the PIT areas, for the purposes of rural development, the ROP also provided room for the activation of PIARs (Integrated Projects for Rural Areas), which have supported the construction of 41 infrastructural works in rural agricultural system.

The definition of the PIT areas, territorially contiguous municipalities within the provincial boundaries, was carried out under regional direction, taking into account the specialisations of the Calabrian territories and the territorial areas already involved in sub-regional area programming experiences (Mountain Communities, LAGs, Territorial Pacts and Parks). A wide-ranging territorial and institutional animation activity was carried out, with the support of Formez, which was necessary to fertilise the territory, local institutions, and business associations on the innovative potential of the PITs. In the words of an interviewee, «we wanted to understand what hold these instruments could have on the territories by the politicians».

The Region made the choice to set up 23 PIT areas, covering the entire regional territory. It did not therefore aim at investing only in territories with specific vocations, but at generating the conditions for the creation of cooperation networks between municipalities. The involvement of the entire territory was a political and technical choice by the Region which «wanted to increase the capacity of local governments», not excluding anyone.

The procedure for drawing up Local Area Projects was very complex; it lasted about three years (between 2001 and 2004). Among the approved PITs, few were the truly integrated ones; in most cases they were containers of projects that were not always consistent with the development strategy. The projects that were approved by the Region were mainly aimed at tourism development (13 PITs) and at territorial development in general (7 PITs); in addition, one PIT was oriented to industrial development, one to the environment and one to research and innovation [4].

For the 23 Integrated Territorial Projects, public funding of about 423.20 Mln euro was allocated, with an average funding per PIT of about 18.4 Mln euro. A total of 1092 interventions were financed, of which 482 concerning infrastructure, 179 business aid schemes, 346 training activities, and 80 services.

During the implementation phase, the PITs did not have a unitary management. Following the signing of the Programme Agreements between the Region of Calabria and the Presidents of the Conferences of Mayors, each beneficiary had to sign an individual convention with the Region of Calabria for the intervention. The idea that the most suitable organisational model for the implementation of the Region's PITs was the establishment of a Joint Office, pursuant to art. 30 of the D.Lgs. n. 267/2000, as indicated by the Formez studies [7], was never taken into consideration. Even the calls for private co-financing of interventions were managed directly by the Region.

PIT projects began to be implemented, after long delays, only in 2006, i.e. well beyond the timeframe set by the ROP. This was made possible thanks to the use of so-called 'bank projects' or 'coherent projects', i.e. projects already implemented outside the ROP, which could be used to account for the programmed expenditures.

The PIT experience was strongly guided and supported at the national level by the Department for Development and Cohesion Policies (DPS), directed by Fabrizio Barca, which had attributed to the PITs an important experimental value for the innovation of local governance and the creation of social capital in local territories [8]. The experimentation was supported by Formez in the context of the National Operational Programme 'ATAS' (Technical Assistance and System Actions) for Objective 1 Areas, activated by the Department of Public Administration to support the ongoing reform

processes of the Public Administration through system actions. The Formez, which had previously carried out research and study activities on local development tools (Leader and Territorial Pacts), with the SPRINT Project (System Action), provided its technical support. Through its regional task forces it assumed a strategic role in assisting the Regions and the Local Administrations in the application of the new instruments, using the 'research-action' method [9] [10].

The PIT experience has been the subject of several scientific publications – including by Formez – which have evaluated its procedures, methodologies, governance, contents, challenges and opportunities, through the analysis of a number of case studies. No publication, however, has been specifically dedicated to the overall Calabrian experience. The Regional government itself did not carry any reporting and evaluation activity on the results achieved by the PIT tool in the individual local territories and/or at regional level. The Final Report of Execution (REF) of the 2000–2006 ROP only addresses the implementation of the regional programme broken down by individual 'measure' and by Structural fund. The only specific evaluations of the PITs were made by the 'Independent Evaluator' who noted, in the various updates, the progress of expenditure and the critical points of implementation.

1.2 The Integrated Local Development Projects and Integrated Regional Development Projects in the 2007–2013 Programming Cycle

The POR Calabria 2007–2013 concerning the ERDF, building on the experience of the PITs, which had generated an important institutional mobilisation and had initiated an innovative process for local governance, introduced a new instrument of Integrated Territorial Planning, i.e. the Integrated Local Development Projects (PISL) and the Integrated Regional Development Projects (PISR). The changes were oriented to overcome the criticalities that had emerged with the implementation of the PITs. The orientation dictated by the ROP 2007–2013 was the «concentration of resources on a few priorities, territorial and thematic, in order to realise consistent interventions that can leave deep and lasting traces in the Calabrian territory and to contrast the distributive and dispersive logic of resources that have made local development policies sterile» [11]. The ROP, through the *PISL-Progetti integrati di sviluppo locale* (Integrated Local Development Projects) and *PISR- Progetti integrati di sviluppo regionale* (Integrated Regional Development Projects), aimed at improving the quality of life, the competitiveness and attractiveness of non-urban territorial systems, where about 70% of the Calabrian population lives, the enhancement of local resources and specificities, and the contrast to the decline of internal and marginal areas. The Integrated Territorial Projects implemented by the Region of Calabria in the 2007–2013 cycle were of 7 types and belonged to 3 strategic areas:

- Integrated projects referring to *institutional territorial systems*, based on forms of collaboration between Local Authorities for the associated management of public services: PISL-Inter-municipal Mobility Systems and PISL-Inter-municipal Services for the Quality of Life.
- Integrated projects related to *thematic territorial systems*, geared to areas with a concentration of specific territorial resources or vocations: PISL-Local Tourist Systems and Local Tourist Destinations, PISL-Local Productive Systems, and PISL-Agrifood Districts and Rural Districts.

- Integrated Regional Development Projects, aimed at the achievement of *strategic objectives for the entire regional territory*: PISR-Contrasting depopulation in marginal areas, –PISR-Preservation of linguistic minorities’ cultural heritage, and PISR-Valorisation of historic boroughs.

The territorial and sectorial articulation for the preparation of the PISL and PSR was regulated by the Unified Integrated Planning Framework (QUPI) drawn up by the Region, which, on the basis of the cognitive analysis of the territory and the contents of the regional and provincial planning and programming instruments, divided the regional territory into 60 ‘homogeneous territorial ambits’ considered as the basic units for the delimitation of the areas eligible for PISL/PISR.

Also in the case of the PISL/PISR, the governance model envisaged a multilevel governance involving three levels of partnership bodies: regional, provincial and local. In the programming process, an important role was played by: 1) the Provincial Planning Laboratories, which provided technical-planning support and territorial animation for the definition of the project proposals; 2) the Regional Technical Group/Development Agents, made up of expert professionals who accompanied the implementation and monitoring phases of the programme, to support the beneficiaries as well. In the launching and implementing of the PISL/PISR projects, the regional level was supported by *Formez* in many activities. But, unlike the PITs, no resources were provided for the local level, either for the design of the implementation of projects.

The PISL/PISR implementation started in late 2010, with the territorial allocation of resources for each Calabrian province based on specific indicators. A total of 406.65 million euro, equal to approximately 20 per cent of the ROP, was allocated for the PISL/PISR, to be used across eleven lines of intervention relating to three Axes: Axis V ‘Natural, Cultural Resources and Sustainable Tourism’, Axis VII ‘Production Systems’, and Axis VIII ‘Cities, Urban Areas, and Territorial Systems’.

The selection of the project proposals took place through public calls to which the territories responded by voluntarily aggregating themselves in accordance with the indications of the QUPI, on the basis of the type of PISL/PISR they selected, even more than one, with different aggregations.

Project evaluation and selection activities were very complex and lengthy: 2,150 evaluation hours were spent in 21 panel meetings; and 362 min were drafted, with the involvement of members of the Regional Evaluation Panel (NVVIP) and 15 Development Agents [11]. The operationalisation of the projects also took time. Only after the start of the public works financed did the Region, in 2014, start the procedures for the selection of business projects (aid schemes). Moreover, each beneficiary of the individual intervention had to sign a Convention with the competent regional Department.

The response of the territories to the regional calls for proposals was very high. As many as 106 Integrated Local and Regional Development Projects (PISL/PISR) were received, encompassing 1,028 public works projects (infrastructures and services) for a total value of €995.25Mln. Out of the total 409 Calabrian municipalities, 403 municipalities responded to the calls and 454 partners were involved [11].

On the whole, also in the light of the subsequent shortlisting, the Region of Calabria financed 89 PISL/PISR for a total of €379.59Mln: 544 public interventions (infrastructures and services) for about €313.87Mln and more than 300 entrepreneurial projects

related to tourism and productive activities for about €65.69Mln. Almost all the municipalities of the territorial systems were involved in the new integrated planning tool and in many cases in several projects. The variable-geometry territorial aggregations were formed on the basis of specific leading concepts on which they leveraged the development strategy defined in the proposed project. Among the 89 PISL/PISR, 56 were oriented towards the enhancement of context specificities (18 tourism, 13 local production systems, 3 linguistic minorities, 22 historic boroughs), 28 concerned territorial liveability (quality of life and inter-municipal mobility), and 5, one per province, concerned the depopulation of inner areas). The largest investment was in tourism, with about €180.69Mln in total funding (€127.41Mln for public interventions and €53.28Mln for private interventions), equal to about 47.6% of the total funding of the PISL/PISR.

In spite of the delays in the launch of the procedure (the conventions were stipulated in 2013), thanks to the accompanying effort made by the Region to safeguard resources not spent by 2015, in time, the PISL/PISR were all implemented.

As was the case with the PITs in the previous programming cycle, also for the PISL/PISR, the Region has not carried out an overall evaluation of the experience gained, i.e. of the interventions implemented and the results achieved. The Final Report of Execution (REF) for the ROP 2007–2013 only provides information per Axis and per line of intervention, in terms of expenditure and completion, for operations concluded by 2015. Therefore, we have a few descriptive figures, which are partial and incomplete, and do not represent the overall implementation of the projects, which were eventually concluded in 2018.

1.3 The ITIs for Inner Areas in the 2014–2020 Programming Cycle

In compliance with the EC Regulation 1303/2013 of Structural Funds, in the ROP Calabria (ERDF/ESF) 2014–2020 the *ITI-Investimenti territoriali integrati* (Integrated Territorial Investment) instrument was established, also on the basis of the experiences of the PISL/PISR. In particular, in the light of the Strategic Orientation Document of the Operational Programming 2014–2020 (DOS), which assigned great importance to Inland Areas, the ROP envisaged the use of ITIs to implement its Regional Strategy for Inland Areas, complementary to the National Strategy (SNAI) which was already established in 4 regional areas. The main idea of the strategic choice made within the framework of the ROP was to give continuity, strengthen and integrate the PISL experience by focusing on four areas considered strategic among the Inner Areas: 1) protection of the territory and local communities; 2) valorisation of natural and cultural resources and sustainable tourism (creation of integrative forms of income); 3) sustainable mobility; 4) know-how, handicrafts, agricultural and agri-food production. The general objective was to improve the endowment and quality of collective services, increase social inclusion, and reduce land abandonment, with a view to reverse depopulation dynamics. The Regional Strategy of Inner Areas (SRAI) is aimed at all peripheral and outermost municipalities with a decrease in population exceeding 10% from 1981 to 2011 and involves a total of 113 municipalities in 10 designated areas. In these areas multiple financing instruments can be integrated (ERDF, ESF and EAFRD, plus the national FSC and PAC). In total, €192 million, i.e. about 8.5% of the ROP were allocated to the Internal Areas it is, intercepting 9 Axes.

In 2020, however, with two re-modulations of the ROP, Regional Strategy of Internal Areas and the ITI instrument for internal areas were altogether cancelled.

From what emerged, listening to the various actors in the programming process, it was a political choice: «they did not want to do it», probably not because of the implementation difficulties and the excessively long time needed for the implementation of the ITIs, but because of the «internal political tensions» generated by the ‘strategic choice’ made by the Region, which hierarchically identified targeted interventions for a precise objective and addressed ‘only certain territories».

This cancellation sanctioned, in some respects, the end of the Integrated Territorial Planning experience in Calabria as a key implementation instrument of regional development programming.

2 Evaluations on the PTI Experience and the Actors’ Point of View

On the basis of the existing documentation on the Integrated Territorial Planning (ITP) experience within the framework of the ROPs of Calabria in the twenty-year period from 2000 to 2020 (three programming cycles) and in the light of the information and perceptions acquired during the interviews conducted with various actors,¹ some concluding reflections on the overall experience of ITP are proposed in what follows.

First of all, the evolution of the ITP instruments reveals a weakening – a parabola of sorts – over the three programming cycles. The institutional, local and regional, but also scientific ferment generated in the experimental phase of the PITs has risen with the PSL/PISR and then waned with the ITI. This is probably because over time actors began to see integrated territorial planning as a ‘burden’, due to its implementation complexities: «it wastes time and delays spending», but also because «participation is a transfer of power». However, the analysis of the different programming instruments also reveals an interesting evolution in their approach, even if in the third cycle (2014–2020) it was cancelled midway. It is an evolution that demonstrates the Region’s intent to make increasingly targeted choices in addressing local development policies, although without the capacity to fully implement them.

In fact, the PITs (2000–2006) were characterised by no binding thematic guidelines, with a consequent lack of specialization in most project proposals; by an equalization mechanism, whereby the entire regional territory was involved, with a mostly top-down articulation of the areas; and a negotiated mechanism of approval of the projects. In contrast, in the PISL/PISR (2007–2013) the issues and the strategic objectives for regional development were defined top-down (also with the support of the Provinces), while a competitive procedure (selection by call) was activated among the territories, with a relative freedom to aggregate. This approach generated an important local mobilization, partly based on the previous learning process, with the creation of bottom-up networks and project proposals more in line with the vocations and needs of the territories and greater awareness of local resources and potential. The ITIs (2014–2020) planned for

¹ During the period May 2022–May 2023, 27 actors engaged in Regional Programming, in various capacities and in different spheres (policy, regional administration, regional evaluation, local administration, technical assistance and territorial animation, Local Action Groups administration, Economic and Social Partnership, entrepreneurship), were interviewed.

the Internal Areas, on the other hand, proposed an even narrower thematic focus, with the ex-ante identification of eligible territories based on objective indicators, and with the precise aim of stopping the depopulation of the Internal Areas, also achieving the objective of concentrating expenditure.

With reference to the ITP implementation performance, the widespread perception is that in the 2000–2006 cycle, with the PITs, a «cultural movement» took place, that represented a good season for the territories and a great novelty. For the first time, the PIT tool forced the Mayors to sit around a table «leaving the bell towers» but it was also a new opportunity to «put the European flags in every municipality».

In what concerns the PISL/PISR experience, there are differing opinions. For some actors, the procedures have been too ‘brainy’ and complex in their implementation structure, without real local governance and were «generators of tension between territories» due to their competitive nature; moreover, they were seen as a space for ‘political manoeuvring’, while participation was voided by «political tours in which promises were made to Mayors». For others, they worked better than the PITs, since they were better managed in the phase of defining project proposals with the support of project ‘workshops’, and in the implementation phase with the support of development agents. Projects were also better aimed at the vocations of territories.

On the causes that have led to a sort of *shutdown of the ITP approach* in the last cycle there are different positions: a disaffection with the programming model that no longer keeps up with the territory; the competition for political leadership among mayors; the unfulfilled expectations; but above all the frequent change of local actors: «the integration of the territories on which integrated planning is based is done a lot by the Mayors, by people; when the actors change you lose the harmony».

Although there is not enough evidence to assess the socio-economic effectiveness of the ITP tools independently of the ROPs, it is possible to point out some of the *negative factors* as raised by the interviewed actors, both at the regional and local level.

At the *regional* level, the following emerged: 1) the absence of both territorial and sectoral planning, above all of a Regional Development Plan with a long-term vision (30–50 years); 2) the resistance to implement administrative innovation towards decentralization and the desire to maintain regional control over decision making and public investments at the local level, in order to acquire political consensus; this also explains the resistance to delegate spending to recognised autonomous legal entities representative of mayors and other partners and aimed at the unitary local management of the PTI; 3) the fragmentation of resources and the low degree of financial concentration, as well as the predominance of investment in public works; 4) the absence/shortage of dedicated resources for technical assistance to be allocated directly to local territories for constant accompaniment in all phases of the ITP formulation and implementation; (5) the weakness of overall regional administrative capabilities; 6) the complexity of the implementation procedures of ITPs, which are «time consuming»; 7) the lack of requirements on the quality of the project and the low selectivity of proposals; 8) the political alternance of regional governments, coupled with the discontinuity in programming regulations and tools.

Among the critical factors at the *local level*, the following were particularly emphasised: 1) the absence of an «ability to think about a territory», to work on the construction

of an idea of territory and build a vision that can guide investments; «the aim of acquiring financial resources too often prevails and generate actions that are not strategic»; 2) the implementation of projects that are not always coherent/functional with the real needs of the territories, with the *'idea-forza'* and with the objectives declared, in many cases because of political interference; often there is no 'backbone project' and lack of sectoral integration; 3) the absence of/low integration between public and private investment; 4) lack of resources/skills in the municipal offices responsible for managing the procedures for the implementation of the interventions; 5) discontinuity of territorial aggregations and inability on the part of the Municipalities to create aggregations of legal value, through the tools of the 'Common Offices' or the Union of Municipalities, organised around *common vision*; 6) the rather passive role of the Socio-Economic Partnership that is not very pro-active in the programming phase and absent in the implementation phase; 7) the absence of democratic control over the implementation of project.

Despite these shortcomings, especially in what concerns «the creation of stable areas of local government», such as the Association or Union of Municipalities, overall, the ITP experience has generated also important *positive effects*. In the first place, it has triggered a learning process on the part of the public actors (especially the Mayors) who have learned to dialogue and think in 'collective terms'; they have practiced the «game of institutional cooperation» through which collective needs can better be assessed and responded to. Secondly, it has contributed to create consolidated territorial networks and the emergence of territorial identities in some areas (e.g. the Graecanic Area). It has also generated embryos of 'social capital' and has provided room for the development of new forms of professionalism, including the figure of the 'territorial/institutional animator' who «has the ability to bring together politics with the territories». It has stimulated, in local communities, the discovery of resources, identity, vocations and territorial energies, channelling them towards new forms of decision-making mechanisms and governance. Despite the freeze in municipal personnel hiring, a process of administrative modernization has also occurred, in what concerns technical expertise and project management procedures. It has created new economic micro-activities (rural and naturalistic tourism, handicrafts, cultural events, food and wine). Last but not least, it has helped spread knowledge of European policies and principles throughout the region and trigger a sense of European identity.

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