



ARCO ADRIATICO IONICO

Associazione riconosciuta fondata dalle Province di Pesaro Urbino, Macerata, Ancona, Ascoli Piceno, Teramo, Pescara, Chieti, Campobasso, Foggia, Bari, Brindisi, Lecce, Taranto

The challenge and opportunities of multilevel governance: its contribution to the success of EU's external policy and enlargement strategy.

One of the main social objectives of the Arco Adriatico Ionico Association is to promote decentralized cooperation that can be considered an application of multilevel governance able to contribute to the success of the EU's external policy and enlargement strategy, as demonstrated by past successful experiences gained by Italian Local bodies in the Adriatic region through the cross border cooperation component of the Community Initiative INTERREG.

The decentralized cooperation, in fact, represents a new way of thinking international relations in which Local bodies and civil society's actors are the basic elements. Based on the principles of participation and reciprocity, the decentralized cooperation is aimed at starting a participatory and sustainable process of democratic development that promotes the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms of people. This type of cooperation is inspired by a "logic of process" - in contrast with the traditional "approach for projects", consisting predominantly in donating short-time subsidies - and is characterized by a long-term vision to define rational development strategies starting from specific competences of the territorial bodies concerned.

Focusing on the principle of participation, the decentralized cooperation endorses a bottom-up approach to favour the development of capacities, autonomy and power of decentralized actors of partner Countries, promoting, at the same time, the creation of networks of co-development created from "territorial partnerships", which mean virtuous relationships established, during the time, between Local governments and representatives of social and economic sectors. In this sense decentralized cooperation is a relevant tool to consolidate and make sustainable the democratic institutions in the Countries in transition, paying a particular attention to some aspects such as the participation of population to the political life and the degree of confidence of citizens towards the institutional apparatus.

Decentralized cooperation interventions are functional to the EU enlargement strategy based on the principle of "positive conditionality", according to which the access to certain benefits – preferential trade regimes, economic aids – and in general the future admission perspective, are subordinated to the achievement of specific results in terms of democracy and legality. In this manner a member-State building process is carrying



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on and can count on bottom-up and participatory paths to support decentralization policies and democratic and economic growth of the Countries concerned.

In relation to the Adriatic area, the cooperation initiatives carry on by European local authorities are placed in the broader stabilisation and association process started by the EU to promote the integration of the Countries of the region, as well as their future accession perspective. Up to the launch of the new programming period 2007-2013, within the Community Initiative INTERREG and in particular the New Neighbourhood Adriatic Programme INTERREG-CARDS/Phare, sub-state authorities played an innovative strategic role as extended to the “neighbourhood Countries” the partnership principle that represents the core element of the cohesion policy together with the criterion of subsidiarity. In this manner cohesion policy has been related to the external relations system in procedural and financial terms. Joint planning and management bodies have been created and a parallelism between ERDF - for the European territory - and CARDS funds - to sustain the participation of the South-Eastern Europe Countries in the stabilisation and association process - established.

With the starting of the new programming period 2007-2013 and the last cohesion policy reform, the growing role of local governments in establishing bottom up cooperation relationships with third Countries and favouring a balanced development of an Enlarged Union has been strengthened. INTERREG initiative was transformed into a new objective of the cohesion policy – “European territorial cooperation” – and a deep reform involved also the external policy according to the rule of simplification and integration of the tools at disposal.

The connection between cohesion policy and external relations has been completed with the definition of the cross border cooperation component of the new instrument for pre-accession assistance (IPA) aimed at financing reform programmes in the Balkan Countries (distinguished in Candidate and Potential Candidate Countries). Concerning the cooperation initiatives between European Countries and Candidate and Potential Candidate Countries, the past New Neighbourhood Adriatic Programme was replaced by the Cross Border Cooperation Adriatic IPA Programme. Its “integrated approach” expressed in the principle of uniformity of the legal base, the budget and the programme’s bodies, allows to local governments to capitalize the previous experiences and to stabilize cooperative relationships moving forward the realization of a cohesive Adriatic region in an Enlarged Union.

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