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# Institutional support to community regeneration: insights from the **Sibater project** in Italy

Developing a country's **administrative and institutional capacity** is fundamental to pursue the Sustainable Development Goals. Investment in institutional capacity and more efficient public services implies structural reforms, better regulation improved administrative procedures, and good governance at national, regional and local levels.

In this regard, potential insights can be drawn from the experience of the **SIBaTer Project** "Institutional support for the implementation of the Banca delle Terre", which has been operating since 2018 in municipalities located in Southern Regions in Italy. This initiative is exemplary of a model of **institutional upgrading for social and territorial cohesion** in Italy. The leadership by the National Association of Italian Municipalities, the engagement of Local and Regional Governments closest to the communities, and the active involvement by local communities and young people represent the main distinctive features and value-added of the initiative.



## The Experience

The **SIBaTer project** has been developed within the framework of the strategies for the revitalisation of **Southern Italy**. In particular, it refers to the implementation of "Banca delle Terre" (Lands Bank) tool created with the aim of regenerating abandoned assets through community and youth engagement for the sustainable development of the territories (Law no. 123\2017). The "Banca delle Terre" refers to **abandoned or uncultivated land, built-up areas** (for industrial, artisan, commercial, tourist and receptive use) **and related units that have been in a state of abandonment for a long time (at least 10 years) and which are owned by public actors or private individuals.**

The SIBaTer Project carries out activities to **improve the administrative capacity of municipalities** in the regions of Southern Italy in regard to the competences assigned to them by this law and fostering the **creation of a favourable environment for the generation of community / youth entrepreneurship proposals** aiming at the valorisation of abandoned lands and public heritage. The SIBaTer project targets both Metropolitan Cities and 38 provincial capitals of Southern Italy, with their relative hinterland, as well as small municipalities in rural, mountain or inner area, especially through their inter-municipal unions/aggregations.

These areas are affected by depopulation, and marginal communities facing several socio-economic challenges in terms of accessibility, exclusion and opportunities. So far, 348 municipalities have completed the process of joining SIBaTer Project with the adoption of a Municipal Council resolution or through the adhesion by a supra-municipal body, such as Union of Municipalities, Metropolitan City, and Mountain Community.

At the same time, the SIBaTer project foresees that **community and collaborative economy initiatives**, such as Community Co-operatives, can represent one of the most appropriate tools to recover and regenerate abandoned lands and assets. Indeed, the valorisation initiatives directly involve young people aged 18-40, promoting youth entrepreneurship and creating new economic opportunities in areas where they are often missing. In particular, **Community Co-operatives** represent a model for valorising abandoned lands and assets by producing goods and services at a local level, capable of creating job opportunities, especially for the youth, thus enhancing enabling conditions for regenerating fragile territories and urban peripheries.

The activities promoted by the SIBaTer project, with the ultimate aim of regenerating territories / communities and creating economic opportunities for young people, contribute to the localization of Agenda 2030 pursuing and catalysing the following Sustainable Development Goals:



## ROADMAP

Organizations interested in this model can rely on the following insights and recommendations concerning key phases, actors, resources and actions.

### PHASE 0. TRIGGERING FACTORS

Need to enforce the Italian Law no. 123\2017 and fully implement the "Banca delle Terre" (Lands Bank), in order to regenerate abandoned lands and assets through community and youth engagement, thus the boosting development of fragile areas in Southern Italy. Despite the promulgation of the law, the tool was not used by municipalities, especially where it was most needed. The SIBaTer project is part of an institutional initiative with the aim is to break the vicious circle characterised by depopulation of inner areas, problems linked to the administrative management of small municipalities, lack of socio-economic opportunities for local communities, abandonment of land and assets. These dynamics cause impoverishment of the territories, dispersion of skills and ultimately abandonment by young people.

### PHASE 1. PLANNING

- Verify and ensure the willingness and commitment of the municipalities to be involved in the project by collecting formal adhesion.
- Create a central coordination unit for the project management and identify proximity actors at regional and local level who are able to involve the municipalities and accompany them since the initial stages.
- Depending on the budget, opt for a national, regional or inter-municipal initiative.
- Envisage a diverse partnership that includes all the necessary competences to elaborate and implement the project activities foreseen to achieve the final objective.
- Include in the project a phase to develop technical support tools and training for civil servants within municipalities.

### PHASE 2. START UP

- Identify new public and social economy actors to be involved on the basis of any needs that have arisen, and who are thought to play an important role in the success of the project.
- Identify all skills and resources needed to launch and implement the project.
- Identify and select civil servants within municipalities who show real willingness and commitment towards the initiative.
- Verify that the planned activities fully correspond to the needs of the beneficiaries.
- Elaborate technical assistance tools necessary for the subsequent implementation of the project activities.
- Provide ways of disseminating and making available the tools developed to the beneficiaries.

### PHASE 3. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

- Devote human resources for the creation of a system for the exchange of experiences and the sharing of project ideas.
- Activate under-utilised human and social capital in Municipalities and local communities.

- Design standard procedures with the planned project activities.
- Maintain a certain level of flexibility in the implementation of the project, reversing or modifying activities, if necessary, in order to obtain concrete results at local level.
- Activate participatory processes that nurture citizenship engagement and empowerment, without imposing top-down solutions.

#### SUSTAINABILITY

- Provide for a transfer of skills and knowledge to the project beneficiaries.
- Communicate the results obtained, so as to encourage new municipalities and territories to participate.
- Carry out continuous scouting for resources with partners, seeking collaboration and support.
- Provide for a monitoring and evaluation system capable of redirecting ongoing project activities and measuring the results achieved.

#### KEY DETERMINANTS FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION AND REPLICABILITY

<b>Actors and institutions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Variety of active and motivated actors supporting the project, i.e. national or local associations of municipalities; technical experts; social and solidarity economy actors.</li> <li>• National and local networks supporting the project.</li> </ul>
<b>Social capital</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existence of territorial networks and partnerships sharing of a common vision, development objectives and working methods.</li> <li>• Commitment of local communities (and particularly the youth) around the theme of valorisation and innovation of their territories.</li> </ul>
<b>Human capital</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong technical expertise and competences of personnel involved in the project Task Forces.</li> <li>• Strong personal motivation of actors, starting with the mayors and civil servants of the municipalities to be involved.</li> </ul>
<b>Governance framework</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership and management assigned to a representative body (i.e. the national association of municipalities) and a technical organization.</li> <li>• Well defined multi-level governance mechanisms, but flexible during project implementation.</li> </ul>
<b>Institutional and legal framework</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existence of unused heritage of public or private properties (e.g. lands, buildings and assets) representing both a problem and an opportunity for regeneration. (NB. The existence of the national legislation on "Banca delle Terre" in Italy was an incentive, but the key element was the presence of abandoned lands and assets).</li> <li>• Normative framework allowing the assignment of public heritage to private individuals and community actors, through public-private partnerships.</li> </ul>
<b>Economic resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Free assignment of abandoned lands / assets by municipalities has been an incentive for local communities to participate in the project.</li> </ul>
<b>Services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of technical assistance tools and guidelines to target Municipalities.</li> </ul>

## Value-added as a driver for sustainable human development and SDG localization

The model for institutional support to community regeneration adopted by the SIBaTer project can represent a fundamental driving force for sustainable human development and SDG localization. It simultaneously operates to improve the administrative capacity of municipalities and to enable a favourable environment for the generation of community/youth entrepreneurship through proposals aiming at the valorisation of abandoned lands and assets within their own communities. The model envisages a broad partnership of associations, community actors and third sector organizations with the aim of increasing the demand for lands/assets by local communities, stimulating them to revitalize their territories and create opportunities for socio-economic development. In particular, community and collaborative economy initiatives represent one of the most appropriate tools for this process.

Both the scope of the SIBaTer project in terms of community / territorial regeneration and its leadership through the involvement of the national association of municipalities make this experience interesting and replicable in some emerging countries where similar issues and organizations exist. The existence of unused heritage of public or private properties (e.g. lands, buildings and assets) representing both a problem and an opportunity for regeneration is probably the most important triggering factor to boost a similar process.

Moreover, the following factors are highly relevant for potential replicability and successful implementation: engagement of local communities and youth around the theme of valorisation and innovation of their territories; high personal motivation and commitment by mayors and civil servants; existence of national and local partnerships sharing of a common vision, development objectives and working methods. Taken together, the presence of these soft factors would enable a smoother process of institution-building for community regeneration towards sustainable human development at the local level.

Nevertheless, in line with a place-based perspective, the process can be pursued by prioritising and sequencing different steps and actions and by acting on different levers in different places, or in different times for the same place, according to its contextual and conjunctural conditions, the presence of key determinants and collective political willingness.



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Setting up a Community Foundation for a sustainable local development:  
Insights from the Messina Community Foundation in Italy

Local Action Group as a public-private partnership for rural development:  
Insights from the Local Action Group Maiella Verde in Italy

Setting up a Work Integration Social Enterprise:  
Insights from QUID Social Enterprise in Italy

Setting up a Consortium of Social Cooperatives:  
Insights from the Consortium Sale della Terra in Italy

**Institutional support to community regeneration:  
Insights from the SIBaTer project in Italy**

Local development strategies for inner and fragile areas:  
Insights from the Milk Mountain strategy for the Emilian Apennines

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