

## **A SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF WATER AND SOIL: THE CASE OF RIVER CONTRACTS**

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### *Abstract*

Water and soil preservation represents a challenge for humanity, being part of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals envisaged in the UN 2030 Agenda. In particular, with regard to the theme of water, such Objectives emphasize the need to intervene to improve water quality by reducing pollution; protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including rivers and lakes; support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water management. In this perspective, the River Contract represents a voluntary bottom-up programming instrument aimed at the protection and management of water resources and the enhancement of river systems by integrating in a balanced manner the three dimensions of sustainable development: - economic, social and environmental. In fact, national and UE rules underline the relevance of the adoption of River Contracts as innovative governance instruments, since they are capable of building integrated strategies aimed at the redevelopment and management of the environmental and landscape quality of a river area through the involvement of the local whole community represented by public institutions, private subjects and citizens. In view of these brief considerations, this paper will address the analysis of different governance cases applied to the River Contracts as adopted in central and southern Italy to deal with the challenges of protecting and safeguarding river basins and their ecosystems.

### **1. Introduction**

The preservation of water and soil represents a challenge for humanity that is part of the 17 Goals for Sustainable Development envisaged in the UN 2030 Agenda<sup>1</sup>. This one has revolutionized the approach to the theme of sustainable development by emphasizing the non-postponement of a mental and behavioral change in activating actions, both on a global and a local scale, through governances capable of activating

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<sup>1</sup> 2030 Agenda is the final document of the United Nations Summit on Sustainable Development, which took place in New York, USA, in September 2015. Underwritten by the Governments of the 193 UN member countries, it incorporates 17 Sustainable Development Goals into a broaden action program including a total of 169 “targets” or goals to be achieved by 2030.

For further information see: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/>.

organizational and decision-making processes based on the principle of participation and co-responsibility in terms of *Community Led Local Development (CLLD)*<sup>2</sup>.

Agenda 2030, in fact, addresses global issues that must necessarily be implemented through a local-global (“glocal”) strategic vision. A “globalization bottom up” (Magnaghi, 2010): local networks in solidarity with each other that, as responsible for the whole planet earth, take the path of local (self) sustainable development. In this vision of sustainable development, the community (i.e. all the energies from civil society made up of public institutions, private entities and citizens) becomes an active part in public policies and in the conception and implementation of local-global development projects.

As we will see later, the River Contract (RC), introduced in Europe following the second World Water Forum (WWF)<sup>3</sup>, represents a suitable voluntary instrument of strategic and negotiated planning as it is implemented by local communities that pursue the purpose of a correct management of water resources and the safeguarding from hydrogeological risk on a local scale, but which contributes to produce effects on a global one. It also represents a space for discussion capable of encouraging the dissemination of best practices and in which the involvement of local communities is not limited to the consultative and/or informative sphere alone, but rises to a process of reading of the territory and the environmental levels composing it, declining it according to its variegated *genius loci* (Norberg-Schulz, 1979).

## 2. Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals

2030 Agenda addresses 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including those relating to water resources and water-related eco-systems.

In particular, Goal 6 (*Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all*), provides for various Targets<sup>4</sup> aimed at reducing water pollution and at protecting and rehabilitating ecosystems linked to water (mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers and lakes), also through the support to forms of integrated participation of local communities.

Goal 15 (*Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss*), through Target 15.1 plans to ensure the preservation, restoration and the sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, especially of forests, swamps and mountains.

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<sup>2</sup> The expression “*Community Led Local Development*” is used by the European Commission to describe a bottom-up approach in which, through a local partnership made up of public and private institutions, an integrated and innovative development strategy is developed and implemented.

For further information see: [https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld\\_it](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld_it).

<sup>3</sup> The second WWF was held in The Hague in 2000. It was founded and is co-organized by the World Water Council (WWC), an international multi-stakeholder platform organization. The WWC, based in Marseille, France, was created in 1996. It has over 300 organizations from more than 50 different countries. Its mission is to raise awareness among public opinion and policy makers on crucial issues relating to water.

For further information see: <http://www.worldwatercouncil.org/en>.

<sup>4</sup> Target 6.5 “By 2030, implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate”; Target 6.6 “By 2020, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes”; Target 6b “Support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water management”.

Furthermore, through Target 15.9, it aims at integrating the principles of ecosystem and biodiversity into projects and strategies implemented at national and local level. Directly linked to the potential actions to implement through the RC, Goal 14 (*Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development*), through its Targets aims at reducing the pollution of marine and coastal ecosystems significantly, also intervening in activities carried out on land such as industrial discharges and plastic waste.

Other issues affecting RCs and addressed by Agenda 2030 concern urbanization and models of consumption and production of goods: on the issue of urbanization, Goal 11 addresses the problem of “*making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*” by supporting the economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas, and by strengthening local integrated policies for soil protection and territorial regeneration<sup>5</sup>; with regard to the issue of production and consumption models, Goal 12 aims to disseminate the adoption of an environmentally friendly approach by increasing people’s awareness on issues related to sustainable development<sup>6</sup>.

As we will see, the RC represents the appropriate instrument to respond to the objectives of sustainable development: it guarantees that local planning is consistent with the purposes dealt with by Agenda 2030 as it assimilates the principles of democratic participation in decisions and the themes of sustainable development.

On the other hand, for the RC Agenda 2030 represents the essential document since the latter aims also at “*encouraging and promoting effective partnerships in the public sector, between public and private sectors and in civil society, based on the experience of partnerships and their ability to find resources*”<sup>7</sup>.

The importance of a territorial governance capable of raising awareness and involving local communities in environmental issues, and in particular in those related to water environments, is also emphasized in the works of the WWF. It is therefore recognized that not only an institutional but also a cultural effort is needed to (1) raise awareness and promote agreements between public institutions and public and private partnerships, as well as (2) clearly define and formalize all players’ roles through the contract: an agreement with clear objectives, mutual commitments and a clear differentiation of the respective roles, tasks and responsibilities between the Authorities and each of its public and private operators.

For the resolution of the problems addressed by 2030 Agenda’s Goals, and in particular for those relating to local water services, water infrastructures and the ecosystem, therefore, it is necessary to implement political strategies capable of spreading information, transparency and trust, in order to feed the responsibility of stakeholders, at all levels, towards the issues of sustainable development and in an overall global vision.

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<sup>5</sup> Target 11a “Support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, per-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning”; Target 11b “By 2020, substantially increase the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, resilience to disasters, and develop and implement, in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, holistic disaster risk management at all levels”.

<sup>6</sup> Target 12.8 “By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature”.

<sup>7</sup> 2030 Agenda, Goal 17 - Target 17.17.

Such approach, which stimulates the implementation of effective policies at all levels, is also referred to in the document “*Revitalizing IWRM for the 2030 Agenda*” (Smith M. et al., 2018), according to which strategies for disseminating culture of participation and empowerment are necessary, in order to manage the change locally and globally<sup>8</sup>.

### 3. River Contracts in Italy: experiences of governance

In Italy the instrument of the RC began its institutional path in 2007 with the establishment, between Regions of northern Italy, of the “National Table of the River Contracts” and with the subsequent adoption, in 2010, of the “National Chart of the River Contracts” as a response to the need to “provide” the single territories with governance capable of promoting the environmental and landscape requalification of river territories through actions of prevention, mitigation and monitoring of hydrogeological, pollution and landscape/naturalistic emergencies, in line with the “Water Framework Directive” (2000/60/EC) and the “Flood Directive” (2007/60/EC)<sup>9</sup>.

In 2015, the RC obtained legal recognition by the “Codice dell’Ambiente” (Environmental Code)<sup>10</sup> as, also on the basis of European experiences, it is considered the suitable instrument for the integrated management of river basins, when it is managed by an inclusive and collaborative governance (multi-stakeholder) able to face and combine objectives and processes at different decision-making scales (multi-level). In fact, while not providing information on the legal nature of RCs, the above-mentioned Environmental Code introduces the characterizing elements: it is a voluntary agreement of strategic and negotiated planning that contributes to the implementation of planning instruments for the purposes of protection, proper water management and territorial enhancement, thus contributing to local development.

In 2017, the Ministry of the Environment (MATTM) established the “National Observatory of the River Contracts”, aimed both at monitoring RCs on the Italian territory and at disseminating best practices by promoting collaborations and experiences.

The subsequent growing diffusion of RCs in Italy has highlighted the need to harmonize their operating methods while leaving the needs and peculiarities of the individual territories unchanged. For this purpose, within the “National Table of the River Contracts”, the document “*Definizione e requisiti qualitativi di base dei contratti di fiume*” (Definition and basic qualitative requirements of river contracts) was prepared, according to which RCs are “*voluntary instruments of strategic and negotiated planning that pursue protection, proper management of water resources*”

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.worldwatercouncil.org/en/publications/revitalizing-iwrm-2030-agenda>.

<sup>9</sup> Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, of 23 October 2000, establishing a “framework for Community action in the field of water policy”;

(<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32000L0060>);

Directive 2007/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, of 23 October 2007, “on the assessment and management of flood risks”

(<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32007L0060>).

<sup>10</sup> Legislative Decree n.152/2006, article 68bis: “*River contracts contribute to the definition and implementation of district planning instruments at the river basin and sub-basin level, as voluntary strategic and negotiated planning instruments that pursue the protection, the correct management of water resources and the enhancement of river territories, together with safeguarding from hydraulic risk, thus contributing to the local development of that areas*”.

*and enhancement of river territories together with safeguarding from hydraulic risk, contributing to local development”<sup>11</sup>.*

The document identifies the operating methods of RCs as different and consequential phases: a) activation of open and inclusive participatory processes that allow the sharing of intentions, commitments and responsibilities to be formalized with the signing of the “Document of Intent” from the various stakeholders; b) drafting of the Preliminary and Integrated Cognitive Analysis on the environmental, social and economic features of the territory with the definition of operational objectives; c) elaboration of the “Strategic Document”, which defines the scenario, referring to a medium-long term time future, which integrates the objectives of district planning and more generally of a wide area, with the local development policies of the territory; d) definition and adoption of the “Action Plan”, which indicates the players involved, their respective obligations and commitments, times and methods of implementation, the human and economic resources needed, as well as the related financial availability for the signing of the RC and the related formal and binding assumption of obligations and commitments by all contracting parties.

### ***3.1. The River Contract of the Ofanto River: an experience of interregional integration***

The 134 km long Ofanto River originates in the Campania Region, in the Province of Avellino, from the Irpino plateau at 715 meters above sea level. It affects a vast territory, made up of 51 Municipalities, and crosses the Basilicata Region and the Puglia Region too, flowing into the Adriatic Sea<sup>12</sup>. It represents an interesting example of integration between two different RCs: Alto Ofanto and Medio e Basso Ofanto.

In the Campania Region, the RC was born on the initiative of the Local Action Group (LAG) “CILSI” which included in its “Local Development Plan” the instrument of the RC “Alto Ofanto”, thus starting the partnership construction process that led, in 2015, to the signing of the “Document of Intent” by 19 Municipalities in the Province of Avellino<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> The document was drawn up in 2015 by the “Working Group 1”: *Recognition of RCs at a national and regional scale, definition of quality criteria*, of the National Table of River Contracts. Ministero dell’ambiente e della tutela del territorio e del Mare (MATTM) - Ministry of the Environment and Land and Sea Protection -, Istituto Superiore per la Protezione e la Ricerca Ambientale (ISPRA) - Higher Institute for Environmental Protection and Research - and National Table of River Contracts.

<sup>12</sup> In 2013 the Campania Region subscribed to the National Charter of RCs through the Regional Board Resolution no. 452/2013. In 2019 it disciplined the River and Lake Contracts by the Regional Law no. 5 of 06 May 2019. In the Campania Region three RCs have been activated: RC Alto Ofanto; RC Alto Calore; RC Sarno.

The Puglia Region subscribed to the National Charter of the RCs in 2017 also establishing the “Permanent Regional Technical Coordination Table” through the Regional Board Resolution no. 1788/2019.

The Basilicata Region adopted the National Charter of RCs in 2012. With Regional Board Resolution no.702/2016, it allocated financial resources to support the preparation of the RCs, and recognized RCs as negotiated programming instruments. Subsequently, with Regional Board Resolution n.213/2017, the Basilicata Region assigned a support function to the Basin Authority in order to make its know-how available to RCs in the fields of flood prevention and water resource planning.

<sup>13</sup> Local Action Groups (LAGs) are public-private, local partnerships that implement the strategies of rural areas through the development of a Local Development Plan. They operate as managers of the UE “LEADER”(Liason Entre Actions de Development de l’Economie Rurale) Funds of the European

In the Puglia Region, the RC “Bassa e Media Valle dell’Ofanto”, consisting of a large public-private partnership, developed a Document of Intent which clearly states both the will for cooperation with the already operating RC “Alto Ofanto”, and the need to overcome “old logics” and territorial schemes based on provincial and/or regional borders, in the full epistemological application of sustainable and integrated bottom-up development: *“the specific circumstance that considers the presence of an initiative of the River Contract of the Alto Ofanto river already consolidated, imposes cooperative approaches that guarantee procedural autonomy by the two Contracts, in compliance with the requests from the “bottom” (prerogative of RCs) while sharing the need to identify bioregional actions or actions competing with higher-ranking objectives in its Plans, in compliance with the prerogatives of coordination entrusted to the same District Basin Authority. The territorial system of the RC (...) therefore has the clear purpose of overcoming the vision of the Ofanto river as an administrative border between two Regions, (Puglia and Basilicata), but rather to integrate the structural, environmental, ecological and hydrographic characteristics, but also historical-cultural of the territories affected and influenced by the river system”*<sup>14</sup>.

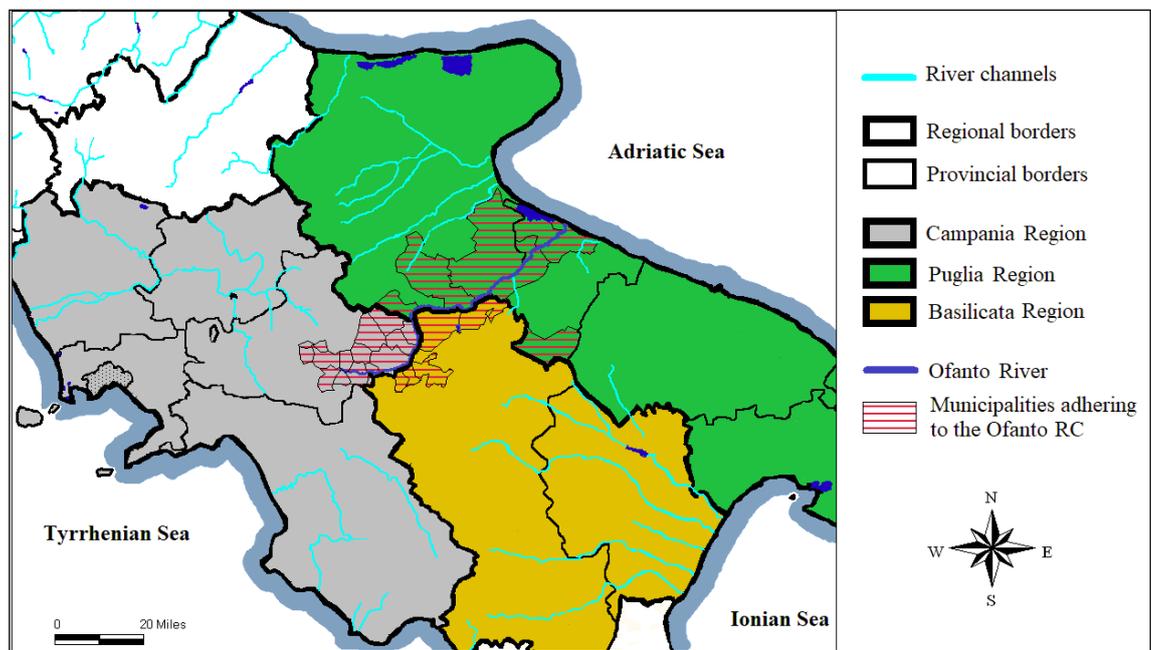


Figure 1: River Contract of the Ofanto River. Source: Our elaboration.

As for the governance profile of the RC, this is composed of (1) the Assembly, made up of 64 public and private subjects, including the Puglia Region, the Polytechnic University of Bari, the University of Basilicata, 16 Municipalities and other stakeholders; (2) the Technical-Scientific Coordination Committee with functions of executive body, composed, among others, by the Basin Authority, the Puglia Region,

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Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), through the *Community-Led Local Development* (CLLD) methodology.

For further information see: [https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld\\_en](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld_en).

<sup>14</sup> Document of Intent of the RC “Bassa e Media Valle dell’Ofanto”: <https://www.cdfbassamediavalleofanto.it/documenti/>.

ISPRA, University; (3) the Technical Secretariat managed by the Agency of the Territorial Pact for Employment Nord Barese Ofantino.

For both RCs, the main impulse came in 2014 following the agreement called “Val d’Ofanto Pact: a Manifesto for interregional sustainable development of Valle d’Ofanto in the European 2014-2020 programming”<sup>15</sup>, aimed at implementing a sustainable development on a bioregional scale by building “synergies between the Ecological Network and the Economic Network of the production chains”. The agreement was signed by many public entities and stakeholders from the three regions concerned, including three LAGs<sup>16</sup>.

### **3.2. Marche Region: the Esino River Contract**

In 2014 the Marche Region recognized RCs as “forms of negotiated and participatory strategic planning for the purpose of environmental redevelopment and the reduction of the hydraulic risk of regional river basins”, adhering to the National Charter of RCs. In 2016, it also established the “Regional Permanent Technical Table for the Coordination of River Contracts”<sup>17</sup>.

With the establishment of the Regional Technical Table, first actions for the dissemination of the practice of CLLD in local communities were launched through the preparation of “*guidance and guideline documents for the homogeneous development of governance and implementation paths of RCs*”. Furthermore, the objectives of the Regional Technical Table include those to organize awareness-raising seminars on environmental issues and sustainable development, as well as to launch project-ideas for other communication initiatives addressed civil society and public institutions.

In addition to the representatives of the Marche Region, the Regional Technical Table is composed of environmental protection associations, the LAGs operating in the Region, the National Association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI), the Regional Reclamation Consortium and other stakeholders.

The activities of the Regional Technical Table and the impetus of local communities have allowed the launch of 12 RCs in the regional territory<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.galvulturealtobradano.it/maggio14/manifesto.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> The following have subscribed to the “Val d’Ofanto Pact”: the Province of Barletta-Andria-Trani; the Municipalities of Aquilonia, Andretta, Bisaccia, Cairano, Calitri, Conza della Campania, Lacedonia, Lioni, Monteverde, Morra De Sanctis, Rocca San Felice, Sant’Angelo dei Lombardi, Teora, Torella dei Lombardi, Villamaina in the Province of Avellino; the Municipalities of Ascoli Satriano, Cerignola, Rocchetta Sant’Antonio in the Province of Foggia; the Municipalities of Atella, Lavello, Melfi, Rapone, Ruvo del Monte in the Province of Potenza; the Municipalities of Barletta, Canosa di Puglia, Margherita di Savoia, Spinazzola, Trinitapoli in the Province of Barletta; the intermunicipal Consortium CO.-RIT. of Avellino; the Territorial Agency for the Environment of Barletta; the Puglia Regional Union of Reclamations; the Regional Union of Campania Reclamations; the Regional Natural Park of the Ofanto River; the University of Bari; the LAG “CILSI”; the LAG “Piana del Tavoliere”; the LAG “Vulture-Alto Bradano” and other stakeholders.

<sup>17</sup> Regional Board Resolutions no.1470/2014 and no.217/2016.

<sup>18</sup> Foglia RC; Metauro e Torrente Arzilla RC; Biscubio, Bosso, Burano e Candigliano RC; Cesano RC; Misa-Nevola RC; Esino RC; Musone RC; Potenza RC; Fiastrone e Lago di Fiastra RC; Aso RC; Tesino RC; Zona Umida della Sentina RC.

### 3.2.1. The Esino River Contract

The Esino River originates from Monte Cafaggio, in the Province of Macerata, and flows south north for a length of about 90 km, flowing into the Adriatic Sea near the Municipality of Falconara Marittima.

In addition to the Marche Region, the Province of Ancona, 24 Municipalities, managing bodies of protected natural areas and other public and private stakeholders<sup>19</sup> subscribed the Esino RC by signing the "Document of Intent". The "Document of Intent" emphasizes the role of the local community both as a "guarantor" of continuous control and monitoring on the territory, and as an active subject in planning actions to be undertaken.

The governance is composed of (1) the Assembly, in which all the subscribers of the "Document of Intent" (public institutions, companies, associations, citizens) participate; (2) the Institutional Technical Committee, composed of 3 Municipalities, the Marche Region, the Province of Ancona, the Consortium of Reclamation, the LAG "Colli Esini San Vicino", the Ripa Bianca Natural Reserve. The technical feature of the RC is handled by (3) the Secretariat Committee managed by the Municipality of Jesi and the Ripa Bianca Natural Reserve.

In line with the guidelines of the quoted document "*Definition and basic qualitative requirements of river contracts*" for the Esino RC, in addition to (a) the signing of the "Document of Intent", the phases relating (b) to the Preliminary and Integrated Cognitive Analysis and (c) the preparation of the Strategic Document functional to (d) the drafting of the Action Plan, were activated.

As regards the dissemination of information and the co-responsibility of the local community, information brochures and cognitive questionnaires were distributed. In addition, "thematic workshops of SWOT analysis" were organized on the subject of both the quality of water, the river ecosystem and the hydraulic risk, as well as the landscape, the urban development planning and the use and economic development of the river area<sup>20</sup>.

Finally, the role of the LAG "Colli Esini San Vicino" assumes considerable importance in the implementation of plans and programs of the RC, since, together with the participating Municipalities and the Consortium of Reclamation, it also plays the role of "potential moneylender". However, as for most of the Regions, even in the Marche Region the 2014-2020 programming of the European Funds did not provide for "reward" mechanisms for RCs. In particular, the incisiveness of LAGs in the role of "potential" provider of funding for the interventions provided for in the Action Plans of RCs has been lost due to the lack of harmonization between the EAFRD European program and the national and regional regulations on RCs. However, the role of LAGs remains relevant within RCs both for the "technical structure" they have, and for the ability to activate bottom-up processes in a CLLD key.

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<sup>19</sup> The following have subscribed: (1) the Marche Region; (2) the Province of Ancona; (3) the Municipalities of Agugliano, Camerata Picena, Castelbellino, Castelpiano, Cerreto d'Esì, Chiaravalle, Cupramontana, Esanatoglia, Fabriano, Falconara Marittima, Genga, Maiolati Spontini, Matelica, Mergo, Monsano, Montecarotto, Monte Roberto, Rosora, Santa Maria Nuova, San Paolo di Jesi, Sassoferrato, Serra San Quirico, Staffolo, Jesi; (4) the Gola Rossa and Frasassi Regional Park; (5) the Ripa Bianca Natural Reserve; (6) the Consortium of Reclamation; (7) the LAG "Colli Esini-San Vicino"; (8) private entities and associations.

<sup>20</sup> For further information see: Bastiani M. et al. (2018);

<https://www.comune.jesi.an.it/articoli/Analisi-conoscitiva-preliminare-integrata/>.

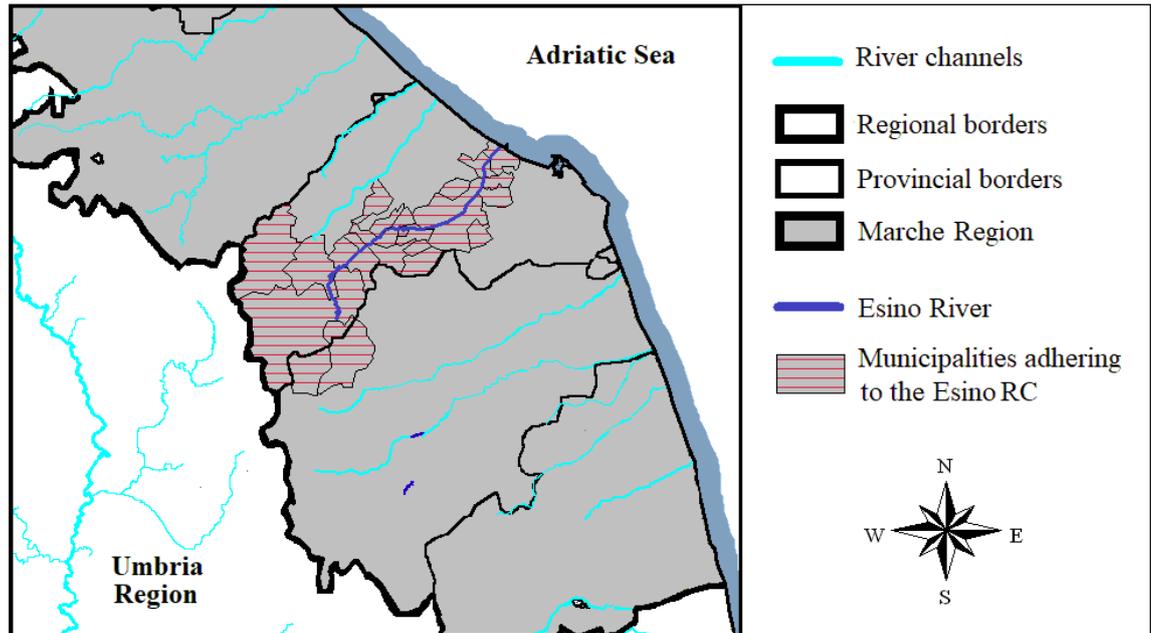


Figure 2: Esino River Contract. Source: Our elaboration.

### 3.3. River Contracts in Lazio Region: some experiences

In Lazio Region, the instrument of the RC starts in 2014 with the subscription of the National Charter of RCs<sup>21</sup>. In 2016, through the Regional Law no. 17, the Lazio Region recognized the “River, Lake, Coast and Mouth Contract” as a “*voluntary instrument for strategic and participated planning, aimed at the integrated management of the river basin and sub-basin policies, together with the protection, enhancement and redevelopment of water resources and connected environments, the protection from hydraulic risk, the sustainable management of naturalness and the river landscape and hydrogeological risk, capable to contribute to local development*”<sup>22</sup>.

In 2018, in order to arrange the governance of RCs, the Lazio Region established a specific office dealing with small Municipalities and river contracts (“*Ufficio di Scopo Piccoli Comuni e Contratti di Fiume*”) having the task of the operational management of regional RCs while, in 2019, the “Regional Forum of River, Lake, Mouth and Coast Contracts”, consisting of representatives of different RCs, and the “Technical Committee” – composed of, among others, the representatives of the Regional Civil Protection Agency, the Regional Agency for Environmental Protection of Lazio, the District Basin Authority of Central Apennines and the District Basin Authority of Southern Apennines<sup>23</sup> – were activated. The Technical Committee has the task of coordinating the different RCs and, in particular, of harmonizing and making regional policies consistent with the European ones on the subject of sustainable development. In order to support the establishment of RCs and to spread interest in the local community on sustainable development issues, in 2019 the Region launched a call to finance the various phases of RCs subscription process and make them fully

<sup>21</sup> Regional Board Resolution no.787/2014 “Adhesion to the National Charter of River Contracts”.

<sup>22</sup> Regional Law no.17 of 31 December 2016, article 3 paragraphs 95-96-97.

<sup>23</sup> Regional Board Resolution no.335/2019.

enforceable<sup>24</sup>. In particular, 19 RCs<sup>25</sup> were funded for the phases following the subscription of the “Document of Intent”: - for the drafting of the Preliminary and Integrated Cognitive Analysis on environmental, social and economic aspects; - for the development of the Strategic Document; - for the definition and adoption of the Action Plan.

### 3.3.1. The Melfa River Contract

The Melfa River is located in the Lazio Region, in the southeast of the Province of Frosinone. It originates from Monte Petroso in the Canneto Valley in the Municipality of Settefrati, on the Lazio side of the Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise National Park. In its 40 km course it crosses the mainly rural area of the Municipalities of Picinisco, San Biagio Saracinisco, Villa Latina, Atina, Casalvieri, Casalattico, Colle San Magno, Arpino, Santopadre, Roccasecca, flowing into the Liri River.

The catchment area is an element of interest in the regional territory due to its environmental and biodiversity characteristics, with a significant presence of Park Areas, Sites of Community Importance (SCIs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Wilderness Areas<sup>26</sup>.

In 2017, implementation phases of Melfa RC were launched through territorial animation activities that saw the participation of numerous stakeholders: 11 Municipalities of the river basin, the University of Cassino and various local associations. The Lazio Region and the Liri-Garigliano and Volturno River Basin Authority were also involved in the preparatory activities for the subscription of the “Document of Intent”.

The governance is composed of (1) the Assembly, which includes all the participating stakeholders, and (2) the “Control Room”, whose coordination has been entrusted to the association “Agen.Pa”, as promoter of the initiative<sup>27</sup>.

The “Control Room” started the animation path in the inclusive and accountability of the local community logic and the definition of the main Catalyst Topics: safeguard of the territory; enhancement of the environmental and cultural heritage; sustainable development.

Currently the Catalyst Topics are the subject of meetings, Focus Groups and thematic tables aimed at sensitizing the local community in the logic of (self)sustainable development through the conception of bottom-up projects capable of protecting all environmental and cultural resources of the rural area, including some aimed at

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<sup>24</sup> Regional Board Resolution no.337/2019.

<sup>25</sup> Almone RC; Amaseno RC; Aniene RC; Arrone RC; Cosa RC; Farfa RC; Fibreno RC; Garigliano-basso Liri RC; Media Valle del Tevere RC; Melfa RC; Paglia RC; Sacco RC; Santa Croce Capo d’Acqua RC; Tevere da Castel Giubileo alla Foce RC; Ufente RC; Agro Pontino Coast Contract; Riviera di Ulisse Foce del Garigliano Coast Contract; Lago Bracciano Martignano Lake Contract; Bolsena Marta Tarquinia Lake, River and Coast Contract.

<sup>26</sup> SCI “Gole del Fiume Melfa” IT6050027; SCI “Val Canneto” IT6050020; SCI “Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise National Park” IT 7120132. For further information see, among others, Grossi G., Polsinelli V. (2019).

<sup>27</sup> The following have subscribed the Melfa RC: the Municipalities of Settefrati, Arpino, Casalvieri, Casalattico, Colle San Magno, Roccasecca, Santopadre, San Biagio Saracinisco San Donato Val di Comino, Villa Latina, Atina; the Association of Architects, Planners, Landscapers and Conservators of the Province of Frosinone; Acqua Filette srl; the associations Agen.PA, Italian Alpine Club (CAI), CICAS Frosinone, Vivinatura; the Civil Protection Unit of Atina, the Comino Valley Tourist Association, the Melfa River Protection and Safeguard Committee.

intervening on: the restoration of the minimum vital flow of the river; the sustainable management of the hydroelectric plans; the enhancement of the river through the creation of a green road system for “slow tourism” and naturalistic sports; the conservation of biodiversity and territorial identity; the protection of typical local products. The thematic tables are multidisciplinary and include university researchers, designers, landscapers, engineers and representatives of citizens’ associations.

At present, in addition to the subscription of the “Document of Intent” and territorial animation activities, first phases of analysis, study and development of the Strategic Document by the technical-scientific group are underway.

### 3.3.2. The Garigliano-basso Liri River Contract

The Garigliano River originates at the point of confluence with the Liri River, in the Municipality of Sant’Ambrogio sul Garigliano, in the Province of Frosinone, and extends for 38 km to its mouth in the Tyrrhenian Sea, in the territory of the Municipality of Minturno, in the Province of Latina, marking the border between the Lazio and the Campania Regions. Three rivers contribute to its basin, the Sacco, the Liri and the Gari rivers. The territorial area in which it flows is mainly rural and with a high presence of Park Areas, Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and the final section is identified as Sites of Community Importance (SCI)<sup>28</sup>.

The development process of the “Garigliano - Basso Liri” RC began in 2016 through the coordination and territorial animation activities carried out by the local association Agen.PA and supported by the LAG “Aurunci and Valle dei Santi”. Following the first Forum “The waterways and the mills”, the first Organizing Committee was set up, consisting of 4 local associations, the LAG and 14 Municipalities belonging to the catchment area<sup>29</sup>.

Its governance is composed of (1) the Assembly of the members and (2) a “Control Room” whose coordination is entrusted to the association Agen.PA as promoter of the initiative.

The instrument of the RC was included in the Local Development Plan of the LAG among the catalyst topics of local development and was subsequently adopted by all the Municipalities of the territory within the “Area Plan”: a voluntary development document which provides for shared planning of interventions and actions among all Municipalities, in the medium term and from the wide area perspective<sup>30</sup>.

The approach to the integrated planning of actions, as is evident with the adoption of the Area Plan, represents an indicator of the maturity of the territory in question not only because of the sharing of actions and interventions having the capacity to have an economic and social impact on large territories compared to municipal ones, in a vision of “wide area”, but also due to the adoption of an intervention practice based on participatory planning capable of elaborating multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary

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<sup>28</sup> SCI “Fiume Garigliano (final section)” IT6040025.

<sup>29</sup> The following subscribed the “Garigliano - basso Liri” RC: the Municipalities of Pignataro Interamna, San Giorgio a Liri, Sant’Apollinare, Sant’Ambrogio sul Garigliano, Sant’Andrea del Garigliano, Vallemoio, Ausonia, Coreno Ausonio, Esperia, Castelnuovo Parano in the Province of Frosinone; the Municipalities of Spigno Saturnia, Castelforte, Santi Cosma and Damiano, Minturno in the Province of Latina; the LAG Aurunci and Valle dei Santi; the Association of Architects, Planners, Landscapers and Conservators of the Province of Frosinone; Acqua Filette srl; the associations Agen.PA, Italian Alpine Club, CICAS Latina, CICAS Frosinone, Vivinatura, Guardian and Care.

<sup>30</sup> For further information see: Grossi G. (2019).

projects and interventions with the possibility of intercepting different public funds. Also in this case, in fact, as in the “Ofanto” and “Esino” RCs, the role of the LAG is significant and shows its relevance above all in the dissemination of good practices of consultation and cooperation, both in the multi-stakeholder and multi level logic, and in the functional integration between plans, projects and European funds.

The sharing of the RC instrument in strategic area plans and projects activated by the Municipalities within the Local Development Plan of the LAG testifies that the territory at issue is made up of local players aware of having to “overcome the logic of the emergency” by activating integrated and widely shared policies that see the environment and the territorial sustainability at the center of local development choices, in the logic of the CLLD.

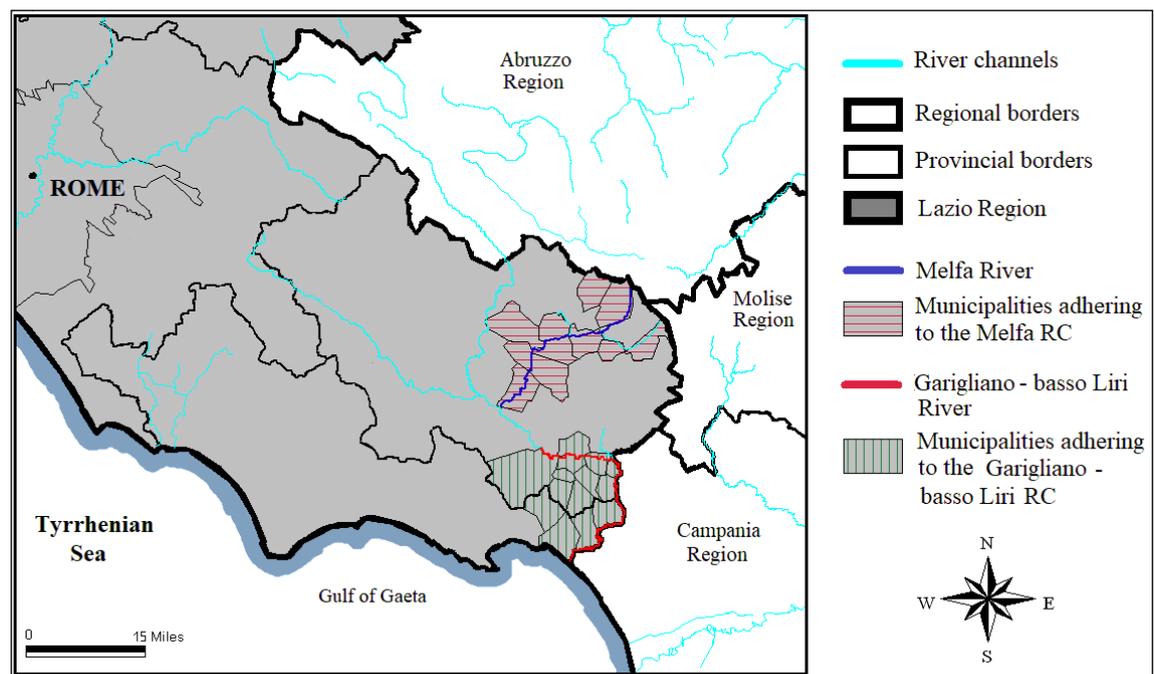


Figure 3: “Melfa” and “Garigliano - basso Liri” River Contracts. Source: Our elaboration.

### 3.3.3. The Tevere River

The Tevere is the main river in central Italy. It extends for 405 km from Monte Fumaiolo (in the Province of Forlì-Cesena in Emilia Romagna Region) and runs through a large stretch in the Lazio Territory until it reaches its mouth in the Tyrrhenian Sea, between the Municipalities of Rome and Fiumicino.

In Lazio Region there are two RCs that affect the Tevere River: (1) “Tevere da Castel Giubileo alla foce - tratto urbano” RC, which mainly affects the urban stretch in the city of Rome up to the mouth; (2) “Media Valle del Tevere da Orte alla Riserva Tevere-Farfa” RC which affects the Lazio (and partly Umbria) section of the route of Tevere up to the gates of Rome.

These are two RCs moving their activities on a main common objective linked to the revitalization of the ecological passageway of the Tevere River, not only in an environmental key but also in terms of value for local development, while operating in different territorial contexts: the “Media Valle del Tevere” RC, mainly rural and

with widespread presence of SCIs and SPAs<sup>31</sup>, and the mainly urban-metropolitan “Tevere – tratto urbano” RC.

As regards the “Tevere da Castel Giubileo alla foce - tratto urbano” RC, in addition to the Municipalities of Rome and Fiumicino, in 2017 Agenda Tevere Onlus - which associates different other associations operating in the environmental and social field, Universities and Research Institutes - subscribed the “Document of Intent”<sup>32</sup>. This one debates the problems affecting the river channel as well as the objectives and the actions to be implemented both for environmental protection and for ecological-urban enhancement, considering that the Tevere River is the main ecological passageway of the City of Rome.

The governance is constituted by (1) the Assembly, currently consisting of 54 subscribers of the “Document of Intent”, (2) the “Inter Institutional Committee” with the function of guidance and programming, (3) the Technical Secretariat with the job of study, research and insights for the development of analysis and document preparation. The phases relating to the preliminary and integrated cognitive analysis and the preparation of the Strategic Document, functional to the drafting of the subsequent Action Plan, are currently underway. As regards the dissemination of information and the co-responsibility of the local community, numerous stakeholders were involved, mainly consisting of associations operating in the field of environmental safeguard and river enhancement<sup>33</sup>.

As regards the “Media Valle del Tevere da Orte alla Riserva Tevere-Farfa” RC, the process of establishment was born in 2013 by 11 Municipalities and the following subscription of the “Document of Intent” by the Regional Agency for Environmental Protection of Lazio, the Biodistrict of “Via Amerina e delle Forre”, 15 environmentalist and representatives of citizens associations, and other stakeholders<sup>34</sup>. The RC is operating in the analysis and study activities, having organized three Focus Groups on land use and water and heritage, and having entered into agreements with some Research Institutions: the National Research Council; the Institute for Technologies Applied to Cultural Heritage of the National Research Council; the Department of Engineering, ICT and technologies for energy and transport.

The governance’s structure is articulated in (1) the Assembly of River Basin, made up of all members, (2) the Institutional Technical Committee, with coordination functions, (3) the Technical Secretariat.

Both RCs discussed in this contribution address the challenge of activating a process of re-appropriation by the local community of the important ecological passageway

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<sup>31</sup> The territory of the “Media Valle del Tevere” RC is affected by the Natura 2000 Area “Riserva naturale Tevere-Farfa” - IT6030012.

<sup>32</sup> Among the underwriters of the “Tevere – tratto urbano” RC, there are Municipalities I, II, III, VII of the City of Rome, the Municipality of Fiumicino, Rome Capital City, Rome Metropolitan City, the Special Archaeological Superintendence of Fine Arts and Landscape of Rome, the Central Apennines District Authority, the Port Authority of Rome, the Regional Agency for Environmental Protection of Lazio, the National Research Council, the University of Rome La Sapienza, the University of Rome Tre, the National Urban Planning Institute, 37 private stakeholders.

<sup>33</sup> For further information see: <http://www.agendatevere.org/contratto-di-fiume/>; Galassi A. et al. (2020).

<sup>34</sup> The following subscribed the “Media Valle del Tevere” RC: the Municipalities of Orte, Gallese and Civita Castellana (in the Province of Viterbo), Torrita Tiberina (in the Province of Rome), Magliano Sabina, Collecchio, Stimigliano, Forano, Poggio Mirteto, Montopoli in Sabina (in the Province of Rieti), the Municipality of Otricoli (in the Province of Terni in the Umbria Region).

represented by the Tevere River through the restoration of the relationship between the river and the city. To this end, the role of RCs is also fundamental in generating a patrimony of knowledge, awareness and responsibility in the communities and, in particular, with regard to aspects related to the “anthropized” environment. Such challenge (especially in the “Tevere – tratto urbano” RC) is addressed through Forums and Focus Groups, in order to catalyze the attention of a wide audience of players and stakeholders to environmental and sustainable development issues in urban-metropolitan contexts, within a system that integrates sustainable development policies and urban planning instruments.

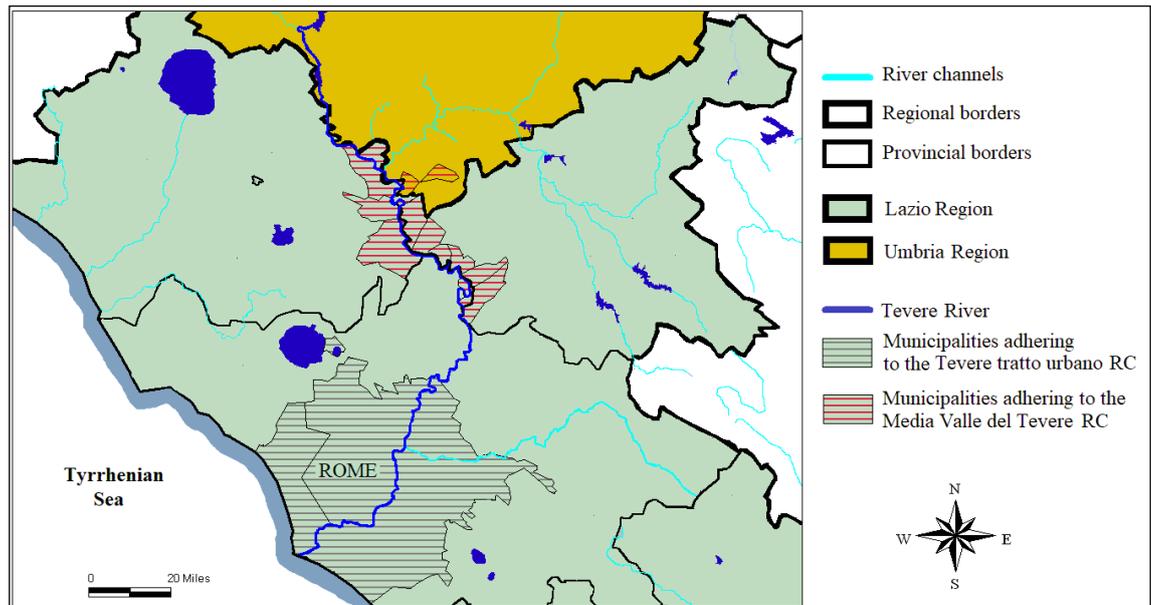


Figure 4: “Tevere tratto urbano” and “Media Valle del Tevere” River Contracts. Our elaboration.

#### 4. Conclusions

This contribution stems from the awareness that it is no longer possible to consider water only as a commodity to protect but that, on the contrary, it must be conceived as an attractor of new economic, environmental and social opportunities, on a local and global scale. Water conservation, the protection, safeguarding and conservation of river basins and their ecosystems and the reduction of pollution represent, in fact, a global challenge whose themes are included among the main Sustainable Development Goals of the UN Agenda 2030. In Italy, as in other countries, the challenges of Agenda 2030 are faced through integrated local development policies whose prevailing operating model, represented by the RCs, is operating above all in territories where there is the “awareness of places” meant as awareness of the importance of the protection of common goods: environment, landscape, culture, knowledge, etc.

In this paper we represented some experiences related to the RCs activated in central-southern Italy that, in general, show local communities with a strong sense of collective responsibility with respect to sustainable development issues and which, in many cases, recognize in the hydrographic basin the matrix of one’s own cultural identity. The collective responsibility demonstrated in the territories in question facilitates (and feeds) the behaviors of participation and co-responsibility in the

conception and implementation of local-global sustainable development projects to be activated through the RCs. Even with their peculiarities and differences, the RCs discussed show adherence to the principles of democratic participation in decisions as not only is the role of local communities within the process of establishing governance well defined, but also highlight the commitment made in the actions of territorial awareness, in the transparency of decisions, in the dissemination of information among the stakeholders, thus feeding the climate of trust. The RCs also show a good degree of participation and inclusion in governance and implementation processes, measurable, as seen, both through the variety of adhering subjects - such as Local Institutions, Universities, Economic Public Bodies, Citizens' Associations, representatives of private interests, Local Action Groups, etc. -, both through the technical-scientific quality of the Technical Committees, mainly composed of professionals, university researchers, etc.

We should also underline that the RC represents a strategic and negotiated programming instrument in which the voluntary nature of the development process, compared to the "induced" one, is emphasized. In other words, the RCs show the peculiarity of the spontaneous mobilization of local players, also as this is aimed at providing a contribution in achieving the global goals of sustainable development.

This aspect introduces the long-debated problem of financial support to the RCs, both with regard to the process of constitution and territorial cognitive analysis, and with regard to territorial animation actions and dissemination of information, and with respect to the implementation/realization of the interventions included in their Action Plans.

Among the intrinsic purposes of the RC (as well as for any local development strategy), in fact, it is important to intercept the necessary funding to be allocated to the implementation of the interventions, especially given the known scarcity of the allocation of the Local Institutions that (remember) represent the basis of the governance of bottom-up policies. Financial resources, therefore, constitute a variable necessary to achieve the governance objectives and on which the stability of the agreement process and the active role of the local community depend.

Therefore, legislative intervention on a national and/or community scale for the definition of funding instruments in favour of RCs is no longer postponed, also in order not to frustrate the efforts of local cooperation in contributing to the global challenges of sustainable development.

In this sense, an initial response has come, among those examined, by Basilicata and Lazio Regions, which, with a special public Call, granted the Local Institutions financial support for the preparatory phases for the establishing of RCs, from the drafting of the Document of Intent until the definition of the Action Plan. However, with regard to the implementation of the interventions envisaged in the Action Plans, there is a significant lack of information in the resolution of a specific allocation of national funding and a fragmented regulatory nature on the part of the Regions.

The European "Multifund CLLD" Programs, activated with the 2014-2020 programming, could have represented the natural financing instrument for the RCs interventions as: (1) their functioning moves within the logic of CLLD; (2) provide for the activation of projects related to interventions capable of operating on different themes (environment, culture, tourism, etc.); (3) contribute to implementing the local

development strategy through access to funds from the ERDF, the ESF, the EAFRD, the EMFF<sup>35</sup>.

However, in Italy, in the 2014-2020 programming, the ERDF-ESF Multi-Fund Programs were activated only by three Regions: Puglia, Calabria and Molise. The EAFRD- ERDF Multifund CLLD was considered only by the Sicily Region, while the EAFRD-EMFF Multifund CLLD was envisaged only by the Puglia Region<sup>36</sup>.

With regard to the EAFRD-ERDF-EMFF CLLD Multifund, therefore, the LAGs adhering to the RCs partnerships did not have the opportunity to “impact” in the interception of various public funds for the interventions’ financing, but had to “limit themselves” to actions of dissemination of good concertation and planning practices on a local scale.

Another instrument to support the effectiveness of the RCs, always in the full logic of CLLD, is most likely represented by the Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) established by the European Regulation no.1303/2013, although not currently effectively active in Italy<sup>37</sup>. Actions and interventions implemented in the form of ITI can be financed by the ERDF, ESF or CF Structural Funds and be complemented by financial support from the EAFRD and the EMFF<sup>38</sup>. In addition, for the management and implementation of an ITI, the Member State or a Managing Authority may designate one or more intermediate organizations, including Local Institutions, regional development institutions or non-governmental organizations. ITIs, in fact, are innovative instruments that allow to: a) adopt a “transversal strategy”, linked to a plurality of issues that together contribute to local development through the activation of a plurality of structural funds; b) facilitate the integration between homogeneous territories, in a vision that looks at the territory as a *unicum* beyond administrative borders; c) realize the integration of the various European Funds (ERDF, ESF, EAFRD, EMFF) in order to support multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary interventions. Furthermore, the instrument of the ITI can also be activated through Memoranda of Understanding or Framework Agreements, which in fact represent the forms of activation of the RCs. Finally, the ITI, being a flexible instrument, allows it to be adopted with a top-down, or bottom-up, or mixed approach, facilitating the establishment of distinct forms of governance of the RCs, in line with the different planning requirements.

Underlying the aspects related to the financing of the interventions, moreover, we note the problem related to community empowerment, that is to say the endurance of the RCs and more widely to the practice of collective action. In fact, as seen, collective action for a “common good” requires a sense of responsibility of the local community and a sense of trust not only among the stakeholders who cooperate in the process of

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<sup>35</sup> In the European 2014-2020 programming, the EU has provided for the possibility of activating Multi-Fund CLLD projects, i.e. financed by different Funds: EAFRD - ESF - EAFRD - EMFF.

<sup>36</sup> Sources:

[http://capacitaistituzionale.foromez.it/sites/all/files/1.3.5\\_lo\\_po\\_plurifondo\\_monofondo.pdf](http://capacitaistituzionale.foromez.it/sites/all/files/1.3.5_lo_po_plurifondo_monofondo.pdf);  
<https://www.reterurale.it/>

<sup>37</sup> Regulation (EU) no.1303/2013 of the European Parliament and Council of 17 December 2013, laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund.

<sup>38</sup> European Regional Development Fund (ERDF); European Social Fund (ESF); Cohesion Fund (CF); European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD); European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).

defining local development Action Plans, but also (and above all) towards higher-scale Institutions. In particular, the collective and voluntary effort put in play for a local development project, albeit fed by a “global cause” (global sustainable development goals), where it does not achieve the implementation (or even only a partial implementation) of planned objectives, not only risks questioning the entire process, but also having a negative impact on the sense of responsibility and trust of the local community: “a high sense of responsibility cannot last long in a condition in which one thinks of not being able to do anything to change the situation” (Martini, Sequi, 1995).

The risk, therefore, is to destabilize the autopoiesis of a territory by triggering a cognitive process based on the representation by the local community of having processed an abstract development plan.

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