



TITLE

POLICY BRIEF

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Experimenting the co-creation approach in the framework of active labor & employment policies

Keywords: participation, co-creation, multi-stakeholder, PPP, networks, skills-certification, soft-skills, up-skilling, re-skilling, lifelong-learning, lifelong-guidance, employerability, flexibility, hybridation

This policy brief is aimed at highlighting the most relevant aspects and the lessons learned from a co-planning experience on the issue of **labor mismatch**, the misalignment between labor supply and demand at a regional level, carried out through **multi-stakeholder participatory workshops**, in the context of the Interreg MED project [+RESILIENT](#) - Mediterranean Open RESouRcEs for Social Innovation of SocialLy Responsive ENTerprises, lead by Veneto Region.

Objectives of the document

- Highlight the positive aspects and opportunities provided by the adoption of the **participatory approach of the Community of Practice in defining employment policies**;
- Identify possible **benefits for all the actors involved** within the Community of Practice;
- Emphasize the importance of **Social Innovation as a cross-cutting and strategic tool** to answer new societal needs, developing actions and strategies which can be more consistent with the rapid and continuous transformation of the labor market;
- Embed this specific experience in the broader framework of active labor policies, in order to explore **the replicability and the sustainable of this model over time, by exploiting the tools offered by the new regional and national programmes**.

A Community of Practice to overcome labor mismatch - The experience of the Veneto Region and Veneto Lavoro

In the context of the + RESILIENT project, Veneto Region, with the support of Veneto Lavoro, has developed a local pilot action, focused on the labor mismatch, the misalignment between the skills of jobseekers and the need for skills expressed by companies.

The main objective was to lay the foundations for the establishment of a "Community of Practice" (CdP), a network of territorial actors with different vocations, skills and approaches to the phenomenon detected, which could cooperate to produce innovative ideas, proposals and solutions, with a participative and generative approach.

After a preliminary phase of study and mapping, a multi-stakeholder co-design process was undertaken, which has been facilitated through the use of collaborative strategic design methodologies and tools.

The results of the workshops were included in a final report, which includes some policy proposals addressed to Veneto Region policy makers and public/private labor market operators.

Why a Community of Practice? Practicing Social Innovation in the context of Veneto's employment policies

In literature, **Communities of Practice** are social groups whose ultimate goal is to generate organized and quality knowledge, accessible to each individual. In a CdP, each member learns from the sharing experience with the others. CoP are based on the idea that mutual-learning is an essential social process that consists in negotiating new meanings within a community characterized by a strong interaction.

The **key elements of the Community of Practice** that have represented the references for the +Resilient Community of Practice in Veneto are the following:

- The presence of a common problem involving a plurality of actors or, in other words, **the presence of a plurality of perspectives on the same problem**. This aspect has been taken into account in the process of selection of the participants in the CoP, consistently with the 4-helix model promoted by the +RESILIENT project itself;
- **Learning by interacting**, thanks to the cross-contamination between different sectors, skills, experiences, values and expectations;
- **The regularity of the interaction**, with the purpose of gradually deepening the chosen topic, and increasingly structuring the dialogue and relationships between the actors involved;
- The possibility of **acquiring new knowledge and skills**, aimed at personal and professional development for members of the CoP.

By the definition given by the European Commission, **Social innovation** is new ideas that meet social needs, create social relationships and form new collaborations. These innovations can be products, services or models addressing unmet needs more effectively. Social innovation aims at increasing social well-being.

From these definitions, it is easy to deduce the link between Social Innovation and the Community of Practice: the CoP represents a mean to produce more coherent and innovative responses to the needs and challenges for an increasingly complex future.

Why is it important to know how to combine these two elements in the context of new active labor & employment policies?

- On the one hand, because we need to **quickly react and adapt to the great changes that the labor market has undergone** in the recent decades - and especially in the last years of the pandemics - by proposing new strategies, actions, tools that are the result of the collective intelligence of those who directly fieldwork addressing these issues;
- On the other hand, because the adoption of the principles and the tools related to SI within the framework of active labor & employment policies can **facilitate the transition towards a more social and responsible economy, not only capable of creating new jobs, but also aimed at support organizations with a positive impact on**



territories and communities (ref. Social Economy Action Plan, European Commission).

The co-creation process and the participatory approach in the development of shared policies: tools to forecast and better understand the real needs of territories and communities

The European Union, for several years now, has insisted on the adoption of the participatory approach to outline local development actions and strategies, in order to overcome the top-down policy process and, conversely, to foster the bottom-up approach. Adopting this approach enables more authentic expressions of the territories and their communities, in terms of needs, problems, but also innovative solutions and new projects .

For instance, the **Community Led Local Development (CLLD)** tool promoted by the European Commission has gradually extended from limited policy areas to many others, including the social one. Today its usage, in the process of policies development and delivery, undoubtedly contributes to addressing the increasing need for innovation, with the purpose of looking for and experimenting "alternative ways of action".

Experiencing the Community of Practice approach, it was possible to test on a small scale the benefits and opportunities offered by participation in a policy area in which it is still not widely adopted. As a matter of fact, the co-creation results have highlighted how this voluntary and inclusive approach can bring an added value to policy interventions, both *ex-ante* (in the preliminary design phase) and *ex-post* (in the evaluation of the results and the impacts produced).

The **advantages of the participatory approach in defining local development policies** are:

- Key role of those who have a need or a challenge to face →The shift from a passive to an active role (from “users” to “producers”) certainly contributes to the **empowerment** of the Community members, strengthening the **common identity**, the sense of **shared responsibility** and the **mutual trust** between citizens, private companies, public institutions and sectoral interest groups.
- A tool to better understand the complexity of the present and the future →This aspect allows to outline needs, problems, ideas and solutions that are **truly sustainable and consistent with the territorial context**, as they should be the direct expression of it.
- The possibility of taking advantage of the tools provided by the EU programmes (e.g. CLLD, ITI), to **focus on complex challenges with a cross-sectoral perspective**, combining efforts and resources on a single, shared goal.

The co-design workshops results: finding out the consistency between identified needs and the guidelines of the new regional planning

- The actors involved are organized as a network, but they do not perceive themselves as such, since their relationships are aimed at satisfying operational needs rather than strategic ones. It is necessary to **build mutual acknowledgment and trust** and to define shared development strategies and actions, thus avoiding the fragmentation of services and the users’ skepticism;



- The need for a common language, a **framework of meanings shared by all professionals and operators working in the sector** →It is therefore essential to **update the skills certification system**, with particular emphasis on **formal and informal learning, soft skills, social and human skills, on-the-job training**. They will facilitate workers transition from sector to sector.
- To be part of a constantly changing labor market, it is necessary to focus on **upskilling and reskilling** workers in a **lifelong learning perspective**, but also improving **lifelong guidance activities**, supporting people throughout their entire professional life (and not only in the most problematic and uncertain phases).
- **Employability vs employerability** –if on the one hand there is a strong need to insist on up-skilling and re-skilling employees and jobseekers, on the other hand there is the need to intervene also on the companies and employers, so that the “pressure” and the responsibilities for the proper functioning of the supply-demand system are distributed more equally between the two parties.
- **Deconstruction of stereotypes** related to labor market, **towards a new paradigm of flexibility** - which must not be synonymous with “precariousness” or “unsteadiness” - **and hybridization of skills and professions**.
- **Strengthening and enhancement of the skills and capacities of labor market operators**, as they have a key role of guidance and intermediation, which is essential in order to face the mismatch.

The “spillover effect”: URBANHUB project - Contamination Lab Belluno Dolomiti

The involvement in the CdP of the realities of FabLab Belluno and Centro Consorzi and the comparison with other local actors on the issue of mismatch provided some inputs for the design of URBANHUB. The project aims at creating a Contamination Lab to stimulate and produce innovative skills to make the Belluno area more attractive, to respond more effectively to the social and demographic challenges of the local context, to reduce the mismatch between the skills produced by the school system and those required by the economic and to foster youth entrepreneurship.

Many of the above mentioned aspects are already reflected in the new regional and national programmes, in the framework of the measures aimed at overcoming the labor mismatch, and in particular within the guidelines of the new Region Operational Program of the EFS+ and of the national “GOL – Garanzia per l’Occupabilità dei Lavoratori” Program, which also insists on strengthening the territorial network of services and on promoting public-private networks and partnerships for the implementation of the various measures envisaged.

Therefore, the experience of +RESILIENT Community of Practice seems to be consistent with the new regional strategies in the field of employment and active labour policies. It could be replicated not only in order to access territorial needs and problems, but also to co-plan/co-design tools and measures to be implemented and to evaluate results and impact in the short, medium and long term.



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