

WP T3

Knowledge management, stakeholder involvement and sustainability of project results

ACTIVITY A.T3.3

Action plans for the long-term operation of SBMSs and the mentoring of managed networks

Action plan on partner level (D.T3.3.2)

Partner: Central European Initiative – Executive Secretariat

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INTRODUCTION

In WPT3 Project Partners carried out joint and partner-level activities contributing to facilitate the cooperation of social enterprises to promote their sustainability and to strengthen their role in social innovation and territorial cohesion. By means of transnational knowledge exchange, local/regional stakeholders' involvement and mentoring services, partners supported the sustainable operation of Social Enterprises in disadvantaged regions. As a final action, partners are to ensure the sustainability and transferability of project results, by developing action plans and policy recommendations.

Based on the needs of Social Enterprises detected in AT1.2 and the Social Enterprises support and networking methodology designed (AT1.3 & AT1.4.) and tested in pilot actions, Project Partners in each country draw up Action Plans including roadmap and measures to set up and operate mentoring services dedicated to Social Enterprises, as well as plans for networking facilitation. The SENTINEL Project Partners elaborated Action Plans following a same structure and based on the experiences gained during the piloting phase.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Partner organisation: Central European Initiative – Executive Secretariat

Other partner organisations involved (if relevant): Trentino Federation of Cooperation

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1. BACKGROUND

1.1. Needs of Social Enterprises

In the framework of the SENTINEL pilot action, implemented in the Carnia and Cadore mountain areas (Friuli Venezia Giulia Region and Veneto Region, Italy), the Central European Initiative – Executive Secretariat carried out a needs’ assessment out through participatory methodologies (i.e. focus groups and interviews) with the direct involvement of social enterprises.

The participants highlighted the most critical issues, mainly related to support services and networking: risk of burnout (social cooperatives are overwhelmed by everyday life, with no time to dedicate to, for example, strategic planning); the lack of managerial and entrepreneurial skills; problems in interfacing with the public administration (often representing the only customer); access to finance and different funding instruments; networking is difficult and often seen as a waste of time; lack of connection between the social cooperatives and the territory to which they belong; marginality is a crucial weakness, both in terms of connections and of mobility; the size of social cooperatives is a critical point since there is fierce competition in this sector, especially with big cooperatives (not rooted in the territory) and for-profit businesses; communication is another critical point, together with a sort of digital divide in the marginal areas which are sparsely populated.

Concerning needs analysis, there are several issues related to networking, both in terms of structure and in terms of activities:

- To foster strategic planning approaches and practices, because SEs are focused on daily work;
- To strengthen the capacity to apply to different funding instruments, like EU funds and other potential funds;
- To promote specific and targeted training modules;
- To support communication to different stakeholders’ groups;
- To promote connectivity and relationships, both material and immaterial;
- To highlight opportunities given by networks, at community, local and international levels.
- A key point is to promote social entrepreneurship as a cultural approach and not just to support existing social enterprises, because the support to potential social entrepreneurs is emerging as a crucial aspect for local development and social inclusion.

In this framework the link with local communities is fundamental. The local community should be considered both an objective and a productive factor for the social enterprises. This means involvement of a multiplicity of actors and a process of co-creation for building a strategic vision. There is the need to set different levels of networking, connecting digital and physical communities, which concerns the formation and functionality of networks: the means and aims of the entrepreneurial action are shared with the stakeholders.

1.2. Social Enterprises supporting ecosystem in each region

The social enterprises supporting ecosystem in the Italian regions involved in SENTINEL (Friuli Venezia Giulia, Veneto and Trentino) is very well developed and has a long tradition, with an extensive presence of social enterprises mainly with the legal profile of cooperatives.

In Italy, the legal framework of social enterprises has been addressed by many national legislation acts, from 1991 to the most recent one in 2017, and also different regional acts, with a strong involvement of the social enterprises in the economic and social activities at regional and local levels. The regional ecosystems stand out particularly for the presence of consortiums: inter-cooperative societies which

coordinate and integrate cooperative activities, creating a second-level organisational system. There are two main forms: umbrella organisations at national level. They have regional or provincial agencies with the main objectives concerning advocacy, lobbying and policy innovation; second-level organizations are traditionally composed of cooperatives operating in specific sectors.

An example of a networking activity is the one provided by the Trentino Federation of Cooperation (partner of SENTINEL), which is the organisation in charge of representing, supporting and supervising the growth of the co-operation movement in the province of Trento. The Federation combines a mix of hard and soft policies.

1.3. Outputs of WPT1: Handbook, Toolbox

Concerning the mentoring and support activities and the networking methodologies, the action plan carried out in Italy focused mainly on innovative networking. Networks do not only increase co-operator's influence but they also bring additional skills, knowledge and information to the co-operatives which may lead to better governance and performance improvements.

Beyond the traditional activities implemented by the umbrella organisations and consortia, the innovative networks should also promote:

- the function of the "general contractor" for the participation of their members in procurements. This can lead to an added value that allows members to be more competitive on tenders and calls, providing adequate knowledge and support in business relations;
- supervision and coordination activities for specific sectors of intervention;
- the coordination of cross-sectoral training courses, starting from participatory assessment of training needs of the members of the network and a set of courses relevant especially for the training aimed at providing medium-high skills, that permit to improve effectiveness and efficiency of management in the social enterprise.

The approach that should be further developed is to consider marginal areas – like mountains – and local communities as habitats of development. Too, social innovation can serve as a means to promote initiatives, governance models and development processes that are socially innovative from a territorial point of view. Networks should promote new local pacts and partnerships that encourage new forms of cooperation between local actors. In this framework, social enterprises are key actors of local development, which provides a potential for a new vision and additional elements compared to traditional approaches.

1.4. Pilot Actions – description of each pilot action and their outputs

The purpose of SENTINEL's pilot action in Carnia and Cadore (Italy) was to demonstrate that Social Enterprises - Social Cooperatives in the specific case - can be actors of local development in marginal areas. They develop coherent sets of interventions that respond to local objectives and needs to promote territorial animation to define the territorial capital value, to activate local communities and stakeholders and to promote the role of SEs. In order to increase the know-how of companies located in marginal areas and to develop specific skills in local development, the pilot action represented a joint initiative of the social cooperatives involved - ATI Cramars and La Cadore. Both these SEs are well established in two target areas and are seen as SEs which gives social contribution to their communities. In this joint initiative, the SEs used their internal resources and experience to develop innovative solutions and tools which defined a framework of networking activities oriented towards the local development.

The main objective was the design of community hubs, places where projects and ideas can be linked with inputs from the community. The two social enterprises developed new activities/sectors oriented

to the development of local communities. Moreover, the SEs from the area have worked to improve their entrepreneurial knowledge and to increase networking activities. Training as well as information and dissemination activities provided fundamental steps towards this transformation for the cooperatives, as well as the communities.

Concerning the main findings, the pilot action achieved the results foreseen in the different phases and some issues can be reported related to last phase.

The first phase of the pilot action was designed in order to make the social enterprise a potential provider of innovation for stakeholders and an actor of local development processes. The main goal was to identify the stakeholders and to define the tools to carry out the necessary surveys and data collection. The main activity of the first phase consisted of interviewing the stakeholders' key representatives on their vision about the future of the local community and the role of SEs.

The second phase consisted mainly in developing the tools to analyse and systematise the territorial capital, designing new business plans and setting up a trans-regional network. To sum up the work done, 3 areas of intervention are most relevant:

TRAINING

The training activity evolved into research/analysis activities and consequently passed on to the enterprises during the meetings organised for in-house training:

- 6 meetings took place in Cadore, 2 of which were dedicated to the people responsible for different production areas and 2 focussed on potential new partners;
- 4 meetings took place in Carnia;
- 7 inter-cooperative discussion meetings.

ANIMATION

Local communities animation activities in the two territories were organized in different ways according to the territory involved:

- 20 interviews (10 in Carnia and 10 in Cadore) with representatives of local stakeholders;
- 1 public event in Cadore in order to introduce the pilot action and the service developed;
- 2 public events in Carnia with the local communities (around 100 people);
- 2 events in Carnia specifically targeting local government (municipalities).

SOCIAL ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

The activity resulted in the design of:

- 2 business models for the two cooperatives
 - 1 focused more on local development and social innovation domains
 - 1 focused on new services of SEs;
- 1 business model canvas for a trans-regional and inter-cooperative network.

1.5. Trends and future challenges

In the final part of the pilot action, aimed at building up and strengthening local partnerships at community level, the two cooperatives faced different issues and decided to follow different paths: Cramars decided to work more at community level, La Cadore to work more at cooperative internal level. These different options demonstrate what can be the future challenges and trends. The focus on local contexts permitted to understand the local needs although in a joint methodological framework of development. This led the cooperatives to define different business plans. The understanding of the encountered issues permitted to draft a joint business plan of the inter-cooperative network more realistically and apt to local contexts, to available resources and potential opportunities.

2. CONCEPT OF THE SOCIAL ENTERPRISES SUPPORT SCHEME/SERVICES.

2.1. Vision of Action Plan

The present action plan is based on the Central European Initiative (CEI) profile. It takes its main inputs from the pilot action's findings that combined a local level operational approach with a cross-regional vision.

CEI, as the oldest and largest intergovernmental regional organization in Europe, is engaged in the promotion of local development for sustainable growth since the very beginning of its existence. With its current Plan of Action 2018-2020, the CEI has established a number of goals and objectives – under the two main chapters “strengthening the connectivity” and “valorising the diversity” - for effectively tackling numerous subjects related to this issue. In implementing the CEI core mission - *regional cooperation for European Integration and sustainable development* – an active involvement of representatives of local and regional authorities has been recognized as vital, in particular in the EU accession process. To this end, the CEI is putting at disposal of the Member States various mechanisms for cooperation at both political and practical (project) level and has delivered many tangible results so far.

CEI recently established an initiative called “CEI Local Dimension” in order to develop forms of “horizontal” cooperation between respective systems of local and regional governments of the CEI member states.

The present action plan is included in this framework, with two specific aims:

- to develop projects and actions aimed at facilitating cooperation on a local level;
- to recognize social economy as a crucial element for the convergence of disadvantaged regions, where social enterprises are key actors in local development, social inclusion and work integration.

CEI will promote and support transnational/cross-border cooperation involving different stakeholders, such as local and regional entities, together with relevant international, regional, national and other actors dealing with different aspects of local development and social economy.

Local development is considered one of the key issues in the European integration process as it empowers local societies. Following the approach of the SENTINEL pilot action, the purpose of this action plan, consistent with the CEI Local Dimension initiative, is, thus, to support actions to address local challenges and to promote the untapped potentials of local areas regarding the issue of sustainable growth. In doing so, CEI will promote an integrated approach to the local development, including the exchange of experience and knowledge in a bottom-up manner.

2.2. Objectives and priorities of Action Plan

The present action plan is based on the conceptual and operative framework referring to the institutional documents and initiatives aforementioned, with the goal of linking the local dimension to a transregional and transnational cooperation. Taking into consideration the many institutional relations and tools deployed, CEI elaborates an action plan structured on three levels:

- The first level is political-institutional within the organisation. This level, under the coordination of the Executive Secretariat, provides for the promotion of strategies and initiatives in the countries of the CEI constituency. The actions likely to be planned are mainly two:

1. Over the next three years, integrating the new Plan of Action with the priority "social enterprises", involving the latter in several activities as per the Plan;
 2. Promoting social enterprises among the framework of initiatives on Local Dimension and Youth.
- The second level is regional. At this level CEI will continue to collaborate both with the institutions (e.g. Friuli Venezia Giulia Region and Autonomous Province of Trento) and local social enterprises. A particular focus will be on the cross-regional cooperation and in this framework the collaboration with Federazione Trentina della Cooperazione (FTC) will keep working after Sentinel conclusion.
 - The third level is European and transnational. There are three areas of intervention that CEI can promote and support at this level:
 1. The first concerns the Social Enterprises Transnational Advocacy Network (SETAN) coordination. This network of social enterprises will be coordinated from the beginning and for the following three years, also through resources coming from CEI directly.
 2. The second is about supporting and promoting social enterprises in Interreg projects, partnerships and thematic networks at a European level; these actions will be also supported by the Federazione trentina della cooperazione (FTC) thanks to their specific experience in the field of social economy and their networks at EU level.
 3. The third area of intervention provides for promoting priorities and partnerships in calls for proposals where CEI stands as donor, such as the Cooperation Fund and the Know-how Exchange Programme.

Considering the high number of actors involved in local development, and in order to provide effective support and relevant participation in accordance with the priorities and topics of both SENTINEL projects and CEI Local Dimension, the main activities will be based on the following methodological approach: network of local actors, trans-national partnerships, promoting knowledge sharing and synergies among different initiatives.

CEI will support the action plan objectives and activities through the existing CEI funds and instruments aimed at providing financial support for cooperation between and among relevant stakeholders. In particular, CEI will promote:

- cooperation activities through CEI instruments annual calls (i.e. Cooperation Fund);
- participation in EU Projects and EU-level networking;
- support to horizontal cooperation through the exchange of good practices developed in the framework of EU-funded projects and initiatives.

2.3. Timeline and funding programme of Action Plan

The duration of the current action plan is three years. Such a timeline is consistent with two of the main priorities set in the plan: the new CEI Plan of Action 2021-2023 and the SETAN coordination over the first three years.

As far as financial sustainability is concerned, CEI will promote the raising and activation of possible regional and transnational funds, especially relevant to European programmes. As for funds, CEI has budgeted for financial support of about €25,000 per year, allocated as follows: €15,000 to personnel, €10,000 to projects financed by CEI-funded calls.

The structure of the action plan can be summarised as in the following table:

	Objectives	Priorities	Activities	Timeline
Local Dimension	Strengthening the topic “social enterprise” in strategic documents and in the Organisation's priorities	CEI Plan of action 2021-2023 CEI strategies (Youth, Local dimension, enterprises.)	Implementing the priorities of the Plan of Action with the topic "social enterprise" and defining the action guidelines Supporting horizontal cooperation in CEI strategies identifying the guidelines for social enterprises	December 2020 October 2020 – December 2022
Regional Dimension	Supporting the "social enterprise" theme in the already existing and consolidated regional relationships	Convention with the FVG Region Partnership with social enterprises ERDF Funds	Integrating the social enterprise and marginal areas theme into activities provided for by the convention with the FVG region Identifying collaboration guidelines through calls for projects Supporting the collaboration between the social enterprises and the FVG Region in order to identify possible interventions to be financed with European funds Supporting the	December 2020 and annual renewal May 2020 – December 2022 June 2020 – December 2022 October 2020 –

		Strategy for inland areas	transregional and multisectoral collaboration consistently with national strategies	December 2022
Transnational Dimension	Promoting and supporting networking and partnership actions at a European level, with special attention to the CEI area	SETAN Coordination	Supporting and developing the Network through advocacy activities, lobbying and fundraising	May 2020 – December 2022
		CEI Funds (cooperation fund and KEP)	Supporting cooperation activities and exchange of good practices in the framework of transnational projects and initiatives	October 2020 – December 2022
		Cross-border or trans-border projects	Participation in EU Projects, networking, co-design and joint implementation through the existing thematic networks, macro-regional bodies and EU-level collaboration platforms	June 2020 – December 2022
		Thematic European Networks		
		Macro-regional strategies		

3. EXPECTED RESULTS AND TRANSFERABILITY

3.1. Stakeholders and their influence – policy recommendation

CEI's institutional profile identifies the member countries as the natural stakeholders whose involvement occurs through consolidated institutional channels and tools. Being an intergovernmental organisation, CEI operates through the national coordinators of the member countries sitting in the respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs. Through these officials the thematic institutional representatives are involved and other organisations, at different levels throughout the various countries, are also contacted.

Whenever formally approved by CEI governance bodies, every promoted initiative is endorsed by political and institutional authorities, thus further empowering the initiative's influence in the countries involved.

CEI serves also as a multi-level policy dialogue platform, fostering the involvement of different actors in multi-stakeholder discussions.

At a transnational level CEI will promote and spread the policy recommendations resulting from the SENTINEL project, both the European recommendations and the national and regional ones.

3.2. Transferability potentials

Transferability is guaranteed by and through the institutional channels of CEI since it encompasses 17 countries and therefore can assure exchanges of knowledge and good practices.

As mentioned above, cooperation and skill transfer activities will be promoted in order to make social enterprises the priority and main topic in CEI's calls for funds.

Finally, the activities of practice and knowledge transferability will be promoted thanks to the SETAN coordination, using also the methodologies developed and shared by SENTINEL partners and SETAN members.

3.3. Influence on the labour market and amount of funds foreseen to be leveraged based on project achievements

The activity promoted and developed by CEI in the current action plan is more policy-oriented than tailored on a direct impact on the labour market, job creation or the activation of other types of financing.

Nevertheless it is likely to have a positive indirect impact all the same, and CEI will do its best in order to make its manifold stakeholders pay special attention to the labour market, focussing especially on supporting access to non-traditional types of funding, both at a regional/national and a translational/European level.

4. QUALITY ASSURANCE

The action plan is structured around a framework of activities that have related deliverables linked to existing strategies and initiatives that will permit to apply the same methodological approach of quality assurance and control, with a specific focus on social enterprises domain planned in the actions as described above. The QA will apply a monitoring and evaluation system of the CEI-ES activities and the respective funding programmes. A specific evaluation questionnaire will be prepared and an assessment survey will be performed each year by the staff of CEI-ES.

ANNEX I.

Declaration of intent

On behalf of the decision-making body of the Central European Initiative – Executive Secretariat I, the undersigned, hereby declare, that the Action Plan designed in the framework of the SENTINEL Project was endorsed and adopted by our organisation.

Date: 26/05/2020

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Anna Marconato – Head of Finance and Administration
Central European Initiative- Executive Secretariat



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