

SENTINEL - CE985

O.T3.2 - Policy recommendations targeted at national level

Version 1
May2020

Executive summary in English

ITALY

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Central European Initiative - Executive Secretariat
in cooperation with
Federazione Trentina della Cooperazione





National context/environment of social economy and description of the challenge/problem which the recommendations aim to tackle (~1000 characters)

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 by different regional acts, with a strong involvement of the social enterprises in the economic and social activities at regional and local levels. 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. The national and regional ecosystems stand out particularly for the presence of umbrella organisations and consortia.

The challenges which the recommendations aim to tackle are mainly related to support services and networking: risk of burnout of the SEs staff; 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.

Main SENTINEL activities and results leading to the recommendations (~1000 characters)

The recommendations are based mainly on the findings of the pilot action carried out by the Italian partners in Carnia and Cadore mountain areas, that was aimed at promoting the role of SEs as local community hubs. The purpose of SENTINEL's pilot action was to demonstrate that Social Enterprises - Social Cooperatives in the specific case - can be actors of local development in marginal areas. The involved social enterprises developed coherent sets of interventions to respond to local needs, promoting territorial animation in order to define the territorial capital value, to activate local communities and stakeholders and to promote the role of SEs. A specific objective was to increase the know-how of companies located in marginal areas and to develop specific skills in local development, and this was promoted by joint activities of the social cooperatives involved - ATI Cramars and La Cadore. Both these SEs are well established in two target areas and their experience permitted to define also business plans that can develop the SEs but also that can give economic and 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 inter-cooperative and cross-regional networking activities oriented towards the local development of mountain areas.



Summary of policy recommendations formulated (~4000 characters)

One of the main elements coming from the SENTINEL experience is the need for a SE to carry out activities with the goal to have social impact: considering marginal areas, the evidence suggests that an enterprise is a social one when it concretely produces a social impact. The issue of social impact, especially in marginal and peripheral areas, becomes particularly significant in relation to the conditions of socio-economic frailty present in peripheral realities. Another element is trust: considering these socio-economic conditions, the quality of life of people is increasingly threatened by economic and financial variables and any development strategies or business initiatives in local communities can be successful only if they do consider the importance of trust, activating value-based relationships between people and among different local actors. Local dimension becomes in this context a challenging definition: social enterprises size and the characteristic to be rooted in the local communities seem crucial elements.

In the development of the SENTINEL project one of the objectives was to define support services and innovative networking models, and the following elements can be transferred from the pilots' experience to an interregional / transnational strategy:

- Emphasising the importance of a comprehensive model, which goes beyond capacity building activities providing an inclusive support ecosystem;
- Ensuring flexibility in the provision of support measures to target groups, based on identified needs;
- Providing guidance and tools on how to foster networking and cooperation, which were recognised as key success factors in the pilot actions;
- Making available operational toolboxes (approaches, skills, learning tools, etc.);
- Providing a proper mix of support services (at enterprise level and at network level);
- Importance of high-quality analysis of the needs of target groups, which is a basis for developing tailored work plans, as well as engagement of all the relevant stakeholder organization;

The policy recommendations can be summarised as follows:

- Strengthening the promoting social entrepreneurship as an element of social cohesion;
- Supporting the specificity of social enterprises by establishing their participatory dimension, their role in local sustainable development processes, their ability to encourage the empowerment of people and local communities;
- Supporting the development of SEs through training and financial resources in support of new social entrepreneurship at local level;
- Strengthening local processes and programs of co-planning capable of enhancing the social impact of local businesses in the various areas of activity in particular for their impact on employment, environmental sustainability and strengthening of bonds and trust networks;
- Promoting the role of SEs in the strategies and financial instruments of regional development and social inclusion (in particular in the ERDF and ESF funds); Strengthening the offer of training courses with methods and regulations suitable for the SEs operating in marginal areas;
- Strengthening investments in research and experimentation of social entrepreneurial experiences able to keep together the economic, environmental, educational and social variables of local development;
- Promoting open innovation paths, involving social enterprises in the co-planning and co-creation of products and services, also in a living lab approach;
- Promoting dedicated access to the supply of goods and services of public interest;
- Defining award criteria in the assignment of contributions and initiatives of public interest;
- Encouraging the involvement of social enterprises in the management of common goods, favouring consortia or forms of co-management with subjects linked to local realities.