

**PROGETTO STRATEGICO
TERRITORI**

Executive summary
English version

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Executive Summary

The **Strategic Territories Project**, developed under the Complementary Action and Cohesion Programme on the National Governance of the European Territorial Cooperation 2014-2020, aimed to build an innovative and replicable model to capitalise on the outcomes of the best ETC (European Territorial Cooperation) projects. The initiative networked together Italian Regions belonging to the Joint Parity Committee (Puglia, Tuscany and Veneto) and added Friuli Venezia Giulia and Lazio, grouped by the three strategic geographic zones: Adriatic-Balkan, Alpine-Central Europe and Mediterranean, thereby creating concrete synergies among them through European and national programmes.

The methodology adopted followed a structured progression of phases: **from selecting the most promising projects, to defining the Key Challenges and Work Tracks, through to establishing the Cooperation Platforms**. These latter served as genuine spaces for dialogue and peer learning, involving institutions, universities, businesses and local actors. The approach combined desk analysis, targeted interviews and participatory discussion moments, ensuring a synthesis between top-down and bottom-up approaches. In this way, it was possible to build capitalisation criteria based on **relevance, sustainability and transferability of results**.

Among the main achievements, the ability to foster a climate of trust and collaboration among the Regions stands out, strengthening territorial networks and consolidating **multi-level governance processes**. Each area developed a thematic focus of its own: ports as energy hubs and the hydrogen resource for the Adriatic-Balkan area; Green Public Procurement and sustainable construction for the Alpine-Central Europe space; impact indicators and governance models for sustainable tourism for the Mediterranean area. The platforms promoted networking, identification of innovative project ideas and the drawing up of integration plans capable of combining various funding and programming sources in a coherent system.

The project demonstrated how interregional cooperation can translate into concrete **policy-innovation** tools, capable of reinforcing institutional dialogue and generating proposals that can influence the 2021–2027 European programming. The most significant outcome is the definition of a model that valorises best practices of ETC, transforming them into replicable opportunities able to engage with macro-regional strategies and with territorial needs.

Looking ahead, the development prospects for the outlined model appear significant. Firstly, there is the opportunity to embed its use within the new Technical Assistance and System Actions Plan (PATAS) 2021–2027, favouring structured capitalisation processes and the embedding of macro-regional policies. Secondly, the experiences gained may feed into the technical fora foreseen by the Partnership Agreement, contributing to inter-institutional coordination and the definition of more effective actions. Lastly, the proposed methodology can also support post-2027 programming, capturing emerging themes and reinforcing regional competitiveness.

The document is structured in six chapters, ranging from defining the Model Structure to proposing future orientations, as detailed below. In **Chapter 1, “The Structure of the Innovative**

Model", conceived to valorise and capitalise the most promising outcomes of European Territorial Cooperation programmes, the five phases are set out to accompany the Regions and the various actors involved through a path that spans from the choice of a strategic theme to the identification of future perspectives. The chapter shows how the Territories project does not merely review its achievements, but offers a replicable method: a participatory, multilevel process that transforms project experience into governance tools, fosters trust and collaboration among Regions, and lays the groundwork for new integrated and sustainable policies.

Chapter 2, "Definition of Theme by Area", highlights the work undertaken to identify strategically significant issues, capable of attracting stakeholders, building on past experience and opening room for future development. The work was based on multilevel analysis: on one side, the priorities of macro-regional strategies and Interreg programmes were considered; on the other, inputs were gathered from the pilot Regions and local actors, while also assessing the presence of already-launched projects and growth opportunities. For the **Adriatic-Balkan area**, the choice fell on ports as energy hubs and the hydrogen resource. The idea of transforming ports into centres for production, distribution and use of clean energy makes them key nodes for decarbonising maritime transport and for sustainable industrial development. For the **Alpine-Central Europe area**, the chosen theme was Green Public Procurement (GPP), with a particular focus on sustainable and smart public buildings. In a context with strong industrial and innovative orientation, the ability of Public Administration to shape the market through green procurement is seen as a decisive lever to stimulate technological innovation, spur ecological transition and promote greater environmental awareness. This choice also reflects alignment with European circular economy policies and with Italy's National Strategy for the Circular Economy adopted in 2022. For the **Mediterranean area**, the chosen theme was sustainable tourism, a key sector for the region's economy but among the most severely impacted by the pandemic. The focus was on how tourism can evolve towards greener and more digital models, in line with the pathways outlined by the European Commission in the Transition Pathway for Tourism and the European Agenda 2030 for tourism. In particular, work has centred on participatory governance models and sustainability indicators — crucial elements to make tourism more resilient and competitive.

In conclusion, this first phase enabled the identification of three thematic trajectories that address global challenges while also reflecting the specificities of the territories involved. The setting of these priorities laid the foundations for the subsequent project phases, providing a clear framework on which to concentrate capitalisation and cooperation efforts.

In Chapter 3, "Selection of the Most Promising Projects", the work carried out by the Territories project in selecting the so-called most promising projects is described — i.e. those experiences deemed most significant and with the greatest potential to be capitalised, transferred or developed into new initiatives. Across all areas, the selection of projects allowed for the creation of a sample of significant experiences, useful not only to valorise what had already been achieved, but above all to generate new cooperation opportunities. The gathering of these projects also facilitated the engagement of a broad stakeholder network — from port authorities to universities, from

businesses to tourism agencies — who could play an active role in subsequent phases of dialogue and co-design.

Chapter 4, “Identification of Challenges and Work Tracks”, narrates the turning point of the project: from the mere census and selection of the more promising projects, it moved to define the major **strategic challenges** and their related **work tracks**, i.e. the concrete trajectories along which to orient future actions. The challenges took the form of long-term, ambitious and broad objectives, while the work tracks provided more operational indications, representing the initial lines of concrete action on which to build new project pathways. The added value of this phase was twofold. On one hand, it allowed for the convergence of past experiences and available resources into common directions consistent with European strategies. On the other hand, it activated a multilevel dialogue process involving Regions and partners, creating the conditions for a robust and lasting cooperation. In summary, this phase turned the wealth of projects into a shared strategic vision capable of guiding not only the concrete actions of the cooperation platforms, but also broader policies.

Chapter 5, “Cooperation Platforms”, describes the transition from analysis to active sharing: the creation of the Cooperation Platforms, genuine working and discussion tables among institutions, project partners and interested stakeholders. The idea behind these platforms is that the capitalisation of results should not simply end with collecting good practices, but become a participatory process capable of generating new project ideas and strengthening the dialogue among different governance levels.

The platforms had three main functions:

- networking, i.e. connecting diverse actors and fostering the birth of communities of learning;
- developing new project ideas, based on the outputs of the most promising projects selected in the earlier phases;
- influencing policies, integrating the outcomes into major regional, national and macro-regional programming instruments.

The platforms’ work relied on participatory tools such as focus groups, peer review, workshops and targeted interviews, which enabled continuous dialogue and validation of the paths undertaken. Through this method, the “givers” (producers of outputs) and the “takers” (potential users) were able to engage in direct dialogue, thus favouring the transferability and adoption of the results.

The results achieved were manifold. On one hand, the platforms consolidated existing networks and created new ones. On the other, they generated concrete project ideas ready to be submitted to European and national calls for proposals. Finally, they improved the circulation of information and the quality of institutional dialogue, thereby strengthening the link between programming and territories.

Ultimately, this phase demonstrated that cooperation platforms can become permanent loci of exchange and innovation, capable of relating diverse experiences and guiding them toward common goals. They represent one of the most innovative and replicable elements of the model proposed by the Territories project.

Chapter 6, “Future Orientations”, outlines the ways to consolidate the results achieved and convert them into guidelines for the future. The underlying idea is that the initiated pathway should not conclude with experimentation, but become a stable and replicable model capable of supporting territorial cooperation even in future European programming cycles.

In short, the document emphasises the importance of embedding the Territories model within structural instruments such as the new Technical Assistance and System Actions CTE Plan (PATAS) 2021–2027. In this way, the methodologies tested may be institutionalised and sustained over the long term. Another possible outcome is the integration of cooperation platforms into the technical fora of the Partnership Agreement, thereby keeping the multilevel dialogue alive and facilitating coordination between Regions and Ministries.

This final phase confirms that the value of the project lies not only in the results it achieved, but especially in the method experimented: a collaborative, participatory and replicable approach that can guide Italy and its Regions in the future of European territorial cooperation. In this regard, the cooperation platforms and integration plans represent a capitalisable asset, a seed that can grow and fuel new policies and project ideas.