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Co-development: a  
fruitful innovation

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# **Co-development: a fruitful innovation**

The objective of the “Master-Class des deux rives de la Méditerranée” is to focus on the Mediterranean Sea not as an element of division, but as a space for positive interaction among local communities. Starting from this assumption we, students of the International Relations and European Studies Master (RISE) programme at the University of Florence, have decided to focus on *international de-centralized cooperation*, meaning cooperation in partnership with local communities.

In this context, crucial is the added value of *co-development* in order to overcome the issues associated with traditional forms of development cooperation. This occurs not only through the practice of *cooperation between equals*, but also with the valorization of the active role of the Northern Mediterranean’s migrant communities, to be seen as new actors with regard to development concerns.

The development of this new approach took the form, in our contribution, of a multi-level analysis. In the first part, the focus is on EU cooperation policies, with room for a critical evaluation of limits and contradictions. The second paragraph is devoted to the economic and planning tools that the European Union, the Italian Government and the Region of Tuscany employ to promote and finance cooperation with the countries of the Mediterranean South. Finally, this paper analyses two case-studies which shed light on the concrete co-development measures taken in Tunisia by the Region of Tuscany, an important cooperation actor with substantive relations regarding the countries of the Mediterranean South. In particular, the focus is on the Futur-Proche project as an example of *cooperation between equals*, and on the Global Health Centre experience, showing a co-development approach based on the role of diasporas communities, and a great sense of co-responsibility.

## **1. Co-development: what does it mean?**

Co-development is an innovative method of international cooperation which aims to promote co-responsibility choices through the cooperation of actors (donors and recipients), in order to formulate policies and objectives aimed at enhancing the interdependence relationships of the

different regions of the world.<sup>1</sup> The building blocks of co-development are based on a logic of equality between donor and recipient, creating a situation of equal responsibility and the exchange of knowledge, techniques, and experiences. Likewise, co-development aims to reduce the ~~gap and~~ disparity between countries involved in cooperation by creating a new dimension of responsibility. This can happen firstly through the recognition of the centrality of migrants and their communities and associations as "development actors" in the territories of origin.

The desire to include the diasporas within co-development policies and objectives originates in the recent growing attention to the link between migration and development, which emphasizes the communities of migrants working within the recipient country, intensifying transnational relations and allocating remittances to the community/family of the country of origin. Financial remittances from the European diasporas can be a useful tool for improving the living conditions of the communities of origin<sup>2</sup>. These remittances may be directly allocated to family members, through real estate investments and even by investing in economic activities.

Although this new, yet experimental, method of cooperation seems to open the way to a future for improving relations between Mediterranean communities, it must be remembered that it is not free from potentially critical issues. In an interview published on CESPI (an Italian think tank on international politics)<sup>3</sup>, it becomes clear that co-development, in its use of diasporas, can lead in some cases to an increase in inequalities in the country in which it is operating. Indeed, the injection of money from abroad may cause inequalities between people receiving money and those that do not. It can also create a new mechanism for income dependency emanating from external factors. In addition, private remittances, although their value far exceeds that of public investments in the cooperation sector, do not serve to finance large scale development projects, but usually have very specific targets: households or at most inhabitants of specific neighborhoods.<sup>4</sup> Despite these limits, the use of diasporic communities by the countries of the north bank could improve the benefits of cooperation and could be an element capable of consolidating co-development policies.

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<sup>1</sup> "Quale cosviluppo?" Interview to Petra Mezzetti, CESPI: "La faccia oscura della diaspora", Nigrazia Africa 54. 10 2019

Website: <https://www.donzelli.it/download.php?id=VTJGc2RHVmtYMS8zd3hVVVY0WldXeINWK2RrTHIET3JLS1A4K0FXZEZsOD0=>

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.cespi.it/sites/default/files/comunicazioni/allegati/intervista\\_mezzetti\\_nigrazia\\_ottobre\\_2019.pdf](https://www.cespi.it/sites/default/files/comunicazioni/allegati/intervista_mezzetti_nigrazia_ottobre_2019.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> ibidem

## 2. Development cooperation and the migration policy of the EU

The European Union supports developing countries by promoting their sustainable development. The Union is a major global player on development cooperation policies. To improve its internal coordination with respect to these policies, in 2005 it made a political commitment to "policy coherence for development"<sup>5</sup>. For the current Multiannual financial framework, 2014-2020, through the European Development Fund and other Community funds, the Union has made available 82 billion euros<sup>6</sup> for development, equal to more than half of the global commitment. The EU is committed to ensuring aid effectiveness and promoting strong relations with partner countries in the programming and implementation of development objectives. The 2007 Code of Conduct on Division of Labor in Development Policy and the 2011 Operational Framework on Aid Effectiveness were adopted by the EU for this purpose. The main objective of the code<sup>7</sup> is to underline the importance of the principle of complementarity, understood as the ideal division of tasks between the different actors and aimed at the optimal commitment of human resources and finance. This entails the provision of sectoral assistance by the actor with the greatest competence. The Operational Framework on Aid Effectiveness<sup>8</sup>, is a text adopted by the European Council which includes practical measures aimed at improving the dialogue between the partners for the division of tasks, technical cooperation for greater capacity development and guarantees with regard to conditions of transparency and accountability in the delivery of aid. In the 2021-2027 MFF, the Commission is proposing to allocate €89.2 billion to the new Neighborhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI). The negotiations between the Council and European Parliament show that "mobility and migration" and "good governance, democracy, the rule of law and human rights" are at the center of the European agenda. However, a vision of migration as an element to be resisted rather than as a possible functional resource for co-development prevails. This incoherence and predilection for order security has certainly depended on the diffusion of a populist discourse, which identifies immigration as a threat to national sovereignty. The main cause lies in the weakness of the EU with respect to building a real common migration policy. Until now, in fact, States' national agendas have prevailed

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<sup>5</sup> "Through Policy Coherence for Development the EU seeks to take account of development objectives in its policies that are likely to affect developing countries. It aims at minimising contradictions and building synergies between different EU policies to benefit developing countries and increase the effectiveness of development cooperation. This concept of policy coherence for development was introduced in EU fundamental law in 1992 with the Treaty of Maastricht and was further reinforced in the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009 (Art.208 TFEU)", European Commission.

<sup>6</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/funding/about-funding-and-procedures/sources-funding\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/funding/about-funding-and-procedures/sources-funding_en)

<sup>7</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM%3Ar13003>

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.senato.it/japp/bgt/showdoc/17/DOSSIER/0/1021292/index.html?part=dossier\\_dossier1-sezione\\_sezione11-h2\\_h22](https://www.senato.it/japp/bgt/showdoc/17/DOSSIER/0/1021292/index.html?part=dossier_dossier1-sezione_sezione11-h2_h22)

over the principle of solidarity declared in Art. 80 TFEU: "The policies of the Union [on asylum and immigration] and their implementation shall be governed by the principle of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility, including its financial implications, between the Member States". Limited receptive capacities and lack of adequate structures in the southern member states vis-à-vis migrant flows as well as electoral rhetoric in some Member States seeking to consolidate political consensus by exploiting the issue, have led the EU towards a “defensive” approach which risks further undermining its coherence in development cooperation and migration policy commitments. An alternative course of action focused on solidarity, human rights, integration and coherence, could be more beneficial for receiving countries while at same time politically more fruitful for the EU, making its developing cooperation policy a key instrument for building up EU foreign policy<sup>9</sup>. In conclusion, even if the EU demonstrated a willingness to adopt measures to improve development cooperation and immigration policy, its full potential is still yet to be exploited. Too often, in fact, the gap between discourse and policy practice remains significant. Moreover, understanding the potential for and promotion of co-development within EU development and migration strategies represents a necessary step towards facing the news challenges ahead.

### **3. European, National, and Local Instruments for De-centralized Cooperation and Co-Development in the Mediterranean**

Funds which support EU cooperation and migration policies, and which can financially support new forms of decentralized cooperation and co-development between local communities, include some of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI Funds). The ESI Funds are the main financial instruments of regional policy within the European Union, have as their objective the strengthening of economic, social and territorial cohesion by reducing the gap between the most advanced and the least developed regions. In particular the:

- *European Social Fund (ESF)* - which supports employment projects across Europe and invests in the human capital of Europe: in workers, young people and all those looking for a job, and is also used to guarantee reception, integration, education, and training for migrant communities, especially those concentrated in suburban areas;

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<sup>9</sup> V. Fargion and M. Mayer (2013), “Refocusing Development Co-operation in Africa: The EU as a Global Health Champion?”

- *European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)* - which promotes balanced development in the various regions of the EU and finances European and neighborhood cooperation programs in the Mediterranean (ENI MED and Italy / Tunisia);

One of the programme objectives of European cohesion policies 2014-2020 is the European Territorial Cooperation<sup>10</sup>, financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). It is part of interventions designed by the European Union to strengthen internal economic and social cohesion, to reduce the gap between the levels of development of the various regions and to encourage cooperation in the Mediterranean.

Of particular note for the support it can offer to decentralized cooperation and co-development, is one of the EU's Territorial and Neighborhood Cooperation programs called *ENI CBC MED*, which specifically concerns the Mediterranean area. This program is aimed at promoting fair, equitable and sustainable economic, social and territorial development, conducive to cross-border integration and which enhances the territories and values of the regions or sub-regional areas bordering the Mediterranean in Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, France Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Morocco, Palestine, Portugal, Spain, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey. There are four thematic objectives: 1) business and SME development, 2) support for education, research, technological development, and innovation, 3) promotion of social inclusion and the fight against poverty, 4) environmental protection, adaptation, and the mitigation of climate change<sup>11</sup>.

The Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) is an important fund managed directly by the European Commission, specifically by the Directorate-General for Migration and Internal Affairs. Every year, through project calls, tenders, direct grants, and delegated agreements, numerous projects on the reception and integration of migrants are established in European states in close

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<sup>10</sup> The components of the ETC are three: 1) cross-border cooperation between neighboring regions with maritime and land borders in two or more Member States or between neighboring regions in at least one Member State and a third country on the external borders of the Union other than those covered by the programs within the Union's external financing instruments; 2) transnational cooperation on larger transnational territories; 3) interregional cooperation involving all 28 Member States of the European Union and aims to strengthen the effectiveness of cohesion policy by promoting the exchange and transfer of experiences and good practices. The resources for the CTE objective amount to € 8.9 billion, of which € 6.6 billion are donated to cross-border cooperation (around 74%), € 1.8 billion to transnational cooperation (around 20%) and € 500 million to interregional cooperation (around 6%).

<sup>11</sup> Between 2014 and 2020, 41 cooperation projects were financed, many of which concern Tunisia, including AQUACYCLE, aimed at promoting sustainable treatment and re-use of water in the Mediterranean regions, HELIOS, for better inclusion of the "NEETS", INNOMED-UP, concerning the circular economy and waste management, and MED-InA, with the aim of creating a real alliance for recycling and waste management, involving not only the municipality but the citizens of the Mediterranean area themselves.

collaboration with the countries of migratory origin, including all those of the southern shore of the Mediterranean<sup>12</sup>.

At the Italian national level, the main innovation within the field of cooperation and co-development is represented by the cooperation reform law (125/2014). In the first articles of the text we find clear references to co-development and migration: the eradication of poverty and reduction of inequalities, promotion of human rights and gender equality, support for liberal democracy and the establishment of the rule of law. It is not an "economic" agenda but a human promotion agenda. The theme for the future is a fairer distribution of wealth, a guaranteed right of access to health and education as well as ~~and~~ environmental sustainability. This is the challenge that cooperation wants to confront and resolve, embracing a new form of "human-promotion economy" in which public and private actors can be brought together, combining culture, education, work, rights, business, and community programmes according to the European and Italian models. The project aims to be a concrete help to men, women, and children that we would otherwise see die on our shores, fleeing wars and underdevelopment.

As for the local level, we would take as an example the Tuscany Region with its strong and continuous commitment to cooperation with the countries of the southern Mediterranean and the reception of migrants from those countries, Tuscany is one of the few Italian regions that promotes and supports international development cooperation and international collaboration and partnership activities. These activities are intended to contribute to the realization of social and sustainable development on a local scale all over the world, to solidarity between peoples and the democratization of international relations. In the international cooperation activity carried out by the Tuscany Region, it is clear that the issues of cooperation and migration in the Mediterranean area play a leading role. Tuscany promotes and supports numerous decentralized cooperation projects in the Mediterranean and encourages participation in the cooperation programs by all areas of Tuscan society including local authorities, universities, civil society actors and private individuals. This is in close collaboration with government EU cooperation programs as well as international organizations and envisages co-development as an innovative, albeit still experimental, approach to relations between local actors on both sides. Furthermore, in the last few years, the Tuscany Region has proved to be a

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<sup>12</sup> "AMIF" includes financial incentives for EU Member States to support the resettlement program for migrants and refugees from EU countries and a specific financial mechanism for the transfer of refugees and asylum seekers from EU states with high pressure. migratory to other states. Most of the available funds are therefore managed at national level, in the case of Italy, by the Ministry of the Interior. Among the main entities to which the fund is addressed are undoubtedly local public bodies, in particular regions and municipalities..

real innovation laboratory regarding international cooperation. The Region decided to fully embrace the possibilities of co-development choosing it as a pillar of its global effort for development cooperation. Besides the two broader case-studies we will present, Tuscany develops annually valuable new projects. For example, “BESIDE – BusinESs Inclusion Development”<sup>13</sup>, funded by the Tuscany Region and promoted by Arci Toscana in collaboration with 6 local Partners and 1 Tunisian Partner, intends to bring to the attention of SMEs the new opportunities offered by their involvement in international development cooperation. Moreover, ARCI Toscana, in collaboration with ANCI (National Association of Italian Municipality) Toscana, CESVOT, COSPE, Euroafrican Partnership, Fondazione Finanza Etica and University of Pisa have decided to carry out (as part of the initiatives financed by the Region) a new training course, after the successes of the previous year, addressed to migrant associations in Tuscany on planning in the context of international cooperation. This will allow migrant associations to act as "development and change actors", at an economic and social level in their communities of residence, creating prospects for further development in the territories of origin<sup>14</sup>.

#### **4. Study cases: Futur-Proche project and the Global Health Centre of Region of Tuscany**

Interviews with Mrs. Alice Concari and Dr. Maria José Caldes, respectively coordinator for the Project Futur-Proche<sup>15</sup> and manager for the Centro Salute Globale<sup>16</sup> (Global Health Centre) for the Tuscany Region, have highlighted how the co-development approach, developed by the Region through the involvement of both local and national actors, has found fertile ground in Tunisia. This country has always been a strategic partner for Italy, given its geographic proximity and its importance as a partner in migration management. Given its political stability if compared to neighboring countries, Tunisia is also an important economic partner for Italy. Indeed, it hosts an Italian community composed of entrepreneurs, intellectuals and co-development actors.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.asev.it/settimana-del-business-inclusivo-progetto-beside/>

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.arcitoscana.it/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2663:un-bando-per-microprogetti-nellambito-del-co-sviluppo-&catid=55:campagne&Itemid=131](https://www.arcitoscana.it/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2663:un-bando-per-microprogetti-nellambito-del-co-sviluppo-&catid=55:campagne&Itemid=131)

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.anci.it/anci-toscana-al-via-futur-proche-per-lo-sviluppo-locale-e-la-cittadinanza-attiva-in-tunisia/>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.centrosaluteglobale.eu/>

Both interviewees agree on the fact that the successful implementation of their respective projects has been possible due to the Tunisian level of development in economic and social terms. The recent revolution that took place in 2011, known as the Jasmine Revolution, has promoted a process of democratization at the institutional and civil society levels. The European Union recognized the importance of such transformation and decided to direct investments aimed at the establishment of local development and consolidation of the democratization process. Tunisia is to be considered a crucial country in shaping the political and economic relations between the two Mediterranean shores.

The Futur-Proche project, financed by the Tuscany Region and the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, was launched in 2017 with the aim of promoting administrative decentralization and the strengthening of governance within local Tunisian institutions. The project focuses on the development of a sustainable local economy and on facilitating the market participation of entrepreneurs. Within Futur-Proche's framework falls other projects as well. The communities affected include the peripheral Governorates of Kasserine and Sidi Bouzid, historically disadvantaged areas. In these territories there are opportunities for economic, touristie and cultural developments although there are many issues which would need to be initially addressed.

Some priorities identified by the Tunisian government concern the support and recovery of "traditional jobs" and crafts. In the context of the Futur-Proche project, a "Code of Territorial Communities" has been developed. It revises the competences of the municipalities and their spheres of action. Numerous workshops have been organized to inform and instruct the mayors on the legal aspects of the Code and opportunities have been established for a participatory dialogue with the population. These include public workshops on the management of public service involving the population directly given the importance of the democratic discourse.

The project has three axes of activity: ANCI Toscana coordinates the 'institution-building' phase dedicated to governance, which aims to support Tunisian municipalities in the administrative decentralization process. The city of Tunis is today required to apply the new Code of Local Authorities approved in May 2018, which defines the functioning of the administrative structures and their competences and introduces elements of participatory democracy to achieve a 'just and sustainable' decentralization.

In this context, the relationship with ANCI Tunisia has been identified as a fundamental priority for the strengthening and support of the nascent democratic culture. The cooperation between ANCI Toscana and ANCI Tunisia is, in fact, the most efficient way to achieve the objectives of

support for decentralization with reference to the issues of waste disposal, urban development and citizen participation.

The relevant elements of the project from the point of view of co-development understood as peer cooperation, are emphasized by the fact that:

- Tunisia now appears to have a very advanced and, in some respects, more innovative law on decentralization than the Italian one. This could be mutually beneficial and ANCI Toscana can benefit from this experience with regard to lobbying activities concerning Italian national legislation on decentralization.
- Tunisian municipal territories, in listing their development programs and the political agenda of the local leaders, have strongly focused on the 17 Sustainable and Development Goals established by the United Nations. The approach of the Tunisian municipalities towards the SDGs is undoubtedly good practice which Italian municipalities can emulate in order to improve their own adherence to these goals.
- The common interest in the circular economy as an innovative engine for local development and the fight against climate change. The municipality of Capannori (Lucca), which is one of the Tuscan project partners, is known in Tuscany and in Italy more generally for its innovations in the field of the circular economy and waste disposal. In this case, the Tunisian municipalities can benefit from the fruitful experience of the Tuscan municipality, which in turn can take inspiration from the greater propensity to recycling shown by Tunisian as compared to Italian society.

In this exchange of experiences, characterized by peer development cooperation, co-development takes shape.

The second case which focuses attention on co-development experiences regards ~~regarded~~ the activities of the Centro Salute Globale (CSG). This a project, started in 2007 by the region, has as its main aim the strengthening of the healthcare system in those countries with whom the region has international co-operative relations. The aim is to improve citizen's healthcare, in particular for women and children. The CSG's objectives are pursued in a number of different ways: a technical-institutional support for ~~to~~ public healthcare systems; the improvement of primary care services as a basis for the re-organization of healthcare services from communities to districts and hospitals in an efficient, effective, appropriate and sustainable way; the implementation of human resources for the healthcare system; the strengthening of scientific research, development and innovation in the healthcare environment – not only for the beneficiary countries, but also those of Tuscany – regarding

global healthcare and international healthcare cooperation; the strengthening of the relationship between migration and development within international healthcare cooperation projects.

The CSG works on international healthcare cooperation through the Tuscan healthcare district network. Among the tasks of the Centre are the provision of healthcare for migrants passing through Tuscany and coming from the southern Mediterranean and Sub-Saharan Africa. Given the Jasmine Revolution and the subsequent flow of migrants, the Tuscan administration set migration management as a top priority. Thus, in 2012 regional authorities organized a coordination center that falls within the international healthcare cooperative framework. The CSG is one of the main actors in this strategy promoted by the Region, dealing in particular with the management of healthcare projects through dialogue with the regional bodies in order to give a juridical answer to migrant healthcare, with a focus on asylum seekers, who will stay longer in the country. Due to the requests coming from the municipality networks and associations – and so with a bottom-up approach – we were able to define the initial actions undertaken by the region, both in terms of financial support and healthcare expertise.

In the international cooperation context, the CSG was mainly involved by the Region in order to support Tunisian healthcare. Furthermore, it received founding from UNDP for promoting the actions which were connected to the co-development context in the country. Tunisia is in fact a particular case among the other African countries from the healthcare perspective if we take into account both life expectancy and the general development of the country. This is the main reason why co-development actions in the context of cooperation can obtain very positive outcomes. The co-development approach, specifically, was realized with the involvement of Pontes, an association of Tunisians who lived in Tuscany, which promotes the development and exchange of healthcare techniques. This resulted in the construction of health centers locally, in which local NGOs were also involved.

During the realization of co-development projects, a crucial part is the involvement of migrants residing in Italy whose native regions are affected by specific projects of cooperation. This involvement is crucial as it allows for the establishment of a direct link between the two countries with common language and culture favouring such an approach.

In the healthcare sector the CSG, on behalf of the Futur-Proche project, took responsibility for co-training actions and the training of nurses and doctors in the peripheral Kasserine Governorate. Specific attention has also been reserved for the promotion of decentralization and the management of health facilities and structures.

It must be underlined, however, that co-development, intended as cooperation among equals in the healthcare sector, can be complicated by a more pronounced Italian medical progress. Any cooperative equality can be limited to specific circumstances, such as those periods of exchange mobility for interns and professionals of the Tunisia Children's Hospital, who come to Italy for a two-months learning experience. This kind of exchange is mutual with the pediatricians of the Meyer Hospital in turn having the opportunity to carry out internships within some Tunisian medical establishments.

Another great opportunity concerns the exchange of information and knowledge about tropical diseases and unusual illnesses, not widespread in Italy but epidemiologically important in Tunisia. Italy – in line with other Western Countries – is witnessing a progressive increase in infectious diseases which have been neglected in past decades. Ever-growing mobility, together with climate change, are progressively facilitating the spread of tropical and exotic diseases, and the “western” immune system is not adequately prepared. In this sense the CSG, through the promotion of exchanges between young Tunisian and Italian doctors, seeks to improve the sharing of now more relevant healthcare practices in which Tunisians appear to be proficient<sup>17</sup>. This exchange programme aims to avoid what, in recent years, has been defined by developing countries as a “brain drain”, i.e. the emigration of highly trained or qualified people from a country. This phenomenon is very relevant in health-related sectors and represents a net loss of skilled human resources.<sup>18</sup>.

## Conclusion

Considering the examples detailed above, co-development practices and related elements seem to be the right path to be followed concerning the practice of forms of *cooperation between equals* and the valorization of the active role of migrant communities. Although perceived as a positive practice however, it presents some evident limits, as previously stated. A challenge for future cooperation between the two sides of the Mediterranean is to broaden experience within the field while working on criticalities in order to contain and prevent them.

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.centrosaluteglobale.eu/ivermectin-days/>

<sup>18</sup> Re-focusing Development Co-operation in Africa: The EU as a Global Health Champion? (2012) Valeria Fargion and Marco Mayer (pag. 28)