THE EUROPEAN GROUPINGS OF TERRITORIAL COOPERATION IN ITALY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The report is the result of full collaboration among the participants of the research group, managed by Cnr Issirfa and coordinated by Raffaella Coletti, who jointly defined objectives and methodologies, collaborated on research activities, and approved the resulting findings. The chapters of the report, written by some members of the working group, were reviewed and supplemented by the others. Although each chapter indicates in a footnote the authors who edited it, the work can be attributed overall to the research group as a whole, which includes: Raffaella Coletti (Cnr Issirfa); Luca Cestaro (Politecnico di Torino); Marco Del Fiore (Politecnico di Torino); Andrea Milone (Cnr Issirfa); Francesco Palermo (Eurac Research – University of Verona); Sara Parolari (Eurac Research); Giulio M. Salerno (University of Macerata - Cnr Issirfa); Gabriella Saputelli (Cnr Issirfa); Loris Antonio Servillo (Politecnico di Torino); Alice Valdesalici (Eurac Research); Jens Woelk (Eurac Research – University of Trento); Carolin Zwilling (Eurac Research).

The reflection on the revision of the national legislation was carried out by a working group within the Cnr Issirfa, composed of Alessandro Gentilini, Antonino Iacoviello, Clelia Losavio, Gabriella Saputelli.

The cartographic elaborations were carried out by the Polytechnic University of Turin – FULL Laboratory, and in particular by Luca Cestaro, Marco Del Fiore, Yasamin Farahani and Mohadese Kamali.

Finally, the entire report is the result of research work that was conducted in close collaboration with Coun. Giovanni Vetritto, General Director at DARA and head of the "ITALIAE Project" and with Mr Antonio Travascio, coordinator of the Service for International Activities of the DARA Territorial Autonomy System.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) are institutionalised bodies dedicated to planning and managing cross-border and transnational activities. They are based on Regulation 1082/2006 (subsequently updated by Regulation 1302/2013), which allows public entities from different Member States to form, together, a new entity with legal personality. These are the first European cooperation structures with legal personality that have been defined by European Union law. In Italy, the legislation implementing the 2006 European regulation was adopted in 2009. EGTCs are governed by a convention concluded unanimously by the members and by a statute approved subsequently, and aim to facilitate and promote territorial cooperation, with the ultimate aim of strengthening economic, social and territorial cohesion in the European territory.

As of August 2025 (latest update available), 91 Groups operating within and across the territory of the European Union were registered in the official register of EGTCs (managed by the Committee of the Regions); among these, fourteen provide for an Italian participation. In addition, other EGTCs are being set up with the involvement of Italian entities, with processes at different degrees of maturity.

Until now, there has been a lack of an in-depth and systematic study of the experiences of EGTCs in Italy that could, on the one hand, allow us to understand what has been achieved through this instrument and what the future prospects are; on the other hand, to allow the Groups themselves to get to know each other by learning through an exchange of experiences and good practices. The project "European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation in Italy: state of the art and policy recommendations" aimed to fill this gap. Funded as part of the ITALIAE Project, it is the result of an agreement between the Department for Regional Affairs and Autonomies (DARA) of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, which is responsible for the authorization for the establishment of EGTCs and provides for the maintenance of the National Register of EGTCs in Italy (pursuant to Article 46 of Law No. 88 of 7 July 2009), and the Institute for Studies of Regionalism, Federalism and Self-Government of the National Research Council of Italy (Cnr Issirfa). For the implementation of the planned activities, Issirfa has involved two centers of recognized prestige with specific expertise in the field of territorial cooperation: the FULL – Future Urban Legacy Lab of the Politecnico di Torino and the Institute of Comparative Federal Studies of EURAC Research.

The activities carried out during the life of the project (July 2024 – December 2025) can be classified into three categories:

- Research activities: the project aimed to investigate the EGTC instrument and its practical implementation in Italy, also through a direct survey on the experiences of Italian public entities in the field;
- Accompanying activities: The project provided a platform to connect existing and planned EGTCs with Italian participants and discuss the issues and opportunities of the instrument. Specific support activities have also been carried out for some EGTCs currenty being established;
- Regulatory support activities: the project provided the space to discuss the European and national regulatory framework, and to propose an adaptation of the latter to the innovations introduced by Regulation 1302/2013.

The final report gives an account of all these activities.

Chapter 1 presents a review of the main existing literature on EGTCs at national and international level. In addition to taking stock of the state of the art of the publications that have deepened the experience of EGTCs over the last 20 years, the review was the starting point for the identification of the open issues addressed in the analysis of EGTCs in Italy.

The EGTC emerges from the analysis conducted as a multifaceted instrument, whose discipline is found primarily in the legal system of the European Union, but finds a diversified implementation in the national law of the Member States, generating new legal challenges and opportunities. Research on the subject has undergone a significant conceptual and methodological evolution, that reflects not only the stronger maturity of the tool, but also the progressive refinement of the theoretical and methodological approaches of the social sciences applied to European studies.

The first phase of the production of academic literature on the subject was mainly descriptive and/or normative in nature. These researches have mainly focused on the examination of the legal framework of the EGTC, also from a political perspective, establishing the conceptual parameters that would guide the subsequent evolutions of academic research. A growing literature (reports and academic articles) on the application of the EGTC has also developed, with a more practice-oriented approach. In parallel, numerous studies have been published, mainly focused on the effectiveness of individual applications of the tool. The main focus of these studies is the impact of EGTCs in promoting cross-border cooperation.

Overall, many aspects related to the use of the EGTC emerged: its role in the Europeanization process, the promotion of the integration of border areas, the potential of the EGTC in terms of participatory governance at multiple levels and interethnic reconciliation. The maturation of the empirical corpus on EGTCs has stimulated increasingly sophisticated attempts at theoretical systematization and development of analytical frameworks. At least three analytical dimensions can be identified: territory (given the heterogeneity in terms of cooperation methods, composition of members and territorial extension), institutions (considered fundamental in the process of building networks and spaces that transcend national borders), and society (related to the role of the EGTC in promoting cross-border and transnational identity and in involving citizens).

Despite the richness and articulation of the literature on EGTCs developed over the last two decades, several methodological and thematic gaps remain, which limit the ability to provide comprehensive evaluations of the effectiveness and impact of these tools. One of the limitations lies in the predominance of single case studies which, while providing valuable insights into specific experiences, prevent the development of robust theoretical generalizations. From this point of view, the development of systematic comparative studies using standardized analytical frameworks to examine multiple EGTC experiences is particularly relevant.

Chapter 2 illustrates the current regulatory framework at European and national scale for EGTCs and discusses the prospects for the reform of the latter. Since its establishment by Regulation (EC) No. 1082/2006, numerous EGTCs have been created throughout Europe. On 29 July 2011, the Commission adopted a report on the application of the Regulation in which it examines the experience of EGTCs, identifying the critical issues and difficulties encountered in the practical implementation of this instrument and announcing its intention to propose some amendments to the 2006 Regulation. The amendments were approved in 2013, with Regulation (EU) No. 1302/2013 of the European

Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 as regards the clarification, simplification and improvement of the rules on the establishment and functioning of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). The 2013 regulation was finally amended in some minor parts in the same year.

In Italy, the legislation implementing the 2006 European Regulation was adopted in 2009, through the provision of a specific section of the annual Community law: Law No. 88 of 7 July 2009 on "*Provisions for the fulfilment of obligations deriving from Italy's membership of the European Communities*" (Chapter III, arts. 46, 47 and 48). The same year the Prime Ministerial Decree of 6 October 2009 was adopted, which established the "*Register of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation*" (EGTC) and entrusted its management to the Department for Regional Affairs and Autonomies (DARA) of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. The Prime Ministerial Decree has also assigned to the Department the preliminary activities relating to the establishment and participation in an EGTC. Over the years, various regional regulations have also been adopted, aimed at regulating the participation of the Regions in the EGTC or providing forms of financial support to EGTCs.

The current Italian legislation presents problems of compatibility with the supervening European legislation. Some provisions, due to the nature of the regulation, are directly applicable and prevail over conflicting national provisions; others, on the other hand, require an adaptation intervention by the national legislator. Changes to national legislation can be made either by intervening directly on Law No. 88 of 2009, or by providing for a new law dedicated to EGTCs.

In the second part of the chapter, some elements on national regulations in some European countries are presented, in particular those hosting EGTCs with Italian participants. Differences emerge according to the type of State examined and therefore to the centralized or decentralized model of the legal system within which the European legislation is implemented. Austria and Germany, two federal states, both offer an example of a decentralised model, in which implementation is entrusted to the Länder, in line with the division of competences set out in their respective federal constitutions. In the face of this common model, in Austria there are detailed laws for each Land, while in Germany many Länder have adopted extremely concise acts, limited to the designation of the competent authority to authorise the newly constituted EGTC. Overall, however, in neither case is there a particularly differentiated discipline on a territorial basis, all the laws following an almost identical model. France and Greece, two unitary states, offer an example of a centralized model. It is a national legislative act that regulates the establishment and participation in EGTCs of entities located in their respective territory. Spain represents, from this perspective, a *tertium genus.* Despite the strong political decentralization that characterizes the 'State of autonomies', the implementation of the regulation is the result of a centralized model, being moreover carried out through a government decree, the latter adopted, however, after consultation with the autonomous communities, in compliance with the principle of loyal collaboration. If the federal-decentralized model (Austria, Germany) contributes to increasing the flexibility of the instrument, making it possible to have a different practical declination based on the needs of the territories, at the same time it can cause fragmentation and complexity in terms of implementation. On the other hand, the centralised model (France, Greece), while ensuring greater regulatory coherence and thus faster implementation phase, risks not fully grasping local needs, especially if an effective consultation phase is not guaranteed. The Spanish

'hybrid' model represents a good functional compromise in this context, although the outcome of the planned consultation depends heavily on the quality of the dialogue between the centre and the periphery.

Given that there is no absolute "best" model, it should be noted that the regulatory plurality that characterizes the decentralized model risks being inefficient, considering that in the cases analyzed there are no substantial differences in the different disciplines introduced. On the other hand, for centralized models, the ability to effectively involve the territories is a decisive element. In all cases, moreover, the effectiveness of the discipline depends on the political and administrative will to promote EGTCs as a key instrument of cross-border cooperation.

Chapter 3 presents, through a wide range of maps, an overview of EGTCs with Italian participants. The chapter is divided into two main sections. In the first part, a taxonomy of EGTCs is proposed based on parameters such as: national composition, year of establishment, applied legal system, territorial typology (cross-border, transnational, interregional), functional specialization (multi-theme/generalist, single-topic/sectoral - the first term refers to those EGTCs that deal with multiple issues, having mainly as their general purpose the strengthening of cooperation between the participating territories; the second term refers instead to cases of EGTCs that arise around a specific idea or theme, and whose members aim to work together in that specific area) and budget (in terms of overall value and composition – internal or external sources). Six of the fourteen EGTCs with Italian participation are cross-border; five are transnational; and three are interregional, and do not provide for territorial proximity. Both transnational and interregional EGTCs therefore provide for network management of non-contiguous territories. Of the six cross-border EGTCs, four can be categorised as generalist, i.e. aimed at strengthening cross-border integration by responding to the needs of the territory on different issues. Four out of five transnational EGTCs also have a similar approach. All interregional EGTCs, on the other hand, follow a sectoral approach and it could not be otherwise, since it is precisely the issue that brings geographically distant territories closer together. The single-theme/sectoral EGTCs seem to pursue more concrete results on specific objectives, while the generalist EGTCs give greater value to the integrated management of a "360-degree" territory. Overall, a great variability emerges in the Italian experiences, linked to the specificities of the different contexts.

The second part presents description sheets of the fourteen EGTCs with Italian participants currently existing. Each description contains common elements (applicable law, members, headquarters, date of registration in the register, website where available, objectives of the EGTC) and then focuses on some of the aspects that, in the context of the research, have been particularly relevant in the specific experience of the EGTC. The descriptions do not claim to be exhaustive, but aim to offer a first look at the varied and rich panorama of EGTC experiences in Italy, while identifying some of the specificities of each experience. At the bottom of each description, reference is also made to studies on the EGTC already published, where available.

Chapter 4 reports on the research activities carried out. After a brief methodological introduction, the results of the survey are presented, divided into four main themes: internal organization; funding and resources; external organization; administrative matters. The work is based on the results of a comparative analysis of the statutes and conventions of all EGTCs with Italian participation, on the analysis of the answers to the questionnaires and

on qualitative interviews; it also takes into account the debate emerged in the framework of the exchange of concrete experiences between the participating EGTCs during the life of the project.

The *internal organisation* of EGTCs is an essential element, both for understanding their nature and mandate and, from a functional point of view, for making the operations of the structures effective and efficient. This section therefore addresses the main characteristics, problems and difficulties related to the internal organization and management that EGTCs with Italian participation have encountered in their establishment and that they encounter in the daily management of their activities. After a brief introductory description of the general premises relating to the regulation of EGTCs, the chapter explores the composition and members of EGTCs and their institutional structure, with particular attention to revisions of the Statute occured during the years, internal regulations, choice of working languages, functioning of the assemblies and other bodies, staff, organisation of the work programme. Formally, statutes and conventions of different EGTCs follow similar models. The issue of transparency appears to be particularly heterogeneous, at the center of attention for some EGTCs and neglected by others; an open question is the greater or lesser effectiveness of the mixed composition of some EGTCs. The issue of personnel, in the heterogeneity of the solutions adopted, is central to all experiences. In some cases, an interesting evolution of the organisational structures emerges, especially in the direction of a greater "democratisation" of the EGTC. The importance of political will as an essential ingredient of cross-border cooperation is confirmed in all cases.

The next section focuses on the *financing of EGTCs*, which is essential for their activity. This section discusses, on the one hand, the main financing instruments activated by EGTCs with Italian participants; on the other hand, the most substantial items of expenditure that appear in the budgets. After a description of the funding provisions contained in the Statutes and Conventions of the EGTCs with Italian participants, the practices and experiences (as reported by the EGTCs during the research) are discussed. In terms of financing instruments, the management of membership fees and the activation of external funds is analyzed. Particular attention is paid in this context to the relationship of EGTCs with Interreg programmes; the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation were in fact created with the aim of providing a standardized tool to institutionalize cooperation between territories, with respect to which Interreg programs represent the main and direct form of funding. While this implies a natural relationship between EGTC and Interreg, the forms that this relationship takes in practice can be very different. Moreover, many of the EGTCs involved in our survey have successfully participated in other types of European, national or regional funding schemes. Some EGTCs have also managed resources from different sources as implementing bodies, therefore without participating in tenders; others have triggered revenue from activities as diverse as marketing initiatives. On the expenditure side of EGTCs, the majority of these is allocated to the implementation of projects. Other expenses include the management costs and, in some cases, the support to direct initiatives (such as prizes awarded by the EGTC).

The third section relates to *the external relations of the EGTC,* i.e. the ways in which EGTCs with Italian participants relate to the institutional system in which they operate. The analysis of external relations allows us to understand not only how EGTCs fit into the landscape of European multilevel governance, but also how they build their democratic legitimacy and operational effectiveness. In this context, external relations cannot be

considered simply as an ancillary aspect of the work of these instruments, but rather as a constituent element of their nature and functioning. An EGTC that fails to develop effective relations with its institutional and territorial environment risks remaining isolated and progressively losing relevance. On the contrary, an EGTC capable of building solid and diversified networks of relationships can significantly amplify its impact and contribute effectively to the objectives of European territorial cooperation. With the term external relations we refer, in the analysis, to the relations that EGTCs maintain with European, national, regional and local institutions or associations; the links with macro-regional strategies; the horizontal relations with other EGTCs; the plans and methods of communication, including the management of websites; the relationship with citizens and the participation in the life of the EGTC, both institutionalized and informal. It is therefore a multifaceted and complex dimension, which requires specific skills and articulated strategies. As in the case of internal organization, also in terms of external relations the experiences of EGTCs with Italian participation vary a lot. In general, there is a more systematic attention to this dimension among the EGTCs in the Alpine area.

Finally, the fourth section addresses the main *problems and difficulties of an administrative and regulatory nature* that the fourteen analysed EGTCs have encountered in their establishment and that they still encounter today in the management of their activities. Among the most diffused difficulties EGTCs have reported the complexity of authorisation procedures, the need for coordination between different levels of government and the management of variable regulations and resources between Member States. In this section, the main administrative problems encountered by EGTCs are described in five broad categories: difficulties in the process of establishment; problems with public and administrative regulations (personnel, tenders, procedures to be used); the nature of a body governed by public law in Italy and related obligations (publication of acts and transparency strategy); problems related to the cross-border and transnational nature of EGTCs; problems in the interpretation of the applicable legislation. Despite the inevitable specificity of some of the issues encountered, the analysis also highlighted a number of common issues and cross-cutting needs, which make the comparison between EGTCs in this area particularly valuable.

Chapter 5 proposes a problematization and discussion of a series of elements and themes that emerged as central to the experience of EGTCs analyzed during the research work, summarized below.

The members and activities of EGTCs: In general terms, the EGTC instrument seems to be particularly suitable for cooperation between local public bodies such as Regions, Provinces or Municipalities; however, from the analysis carried out, the limitations do not seem to be linked so much to the nature of the entities, but to their size and availability of means. The issue of the nature of the promoters is linked to the categorization between multi-thematic/generalist and single-theme/sectoral EGTCs. Also in this case, as in that of the promoters, it is not possible a priori to establish that one type of EGTC – generalist or sectoral – is more effective than the other; The survey has in fact highlighted successful experiences in both types.

The temporal dimension: The temporal dimension is an important element even before the actual birth of EGTCs, linked to the pre-existence of long-term relationships. Over time, some EGTCs have inevitably undergone changes, such as changes in composition. Some EGTCs have also felt the need to amend their Statutes to make them

better suited to meet their needs. In general terms, the survey conducted highlighted the relevance of the time element as an ingredient not to be underestimated for the full effectiveness of an EGTC: it is, in fact, a tool that needs time to reach full activity. The survey also highlighted examples of EGTCs or individual Italian participants who, over the years, have lost their driving force and, at present, do not carry out or take part in any type of activity. In these cases, the choice that the public authorities involved should make is between a relaunch of the initiative or of their participation, or a dissolution or withdrawal from the EGTC.

The territorial dimension: The EGTC includes the different components of European territorial cooperation: cross-border, transnational and interregional. In the case of cross-border EGTCs, all territories covered by the member entities are potentially involved and influenced by the activity of the EGTC. In the case of transnational and interregional EGTCs, the correspondence between territories and activities is less evident, especially when it comes to sectoral EGTCs that invest little in communication; in these cases, the activities carried out often remain disconnected from the territories, without prejudice to the possibility of positive effects of the activities carried out. In recent years, particular attention has been paid to cross-border EGTCs at European level. However, the results of our research do not necessarily seem to confirm the supremacy of cross-border EGTCs over other forms of EGTCs. The preliminary conclusion of our study is that, although geographical proximity is a facilitating condition for EGTCs, this is certainly not the only element to ensure the success of an initiative; nor is its absence sufficient to prevent the development of successful and well-functioning experiences.

Visibility and involvement of citizens: Overall, the EGTC is not a well-known tool, even among public administrations. All EGTCs under Italian law should, as bodies governed by public law, operate on the basis of a criterion of transparency, thus making a series of information public on their website; however, not all EGTCs meet this need. Our research has also highlighted how only some of the EGTCs devote attention to communication activities, for example by developing specific strategies for different types of targets, depending on their activities and interests. The theme of communication is strongly linked to the relationship with citizens, especially when this is the recipient of the communication activities introduced. The communication is part of a set of strategic choices made by EGTCs, which have a wide variability. For some types of EGTCs, the relationship with citizens may not play a particularly important role, given their nature and objectives. However, in general terms, a greater knowledge of EGTCs and the initiatives they develop and carry out could contribute, on the one hand, to a positive involvement of citizens in the implementation of European policies; on the other hand, to enhance and promote the spirit of cooperation.

The EGTC and the macro-regional context: If the first experiences of EGTCs arose in a balanced way on the Italian territory, the analysis conducted showed how, in recent years, the EGTCs of the Alpine area have in many cases started virtuous paths, while those of the Mediterranean area suffer from greater fatigue, at least from the perspective of the Italian participants. Several reasons can explain, at least in part, this trend; however, it is clear that a network between the different EGTCs could help those who find themselves in more difficult situations to relaunch their activities. If some exchanges – formal and informal – are already underway in the Alpine area, an expansion of these practices on a national scale could certainly contribute to a relaunch of the EGTC instrument even in contexts where its full potential has not yet been exploited.

The issue of financing and the strategic nature of EGTCs: The analysis carried out has made it possible to identify different models of financial management of EGTCs, ranging from experiences mainly self-financed by the participating public bodies, to cases in which EGTCs rely mostly on external resources – especially European funds. From this point of view, it is clear from the research conducted that there is no single way to ensure the sustainability of EGTCs, but how, rather, each body can find its own growth strategy. The fundamental element, however, remains the coherence between the strategy adopted and the resources available: even in the case of EGTCs that manage to support themselves financially with their own resources, there was hardly a lack of interest in external resources – in particular European – in the survey conducted. In many cases, there are difficulties – and, in some cases, a certain resistance – for public administrations to participate in tenders that are characterized by different complexities. On the other hand, it emerged that the quality of the relationship between EGTCs and Interreg programmes also depends on the attitude of the programmes themselves. Some Interreg programmes explicitly encourage the participation of EGTCs in the calls they issue, and other Interreg programmes involve EGTCs directly in the management of resources.

Flexibility and autonomy: Although the analysis has highlighted some trends and elements of common interest for EGTCs in Italy, it has also unveiled the extreme variability of the experiences collected. The differences do not only concern the broader categories in which the different EGTCs can be included and referred to in Chapter 3, but concern, more deeply, the very way in which the instrument is conceived, which in turn depends on the type of problems and challenges it is called upon to face. The flexibility and autonomy of EGTCs are therefore essential. On the one hand, EGTC allows local actors who wish to collaborate on a permanent basis to acquire public law personalities, thanks to European Regulation 1082/2006; on the other hand, however, the tool offers wide room for interpretation and adaptation to local contexts, which can also be very different from each other. From this point of view, the research confirmed that the EGTC instrument does not require particular adjustments as such; rather, what is necessary to obtain good results is to learn how to use the instrument and adapt it to specific contexts.

Added value and success elements of the EGTC: The variability of the experiences of EGTCs with Italian participants concerns not only the practices and initiatives implemented, but also the perception of the effectiveness and adequacy of the instrument with respect to the objectives that have been set. The basic question is what is the added value of the EGTC: in which cases can the investment in this complex instrument actually offer advantages that make the commitment required sustainable and justified? There are a number of advantages that the EGTC offers over territorial cooperation activities. In particular, the EGTC: allows for the formalization of these activities, as well as a framework within which to develop long-term strategies; provides a legal and regulatory framework with which participants can comply; offers a stable framework overcoming the variability linked to politics; allows the territories to be enhanced, giving space to *place-based* approaches and that take into account the specificities of places and their interconnections; over time, it acquires increasing experience in the management of territorial cooperation and in the resolution of problems that emerge from the collaboration between bodies framed in different regulatory and administrative systems. At the same time, the fulfilment of some conditions have emerged, in our research, as necessary for the effectiveness of the EGTC and for the activation of the added value just described: the need that drives the establishment of the EGTC, which must always represent a means, not an

end, to respond to specific territorial challenges; the *ownership*: the EGTCs that achieve the most results are those born from a solid will of the local authorities involved, which therefore invest in the instrument for its full exploitation; the pre-existence of cooperative relations, which is an element that positively affects the success of the EGTC, even if it is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition; the clarity in the objectives and in the path that the EGTC wants to address; the consistency in the strategy and resources of the EGTC, with respect to the desired results. These are key elements to consider for local or regional authorities interested in setting up an EGTC or considering the opportunity to continue with this instrument.

The national role: Since the first experiences of implementation of Regulation 1082/2006, a comparison between EGTCs has been promoted at European level, to allow a better use of the instrument. There has not been a similar mechanism at national level so far. The national scale has its own specific relevance, also in light of the national legislation implementing the European regulation. Italian participants to EGTCs share the experience of participating in a European Group starting from the same regulatory and administrative context – the Italian one, and can therefore share problems and solutions. Reasoning about EGTCs with Italian participants not only as individual experiences with their own specificity, but also as a whole, can also allow EGTCs themselves to reach a critical mass and thus become more visible and recognizable at national level. The current model of relations between EGTCs and the national level, limited to the establishment phase, would benefit from an expansion, allowing the evolution and development of EGTCs to be effectively supported in a medium-long term perspective.

Chapter 6 discusses the operational activities implemented within the project, which are divided into five blocks for the sake of clarity. Firstly, the project has allowed the construction of a network of reference persons in EGTCs with Italian participants. Secondly, it envisaged the creation of a cycle of online seminars, with the participation of the research team, the Department for Regional Affairs and Autonomies, EGTCs with Italian participants (including some in the process of being established), with the aim of illustrating and validating the first results that emerged from the research and putting the EGTCs with Italian participants in dialogue with each other. Thirdly, a specific consultancy activity was carried out for the EGTC being established between the province of Rimini and the Republic of San Marino. Furthermore, further individual activities of collaboration and sharing of projects and programs were carried out with some EGTCs, on topics emerged thanks to the research project. Finally, a checklist has been created to support the process of establishment of EGTCs, aimed at the public administration but potentially also useful for EGTCs promoters. In conclusion, the project has made it possible not only to produce in-depth and up-to-date knowledge on EGTCs with Italian participants, but also to identify paths and strategies for better operational performance. In summary, three types of interventions in support of EGTCs have been tested, which could be further developed and replicated in the future: stimulation and facilitation of exchange and sharing activities, general support activities (such as the provision of operational tools), targeted support activities.

Finally, in **chapter 7** some conclusions and recommendations are outlined for the DARA and for an optimal enhancement of the EGTC instrument in the Italian context. The analysis has in fact made it possible to identify strengths and margins for improvement for EGTCs with Italian participants. Among the possible lines of intervention discussed in the pages of the report, some seem particularly relevant and, at the same time, viable in the

short term. On this basis, at the end of the report, a series of policy recommendations are proposed addressed to interlocutors on a national scale, aimed at improving the overall experiences of EGTCs with Italian participants. Some of these are directly related to the role that the Department for Regional Affairs and Autonomies plays in the process of establishment of EGTCs; others go beyond this responsibility, but can be included in a broader sense in the support to local public bodies that the Department offers in various of its activities. The main recommendations can be summarized in the following:

1) *Revision of national legislation:* In Italy, the legislation implementing the 2006 European regulation was adopted in 2009, through the provision of a special section of the annual EU law: Law no. 88 of 7 July 2009. The current Italian legislation presents problems of compatibility with the supervening European legislation (Regulation (EU) No. 1302/2013); it is therefore suggested to update it.

2) *Facilitating the process of setting up EGTCs*: The process of launching an EGTC can be lengthy and complex. This process could be facilitated through the provision of tools that can be used by the interested parties, also aimed at a more immediate understanding of the instrument by the various public administrations involved in the process. Facilitating the process of establishment could be an important step towards a greater diffusion of the EGTC tool among Italian local authorities.

3) *Animation of the relationship between EGTCs with Italian participants:* The EGTC has confirmed itself as an adaptable tool: each of the experiences involved in the project activities has in fact shown different objectives, strategies, activities. However there are issues, opportunities and, in some cases, problems that are horizontal, and that are potentially of interest to all EGTCs, already established and in the process of being established. From this point of view, the project highlighted how a horizontal networking activity between EGTCs could certainly contribute to improving their operational performance. Many EGTCs are in fact already spontaneously and actively involved in exchange and comparison activities among them, however, a specific added value would lie in the organization of (regular) meetings non only at European scale but also between EGTCs with Italian participants, which could in fact allow a comparison that takes into account the peculiarities of the regulatory and administrative national system and the specific solutions adopted.

4) *Support for the relationship between EGTC and state bodies:* In recent years, in the European context, there is a growing awareness of the importance of the role of Member States in facilitating (or hindering) territorial cooperation, especially when there is a need to overcome the administrative and bureaucratic obstacles that often stand in the way of the implementation of initiatives. A space for direct relationship and confrontation between EGTCs and state bodies could also enhance the experiences of territorial cooperation as drivers for development, inserting them into the broader perspective of policies supporting territorial development. Finally, it would give EGTCs the opportunity to present their needs and requests at national scale.

5) *Communication aimed at greater knowledge of EGTCs among a wider audience:* The issue of communication by EGTCs with respect to their objectives and activities has emerged as central, in particular with reference to the construction of a direct relationship with citizens, the ultimate beneficiaries of the activities carried out. Communication on a local scale could be usefully paralleled by communication carried out through national channels. Such a strategy could make it possible to spread knowledge of the EGTC

instrument to other local public bodies potentially interested in the instrument; it could also enhance the experiences of EGTCs disseminating good practices and innovative solutions.

The report is accompanied by **two annexes**: a checklist that collects the steps necessary to proceed with the establishment of EGTCs; and an extensive bibliographic collection relating to European territorial cooperation and EGTCs.

Overall, the report offers the results of a first attempt to systematize and network the knowledge accumulated by EGTCs with Italian participants almost 20 years after the approval of Regulation 1082/2006. The results of the research activity give a snapshot of a dynamic and evolving tool that has so far made it possible to achieve very significant results and, at the same time, seems not to have yet fully exploited its potential. From this point of view, the report also offers a series of ideas for further study and activities, in which research can support the effectiveness and usefulness of European territorial cooperation actions

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