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Decentralised cooperation and its potential for local democratic governance: the experience of Trentino decentralised cooperation

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Abstract

Since the early 1990s Local Authorities (LAs) have stepped into the international development cooperation arena and in many European countries Decentralised Cooperation (DC) has become increasingly relevant as a new development cooperation modality that has great potential in terms of promoting sustainable development and local democratic governance. DC in international development is a relatively new phenomenon and its full potential is not yet fully known.

Based on the findings of a two year long evaluative research of four DC programmes implemented by Trentino in Northern Italy in partnership with three municipalities in the Balkans and a rural district in Mozambique, this paper contributes to the literature on DC policies and practices in highlighting a scarcely analysed issue: the contribution of DC to local democratic governance and the possible reasons as to why DC, despite its potential, faces challenges that hinder its capacity to effectively contribute to decentralised governance.

Key Words: *Decentralised Cooperation, Local Authorities, Democratic Governance*

Glossary of Abbreviations

APP	Associazione Progetto Prijedor
ATcK	Associazione Trentino con il Kossovo
CAM	Consorzio Associazioni con il Mozambico
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DC	Decentralised Cooperation
LAs	Local Authorities
NGOs	Non Governmental Organisations
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PAT	Autonomous Province of Trento
TCIC	Training Centre for International Cooperation
TTKv	Tavolo Trentino con Kraljevo

1 Introduction: Decentralised Cooperation and Local Democratic Governance

1.1 Decentralised Cooperation: emergence and spread in the last twenty years

Local Authorities (LAs) in Europe have been engaging in international cooperation for decades. Initiated after World War II, mostly in the form of twinning, Decentralised Cooperation (DC) was initially aimed at building bridges of understanding between people of nations that had been at war (UNDESA, 2008). After the independence of colonies, links between towns and schools in Europe and counterparts in former colonies were developed. Twinning was aimed at bringing about social and cultural exchanges between municipal officials, schools and community groups: led by mayors and community leaders links tended to be somewhat exclusive, consisting largely of high-level visits between the twinned towns, supplemented by cultural and sporting exchanges (Hulst and van Montfort, 2007; UNDESA, 2008).

In the 1980s and 1990s ties between municipalities in the Global North and Global South as well as ties between local governments in Western and Eastern Europe were established with objectives much broader than the traditional twinning (Hoetjes, 2009). Community development with a focus on meeting basic needs, building municipal capacity, awareness raising and development education became key objectives and matters of governance, strengthening local democratic institutions and encouraging wider community participation emerged on the agenda (Bongers and McCallum; 2003; UNDP, 2000 cited in UNDESA, 2008).

While the involvement of LAs in external cooperation and development policy has a long history, the last twenty years have witnessed a radical change in its nature. DC has emerged as a new and important dimension of international development cooperation (Commission of the European Communities, 2008). It is now considered an innovative way of supplementing development assistance within the context of decentralised governance (UNDESA, 2008). The assumption is that DC is an idea and practice of development cooperation less focused on the paradigm of aid and more inclined to promoting relations and the mutual interests of local communities that, though living in far-apart places, are facing the same challenges of globalisation and post-modernity (Ianni, 1999). It is seen as a vehicle for creating long-lasting 'North-South', 'South-South', 'East-West' cooperation that provides LAs and Civil Society

Organisations (CSOs) with the possibility to assist each other, learn from each other and share knowledge and experience (Bongers and McCallum; 2003; Hulst and van Montfort, 2007; UCLG, 2009; UCLG, 2013).

Even though there is not one definition of DC, the literature available on DC (Hafteck, 2003; Hoebnik, 2010; Bontenbal, 2010) focuses on the new role of LAs as active players in international development cooperation. It is important to underline that the different definitions all agree with a key principle guiding DC, i.e. the importance of participatory development and in particular the strengthening of the capacities of local actors to promote democratic governance and sustainable local development (Nord Sud Costruire insieme è possibile, 2008b). Its main characteristics are: (i) The key role played by LAs; (ii) The territorial approach characterised as a bottom-up and long-term process based on a multi-actor and multi-sector approach in which different local institutions and actors work together to define priorities and plan and implement development strategies; (iii) The participation of different types of actors in the territories "here" and "there" that participate in development cooperation through the creation of territorial partnerships; (iii) A circular approach characterised by the development of relationships between actors "here" and "there" based on mutual exchange/learning and ultimately reciprocity.

DC is often referred to as "cooperation between communities" (Cereghini and Nardelli, 2008)22 so as to emphasise the key feature of this cooperation modality, that is the involvement of different actors from the public, private and third sector of a community "here" (regional and local authorities, universities, schools, associations, community groups, youth organisations, cooperatives and credit unions, etc.) that become involved in cooperation initiatives together with homologous actors of communities "there" establishing permanent relationships based on reciprocity (Cereghini and Nardelli, 2008; Grieco and Lenci, 2004; Hafteck, 2003; Hoebink, 2010; Van Ewijk, 2012).

The reasons leading to the spread of DC can be linked to three key trends. First, since the late 1980s the international donor community increasingly recognised LAs as actors in development together with CSOs. This is reflected in a more general tendency in which the international donor community became more receptive to incorporating into development cooperation non-conventional actors such as LAs, NGOs and in general civil society and local communities (Bontenbal, 2010). Second, the process of decentralisation that has taken place in the last thirty years in many developing countries increased the devolution of political and economic power to local governments. At the same time, development discourse increasingly recognised the importance of democratic institutions and good governance at the local level as key factors for the eradication of poverty and the promotion of sustainable development (Bonfiglioli, 2003; Gaventa, 2004; Osmani, 2000). Lastly, an important factor was also the growing importance given to the creation of "partnerships" in international development, i.e. a move away from the traditional hierarchical donor-recipient relationship towards more balanced North-South power relationship in which partners cooperate on a peer basis and in the framework of globalization (Bontenbal, 2010).

Despite the fact that LAs in several European countries became a significant player in international development, until the last decade, neither national governments - with a few exceptions - nor the European institutions really understood the value and potential of local and regional government's contribution to international development (Smith, 2010).

Today, the role of European LAs varies from countries to countries depending on the level of LA's autonomy. In some countries where regions are large and powerful (Spain, France, Germany, Italy, Belgium) the regional government is a significant donor for development actions, financing the development activities of CSOs and/or acting as a territorial partner involved directly in international partnerships (Smith, 2010). Indeed, in the period 2002 – 2008 LAs in some EU member states increasingly allocated considerable financial resources to development which represented significant percentages of national Official Development Assistance (ODA).

Table 1: LAs financial allocations to international development in 5 European countries

Year	Country	LA contribution €	% of national ODA
2005	Italy	€ 50 million	10%
2006	Spain	€ 442.8 million	14,8%
2006	Germany	€ 764 million	10%
2006	Belgium	€ 64.9 million	4%
2007	France	€ 150 million	1.5%

Sources: for Italy, Nord Sud Costruire insieme è possibile, 2008a; for the other countries, Commission of the European Communities, 2008

In many European countries, the economic crisis has had negative implications as many argue that LAs should not get involved in international development at all (Smith, 2010). But many LAs resist the narrow interpretation of their mission as providers of services only to the own citizens as this ignores the reality of our interconnected globalised world, the value of partnership between sub-national governments and the benefits that DC may bring for European local and regional governments and its citizens (Smith, 2010).

1.2   Decentralised cooperation in the policy of the European Union

According to existing literature, the concept of DC in international development appeared for the first time in the Forth Lomé Convention in 1989 (Bidaguren, 2010, UNDESA, 2008). In 2000 the revised ACP-EU Partnership Agreement popularly known as the Cotonou Agreement explicitly recognised both local government and non-state actors as fully fledged actors and partners in international cooperation and development processes (UNDESA, 2008). In its 2005 revised version the Cotonou Agreement recognised local governments as key development actors and opened a range of new opportunities to support democratic decentralisation processes (Art. 33) and decentralised cooperation (Art. 70-71) (UNDESA, 2008; Smith, 2010).

In 2006, EC Council Regulation 1905/2006 established a financing instrument for development cooperation that included a thematic programme for Non-State Actors and Local Authorities, but it was aimed largely at non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and was very little known or used by LAs. Until 2007 within the framework of EU aid policy, "the role played by local and regional bodies has been a residual, even irrelevant, one

that neither corresponded to the level of interest nor to the surge in these local development aid initiatives in virtually all member states" (Bidaguren, 2010:296).

According to Smith (2010), the European Parliament played an important role in changing the EU's approach. In March 2007 it adopted a resolution on LAs as actors for development which set out the arguments in favour of local governments' role and actions in the field and called on the EC to provide financial support. This led to the adoption of the thematic NSA-LA strategy paper 2007-2010 which set out why local governments are so important to good quality local development: "while they are part of the state structure, local authorities are much closer to the citizen than other public institutions and may offer significant expertise not only in terms of service delivery (education, health, water, transport etc.), building democratic institutions and effective administrations, but also as catalysts for change and confidence building between different parties. They can provide a long-term, country-wide vision on how to build inclusive societies as actors with the necessary political legitimacy and the capacity to mobilise other actors" (Smith, 2010).

It is in 2008 with the EC Communication "Local Authorities: Actors for Development" that the EC fully recognised the importance of DC and attempted to draw out the first elements of a response strategy that would allow capitalisation and maximisation of LA's experience as partners in development policy. In this Communication, the EC acknowledged that DC had "become more comprehensive and professionalised; relying on institutionalised networks with outreach into developing countries; utilising a diversity of tools in all the regions of the world with an exponential increase in financial allocations" (Commission of the European Communities, 2008:3-4). In 2013 a new EC Communication aimed at unlocking the development potential of LAs in partner countries, recognised the role played by DC emphasising its "added value to the implementation of development actions, through continuous peer-to-peer learning, transfer of know-how and enhancement of local actors' participation in the public space at local level" (European Commission, 2013:9).

1.3   Decentralised Cooperation and Decentralisation

DC is considered an aid modality that has great potential in terms of accompanying LAs in the Global South in the demanding tasks called for by decentralisation (UNDESA, 2008).

Defined by Diana Conyers (1983) as a process of change in which functions previously undertaken by government institutions at national level become the responsibility of governmental institutions at sub-national level, decentralisation has gained recognition over the last thirty years as a strategy for deepening democracy, ensuring good governance and fostering local development. The ultimate objective of decentralisation is to guarantee democratic participation at the local level and ensure that services easily reach people. Decentralised governance is thus expected to make local governments both democratic and developmental (Faguet, 2014; UNDESA, 2008).

Several arguments have been put forward in support of decentralisation and the strengthening of local government (Dillinger, 1994; Faguet, 2014; UNDESA, 2008, UNDP, 1999; UN-HABITAT, 2007;): first, transferring governance to local government levels provides significant opportunities for popular participation and increased involvement by people and communities in decisions that directly affect their lives. Second, it is through strengthened LAs that local policies, plans, programmes are likely to reflect local needs more accurately than in centralised systems of governance. Third, more autonomous LAs charged with service delivery and which are accountable to their local constituency will manage the local fiscal base and revenue collection system more efficiently and effectively than central administration.

DC has great potential in terms of enhancing local democratic governance. The assumption is that it can contribute to strengthen local accountability and democratic governance and in so doing reinforce wider processes of political and administrative decentralisation (Coppedge et al, 2011; Faguet, 2014; UNDESA, 2008). But DC can have a positive contribution to local democratic governance if institutional support is a key feature (often it is not) and is aimed at strengthening local authorities in terms of (UNDESA, 2008): (i) Increasing their capacity to identify, plan and coordinate realistic priorities taking into consideration the social, economic, political and financial contingencies; (ii) Improving their capacity to organise and maintain the collective services necessary to improve the life of the local population. On the other

hand, it is also important to strengthen civil society through (Coppedge et al, 2011): (i) Citizenship Education to develop civil consciousness and leadership; (ii) Community Organisation to build and support grassroots groups, associations, movements so that they become strong autonomous organisations; (iii) Capacity Building of CSOs to enable them to hold decision makers to account and engage in shaping policies and programmes.

2   The evaluation of Trentino DC policy and programmes
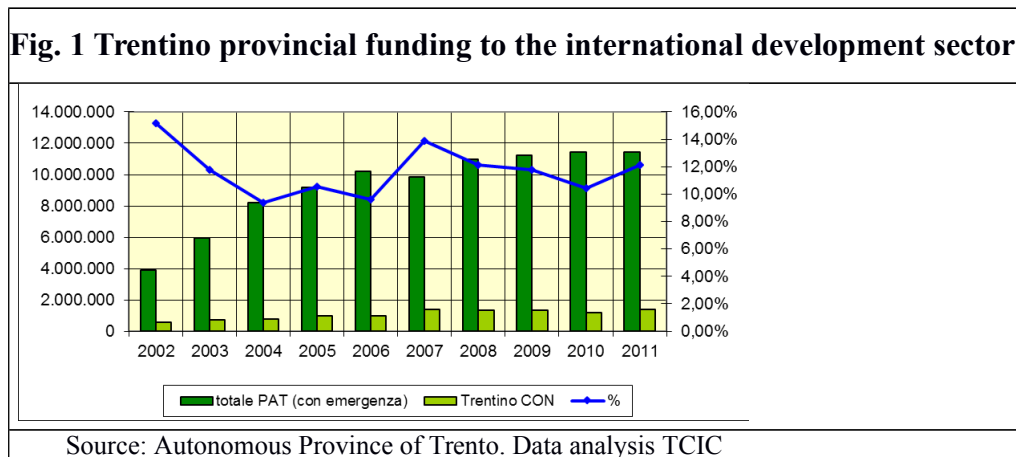
2.1   The unique context: a Province committed to international development

Trentino is an autonomous province in northern Italy and together with the Autonomous Province of Bolzano forms the Autonomous Region of Trentino Alto Adige / Südtirol. It has an area of 6212 km² and as of January 1st 2014, 536,237 people lived in the province of Trento, distributed in its 217 municipalities. Trentino has one of the highest per-capita income and public expenditure at national level. Thanks to its special autonomy, in addition to the typical administrative functions of Italian provincial authorities, the Autonomous Province of Trento (PAT) has legislative power in many areas normally under the central state or regional jurisdiction. Particularly important are the competences in terms of health, education, training, employment, energy, economy, transport and roads.

Trentino is highly committed to international development due to its historical background and in particular a high rate of migration from Trentino in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, the strong presence of the Catholic Church and high number of missionaries who kept strong ties with their communities of origin in Trentino and lastly the widespread presence of social enterprises (cooperatives) which are commonly seen as the socio-economic mechanism which promoted Trentino's exit from poverty in the decades after World War II.

At the national level, PAT paved the way for DC adopting in 1988 its own legislation on the matter. Thus, international development represented one of the areas in which Trentino tested its autonomy. Since the early 1990s, PAT invested a significant and growing share of economic resources in international development. According to its 2005 law on international development, PAT is committed to allocating at least 0.25% of its budget to this sector. Since then it has invested in international development an increasing amount of funds reaching a

yearly contribution of about € 11 million over the period 2008-2011 (see Fig. 1). These resources are spent on development projects including DC, emergency response, development education and awareness raising and training activities.

Fig. 1 Trentino provincial funding to the international development sector

Source: Autonomous Province of Trento. Data analysis TCIC

2.2 The evaluative research of the "Trentino with" DC policy: the methodology

Between the late 1990s and the early years of the new millennium, Trentino started four DC programmes in partnership with four local communities: Prijedor (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Peja/Pec (Kosovo), Caia (Mozambique) and Kraljevo (Serbia). These four DC programmes supported significantly by PAT and implemented by Trentino based CSOs from the late 1990s till today represent a major international development policy of PAT. They are characterised by a high level of creativity and experimentation. They bring innovation in the context of Trentino's international solidarity and provide a heritage of practices on which to reflect and to learn lessons from, useful on a Trentino, national and international level.

The Training Centre for International Cooperation of Trento (TCIC), set up in 2008 thanks to the vision and the political foresight of PAT to provide training and research in international development, since its inception considered DC as a priority of its research and training work. As the four DC programmes in the Balkans and Mozambique represented the most innovative DC initiatives in Trentino, TCIC in collaboration with PAT and the CSOs involved in the programmes decided to carry out an evaluative research.

This paper is based on the finding of this evaluative research (Capuano et al., 2013a). Considering that the four experiences were little known, not yet described and were still

ongoing the evaluation team chose to carry out an evaluative research at the level of the policy. The evaluation team therefore did not carry out an ex post evaluation of each programme to assess results achieved and impact but rather analysed each programme separately and jointly, as the outcome of a single DC local policy: we called this policy "Trentino With". The purpose was to provide an overview of Trentino DC approach focusing in particular on the structures and the methods experimented. The study sought to investigate not so much what was done, but the reasons behind the intervention logic (Leeuw, 2003; Stame, 2004; Torrigiani, 2010), analyzing the relevance between the analysis of the contexts and the processes that led to the choices made in terms of interventions. Central in this type of evaluation were the cognitive strategies put in place, first in terms of "entering" the contexts (context analysis), and then in terms of taking action and creating desirable and shared changes (the projects implemented) (Bezzi, 2010; Stame, 2004). The research therefore investigated the processes and the context in which decisions were made as wells as how the intervention logic of the programmes, in an explicit or implicit way, was agreed and implemented.

The methodological approach chosen for the evaluative research focused on facilitating learning for the stakeholders involved. The primary focus was learning from experience to improve future practices and not accounting for results achieved. In line with this, the research team adopted a highly participatory approach conscious of the fact that learning happens during an evaluation process and not only from an evaluation report. The evaluation process, by taking the contribution of utilization oriented and responsive schools (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Rossi, Freeman, Lipsey, 2004), was designed to help those involved in managing and implementing the programmes to cope in the best possible way with new situations that may be partly similar, partly different to experiences already made.

The research included two key phases: 1. Research and documentation of the historical evolution of each experience: many people had been involved over the years, each person carrying her or his own fragment of experience and interpretation. It was important therefore to reconstruct the genesis and development of each programme in order to build a common platform of knowledge. The evaluation team analysed organisational and programme documents (Statutes, Manifestos, minutes of Board meetings, internal memos, MoUs, provincial laws, resolutions and decisions, project proposals and reports, etc.) and used qualitative data collection methods such as participant observation, meetings with key stakeholders, focus group and semi-structured interviews in Trentino and in the field (8 focus group, 70 semi-structured interviews in Trentino, 131 semi-structured interviews in the Balkans and Mozambique). This resulted in the drafting of four preliminary reports (one for each experience) documenting the historical evolution of each programme. Sharing and discussing the reports with the stakeholders was crucial in order to build shared knowledge, agree facts, situations, processes, turning points and especially define together a raking of the relevance of the different evaluation questions to be analysed in depth in the second phase. The closure of this phase coincided with the validation of the four "1st phase reports".

2. In-depth analysis and evaluation of four key questions that were not set a priori by the evaluation team but were identified in the course of the research and in dialogue with the stakeholders. The criteria used was "self-relevance", i.e. the relevance of the issues for the key actors involved in the programmes. The issues identified were: a. Organisational arrangements, b. Evolution and coherence of the system of objectives, c. Partnerships and relationships between distant territories, d. Role of the provincial authority. The participatory approach characterised also this phase of the research. Representatives from PAT and the CSOs implementing the programmes participated in joint meetings and seminars. The methodology was primarily qualitative and dialogic. A taxonomic analysis of the objectives was carried out in order to map the evolution of the systems of the objectives and analyse their internal and external coherence. This phase resulted in the drafting of the final report that was shared and discussed with the stakeholders involved. The closure of this phase coincided with the validation of the final report and the drafting and publication of a synthesis (Capuano et al., 2013a).

2.3 Overview of the four DC programmes

CSOs were the drivers of the genesis, development and consolidation of these experiences. In the case of the Balkans a major factor in the genesis was the creation and existence of peace movements that were established and became active as a result of the wars in Iraq and in the Balkans in the early 1990s. The mobilisation in support of peace led to the creation of different CSOs that gathered under the umbrella of "Casa per la Pace" di Trento, which represented a driving force and key focal actor in the establishment of the DC programmes in the Balkans. In the case of Mozambique a key actor in launching the programme was a local organisation called Sottosopra that together with PAT saw in the Local Human Development Programme (PDHL) of UNOPS (United Nations Office for Project Services) in Mozambique the opportunity to promote a new modality of development cooperation.

Over the years the four DC programmes developed specific identities and features while at the same time, being rooted in the same territory, they shared some common principles and characteristics.

The organisational arrangements created in the "Trentino with" experiences have been a topic of particular in depth analysis in view of the high level of complexity and diversity in organisational solutions adopted in Trentino. The experiences analysed, although showing significant differences, are characterised by some relevant traits in common which are as follows:

(i) A second level association, composed of different public and private organisations from Trentino, was established to be responsible for the implementation of the programme. The associations implementing the "Trentino with" policy are: Associazione Progetto Prijedor (APP) managing the programme in Bosnia, Associazione Trentino con il Kossovo (ATcK) managing the programme in Kossovo, Tavolo Trentino con Kraljevo (TTKv) managing the programme in Serbia e Consorzio Associazioni con il Mozambico (CAM) managing the programme in Mozambique;

(ii) A network of organisations that revolved around the second level association was created. It included organisations that were not interested in joining the second level association and be involved in the management of the entire programme but were rather willing to participate

and contribute, even significantly, to specific sectors or projects. The network included cooperatives, credit unions, social enterprises, youth associations, university departments, public bodies such as libraries and museums and individuals. Different modalities were used to ensure participation of these actors such as the establishment of permanent or temporary working groups that took part in the planning, implementation and monitoring of sectors or specific project and activities.

While started in post war contexts, since their inception all four programmes were characterised by a long-term perspective and the intention to move from the reconstruction & rehabilitation phase to the establishment of sustainable development programmes. The four "Trentino with" programmes put in place a complex system of ambitious objectives: (i) Promote collaboration between international development actors in Trentino so they could influence and create synergies between each other and enhance the impact of the projects of single associations; (ii) Facilitate the involvement of the Trentino territory and especially of CSOs (NGOs, cooperatives, youth associations, credit unions, radios, university departments, etc.) in international development activities through the creation of local networks; (iii) Facilitate the development and maintenance of direct and long-term relationships between Trentino based partners/people and partners/people in the other four territories; (iv) Implement multi sector and long term programmes in Bosnia, Kosovo, Mozambique and Serbia; (v) Contribute to building a culture of solidarity and openness (attention) to the values of the "other" in Trentino and raise awareness about development issues.

The research shows a high degree of correspondence between these five objectives of "Trentino with" and the objectives of PAT's policy on international development. The analysis suggests that a relationship of trust and an intense dialogue between the LA and the CSOs implementing the programmes was established and this led to the definition of the priorities of "Trentino with" through a process of cross-fertilisation between the LA and civil society.

The four experiences are characterised by the development of parallel and complementary programmes in the four "elsewhere" territories of the Balkans and Mozambique and in Trentino. In the four "elsewhere" territories, the areas of intervention were in many cases very innovative and pioneering not only locally, but in some cases also at the national level.

This is the case, in particular, of the promotion of sustainable tourism in Kosovo and Serbia, the facilitation of youth entrepreneurship in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the development of local capacity in urban/rural-land use planning in Mozambique.

The programme in Trentino was the other of the two pillars on which "cooperation between communities" is based. It turned out that the work in Trentino remained linked to the keywords and declarations of the manifestos of the programmes. While some significant results were achieved in terms of mobilising different CSOs and facilitating their involvement in different projects, overall the results in Trentino in terms of raising awareness about global issues and promoting global citizenship were more limited.

3   The contribution of Trentino DC to local democratic governance

3.1   Operating in the interface between territorial orders through institutional building

The research highlighted that the "Trentino With" programmes were carried out in the interface between territorial orders. The former Yugoslavia moved from the disintegration of the Socialist Federation to the dream of integration within a democratic Europe of the people. In Mozambique the situation changed from years of war to post-war reconstruction within the prospect of decentralisation. The Trentino CSOs implementing the DC programmes stood in these transitions between territorial orders and, interacting with local organisations, played a key role in the processes of institution building.

The CSOs demonstrated capacity to adapt to the time necessary for each territory to develop adequate institutions. Considering the discontinuous processes of decentralisation in Mozambique or the emergence of local government with which it was possible to interact only after several years of presence in the area, as in the case of Peja / Pec and Prijedor, the choices were of two types: wait until the context was suitable for the projects or, as it was done, accept the challenge of supporting the emerging local government and civil society through processes of institution building.

In Mozambique in the context of a fragile and discontinuous but nonetheless present process of decentralisation, Consorzio Associazioni con il Mozambico (CAM) gave priority since the start of the programme to the interaction with the local government and played a significant role in terms of accompanying local authorities and strengthening the capacity of the administration and its different departments. In Kosovo and Bosnia, on the other hand, at the start of the programmes local authorities were either not present (in Kosovo there was a UN interim administration) or complicit in war crimes (Bosnia), Associazione Trentino con il Kossovo (ATcK) and Associazione Progetto Prijedor (APP) gave priority first to supporting the birth and strengthening of local civil society and only when the conditions for the interaction with new local authorities were mature, they began to interact with them and support them in their role of governing authorities of a territory.

Institutional strengthening in Mozambique

In terms of strengthening the local government, the case of Mozambique is particularly relevant. Right from the beginning, CAM gave an explicit connotation to its presence and role in Caia district in terms of stimulus to the strengthening of processes of democratic self-development in the community and cooperation between civil society and public administration. Since the beginning, ambitious targets were set for strengthening participatory processes in planning development strategies within the district. Activities were developed to enhance the operational capacity first of district Working Groups, and then of the *Conselho consultivo*, as the main forum for the participation of civil society. Work was also carried out directly with the district departments to strengthen capacity in responsible planning and management of development projects. The planned idea, however, clashed with the reality. In fact, on the one hand the capacity at the level of civil society was very limited and therefore there were considerable difficulties in accompanying the *Conselho consultivo* in identifying priorities and strategies for the development of the district, on the other hand, local institutions also had severe limitations in terms of both representation and capacity and resources to govern the process of district development. Over the years CAM continued to play an important institutional strengthening role. In addition to pre-employment and training of district administration staff, CAM directly promoted the creation of two offices and the recruitment and training of its personnel: the District Planning Office and the District Water and Sanitation Office, both subsequently inserted into the District Planning and Infrastructure Department. Over the years, it continued to play a role in *assessoria*[1] to the local administration and in particular to the district departments. It also played a key role in advising the district administration on the development of a Five Year Development Plan.

All the programmes functioned as incubators for the creation of new local organisations. In Mozambique, the network of actors involved in the programme included, in addition to the

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1 Term used to define the work of mentoring local partners. It is not easy to define the equivalent in English, because the service is between consultancy and accompaniment, thus less formal and less punctual than consultancy, but more structured than an informal support. The distinguishing element is its continuity.

local institutions, public and private organisations which the programme itself contributed to create and that became in the local context important actors for the local population. In the Balkans, local partnerships today mainly include organisations that emerged directly from these programmes. The office in Kraljevo, for example, from the start considered itself as a reference and support point for the rebirth of civil society. The office then became not only a meeting place for some small local organisations, but also an "incubator" for local groups that in some cases did not reach the necessary organisational maturity to survive and become effective actors in the area while others with the support of the programme managed to become significant local actors in their sectors.

The decision to work in post conflict, fragile contexts presented both opportunities and challenges. Trentino DC had the opportunity to work in the complex transition from post conflict reconstruction to local development, playing a role in terms of processes of institution building at different levels. This allowed for the development of expertise in institutional strengthening in such fragile contexts. At the same time working in such fragile and unstructured contexts presented challenges in terms of pursuing and achieving some objectives, in particular those related to the creation of relationships and partnerships between homologous actors "here" and "there" based on reciprocity. Working in contexts where both local authorities and civil society were very weak did not facilitate the identification of common grounds on which to create and sustain partnerships between Trentino based actors and counterparts in the partnership territories. Many of the relationships established were essentially about the Trentino based actors sharing their expertise and providing technical support to the counterparts in the partner territories. Although present in a number of instances, the flow in the other direction was generally less evident.

3.2 The key role of Trentino civil society

The Trentino DC experience demonstrates that significant results were achieved because a positive interaction and an intense dialogue emerged between the local authority (the Autonomous Province of Trento) and Trentino CSOs (APP, ATcK, TTKv and CAM) in the definition of this DC policy and in the implementation of the four programmes. This interaction led to a partnership based on mutual trust and facilitated complementarity in roles between the LA and CSOs and reciprocal support. The Autonomous Province of Trento (PAT)

played a key role in creating an enabling environment for the establishment and development of these DC programmes while APP, ATcK, TTKv and CAM were given the space to experiment, design innovative interventions and implement them in collaboration with the local partners.

The financial commitment of PAT to the four programmes was very significant and continuous in time. It also developed flexible administrative procedures that allowed for the design and development of planning processes adequate for these complex multi-annual and multi sector programmes, and their needs in terms of adapting to the variable conditions of the operational contexts.

Table 2: PAT's financial allocations to the development sector and the DC programmes

Year	Total PAT	Trentino DC programmes	%
2002	3.910.674	592.986	15,16%
2003	5.974.242	704.087	11,79%
2004	8.202.428	768.792	9,37%
2005	9.161.736	966.027	10,54%
2006	10.181.612	979.931	9,62%
2007	9.833.504	1.364.905	13,88%
2008	10.955.442	1.328.538	12,13%
2009	11.223.429	1.324.331	11,80%
2010	11.420.418	1.190.745	10,43%
2011	11.455.290	1.389.521	12,13%
TOTAL	**92.318.775**	**10.609.863**	**11,49%**

In the case of Kosovo and Mozambique, PAT also offered political support through the stipulation of agreements with the institutional counterparts and through the exchange of official visits. This was very important in terms of defining the cooperation strategy between Trentino and the partner territory and giving legitimacy to the presence and role of ATcK and CAM on the ground. In the context of the institutional relations with the local authorities PAT did not put explicit conditionality. It chose to delegate the definition of reciprocal responsibilities between Trentino and the local authorities to ATcK and CAM which took on a mediating role between PAT and the local authorities.

In contexts characterized by limited institutional capacity as was the case in Mozambique and the Balkans, PAT could have played an important role in assisting the process of institution building at the local level. The research highlighted that its role was not explicitly geared towards institutional strengthening and capacity building of the partner local authorities. In particular, the research highlighted that PAT did not provide technical assistance nor made available to its DC programmes the expertise (through the involvement of its civil servants) that it has developed in different sectors, also thanks to its special autonomy. This opportunity was not seized by either PAT that did not propose institution building activities within which it could have played a role, nor by the CSOs implementing the programmes (APP, ATcK, TTKv and CAM) as they did not submit concrete proposals for a precise and technical involvement of PAT in institutional strengthening activities. Within the local development programme in the Balkans, APP, ATcK, TTKv tried to involve the provincial offices that deal with tourism, but without success. In the case of Mozambique, CAM did invest in

institutional dialogue and processes supporting district planning and management of development processes, urban and land use planning but it relied mainly on its own expatriate staff and on university personnel.

4 Decentralised cooperation and local democratic governance: a missed opportunity?

Decentralised Cooperation (DC) has affirmed itself as an international development modality in which Local Authorities (LAs) have become development agents and partners. But DC is not confined to the participation of LAs alone. While the concept of a relationship between LAs is at the core of the partnership, the participation of civil society is a feature of equal importance. The objectives of DC combine an attention to the partner countries in terms of fostering decentralised democratic governance as a precondition to local sustainable development but also to the countries where DC originates. It is process-oriented and entails a peer-to-peer approach that aims to increase local ownership and sustainability. It can be an effective channel for funds at the local level and, differently from other cooperation modalities, is by its very nature long-term (UNDESA, 2008).

DC has therefore great potential in terms of supporting decentralisation processes. When DC activities are geared towards institutional strengthening and capacity building at the local level, DC can contribute to fostering local democratic governance and active citizenship. Unfortunately this is not always the case. Anger and Moberg (cited in UNDESA, 2008:72) in the evaluation of the Norwegian Municipal International Cooperation Programme stressed that "there were several examples whereby the projects had turned into 'NGO-style' projects focusing more on service delivery than institutional capacity building and where the Norwegian municipality was seen more as a 'channel of funds' and a 'regular development agent', with little emphasis on transfer of knowledge and the building of strong local governments in the south". A study carried out in Italy on a number of DC projects underlined that there were cases where DC strengthened local governance, democratisation and decentralisation processes. However only in a limited number of DC projects support to local democratic governance was an explicit objective and therefore there was a very limited contribution to it (Nord Sud Costruire insieme è possibile, 2008a).

DC could have a key role in accompanying and sustaining local democratic governance but this potential often is not fully tapped. This seems to be linked to five key reasons (UNDESA, 2008): first, European LAs are stimulated by a concern to address the immediate needs of the local population, as often channelled by the partner LAs, without paying attention to incorporating the institutional dimension. Second, infrastructural activities and tangible projects offer a more "positive image" and hence tend to be favoured as the political return for both the European and the partner LAs tends to be higher in these cases compared to the more volatile return of capacity building activities. Third, European LAs know how to carry out functions and tasks assigned to them within their respective countries decentralised frameworks, however they do not necessarily possess the local governance conceptual knowledge required for designing projects supporting decentralisation and governance. Fourth, acquiring the knowledge about the legislative, institutional and administrative framework of the partner country as a necessary condition for sustaining decentralisation requires more time and effort in comparison with other types of activities. Lastly, European LAs often face severe personnel constraints and may not be in the position to second employees for a considerable period of time in a foreign country.

Although common, these obstacles are not insurmountable and indeed there are experiences of effective support to democratic local governance through DC. Drawn from the analysis of three DC experiences[2], a study concluded that "the choice of focusing decentralised cooperation activities on decentralised governance is a winning one" (UNDESA, 2008:92). However, the following two prerequisites are necessary if the DC actions are to succeed: (i) The presence of a strong and enduring political support for DC in the European LA; (ii) The existence in the European LA of an institutional and organisational framework for DC (multi-annual plans, dedicated budget lines, full-time staff) (UNDESA, 2008). Other factors that will increase the likelihood of success are the existence of a previous partnership, the involvement of external expertise beyond that available within the European LA and the maintenance of an active role by the European LA in the project (UNDESA, 2008). Other good practice approaches typical of development cooperation will also increase the success

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2   The three case studies are: (i) DC between the Picardie Region in France and the Collines Department in
    Benin; (ii) The AfricaForm project of Tuscany Region in Italy; (iii) The GSO Programme and the
    LOGO South Programme of the Ministry of Foreign Affiars of the Netherlands, VNG International and
    the Association of Netherlands Municipalities

of DC activities: a participatory approach that promotes ownership and empowerment, donor coordination and synergies to avoid duplication and wastage of resources, adoption of the project cycle management and the logical framework approach (UNDESA, 2008).

5 Conclusions

The findings of the research on Trentino DC are largely in line with those of the studies carried out in Norway and Italy. Although Trentino DC programmes did make a contribution to local democratic governance as a result of its long-term horizon, the nature of its process, its learn-by-doing approach and the attention given by the CSOs implementing the programmes to institution building, the results were mainly in terms of strengthening civil society with a more limited role in terms of strengthening decentralised governance and building the capacity of the local authorities. While the two prerequisites highlighted above were present in the Province of Trento (PAT), i.e. political support for DC and existence of an institutional and organisational framework, PAT did not seize the opportunity to be actively engaged and opted instead for a role of "distant participant" and "generous and flexible donor". PAT did not maintain a leading role and chose to delegate the planning, implementation and monitoring of the activities to the CSOs responsible for the programmes (APP, ATcK, TTKv and CAM). These organisations in turn mobilised external expertise from the University of Trento and other local CSOs. PAT did not make available to the local partners its governance and technical expertise, did not actively engage in institutional support activities and therefore the potential advantages of the peer-to-peer approach inherent in DC were not fully tapped. In conclusion, if we look at the contribution of Trentino DC to local democratic governance there seemed to be a missed opportunity.

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