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Santa Fiora, Tuscany, Italy

Local ecosystem in Santa Fiora village for youth entrepreneurship development

Keyword(s):

Entrepreneurship; Empowerment;

Network; Local and regional development;

Cluster promotion

Introduction

The need to support local development by the regional government is the basis of the initiative. The preliminary measure promoted was the "smart village" aimed at supporting work-life balance and quality of life, limiting depopulation of villages, cut down commuting-related emissions. In the frame of supporting the local economy in the rural areas of the region, in July 2021 Tuscany Regional Government signed a Memorandum of Understanding with local municipalities for the pilot project boosting innovation, digital growth, entrepreneurship, collaborative economy, and work-life balance. In this frame, the Regional Government plans to promote the creation of a local ecosystem including a variety of stakeholders that can support the development of the territory.

The experimental phase of the initiative is taking place in the Santa Fiora local area (close to Grosseto municipality). This is connected to the local project named "Santa Fiora smart village" that was launched by the municipality to attract people and settle down their life and business in the area (before the pandemic).

Since 2021 the initiative is supported by the Regional Government to meet the priority to contribute to the economic and social development of local rural areas.

Main challenge

The Tuscany Regional Government is working at promoting capacity building in a rural area named Santa Fiora in order to put together different stakeholders and test some entrepreneurship actions for youth.

The initial idea of the municipality was to attract Italians and foreigners, young and aged people to live and work in Santa Fiora due to the quality of life and the possibility of smart working. The idea was liked a lot right before the pandemic and was much more promoted and supported when smart working was reinforced all over the world due to COVID-19. To do so different local stakeholders decided to work in strong cooperation to host people in welcome centres (bed & breakfast, private rooms, etc.), strengthen technological facilities (ie wifi connections), to create a network of services for different target groups.

The main challenge is to support the capacity-building processes among public and private local and regional stakeholders that can together cooperate for the development of the local ecosystem.

The Regional Government supports the initiative to create a local area where innovative start-ups can have their locations, and co-working spaces can be used by any workers. Local and Regional Governments work in close cooperation for purchasing spaces (local authority) and searching for financial resources that are needed for furniture and technological facilities (regional government).

Additional local stakeholders work in clusters to support individual initiatives.

Timing

The regional initiative started in 2021. Covid-19 was going on and the connected economic crisis gave an additional motivation to go on with the "smart village" experimental measure.

Objective

The initiative aims at supporting the development of local networking among the key public, private, and not-for-profit stakeholders for improving lifelong learning local policies. Specifically, the general objective is to support the creation or exploitation of local clusters that may support NEET, young people, unemployed to get an idea for self-entrepreneurship or to set up one's own business in the territory.

Target group

Young people aged 18 and over that are interested in setting up their own business in the Santa Fiora rural area.

Geographical range

The initiative covers one of the rural regional areas located in AMIATA. Santa Fiora municipality is part of it. Santa Fiora has been very active and innovative to set up a local initiative aimed at attracting as many people as possible to populate the rural area and arranging a proper environment for living and working for people of any age and nationality. Since 2021 the Regional Government is supporting this local initiative in different ways. Starting from the local needs analysis the Regional Government plans to set up policies and measures supporting youth entrepreneurship on a regional level thanks to EU and regional funds and Calls for projects.

Stakeholders and partners

Stakeholders that took part in the local initiative are the Regional Government, the Major of Santa Fiora, the local municipality, the training centre, the employment centre, local businesses represented in the PATTO PER L'AMIATA (Amiata Area's Plan). Additional stakeholders may join the local ecosystem depending on the kind of businesses that will be developed in the course of the ecosystem development (ie universities, guidance centres/counsellors, micro-credit consultancy agencies, infrastructures in the neighbourhood).

Strategy / materials

The strategy the Regional Government used and is still using is to promote alliances among local stakeholders that can work in different clusters depending on the business ideas to be supported and developed in the territory. Clusters are of different kinds and they have in common that are geographical concentrations of different actors including public institutions (ie municipality, employment centres), service providers (ie training centres), firms in specific industries depending on the local community the clusters are working in, suppliers. They all are geographically proximate and close to citizens that are interested in setting up their own business and/or their life in the community. The Regional government plays an important role as it is being promoting the cooperation of stakeholders in clusters and might also support the cooperation among different clusters in the community. That

creates innovation linked to the movement of people, ideas, any entity that is useful for self-entrepreneurial development.

Communication is mainly carried out by the Regional Government among local stakeholders that are reached to include them in the local networking and in any future clusters that will support self-entrepreneurship on a community level. The mainstream idea is to have a mainstream communication that creates linkages across local stakeholders, institutions, industries that are important for self-entrepreneurship in a particular field. Communication consists of having meetings and communications with potential stakeholders in the community that are potentially interested in the local networking and in being active parts of local clusters for providing people with the needed support for self-entrepreneurship.

The local networking that is being put in place does consider any citizen that is interested in setting up his/her business in the rural area of S. Fiora (Italians, foreigners, men, women, disabled, etc.). The only limitation is the age as this testing phase is related to an international project dealing with young NEETs aged until 30 (YESpecialists project).

Resources

Resources foreseen are (i) staff from the Regional Government as well as from HE due to the methodological guidelines that need to be arranged and continuously adapted to the institutional learning processes aimed at capacity-building development on a local level. Regional Government staff is at different levels: decision-making level, managerial level, operational level, administrative level; (ii) financial resources that are needed to design the capacity-building process and support self-entrepreneurship policies.

Compliance with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

The regional and local policy measures mentioned are in line with several SDGs like:

Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

They are all part of the local strategy to make rural areas alive and attract people living there. This requires strong cooperation among different stakeholders that take care of employment, houses, security, welfare, formal education, cultural infrastructures, everything that is needed to create a learning environment supporting the creation of personal and professional life.

Innovation(s)

The innovation is about the inter-industry and inter-stakeholder linkages that are promoted by the Regional Government to support their capacity building in adult learning and self-entrepreneurship policy development.

Evaluation

The initiative allows the development of the regional lifelong learning strategy in the field of self- entrepreneurship. Further evaluation will be done once the local networking development will be further developed. Thus far the parameters that are being considered for the future evaluation are social, institutional and economic ones. Specifically, the social growth is crucial in terms of results and impact evaluation as it commits the local community to attract people, motivating them in having their business in the community and welcoming them through a network of services (accommodation, transport, technological facilities, etc.).

The economic parameters are related to the possibility to get a new business set up in the community (parameters can be related to the number of new ideas set up, number of business ideas under evaluation, number of people involved in the new local businesses, number of people employed in them, etc.).

Institutional parameters can be related to the kind of roles played by local and regional institutions in promoting the creation of new business in the rural areas and the kind of learning outcomes achieved.

Impact

The Regional Government is regularly monitoring the capacity-building process and the impact in terms of what is being done by local stakeholders, obstacles to be tackled, supporting measures that might be provided (ie promoting international benchmarking with the regional/local institutions).

Moreover impact is also in terms of how to improve calls for proposals that may meet local demands of learning and entrepreneurship and may support the creation of innovative local businesses.

Impediments

The role played by the Regional Government is to guide, support, and promote the development of local networking among stakeholders that may be working in clusters to meet the demand of citizens. Current and potential demands are about the possibility to set up one's own business in productive sectors that are developed in the territory or are to be developed in the short and medium-term. Impediments are about (i) supervising the whole process by the region, from the demand knowledge, promotion, analysis by local stakeholders, (ii) motivating local stakeholders in their active participation with limited incentive measures available. Getting the methodological support and defining a roadmap with the relevant local stakeholders (ie major, municipality, local businesses in PATTO PER L'AMIATA, employment centres, training centres) helped in moving the process forward and getting ideas development implemented.

Replicability

The "local networking model" is planned to be replicated on a regional level in Tuscany in other areas (ie other rural areas). The commitment of local stakeholders (public, private, not-for-profit ones) is key as well as the pushing and supervising role to be played by the Regional Government having the solid capacity to support capacity building process and enhance capacity building among local stakeholders.

Concluding remarks

The key in this initiative is to have clear the roles that can be realistically plaid by public institutions along with other local stakeholders and the feasible goals to be reached both towards citizens who are interested in learning how to set up their own business and towards the local community.

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