

HealthyGrowth

From niche to volume with integrity and trust

FULL CASE STUDY REPORT

Bio-Distretto Cilento - Italy



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Most local organic market chains have inherent problems in moving from niche to volume, and mainstream large-scale market chains have inherent difficulties in securing and advancing organic values. The project "Healthy Growth: from niche to volume with integrity and trust" investigated a range of successful mid-scale organic value chains in order to learn how they are able to combine volume and values, and to use this knowledge to support the further development of organic businesses, networks and initiatives. Research teams from ten European countries contributed with 20 case studies. More information and documentation can be found at: www.healthygrowth.eu

1. Introduction

The Italian long-standing tradition and experience with industrial and agro-industrial districts and the 2001 national Agricultural Act including a specific article on “rural and quality agro-food districts” (and following regulations), have undoubtedly contributed to inspire the more recent phenomenon of “bio-distretti” initiatives. Bio-distretti are spreading from south to north across the country, gathering the interest of private and public actors around a context-specific project of local development. This is essentially based on the combination of the “district culture and tradition” with a precise focus on organic agriculture and its significant potential for sustainable territorial development (Pugliese and Antonelli 2015).

Bio-distretto Cilento, in Campania region, is the first bio-district initiative carried out in Italy. Its pioneer experience constitutes a key starting point and reference case for the many other initiatives that have emerged in the last five years, each with specific context features and distinct development history and trajectory, but all sharing the “bio-district” vision and objectives.

So far 11 bio-districts have been officially established in 9 regions and 3 more are underway (Fig. 1).



Figure 1: Map of Italian bio-districts (www.biodistretto.net)

Also an international network, the IN.N.E.R - International Network of Eco-Regions, has been officially constituted in 2014 to foster cooperation between Italian bio-districts and alike initiatives in Europe - like the Austrian eco-region ‘Bioregion Mühlviertel’ or the ‘Biovallée’ in France - and around the world.

A “bio-district” is defined as a geographical zone where farmers, citizens, tourist operators, associations and public actors “sign an agreement” for the sustainable management of local

resources, based on organic principles and practices, aiming at the fulfilment of the economic and socio-cultural potential of the territory.

In the Cilento area the bio-district is proposed as an innovative solution for a sustainable, integrated and participatory territorial development (Basile, Cuoco 2012). Broad in its ambitions but also quite pragmatic in the proposed actions, the bio-district concept, in its original formulation, is essentially built around three main dimensions:

- the social dimension. It is about, more specifically, the development of social cohesion in support of sustainable and inclusive territorial development strategies; the improvement of social aggregation and cultural exchanges; the centrality of farmer's role; the revitalization of rural areas; the generation of new job opportunities, for vulnerable groups too, through social farming; the protection of farmer's and consumer's health;
- the economic dimension. It focuses, in particular, on the economic benefits that organic farmers, tourist, cultural, catering enterprises can draw from the bio-district initiative; the reduction of organic certification costs which represent a significant financial burden for small farmers; the creation of new economic activities in the area; the promotion through territorial marketing tools (like AIAB Bio-Distretto[®] label); the aggregation of the organic supply and the access to alternative market channels (e.g. green public procurement and short supply chain initiatives);
- the environmental dimension. It entails the protection and increase of biodiversity (through the cultivation of local seeds and ancient varieties); the protection of natural resources, especially of underground water sources; the improvement of soil fertility, alleviation of the desertification risk as well as of the greenhouse effect; landscape conservation and maintenance.

Many of such ideas have actually been operationalized in the Bio-distretto Cilento project in these years. The main development stages and outcomes of the Bio-distretto Cilento initiative are briefly presented in this report which also includes some specific focus on the internal governance, the organization of organic supply chains as well as a reflection on critical issues and prospects of the initiative and some concluding remarks.

2. Case-study approach: materials and methods

The material for the present case-study report has been comprised from different documents.

Firstly, a number of consecutive semi-structured in-depth interviews were directly carried out with the Italian Bio-Districts National Coordinator and Secretary General of Bio-distretto Cilento, in the period between July 2013 and February 2015. Also the personal communications and power point presentations delivered by the same person in various seminars, workshops and international conferences were collected and used to compile this report.

Secondly, the materials of an in-depth analysis on the structure, development trends and performances of Bio-distretto Cilento, conducted in 2014-15, in the framework of a research project funded by the Italian Ministry of Agriculture¹ (Zanasi *et al.* 2015) were accessed and used

¹ DIMECOBIO – Progetto per la definizione delle dimensioni economiche del settore dell'agricoltura biologica ai diversi livelli della filiera (Decreto MiPAAF n. 67510 del 27/12/2013).

for the present report. For this study, a number of structured interviews were carried out to key informants, among those, the Director of Bio-distretto Cilento Association, the responsible person for the regional (Campania) branch of AIAB (Associazione Italiana per l'Agricoltura Biologica) and a representative of one of the 32 municipalities included in Bio-distretto Cilento. Also, data from an internal AIAB survey carried out in 2011 on a sample of Bio-distretto Cilento organic farmers in the framework of LOGINBIO project² was used.

Thirdly, useful data and information derives from the consultation of available statistical sources, relevant websites and documentary analysis of published and unpublished materials (see references at the end of the report).

Fourthly, additional complementary information was collected on site, on the occasion of different visits to Bio-distretto Cilento, or during seminars or public events organised by the bio-districts.

3. Italy – The national context

In Italy, the first grass-root initiatives in organic agriculture date back to the 1960s-1970s. The establishment of the institutional setting started later and progressively developed over the period between 1980s-1990s. In the mid-1980s, the first national commission for organic agriculture was established, made up of representatives of organisations and consumers' associations from each Italian region. In 1986, this Commission established first nation-wide, self-regulatory standards for organic farming, followed in 1988 by the first proposal for a national law on organic agriculture, presented by the Green Party.

AIAB (Associazione Italiana per l'Agricoltura Biologica), the largest Italian association for organic agriculture, was established in 1988. Once the EU Reg.2092/91 was implemented, Federbio (Federazione Italiana Agricoltura Biologica e Biodinamica, the Italian Federation of Organic and Biodynamic Agriculture), was founded in 1992, gathering a national network of various associations, national certification bodies and other private actors.

Today, in Italy there are 14 officially recognized certification bodies. The first national research network dedicated to organic agriculture, the GRAB-IT (Gruppo di Ricerca in Agricoltura Biologica) was created in 1996, more recently, other networks have been established, namely FIRAB (Fondazione Italiana per l'Agricoltura Biologica e Biodinamica) and RIRAB (Rete Italiana per la Ricerca in Agricoltura Biologica).

In 2000, in collaboration with the Italian regions, the Ministry of Agriculture established SINAB (<http://www.sinab.it/>), the National Information System for Organic Farming, a platform providing information and services to organic stakeholders for the development and promotion of the sector. Complementary interesting statistics and information are also published by Biobank (<http://www.biobank.it/>).

Starting with the implementation of EU Reg.2078/92, followed by more recent rural development regulations, agri-environmental measures significantly supported the growth of organic agriculture in terms of numbers of converted farms and land investments, especially in Southern

² www.loginbio.net

regions of the country. This contributes to explain the reason why, in the 1990s, the organic sector in Italy showed one of the largest average annual growth rates in Europe. Yet, it is also important to notice that a significant share of organic farmers, in some regions more than in others, preferred not to take advantage of the support provided by agro-environment measures, considering it insufficient and being rather interested in the premium price they could get on the market (Compagnoni *et al.* 2000).

According to the latest statistics in 2013, after the leading country Spain with 1,6 million hectare, Italy ranks second in the EU with 1.3 million hectare of cultivated organic land, (FiBL and IFOAM 2015). In the same year, the total number of Italian organic operators added up to more than 52 million (SINAB 2015). Italy represents a key player also in market terms. It is a major exporter of organic products, thanks to favorable climate and agronomic conditions and geographical proximity to major export markets. Likewise, also Italy's domestic market has shown increasing trends since 2005, even though the general food sector was facing difficult years at that time. Its size is estimated to be about 1.9 million EUR in 2013, but organic consumption remains mainly concentrated in Northern regions. Mass retailers and specialized shops are the major market channels. Organic products are also sold through various direct marketing initiatives, on-farm sales, farmers' markets and purchase groups which are often also associated to tourist, recreational and educational services. Green public procurement, especially school canteens, also represents an interesting outlet.

In Italy, the production, market and lifestyle facets of organic agriculture are integrated into the increasingly popular concept of "bio-district" which advocates a strong territorial approach to the development of the organic value chain.

The Italian Agricultural Act (Legge di orientamento) (decree 228 of April 2001, the 6th) defines the notion of "rural districts". They are characterized by a homogeneous historical and territorial identity and the production of very specific goods or services. The act serves as a legal basis for the creation of rural districts and adapts the concept of "industrial district" (Becattini 2000). It extends the "industrial concept", which focuses on clusters of small enterprises and the local community, to include the natural environment and civil society (Brunori and Rossi 2007). The recently emerging concept of "bio-district" could serve as a specific interpretation of the rural districts. At the same time, through the pivotal role played by certified organic agriculture in its underpinning rationale and operational development, the "bio-district" fits also into in the 'quality agro-food district' (defined in the same decree). This hybridization of the "district" concept, can contribute to explain why a national producer organization like AIAB is the main promoter and why it was possible to initiate almost immediately a number of new bio-districts based on the Cilento model, forming a national network and even extending its activities to the international scale. The details of this interesting evolution in the following paragraphs.

4. Overview of the case – general and common to all tasks

<u>Product types:</u>	mostly Mediterranean Diet products: fruits and vegetables, chestnuts, oil, wine but also chestnuts and some dairy products
<u>Main actor:</u>	Bio-distretto Cilento Association
<u>Number of members:</u>	≈ 50 actors represented in Bio-distretto Cilento Association (see 5.1); 450 organic farmers operating in Bio-distretto Cilento area

<u>Distribution channels:</u>	Primarily direct marketing increasingly also via tourism/gastronomy; minor amounts via HO.RE.CA., traditional retailers, export
<u>Current Turnover:</u>	a rough estimate of the turnover concerning only agriculture and on-farm processing activities has been estimated at approximately 3 million EUR (Zanasi <i>et al.</i> 2015). No estimate exists about other important economic activities carried out in Bio-distretto Cilento area, like tourism.
<u>Facebook Likes:</u>	216 (June 12 th 2015)
<u>Google Hits:</u>	4 770 (June 12 th 2015)

4.1 Presentation and trajectory

It is not by chance that the first Italian bio-district was developed in Cilento, land of nature, culture, history and food traditions. Bio-distretto Cilento is an area of 3.196 km². It is not an homogeneous landscape. Its highly diversified geographical traits determine important socio-economic disparities existing among local communities. This area suffers from serious territorial imbalances which still remain essentially unsolved.

The Cilento's beautiful (and highly popular) coastland is hundreds kilometres long on the Tyrrhenian Sea, lapped with the clearest sea waters in Italy (the Blue Flag award by Legambiente in 2013 was given to Pioppi village and its surroundings) and characterised by beaches that alternate between very fine sand and rocks, promontories and grottos cut into the rock. The 'Alburni mountains' are situated a few kilometres away from the sea, with six peaks higher than 1,700 metres, sloping hills and human settlements here and there, most of which date back to ancient times and which are often very small with just a few hundred inhabitants. Many ancient castles, monasteries and sanctuaries are also sitting on the mountain ridges. In the middle (between Cilento and Alburni), the narrow plains of Valle di Diano are located on the bed of an ancient lake turned into a highly fertile (overexploited) agricultural zone by irrigation infrastructures.

Apart from its striking morphological heterogeneity, the Cilento area is also profoundly complex in terms of cultural, social and economic relations. It is a deeply entropized area, where a very dense network of socio-cultural and economic relations exists and families are aggregated in small or very small communities. This geographical proximity has favoured synergies and complementarities among economic activities and pushed self-organisation and social innovation.

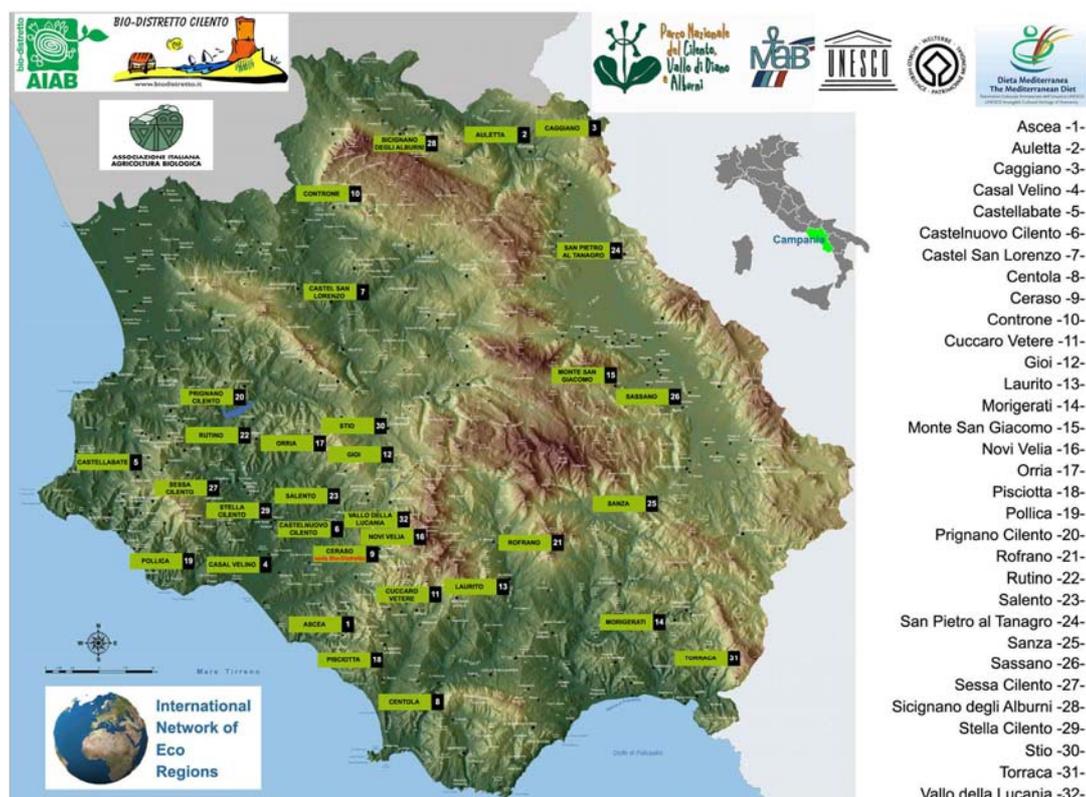


Figure 2: Geographical location of the Bio-distretto Cilento (incl. the 32 municipalities that joined the project)

Bio-distretto Cilento area is partly included in the National Park of Cilento, ‘Valle di Diano e Alburni’, the second largest nature park in Italy. It comprises some world-famous archaeological sites like ‘Paestum’, ‘Padula et Elea-Velia’ which, together with various other interesting sites, contribute to make Cilento a fascinating land of myths and legends.

Cilento is also much known for its agricultural products, still processed by old methods, and for its food heritage, essentially based on ancient family recipes and traditions. Interestingly, the concept of “slow”³ is inherently part of the “Cilento lifestyle”. In this regard, it is worth recalling that, back in 1960s, the American scientist Ancel Keys was the first to study the benefits of the healthy diet of Cilento inhabitants (rich in vegetables, fruit, pasta, bread and olive oil and not a lot of meat, eggs and dairy products), which he popularised in a famous book “Eat Well and Stay Well: The Mediterranean Way”, published with his wife in 1975 and based on the studies he conducted in Pioppi, a small village of Cilento, which has now become the world capital of Mediterranean Diet.

Nowadays, the production of quality foods still represents an important feature of the Cilento’s diversified farming systems where organic farming practices are quite widely diffused, even though not always officially certified. More precisely, in the Bio-distretto area there are approximately 450 organic farms (23% of total organic producers in Campania region in 2013),

³ It refers to the Slow Movement, started in the mid-1980s and advocating a cultural shift toward slowing down life’s pace. Besides the popular Slow Food organisation, created by Carlo Petrini, the Slow Movement community - which is not organised and controlled by one single organisation - has, over time, developed the concept into also in various other areas (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slow_Movement).

2300 hectares (approx. 8% of the total regional organic land area in the same year). Cilento quality foods also include seven Geographical Indications and 16 traditional products. It is worth noticing that young organic farmers have contributed to preserve and enhance agricultural traditions and food heritage, by playing a “bridging” role between tradition and modernity and introducing interesting innovations.

Being such a rich territory, Cilento has been awarded, the sole case in the world, four UNESCO recognitions: the National Park of Cilento, ‘Valle di Diano e Alburni’ is included in the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites, in the list of UNESCO Geoparks as well as in the UNESCO Program on Man and the Biosphere (MAB). Additionally, since 2010, the Mediterranean Diet is inscribed in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List.

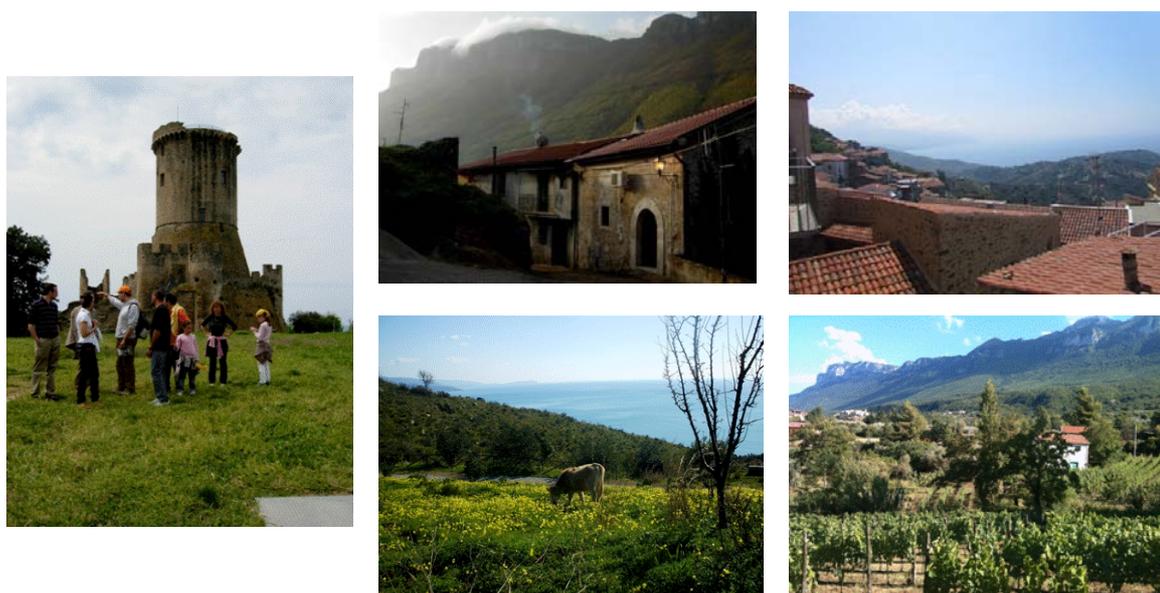


Figure 3: Bio-distretto Cilento landscapes

In the development trajectory of the *Bio-distretto Cilento*, three main phases could be identified:

- 1. 2004-2009: The emergence of the “bio-distretto” idea and the setting up of a favourable institutional environment and inclusive process at the local level to support its development**

A strong bottom-up push is at the origin of the creation of a “bio-distretto” in the Cilento area at the beginning of 2000s decade. The first important driving factor was the persistent request of help that local organic farmers addressed to local institutions to get some support in developing the market for their organic products, which at that time was virtually non-existent. Taking such needs into consideration, the responsible officers of the agricultural department of ten municipalities of the area decided to hold a number of public meetings to debate the issue and try to find some viable solutions. They also asked the Campania regional branch of AIAB to help organising these discussion fora.

Therefore, between 2004 and 2007, with the support of AIAB-Campania, various public events with local stakeholders including citizens, environmental, social and cultural associations, agricultural producers, enterprises, local authorities and research and education institutions were organised. These discussion fora were designed to identify weaknesses, needs and potentialities

of the Cilento territory and to share ideas about prospects for a sustainable development of the area. Subsequently, these events represented the first important step of a long participatory process which, with the support of all local government levels (Campania Regional Authority, Salerno Province, various municipalities, the Cilento, Valle di Diano e Alburni National Park Authority) and the collaboration of various local associations and institutions (Legambiente, Associazione Dieta Mediterranea, Associazione Produttori Locali del Cilento, Associazione Città del Bio, Osservatorio su Tipicità e Bio Eccellenza, Salerno University, Biocert) eventually led to the creation of the Bio-distretto Cilento some years later.

Some municipalities of the internal area of Cilento (Alburni) were the first to demonstrate interest in the initiative, followed by municipalities of the coastal area (Cilento) and later on also by various municipalities of the Valle di Diano area who joined too.

Since the beginning, the Campania regional branch of AIAB played an important leading role in the whole process which also encompassed the testing of the bio-district concept in the park area, through a pilot pioneer project implemented by AIAB and 'Città del Bio Association' and involving various local private operators and public institutions. The project aimed to promote a fair, inclusive rural development pathway based on organic agriculture values, practices and products.



Figure 4: Posters of the first Bio-distretto Cilento public consultation events

2. 2009-2012: Operationalisation and multi-dimensional development of the “bio-district” concept and promotion of the initiative

The initial efforts made to test and promote the “bio-district” concept finally led a core group of actors - namely AIAB, Campania Regional Authority (agricultural dept.), Salerno Province (agricultural dept), National Union of Mountain Municipalities, the Cilento and Valle di Diano National Park Authority and Città del Bio Association - to sign, in 2009, an official Memorandum of Understanding for the creation of the “Bio-distretto di Cilento and Valle di Diano National Park” (see fig.5). The rationale behind the document entailed the establishment of the Bio-distretto not only as a tool for promotion and growth for those local enterprises and territorial actors which were interested in organic agriculture, but also, in a broader perspective, as a first crucial move towards a long-needed exercise of shared decision-making and joint strategic action for a sustainable and inclusive management of Cilento’s valuable resources and potential.

The MoU was published in the official Regional Bulletin of the Campania Regional Authority (BURC no. 63, 19 Oct 2009) and partners signing it committed themselves to contribute to and co-finance the implementation of the priority preliminary activities listed in the MoU. More precisely, it contained following concrete actions: [1] a pilot initiative of organic group certification; [2] the setting up of specific production guidelines for organic producers in the area of the park aimed at protecting and enhancing the origin and the specificities of such products; [3] an awareness campaign about organic agriculture and [4] to foster the Mediterranean diet in local schools; pilot actions aimed at the creation of a “menu of the park” to be adopted in the local schools interested in promoting the Mediterranean diet model.



Figure 5: Official signature ceremony of the MoU for the creation of Bio-distretto Cilento

After signing the MoU, further progress in the operationalisation of the bio-district concept became possible in the following years thanks to continued and smart efforts of fund raising, mainly coordinated by AIAB-Campania, which, from 2009-2012, successfully implemented various projects in the bio-district area, allowing a consistent, though somehow fragmented development of multiple dimensions of the bio-district concept.

Some projects, funded by Campania Regional Authority through EU structural funds, supported technical advice activities for local farmers and the organisation of organic farmers’ markets in the bio-distretto area. In the framework of the Italian Organic Action Plan, implemented with the financial support of the Italian Ministry of Agriculture, various awareness raising activities - some specifically targeting school canteens - were funded together with a pilot initiative to set up a logistic platform (LoginBIO) for the distribution of organic products at the local level, essentially serving short organic supply chains. Also, training activities for newly converted organic farmers were carried out with EU funds (Leonardo Da Vinci projects) and AIAB successfully tested a participatory organic group certification scheme aimed at meeting the demand of many very small farmers for whom organic certification costs represent an unbearable financial burden.

As the initiatives and the activities grew, the need became stronger for some kind of coordination and coherent planning of the whole project. Therefore, in June 2011 a non-profit association (Bio-distretto Cilento Association), including some of the core founding actors, was finally established, to ensure some kind of structured and coordinated governance of the “Bio-distretto Cilento”-project. The association is currently coordinated by AIAB Campania.

3. 2013-present: Promotion of the “bio-district” concept as an innovative model for sustainable local development and setting up of the national and international network (IN.N.E.R.)

The claim to become a model for sustainable local development has always been in the spirit of the Bio-distretto Cilento initiative since its early stages. The interesting outcomes produced by the 2009-2012 projects (see paragraph 4.2 for details) significantly contributed to flesh out the “bio-district” concept and to pave the way for the new interesting developments which were to come. And, finally, starting from 2013, a number of good occasions timely emerged for Bio-distretto Cilento to start fulfilling its “role model” ambition.

First of all, Cilento Bio-District was identified and promoted as a model of innovative initiatives within the UN-supported cooperation program IDEASS (Innovation for Development and South-South cooperation) aimed at facilitating the identification, promotion and dissemination of innovations contributing to human development, conservation and valorisation of environmental resources, to poverty and social exclusion reduction. For this purpose, in 2012, a comprehensive report of the Bio-distretto Cilento initiative was published in five different languages on IDEASS website (<http://www.ideassonline.org/innovations/brochureView.php?id=91>).

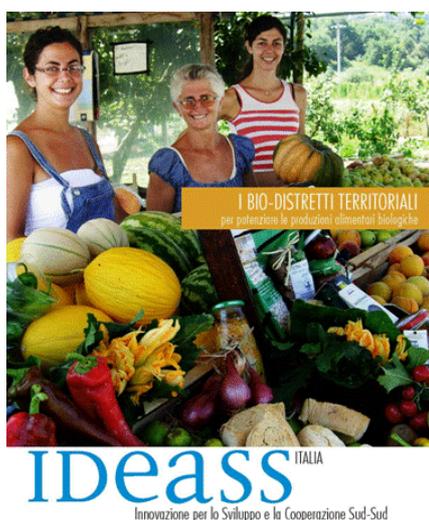


Figure 6: IDEASS report

In 2013, the idea of a national and international network of “bio-districts” and “bio-district-like” initiatives was launched and started to be discussed out of four main considerations:

- a) the rapid emergence of a number of bio-district projects in other Italian regions, inspired by the Cilento experience, most of which established with a strong contribution of AIAB;
- b) the parallel development of other interesting initiatives of territorial development closely combined with organic agriculture in other European countries, like Biovallée project in Drôme Valley (France) and eco-regions in Austria;
- c) the organisation of various exchanges and experience sharing events with Biovallée. These events eventually led to the signing of a formal collaboration agreement between the two initiatives which agreed to exchange experience and collaborate on three specific topics: sustainable tourism, marketing of local organic products, renewable energies;

d) the growing awareness of the interesting potential of the Bio-distretto Cilento experience for context-specific adaptations in other European countries as well as in developing countries.

In December 2014, the International Network of Eco Regions (IN.N.E.R.) was officially established in the framework of an international workshop held in Corchiano (Viterbo, Lazio region, Italy) in the area of the Bio-distretto della Valle Amerina e delle Forre.



Figure 7: Bio-distretto Cilento-Biovallée agreement – event logo



Figure 8: IN.N.E.R. logo

In order to capitalize on the pioneer model experience of Bio-distretto Cilento, AIAB also developed and launched in 2014 the AIAB “Bio-Distretto[®]” label. The label, conceived as a tool of collective territorial promotion, is associated with specific guidelines where the experiences made in the Cilento have been codified into a stepwise approach for the establishment and management of other bio-district initiatives. These are the main steps that were identified:

- create an organizing committee which is in charge to set up first meetings with stakeholders and who is also responsible to conduct a preliminary analysis of territorial needs and resources;
- check on the ground the level of support of the local community and the interest of the local, public and private actors, to have a commitment in the realization of the bio-district;
- jointly define the boundaries of the bio-district;
- formalize, through official acts, the involvement of interested municipalities and other public actors;
- draft, in a participatory way, an action plan on the basis of the preliminary context analysis;
- produce an operational program of activities to be implemented by the promoters of the initiative;
- formulate a communication strategy targeting local actors and external stakeholders.

In the Bio-Distretto[®] labelling guidelines, indications are also provided to regulate the use of the label by different categories of actors.



Figure 9: Bio-Distretto® label

It may be interesting to notice that the Cilento area and the Bio-distretto model were recently (in May-June 2014) discussed in the framework of the ongoing experimentation work for the implementation of the National Strategy for the development of Internal Areas that the Italian Ministry of Economic Development and Finances (Dept. for Economic Development and Cohesion) designed to foster a more effective use of EU, national and regional funds (Barca *et al.* 2014).

Finally, in August 2014, the Campania Regional Authority issued a regional law on the recognition and creation of rural districts, quality agro-food districts and supply chain-based districts. The Cilento Bio-district experience is not explicitly mentioned, though.

4.2 Basic facts

The long-term commitment and the remarkable efforts of various stakeholders in support of the Bio-distretto project have produced, over time, a number of interesting results. These are reported in most publicly available documents on the Bio-distretto Cilento activities. Following some of the basic facts that can be associated to the implementation of the Bio-distretto project shall thus be briefly reported.

First, some important progress has been experienced, first of all, in the development of the organic sector in the Cilento area itself. The **number of organic producers and the extension of organically managed land have increased**, also thanks to the conversion to organics of public farmland managed by some municipalities which have joined the Bio-distretto. Overall, there are currently 450 organic farms and 2,300 hectares, representing, respectively, 23% of total organic operators in Campania region and about 8% of the total organic regional land area in 2013 (SINAB 2014).

Second, the establishment of short supply chain outlets like, organic farmers' markets, organic purchase groups and green public procurement and a number of other initiatives specifically targeting tourists (i.e. bio-beaches, bio-trails, organic menu in local restaurants etc.) have contributed to **create stable market outlets for local organic products**, thus meeting farmers' need for viable market opportunities which was originally the intention of the creation of the Bio-distretto initiative.

Third, through its continued active presence in the area and its multiple initiatives, the Bio-distretto project **contributed to the protection of local foods and traditions as well as of the Mediterranean Diet heritage**.

Fourth, the Bio-distretto Cilento succeeded in creating relatively permanent socio-economic links between inland and coastland areas as well as between agriculture and other promising economic sectors in the region. This is for example the case regarding tourist activities that successfully link

the Bio-distretto Cilento with organic agriculture and local-rural food traditions (through farmers' market, bio-beaches, bio-trails) contributing to **develop off-season tourism** and **multi-functionality** as well as to **increase economic resilience** of (the still few) concerned operators. And even though such initiatives did not really stop rural exodus from marginal areas, their positive impact is widely acknowledged by local operators.

Fifth, as a result of the many initiatives, it is claimed that the **turnover of local organic farms and enterprises** participating to the Bio-distretto activities has **increased by about 20%** on average in these years.

Sixth, the presence of Bio-distretto project - which had among its prior objectives the improvement of the quality of life and of the environment - **contributed to spread the "green economy and lifestyle" culture in the area**. At present, thanks also to the commitment of various municipalities, differentiated waste collection reached 90%. Also the use of renewable energies is increasing and bio-architecture materials and practices are getting experimented with.

Seventh, many of the activities carried out under the Bio-distretto umbrella have managed to **test and introduce innovative solutions to local problems and to broaden horizons with innovative projects** (like those on care farming). Innovation and experimentation are deeply rooted in the vision of the Bio-distretto project which claims to be an open air laboratory for social innovation and is working to establish itself as a "model approach" for sustainable local growth dynamics and quality of life improvement.

This ambition undoubtedly also calls for organised collective action which has started to emerge in various fields in the Bio-distretto area; for instance, farmers are joining forces to more effectively address market issues; municipalities are getting together to better manage service provision, etc.

The Centre for studies "Pietro Ebner", established in the Ceraso municipality (the so-called capital of Bio-distretto) hosts the Bio-distretto legal seat working as a kind of platform for exchange, information and training activities. The place 'physically' represent the Bio-distretti's aspirations to become a reference region for other territories that want to engage in sustainable transitioning to organic agriculture and locally driven development.

Although a lot of interesting anecdotal evidence is relatively easy to find about the positive outcomes that the Bio-distretto initiative has been generating on the ground, **solid, thorough and consistent assessment of such outcomes and long-term impacts remains an important challenge** which IN.N.E.R. has recently taken on board and is willing to address systematically with regard to all Italian bio-distretti and similar eco-regions initiatives. A study recently conducted on the structure, development trends and performances of Bio-distretto Cilento (Zanasi et al. 2015) - and often referred to in the present report - represents a first original exercise in this direction.

4.3 Organizational structure (project phase)

The current stakeholder map of Bio-distretto Cilento is shown in Figure 10.

The role played by some key actors in the development of the initiative has been briefly sketched earlier on, in paragraph 4.1.

Further insights are provided in the following paragraph (5.1) which also describes the relations linking some of the main actors.

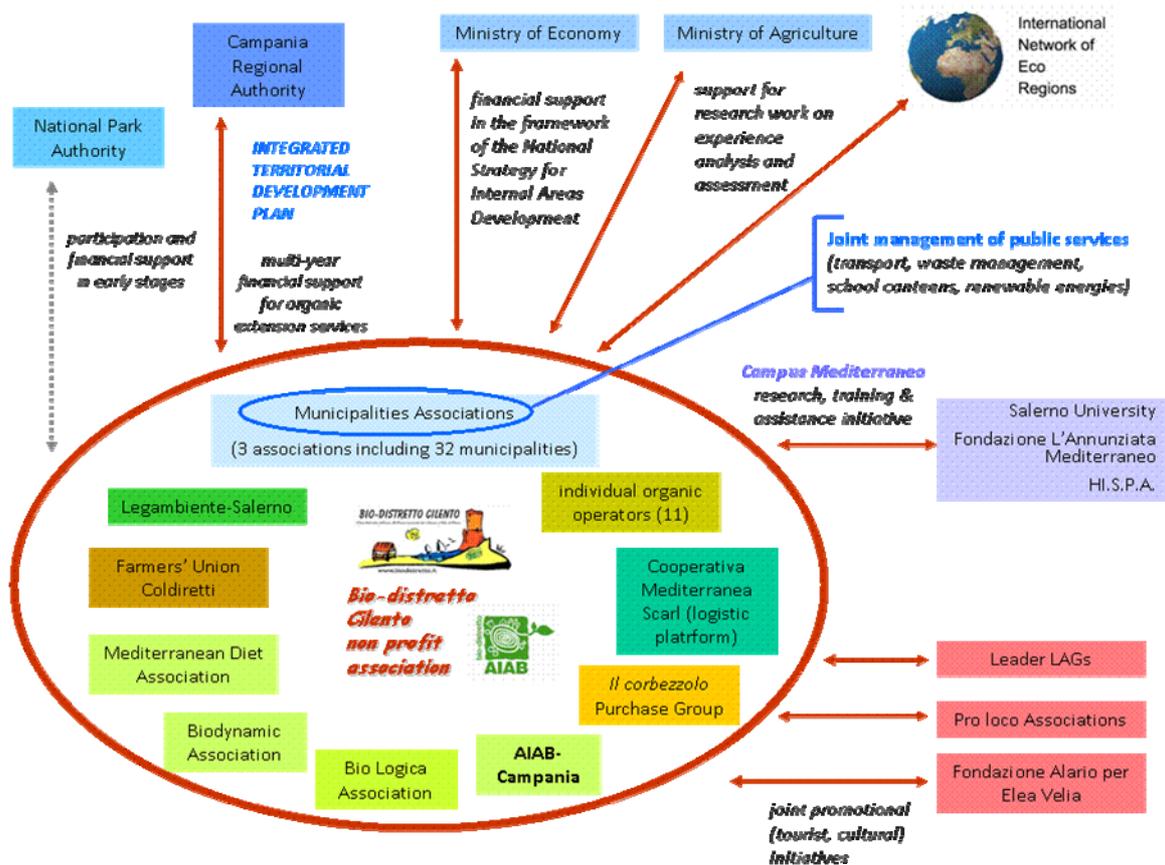


Figure 10: Bio-distretto Cilento stakeholder map

5. Analytical perspectives

5.1 Organization and governance

The setting up of a permanent network and a continued exchange linking all interested (public and private) stakeholders is a mainstay principle of the Bio-distretto project and, after a decade of efforts in this direction, quite an important achievement of the core group which has worked at the project, making sure in these years that decisions were taken through a broad participatory process and therefore shared with concerned parties.

Apart from the National Park Authority, many of the founding actors are now included in the core group gathered in the **Bio-distretto Cilento non-profit Association** which is currently composed of various private and public stakeholders, namely:

- 32 municipalities gathered into 3 associations corresponding to the three main geographical areas of the bio-district, Cilento coastland, Alburni mountains, Valle di Diano plains
- Associazione Italiana per l'Agricoltura Biologica (AIAB), Campania branch, which is also coordinating the association's activities
- Associazione Bio-Logica
- Associazione Biodinamica

- Legambiente (one of the most important Italian environmental associations), Salerno branch
- Associazione per la Dieta Mediterranea
- Coldiretti (one of the most important farmers' unions in Italy)
- Cooperativa Mediterranea (established out of the Login-BIO project and mainly acting as the local logistic platform for the short supply chain)
- Il Corbezzolo organic purchase group
- 11 individual organic operators

Since no specific budget is allocated at the regional/national level for bio-districts, the members of the **Bio-distretto Cilento non-profit Association** directly contribute to the management costs of the association with their own budgets. Financial resources needed to carry out Bio-distretto's activities have, up to now, derived from different projects (as described in paragraph 4.1).

A **multi-level governance and bottom-up approach** is adopted in decision-making concerning Bio-distretto Cilento.

The *Bio-distretto Cilento non-profit Association* mainly focuses on the communication and promotion of the initiative as well as on planning and fundraising the actions aimed to keep it running in the future. It has been established to play a fundamental catalysing role in the development of the project.

The members of the Association represent the interests of the different stakeholders living and working in the area, whose specific needs are gathered, discussed and taken into consideration in the drafting of the Bio-distretto development strategies. As a result, an **"Integrated Territorial Development Plan"** is being finalised to be proposed to the Regional Authority. On the basis of available funds, negotiations will be made and priorities set for future action, the implementation of which will be delegated to municipalities. The Plan could be funded through different operational programs and through different axes, within one operational program. Besides various sector interventions, a number of horizontal actions are also functionally planned, essentially targeting human capital enhancement, local mobility and transport, services to local population and enterprises, technological transfer and IT diffusion.

Financial support to some specific activities is also provided by the Ministry of Economy and Finances and by the Ministry of Agriculture.

It is interesting to notice that to concretely improve life conditions of residents, Bio-distretto *municipalities* gathered in 3 associations are currently working at creating a joint management system for some public services like transport, waste management and green public procurement. The organisation of a more rational and integrated provision of public services represents a critical urgent need in the area. Moreover, such collaborative practices are very much appreciated in an area like Cilento, where competition between municipalities and between institutions is quite a common circumstance.

AIAB continues to play a crucial permanent bridging role between the "core institutional group" and "the field" where activities are carried out and new ideas and initiatives continuously emerge.

The *National Park Authority* played an important part in the initial phases of the Bio-distretto project; it was one of the institutions to sign the 2009 MoU and actively took part in some short supply chain initiatives as well as in the testing of a participatory organic group certification scheme. It also supported the “Seed Savers” project through which a group of farmers located in the park area gathered many ancient local varieties of cereals and who are now producing pasta. The Park fully supported the establishment of the mill and the pasta-making plant.

Unfortunately, later on, the National Park Authority sharply reduced its contribution to Bio-distretto activities, also due to serious internal management problems. Nowadays, the National Park seems unable to play the leadership role that many would expect it to have in the area, as also suggested in a recent report produced in the framework of the ongoing work being carried out for the implementation of the Italian National Strategy for Internal Areas (Comitato Nazionale Aree Interne 2014). The document - essentially presenting the results of a recent exploratory mission carried out in Campania region by a delegation of the National Committee for Internal Areas - points out that, although the National Park Authority still clearly constitutes an important reference institution, at present, it is not strong enough to take the pivotal leadership role for the future development of the Cilento area where no clear institutional leadership appears to exist at all. This contributes to explain also the current difficult relation between the National Park and the Bio-distretto initiative.

However, despite the current lack of institutional collaboration, in principle the presence of a protected area (like the National Park), with its rules in terms of natural resources management, clearly represents an important asset for the Bio-distretto: it indirectly fosters the adoption of organic farming methods and helps to protect local natural capital. At the same time, it must be also acknowledged that the relations between the National Park Authority and farmers are always quite tense, since farmers are not very happy with the management rules imposed by the Park (for example one big conflicting issue being the shooting of wild black pigs that often devastate crops).

Networking and innovation are indeed at the heart of the Bio-distretto concept which presents itself as an open-field permanent laboratory where ideas and projects for territorial sustainable development are welcomed, shared and supported.

In this course of action, the Bio-distretto Association has also recently signed a MoU with a group of partners, namely Salerno University, Fondazione L’Annunziata Mediterraneo and HISPA (Scuola di Alta Formazione per la Pubblica Amministrazione di Aree Protette) to establish the “Campus Mediterraneo”, a centre for training, research and technical assistance services supporting innovative territorial development processes in the area.

Moreover, the Bio-distretto Cilento also has collaborative exchanges with some “Local Action Groups (LAGs)” established in the area through the EU-funded LEADER programme and with local “Pro loco” associations mainly concerned with the promotion of tourist and cultural activities.

Concerning relations among Bio-distretto farmers, competition undoubtedly exists between big organic operators who work in the same branches (for example olive oil). Smaller farmers instead tend to join forces and cooperate, at least to meet common needs, like for the purchase of technical inputs and the selling of their organic products.

No specific troubles have been experienced so far in the relationship between organic and conventional farmers. Rather, both take part together in the various training initiatives organised by the Bio-distretto project (field days, seminars on technical and regulatory topics). Undoubtedly, being the Bio-distretto mostly located in a protected area (where agro-chemicals and other harmful practices are banned) facilitates the convergence of farmers' interests and behaviours. Also, organic and conventional farmers have different market outlets and strategies: the former are mostly involved in short supply chain and direct marketing initiatives, the latter mainly target conventional retail outlets.

5.2 Business and management logics

Short supply chains, permanently linking local organic operators with (regular/local and seasonal/tourist) consumers, are a key feature of the Bio-distretto Cilento.

Almost the totality of organic food produced in the Bio-distretto is consumed, sold and processed locally. This **prevalence of local market outlets** is often proudly described as a valuable choice, but, in a more critical perspective, it may not necessarily be always a deliberate marketing strategy for all operators, but rather the sole option due to the lack of adequate competences and resources to explore other even more distant but more profitable market opportunities. This issue is currently being discussed in Cilento and in other existing bio-districts areas and is likely to represent an important field of research and action in the near future.

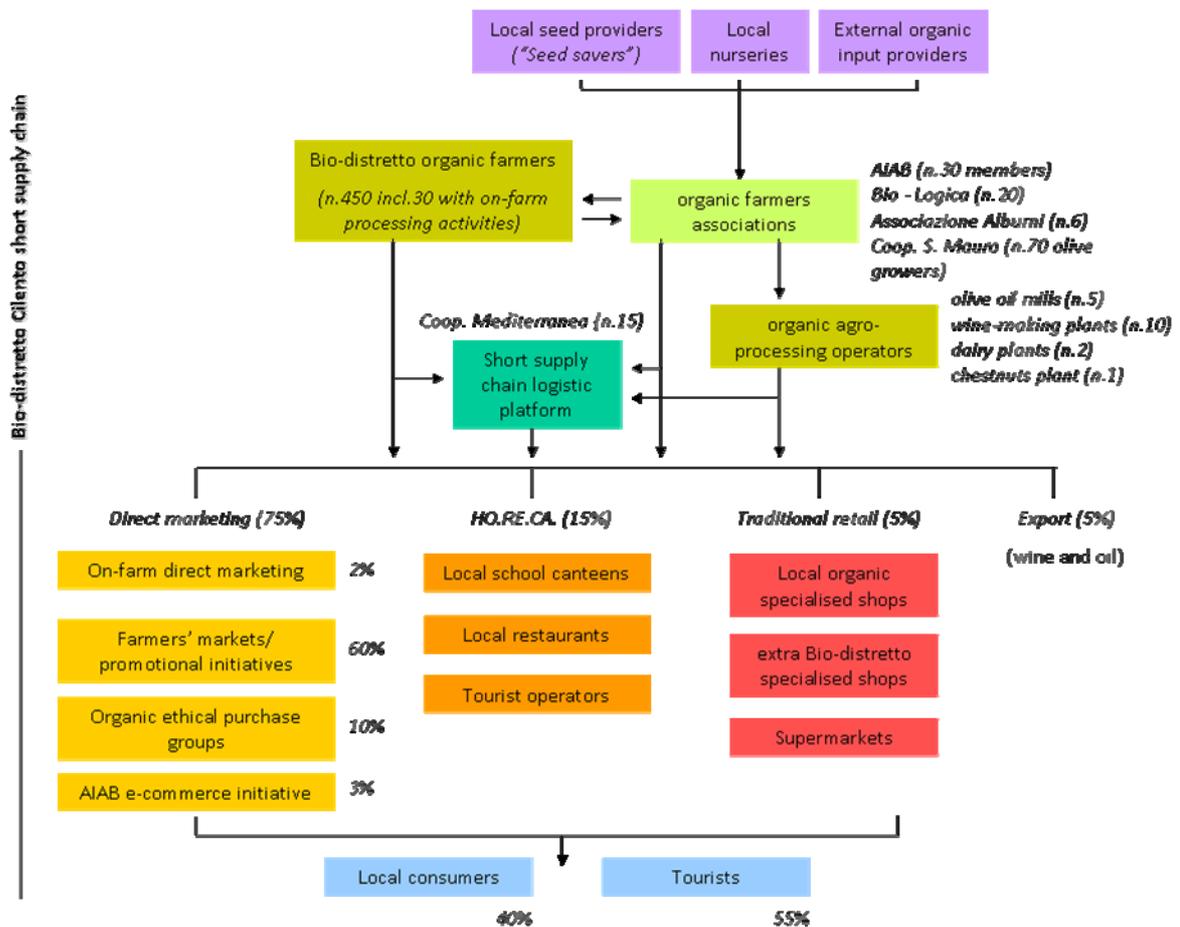


Figure 11: Bio-distretto Cilento organic supply chain

The backbone of the Bio-distretto farming system is made of small/medium **family farms** (5 ha on average); chestnuts, vineyards, olive and fruit trees are distinctive traits of the beautiful hills, plains and terraced landscapes of the area where also pulses and vegetables are grown.

Approximately $\frac{1}{3}$ of all organic producers are grouped in **associations and cooperatives** through which they collectively market their produce. Through the associations, farmers also collectively buy the external organic inputs which are not locally available. In general terms, the quantities of such external inputs are quite small, most producers prepare themselves the inputs they need on the farm and source seeds and seedlings from local nurseries and from the “Seed Savers” initiative. Those farmers who are members of AIAB-Campania receive regular technical assistance services through a seven-year programme funded by the Regional Authority.

A logistic platform, established also with the support of the Login-BIO project to specifically support local short supply chains, is also operating. This initiative contributed for instance to the creation of a “basket”, gathering a number of local top-quality agro-food products, which are collectively marketed on various occasions, helping especially small producers in remote areas to sell their organic products. The basket is quite diversified and includes pulses, vegetables, various cheese types, wine, olive oil, chestnuts, anchovies, the Cilento white fig, black pork and black goat products.



Figure 12: Bio-distretto Cilento products

There are about 30 operators with small on-farm **processing** activities (mostly jams); 10 wine-making plants, 5 olive oil mills, 2 dairy plants, 1 chestnut processing plant.

Most organic products, about 75% of the total volumes, are sold via **direct marketing initiatives**. The most important of those are *farmer markets*; also, organic ethical *purchase groups* represent a quite established channel and some small volumes are also sold *directly on the farm* and through the AIAB *e-commerce* website.

The HORECA sector (hotel, restaurant and catering companies) accounts for about 15% of all organic products sold in the region: school canteens in four municipalities provide 100% organic menu; organic foods are also being regularly served in 20 local restaurants and on various holiday farms.

Moreover, organic products are consumed in the framework of various **promotional activities** essentially targeting tourists. This is for example the case of “*bio-beaches*” events which are organic and typical food tasting events organised in summer time on the beaches of the crowded coastland of Cilento. Municipalities of inland areas buy products from local farmers and operators and distribute them to tourists on the beaches to make them appreciate the territory and its products. About 10 beach clubs are involved in such initiatives. Tourists and local consumers can also visit local organic farms and other interesting spots located along the so-called “*bio-trails*”, eco-tourist routes, promoted by local tourist operators, connecting the coastal area with the internal rural zones and specifically guiding tourists through various places of interest (farms, guest-houses, villages, certified public lands, sites of high environmental and socio-cultural interest, interesting and innovative enterprises).

To promote organic sales and eco-tourist activities, two specific guides on farmers markets and bio-beaches initiatives (<http://www.biodistretto.it/images/biospiagge.pdf>) as well as a Bio-distretto Cilento Guide (a booklet including information about bio-district initiatives, organic farms, direct selling points, restaurants and specialised shops with a description of the available products and services) were published in 2009 (<http://www.biodistretto.it/images/guida.pdf>). The publication of an updated version of such guides is scheduled in the near future.



Figure 13: Bio-Distretto Cilento guides

It is interesting to notice that not only was Bio-distretto able to target the huge tourist population crowding Cilento coastland in summertime, the project also contributed to develop various off-season tourist activities, mainly in internal rural areas, acting as an important driver for multi-functionality and indirectly increasing economic resilience of these operators.



Farmers markets



Bio-beaches



Bio-trails



Educational activities with schools

Figure 14: Bio-distretto Cilento marketing, recreational and educational initiatives

On average, organic products sold locally through short supply chains do normally not get a high premium price. Actually, prices for organics are reportedly pretty similar to conventional products. However, as previously mentioned, farmers are sure to be able to sell all their produce, which represents a very valuable guarantee for them.

Some small quantities (5% of the total volumes) are sold, at much higher prices, through the **traditional retail sector**, mostly in the three local organic specialised shops. Even more marginal volumes are sold in specialised shops and supermarkets outside the Biodistretto, except for chestnuts, sold in large quantities to one customer in Emilia Romagna. A few big agro-processing operators **export** olive oil and wine (5% of the total).

As anticipated earlier, organic sales are not the only and sometimes also not the most important source of income for many organic operators of Bio-distretto Cilento. Many of them have turned their business into **multifunctional farms**, including tourist services and educational activities, thus adding value to organic farming and generating (still a few) gratifying job opportunities for their families and some local people.

A rough estimate suggests that while in big farms income which derives from these complementary activities accounts for 30% of the total farm income, in small farms it can reach 50% and in medium farms with agro-tourist activities even 70%.

5.3 Trade-off between quality differentiation, volume and economic performance

According to the above mentioned recent study on the structure, development trends and performances of Bio-distretto Cilento (Zanasi et al. 2015), Bio-distretto Cilento is still in an early stage of development.

The activities carried out and the important steps implemented so far have effectively supported the take-off phase of the project which however has not yet been able to involve large parts of the local population so far. Also the required critical mass of produced and marketed volumes has

not been reached yet. Such circumstances contribute to explain the project's still limited impact in terms of income generated in the area.

At the same time, this also emphasizes the promising growth potential of the initiative. In the future, the fulfilment of such potential will inevitably bring the challenge of the trade-off between quality differentiation, volume and economic performance. But for now, this does not really represent a critical issue.

5.4 Communication of values and qualities

In most recent documents, the Bio-distretto Cilento gets promoted through three key quite complementary messages:

- **the Bio-distretto Cilento is an organic value chain with a strong territorialized nature**, the key elements contributing to this “territorialized nature” being: *i)* the strong links of the Bio-distretto project with the local history and environment; *ii)* the broad involvement of relevant local stakeholders; *iii)* the adoption of a participatory bottom-up approach in decision-making; *iv)* the focus on short supply chain development (incl. input sourcing); *v)* the adoption of a collective label (AIAB Bio-Distretto® label).
- **the Bio-distretto claims to be a model approach and a laboratory for sustainable social innovation;**
- **the Bio-distretto Cilento is defined as a “multi-vocational” model of development based on the multi-faceted potential of a territory.** Such a potential is deeply entrenched into the territory's history, culture and natural resources and their interconnected evolutionary processes. The bio-distretto concept caters for society's increasing concern for resource scarcity. It conveniently builds on the need to pursue economies of scope instead of exclusively focussing on economies of scale, which though remain crucial for the bio-distretto to reach the critical mass required to access additional profitable markets. Also, the bio-distretto concept conveniently contributes to rethink and rebalance rural-urban relations.

Following Nicoletti's graphical conceptualisation showed in Figure 15, **the bio-district is depicted as a gravitational field generating an attractive force able to accelerate and drive the development of a territory**, given the fact that some pre-conditions are met, namely: *i)* the territory has some distinct “identity” traits which foster aggregation and contribute to create its specific gravitational field. The territory is therefore not defined by geographical borders, rather it is conceived as a node indefinitely connected with the global world through synapses; *ii)* this node is a network of networks deeply ingrained in the “glocal” concept; each enterprise in the territory can rely on collaboration of other operators and applies Anderson's “long tail” concept⁴; *iii)* shared, aggregated knowledge becomes a “common” that everybody can capitalise upon; *iv)* the international recognitions (like the UNESCO ones awarded to Cilento) contribute to create trust and confidence in the local aggregation capacity and to build up a vision to develop the territory's potential (Nicoletti, pers. communication).

Such considerations can contribute to explain the reason why Bio-distretto Cilento claims to be an increasingly dense network of best practices rather than simply a sum of individual success stories.

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Long_tail

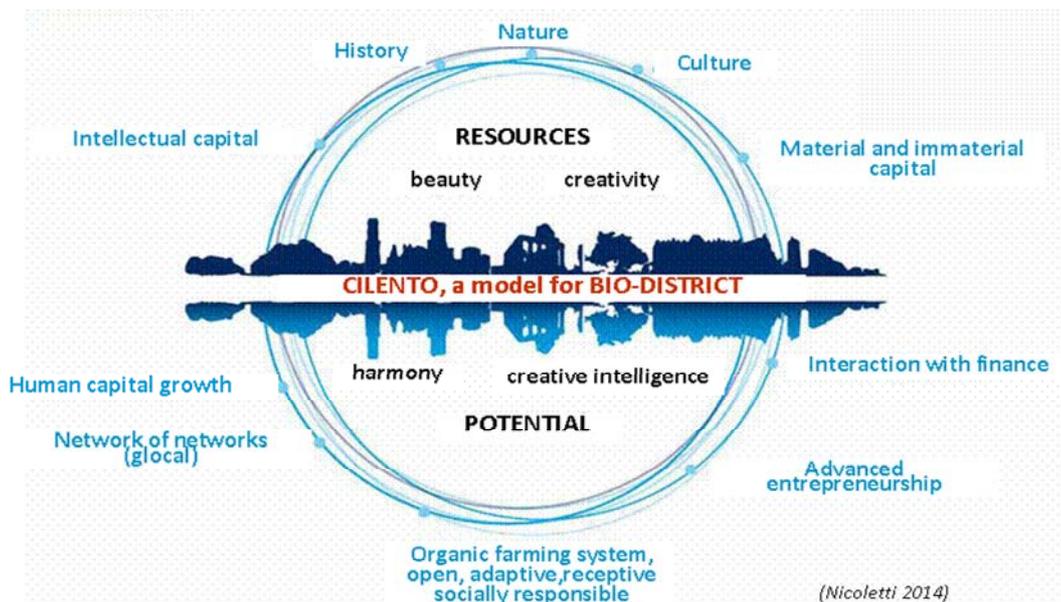


Figure 15: Cilento, a model for BIO-DISTRICT

5.5 Quality mediation

In the same study mentioned earlier on (Zanasi et al. 2015), the specific values and objectives driving the Bio-distretto Cilento project have been systematically analysed in relation to the activities carried out in these years and the resulting outcomes, as described by key informants.

The results of this interesting exercise, briefly reported in this chapter, appear to suggest a substantially positive evaluation of the project in terms of coherence between underpinning values, declared objectives and actions undertaken.

The Bio-distretto Cilento was primarily established to popularize and diffuse organic farming practices and mix farming systems in the area as well as to encourage a constructive co-existence between organic and conventional agriculture. In this respect, the initiative appears to have been quite successful.

Making life easier for organic farmers through the *simplification of organic certification* was also listed among the aims of the project. Group certification was tested in the framework of a national project, with good results, but future, broad implementation of this approach will clearly depend on next developments of EU and national regulations for organics.

Two further core principles of the Bio-distretto Cilento concept are undoubtedly the promotion of *food sovereignty* and of *direct producer-consumer relations* through alternative food networks, which explains the reason why various activities have been carried in these fields. With mixed results, though. Many direct marketing initiatives, like purchase groups and farmers markets, have been established and green public procurement has been actively promoted and launched in the area. However, the participation of local population remains limited; self-provisioning, which is still quite diffused in the area, contributes to keep the local demand relatively low. The development of green public procurement suffers from discontinued and insufficient local supply. Therefore, summer tourists and visitors remain the main buyers, thus, the main target groups of various initiatives.

In more general terms, sustainable territorial development is conceptually at the heart of Bio-distretto Cilento's project, progressively built on a multidimensional vision of development. Multifunctional agriculture has an important place in this vision. And sustainable rural tourism is only the most obvious diversification path for Cilento farmers that have also been involved in other, more socially innovative ventures like care farming, providing health, social or educational services for various groups of vulnerable people (i.e. children, old people, prisoners, disabled persons). Many of such initiatives have been established in the bio-district area, with promising results.

5.6 Resilience

Considering the distinctive features and the relatively recent development trajectory of the Bio-distretto Cilento, in the future, the resilience of the initiative will primarily depend on the internal capacity to adequately tackle important challenges. Also, continued external institutional support would be critically needed.

In this regard, various critical points can be identified in the Bio-distretto initiative of which the most important issues are briefly presented in the following.

- a. **No continued long-term funding** has so far supported the Bio-distretto project. Funding has been fragmented and has relied on different sources with different implementing procedures and timing. As a result, long-term, coordinated planning of the activities has been extremely difficult.
- b. **Heavy reliance on voluntary work** in carrying out most of the activities; voluntary work represents an extremely valuable resource and has played a crucial role so far in the construction of the Bio-distretto project. However, voluntary workers often change and the consequent need to train new people makes it difficult to use voluntary work in a consistent and effective manner for long-term action.
- c. **Frequent turnover of people in decision-making positions** - mainly for political reasons - in the 32 municipalities of the Bio-distretto has hampered so far efforts made for a medium-long-term planning exercise of the Bio-distretto initiative.
- d. Many small organic producers struggle to stay in the organic certification system for financial and paperwork reasons. Group certification schemes (that have been successfully tested in the Bio-distretto) may provide a solution to such problems but the **lack of a regulatory framework on organic group certification** still constitutes a big problem in this field (which might be possibly addressed in the new EU organic regulation currently under discussion).
- e. The innovative value and the promising potential of the Bio-distretto project is really fully appreciated only by those people and institutions that have been directly involved in these years in its construction. Apart of this group, **knowledge and appreciation of the initiative remains scarce in the wider local community** (see also point g in this list).
- f. **No deep, shared and structured knowledge exists about the outcomes and the impacts** of the Bio-distretto project; a solid, thorough and consistent assessment of outcomes and impacts produced on the ground is yet to be produced and represents a crucial course of action for the near future.

- g. Valuable territorial planning experience and competences exist in the Cilento area where, however, the past programming periods (especially 2007-2013) resulted in a **fragmented landscape of different (small-scale) interventions**. More work is therefore needed to foster joint planning processes aimed to draft a shared strategy for the future of the area. On one hand, the Bio-distretto project is one of various interesting, innovative and promising initiatives realised in the area which, however, appear to be still perceived, at least by external observers, as relatively isolated and partial efforts (Comitato Nazionale Aree Interne 2014). On the other hand, it should be acknowledged that the multi-level and multi-actor governance adopted by Bio-distretto Cilento in the decision-making process may well represent in the near future a powerful drive for aggregation and further collaboration among local actors.
- h. The **observed prevalence of local market outlets** in Bio-distretto Cilento may not necessarily be a deliberate marketing strategy for all operators, but rather displays the **only option due to the lack of adequate competences and resources to explore other, more distant market opportunities**.

6. Future orientation

As declared in public speeches and face-to-face interviews, the key actors of Bio-distretto Cilento appear to be committed to take the following steps to support the future development of the initiative:

- a. **Enlarge the Bio-distretto membership and develop new fruitful partnerships.** So far 32 out of 95 municipalities have joined the Bio-distretto. Increasing the number of municipalities actively participating to the project undoubtedly represents a strategic course of action in the near future. Equally important will be for Bio-distretto Cilento the development of new local, national and international alliances.
- b. **Further foster institutional collaboration in the Bio-distretto area.** Currently the 32 municipalities are split into 3 associations which are sitting in the Bio-distretto Cilento Association board. The 3 associations represent the specific needs and interests of the three different geographical areas composing the bio-district territory - Cilento coastland, Alburni mountains and Val di Diano plains - and contributing to its beauty and multi-faceted potential with distinctive natural and socio-economic features. Grouping the three existing associations of municipalities into one represents a critical challenge for the future.
- c. **Raise funds for and implement the Integrated Territorial Development Plan.** The recently drafted Integrated Territorial Plan includes the following actions:
- develop and innovate local production systems and supply chains (agro-food, handicrafts, industrial)
 - develop the renewable energy supply chain
 - develop sustainable tourism initiatives
 - protect and adequately manage landscape, soil and (animal and vegetal) biodiversity
 - enhance the cultural capital and artistic heritage of the territory
 - improve the access to basic public services

- support social inclusion of specific disadvantaged groups of people
- encourage the diffusion of legal practices and social inclusion in marginal areas of the territory
- favour urban regeneration through service provision and the creation of inclusive spaces for the community
- add value to fishery production and traditions and short supply chains
- diversify local economy in connection with the current changes that the fishery sector is currently undergoing

Financial support for the implementation of the Integrated Territorial Development Plan is to be primarily derived from EU structural funds managed by the Campania Regional Authority. At the same time, the Bio-distretto Cilento Association is exploring additional and complementary funding frameworks where the bio-district concept and experience can fit and provide satisfactory solutions to specific needs.

- d. **Further add value to and develop market for Bio-distretto products and services**, by broadening targeted market and working at reaching a convenient balance between local and external market opportunities, incorporating innovation into products and services, further develop the downstream steps of the supply chain.
- e. **Encourage the adoption of AIAB Bio-Distretto® label** by other bio-district initiatives under development on the national territory.
- f. **Consolidate and expand the international network of bio-distretti IN.N.E.R.** On the occasion of the Corchiano meeting in December 2014, IN.N.E.R. was officially established with the following objectives:
 - develop a coordination platform for an innovative development of bio-distretti through needs, experience and knowledge and best practice sharing;
 - fully understand and make good use of the value attached to the diverse, specific “identities” characterising bio-districts and eco-regions initiatives around the world while, at the same time, promote joint actions for common goals;
 - setting up a permanent network of partnerships between existing bio-districts and eco-regions with the ultimate goal to build up a consortium to submit project proposal in the framework of international cooperation programmes;
 - pro-actively contribute to the design of regional development policies at the national and international level to support bio-district initiatives.

To pursue such objectives a strategy combining some deepening work on topics of high common interest with a cross-cutting horizontal approach is to be followed.

In this regard, the IN.N.E.R.’s internal governance mechanism has been approved, five topics have been identified and the corresponding working groups established: [1] agro-food systems; [2] sustainable tourism; [3] energy saving and renewable energy sources; [4] social inclusion; [5] local short supply chains.

One final consideration to broaden the analytical perspective beyond the pioneer, interesting experience of Bio-distretto Cilento.

It should be clear by now that the very notion of “bio-district” is inherently hybrid by nature. Similarly to a “rural district”, a “bio-district” aims to provide a conceptual and operational framework for sustainable territorial transitions. At the same time, like in a “quality agro-food district”, the bio-district project is primarily concerned with the development of a specific quality agro-food segment, namely, organic agriculture. The development of the local organic value chain is therefore pursued with a clear territorial approach, with the intent of creating something like a *filière territorialisée*.

So far, with a few notable exceptions (Pugliese, Antonelli 2015), this hybrid nature has been hardly captured by Italian Regional Authorities, most of which have regulated the establishment and management of “rural” and “quality agro-food” districts but have not so far paid much attention to the organic thematic variation of the agricultural district concept.

At the same time, the bio-district idea continues to attract the interest of public institutions and private actors for its multidimensional vision and multi-stakeholder approach to local development. Now, also considering some analysts’ warning about the Italian district-mania (Chiappino, Toccaceli 2013), further critical evaluative work will be needed to gather evidence proving that the bio-district can be an effective governance tool, a viable income-generating option and an important driving force of social innovation in different areas.

Bio-distretto Cilento and the other Italian bio-districts will present their experience and discuss future prospects during the International Week of Bio-districts to be held at EXPO Milan on 1-6 September 2015.

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