



PON Città Metropolitane 2014-2020

Servizio di valutazione indipendente a favore dell'Autorità di Gestione del PON Città Metropolitane 2014 – 2020 con riguardo agli interventi dell'Asse 3 del PON Metro

Report Finale Indagine n. 2 – Analisi del processo di attuazione degli interventi di sostegno all'attivazione di nuovi servizi in aree degradate finanziati dall'Azione 3.3.1 dell'Asse 3 del PON Metro

[Versione in inglese dell'Executive Summary](#)

Regolamento (UE) n. 1303/2013 - articoli 72, 122 e Allegato XII
Regolamento (UE) n. 1011/2014- articolo 3 e Allegato III

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of Survey 2 was to analyse the implementation process of projects aimed at activating new services in degraded areas financed by Action 3.3.1 of the National Operational Programme on Metropolitan Cities 2014-2020 (NOP Metro). The analysis included the assessment of the projects' strengths and weaknesses, their effectiveness in achieving the objectives, the level of integration with other Actions the Programme, the main results achieved, and lessons learned from the implementation of the interventions.

The **methodological approach** comprised a quantitative analysis of the financial, procedural, and physical progress of Action 3.3.1, a mapping of the projects implemented by the different Metropolitan Cities, and an on-field survey. The latter consisted primarily in direct interviews with the main representatives of Action 3.3.1 in the 13 Metropolitan Cities that activated this Action (the Intermediate Body of the NOP Metro, the Departments of the Municipal Administrations, the Technical Assistance and, where necessary, any other players involved in the implementation of the projects) aimed at assessing the results achieved and the implementation and governance mechanisms adopted. A network analysis was also carried out, functional to the assessment of the networks activated by some Metropolitan Cities.

The monitoring data on the progress of the Programme showed that, as of October 2022 (update date), the 13 Metropolitan Cities that activated Action 3.3.1 recorded a **total financial commitment of 45.2 million euros**, corresponding to 73.3% of the available funds. The developed Regions committed almost 80% of the available funds, driven by Florence, Genoa and Turin, which used most of the available resources; in the less developed Regions, the commitment capacity stood at around 69%, with higher percentages in Bari, Catania, Naples and Palermo. Spending capacity, measured in terms of payments validated by the Internal Operations Manager relative to the funds available, was 55.7%, while certified expenses corresponded to 43.2% of the funds (equal to 26.7 million euro), confirming the time gap that is traditionally found between commitments and expenditure.

From the beginning of the Programme, a **total of 122 projects were launched** and many of them were implemented according to the modality "*a regia*", i.e. projects that provide for the granting of contributions to various beneficiaries, typically Third Sector organizations, each of which is responsible for the implementation of its project and for the related administrative procedures (but

the Public Administration is responsible for the overall coordination)¹. From a time-related point of view, over a third of the projects (43 in absolute terms) were initiated before 2019. During that year, 24 additional projects were launched but in 2020 there was a substantial reduction, mainly due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Year 2021 saw a significant recovery, with 40 new projects launched, while in 2022 the number of new interventions saw another reduction (7 projects over a period of about nine months)

The projects provided services to over 132,000 people, of whom almost 90% lived in the Metropolitan Cities of Central-Northern Italy. This good performance allowed to exceed, also in the less developed Regions, the target values defined in the Programme for indicator IO16a, which measures the number of people involved in the activities. Cagliari, the only city located in a transition Region was however still far from the goal, as it had experienced delays in the start of its planned intervention.

The surveys conducted in recent years, aimed at quantifying the result indicator IR18c, which measures the proportion of disadvantaged recipients involved in the activities of the networks who, one year after the end of the intervention, had exited from the condition of exclusion, recorded values constantly higher than the expected target. **This underlines the contribution of the initiatives activated in the territories in improving the context in degraded areas.**

As regards the type of projects activated, it seems possible to identify **two different intervention paradigms**. On the one hand, some Metropolitan Cities, mainly in the Northern Regions, interpreted Action 3.3.1 as a strengthening of the networks between public and private entities through services focused on social innovation, giving plenty of space to Third Sector organizations. These initiatives involved a large number of recipients and often used public calls for proposals for the granting of contributions to Third Sector entities. On the other hand, Metropolitan Cities located mainly in Southern Regions, financed more "traditional" projects, which provided services addressed at specific target groups and where the Third Sector organizations act as service providers (through competitive bidding processes or as accredited local entities).

The projects implemented in the **developed Regions** appear to be characterized, in general, by **higher levels of complexity**, understood as the activation of a variety of services within the same operation. **In these regions, services aimed at reactivating and strengthening empowerment prevailed, rather than specific interventions to support employment**, which instead found a

¹ The other category refers to projects "a titolarità", i.e. implemented directly by the Local Administration, which therefore is also the beneficiary of the funding.

specific **intervention niche in the Less Developed Regions**, where they accounted for a high share in the total number of measures implemented. In both types of regions, however, a significant proportion of the projects concerned the creation of physical spaces, understood as a **real protection against the phenomena of marginality and delinquency** that often characterize degraded areas.

In general, the **success of the projects** can be primarily ascribed to their **responsiveness to the needs of the territory**, which was made possible thanks to the **collaboration between the various entities** involved in the planning or actively operating on the territory. Their knowledge and ability to interpret the local context allowed to identify its peculiarities, to precisely define the areas to be addressed, and, during the design of the projects, to "tailor" the interventions to the actual needs of the local communities.

On the **implementation** side, the **previous experience and knowledge of the entities involved in the management of complex projects**, together with the ability of the Administrations to support less experienced operators, proved to be particularly important for the feasibility of the projects. This assistance was crucial because it allowed Third Sector organizations to accomplish even the complicated administrative and management activities, especially those connected to the financial reporting. It should be noted, however, that due to the long times needed by the Administrations to reimburse the payments, the less structured organizations often encountered difficulties in covering the expenses.

Despite the difficulties, the Metropolitan Cities showed a **good capacity to rapidly respond to the changes in the context and the new needs generated by the Covid-19 health emergency**. They were able to adapt the interventions without changing their nature and quickly organised themselves to carry out the project activities, where possible, in online mode. However, in some cases, the pandemic forced the total, albeit temporary, suspension of project activities, resulting in significant delays in the implementation of certain interventions.

Other projects instead experienced **slowdowns during implementation due to delays in the renovation of buildings intended to house the planned services**. The works on the buildings had in fact been conceived under Action 4.2.1 as functional to Action 3.3.1, but many areas experienced a temporal asynchrony between the two Actions, which also delayed the implementation of projects financed under Action 3.3.1. The delays in Action 4.2.1, mainly due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and the consequent "chain" effects on Action 3.3.1 were more frequent in the Southern Regions than in the Northern ones, highlighting how the former are still less equipped to face certain types of difficulties.

As regards the complementarity of Action 3.3.1 with other Actions, in some cities there was an **important synergy with Action 3.1.1** (Integrated actions to fight housing poverty), mainly because it facilitated the identification of potential recipients and allowed, thanks to the multidimensional assessment of the needs of the users taken in charge with Action 3.1.1, to better address the different types of services envisaged with Action 3.3.1. On the contrary, the complementarity with other Axes resulted sporadic and limited exclusively to Action 1.1.1, within the implementation of online platforms.

Among the main results of Action 3.3.1 of the NOP Metro, it is possible to include, firstly, the fact that a significant part of the projects introduced elements of discontinuity and innovation compared to previous products, services, or models. These initiatives embraced the paradigm of social innovation, in line with the Programme's theory that aims to support the *"activation for inclusive purposes of the civil society and the social economy in the search for new ideas (products, services, and models) that meet social needs more effectively than existing public practices and services, while also creating new relationships and collaborations"*.

The level of complexity and the degree of accomplishment of these initiatives vary considerably and appear to be significantly related to the expertise of the different Metropolitan Cities on the subject: **social innovation** is, in fact, **the outcome of a gradual process**, which step by step leads to the construction of a different *modus operandi* and a new system of relations in the reference territory.

The main elements of **innovation and discontinuity** refer to the consolidation of various interconnected projects into a unified strategy (also possible thanks to a greater availability of resources), the experimentation of initiatives targeted at specific groups (such as detainees, families involved in foster care experiences and identified as vulnerable by social services, etc.) and/or models of territorial intervention. Another element consisted in the use of cultural activities as a lever for social inclusion and for combating educational and cultural poverty. In terms of process/method innovation, a first innovation was the issuing of complex calls for tenders, which envisaged several consecutive steps in the implementation of interventions, according to a logic of supporting individual citizens, informal groups of citizens, or Third-Sector organizations in the implementation of activities and proximity services for the benefit of the local community. A second particularly innovative approach, experimented in some cities (Milan, Venice, Turin), was the civic crowdfunding, which, in the words of an interviewee, becomes *"an element of democratization of public policies"* as it is the citizens who, through their contributions, choose which projects will be funded by the Public Administration.

However, it is worth noting that even the Metropolitan Cities that did not strictly adhere to the paradigm of social innovation have, in any case, seized the opportunity of funding under Action 3.3.1 of the NOP Metro 2014-20 to introduce *elements of innovation and discontinuity compared to existing practices and services in their territories*, creating a "**relative innovation**" in their respective contexts.

In general, the possibility of **further stimulating the introduction of elements of discontinuity and innovation** with respect to existing policies and practices appears to be linked to the *ability to listen and to identify needs*, also through the *development of co-design practices* (in compliance with Legislative Decree 117/2017 reforming the Third Sector and the guidelines set out in the Decree of the Minister of Labour and Social Policies no.72/2021 of 31/03/2021). Further margins for innovation in certain territories could involve the introduction of *impact finance* elements, moving beyond old models by using *impact assessment tools*, and embracing a more *multidimensional and community-oriented care*. Finally, capacity building processes should be launched in a systematic and structured way, involving both the Public Administration (which may not yet be fully prepared to plan and manage complex social innovation processes) and the potential beneficiaries (Third-Sector Organizations), with the aim of achieving a comprehensive systemic integration.

Closely linked to the social innovation paradigm is also the propensity to involve citizenship and "bottom-up" participation. In the most innovative interventions, which are often complex and articulated, there is, in fact, in most cases a participation of the local community on a larger scale than in operations less oriented to the principles of social innovation, which instead involve citizens mainly (and in certain cases exclusively) as final recipients of the measures implemented. Therefore, for highly innovative projects, **Action 3.3.1 of the NOP Metro played a significant role in stimulating the participation of citizens**, with a view to revitalizing territories and reactivating local communities, especially in the case of the creation of proximity services and local initiatives (as happens, for example, in Turin, with the community concierge and the physical spaces for the collection and sale of used clothes and for the conduction of social inclusion workshops, or in Venice, with the community welfare project).

The involvement of citizens relates to "bottom-up" planning through participatory design processes and the co-design of new social innovation services and projects carried out by the citizens themselves. In some cases, this has even led to the creation of new Third Sector organizations, as happened in the projects implemented by the Metropolitan Cities of Cagliari, Milan, Naples, and Venice. These experiences triggered and developed processes of aggregation

among informal groups with innovative project ideas, who then organised themselves as Third Sector entities.

One of the key elements of the projects financed under Action 3.3.1 of the NOP Metro was the emergence of **new forms of collaboration between the Public Administration, the Third Sector, private enterprises, and citizens**. This represents a central dimension, both in terms of developing new models and modes of interaction among the different players, and in terms of the long-term sustainability of the networks created.

This is not a completely "new" relationship, as in the social sector interactions between Municipal Administrations and Third Sector organizations already existed, at different levels; in most cases, however, this relationship was further strengthened by the implementation of the initiatives funded under Action 3.3.1 of the Programme. Methods and mechanisms of interaction in the different Metropolitan Cities were however influenced by pre-existing models and levels of development, although in some cases, the NOP Metro funding has allowed - for the first time - to approach or consolidate more structured co-design practices.

In addition to strengthening public-private networks in the territories, the Programme also facilitated the creation and/or the consolidation horizontal networks, both **within the Public Administration** (by promoting new collaborations among different municipal departments, with positive effects in terms of capacity building for the involved administrations) and **among the Third-Sector organizations**.

The type of players involved in the networks created thanks to Action 3.3.1 of the NOP Metro appears to be linked to the type of interventions activated and their level of adherence to the paradigm of social innovation. In the most innovative projects, the private social sector, especially informal groups and the local community as a whole, played a major role, as in the case, for example, of Bologna, Turin, Milan, Venice, Naples, and Cagliari (where the local community was directly involved in the projects). On the other hand, in projects implementing measures that primarily addressed specific user groups, with limited involvement of the local community, the interactions concerned almost exclusively "formalized" players, such as accredited Third Sector organizations and other entities, according to the type of services offered and the objectives of the projects implemented: players in the territorial employment system for projects than envisage active inclusion pathways, educational institutions and libraries for initiatives targeting minors, etc.

In order to **further investigate the theme of creating and strengthening partnership networks** within Action 3.3.1 of the NOP Metro, a survey was conducted using the **Network Analysis**

methodology, in collaboration with the representatives of the Metropolitan Cities and the implementing entities of selected projects. The aim was to map the players involved in the design and in the implementation phases for each of the selected projects, as well as their direct/actual relationships, regardless of mere formal participation in the project. The analysis covered eight projects selected among those “*a regia*” or similar, i.e. projects implemented by Third Sector organizations, which are the actual beneficiaries of the funding (but coordinated by the Municipal Administration)². The projects were selected according to their economic dimension, the size and composition of the resulting network from the available documents, and the implementation period.

The comparative analysis of the networks showed that during the implementation of the projects, **the networks tend to change in size** (with the number of players involved ranging from a minimum of 10 to a maximum of 55) and to **become stronger**. In almost all projects, in fact, the size of the networks and the type of players changed depending on the project’s phase. More specifically, **the networks that participate in the design phase tend to be smaller, more centralized, and less complex compared to the networks that participate in the implementation phase**, which more frequently include citizens’ associations and the business community. Furthermore, the **density of the networks**, i.e., the number of links between entities, is consistently **higher during the implementation phase compared to the design phase**.

The analysis also showed that in 5 out of the 8 projects surveyed, the network was set up specifically for the project, although there were some pre-existing partial contacts among some of the entities involved. All the project networks analysed **are sustainable** and can be (and have already been) **reactivated for future projects**.

The main **strength and added value** of the networks consisted, in most cases, in the active participation, in all phases of the activities, of all the players involved in the network, as well as in the pooling of resources, not only economic but also in terms of skills, experience, and expertise. The main critical issues identified instead relate, in the first place, to the exogenous element related to the Covid-19 pandemic, which imposed adjustments to the activities and, secondly, to the difficulties in the coordination of the network, especially when it involved a high number of different players.

² The other category refers to projects “*a titolarità*”, i.e. implemented directly by the Local Administration, which therefore is also the beneficiary of the funding.

As regards the effect of Action 3.3.1 on the territories and communities where the interventions were implemented, in line with the explicit objectives of the Programme, the interviews with the representatives of the Metropolitan Cities revealed a broad consensus concerning the contribution of the Action to the reduction of degradation. However, due to the modest scale of the projects compared to the demographic size of the areas they address, this reduction is not visible or objectively measurable, a difficulty that in this specific case is intensified by the impossibility of comparing pre and post-Covid situations.

On the other hand, the positive effects of the interventions on the **quality of life** of people can be identified, although limited to those who participated in the project activities or who used the services provided (and therefore also in this case not measurable at the level of the resident population of the area). **The improvement can be identified in a variety of fields, according to the nature of the interventions and to the type of needs they respond to.**

Finally, **considering the results of the evaluation activity as a whole**, it seems possible to propose some **suggestions and operational indications for the 2021-2027 programming period.**

Considering the stimulation of new ideas, as well as the added value provided by shared planning among the main players in the territory, as emerged from the experiences achieved so far, it seems foremost useful to **encourage**, for the next seven years, **implementation methods oriented towards participatory design**, involving all stakeholders and, where possible, also the final recipients of the interventions, **as well as co-designing**, also in those contexts where this modality has been scarcely used during the current programming period.

The critical issues encountered in terms of management and procedural aspects reveal the need to **simplify the procedures for the beneficiaries**, albeit within the limits of regulatory constraints, but, at the same time, to constantly oversee the implementation, the financial reporting, and the monitoring of the projects. It is also important to support the Third Sector organizations beneficiaries of the funding with **accompanying activities and technical assistance**, since this allowed to achieve good results during the current programming period.

In the light of the difficulties encountered in territories where pre-existing relationships were not particularly strong and where there was no shared initial planning, it seems important to **systematize the networks that have been created at the local level** and further enhance the capacity for **internal dialogue within the Public Administration, between the various Departments involved and the different levels of governance.**



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Given the significant procedural and administrative burden generated during the current programming period by the high number of small projects, which was aimed at intervening extensively on the territory, which however was not always met by an equally considerable impact - in terms of investment of resources and energies - it is suggested, for the next programming period, **to focus on a greater concentration of resources.**

Lastly, it would be desirable to plan, already from the initial phases of the next Programme, structured evaluation systems of the experiences, which during this programming period were sporadic.