



COMUNIS

Inter-municipal Cooperation for Strategic Steering of SME-oriented Location Development in the Alpine Space

FINAL EVALUATION NOTE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Aims of the Evaluation.....	4
2. Tools for the Evaluation.....	4
3. Information on Pilot Areas	6
3.1 Pilot Area: Great Walser Valley (Vorarlberg / Austria).....	6
3.2 Pilot Area: Leiblachtal (Vorarlberg / Austria)	8
3.3 Pilot Area: Alpsee-Grünten.....	9
3.4 Pilot Area: Territoire de la CCI de Lyon à Tarare (Rhône-Alpes, France).....	11
3.5 Pilot Area: Martigny / Sion / Sierre (Valais, Suisse).....	12
3.6 Pilot Area: Nizza Monferrato / Calamandrana / Canelli (Piedmont, Italy)	13
3.7 Pilot Area: Passeiertal, Region of South Tyrol	14
3.8 Pilot Area: Gorenjska; Zone Brnik (Slovenian Alps).....	15
4. Results of Evaluation Analysis	16
4.1 Location	16
4.2 Intermunicipa cooperation.....	17
4.3 Commercial Land Use Management	18
5. Concluding Remarks on the Evaluation.....	20
6. Recommendations.....	21

1. Aims of the Evaluation

This note of evaluation is not an exercise of accountability, but a tool in support of the capitalization of the results achieved, to build models and enucleate general and specific lessons, useful in terms of sustainability and hopefully, replicability of the experience in similar contexts.

The evaluation in the case of Comunis Project, aims at understanding if:

- the project was able to elaborate a strategy for the integrate development, at inter-municipal level, of poly-functional production areas;
- the adopted strategy has proved capable of activating positive local economic dynamics, involving companies and public institutions, on the basis of programmatic agreements aimed at promoting the efficiency of the settlements
- the strategy actually allows to obtain effects, assessable in the medium and long term, not only in economic terms but also in terms of social and environmental sustainability of the areas concerned.

The evaluation of the project will initiate, beyond the formal conclusion of the project itself, a reflection phase, in relation with local interested parties (beneficiaries and stakeholders), to confirm, adapt, improve, possibly reorienting future strategies.

2. Tools for the Evaluation

As presented in Comunis publications (guidelines and booklet), it was chosen to adopt the BSC (Balanced Scorecard) analysis approach, with its indicators, to allow - despite the diversity of contexts - a work of analysis, synthesis and comparison of situations and objectives related to different areas on which the project is implemented.

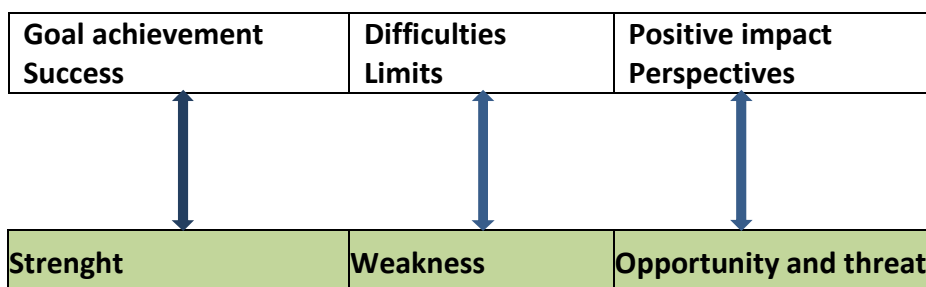
In fact, in cases where involved partners work in different contexts, but have taken similar objectives of the project, as in the case of the Comunis, evaluation implies to adopt common tools of analysis, able to give account of the experiences on the basis of parameters shared.

The BSC (Balanced Scorecard) analysis approach, in effect, constitutes a formalized tool which allows a work of synthesis sufficiently appropriate.

Comunis project partners used the following grid, representing core fields and specific fields of activity, used in the analysis, according to the BSC method. The grid is applicable to each pilot area and allows to combine the structure of the BSC with the classic SWOT analysis, in order to account for the experiences gained by adopting a simplified preliminary reflection on the results obtained from the project.

Core field Field of activity	Measure Process	Model of CLD Category	Goal achievement Success	Difficulties Limits	Positive impact Perspectives
Location					
Situation / Location					
Economy					
Image					
Intermunicipal cooperation					
Intensity of cooperation					
Attitudes and expectations					
Political and legal framework					
Commercial land use management					
Availability of Land for Industrial Use					
Framework conditions					
Land prices					

Every field of activity, identified in the project, can be evaluated in terms of goal achievements, difficulties and limits, according to a scheme (below) inspired by the SWOT analysis method:



3. Information on Pilot Areas

3.1 Pilot Area: Great Walser Valley (Vorarlberg / Austria)

In this area, specific objectives, linked to the particular conditions of the valley (Biosphere Reserve Model Region, threatened by exodus), have been defined.

In the framework of the project, the communities of the region discussed and concluded measures for the establishment of a common and inter-municipal structure for implementation of an active land policy to increase the attractiveness of the area.

COMUNIS has made a significant contribution to the preparation of economic development issues in the valley, but inter-municipal cooperation still faces difficulties, mainly caused by the persistence of localist logics. The affirmation of tangible results takes time for discussion and debate. Comunis has helped to stimulate the decision makers in this direction, but it will be necessary that cooperation continues beyond the temporal limits of the project.

Steps forwards have been made. Strategies and objectives for a regional model for business location development have been formulated, and specifically adapted to local market.

All parties involved in the project are convinced that the establishment of the planned PSG (Operating Company site) will greatly contribute to increase the attractiveness of the site.

In an interdisciplinary planning process the model of an inter-municipal cooperation was developed for a business location company. All contract documents are created and decisions are taken in five municipalities in the region. The operation of the company is well prepared by the definition of measures. Commercial properties have been pre evaluated and included in the spatial development concept.

The awareness of a common regional economic policy could be improved. With the proposed creation of a joint and inter-municipal company for an economic development site, the project has made an important contribution to the development of the region.

The legal backgrounds for the foundation of a public, private company are now available. Obstacles in the unification process for establishing a joint business unit are in the political environment. The community involvement in associations and organizations need qualified majority voting in the municipal parliaments.

Within COMUNIS, an inter-municipal approach on site policy has been adopted. There, the available and potentially available land has been identified. With a survey among companies in the valley the demand for business expansions and sites was detected. Initial negotiations with landowners have begun.

Due to the political decision-making process in the communities, the project has proved to be more time consuming than originally anticipated. Five of the six communities have decided the participation on an inter-municipal location development association. Also a positive decision is expected in the sixth community, but not before the completion of the project.

The project result, the established PSG will take strong influence on spatial planning and regional activities in the Great Walser Valley in future. With the establishment, the six municipalities have delegated specific tasks of the site development to the common structure. This common structure will reduce the competition between municipalities drastically.

3.2 Pilot Area: Leiblachtal (Vorarlberg / Austria)

Five Leiblachtal Municipalities planned a series of workshops to programme common policies. The establishment of a joint association is in progress.

The five cooperating municipalities are a heterogeneous composition with large differences - both in size and situation – but they all have interest in cooperating in the field of location development to expand the job opportunities, to provide young families attractive living space and to counteract to an imbalance in land prices and the pressure of the free market by means of suitable instruments.

In the course of the development of regional cooperation, economic and political goals were discussed. It should be noted that different conditions prevail in the communities often deal with the availability of land. Economy promoting activities, especially for young entrepreneurs and to encourage innovation and leadership activities are the community leaders concern.

In the past the intensity of the cooperation of the communities in Leiblachtal has been reduced to a minimum (water treatment, school, social issues). The communities had been largely left to themselves. Cooperation was more or less regular, with meetings of the mayors for them to exchange their experiences. The mayors meetings have led to quite a number of joint and inter-community activities.

With the realization of COMUNIS, the awareness has grown that an institutionalized and operationally efficient structure is needed to further develop the cooperation. The readiness of the project was an important step towards strengthening the cooperation of the communities in Leiblachtal.

Now, the five municipalities have agreed to implement a structure for economic development and in the course of the process have agreed on common economic policy approaches associated with it.

As part of the planning process, strategies and actions of a joint operating structure have been defined. Legal bases were developed and accorded.

Comunis made active land policy of the communities of the Leiblachtal aware and demonstrated design possibilities. This will have positive impact on the development of the business location.

By defining specific objectives and measures, the inter-municipal cooperation was thematically defined for the coming years. The operative bases for the implementation of development measures have been put, but implementation will require time.

3.3 Pilot Area: Alpsee-Grünten

In the framework of 11 workshops, the statute for the establishment of a one-stop agency was elaborated, in agreement among the Municipalities and with the technical support of experts. Tasks, organizational structure and funding arrangements of the association have been defined.

Negotiations met, as foreseeable, obstacles and this brought to a revision of the Statute. In the end, partners decided that business settlements within the region become more transparent and efficient as the one-stop agency is the only interlocutor. The agency that has an overview of appropriate areas can advise and offer local and foreign businesses appropriate areas which are ideally suited to the wants and needs of the interested companies.

Therefore, the implementation of a one-stop agency might also have an indirect impact on an increase of entrepreneurship but also on the demographic trend within the region to the extent that the numbers of young people and families may be maintained as attractive job offers can be increased due to the maintenance and attraction of local and foreign companies.

Moreover, a commercial area study has been done with regard to the planning and use of the military areas in Sonthofen which will be available for civil use in 2016.

The defined objectives for the one-stop agency are as follows:

- select, plan and develop market sites within the region;
- support inquiring companies with legal and administrative procedures;
- regularly carrying out company surveys, in order to determine the future demand of land;
- to jointly develop former military areas in Sonthofen.

Even if one municipality left the cooperation at a late point in time, the political decisions to establish the association have been taken. Although big efforts were necessary to implement the association, the high liability of the cooperation now is the basis for a long lasting and reliable cooperation.

25 % of the enterprises replied to the survey and clarified their land demand. In total 5 ha from 33 ha will be available for commercial use which could be jointly developed.

In relation to the need of improving the availability and access to the areas, Municipalities agreed on the following points:

- developing binding agreements between municipalities for economic development and steering land;
- formulating a fair balancing of risks, costs and benefits;
- reducing mutual competition for companies in the region;
- developing tools such as printed materials or a web-based database for local and foreign companies.

With their agreement on the statute the municipalities intend to establish a common management office for CLD where risks, costs and benefits between the partners will be equally shared.

Due to their decision to found the association, municipalities expressed their interest to reduce conflicts through a foresighted, coordinated and concerted land use management.

It is now feasible to develop a common economic area and to secure and create new workplaces within the region. Moreover, the cooperation enables an economical use of land.

3.4 Pilot Area: Territoire de la CCI de Lyon à Tarare (Rhône-Alpes, France)

In this pilot area, activities focused in particular on:

- support to the settlement of new population in the area;
- starting of collaboration processes among local actors, with the aim of increasing the attractiveness of the area;
- communication, towards entrepreneurs, to present the advantages of settling in the area (support, tools and facilities);
- discussion, sharing and dissemination of the methodology based on the BSC analysis;
- discussion on the methodology and contents of booklet documentation, published at the end of the project;
- organization of meetings with local actors.

Also in this area, problems were detected, related to long lead time for the development of the methodology, due to the need - by all local partners - to follow the political and technical process.

A very positive impact had the dissemination of the brochure for entrepreneurship and the promotion of the area, elaborated in the frame work of the project – a second edition of the brochure for entrepreneurship is made available.

The work on area image promotion was particularly necessary and relevant, with the twofold aim at:

- promoting the settlement in the area of external businesses and investors;
- implementing a hosting policy, aiming at attracting and supporting the establishment of new active population.

From an operational point of view, this image strategy implied, beside the shared production of the brochure, and the use of website, the organization of meetings, workshops and workgroups, involving local authorities, voluntary municipal committees, enterprises and local population.

This does not imply an easy realization of the project. The network was really difficult to build because some partners were not fully convinced of the usefulness of such project and others were a bit suspicious about the real involvement of each other. Moreover, businesses and local authorities initially involved in the project were not expecting the same result and will not thus be involved the same way. This has made necessary an in-depth dialogue with each partner.

It can be said that local stakeholders (public & private) are now more open to cooperation. This is due to various things, Comunis project and its actions on one hand and on the other hand due to a certain level of awareness and maturity.

3.5 Pilot Area: Martigny / Sion / Sierre (Valais, Suisse)

With the aim of creating a quality area, through the cooperation between regions and their municipalities, activities focused on:

- capturing synergies for industrial symbiosis in existing industrial areas or in other ones that are to be created;
- promoting the transfer of knowledge and experience in energy saving.

Activity implied, besides an in-depth territorial diagnosis, encouraging the establishment of recycling enterprises in the area, and the inventory of existing and potential resources for industrial symbiosis, a vast information on good practices in industrial ecology and a provision of tools through a platform and economic conferences.

Operations included:

- the organization of participative workshop for the companies;
- visits of the principal generators of flow in the areas;
- realization of catalog of incoming and outgoing resource flows;
- launch of energetic collaborations between companies;
- organization of working lunches, workshops and workgroups and a symposium on industrial ecology.

Comunis project contributed to raise the awareness on the importance of environmental approach, for society, as well as in view of economic return on investment in industrial ecology.

3.6 Pilot Area: Nizza Monferrato / Calamandrana / Canelli (Piedmont, Italy)

The pilot project was implemented on the areas of Nizza Monferrato, Calamandrana and Canelli, the objective being the promotion of collaboration amongst companies located on the pilot area, encouraging the sensitivity of businessmen to energy issues, with the following purposes:

- to develop the currently settled economic activities, increasing their competitiveness;
- to enhance areas aimed at commercial/production activities from the environmental point of view;
- to encourage the inter-municipal production system with a view to sustainable development and reduction in consumption and energy cost.

In this context, the municipalities are meant to promote the aggregation of private individuals with a common interest. In this way, the municipalities become guarantors and heir of a social energy responsibility and create the conditions for making the industrial area more attractive.

Some intervention guidelines have been proposed to the municipalities and by mutual consent, it has been decided to pursue a first concrete result through the formation – on the reference territorial area and created by the companies themselves – of spontaneous purchasing groups of energy resources. The purpose of this initiative is to produce a consistent critical mass in terms of consumption able to create a contractual power to support lower purchasing costs of electricity.

In this type of action, the municipalities play the role of aggregating actors, encouraging inter-municipal collaboration and adhesion.

By the end of the project, the companies interested in creating a spontaneous purchasing group will be contacted to allow the sustainability of actions even at the end of the European funding. At the end of the project Municipalities can carry on the action with companies.

It can be said that Comunis project allowed a remarkable growth of awareness of political actors and stakeholders, on the basis of proposals of concrete and shared measures of intervention. It is of course necessary that the collaboration continues beyond the time limits of Comunis.

3.7 Pilot Area: Passeiertal, Region of South Tyrol

In Passeiertal, region of South Tyrol, Comunis project aimed at the development of strategies and tools for inter-municipal management of commercial zones, to optimize the utilization of the zones for industrial, commercial, crafts activities and avoid new land development, through the evaluation of suitability of the various CLD models for land use management for implementation in the pilot area.

Project interventions allowed to raise the awareness, among political stakeholders, for the problem of fallow land and unfinished buildings in the commercial zones and the necessity for using these zones before developing additional ones.

The ambitions of the project took into account the particular situation of Passeiertal, which has the following characteristics:

- offer of land for carrying out economic activities in the industrial/crafts/commercial zones exceeds the demand for land;
- legal framework conditions do not effectively foster inter-municipal CLD;
- numerous small (scattered) commercial areas in which the possibility to expand is limited or not given.

Although a concrete CLD-model could not be implemented, the political stakeholders are aware of the situation in the zones. Activities are undertaken within the local economic association to sustain local companies and individuate businesses matching the local economic profile.

3.8 Pilot Area: Gorenjska; Zone Brnik (*Slovenian Alps*)

In the pilot area identified in Gorenjska in Slovenian Alps, the project activities allowed to set up a working group to address the problems of political and socio-economic area, in particular the area of the airport, which is of great importance both for the value of the areas and for the quality of human resources.

A process of rapprochement, dialogue and agreement was initiated between local communities and private entrepreneurs, during a series of meetings aimed at establishing joint activities.

Particularly relevant are unfortunately the constraints of legal nature, which currently prevent local communities to take effective action in terms of planning, in addition to the difficulties due to the different interests involved (state, public institutions, private owners).

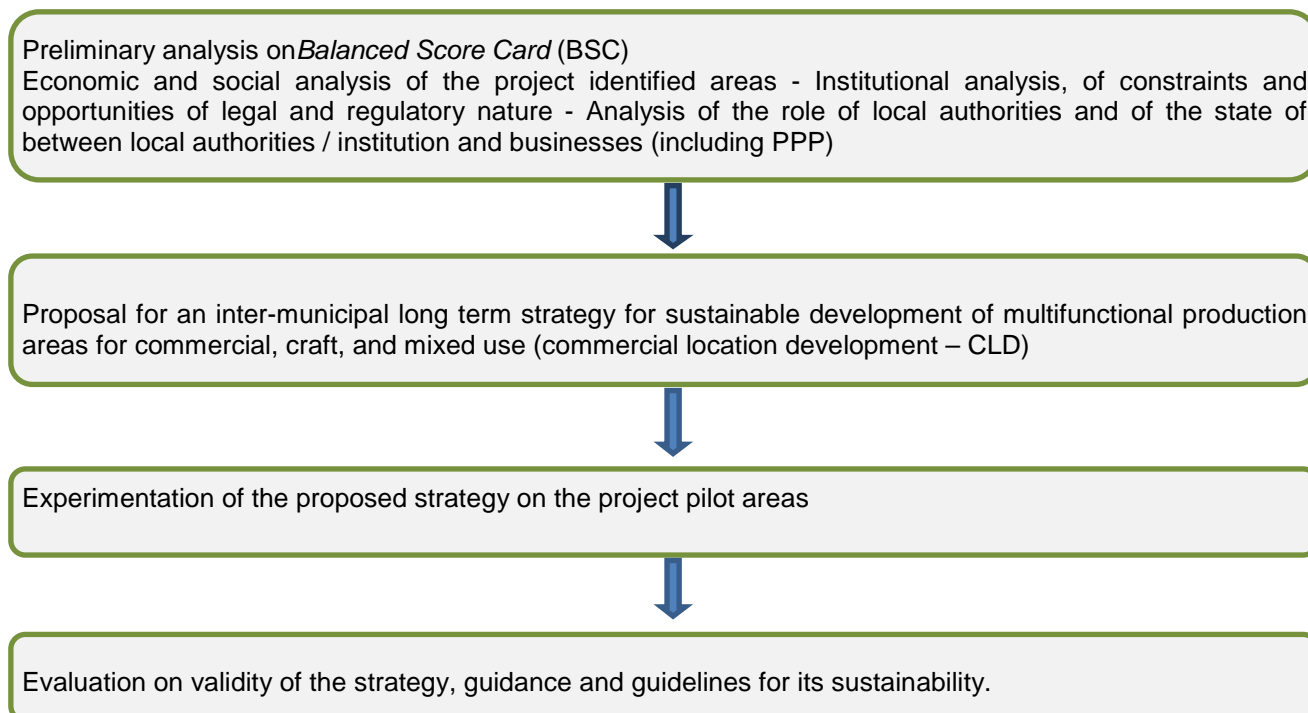
However, in the airport area, the planning process is progressing. The mayors have regular meetings and the preliminary studies on the underlying issues of cooperation were drawn up: forest and environmental policies, analysis of the production area, availability of services.

One of the main problems to be overcome in the future is the weak financial capacity of local communities, which threatens the chance to intervene with programs to assist business start-up, in a general framework of pure free-market acquisition of areas.

With the conclusion of the project Comunis it will be required that the working group continues its work to achieve a shared schedule and its implementation, in addition to the recovery of the necessary political image of the area.

4. Results of Evaluation Analysis

Evaluation concerned the various phases of project activity, traceable to work packages, focusing on results of the experimentation of CLD strategy, on the basis of data on seven pilot areas: Leiblachtal /Großes Walsertal (*Vorarlberg*), Alpsee-Grünten (*Bayern*), Val Passiria (*province of Bolzano*), Gorenjska (*Slovenian Alps*), Nizza Monferrato, Calamandrana and Canelli (*Piedmont*), Martigny /Sion / Sierre (*Valais*), Territoire de la Délégation de la CCI de Lyon à Tarare (*Rhône-Alpes*).



The analysis of the experiences of the pilot regions highlighted the following element.

4.1 Location

The strategy was developed in terms of accommodation, communication, support to image and to service offer, in order to promote the attractiveness and sustainable development of the pilot areas.

The area becomes a product and therefore justifies a (territorial)marketing activity. The goal is to create added value (economic, commercial, social, and ecological).

The activities had good results, especially in terms of appropriation (by the local actors) of the strategy for maintaining the existing population and, where appropriate, the attraction of new population. The difficulty for the future, will reside in the ability to give continuity to the existing level of dynamism in view of increasing attractiveness.

The specific characteristics of each pilot area have been described in terms of *Balanced Score Card* (BSC).

The institutional analysis has, on one hand, highlighted the differences between the needs of different areas involved in the project and, on the other hand, formed the basis of pilot initiatives to adapt to particular local contexts.

The variety of constraints and opportunities, in economic and social terms, but also of legal and normative nature, has characterized the entire project implementation.

It was necessary to work intensively on the branding of areas, particularly where the new approach immediately encountered difficulties in being understood and accepted. Local people have been involved through the activation of local committees and / or invited directly to public initiatives.

4.2 Intermunicipal cooperation

The challenge was to strengthen cross-municipal cooperation in support of business and manufacturing base in the context of promoting a better image and competitiveness of businesses located on the territories covered by the project.

This activity has been quite successful. Inter-municipal agreements were made and between Municipalities and businesses (especially SMEs) for the promotion and marketing or management of the areas.

Meetings with authorities, workgroups, workshops and other events allowed, on the basis of studies resulting from the Comunis project, to produce different results depending on pilot areas, ranging from the minimum level of pure inter-programmatic agreement up to the establishment of a real structure / agency able to plan the management of land use.

The analysis of the role of municipal authorities and other relevant institutions responsible for land management in the different pilot areas, enabled to identify the processes needed to strengthen inter-business cooperation, inter-institutional, and between local authorities and businesses.

It was not just suggested to local authorities a general collaboration and partnership , but a long term inter-municipal strategy on a specific subject: the sustainable development of multifunctional production areas for commercial, craft, industrial and mixed use.

The best results were achieved when the experiences of municipalities had already been developed and where it was possible to lay the bases for the establishment of a genuine inter-municipal organism for the management of areas.

It can be said that inter-municipal cooperation is strengthened by the project, both generally and with respect to the specific objectives of the Comunis project, but it is necessary to maintain - after the conclusion of the project - the degree of intensity of cooperation undertaken. In this sense, a role can be played by civil society in its role to push public institutions.

4.3 Commercial Land Use Management

The goal was the joint (inter-municipal) management of surfaces, to optimize their use in view of economic development in general, and in particular, of areas of settlement.

From the point of view of the use of soil, the different pilot areas started from very different conditions:

- ✿ situations where there are high prices of soil due to the scarcity of land available for the realization of production areas (as in the cases of Alpsee-Grünthen, Passeiertal or Slovenian Alps);
- ✿ situations where there are already many established industrial areas (such as the provinces of Asti);
- ✿ situations where there are many abandoned industrial areas (such as in the Valais) and is therefore appropriate, firstly, a strategy for their reuse;
- ✿ situations where it is appropriate to avoid further damage to the area giving priority to environmental protection (such as in Passeiertal).

In any case, the strategy aimed at enhancing the area's image, the setting of actions of communication and local marketing, concerted actions with the interested municipalities to manage the destinations of use, and - where possible - the operational management of inter-municipal land available, the conversion of abandoned areas, the protection from natural hazards where they exist (as in the case Alpsee-Grünthen), the elaboration and implementation of inter-municipal business plans and for the repositioning on the market.

In general, the project activity, dealing with land use management strategies, has encountered several difficulties, that can be summarized as follows:

- ✿ will of individual authorities to manage this aspect of the problem themselves;
- ✿ different points of view of local partners on land use in specific situations (conflict between the needs of economic growth and the need to protect the territory, giving priority to the reuse of abandoned or not completed areas and buildings);

- ✿ different legal constraints;
- ✿ slow identification of a possible concerted inter-municipal strategy.

The conditions appeared very diversified in terms of results. In some situations, the project partners have come up to the drafting of a binding agreement for the setting up of a purpose association (or an actual organism) between municipalities, with precise tasks and structure, with responsibility for management (marketing and development) of areas.

On the contrary, in other situations, although a growing awareness of the need to implement a common strategy can be registered, specific procedures has not yet been translated into practical tools for managing common areas.

This was particularly the case where the supply of land for economic activities exceeds the demand and/or the institutional framework does not encourage the implementation of a model CLD and/or the commercial areas have many difficulties to plan their development.

For the future, therefore, will be necessary either to monitor the market to identify business opportunities and to continue to improve the institutional framework.

In any case, the issue of land management continues to be a key problem. The industrial and commercial development, in compliance with the environmental characteristics of the areas, necessarily requires a strategy between local authorities, since the municipal size is too small and isolated to be able to respond effectively to the needs of economic forces, which of course follow logics sized at least at the level of homogeneous area.

5. Concluding Remarks on the Evaluation

The experimental implementation of the CLD strategy was a test to demonstrate the validity of an inter-municipal approach for improving the competitiveness of the territories for industrial and commercial use. Its experimental nature, however, requires a continuous effort, entrusted to local authorities themselves, to businesses and economic operators of the municipalities concerned, which will allow / encourage the transition from experimentation to set up of the strategic tested approach.

Comunis project, ultimately, must be particularly valued (with its results and its limitations) for the validity of the proposed CLD strategy, for the interest that the strategy has aroused among local communities, businesses and actors of the economy and civil society, for the new dynamics that it generated towards the awareness of the need for policies on inter-municipal territorial management. Inter-municipal cooperation is part of a general evolution of modern societies, not only for the mere economic development of specific areas designed for production and commercial activities, but also for the development and qualification of entire territories, in line with the needs of environmental protection, landscaping, tourist attraction, improvement of the quality of life.

Among the major outputs of this project, elaborated in view of the sustainability of the strategy, it has to be noted:

- The guidelines, which are intended as a useful tool for any other projects, other partners and other situations, to experiment, learn and perhaps better still deepen the experience of Comunis and of the CLD strategy.
- The Knowledge Management System of the project, which is brought as an example of success. The communication system has used an online platform and a network of effective exchange of information, which allowed constant and real-time access to partners' activities, facilitating the proper management of the project phases by the management structure in a participative context.

6. Recommendations

The experience of the Comunis project points out some key elements which must be followed for the smooth running and success of other projects with similar goals.

The main methodological indications can be summarized as follows:

- ✿ to produce, in different local contexts, processing and analysis tools that would prove (if quantifiable) costs and benefits (in economic, social, environmental, image point of view) of the CLD strategy and of inter-municipal cooperation that this implies;
- ✿ to identify constraints and opportunities of the area in its specific national and regional, institutional and political, legal and regulatory context, for the strategy to be adapted to the reality (problems, needs, expectations) and to implement effective;
- ✿ to deeply analyze strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats, so that the CLD strategy is not limited to an exercise of analysis and study (while useful as a starting point), but will actually translate in the implementation of innovative measures that involve all stakeholders and that are able, in the medium and long term, to produce significant changes at territorial level;
- ✿ to create meeting opportunities for local administrators not only to discuss general strategies for cooperation, but to decide together to take concrete shared measures, within their own prerogatives, so that the strategy is translated into concrete action lines and improvements in regional policies;
- ✿ to favor, wherever possible and with the time needed, the establishment of inter-municipal organisms (a inter-municipal "structure", rather than generic and unwritten programmatic agreements), which can take different legal forms (Association of purpose, inter-municipal agency, instrumental entity, a public company etc..) but acting on the basis of a statute (or a set of written and approved rules) in the interest of participant local authorities;
- ✿ to involve all local stakeholders interested in regional development policies (companies, intermediary organizations, associations, organizations representing specific interests, citizens' groups, etc.);
- ✿ to involve local population in the discussion of practical steps for inter-municipal cooperation strategy;
- ✿ to keep alive, all along the timeframe of the project, a system of dissemination and information sharing that enables the active participation (interaction) between all parties involved.