



IN.N.E.R. ASSOCIATION
INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF ECO-REGIONS

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IN.N.E.R. - International Network of Eco-Regions was established in 2014 in Italy, where the Cilento eco-region model was implemented in 2004 and successively disseminated worldwide. At present more than 30 bio-districts are operating in Italy. Other countries where the eco-regions have been implemented are: Portugal, France, Austria, Switzerland, Spain. Countries such as Slovakia, Hungary, Germany, Brazil, Tunisia, Morocco, Senegal, have started the process for its constitution.

Since 2017, IN.N.E.R. has obtained the recognition of eco-region as a good practice within the **FAO** Agroecology Knowledge Hub (<http://www.fao.org/agroecology/database/detail/en/c/1027958/>) and has also established collaborative relationships with the Network of Local Economic Development Agencies, **ILS LEDA**, present in more than 20 countries in Latin America, Africa and the Balkans. IN.N.E.R. joined in 2018 the **OFSP** (Organic Food System Programme - Core Initiative of United Nations 10YFP Sustainable Food Systems Programme). IN.N.E.R. has also established partnerships with the "**IDEASS**" Programme of the United Nations (www.ideassonline.org) and the **KIP International School** (<https://kipschool.org>), two bodies that promote, at international level, the results of the significant experiences of the Sustainable Human Development Programmes carried out by the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) in cooperation with the United Nations Agency system and that contributed to the international dissemination of the methodological approach of the eco-regions, recognizing the high degree of innovation and coherence with the SDGs and methods of the UN 2030 Agenda.

THE BIO-DISTRICT

Bio-district (or eco-region) is a territory of a sub-regional level with a no profit association amongst agriculture enterprises and agro-food farmers, citizens/consumers, even associated together as with the fair trade groups, local public administrations, national and regional parks, protected natural areas, commercial, touristic and cultural enterprises, social cultural and environmental associations. They act according the principles and methods of the organic production and consumption.



Each Bio-district is marked by lifestyle, nutrition, human relations, nature. It results that agricultural productions are more valuable and typically characterized, hence more appreciated by the market.

The productions resulting from the link between territorial vocations and production techniques are often enhanced by setting in production areas the stages of processing the agricultural product.

Hence the food product in these areas also becomes cultural heritage and a local identity mark: local economic and social actors become more responsible in the management of natural and environmental resources, which are common to several sectors (agriculture, tourism, commerce, etc.). This awareness has made the mobilisation and the protection of local resources more easy, most of all those related to agricultural systems and to agro-food industry.

An integrated approach of sustainable development is adopted by a Bio-district. The different actors are involved for shared purposes: the improvement of the life quality, the employment of local population and the reduction of population's decrease in rural areas, the employment increase of young people and women, and of the quality of agro- food productions and of local livestock premises.

Also to ensure the consumers safety, a traceable and healthy food, the increasing and seasonal regulation of tourist flows, through a multiple eco-tourism and local culture supply, biodiversity protection, enhance landscape and natural resources.

The Bio-districts are therefore a real answer to the present trend of economic development causing massive phenomenon of abandonment of rural areas and the increasing urbanization of people in search of better condition of life and a higher income. The process affects both the most industrialized countries and developing countries, causing the degradation and the progressive impoverishment of territory resources, the loss of biodiversity and of the cultures and traditional knowledge.

MULTIFUNCTIONAL AGRICULTURE

The practices of Bio-districts are characterized by the agricultural and agro-food enterprise multifunction: a set of activities increasing its entrepreneurial added value as the renewable energy production (solar and bio-mass), the teaching-farms, the agro-schools for children, leisure activities as gardening care, kitchen courses in countryside, social agriculture for disabled people, imprisoned and drug addicts, direct and farmer markets, the maintenance of parks, gardens and the landscape preservation.

The multifunctional agriculture demonstrates that agro-farmers, in addition to ensure food production, increasingly important in the future, patrol and protect the territory, the biodiversity, the hydro geological balance, the landscape, natural resources, first of all water and land, local culture and traditions. It is an overall approach to the farm management: the agro-food production, that combines best environmental practices, a high level of biodiversity, preservation of natural resources and the application of high level animal welfare standards, as well as production methods following the responsive preferences of a growing part of consumers for products obtained from natural substances and processes.



The development processes in the Bio-districts' territories focus therefore on these specific features, latent factors of development and topics of great significance, also linked to the considerable potential of the hidden resources existing in these areas.

In this way it is possible to make enjoyable and attractive our territories, acting on a whole of factors and trying to improve local agro-food productions and other economic sectors, to improve the transports, the use of renewable energies, enhancing cultures and local know-how, to invest in education at all levels, offering health services of good quality for all, circulating information, giving everybody access to the new Information and Communication Technologies and, most of all, promoting a long lasting and pro-active dialogue between institutions, associations and private sector.

This last issue is perhaps the most significant: agriculture and food production made through the social dialogue, direct commercialisation, by giving concrete answers to responsive consumers, can create growth and new employment, at the same time enriching the community. This practice of economy of development joints together sustainability, ethic labour and social cohesion.

THE IN.N.E.R. NETWORK

The constitution of the IN.N.E.R. association intents answer to a double need of the Bio-districts: from one side strengthening the practices in place through a *coordination* strategy for development and continuous innovation, with a common line of action and exchange of information and experiences; on the other side sustaining the practices through a supporting *political* capacity at local, national and international level.



Operationally, these goals also meet the challenges of the Bio-districts for the years to come:

- **To increase the quality of organic production** through further use of *research and innovation*, by the building of networks with IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movement) and the development of products, processes, practices and innovative technologies together with the protection of ecosystems and landscape: innovative methods for the management of pests, diseases and weeds; ecological plant protection; reduction of energy consumption of the greenhouses; improvement of soil fertility; more efficient use of energy; coexistence of organic farming and non-biological ingredients; and techniques for the processing of organic food by creating a virtuous circle of dissemination and exchange of information, knowledge and experiences.
- **To improve and strengthen the *multilevel governance* policies**, open and actively participated by the citizens; facilitate social dialog on reproduction and rationalization of the natural resources used (water footprint and biodiversity), pollution reduction (carbon footprint) and animal welfare.

- **To involve all territorial actors** and adopt the *measurements* of the undertaken processes which enable, in fact, a greater food security, increase the consumer's confidence, allow an easier access for the small workers to the organic system, in an ambitious and rigorous context of rules for the certification of products. Furthermore, it is worth to adopt the electronic certification to improve the territorial traceability of products.
- Finally, to **promote and implement actions of international cooperation** for the spread of the Bio-districts network, to help solving the serious imbalances of the current development that, together with some advantages, also produce poverty, exclusion, conflicts, violence and a serious decay of the environment that threaten the future of all. This line of activities is complementary to and integrate multilateral agreements amongst countries to enhance food security and the high quality of organic products.



THEMATIC GROUPS OF THE IN.N.E.R. NETWORK

The IN.N.E.R. network works through 4 interlinked *thematic groups* with the participation of the representatives of each adherent Bio-district:

Eco-tourism, to enhance and improve the quality of the Bio-district touristic offer with an innovative integration among natural and cultural resources, the artistic and architectural heritage and wide choice of hospitality, the improvement of environment and landscape, the promotion of culture, traditions and local knowledge, and of national and international markets.



Agro-food systems, to improve the connection of the typical productions of excellence from the Bio-districts with the extra-local and foreign markets and with consumers in national and foreign urban areas, through new channels and commercial services, making the public administrations sensitive to their green procurements; to increase the responsibility of the local economic and social actors in exploiting and preserving natural and environmental resources, reinforcing the integration between primary production, transformation and marketing methods, in order to improve the distribution of its added value in support of the agro-farms.



Energy to support the creation and to secure local chains of renewable sources by the monitoring of technological trends of energy systems and by facilitating connections with the institutions and national expertise centres. Energy saving and the production of renewable sources are encouraged, as well as the sustainable exploitation of biomass, favoring investments dedicated to energy conversion; the closure of the production and consumption cycles, and the creation of business systems for the treatment and energy production, derived from the use of solid and liquid animal waste, are also fostered.



Social inclusion, in order to deal with the issue of agriculture and social inclusion of disabled people, imprisoned, drug addicts, immigrants and at the same time the residents' quality of life, in order to facilitate integration into the local community of disadvantaged groups and experiment new forms of welfare.



To know more:

- IN.N.E.R. Bio-districts Network website (www.ecoregion.info)
- IN.N.E.R. Bio-districts Network in Facebook (www.facebook.com/biodistretti)
- IN.N.E.R. Bio-districts Network in Twitter (www.twitter.com/Biodistretti)

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