Inter-municipal cooperation: from cooperation through rules to cooperation through networks – empirical evidence from Puglia

Marilena Labianca*

Dipartimento di Storia, Società e Studi sull’Uomo, Università del Salento, Lecce, Italy

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In recent years, inter-communal cooperation has been steadily growing across all European countries. This is especially true for Italy, where in connection with the recent reforms dictated by the objectives of public spending containment, a gradual increase in the number of municipal unions has been noted. This paper, which is based on the literature and the best practices of Italian municipal unions, aims to identify the factors that underlie their success and to detect the conditions that facilitate the transition from the simplest forms of cooperation to more complex ones. In particular, in the south of Italy (in Puglia, specifically), it seems that these conditions exist. The region has particular and common features with the best practices of Italian municipal unions, but also critical issues to solve. Therefore, this paper will initially present the context of cooperation in Italy, and then will focus on the situation in Puglia. The Apulian union’s features, objectives, roles and ongoing task assignments will be examined and compared with the exiting data in order to verify their efficiency. In this way, the type of inter-communal cooperation will be identified in relation to the municipal unions that exist in the region. The study will then be deepened to verify the existence of favourable conditions for the transition to more complex forms of cooperation.

Keywords: inter-communal cooperation; municipal unions; Puglia; partnership; stability

Introduction

In recent years, specific types of associations – in particular, the inter-communal cooperation that is evident in Western European countries – have been continuously growing (Hulst & van Montfort, 2007; Hulst, van Montfort, Haveri, Airaksinen, & Kelly, 2009). It is rather difficult to find comparative research (Hulst et al., 2009) that explores the functioning, achieved results and difficulties that these institutions encounter operationally (Baldini, Bolgherini, Dallara, & Mosca, 2009; Bolgherini, 2009). On a national and European scale, the studies that have been conducted on the topic have been published rather recently (Baldini et al., 2009; Bolgherini, 2009; Cittalia – Anci Ricerche, 2010; European Committee on Local and Regional Democracy, 2007; Fedele & Moini, 2007; Hulst & van Montfort, 2007; Messina, 2009; Salvato, 2009). As Norton notes (Norton, 1994, cited in Hulst & van Montfort, 2007, p. 8), at a European level, inter-communal cooperation is the result of persuasion, incentives and legal impositions. In particular, legal forms and financial incentives have encouraged many local governments to cooperate with one another. The main reason for this is that inter-communal cooperation seems to combine two values that are deeply rooted in the governmental systems of

*Email: labiancamarilena@libero.it

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many European countries: local self-government and rational governance (Hulst & van Montfort, 2007, p. 8).

Over the past 50 years, a series of developments, such as the scaling up of public services and the rising standards and expectations of these services set by the people, the development of social and economic processes, and the existing European market dynamics, have exerted pressure on the local government. To deal with these pressures, individual states have used different strategies, one of which is inter-communal cooperation (Hulst & van Montfort, 2007). This strategy does not involve the establishment of new authorities or the transfer of functions and duties to other authorities; rather, it leaves the fulfillment of public tasks to the municipalities or to their direct representatives. According to Hulst & van Montfort (2007, p. 7), the joint operation of public service provisions must produce scale economies, and the mutual adjustment of local policies must lead to a coordinated approach of addressing issues that surpass municipal boundaries.

In recent years, the European crisis has had an impact on the various nation-states. In Italy, there are compensations between national and European crises, as was the case in the 1990s, and there are concatenations of crises, as is the case today (Rivière, 2013).

In Italy, especially in the North-West regions, recent administrative reforms (as dictated by cost containment goals and the rationalization of public expenditures), regulatory incentives, as well as European and regional finance corporations have determined a gradual increase in inter-communal cooperation with respect to the management of services and tasks; this type of inter-communal cooperation has been represented by associations known as ‘municipal unions’ (MUs). In the last two years, the national legislature – due to the traditional and the widespread phenomenon of ‘Powdering’ among Italian municipalities – has imposed the mandatory practice of ensuring that certain functions are provided by the small municipalities in associated form. These municipalities could face problems associated with isolation and institutional sustainability – the latter concerning not only organizational and financial autonomy, but also the ability to learn and adapt to a dynamic dimension of the institution (Lanzalaco, 2009; Messina, 2011).

Case studies describing the grounds for the development of successful Italian MUs have underlined the common elements of these MUs, and they have discussed the questions surrounding the possibility that, under certain conditions, it may be possible to transition from the simplest forms of cooperation (which are aimed at managing services and tasks in order to achieve economies of scale and to protect adequate service levels on behalf of the citizens) to more complex forms in the development of the involved territories.

In southern Italy, mainly Puglia, the conditions that make this transition possible appear to coexist. Like most of the regions in Italy, Puglia also gained incentives to create unions. The region is characterized by distinctive features that set it apart from other regions in Italy, such as the size, objectives, concentration of the unions in certain territories, significant stability concerning the partnership composition over time and its transition to a system characterized by integrated programming (wide area planning). In addition, the European Union (EU) plays a significant role in this region; it has become one of the beneficiaries of the policies established in the 1990s (as was seen in other regions in southern Italy, as addressed by the Convergence Objective), and thus of the funding allocated to promote certain development tools within a so-called bottom-up approach.
Based on the literature, this paper aims to provide a framework of the Italian context and of the best practices of MUs in order to understand their features, the factors of their success, and the conditions that might create the grounds for the transition to more dynamic and complex forms of cooperation. A first study shows interesting peculiarities and also common features between Italian best practices and the MUs in Puglia. Starting from this assumption, this paper will describe the context, the features of the Apulian MUs and try to understand the type of inter-communal cooperation in relation to the MUs that exist in the region through a comparison between what was stated by a programmatic point of view (through a textual analysis that was conducted on the statutes of the unions) and the concrete implementation of services and task co-management (through ministerial indicators that are designed to measure them, and the collection of some outputs, identified as significant, in particular projects and ongoing initiatives). Then, by comparing the MUs in Puglia with Italian best practices, in particular the MU of Camposampierese in Veneto, the paper will highlight the common elements and verify the existence of favourable conditions for the transition to more complex forms of cooperation. In both regions, in fact, as will be seen below, there is a high degree of overlap with other inter-municipal cooperation instruments.

**Inter-communal cooperation: main features and typologies**

Since the 1950s, municipal cooperation has been increasing in various forms: ranging from single- to multipurpose cooperation; from mutual consultations to joint operations of the inter-communal bodies, involving small and large numbers of municipalities, and including different territorial scales; or, in some cases, cooperation has existed as a statutory obligation, whereby laws are established to define specific objectives and competences (Hulst & van Montfort, 2007, p. 7).

Inter-communal cooperation involves – to varying degrees and depending on the situation – radical changes in the administrative organization of the state, thus requiring formal legislation. Moreover, it also occurs various adaptive capacity of the different administrative systems. Regarding the initial difficulties experienced (which were mainly operational, and as they pertained to management) when creating an environment for concrete cooperation, the literature recognizes several advantages. For example, organizations have the ability to adapt greatly to new circumstances and developments (Baldini et al., 2009; Bolgherini, 2009; Frieri, Gallo, & Mordenti, 2012; Hulst & van Montfort, 2007; Messina, 2009). Although it cannot be considered a new form of governance (and it can actually be said that in many countries, inter-communal cooperation has a long historical tradition), inter-communal cooperation may prove to be more capable than other traditional forms of government in dealing with recent and rapid environmental changes (Hulst & van Montfort, 2007, p. 9). Such cooperation foresees the interactions between and relationships among all the partners in order to achieve a shared goal or to fulfil certain tasks; this is achieved with a variable degree of institutionalization and integration (Fedele & Moini, 2006; Hulst & van Montfort, 2007; Hulst et al., 2009).

When addressing the different types of inter-communal cooperation, most of the literature distinguishes between cooperation and collaboration. Cooperation includes the greater stability of task fulfilment by the different subjects involved, while collaboration is characterized by informality and by the temporary nature of the relationships involved (Fedele & Moini, 2006, 2007). March & Olsen (1989) distinguish between ‘uniting institutions’ and ‘integrative institutions’. The theories of uniting consider public
policies and resource allocation as the fundamental result of a political process, while theories of integration consider the development of a political system with shared values and purposes as the primary result. Hulst & van Montfort (2007) differentiate between operational tasks (which are used for the joint production of services, with the ultimate aim of overcoming limitations and inefficiencies that are primarily associated with the largest territory that needs to be served) and coordination tasks (which are used for outsourcing regulations associated with local policies, as well as for resource and cost allocations), which are used at a more efficient governmental level (over-local). The coordination tasks involve the activities of the municipalities that may influence the national and European governmental levels.

Context: inter-communal cooperation in Italy

In Italy, with respect to the network management of services, one important distinction concerns cooperation continuity: there are the stable networks, such as the MUs, and the networks that are characterized by collaboration, such as the conventions (governed by article 30 of the ‘Testo Unico delle leggi sull’ordinamento degli enti locali’ No. 267/2000 [see Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, 2000]). Over the last few years in Italy, the associative forms regulation has constantly undergone numerous changes. Conversely, inter-communal cooperation has a long historical tradition (Baldini et al., 2009; Fedele & Moini, 2007; Hulst & van Montfort, 2007), and this should be considered from two points of view: the demographic decline of the Italian municipalities that has been occurring since the national unification until the 1990s; and the delay in local government reorganization (Fedele & Moini, 2006, 2007; Società Geografica Italiana, 2014). The regionalization start-up of the 1970s and the lack of a clear legal framework regarding the local authorities have led to the launch of a series of experiments on cooperation that have extended beyond the municipal level, and which spans between the various Italian regions (usually with inter-municipal associations and districts).

The first attempt to systematize these associative forms of cooperation was regulated by law No. 142 of 1990. It regulated the consortiums, the mountain communities, the fusion of small municipalities and introduced the MUs as associative forms that extend beyond the municipalities. However, the new regulation did not hide its limitations; it showed an ‘authoritarian vision of autonomy’ which, in many respects, denied the possibility the spontaneous bottom-up creation of inter-communal cooperation (Fedele & Moini, 2006, p. 73).

In the late 1990s, with the enactment of the ‘Bassanini’ law and the subsequent Leg. Dec. 112 of 1998, with the changing of Title V of the Constitution and with the ‘Testo Unico’ of the year 2000 concerning the local authorities, the so-called administrative decentralization process began (Società Geografica Italiana, 2014). As a result, the associative forms of cooperation were recognized; in particular, the MU was regarded as a multifunctional and privileged associative authority. However, the delay in reform implementation (especially regarding the identification of the reform’s key features) has led to a state of general disorientation, particularly among the smaller municipalities (especially in the southern regions).

The current bill, which has been repeatedly modified over the past two years, has required compulsory task fulfilment from municipalities of specific sizes; if this is taken into consideration in conjunction with data and forecasts on public finances over the next three years, which predict drastic cuts in the resources available for the local authorities to spend, the risks associated with a municipality’s actual abilities, as well as
the quality of the services provided, might be better understood (IRPET et al., 2012) (as already occurs in various territories, especially among the smaller municipalities and the mountain municipalities). Indeed, according to article 19 of the Law Decree 95/2012, which was converted into law No. 135/2012 (Spending Review II), municipalities with a population of up to 5000 inhabitants (or up to 3000 inhabitants, in the event that these individuals belong, or have belonged, to mountain communities) by 1 January 2014 are bound to fulfill their fundamental tasks through an associative form of cooperation, through MUs or by certain agreements. The minimum threshold for the formation of an association is 10,000 inhabitants, unless another population limit is set by a specific region (Alesio, 2012; Argenio, 2012).

Meanwhile, the recent administrative reforms undertaken by the Mario Monti government – and which have been continued by the Enrico Letta and (now) Matteo Renzi governments – the reshaping or suppression of some entities (such as the provinces) and the encouragement of the establishment of joint management forms (such as the MUs) have been increasing over the last few years.

Inter-communal cooperation in Italy: from cooperation through rules to cooperation through networks

A study on the different forms of inter-communal cooperation in Italy (Fedele & Moini, 2006, 2007) identified four specific types of cooperation, while considering a further element of classification. This element involved the identification of a system where one can move from the simple provision of services (which occur more frequently) to the formulation and implementation of public policies. In the first case, the goal is to achieve economies of scale and administrative efficiencies, and the processes are limited to the organizational and managerial dimensions. The second option is more complex, since the processes are not only limited to the organizational and managerial dimensions; rather, they require coordination, as well as the sharing of objectives and solutions. They also require that dialogues take place among the different entities and, in successful cases, organizational skills related to the development of strategic networks should be utilized (van den Berg & Braun, 1999).

The study by Fedele & Moini (2006, 2007) assessed two variables: the institutionalization, structuring and interaction level, which characterize the level of cooperation and the collaboration, as well as the subject or the collaborative strategies appliance (the provision of services or the making and the implementation of policies), will result in four main types of inter-communal cooperation: ‘cooperation through agreements’, which is characterized by joint action among the local authorities in order to manage services efficiently (including the establishment of agreements and conventions); ‘cooperation through rules’, as previously accomplished with the provision of services, but which is characterized by a high degree of institutionalization and formalization in terms of the relations among entities (such as among the mountain communities and some MUs); ‘cooperation through networks’, which implies not only a high level of institutionalization of the various local authorities, but also a certain degree of integration among different policies and between the policy networks; and finally, ‘the collaboration through pacts’, which relies on cooperation to develop policies – this is where the interaction forms are poorly structured, and they are connected by the specific policy goals that need to be achieved (territorial pacts are an example) (Fedele & Moini, 2006, pp. 80–81).
The ability to exploit the benefits of cooperation largely depends on the type of cooperation implemented. Van den Berg & Braun (1999) suggest that the complete exploitation of network outsourcing depends on the existence of an administrative body that is able to define, develop and harmonize the objectives of the stakeholders living in the city’s network. The key elements of ‘cooperation through networks’ include the integration of different policies, which refers to a common and shared vision of development (van den Berg & Braun, 1999), and the integration among various policy networks (in this context, a central role is played by the subject networks) (Fedele & Moini, 2006). It is known that the subjects have the ability to remodel the restrictions and to exploit the potential of a territory, to overcome institutional fragmentation, and to create a functionally adapted structure of metropolitan governance. This, however, is not sufficient; it is essential for the subjects to exhibit cooperative behaviour – a ‘positive coordination’ that relies on interaction, communication, negotiation and goal-sharing in order to reach a common vision and to promote cooperation stability (Heinelt & Zimmermann, 2011). Within metropolitan governance, two conflicting situations may occur: ‘progressive’ characterized by a dynamic and integrated organization, ‘regressive’ dominated by the fragmentation and the secession. The premise is that various situations cannot be accounted for in light of global, European, national or institutional economic influences, but they are influenced by a combination of factors, structures, locally exploited opportunities and, in many cases, these situations are created by the same local subjects (Heinelt & Zimmermann, 2011).

In such contexts, and in addition to physical proximity, it is known to have the ability to ‘facilitate the relations between subjects that are not institutionally close to each other, […] but the latter alone is not able to activate the local development processes, without the achievement of an organized proximity’. In this way, ‘the joint activity of organized and physical proximity effects characterizes a territory, defines its borders, resources and affiliations and helps designing its governance types’ (De Rubertis, 2013, p. 139). In fact, according to the literature (Bertrand & Moquay, 2004; Billaudot, 2001, cited in De Rubertis, 2013), the coordination and inter-municipal cooperation initiatives that take place among many subjects are facilitated by physical proximity effects, and they can generate new and significant organized proximities.

The creation of inter-communal partnerships is therefore the proximity cause and effect and also the subjects networks reinforce geographical proximity phenomena (cognitive, social, organizational and institutional), and they represent the backbone of the different forms of inter-municipal cooperation for the implementation of various territorial development projects (De Rubertis, 2013, p. 139).

Stemming from these considerations, in the following sections an overview of the MUs in Italy will be presented; their features, associated factors and the conditions associated with best practices will be discussed in order to initiate a comparison with the case in the region of Puglia.

Municipal unions in Italy: features and best practices

According to a Ministry of Internal Affairs Report (Ministero dell’Interno – Dipartimento per gli Affari Interni e Territoriali, 2004), the significant increase in the number of MUs registered between 2000 and 2003 (from 67 unions with 306 municipalities to 222 unions with 985 municipalities) is primarily due to the previous reform in legislation (introduced by article 6 comma 5 of law No. 265 of 1999), as well as to the contributions granted by the regions and by the state (which is also in favour of smaller-sized
unions, or of those without previous experience). In addition, this is also to the greater degree of clarity of the most important financial and legal provisions. According to an analysis of ISTAT – Pubblica Amministrazione (2013), data addressed to the public administration, in 2011 there were 391 MUs, and the growth at a national level from 2008 to 2011 was at almost 20%, with peaks noted in Toscana and Emilia-Romagna. These forms of cooperation are heterogeneously distributed across the nation; they were heavily concentrated in certain regions of the northwest (Lombardia and Piemonte). These regions are characterized by the highest numbers of unions and by higher averages of small municipalities (79.6%). A similar distribution occurred across the islands (Sicilia and Sardegna) (Figure 1), while the phenomenon is totally absent in Liguria, Valle d’Aosta and Basilicata.

From this perspective, national studies (Centro Documentazione e Studi Comuni Italiani ANCI-IFEL, 2013; IFEL – Ufficio Studi e autonomie locali e sistemi territoriali, 2011) have reported that the phenomenon mainly involves the smallest municipalities; almost 80% of municipalities being part of MUs do not exceed 5000 inhabitants, and about 30% of them are between 1001 and 2500 inhabitants. As shown in Figure 1, on a national scale, the regions that hold the record for the greatest number of unions are: Lombardia, Piemonte, Sicilia, Sardegna, Emilia-Romagna, Veneto, Toscana and Puglia. Regarding Piemonte, Lombardia, Sardegna, Sicilia and Veneto, these statistics appear to be due to the presence of higher percentages of smaller municipalities within the regions. A different situation is evident in Toscana, in Emilia-Romagna, and especially in Puglia (Figure 2).

![Figure 1](image-url)

Figure 1. Italian regions: number of municipal unions.
Source: elaboration on the basis of Comuniverso (2013b).
Considering the propensity for association (which is calculated as the ratio between the unions’ number of municipalities and the total number of municipalities in the region, multiplied by 100), high percentages in Sardegna, Toscana, Sicilia, Emilia-Romagna and Puglia emerge (Figure 3). In this case, it is possible to assume that there is a relationship between the highest number of small municipalities and the propensity for association, which is enough to justify the highest values observed in Sardegna and Sicilia. In the case of Toscana, but especially in Emilia-Romagna and Puglia, the highest degree of propensity for association is not related to the presence of small municipalities. As will be demonstrated below, Toscana and Emilia-Romagna represent cases of best practices in Italy, which, at this point in the research, lead to favourable speculations regarding the conditions that exist within the territories, which will also be investigated in greater detail.

One of the most popular indicators used to evaluate the association between municipalities is represented by the type and number of services that the institutions agree to perform. According to the Ministero dell’Interno – Dipartimento per gli Affari Interni e Territoriali (2004), in 2003 the regions with the highest number of indicators were: Lombardia (35.2%), Piemonte (17.3%), Veneto (13.6%), Emilia-Romagna and Lazio (7.3%), while Puglia occupied an intermediate position in the national ranking (3.9%). On a national scale, among the most frequently associated services (in descending order) are: the municipal police, the administrative offices, the assistance office and the public services: school assistance, financial management, infrastructure, waste disposal, the
technical department, general services and institutional bodies. In particular, the local police have benefitted from a specific intervention of the national legislature which, by the Finance Act of 2003, has allocated €5 million to the MUs in order to achieve integrated solutions according to ‘proximity police types’, and this has certainly had a significant impact on the regional legislation (Ministero dell’Interno – Dipartimento per gli Affari Interni e Territoriali, 2004).

The study of these successful experiences has shown several important aspects. Various studies conducted on regional experiences (Baccetti, 2013; Baldini et al., 2009; Bolgherini, 2009; Frieri et al., 2012; Messina, 2013) have focused on the descriptions of certain features (the number and size of the municipalities that are signing up, their organizational ways), as well as on the actual functioning and the concrete implementation of the associated management strategies. The degree of integration and the quality of services provided by the municipalities are being evaluated, often using interviews of privileged partners, or the collection of documentary material. These studies mainly concern the regions where inter-communal initiatives are particularly encouraged, and which represent best practices on a national scale (as seen in the MU from Bassa Romagna, Terre dei Castelli in Emilia-Romagna, Circondario Empolese Valdelsa in Toscana, and the Federazione dei Comuni del Camposampierese, which emerged from the fusion of two unions in Veneto).

In Toscana, the MU of the Empolese Valdelsa represents an emblematic case of bottom-up cooperation. Thanks to the political role of the municipalities, the culture, the

Figure 3. Italian regions: propensity to join in the municipal unions. Source: elaboration on the basis of Comuniverso (2013b).
historical traditions of cooperation (since the 1970s), the valorization of decentralization, and the degree of regional cooperation (this was one of the first cases observed in Italy that identified the most appropriate territorial areas, and that legally established inter-communal associations and promoted them over time), the processes of the MUs appear to be reinforced, moving towards the imposition of fundamental tasks for the small municipalities (Baccetti, 2013). The regions’ support, in conjunction with a legislation that is aimed at facilitating the joint practices of the purposes, seem to represent the main factor for success; indeed, the three regions have provided, at different moments in time, an organic reorganization of the matter through a specific regional law. If we consider that within the administrative decentralization process that began in Italy in 1997 (with the enactment of the Bassanini law) the regional responses were different – moving from the development of an organic law regarding the transfer of purposes (such as in Emilia-Romagna and Toscana), to the development of a legislation with a weak implementation impact (such as in Basilicata and Puglia, which has yet to be seen) – it should be observed that those regions that have provided a clear legislation in order to regulate and encourage the associative task fulfilment have become success cases on a national scale. As noted in a recent national study (Baldini et al., 2009), the presence of the small municipalities in the regional territories is not always involved in the development and enforcement of structured and strongly encouraged policies that are in favour of a territorial reorganizational process, among other things.

A successful experience is represented by the MUs that can rely upon a collaborative and traditional culture, and on previous associative experiences, such as the convention or the association of municipalities. The latter allows the communities involved (through a transitional formula and without the creation of an institution) to get to know each other and to explore different forms of cooperation that are regarded as necessary, and these communities will eventually become more stable and be regarded as more mature forms of cooperation (the MUs). In this way, trying to examine the inter-communal cooperation experiences recognized by the literature as best practices (Baccetti, 2013; Bolgherini, 2009; Frieri et al., 2012; Gallo, 2009; Messina, 2013), it is possible to identify the common elements associated with their success, as success is related to the presence of a traditional culture of cooperation and of networks of active subjects, the European and regional distribution of funds, the presence of supportive and encouraging regional forms within the territories (from both a financial and legal point of view) and, in many cases, of effective local leadership (about the importance of leadership on local scale; Beer & Clower, 2014). In these contexts, beyond a high degree of institutionalization and formalization of the relations between entities, the goals are to create a system of services that are suitable for achieving economies of scale and increasing the quality of services for the benefit of the involved communities, so we can speak of forms of ‘cooperation through rules’ which, in many cases, could rely on the prior experiences of ‘cooperation through agreements’. This is emblematic in the case of the Veneto region, especially with the Federazione dei Comuni del Camposampierese. The region shares a high degree of overlap with other inter-municipal cooperation instruments, and there are also inconsistencies in the management and programming frameworks; therefore, the 2012 territorial reorganization plan seeks, on the one hand, to create conditions that can ensure the effectiveness and rationalization of the associated management, while, on the other hand, it can follow the programming goals for development by providing the appropriate incentives for those municipalities that are able to create virtuous forms of associations (Messina, 2013). The aforementioned union aims to be a ‘union of services’ in order to create a system of adequate services.
(achieving economies of scale), providing higher quality services and added value; to benefit from economic incentives (as occurred among all of the other successful cases); but to also become a ‘Union for development’ that is known as an integration centre and as a directing studio for territorial and administrative policies, as a project centre for accessing European Union funds, as a tool for local development (Frieri et al., 2012, pp. 505–529).

Within the union described here, it appears that the grounds for the transition to other forms of cooperation through networks are being set. In this regard, in the following section, the Apulian case will be described, so as to draw a comparison with the best practices in Italy.

Municipal unions: the case of Puglia

As Hulst & van Montfort (2007) argue, both the national and European contexts are conditioning the establishment of inter-communal cooperation. In particular, the local government is increasingly constrained by European Union rules and regulations, which can create opportunities, but they can also limit the actions that will be implemented. The national legal framework determines the modalities of cooperation. The presence of structures and incentives may not only explain the differences and trends that are observed, but they also highlight the features and types of agreements. Also, the result of the cooperation processes depends on the characteristics of the institutions (based on their type of cooperation), which have been developed over time within the territories.

The situation in Italy, as well as the best practices research available, prove that the national, regional and European financial incentives provided in the early 2000s, the regulatory supported by the local institutions, in Italy, basically by the region, the presence of a culture of cooperation rooted in the territories and also the presence of active subject networks, are among the key factors of progressive development, but they also serve to enhance mentioned MUs’ successes.

As in other Italian regions, in Puglia regulatory obligations – particularly the financial incentives that aimed to promote the creation of MUs – predicted a gradual increase. As previously presented, the first analysis revealed interesting findings regarding the most successful Italian practices (such as the high number of unions, the high propensity for the creation of unions on a national scale and the independent values that relate to the percentage of small municipalities within the region). Specifically, in 2013, Puglia had 22 unions, with 111 municipalities signing up; these municipalities have a total population of 863,960 (approximately 21% of the region’s population resides in MUs) and a total area of nearly 3500 km (almost 18% regional). In all cases, the municipalities are spatially contiguous. The unions are a recent creation (they have been around since 2001); they were all located in Lecce province, and as of 2008 they are also located in the provinces of Foggia and Taranto.

On a regional scale, the distribution of the phenomenon is heterogeneous. The province of Lecce has the highest number of MUs and the greatest propensity of municipalities that participate in the unions (more than 70% of the unions in the region are concentrated here; at the provincial level, over 80% of the municipalities participate in the union), as compared with the lower propensity noted among the provinces of Bari and Foggia (Figure 4). The total absence of the phenomenon in the province of Bari (where no unions exist) may be attributed to the fact that within the territory there are medium-to-large municipalities; furthermore, in some cases, the remaining municipalities present thresholds well over 5000 inhabitants and, in many cases, their thresholds are
over 10,000 inhabitants. Therefore, under the current legislative provisions, this province would not be obliged to deal with tasks and services in an associative form. On the contrary, the province of Foggia has, on a regional scale, the highest number of smaller-sized municipalities, and the largest number of municipalities that are not involved in any union (more than 60% of the municipalities do not exceed 5000 inhabitants, and it is also the only province that presents ‘powder’ municipalities) (Figure 4).

The different responses from the northern and southern parts of the region led to a comparison with the best practices in Italy. In particular, the MU of the Camposampierese in Veneto was examined. In Puglia, the province of Lecce (in the southern region) demonstrates a significant degree of overlap in terms of the cooperation used in the development of projects, and a sense of continuity over time regarding the partnership structure, from the territorial pacts up to nowadays (De Rubertis, Ciavolino, Fighera, & Labianca, 2013). With respect to unions, such continuity arises by comparing the partnership structure with that of the LAGs (Local Action Groups in the Leader Approach) and of the Wide Areas (Figure 5). Figure 6 shows the municipalities that have fewer than 5000 inhabitants and the corresponding degree of partnership stability; a high score indicates the perfect and simultaneous coincidence of the unions, LAGs, and Wide Area partnerships; an average score indicates minimum fragmentation of the unions, LAG, and Wide Area partnership structure; and a relatively low score indicates increased fragmentation. The province of Lecce also presents a significant constant participation to the same Wide Area (especially Salento 2020 and Lecce 2005–15), and of some specific LAGs (Terre d’Otranto, Santa Maria di Leuca and Isola Salento). So, within a single union, what happens is that municipalities choose to join together in the same LAG or a different LAG, but they do it en masse, so we can say that the degree of fragmentation is minimal.
Figure 5. Puglia: administrative boundaries of the municipal unions and the associated partnership stability. Source: elaboration based on the statutes of Apulian municipal unions, local strategic plans of LAGs for 2007–13.

Figure 6. Apulian municipalities: mountain community members and partnership stability, showing the partnership stability between MUs (not including the mountain communities), Wide Areas and LAGs. Source: elaboration based on ISTAT – Geodemo (2011) and on regional official sources.
In particular for the province of Lecce, this could be explained by the fact that since the late 1990s (characterized by different experiences associated with the negotiated programming), the territory has experienced, to a great extent, a type of cooperation ‘through pacts’, and this may have consolidated the gradually formed coalitions over time. This might explain the phenomenon associated with the concentration of unions, especially in these territories. Initially, the subject networks solicited by the European and regional intervention policies seem to have been constituted and subsequently strengthened, meaning that in the territory there exist not only spatial continuity but also, presumably, strategic and organizational continuity. In the southern part of the region (unlike in the north), one can observe the concentration of MUs, as well as other forms of inter-communal cooperation, partnership stability, and the participation of smaller municipalities in the unions (Figure 6). On the other hand, the inactivity of the provinces in the northern region of Puglia (especially in the province of Foggia) could be justified by the fact that those territories were part of the mountain communities until 2009; today, they are being replaced by mountain MUs (with fewer than 3000 inhabitants). In fact, from this study (and as shown in Figure 6), it could be seen that most of the smaller municipalities (especially the so-called ‘powder’ municipalities) were signing up members to the mountain community of Gargano, to the south and north of Monti Dauni – entities that have since been completely cancelled. Trying to put together the territories of the smallest municipalities (those that are the most interested in national administrative reorganization), the municipalities that are part of the MUs and of the mountain communities, and the degree of partnership stability, it may be observed that the areas characterized by a high degree of partnership stability are also those that most frequently join together.

Until the time that deadlines were provided by the national legislation (since January 2013), the failure of such territories to choose their associated management form could be attributed to several factors, including the strong guiding role of the regional administration. In this regard, the study of regional regulations (the regional laws had expanded over time, transitioning from regional law No. 10 of 11 February 1999 to regional law No. 36 of 2012; in addition, the social plans of the region underwent various programming cycles from 2004 to 20137) showed that in Puglia, organic reorganization does not exist, and it is not as well defined as in other Italian regions (such as in Veneto, Toscana and Emilia-Romagna). An obvious division of the issue emerges, where there is a strong role for the region’s centralization, and unclear guidance and support (especially financial and technical) in the creation of unions. An exception to this is the support provided by the local police, whereby the national law (we refer to the Finance Act 2003) seems to have established clear regulations and provided financial support for this service, which is in favour of the MUs.

Municipal unions in Puglia: patterns, features and purposes

Puglia has the third highest rate of MUs in southern Italy, trailing Sicilia (50) and Sardegna (35) (Figure 1). Sardegna has 23 unions, with fewer than 1000 inhabitants, and Sicilia has 12 (Comuniverso, 2013a); both have the highest percentages of municipalities with fewer than 5000 inhabitants on a national scale. In such circumstances, as is the case in most of the Italian regions, the high percentage of unions is justified by the small size of the municipalities and, therefore, the national
legislature’s intent to encourage the creation of the small municipality associations seems to materialize. The situation in Puglia is different. On a national scale, Puglia does not have unions featuring a population below 1000 inhabitants, but it does have a high percentage of unions where the signing members are predominately the largest municipalities. Furthermore, on a regional scale, a different response from the various territories emerges regarding the creation of unions (mainly regarding the small municipalities).

As discussed above, the first analysis revealed an interesting affinity with the most successful Italian practices, especially the MU of Camposampierese in Veneto. At this point, the study focuses on the main characteristics, programmatic objectives, targets and the actual activity of the unions in Puglia to identify the type of cooperation that exists in the region, and then based on the results, the study will try to identify the territorial conditions that can promote a shift to more complex forms of cooperation.

In order to identify the Apulian unions’ features, a preliminary survey was initiated to determine the number, location and degree of participation from the various provinces and municipalities. Figure 4 shows the administrative boundaries in the southern part of the region where a significant concentration of the phenomenon is found.

In order to study the aggregation mode, a classification report was established (Cittalia – Anci Ricerche, 2010), which described and highlighted the occurrence of some group types at the national level. The five main group types listed in the report include: the ‘satellite’ type, which joins together one or more large centres with smaller municipalities; the ‘only small size’ category brings together municipalities with fewer than 5000 inhabitants; the ‘only big’ type of unions join together (three or more) municipalities with over 5000 inhabitants; ‘the couples’ unions are those formed among only two municipalities, which are characterized by variable dimensions; finally, the ‘archipelagos’ type features several small (and even smaller) municipalities that associate with themselves in order to manage joint tasks, as based on the specific requirements of the reference territory. This rather generic feature, precisely because of the Apulian municipalities’ size, cannot establish its specific type with certainty (we refer to the possible confusion between the satellite and archipelagos types, which was often encountered during this research). But it can be said that the most common group types are the medium/large unions (in total nine) and the satellite/archipelagos unions (seven). There are, however, unions formed by small municipalities.

In order to detect the features, programming objectives, and purposes of MUs in Puglia, the statutes of the abovementioned forms of cooperation were collected and interpreted. The second comma of article 32 of the ‘Testo Unico’ No. 267/2000 defines the statute as the document that ‘identifies the Union’s bodies and their creation types and also identifies the tasks fulfilled by the Union and the corresponding resources’; therefore, it contains the basic rules of the union’s functioning, the rules associated with organizational, financial, and administrative processes, and it also defines the objectives and purposes. The textual analysis of the statutes was made using the descriptor method (described by Fiori, 2002), which makes it possible to identify and reconstruct specific ‘values’ that are subtended by analysing the regulation. The interpretation of the statutes shows that the union is a second-level authority (with bodies originating from the associated municipalities), and that it is a legal local entity ruled by public law, characterized by large, autonomous boundaries (statutory, regulatory, organizational, budgetary and financial) (Labianca, 2013). The political and administrative union bodies are represented by the council, the president of the union, and by the assembly.
The president, who is chosen by rotation, is at the head of the union; his mandate has a variable duration (from six months to two years). He represents the union, ensures political unity and performs the tasks that are recognized by the mayor. When considering the regional situation, a critical point is illustrated by the different lengths of the mandate provided for several tasks that the aforementioned subject needs to fulfil simultaneously (as mayor and president of the union), as well as of the short-term mandate of the president of the union. This affects the continuity of the work and, in fact, does not allow the programming and planning interventions to be enacted across the territory in the medium- or long-term; however, they can often be enacted only for a short period of time, though they are limited to solving routine administrative problems. This can create frustration with respect to attempting to coordinate with other inter-communal cooperation tools in the territory. Also, when the degree of politicization of these entities is very high, specific problems can occur. As has emerged in the present study, the party/political fragmentation of the administrations involved may play a key role, as the heterogeneity within the councils can affect or limit the possibility of reforming an issue, and this can weaken the stability of the cooperation; conversely, institutional fragmentation (the number of entities involved) does not necessarily represent an obstacle.

The interpretation of the statutes indicates that the most frequent tasks of the union are as follows, in descending order: social services, sanitation, providing local police services and civil protection, offering personnel services, facilitating economic development, canteen services, local transportation, services for the prevention of stray dogs, as well as tourism and cadastral promotion services. Most of the cases for services are particularly complex, whose joint management and coordination with over-municipal planning tools (such as the Wide Area’s strategic planning and the LAG’s actions) could produce significant effects in terms of increased efficiency and expense reduction (as a coordinated transport system), and it may serve to increase the benefits experienced across the entire territory (such as through tourism promotion, providing training and professional guidance, offering economic development services). In addition, it could also generate conflicts that stem from individual interests (e.g., from the local police) if not properly handled. The main goals of unions are to integrate and harmonize in order to achieve efficiency, effectiveness, and the streamlining of administrative action, as well as to recognize the great potential (i.e., the political advantage) arising from the union in dealing with the over-local authorities (Labianca, 2013).

Interesting results emerge from studying the small unions’ goals. In trying to identify the group types and their aims, it seems that small unions not only seek to carry out operational tasks (or better said, they do not solely aim to jointly produce services in order to overcome general limitations and inefficiencies) but, like the larger unions, they intend to carry out coordination tasks, more exact of self-government, of determination, specification and implementation of local objectives in accordance with those laid down at the community, national, and regional levels. Also significant is the intention to maintain constant and productive relations with other municipalities within or outside the network. Therefore, there is a tension among the territories towards local autonomy. In this regard, as Governa (2005) states, it seems that the local level intends to achieve a certain capacity of internal self-representation and, at the same time, of external opening towards the participation of over-local level relations. Considering the fact that these territories are characterized by physical proximity and, as mentioned previously, by a certain degree of stability within the cooperation framework, it is possible to assume that the conditions for switching to more complex forms of cooperation exist, meaning that this represents cooperation through networks, though this is strictly stated.
on paper (within the statutes). It is necessary to compare the policy goals and the operating results in order to better understand the type of cooperation that exists in Puglia, and especially to reveal the presence of conditions that are favourable to the transition to more complex forms of cooperation.

**Municipal unions in Puglia: policy objectives, partnership stability and efficiency**

The results obtained from the textual analysis of the statutes were compared with some indicators that were aimed at evaluating the actual start-up and operational capacity of the MUs. These results were connected with the previous study that was conducted to determine the degree of overlap with other forms of cooperation presented in the region. Based on some evidence that has already been previously detected, the study examined this issue by comparing partnership unions with two main tools of inter-communal cooperation adopted in Puglia in recent years: the Wide Area’s strategic planning and the creation of LAGs (under implementation of Axis 4 of the Community LEADER approach). The results showed that the partnership structure presented a certain level of stability regarding the MUs, Wide Areas, and LAGs in the southern part of the region (province of Lecce) (Figure 5).

By comparing the objectives, functions, and tasks declared on the statues, as well as the indicators that aim to evaluate the efficiency of the Apulian MUs, at this point, the study aims to establish the type of cooperation that exists in Puglia. The study tried to verify the existence of a relationship between the operation/performance of the unions with the continuity/stability of the partnership to verify the presence of conditions that could facilitate the transition to more complex forms of cooperation. To evaluate the unions’ efficiency, the data and information contained in the actual certificates were used, and these were available through the database of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Ministero dell’Interno – Dipartimento per gli Affari Interni e Territoriali, 2013), and this information was regularly sent by the local authorities. Data were collected from 2008 to 2012, related to the so called ‘essential services for the municipalities and the municipal unions’ framework. In fact, in this section, the main services were indicated (institutional body-related services, general administration, local and administrative police services, waste systems, infrastructure, and public lighting), with specific information provided on the number of employees, the total direct costs, the form of management, the number of resolutions, mileage, and so on. The values that were compared over time can somehow be used as indicators of the unions’ degree of activity.

The research shows that in most cases, the process of creating unions began during this period of time. The presence of a certain number of employees, the allocation of financial resources for various services (constant or growing), and the availability of resources within the union, indicate the concrete factors required in initiating this process, and they also highlight a certain level of efficiency of the institution. However, there are cases where the process seems to be blocked, or where it never initiated in the first place (such as with the Valesio Union, Tavolieri Meridionale, Serre Salentine, Terre di Mezzo, Messapia, Entroterra Idruntino, Presicce and Acquarica del Capo). These are territories that belong to different provinces (Brindisi, Lecce, Barletta, Andria and Trani [BAT]); in three cases, it was revealed that there was a high degree of partnership stability and medium for the rest of them. Therefore, the comparison between the ambitious goal-related policies and the operational processes reveals that a real start-up process
has begun, but that this process was limited to the joint services management; this presented modest results in many cases.

In trying to identify the territories where the best performance of any time are registered, the research highlighted the fact that these unions are mostly concentrated in the southern part of Puglia (the province of Lecce; more specifically, the Grecia Salentina, Jonica Salentina, Terra di Leuca bis, Costa Orientale and Terre d’Oriente). These unions are characterized by a high level of partnership stability. In all the other cases in which the unions showed a high degree of partnership stability, inactivity was apparent in three cases, while limited activity (or a progressive reduction in activity) was found in two cases. In trying to illustrate a framework of the activity state of the Apulian unions, it can be said that with the exception of the gradual increase registered after 2001, the situation seemed to reveal a significant decrease in activity starting in 2009; probably due to the reduction of the state’s funding in favour of the unions. In some cases, discrete levels of performance were registered, and these were constant over time on a regional scale. This phenomenon occurred in southern Puglia, where the partnerships showed significant stability/continuity; however, this does not mean that there is a relationship between the two phenomena. In fact, there are the cases where a high degree of partnership stability does not correspond to the activity level (as in Valesio, Tavoliere, Meridionale and Talassa Mare di Leuca).

In order to complete the investigation on the degree of activity observed among the Apulian unions, a review was conducted to define the main outputs, in particular projects and ongoing initiatives with respect to different funding sources. The data sources are different; they are mostly regional and, to a lesser extent, they also take into consideration the data supplied by the individual unions (through the use of questionnaires), as well as the documents published online and the available data on the open cohesion database (Dipartimento per lo Sviluppo e la Coesione Economica, 2014) at the heading ‘Subjects’. Due to the heterogeneous nature of the sources, the listing does not always present homogeneous data in terms of classification, nor does it provide a complete picture of the unions’ projects and initiatives. However, when considering the available data, all of the Apulian unions (with the exception of some cases, such as in Valesio) have a number of projects that are destined to various types of interventions, ranging from cultural activities and environmental protection, to social services and welfare, to community, regional, and ministerial funding sources, and – to a lesser extent – personal financing sources (such as the Unione Tavoliere Meridionale, Terra di Leuca bis, Costa Orientale, Union 3, Andrano, Spongano e Diso).

Crossing data concerning the stability of the partnership, the efficiency/implementa-
tion of the unions, the number and quality of projects, we can’t achieve unique inter-
pretations. However, based on all of the collected data, it can be said that such a high level of partnership stability does not always reflect the idea that a number of major projects are underway. Conversely, there are cases in which the high degree of partnership stability is associated with improved performance and a rather low number of projects, but these projects are less dependent on external sources of funding (this is mainly provided through the European Union). This is the case for the unions of Terra di Leuca bis, Costa Orientale, Andrano, Spongano and Diso – all of which are located in the province of Lecce.
Conclusions

This paper discusses some of the findings from the study on, and subsequent comparison of, the best practices of Italian MUs and the case of Apulia, with the aim of highlighting the factors related to their success, the context variables that may explain the different responses of the territories, and transitions from the simplest form of cooperation to more complex ones. The research revealed that the national phenomenon became more solid over time, focusing on certain regions in the north-west and primarily involving smaller municipalities. As was already shown, Italian MUs exhibit certain features and they are heterogeneously distributed across the territory.

The national legal framework study confirms that inter-municipal cooperation forms are not new; the difference is that while in the past these forms of cooperation were described as an ‘opportunity’, today they are mostly considered a necessity, especially considering that they are moving an important asset of the Italian political system (federalism) in a new direction. Thus, it can be said that this devolution could be realized only through the promotion of the forms of cooperation that do not have service provision limits, but that are moving forward in the formulation and implementation of policies. As previously explained, the legislative and administrative context, the incentives (especially financial) have influenced the development and also the setting of the MUs. At this moment in time, the research shows that most of the Italian – and especially the Apulian – MUs fall into the ‘cooperation through rules’ category, where the institutions are mainly focused on the effective functioning and concrete implementation of the associated management (which is accomplished with some degree of difficulty – especially at the operational and management level, with respect to their ability to be integrated, and in terms of the quality of the services provided by the municipalities). The transition to the ‘cooperation through networks’ category is often the intent of some unions’ policies, such as in Veneto and Puglia. However, for this to occur, as suggested by the best practices study, and as stated by van den Berg & Braun (1999), the presence of a number of factors are required, such as the existence of strategic networks, political and social support, homogeneous spatial and economic conditions, a common and shared strategic vision, and specific types of incentives— at least at the initial stages of the process. In the case of Puglia, the simultaneous and conscious adhesion to various instruments of intermunicipal cooperation, such as to Wide Area planning and to LAG, may facilitate this transition. As the study revealed, in the case of Veneto, the subjects that interact in various institutional offices may, under certain conditions, help promote greater coordination, continuity, and consistency in policy management and in territorial development.

In Puglia, the comparison between the policy objectives set out in the statutes and the ministerial data, which are used to assess the actual functioning of the association between municipalities, proves that the statement was not always realized in practice. Considering the effectiveness of Apulian unions and their relationship to partnership stability, the research does not reach unique interpretations. Partnership stability has not always revealed the real activities of the subjects involved; however, in some areas in the southern of the region, certain self-organizing abilities have emerged in addition to the development of a dynamic organization that relies on local factors. The concentration of the phenomenon, the partnership’s structural stability over time, and the constant activity (though limited to the ordinary tasks associated with management) reveal that in some territories (particularly in southern Puglia) – and with the exception of spatial proximity – there might be organizational proximities that over the medium- to long-term could facilitate the transition to more
dynamic and complex forms of cooperation. This is probably due to the capacity of the territories to sediment past experiences of cooperation (spanning from the territorial pacts until today).

Therefore, it can be said that the one of the biggest obstacles for the territory – as had emerged when comparing successful experiences with one another, as well as from the study of the regional legislation of joint management – is represented by the strong, ambiguous role played by the region’s guidance and by excessive task centralization, which should be allocated to local authorities. At the moment, a clear legal framework on the subject does not exist, as it occurs in other Italian regions (where good practices exist). There is a certain predilection towards less structured forms (which are, therefore, more flexible) of joint management that serve as the convention or the consortium. This can somehow explain the different responses observed across the territories in the north and south of Puglia. In particular, regarding the province of Foggia where the small and ‘powder’ municipalities are concentrated, the associated services and task management processes become unavoidable necessities that are required to prevent exclusion and isolation. For these territories, there are serious problems of institutional sustainability, which is the ability to survive over time without relying on external support, while carrying out designated tasks (Lanzalaco, 2009; Messina, 2011) (in fact, before 2009, these territories were adhering to mountain communities which, as we know, were using state or other public body transfers to finance their activities). In these territories, the Region’s guiding and supporting role is even more prominent.

Another risk relates to the possibility of pre-empting the work of territorial connections and of network construction and consolidation, which are created with difficulties and sustained over the time by Europe, especially in Puglia (as in other southern regions of Italy); this is especially detrimental for the most active areas (including some of the mountain communities in the north of Puglia, where there is territorial and strategic continuity, as well as institutional continuity through pacts up to the Wide Area planning and LAG) (De Rubertis et al., 2013).

Therefore, the region’s role, the political will, the presence of effective local leadership, the ability to self-organize (the maturity and autonomy of the territories), and to formulate a common and shared development strategy by exploiting the over-municipal level of planning are crucial. In this case, the MUs would not only improve the amount of service management offered (economic benefits, managerial processes), but they would also strengthen and better coordinate the Wide Area policies, allowing institutions to increase their potential while negotiating with social, political, and economic forces – especially at higher institutional levels.

The associative forms, which primarily developed on a voluntary basis, have not been designed exclusively for the shared performance of certain services and activities (fusion for aggregation); rather, they should encourage a strong interaction between different subjects. This could represent a concrete solution for redefining the country’s administrative structure. This does not only offer benefits from a purely financial point of view, but it also serves as the concrete cooperation between authorities, subjects, and entities. In order for this to happen, authentic legislative, technical, and financial supports from the local authorities that are directly involved (in particular regional authorities) are needed.

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Notes
1. A communication, held on the occasion of the 27th Congress of the Italian Society of Political Science (Labianca, 2013), is the starting point of this paper. This paper continues and deepens the research work.
2. This refers to the integrated programming (specifically, the territorial pacts), which took on different forms in particular in the south of Italy and in Puglia—the ‘PIS’ (the Integrated Sectorial Projects) and the ‘PIT’ (Integrated Territorial Plans) (Bianchi & Casavola, 2008; Ministero dell’Economia e delle Finanze – Dipartimento per le Politiche di Sviluppo, 2003) – and the more recent experience of strategic planning in 2005 (De Rubertis, 2010, 2013).
3. The spread of the phenomenon of the ‘powdering’ of Italian municipalities prompted the legislature to define a specific discipline for municipalities with fewer than 1000 inhabitants (or fewer than 5000 inhabitants) (148/2011 Law and subsequent amendments).
4. Van den Berg & Braun’s model talks about organizational ability, where the key elements are represented by a vision and an integrated and coordinated strategy of urban development, as well as by the ability to develop strategic networks. Spatial economic conditions can provide a rational explanation for collaboration among different territories.
5. As Figure 1 shows, however, these interpretations are not unique. It is noted that at the national level, the presence of small municipalities in the regional total is not always associated with a high level of propensity for the development of MUs. Among the most significant cases are Trentino-Alto Adige, Friuli Venezia-Giulia and Umbria.
6. For the mountain communities, with respect to the particular figure of the MUs, law No. 191 of 2009 had envisioned the abolition of financing by the state in order to contain government spending. Puglia has complied with that obligation with the Presidential Decree of the Regional Assembly n. 132 of 6 February 2009.
7. The main sources used for research from references Regione Puglia (2006, 2009, 2012, 2013).
8. In pursuing this goal, the classification criterion of a recent national report (Cittalia – Anci Ricerche, 2010) has been used, with appropriate size adjustments for the municipalities of Puglia (Labianca, 2013). It should be mentioned that the demographic criterion is not sufficient to establish with certainty the ‘hierarchy’ or the area (municipalities) around which everyone else gravitates. A method is outlined in Fiori (1990).
9. These values converge as special ‘descriptors’ that are explicitly or implicitly present in the text. These descriptors are ‘illustrated through words-concept’ that summarize the main categories (Fiori, 2002).
10. This information was collected through 18 interviews of privileged witnesses (presidents and secretaries of unions). Interviews are ongoing.
11. The data were extracted from the Ministry of Internal Affairs database, specifically from the 13th frame for each union and year from 2008 to 2012. The data were collected with respect to the unions’ original classifications, which indicate the main services, as well as the amounts and quantities of the main entries. These data were later integrated and reworked with the unions’ information regarding population size, surface size and stability of the partnership.
12. Veneto research shows that this occurs when service management coincides with programming development (Messina, 2013).
13. The political will is considered crucial; that statement is present in the questionnaires given to the Apulian unions.

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