

# SUDEUROPA

Quadrimestrale di civiltà e cultura europea

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NUMERO MONOGRAFICO

## FUTURO DIGITALE

Scenari e opportunità del mercato unico europeo

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Istituto Superiore Europeo di Studi Politici  
Rete dei CDE della Commissione europea

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# Enterprise Start-up in the Euro-Mediterranean area. The case-study of Mazara del Vallo's fishing district and consortium\*

*Domenico Nicolò, Giuseppe Valenza, Riccardo Tamiro\*\**

## Background

Over the last twenty years, the European Union's policies aiming to foster the entrepreneurship in the Euro-Mediterranean countries have failed. The theoretical model underlying these policies is inconsistent with the characteristics of the entrepreneurial ecosystems of these countries.

Since no enterprise can survive in the long run if it has inconsistent characters with the ecosystem in which it operates, in Euro-Mediterranean countries it is necessary to adopt a specific theoretical model on start-up business, different from the one described by the international literature. The fundamental principles of this theoretical model therefore must be drawn from the common characteristics of successful enterprises and networks operating in these Euro-Mediterranean regions.

In order to define this general theoretical model, which we call the "Mediterranean Start-up Model", in 2013 I founded with some colleagues the Re.T.M.E.S. – *Research Team for Mediterranean Enterprises and Start-ups* at the University Mediterranea of Reggio Calabria. In partnership with the Entrepreneurs' Association of Reggio Calabria, the lab is also carrying out a free consulting and support program for startupper. This

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\* This paper is based on the speech of the Prof. Domenico Nicolò at the conference: "Futuro digitale. Scenari e opportunità del mercato unico europeo", November 18th 2016, at University Mediterranea of Reggio Calabria. Domenico Nicolò is the author of the Background, section 2 and the Findings and research perspectives; Riccardo Tamiro is author of section 1; Giuseppe Valenza is author of section 3.

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program, called “Sportello ImprendiReggioCalabria”, helps start-uppers to design a business model and evaluate the economic and financial sustainability of their business model through the business plan. Aspiring entrepreneurs complete the program by meeting successful and experienced entrepreneurs working in their industry to set strategic partnerships and trade relations useful to mitigate the high vulnerability of enterprise start-up.

This paper includes three sections. The first provides statistical data highlighting that Italy, as well as other countries in the Euro-Mediterranean area, is composed almost exclusively of micro- and small family businesses. When it is necessary to cope with the competition, these small family businesses create industrial districts, clusters, networks and consortia. The second section outlines the essential features of the “Mediterranean Start-up Model”, which is based on the collaboration between small autonomous enterprises. This theoretical Model is needed in EU’s lagging regions, lacking cultural conditions – such as propensity to create managerial companies – and institutional ones – such as the development of large and efficient stock markets and private equity operators – needed to successfully adopt the general Start-up Model described in the literature. The last section proposes a case study: The Fishing District and the Consortium of Mazara del Vallo – COSVAP, a successful network that combines autonomy and collaboration between many small businesses interoperating in a network.

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## **1. The spread of small businesses in Italy**

The Commission Recommendation 2003/361/EC classifies enterprises into three different categories:

- a micro-enterprise is defined as an enterprise which employs fewer than 10 persons and whose annual turnover and/or annual balance sheet total does not exceed EUR 2 million;
- a small enterprise is defined as an enterprise which employs fewer than 50 persons and whose annual turnover and/or annual balance sheet total do/does not exceed EUR 10 million;
- a medium-sized enterprise is made up of enterprises which employ fewer than 250 persons and which have an annual turnover not exceeding EUR 50 million, and/or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding EUR 43 million.

Considering this classification, the table below shows the size of enterprises in some of the European countries located in the Mediterranean area. The table 1) shows that micro-businesses are 95% of the total in the countries of the Euro-Mediterranean area. In the countries of central and northern Europe, however, the number of micro-enterprises is smaller, such as Germany (82.16%), Great Britain (88.09%), Denmark (89.04%), Ireland (89.09%), and Romania (87.74%). In the Italian context, micro-enterprises employ about 7.8 million workers (47% of total workers compared with 29% of the European average) (ISTAT, 2015a).

Country	Micro	Small	Medium	Large
Italy	95.08%	4.34%	0.49%	0.08%
France	95.08%	4.12%	0.66%	0.15%
Spain	94.08%	4.48%	0.6%	0.11%
Greece	96.79%	2.79%	0.37%	0.06%
Malta	93.48%	5.15%	1.17%	0.19%
Slovenia	94.84%	4.17%	0.82%	0.17%
Croatia	91.94%	6.64%	1.13%	0.29%
Portugal	95.21%	4.07%	0.63%	0.1%

Tab. 1 – Enterprises in the countries of the Euro-Mediterranean area classification by size). [European Commission, Annual Report on European SMEs, 2016]

Reports published by UnionCamere have shown that family businesses<sup>1</sup> are about 4 million (93% of the total), with an employment impact of more than 90% (UnionCamere, 2014).

The presence of family businesses in Italy is very high. 85% of enterprises are family businesses (considering those are obliged to submit the annual financial statement). The presence of family businesses is also very high

<sup>1</sup> The family business definition adopted by UnionCamere is due to the Expert Group operating on behalf of the European Commission – Directorate General Enterprise and Industry. According to the Expert Group, a firm, of any size, is a family business, if: 1) the majority of decision-making rights is in the possession of the natural person(s) who established the firm, or in the possession of the natural person(s) who has/have acquired the share capital of the firm, or in the possession of their spouses, parents, child or children’s direct heirs; 2) the majority of decision-making rights are indirect or direct; 3) at least one representative of the family is formally involved in the governance of the firm; 4) listed companies meet the definition of family enterprise if the person who established or acquired the firm (share capital) or their families or descendants possess 25 per cent of the decision-making rights mandated by their share capital.

in other European countries, such as France (80%), Germany (90%), Spain (83%) and Great Britain (80%) (AUB Observatory, 2015). An important aspect of the Italian context is that family businesses avoid recruiting external managers, as long as they can. In fact, 66% of Italian family businesses have a management consisting of family members. The situation is different in France and Great Britain, where percentages are much lower (26% in France, and 10% in Great Britain) (AUB Observatory, 2015).

With reference to the production sectors, Italian family businesses are mainly concentrated in the Manufacturing sector (about 43%) and Trade (28%). However, there is a smaller presence of family businesses in other economic sectors, such as Financial and Real Estate (12%), Services (8%), Building industry (4%), Transport (3%), Energy and Extraction (2%) (AUB Observatory, 2015).

Family businesses often have limited financial resources and little propensity to hire non-family managers. Consequently, these firms tend to form industrial districts (or industrial zones) in order to face challenges of the competition between enterprises. The economic, sociodemographic and territorial characteristics of industrial districts can attract the interest of investors, customers and suppliers.

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## **2. Towards a business start-up theory in the Euro-Mediterranean countries**

The European Union's policies aimed at promoting entrepreneurship in the Mediterranean countries have systematically failed over the last twenty years. The gap between rich and poor nations has not only not reduced but has even grown.

Evidently, the theoretical model underlying the EU's development programs is inconsistent with the socio-economic characteristics of these regions lagging behind in economic development. This development model finances the business plan that foresees a higher growth of the company in turnover, investments, number of employees and profitability, is in contrast with the characteristics of entrepreneurial ecosystems in the Euro-Mediterranean area, which are almost exclusively composed of micro - and small family businesses. In this way, startupper tend to overestimate the company's growth prospects: the business plan often becomes an unrealistic "wish list", rather than a tool for assessing the company's financial sustainability. This European model evaluates the business plan, not the actual ability of startupper to produce products / services that can achieve a sustainable competitive advantage in the

market. As a result, they get financial incentives for start-uppers who have the best project, not the best entrepreneurs.

The countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea are not economically and politically homogeneous (Cananzi, 2016). However, if we only consider entrepreneurial ecosystems in the Euro-Mediterranean regions, we can see many similar characteristics. Among these common features is the large spread of small and small family businesses, which are almost the only type of businesses operating in this geographical area. This common characteristic of Euro-Mediterranean countries must be considered when writing business plans for start-ups and when formulating EU development policies as the survival and development of businesses depend on the consistency of their strategy with the characteristics of their ecosystems (Mintzberg, 1973; Dubini and Schillaci, 1988; Audretsch and Mahmood, 1995; Swaminathan, 1996; Everett and Watson, 1998; Audretsch et al., 2000; Aldrich and Martinez, 2001; Moore, 2006; Box, 2008; Adner and Kapoor, 2010; Moss Kanter, 2012; Ebert et al., 2015).

These small family businesses survive mainly thanks to the financial and human resources coming from the family, often at lower costs than the market prices. When needed, family members work late beyond office hours and are also willing to sell their own assets to “save” the enterprise and the “good name” of the family. These companies often decide not to undertake development strategies, even when they have opportunities for development, because growth often implies the involvement of non-family members in the company’s ownership and management (Levinson, 1971; Lansberg, 1983; Piantoni, 1990; Schillaci, 1990; Ward, 1990; Corbetta, 1995; Marasca, 1996; Iovenitti, 1998; Nicolò, 2000).

Small businesses in the Mediterranean have faced competition in different ways, such as:

- locating within clusters or clusters to make “critical mass” and survive the competition of large corporations while remaining small enough to maintain control and management within the company’s own family;
- specializing in high quality production protected by a strong brand (e.g. “Made in Italy”);
- taking advantage of the high tourist attraction of the geographical location;
- focusing their activity on local markets, protected by competition from geographic and/or political barriers.

The huge acceleration of technological development over the past few years and globalization have led to the ineffectiveness of these strategies that elude competition, thus endangering the survival of small family businesses operating in traditional sectors.

Especially in recent years the survival of micro and small family businesses operating in the traditional sectors is mainly threatened by:

- the increasing digitization of products and services that in many industries has greatly reduced their marginal cost, in some cases it has even made it zero (Rifkin, 2014);
- the relevant acceleration in technical progress, which has considerably reduced the life cycle of products and has greatly increased the productivity of businesses, causing the saturation of many markets because the supply is much greater than market demand;
- the great increase in the speed of diffusion of innovations worldwide through the Internet.

To cope with these threats, micro – and small family businesses must innovate their production and sales operations and focus their strategy on internationalization. This implies that these companies must undertake development strategies, overcoming their characteristic closure to the involvement of non-family members in enterprise ownership and management. Since this cultural change will take a long time, in the short term these small businesses can only grow by cooperating with each other in networks, industrial districts (Becattini, 1979), clusters (Nicolò, 2005), or consortia. By cooperating, these small businesses can become competitive even if they continue to be small and (relatively) autonomous.

This collaborative model between small businesses allows clusters and industrial districts of the Euro-Mediterranean area to face international competition. For this reason, it must be taken as a reference in the design of new businesses.

It is very important, therefore, already in the pre-startup stage, to create strong relationships and collaborate with other companies that carry out similar and / or complementary activities. Thanks to systematic collaboration with other companies, startupper can create businesses that, while being small, have the strength of bigger business entities (Porter and Fuller, 1987; Lorange and Roos, 1993).

Small businesses need to focus on their best-performing activities at lower cost than the market and collaborate with other companies to

get all the other things they need. Through collaboration agreements, small businesses can also bridge the gap of technological know-how with larger companies (Mariti and Smiley, 1982; Anderson and Dekker, 2005, Masquefa, 2008).

Strategic alliances and collaboration within networks, industrial districts and clusters are not enough and small businesses need to set up consortia to delegate activities they cannot perform individually because of their small size, such as: internationalization, research and development, marketing, e-commerce, quality assurance, etc. Companies belonging to a district or cluster often find it convenient to collaborate. In this way, these small businesses can overcome the problems that make them uncompetitive in the current scenario. Literature has defined co-opetition these collaborative relationships between competing companies (Hunt, 1937; Child and Falukner 1998; Bradenburger and Nalebuff, 2011; Dagnino and Padula 2002).

In the last few decades, networks and alliances have grown very much, mainly because businesses outsourced non-core activities (Kulmala, 2003; Tardivo, 1992; Giubitta et al., 2005). Aware of the importance of focusing on activities in which they have a sustainable competitive advantage (Osborn and Hagedoorn, 1997), companies increasingly make alliances to acquire non-strategic resources (Osland, 1995; Ernst and Bamford, 2005; Jagersma, 2005).

Collaboration among businesses within the network is always based on mutual trust. In the initial phase of the relationship, mutual trust is generally low and, consequently, there is a high level of contractual information and regulatory requirements (MacNeil, 1980; Heide and Miner, 1992). Information exchange fosters mutual trust between partner companies (Seal et al., 2004; Free, 2008) and reduces the need for information (Seal et al. 1999; Hakansson and Lind, 2004; Bardy, 2006; Emsley and Kidon, 2007; Tomkins, 2001). Trust and need for information are inversely related. Over time, collaboration between businesses increases mutual trust and reduces the need for information on their business relationship.

Management accounting systems, as it generates information to control the business relationship within the network, strengthens mutual trust between partner companies and increases the internal network coordination (Mouritsen et al., 2001; Dekker, 2004). However, this presupposes that partners agree to share information about their relationship (Mouritsen and Thrane, 2006).

In order to achieve the necessary coordination and synchronization of production and sales activities, each company part of the network must have an information system that also collects information and data on operations carried out by other companies but which are strongly interlinked with those carried out internally (Osborn and Hagedoorn, 1997). Thus, the management control system must cross the legal boundaries of each cooperating entity to extend to the strategic boundaries of the network (Hopwood, 1996).

Young businesses are very fragile because they do not have a history that can demonstrate their ability to meet the expectations of stakeholder. For this reason, they generally create weak bonds of trust with financiers, investors, suppliers, and customers. As soon as the first difficulties arise, these weak bonds break up, causing the crisis and the extinction of the company for lack of the human and financial resources it needs. It is therefore necessary, in the pre-start phase, to start the process of building a corporate reputation to create strong trusts with stakeholders and, in this way, create a prerequisite to reduce the typical high start-up vulnerability (Nicolò, 2015a, 2015b, 2016). By participating in districts, consortia and / or networks, start-ups can strengthen the bonds of trust with the stakeholders because they benefit from the relational capital and reputation of the network to which they belong.

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### **3. The case study of the fishing Consortium-District of Mazara del Vallo CO.S.VA.P.**

According to Marshall (1920), districts are aggregations of companies that are part of the same production system (located in a specific geographical area), where there is both collaboration and competition. Becattini (1979) considers the district as a model characterized by a large number of small enterprises in a territorial sphere where socio-economic structure (history, culture and traditions) affects both business relationships and economic development processes. According to Sforzi (2008), key elements of a district are: presence of a typical and characterizing socio-economic situation; concentration of enterprises in the same area; competitive and collaborative relationships between enterprises; specialization of production.

With reference to the consortium model, participating enterprises remain legally independent, but they delegate some functions and activities to the consortium, which are jointly performed for all participating enterprises (Lai, 1991; Tedeschi, 2007).

Italian entrepreneurial history shows that enterprises in the Mediterranean area want to maintain a strong family vocation, even at a cost to have a small size. From this point of view, districts and consortia can be considered solutions to be competitive while maintaining a small size and family ownership.

However, today international competition is very high, therefore internationalization plays a key role in the survival of enterprises. Small and medium-sized enterprises in the Mediterranean area seem helpless. It is therefore necessary to redefine the collaborative-competitive model by integrating functions of districts with those of consortia.

The Consortium-District model could support internationalization processes that a small enterprise can hardly perform independently due to the lack of specific professional skills inside the firm (Valenza, 2015). Aggregation through the Consortium-District represents an intermediate good solution because it combines decision-making autonomy of enterprises with benefits and advantages of cooperation. The district model allows the exploitation of advantages deriving from localization economies in specific territories, while the consortium model allows enterprises to delegate to an external organization the execution of certain activities (e.g. supply, logistics, promotion, marketing, etc.). The Consortium-District model should systematically coordinate the production chain for the participating enterprises. Coordination of the production chain is made up of district activities and consortium activities.

This paper presents an important case study, the Fishing District of Mazara del Vallo, which plays a key role in promoting the economic development of the fishing industry in the province of Trapani (Sicily). In particular, the Fishing District has characteristics of the Consortium-District model.

The District is headquartered in the municipality of Mazara del Vallo, whose economy is based almost exclusively on fishing and all related activities, such as food-processing industry, fish conservation, marketing and shipbuilding activities. The Fishing District was established in 2006. It is the first district officially recognized by the Sicilian Regional Government as well as the first Italian district focusing on the fishing sector.

The District is made up of two organizations: the Fishing District and the Consortium CO.S.VA.P. (Sicilian Consortium for the Enhancement of the Fisheries Sector).

The District consists of companies, fishing vessels, workers, shipyards, fish processing industries, satellite companies around the industry,

partners from public and local authorities, associations, schools, professional training centres, trade unions, universities and research centres.

The district covers the entire area of the Province of Trapani, but Mazara del Vallo plays a central role because its enterprises capture 60% of the total quantity of fish caught (30,000 tons annually). The District also involves some North African areas such as Libya and Tunisia, with which some joint ventures have been promoted in the food processing and shipbuilding sector.

Therefore, the District was created by the need for enterprises to face market and technology changes, despite their small size and low availability of economic resources. Basically, it was necessary to set up a body for the promotion and coordination to define a strategic business policy for all fisheries companies.

District activities can be summarized in the following points:

- promoting the competitiveness of the fisheries sector, focusing on product quality policy;
- fostering systemic aggregation of enterprises based on the integrated chain model;
- strengthening infrastructures of the district territory;
- promoting the provision of services for enterprises;
- improving energy efficiency of the supply chain and promoting environmental protection;
- promoting research projects in support of enterprises;
- obtaining protected trademarks and marks of origin for local fish specialties;
- promoting technological innovations;
- promoting the valorization of human resources through professional training;
- establishing fiscal and financial policies for participating enterprises;
- promoting internationalization of enterprises;
- planning district marketing strategies to increase sales of fish products.

Consortium CO.S.VA.P. (Sicilian Consortium for the Enhancement of the Fisheries Sector) was established in 1989. Before the foundation of the

District, the organization worked through the Consortium with targets similar to those of the District. The Consortium aims to increase the competitiveness of fisheries enterprises through high quality standards of products, exploiting modern technologies and infrastructures in order to enhance the production of local businesses.

In detail, the activities of the Consortium can be summarized in the following points:

- enhancing fishery and agro-food productions;
- protecting typical local products;
- supporting internationalization processes of enterprises, through partnership agreements and joint ventures with foreign companies;
- promoting the coordination of supplies and sales, facilitating imports and exports;
- aiming at the development of the production chain by developing appropriate agreements with foreign countries;
- obtaining the protection of trademarks from public institutions to guarantee the quality, hygiene and origin of productions;
- regulating fisheries, food processing and trade;
- promoting the participation of enterprises in trade exhibitions and events for the communication and promotion of local productions.

According to the District Agreement of 2006 (Patto per lo Sviluppo del Distretto 2006), the number of affiliated companies was 114, employing 2120 workers. The total turnover was € 259,553,455.63 (2005), while the export sales amounted to € 44,273,742.18. According to the data reported in the District Agreement of 2011 (Patto per lo Sviluppo del Distretto 2011), the number of associated companies remains constant in 2010 (114). With regard to turnover, there is an increase in total turnover (€ 299,310,000) and a decrease in export sales (€ 35,047,000), while the total number of employees involved is 1144. The District Agreement 2016 (Patto Distrettuale 2016) shows a smaller number of affiliated companies, which are 102 (of which 60% are new affiliates). The total annual turnover is € 407,740,000, while the export is € 61,200,000.

The above values are compared in the following table 2.

	2006	2011	2016
<b>Number of Affiliated Enterprises</b>	114	114	102
<b>Total Turnover</b>	259,553,455.63 €	299,310,000 €	407,740,000 €
<b>Export</b>	44,273,742.18 €	34,512,000 €	61,200,000 €
<b>% Of Export on Total Turnover</b>	17.06%	11.53%	15.01%
<b>Employment</b>	2120	1144	1294
<b>Average Employment</b>	18.8	10	12.7

Tab. 2 – The development of the CO.S.VA.P. Consortium 2006-2016.  
[Source: District Agreement 2006, 2011, 2016]

The comparison between 2006 and 2011 is characterized by some negative trends due to the crisis in the fisheries sector. In fact, it is possible to notice a decrease in exports and employment. However, there are also positive aspects, as the number of businesses does not decrease and turnover has increased despite the crisis. The values contained in 2016 data show positive economic growth figures when compared to 2011 statistics. In fact, there is an increase in turnover of 38%, an increase in exports of 77% and an increase in workers of 13%.

The growth in turnover and the substantial stability of the number of companies are indicative of an increase in internal efficiency and an improvement in the operational aspects of the District enterprises. The increase in exports is indicative of a greater propensity for internationalization and exploitation of international markets. It is possible to see how employment, after a first decline, has increased. In addition, labor productivity increased, as the increase in turnover was more than proportional to the increase in the number of workers. Therefore, the District-Consortium has certainly helped the affiliated companies to overcome the negative impacts of the economic crisis in the fisheries sector, favoring its survival and economic recovery.

Since the foundation of the District, initiatives to promote fisheries have increased (e.g., creation of laboratories, participation in international trade fairs, conclusion of agreements with countries, etc.). New partners have emerged, involving countries such as Algeria, Angola, Guinea, Ivory Coast and Ghana, in addition to traditional relations with some North African countries, especially Libya and Tunisia, but also Egypt, Cyprus and Crete. The number of public bodies involved is 25 today. Considering

this data, it is possible to say that the District, although operating within a naturally closed ecosystem, has a strong international vocation for the benefit of affiliated companies.

Enterprises affiliated to the District can retain their decision-making autonomy by selling their own products through their own brand but, at the same time, businesses can exploit arrangements, distribution channels and the image of the District, which acts on behalf of all the participating enterprises. Therefore, there is a phenomenon of cooperation-competition.

Thanks to the work of the District, affiliated enterprises have been able to carry out effective internationalization policies (as evidenced by the increase in exports). Through the functions of the District, affiliated enterprises can maintain small size and family management, taking advantages from the benefits deriving from the large size that the District allows to realize. In fact, according to European classification parameters, the district aggregate is composed of 64% by micro-enterprises, 35% by “small enterprises” and only 1% is represented by medium-sized enterprises.

The Fishing District – COSVAP of Mazara del Vallo represents an important case related to the “Consortium-District model”, which is consistent with the characteristics of ecosystems in the Euro-Mediterranean area because it fosters autonomous small businesses to cooperate. The District of Mazara del Vallo should be taken as a case study to replicate in other territories these models of entrepreneurial aggregation. In this way, it is possible to face international competition, compatible with a small dimension and a strong family vocation of businesses.

## **Findings and research perspectives**

The global crisis and the increased international competition threaten the survival of small and medium-sized enterprises in the Euro-Mediterranean countries.

This paper has shown, on a logical theoretical basis, how these micro and small businesses, while remaining autonomous and competing with one another, must systematically cooperate within industrial districts, clusters, networks and consortia to overcome problems arising from their small size.

This principle of systematic cooperation between autonomous and (in some cases) competing small enterprises must also guide the design

of new businesses, so that they can assume features consistent with the Euro-Mediterranean ecosystems.

When designing a new company, moreover, building strong relations with other companies will provide the young firms with a relational capital and a corporate reputation that will enable it to overcome the problems of the shortage of financial and human resources.

In the business start-up stage, therefore, it is necessary to combine autonomy and collaboration. This model is a hybrid between hierarchy and the market. The network must have a high level of internal coordination. The companies that are part of it, while being autonomous, for some activities they have to cooperate as if they were a single economic entity.

Relationships with other businesses can mitigate the high vulnerability typical of young businesses also because they speed up the process of building their corporate reputation and, in this way, to build strong bonds of trust with stakeholders who provide the necessary resources to the enterprise.

The prerequisite for adopting the Euro-Mediterranean model is that cooperating companies adopt accounting information systems based on the sharing of information.

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In the last part of this paper it is proposed the case study of the Consortium and the District of the Pesca – COSVAP of Mazara del Vallo, which represents a model of success that must be taken as a reference both from mature companies and young firms. The “consortium-district”, acting as a single large enterprise and promoting co-ordination of the activities of the production and distribution chain, represents the “Mediterranean way” for the competitiveness of small autonomous enterprises.

Our future research will look at the common traits of the most successful companies and clusters in the Euro-Mediterranean countries to see if collaboration between autonomous small businesses is the basis for their entrepreneurial success.

### **Abstract**

The start-ups described in the international literature are innovative and high-tech companies, founded by a team of highly qualified specialists (often researchers), which aim at rapid growth, often involving venture capitalists and business angels. The Euro-Mediterranean regions lack the necessary conditions to adopt this general business start-up model. The small family business is almost the only type of business, large

corporations managed by professional executives are very few, private equity is not developed and stock markets are not as large and efficient as those of the most advanced nations. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a different theoretical model that can be taken as a reference by those who want to start a new business. In this paper, a “Euro-Mediterranean Start-up Model” is proposed, consistent with the ecosystem characteristics of these regions. This model is based on competition and collaboration (coopetition) relationships between small businesses belonging to clusters and industrial districts – widespread in ecosystems in the Euro-Mediterranean area – which allow these small businesses to face the threat of international competition. The underlying idea of the proposed model is that the high vulnerability of young businesses can be reduced by building relationships with other companies in clusters and industrial districts. The last section of this paper describes a case study: the Industrial Fishing District and the Mazara del Vallo Consortium – COSVAP, which should be considered as a reference model for business start-up design in Euro-Mediterranean countries, since it is a successful network based on the collaboration between small autonomous companies.

**Keywords:** Business Start-up; Start-ups; Small Business; Mediterranean Start-up Model; Networks.

## Abstract

L'impresa familiare di piccole dimensioni è assai diffusa in Italia e, in generale, nei paesi dell'area euro-mediterranea. La dottrina ha posto in luce che queste imprese tendono a rimanere piccole anche quando si presenta loro la possibilità di crescere, giacché lo sviluppo spesso implica l'ingresso di estranei al capitale e alla gestione dell'azienda di famiglia. Quando sono costrette a fronteggiare la concorrenza di imprese di dimensioni maggiori, piuttosto che intraprendere una strategia di sviluppo, le aziende familiari tendono ad aggregarsi in distretti industriali ed altre tipologie di addensamenti produttivi oltre che a dare vita a consorzi, per colmare i limiti manageriali e finanziari derivanti da una gestione esclusivamente familiare.

Nel progettare una nuova impresa nell'area euro-mediterranea è assai difficile replicare su larga scala il modello anglosassone della startup, costituita da un team di specialisti con l'intento di perseguire una rapidissima crescita attraverso il coinvolgimento del private equity e la quotazione in borsa.

In questo scritto si propone un modello di creazione d'impresa - che chiamiamo “mediterraneo” - perché coerente con le caratteristiche di quest'area geografica, giacché si basa sulla collaborazione tra piccole imprese autonome.

Nella parte finale dell'articolo si presenta un caso di successo: il distretto e il consorzio della pesca COSVAP di Mazara del Vallo, nel quale collaborano piccole imprese autonome e pertanto può essere assunto quale modello ideale di riferimento nel progettare la nascita di nuove imprese nei paesi dell'area euro-mediterranea.

**Parole chiave:** startup; piccola impresa; modello euro-mediterraneo di startup; distretto; consorzio.

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Il terzo fascicolo del 2016 di SUDEUROPA si presenta in forma monografica e raccoglie gli atti del Convegno "Futuro digitale. Scenari e opportunità del mercato unico europeo" organizzato nell'ambito del progetto della rete dei CDE 2016 "Mercato Unico Digitale per l'Europa".

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