

# Cooperative tourism: a blueprint for the development of the Monti Dauni.

## Event Report



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## Introduction

The event '**Cooperative Tourism: a development model for the Monti Dauni**' was held on Thursday 27 June 2024 in Lucera organised by **Gal Meridaunia**, attracting a wide participation of local actors and institutional representatives. The event represented an important opportunity to discuss and develop innovative strategies aimed at enhancing local resources and promoting sustainable tourism in the rural areas of the Monti Dauni.

The **main objective** of the conference was to **promote cooperative tourism** as a tool for the **integrated development** of the Monti Dauni and **rural areas**. It is a **socio-economic model** based on cooperation between all the players in the area, between the **public and private sectors**, actively involving local communities in the **management** and development of tourism **resources**. This approach aims to create a more **resilient, inclusive** and **sustainable** tourism system.

It is particularly useful for marginal and rural areas, as it makes it possible to enhance itineraries and territories that are outside the mainstream tourist flows. Through cooperation and networking between local actors, this model promotes the economic and social development of communities, improving their ability to cope with systemic shocks and adapt to the challenges of the tourism market.

In addition, **cooperative tourism promotes social inclusion** by providing employment and training opportunities for vulnerable groups, and enhances the local cultural and natural heritage, making it accessible and usable for all. Through the creation of local networks and cooperation between different stakeholders, cooperative tourism can contribute significantly to the creation of community welfare, improving the quality of life for rural inhabitants and increasing the attractiveness of the area for tourists.



## **Proseguimento della Strategia VisitMontiDauni**

The event was organised as a continuation of the Visit Monti Dauni strategy of the **2014-2020 programming period**. The VisitMontiDauni platform, launched by Meridaunia to promote tourism in the Monti Dauni, is an ideal channel for integrating and enhancing cooperative tourism initiatives. Through this platform, it is possible to offer visibility to tour operators, B&Bs and other local activities that embody the principles of sustainability, authenticity and community participation. This approach not only helps diversify the tourism offer of the Monti Dauni, but also encourages visitors to have more immersive and meaningful experiences.

Cooperative tourism is a fundamental tool for strengthening and increasing the growth strategies of tourism operators, but also of social and educational farms, museums and sites of historical and cultural interest, producers of the excellent food and wine of the Monti Dauni, and cultural and social promotion associations. Through the support and promotion of local networks, it is possible to create a more resilient and integrated tourism ecosystem, capable of facing market challenges and developing new economic opportunities for local communities.

Furthermore, through **collaborative marketing strategies**, we can effectively communicate the uniqueness of the Monti Dauni to a wider audience. The VisitMontiDauni platform and other joint promotion initiatives can help build a strong image for the destination, attracting visitors interested in exploring an area that offers not only natural and cultural beauty, but also a model of sustainable and responsible tourism.

This type of tourism, based on cooperation and the active participation of local communities, is an added value for visitors and a powerful development tool for the area. The event of 27 June was therefore an important step in consolidating and expanding the strategy of Visit Monti Dauni, creating community itineraries, demonstrating how cooperative tourism can be effectively integrated into territorial development policies and contribute to the sustainable growth of rural areas.

## Profile of Event Participants

The event was attended by a wide range of local actors, all of whom are key to the success of cooperative tourism in the Monti Dauni. The profile of participants was varied and representative of the richness and diversity of the area. Among those present were:

- **Tourism Sector Operators:** Owners of B&Bs, agritourisms, hotels and other accommodation facilities operating in the Monti Dauni. These operators are often pioneers in promoting authentic and sustainable experiences, and their involvement is crucial to diversifying the local tourism offer.
- **Social Cooperatives:** Organisations committed to social inclusion and supporting vulnerable people, such as cooperatives working with people with disabilities or providing educational and social services. They see co-operative tourism as an opportunity to promote community welfare and create employment for their users.
- **Cultural and Social Promotion Associations:** Bodies that work to enhance the cultural and natural heritage of the territory. These associations organise cultural events, manifestations and thematic routes that attract both visitors and residents, contributing to the cultural vitality of the Monti Dauni.
- **Agrifood Producers:** Local farms and producers offer typical and quality products, such as olive oil, wines, cheeses and cold cuts. These producers supplement the tourist offer with authentic food and wine experiences, such as tastings and guided farm tours, which enrich the visitors' experience.
- **Museums and Sites of Historical and Cultural Interest:** Institutions that preserve the historical and cultural heritage of the Monti Dauni. They collaborate with tourism initiatives to make visits more meaningful and engaging, offering guided tours, educational workshops and special events that highlight the historical and cultural wealth of the region.
- **Local Authorities and Public Administrations:** Representatives of local and regional administrations, who play a fundamental role in the planning and implementation of tourism development strategies. Their participation ensures that initiatives are in line with public policies and that there is institutional support for the activities promoted.
- **Third Sector Associations:** Non-profit organisations that work in various fields, from environmental protection to the promotion of civil rights, and that see cooperative tourism as a means of raising awareness and involving the community in sustainable development projects.




## Morning programme


The morning of the conference was devoted to a series of speeches that explored various aspects of cooperative tourism and its importance for the development of rural areas. The speeches offered a comprehensive overview of the opportunities and challenges related to this development model, with a special focus on public-private partnerships.

**Pasquale De Vita**, President of Meridaunia, highlighted how the LAG sought to answer two crucial questions: how to increase the tourism offer of the Monti Dauni and how to improve it. He explained that the tourism offer in terms of infrastructure has improved considerably, with each municipality equipped with accommodation facilities, spaces for nature and cultural tourism and restored historical buildings. This progress, together with the Visit Monti Dauni platform, effectively answered the first question. De Vita then emphasised the importance of further improving the tourism offer, recognising the fundamental role of all the actors linked to the associations and Pro Loco in consolidating and promoting the Monti Dauni's increasingly appealing brand.

Professor **Alceste Santuari**, associate professor of Economics Law at the Alma Mater Studiorum - University of Bologna, opened the session with a speech entitled "Law of socially responsible organisations". She explored the legal guidelines and the importance of the third sector in the development of cooperative and community-based tourism, highlighting how co-programming and co-planning, in the light of the Third Sector Code, can boost Public Administration (PA) action. He emphasised that although PAs often prefer procurement for its simplicity, it is crucial to choose procedures based on the actual needs of the territory to maximise the effectiveness of interventions. He also emphasised the PA's central role in coordinating efforts and resources, involving local actors to activate effective public-private partnerships, and reiterated the importance of continuous training for the PA.

**Carmelo De Rosa** of Pugliapromozione, territorial office of Foggia, presented the 'Strategic Plan Tourism Culture 2030', outlining the guidelines for the tourism and cultural development of the region in the coming years. His presentation provided a long-term strategic framework, highlighting key initiatives to enhance Puglia's cultural and natural heritage.





**Noè Andreano**, vice-president of ANCI Puglia, discussed the crucial role of local authorities in the development of cooperative tourism, in light of the regulations on public-private partnerships. He reiterated how Puglia's municipalities are committed to enhancing co-planning experiences between public administration and private organisations, emphasising the importance of collaboration between various levels of government and the private sector for the success of tourism initiatives.


**Carmelo Rollo**, President of Legacoop Puglia, and Gerardo Fascia, President of Confcooperative Cultura Turismo e Sport Puglia, concluded the morning with speeches that emphasised the importance of cooperatives in the tourism sector. Both emphasised how cooperatives can act as an engine for local development, promoting an inclusive and sustainable model of tourism that enhances the territory's resources and encourages the active participation of the community.


The morning was therefore an important opportunity for discussion and sharing of ideas, providing a solid theoretical and practical basis for the participatory planning tables in the afternoon.

### **Participatory concretion session**

The afternoon part of the event opened with the speech of **Gerardo Fascia** President of Confcooperative Cultura Turismo Sport Puglia. With him we explored in detail how to put cooperative tourism experiences into practice. We discussed the fundamentals of cooperation set in the context of tourism in rural areas. It was discussed in detail how cooperation can bring significant benefits to the tourism sector, both in economic and organisational terms. Meridaunia presented a concrete example: the single booking portal VisitMontiDauni, which allows centralised bookings, saving time and reducing fragmentation.

This system offers a more efficient service for both tourists and local operators, facilitating the management and improving the accessibility of the area's tourist offer. In addition, the advantages related to marketing and promotion were highlighted. The socio-economic operators of the Monti Dauni, often small in size, lack the resources and skills necessary to promote themselves effectively on an individual level.






However, through cooperation, it is possible to pool resources for the enhancement of the area as a whole. This synergy makes it possible to develop more effective marketing campaigns and to participate, for example, in trade fairs, which usually entail high costs. Joining forces makes it possible to attend major promotional events, increasing the visibility and attractiveness of the Monti Dauni area.

These examples have clearly demonstrated how cooperation not only favours a more efficient management of resources, but also makes it possible to expand growth and development opportunities for all the actors involved. The ability to operate as a unified entity makes the tourism offer stronger and more competitive, bringing lasting benefits to the entire community.


## **Activities**

The afternoon was dedicated to working tables with the socio-economic actors of the Monti Dauni led by Meridaunia. These worked together to lay the foundations for a shared long-term strategy on local tourism development, with the main objective of generating lasting benefits for the area. The session was attended not only by operators in the tourism sector, but also by third sector associations, social farms, cultural and social promotion associations, agri-food producers, museums, and others.

During the workshops, a participatory planning methodology called the Expectations Matrix was used. This approach made it possible to understand how each participant can contribute something unique, while also having expectations that they cannot fulfil alone. Through interaction and collaboration, participants were able to identify common solutions and ways to support each other.







The methodology used in the workshops is part of the CoCreAid project, in which Meridaunia is a partner. CoCreAid aims to improve digital co-design among non-profit organisations in rural areas. Feedback from the participants was very positive: all showed great interest in the topic and the conviction that cooperation is the key to socio-economic development in rural areas.

## Results of the Participatory Design Tables

The participants were divided into two working tables to address the participatory planning activities using the expectations matrix.


**Table 1:** composed of representatives of tourist accommodation, food and wine producers and museums and sites of interest.


**Table 2:** composed of third sector organisations, pro loco and tourist guides.

The **first activity** saw each table identify its **main objectives** for tourism development. **Table 1** identified **the objective** of 'Generating a sustainable and inclusive tourism offer', while **Table 2** focused on 'Creating experiential and inclusive events'.

In the **second activity**, participants reflected on the **contributions** they can make to **tourism development**, the **resources** they have at their disposal (tangible and intangible) and their **expectations**. The contributions identified by **Table 1** included '**Hospitality and relaxation, wine and food tasting, educational visits**'.

On the other hand, **Table 2** highlighted '**knowledge of the territory, creation of practices for social development**'. In terms of needs, **Table 1** indicated the need for '**Human resources, skills, partnerships, collaboration with other operators and entities**', while **Table 2** indicated '**Sponsorship and promotion, financial support, increasing the offer of both social and cultural development**'.






At the end of this activity, one contact person per table presented the results, and there was then a collective reflection on how the expectations of one group could be met by the other. This process highlighted the importance of cooperation between different actors for the development of integrated, community-based tourism.

For example, it emerged that third-sector entities working with disadvantaged individuals could form partnerships with proloco and tour guides to prepare these individuals to become tour guides in local museums. In addition, agri-food producers could collaborate with tourist accommodation, offering educational activities to enrich the offer for tourists.

This synergy demonstrated how cooperation and the sharing of resources between different actors can significantly contribute to the sustainable and inclusive development of tourism in the Monti Dauni.





## Conclusions


The event 'Cooperative Tourism: a development model for the Monti Dauni' marked the beginning of a continuous and shared development path for the territory. Participation was high, demonstrating a strong interest and commitment on the part of local actors and institutions. The feedback gathered during and after the event was extremely positive, clearly indicating the need and desire to continue along this path.

The conference highlighted the potential of cooperative tourism as a tool for the integrated development of rural areas, providing a platform for co-creation and collaboration between various stakeholders. This approach provided an insight into how cooperation and resource sharing can significantly contribute to the sustainable and inclusive development of tourism in the Monti Dauni.

The methodology used, in particular the Expectations Matrix, proved to be an effective tool for facilitating dialogue and collaboration between various stakeholders in the area. This led to the identification of shared solutions and highlighted how each participant can make unique and beneficial contributions to the tourism development process.

The event also underlined the importance of improving the tourism offer through collaboration between public and private entities and civil society. The example of the VisitMontiDauni platform and discussions on the economic and organisational benefits of cooperation demonstrated how an integrated approach can increase the attractiveness of the area and create a more resilient and competitive tourism system.

In conclusion, the success of this first event encourages us to continue working together, building on the foundations laid today for a prosperous and resilient future for the Monti Dauni. We are determined to pursue this vision, strengthened by the support and active participation of the local community and institutions involved. The path of cooperative tourism development in the Monti Dauni has just begun, and we are ready to face the challenges and seize the opportunities that lie ahead.



**Thank you for joining us**

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