

THE ROLE OF ETHICAL STRATEGIC ALLIANCES IN RECOVERING A TERRITORY: A CASE STUDY.

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ABSTRACT

Strategic alliances among organizations have grown dramatically during the past two decades and are supposed to grow in the near future (Elmuti & Kathawala, 2001). A vast literature on strategic alliances and networks has thus emerged in fields such as economics, management, sociology, and organization theory (Kim & Vonortas, 2014), with much of the research focused on the implications of strategic alliances and networks in terms of marketing or technological advantages and on their effect on the performance of firms engaging in such a relationship (Chan *et al.*, 1997; Kale *et al.*, 2002). Few papers have a macro-economic point of view, dealing with the benefits that alliances could bring to the economic system within which they operate, and these papers deal with the competitive and productive advantage of the industrial system (Ricciardi, 2011).

No paper, to the best of our knowledge deals with ethical alliances and with the role that they can cover in restoring a territory. Our paper would like to fill this void by presenting a case study of an ethical strategic alliance, operating in the Calabrian Locride with the aim to recover a territory plagued by mafias and high youth unemployment through a strategy focused on a strong concept, which is that the beautiful could also be good, that ethics should go hand in hand with business, in the light of the creed of the Magna Grecia, *kalokagathia* (the good and the beautiful).

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1. Introduction

Strategic alliances among organizations have grown dramatically during the past two decades and are supposed to grow in the near future (Elmuti & Kathawala, 2001). A strategic alliance can be defined as an alliance in which independent organizations share the benefits of partnership and participate continuously in one or more key strategic areas such as product design, production, marketing, distribution, and technology (Arend and Amit, 2005; Gulati, 1998). Alliances can take many forms, ranging from simple agreements with no equity ties to more formal arrangements involving equity ownership and shared managerial control over joint activities (Chan *et al.*, 1997; Gulati, 1998; Gulati *et al.*, 2000; Elmuti and Khawala, 2001; Todeva and Knoke, 2005) and that evolve with time (Marafioti *et al.*, 2013; Castro *et al.*, 2013).

A vast literature on strategic alliances and networks has thus emerged in fields such as economics, management, sociology, and organization theory (Kim & Vonortas, 2014), with much of the research focused on the implications of strategic alliances and networks in terms of marketing or technological advantages and on their effect on the performance of firms engaging in such a relationship (Chan *et al.*, 1997; Kale *et al.*, 2002)³.

Few papers have a macro-economic point of view, dealing with the benefits that alliances could bring to the economic system within which they operate, and these papers deal with the competitive and productive advantage of the industrial system (Ricciardi, 2011). No paper, to the best of our knowledge, deals with ethical alliances and with the role that they can cover in restoring a territory. Our paper would like to fill this void by presenting a case study of an ethical strategic alliance, operating in the Calabrian Locride with the aim to recover a territory plagued by mafias and high youth unemployment through a strategy focused on a strong concept, which is the beautiful could also be good, that ethics should go hand in hand with business, in the light of the creed of the Magna Grecia, *kalokagathia* (the good and the beautiful).

The paper contributes in several ways to the literature. Firstly, it contributes to the strategic alliances literature by shedding light on one of the less investigated strategic themes of the alliance literature, that is, the ethical dimension of networks and its links with competitive success. It also contributes to the non-profit literature, as the network examined is a network including both non-profit and profit organizations, and contributes to this literature from an empirical point of view, with a novel approach with respect to the existing conceptually oriented literature on the topic (Lönqvist *et al.*, 2009). The paper shows how the two approaches, profit and non-profit, can live together, with mutual benefits, also contributing to the wellbeing of a depressed region. By linking together ethics and business, the paper also contributes to the ethical literature and to the unresolved dispute about whether ethics favor business or not (Eisenbeiss *et al.*, 2015). From this perspective, the empirical analysis of an ethical management project applied to a difficult context (high perceived corruption, high unemployment) has novelty value, as it is a scarcely investigated theme. Finally, the paper contributes to the economic literature that deals with the several benefits (economic, competitive, knowledge, and ethical) that a network can bring to a territory, thereby embracing a macro perspective.

The originality of the paper lies in investigating ethical issues from an empirical point of view assuming a strategic alliance located in a depressed territory as the unit of analysis. To the best of our knowledge, ours is the first study pursuing the aim to investigate how and whether an ethical network can succeed in recovering a depressed territory.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 briefly discusses the literature and poses the research question; Section 3 outlines the methodology; while Section 4 introduces the case study, also analyzing the context within which the ethical network operates; Section 5 analyzes the main findings; Section 6 concludes the paper.

³ In the literature there is a difference between alliances and networks, which has to do with the extent of relationships (an alliance involves two or more partners working together on a single project whereas a network is made up of a collection of relationships, formal alliances or other relationships that binds a group of organizations together; cf. Dyer and Singh, 1998; Kim and Vonortas, 2014). Nevertheless, in the paper we will use the two terms as synonymous.

2. Literature review and research question

Our research can be included in the stream of strategic alliances literature that links value creation of networks to underlying shared, maintained and developed network resources (Hervas-Oliver & Albors-Garrigos, 2007; Gretzinger and Royer, 2014). The paper assumes thus a resource-based view (RBV) perspective (Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1991).

From an RBV perspective, networks can offer a variety of advantages for their members in the form of access to valuable shared and non-shared resources (Das and Teng, 2000; Lavie, 2006). Applying the RBV to networks, the necessary bundle of resources and capabilities are thus internal to the network but external to any single firm (Marafioti *et al.*, 2013).

Subsequent studies of the knowledge-based view (KBV) focused on the intangible content and cognitive character of inter-firm relationships (Foss, 1996; Grant, 1996; Conner & Prahalad, 1996; Teece *et al.*, 1997; Curado and Bontis, 2006). These studies assign a predominant role in explaining firm performance variations to the possibility of a firm belonging to a network of accessing knowledge potentially usable to generate advantages for the firm itself and for the whole aggregate (Grant and Baden-Fuller, 2004; Dyer and Singh, 1998; Inkpen, 1996; Della Corte and Sciarelli, 2011). Several studies adopt a KBV approach in studying network of firms, such as Kale *et al.* (2000), Inkpen and Tsang (2005), Colins and Hitt (2006), Welbourne and Pardo-del- Val (2009), Liu *et al.* (2010), Gretzinger and Royer (2014).

The Intellectual based view (ICBV) is the ultimate evolution of the RBV (Reed *et al.*, 2007; Martin-de-Castro *et al.*, 2012). Specifically, ICBV deals solely with knowledge that is created by and stored in a firm's three capital components; i.e., in its people (human capital), social relationships (relational capital), and information technology systems and processes (organizational capital) (Edvinsson and Malone, 1997).

Several studies adopt an ICBV approach in studying the network of firms, such as Das *et al.* (2003), Schiuma *et al.* (2005), Oliver and Porta (2006), Allee (2008), Solitander and Tidström (2010), Peng (2011), Joia and Malheiros (2009), Chang *et al.* (2008).

The majority of the studies on strategic alliances following RBV perspective analyzes the strategic alliances in terms of achievement of competitive advantages related to marketing or technology (Rutten *et al.*, 2014; Brown *et al.*, 2014; Lerro and Schiuma, 2009; Tallman *et al.*, 2004; Kale *et al.*, 2002).

Very few papers have a macro-economic point of view, and widen their perspective to include the effects of the networks on the territory, but their focus is mainly on the creation of competitive or technological advantages for the territory including networks (Ricciardi, 2011; Marafioti *et al.*, 2013; Sotarauta, 2009, 2010).

No paper, to the best of our knowledge, deals with ethical alliances and with the role that they can cover in restoring a territory. This research gap presents an opportunity to scholars and constitutes the purpose of this study.

3. Methodology

On the basis of the considerations developed in the previous section, we posit the following Research Question (RQ):

“Could ethical networks help to recover a territory?”

As the RQ is context-specific, it has been addressed to investigating a case study.

A case study approach is appropriate when a researcher needs to conduct a holistic and in-depth analysis of a complex phenomenon in its real-life context (Yin, 2003; Berry and Otley, 2004). Moreover, the case study methodology offers the possibility of investigating accounts from a practical rather than from a theoretical perspective, through the exploration of a phenomenon in a specific context. The use of case study

also allows researchers to use different methods of collecting data, thereby giving them a rich source of data from real settings, with the aim to deepen the understanding of the investigated phenomenon (Yin, 2003).

As such, this method is particularly suitable for exploring practices related to the ethical and business management issues from an inside-out perspective, in a complex, context-dependent and firm-dependent context. Business ethics is a social object and, in order to be understood, it has to be “contextualized” (Jørgensen, 2006).

The GOEL strategic alliance has been selected for the case study. It is located in the Calabrian Locride, a territory plagued by mafias and high youth unemployment, and for this reason chosen as the right context for conducting our case study.

Owing to the nature of the paper, document analysis (Bowen, 2009) was the main tool to collect the accounting data (primary sources) needed to provide evidence for the research question. The collection and storage of the data was carried out through the GOEL website.

4. The GOEL group case study

The region of Calabria is located in the South of Italy, less economically developed than the North of Italy⁴. The main problems of the southern regions are the weakness of regional and national institutions, the strength of organized crime, poor education standards, high unemployment, low productivity, insufficient infrastructure and widespread perceived corruption⁵ (Svimez, 2014; Nisticò, 2014).

Despite efforts at national and supranational level, the southern regions have not succeeded in inverting the trend (Svimez, 2014). From 2000 to 2011, Italy received more than \$60 billion in European Union financing to underwrite a wide array of programs, most of it directed to the South of Italy, but the European money was misused and these regions did not demonstrate the capacity to plan and to achieve results from the funded projects (Donadio, 2012).

Calabria is the least-developed Italian region (Svimez, 2014). Compared to the southern regions, Calabria has the typical features of weak economies (Aiello and Castiglione, 2014): a high degree of dependence on external public transfers (European Commission, Regional Innovation Monitor Plus); a low degree of internationalization; a fragile financial structure; a widespread corruption; an unemployment rate of more than 20% (Nisticò, 2014)⁶; and a weak innovative system⁷.

Furthermore, since the 1970s the entire area has developed a clientelistic mentality (exchange of goods and services for political support) vis-à-vis the major parties, which are often voted in exchange for jobs and favors, which in turn increases corruption. In this kind of environment, the ties between organized crime (*'ndrangheta*) and local politicians run deep⁸. The perceived corruption is really high and few Calabrians have much confidence in their leaders (Donadio, 2012; BCC Mediocrati-Demoskopika, 2013).

⁴ The high heterogeneity in firm performance and the persistent regional productivity gaps are some of the most debated issues in Italian economic literature and a structural factor of the Italian economy (Svimez, 2014). In the South of the country, the typical weaknesses of firms are exacerbated as they are, on average, much smaller than their counterparts in the Centre-North, exhibit a very low level of internationalization and underperform in every innovative activity (Pompei, 2013).

⁵ The high perceived corruption is in line with the corruption perception index 2014, that places Italy in the last position in the EU and Western European countries, together with Greece and Romania. Based on expert opinion from around the world, the Corruption Perceptions Index ranks countries and territories based on how corrupt their public sector is perceived to be (Corruption Perceptions Index, 2014).

⁶ The unemployment rate of 20.6% is higher of the southern unemployment rate (19.6%) and much higher than the Italian unemployment rate (12%) Cf. Nisticò, 2014.

⁷ The differences between Calabria and the rest of Italy are worrying both in the public and in the private-sector; if we look at the investments in Research and Development (R&D), we can underline that the % of regional GDP invested in R&D in Calabria is 0.5%, mainly from universities (against a 1.53% in the rest of Italy) and the average firm's investment in R&D is 1 euro, against 11 euros invested by north western Italian firms (Aiello and Castiglione, 2014).

⁸ However, the organized crime problem is not confined to Southern Italy; on the contrary, it has permeated elsewhere in the nation and has sometimes even been 'exported' abroad.

The territory known as Locride is sadly one of the most infamous territories characterized by a strong presence of the local Calabrian mafia (*'ndrangheta*), the most powerful Italian criminal organization (Svimez, 2014), in which a jobs-for-votes culture persists that, nurtured by the organized crime endemic in this region, leaves the territory geographically and economically isolated (Donadio, 2012). The majority of jobs are precarious, precariousness generates dependence and, in turn, dependence allows the control of public resources and of political consensus. The Locride area counts 140,000 inhabitants, includes 42 municipalities and registers a high unemployment rate of 42%.

In this kind of environment, the GOEL Social Consortium was founded in 2003, with the aim to become a platform of change. The name has biblical roots (in fact GOEL was founded by Mons. Bregantini and by the Pastorale Sociale e del Lavoro of the Diocesi of Locri Gerace) and means the “ransomer”. The Consortium was a not-for-profit network, including 9 social cooperatives, 1 voluntary association and 1 foundation. The mission of GOEL has been, from its beginning, “*to change Locride and Calabria, fostering the achievement of freedom, democracy, social and economic justice, the respect of people’s rights of marginal and disadvantaged people, of common goods and of local communities*”.

GOEL is thus a project in which the economic dimension is instrumental to social change.

The two main strategic aims of GOEL are:

- 1) To allow people to express their consensus freely, overcoming the jobs-for-vote culture;
- 2) To achieve entrepreneurial initiatives aimed to sustain socio-political proposals for change.

In 2010, GOEL CONSORTIUM became a Cooperative Group, involving the same GOEL Consortium and two main holding cooperatives made up to manage specific sectors of activities, named GOELBIO and MADE IN GOEL.

GOEL Bio is the holding cooperative society of the GOEL group operating in the agricultural and energy industries through the production or transformation of typical organic products (organic citrus fruits, biological extra-virgin olive oil and the development of an innovative project of eco-sustainable production of energy). GOEL Bio includes all the producers physically located in the Locride and Gioia Tauro areas who not only have to offer high quality organic produce, but also they should guarantee an ethical conduct. The main aim is to promote the development of social cooperation and the employment of disadvantaged people through the valorization of typical products of the territory.

MADE in GOEL is the holding of GOEL group which includes all the social cooperatives dealing with the production and commercialization of the products branded *Cangiari*. All cooperatives should guarantee to give work to disadvantaged people, to face up against mafias and to take care of the belonging communities. *Cangiari*, in Calabrian idiom, means “to change”. The trademark is completed by the mathematical logo meaning different (\neq), to underline the commitment of the cooperative to innovate and differentiate from the competitors. The *Cangiari* collections are entirely designed and produced in Calabria with prestigious organic and natural raw materials and are handcrafted following the old ancient Calabrian traditions of textile at looms, re-examined and modernized. Each *Cangiari* item sends a message to the customer; under the claim “beauty is different”, Cangiari invite the customer to reflect that ethical issues (such as the respect for the environment and for the people, the economic equity, and social cooperation) are not only good but also beautiful.

CONSORTIUM GOEL includes all the social cooperatives devoted to providing citizens with social services. The social cooperatives belonging to the Consortium GOEL are type “A” or type “B”. Type A cooperatives provide the weak segment of the population (disabled people, aged people, immigrants, younger people and so on) with social services. Type B cooperatives are manufacturing firms operating in several economic sectors in which some members and workers are disadvantaged people⁹.

The first group of social cooperatives deals with responsible tourism (“I viaggi del GOEL”), tutoring to the start-up of new enterprises (“Crea Lavoro”), the consultant services for the citizens’ rights (“Diritti di cittadinanza”), the creation of an innovative market complementary to the ordinary one in which products

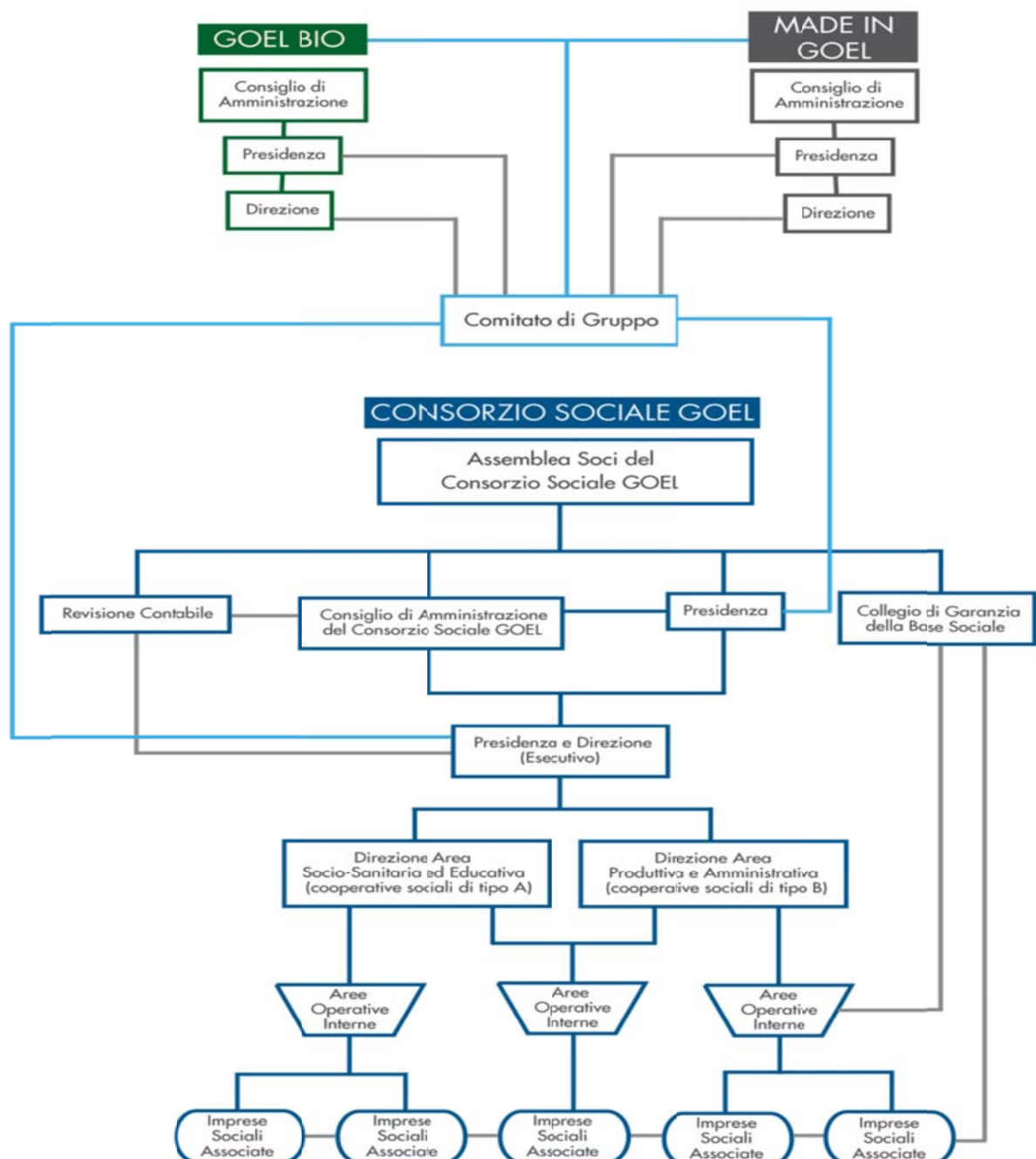
⁹ See art. 1, comma 1, Law 381/1991 that institutes the social cooperatives.

and services are exchanged with different competencies instead of money (“Aiutamundi”), and the consultancy for an effective ethical communication addressed to enterprises, not-for-profit organizations and public entities (“GOEL ethical consulting communication”).

The second group of social cooperatives provides welfare services, i.e. services related to the education, the health, and the social issue of immigration. In detail, “Goel edu.care” offers a wide range of services to the families, ranging from pedagogical support to families to the job placement of the young, including training for both young people and operators. “Comunità Davide e Maria Chiara” welcomes and rehabilitates mentally ill and seriously disabled people. Finally, the “Accoglienza immigrati” aims to integrate immigrants economically and socially through literacy courses, enterprises laboratories and providing accommodation for them.

Figure 1 illustrates the organizational structure of GOEL group.

Fig. 1 – The organizational structure of Cooperative Group GOEL



Source: Goel website

5. Analysis of the main activities and main results achieved

The GOEL Group has three main areas of activity: ethical fashion (Cangiari), sustainable agriculture (Goel Bio) and social and welfare services.

As regards Cangiari, it should be underlined that it started in 2009. In its beginning, the startup of the Cangiari brand benefitted from a contribution of €250,000 from Fondazione Vodafone and the tutorship of the National Chamber of Italian Fashion and of Santo Versace, a famous Italian fashion designer. Under a manufacturing profile, Cangiari received the support of the Yuki firm, which sell textile machines at cost price to Cangiari, thereby allowing Cangiari to combine technology and handcrafted work.

The main features of the Cangiari brand are: the high brand positioning on the fashion market¹⁰; sponsorship by known fashion designers; the use of the work of young but already successful designers; a great attention to the eco-compatibility of raw materials employed; and the combination of ethical significance and business entrepreneurship.

Its main competitive advantage is that it was a forerunner, as it is the first high-quality ethical fashion brand in Italy. It proposes a new vision, in which ethics and esthetics should go hand in hand and the workers are also owners of the brand.

Among the main strengths of Cangiari, we should underline the ability to mix tradition and technological innovation. In fact, the products are obtained following the ancient art of the *majistre*, who transmitted the secrets of the handcraft textile art to the Cangiari textile workers. Technologically speaking, the production is carried out through the technologically advanced textile machineries built on the basis of a 100-year old textile machine and the marketing uses both traditional and web channels.

Among the brands of the GOEL group, Cangiari is the brand with a greater international attitude: in fact, despite the production being entirely located in the Locride area, in 2010 Cangiari opened a showroom in Milan (in a place subtracted from the mafias), and others are planned in Rome and New York. Moreover, Cangiari achieves a large amount of its sales in Canada and the USA and among its future objectives is the desire to conquer the North European markets, where organic-certification and ethical production chains are considered competitive advantages, and the Chinese market. In addition, the international press has devoted several articles to the brand and the Cangiari collections have walked the runway in several countries, such as in Israel and Africa. Its production has been awarded prizes worldwide, for instance in 2010 it was awarded the sustainable luxury store in Paris, where it was the only Italian fashion brand.

Currently Cangiari is a solid reality, despite closing with a net loss of more than €8,000 in 2009 (the starting year), the subsequent years recorded a positive net income and a rapid growth of the turnover, equal to more than € 280,000 in 2010 to more than € 332,000 in 2011 and to more than € 350,000 in 2012.

GOEL Bio is an agricultural social cooperative, whose activities are mainly focused on the production of organic citrus and organic extra-virgin olive oil. It combines typicality, legality and respect for the environment with the high quality of the products. To commercialize its products, GOEL bio signed several agreements with suppliers specialized in organic food, such as EcorNaturaSi and Altromercato,

These two distributors share with Goel Bio its ethical mission to face up to the 'ndrangheta in the agricultural field and to restore dignity to agricultural workers; for this reason the EcorNaturaSi group adhered to Goel Bio as funding partner and Altromercato signed the "Alleanza per la Locride e la Calabria" to stop the 'ndrangheta¹¹.

¹⁰ It was an obliged choice, owing to the high production cost of the handcrafted textile material (€100 for 1 metre). Currently, Cangiari offers to its clients, together with the extra-luxurious collection, a cheaper collection devoted to young people.

¹¹ Since 2008, GOEL has promoted the Alliance with Locride and Calabria, in which over 3,000 people and 750 institutions and organizations are subscribed to. This alliance aims to combat the spread of the mafias, throughout Italy, giving life to concrete projects.

Among the main projects launched by Goel bio we should mention the “Laboratorio Sperimentale”, a platform to produce and distribute agricultural organic Calabrian products in an ethical and innovative way. Sustained by local partners (AIAB Calabria, Coldiretti Calabria, CCIA Calabria and ICEA), the project aims to innovate ethically by creating a platform in which excellent organic Calabrian products merge to valorize the typicality of the territory from the perspective of a sustainable development of the entire region of Calabria. Other future projects deal with the production area, with the aim to welcome new farmers, and the distribution area, with the aim to penetrate the ethical shelves of the GDO (Great Organized Distribution).

As regards the services, GOEL Group is really active in providing both social (sustainable tourism, job creation, defense of citizens’ rights, ethical consulting) and welfare services (education care, health assistance, immigrants welcome). Among social services, the GOEL group launched an innovative project, *Aiutamundi*. It is an experimental exchange system of products and services, collateral to the traditional market, in which products and services are exchanged with competencies and capabilities, both between citizens and firms, with the ultimate aim to widen the “competence capital” and to develop mutual assistance in the territory. The project involves 37 entities and it is funded by the “Fondazione per il Sud”, a non-profit organization including bank foundations and non-profit organizations to promote the social infrastructure of the South of Italy sustaining exemplar initiatives.

Among the welfare services, we should quote the projects carried out to favor the welfare of mentally ill patients, through the realization of social and relational creative laboratories and of paths to insert mentally ill patients in job, to guarantee their social integration and develop a territorial network of equity and solidarity. The project “Si può fare!” (You can do it!), still open, has already settled 16 patients into a job. In the welfare services, several projects are addressed to migrants, ranging from a welcome to younger people, to protection for those requiring asylum, to support and safeguarding of migrants in finding their autonomous home (“Un nido per le radici” project), to the re-integration of refugees (“Radicando” project). The last two projects closed successfully: the “Un nido per le radici” project guaranteed 25 families an effective right to a house with good prices, good structural conditions, good quality furniture; the project “Radicando” took care of 70 refugees, following their path towards a full re-integration and supporting their way by helping them with several services, from the assignment of fully furnished houses, to the providing of first necessity goods, food and a training course in the Italian language.

6. Conclusions

The paper deals with a novel research question, that is, whether a network driven by ethical values in a depressed region can achieve advantages for both the network (in terms of business success) and for the territory surrounding the network.

The case investigated is GOEL, which includes both profit and not-for-profit entities, operating in Calabria, an underdeveloped region plagued by mafias, high unemployment rate, and high corruption.

The answer to the main research question is positive, as in its history, GOEL has demonstrated itself to be a solid reality, carrying out several projects and initiatives to develop the territory (and also itself). As Monsignor Bregantini (the Bishop of Locri and the former founder of GOEL) declared in a recent interview, “the main aim is to change, not to do business, but if the business is going well, it is a sign that things are working” (Terragni, 2015).

GOEL is openly against everything that denies the dignity of people and communities, especially to the most vulnerable. It tries to build entrepreneurial paths based on environmental sustainability, economic fairness and social responsibility. According to GOEL; ethics should not be the “right” answer, but must become effective in all areas and sectors.

Another relevant result achieved has been to develop a sense of pride and belonging to the network; the head of the designers outlines the unicity of the GOEL philosophy (“We put our soul into each item”).

Also it demonstrates that it is possible, even in a depressed area, to conjugate ethics and business with reciprocal advantages for the organizations and the territory. The workers are paid 8 times more than they are

by the mafias to produce organic agricultural products and there are no illegal workers, the textile workers are paid fair salaries and the revenues cover the production costs and the costs of the initial investments, providing evidence that the ancient Magna Grecia creed *kalokagathia* (the ethic and the beautiful) is a possible dream.

The GOEL project additionally succeed in combining the ancient with the new, tradition with technology: textile workers restored ancient looms to produce clothes inspired by ancient Greek Byzantine textile designs (the Greek rose, Partridge eye, Malta cross). The technique of the ancient *majistre* (old women, often illiterate, who transmit their know-how converting it into lullabies that go with the squeaking of the looms) has been codified into mathematical models and the research on the textile product is always active, to widen the selection of natural colors (broom, blackberry, raspberry).

Currently GOEL is one of the largest companies in the Locride; it employs an important number of workers, more than 100, achieving a turnover of 4-5 million euros (Terragni, 2015). It includes several profit and not-for-profit cooperatives, operating in several industries such as training, social, health, tourism, art craft, food, business creation, multimedia production, and ecology. For instance, GOEL Bio is an activity carried out by farmers previously victims of the *'ndrangheta*, which produces fruit, oil, preserves, distributed by organic retailers throughout Italy; the "Amal" restaurant provides high-quality organic cookery, the travel agency "The GOEL travels" proposes responsible tourism, the cooperatives offer socio and health services, welcome immigrants and promotes a consultancy agency for effective ethics.

The *Cangiari* brand of the GOEL group has also obtained important acknowledgments, both from other famous Italian designers (the reference is to the worldwide famous stylist Santo Versace) and abroad, as international markets such as Canadian and USA markets are the outlet for the textile products (Terragni, 2015).

Of course, the paper describes the results of a single, yet successful initiative. It is true that the findings cannot be generalized, but it also true that the GOEL case could be seen as an exemplary case, conjugating ethics and business in a profitable way not only for the working organizations and the network, but also for the territory within which the network operates.

Calabria constitutes an example of crisis of accountability (Donadio, 2012); the experience of the GOEL network, instead, shows that the pursuing of eco-sustainable strategies stimulating ethical yet profitable innovations are feasible, both in the profit and not-for-profit domains (Bebbington and Larrinaga, 2014).

The innovative range of the GOEL project could be reduced by the weak rewards attributed to its initiatives in the territory in which it operates. To face this risk an alliance was created, the "Alleanza per la Locride e la Calabria", with the aim to sustain GOEL and other similar initiatives, but there is still much to be achieved. Only when GOEL receives the certain support of its Calabrian community, will it become a solid and stable reality, able to achieve its ultimate aim, which is to change the world around it.

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