



COMPAGNIA DEI PARCHI  
FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

IDEASS<sup>ITALY</sup>

Innovation for Development and South-South Cooperation

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# Introduction

by Roberto Di Vincenzo

**In general**, protected natural areas in Italy are areas that, while historically important, are also the least developed areas of the country. Since the 1950s, various development initiatives have been implemented in these areas. However, they have met with little success as they have all been top-down in approach and re-applications of a standard industrial model. Since 1999, Compagnia dei Parchi (CDP) has promoted the relaunching of these rural and protected areas by setting in train a virtuous circle linking the environment, the territory, the economy and tourism. CDP enables income generation in areas that have been neglected but that possess a wealth of particular assets, and allows the local populations to relaunch a tourism-based microeconomy with a small investment outlay.



**CDP is** an innovative, non-profit, limited liability consortium that generates income by using suitable existing properties as tourist accommodation. In this way, it promotes fresh economic development based on local resources. Through a bottom-up approach, CDP makes full use of the distinguishing qualities of the protected areas, not only their natural heritage, but also their history, culture, folklore and architecture. It achieves this through a process of sustainable development.

**CDP operates** through an agile organisational structure consisting of a head office, which is responsible for bookings and tourism marketing, and a network of affiliated accommodation structures.

**Between 1999** and 2004, CDP extended its operations to 16 protected areas. Working with the various park authorities, it has created a network of more than 1,000 accommodation structures and promoted them through the Internet, trade fairs and tourism links. In terms of quality, CDP has fostered a culture of tourist hospitality in areas not traditionally associated with tourism and also promoted a feeling of pride in local identity. CDP works by generating income from existing properties (houses and other forms of accommodation) and from local produce and products (e.g. local specialities, handicrafts and small enterprises). It also fosters the development of new tourism-related services. This model enables local people and enterprises to achieve financial returns for a small outlay within even a short time.

**CDP was** created in 1999 by CARSA (an integrated communications agency specialising in tourism- and environment-related communication) in association with Legambiente, Cresme S.p.A. and with the National Parks of the Gran Sasso and Monti della Laga, the Majella, and Monti Sibillini. This initiative has since been extended throughout the whole of Italy and is now attracting the interest of various Mediterranean countries. Indeed, CDP's project-based approach and the nature of its promoters have generated considerable broad-based support. This has enabled the activating of an innovative tourism product that fosters a form of economic development that works in synergy with the affirming of local identity and the strengthening of a feeling of pride in belonging to a territory.

**CDP is** the key reference point for the initiative called Appennino Parco D'Europa, a broad project to promote the Apennine region, which has the active backing of the Italian Ministry of the Environment, Legambiente and the Abruzzo Region.



**The CDP** model formed the basis for the motion Mediterranean Mountains, approved by the "World Conservation Congress" (IUCN) in Bangkok in November 2004.



# What problem does it solves?

**Compagnia dei Parchi (CDP)** was launched in 1999, with European Union funding. It began as a pilot project for sustainable tourism and development in the protected areas of the National Park of the Gran Sasso and Monti della Laga, the National Park of the Majella, and the National Park of the Monti Sibillini.

**CDP strives** to valorise and promote park areas by acquiring and developing available tourist accommodation. From the outset, CDP has achieved concrete results, creating for the parks concerned an accommodation database and a catalogue of services for non-package tourism, which includes 500 rentable properties.

**In 2001**, CDP became a non-profit, limited liability consortium (S.C.R.L.). It focuses on organising and promoting hospitality in Italy's protected areas by bringing together in a network non-conventional forms of accommodation such as farmhouses, country villas, Alpine cottages,



traditional village houses, B&Bs and agritourisms (farm-holiday enterprises). CDP centralises the promotion and marketing of the network of accommodation available, so solving the problem of a fragmented supply, which could not be addressed at local level.

## The institutions that founded Compagnia dei Parchi and that are involved in its work are:

- **Legambiente.** This is Italy's leading environmental association with 1,000 local branches, 20 regional committees, and more than 110,000 members and supporters. Legambiente works to raise awareness in areas where the CDP approach is or can be applied.
- **Fedeparchi.** The Italian Federation of Parks and Nature Reserves groups together 17 national parks, 69 regional parks, and 9 nature reserves, land and marine. Internationally recognised, it raises awareness among the institutions and bodies that are already or potentially involved.
- **Carsa S.p.A** This is a communication enterprise that focuses on environmental planning and development. It co-ordinates and manages CDP. It promoted the original idea and has developed the organisational model and marketing and communication strategy.
- **Gruppo CRESME ricerche S.p.A.** This is a research company. It has provided the methods for analysing the territories, their socio-economic aspects, and their level of competitiveness.
- **Parks.** The National Park of the Gran Sasso and Monti della Laga, the National Park of the Majella and the National Park of the Monti Sibillini were the first to adopt the CDP model in their areas.



**According to** research conducted by CDP's tourism observatory, the municipalities in Italy's national parks attract 118 million tourists, who bring in 5,500 million euro and sustain more than 104,000 jobs. Moreover, the growing trend in excursions is by itself able to generate 1,400 million euro in these localities. This is a growing market, and CDP is contributing to its rational development by disseminating a network-based culture of hospitality and by organising the previously fragmented supply.

**CDP enables** income generation from existing properties (houses and other forms of accommodation) and from local products (specialities, handicrafts and small enterprises), and also promotes the development of new tourism-related services. The approaches adopted allow local actors to achieve real economic returns, also within a short time, for a minimal outlay in terms of investment and training. In general, development in traditional tourist destinations has taken place through outside investment, with negative effects on local cultural models and with little benefit for the local microeconomy. CDP promotes a local approach that provides growth opportunities for local enterprises.

**CDP's** first project was financed by the European Union. The validity of its organisational model has since been confirmed by sectoral studies and market research conducted by Italian organisations and institutes such as CENSIS, the Italian Tourist Board, and CRESME Research Company.

**CDP's** research centre has been recognised as the National Tourism Observatory in Protected Areas, becoming a reference point for tourism in Italy. Finally, after first being trialled in three parks (National Park of the Gran Sasso and Monti della Laga, and the parks of the Majella and of the Monti Sibillini), the CDP model has been applied in parks and protected natural areas in three Italian regions (Abruzzo, Campania and Umbria) through the European Union's Equal initiative.



# Compagnia dei Parchi in practice

**The idea** to create Compagnia dei Parchi (CDP) stemmed from an analysis of the tourism potential of protected areas. The analysis revealed that although the areas did have the potential to provide modern high-quality services, they were providing non-standard products in a fragmented way. This meant that they could not be included by tour operators in their packages or as part of the extended tourism market. The analysis highlighted the need to:

- Examine the possibility of developing an integrated system of local tourism through an ongoing dialogue with the local communities.
- Create an integrated tourism product that would combine the providing of hospitality with all the components of the tourism system, with value- and experience-based planning able to bring together local culture, natural heritage, local produce and traditional crafts.
- Create a national-level capacity to place these products on the market, while ensuring that the bulk of the value chain remains local.
- Supply and network tourism products that are homogeneous and comparable in terms of quality standards.

**This basis** then gave rise to the idea of creating a tour operator/service provider able to bridge the business and marketing gap for the tourism and productive systems of the protected areas in terms of both the supply and demand sides.

**Created with** public and EU funding, CDP has become a growing and sustainable structure. In Europe, CDP represents an innovation because of its functions for promoting local development, beginning with the organisation of the supply of tourism services. It is an integrated system that brings together tourism, agriculture, crafts, and hotel and non-hotel accommodation.

**CDP is** unique because it has adopted a bottom-up structure that promotes the many and varied interests of the people living in protected areas. It acts as a link between various social groupings, fostering dialogue among local actors, and valorising their architectural, environmental and tourism resources.





## CDP OPERATIONAL SYSTEM

CDP is a non-profit consortium. It can receive funding from a range of sources:

- Public funds from local, national and international initiatives.
- Private funding from its own activities of intermediation, marketing and promotion of accommodation structures (hotels, houses and agritourisms) that have chosen to join CDP's network and pay a regular membership fee for its services.
- Funding from projects created, implemented and proposed by CDP.

**Through its** network of institutional partners (Legambiente e Federparchi) and members, CDP maintains regular contact with park authorities through meetings organised locally.

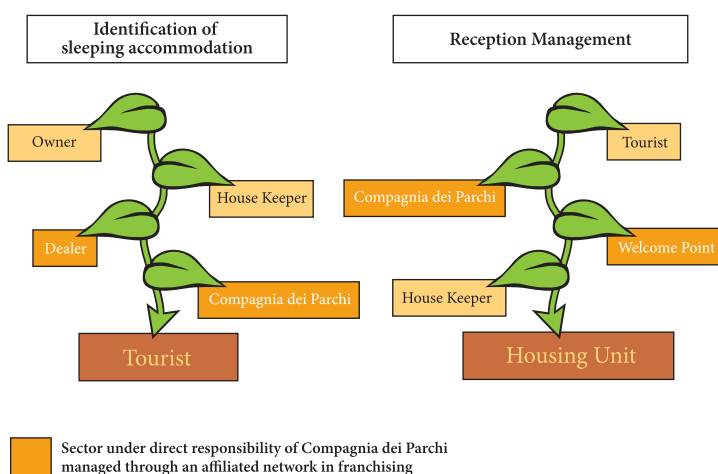
**CDP operates** through an agile organisation that consists of:

- a head office, responsible for all reservations and for marketing tourism-related products and services;
- a network of associated accommodation structures.

## CDP'S HEAD OFFICE

**CDP's** head office keeps in regular contact with traditional and non-conventional accommodation structures such as hotels, houses, farmhouses, Alpine cottages and agritourisms. In this way, the head office establishes agreements that give CDP priority when booking rooms or whole structures. In addition, the head office provides booking, communication and promotion services for the accommodation structures. In other words, it identifies potential tourists for the accommodation structures and promotes these structures through catalogues, agreements with tour operators, Internet promotions and trade fairs, such as the International Tourism Exchange. The accommodation structures pay CDP for its services and, in some cases, promote the CDP model among other local actors.

## Functioning of CDP network



**The CDP** helps to prevent the deterioration of the often disused properties in the park areas, and it favours income generation from tourism for all the dwellings in the area, which are generally second homes.

**Thus,** CDP has many functions: it promotes park tourism; it creates links between the demand and supply sides of tourism; it fosters a culture of tourism and hospitality in Italy's less developed areas, which often coincide with the location of the parks. In this way, it favours the growth of a tourism-based enterprise culture, a goal it also pursues through targeted training activities.



## The structure of the head office – co-ordination, sales, marketing and training

- **Planning and co-ordination office:** This consists of personnel responsible for establishing and strengthening links with protected areas and with providers of tourist accommodation. The office also draws up projects that can be financed by national and international initiatives or by private enterprises that want to apply the CDP model in specific areas.
- **Sales office:** This consists of personnel responsible for making contracts with accommodation structures and for maintaining contacts with tour operators, travel agencies and other actors interested in booking holidays in the park areas.
- **Marketing office:** This consists of personnel responsible for developing marketing and communication strategies to raise the profile of CDP in the tourism market.
- **Training office:** This consists of personnel responsible for preparing training courses on tourism marketing, EU and national tourism regulations, and the CDP organisational model.

### The network for organising tourism-related services

In terms of organisation, CDP uses a network to organise, promote and manage hospitality in the associated accommodation structures and properties. This network is the most effective response to the fragmentation and diversity of the supply of hospitality and to the difficulties that the individual tourism operators face in breaking through. The network organisation enables the development of a broad-based supply that is able to cater to a wide range of requirements (in terms of location, type and price). Therefore, it can reach out to a broader range of potential tourists, and meet the needs of a more demanding tourism market.

### The network for managing the tourism services and structures consists of:

- **Welcome Points:** They welcome tourists on their arrival at their holiday destination (1st-level associate). These are local enterprises, co-operatives and individuals linked through an Intranet with CDP's head office. They handle the local bookings and introduce the tourists to the House Keeper, who may in some cases also be the Welcome Point.
- **House Keepers:** They keep the keys to the accommodation and hand them to the tourists. The House Keepers either run tourist-accommodation structures or are "administrators" of one or more properties or of a "scattered condominium", on the basis of a further contract stipulated with the owners.
- **Dealers or intermediaries:** They develop and co-ordinate the network of House Keepers and Welcome Points in their area (2nd-level associate). The dealers may also be the managers of the Welcome Points and House Keepers.







### Application of the operational model in the National Park of the Gran Sasso and Monti della Laga

The National Park of the Gran Sasso and Monti della Laga is located mainly in the Abruzzo Region, and in part in the Marche and Lazio Regions. In Abruzzo, the park comprises 40 municipalities of the provinces of L'Aquila, Teramo and Pescara and 5 mountain communities. In socio-economic terms, the area is characterised by a considerable dependence of the local economies on income from outside the area in the form of

pensions, commuting, remittances from migrants, and seasonal income flows from tourism; a limited range of productive activities, which is undoubtedly an element of structural weakness in the local economy; a rate of population growth that is well below that in the rest of the Abruzzo Region.

**CDP has** set up a Learning Centre to serve as a hub and catalyst for the creation of a network of outlying information centres, and as a reference point for the network of local actors. The project has undertaken the following activities:

- It has formed a local network of 3 Tourism Information Centres (TICs), providing training and information in the Abruzzo area of the park, and linked to the Learning Centre.
- It has held training courses at the Learning Centre for information and guidance operators, tutors, trainers, and co-ordinators of the Centre and outlying centres. The TICs have used distance-learning modules developed by CDP and the Learning Centre, for induction into the CDP network. Each TIC has been provided with its own operational structure and an Internet link with the Learning Centre (MSN Messenger). In addition to the IT facilities, the operational structures of the network provide training and tourism-information services. They are the operational tools of CDP, acting as intermediaries with the diverse local supply of tourism-related services both actual (existing accommodation) and potential (houses that may be available as tourist accommodation).
- It has been an active participant in initiatives, using targeted information, and taking part in local fairs and exhibitions.

**The Learning Centre** employs 2 professionals who provide training and advice. The TICs employ 3 skilled operators, who are in constant contact with the partners and the head of the Learning Centre to guide decisions and plan activities. The induced employment, estimated at 30 jobs, is mainly in: accommodation maintenance and management; maintenance and management of local paths and itineraries; expert guides; co-operatives that organise excursions and transfers; and communication and information activities.

# Results

**CDP's** innovative business model has achieved very significant results:

- It has promoted the conservation of the distinguishing values of the park areas of inland Italy, by fostering the resurgence of local pride in belonging among populations that had long been weak economically and marginalised socially.
- It has provided park authorities with new and effective operational models, so enabling them

to become development “incubators” in the protected areas and not mere custodians.

- It has created local economic development, managing to generate income from properties that had been in decay.
- It has given dignity to the tourism product in the park areas. If today tourism in the parks has become a significant reality and an integral part of the “made in Italy” tourism system, this is also thanks to the work of CDP.

## **CDP has promoted and organised the national tourism offering, working in 16 protected areas:**

- National Park of Gran Sasso and Monti della Laga – Abruzzo and Marche Regions
- National Park of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise – Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise Regions
- Regional Park of Monte Cucco – Umbria Region
- National Park of the Monti Sibillini – Marche and Umbria Regions
- Regional Park of Sirente Velino – Abruzzo Region
- National Park of the Majella – Abruzzo Region
- Regional Nature Reserve of Zompo lo Schioppo – Abruzzo Region
- Regional Nature Reserve of Monte Genzana Alto Gizio – Abruzzo Region
- National Park of the Gargano – Puglia Region
- National Park of the Cinque Terre – Liguria Region
- National Park of the Dolomiti Bellunesi – Veneto Region
- National Park of the Foreste Casentinesi, Monte Falterona and Campigna – Emilia–Romagna and Toscana Regions
- National Park of the Pollino – Basilicata and Calabria Regions
- National Park of Vesuvio – Campania Region
- National Park of the Cilento and Vallo di Diano – Campania Region
- Regional Park of the Po Delta – Emilia–Romagna Region

**The results** achieved by CDP are best described by examining its impact in the National Park of the Cilento and Vallo di Diano.

## **RESULTS IN THE NATIONAL PARK OF THE CILENTO AND VALLO DI DIANO**





**The National** Park of the Cilento and Vallo di Diano is located in the Campania Region and its territory comprises 80 municipalities in the Province of Salerno. The local socio-economic conditions are characterised by; a significant dependence of the local economy on transfer of income from outside the area in the form of pensions, commuting, remittances from migrants, and seasonal income flows from tourism; a limited range of productive activities, which is undoubtedly an element of structural weakness in the local economy; a rate of population growth that is well below that in the rest of the Campania Region, especially in the mountainous areas and the inland areas of the park; a significant gap between the more developed coastal communities and those in the mountains; an illiteracy rate of 6.9% (more than 10% in some inland communities); the percentage of local people with no educational qualification is 19.2% compared with 15.8% for the province as a whole; the percentage of local people with a high-school diploma is 13.3% compared with 16.2% for the province as a whole.

**In the** last ten years, the area has seen tourism grow by 6%. However, this growth has been mainly in the coastal areas of the Cilento, which is popular with both Italians and foreigners. In order to give the more marginalised areas a chance of developing, targeted policies were needed involving the putting together of packages that could combine the natural beauty of the sea with culture, sport and cuisine. Before CDP started its work, the hilly and mountainous areas of the park had seen little tourism. Furthermore, because of the unplanned development of small hotels and the renting out of private homes, the coastal area had been spoiled by inappropriate urban development.

**CDP set** up a Learning Centre for education and training to serve as a hub and catalyst for a network of outlying information centres, and as a reference point for local actors. The project has developed through:

- The setting up of a network of 8 Tourism Information Centres (TICs), that provide training, information and advice. These are scattered throughout the park area and linked to the Learning Centre. This structure has provided services to guide the management of the park in shifting away from a subsistence economy towards policies that are more in keeping with a mature economy.
- Training courses, held at the Learning Centre, for information and guidance operators, tutors, trainers, co-ordinators of the Centre and the outlying branches, so laying the basis for the effective functioning of the TIC network.
- Active involvement, with targeted information, participation at local fairs and exhibitions, and the setting up of real and virtual round-tables.

**The 8** TICs completed distance training modules, prepared by CDP and the Learning Centre, before becoming part of the CDP network. Each TIC has its own operational structure and is linked by Internet with the Learning Centre (msn messenger). In addition to IT resources, the network's operational structures provide tourism-related information and training services. They are the operational tools of CDP, acting as intermediaries with the wide diversity of local tourism accommodation both actual (existing accommodation) and potential (accommodation that may become available for tourism purposes).



## IMPACTS IN THE PARK AREA

**The Learning** Centre employs 2 professionals who provide training and advice. These operators develop skills and tools to activate widespread organised, network-based initiatives to foster heritage (in terms of buildings, tourism and the environment) both within and outside the local territory. The TICs employ 16 skilled operators who are in constant touch with the partners and the head of the Learning Centre to guide decisions and plan activities. The induced employment, estimated at 30 jobs, is mainly in: accommodation maintenance and management; maintenance and management of local paths and itineraries; expert guides; co-operatives that organise excursions and transfers; and communication and information activities. Overall, the direct and induced employment arising from CDP's work in the National Park of the Cilento and Vallo di Diano totals 48 jobs.

**The CDP** network has developed a supply of available accommodation for 480 tourists, and 20 weekend and weekly rental properties, by involving local authorities, social actors, and the owners of houses and other forms of accommodation. CDP has opened up the possibility of a self-sustaining development that



is in keeping with the nature of the territory through marketing and a self-help enterprise culture. Its work has focused on previously neglected cultural and environmental heritage and on rediscovering local traditions, cuisine and handicrafts. Indeed, its most significant impact has been in the rediscovery of local values and in giving credibility and recognition to a lost identity. This has given local people pride in a sense of belonging and strengthened their ties to their homeland. These values are vital to the continuing of self-sustaining growth and to removing the spectre of emigration.

**However,** it will only be possible to quantify these impacts after CDP has further developed its activities over a longer time.



# International interest

**The CDP** operational model has received official recognition from the European Union, which funded its first pilot project (Adapt II and Agrus programmes). The project enabled the model to be trialled in the parks of Gran Sasso and Monti della Laga, the Majella, and Monti Sibillini. Its success and real impact created the conditions of trust for further funding from the European Union (Equal programme). This financing enabled CDP to expand its activities to the Umbria and Campania Regions.

**Encouraged by** the success achieved throughout the country and especially in the National Park of Gran Sasso and Monti della Laga, the Italian Federation of Parks backed the transformation of CDP into a non-profit organisation, charged with the task of being a tour operator and service provider for the sustainable development of Italy's parks.

**The Government** of Albania has adopted the CDP model as part of its efforts to relaunch the protected areas in its territory. The Government of Albania has officially expressed its interest by supporting the request for funding for the European Union initiative "LIFE Third Country".

**CDP is** the reference point for tourism development for the project Appennino Parco D'Europa (APE). This was initially a system-type project promoted by the Ministry of the Environment and by Legambiente. It has since become a system-level project for the Mediterranean, now called Mediterranean Mountains.

**CDP was** presented as part of the Mediterranean Mountains system-level project at the third "World Conservation Congress" held in Bangkok in autumn 2004. The congress was organised by the



IUCN, which is an international body that brings together 140 countries, 77 states, 114 governmental agencies, more than 800 NGOs, and more than 10,000 scientists and experts of international standing to safeguard the environment.

**The CDP** operational model was also presented in Spain at the first International Conference on Responsible Tourism Management in Unique Coastal Destinations, organised by the Municipality of Sitges.

**CDP is** participating in the second phase of the European Union's Equal programme on diffusion and mainstreaming. The initiative will disseminate the results achieved by CDP in Italy and Europe, so that the CDP model can be replicated in other interested countries.

# Adopting Compagnia dei Parchi in other countries

**In order** to replicate CDP's operational model in other countries, it is vital to establish a network of relationships with all those public institutions that, both directly and indirectly, are charged with the task of relaunching neglected areas that are potentially important in terms of tourism and the environment.

## **The basic requirements for replicating the model in other countries are:**

- A body of national regulations that ensure the respect of the commonly accepted rules of a free market, and the creation of a system for the provision of local tourism-related services.
- The country intending to apply the model needs to respect the international conventions governing the tourism sector.
- A regulatory framework that fosters the growth of a microenterprise culture by reducing the amount of red tape.

- A motivated and organised local community to lead the territory.
- Institutions that manage the territory (park authorities, local authorities and communities) and NGOs able to play a significant role.

## **In terms of culture, it is essential that the local communities in the areas where the CDP model is to be applied present the following characteristics:**

- aware of their own resources and of the tourism potential they represent;
- receptive to new proposals for local development;
- culturally predisposed towards teamwork and relations with a range of interlocutors: institutions, economic and social parties, communities, and trade associations.

## **Other essential prerequisites for adopting the CDP model in an area are:**

- the existence of properties (hotels, houses, huts, etc.) available for use as tourist accommodation;
- the area must be accessible.

**All the** organisations involved in CDP, the National Park of Gran Sasso, Legambiente, Carsa S.p.A., Federparchi and Cresme, are available to provide technical assistance to countries interested in implementing the model.





## To learn more

The following organisations and people can provide further documentation on Compagnia dei Parchi:

### **CARSA S.P.A.**

#### **Edizioni&Comunicazione Integrata**

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### **PARCO NAZIONALE**

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### **Gruppo CRESME ricerche (S.P.A.)**

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**CARSA spa**  
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**The IDEASS Programme** – Innovation for Development and South-South Cooperation – is part of the international cooperation Initiative ART. IDEASS grew out of the major world summits in the 1990s and the Millennium General Assembly and it gives priority to cooperation between protagonists in the South, with the support of the industrialised countries.

**The aim** of IDEASS is to strengthen the effectiveness of local development processes through the increased use of innovations for human development. By means of south-south cooperation projects, it acts as a catalyst for the spread of social, economic and technological innovations that favour economic and social development at the local level. The innovations promoted may be products, technologies, or social, economic or cultural practices. For more information about the IDEASS Programme, please consult the website: [www.ideassonline.org](http://www.ideassonline.org).

# IDEASS

## Innovation for Development and South-South Cooperation



ART - Support for territorial and thematic networks of co-operation for human development - is an international co-operation initiative that brings together programmes and activities of several United Nations Agencies. ART promotes a new type of multilateralism in which the United Nations system works with governments to promote the active participation of local communities and social actors from the South and the North. ART shares the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals.

In the interested countries, ART promotes and supports national co-operation framework programmes for Governance and Local Development - ART GOLD. These Programs create an organized institutional context that allows the various national and international actors to contribute to a country's human development in co-ordinated and complementary ways. Participants include donor countries, United Nations agencies, regional governments, city and local governments, associations, universities, private sector organizations and non-governmental organizations.

It is in the framework of ART GOLD Programmes where IDEASS innovations are promoted and where cooperation projects are implemented for their transfer, whenever required by local actors.