

1. Subsidiarity, sustainable development and SMEs

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1.1 Introduction

The direct involvement of the profit world that closely cooperate with various actors, active in different territories, seems increasingly strategic in order to face and succeed in the challenges presented by the international panorama and outlined in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda.

However, when we deal with issues which affect the well-being of all and the protection of the planet, some widespread resistances towards the private sector persist, mainly due to an ideological legacy typical of the XX century, even though sometimes motivated by behaviours less inclined to include profit within the framework of a universal horizon of shared responsibility.

This explains why the private company is frequently considered as an actor committed only to its own interests, rather than to global emergencies. These are obviously biased points of view, since several profit companies are implementing good practices and thus playing important roles in programmes and projects related to the Sustainable Development Goals, collaborating with other private (profit and non-profit) and public stakeholders.

The strategic role of the private sector is increasingly evident not only in relation to large companies but also to the experience of Small and Medium Size Enterprises (SMEs) that, in many contexts, not only in Italy, have been and still are drivers in territorial systems, creating innovative, formal and informal partnerships, which become the vital nourishment of those systems.

Nonetheless, the global challenges require an acceleration based on overcoming the idea according to which social responsibility is simplistically alongside business models and on rethinking business models in the horizon of a real sustainable development, following the remarks of Pope Francis in the encyclical *Laudato Si*.

And the various and strategic universe of SMEs is called to be one of the fundamental catalysts for a virtuous process in line with the 2030 Agenda.

1.2 Towards sustainable development

The 2030 Agenda is the result of the evolution of the concept “development”, now strictly connected with the term “sustainability”¹.

It has been years since the United Nations detected the binomial “sustainable development”: in 1972 at the Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm, this term was mainly used to refer to the mere environmental dimension of the development concept (UN, 1972). During that occasion the necessity to preserve the planet, as home of mankind, emerged. Therefore, a new horizon that framed any human initiative in the perspective of preserving nature, was presented.

Then, in 1987 the most common definition of sustainable development was proposed. It was contained in the Brundtland Report (WCED, 1987), according to which sustainable development “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. This definition is important, first of all, because it takes account of personal and collective needs, attributing to the individual all the possible dimensions considered relevant in order to face the issue (usually summarised in the “social”, “economic”, “environmental” and “institutional” dimensions) and second, since it linked the concept of sustainability to that of “responsibility towards future generations” without which sustainable development cannot exist.

Later, another fundamental step was the United Nation Conference on Environment and Development (1992). Among the documents signed at the conference there was the 21 Agenda which, besides other several issues, focused on the promotion of sustainable development at local level, indicating how the

¹ See Giovannini (2018) for a brief description of the main stages of the sustainable development path.

democratic participation could be considered the starting point for a “sustainable management of resources” (UN, 1992).

Eventually, the last two key steps in the path towards sustainable development are the Millennium Declaration (UN, 2000) and the 2030 Agenda (UN, 2015a). The former detected 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to be achieved by 2015 (Figure 1.1)² and remarkable results have been reached: for example, in 1990 extreme poverty³ affected half of the world population, while in 2015 this percentage has been reduced to 14%; from 1990 to 2015 the under-five child mortality rate decreased by 50%; from 2000 to 2013 new HIV infections diminished by 40%; from 2000 to 2014 the official development assistance increased by 66% (UN, 2015b).

On the one hand, considerable results concerning proclaimed emergencies have been achieved but, on the other hand, other goals have not been fulfilled. The main encountered limitations were the fact that improvement was not homogeneously distributed, leaving some African regions in poverty, especially the Sub-Saharan or landlocked ones and the small island states, and the increasing inequalities between and inside different economic systems.

The 2030 Agenda, more explicitly based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948), has specified 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which retakes and relaunch the Millennium Development Goals by positioning them in a wider perspective and introducing innovative elements, such as the consideration of the SDGs as the core of an adequate development for all the Countries of the world, without any distinction, the responsible engagement of all actors in society, a uniform, holistic and integrated idea of development and thus of the policies needed for its implementation (Figure 1.2).⁴

In this report we would like to emphasise one feature of the 2030 Agenda that seems not to be completely understood in all its implications in order to implement all the SDGs: the necessary sharing of responsibility among all actors in society in the due consideration of the strategic importance of various territories, at different levels. The diversity between the MDG 8 and the SDG 17 is at the heart of this new conception, even though, actually, it permeates the whole 2030 Agenda.⁵

1.3 Achievements and criticism

During these first three years, the path to fulfil the commitments made by Countries all over the world and defined in the 17 SDGs has produced relevant results towards several Targets related to the Goals. However, criticism is so widely present in other Targets, even in the most important ones – linked for example to hunger, food insecurity, inequalities, ecosystems quality, climate change, especially for the more disadvantaged and marginalised groups – that make it difficult for the planet to achieve the predefined results by 2030 (UN, 2018; BS and SDSN, 2018; Istat, 2018, ASviS, 2018).

In Italy, on the one hand, the effort taken by some actors⁶ has to be acknowledged but, on the other hand, the gap in terms of SDGs implementation in relation to other countries is considerable. As a

² The 8 Millennium Goals were: 1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; 2. Achieve universal primary education; 3. Promote gender equality and empower women; 4. Reduce child mortality; 5. Improve maternal health; 6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; 7. Ensure environmental sustainability; 8. Develop a global partnership for development.

³ Since 2018 the World Bank considers in extreme poverty conditions people who live on less than 1.90 USD a day.

⁴ In 2015, 193 Countries signed the 2030 Agenda with its 17 SDGs (and 169 Targets): 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere; 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture; 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages; 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all; 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls; 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all; 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all; 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all; 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation; 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries; 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable; 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns; 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts; 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development; 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss; 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels; 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

⁵ See Vaggi, 2018 for an interesting in-depth study about the importance of the SDG 17 for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

⁶ First, by the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development (ASviS). “The Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development (ASviS) was established on February 3rd, 2016, upon the initiative of the Unipolis Foundation and the University of Rome “Tor Vergata”. Its aim is to

matter of fact, Italy ranks 29th on the global list provided by the most authoritative international report about this topic (BS and SDSN, 2018).⁷

According to this study, significant disparities emerge in relation to the average performance by SDGs in Italy, which seems to lack of progress with respect to the SDGs 9, 12, 14, 16 and 17. This last goal is particularly relevant for its strategic in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Istat comes to more precise conclusions: it also offers different indicators from those used in the previous report, in order to better understand the structure and dynamics of the Italian context by monitoring the features that the international Agenda do not explicitly consider⁸: “With reference to a representation that excludes the unavailable indicators, the summary of long-term trends indicates positive developments with reference to Quality education (goal 4), Industry, innovation and infrastructures (goal 9), Consumption and production (goal 12). The effect of the economic crisis is evident from the analysis of the five-year period from 2006 to 2011, with a greater number of indicators that worsen for Goal 1 (Poverty), Goal 8 (Work) Goal 11 (City) and Goal 7 (Clean and accessible energy). The indicators relating to Goal 4 (Education), Goal 5 (Gender equality), Goal 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructures) and Goal 12 (Consumption and production) are recording slightly positive trends. In the nearest five-year period (from 2011 to 2016) moderate progress was observed: the sharp negative variations decreased in Goal 1 (Poverty) and Goal 11 (City), in addition to Goal 3 (Health); slightly positive changes are in goals 4, 5, 7, 9 and 12; more than 30% of the indicators remain unchanged, in particular for Goal 8 (Work), Goal 16 (Peace, justice and institutions) and Goal 10 (Reduce inequality).” (Istat, 2018, p.9).

The effort that Istat is taking is undoubtedly invaluable. Perhaps, it might be worthwhile to further analyse the SDG 17 in the future, since Istat has attributed to it only five indicators, which refer to 4 out of 19 Targets. Moreover, it has not examined issues closely connected with Targets about partnerships between public, public-private actors and civil society; so, it has not provided specific quantitative elements to investigate the development of those dynamics and of the related ones.

Eventually, through the use of international, national and regional indicators elaborated by itself, ASviS showed that, on the one hand, in Europe “progress towards the SDGs is too slow and in few cases lacking” (ASviS, 2018, p.6). On the other hand, in Italy “even where significant progress has been achieved, Italy is still very far from reaching the Goals and in some cases the observed trends go in the wrong direction. Adding to all this, the country is characterised by large inequalities in terms of gender, social groups and territories. In particular, according to the latest available data, Italy shows signs of improvement in eight areas: nutrition and sustainable agriculture, health, education, gender equality, innovation, sustainable production and consumption models, fight against climate change, and international cooperation. The situation significantly worsens in relation to poverty, decent work and economic growth, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities, and life on land. No significant changes characterize the Goals on clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, life below water, and peace, justice and strong institutions” (ASviS, 2018, p.6).

The ASviS Report undoubtedly offers important remarks, but again: it might be worthwhile to take greater account of the SDG 17 in the future. Even though it promotes the initiatives suggested by civil society and is trying to “territorialise” the SDGs, ASviS has not proposed yet adequate indicators which refer to Targets about partnerships, thus it does not provide specific quantitative elements to assess the evolution and efficiency of these instruments.

raise the awareness of the Italian society, economic stakeholders and institutions about the importance of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and to mobilize them in order to pursue the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Alliance already brings together over 220 member organizations among the most important civil society institutions and networks.” (<https://asvis.it/asvis-italian-alliance-for-sustainable-development>)

⁷ In this Report, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Germany, France, Norway and Switzerland are at the top of the overall ranking.

⁸ There is no perfect coincidence between the international and Italian indicators. “For 83 measures there is a perfect coincidence with international indicators, 96 measures partially reflect the information needs of the international indicator to which they are linked (this happens for several reasons mainly because not all data are available in the required specificity). The remaining 56 measures have been included in order to provide further elements useful for understanding and monitoring the target set in the ‘national context’.” (Istat, 2018, p.2)

1.4 Subsidiarity and sustainable development

We think that subsidiary culture in its wider definition and how it might support the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda deserve more attention. This is not a statement of principle, rather, a realistic finding suggested by the experience in Italy, Europe and all over the world: there is not and there will never be sustainable development without subsidiarity (Brugnoli, 2018; Vittadini, 2018) for many reasons.

The first one, and maybe the most evident, is that subsidiary culture promotes the involvement and participation of all the actors in society. It is mainly a matter of freedom which is useful to fulfil our own desires. And without this collective action, social, environmental, economic and human resources, necessary to the implementation of this ambitious and at the same time essential aim, will not be mobilised.

The subsidiary approach unlocks people's and institutions' resources (public and private, profit and non-profit) at different levels. It is now clear that we need everyone's resources to follow the path towards sustainable development at a local, national, supranational and global level.

The second reason might be less obvious than the previous one, but it is not less actual: subsidiary culture offers people and institutions appropriate incentives to take a challenge in the pursuit of sustainable development, since it bases the personal and collective action on the nature of the human heart, rather than on specious or contingent reasons. Therefore, this is a matter of responsibility. Clear responsibility is needed to take account of everyone's needs, especially of who is generally excluded, and to ensure social, economic and environmental resources to future generations. This is only possible if we keep in mind the most important human needs and desires, such as truth, justice, happiness, love and peace. In other words, subsidiarity provides the right incentives to follow efficient, effective and sustainable development paths.

We can find other reasons which are partially included in the previous. Now, we consider the two most remarkable ones.

Subsidiary culture fosters cooperation, inclusion and solidarity, by reducing inequalities and conflicts between different actors. In the present globalised and interconnected context, it is increasingly crucial that each person carries out its project with the collaboration of other actors at different levels, rather than work individually. It is also a matter of trust in the possibility that a choral participation attributes more importance to each experience, strengthening and introducing it to previously unimaginable path, by acknowledging equal dignity and emphasising the peculiarities of each player.

Eventually, subsidiary culture allows to pursue the best government and governance strategies, considering the different territorial scales, thus helping public authorities appropriately identify the priorities in transformation processes, in order to tackle local, national and global system emergencies.

Today, it is clear that we cannot have sustainable development at a global scale without transferring it to each local area. Subsidiary culture emphasises the importance of an acceleration for a direct involvement of all actors (public and private, profit and non-profit people and institutions) in different territories, each one according to its peculiarities and roles, in relation to its own ability to act in the target territory with a broad vision, and thus able to leverage multiple financial resources through innovative ways of managing them. Therefore, a real sustainable development can only be achieved through authoritative, democratic, transparent and efficient multilevel governance systems, which aim at creating a teamwork where each player has the opportunity to make its contribution, avoiding prevarication and ambiguity.

Keeping this in mind, the contribution subsidiary culture may offer to the implementation of the SDG 17, which best conveys the spirit of cooperation necessary to the overall purpose and which represents a Goal at the service of the other 16, is vital. In particular, the forms of collaboration between public and private actors that aim at creating public-interest works and services, can develop thanks to the subsidiary approach, considered as a versatile resource of political culture that has in its DNA the ability to facilitate the organisation of even complex collaborations and organic relations. This

approach may lead to forms of strategic participation to promote plural models which work together in order to fulfil the Goals of the 2030 Agenda, through shared projects, constantly monitored, especially in the enhancement of specific skills and roles.

The wellbeing of the present and future generation is based on the concept of shared responsibility: there cannot be sustainable improvement of living conditions for all without following a sustainable development path. And thanks to its nature that means to emphasise “the adventure of a responsible freedom” (Mounier, 1949) subsidiary culture is able to establish a fruitful relation between all players, giving them back what they yearn for.

1.5 The role of the private sector and SMEs

Keeping in mind the background presented in the previous paragraphs, we would like to offer a contribution for a better comprehension of the role that the private sector, in particular, SMEs can play in guiding different territories and the whole planet, with all their inhabitants, towards sustainable development paths.

It has definitely been a long time since private sector became a fundamental actor in the context of international development cooperation (IDC). This is certified by data and frequently recognised by the international community.

In particular, the community has more explicitly been aware of its importance during two occasions: the Third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, held in Accra (OECD, 2008) and the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, held in Busan (OECD, 2011). In both cases, the key role of the private sector in the process of poverty reduction, especially through job creation, higher income production and promotion of innovation, was recognised in final comments and documents.

Later, in 2014 the European Commission Communication 263 (EC, 2014) asked for a stronger role of the private sector in IDC, in order to promote an inclusive and sustainable growth, especially through its commitment in strategic sectors such as agriculture, infrastructure, alternative energy and through the creation of partnerships with the public sector.

Therefore, the partnership issue became the core of Addis Ababa works (UN, 2015c), where the importance of strengthening the policies that align public and private investments and encourage the private sector to engage in development practices, was highlighted.

The importance of the private sector, thus of SMEs, has been confirmed in the 2030 Agenda. The key paragraph follows:

“Private business activity, investment and innovation are major drivers of productivity, inclusive economic growth and job creation. We acknowledge the diversity of the private sector, ranging from micro-enterprises to cooperatives to multinationals. We call upon all businesses to apply their creativity and innovation to solving sustainable development challenges.” (UN, 2015a, p. 25).

In Italy, the fundamental role of the private sector in IDC started to emerge with the law 49/1987, "New discipline of Italian cooperation with Developing Countries", in which new actors such as civil society and local autonomies, fundamental for the development of decentralised cooperation, were introduced:

“The Minister of Foreign Affairs, in agreement with the Minister of the Treasury for his part, shall promote and coordinate within the public sector, and between the public sector and the private sector, operational programmes and any other initiative in the field of development cooperation” (art.5, 49/1987).

The role of the private sector is institutionalised with the Law 125/2014, which consider actors of development cooperation:

“profit organisations when, acting in compliance with the principles laid down in this Law, meet the standards commonly applied to social responsibility and environmental safeguard clauses, and comply with human rights legislation in making international investments”

In particular, the Law:

“acknowledges and favours the contribution of companies and banking institutions to development processes in partner Countries” (art. 27, 125/2014).

This concept has been confirmed in the recent Three-year Programming and Policy Planning Document 2017-2019 of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Development Cooperation, which states that:

“The involvement of the private sector, envisaged in art. 27 of Law 125/2014, coincides with the international trend to recognise a growing role for firms in development cooperation activities, with the objective of promoting a business culture that contributes to implementation of the 2030 Agenda; in particular: i) support the generalised development of SMEs; ii) facilitate sustainable and inclusive economic growth that assures full employment and decent work for all; iii) reduce inequalities by promoting social, economic and political inclusion, without discrimination; iv) guarantee a more peaceful and just society, with solid and responsible institutions; v) facilitate partnerships between Italian and local firms, not least to guarantee the continuity of investment; vi) encourage sustainable investment in social and environmental terms, especially in areas that might be economically unattractive, promoting partnerships with actors - NGO/CSOs and other non-profits - that have demonstrated experience and local knowledge.” (MAECI, 2017, p.7).

The actual commitment of Italian firms, especially SMEs, has been confirmed by their interest in the first calls for proposals promoted by the Italian Agency for International Cooperation. These calls foster sustainable initiatives proposed by Italian firms in cooperation partner Countries⁹, that is, the Official Development Assistance (ODA) recipients that appear on the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) list¹⁰. The calls for proposals were addressed only to private actors and among the prerequisites there was the formal adherence to the ten UN Global Compact Principles and to the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, developed by the UN Human Rights Council in 2011 and reaffirmed by the EU with conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council in June 2016.

In Italy, the involvement of SMEs has been proved by other several initiatives, such as “Patto di Milano” (Milan Agreement), signed for the first time on the 31st May 2017 by ten business organisations – Cooperative Italiane, Confagricoltura, Confartigianato Imprese, CIA-Agricoltori Italiani, Confederazione Nazionale dell’Artigianato e della Piccola e Media Impresa-CNA, Confcommercio, Confindustria, Federazione Banche Assicurazioni e Finanza-FEBAF, Unioncamere, Utilitalia – and renewed in June 2018. Thanks also to the support of ASviS, each organisation is proposing and implementing actions to offer its own contribution to the achievement of the 17 Goals of the 2030 Agenda.

As it was highlighted by the OECD, companies, SMEs included, can provide necessary investments for the SDGs fulfilment (OECD, 2016). The Report analyses five important pathways that enable the private sector to be a key player in the sustainable development process. The first one refers to Foreign Direct Investments that create jobs, boost production and technology and enable firms to access new markets. The second path is related to blended finance that can improve investments in Developing Countries. The third one regards the monitoring of private mobilised funds that aims at promoting transparency and good practices. The fourth is about social impact investments, meant for improving living condition of the poorest, considered promoters of innovation in relation to sustainable business forms. The fifth concerns the responsible business conduct at two levels: relation between investment

⁹ “Procedura aperta per la selezione di iniziative imprenditoriali innovative da ammettere a finanziamento/cofinanziamento e da realizzare nei Paesi partner di cooperazione per il perseguimento degli Obiettivi di sviluppo sostenibile” (AICS, 2017; AICS, 2018).

¹⁰ https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/DAC_List_ODA_Recipients2018to2020_flows_En.pdf

quantity and quality and close attention to the three sustainable development dimensions: social, environmental and economic.

The OECD has recently examined the role of SMEs in relation to how “to leave no one behind” in the journey towards sustainable development, acknowledging them as key actors for inclusion processes and recognising that they could be increasingly supportive if they had access to considerable financial resources (OECD, 2018). This applies both to advanced and underdeveloped contexts. In this framework, the private sector engagement cannot be considered as mere philanthropic activity. Indeed, the private sector plays an active role through the partnership with other actors. In this way, it makes not only donations, which, on the one hand, can improve its image but, on the other hand, do not provide additional advantages and do not trigger collaboration processes, but it also gains economic benefits. Companies can contribute to partnerships in different ways: sharing knowledge and know-how; discussing policies about feasible strategies and the adoption of specific standards and good practices; providing technical assistance; promoting and strengthening capacity development among all actors. It is known that OECD DAC members are fostering more partnerships with the private sector in order to leverage its economic-financial capital, competences, innovation and core businesses in favour of sustainable development (OECD, 2016).

1.6 Report structure

This Report, as it has been previously underlined, means to offer a contribution for a better comprehension of the crucial role played by the private sector, in particular SMEs, on the path towards sustainable development.

This in-depth study is not based on several indicators used at international, national and regional levels, mentioned in the paragraph 1.3. Even though they perform a decisive function regards the aims which they are created for – the “official measurement” of the progress and implementation of the SDGs -, these indicators are not sufficient to provide enough information about them.

We would like to identify and investigate the issues which seems to be crucial in order to understand SMEs’ potentialities to achieve the 2030 Agenda, according to the perspective of the above mentioned subsidiary culture that helps us focus on the ways of implementing the SDG 17, mainly on its subsidiary dimensions.

Therefore, this is the perspective that has shaped the Report structure.

In the first part, dedicated to the analysis of sustainable development path that European SMEs, especially the Italian ones, could follow, Bramanti and Brugnoli reconsider the basic elements of the Italian economic and productive model and propose an original overview of territorial development models, structural transformations and 2030 Agenda, with the aim of detecting sustainable development trajectories which have a paradigmatic value.

The second part is dedicated to young people, not only to take into due consideration their role for the implementation of the SDGs 4 and 8 but also, and especially, to refer to the sustainable development definition, mentioned in the paragraph 1.2¹¹: the necessity to look at the needs of the individual and of all people and the necessity to live a “responsibility towards future generations”. This is why the second part deals with the analysis of two fundamental questions in the relation between SMEs, young people and sustainable development: on the one hand, Bertagna and Magni offer a wider overview of the aspects at the basis of an adequate person’s education in relation to the changing needs of the labour market, suggesting possible ways to follow in the near future. On the other hand, Minola originally investigates for the first time in literature with the help of an empirical analysis, the contribution of innovative Italian start-ups to the achievement of the SDGs and the role of young people in these contexts.

¹¹ Sustainable development “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

The third part focuses on the impact of Italian SMEs' partnerships on the internationalisation paths and on the main corporate benchmark variables, thus introducing an important aspect for the implementation of the SDG 17 in a subsidiary perspective: Zucchella and Magnani analyse the role of formal and informal partnerships as drivers for the international development of Italian SMEs and, through this, for their inclusion in sustainable development paths. Garrone offers evidences of the impact of cooperation agreements with other firms on Italian SMEs and investigates the existing relation between agreements and corporate performance.

The fourth part examines the access to credit that, besides being an important element for the implementation of all SDGs, represents one of the most relevant means of action mentioned in the SDG 17. It is also crucial according to a subsidiary perspective. Erzegovesi presents the evolution of availability, risks and cost of credit for SMEs during the years following the global financial crisis (2007-2008) and hypothesises a new role for credit consortia (confidi), alongside the rethinking and relaunching of bank business models. Brugnoli and Matraia show the importance of the different financing methods for SMEs and revise the policy measures that have been proposed by international institutions and stakeholders in order to strengthen the supporting policy to financing access for SMEs.

The fifth part is characterised by some case studies that we consider paradigmatic for the Italian context: Celentano, Misuri and Romeo (Unioncamere) introduce the challenges that digital technologies are posing to SMEs and how the Chamber of Commerce System has organised itself, through "Punti di Impresa Digitali", (Corporate Digital Centres) in order to turn these challenges into opportunities for sustainable development; The "Centro Studi & Cultura d'Impresa" of UCIMU Foundation investigate the ongoing dynamics in the machine tool, robotics and automation sectors, examining in depth the analysis, also in relation to young people and to the different ways of cooperation between companies; the Study Centre FederlegnoArredo presents the results of an interesting survey conducted among the company partners in order to verify the level of awareness and receptiveness of Filiera Legno Arredo (Wood Furniture Supply Chain) regards to the concept of sustainability, paying particular attention to the role of young people and to cooperation between companies.

In the end, the Conclusions contain some synthetic remarks, whereas the Comments offer some food for thought about the contents of this Report and they are provided by different personalities of the Italian economic and social panorama.