

# Italian social co-operatives in the field of social service delivery: some good practices

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# The processes under way: a never-ending transition?

- **Decentralisation:** the public body in charge of social services is the municipality; need for new forms of coordination at the various public administrative levels (state, regions, etc.)
- **Reorganisation:** the (often small) municipalities create new forms of aggregation to govern policies and to manage social services
- **Entrepreneurship:** social services are increasingly managed by businesses (social enterprises, mixed public-private companies, for-profit enterprises, etc.)
- **Informal solutions:** wide spread in some sectors (e.g. elderly home care) of “informal” operators (immigrant workers)
- **Mutuality:** spread of spontaneous aggregations of people with new needs on a community basis to advocate and produce welfare service (e.g. health and environmental protection)

# Social enterprises in the delivery of social services

- The most widespread legal form is the social cooperative. It was acknowledged in 1991 with the introduction of a specific legal framework (the first initiatives have started to develop at the end of the 1970s). Salient features shown:
  - Mission public-oriented (the goal is to promote the “general-interest of the community”);
  - Economic constraints coupled with a non-distribution constraint (social cooperatives are prevented from distributing profits)
  - Can be characterized by a multi-stakeholder membership (it is co-managed by workers; volunteers; beneficiaries)
  - Performs its activity in the field of social, health care, and educational services, as well as in order to integrate disadvantaged workers to work.

# The ambivalent role of social co-operation in Italy

- It is a successful case in the Italian panorama (7,000 enterprises, 230,000 workers, 2.5 million users, € billion turnover)
- Active role in the construction of social services system; not only rationalisation of the existing supply (product innovation)
- Capacity to mobilise and combine different kinds of resources to make the supply of welfare services sustainable; emphasis on the local dimension of the action (process innovation)
- Trend to shift towards the public sphere of the welfare system as an effect of local authorities externalising service provision (risk of dependence)
- Discontinuous relationship with the private social service market (residual role and risk of crowding out)
- Reduction of the community aspects of social enterprise (e.g. reduction of voluntary staff and limited donations)

# Welfare policies, social co-operation strategies

- **Out of niche, but without incentives:** the new law on social enterprise (2005) enables new sectors of activity (culture, environment, etc.) and new organisational forms (not only social co-operatives), but without providing for incentives; need to connect the new norm to the rest of sectoral legislation (e.g. social services, labour policies, support to entrepreneurship, etc.)
- **Diversification of resources:** the decrease of public financing for welfare services raises the need to find new solutions: incentives to private demand (service vouchers, tax relief), requalification of community properties (e.g. religious estates); it is a medium/long-term process
- **Networks to govern the territory and to manage innovative and systemic projects:** spreading of local initiatives to plan local welfare and to promote partnerships (e.g. EQUAL); costs and benefits not well identified

# Best practices

- Development of social cooperative **networks** not simply displaying a coordination and representation function, but also apt to create a “spinneret” of welfare services (e.g. re-habilitation coupled with social and work integration)
- Opening of social cooperative **governance** systems to various stakeholders belonging to the local community. This in order to grasp the new needs that arise at local level, adjust the supply of social services accordingly, and mobilize precious resources
- Adoption of **tools** apt to both manage the production processes (e.g. quality certificates) and account the economic and social performances (e.g. social balance sheets)
- Spread of strategies of empowerment of **human resources** in order to improve the professional competences and support the motivations to work (not simply economic, but also relational and related to equity)