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SOCIAL INNOVATIONS IN BRESCIA, ITALY

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INTRODUCTION – LOCAL BACKGROUND OF THE SOCIAL INNOVATIONS

Brescia is a middle-size city situated in the East of the Lombardy Region, with 189,085 inhabitants¹, and is the chief-town of one of the 12 provinces of the Region. It is the second Municipality in the Region by population. The metropolitan area counts around 500,000 inhabitants, and the province is the fifth most populated in the country. The strong ageing of the population has been partly compensated in the last decades by very important rates of migration (Costa and Sabatinelli 2012b).

The province of Brescia is the second in the Lombardy Region, after Milan, both by demographic and by economic size (in terms of overall added value). The province is one of the most industrialized areas of the whole country (Provincia Brescia 2011), with a strong industrial vocation, mainly based on medium and small and family-based firms. The city has a long-lasting history as an university site, with - presently (2013) - around 25,000 students.

In the post world war period Brescia was mainly governed by coalitions guided by the Catholic party (*Democrazia Cristiana*). Between 1948 al 1975 the Municipality was administered with no interruption by the same Christian Democrat Mayor, Bruno Boni, under whose government many urban infrastructures (including some state-of-the-art projects and some controversial interventions) have been built. The predominance of the Christian Democrats in local governments continued until the political shock that invested Italy at the beginning of the Nineties, as a consequence of the major corruption scandals known as ‘Tangentopoli’. Afterwards, the Municipality has been governed for many years (1992-2008) by centre-left coalitions and then (2008-2013) by a centre-right wing coalition, including the localistic Northern League.. In June 2013 a centre-left wing coalition has won the municipal elections.

The municipal welfare model has been conditioned in the last two decades by the Lombardy regional framework that, since the introduction of direct elections of regional governors, has developed a quite strong quasi-market approach in an increasing number of policy fields. From the social solidarity point of view, Brescia has a consolidated tradition of civil society organizations, especially expression of the social-Christian world, e.g. many Catholic Third Sector agencies and a capillary network of social cooperatives. Ever since the 1980s, a provincial consortium of social cooperatives was created (“Sol.Co.”, whose acronym means "furrow"). The contribution of cooperativism to the development of the city is clearly visible in the residential areas built in the Sixties in the urban periphery.

2. WELFARE INNOVATIONS IN THE THREE POLICY FIELDS

The present report presents and analyzes cases of social innovation in three areas of Brescia’s local welfare. The first one deals with employment (re)insertion of specific groups of population; the second one with activities in favour of families in conditions of need (including monetary and in-kind support, care and support services); the remaining deals with housing inclusion of different target groups. As it will be seen, the selected cases are quite diversified as to the type of actor that initiated the programme or the project (public or third sector), and to the width of territorial networks involved, which often included also for profit bodies.

¹ January the 1st 2012 (<http://demo.istat.it/>).

Each case-study is based on interviews with representatives of the different stakeholders involved in the programs², as well as on the analysis of available documents, official websites and press information and, in some cases, on visits on the sites where programmes are carried out.

2.1. Labour market (re)integration

2.1.1. Short description

The Municipality of Brescia has been managing for two decades an Employment Insertion Service (*Servizio per l’Inserimento Lavorativo*, SAL). It is a ‘second-level’ service, that only takes in charge persons signalled by either public social services or by services run by Third Sector bodies with long-lasting collaborative relations with the Municipality.

As a few other municipal services (e.g. in Milan), the SAL was first created at the end of the Eighties to support the employment of disabled persons. For this purpose, the service used to work with a specific methodology: assessment of competencies; individualised follow-up, training and placement; traineeships or stages (i.e. subsidized work experiences), with a relation between the service and the firm; mediation between the beneficiary and the labour market.

Since the half of the 1990s, this methodology has been applied to other targets too: first to beneficiaries with severe social disease (i.e. homeless people, and so on), and later also to applicants and beneficiaries of the Municipal social services, like people with addiction, former convicts, single mothers, over50 long-term unemployed, etc. More in general, all basic and specialised social services, also Third Sector ones (such as Caritas), can signal to SAL their users with an employability potential.

The number of users of the SAL service has increased by three times in the last decade, and even more so since the financial crisis has impacted on the real economy and labour market. In 2010 the service dealt with 421 persons; 69% of them were Italians; more than half are disabled, including 72 psychiatric patients previously in charge of the Local Health Agency. Since the current economic crisis has worsened, Municipal social services are confronted daily with desperate persons in need of income support, whose utilities (gas and electricity) have been cut for arrearage, and whose main request is ‘a job’. Both social workers and the municipal council member define the income need as “an emergency” that goes beyond the possibility of local authorities to tackle it with its resources [interviews Brescia municipal social services].

A specific voucher (*dote* is the Italian term used to indicate this kind of measures in the framework of the Lombardy Region social interventions³) has been managed by the SAL in the last 3 years. The “Dote Investing in Expertise” (the official name of the voucher is in

² We hereby thank all the interviewees who devoted their time to answer our questions: Beatrice Valentini, Silvia Bonizzoni, Claudio Perlotto (municipal social services); Giorgio Maione (former town councillor for Social Services); Fabio Baresi (Bimbo chiama Bimbo); Santina Katiuscia Bugatti and Achille Gasparotti (Provincia di Brescia); Margherita Rocco and Manuela Archetti (I.S.B., Immobiliare Sociale Bresciana); Alessandro Augelli (Informagiovani and Cooperativa Il Calabrone); Giovanni Valenti (Ufficio Stranieri) and Giovanni Boccacci (Centro Migranti).

³ The *Dote* (literally endowment or dowry) is the voucher tool used for the development of a quasi-market approach in the provision of employment services (after introducing it in other policy areas), imposed by the Lombardy Region to provinces and local providers (Sabatinelli and Villa 2011).

English; from now on we shall refer to it as 'liE'), was introduced and financed by the province of Brescia and reserved to two groups of unemployed with particular difficulties in finding a new collocation on the labour market. The two groups, identified among the regionally defined priority targets, were:

- a) persons over 45 years of age, and
- b) lone women with family charges.

The social innovation character lies here in the definition of a measure with the precise aim to draw on the ways of working of the municipal SAL and facilitate the (re)insertion in the labour market of particularly fragile groups of jobless people.

2.1.2. Conceptions and ways of addressing users

The employment insertion activity of the SAL is based on personalized paths that are organized around three main phases:

- a) *preliminary actions* (cv drafting; competences' assessment; training to active research of jobs);
- b) *training* (professional training groups; on-the-job training, apprenticeship);
- c) *support to hiring* (subsidized jobs in cooperatives or firms; extraordinary post-hiring interventions, in order to mediate conflicts or strengthen skills if necessary).

A traineeship indemnity is foreseen; in the case the trainee was receiving a municipal monetary benefit, the indemnity does not cumulate with it but substitutes it (see Costa and Sabatinelli 2012b).

For the beneficiaries/applicants with the most difficult personal situations, who are not ready for professional-based training, 'social traineeships' are developed. These are a sort of voluntary activity with an educational content, aimed at giving them (back) a social role, enhancing their self-esteem and "justifying" the monetary benefit they receive in the frame of an informal social contract. These social insertion experiences may be a first step that - after a positive conclusion - leads to a real labour-market insertion project, following the same steps described above [interviews Brescia municipal social services].

Since the current economic crisis began, the personal fragility of applicants has increased, as well as the duration of the insertion period. The SAL officers tend therefore to develop longer traineeships, also due to the augmented difficulty in (re)inserting the applicants into the labour market.

First of all, it should be considered that the genesis of the voucher "Investing in Expertise" is rather typical for the Italian context: some funds were available since 2007 from the Lombardy Regional Agency for Education, Training and Employment (ARIFL); a project was drafted and a target identified on the basis of the accessible money, i.e. 350 thousands euros from regional funds plus a 20 thousands euro integration by the Province of Brescia⁴, rather than the other way round. This contributed to limit the process of programming. The objective was to cover unprotected segments of the population, particularly at risk of unemployment in general terms, and even more so in these year of crisis.

⁴ Residual funds were individuated later on and used to integrate this amount and finance 8 more vouchers.

The general framework was given by the regional voucher system (Sabatinelli and Villa 2011). The specific model of functioning was inspired by the provincial voucher system for the targeted employment-insertion of the disabled⁵.

The measure, operating since 2010, was opened to all municipalities in the province, but it was defined in its details in strict collaboration between the province and the municipality of Brescia (and particularly with the SAL office). The distribution of resources was concentrated in the chief town: 30 vouchers were reserved to the city of Brescia, while other 47 vouchers were open to the other 205 municipalities of the province. All applicants were selected by the municipalities (and by Caritas in Brescia, as explained below), among beneficiaries already in charge of the local social services. This contributed to further qualify the target of this measure as cases with a particularly high level of fragility.

Each of the smaller municipalities of the province could apply only for 1 voucher. The municipal services were in charge of the selection of the candidate, then vouchers were attributed to municipalities on a 'first come first served' basis.

Beneficiaries of this voucher are persons signalled by basic social services (in case of lone mothers: Municipal Children's office or third sector bodies, such as Caritas). The selected persons apply in agreement with SAL for a voucher with which to pay a package of training and employment services and tutoring. The aim of the measure is to give beneficiaries tools to be more able to deal with the labour market (again). Besides basic transversal skills, as cv-drafting and active job-research techniques, the objective is to give the beneficiaries the opportunity to achieve specific educational and/or training results, and to enhance their competences. Examples are: getting the driving license; completing professional courses to become elderly carer with basic socio-health qualification.

The quota of voucher reserved to the income support of the beneficiary was considered too low by the Municipality of Brescia to allow to sustain with dignity the (re)insertion path. An additional difficulty was given by the fact that the voucher system foresees that the benefit is entirely paid at the end of the whole period, once it is certified that the project was accomplished in all its parts (Municipal Report on liE voucher).

Also in order to tackle these shortcomings, the municipality of Brescia signed an agreement with the local Caritas, to collaborate on the management of this measure. Caritas selected 1/3 of the applicants for Brescia city, and contributed to finance an extra income benefit for all the Brescia beneficiaries, granting 600€/month income support for 6 months (of which 400€ were paid by the Municipality and 200€ by Caritas). As far as the provincial coordination knows, no other municipality found additional resources to complement the liE measure.

Involved firms are not obliged to hire the inserted person at the end of the apprenticeship period. The project foresaw a rather generous bonus in case of hiring: 500€ for a 6 month contract, 1,000€ for a 1 year contract. Even though this bonus was doubled by own municipal resources in Brescia, it proved to be rather ineffective. The involved firms opted, in fact, for rather shorter contracts, all the more so in these times of recession, despite this meant renouncing to the extra-payment.

The beneficiaries of liE vouchers in Brescia Municipality were 15 men over 45 and 15 women with family charges (mostly migrant lone mothers). Half of the beneficiaries were

⁵ In the province of Brescia the targeted employment-insertion of the disabled concerns 200 persons a year, 100 of which in the frame of the national norms on compulsory hiring of disabled persons (national law nr. 68 introduced in 1999).

Italian and half foreigners. A vast majority (90%) of participants were involved in training courses. More than the half (17 out of 30) were involved in a job experience in a firm or cooperative (traineeship).

21 persons were hired after the traineeship, but most of them (16) with a short-term contract (less than 6 months). Only 4 persons were hired with a contract between 6 and 24 months, and one beneficiary was hired on a permanent basis. The employment outcomes are defined by the province management as “not exciting, but interesting” [interviews Provincia Brescia]. Municipal social services underline, though, that short term contracts, although useful in principle as an enrichment of individual CVs, are nevertheless tricky as they may in fact imply a worsening of personal weaknesses, because fragile cases find particular difficulty exactly in the management of insecurity and anxiety [interview Municipal social service].

Because most of the available jobs have atypical working hours, the Municipal Children’s Office has organized a baby-sitting service defined on a case by case basis, involving a relative, a neighbour, or another mother in charge of the Children’s Office, with the payment of a reimbursement. As a result, most vouchers destined to lone mothers actually activate two women at a time. This is an important result that draws on the role of childcare solutions as a lever to increase female employment. It is even more important, as it gives the possibility to municipal social services to offer a job to women who otherwise would be hard to place, especially in times of crisis.

2.1.3. Internal organization and modes of working

The municipal SAL staff is made up of two municipal employees (civil servants) that work in cooperation with the other sectors of the municipal social services. The collaboration does not only consist in the signalling of potentially employable users, but also in the overall identification of their personal resources and needs (see for instance the consideration of, and answer to, childcare needs just recalled above). Reorganization was recently carried out in order for the Municipality to keep direct responsibility only about the coordination of activities, while all other tasks, including case-management, have been outsourced to an accredited private employment agency.

The service traditionally works in partnership with social cooperatives linked by an agreement to the Municipality; one of them is specialised in employment services for the disabled, the other one for persons with social disadvantage. In order to be able to include work experiences in the individualized path developed by SAL for each user, since the half of the 1980s the Municipality has an agreement with local social cooperatives that can obtain contracts to develop outsourced activities for the municipality, such as maintenance of green areas, cleaning services, data-entry, etc. at the condition that they hire persons signalled by the social services. This used to constitute a stock of available protected job experiences (around 50 per year) to be offered to the persons followed by the SAL. Such an agreement has, nevertheless, become contested in the last years, as it goes against the possibility to sign outsourcing contracts at the lowest price possible, what is difficult to defend in a period of heavy budget constraints.

To manage the liE vouchers, partnerships with accredited private job centres needed to be further developed. Interestingly, the evaluation of the SAL is that not all private job centres are at present ready to support paths of integration with persons with fragile profiles, and municipal services needed to provide a strong tutoring of the individual cases even when these were in charge of the private bodies.

The smaller municipalities of the province, not having an internal employment service comparable to the SAL, needed to establish partnerships with (mostly private) employment agencies.

2.1.4. Interaction with the local welfare system

The measure was originated by a project developed by the Province of Brescia, in close connection with the employment insertion service of the Brescia Municipality (SAL), that was to manage most of the available resources due to the concentration of province population in the chief town, and to the relatively higher weight of the labour market. As we have seen above, the other municipalities of the province did have the possibility to participate, but only 47 vouchers were available for them; thus only less than $\frac{1}{4}$ of the remaining municipalities could benefit from the measure, obtaining only one voucher for one selected beneficiary each. This means that the measure was basically an “urban” policy, rather specifically implemented in the Municipality of Brescia, where it could count on a particular municipal services with a specific experience in the field, trained staff and consolidated routines in order to be implemented. The smaller Municipalities needed to externalize entirely the case-management to private accredited bodies and, despite the province claims to have kept the application procedure as simple as possible, many of the municipalities that did apply manifested many severe difficulties in approaching the instrument, characterized by rigid online procedures [interviews Province of Brescia]. This calls for some caution in applying the same measure, through the same standardized procedures, to different - although so close, even neighbouring - contexts.

Although the project is virtually still in place (a few vouchers have not been closed yet, since some of the individual activities are still running), it has in fact expired, as the fund has been used up, and no other resources have been destined to this purpose. This makes the whole measure a sort of an unintended experiment, that would certainly need more resources and more continuity in time in order to have a real impact, in terms of:

- long-term social and professional (re)integration of beneficiaries;
- institutional learning by the involved public and private bodies.

The ‘accidental’ experimental feature would have also gained much more value in presence of a systematic monitoring of the implementation. On the contrary, evaluation was not officially and compulsorily required in the procedure. Brescia was the only Municipality to produce a synthetic report on the results, and there was no systematic collection of feedbacks from the smaller Municipalities, where the space for institutional learning was wider, since in many contexts this was the only case, or one of the rare cases, in which a measure with such contents, objectives and procedures was ever implemented.

2.2. Family support

2.2.1. Short description

The Association *Bimbo chiama Bimbo* (Child calls child) stems from the solidarity activities carried out at the end of the Nineties in favour of Croatian children hit by the war by a group of families close to a parish in the Brescia neighbourhood of Mompiano. Since 2004 it was officially created as an association of volunteers. At the end of 2011 it counted 395 volunteers, committed in social, cultural and leisure activities. Its main target is the support to children and their families, through projects and collaborations with neighbourhood and municipality actors, including schools. The objective is to sustain a “careful, supportive, respectful development of the children”.

From the social innovation point of view what is interesting is the attempt of the association to tackle in an encompassing way different but interrelated needs of households with children: the income need; the childcare need; the parenthood support and socialization need; the need for personal support and social relations; the need for social psychological counselling; need for the integration and participation of the young.

2.2.2. Conceptions and ways of addressing users

The different activities and services developed to tackle the needs of families can be grouped around three main areas:

- a) peer to peer and specialized family support;
- b) solidarity-based shopping;
- c) child education and care⁶.

La Porta Accanto (Next door) is a service carried out by families for families, in the attempt to support in an encompassing way families in need. Key-words guiding the service are: receiving with a non-prejudicial attitude; listening (in order to be able to walk in the others' shoes); helping with immediate basic needs; tutoring to gain back autonomy. It was first born as a mutual help service, but has evolved during the years and is now coordinated by six employed workers. The main available resources are:

- a front-desk for families who turn to the association in search of support;
- listening (350 meetings/year), with the presence of an educator;
- services available for free, also thanks to a network built with other territorial actors;
- a 2,000 € monthly budget to be distributed among families in need;
- *Supporting Families* ("Famiglie d'Appoggio") sustain other families in temporary condition of disadvantage, in order to help them carry out some everyday activities (caring for children for a few hours, take them to or from school, shopping, going to medical controls, talking with children's teachers) or achieve educational objectives (building a social network for those who have no relations in the place where they live; achieving new abilities; school and relation-building support for children). It is in fact a mutual help program - mediated by the association with training, mediation, and the support of a psychologist - in which also the supporting families learn. 22 families are supported in this way yearly.
- *0-12 un anno per cominciare a crescere* ("0-12 a year to start grow up") allows, since 2011 and thanks to a regional fund (24.000 euro/year), to support 30 families with new born children for a year, to distribute fundamental goods (food, hygiene products, pharmacy vouchers, strollers), and to support mothers through a psychologist and a cultural mediator.

⁶ Other activities that the association carries out include: study help; *Pedibus* (initiative to collectively walk children to and from school, in order to reduce the private use of cars for short itineraries active in various municipalities in Italy); vegetable-gardening with children; leisure and socialization activities for families; *Scuola-Mestieri*, apprenticeship project; various initiatives for self-financing of the association (e.g selling handcrafts); solidarity with Croatian households.

A solidarity-based Food Store (*Magazzino Alimentare*) was opened at the beginning of the years 2000s. Beneficiaries are households in rather severe economic need, either signalled by municipal social services, or selected by the *Next Door* service of the association, or sent by other local associations. These families receive a voucher to be spent once a month in a space that resembles a mini-supermarket, for a value that varies according to the family size and conditions. Households are received one by one by a secretary who keeps an personal and individual relation with them. The voucher allows a monthly shopping for non perishable foodstuffs, products for cleaning and for personal hygiene. Since 2010 also a weekly distribution of fresh food is organized: beneficiaries are around 150 households, signalled by the Next Door service, plus the 30 households with newborn children part of the 0-12 regional project seen above; the number of beneficiaries has increased in these years of crisis.

The Food Store is open, thanks to volunteers' work, four afternoons a week and on Saturdays, to facilitate the beneficiaries who work during the week. 28 unpaid collaborators guarantee this service, including young volunteers from the parish and Scouts groups. Products to be distributed come from food collection organized by volunteers (products donated by private citizens at the exit of supermarkets); from selective wholesale purchases in big stores; products from a yearly agreement between Caritas and AGEA⁷; fresh products are bought at forfeit price from other local social cooperatives and associations producing fruits and vegetables and dairy products.

The Municipality pays a contribution to cover the vouchers of beneficiaries selected by its social services, but the agreement has been reduced year after year, justified by the Municipality with the reduction of available resources.

In another building of the association a large store (*Guardaroba*, Wardrobe) collects used clothes and shoes, for men, women and children, together with a sector for cradles, strollers, toys and other stuff for babies, toddlers and children.

Around 500 users come from the whole city and even province of Brescia; most of them have two or three children. The clothes' store is open 3 afternoons a week and on Saturdays. It is managed by 50 volunteers, distributed on weekly shifts, including some adolescents. Given the high demand, and its increase in connection with the crisis, the shifts of volunteers to manage the service have been widened and the users are asked to make an appointment. A welcome office is available, to establish a personalized relationship with users, and a small separated space is prepared where volunteers play with children while adults choose the products they need.

The cooperative provides a service for families with children under 3 years of age (*Centro Zero Tre*, "0-3 Centre"), where children can live an educational experience with their parents or grandparents or child-minders, and other children, in a stimulating environment. The service aims at supporting the cognitive and emotional development of children, and the enhancement of relations between adults and children, among children, and among adults themselves; it also aims at confrontation and prevention on problems related to early childhood. It is open 2 mornings and 3 afternoons every week, for 3 hours. Around 60 families regularly attend the service (around 10 children a day, divided in shifts); some other families have used the service on an occasional basis. The activities are mediated and organized by an educator, supported by assistants and volunteers. Part of the volunteers are mothers or grandmothers who used the service in the past or who are

⁷ National agency on behalf of the European Union for the support of agricultural production.

currently using it. The volunteers' group reflects the heterogeneity of the (adult) users, including two men and five persons with a migrant background.

The initiative was inspired by an analogous centre created by the Catholic Third Sector actor Caritas (*A piccoli passi*, Tiny Steps) in Brescia. This type of service has been promoted since the end of the Nineties by a national law (LN 285/97) financing projects for children carried out by local networks, among which also parenthood support and integrative and innovative childcare services, promoted by public or non public bodies, were foreseen (Costa and Sabatinelli 2011). The main strength of such services is the possibility to include those families whose young children do not attend "harder" services, and particularly the day-care center, and who might end up socially isolated in the delicate period of the early years of parenthood, especially if they do not have a strong family and primary network where they live. The so-called integrative services, although slowly increasing, are still rather marginal in Italy, with a coverage rate of children <3 of 1.6% in Italy and of 2.4% in the Lombardy region (ISTAT 2013). Thus, such initiatives constitute an innovation in those territories (meaning also neighborhoods) where they are lacking.

A service called *Baby Sitting di emergenza* (Emergency Baby-Sitting) is organized by the cooperative to take care of children from 18 months to 6 years of age in the periods when day-care centres and kindergartens are closed. The principal target are lone mothers and families who cannot count on the family network for everyday childcare. It is open in the summer and during Christmas holidays, from 7.30 a.m. to 7.30 p.m. in order to cover the differentiated working hours of parents. The aim of the service goes beyond the mere baby-sitting, and intends to build an educational project, and a quality relation with the children, although based on a time frame that is well shorter than the one that characterizes day-care centres for instance, and in spite of the differentiated age range of attending children. The activities are based on specific routines; a wide outdoor space allows to vary the proposed activities, especially during summer. The staff consists of educators, assistant educators and volunteers.

In 2011 68 children were enrolled, with 35 of them attending every day on average. Six educators worked in the service, providing 1500 hours of work, 20 hours of coordination, 20 of training, 6 of supervision. Educators were helped by 58 volunteers between 13 and 17 years of age. During the winter holidays the inner space allows to receive a smaller number of children (25), and thus also a smaller staff of educators and volunteers is enrolled.

This service is the most expensive for the association, as it costs 40 thousand euros a year. Families pay a weekly income-related fee and the Municipality of Brescia, on the basis of an official agreement, generally pays the fee for the households with very low income or deprived conditions. In 2012 such coverage was nevertheless not granted, due to cuts to social expenditure in connection with national austerity programs. Later, the agreement was reactivated, but the municipal contribution was fixed at a lower amount.

This service has not only an educational and socialization value, but clearly also a crucial reconciliation function, since it covers exactly those (long) holiday periods in which - since education and care services are closed - many families hardly know whom to entrust their children when they work. With the same spirit, the association has recently started a programme to receive children from 2 to 6 years of age on Saturdays (opening hours from 8 am to 8 pm). Especially (though not only) children of working parents are welcome; the reconciliation objective is here is either direct, for parents who work on Saturdays, or indirect, for parents who work during the week and must devote Saturdays to run personal and family errands.

2.2.2. Internal organization and modes of working

The association is - by nature and definition - mostly managed by volunteers. Nevertheless, as some of the activities have grown in a rather massive way, a core team of employed workers has been established (six persons), to grant coordination and professionalization to the organization, although the bulk of the work continues to be carried out by volunteers.

A peculiar feature of the association is the involvement of teen-age volunteers (aged 13-17). Particularly young volunteers who commit themselves at least for 4 hours a day in the babysitting service, but who are not professionally mature yet, are considered “assistant educators”, also with the aim to train those who could work as educators in the association in the future; a small reimbursement is reserved to adolescents with low-income family background.

Many members of the families that receive support from the association are also involved in activities for the maintenance of the association structures. The site where the association is currently located, for instance, was provided by the Foundation of a Catholic body - the *Congrega di Carità Apostolica* - but it was autonomously restored, almost entirely via volunteer work. Alternatively, they are engaged in specific initiatives, according to their competencies and skills. This approach is oriented at emphasizing reciprocity and circularity of help, and reducing the dependency and passivity feelings that may lead beneficiaries to sentiments of shame for their condition of need and stigma for their position of helped persons. It is also, of course, aimed at reducing the costs of functioning of the whole association and of its single services.

2.2.4. Interaction with the local welfare system

The association is strongly embedded in the neighbourhood where it was created. The families who founded the first nucleus of the present associations, after having come together for a solidarity project out of the city and of the country (in Croatia), later decided to commit also to local solidarity projects, and chose a rather peripheral neighbourhood (in the North of the city), comparatively deprived in terms of social infrastructures. The association is in fact very well-known in the neighbourhood. Yet, as long as the activities of the association grew, increasing numbers of persons in need from other areas of the city began to turn to the association.

The activities are carried out thanks to a territorial network with several actors from the neighbourhood, the city and the province, including many third sector bodies, such as associations, cooperatives, foundations, parishes, but also public authorities and services.

The sources of financing are diversified. The main resources come from:

- *5xmille*: 5% share of the amount of the taxes on personal income that taxpayers are free to destine to bodies carrying out socially useful activities (e.g. various non-profit activities, scientific research). The association is one of the main receivers of this quota in the city of Brescia;
- agreements with the Municipality, implying a financing in exchange of the destination of part of the resources/services to beneficiaries signalled by the municipal social services (e.g. for the food store and the 0-3 centre);
- agreements with Caritas and local foundations;
- donations from supporters, that can also take the form of continuative bank transfers;
- self-financing activities (like small market of handcraft products);

- voluntary work (see above).

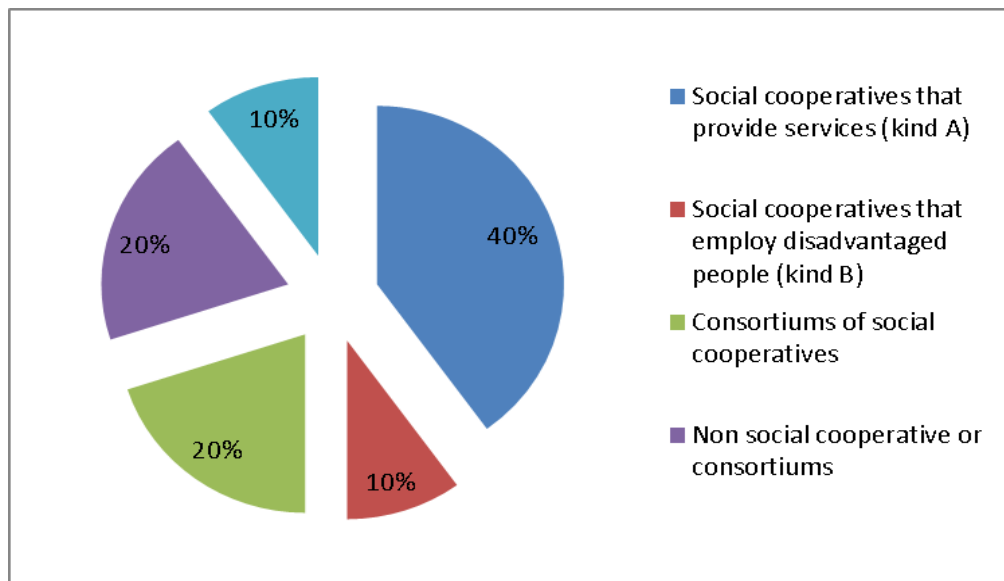
The connection with the municipal social services does not only consist in the funds that the Municipality devotes to the association to support some of its activities. There is a mutual signaling of cases of persons in need between the municipal social services and the association. Some of the cases are managed in a coordinated way by municipal social workers and the employees of the association.

2.3. Lone mothers and lone women housing inclusion - “Via del Carmine 15” Project

2.3.1. Short description

The project is developed by *Immobiliare Sociale Bresciana* (ISB). ISB is a consortium of cooperatives born in 2001 with the aim of developing social housing projects, both supporting the participating cooperatives to do it and developing own projects building new apartments or recuperating buildings to devote to social targets populations. ISB also builds for its affiliated social cooperatives (to host their workers or to host their activities). In any case social cohesion is one of the most important criteria that guides ISB in its activities. ISB is composed by social cooperatives (A and B, the first ones offer services, the second ones include “weak workers”, like psychiatric patients, ex imprisoned people, etc.), consortium of cooperatives, other kind of cooperatives and banks, as seen in fig. 2.

Figure 2. Composition of Immobiliare Sociale Bresciana



Source: Bilancio Sociale 2012.

The subjects affiliated to ISB are (in 2013): *Cerro Torre Società Cooperativa Sociale Onlus*, *La Rete Società Cooperativa Sociale Onlus*, *Il Calabrone Società Cooperativa Sociale Onlus*, *Consorzio Acli Solidale*, *Cassapadana*, *Consorzio CGM Finance*, *Consorzio Acli Duemila*, *Cooperativa sociale Margherita CVL società cooperativa sociale Onlus*. The value of real estate belonging to ISB (all devoted to social activities and social housing) was in 2012 around Euros 12 million. ISB is in good health from the economic and financial point of view compared to other actors in the field (such as big, medium and small building cooperatives). Receipts deriving from rents are around euros 300.000/year. Both values (assets and revenues) grew significantly during the last years because of the increase in assets devoted to the core activity (social housing).

From 2002 till now, ISB developed many different projects working with a lot of different agencies (Municipalities, affiliated and not affiliated cooperatives, third sector actors) hosting at the beginning only temporarily problematic people that, otherwise, would not have any housing inclusion opportunities. ISB gives the possibility to tenants to access new and furnished apartments at modest prices (compared to the market ones) and offers personal services that permit them to reach a housing autonomy. ISB has in fact from the half of the decade pluralized its housing stock in order to propose different levels of apartments and solutions: from emergency solutions for evicted families or for homeless people for example, to secondary solutions and permanent renting apartments to stabilize users in their housing needs. ISB operates in favour of different targets (kind of families, age groups, their origin, their problems). ISB own the buildings (or part of the buildings) where social housing projects are developed, is the social manager and the provider or developer of a multiplicity of housing and personal services. Social housing for ISB means renting with modest prices (for example the “rent to buy” formulas are not used).

ISB also have a whole building that host immigrant families who moved from Il Carmine (the historical centre of the city invested by a huge requalification project in the last decade that pushed out many people, mostly migrants, to other part of the city). ISB works with them with the same philosophy that will be explained for the chosen projects that are analyzed here. Here also rents are quite below the market levels ones. Two specific recent projects of ISB will be analysed here, both located in Il Carmine, the historical centre of Brescia.

The social housing project implemented in Via del Carmine 15 was developed to cope with lone mothers housing needs in some way signalled by Brescia Municipality which asked to ISB to welcome women with young and very young children that have experienced domestic violence and were trying to be independent from their partner. Most of them were migrants, from Eastern countries. In 2009 an ISB building has been renewed and 14 apartments have been rented to lone women or lone mothers with young children. Their size range from 50 to 80 sq/m. Rents are quite below free market ones, about Euros 60/sqm (which in the Lombardy context is called *canone convenzionato*) and renters hold personal renting contracts with ISB. From 2009 to 2012 the condominium hosted mostly lone mothers (80%). In the smallest apartments 3 lonely women have been inserted and in the biggest one a whole family with 3 children and one single earner started to live in. At the end of 2011 *Contrada del Carmine* hosted 3 families, 6 women with young children and 5 lone women (in total 28 persons, 13 Italians and 15 migrants). During 2012, 4 (on a total of 14) apartments have been occupied by new dwellers, in most cases because the previous ones have moved thanks to better life and work conditions (they got married or bought a house). This project did not suffer from arrears in rents' payments.

2.3.2. Conceptions of and ways of addressing users

The Via del Carmine ISB social housing project conceive users as normal people who need a nice, beautiful and peaceful place to live and not as “people with difficulties”. All dwellers are very well known by ISB who normally decides who insert in their apartments and who don't. ISB manages its dwellers very carefully, helping them in whatever they need considering them as “partners” of the project and the housing initiative. Some of them can use special resources (counselling services) from the project “Intermezzo” (literally, “between acts”) financed in 2011 by *Fondazione di Comunità Bresciana* to support housing awareness of those who are in personal troubles. These cognitive resources gave light to a high mobilization of dwellers to help each other, to find solutions to personal needs with reciprocal helps and to the decision to define “real condominium

delegates” showing how democracy wills can raise in contexts characterized by high diversity but where common goals are recognized as being in place.

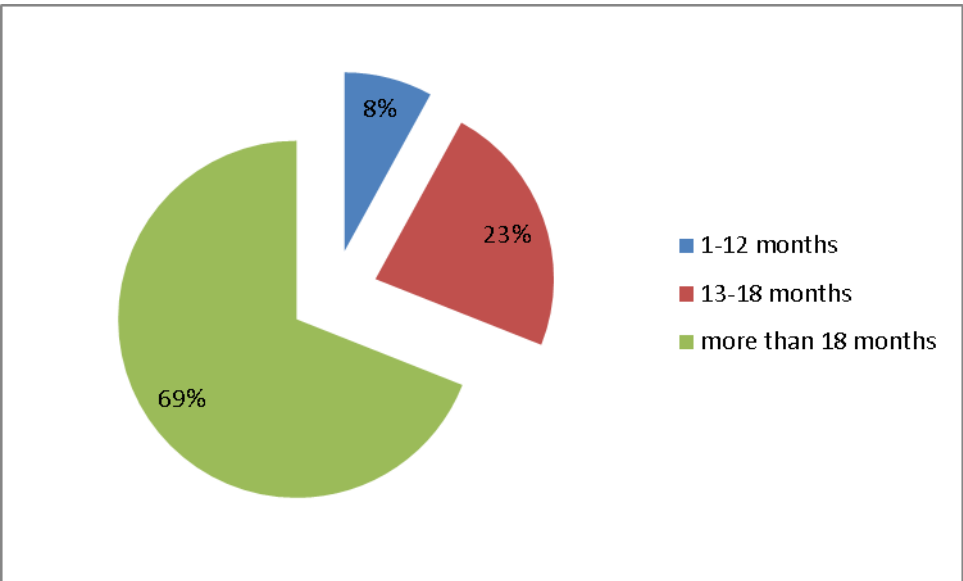
In this project as well in other ISB’s social housing initiatives, contacts with past, present and future individuals and families tend to be longer than in other contexts they are considered as dwellers and not clients, they are supported in the way to housing inclusion. In other contexts and projects lone mothers with children are hosted temporally and are not helped with other supports or case management.

2.3.3. Internal organisation and modes of working

One of the more innovative aspects in this specific project to what regards the internal organization is that a lot of energies have been invested in “building self-organization capacities” in those who live in the building, at least in the first two years. It could seem a paradox that the social manager had to intervene to support self-organization so these statement needs to be explained. It has to be considered that those who live in this “social condominium” come from many different countries and have different backgrounds and that the building is located in a neighbourhood that is now attractive to middle classes (as a gentrified part of the city) and is to some extent gentrified, but bears a long standing stigma attached to the high presence of migrants, drug dealers, prostitutes and so on. The social manager is a young women that functions as a connection between those who live in the building and the owner/general manager, ISB. She lives in the building as a tenant and assures that dwellers voices are heard, that problems find a transparent and efficient solution, that auto-organized cleaning activities work well for all. This young girl is a social operator that woks also for the ISB and can “keep an eye” on the whole building and its inhabitants needs.

Most dwellers are inserted with long contracts as can be seen in figure 2. Short contracts are related to special insertions arranged with Brescia Municipality (Social Services Division) or due to dwellers needs. More than 50% of dwellers have quite modest incomes, between 8.000 and 17.000 Euros/year and are eligible also to public housing. Some more than 30% have relatively high incomes (30.000 euros/year) which lead to a social mix in the building also from the economic point of view.

Figure 3. Contracts in Via del Carmine 15, by nr, of months length



Source: Bilancio Sociale 2012.

2.3.4. Interaction with the local welfare system

As stated before, this specific social housing project has been developed in agreement with Brescia Municipality (*Assessorato ai Servizi Sociali*) even if following own strategic objectives an mission. The agreement consisted theoretically in the fact that ISB would apply moderate rents and the Municipality would guarantee for rents payments in case of arrears or insolvency of renters. As a matter of fact it did not happened when a person (sent by the public administration) could not pay and ISB just did not receive that money. The interaction with the local public welfare system is not very strong because of the good functioning of the project and because it works without public funds.

2.4. Young people housing inclusion - *Fare e abitare* (Doing and living)

2.4.1. Short description

This project has been developed by *Immobiliare Sociale Bresciana* also It is a very small but quite innovative project devoted to young people (18 to 30 years old) who want to leave their family and live independently. Two apartments (100% furnished) are available, one for 2 young people and the other for 4 of them. They are located in a little building now owned by ISB which was bought apartment by apartment (one thanks to a bequest to ISB). Rents are about Euro 140/month plus expenses, total 200 euros per month per person.

Dwellers pay quite low rents but have to activate themselves for the city or for the neighbourhood through voluntary activities, be they cultural (for example through events that promote integration among migrants and “autochthonous”), social (for example offering help to migrants during day time moments) or pro-environmental (for example doing urban gardening). The project idea have been launched and then implemented by ISB and one of the affiliated cooperatives, “Il Calabrone”. The cooperative is also the social manager of “Fare e Abitare” following it’s mission.

2.4.2. Conceptions of and ways of addressing users

Initially, ISB wanted to simply devote the two apartments of the nowadays project to cope with young people housing needs because in Brescia policies to support young people housing inclusion are very weak. After some discussions with the Municipality director of young people policy sector that decided to support the project, it had been decided to turn to a wider project in terms of scope even if without further resources dedicated to it. Through *Fare e Abitare* ISB launched an “ideas event” for the city inviting interest young people to apply bringing projects for the neighbourhood (Il Carmine) or for the city in some way assuming that “young people are not the needy but those who have resources and capacities to share” with the rest of the population. The project aims are the following:

- To activate young people in the city asking them to develop value added activities and giving them a stable housing accommodation;
- To increase the quality of living in the neighbourhood with low cost activities that can bring strong social cohesion;
- To promote co-habitation as a life style among young people in this specific historical moment characterized by the need of reducing land use and new constructions.

These aims should be reached all together. The innovators have been inspired by international cases that have been studied in detail. They look at UK experiences, in Manchester where young districts have been done to support their working activities and partially their housing needs. They also worked with Italian academics who are also involved in developing policies for young people.

Fare e abitare received 16 projects from different groups of potential co-habiting persons. Almost all projects are related to the neighbourhood where the dwellings are located, in “Il Carmine”. The content of those who have been declared as winners project are:

1. to promote moments to eat together in the neighbourhood to support friendship and relations among neighbours. The neighbourhood is “Il Carmine”, where there are a lot of migrants (who live there but mainly work there running mostly ethnic commerce activities). The project is called “Parla come mangi” that can be translated as “talk as you eat” following a very well known popular *adagio*. Partners of the project are the local GAS (“Gruppo di acquisto solidale”, ethical purchasing group) and the Brescia University.
2. to promote cultural activities in Santa Giulia Museum and in the Verziano prison. These project won also an university call. The winners are 4 young girls; one of them is serving a term of imprisonment, sleeps in prison and has the permission to work outside the prison during the day and have an apartment to use in these hours.

2.4.3. Internal organisation and modes of working

One of the more innovative aspects of the project is the way by which users have been recruited. A call have been launched in august and has been closed after two months receiving 16 projects and applications. Young people are considered as resources for the community and not just “a specific target” a conception that has an impact on the way of working because the social manager not only has to recruit dwellers and manage their insertion in the apartments, but has also to help and support them in developing their project which implies further and more collaborative work among “formal operators” and “informal facilitators and agents” as the selected dwellers are.

Dwellers had not been chosen directly by ISB but had to pass through a selection mechanism that obliged all the involved actors to conjugate their aims with the others ones giving life to a positive and synergic outcome.

2.4.4. Interaction with the local welfare system

The role of the Brescia Municipality (*Assessorato Politiche Giovanili*) in this project is quite marginal although they have formally supported it. The Municipality has offered an office and a person who made telephone calls to promote the project and has involved the *Informagiovani* (a special service for young people who look for jobs, information about working or studying opportunities, etc.) to publicize it. No funding has being provided. The call for the project has been launched under the following partnership: ISB, Brescia Municipality and *Cooperativa Il Calabrone* (affiliated to ISB and manager of the local *Informagiovani*, counselling and information service for young people who look for work, study opportunities etc.).

The competent town councillor has declared that the public support for the project goes along with “our initiatives for employability and access to credit [...] because housing and housing autonomy are the instruments though which the young people liberate themselves

from the family dependence [...] the project shows that rights have to be thought with duties”. The emphasis put on the project by public officers is high even if no substantial public resources have been invested in it.

The social manager thinks that the interaction with the Brescia University and with the prison as well as with one of the principal museums of the city (Santa Giulia) through the winners projects will enhance the possibility to collaborate in the future within the same scheme (ISB provides new apartments and call for projects) or in other relationships as participating to financing opportunities, etcetera.

As a critical point, it is considered that rents (as wrote, about Euro 140/month plus expenses, total 200 euros per month) are too high for young people that have to share their home. Even if 200 euros is a low price to live in Brescia, in order to really help and support young people housing autonomy costs should be quite lower. Another critical aspect is that the two rooms apartment are too big and have too many common spaces that not allow enough privacy for its dwellers. This aspect teaches for future other opportunities that will be provided to young people.

2.5. Migrants housing inclusion - *Una casa in più* (One house more)

2.5.1. Short description

The project has been developed by a very small cooperative, the *Cooperative Scalabrini Bonomelli*. The cooperative was born in 1990 as a building cooperative acknowledging migrants needs voiced out in the *Segretariato Migranti della Diocesi di Brescia* (Brescia Diocese Secretariat for Migrants⁸) from 1981 onwards. The cooperative’s mission was since the beginning to find housing solutions for migrants (which, in that years, arrived quite massively to Brescia) assuming that this could be a good starting point to support their autonomy and their social inclusion in the hosting city⁹. The cooperative had the aim of creating conditions of social inclusion for migrants, avoiding the development of neighbourhoods inhabited by migrants only. Furthermore, the cooperative was born to increase the “cooperative spirit” (in the sense of working and participating to cooperatives activities) in migrants, present not only as members of the cooperative but also in the directory board. The cooperative worked identifying apartments, restructuring them and then renting them to migrants also encouraging autonomy and social and economic growth of dwellers.

In 2005 the cooperative transformed itself from a building cooperative to a social cooperative to pluralize their activities focusing also on prevention and interventions in case of migrants hardship. The cooperative has many relationships with public agencies and with the local church.

The project *Una casa in più* was developed in 2003/2005 thanks to a special Regional program that financed housing solutions for migrants. The migrants officer of Brescia at that time invited the cooperative to participate to the call developing something that had already been experienced in Bergamo by a very big migrants housing cooperative *Casa Amica* which good projects have been copied by other in Lombardy across the years. The Bergamo cooperative also participated to the call. The idea was to identify apartments that could be rented to migrants with long contracts of 10 + 10 years with the formula

⁸ Now the “Diocese Center for Migrants”.

⁹ Following the most intelligent positions found in literature which states that migrants have to be at least supported through housing inclusion and that no other policies should be developed for them.

patto di future vendita (rent to buy) in order to permit them to have a good accommodation, to pay rents below the market prices and to have the opportunity to buy the dwelling at the end of the period.

The project has been appreciated pretty much by academics working with migration issues and that were quite influent in regional decision making. Even if the first evaluation of Lombardy Region was negative, at the end the *Cooperative Scalabrini Bonomelli* received 500.000 euros to develop the project through the participation to the call by the Municipality of Brescia.

The cooperative identified 15 apartments to devote to the project, half of them to let in normal rent, and the other half with the rent to buy formula. Monthly rents were and are around 500 Euros (*canone convenzionato*) and the price to pay at the end of the 20 years transforming dweller in homeowners around 1500-3000 euros. This rent value incorporates also a capital part (to buy the dwelling month by month) and is higher than normal rents applied by the cooperative. As a matter of fact, one of the goals of the cooperative was to generate a consistent cash flow to invest in other similar projects.

2.5.2. Conceptions of and ways of addressing users

The project has been considered as very innovative because for the first time migrants were targeted as possible buyers of houses through contracts that permit to rent for 20 years paying a sum that is, in part, an anticipation of capital. The project acknowledged that migrants would stay for long years in the city, would adopt in the middle term the same Italians housing strategies (be homeowners) and that would need stable housing accommodation.

Thanks to the opportunity window represented by the Regional funding, this formula could be applied to migrants. The latent aim of the project was also to make dwellers more responsible for payments of rents and for the good maintenance of the cooperative housing stock. Migrants, once inserted in the cooperative dwellings tended to assume that they had a “right” on it, without respecting duties attached to the possess of a home. These project permitted to some extent to revert this behaviour clarifying with dwellers and potentially future owners the terms of their insertion in the housing stock.

2.5.3. Internal organization and modes of working

The project *Una casa in più* in some way changed the way of working because it inaugurated this small but crucial activity of supporting migrants in their way to homeownership. The cooperative had to structure its capacity to interact with banks and funding actors as well as supporting migrants in accessing credit opportunities.

2.5.4. Interaction with the local welfare system

The project has been financed by Lombardy Region with 500,000 euros. The cooperative has been invited by Brescia Municipality to participate to the regional call and had to work with it to prepare its candidacy. Afterwards relationships had been very weak and no special support has been given by the local actor to the project or to the cooperative which continues to insert very slowly migrants in the public housing stock facing all the problems related to the scarcity of housing opportunities. In other words, the project “Una casa in più” did not create better conditions for the cooperative activities in the following years and the project has not been replicated neither by the cooperative and by the Municipality.

The principal critical aspects of the project are related to its timing not to the main ideas of it. At the beginning of the 2000s’, migrants home ownership rates were almost double than the nowadays ones, 22% versus the actual 12%, they were the highest in Italy. So the project was well contextualized, aiming to support stabilization of migrants in the city through an assisted (and easiest) pattern to home ownership. The project contemplates a very long period to rent and then buy, 20 years which from one side was the necessary base to permit people to buy their own dwelling, but from the other side creates uncertainty attached to a long period changes, especially in the migrants lives ones. In the last 5 years the scenario changed pretty much. Many migrants are going back to their countries of origin. Not all the apartments destined to be bought with the 20 years long renting formula have been allocated because this span of time have been considered too long at that time by potential dwellers. Originally 8 apartments were devoted to the rent/buying formula but 2 of them have at the end be devoted to normal rent.

CONCLUSIONS

The quite different cases of social innovation presented here suggest some conclusions in relation to financing, duration of projects/programmes and networking.

The scarcity of resources, especially in these years of crisis, is a recurrent evident element in our cases. Need (and also applications) for income support, employment insertion, housing inclusion and other kinds of helps have enormously increased, in the face of scantly, and surely not enough, dedicated resources. Resources for social policies have been severely cut at the central level, and transfers to local levels have been drastically reduced as well. Moreover, Italian Municipalities are heavily constrained by the inner stability pact that - in order to respect the European fiscal parameters - impedes them to spend over certain thresholds even if they do have money. As a consequence, many programmes and projects, both directly managed by public services and outsourced to non public actors have been reduced, and agreements with third sector actors have been downsized and/or the renewal of their financing has been delayed (as in the case of the 0-3 centre, see 2.2.), or fixed-term projects have not been prolonged or renewed (as it was the case of the Voucher investing in expertise, see 2.1.).

Some interviewees underline how, in some specific cases, the “spending review” is not necessarily detrimental to the contents and quality of the service, but may instead lead to

useful and positive reorganizational processes¹⁰. These may raise protestations, due to the fear of beneficiaries to lose in quality or quantity of the intervention that may however cease once the beneficiaries verify the functioning of the new system.

Nevertheless, such positive examples should not shadow the fact that there is a clear need for continuity, and stability (and even increase) of financing for new and for consolidated services that, even when provided by non public actors, do intercept cases in need. If funds are not adequate to the objective, the impact of the measures can be really marginal, even if their content is innovative in their context. Even more so, they risk to not even represent an opportunity for institutional learning for the actors involved, as the example of the small municipalities in the province of Brescia, having to mobilize in order to manage only one single voucher for labour-market (re)insertion shows (see 2.1).

Also the capacity to use windows of opportunity, that becomes more and more important in a context of limited resources, needs time to be developed by actors. Moreover, it should be implemented without losing a long-term and context-based perspective.

Some specific considerations are worth to be drawn on the cases on housing inclusion, that we selected as paradigmatic of this “new” issue in the Italian context. Social housing initiatives are expanding but remain very small in terms of their capacity to offer dwellings at a modest price for rent, compared to the growing housing needs. Social housing projects sometimes are intended as substitutes to the public action and not as complementary to it, which poses problematic issues. Moreover, very often local public actors (as Municipalities) use social housing projects as “flagships projects” to show that “something is going on” or better “we are doing things” but then, after an initial engagement, they fail in supporting these projects with other means (for example, filling the gaps and providing a fast track to access public resources in case of individual drop-outs in the social housing projects).

Social housing projects are quite vulnerable from the economic financial point of view. They are exposed to a variety of oscillations in the housing and land markets, in the political context, in the mix of promoters activities. Normally, social housing projects can be feasible if they can count on favourable conditions, be they in terms of land use or concession, public or generous private funding (that don’t have to be paid back). Moreover, they have to be mixed with “pro market” or “in the market” initiatives which provide the resources to finance social housing activities. If at least one of these 2 conditions are not in place, projects do not even start.

Social housing projects fostered by private actors normally work for the “grey” part of the market, for those who are not poor enough to be eligible to the public housing stock (which, anyway, would not automatically imply to access it, as it is very scarce, see Costa and Sabatinelli 2011 and 2012) and are not wealthy enough to stand in the market. Very rarely private actors work for the poorer because they would be obliged to apply very low rents that would not remunerate their investments. The only channel through which it is possible to develop social housing for the most needy is very conspicuous public funding for its construction and management, which is quite rare in the actual context. Operating for the grey part of the market can be a good solution for operators (who are experiencing the economic crisis in the normal market) because they can intercept some public financing and can, at the same time, cope with the housing needs of specific groups of population (such as members of housing cooperative, people signalled by social services, etc.) but in any case, they are not able to respond to housing hardship situations.

¹⁰ An example is given by the new modalities introduced for the public transportation of disabled, not analysed in this report.

A mismatch between projects and needs is observed. Housing needs are frequently long-term needs, so that what was thought to be a temporary solution (even if not an emergency-based one) becomes a permanent housing insertion. Social housing projects, as well as public housing ones, have a low turn-over in terms of users/dwellers: even if those who apply for social housing projects are invited (if eligible) to apply also to public housing, because of the scarce production of new dwellings and the very low turn-over of the existing dwellers, they tend to occupy these apartments for many years, preventing other persons to benefit of this (temporary in principle) opportunity. This specific problematic aspect was positively coped by *Immobiliare Sociale Bresciana* who decide to pluralize it's mission and length of contracts in an innovative and useful (for dwellers) mix.

As a way of conclusion, and given this problematic scenario, it is worth to state that innovation is happening in Brescia. Not all analysed projects are sustainable and have the possibility of being replicated, but most of them show that actors learn from experiments (in the case of social housing, they can be quite costly ones) and evolve in their capacity of structuring or focusing their activities.

The territorial networking and collaboration between public and private actors has a long-lasting tradition in Brescia, but quite some margins of improvement are observed. In some cases, in fact, relations are limited to rather narrow ways of cooperation (e.g. specific agreements on financing of parts of services), which are furthermore currently endangered by the shrinking of resources. The scarcity of available means would call for more synergic collaborations, overcoming the potential barriers due to the defence of the legitimate organizational identity of existing bodies.

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