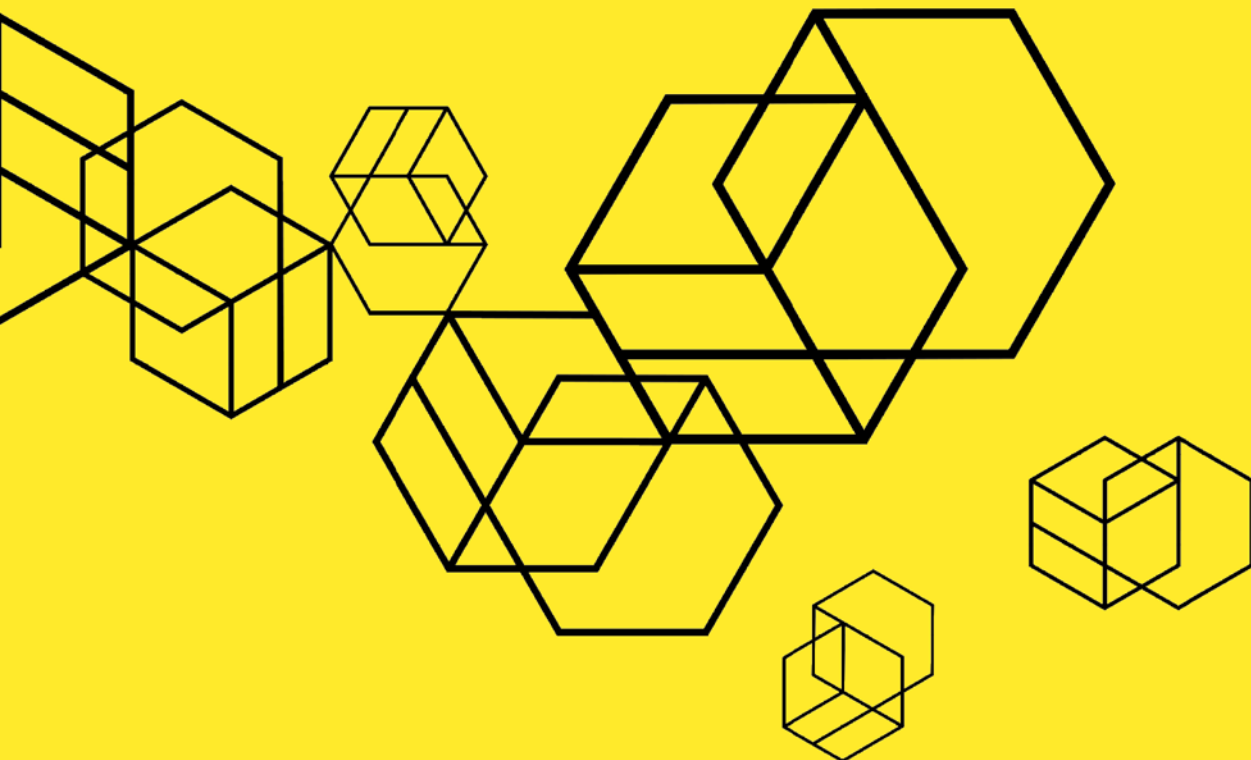




**SOCIAL
INNOVATION
COMMUNITY**

Case study on Social Innovation in Emilia Romagna

Giulio Ecchia & Giovanni Maria Mazzanti





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ABSTRACT

This case describes four examples of social innovation in Emilia Romagna. Emilia Romagna is a territory with a high number of social innovation experiences representing specific learning processes. The analysis of the cases, of their evolution and of their learning process will help to understand if their success depends on specific and local dynamics or whether a social innovation ecosystem can be identified. This provides also the basis for a brief discussion of the factors which could promote a real ecosystem of social innovation in Emilia Romagna.



1. DESCRIPTION OF THE CASE

THE CONTEXT



Emilia Romagna is a dynamic Italian region from an economic and social point of view. Emilia Romagna is the 7,3% of the national population and represents 9% of the Italian GDP. It is also one of the fifteen richest regions of Europe (in terms of nominal GDP), the sixth European region for number of employees, the first Italian region for per capita export. Emilia Romagna can be also considered as the Italian hub for the food industry (for examples parmesan and balsamic vinegar) and motor vehicles production (for example Ferrari, Lamborghini, Ducati) as the first European bio medical district. It is a community with a strong attitude to economic innovation and it is the first Italian region for European patents.

Emilia Romagna is also a territorial community with high quality social services and a strong presence and tradition of cooperative and social economy. There is a growing relevance of social economy at European level representing 10% of the total enterprises and 6,5% of the total employees and Emilia Romagna is one of the most important regions in this respect¹. In Emilia Romagna is based 8,24% of the total Italian organizations of the social economy, 13,7% of the paid employees and the 9% of the total volunteers². Two thirds of the total regional employees in the Third Sector are working in one of the 723 social cooperative (56% are social cooperatives of type A, 21% are social cooperatives of type B and 17% are social cooperatives of mix type)³. Despite the crisis, social cooperatives grew in numbers and in employees and in their contribution to the regional GDP. The importance of social cooperatives in this territory, their links with the rest of the cooperatives sector and the interaction between cooperatives and for profit enterprises makes Emilia Romagna a potentially interesting case study of social innovation creation and dissemination. These elements make Emilia Romagna often regarded as a social and economic model of regional success.

Two additional points should be worth mentioned in this regard. Regional economic and social differences across Italy have been analyzed in a recent study (Bigoni, Bortolotti, Casari 2016) where the authors investigate the role of social norms in order to explain them. Following the influential contribution of Putnam (1993) who identified in the collective disposition towards cooperation and good government the reasons of the differentiations between parts of Italy, the

¹From: *Economia Sociale: leva di sviluppo e ben-essere*, Regione Emilia Romagna, with the support of with Ervet and Aiccon, 2014.

²From "Welfare e Ben-essere: il ruolo delle imprese nello sviluppo della comunità" Regione Emilia Romagna, with the support of with Ervet and Aiccon, 2014.

³Social co-operatives were legally recognised in 1991 through Law no. 381/91. They fulfil their activities 'for the general benefit of the community and for the social integration of citizens'. Type A social cooperatives can deliver health, social or educational services. They operate as commercially orientated businesses, with workers and volunteers being members of the co-op. Social cooperatives of type B integrate disadvantaged people into the labour market, giving them greater involvement in the operation of their enterprise. Type B co-operatives seek to be financially self-sustaining, but their core function is to provide working environments and social integration for marginalized people. At least 30% of workers in a B co-operative must be disadvantaged. The main typologies of disadvantaged involved as members and workers are people with physical or learning disabilities, people with sensory difficulties, people treated for mental illness, drug and alcohol addicts, refugees and people with an alternative punishment to prison.

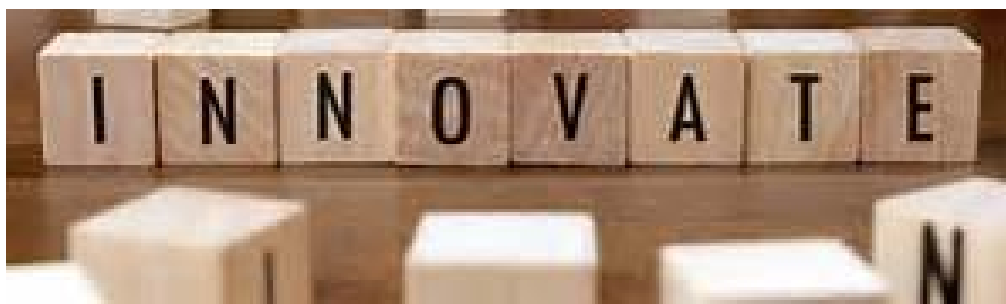


authors present evidence based on the first laboratory in the field experiment⁴ conducted on the Italian North – South differences, where the city of Faenza, based in Emilia Romagna, is one of the four selected at national level. They developed a representative sample of the population, measuring whether regional disparities in ability to cooperate emerge even if differences in geography, institutions and criminal intrusion are silenced. They argue that a behavioural gap in cooperation exists so Northern and Southern citizens react differently to same incentives. Tolerance of risk, as proxy of social capital and amoral familism is not the crucial variable because at least a part of the disparities derive from persistent differences in social norms “*the ability to cooperate appears as inherently social and can spread as a beneficial bacterium, in a self-reinforcing process*”. They finally find evidence of the high attitude to cooperate in Emilia Romagna.

Another relevant regional aspect is level of density on entrepreneurs. Most of the literature finds the explanation for these differences across regions in terms of availability of resources, mainly financial, that influence the propensity to become entrepreneur. Guiso, Pistaferri, and Schivardi (2016), using data from 1950 to 2015 of the main Italian Provinces and Metropolitan towns, find evidence that the explanation is based on the learning environment produced by the presence of a strong entrepreneurial opportunities. They stress the fact that “*Those who grow up in an area with higher entrepreneurial density are found to be more likely to become entrepreneurs themselves*”. They use this interpretation in order to explain the evolution of entrepreneurial density across Italy and it is relevant that the province of Bologna is always ranked in the first three provinces for entrepreneurial density in Italy.

In this context, many examples of social innovation can be observed in this region and thus it could be useful to evaluate whether these examples create a collection of single positive cases or represent an enabling ecosystem.

⁴Authors run the experiment in four cities, two in the North and two in the South, choosing medium-size cities, Faenza, Cuneo, Crotone e Ragusa, “large enough to study cooperation beyond the family circle but small enough to have a stable community in which dispositions should be shared and deep-rooted”. In each location, they recruited a sample reflecting the composition of the national population for a total of 618 participants.



2. DESCRIPTION OF THE LEARNING PROCESSES

2.1 THE CASES

Emilia Romagna is a context rich of social innovation. In the following we are going to present four representative experiences of social innovation in Emilia Romagna, each of them with specific features in terms of learning processes and possible scaling up.

2.1.1 NURSERIES AND EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES.

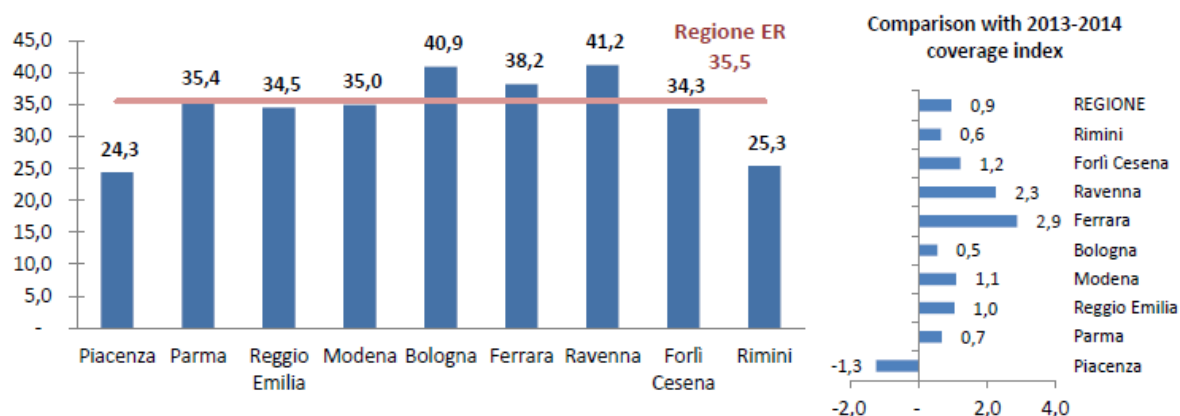
Emilia Romagna is one of the Italian regions with the highest level of early childhood education services with almost fifty years of experience characterized by elements of social innovation and scaling up. The early childhood education received the first official public intervention in Italy in 1971 with the Law no. 1044/71 that introduced a public funded plan for the institution of public nurseries. The services were delivered for the 0-3 population as “social service of public interest” in order to ensure assistance to families, to facilitate the access of women in the labour market and to offer an educational qualified opportunity to children. The law allowed municipalities to build and manage childcare services: national funds were allocated to Regions, responsible for planning and regulations while the Municipalities, through the national contributions granted by the Regions, had the duty of managing and controlling the services. In this framework, in Emilia Romagna the main cities as Bologna, Modena and Reggio Emilia started a local public plan for offering early childhood services. The law was very innovative, as it was innovative the idea of a public funded plan for establishing a system of early childhood services on the national territory.

This opportunity was largely used in Emilia Romagna where this created the conditions for building a system of public nurseries, supported by a very innovative and qualified team of pedagogists who were in charge of the coordination at local level of all these services.



In terms of numbers, in 2014 Italy offers a coverage rate of 22,5% against the European target of the 33%. Emilia Romagna has a coverage ratio of 35,2% and it is the Italian region with the highest number of public nurseries, that represent the 59% of the total regional offer of places available. See table 1.

TABELE 1: RATE OF COVERAGE OF EMILIA ROMAGNA PROVINCES



In the last decades the reduction of public budgets and the growing propensity to demand early childhood services led to the necessity of introducing innovation also in terms of institutional nature of the players able to offer quality services. A mixed system of providers, a differentiation of the services, a public managed pedagogic coordination of the mixed network of offer made possible to grow the rate of coverage of the service in a context of high quality services.

All the process has been characterized by a high level of innovation in different steps and forms.

The first step of innovation in the 70s was strongly linked to the legislative innovation of introducing in Italy a plan of funds and opportunities for building a system of nurseries across the country. Emilia Romagna was one of the regions that took the opportunity and used the public funds in order to build a public system of offer of services for the early childhood.

The service focused on a double innovative aim: a social aim related to the opportunity of woman to enter the labour market and of children to receive high quality services and an educational aim linked to the educational innovation of a large scale public service with high pedagogical standards.



The pedagogic coordination of the services was a very innovative approach able to reach the highest levels of innovation and experimentation of high quality services in Italy. Strong attention was also devoted to produce positive spill overs and exchanges between operators and different nurseries. The so called “pedagogic February”⁵ introduced in Bologna during the 60s and 70s, a kind of open training for all the operators involved in the organization of the nurseries is still one of the most significant examples of dissemination of knowledge in order to improve and scale up high quality services.

Nurseries are also an important milieu of integration for families coming from other territories and the ways in which the participation of the families could help this process in a good interaction also with the profession employees involved in the nurseries is a powerful environment of social innovation also outside the service.

The level of social innovation has been strongly supported by public actors in the first part of the organization of these services. Nowadays the driver of innovation is the way in which a mix system of supply is built, recognized and supported in a continuous process of improvement in order to raise the level and the quality of the services. From this point of view many differences can be seen in the different Municipalities of Emilia Romagna, and some scholars, as Bassi and Lazzari (2016) argue that the level innovation now is favored by the presence of private suppliers whereas the high percentage of public coverage is often a hinder to innovation. On the other hand, the strong network of pedagogists managing the public early childhood public services has been and is also crucial in order to make possible to integrate the system of supply with non profit providers.

In general terms, it is possible to recognize an important role of the networks of actors and of their interconnections. Social economy organizations, above all social cooperatives, play a growing role in the provision of services for the early childhood. Positive cases support the idea that good non profit actors can help to introduce elements of social innovation even in a context with high quality standards. Among the others, the use of the spaces also for other social purposes, the flexibility in the opening and timetable times of the structures are elements of innovation introduced by these suppliers.

Another expression of innovation is the growing number of company nurseries who started linked to some big enterprises or public institutions (for example, the cases of the multiutility Hera, the University of Bologna, the Coesia Group). In all cases the innovative and crucial

5 The “Febbraio Pedagogico” was introduced by the Municipality of Bologna in 1962. It was almost a month of open discussion about the crucial aspects of the pedagogic views, didactic methodology and education services organization, It was an open opportunity of training for professionals involved in early childhood services.



point is that these suppliers are anyway integrated with the public network of pedagogic coordination in order to build a pluralistic system able to offer specific answers for the enterprise needs but also an opportunity of new places under the public managed system.

Another important example of innovation is based on the networks of small enterprises creating company nurseries inside the territory but within a system of pedagogic coordination. In this case, the innovative challenge is also linked to the opportunity to build networks of small enterprises coordinated in order to reach the needed scale for offering early childhood services. Thus, innovation is linked not only to the new provision of services but also to the ability to cooperate of some small enterprises that would be unable, working alone, to provide them.

The high quality of the public and integrated services has also built the opportunity for activities of counseling, research and dissemination based on the “Emilian way” of building and managing early childhood services. This is the case of the Reggio Children Foundation that is operating at international level for training, counseling and research activities about early childhood services.

Finally, it is possible to argue that the level of social innovation in the provision of early childhood services in Emilia Romagna is still relevant, but it changed from an initial completely public system to a mixed system of supply. It is possible to argue that this experience is an excellence at national and international level thus the process of innovation can be of interest from many other points of observation and can be targeted as replicable in other contexts. Their constant production of social innovation made of this case a possible paradigm for other regions at national and European level.

2.1.2 SAN PATRIGNANO COMMUNITY

San Patrignano is a community founded in 1978 near Rimini for the assistance and the rehabilitation of drug addicts. It started as a so called “recovery community”, a nonprofit experimental institution that at that time were the only answer to the drug dependency. In addition, it always worked with a specific style and a high level of innovation. Hybridization, education to practical competencies with the creation of social enterprises have always been crucial characteristics of this experience.

The program of the drug rehabilitation inside the community takes in general three or four years with an average of 1500 people living inside and a total of more than 25.000 people that have been hosted by the community since its beginning. San Patrignano operates with a total



annual budget of 15 millions of euro covered by donations and fund raising and without monetary contributions of the residents. The Community is managed through a foundation that is the holding of other two social cooperatives and two associations dealing with the different aspects and activities.

San Patrignano focused since the beginning on the idea of offering to the young guests an opportunity or a new start of their lives based on work experiences inside social enterprises involved in production of goods and services of high quality. Vincenzo Muccioli, the founder of San Patrignano, was used to say *“I don’t want that people could be products made in San Patrignano only because they are made by addicts as you do when you are by a charity. I want that people could be our products because they are good, nice, and of high quality.”*

In general terms, the vocational training often used in the recovery communities in San Patrignano has been always linked to a market orientation of all the projects. High quality standards, innovative tools of management, innovative system of organization are always a special characteristic of the San Patrignano style.

San Patrignano has always recognized high quality social agriculture an important area to develop its activities. In this perspective, they produced excellent wines, winners of important recognitions at national and international level and now their brand is famous and appreciated. They also produce meat, milk, vegetables, olive oil, cheeses and bread. In order to motivate the former drug addicts to return to a ‘normal’ lifestyle the idea is to have the opportunity to work in a high standard production inside a social enterprise. It is also possible to argue that their activity produced positive externalities in all the rural area around San Patrignano where the production of wine grew in quality and in reputation.

This market orientation is a basic characteristic of the activities of San Patrignano, based on the idea that in order to help people to start a new life they need also to contribute to build a better economic system. Under this perspective, they introduced also innovative approaches in order to organize their socio economic activities. A social micro franchising⁶ has been started in order to scale up the internal pizzeria⁷ and in order to bring their brand and products in other regions of Italy. In addition, they have an excellent restaurant “Vite”, a shop “SP.accio” where they sell all their agricultural products, food and handcrafts.

In general, they also offer a location for enterprises interested in social responsibility in order to use their services and to build different kinds of interaction and partnerships. This process of

⁶During the 2016 summer the pizzeria “Squisito!” was open in Verona, the first “San Patrignano” pizzeria outside San Patrignano., the first step of a network of social franchising pizzeria started by San Patrignano.

⁷ The San Patrignano pizzeria is one of the thirty best Italian pizzeria according to the ranking of the Italian guide Gambero Rosso.



collaboration and positive contagion with the business world is also targeted by a new educational, research and campaign activity, called the “positive economy” with the aim of scaling up and disseminating the vision and the social innovation they introduced in their experience.

2.1.3 LEGALITY. THE CASE OF FORLÌ, WITH SLOW FOOD.

The fight against mafias is a very important issue in Italy from an economic and social point of view. The reuse of confiscated assets previously owned by mafias is an effective tool in that fight. The law no. 646/1982⁸, introduced the possibility of the confiscation of the goods of mafiosi. The law no. 109/96 introduced the possibility, following the Ostrom⁹ approach, to use them for social purposes. Despite these important laws in many cases the reuse of a confiscated good is a complex process with many difficulties for the Municipalities involved. In order to facilitate this process of concrete and symbolic reuse the Regione Emilia Romagna introduced with an ad hoc law, the law no. 3 of 2011, a system of positive actions and policies in order to support Municipalities dealing with the reuse of confiscated assets in their territories. This regional support defines an enabling and innovative environment and the reuse of the “podere ex Limonetti” in the town of Forlì is an interesting case to discuss the role of social economy actors in collaboration with local public institutions.

The confiscated asset, the “ex Limonetti”, is an agricultural terrain in the urban area of Forlì. The land and the two related buildings were confiscated on grounds of a felony of usury, confirming the dimension of money laundering and of the presence of the “collettibianchi”. The land was entrusted via public selection to two Type B social cooperatives to find work placement for disadvantaged subjects. The two social cooperatives, CoForPol and Ecosphera, that in 2015 merged in For.B. dedicated their first efforts to clean the terrain which had become a sort of dump of different material from refrigerators to fiber cement siding and other ruins (Mazzanti, Ecchia, Komatsu 2016). The two buildings, on the other hand, have been temporarily transformed into a warehouse for public institutional use, one of which will be soon devoted to educational activities.

The first step in regenerating the terrain was to verify that no harmful materials had been deposited or spilled on the land. The next steps were: to treat the land; dismantle the illegal shacks that had been used to raise courtyard animals and finally, plow and mill the land. The asset is about six hectares, of which five are cultivable. During the year 2012/13 the first three and half were cultivated with grain. The following year, three hectares were cultivated with

⁸This law, known as the law Rognoni - La Torre, passed by the Parliament in April 1982, following the assassination of Pio La Torre, (a Sicilian politician standing for the necessity of an economic fight against mafias, based on the possibility of confiscated their patrimonies) introduced into the Italian Penal Code under the article 416-bis, the possibility of confiscating the goods and assets of mafiosi.

⁹Ostrom, E. 1990, 1996 and 2000.



vegetables for local shops and restaurants run by social enterprises. The remaining hectare has been cultivated with cereals and the other half of hectare will be designated to the start up of social gardens. The cultivation has been done under the prescription of the organic approach. The garden part of the asset has been divided into two subsections: one for private use and one for those in need through the help of Caritas who will cover the cost of the project with the funds coming from its 8x1000 campaign. The renters will pay an annual fee for a subsidized price, which includes the supply of the necessary working tools for the terrain.

The cultivation of vegetables is the result of a project done in collaboration between For.B. and AltroGiardino, a cooperative that works with physically and mentally challenged individuals who cultivate and transform herbs into aromatic herbs. AltroGiardino will take part in the project by cultivating the vegetable plants in a greenhouse, which will then be transplanted onto the asset by the employees of Ecosphera. The remaining part of the terrain has been left uncultivated due to the high density of nut plants and has been designated to be a recreational area for the visitors who come to visit.

The regeneration of the buildings, on the other hand, is under way and it has been founded by a grant of Regione Emilia Romagna and cofounded by the local municipality. The buildings have been designed to support the agricultural activities of the asset: to store material and agricultural machines and to create an educational center of legality and responsible citizenship for the Romagna's area. In particular, the center seeks to offer an innovative response to the growing demand to visit confiscated assets by school children in the Emilia-Romagna Region. Hence, on top of the agricultural activities done with the citizens of Forlì, the center would create an opportunity to engage with a larger part of the territory. The history of the asset could also create the ideal environment for educational activities on responsible consumption and ethical financing and educate the territory in responsible citizenship in the areas of: legality, organic techniques, urban gardening and sustainable finance and economics.

After the first year of activity the project gained the interest and the collaboration of the Observatory of Legality, a co-project of the Municipality of Forlì and of the Forlì Campus of the University of Bologna. The idea of the educational part of the project in fact came out of the collaboration and research of the Observatory and should enable the project to improve the effectiveness not only of the use of the land and of the buildings but also the cultural work regarding legality, active citizenship and civic lifestyles.

A very innovative collaboration has been introduced during the last year between For.B and Slow Food. Slow Food is a “global, grassroots organization, founded in 1989 to prevent the disappearance of local food cultures and traditions, based on the idea that through our food choices we can collectively influence how food is cultivated, produced and distributed, and as a result bring about great change”. Slow food started a partnership for supporting all the



educational needs of people interested in managing a social garden in the “PodereLimonetti”. Slow Food has a strong international experience of social gardens, but this is the first case in which social gardens have been developed inside a confiscated and reused assets.

According to the last decade experience we can recognize three main models of reusing confiscated assets in Italy: the LiberaTerra¹⁰ experience, the Goel Consortium¹¹ experience and a third model linked to the main urban areas of Centre and Northern Italy. For all the three models a strong evolution in terms of scaling up is desirable. The confiscated asset in Forli has a high impact potential for the Forli territory and its surrounding area. Firstly, by providing a positive and concrete response to reusing confiscated land for community benefit. Some of the more important and characterizing aspects of the confiscated asset in Forli include: (1) its location: in Northern Italy and in an urban area; (2) ability to generate awareness in the Forli citizenship not only about the presence of the mafias on its territory but also in positive terms about its ability to offer an answer for re-using it; (3) the management of the asset as a community asset; (4) the service mix between agricultural products and activities and educational programs; (5) the specific and innovative experience of social gardens with the educational and training support of one of the leading social enterprise dealing with the culture of food, the culture of the heritage and the social and sustainable agriculture as Slow Food. The agricultural products will be sold in various channels: organic stores, fairs, supermarkets, and restaurants managed by the cooperative and non-profit sector in Forli. (6) The educational part will start next year as soon as the work for the renewing of the first building will be finished. The activities and the follow up will be for the Forli citizenship but not only; the project has been ideated for all of the surrounding areas of the Romagna, mostly for the schools and for the youth but also for interested individuals. (7) The target is to transform a shame and a drain on the social and economic tissue into an opportunity for growth and future opportunity. The possibility of combining the land use with an educational component directed at legality and critical consumption is an innovative and sustainable solution that can be scaled up in other contexts with similar situations and problems at a national and international levels. (8) The

¹⁰“LIBERA TERRA MEDITERRANEO is a non-profit consortium that includes the social cooperatives of Libera Terra as well as other operators that share the same principles. It was established in 2008 with the purpose of bringing together the farming activities of the different cooperatives in order to penetrate the market in a united and efficient manner. It is organized into different sectors, with, among others, product/market divisions. Highly-qualified professionals from different backgrounds deal with the different steps of product merchandising. It coordinates the production phases of its individual cooperatives and oversees the transformation from raw materials to finished product, looking for the best way to boost its products' qualities and ensuring economic value. *Libera Terra* guiding principle is always to stay true to its fundamental mission: the social re-use of confiscated property. The creation and safeguarding of farms with a promising future, which provide stable employment, is made possible by producing and selling the best goods, with outstanding price/value ratios. The pursuit of excellence guides every decision that has to be taken - and one of the payoffs is to see the products sold in the most prestigious Italian and international stores”.

¹¹Goel is a consortium of social cooperatives based in Calabria and in Milan. The mission is to support an economic, social and personal freedom of people and communities from Ndrangheta. Social cooperatives, a fashion brand, bio agriculture and responsible tourism are the main field of activity.



collaboration with the University of Bologna through the Observatory of Legality is also another specific and innovative item of the Forlì case. (9) The project, finally, is highly innovative for its use of a confiscated asset and transforming it from a form of violence as it was under the mafia into a form of common pool resource and hence asset based strategy for a better human development.

The support of Slow food is very important because it makes possible to relate the civiness approach of the restitution to a community to the heritage dimension of a new relation with the land and with its history. This kind of project has been introduced for the first time in Forlì and it has a strong potential of diffusion in other similar contexts of reuse of assets in other parts of Italy. The use of social economy and the role of Slow Food makes the “ex Limonetti” case an experience for Emilia Romagna and possibly for other Italian regions.

Finally, this case is a positive example of how a local community can respond to a problem as big as the presence of mafias in non-traditional areas, quite similar to other parts of Northern Italy and Europe. The State’s efforts against the mafias are now making available a high number of confiscated goods and enterprises around Italy. Good management of these assets is now crucial in order to support the activity of the State and also to use these resources for producing wealth and opportunities for the local communities. The challenge is both concrete and symbolic: confiscated lands, assets and enterprises confiscated must be better used than when they were owned by mafiosi. When this outcome is achieved the positive consequences are very effective; likewise, should the opposite occur, the consequences are equally negative and become relevant. The scale of the problem is considerable as the values of the assets are so high that pivotal experiences need to be expanded, replicated and innovated at the local and international level in order to be effective in re-using the confiscated assets. The positive re-use of confiscated assets for social or institutional purposes is a strategic issue for a State and a society that want to promote social and economic development.

2.1.4 SOCIAL STREETS

Social streets are a movement born in 2013 in Bologna from the experience of a group of residents of via Fondazza¹² who built up a local and closed facebook group of people living in that street in order to socialize, exchange knowledge and organize common projects. The project was aimed to find an answer to the isolation of people living in urban areas through actions aimed to re-establish the importance of social relations.

They use closed groups of Facebook as a free medium for sharing informations and as facilitator of the transition from “virtual to real” contacts. Territoriality, is the crucial factor of this

¹²Via Fondazza is a street in the historic center of Bologna.



approach because each group is linked to a predetermined territory of a small size. This particular territory, once defined, is used as a unifying element in order to dismantle other categories in which people recognize and divide themselves (like social classes, interests, age, political affiliation, country of origin). Meetings, new relations, common projects for taking care of the streets, local events are examples of the positive outcomes of this projects, producing innovative solutions to the lack of social linkages.

This innovative link between a small territory and social media has been very effective and more than 400 groups were born in Italy and abroad following this “model” of social innovation and inclusion linked to a territory.

It is possible to argue that social streets are an innovative example of renewed interest in common spaces in urban areas. Whereas the weak linkages bring to a lack of responsibility in terms of organization, usage and care of the public spaces of neighborhood, social media are in this case used for their ability to exchange effectively information for free in order to share opinions and to take common actions.

The social innovation of social streets is also focused on the possibility of a new approach to the urban commons, using a specific territory as the space in which is possible to rebuild social links. A common space for whom it is possible a common effort able to modify the perspective and the proximity to spaces previously perceived as far and neutral.

2.2 THE LEARNING PROCESS

The previous cases from Emilia Romagna present a territory that is reach of different and positive cases of social innovation with a specific learning process.

The early childhood services present a consolidated system of learning based on almost fifty years of experience. The public sector, State, Region and Municipalities played an important role since the birth of the services. The dissemination of knowledge, linked also to the educational characteristics of the services, was a specific target of the investment and of the project. The pedagogical dimension was disseminated through specific moments of reflection, training and exchanges that were organized at municipal level. The regional coordination played also an important role in the dissemination at regional level of the best experiences of Reggio Emilia and Bologna. Nowadays the frontier of the social innovation is more linked to the way in which a positive partnership between public and private suppliers is built on. Under this new perspective an important part of the learning process is created inside the different organizations whereas the pedagogic coordination helps the transmission of knowledge between organizations. The entrance of private non profit, above all, social cooperatives, in the



management of nurseries introduced elements of differentiation and innovation that give a positive contribution to the general process of innovation. Similar considerations can be applied to the experience of company nurseries and other early childhood services. In general terms, the public pedagogic coordination is a crucial factor in supporting the real integration of different institutional suppliers and typologies of services in a high quality and coverage service.

The case of San Patrignano illustrated a different context with a different contribution of the different institutional actors. The social innovation of the community of San Patrignano can be considered based as well on a consolidated learning process during the almost forty years of life of that community. The role of the State in this case is weaker and also it is important to remember that San Patrignano as other recovery community started their activities because the State was unable to take care of this problem. The learning process linked to the founder Vincenzo Muccioli was in the first phase based on a learning by doing approach seen that it was the first time that this problem was tackled. San Patrignano tried to develop a strong learning process inside the community also because a relevant part of the job was to learn a new life for the residents. The learning was passed through the quality standards of the social enterprises in which the residents were involved for their recovery programs. A strong focus on the market orientation, on the positive economy and on the quality of the products are elements of the reeducation strategy of the Community.

A good and important support has been brought not only by the qualified social and medical collaborators but also by all the professional figures of people supporting the activities of the community. Learning to participate in the market via competitive and sustainable social enterprises could be recognized as another specific attitude of San Patrignano.

The case of the reuse of confiscated asset in Forlì is a more recent experience with a learning process under way. The challenge of the management of a confiscated asset in Forlì was new for all the actors, from the Municipality to the social cooperatives. Focusing on the two social cooperatives they were characterized by a previous strong experience in other fields. The mix of the two gave to both cooperatives the possibility to find internal and innovative solutions for finding the right and new answers to the new problem and opportunity. In order to augment the effectiveness of the job and the impact on the collectiveness of Forlì they started different steps of engagement of other non profit actors in the management of the good and in the elaboration of the projects. Under this perspective we analyzed also the partnership with Slow food strongly based on an idea of learning of agriculture practices related to the seasonality. The creation of the social gardens, with the collaboration of Caritas and Slow food and at the same time the development of the organic production on the land are all images of a quick and innovative learning process inside the cooperative and with the other social economy and third actors involved in the project. A further step will be the reuse of the near building for activities of



education to legality, active citizenship and education to the use of the land that will be a further and important step for the activities offered at the “ex Limonetti, for their learning process and for the relevance of the project.

Social streets are the most recent example with a learning process internal to the territory and another one that is external. The internal one is mainly based on the ability to use social media as tools of communication and of creation of real contacts. The new discovery of the territory is another part of the learning process leading to a changing attitude towards the goods previously perceived as far and now lived as commons, as well as the space previously seen as empty and neutral and now seen as a common space.

The success of this interaction of new technology and new vision of the territory was fast and based also on the simplicity and on the replicability of the learning process about the use of social media inside a territory and a community. This process has encouraged the public awareness of the issue that resulted in the introduction of a regulation of the City of Bologna (the first at national level). Its aim is to propose a framework for recognizing and supporting the spontaneous organizations of active citizens who take care of the commons of their town. The social innovation of this process is the ability to learn to see and to live a territory as a community and not as a land without relationships. Also in this case the dimensions of the learning process are many and crucial for the innovation process linked to this case.

This process of learning can be recognized also in other cases of social innovation that can be briefly discussed.

For example, the “Future Food Institute¹³” is an Italian-based non-profit that “aims to build a more equitable world through enlightening a world-class of innovators, boosting entrepreneurial potential and improving agri-food expertise and tradition”. Future Food Institute has its headquarters in Bologna, Italian capital of the quality food industry. Ranging from the support to innovative start up in the social agriculture field to the organizations of master and post graduate programs, Future Food Institute is a new and innovative experience of social innovation creation through the education of social entrepreneurs in the field of social agriculture. Moreover, Future Food Institute represents a bridging experience between the for-profit sector with a social vision and the cultural heritage of the territory represented by the food supply chain.

Another example are the “Case Zanardi” a positive case of partnership between local municipality and third sector organizations for implementing projects against social exclusion and poverty. More than one hundred associations, social cooperatives and volunteers groups

¹³<http://futurefoodecosystem.org/institute/>.



collaborated indeed with the Municipality of Bologna for offering eleven real social spaces around the town for people with problems of poverty and exclusion. Innovative projects, courses and social shops are the main outcomes of this project that started in 2013. The learning process is young even if is based on the strong experiences of the different associations and institutions involved in the project. The ability to pool resources, to develop common project are crucial for reaching a better scale of intervention that would not possible for single players. The growing awareness of the Municipality about the need to be open to the partnerships with other institutions and agents are part of the learning process of the project.

Moreover, another example is offered by the Foundation MAST, an international cultural and philanthropic institution that focuses on art, technology and innovation. MAST wants to build a bridge between the funding Company, Coesia Group, and the Community. MAST Foundation supports the development of creativity and entrepreneurship also cooperating with other institutions, in order to support economic and social growth. Mast foundation can be considered as an innovative case of philanthropic activity based in Bologna offered by the Coesia. The beneficiaries are members of the local community and employees who are entitled to have access to some services as a firm innovative nursery open to the territory and integrated with public pedagogic supervision. Mast is one of the recent examples of company foundations born in the last years in Bologna, actors who can contribute to develop social innovation in their specific fields of activity. The learning process is highly professionalized and at the same time this activity produces positive externalities and of spill overs on the territory and the local community.

Finally, a positive example of innovation in the field of the provision of health services is offered by Cup 2000. It is a public owned society, founded in 1996, as a local spin-off, for the management of the Joint Booking Center (Centro Unificato Prenotazioni – CUP) of the city of Bologna in order to make easier to book a visit, to reduce the waiting time to improve the allocation of the available resources. Cup 2000 grew fast to the other regional towns and in 2015 has a production value of thirty millions, almost 530 employees and it is managing and developing the electronic folder for its stakeholders. An enterprise very innovative for the organization of the service they introduced and for the social innovation that this kind of service introduced in the relationship between citizens/customers and the regional health system.

3. DISCUSSION

The previous cases represent some examples of social innovation that can be found in Emilia Romagna. In our opinion, the main features which have emerged, such as the replicability, the learning processes, the hybridization, and the different kinds of partnerships between the State, the private for profit and non profit organisations make this region a useful case to discuss.



The nurseries' experience shows that a level of early childhood services adequate to the European targets has been achieved by social innovation thanks to an initial strong role of public institutions. In this respect, a given policy has been implemented and it has been effective in producing social innovation for a specific need. Nowadays, the crucial dimension of social innovation is the creation of public private partnerships, typically with social economy organisations, for the management and the realization of new nurseries and services. The possibility of a continuous innovation is related to the ability of new actors to organize the services and to respond to families' needs to match a fast changing work-life balance (Bassi and Lazzari, 2016).

The San Patrignano Community is an interesting example of how a social enterprise involved in social agriculture, producing goods and services of high quality is a tool for supporting a new life chance for the residents in the Community. In short, a leading experience with a strong orientation to the market and the building of a "positive economy". Social innovation is the result of a strong commitment of a non profit institution in order to develop an effective and sustainable social enterprise as the instrument to educate residents to a new opportunity for their lives.

The reuse of confiscated land in Forlì is a case of social innovation based on the ability to find an innovative solution for the management of a confiscated asset. Civicness, the role of social economy, heritage and reuse of the land, are the main elements transforming a social problem in a positive opportunity for the local economy and community, a process that can be replicated also in other regional and national contexts. Social innovation is related to a strong and innovative collaboration between the Municipality and two social cooperatives, implementing a national law but also introducing local original solutions. Moreover, a new direction for innovation is represented by the interactions with other third sector actors and the university, with a strong emphasis on the educational dimension of this experience.

The model of social street is a small but relevant case of success for the efforts of a community that wanted to recreate a link with its space/territory thanks to the support of social media. This represents an example of new technologies strengthening personal relationships and vice versa. An example easily replicable all around the world thanks to its simple logic and framework of implementation. This social innovation produced by spontaneous interaction of people living the same street also spurred the recognition by the Municipality of Bologna that has been the first in Italy to introduce a possible guideline for the management of the city commons, like social streets.

It would be possible to add to this discussion some features of other cases of social innovation in Emilia Romagna but the point is whether we are facing simply a selection of positive



examples or we can refer to a real regional system of social innovation. Emilia Romagna is a region with a strong presence and role of social economy organisations, with a culture of cooperation and a high level of innovation that could constitute the drivers for innovative answers and solutions to the changing needs and opportunities of the society. The level of social innovation reached in Emilia Romagna is relatively high for the Italian standard but what emerges from the case studies is the lack of a comprehensive framework which favours social innovation despite the presence of assets that can be potentially very useful for this result.

In fact, the positive outcomes of the cases analysed are typically related to specific ideas or policies targeting a particular issue or need. The evolution and the learning process of the social innovation is the result of sectoral investments or innovative ideas but this has not been sufficient to create an ecosystem of innovation. In order to achieve this result it would be important to foster a higher level of awareness about the relevance of this goal. A first step in this direction would be the change in culture and practice of public policy institutions towards a more participatory system of governance. Secondly, one could stress the relevance of the role of intermediaries between the various actors in order to favour the creation of a bridge between beneficiaries and social innovative solutions (see the contributions in J. Terstriep (2016) for more analysis of these two points).

Finally, it is clear that willingness and the ability to build a real ecosystem of social innovation is a complex process in which many actors are involved. Public institutions, for profit enterprises, social economy organisations and civil society are all protagonists of this challenge. A strategic approach and a comprehensive policy would help to produce positive externalities in the economic and social system as a result of the growing level of social innovation in this territory.

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