

MILAN – A COMPLEX SOLUTION TO A COMPLEX PROBLEM

You cannot accuse the Agenzia di Cittadinanza partnership of thinking small. It assembled an alliance of no less than 91 organisations across the social spectrum to turn a fragmented social service system into a coherent whole, functioning on a basis of trust and co-operation. The results, focused on four contrasting areas around Milan, include new partnership structures, a microcredit fund, more responsive policy-making processes and legal reform, all backed up by capacity building including dozens of publications and 1,500 hours of training delivered to over 600 people.

KNITTING TOGETHER A FRAGMENTED SYSTEM

The province of Milan, one of the powerhouses of the Italian economy, is home to some 4 million people. It also has a lively social economy, with over 300 social co-operatives providing services in care and labour market integration, which employ 9,200 people. But despite its industrial strength, sections of its population – among them immigrants and women – suffer exclusion. Altogether, some 5% of the population – 200,000 people – are at risk of exclusion.

In tackling this situation, EQUAL's Agenzia di Cittadinanza ('Citizenship Agency') development partnership had two essential aims:

- to support and strengthen social enterprises;
- to facilitate co-operation between public bodies and the third sector



Citizenship agents: Stefano Radelli, Daniela Varisco and Valentina Caimi of Caritas Ambrosiana

It succeeded in stimulating public debate and in transforming the social service delivery system in the Milan area from one based on competition to one operating via co-operation and networks. "We wanted to bring together the fragmented organisations operating in social services," says Valentina Caimi of the lead partner, the Fondazione Caritas Ambrosiana, which operates under the aegis of the Diocese of Milan. "The increased levels of trust and social capital we have built up make for much more efficient operation and higher quality services."

The bulk of the partnership's activity was to build up the capacity of the social enterprise sector through business consultancy and training. The partnership delivered over 1,500 hours of training to more than 600 people, on subjects including:

- human resource management
- equal opportunities, including a gender approach to social services
- business development through the phases of social enterprise culture, start-up, growth and maturity
- marketing and finance for social enterprises
- quality and impact measurement, through the application of the social balance sheet (*bilancio sociale*), developed in different forms for social co-operatives and for public bodies
- territorial planning, including need and resource mapping
- transnationality, including an observatory on practices in different countries

The partnership also worked intensively to create and pilot the tools that would help social enterprises in Milan to prosper, and would promote partnership between the public and social enterprise sectors, including a set of handbooks, a quality system for service delivery, and tools for 'territorial negotiated planning'. It organised several dozen conferences, seminars and workshops, and publicised its activities through a website and regular newsletter.

Its work to make local structures deliver more effectively contributes to a number of European policy guidelines. Improved social services help to *ensure inclusive labour markets for job-seekers and disadvantaged people* (guideline 18) while better child and elderly care and reduced gender gaps in employment *promote a lifecycle approach to work* (guideline 17).¹

A CRITICAL MASS

The DP was very extensive, and in total involved 91 partner organisations. On the part of the public sector there were the province of Milan, ANCI – the national association of municipalities (*comuni*) – and 46 *comuni* individually. The co-operative sector was represented by the two largest co-operative federations (Legacoop and Confcooperative) as well as seven consortia of social co-operatives and six individual social co-operatives. In addition there were eight training organisations, eight business service organisations, and assorted foundations, associations, volunteer organisations, chambers of labour, trade unions – as well as one bank, the Banca Popolare Etica. "It was a key achievement to bring such a wide variety of organisations together, and to overcome ideological and methodological differences to tackle the discrimination agenda," says Ms Caimi.

How did Caritas Ambrosiana generate this level of collaboration? It had built up contacts with a number of partners over the course of previous work in the 'Employment' Community Initiative, and building this into a formal EQUAL partnership involved a good deal of discussion as well as the support of the local authorities and MEP Fiorella Ghilardotti.

"We wanted essentially to overcome the fragmentation of the social services system in the province of Milan, and to defend citizens' rights, particularly in the fields of work and health, but the idea kept snowballing" explains Chiara Lucchin, Head of Caritas Ambrosiana's European Office. "We were faced with a complex problem, so we needed a complex network – but of course this had its drawbacks. The fact that we were able to overcome the significant philosophical differences among our partners was in large part due to the charismatic leadership of our president, Don Virginio Colmegna, who is a very well-known figure. And the province agreed with our approach."

For Stefano Radaelli, the project's co-ordinator of services to social enterprises, one of the key benefits of the broad partnership was to bring coherence to the supply of social services: "We have succeeded in changing the dynamic so that rather than a confusing myriad of specialist providers, people have a joined-up network at their disposal. Now, users don't have to keep going back to square one."

TWOFOLD STRUCTURE

Appropriate structures were required to manage such a large number of partners. Following Italian custom, a new legal body was created to manage the EQUAL project, in the form of a 'temporary association' (ATS Agenzia di Cittadinanza) which all the 91 partners joined, having an equal vote in the quarterly general assemblies. This was controlled by a board of a dozen people, elected by 'families' of organisations of the same type (for instance social co-operatives or local authorities). Alongside this there is also a permanent association, financed by a €250 subscription fee, which provides an element of continuity and stability and works principally at the policy level.

Meanwhile on the operational side, the partners divided into working groups serviced at central level by co-ordinators covering functional areas such as good practices, services to social enterprises, knowledge management and transnationality, and by the four area offices. In practice, the bulk of the work in the four areas, divided into 54 separate monitorable actions, was done by a core of 28 partner organisations.

¹ *Integrated guidelines for growth and jobs (2005-2008)*, COM(2005) 141. See http://europa.eu.int/growthandjobs/pdf/COM2005_141_en.pdf



Residents of the Casa della Carità in Milan prepare to celebrate its first birthday

The EQUAL project office is located in the thick of the action, in the basement of the Casa della Carità in the Adriano district in the northeast of the city. This disused school was renovated with financial support from a local businessman and now provides a home for 112 severely excluded people, many of them immigrants from more than 40 countries who have nowhere else to go. It opened its doors in November 2004, and celebrated its first birthday with a performance of Roma songs and dances. "In our first year we have played host to 254 people, and got 74 of them into work," says Linda Donini, the partnership's general secretary. "We offer them a bed for three months, and during that time we expect them to take part in a course of work integ-

ration. We also run an academy for volunteers, and in particular we ran a course for all the 91 EQUAL partner organisations."

The partnership has continued into the second round of EQUAL, meaning that a fresh temporary association has been founded, and this time there are even more partners, as two new and contrasting areas have been added, at Rho (the fairground area under redevelopment in north-west Milan) and Magenta, a predominantly agricultural area to the west of the city.

To go with such a big project there was a relatively big budget, totalling some €3.7 million, of which 90% was public funding split between the national and European levels, with the remaining 10% coming from private sources.

TERRITORIAL LABORATORIES BRING INNOVATION INTO THE COMMUNITY

A key operating method was to open area offices – 'territorial laboratories' – which acted as antennae to find out what local needs were and formed the hubs of local networks. The partnership opened four local area offices, each with their own complement of staff. The four areas, which covered 50 *comuni* (municipalities) all together, were centred on:

- Giambellino in central Milan (population 1.4 million)
- Vimercate (population 180,000) in northeast Milan
- Sesto San Giovanni (population 250,000) in north Milan
- Corsico (population 60,000) in south Milan

"The laboratories had a crucial input in determining the project's activities, and have grown into meeting places for local third sector organisations, the local authorities and individual citizens who want to start social initiatives," says Ms Caimi. They have led to the creation of housing agencies, incubators for start-up enterprises and neighbourhood services, as well third sector fora and participation in local improvement plans.

A CHANGED BALANCE OF POWER

"The partnership had the scale to succeed in changing the balance of power between the local authorities and the social co-operatives in the way social policy is made and implemented," Mr Radaelli explains. "National law 328/00 defines what qualifications social co-operatives need to operate in healthcare, social services and other community services, and sets up a voucher system. It provides for joint 'negotiated planning' in areas such as child and elderly care, handicap, mental illness, immigration and poverty. It works through local committees (*tavoli*) comprising representatives of the local municipalities, third sector organisations and trade unions. These committees decide social policy at the district level, and typically cover a population of several hundred thousand people. On Milan's committee (which covers the city's entire population of 1.4 million) the EQUAL partnership has won direct representation. "This enables us to engage in a dialogue with the local authority, which currently covers health, housing, employment and training – and we would like to extend this to town planning too," adds Mr Radaelli.

This participative policy-making system means that voices have been heard that previously were ignored. In Vimercato, for example, to tackle the 'new poverty', a €50,000 rotating fund was established at the end of 2003 as part of the *Un Tetto per Tutti* ('A Roof for All') homelessness project. It finances the deposit and renovations that tenants need before they can move into a new home. It was the fruit of a new three-way collaboration promoted by the territorial laboratory: "the local authority provides properties, a private company provides the money, and associations provide the know-how," Mr Radaelli explains. Housing has been provided for severely marginalised people, two new nurseries have been opened and a system of vouchers set up to provide two-week periods of respite care. A separate permanent *Associazione per la Casa* (ASCA – Housing Association) has been set up.

In another of the project's areas, Sesto San Giovanni to the northeast of Milan, the territorial laboratory worked on bringing a concern for social policy into town planning. It made use of a national initiative called *contratti di quartiere* (neighbourhood contracts) by taking responsibility for inserting a social dimension into an infrastructure restoration and environmental project.

BETTER VALUE FROM PUBLIC PURCHASING

An important part of the partnership's work was to build better partnerships between the public sector and the social economy in the delivery of social services. The previous style of informal relationships has been transformed since the passage of the EU Public Procurement Directive (2004/18/EC), which has introduced a framework through which contracts for public services must be specified and awarded in a transparent and competitive process. "At first, there was the risk that public authorities that were in any case facing cuts in their budgets would use the tendering process to select the cheapest bidders, with no regard for quality," commented Barbara Torazza from the ESSERE partnership in Genoa at the partnership's dissemination event in Brussels. "In the field of inclusion through work this is counter-productive, as it leads to contractors employing only the 'easiest' cases who will be most economically productive. The most severely disadvantaged people are even further excluded." However Ms Torazza's analysis shows that the legislation in fact gives local authorities lots of scope to avoid this levelling down and to encourage high standards and community benefits:

- Article 7 says that for the services listed in annex IIB, public procurement rules only apply to contacts over €249,000 (annex IIB includes many activities typically provided by social enterprises: job search, social work, welfare, day care, guidance, counselling, family planning and rehabilitation services).
- Article 21 says that contracts for the services listed in annex IIB are subject only to the procedure set out in article 23 (clear technical specifications must be published), and article 35 section 4 (an award notice must be published). This means that the local authority can decide its own criteria for awarding contracts.
- Article 19 allows authorities to operate sheltered workshops for handicapped people.
- Article 26 allows authorities to lay down special conditions – that is social and environmental conditions – so long as they are compatible with Community law (geographical discrimination is prohibited) and specified in the tender.
- Article 29 allows authorities to use the method of "competitive dialogue" in complex cases where the open or restricted procedures would not work. This means authorities can specify that a service should provide the output of social inclusion.
- Article 53 says that authorities can decide between bids using the criteria of "economically most advantageous" or simply the "lowest price". This clearly states that purchasing authorities can take many qualitative criteria into account.

The partnership has thus promoted good practice in the contracting-out of public services according to the new European legislation.

MEASURING VALUE ADDED

The municipality of Vimercato also scored a first by piloting the use of social accounting – the *bilancio sociale* – to calculate the costs and benefits of different ways of delivering social services. "The *bilancio sociale territoriale* measures the quantitative savings that are achieved by improving the availability of services," Mr Radaelli explains. "For instance you can save public money in two ways by opening another nursery: firstly it cuts benefit spending immediately as it enables more parents to go to work, and secondly (although with a delay of a few years) it boosts the local economy by raising educational levels." So the system can be used to achieve a more rational system of planning public expenditure – and this without trying to put a price on any

intangible benefits that might accrue from improved services, such as reduced healthcare or policing costs. “We aim to address the issue of measuring non-economic benefits in the second round of EQUAL,” Mr Radaelli says.

Social accounting has other uses for public authorities: it enables them to improve the accountability to their electors, and to improve their internal organisation. Following the pilot at municipal level, the province of Milan is now in the process of selecting a contractor to extend the system to the whole province.

CLOSE TRANSNATIONAL LINKS

The Agenzia di Cittadinanza’s approach was transnational to an unusually high degree. “Our transnational partnership was one of only 6% within EQUAL that had a budget of over €750,000,” says Valentina Caimi. The partnership joined with three others – in France, Greece and Italy – to create the transnational partnership called SEED (for ‘Social European Enterprises Development’).

“Throughout the project, the partnership enabled us to compare experiences in the three countries and learn from each other,” Ms Caimi continues. “The greatest single piece of transfer between the countries was on legal structures for social enterprises from Italy and France to Greece. This has undoubtedly helped them in their experimentation with social co-operatives.”

The project set up co-operation networks on several key issues:

- the model (involving nine people)
- development models for the social economy (involving 18 people)
- new skills and professional profiles (involving 14 people)

There were also exchange visits among the four participating regions, which involved 52 co-operative members, local authority officials, mayors and business development workers. These focused on specific issues: in Milan the topic was social housing – the French partnership was led by the *Logement Français* housing agency – while in Volos (Greece) the focus was on models for social enterprise and vocational and entrepreneurship training. Meanwhile in Abruzzo the topic was personal services (care and tourism) and in Paris neighbourhood services and, again, social housing.

For Italy, a particularly useful piece of learning took place in the area of new skills, regarding the new roles, much needed in suburban housing estates, of ‘social mediator’ and ‘social caretaker’. The job of social mediation involves defusing potential conflicts by listening to problems, creating dialogue, and helping people in need, especially those of foreign origin, to obtain access to help. This might include arranging meetings at schools or medical centres, or simply providing the security of a human presence in the public places. Social caretakers offer elderly or disabled residents a myriad of services ranging from shopping to minor household repairs. The French are in advance in this domain since they have developed these into recognised professions and analysed which competences are required, which boosts labour mobility. More importantly still, they have opened up access to these professions by developing ways to certify experience and not only taught courses.

A PERMANENT LEGACY

The partnership has thus wrought a change in the power structures that decide social policy in Milan, as well as creating and piloting numerous practical tools. To boost the permanence of its results, the Agenzia di Cittadinanza partnership joined with four others in Italy to carry out the *O.L.T.RE (Obiettivo Laboratori Territoriale in Rete)* action, which rounded off towards the first half of EQUAL. This focused on transferring the model of the territorial laboratory for the promotion of the social economy. The Agenzia di Cittadinanza’s special contributions were on the good practices it had previously piloted in organising such an agency, skills needs and training, and the use of the *bilancio sociale* as a tool for transparency and participation.

At regional level, Agenzia di Cittadinanza played an active role in the Lombardy EQUAL Forum which brought together 18 development partnerships at provincial level. It co-ordinated the forum’s work on the theme of labour market integration through social enterprises. This piece of profile raising led to an unexpected change in the law in October 2005, when a regional law was

adopted promoting partnerships between municipalities and social co-operatives for the social and economic integration of disadvantaged people.²

Moving to the European level, the DP held a conference in Brussels in December 2004 to publicise its achievements and raise issues before decision makers including MEPs. The event, which took place in the offices of the Italian central regions, provided a platform for presentations on new professions, new forms of local partnership, notably as created to address exclusion of members of ethnic minorities in the Paris periphery, and new models of business development including social franchising.

BRANCHING OUT

The partnership's strength has been officially recognised and its work continues in the second round of EQUAL, focusing on partnership between local authorities and social enterprises and improving quality in service delivery and work integration, thus bringing the private sector more into more active partnership. New partners including the Milan chamber of commerce training agency Formaper and a university have come on board. Some specific topics on the agenda are joint planning of social services and neighbourhood services (*services de proximité*), social franchising networks in housing and service vouchers, a solidarity supermarket that recycles second-hand goods, and support for Roma people and victims of trafficking. It will also extend its reach into the new EU Member States.

CONTACT

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DP ID: [IT-IT-S-LOM-039](#)

National partners: AFGP (Associazione Formazione Giovanni Piamarta), ACLI (Associazioni Cristiane Lavoratori Italiani, Sede Provinciale di Milano), ANCI (Associazione Nazionale Dei Comuni Italiani), ANFFAS (Associazione Nazionale Famiglie Disabili Intellettivi e Relazionali Onlus, Sezione Milano), Agesol (Agenzia di Solidarietà per il Lavoro), Associazione Agenzia di Cittadinanza, Associazione Impresa Politecnico, Associazione Lombarda Cooperative Servizi e Turismo (Legacoop), Associazione Onlus Aias Milano, Associazione Italiana Assistenza Spastici, Associazione Orientamento Lavoro Onlus, Banca Popolare Etica scrl, CDiE (Centro di Iniziativa Europea), Camera del Lavoro Metropolitana di Milano (CGIL), Ciessevi (Centro dei Servizio per il Volontariato per la Provincia di Milano), Comune Sesto San Giovanni, Comune di Cinisello Balsamo, Comune di Cologno Monzese, Comune di Corsico, Comune di Milano – Direzione di Progetto Milano Lavoro, Comune di San Donato Milanese, Comune di Vimercate, Confcooperative – Unione Provinciale di Milano, Confederazione Nazionale Artigianato e PMI – Milano, Consorzio CSC (Condivisione, Solidarietà Carcere) soc Coop Soc arl Onlus, Consorzio Farsi Prossimo Coop Soc arl, Consorzio Nova Spes Onlus Soc Cons Soc arl, Consorzio per la Formazione Professionale e l'Educazione Permanente – San Donato, Consorzio Sociale Cascina Sofia scs arl, Consorzio Sociale Light Soc Coop arl, Consorzio Sud Ovest Milano per la Formazione Professionale, Cooperativa Sociale A77 arl, Cooperativa Sociale Comunità del Giambellino Scrl Onlus, Cooperativa Sociale Grado 16 arl, Cooperativa Sociale la Cordata arl, Cooperativa Teseo arl, Donnalavorodonna, Ricerca orientamento formazione professionale, ELEA spa, Fondazione Caritas Ambrosiana, Fondazione ENAIP Lombardia, Fondazione Luigi Clerici, Fondazione San Carlo Onlus, Istituto IARD Franco Brambilla – Cooperativa di ricerca arl, Italia Lavoro spa, Noima srl ricerca e formazione, Obiettivo Lavoro Scrl, Società di Fornitura di Lavoro Temporaneo, Provincia di Milano, SIS. Sistema, Imprese Sociali – Consorzio di Cooperative Sociali arl Onlus, Sodalitas – Associazione per lo Sviluppo Dell'Imprenditoria nel Sociale, Urbana – Cooperativa di Solidarietà Sociale scrl, La Nostra Famiglia Onlus – ente ecclesiastico

Transnational partnerships: TCA 575 SEED (Social European Enterprises Development) – partners: FR-NAT-2001-10675 NEAR – nouveaux emplois d'agents de relation, GR-200923-

² see www.regione.lombardia.it (click on Regione; Direzioni Generali; Industria, Piccola Impresa e Cooperazione; and select story under News in left-hand column)

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