Investing in the Future!
Three Social Innovation case studies in the Emilia-Romagna Region ECEC services system.

andrea.bassi7@unibo.it
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I

The Research Design
ECEC as Social Investment policy

• The Report presents the results of an **eight-month research** program undertaken under the INNOSI Project framework, pursuing three main **objectives**:
  1. Proving that ECEC services are beneficial to a **wide array of actors**: children, families and society at large;
  2. Collecting knowledge aimed at **improve quality and effectiveness (equitable access)** of ECEC system to reach a higher level of growth and to guarantee children’s academic results and employability in the future;
  3. Analysing, through a **case study approach**, the integrated ECEC services’ system in Emilia-Romagna Region as possible **best-practice of Social Innovation with regard to the partnership between public, private for profit and nonprofit actors**. Namely social economy initiatives pro-actively engaged with local actors, including children, their families and the communities in which they are living.
The reports monitoring the situation of ECEC in the national context highlight that accessibility and the educational quality provided by ECEC services are very unequally displayed across the national territory, although exceptions exist in those Regions where investment in ECEC has occurred over a long period of time (e.g. Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany).

The choice of the ECEC services system of Emilia-Romagna Region (focusing specifically on the services addressed to children aged 0 to 3 and their families) is due to the relevance of this policy area for the theme of Social Investment and because of the significant presence of partnership with social economy actors such as social cooperatives.
The Social Innovation Compass

Authority Flows

Resources

Routines

Beliefs
Case Studies research technique

• In order to verify the potentialities in term of Social Innovation of the ECEC services in the Emilia-Romagna region, we opted for the “Case Studies” research technique.

• We carried out an ECEC services analyses articulated at the micro (social demands), meso (societal challenges) and macro (systemic change) levels.

• We selected three cases: “Filonido” in the city of Bologna; “Il Girotondo intorno al Bosco” in the village of Serramazzoni; “La Gabianella” and “L’albero delle meraviglie” in the small town of Comacchio;

• one for each ECEC main typology operating in the system: “Nurseries-kindergartens”; “Integrative - complementary services”; “Home services”.

Three dimensions of service outcome

• We also took in consideration the following variables: a) Geographic distribution; b) Municipality dimension; c) Ownership structure.

• We analysed three main dimensions of the services’ outcomes:

  1) reconciliation of family and working life responsibilities for parents;

  2) equal educational opportunities for children’s development and growth;

  3) participation of groups which are at risk of social exclusion (low-income families, children from ethnic minority background).
Emilia-Romagna Region

Population = 4,451 millions; Territory = 22.453 km²; New born in 2015 = 35.813.
II
Methodology
Case Studies selection process

• First of all we contacted the Head of the ECEC Services System at the Emilia-Romagna Region. We explain the research design and we asked him to offer the support of the ECEC Services Offices.

• Then we elaborate the criteria to select the services to be included in our inquiry and we had a confrontation with the Public official (she) working in the ECEC Services Office at Regional level.

• Once we agreed on the criteria we asked them to select - out of the 1.206 Services active in the School Year 2013/2014 - twelve (12) Services among which the Research Team should have chosen six case studies (2nd Mars 2016).
Case Studies selection process

• Once we selected the six case studies (4\textsuperscript{th} Mars 2016), the ECEC Services Office send a letter (24\textsuperscript{th} Mars 2016) to the Public Official in charge of the coordination of the ECEC Services in the Administrative Area concerned (usually a Municipality) for acceptance.

• Finally, when we received all the letters of acceptance (15\textsuperscript{th} of April 2016) we started to contact the persons in charge of the ECEC Services coordination, in order to carry out the research on the field.

• The first on-site visit was delivered the 22\textsuperscript{nd} of April 2016.
Criteria of Selection

- The cases to be included in the research has been selected following **four main criteria** (variables):

a) **Geographic distribution** = West, Center, East areas of the Emilia-Romagna Region (mountain/hills; plain; sea-side);

b) **Municipality dimension** = small (up to 15.000 inhabitants); medium (up to 100.000 inhabitants) and big cities (metropolitan area, from 250.000 to 500.000 inhabitants);

c) **Ownership structure** (principal delivering organization) = public, private for profit, private nonprofit;

d) **Services typology** = following the classification defined by the Emilia-Romagna regional government [a) Nurseries/kindergartens; b) Integrative/complementary services; c) Home services; d) Experimental services]
Final case studies designation

• As far as we carried out the first two on-site visits, we realised that it would not have been possible to conduct all the six case studies we planned to do, given the duration of the research project.

• So we decided - in agreement with the Public Official responsible of the ECEC Services of the Emilia-Romagna Region - to reduce our case studies to three. We selected one service for each ECEC main typology: a) Nurseries/kindergartens; b) Integrative-complementary services; c) Home services.

• Namely: “Filonido” in the city of Bologna (387.500 inhabitants) for the first type; "La Gabbianella" and “L'Albero delle Meraviglie” in the small town of Comacchio (22.600 inhabitants), for the second type; “Il girotondo Intorno al Bosco” in the village of Serramazzoni (8.200 inhabitants), for the third type.
Case study method

- Given the characteristics of the “case study method” a variety of data sources has been taken into consideration:

  a) **Official documents** (Laws enacted by the Regional government; Regulations enacted by municipalities);
  
  b) **Unofficial documents** (bylaws of nonprofit organizations; minutes of Board of Directors of for profit enterprises involved in corporate welfare programs);
  
  c) **Grey material** (research reports, evaluation reports, etc. by public bodies and research institutions);
  
  d) **Face to face interviews** with representatives from public administration, nonprofit organiza-tions, private corporations, parents associations, etc.;
  
  e) **Focus group with representatives** of the above mentioned organizations;
  
  f) **On-site observation** of ECEC services Centers.
Methodological tools

In order to collect the information of the letters d), e) and f) above mentioned, we tailored methodological tools for the specific purpose of the study:

1. Interview outline - for face to face interviews with ECEC Public Officers;
2. Interview (or Focus Group) outline - for face to face interviews with ECEC Services professionals (Educators and pedagogical coordinators);
3. Interview (or Focus Group) outline - for face to face interviews with parents whose children are attending ECEC services;
4. Interview outline - for face to face interviews with Managers of Corporations and Public Authorities involved in “Corporate Welfare Activities”;
5. Template - for field observation of daily activities in the ECEC Services.
III

The Three Case Studies
The Three Case Studies

• 1 – “Girotondo intorno al Bosco” – “Ring a Ring-o' Roses in the wood”, a small Educational Group (home-based) in the small town of Serramazzoni (MO);

• 2 – “La Gabbianella” – “The little she seagull” an Integrated service encompassing a daycare Centre (attended by 0-3 aged children) and “L'albero delle meraviglie” - “The wonder tree” a Centre for children and parents (attended by 2-5 aged children and their families) in the small town of Comacchio (FE);

• 3 – “Filonido” – “The string (wire, line, cord) nest” a daycare Centre attended by children aged 0-3 and located in the city of Bologna.
N. 1
Ring a Ring-o' Roses in the wood

- The City of Serramazzoni is situated in the first buttress between the plains and the mountains of the Modena Province. It takes part of the “Frignano” Municipalities Union and counts 8,289 inhabitants, of which 195 (2.4%) from 0 to 3 years. Of these, 17% are foreign citizens.

- Serramazzoni has had over time a remarkable growth because of its proximity to the cities of the plain, the Altitude (m. 791 s.l.m.), the green and its panoramic position.

- The period of maximum population growth is reached in 2001 with a population increase of the 26,81%. This data has been growing steadily until 2013, when there was a decrease of 2.16%.

- Updated to 31/12/2015
The demographic trend between 2001 and 2012 shows a dynamic expansion in the number of families (24.18%). In the same period there was an increase of the resident population from 0 to 3 years: 2005 was the year with the highest number of children in this age group (n. 293).

Population growth of those years is due to the new possibilities of employment coming from the nearby “ceramic district” and migration flows of foreign citizens arriving mainly from North Africa and Eastern European countries.

In order to respond suitably to the new social needs that emerged as a result of the demographic development of the territory, the Serramazzoni City Council has seen fit to promote experimentation of services for working families with children from 0-3 years.
Ring a Ring-o' Roses in the wood

• The Serramazzoni family day-care centre, is an example of community-based social investment policy given the fact that it offers a nursery service – in a small, informal, friendly and familiar setting – to families that otherwise would not have the possibility to care in a high qualified way for their children.

• Taking into consideration that the municipality of Serramazzoni is a small village on the hills outside the big city of Modena, in a very industrialized and developed area of production, with many young families without relatives in the neighborhood, the family-day care centre not only offers the possibility for the parents to conciliate family-work balance but it also contribute to build social networks in the local community.
Social Innovation

• The social innovation element of the Serramazzoni case study consist of an attempt to modify the Authority Flows of the local community in regards to the system of services towards childhood (see the “upper quadrant” in the Social Innovation Compass) in a dynamic and lively small town situated in one of the most developed economic and productive territory of the Region.

• The growing demographic trends of the beginning of 2000’s with the increasing number of young families with infant children, both parents working outside the home, without relatives living nearby, it springs a pressure towards the local administration to implement ECEC services.
New market in the local community

• The impossibility to build a Nursery Centre – due to the high investment cost – pushed the municipality to promote the research of new settlement and innovative solutions, possibility that was allowed by the new regulation framework enacted by the Regional Government in 2000. The new Law (n.1 of January 2000) at the Art. 3, differentiates the plurality of ECEC services available and it introduces the typology of “Home Educator Service”.

• So the Serramazzoni case study constitutes a clear example of combination of different elements that changes the flow of authority in the local community, giving voice to the requests of families with infant children, and creating a “new market” for ECEC services in which new private providers can find an opportunity to develop their businesses.
The little she seagull and The wonder tree
The little she seagull and The wonder tree

- “La Gabbianella” & “L’albero delle meraviglie” are an example of social investment micro-policy in the sense that they offer a “public space”, a “shared place” where children and adults belonging to different generations and socio-cultural backgrounds can meet in a welcoming environment, that nurtures – both formally and informally - children’s education and socialisation experiences.

- It is a particularly important facility especially in a traditionally deprived and isolated geographical area, and a key actor of the community in the effort to build an inclusive and cohesive society.
Isolated and deprived area

- The social innovation element of the Comacchio case study consist of an attempt to modify the “cultural orientations” and the “beliefs and values” of the local community towards childhood and adolescence (see the “bottom quadrant” in the Social Innovation Compass) in an isolated deprived area of the country.
- Until the end of the ‘80ies of the last century, the territory suffers of a lack of attention toward early childhood education; there were literally no services dealing with problems related to the accompaniment of the development of boys and girls in the early years, the support of parents’ role and facilitation of parent-child relationship.
• Only the successful interaction of international (Bernard Van Leer Foundation), national (New ECEC Regulation), regional and local actors (public, private nonprofit and private forprofit) could create the fertile environment for the development and the growth of a germ of experimentations around which take roots a bunch of activities and projects that are still going on and were able to multiply themselves in a plurality of services and facilities.
The Nursery Center in Bologna

N. 3
The “string nest”

- **Filonido** is a clear example of a social investment localised-policy given the fact that it offers a very high quality nursery service, at the price established by the Local Authority, to a broad number of families.

- **Filonido** is located in a very high density office-district (the “Trade district”) that is characterised by the concentration of many private enterprises (consultancy, financial and commercial intermediaries), cooperative enterprises (Insurance, Bank Services, Umbrella organisations giving services to their membership) and Public Agencies (the Regional Government), with an high proportion of women workforce.
Conciliation of working life with family life

• The possibility to entrust their children in a functional nursery service – with a flexible time schedule – near their work, allows them to conciliate their working life with their family life, and to ameliorate their life-working balance.

• It is about very high skilled, well educated, middle class women who occupy middle-high level job positions in the tertiary sector of the economy.
The Bologna case studies could be understood as an outstanding example of Social Innovation from the point of view of an original and unusual combination of economic and financial resources (see the “left quadrant” in the Social Innovation Compass).

In this chart we represented the Social Innovation process as an “emerging phenomenon” that arise from the interaction (virtuous circles) of four main dimension of social action: Resources – Authority Flows – Routines – Beliefs.
A network of actors

• The peculiarity of the Nursery “Filonido” is the very innovative arrangement of public, private for profit and private nonprofit actors, that made it possible to (literally) build a new nursery Centre in the “Fiera District area” in the city of Bologna.

• - The Bologna Municipality = gave the land (for a thirty years period);
• - The Emilia-Romagna Regional Government = gave a loan of 2 million Euros, in front of a 2,5 million total budget for the construction of the Nursery Centre.;
• - The Cooperative movement = set up a consortium (of five members);
• - The Consortium Karabak = built the new Centre;
• - The cooperative “Dolce” = run the Centre;
• - The cooperative “Camst” = supply the food service;
• - The Emilia-Romagna Region; the Hera corporation; the Unipol Corporation; the Legacoop umbrella association = pay for a certain number of places in the nursery for the children of their employees.
IV
Conclusive Remarks
Lessons to be learned

• 1 – Social Innovation initiatives are highly “context dependent”, not only in the sense that what can be understood as an “innovation” in one territory it is not in another one, but because social innovations are strictly interweaved and interlocked with a network of actors (that we defined the “relational system of interaction”) that are embedded in a specific economic-political-social-cultural environment;

• 2 – The Public Sector is not always an obstacle to the development and the diffusion of Social Innovations, on the contrary in order to be effective, stable (scaling-up), durable and sustainable social innovations require a crucial role to be played by the different agencies of the Public administration;
Lessons to be learned

• 3 – The **private for profit sector** can play an important role in social innovation initiatives, but usually – in the field of social, health and education services – is not the actor who starts the experimentation process that give way to the social innovation initiative;

• 4 – **Civil society organisations** at different level of social action– micro, meso and macro – play a crucial and central role in the beginning of small, locally based, experimental, pilot activities, projects and actions, that constitute the favourable environment in which social innovations can start, grew and develop;
Lessons to be learned

• 5 – Social innovations are more effective (and sustainable) when they are able to trigger a virtuous circle that activate processes of change in all the four dimension of the “social innovation diamond” (or compass): a) Resources distribution; b) Authority flows, regulation, actors’ roles; c) Routines, social norms and relationships; d) Values and Beliefs.

• 6 – Social innovations often emerge as an “unintended consequences” of social action put in place by social actors who want to solve an immediate, concrete and urgent need of their individual members (or families);

• 7 – Usually at the beginning of a social innovation process there is the action of a person or of a group of people that play the role of “entrepreneur”, not only nor primarily in an economic sense of the term, but more widely form a social, political and cultural perspective.
Thank you for your attention!