

Tradate Solidale:
**Paths of activation and
the transformation of
the local social welfare**

*Tatiana Saruis, Fabio Colombo,
Yuri Kazepov, Chiara Civino*

Case Study N°23
April 2016

Acknowledgements

The research for this Case Study has benefited from financial support by the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2012-2016) under grant agreement n° 290613 (ImPRovE: Poverty Reduction in Europe: Social Policy and Innovation; <http://improve-research.eu>). The authors are solely responsible for any remaining shortcomings and errors.

Case study carried out in May 2015

© Tatiana Saruis, Fabio Colombo, Yuri Kazepov, Chiara Civino

Bibliographic Information

Saruis T., Colombo F., Kazepov Y., Civino C. (2015), *Tradate Solidale: paths of activation and the transformation of the local social welfare*, ImPRovE Case Study No. 11/23. Antwerp: Herman Deleeck Centre for Social Policy – University of Antwerp.

Information may be quoted provided the source is stated accurately and clearly.

Reproduction for own/internal use is permitted.

This paper can be downloaded from our website: <http://improve-research.eu>



Table of contents

- 1 The initiative and its organisers4
- 2 Basic information on the (local) context and the emerging problems5
- 3 Genesis of the initiative7
- 4 The activities and organisation10
- 5 The innovative dimension of the initiative11
- 6 Institutional mapping and governance relations15
- 7 Governance challenges18
 - 7.1 Mainstreaming social innovation..... 18
 - 7.2 Governing welfare mix: avoiding fragmentation..... 18
 - 7.3 Governing welfare mix: developing participatory governance style..... 19
 - 7.4 Equality and diversity..... 20
 - 7.5 Uneven access..... 20
 - 7.6 Avoiding responsibility..... 21
 - 7.7 Managing intra-organizational tensions 22
 - 7.8 Enabling legal framework 22
- References.....24
- Appendix.....25

1 The initiative and its organisers

Tradate Solidale (TS) stands for “Supportive Tradate”. It is a project run by the Municipality of Tradate, in the Province of Varese in Lombardy Region, in the North West of Italy. The project involves a network of national and local associations, social cooperatives, public agencies, private organisations and individual citizens. Within *TS*, traditional social provisions are provided in coordination with innovative measures aimed at activation through outsourced services. Its purpose is to combat poverty and social exclusion of the long-term unemployed and their families.

The *Tradate Solidale* experience is an innovation of the local welfare system, introduced and coordinated by the Municipality: a small public administration is trying to build a participatory process to programme, design and provide social and activation measures. The involvement of local civil society and citizens is aimed at sharing a common strategy and resources to deal with the growing problems of unemployment and poverty in this context.

In its two years of activity, the initiative has transformed the role of the municipality (and especially of the social services) from mainly a provider to mainly a coordinator of a complex network. It has also reinforced the role of the third sector through a stronger partnership with the public institutions. It has transformed the content of the local policies to combat poverty and social exclusion by integrating economic benefits and measures of activation. Finally, it has led to a re-think of the public and private resources available for the welfare policies, finding new potential in building relationships of collaboration among services, stakeholders and citizens and sharing and circulating new ideas.

The Municipality of Tradate is the main actor and coordinator of the network of organisations involved in the project. It is the responsible for social services and policies and it has recently started to strengthen its intervention on active labour market policies. In fact, it promotes job opportunities in the outsourced services, microcredit projects and the distribution of public land to poor households (to collect firewood and cultivate vegetables). It has also established agreements with third sector organisations to create job opportunities for disadvantaged citizens. It has reinforced its collaboration with the local Centre for Employment managed by the Province of Varese, which holds the institutional competence on job activation.

The network involved in *Tradate Solidale* is composed of the social cooperatives *Il Giardino del Sole* and *San Carlo*, the associations *San Vincenzo* and *Centro Aiuto alla Vita* of Varese, the local branch of the *Italian Red Cross* and the Centre for Employment of Varese.

The cooperative *San Carlo* has been operating in the area of Tradate for nearly thirty years and employs 14 people, including disabled people and trainees. The cooperative *Il Giardino del Sole* has currently 50 employees. 40% of them are disadvantaged people. The cooperative was established in 1993 and has performed different activities over time: it has started with the maintenance of public parks and floriculture, then cleaning offices and buildings and waste management and recycling. Recently, it has opened a restaurant thanks to a loan obtained from a local bank foundation. Within these activities, the cooperative provides opportunities of jobs and training for people in charge of the municipal social services or the local Health Agency (ASL).

The Centre for Employment of Tradate has the task to facilitate the matching of job demand and supply, provide information about working and training opportunities, guidance and personal

counselling. The registration in its official register certifies the status of unemployed and active job seeker, required to access the economic benefits provided by the national State and by the Lombardy Region (*Dote Comune*).

The two aforementioned cooperatives and the Centre for Employment collaborate with the municipality, within *Tradate Solidale*, in order to offer job opportunities and training support to citizens who fall under the responsibility of the local social services.

The association *San Vincenzo* is a historically local organisation working on poverty in Tradate. It belongs to the national catholic network Conference of San Vincenzo. It operates generally within the parishes and its main aim is to give support to more disadvantaged families and individuals, both in terms of material and financial help (concretely, paying the bills and providing food packages) as well as spiritual and immaterial help.

The *Red Cross* of Tradate collects and redistributes basic goods to poor people, like food, medicines and so on.

The association *Centro Aiuto alla Vita* of Varese is a local expression of the homonymous national federated movement. Regardless of the typical mission of this religious organization in preserving life and natural death, its task in the field of poverty is supporting lonely mothers with minor children suffering economic and social disadvantages.

As it will be explained in detail, *Tradate Solidale* was born within a local public-private permanent board of welfare organisations participating in the programming and designing of social policies. It has later developed as an autonomous network, while maintaining and enhancing strong connections with the board, in particular with the family-and-employment subgroup.

2 Basic information on the (local) context and the emerging problems

The Italian welfare system is classified by the literature as a familistic Mediterranean system (Ferrera 1996; Andreotti *et al.* 2001). As other welfare systems in Europe, it has not been able to meet the new social needs arising from demographic, social, cultural and economic changes (Ranci 2010). The re-organisation of the labour market, the decline of the traditional male breadwinner family model and the creation of structural unemployment have not been followed by a resettlement of the social protection schemes, as well as the introduction of national arrangements against poverty, such as minimum income measures.

The rate of unemployment in Italy has increased from 6.5% to 10% from 1990 to 2012, the long-term unemployed representing 53% of all unemployed in 2012. The persistence of unfavourable conditions in the labour market in 2013 resulted in a more intense growth of long-term unemployed, which reached no less than 56.4% of all unemployed. The significant increase in the incidence of long-term unemployed mostly affects men (from 51.0% in 2012 to 56.1% in 2013), compared to the lower growth in the female component (from 54.1% to 56.7%) (ISTAT, 2014b).

Italy, compared to almost all other EU countries, allocates residual resources to functions of social protection targeted to poverty and unemployment. For instance it ranks last among EU28 countries in

terms of resources allocated to income support measures to combat poverty or in-kind benefits in favour of people at risk of social exclusion¹ (0.3 percent compared to the EU28 average of 1.6 percent).

Regions, Provinces and Centres for Employment are the institutions that share the responsibility in unemployment and labour market policies. The Regions have legislative competence and programme policies, the Provinces manage their implementation and organise the Centres for Employment, which provide direct services to citizens. The Central State is the main financier of this policy area, but the Regions contribute with their own resources.

Lombardy, in Northern Italy, is one of the richest regions in the country. The long-term unemployed make up 50.8% of all unemployed in 2013, increasing significantly from 2010 when it passed from 33.6% in 2009 to 41.8% in 2013 (ISTAT, 2014b). The province of Varese in the Lombardy Region has always been one of the most industrialised and rich areas of Italy, also thanks to its central and strategic territorial location. It is bordered by the metropolitan area of Milan in the south and by Switzerland in the north. The local productive system is characterised by medium and small-sized enterprises, mainly in the textile and mechanical sectors.

The unemployment rate in the province of Varese increased sharply from 2.9% in 2007 to 8.3% in 2014, in line with the trend registered in Lombardy (8.2% in 2014) (CCIAA Varese, 2013, p. 3)². The industrial sector of the province has shrunk: 8.38% of the companies closed in 2012. The process of tertiarisation of the local economy, which started several decades ago, has not compensated for this reduction during these years. The annual number of new job contracts has decreased from 105,000 in 2008 to about 93,600 in 2013, despite the increased flexibility introduced in the labour market by the national government. Permanent contracts have suffered a contraction of almost 40% and now represent a share of only 15% of the total number of contracts (22% in 2008) (*ibidem*, p. 10).

Tradate is located 14 km from Varese and 40 km from Milan. The city lies in the Olona Valley and was home to 18,289 inhabitants in 2012³. Tradate has been severely affected by the economic crisis: *“The recent economic and financial crisis has caused an increase in poverty and social exclusion that the town has never seen before.”* (Mayor of the Municipality of Tradate).

As in other municipalities, the crisis has affected especially the most vulnerable households, as well as the availability of resources for social policies. In December 2012, according to the data provided by the local social services (Municipality of Tradate, 2013), the households facing serious economic and social difficulties (having an income below the minimum subsistence rate) in 2012 were 2% of the 7.902 total families and this data is expected to rise in 2013. Families receiving welfare benefits doubled from 2012 to 2013: from 44 to 84 households. From 2008 to 2013 the demand on the social service registered +58% (Municipality of Tradate, 2013).

According to the Deputy Mayor of Tradate, the social services' claimants are described as follows:

The segment of poor population has expanded exponentially due to the presence of immigrants (60% of this group) who don't have a social network supporting them. The share of Italians without a family network (especially men) is also growing. These are very fragile social categories: low-skilled women, immigrants without any qualification, men previously employed

¹ We follow here the AROPE definition and refer to people either at risk of poverty, or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. See: <http://goo.gl/Ezt8fl>

² See: <http://osserva-varese.it/>.

³ See: <http://www.comuni-italiani.it/012/127/statistiche/>.

in the construction sector, people with disabilities, unemployed over fifty years old. They often live in severe multi-problematic situations, in a structural poverty. Job and housing are the two critical recurring issues. The loss or absence of work generates arrears in the payment of home loans, evictions, inability to pay rents. Our goal is to stop this spiral of extreme poverty and to create a context of more sustainable life conditions. (Deputy Mayor, Municipality of Tradate)

As reported by the interviewees, a growing number of families, despite being in serious financial difficulties, do not apply for public services or third sector organisations for assistance: they prefer to ask support to their family or informal network. These citizens contact the services only when their situation becomes extremely critical.

3 Genesis of the initiative

In May 2012, a new political administration was elected in Tradate, guided by a coalition composed of centre-left parties.

The Deputy Mayor and the Coordinator of the social services have been the main promoters within the public local administration of a strategy to create a participatory welfare mix, involving the local community in planning, organising and providing social measures and services. This idea was based on the consideration that new and complex social needs were rising and the awareness that the answers to them and to the more general problem of poverty in Tradate could not be given anymore only by the municipality, but should involve the whole community.

The social services started to organise weekly meetings with the municipal social workers and the services' users, to discuss and reflect on the emerging needs and demands of intervention and the change of the context, its resources and problems.

In July 2012, the participatory strategy was more strongly formalised with the institution of the *Stati Generali del Welfare* (Permanent Conference on local Welfare - henceforth SGW), in order to reform the local welfare system to promote a community-based welfare system, innovating and diversifying the range of institutional social interventions and strengthening the synergies with local civil society. The Deputy Mayor launched a call for participation to citizens and civil society organisations through an informational campaign and extended the invitation even outside the city boundaries. Immediately 34 organisations joined it, among national and local voluntaries associations, social cooperatives, public agencies and private organisations, in addition to individual citizens. In the following months, the participation became increasingly wide, involving 46 agencies and nearly 200 people.

In September 2012, five thematic working groups were activated within SGW in order to design and realise activities for different targets (family and employment, minors, disabled, immigrants, elderly) led by professionals who already operate in the field.

The goal for the first year of activity (2012-2013) for the five groups was to define a plan of needs and priorities for each target. This was done in a bottom-up logic, through meetings and consultation with users of the social services and citizen residents across all the city neighbourhoods, in order to conduct a participated needs analysis and develop consequent aims and actions. This participation process has revealed the following needs and difficulties, reported in the plan on poverty:

- Increase of income poverty and unemployment among the households living in Tradate (Italian and immigrant), resulting in difficulties in building an autonomous and adequate response to

their needs (food, housing, care, inclusion etc.) and in caring for the most fragile social target (minors, elderly, disabled people, immigrants, etc.);

- A crisis of relationships within families and proximity networks (mutual relationships among the community members);
- Low skills and tools to adequately access the services;
- Lack of resources and of integrated projects within the services.

Considering this analysis, the main priorities contained in the plan were the following:

- Consolidate the network the existing resources, both private and public, and to diversify the proposals and responses to be acted within the services;
- Enhance the local networks among public, private and civil society organisations, and to increase solidarity and cohesion within the whole community through activation initiatives, neighbourhood and mutual help projects.

In November 2012, before defining the definitive strategic planning and writing the welfare programme, the municipality organised a meeting with the services' professionals in order to consult their advice and receive counselling about the proposals which emerged from the public consultation.

The final programme, including the needs analysis and the aims described above, was included in a SGW plan and integrated in the municipal social policy programme approved by the City Council for the period 2012-2015.

After the programme approval, monthly meetings with the five groups were organised to monitor its implementation, while the Deputy Mayor and the Coordinator of the social services (the institutional referents of SGW) supported its development, leaving complete autonomy to the participants to design projects and operate within the shared aims.

From the beginning of the experience, the other municipalities belonging to Tradate Social District⁴ were invited to participate in the SGW meetings. The aims were, first, to share information about innovative experiences conducted in their territories (solidarity markets, etc.) and, secondly, to open the possibility of an extension of the SGW programme (or at least of its most successful projects) to the whole social district, in view of integrating them into the District Social Plans (*Piani di Zona*). In January 2014, the assembly of the mayors of the District voted to join the SGW.

Tradate Solidale was designed in early 2013 as a project of a group of SGW participants working on the target "family-and-employment". It addresses two problems that emerged in the needs analysis conducted within the SGW: the need to generate new resources for the local welfare system by activating the community, given the municipal financial constraints, and to improve the coordination of the public-private tasks in combating poverty and social exclusion integrating social and activation measures.

As already explained, the municipality is responsible for social services implementation: they provide poor citizens with economic contributions and social support. The Centre for Employment, managed

⁴ The Social District is a territorial scope which includes several municipalities, generally neighbouring, running together the basic social services. For basic social services we intend the basic actions for information, advice and assistance, as well as their complementary interventions aimed at preventing situations of disadvantage and social hardship aimed to overcome or mitigate emergencies and to promote family, school, professional and social integration. The district is governed by a body composed by the Mayors of the municipalities involved (or by the Councillors for Social Services).

by the province, offers support in accessing the labour market. The Third sector organisations can be service providers on behalf of the public administration or can act autonomously providing services and goods to poor people and households.

As emerged through the SGW discussions and meetings, these functions were not coordinated well enough: the interventions were widely experienced as fragmented, sometimes incoherent and not very effective in promoting citizen autonomy, activation and empowerment. The use of resources was often inefficient as parallel or overlapping initiatives were coordinated by unconnected organisations.

The shared strategy gave birth to *Tradate Solidale*. The project has to provide citizens in economic and social difficulty with an integrated intervention, formalised in a contract (a pact) with the social services (*Patto di Servizio*), including and connecting the transferral of economic benefits and opportunities and support in activation. Old and new public and private resources are combined and coordinated to increase the effectiveness and efficiency in the intervention of the social services and to give citizens an alternative opportunity than traditional passive intervention. The participation of third sector organisations is crucial: as suppliers of public services, they primarily provide training or internship opportunities for social services' individual programmes, as autonomous organisations, they choose to coordinate with them their intervention and the resources and value provided.

Activation was the key issue from the beginning inspiring the project.

The Centre for Employment in Tradate joined TS to enhance its function of matching between job demand and supply and of informational support to the Social Services about employment opportunities for the users. On July 2013, the social cooperative *Il Giardino del Sole* was commissioned by the public administration to take care of public parks as well as cleaning of the municipal nursery and the social cooperative *San Carlo* renewed the agreement for the delivery of meals to elderly people. The tenders for outsourcing and the consequent contracts established in the so-called "social clauses" that a number of citizens from the social services have to be employed in the outsourced services for short periods:

"[Inserting the social clauses] *basically, we limit the participation at some tenders to the social cooperatives. Social cooperation has a great potential value, but if public sector doesn't invest on it and allow it to work, this huge value is lost.*" (Coordinator of the social services, Municipality of Tradate)

The collaboration between the municipality and the association San Vincenzo was consolidated and an agreement with the Red Cross of Varese was signed with the aim of ensuring synergy between the provision of food aid and financial help. Another agreement, between the municipality and the *Centro di Aiuto alla Vita* guaranteed help and support to mothers with young children (0-3 years) and the activation of microcredit.

The municipality did not define a budget to finance the implementation of the SGW plan, but the search for resources was considered as one of the activities in which all participants were invited to take part with their own tools, skills, networks and knowledge of fund raising. During 2013, the municipality defined its own contribution to the start-up phase of the implementation assigning a small fund of 5,000 Euro per group for their projects' implementation.

4 The activities and organisation

Tradate Solidale aims to connect the economic benefits provided by the municipality with activation measures realised with the collaboration of a network of public and private organisations. The access is open to all the citizens of Tradate who are assisted by the social services, also for people who do not have specific disadvantages. In fact, specific targets (like people with psychological or psychiatric diagnosis and people with physical disability or problems) are usually already provided with services of labour and social integration by public institutions and/or in social cooperatives.

The project addresses whole households, rather than individuals, considering the needs and potential of all their members. Families with minor children constitute a priority within *TS*.

The interventions provided by *Tradate Solidale* until October 2013, during the start-up phase of the project, were:

- Activation of a temporary job contract for one person at the cooperative *San Carlo* in the service of meals delivery to elderly people.
- Activation of eight people at the cooperative *Il Giardino del Sole* in the care of public parks. Five beneficiaries were employed in activities not requiring any special skills, and they were paid through the *vouchers*, usually used by employers to pay of occasional job performances. Three people were employed in nursery's maid service during the complete school year.
- Microcredit was allocated by the municipality to eleven beneficiaries, for a total amount of € 30,000. This measure was directed to people in financial difficulty, who have a small income (under € 20,000) or a guarantor. The loans provided were between € 1,000 and € 3,000, refundable within 36 months without interest or other charges.
- A convention with the association *Centro di Aiuto alla Vita* has allowed the social services to improve the support to mothers with children 0-3 years old and with economic and social problems. Volunteers were involved in child caring and provision of basic goods such as clothes, diapers, milk, food, prams and so on. They periodically visited the mothers' houses in order to help with the concrete and daily care of children. 16 children were followed up in coordination with the social services.
- The relationship between the municipality and the association *San Vincenzo* has been consolidated within *Tradate Solidale*. New agreements guaranteed extraordinary supplies of foodstuffs from a local supermarket and from the nursery canteen leftovers. The food packages were delivered to 80 families.
- Another agreement with the *Red Cross Section of Varese* guaranteed the monthly delivery of food baskets to six families with minor children under the care of the municipal social services.

The operative staff of *Tradate Solidale* includes three social workers of the municipal social services, two professionals of the local Centre for Employment and professionals belonging to the third sector organisations involved in the project.

The social services have the task of evaluating the cases, focusing on their social relationships, elaborating and proposing customised and integrated pathways for the individuals and their families, taking into account the range of available opportunities provided by all the organisations involved in the project.

The third sector organisations involved in *Tradate Solidale* have different operational tasks: the social cooperatives host users' job placements, while the associations coordinate the distribution of food parcels and provide individual support.

The access of citizens to the opportunities offered within the project is mediated by the social services and by the Centre for Employment. The candidates' demands are assessed in a shared consultation between them. If their response is positive, the social services send them to an interview with the referents of the cooperatives involved in the project, to be employed in their services.

People recruited by the cooperatives carry out the assigned activities with the support and supervision of professionals working in the ordinary activities of these organisations: social assistance, cleaning, care of public gardens and so on.

The development of TS is constantly monitored within the *SGW* and in particular by the family-and-employment group. The latter elaborated an agenda for *Tradate Solidale's* follow up, considering other opportunities identified in the territory. The new ideas on the agenda concern:

- The creation of a permanent food bank managed by the association *San Vincenzo* and the *Red Cross*, recovering surplus food from canteens or supermarkets and promoting the autonomous production of bread by a group of families;
- The creation of urban gardens and a market by citizens, to promote self-cultivation and sharing of the products. This initiative is linked to the project on Urban Gardens (*Orti Urbani*) starting in autumn 2014 and financed by the *Rotary Club* of Tradate;
- The creation of a "shopping card", financed by the municipality, allowing families with economic problems to have access to basic goods;
- The establishment of an observatory for the documentation and monitoring of socio-economic and cultural changes of the population of Tradate.

5 The innovative dimension of the initiative

As suggested by the literature about social innovation, the experience of TS has been analysed through three basic components (Gerometta, Häußermann and Longo 2005; Moulaert et al. 2005a, b): a) the satisfaction of basic social needs (content dimension); b) the transformation of social relations (process dimension); c) and the empowerment and socio-political mobilization (linking the process and content dimension).

a) Content dimension

The set of interventions implemented through *Tradate Solidale* allowed the social services to meet more adequately the complex new socio-economic needs of a growing part of the population to which the classical interventions implemented both by the public administration and the third sector organisations were considered ineffective.

The central need revealed in the intervention was the growing poverty and social exclusion of individual and families, strictly connected to the long term unemployment. Both poor immigrant and native households are generally characterised by low-skill profiles, long term unemployment and an absence of social networks supporting them.

As already described, the traditional services to combat poverty and social exclusion lacked coordination and effectiveness. The use of resources was often inefficient as parallel or overlapping initiatives were carried out by unconnected organisations.

The constraints in municipal finance have given rise to the need to aggregate the available welfare resources from the context and to generate new ones by activating the whole community.

The municipality has assumed the task of reorganising the local welfare network, in order to satisfy both the basic and the new emerging social needs. Traditional social provisions have been provided in coordination with innovative activation projects in outsourced services, focusing on the households' specificities and on the job demands.

The social workers are aware that temporary solutions do not resolve long-term unemployed problems, but they provide them an opportunity for experimenting with their skills and for having some immediate resources for basic needs:

We were always aware that they do not solve a situation of chronic poverty. However, on the one hand, they can meet urgent needs and pay expiring bills, and on the other hand, they give them the possibility of activation. The long-term unemployment causes deterioration of professional skills as well as a devastating effect on the perception of self. They contribute (...) to the wellbeing of the community is, first of all, a revaluation of the person's dignity. (Social Worker, Municipality of Tradate)

The public actor has enhanced the connection between public and private resources, by valorising and spreading the local welfare network. The participatory strategy and the mix of activation measures have reinforced the role of the third sector through stronger partnerships with the public institutions.

Public and private contributions, traditional and innovative solutions, economic and social support and activation are integrated to guarantee a better and complete interventions on multidimensional poverty problems.

b) Process dimension

Tradate Solidale and *SGW* are both aimed at innovating the method of providing support to poor and excluded people by networking.

Traditionally, interventions from both public service and third sector organisations on poverty was self-centred as each of them provided their own resources to citizens in difficulty without knowing and considering the others' actions, even regarding the same citizens.

Tradate Solidale and *SGW* try to overcome this logic, by enabling a process of transformation of the local welfare in order to increase the relations of solidarity and of reciprocity, both formal and informal, in order to reduce old and new poverties within the local community:

We believe that the social welfare depends on the ability of citizens, social organisations, public bodies to interact, to exchange ideas, to help each other and to grow in a common framework of rights and duties. (Coordinator of the social services of the Municipality of Tradate, 2013)

The initiatives of *SGW* and *Tradate Solidale* have been developed through a participatory process launched by the local municipal institution. *SGW* represents an experiment of engagement of the civil society and shared planning of the provision of social support and assistance in the city for the whole population. In fact, as already told, weekly meetings between the municipal social workers and the

users have been settled to discuss and reflect on the emerging needs and demands of intervention and the available resources to face them. The SGW emerged from this participatory process has been joined by national and local voluntary associations, social cooperatives, public agencies, private organisations as well as individual citizens. The needs analysis, aims and actions to reach them, have been included in the final SGW programme, which has been integrated in the municipal social policy programme, approved by the City Council.

Tradate Solidale is part of this network's activities. It provides activation and support to the unemployed embracing the method of SGW, its guidelines and ideas, and in fact some of its actions are developed or designed together with SGW's thematic groups, in particular with the group working on family-and-employment.

The method implemented within SGW is supposed to provide a better understanding of community needs and changes, thanks to a continuous dialogue among the local institutions, social organisations and citizens.

In effect, the participation process has led to the elaboration of innovative interventions, like *Tradate Solidale*. The involvement of organisations and citizens in proposing ideas and contributing to interventions has led to an increase in the resources that are available and in the elaboration of complex integrated pathways for citizens requesting the social services' support.

If I should design a project for elderly, I could have never written a project including the use of tablets as tools for information exchange, as in a project for families I would not consider the reuse of surplus food to be thrown away or the creation of social urban vegetable gardens. The reading of needs combined with an improved ability to raise resources activated within SGW create a working praxis (...) which is really different from that typical of social services. (Deputy Mayor of the Municipality of Tradate)

The search for resources needed for the implementation of the SGW programme is itself an activity in which all the participants are invited to take part, proposing their ideas and providing their own skills, means and knowledge to obtain funding.

This is the philosophy that inspired this project: the idea that in a period of crisis, the resources and the energy must be found in the community. (Responsible of the social services, Municipality of Tradate)

The municipality is the main promoter of the networks and of the new method. Its role is different in SGW and in *Tradate Solidale*. In fact, in the latter, the municipal social services are the central actor having the task of selecting the users, providing the economic contributions and coordinating the network of resources. In the wider SGW network and within thematic groups the municipality has experimented with a new role in the project, passing from the traditional role of "passive" funder of projects (top-down logic) to a role of *primus inter pares* being the promoter and coordinator of the project but also a participant like the others. It has abandoned its leading role after the start-up phase of the initiative and leaving the citizens and organisations involved a wider freedom for proposing ideas, solutions and collaborating in their implementation. The so called "light governance model" is considered as successful by the participants, since the network is constantly growing, involving new citizens and organisations from Tradate and other surrounding municipalities.

All the interviewees have a shared view of a network addressed not only to poor citizens but also to support social workers of public and private services to overcome the feeling of loneliness and

helplessness they experienced in front of the increasing social problems, especially since the crisis has begun:

Sometimes my impression is to be alone in the “trenches” trying to cope with users’ anger, emotions and their explicit and implicit pressing demands. Thus, it helps a lot to feel not alone but within a network. When you are in panic and do not know how to behave or you are in a situation that is not exactly your competence, you can contact people within the network to share these critical moments and find shared solutions. (Professional of the Centre for Employment in Tradate)

c) Empowerment dimension

Tradate Solidale and SGW started as top-down processes promoted by a small municipality in order to innovate its own welfare system improving its governance model and method of intervention on poverty problems through the involvement of local stakeholders.

The empowerment aspect of *Tradate Solidale* refers to the initial phase of definition, when weekly meetings were arranged between social services’ users and the municipal social workers, in order to discuss and reflect on the context, its resources and problems. This has provided the public administration with the essential knowledge and awareness about the emerging needs and demands of intervention expressed by the target group, in order to appropriately define the activation measures and the tasks of the network’s actors. *Tradate Solidale* aims to reactivate unemployed people by proposing to them supported pathways integrating social measures, economic benefits and job activation. This opportunity has the aim to open up the possibility of supporting them in specific difficulties, improving their skills and building new relationships after periods of inactivity, exclusion and isolation. In the mix of measures included in the individual projects, the municipal social workers try to take in account specific needs, resources and potential, and a shared pact is signed between the service and the claimants. However, the latter do not take part directly in the governance of the project and, in this sense, they are not the direct promoters of their change. While users asked for more opportunities of employment and more economic and in-kind provisions, the workfare approach has been designed by the municipality, and it has resulted in the coordination between public services, centre for employment and cooperatives. It reduces the degree of empowerment of the initiative, as users have not operated autonomous choices about the solutions to their needs. The conditionality of benefits opens a potential risk of paternalism, authoritarian decision making and might be offensive to one’s dignity.

In *Tradate Solidale*, the listening and the analysis of users’ conditions and the assumption of a perspective of activation have stimulated in the social workers involved a new perception of the clients: not only as people in need, but also as people with a potential to be considered and improved in terms of skills, relations, motivation and other resources. This means the purpose is to assist them in overcoming economic problems and at the same time to formulate proposals and opportunities to make emerge their capabilities and promote their autonomy.

Thus, an empowerment effect has interested the social workers of public services and third sector organisations. The collaboration and sharing of information, co-planning and co-implementation of activities has increased and improved the awareness of old and new territorial resources and the capacity of coordinating and integrating them in coherent pathways for poor and excluded people.

SGW is a participative initiative aimed at involving civil society both as individual citizens and through organisations and associations in analysing the context, programming, designing and realising local policies and projects to combat poverty and social exclusion in a bottom-up logic. All the available citizens, belonging to third sector organisations or as individuals, are called to take part in the network to share ideas and contribute to realise actions in this field. Social services' users and professionals, groups of residents in the different city neighbourhoods, voluntaries and professionals of the third sector were all invited to take part to concretise the idea of a community welfare based on a knowledge alliance.

Through SGW, the public actor has started an empowering process of the whole community. The role of the local administration, after a first phase of strong promotion of the initiative, became less directive: the participants to the field research defined it as a "light governance model", underlining the horizontal perspective of participation assumed by the municipality in the process.

6 Institutional mapping and governance relations

As already described, *Tradate Solidale* has developed in connection with the network of SGW. In particular, it is linked to the family-and-employment group, one of the five thematic group working within SGW.

Both the projects follow a participatory strategy to reform the local welfare system. The role played by the public administration in the two projects is quite different. While in *Tradate Solidale* the municipal social services act in a strong role of coordination, while SGW is steered by the municipality through a so-called "light" governance model aimed to build a more horizontal relationship to stimulate a better sharing of ideas, resources and tasks, aligning the participants' attention and responsibility with the co-defined aims and actions.

In *Tradate Solidale*, the municipal social services have the task to coordinate the monetary, material and human resources made available by agreements and conventions with the members of the network, on the basis of the individual social project elaborated in favour of citizens.

The professionals of the social services have to evaluate and select the users and to elaborate a proposal of integrated resources and opportunities aimed at social support and activation, sharing their implementation with the members of the network. They also act as connectors with the SGW's network and thematic groups to provide a feedback on the project's progress and results.

The Centre for Employment is a partner of the social services on the cases and issues related to activation. They provide the expertise on the local labour market (analysis of job demand and supply, opportunities and so on) and the assessment of individuals' professional and social skills. They are consulted by the social services on individual cases, employability and on the matching between the potential worker and the available job opportunities. The Centre for Employment provides job placements, matches job demand and supply and proposes opportunities to unemployed citizens who are not the target of the social services. However, the interview with the Director of the Centre has underlined that the lack of resources, the current economic slowdown and the increasing structural unemployment pose limits to their effectiveness in managing these functions. This is why the municipality, as the main responsible for social inclusion at the local level, through TS, decided to find

additional support in the local civil society by enhancing and activating networks and to propose innovative methods of intervention.

The social services and the Centre for Employment belong to different public institutions (municipality and province) but they have their headquarters in the same building, which is an efficient logistic solution that has fostered their collaboration. They consult each other on the cases, taking reciprocal advantage of their databases, information and professional opinions.

Thanks to the partnership with the third sector, both the services can benefit from improved knowledge about the local context and they are able to provide more appropriate integrated interventions to unemployed citizens and their households.

The other partners, all belonging to the local third sector, are the following:

The two cooperatives *San Carlo* and *Giardino del Sole* host the beneficiaries in their activities and support and monitor their activation paths.

The association *San Vincenzo* and the *Red Cross* of Varese manage the activities of delivery of food distribution. The social workers of the municipality periodically consult the volunteers of *San Vincenzo* in order to coordinate the interventions through economic benefits with food distribution.

The association *Centro di Aiuto alla Vita* has a special agreement with the Municipality for the provision of additional human resources (volunteers) to social services for the implementation of interventions for mothers with children from 0 to 3 years old.

Except for the local section of the *Red Cross* and the social cooperatives which have formal agreements with the municipality, the collaboration among the partners of *Tradate Solidale* is regulated informally.

As already explained, *Tradate solidale* is part of the *SGW* network and is specifically linked to the family-and-employment group. The social services have the task to take care of these connections. The cooperative *San Carlo* and the association *San Vincenzo* are also part of the family-and-employment group.

After the first call, 34 organisations joined *SGW*. During the process of programming and designing *SGW*'s initiatives, the participation has become increasingly wide, involving almost 50 institutions and nearly 200 people.

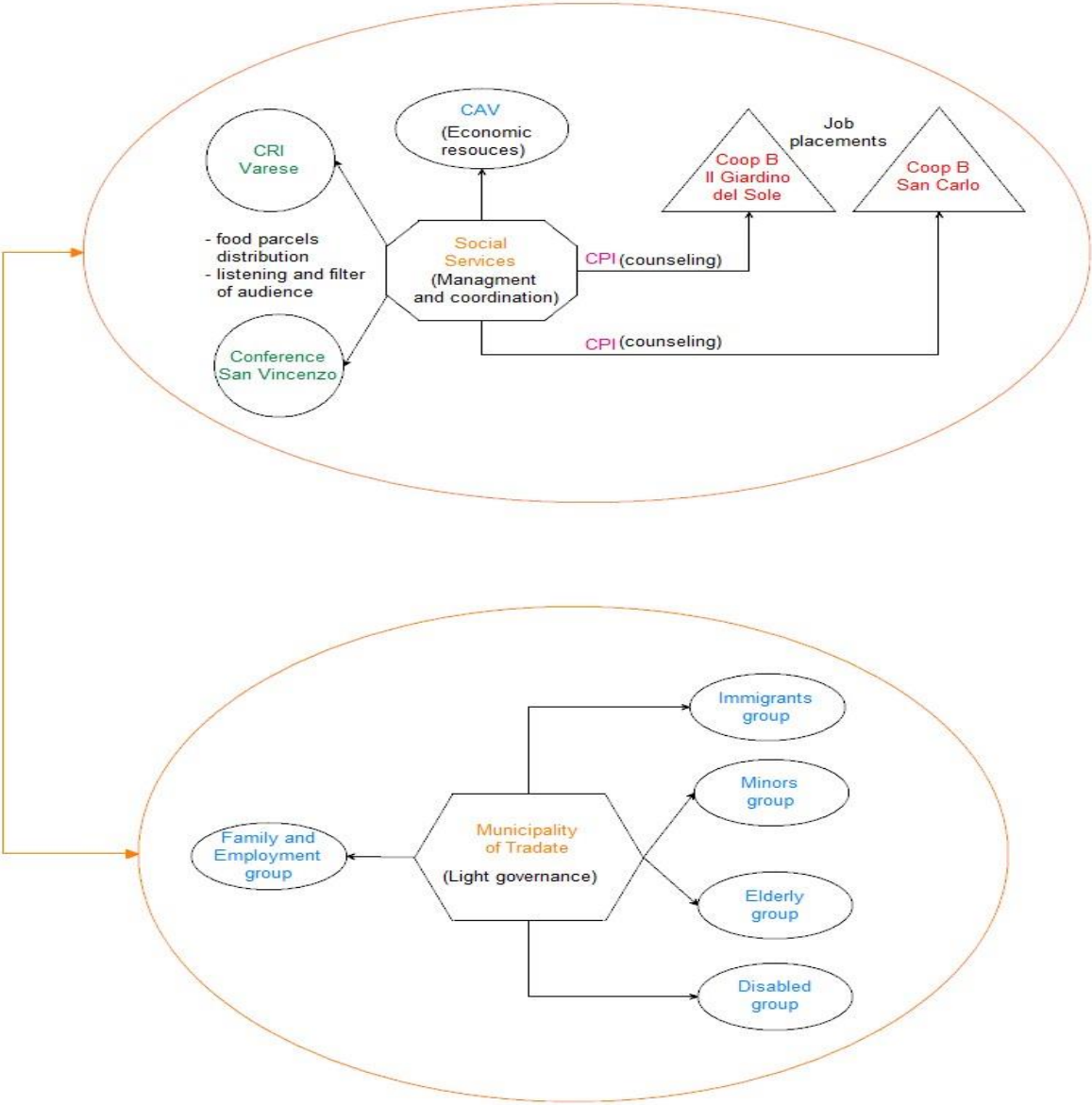
The "light" governance strategy allowed the local organisations, professionals, volunteers and other citizens worried about poverty, to share ideas on possible solutions, but also responsibilities and decisions.

In January 2014, the assembly of the mayors of the municipalities belonging to the Social District of Tradate voted to join the *SGW*.

According to some interviewees, *Tradate Solidale* could be improved with the involvement of accredited or authorised private operators (e.g. agencies for employment) that currently offer a wide range of services to support the same potential target. They act as key interlocutors between job seekers and private companies and could increase the available opportunities for unemployed people involved in the project. They are considered as not very aware of the community needs, being more focused on their own business interests. However, their involvement in the project could increase their attention to and improve their understanding of weaker groups among the unemployed, which may help them to better support that part of their client base.

Another actor that should be included in the project, in the opinion of the interviewed participants, are the schools. They could provide an important contribution to the project, on the one hand, increasing the attention to youngsters who are at risk of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion, on the other hand, sharing the responsibilities on children’s families involved in the project.

Fig. 1 – Tradate Solidale in the local governance system: actors and relationships



Source: Author’s elaboration from desk analysis, interviews and focus group

7 Governance challenges

The following paragraph identifies the governance challenges to social innovation in the experience here analysed. They are described as they emerge from the documents and the field research, using the *ImPRovE* definition.

7.1 *Mainstreaming social innovation*

Tradate Solidale is an attempt to create and systematise an innovative method of social work that both strengthens local synergies among public and third sector organisations and integrates old and new, social and job related, public and third sector's resources to combat poverty and social exclusion.

In the opinion of some interviewees, a first aspect facilitating the realisation and rapid diffusion of the project is its small territorial dimension, which allowed both to act close to the target population adapting the proposals and opportunities to specific needs and to individuate local resources and activate and cultivate cooperative relationships. The direct contact among the involved actors makes simpler the sharing of ideas, aims and resources. Thus, the small and localised dimension is considered as a strength and a condition to replicate the project.

In the next months, the effectiveness and sustainability of *Tradate Solidale* will be monitored and evaluated. If the results are positive, it will become a stable part of the municipal social services.

During the few months of its realisation, the interest of local organisations in *Tradate Solidale* and *SGW* has grown. The number of participants has increased and the municipalities belonging to the same Social District entered the *SGW* network.

The diffusion of *Tradate Solidale* (and *SGW*) does not aim to go beyond the local dimension. As well known, the Italian welfare system is strongly decentralised, assigning the exclusive legislative competence on social policies to regions and the function on programming interventions, organising the services, designing projects and implementing measures to municipalities, organised in Social Districts. The State is mainly the financier of the system. No predefined institution has the task to elucidate social innovative experiences, promote and diffuse them in other contexts or at the regional or national level. This results from the fragmented welfare system and reduces social innovation's potential of mainstreaming.

7.2 *Governing welfare mix: avoiding fragmentation*

Tradate Solidale is a project which aims to fight fragmentation among the various autonomous initiatives against poverty realised by the organisations belonging to public, private and third sector, which made the traditional welfare system ineffective. The systematisation of resources is supposed to have a strong impact on poor citizens' lives and in promoting their autonomy, activation and empowerment.

Nevertheless, the interviewed participants involved in *Tradate Solidale* assert that the network has been strengthened over time and its actual aim should be to further expand, including other organisations in order to extend the possibility of interventions and better adapt the kind of opportunities to users' specific needs.

We address especially to immigrants who urgently need to find a permanent job in order to obtain or renew their residence permit. Often they are women who do not speak Italian, so it would be important for us to know about the available courses of Italian for foreigners to inform the users (...) and help them in this path. (Professional of the Centre for Employment of Tradate)

The networking strategy aims to avoid the overlapping and waste of resources created by the replication of unconnected interventions due to the isolation of self-centred organisations. Each institution has to complement each other's work and be part of a wide offer to be adapted to citizens with different needs and potential.

According to some interviewees, the network should include other organisations that are working on similar topics, like the private Employment Agencies, or similar targets, like the schools.

7.3 Governing welfare mix: developing participatory governance style

Both the projects *Tradate Solidale* and *SGW* are enabling a process of transformation of the local welfare system in order to increase the collaboration among different organisations and citizens and relations of solidarity and reciprocity within the local community:

We believe that the social welfare depends on the ability of citizens, social organisations, public bodies to interact, to exchange ideas, to help each other and to grow in a common framework of rights and duties. (Municipality of Tradate, 2013, p. 2)

Through *SGW* the Municipality of Tradate has created a context for participatory planning with the aim of filling the gap between institutions and citizens. The challenge was to shift from a traditional government to participatory governance, from programming policies exclusively inside the local administration to sharing them with other organisations and citizens interested in building a community welfare:

Since the beginning we have decided not to set up something and then give it to the community, but to build something with and for citizens. We have involved a fairly reasonable number of people sitting at the same table to work around the key-objective of building the common good. Firstly, this has given us emotions and enthusiasm that led to the conception of strong and valid projects. (Deputy Mayor of the Municipality of Tradate)

As already explained, the search of resources for the implementation of the programme of the *SGW* has become itself an activity involving all participants:

This is the philosophy that inspired this project: the idea that in a period of crisis, the resources (monetary, material, human) and the energy must be found in the community. (Coordinator of the social services, Municipality of Tradate)

The experimental method of participatory planning has allowed a gradual and spontaneous expansion of participants and increased the awareness of the problem of poverty, but also of the available resources. *Tradate Solidale* is an example of this potential.

The partners involved in the project are invited to participate to *SGW* meetings and they underline it would be important to take part in the initiative, but they cannot always do so, due to work commitments. It is a general problem often highlighted by the third sector organisations: human

resources are sometimes lacking to take part to the meetings. It would be important for social workers or other professionals to participate, to share ideas and knowledge, but this possibility is limited and the engagement can be discontinuous.

7.4 Equality and diversity

The activities of *Tradate Solidale* are directed to all those people assisted by the social services experiencing social and economic difficulties, who do not have specific disadvantages, with priority to households with minor children. People with a mental or physical disability are excluded from the project, because they can already benefit of services for labour and social integration in Health Services, Centres for Employment and social cooperatives.

Unemployed people without any physical or psychological difficulty requesting economic and social support express a new demand for intervention of the social services and local third sector, mainly due to the crisis, as Tradate is located in one of the most economically developed regions of Italy, which had not experienced these kind of problems in a recent past.

This problem led the municipality, as the main responsible of social welfare, to study and propose new solutions for this people, also considering that public resources are not enough to guarantee public support to all the citizens in need.

The target of the project includes a wide variety of situations: individuals and families, elder people, single mothers, large families, immigrants, Italians and so on. *Tradate Solidale* provides individualised support shaped on the households situation, elaborating a specific mix of measures and activating the subjects of the network on the basis of citizens' specific needs, resources and potential.

Tradate Solidale, as previously mentioned, is intended only to users who are administered by the Social Services: people in economic and social difficulties who are not registered at the local institution are therefore excluded from the project. According to the actors interviewed, this is mainly due to two reasons: the available resources are still limited compared to the potential user base; in second place, there are still people in extreme poverty who do not require the intervention of the municipality or of organisations who are partners, so they cannot have access to the innovative interventions provided. This is why the city has activated another wider network, SGW. The people who benefit from SGW are not forced to apply to social services, but they can have access to it through other organisations or even through informal channels (word of mouth, acquaintances or family members, collective initiatives, etc.). The five subgroups are divided into categories, thus they allow to reach a wider number of users for each target group, also due to a higher potential amount and level of optimisation of resources.

7.5 Uneven access

The number of cases involved in *Tradate Solidale* is very small compared to the total population requesting economic benefits, social support and job services to public institutions.

In the opinion of some interviewed, this is at least partially due to the holistic logic behind the project itself, aimed at taking in charge the cases considering all their problematic aspects. This approach makes the intervention complex and engages much energy:

Our numbers are not large, the logic of Tradate Solidale is that every person has his/her importance, he/she is not a simple number. I can talk also for my colleagues at the local Centre for Employment, every single case that finds a solution is a success for us. Both the number of users reached by Tradate Solidale and those related to the general activity of job placement in the Centre for Employment are small but weighing because in the most of cases they are in very critical situations. (Director of the Local Centre for Employment)

Tradate Solidale is addressed to citizens administered by the social services, which represents a small portion of people that are supposed to suffer from poverty and exclusion in Tradate. In fact, in the perception of the interviewees, people ask public support only after having completely exhausted the family, parents and informal network's support and maybe compromised part of their relationships and psychological energies, thus in a very advanced phase of their poverty and social exclusion pathways.

The idea is that the access to the services can be improved by the synergies activated by the project. For example, the association *San Vincenzo* and the *Red Cross* are encouraged to send to social services citizens who have not yet had access, if they have the perception that it could be useful.

The selection of users is made by professionals of the public social services considering their conditions, evaluated on the bases of the municipal regulation.

As stated above, the number of people involved in *Tradate Solidale* is small, mainly for the limited availability of resources (e.g. funds, professionals, availability of job opportunities in the social cooperatives), but also because the project is recent and still an experiment.

7.6 Avoiding responsibility

According to the already elaborated data (see par. 2), the institutional investment of public resources in favour of unemployed people and on active labour policies is very limited compared to the EU average. This obviously negatively affects the possibility of providing adequate support to the target group of *Tradate Solidale*.

The local Centre for Employment, as highlighted by the interviewed, lacks sufficient resources and support for an adequate policy strategy to be effective in performing this task and reach all unemployed people.

The Municipality of Tradate, responsible for providing the social services, has the task to intervene on poverty, thus also with unemployed citizens who are in financial difficulty. In order to avoid the sole provision of passive assistance measures to those who have the capacity to work, the municipality tried to build its own strategy on activation policies. Because it does not have the necessary resources to invest in this direction, which is not even exactly its task, it has created a network of resources with the Centre for Employment, two local cooperatives and some associations. It is a low cost solution for the public administration, which takes advantage of the solidarity and participation of local civil society as a resource to support weaker citizens.

The same logic undertakes both *Tradate Solidale* and *SGW* projects as strategies to activate human, economic and social resources in the local context, creating an alliance between the public institutions, third sector and citizens to fight against the crisis.

A risk of these kind of strategies could be to hide or lead to a delegation of public tasks to civil society, assigning it to replace government intervention instead of subsidiarity, moving public responsibility to the private sphere and overloading the civil society with excessive tasks.

Instead, despite the reduction of available resources, the Municipality of Tradate has kept its social budget unchanged and continued to provide citizens with social benefits and services, but trying to take in account new needs and offer new and more effective solutions.

Even the concept of public resources could be re-thought thanks to a better circulation of ideas within SGW. For example, one suggestion that emerged in the debate and that was subsequently realised was to assign unused public land to poor families to make vegetable gardens.

The social clause inserted in the public tenders for outsourcing services is also part of the strategy of re-thinking public potential. Thanks to this solution, the municipality promotes the social value of the social cooperation and creates the possibility of engaging citizens in difficulty in these organisations for short periods, with a small amount of public resources invested. This opportunity does not guarantee people a long-term contract, but to reactivate or acquire skills, competences and self-confidence and to gain an economic support out of the assistance logic.

7.7 Managing intra-organizational tensions

The positive relationships and trust established within the *Tradate Solidale* network is considered as one of the main strengths of the project. All the interviewees have expressed their willingness to strengthen the collaboration and spread the experience.

Some initial tensions were highlighted in relation to professionals' work overload, as building the network and new collaborations were new tasks added to social services' traditional functions. But after a first difficult moment, it became clear for them that this collaboration could be an advantage for their activities:

When our manager has introduced me and my colleagues the SGW, we only saw an extra amount of work. Thus at the beginning we were quite disappointed, because obviously it required a considerable investment of our time and energy. Furthermore it was full summer, so we started with discouragement ... Actually, during the early stages of the work, the added value of the project has really come out and allowed the development of projects like Tradate Solidale.
(Social Worker, Municipality of Tradate)

7.8 Enabling legal framework

The target of unemployed people without social disadvantage or physical or mental health problems does not concretely gain specific benefits from the traditional welfare system: this social group is not concretely considered as entitled recipients of social security measures. Lacking a measure of minimum income, after a period of economic support linked to the previous job position (if due, because not all the workers have this right), part of the population is exposed to the risk of poverty in case of unemployment.

Furthermore, the national legislation on social cooperatives (NL 381/1991), which are cooperatives whose aim it is to offer work opportunities to citizens with difficulties, does not include long-term

unemployed in the classification of disadvantaged target populations. This means that the social cooperatives cannot include them in the minimum percent of workers with a weak profile that they have to reach according to the law and cannot receive tax reductions for employing them.

Tradate Solidale tries to cope with this problem, in a moment of retrenchment of resources due to the austerity policies and of growing demand of intervention due to the economic crisis.

The municipality and the social cooperatives involved in *Tradate Solidale* have special agreements to support this emerging target: the already mentioned procedure introducing the social clauses in the public tenders for outsourcing public services. The access to these opportunities is mediated by the social service and it is part of a broader individual project that includes other measures to support citizens and their households depending on their different situations and combination of needs and potential.

References

- Andreotti A., Garcia S.M., Gomez A., Hespanha P., Kazepov Y. and Mingione E. (2001), Does a Southern European Model Exist?, in *Journal of European Area Studies*, 9(1), 43-62.
- CCIAA (Camera di Commercio Industria Artigianato Agricoltura di Varese) (2013), Programma Pluriennale, 2013/2017, pp. 3-4.
- Comune di Tradate (2014), Amount of the total population of *Tradate* in 2012, on-line:
<http://www.comuni-italiani.it/012/127/statistiche/>
- Comune di Tradate - Settore Servizi Sociali (2013), Gli Stati Generali del Welfare di Tradate, Primo documento di programmazione, pp. 2-3.
- Comune di Tradate - Settore Servizi Sociali (2013), Interventi di contrasto alla povertà, pp. 4-6,12.
- Comune di Tradate (2012), Verbale di deliberazione della Giunta Comunale, Delibera di indirizzo per la realizzazione degli Stati Generali del Welfare della Città di Tradate, Luglio 2012.
- Ferrera M. (1996), The Southern Model of Welfare in Social Europe, *Journal of European Social Policy*, 1, 17-3.
- Gerometta G., Haussermann H. and Longo G. (2005), Social innovation and civil society in urban governance, *Urban studies*, 42 (11), 2007-2021.
- Istat (2014a), Rapporto Annuale 2014, on-line: <http://www.istat.it/it/files/2014/05/cap4.pdf>
- Istat (2014b), Rates of unemployment, on-line:
http://dati.istat.it/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=DCCV_TAXDISOCCU
- Ranci C., ed. (2010), Social vulnerability in Europe Social Vulnerability in Europe. The New Configuration of Social Risks, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.

Appendix

Following the established protocols for the fieldwork, the actions conducted for the case study by the University of Urbino team, between January and February 2014, are:

- Analysis of documents, data and publications concerning the innovative experience and aimed to individuate useful information about its working and development. Analysis of institutional documents, data and researches to describe the economic and social situation in the Province of Varese and in the territorial zone of Tradate, focusing on the unemployment issues.
- 5 qualitative interviews involving: a) the Director of the local *CPI of Tradate*; b) the President of the Cooperative type B *Il Giardino del Sole*, partner in the project *TS*; c) one of the two social workers belonging to the social services of *Tradate* involved in *TS*; d) the Deputy Mayor and the Responsible of social services of *Tradate*; e) the Coordinator of the Family-and-Employment group, part of the *SGW*. The interviews aimed at describing in depth the project, its genesis and potential, its organization and network, the characteristics of the target and the issue of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion in *Tradate*, the national, regional and local policies concerning the target. the coordinator of the Cooperative type B *San Carlo*, partner in the project *TS* and member of the *SGW*
- A focus group involving 5 participants: the Director of the local *CPI of Tradate*; the coordinator of the Cooperative type B *San Carlo*, partner in the project *TS* and member of the *SGW*; the Responsible of social services of *Tradate*; one of the two social workers belonging to the social services of *Tradate* involved in *TS*; the operator of the Conference of *San Vincenzo*, partner in the project *TS* and member of the *SGW*. The focus group aimed at going in deep on the analysis of the project *TS*, better describing its innovative characteristics in the relation with the context where it is realised.
- A focus group involving 14 participants: the Responsible of the social services in Tradate; the Deputy Mayor of social services of Tradate; the President of BdT - Banca del Tempo e dei saperi (Time and knowledges Bank) and President of Macondo (a fair-trade shop in Tradate); a member of the BdT; a member of ANFN (Associazione Nazionale Famiglie Numerose - National Association large families) and coordinator of the high schools of the District; a member of the staff of a fair shopping project from CARITAS of Mozzate (a Municipality nearby, belonging to the same district); a member of CARITAS of Tradate (Fondo Famiglia-Lavoro - Family and Work Fund); a member of the staff of the Counseling Center (Centro di ascolto) of CARITAS of Tradate; member of ACLI (Associazioni Cristiane Lavoratori Italiani - Christian Associations of Italian Workers); the manager of a local agricultural enterprise and private citizen; the President of the Rotary Club of Tradate; a farmer, and private citizen; a member of the staff of Tendi la Mano (helpdesk of listening and family counseling at the parish of Mozzate); member of the Conference of San Vincenzo; member of Legambiente. The focus group aimed at going in deep on the analysis of the project *SGW*, better describing its innovative characteristics in the relation with the context where it is realised.

ImPRovE: Poverty Reduction in Europe. Social Policy and Innovation

Poverty Reduction in Europe: Social Policy and Innovation (ImPRovE) is an international research project that brings together ten outstanding research institutes and a broad network of researchers in a concerted effort to study poverty, social policy and social innovation in Europe. The ImPRovE project aims to improve the basis for evidence-based policy making in Europe, both in the short and in the long term. In the short term, this is done by carrying out research that is directly relevant for policymakers. At the same time however, ImPRovE invests in improving the long-term capacity for evidence-based policy making by upgrading the available research infrastructure, by combining both applied and fundamental research, and by optimising the information flow of research results to relevant policy makers and the civil society at large.

The two central questions driving the ImPRovE project are:

How can social cohesion be achieved in Europe?

How can social innovation complement, reinforce and modify macro-level policies and vice versa?

The project runs from March 2012 till February 2016 and receives EU research support to the amount of Euro 2.7 million under the 7th Framework Programme. The output of ImPRovE will include over 55 research papers, about 16 policy briefs and at least 3 scientific books. The ImPRovE Consortium will organise two international conferences (Spring 2014 and Winter 2015). In addition, ImPRovE will develop a new database of local projects of social innovation in Europe, cross-national comparable reference budgets for 6 countries (Belgium, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Italy and Spain) and will strongly expand the available policy scenarios in the European microsimulation model EUROMOD.

More detailed information is available on the website <http://improve-research.eu>.

Bea Cantillon (Coordinator)

E-mail: bea.cantillon@uantwerpen.be

Phone: +32 3 265 53 98

Address: University of Antwerp – Sint-Jacobstraat 2 (M.177) – 2000 Antwerp - Belgium

Tim Goedemé (Manager)

E-mail: tim.goedeme@uantwerpen.be

Phone: +32 3 265 55 55

Mobile: +32 494 82 36 27

Address: University of Antwerp – Sint-Jacobstraat 2 (M.185) – 2000 Antwerp - Belgium