

A project to support Roma children in education and social inclusion pathways in Lecce-Italy

*Yuri Kazepov, Tatiana Saruis and Chiara
Civino*

University of Urbino Carlo Bo

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1 The initiative and its organizers

The innovative experience we are going to present here is designed and implemented a little local organization aimed at social promotion *Alteramente*. Constituted in 2013 by four young women, the association resulted among the winners of a public competition for young entrepreneurs, called *Principi Attivi: Giovani Idee per una Puglia Migliore*¹, financed by Puglia Region. The project aims at supporting Roma children in social inclusion and education pathways and is based on previous research and collaboration within the Roma community in Camp Panareo. This Camp is located in the Municipality of Lecce, a city of about 90,000 inhabitants and capital of the Province in Puglia Region, in the South of Italy. The project started in 2013 and is called “*Jek, Duj, Trin ... Ánde Škola: Percorsi di Inclusione Sociale e Scolastica dei Bambini Rom del Campo Sosta Panareo di Lecce*” (*Jek, Duj, Trin ... Ánde Škola: Pathways of Social and school Inclusion of Roma Children living in the Camp Panareo in Lecce*).

2 Basic information on the local context and the emerging problems

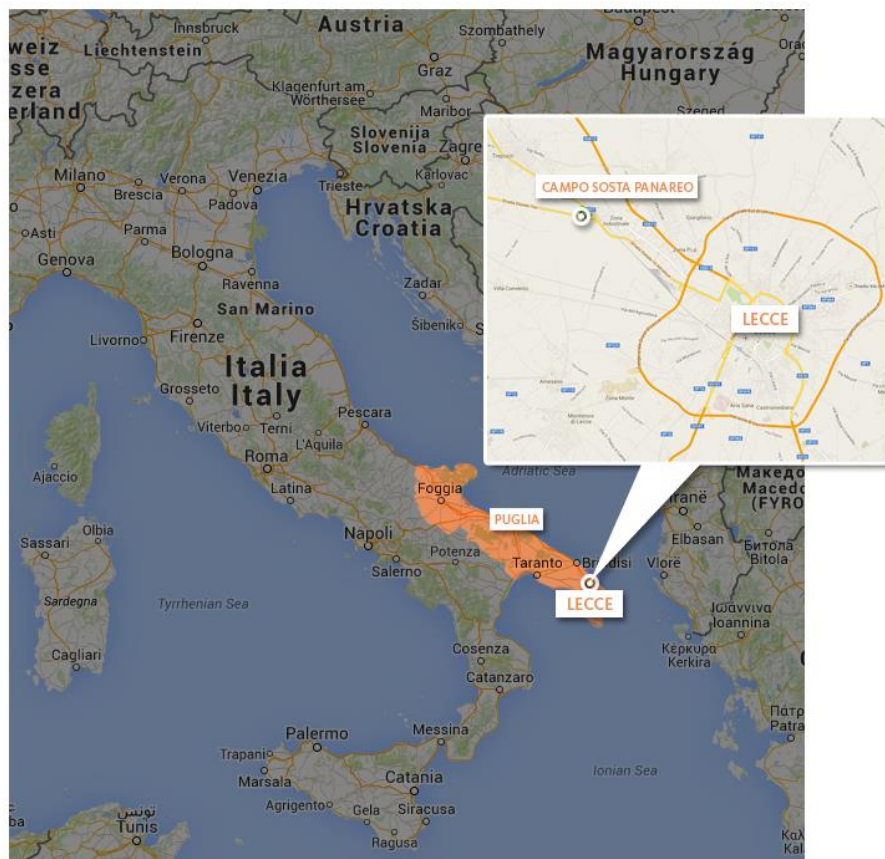
Italian legislation does not recognize Roma as a historical, cultural and linguistic minority. Formally this is a consequence of the lack of clear territorial roots of their community, which is spread all over the country. This implies that they are entitled to individual rights, as Italian or foreign citizens, but also that they do not have specific rights as a community. Many regions have recognised them as a minority in their statutes or regional laws. This is relevant, because regions are the main institutions responsible for social policies, having exclusive legislative competence. Municipalities, however, enjoy significant degrees of autonomy in programming and implementing social measures. This caused a fragmented development of social policies and a diversification of services and provisions. This implies also that measures aimed at the inclusion of Roma strongly depend on local choices and resources. The weakness of public intervention on Roma issues is partially compensated by the third sector, especially volunteers, who play a crucial role in supporting, promoting and implementing projects aimed at promoting their living conditions (IREF 2010). The lack of a national strategy is only partially compensated in Europe’s attention and funds.

The presence of Roma in Italy is estimated between 130.000 and 150.000 people and about half of them are Italian citizens (*ibidem*). The large majority has never practiced nomadism even though they often live in authorised and non-authorised settlements called camps (*campi nomadi*), often in precarious situations (shacks, abandoned buildings, caravans, temporary prefabricated houses or containers provided by public administrations).

In Puglia Region, there are 19 settlements, located in 9 municipalities. In the Municipality of Lecce, there is a group of 80 families (180 in the whole Province) of *Khorakhanè Shiftarija*, from Kosovo/Montenegro, and *Khorakhanè Cergarija Crna Gora*, from Bosnia. Part of them live in private houses and are integrated and mixed to the rest of the population (*ibidem*). While 33 families live in a “temporary” camp regularly provided and equipped with water and basic services by the Municipality and the Province in 1998 (OPI, 2010). The camp is

¹ It is a public selection to finance projects of social inclusion, sustainable, cultural and innovative development, presented by young citizens in Puglia region. More details will be described in the following.

located in an ancient farm (so called *masseria*) “Panareo” in the periphery of Lecce, 6 km from the city. Its original population came to Italy from ex-Yugoslavia (mainly Montenegro), during the political and economic crisis in the Eighties and Nineties. In the last census, Roma in Lecce were about 200 people. Minors are 89 and almost all of them were born in Italy, mostly in Lecce and in the surrounding Municipalities. Considering the whole population of Camp Panareo, almost half of them were born in Italy (IREF 2010). Families are numerous (half of them have more than 5 members, even though 20 of the 33 families are nuclear) and young (they are considered ready to get marry and have children from 13-14 years of age). The population of the camp tends to be young: 50% is under 24, while only 1.55% is over 65 (OPI 2010). Moreover, 62% of the population in working age has a job². The most diffused activities are in the trade of flowers and plants and in the trade of used cars (IREF 2010, OPI 2010).



In Puglia, beyond regional interventions, the Provinces of Lecce and Foggia are considered the most active in supporting Roma population, with projects aimed at promoting not only the access to rental housing and jobs, but also to public services. These services are integrated by relevant initiatives of Municipalities, Health Districts (ASL), associations and volunteers. The camp elects its own representatives with democratic consultations and the relationships with local institutions and networks are quite good (IREF 2010).

² As a proxy, the general employment rate in the Province of Lecce was 44.4% in the same year (Istat, 2014): <http://goo.gl/LXsBnu>.

In 2010, the Provincial Observatory on Immigration (*Osservatorio Provinciale sull'Immigrazione a Lecce – OPI*³) carried out a quanti-qualitative research in the camp (OPI 2010) and highlighted a relevant change in Roma relations with the school. They argue that, in the past, children were sent to school mainly as a sort of exchange with the institutions in order to obtain social benefits or regular permission to stay in Italy. Despite this is still true, actually, parents more often recognise the advantages for their children of having completed at least compulsory education. This is due to the more than twenty years stabilization and to the necessity of basic degrees to have access to some jobs. Probably it is a sign of increasing integration with the local culture. Some young people have also attended professional training and vocational programs, supported by the additional possibility to have access to monetary benefits. The research underlines that all school-age children living in the camp have a quite regular attendance, especially in primary school (age 6-11). Problems become relevant in lower secondary schools: the attendance becomes less regular and drop out and repetitions increase, despite it is still compulsory schooling. However, a positive result is that some 15-24 years old people attend evening classes. This is usually provided for people who have not reached the degree during compulsory schooling. The number of illiterates is mainly concentrated in the age group 35-39 years.

Tab. 1. Levels of schooling in the Roma Community in Camp Panareo, Lecce, 2010

Levels of schooling in Camp Panareo, Lecce, in 2010	n.	%
No scholar age	15	7.77
No primary school licence and illiterate	21	10.88
No primary school licence, but able to read and write	38	19.69
Enrolled in kindergarten (3-5 years old)	18	9.33
Enrolled in primary school (6-11 years)	24	12.44
Enrolled in secondary school of first degree (11-13 years)	20	10.36
Enrolled in evening classes of secondary school of first degree (over 16 years)	8	4.15
Enrolled in secondary school of second degree (14-18 years)	9	4.66
Not in education and having a primary school licence	19	9.84
Not in education and having a secondary of first degree school licence	12	6.22
Professional school licence	4	2.07
No data available	5	2.59
Total	193	100.00

Source: OPI, 2010, p. 12.

³ Actually, the Observatory has changed its name in ICISMI - International Center of Interdisciplinary Studies on Migrations of the University of Salento, see: <http://goo.gl/aVqOBg>

3 Genesis and development of the initiative

3.1 The research-action phase and building relationships

Three of the women who have established the association in 2013, came from a six years' experience as volunteers for the *Local Committee for the Defence of Immigrants Rights* and as students within the ICISMI (*International Center of Interdisciplinary Studies on Migrations of the University of Salento*), at the University of Lecce. Through these collaborations, they had the possibility to have access to Camp Panareo and to conduct an action-research involving the Roma community (OPI 2010). There they met the fourth member of the association: a young woman living in the Camp, who acts as a linguistic and intercultural mediator within the association. Through this the willingness of Roma population in improving their children' school pathways emerged:

“Their culture remains mainly oral but, by time, parents’ attitude toward children pathways at school has really changed. Our research revealed that once parents sent their children at school as an exchange with the institutions (to obtain residence permits or subsidies), so under a sort of threat (...). Actually, 100% of children attend school and not just formally: before they went there without their school bags, without books and only if they wake up in the morning ... While now there is a real attention: parents wake up them, prepare them and send them to the school bus. (...) Parents are young, 30-35 years old, but they know very well the difficulties of been illiterate, without being able to read, write or sign a document ... they understand that school is useful to find a work ...” (Interview to referents of *Alteramente*).

Considering these results, researchers decided to offer the children of the Camp their support to school activities within the project. The intervention was conducted in the Camp and aimed at helping the pupils of primary and lower secondary degrees in the afternoon homework.

Alteramente members report that these activities were much attended and appreciated by the children and their families. Thus, after the end of this experience, they asked to prolong it. Furthermore, the relations between researchers and the community improved, thus they too were willing to continue with the experience. Thus, they started to look for any resources to finance a new project in the camp.

At the same time, they didn't interrupt the relationships with the people in the camp:

“We attended the community assiduously in these years, sleeping and eating with them, participating to their celebrations, visiting their Country of origin ... so that they actually say - you became just like us, you belong to ours -.” (Interview to *Alteramente* members)

3.2 Fund raising and project design

The experience in the camp gave the young researchers the possibility to experiment the first support to Roma children in school and provided the conditions and the inspiration to continue and improve the project.

There were some other attempts before, but in 2012, as an informal group, they participated to the already mentioned public competition for young “entrepreneurs” called *Principi Attivi: Giovani Idee per una Puglia Migliore*⁴ (*Active Principles: Young Ideas for a Better Puglia*) financed by Puglia Region within the Program of Policies for Youngsters *Bollenti Spiriti*⁵ (*Hot Spirits*).

Principi Attivi can be considered a socially innovative experience in itself, within the frame of active policies in favour of young people, in Puglia and in the Italian context. The unemployment rate in 2014 was in Puglia 20.9% (13.6% in Italy). For younger people (15-29 years) it was 41% (Istat, 2014). The funding program, supported by ESF, has a double aim: on the one side promoting social participation and direct activation of youngsters in creating new associations, cooperatives or other enterprises. On the other side in creating sustainable, inclusive and innovative economic development in the regional context. In fact, the projects have to be presented by informal groups of youngsters and concern three lines of development: - protection and promotion of the territory (e.g. valorisation of cultural and artistic heritage, sustainability in urban and rural development), development of the knowledge economy and innovation, and social inclusion and active citizenship. The maximum amount for each project is 25,000 Euros and the duration is of one year. The funding program has had three editions, in 2008, 2010 and 2012.

The same group presented a project in 2010, but it wasn't financed:

“We presented a similar project two years ago, but we didn't win. We have to recognise that we were not ready to implement it: our competences and relationships were not yet developed enough. This time we won because we have the right level of training and experience in the camp's life” (Interview to referents of *Alteramente*).

In 2012, the project was ranked 136th on 173 financed projects and got a contribution of 25,000 Euros for a period of 9 months (afterwards the months of activities became 10 with the same budget). It had a broader scope compared to the homework support implemented before as it aimed at supporting a) social inclusion and b) education pathways of Roma children living in Camp Panareo.

The first step of implementation was the constitution of an association of social promotion⁶ to manage the project: the association *Alteramente*. The members were the three Italian students working at the mentioned research-action and the Roma young woman whom they met in the camp during this experience.

The community was immediately informed about the new opportunity and the project was presented officially to the camp, during a meeting organised in collaboration with the *Association CSP Rom di Lecce* (the association of Roma citizens constituted within the camp).

“We had the support of all the camp. All! They were very happy. In fact, we had the maximum of enrolment of children to the activities. Some families were angry and disappointed because their children attend secondary schools of first degree and we can involve just primary school children. But it was necessary, for logistic reasons, resources, space ... so they were excluded.” (Interview to referents of *Alteramente*)

⁴ See: <http://goo.gl/byQ8FF> .

⁵ See: <http://goo.gl/Apm934> .

⁶ Regulated by the NL 383/2000.

The implementation phase of the project had to take in account some limits concerning, on the one hand, the budget (and consequently the number of children to involve) and, on the other hand, a not homogeneous sensitivity in the community toward secondary education. In fact, while some families would have appreciated to have a support for their teenage kids in school activities, others, considering them as adults with family and work responsibility, were offended a support and they refused it. This could damage the relationships between the association and the community, rise a conflict within the camp and/or create a situation of unequal access. The final decision (considering the number of participants had to be limited in any case) was to reserve the afterschool to the primary schools pupils. Some teenagers and their families were disappointed because they would have liked to participate, but this choice avoided a potential risk of failure for a project strongly based on good relationships and cultural sensitivity. The target of the intervention is not directly the most problematic school segment (11-16 years old pupils) in terms of drop out and repetition of the school year; but it aims at preventing these problems to emerge at a later age by supporting younger children and helping them to develop a different idea of their own potential and attitude toward education.

Considering the project's double aim of support education and social inclusion, the association decided to organise the activities out of the camp. They wanted to reinforce in the community and in the children the perception of the outside as a place of opportunities.

Other obstacles had to be overcome in order to be able to start the project: finding a room to carry out the different activities with the children and organising the transportation to this place, considering there is no public transportation connecting the camp with any other place around⁷.

They asked the partners of the bid for support in finding a room⁸, even though it was not possible to have the immediate availability of public institutions (the school and the municipality) and to arrange an agreement with them rapidly enough. Two local associations, *Intercultural Center Migrantes* and *association Popoli e Culture Onlus*, activated their networks to help *Alteramente* to solve the problem.

They found a catholic parson in Surbo (a municipality 7 km far from Lecce) who gave the free availability of some rooms belonging to his church. He made more: he sensitised his community on the goodness of the project and asked voluntaries to support the activities with the children. Fifteen parishioners answered the parson's call.

⁷ The camp is isolated for people who have not a private car. Except for the bus school, public transportation doesn't reach it. This creates any problems to find a work and an obstacle to social inclusion. From much time, this issue is a subject of claim and conflict between the Municipality and associations working in favour of Roma community.

⁸ The network will be described in the following. Formally the partners of the project were: Association CSP Roma in Lecce (it is the association of Roma citizens living in the camp); Municipality of Lecce; Istituto Comprensivo Statale "Ammirato - Falcone" di Lecce (a public school in the city); University of Salento - ICISMI (International Centre of Interdisciplinary Studies of Migrations); Consorzio Nova Onlus (National Consortium for Social Innovation); F.R.I. (Foundation Romanì Italy); Comitato per la difesa dei diritti degli immigrati (Committee for the defence of immigrants); A.M.I.S. Onlus (Association of Intercultural Mediators in Salento); Intercultural Center Migrantes; Association Popoli e Culture Onlus.

Alteramente appreciated the welcoming attitude of the parson and the local catholic community toward the project, thus, they accepted their generous offer, more precious because the Roma community is Muslim. There was one only weakness: the distance from the city hindered the possibility for children “exploring” many important opportunities, as libraries, cinemas, theatres, museums, public parks and everything important in their education and social inclusion.

The parson also helped the association to find an agreement with a social cooperative working with disabled people, which provided a bus with a driver for just a little money.

Migrantes and *Popoli e Culture* supported the project also with didactic materials.

Applying these cheap but effective solutions, more resources could be mobilized in order to implement the activities with children, mainly paying insurances for children and workers, paying the work hours and buying some didactic materials.

In October 2013, the project was ready to start.

4 The activities

The project involves 27 children (5-10) in the camp attending primary school.

The members of *Alteramente* are four, all working in the activities, held in the afternoon, three times a week for three hours each time.

About 15 volunteers of the church support them: 10 of them are available about once a week or occasionally, while 5-6 regularly participate to the activities. Among them, there are university students and retired schoolteachers, having professional skills to invest in the project. They often bring gifts as pens and copybooks or sweets for the children. At the beginning of their collaboration, *Alteramente* organised some meetings to provide them information about the project and basic knowledge about Roma culture.

Part of the proposed activities aims at supporting children in doing their homework and reinforcing their linguistic and mathematical competences. A mother tongue teacher holds English classes. Other cultural activities concern extra-school subjects, as Environmental and Civic Education, to reinforce their awareness on rights and duties and citizenship.

Leisure and recreational activities, as making biscuits, painting or having birthday parties, aim at making the children feel they are in a funny and friendly context.

A very important part of the activities concerns the education in the field of Roma culture and Romanés language.

“There are some hours dedicated to Romanés, which is an oral language, and their traditions. That’s because many children were born and are growing up here, in the camp, (...) they live in Lecce from generations and they lost their traditions. (...) For example, on January the 27th the Holocaust Remembrance Day will take place. We want to propose the children some easy activities, because they are very young, about what happened to Roma people in that persecution.” (Interview to referents of *Alteramente*)

The member of *Alteramente* who comes from the camp acts as a mediator and expert of

Roma culture and language. She is a sort of “peer” operator, having a role in their education but also representing a good example of inclusion for the children.

The double cultural identity of the children is considered as a strength on which to base the education pathways:

“We start from the assumption that they speak Romanés all day and Italian just at school. Therefore, they are bilingual children. This is an unusual point to base their education (...). For us, their Roma identity is a strength and we want to give them this awareness. We discovered that some children denied living in the camp; they were ashamed to say they were Roma. On the contrary, we wish they live peacefully their identity. Knowing Roma culture get ourselves enriched, so we want it is the same for them.” (Interview to referents of Alteramente)

It has also to be highlighted that some of the proposed activities aim at involving other adults, who are reference points for the children. The representative of the association of Roma community will be involved in organising an event for the children in the camp, concerning ecology, and schoolteachers will be invited to participate; elderly people in the camp will be involved in helping the children discover their origins and study Roma traditions. This participatory method aims at increasing mutual respect, reinforce relationships and improve social inclusion and cohesion. The common attention to children can “bridge” between two separated cultural and social “worlds”.

The program of activities and their implementation are coordinated within periodic meetings with the children’s teachers or by telephone if there are news or problems to be shared. An agreement is going to be formalised to define the collaboration (actually conducted informally) with the pedagogical expert and the social assistants of the Roma Sector of the Social Service⁹.

This collaboration with public institutions (schools and municipality) is crucial to obtain a coordinated and coherent strategy in issues concerning the children, their families and the camp. For example, the parents are invited to check if the children are taking all the needed supplies at school and to encourage them to attend classes; teachers pay more attention to their homework and their results and signal any special weakness to the association, giving suggestions to help the children; the pedagogical expert and the social worker have found a significant support for their activities and ask a mediation in case of problems. There are operative meetings among professionals to coordinate these interventions, but also informal contacts when needed. As emerged by the interviews, the project has had a sort of empowering effect on all these actors, reinforcing their attention on children’ potential through a new alliance based on a common strategy and new resources.

The members of the two local schools attended by the children and municipality were involved in the focus group and interviews and were enthusiastic of the results of the project. They all consider *Alteramente’s* activities as a good service for children, their families and even a support to their own work. They hope the project will have continuity and if possible expand the afternoon activities for more days a week. Nevertheless, all of them also precise they think the organizations they belong to have not available resources or

⁹ The Municipality of Lecce has constituted a specific area of social services and professional resources to this topic, manifesting attention to the issues concerning this part of the population: economic support, contrast to drop out, activation measures, etc.

the willing to contribute or finance its follow up after the end of the regional funds. In a few months, the association has been able to gain the trust and appreciation of social workers of the public institutions, but the political attention is still lacking.

5 The innovative dimension of the initiative

As suggested by the literature about social innovation, *Alteramente's* project has been analysed through three basic components (Gerometta, Häußermann and Longo 2005; Moulaert *et al.* 2005a, 2005b): a) the satisfaction of basic social needs (content dimension); b) the transformation of social relations (process dimension); c) and the empowerment dimension, as activation of actors and relationships to create participation and activation of local actors.

5.1 Content dimension: not just education

The innovative content of *Alteramente* experience lies in the double aim of supporting educational pathways and increasing social inclusion of Roma children.

The first target of the project are the children, who are supported in reinforcing their school curricula, improving their relationship with the school and with the whole city, growing their awareness of a precious double cultural identity and language. Giving them the possibility to spend some time out of the camp and from the very structured context of the school to make them better know the opportunities of the city have contacts with different people and overcome the segregation.

The second target of the project are the children as “future adults”. In the long period, the desired effect is to increase social mobility and the inclusion of Roma citizens in better jobs, positions and social relationships within society. The idea is that helping a child means helping a family:

“When the project will be finished, we hope it will go on having good effects in the camp. The children can transmit what they learn. They will be able to look at their little brother who is making homework and explain: - this is not the right way ...”
(interview to a voluntary involved in the project)

The third target are the camp and the city. Aiming at offering support to the children allows activating all actors that play different roles: their parents and teachers first of all, but also voluntaries, social assistants and others. In this sense, children become a sort of “key” to open new collaborations between the camp and the rest of the city. An example is an educational event on ecological topics to be realised in the camp: children are at the centre of this happening, the association of the camp will be involved in its organization, the teachers and voluntaries of the church and obviously, parents and other inhabitants of the camp will be invited to participate. It is an explicit strategy of *Alteramente* to build and reinforce networks into, from and to the camp, fighting prejudice and segregation, considering cultural diversity as a value and a skill, instead of a problem.

5.2 Process dimension: creating bridges to the camp and back

The project follows a bottom-up logic, after 7 years of study and action-research “*in the camp and with the camp*” (Focus group with *Alteramente* and its network). This phase of exploration has provided a solid base for the project.

First, it allowed the project to be grounded on knowledge and awareness. Students had the opportunity of knowing Roma culture and the camp’s organization (rules, roles, relationships, representatives) and be aware of their needs and strengths. They could individuate an emerging demand of education by parents and share with the community the project’s aims.

Second, it provided the preconditions to develop trust and solid relationships:

- Within *Alteramente* group, because its members could experiment their ability to collaborate for a long time, before establishing formally their association;
- Between *Alteramente* and the Roma community. The interviewees of the association consider the community’s trust as the main reason of the good results of the project;
- Between *Alteramente* and other local organizations working on the same or similar topics. This has been especially evident in the phase of implementation: what limited economic resources could not reach, was obtained by mobilising relationships, as for finding a room to realise the activities. As already highlighted, the attention for the children activates collaborations with other subjects interested in their wellbeing: their parents and their community, their teachers, but also social workers, pedagogues and psychologists of the municipality or volunteers of associations. The children catalyse much attention, energies and resources and stimulate networking.

Nevertheless, taking care of the network is still a core commitment for the association.

5.3 Empowerment dimension: changing the strategy of intervention

A multiple empowerment dimension can be highlighted in this project.

1) First of all, as already explained, the project is not just aimed at supporting children’s education but also their social inclusion. Proposing them to spend their afternoons out of the Camp is based on the intention to break their isolation and to give them the possibility of considering contacts and opportunities outside. The project aims to go beyond success in compulsory education:

“It will be satisfying if one of them could finish the secondary schools and go to the University. I will be fifty years old and all my hair will be white, but this is our bet. Because in the Camp there are not graduated people. But ... If you change these girls’ minds (...), if you propose these children a different perspective from having a husband and a child ... but school, experiences, going out of Lecce ...” (Interview to referents of *Alteramente*)

Belonging to a double culture and having two mother tongues is considered to be an asset for the children’s education pathways. This means to reinforce this knowledge and to promote these skills as competences to be spent in their education and life pathways, also outside the Camp and maybe outside the city.

2) Furthermore, *Alteramente's* strategy aims at encouraging all actors, i.e. Roma families, schoolteachers, referents of the municipality and other organizations in better collaborating and coordinating their common tasks and activities. Most prominently children's education.

"Seeing this improvement in just four months, you have the proof that he's not a disabled child or a child who cannot, but a child who simply needs to be supported as any other child. It is our commitment. It is the children's commitment. It is parents' commitment, who promise to be correct and send them always at school with their school supplies. It is schoolteachers' attention to put the books in their schoolbags, write the homework in their agendas and give us advices for the afternoon activities. (...) We see the positive effects on the children and on their relationships with their class group. That is because Roma children see they can reach the other students. They feel more confident and willing to attend school, to show their homework ..."
(Interview to referents of *Alteramente*)

Sharing the goal of improving children's education is considered an effective reason to encourage families in the Camp and the different actors involved (also from the Institutions) to envisage and share a common strategy.

The research conducted in the Camp (OPI 2010) argued the main strategy applied in contrasting school dropout was based on a sort of exchange/blackmail: families will be given economic support or their residence will be legalised if children will be going to school. *Alteramente* project breaks this logic and bases its intervention on: - an "alliance" with the Camp (built on reciprocal trust and knowledge and respect of Roma culture and the Camp organization) and - collaboration with other public and private organizations working on common aims (based on relationships, common tasks and a legitimation created by good results obtained by the project).

3) Finally, it is important to underline this project is financed by public funds aimed at contrasting unemployment and youngsters' social exclusion, a relevant issue in Italy and especially in the South of the Country. It is part of the regional Puglia Program *Principi Attivi*, aimed to encourage young entrepreneurs and support their participation in the labour market and in cultural, social, touristic, technological development of the local context. Those who are financed are the young women working in the project, helping them in the start-up of their own social enterprise and in having a fruitful work experience.

6 Institutional mapping and governance relations

Even though *Alteramente's* project has a local dimension the network collaborating to its implementation is broad and complex.

Figure 1 shows its configuration as emerged from desk analysis, interviews and focus groups.

Three layers of collaboration are identified:

a) The *operative* network, including *Alteramente* and the voluntaries of the Catholic Church in Surbo, concretely realising the afternoon activities dedicated to the children. The region, as the funding institution of the project, can be considered as part of this network;

b) The *active* network, including actors involved in the project with continuative complementary tasks: children's families and schoolteachers, the pedagogy expert and the

social assistant of the municipality; without this network, the project could not work and be effective;

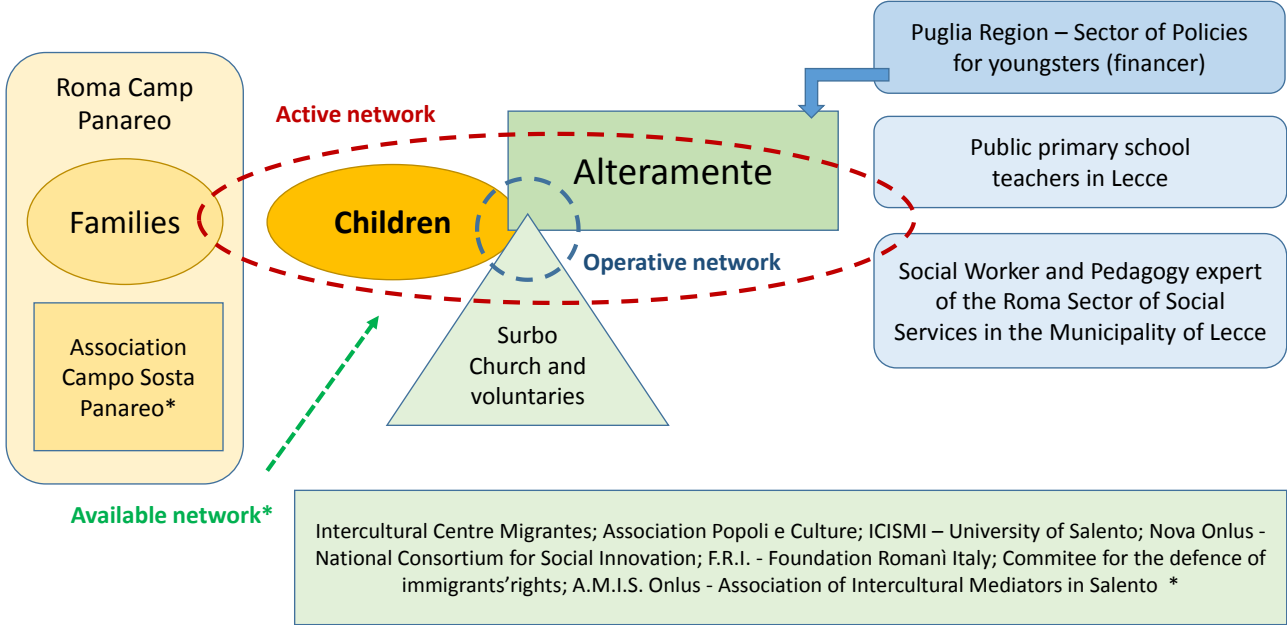
c) The *available* network, including organizations who are available to contribute to the project if requested; for example, the *Association Campo Sosta Panareo* (internal to the camp) will help *Alteramente* to organise an event in the camp, *Migrantes* and *Popoli e Culture* helped to find a room for the activities and furnished school supplies. Some of the organizations included in this network are national partners who can offer advice, know-how and information to a young association as *Alteramente* is.

The association is actually working in improving the second level of the network: the active network.

Next step in *Alteramente's* project is to create direct contacts between the teachers and children's families, an important relationship that has been mediated until now.

The relationship between *Alteramente* and Social Services was recently regulated by a formal agreement. It is a good step towards a solid relationship, but it does not include the school. This can be considered as a weakness: *Alteramente* and teachers have periodical meetings and calls on emergencies, but their relationship remains informal. Informal practices allow them to act in a quick and fluid operative way, but the risk is that lacking a key-actor (a teacher could change school, for example) a crucial link is lost, so the practice has to be rebuilt from zero. The formalization would also give the right value to the association and the teachers' efforts. The involvement of the school as formal institution would be the best option for the future of the project, but the principals have not been available to consider this possibility until now.

Fig. 1 – *Alteramente's* project: actors and relationships



Source: our elaboration from desk analysis, interviews and focus group

Summing up, *Alteramente's* project is strongly based on interpersonal networking. It has a small dimension: it is realised by a small group - the 4 members of the association and 15 volunteers of Surbo Church, supported by an external network - and addressed to 27 children of the Camp. The small and local dimension has helped to build reciprocal trust and to base professional relationships on personal relationships. The focus on "alliances" has consented to this social innovative experience to rise up and succeed. The collaborations and exchanges have gradually grown in the few months of the project's realization (10 months). Personal relationships consent a rapid activation on emergencies, fluidity on processes of intervention, finding integrative resources in a context where funding are limited.

The project is based on a reinterpretation of the concept of "resources". Regional funds have been obviously crucial in consenting the project's start-up, but they were limited, considering the aims to be achieved. They were integrated by other sources - whose access is consented by relationships - of goods (as a free room to realise the activities and school supplies), voluntaries and knowledge. The problem is to go on without at least a limited budget (the cost of 10 months of project was 25.000 €).

This is the main cause of the project's fragility, in the sense that its continuity is at risk. The funds for the start-up phase were public - regional - and aimed at stimulating social innovation in Puglia. As explained before, the local governance system is based on a partially-passive subsidiarity. What is lacking is a support to make the experience - even recognised as innovative and effective, as emerged by the interviews and focus group - go on, consolidate and grow up. It does not emerge any possibility for this project to be picked up by the welfare system and upscaling. The only step on this direction is the process to define a formal agreement on common practices to be signed by *Alteramente* and the Municipality of Lecce, which will reinforce their collaboration and recognise its value.

The possibility for this experience to be up-scaled or spread outside the local dimension is interesting to be discussed as an example of one of the most relevant problems of Italian welfare system for social innovation: fragmentation (Kazepov 2013; Oosterlynck 2013a, 2013b).

The small dimension can meet the need of satisfying local needs, emphasising local resources and consenting and valorising a relational approach. The strategy based on interpersonal collaboration, on the one hand, helped to realise the project with limited resources; on the other hand, it is part of its quality, as reciprocal trust and human care are probably good characteristic for any social intervention; and finally, it is crucial for the access and collaboration with the Camp. Its limits concern the potential future of the innovative experience: first, its possibility of spreading outside the local context, because personal specificities and relationships would have to be partially overcome; second, the possibility of its continuity in the medium-term, as the project is linked to *Alteramente's* few members' personal pathways and decisions.

7 The governance challenges

The following paragraph identifies the governance challenges to social innovation in *Alteramente's* experience. They are described as they emerged from the documents and the field research, using the ImPROvE definition.

7.1 Mainstreaming social innovation

This seems to be the main problem of the project. Even considering the good results recognised in the interviews and focus group by all the actors involved, the idea of mainstreaming, upscaling, spreading or, at least, giving continuity to the project remains difficult to be realised.

Both the main public institutions involved (as beneficiaries, in some way) in the project, public schools and municipality, have no intention to finance its follow up at the end of the regional funds. The interviewees and focus group participants argue that, on the one hand, this is due to scarce available resources, considering the emergencies created by the economic crisis, on the other hand, they underline that the topic of Roma integration is very controversial in the public debate and can rise conflict, thus it does not constitute a political priority (#6).

The association is oriented to the European funds, but aware that it isn't an automatic or immediate solution, considering that access is through a competition and that it takes several months (and resources) to design the project and then wait for the results of the competition and – eventually –obtain the funds. Probably the project will be suspended in the months following the end of the regional financing (July 2014) or will be continued in a reduced version with the only effort of volunteers until new resources will be available.

Since the first version of this report has been written the association has defined its strategy to make the project survive: a crowd funding campaign on the internet¹⁰. The target is 3.500 €, needed to pay the bus, the furniture for the classes and the compulsory insurance for the children and the volunteers. Roma families will contribute with 2 € per month per child and this is considered as a good sign of their appreciation. The program should be reduced: the activities will be carried out twice a week instead of three as in the previous edition. Members of the association will organise and carry out the different activities as volunteers. Until now (December 2014) about 90% of the cost has been covered thanks to private donations. No contribution has arrived from the public institutions and no mainstreaming process has been activated.

7.2 Governing welfare mix – avoiding fragmentation

Some of the interviewees argued that policies and interventions in Camp Panareo are often fragmented and incoherent. This is supposed to be due to weak coordination and collaboration among the public and private organizations working in this field. The perception, emerged in the focus group, is that the interventions on the Roma related issues (mainly targeted to public order, as the State keeps strong competences in this field) decided in a top-down logic, thus not adequate to the local specificities and often incoherent and contradicting the agreements shared at the local level. For example, a demand of leaving the camp has emerged among the Roma population, but public resources (they say one million euros at year) are still addressed to the camp's structures and services.

A local panel within the Prefecture is foreseen (Territorial Council on Immigration), including the topic of Roma, to discuss and share aims and interventions. Nevertheless, first, it is not convened by the competent authority; furthermore, the context (the Prefecture belongs to

¹⁰ See: <http://www.buonacausa.org/cause/andeskola>.

the Ministry of Interior) doesn't look really adapt to evidence and work on the social dimension of the issue, instead of treat it as a problem of public order.

The municipality is going to establish a panel on families and migration issues within the local social planning (*Piani di zona*), but actually it is not yet active.

In this context, what *Alteramente* could do was to build an operative network on Roma issues. As explained before, they built a three level network with many actors involved in the support to the project. It is a challenging aim and a work-in-progress, but some significant targets are actually reach.

On the one hand, the collaboration between *Alteramente* and the municipality is awaiting to be formalised by an agreement regulating the shared praxis. On the other hand, the relationships with the teachers are still informal, even though in these months, the operative meetings and contacts have been very frequent. Furthermore, other local organizations willing to organize and implement activities in the Camp asked *Alteramente* a mediation with the inhabitants to have access to their place.

The next step will be to create direct relationships between teachers and the children's families, because until now, the association has been considered as a sort of mediator between them.

Local third sector organizations have demonstrated a good sensitivity and capacity to activation in supporting a little new innovative project, as *Alteramente's* proposal: Surbo Church *in primis*, offering volunteers and a place where to realise the activities, and other associations working on migrants (*Migrantes* and *Popoli e Culture*), for example providing books and school supplies. As already observed, the resources activated by the relationships have replaced the limited financial resources.

The weakest link in terms of capacity of mobilising and contributing - appears to be public institutions: the (central state) schools and the municipality, even though formally belonging to the project's partnership, have taken their time to understand and appreciate it and their activation is recent and still partial. The central state administration has not a role in this experience. The only public institution playing an active role in promoting the project is Puglia Region, which financed its start-up.

7.3 Governing welfare mix – developing a participatory governance style

During the interviews, the members of the association underlined that the possibility of succeed in their aim is based on a long experience in the Camp, allowing them to build solid relationships with the Roma community and knowledge about Roma culture and everyday life. They highlight that their strategy based on reciprocal trust overcomes a diffused institutional strategy pushing Roma parents to send their children at school (or to fulfil other compliances) in exchange of social benefits or legalisation of their permanence in the camps (OPI 2010). The action-research gave them the possibility of listening and understanding the community, making emerge directly from the "voices" of the camp, its needs, desires, resources and potential solutions. The project submitted for funding to the region was defined through a consultation process carried out in the camp, family by family, on their ideas and requirements in order to allow the children participate to the foreseen activities.

The association of residents in Camp Panareo has been always informed and involved in the project. It was identified as a crucial actor from the beginning: it was involved in the research-action phase, it was included in the partnership of the project presented to the region in the competition for funds and it actually supports some of the association's activities (as the already described event on ecological topics to be realised in the camp). The collaboration between the two associations is strong and based on reciprocal trust and support.

Furthermore, one of the members of *Alteramente*, a Roma young woman living in the Camp, acts as a mediator within the project and this also helps the contact and collaboration with the community. As highlighted, she is considered as an example of a good social inclusion for the children, giving them the idea of a possibility of building a good life and job experience on the value of a double culture.

Some local associations willing to organize and develop initiatives involving Roma people asked *Alteramente* a mediation with the Camp, recognising them as a relevant actor in this field.

From the start of the project, the association has continuously searched for relationships with public and private organizations working on Roma issues. After a first moment of distrust, they could build an effective collaboration with the referents of local Roma Sector in Social Services and schoolteachers.

The next target to be reached for the *Alteramente's* members is to create direct relationships and reciprocal trust between Roma parents and schoolteachers, reducing and then eliminating their mediation.

7.4 Equality and diversity

The project applies a careful multicultural and relational approach, where the equilibrium between equality and diversity is crucial.

The afternoon activities are the best example of this approach: the children have the possibility to improve their competences in school subjects, but also to learn the importance of Roma culture, traditions, history and language. Their diversity is considered for its value, as part of a double culture, Italian and Roma, thus as a strength, instead of a problem. At the same time, the idea is promoting equal opportunities, improving their education pathways improving their competences on school programs.

The multicultural approach is complex and it has posed some boundaries to the project. The association decided, also due to limited resources, to concentrate the intervention on children attending primary school (6-11 years old). Even though some families and children attending lower secondary school (that is also compulsory in Italy) would have liked to be involved in the project (and this really means parents are willing to promote their children's education). This choice was also based on the consideration that the intervention on this group should be more complex, because Roma children who are about 12-14 years old are often considered as quite-adults, almost ready to get married and have their own children and family. Sometimes it is difficult for them to attend school: they feel they are no more children to be educated and they want to be considered as adults. Furthermore, their families often have already marriage plans and an idea of what job they want for them. This partially explains why the problems concerning drop out and repetitions of Roma children

are concentrated especially in the compulsory segment of lower and (first years of) upper secondary schools. Proposing education and different perspectives to children of this specific age group would have meant for the association to elaborate a different (and additional) project which might have risen conflicts with families and the community. Involving younger children means not just to respect Roma culture specificities, but also, at the same time, to start from the beginning to improve families and children's attitude toward education, hoping they chose to go on in school pathways, maybe by themselves or keep the contact with the association also after primary school. The project aims not at resolving but at preventing drop out and repetition problems diffuse among teenagers, giving younger children a different perspective on their own potential and on education.

7.5 Uneven access

The issue of equality and diversity (7.4) already highlights a problem of access, created by a combination of limited resources and cultural specificities which need to be taken into account.

Problems of uneven access exist but are not specific to this project, but to the way in which local and national social and educative policies and intervention on Roma issues are addressed in Italy.

The governance system and organization of institutional competences in social policies and in the education sector is fragmented and diversified. This fragmentation access to school and life opportunities is uneven for Roma children living in Italy as it depends on local characteristics (priorities, resources and networks) rather than on clear and common access criteria. Roma segregation, however, concerns many aspects of everyday life. The best example is the isolation of Camp Panareo from the rest of the city and the lack of public transportation, which poses many difficulties to the inhabitants (especially women, children and teenagers) to have access to job opportunities and basic services, for example health services, and to public spaces, as public libraries or parks. *Alteramente's* members have a clear vision of this problem and tried to break the segregation, realising their afternoon activities outside of the Camp, even not in Lecce as they wanted, and building and reinforcing relationships between Roma children and families and the world outside. The bus aims at overcoming the general problem of uneven access of the children to the territory where they live and its resources.

All 6-11 aged children of the camp access the project, but not all kids who might want to participate and which are from other age groups. Also Roma children from other camps cannot participate.

7.6 Avoiding responsibility

Public local institutions reacted differently towards *Alteramente's* innovative proposal. On the one side, it has to be noted that the project is financed through regional funds, so the source of investment consenting the start of the social innovative experience is public. On the other side, the municipality of Lecce appeared more sceptical toward the innovative proposal, especially at the beginning. Even though it formally belonged to *Alteramente's* partnership in the competition for the funds, the municipality did not support the

implementation of the project. For example offering a room where to carry out the foreseen activities with the children, as the association asked for. In general, the municipality devotes quite some attention to social issues concerning Roma population: local Social Services have a Roma Sector with dedicated professionals (a social worker and a pedagogue). These civil servants started a fruitful collaboration with the association, firstly on the children's needs, then on difficult cases and other problems concerning Roma people. Overcoming the initial distrust, they understood the project could be considered as a sort of "service for services", not just for Roma citizens or children: as they explained during the focus group, it could help them to better do their own job. Recently, the municipality has also start a process to formalise an agreement with *Alteramente* to regulate the common praxis: it will recognise the association's competences on Roma issues and its experience in the local community; it will formally establish the possibility of exchanging information, consulting on problems and coordinating their interventions on common cases. This is a further step in reinforcing their relationships and recognising the association's contribution in this field. What lacks is a contribution to give continuity to the project; this is at least partially due to the lack of funds, but probably also to the limited political interest for Roma issues, still a sensitive topic for public opinion.

Schools are beneficiaries of the project too, because the support to Roma children helps teachers to better work with classes and reach their targets. The two primary schools attended by Roma children were also part of *Alteramente's* formal partnership in the competition for the funds, but they could not support the implementation of the project. The principals were especially sceptical on the project, also motivating their attitude with a lack of resources for doing anything. By time, after the start of the activities with the children, teachers began to understand their effects on the students and on their own work and, during the focus group, they also asked about the possibility of increasing the commitment of the project. However, no formal protocols or agreements have been established between *Alteramente* and the schools. A formalisation could help to give continuity to the established practices and reinforce the relationships between the two organizations. The fact this formalization lacks increases the risk of losing what has been built in these months of common work: if a teacher is transferred, for example, the relationships and praxes have to be re-negotiated and re-built. The effect of the project on teachers and social services' professionals is to make them feel supported in their own tasks and start a collaboration with a new third sector resource. They (gradually) welcome the new strategy of intervention proposed by the association, based on mediation, trust and cultural respect.

Mainly for this reason, it cannot be said that public institutions have a totally passive attitude toward the project: social services' employees and teachers have a good relationship and an established collaboration with *Alteramente*. This cannot avoid the risk of ending what they all consider a good practice, not picked up by the welfare system. As already highlighted, what lacks is the availability of an active support allowing the project to be recognized both by the municipality and the schools. The lack of resources to be targeted to the project they claim being one of the main impediments.

Due to the economic crisis, increasing poverty and unemployment, and policies aimed at reducing public expenditure, public institutions select their priorities strictly, considering many emergencies and stakeholders. This is especially true for the South of Italy, where the territory is suffering particularly.

In this selection, Roma issues are unlikely to be considered a priority: an increasing part of the population lives in socio-economic uncertainties, thus to target resources and address them might be very unpopular. Roma are weak stakeholders in the public and political debate and they are definitely weak in the competition for resources.

Even this project is financed not through resources targeted to Roma people, but through a regional fund (*Principi attivi*) aimed to increase young peoples' employment and participation to local development, i.e. the members of the association (all young women) are formally the target of the policy.

7.7 Managing intra-organizational tensions

Before the project's start, some years of collaboration (in action-research) and contacts with Camp Panareo gave *Alteramente's* members the possibility to know each other and to build solid relationships and collaboration within their group and with the Roma community. Maybe this is a reason why no intra-organizational tensions were reported during the interviews and the focus group.

In the interaction among different organizations, the members of the association could not hide some disappointment for the lack of local support by public institutions, despite their work was appreciated all the professionals involved.

The participants to the focus group underlined some incoherence of public institutions' decisions on Roma issues: the top-down intervention, mainly based on the logic of public order, has sometimes contradicted the agreements shared at the local level (#2). This created tensions and distrust between the community and the third sector on the one hand and the public institutions on the other hand.

7.8 Enabling legal framework

The legal framework is weak in promoting Roma social inclusion through social and educative policies. The institutional competences are fragmented and this causes the isolation of an innovative experience that could be a potential good example for other contexts with similar problems. The absence of a super-local network restrains the diffusion of ideas and solutions.

In this conditions, improving the legal framework is a rather local issue (see #6): an agreement signed by *Alteramente* with the municipality to formalise their shared aims and practices is seen as a potential step forward for the project.

In conclusion, from the point of view of the ImPRovE project, the analysis of this case study rises-up many questions concerning social innovation. How can a social innovative experience, where personal relationships are crucial, be systematised to become part of a rational, homogeneous and equal welfare system, overcoming fragmentation? How to balance personal and professional relationships in upscaling or spreading social innovative experiences, considering they are both part of their quality? Is it possible that public institutions are financing start-up projects, but not assessing, identifying, supporting and systematising best practices and using them to improve the general welfare system? Are

there different strategies to better integrate innovative experiences within the welfare systems? Probably some of them can become grown up and go beyond the local dimension; others can modify and improve the consolidated system; others, like in the case here analysed, can follow a logic of best practices' transferability, keeping their small dimension as the best possible option for them. However, *Alteramente's* project is too "young" to foresee its possibility of diffusion: the actual question for its members concern securing funding to be able to carry on their activities.

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Appendix – The fieldwork

As established in the ImPRovE methodological paper on social innovation (Kazepov *et. al*, 2013), the field research aims, through a complex transdisciplinary and integrated methodology, to analyse the conditions influencing the rise of innovative experiences on poverty problems and their potential of mainstreaming in different welfare models. Following the established protocols and agreements 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 (e.g. reports of research about Camp Panareo, data furnished by *Alteramente*) 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 local policies and Roma community conditions in the framework where the project is realized (e.g. local social plans containing needs analysis, implementation programs and evaluation reports).
- 3 qualitative interviews involving: a) the four members of *Alteramente* association, as main referents of the project; b) a voluntary of Surbo Church collaborating in the afternoon activities involving the children; c) the pedagogic expert belonging to the Roma Sector of the Social Services in the municipality of Lecce. The interviews aimed at describing in depth the project, its genesis and potential, its organization and network, the characteristics of Roma community and its relationships with Roma context, the local policies concerning Roma children, their education and social pathways.
- A focus group involving 13 different actors: the four member of the *Alteramente*; a mother of some children involved in the afternoon activities; an expert on Roma issues from ICISMI-University of Lecce, who collaborated to the project design; a local referent of the association *Migrantes*; the social worker and the pedagogue of the municipality of Lecce, belonging to Roma Sector of Social Services; two schoolteachers from the two primary schools attended by the children involved in the project; two voluntaries of Surbo Church supporting the afternoon activities. The focus group aimed at go in deep on the analysis of the project, 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