"The case of *Centro Sociale Leoncavallo* as an example of social innovation"

Andrea Membretti
University of Pavia – Italy

A self-managed social centre coming from movements of the Seventies

■ The *Centro Sociale Leoncavallo* was born in 1975, in Milan, in a blue-collar district. It was a bottom-up response to a strong need of places for self-organisation of the people: the aim of the centre was to organise political activities, while offering social and cultural services to the neighborhood

■ Inspired by the leftist part of the social movements of the sixties/seventies, the centre was squatted in a post industrial building by an informal group of young people and founded on self-organisation: no hierarchy and assembly power were - and still are - the organisational principles of *autogestione*

■ After the partial distruction of the building by the Police in 1989, the centre was finally forced to leave its headquarter in 1994. A new post industrial site was found and has been illegally occupied till nowadays, also thanks to a sentence of the magistrature, that recognized the public utility and relevance of the centre and of its activities

■ A change in the leadership of the centre, combined with a growing consensus reached among different urban populations (students, intellectuals, unemploied people, ..), signed the beginning of a radical re-organisation: from a small group based on strong identity and ideology, Leoncavallo gradually moved to a network organisation (connecting also other socio-political actors), more pragmatic and capable to develope a variety of services and professional skills, even if keeping a strong political connotation

Photo: Archivio Leoncavallo

Towards a civic welfare?
New functions & a renewed role for the centre

■ Activities:

❑ Cultural services: concerts, theatre representations, art exhibitions, debates, bookshop/library

❑ Welfare services: free meals and hostel for migrants and for homeless, job information and orientation, legal assistance

❑ Polical activities: campaigns, demonstrations, network activities

❑ Media and information: radio, web-site, info-point, posters, documents

■ Some figures (2006):

❑ 4 associations inside the centre, with 1.400 associates
❑ 80 active members of the centre
❑ 36 paid workers
❑ 39 volountary workes
❑ 100.000 users/year
❑ a wide national and international network of associations and informal groups
❑ Leoncavallo Foundation

Leoncavallo 2008: spaces & services

Main entrance

Courtyard

Migrants hostel

Kitchen/self-service

Leoncavallo: a case study of Social Innovation in SINGOCOM project

- Why the case study?
  - To use the case study not as a demonstration of a theory, but mainly as a field of questioning to the theories (urban regeneration, social innovation, social economy, ..)
    - Attention to potentialities: case study as a situation of invention and discussion about the transformation of potentialities in resources
    - Case study as an element for comparison, with the aim to put in evidence the importance of contextuality (path dependence; resources/constraints)

  - To use the research process (and the related theories) as an opportunity for the actor studied to better understand its dynamics (reflexivity) and to help positive transformations (action-research)

Approach to the case study

■ Main dimensions considered:

- Organisational cultures and practices:

  "*organising is sensemaking*" (1)

- Spatial and territorial dimensions

- Service dimension

(1) K. Weick

Research methods and Techniques

■ To study the different dimensions of social innovation, and to gather data related to different populations (activists, users, supporters, ..) it was necessary to use a variety of research methods and thecniques

■ Method: action research
– personal engagement of the researcher (level of empathy/distance)
– definition of the potential benefits/risks for the actor studied coming from the envolvement into the research process
– activation of a mutual recognition between researcher and actor to be envolved (role of the brokers)
– mix between qualitative and quantitative approach

■ Techniques and situations/populations:
– active members:in-depth interviews
– human environment and spaces: participant observation (cultural events, assemblies, interaction between different populations, use of spaces,...)
– history and ideology:study of documents (reports, web, video/photo)
– users of the services: survey through questionnaire (sample)

Social Innovation:
a multi-dimensional concept

- The 3 dimensions of Social Innovation (1)
  analyzed in the case study (ALMOLIN frame):

  - ❑ Definition and satisfaction of human needs
  - ❑ Change within social relationships
  - ❑ Empowerment and participation

- 3 key-concept used in the case study as operational tools:
  - Social enterprise
  - Flexible institutionalisation
  - Autogestione (self-management)

(1) F. Moulaert et al.

Definition and satisfaction of human needs

❑ Key-concept: *Social (and political) enterprise*

    ❑ relevance of practices (enterprise as acting, not as actor)

    ❑ shift from expression of, and response to individual needs (culture, welfare, ..) to collective definition/response to these needs

        ❑ from passive satisfaction (dependence of welfare state; consumerism of market) to active construction of processes (claim for rights: political sphere)

    ❑ re-embedding (and reconceptualisation) of economics in social relationships (1)

        ❑ reciprocity, refuse of monetarisation, economics as field of innovation (not costs, nor profit, but resource to produce social capital)

    ❑ development of capabilities (2)

(1) K. Polanyi
(2) A. Sen

Change within social relationships
(inside and in relation to the outside world)

❑Key-concept: *Flexible institutionalisation*

   ❑ adaptation to external environment

      ❑ organizational mimesis (associations, foundation)

      ❑ use of public institutions (municipality, Parliament)

      ❑ networking (horizontal and vertical)

   ❑ dialectis between movement and institution (1)

      ❑ consolidation of repertoires of action

      ❑ tension between institutional frames and informal processes

      ❑ use of conflict to redefine the position in public arena

   ❑ public space of proximity (2)

      ❑ introvert/extrovert (local/global)

      ❑ Connecting community/ies to society (and individuals to community and to society), mixing different socio-spatial frames

(1) F. Alberoni

(2) J.- L. Laville

Empowerment and participation

- Key word: *Autogestione (self-management)*
  - informality
    - lack of (formal) hierarchy
    - lack of fixed roles
    - assembly power

  - reflexivity (recoursive processes)

  - different level of participation
    - decentralisation
    - strenght of weak ties (1)

  - empowerment
    - development of capabilities
    - recognition of individuals as citizens owners of rights

(1) M. Granovetter

Building citizenship as an innovative service

Social innovation in Leoncavallo case study:

a process of glocal production of active citizenship,
through a socially innovative management
of services and spaces,
towards the emerging of a public, flexible institution