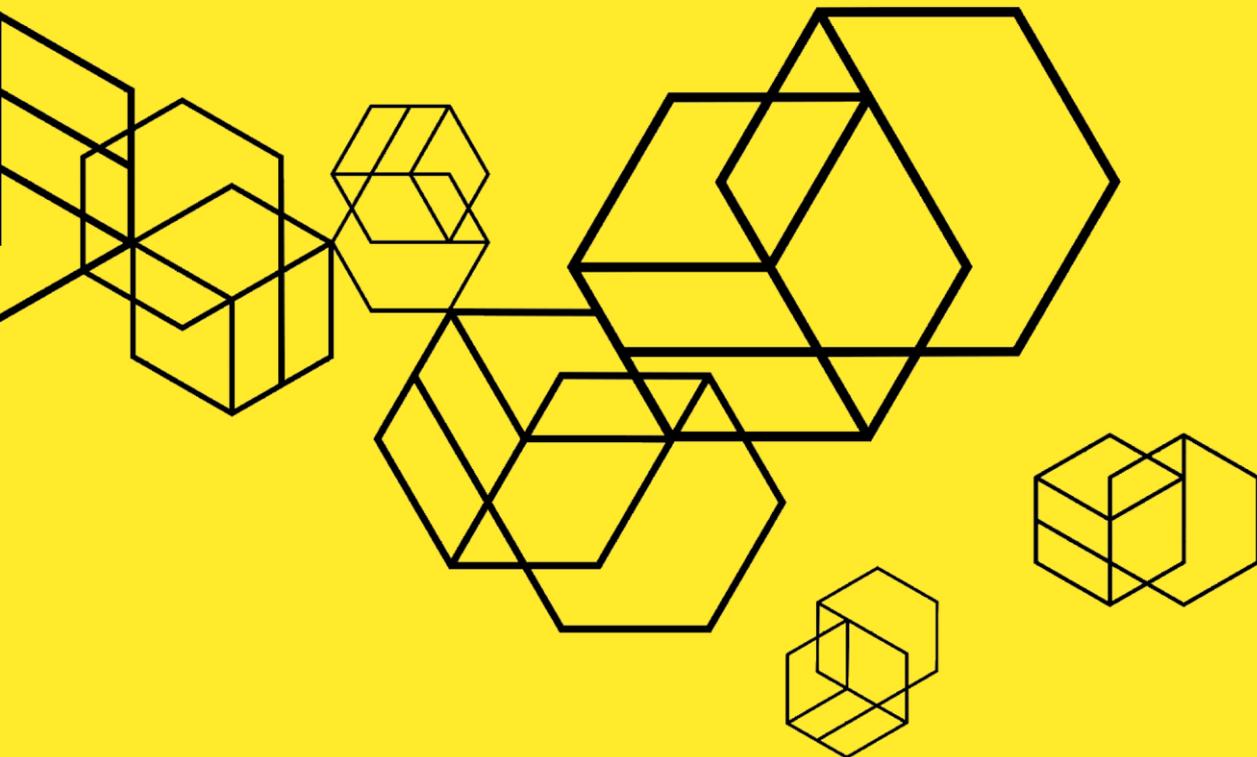




**SOCIAL
INNOVATION
COMMUNITY**

***Co-designing
welfare in Brescia:
out with tenders,
in with
collaboration***

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Co-designing welfare in Brescia: out with tenders, in with collaboration

ABSTRACT

The Italian city of Brescia is facing a growing welfare challenge similar to other European cities: a rising ageing population met with low fertility rates, a high percentage of NEETs and a growing, younger immigrant population in need of integration. To respond to this problem, the Deputy Mayor of Welfare, supported by the city's administration, decided to implement a new vision of welfare provision for the city, in which the Public Administration is no longer the sole provider but rather the promoter and supporter of the system of actors in place. To implement this vision, tenders for welfare services were replaced with calls for accreditation, eliminating competition and favoring collaboration in welfare production. The process now calls for all actors to co-create, co-design and co-produce welfare along with the Public Administration and thus be co-responsible for city-wide wellbeing.

A NOT SO UNIQUE EUROPEAN CITY SETTING

Brescia, the second largest city in the Italian region of Lombardy, is facing many problems common to many European cities: a rising elderly population in contrast with low fertility rates, emerging welfare needs and shrinking public budgets. Brescia has a population close to 200,000 inhabitants within its city limits, of which for every 100 young persons under the age of 14, there are 118 elderly persons (Comune di Brescia, 2018, p. 16). The population consists of about 95,000 families, of which single member families are on the rise, with elderly women, single households making up the majority (ibidem, 2018, p. 16). The immigrant population is contrasting the demographic crisis by keeping the population younger; nevertheless, the ageing population will constantly require more and more care and assistance from the city's welfare services in the future (ibidem, 2018, p. 15). Furthermore, the NEET category is also a big problem in the city with 8% of families having at least one individual out of work and not in school under 35.

Five years ago, in 2013, the Deputy Mayor of Welfare for the city of Brescia, Felice Scalvini, supported by the newly elected Mayor, Emilio del Bono, decided to bring in a new vision to the planning of welfare services and its supporting infrastructure. At the beginning of his term, it was estimated that the annual expenditure on welfare services amounted to €130 million, of which €29 million was spent by the city and €30 million came from regional subsidies (Scalvini, 2017). The remaining ~€70 million came instead from private citizens in the form of co-payments, salaries for caregivers and fees for



private services (ibidem, 2017). These numbers exclude the value coming from volunteer services and other philanthropic resources. From this picture, it was quite clear to the Deputy Mayor and the administration that the city's welfare services were only partially offered by public social services, and that that the economic burden was mostly covered by private citizens and other actors from the third sector. The producers of welfare, on top of the Public Administration (PA) include third sector organizations, individual providers, families and caregivers. In fact, according to the most recent Social Balance, there are 321 welfare producers other than the city and 761 services/products/programs available (Comune di Brescia, 2018, p. 20).

A CHANGE IN PERCEPTION: WELFARE AS A COLLABORATIVELY PRODUCED ASSET

Therefore, the vision of the city's role in the provision of welfare had to change from one of being perceived as the sole provider of welfare services to being one actor in a plurality of actors working in a productive, "industrial" district of welfare. In other words, the municipality had to become a promoter of local resources, able to track and monitor what resources were available and to coordinate and conduct them in the most efficient and effective way possible towards a shared and co-created vision of "universal" wellbeing. This change in role or rather field of action had to be understood and assimilated not only by the PA but also by the other actors involved.

To act on this insight, the city decided to promote a vision of the city as an incubator of services for universal welfare, with the PA as leader and supporter of the city's wellbeing district. The decision was thus made to stop tenders in the area of welfare and activate a process of accreditation; thereby interpreting in a different and perhaps more literal way Article 118 of the Italian Constitution that charges the PA to "promote autonomous, citizen initiatives, whether individual or in association, that develop activities of general interest on the basis of the principle of subsidiarity". Welfare, in the words of Scalvini, "isn't bought based on price" (Stinco & Marcante, 2015), so the idea of creating tenders that put welfare providers in competition with each other for the lowest price wasn't the most logical strategy. It furthermore put actors – mainly social cooperatives – who weren't born to compete but rather collaborate in a situation that distorts their nature and in doing so broke down the potential for a real community of welfare providers. By eliminating the tenders and thus the competition between actors, all working to promote general interest, the city can amplify the number of resources available and with which to plan a holistic approach to social services in the city. The process was thus transformed from the traditional call for tender to a call for accreditation.

FROM COMPETITION TO COLLABORATION

The first step towards this happened in 2016 with the establishment of the Council of Citizen Welfare along with 5 new Territorial Social Services Branches that covered the whole city. The council was composed of actors coming from all sectors, representing interests coming from all stakeholders to



allow for a more fruitful and constructive discussion and more strategic planning. The 5 new branches were fundamental in creating bridges between the territorial offering and the city-wide strategic vision.

One of the tasks of the Council is to design the call for accreditation. The call is used to collect interest from actors willing to adhere to the new vision and co-create and co-design the way forward. The call also establishes the need to be addressed and the fixed budget that can be spent and the minimum requirements that must be met. Once the candidates have been established, they work together to create a unified proposal that meets the social need and makes use of the budget available and the resources they can each contribute. Once the proposal has been accepted, a co-design process begins, which lasts for about a month to a month and a half, in which what can be done together in a long-term timespan of at least 3 years is defined. Once this process is done and the plan approved, the accreditation process begins. The accreditation process opens up the number of actors responding to a social need to a much larger number. This gives citizens more choice in their care provider and allows for a more concerted and variegated response from the supply side, ensuring that a larger number of even more specific social needs are met. In fact, the number of public-supported services used has increased since 2013, while the public budget for welfare has remained relatively the same over the years. The amount of money, however, recuperated through co-payments has decreased causing the overall public expenditure to increase by 1.2% since 2013 (Comune di Brescia, 2018, p. 79).

The new process of outsourcing services to the third sector through mechanisms of collaboration rather than competition is furthermore strongly associated and in line with the new Code of the Third Sector, passed on July 3rd, 2017, and came into effect on August, 3rd of the same year. This is quite clear from the very first article, which states the objective of the Code: “to support the autonomous initiative of citizens that work, also in associative forms, to pursue the common good, to elevate the levels of active citizenship, inclusion and the full development of the person, to valorize potential growth and employment and to implement the Articles 2, 3, 4, 9, 18 and 118, comma 4, of the Constitution” (DL 117/2017, art. 1). Particularly relevant to the actions taken by Scalvini and the city of Brescia is what was clarified in Art. 55, which is directly in line with the principles of subsidiarity delineated in Art. 118, comma 4, not only allowing but defining the relationship between the PA (national, regional, municipal, etc.) and private citizens who pursue the general interest as being one of mutual support, in which the latter are to be supported and promoted by the former (Scalvini, 2018, p. 265-266). Furthermore, the new Code makes it the responsibility of the PA to activate processes of co-creation, co-design, partnerships and accreditation measures, which are listed in the Code as tools to support the implementation of subsidiarity actions. Lastly, an important shift is also the leveling of the playing field concerning welfare providers: the PA is no longer to be seen as the sole provider responsible for the general interest, but is rather one of many actors working towards the same goal. Public sector organizations and third sector organizations are now equal, while still maintaining their distinct characteristics and roles. The reform marks an interesting moment of transition for the welfare system in Italy and the experimentation being done by Brescia, who in a way anticipated the reform, provides



an interesting and important model for how the reform can be implemented.

BRESCIA, THE CITY OF “WE”

The project, “Brescia città del noi” (Brescia, city of ‘we’), financed by the Cariplo Foundation, was launched in May 2016 to help the municipality implement their vision. The project is led and coordinated by the city of Brescia in partnership with Auser Brescia, Cooperativa Co.Libri, Centro Studi Socialis, Università Statale di Brescia e Università Cattolica di Brescia. The project’s main goal is to create a new infrastructure for welfare in the city that includes not only public sector organizations but third sector and citizen activities as well and by doing so reconfigure the roles and relationships installed between the various actors around the shared goal of creating wellbeing in the city. The 3-year project started in 2016 and has already seen a lot of progress. In the first year, the project partners mapped the welfare services and activities offered in the city ([accessible online](#)) and were able to map 433 organizations, of which the majority was associations. In the second year, the project was able to work closely with the five Territorial Social Service Branches to conduct 33 workshops (done using a world café format), one in each of the city’s districts, to share the project goals and the transformations that the Deputy Mayor and the city were making to change and improve the city’s welfare response. This action strengthened the number and quality of relationships between the Territorial Branches, the District Councils and the Community Points in the zone. The Community Points are another output of the project. Their goal is to promote and coordinate the local resources at the citizen’s disposal and facilitate informal help from the local community. The Points serve to: 1) welcome and listen to users; 2) inform and orient the user to the different services available; 3) distribute forms that need to be filled out and if necessary, help them meet with the local Center for Fiscal Assistance for aid in correctly filling out certain forms; 4) help fill out forms and requests for services; 5) help with grocery shopping, assistance getting to medical visits and social gatherings; and 6) provide company through at-home visits. At the moment, there are 14 Community Points but the goal is to have one in each district for a total of 33.

FUELING CO-RESPONSIBILITY

The transformations to the welfare system carried out to date by the city of Brescia are quite inspiring, not only for their novelty, but also for the changes brought about on the systemic level. The abolishment of calls for tenders and the implementation of a new, holistic vision of welfare provision implemented through the installment of calls for accreditation didn’t change the roles of each actor but rather how they were perceived and understood, calling for and working on a more active relationship between the PA, the Third Sector and private citizens. This vision changed the way each actor worked, both in terms of operational procedures but also in terms of expectations and working rapport. Creating this change, required a lot of discussion and empowerment of certain actors. Third Sector actors were often not used to or prepared to take part in strategic planning, as well as cooperating with other similar actors. In summary, each actor was empowered during the process to be responsible for more than just their own role, but to be responsible also for the bigger picture and system at hand.



The “Zero Tender” experiment being done by Brescia in their welfare services is an important example of how social innovation actors can support the public sector in responding to current and emerging welfare needs of citizens and highlights the importance of having a robust ecosystem of actors working to satisfy social needs and promote the common good. This requires a visionary PA, willing to experiment with new ways of doing things. Having this not only strengthens and incentivizes the existing supply but could also encourage and catalyze different and new responses. While more work still needs to be done, the case of Brescia sets an example for other cities who are struggling with similar challenges.

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