

Discovering new strategies for welfare processes: social actors, policies and practices

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Abstract

To explain the welfare processes' morphogenesis we need heuristic categories, to interpret the present context featuring increasing complexity, multidimensionality of social needs, plurality of social actors. Social partnerships, social capital and good practices are there examples of such new interpretative categories.

A quantitative research carried out in Italy on 110 multilevel third-sector organizations highlights the existence of practices that are innovative with reference to networking processes and social partnerships, presence of social capital, quality of the relationships between different stakeholders (state, market and third sector) and the modality they use to meet needs in services and activities (practices).

A logistical regression analysis to identify the impact of the welfare enacted by these practices was realized.

1. Introduction

Third sector organisations are becoming increasingly important in the realm of contemporary welfare arrangements thanks to their ability to address the current multiform needs and to introduce innovation in the offer of services, with the goal of providing an adequate and effective answer to ever more complex needs (Anheier, Rossi, Boccacin 2008; Osborne 2008). In this connection, there are three interpretative categories that will be referenced in the following pages: social partnerships, social capital and good practices (Boccacin 2014).

The conceptual framework based on these three key-concepts offers a scientific background for a quantitative research study carried out in 2009 in Italy on 110 nationally-based pro-social associations and multilevel organizations belonging to the third sector.¹

2. The first key-concept: social partnership

The term “partnership” refers to a structural configuration characterised by equal collaboration between third sector organizations, local public agencies and market enterprises, founded on reciprocal relations, in which resources, capabilities, and risks are shared for the realisation of a multidimensional project not achievable by any of the individual entities (Newman 2001; Boccacin

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¹ The quantitative investigation entitled “Nationally-Based Pro-social Associative Networks and Social Capital” is situated within the Prin-Cofin national project (2007-2009) entitled, “Societal Networks, Social Capital, and Valorisation of Public Goods” directed by Pierpaolo Donati of the University of Bologna. The investigation presented here was carried out by a team from the Department of Sociology at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan, directed by Giovanna Rossi and coordinated by Lucia Boccacin. The collection of data, of a quantitative type, was carried out between June, 2009 and October, 2009 through the administration of an online semi-structured questionnaire.

2009; 2015). Such a project, connecting skills, know-how, and relational networks, aims to contribute to the creation of goods of public utility. (Rossi and Boccacin 2007).

The itinerary that led to the refinement of this definition started from a conception of partnership understood as a relational intertwinement and moved beyond reductionist meanings that understood it as a simple involvement or interaction among agencies and entities from different spheres and sectors with heterogeneous areas of expertise ².

Thus, partnership is not a simple collaboration between two or more entities, but is something that goes beyond this, putting into relations the identities, in addition to the specific know-how, of the various social subjects (Boccacin 2005). It bases the different partners' remaining together on a context of trust and reciprocity which makes it possible to realise relations aimed at a specific social action (Powell and Geoghegan 2004), thus moving well beyond the presence of a merely instrumental goal. Wherever social partnerships are constituted and active with such characteristics, they can generate a distinctive added value.

The relational definition of the concept of partnership (Boccacin, Rossi and Bramanti 2011) is founded on the free intentionality of the different subjects -- third sector actors (volunteer organisations, social cooperatives, pro-social associations, pro-social foundations), public entities, and private organisms -- to act collaboratively in accordance with a status of relational parity, which does not entail erasing the partners' diversity, however, but involves specifically identifying and then valorising each one's subjectivity.

From the same perspective, Dekker qualifies partnership as a deliberate cooperative relationship characterised by mutual trust and respect that lasts over a prolonged period of time. Dekker (2010) defines partnership as a method for cooperative action founded on a commitment that is freely and mutually accepted by different actors positioned on the same level.

Mixed formulas, which carry out strategic intermediary functions in which responsibilities are shared, give rise to cooperation among different social actors through which they agree to work conjointly in order to achieve a specific goal (Bennett and Krebs 1991).

The realisation of new forms of cooperation among the public, private, and voluntary sectors heralds a sort of trans-sectorial intertwinement that represents something new in the panorama of contemporary societal configurations.

An additional distinctive trait of social partnerships illuminated by the relational definition of this concept has to do the realisation of partnerships in relationship to the sharing of goals by the different partners (Boccacin, Prandini and Terenzi 2016). In this connection, partnership is

² For a reconstruction of the sociological debate regarding the concept of partnership, see Boccacin (2009; 2014).

understood as «a cross-sector, inter-organisational group, working together under some form of recognised governance, towards common goals which would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to achieve if tackled by any single organisation» (Armistead, Pettygrew and Aves 2007, 214).

Likewise, some scholars underscore that the mutualistic input of different contributions as regards financing, human resources, etc. allows for the realisation of a shared project. Moreover, they emphasise that the specificity of social partnerships lies, first of all, in their being a common cause and a relation among a plurality of subjects, making it possible to achieve a shared result and, secondly, in the identification of a collective actor which, with a view to social change, introduces diverse and pertinent modalities of action with respect to a shared and complex object. The objectives pursued by partnerships, whose multidimensional nature allows for a flexible approach in responding to social needs (Hardiman 2006; Kazepov 2005), can be understood as a sort of listening to the local community's interests' need for representation. The pooling of coordinated strategies in order to achieve this (Besse *et al.* 2010) makes possible experimentation and innovation in responses through the realisation of participatory practices, on the part of citizens as well (Petrella 2004).

Thus, actors come from different societal spheres and coalesce around a common agenda and organisational programme (Loncle-Moriceau 2000), bringing with them their diverse experience, attitudes, and interests. They inject into partnerships their different cultures, values, and approaches to needs, in this way contributing to the dynamism within the partnership, facilitating the pursuit of a shared understanding of social problems and, sometimes, allowing the partners to move away from defending their heterogeneous interests toward identifying a common interest of an inter-subjective type.

Like many polysemic concepts, that of partnership risks ambiguity and ambivalence both in terms of definition, in light of the meaning that each cultural context tends to emphasise (Corcoran 2006; Damon 2009), as well as in terms of application, owing to different operative configurations present in various European countries.

Several elements allow us to better characterise this ambivalence: these are social partners' unequal capacity to influence political outcomes (Murray 2006) and asymmetries between partners, whose codes of action are sometimes based on different presuppositions.

The State's bureaucratised and centralised strategies (Powell 2007), or plain and simple marketing strategies, can confine third sector organisations within subordinate and residual positions as regards their participation in the final decision making process.

One additional source of ambivalence that can connote partnerships' internal relational dynamics has to do with the diversity of organisational cultures that often characterises the entities involved and leads them to identify dissimilar and heterogeneous strategies for solving problems.

Even considering these non-linear tendencies in some contexts, the configurations in partnerships represent innovative forms of interaction between the macro-level (social interactions between sectors and institutions), the meso-level (interactions between formal, informal, or hybrid organisations), and the micro-level (interactions between individuals in their respective organisations), which cut across different intervention sectors (Seitanidi and Crane 2009) by interweaving cross-sectionally, through innovative collaborative modalities, each partner's own organisational resources and capacities.

The more the partners maintain their own specific identity and are open both to the expansion of networking through the inclusion of new subjects and to variation of the existing relational arrangement, the more useful and efficacious these configurations turn out to be.

It is just such a morphogenetic capacity that represents a qualifying trait that captures partnership forms in the process of becoming as well as in their outcome (Archer 2010).

Pointing in an analogous direction is thinking that highlights partnerships as relational contexts within which "generative" exchanges can take place. Generativity is understood here as a possible outcome of the different actions carried out within the realm of partnerships: by disseminating good practices, it can inject a virtuous process into the delivery of original, innovative, and creative services.

3. The second key-concept: social capital

Social capital is a complex and multidimensional concept and has been a focus in sociological thinking with respect to its dimensions and the differentiation of its forms (Castiglione, van Deth and Wolleb 2006; Rossi and Boccacin 2006a; Donati and Colozzi, 2011).

Social capital has been used as a concept synonymous with association, synthesising a series of dimensions that foster civic associations (Wollebaek and Selle 2002). This thinking correlates social capital with collective cultural traditions or civic cultures belonging to a specific community or territory (Burt 2005; Lewandowski 2008); such cultures aim to promote associative cooperation among members residing in a particular geographic area; social capital, analysed from the perspective of the collective or community structure that determines subjects' individual agency (Van der Gaag and Snijders 2005; Lin and Erickson 2008), can be traced back to the concept of secondary associative social capital (Donati 2007).

By the relational approach, social capital consists of the ability to create cooperative relations and networks based on relations of trust in order to pursue a common good (Donati and Colozzi 2011). It is thus not only a competitive advantage for the individual who “uses it and consumes it,” and/or for society, which must count on it to regenerate itself as a society: it is also a good in itself that can be seen simultaneously: (a) from the standpoint of the individual, as a resource the individual uses for his or her action, and (b) from the standpoint of society, as a web of relations that constitutes the communal world (Donati 2007).

It became mainstream to associate the notion of social capital with that of social network and, later, with that of partnerships: using the notions of bonding and bridging networks, a distinction between bonding and bridging social capital was introduced.

Both strong and weak bonds play a fundamental role within networks in creating social capital (Koniordos 2005), and each needs the other in order to achieve desired objectives. From this perspective, social relations are seen as a determinant factor for promoting personal and social well-being. The propensity and capacity to cooperate as expressed by the members of a community can significantly influence social development in a given geographical area: indeed, social capital is understood as a crucial factor for the development of a community (Rossi and Boccacin, 2011).

As to multilevel organizations of a pro-social type, which are the object of this investigation, social capital can characterise three different phases of associative life and, as a consequence, can be embodied in different forms (Tronca 2007; Donati and Solci 2011). In the first phase, social capital is often present at the association’s origin, which effectively constitutes its foundation according to modalities that are coherent with inputs and external feedbacks. In a second phase, social capital is intrinsic to the organization, which, by definition, is constituted by a series of relations that generate networks both vertically - hierarchically - as well as horizontally between levels that are equal among themselves.

In the third phase, social capital is the product of the association: it is the public good that the association generates or that can sometimes circulate in the sphere of partnerships. Thus, we infer that social capital is both *explanans* and *explanandum* -- origin and product of the association -- and, at the same time, that it carries out a fundamental function within the organization itself, allowing the different levels to remain connected and integrated.

When it is present, social capital constitutes a fundamental element that permeates and accompanies the life of multilevel pro-social organizations in which trust represents a very peculiar “object” in that it is an asset put into play both internally, among the different levels and places of coordination, and externally, as regards those who benefit from the organization’s services as well

as the subjects which we could define as stakeholders. Trust thus emerges as a relational good, as the nature and foundation of the relations.

Reciprocity is a form of exchange in which the subject is aware that in giving something, he/she will receive something in exchange, not in purely economic terms -- the problem is not the equivalence of the goods involved -- but, rather, through an empowerment of the relation itself, which becomes stronger and increases its generative surplus.

Finally, a cooperative orientation constitutes the engine for the entire service activity carried out within the relations characterising associative environments.

Considering the differentiation of the diverse functions carried out by both bonding and bridging social capital and the consequent forms that it assumes, it becomes possible to clarify, in the specific context of multilevel organizations (Putnam 2003; Woolcock 2001), what role trust, reciprocity, and a cooperative orientation play within them and what forms their interaction assumes.

4. The third key-concept: good practices

The concept of good practices has entered the language of social policy, to indicate a concrete benchmark of reference in social intervention evaluation. It refers to concrete experiences of flexible, networked and personalised services chosen to address social needs.

The term “good practices” becomes an interesting construct on the international level in the passage from the experimental phase of innovative projects to the strategic decision to finance, through project structural funds, the capillary diffusion of promotional and developmental interventions. It becomes necessary, therefore, to have available shared criteria for the selection and evaluation of projects. In the European sphere, this work has been carried out by numerous commissions, the best known of which is the European Commission for structural funds, which has proposed the ambitious undertaking of homogenizing the concepts underlying the planning, implementation and evaluation phases of projects at an international level.

The use of the term “good practice” goes hand in hand with the concept of best practice (which evokes characteristics of exceptionality typical of innovative phases), thus including a reference, albeit implicitly, to its realizability, reproducibility and sustainability. In recent years, the European Commission Mainstreaming Working Group has introduced a further concept, promising practice, to indicate a practice that has in itself the potential to become a good practice.

The problem thus arises of defining the empirical criteria with which to identify good practices.

Two paths have been followed:

(1) The evidence based criteria (coming from the health care sector); empirically documented on

the basis of demonstrable scientific evidence and applied for the most part in socio-sanitary border territories;

(2) The identification of specific criteria in individual project areas that give rise to a multitude of dossiers and guidelines produced by national and international organisms.

Many organisms produce operative indications to help political decision makers select actions to support. According to UNESCO, for example, “good practices are innovative if they present new and ‘creative’ solutions to the problems of poverty and social exclusion and produce a positive and tangible impact in improving the living conditions of individuals, groups, and communities; if they contribute in terms of sustainability to eliminating poverty and social exclusion; if they are potentially reproducible, that is, they provide models for promoting politics and initiatives in different environments from those for which they were created” (UNESCO/Council of Europe, 2001).

Analytical indicators regarding innovativity, efficacy, efficiency, sustainability, reproducibility, transferability, are present in a vast amount of studies of a national and international character, that allows to respond to this question, as simple as it is crucial: “good with respect to what?”

(1) Good because involved in its realization are a plurality of actors -- public, private and of third sector -- that oversee the activity and assure that it conforms to quality parameters of a communitarian rather than private stamp;

(2) Good because it produces social cohesion and strengthens, in the communities in which it is produced, the stakes in sociality, that is, the willingness to form relations and act cooperatively;

(3) Good because it works with the social sphere to confront problems and develop collective projects to do away with discrimination, oppression and inequality, which create hardship for individuals and communities (Houston 2001).

5. Hypothesis, research questions and sample

The conceptual framework based on these key concepts offers a scientific background for a quantitative research study carried out in Italy on 110 nationally-based pro-social associations and multilevel organizations belonging to the third sector.

Nationally-based pro-social associations in Italy conduct non-profit activities through actions inspired by altruism, giving, equity, reciprocity, and attention and care for others; they include among their goals the promotion and strengthening of relational networks of solidarity. From the legal standpoint, the reference is Law 7 of December, 2000, n. 383, “Regulation of pro-social associations,” which states in article 2, I comma:

«Recognised and not recognised associations, movements, groups, and their coordinations and confederations constituted for the purpose of conducting activities of social utility in favour of associates or third parties without a profit motive and with full respect for the associates' freedom and dignity are considered to be pro-social associations».

This is a broad definition in which it is possible to include multiple associative forms that vary in relation both to the context in the sphere in which they operate as well as to the inner nature of their goals and modalities of action (Wollebaek and Selle 2002). As regards associations' spheres of action, we find an abundant offering of interventions that range from child care, training, health, and social welfare services to activities pertaining to sports, art, scientific research, civil and environmental protection, consumer protection, the safeguarding of human rights and human welfare, and, more in general, social integration.

The hypotheses that guided the investigative work can be summarised in two questions. The first, of a descriptive nature probes the forms of both the bonding and bridging social capital that is generated and put into circulation by the nationally-based pro-social associations considered as multilevel organizations. The second question, of an explicative nature, has to do with the connection between forms of social capital and organizations' propensity to establish formalised relations – partnerships - with different subjects. This second point represents a specific finding of the investigation under consideration and concerns both the identification of formalised networks in which the associative organisms under study are involved as well as the societal significance of such processes in terms of their results in the form of practices produced. The synergy realised in partnerships is positioned at the point of origin of an organizational and social process that extends over time: in this way, the configuration of partnerships understood exclusively as an action of mere contingent exchange between parties is superseded by a medium to long term temporal perspective that often assumes broader social significance.

The sampling technique used is of a non-probabilistic type in that the subjects constituting the universe do not have the same probability of becoming part of the sample. In fact, the very nature of the associations studied and the lack of universalistic sources does not allow for the use of a random sampling procedure of a probabilistic type. Data collection for the research regards the apical levels of the organisations, i.e., the associations' national or coordinating headquarters.

The questionnaire, with its 57 questions, was administered online and refers to four thematic macro-areas: the first section has to do with the organisation's structural data. The second section focuses on the establishment and the consolidation of the associative processes currently underway. The third section considers the organisational dimension, the services, the practices and activities offered, the services recipients, the articulation of internal relations, and the levels of coordination

present in them. The fourth section is aimed at exploring the organisations' openness to the outside and their networking capacity.

6. A socio-structural profile of the multilevel associations

The activities offered by the organizations analysed cover a vast array of services, some of which are provided only on a central level, some only on a local level, and some on both levels, as shown in the following Tab. 1:

ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN	ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN AT CENTRAL LEV. %	ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN AT LOCAL LEV. %
Health care	6.4	15.5
Socio-sanitary	20.0	28.2
Social welfare	29.1	46.4
Educational	38.2	54.5
Training	62.7	57.3
Cultural and artistic	0.0	29.1
Specific to coordination	69.1	20.9
Recreational and/or sports	14.5	34.5
Protection of rights	46.4	34.5
Work orientation	5.5	10.9
International development	32.7	16.4
Environmental defence/ promotion	13.6	16.4
Sensitisation	68.2	50.0
Research	34.5	12.7
Information / updates	74.5	50.9

Tab. 1 – Organizations according to activities undertaken on both a central and local levels (line percentages -- absolute reference value 110).

The table shows the specificity of actions carried out by the central or national headquarters, realised as activities of coordination (69.1%) and updates and information (74.5%), as well as by local offices, which are characterised more by interventions related to training (57.3%), education (54.5%), information and updates (50.9%), and social welfare (46.4%).

The sample includes third sector multilevel organizations that offer human services in a broad sense. Taking into account this breakdown of the intervention sectors, it is possible to contextualise the users of the associations under study.

The recipients of these services are mostly minors, the elderly, and the disabled (Tab. 2) while, considering the organizations on the basis of the predominant user typology, the finding of an undifferentiated clientele assumes more importance (29.0%).

RECIPIENTS OF ACTIVITIES	RECIPIENT TYPOLOGY	PREDOMINANT TYPOLOGY (A.V. 107)
	Line %	Column %
Minors	60.0 (A.V. 110)	15.9
The elderly	50.0 (A.V. 110)	5.6
Abused persons	17.3 (A.V. 110)	0.9
Incarcerated persons	15.5 (A.V. 110)	0.0
Dependent persons	16.4 (A.V. 110)	2.8
The disabled	49.1 (A.V. 110)	13.1
Economically impoverished persons	31.8 (A.V. 110)	7.5
Nomads	9.1 (A.V. 110)	0.0
Undifferentiated users	42.7 (A.V. 110)	29.0
The sick	35.5 (A.V. 110)	13.1
Consumers/users	24.5 (A.V. 110)	12.1
<i>TOTAL</i>		<i>100.0</i>

Tab. 2 – Organizations according to recipients of activities (typology of recipients and predominant typology)

At the origin of the formalisation of the central level of the organizations under examination we find, in 43.8% of cases, the initiative of people who shared interests and sometimes needs -- *explanans* social capital -- while in 21.0% of organizations, the establishment of a central coordinating level was promoted by one or more local offices (Tab. 3).

By initiative:	%
Of the institution	17.1
Of one or more local sections	21.0
Of another third sector organization	4.8

Of a group of families	10.5
Of people with same interests/needs	43.8
Of people with same professional expertise	2.9
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>100.0</i>
<i>A.V.</i>	<i>105</i>

Tab. 3 - Organizations according to modalities of establishing the central level

In addition to the fairly obvious function of coordination (97.3%), we find the following functions to be extremely widespread: communication (89.1%), training (79.1%), political representation (75.5%) and a social function (74.5%).

7. Forming partnership and actual partnerships

A specific focus of the investigation discussed here has to do with partnerships: in the sample we find that over the last five years, 77.3% of the organizations considered formalised at least one partnership. These configurations involve, to a varying degree, institutional subjects, market subjects, and those belonging to the third sector: the latter, in particular, constitute the highest number of partners (90.6% - Tab. 4).

SUBJECTS IN PARTNERSHIP	%	A.V.
With public subjects	61.2	(A.V. 52)
With the market (companies/firms)	43.5	(A.V. 37)
With the Third Sector	90.6	(A.V. 77)

Tab. 4 - Organizations according to type of subject with which partnerships were formalised (% calculated over 85 units that answered in the affirmative to the variable relative to the existence of social partnerships)

Observing the relational combinations of the partnerships in which the organizations in this sample (Tab. 5) participate, we find, in 31.8% of cases, triadic models of relations connecting institutional, market, and third sector interlocutors, and others that privilege relationships between nationally-based associations and other third sector organizations (30.6% - Tab. 5).

COMBINATION OF SUBJECTS IN PARTNERSHIPS	%
1 Only Third Sector	30.6
2 More or less with everyone	31.8

3 Others	37.6
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>100.0</i>
A.V.	85

Tab. 5 - Organizations according to the combination of subjects participating in partnerships

Our information becomes more precise in reference to the partnerships held to be most significant by the organizations' directors who were interviewed: in these networking configurations, at least two third sector subjects are present in 69.4% of cases and just as many on the institutional level in 45.9% of situations (Tab. 6).

TYPOLOGY OF SUBJECTS	NUMBER OF SUBJECTS INVOLVED IN SIGNIFICANT PARTNERSHIPS (%)			A.V.
	None	One	Two or more	
With public subjects	44.7	9.4	45.9	(A.V. 85)
With market entities (companies/firms)	58.8	17.6	23.5	(A.V. 85)
With Third Sector organizations	25.9	4.7	69.4	(A.V. 85)

Tab. 6 - Organizations according to the number of subjects involved in the most significant partnership formalised

The aims pursued by partnerships are multiple in nature and include realising actions of advocacy, activities meant to foster social cohesion, and the delivery of services and interventions

The partnership praxis has contributed to an increase in inter-organizational collaboration in the majority of associations under consideration (53.2% - Tab. 7) and to a reinforcement of reciprocal trust (51.3% - Tab. 8).

COLLABORATIONS FOLLOWING UPON PARTNERSHIPS (WITH DIFFERENT ORGANIZATIONS)	%
1 Generally increased	53.2
2 Increased with exceptions	28.6
3 Unchanged	18.2
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>100.0</i>
A.V.	77

Tab. 7 - Organizations according to the degree of collaboration with entities different from oneself following upon the formalisation of partnerships

DEGREE OF ORGANIZATIONAL TRUST FOLLOWING UPON A PARTNERSHIP	%
1 Generally increased	51.3
2 Increased with exceptions	25.6
3 Unchanged	21.8
4 Decreased for some	1.3
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>100.0</i>
<i>A.V</i>	<i>78</i>

Tab. 8 - Organizations according to the degree of trust in other organisms following upon the formalisation of partnerships

8. Measuring social capital and partnerships using several indices

Our investigation made available a mass of multifaceted and broadly based data that allowed us to approximate a reasonable operationalization of the theoretical concepts of reference. The preferred tools for this approach were indices that, through repeated re-aggregations, allowed us to achieve a “measurement” of the concepts that is extremely synthetic and, as such, especially suited to being addressed in concert with other information. In this paper we introduce three “super-indices,” the product of the consolidation of some of the most significant constructs used in this investigation which are related to three dimensions underpinning research on bonding social capital, bridging social capital, and the propensity toward networking that characterises social partnerships. Each of these is broken down into three steps: “low,” “medium,” and “high.”

The path described so far allowed us to operationalize three “super-indices” according to the synthetic scheme shown in the following Tab. 9:

SOCIAL CAPITAL INDICES	SUB-INDICES
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Bonding social capital index	General internal relationality index	Index of utility of relational modality	Index of trust	Index of overall internal improvement
Bridging social capital index	General external relationality index	Index of utility of external relations	Index of collaborativity in external relations	
Index of networking in partnerships	Index of trust generated by the partnership	Index of relational good generated by the partnership		

Tab. 9 – Synthetic scheme of the indices

These “super-indices” allowed us to “measure” three crucial dimensions for our analysis, which have to do with bonding social capital, bridging social capital of a “horizontal” type, so to speak, and the specific networking fostered by partnerships, which can be traced to bridging social capital of a cross-sectional type.

The per-cent distribution of each of these is the following (Tab. 10, 11 e 12):

SYNTHETIC INDEX OF BONDING SOCIAL CAPITAL (IND_BOND)	%
Low	20.0
Medium	34.5
High	45.5
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>100.0</i>
A.V.	<i>110</i>

Tab. 10 - Organizations according to the synthetic index of bonding social capital

SYNTHETIC INDEX OF BRIDGING SOCIAL CAPITAL (IND_BRID)	%
Low	26.2
Medium	37.9
High	35.9
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>100.0</i>
A.V.	<i>103</i>

Tab. 11 - Organizations according to the synthetic index of bridging social capital

SYNTHETIC INDEX OF NETWORKING IN PARTNERSHIPS (IND_PART)	%
Low	25.6
Medium	39.7
High	34.6
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>100.0</i>
A.V.	78

Tab. 12 - Organizations according to the synthetic index of networking through partnerships

As an examination of the three tables reveals, the sample of multilevel organizations analysed is characterised by a high level of bonding social capital (45.5% - Tab. 10) and by medium levels of bridging social capital (37.9% - Tab. 11) and of relational networking fostered through the activation of social partnerships (39.7% - Tab. 12).

9. Relations and practices: perspectives emerging from the logistic regression

To obtain a predictive understanding of propensity to establish and maintain/strengthen new relationships, a multivariate analysis was conducted on the data collected by implementing a logistic regression (Lanzetti, 2012). This technique, which places the estimate of maximum verisimilitude at its statistical foundation, considers how, certain conditions being equal, a certain result (expressed with the dependent variable) has a given quantifiable probability of happening or not happening in relation to other variables considered by the researcher to be good predictors.

9.1 Collaboration in relations with other subjects outside the associations under study

The first logistic regression concerns the index of collaboration in relations with external subjects. By bringing to bear an index in terms of attributing meaning, thus involving a synthesis of several concepts, we were able to enrich the analysis with additional elements for consideration.

This index, in fact, considers the perceived (negative and positive) quality of the collaborations established by each organization with subjects outside of itself, belonging to the public, market, and third sectors.

	%
Low	41.9
Medium	24.8

High	33.3
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>100.0</i>
A.V.	<i>105</i>

Tab. 13 - Index of quality of the collaborations within the partnerships

The logistic regression carried out elucidates several latent aspects of this evaluation of collaborative quality, with reference, in particular, to the contemplation of functions aimed at developing and managing external relations, the belief in the efficacy of collaborations with subjects outside the organization for bringing about real improvement, and the launching of partnerships during the last five years. The data reveal that, compared to associations in which representatives believe that collaboration with other stakeholders is hardly, or not at all, effective, associations in which representatives instead believe it to be very useful show a five-fold improvement (Exp(B) 5.329 - Tab. 14) in the probability of finding a medium or high index of collaboration in relations with other social subjects (when conditions of the other predictors considered remain constant).

As regards the formalisation of partnerships, the analysis reveals that entities that participated in such undertakings register a more than doubled probability (Exp(B) 2.358) of obtaining a medium to high index of collaborations with other partners as compared to those that did not take part in such collaborations.

Variables in the equation

		B	E.S.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% CI for EXP(B)	
								Lower	Upper
Step 1a	b67(1) contemplation of functions of developing and managing external relations	-.487	.447	1.187	1	0.276	0.614	0.256	1.476
	RQ69 belief in the efficacy of collaborations with subjects outside the organization	1.673	.711	5.532	1	0.019	5.329	1.322	21.489
	RQ72 launching of partnerships	.858	.513	2.792	1	0.095	2.358	0.862	6.449
	Constant	-4.052	1.763	5.282	1	0.022	0.017		

Tab. 14 - Estimates of beta regression coefficients on the medium and high index of collaboration in relations with other subjects outside the associations examined as regards: contemplation of functions of

developing and managing external relations, belief in the efficacy of collaborations with subjects outside the organization and launching of partnerships

We can deduce from this analysis that pursuing collaborations with other subjects in a reiterated and stable manner through different forms that are structured to varying degrees -- less structured in informal agreements, more so in partnerships -- makes it possible to test the productivity of these exchanges “in the field” and to positively assess their efficacy.

The reduced or almost non-existent influence determined by having a dedicated role in the organization for developing relations with the outside (Exp(B) 0.614) is a significant finding that emerges from the logistic regression. To explain this result, we could speculate that practice appears to make the difference rather than a position appearing on an organization chart.

9.2 Improvement of relationality inside the nationally-based pro-social associations

The second logistic regression carried out on the data focused on networking inside the organizations: this examines the strategic intertwinement within organisms that carry out their activities on multiple levels and that, therefore, need to have access to tools and methods able to foster cohesion among the various organizational spheres and among the different subjects operating in them. The variable of reference is an index -- the index of overall improvement of internal relations in short “relationality” -- which aims to reveal the improvement reported within the associations following upon relationships and collaborations with external stakeholders by taking into account seven specific operative structural dimensions: planning, fund raising mechanisms, human resources management, communication modalities, the realisation of new organizational models, the improvement of services offered, and openness to other external entities.

This index, originally broken down into three steps in the logistic regression -- low, medium, and high -- tends to be high on two levels, the first of which is low (33.6%) and the second of which combines the medium and high levels (56.3%), also due to the fact that the number of cases is not large.

The variables inserted into the logistic regression probe the principle transformations that occurred within the organizations during the last five years with respect to statutory changes or changes in the associative mission, recognition gained on a juridical level and as regards accreditations, quality certifications, and the development of local offices. We also inserted into this logistic regression variables relative to changes in the goals pursued by the nationally-based associations, always for the last five years of activity, and information about a possible increase or decrease in the number of local entities associated with the multilevel organizations. Finally, we

examined the variable relative to the quality of the collaboration among components of the various organizational levels engaged in delivering services and carrying out other activities.

Variables in the equation

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95.0% C.I. for EXP(B)	
								Lower	Upper
Step 1(a)	R43 principle transformations within the organizations during the last five years			1.701	3	0.637			
	R43(1) statutory changes	0.287	0.550	0.272	1	0.602	1.332	0.454	3.915
	R43(2) changes in the associative mission	-0.331	0.689	0.231	1	0.631	0.718	0.186	2.772
	R43(3) recognition on a juridical level	0.815	0.874	0.869	1	0.351	2.259	0.407	12.540
	N44 principle transformations within the organizations during the last five years			5.539	3	0.136			
	N44(1) accreditations	0.301	0.946	0.101	1	0.750	1.351	0.212	8.627
	N44(2) quality certifications	0.162	0.605	0.072	1	0.789	1.176	0.359	3.848
	N44(3) development of local offices	1.625	0.736	4.868	1	0.027	5.076	1.199	21.493
	n45 changes in the goals pursued for the last five years of activity, and information about a possible associated with the multilevel organizations			4.239	2	0.120			
	n45(1) increase in the number of local entities	0.712	0.871	0.667	1	0.414	2.037	0.369	11.236
	n45(2) decrease in the number of local entities	1.453	0.784	3.432	1	0.064	4.274	0.919	19.874
	RN59 quality of the collaboration			2.682	2	0.262			
	RN59(1) in delivering services	0.029	0.626	0.002	1	0.964	1.029	0.302	3.512
	RN59(2) carrying out other activities	0.875	0.637	1.884	1	0.170	2.398	0.688	8.362
	Constant	-1.322	1.004	1.735	1	0.188	0.267		

Tab. 15 - Estimates of beta regression coefficients on the high index of comprehensive improvement of relationality inside the nationally-based pro-social associations as regards statutory changes, recognition of a juridical nature, changes in goals, increased number of local affiliated entities, and quality of the collaboration among various organizational levels.

The variety of variables introduced into the analysis makes a multifaceted discussion possible: from an analytical perspective, it emerges that changes introduced in the last five years regarding services offer, whether within the same intervention area or in different areas, have a five times greater (Exp(B) 5.076 – Tab. 15) incidence, in terms of probability, of improving internal relationality as compared to the option of not introducing changes in the range of services provided.

Analogously, having increased the number of local offices during the last five years turns out to be important: this strategy, in fact, with all other conditions remaining unchanged, considerably increases (Exp(B) 4.274) the probability that the associations that carried out such an expansion will show a noticeable improvement on the index in question as compared to associations that did not increase the number of local offices.

Similarly, collaboration in service delivery and practices among different local entities' members increases by more than half (Exp(B) 2.398) the probability of seeing an improvement in internal relationality following trade-offs with the outside.

Finally, the development of human resources also has a two-times greater probability (Exp(B) 2.259), compared to the introduction of changes of a juridical and statutory type, of triggering an improvement in internal relationality.

A comprehensive examination of the trends that emerged from the logistic regression reveals a kind of *sui generis* "indicator" of associative vitality: in other words, the associations that gamble on increasing internal complexity by expanding services and practices provided, promoting the opening of new offices, and enlarging the operative base involved in the organization's functioning and service delivery are confronted with the possibility of an incremental differentiation of internal structural dynamics which, however, almost paradoxically contributes directly to improving these dynamics. This generative expertise is characteristically typical of pro-social spheres, in particular, which base their social action on oblation and solidarity-building orientations, constituting the premise, in terms of culture and values, that is necessary so that this relationality can give rise to a resource that is peculiar to the relations represented by social capital.

The third sector, together with the family and informal networks, is a sphere specifically dedicated to taking into account and valorising social relations: its social action in Italy over an extended period of time has been characterised on both a reflexive and an empirical level (Donati and Colozzi 2004; 2006; Rossi and Boccacin 2006b) as being especially effective in contributing to

producing relations of trust that lead to cooperation in terms of reciprocity and that succeed in regenerating these same social relations through widespread relationality.

In our case, this regeneration of relations turned out to be a valuable resource for the everyday management of associations and their organizational and functional complexity, both for the relationships with service recipients and for the local context of reference through service delivery.

We can affirm in this connection, based on the comprehensive analysis of the results of the logistic regressions, that there is evidence of the emergence of a specific relational good produced within the associative spheres examined which presents several distinctive characteristics as compared to other types of relational goods produced by third sector organizations. Its most salient feature is its capacity for re-generation and for making associative and inter-associative relations into vectors for managerial competency in the organizations' internal dynamics, for expertise in personalising services offered to recipients, and for policy strategies that address the bond with the socio-communitarian context of reference.

This is, therefore, a multidimensional relational good in which the centre of gravity is constituted by the meso level which, to the greatest degree, determines the generation of this good: around it "offshoots" of a micro type and, occasionally, extensions of a macro type are arranged.

10. Conclusions

This investigation sheds light on the multiformity of this complex investigative "object," which can indeed be differentiated in terms of distinct dimensions. However, the observation of this object cannot be separated from the relations within which this resource takes shape and is spread throughout the surrounding context.

Echoing Simmel's analysis of intersecting social circles, our findings could be grasped analogously, precisely in the processes of intersecting and relating to which the great German sociologist was referring: in this connection, the specificity of our work lies in the observation of these processes on a meso level and on a quasi-macro level, within perimeter of which they are situated.

It is in these processes that several immaterial realities (Donati 1991, 2011) take shape; these are discriminating factors for the achievement of a good quality of life by individual subjects and intersubjective environments. Certainly, social capital is one of these immaterial realities.

In this connection, there is evidence of a significant correlation between social capital and the launching of partnerships: indeed, in the majority of the indices created, the social capital values are higher for subjects participating in partnerships with other interlocutors as compared to values for subjects not participating in these processes. As it was highlighted by the aforementioned findings,

bridging social capital is also strengthened in these cases. We can observe a sort of spiral that raises the level of the social capital circulating in these relational circuits, as it is also demonstrated by the findings, discussed above, on the second cluster.

We conclude with a thought about partnerships: by observing the propensity of the third sector organisations under study to establish formalised relations among different subjects, we were able to capture an emerging orientation that, in quantitative terms, involves over three quarters of the sample. The data reveal that in the partnership forms activated, it is the central level that spends both the organisational identity, understood in its totality, as well as its own specificity with respect to the sphere of synthesis: all this complex relational intertwinement generates an additional instance of social capital, that of cross-sectional bridging social capital, which makes it possible to strengthen community trust (Donati and Tronca 2008).

The research thus confirms the hypothesis that posited social capital as an intervening variable able to mediate the quality and quantity of services offered and practices realized.

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