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Design for social enterprises. Co-designing an organizational and cultural change

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Abstract: The debate on social innovation agrees on the idea that social innovation creates new relationships and roles, enhancing better uses of assets and resources, supporting mutualism and developing capabilities: in this framework social enterprises may play a crucial role, especially if supported by a design-driven approach.

Such reflection builds upon two experimentations developed in Italy: the first one aimed at investigating new strategies to enhance the distinctive collaborative role of social enterprises, the second one was devoted to rethinking the existing services of cooperatives by including users in the co-design and co-production phases.

Benefiting from the lessons learnt from these two case studies, this paper attempts to shape the notion of 'design for social enterprises' as a field in which a combination of design methods and tools may support a cultural and organisational change that places collaboration with communities of users and other local actors at the centre of the social entrepreneurial process.

Keywords: social enterprises, codesign, strategic design, service design, design for social enterprises

1. Background: social innovation, social enterprises and design

In the last years, the interest around the notion of social innovation has grown more and more: the rapid spread of the term has caused many different interpretations and it is widely recognized that social innovation lacks a shared definition.

We start considering a well-known conceptualisation, which is the one provided by Murray et al. (2010) from the Young Foundation (one of the most prominent organisations in the promotion of social innovation): "new ideas (products, services and models) that simultaneously meet social needs and create new social relationships or collaborations. In other words, they are innovations that are both good for society and enhance society's capacity to act." (p.3).

Also in the design field, several scholars and researchers have started to study social innovation: among the pioneers there are Jégou and Manzini who, since 2008, use the term social innovation to

refer to changes in the way individuals or communities act to solve a problem or to generate new opportunities, highlighting how these innovations are driven by changes in behaviour that emerge typically from the bottom-up. More recently, Manzini (2015) has attempted to define 'design for social innovation', by arguing that this is not a new discipline, rather, it is essentially a new field of design activities. He points out that designers must use their skills to sustain promising cases of social innovation, in other words to make them more visible by designing their products, services and communication programmes, and thus supporting their upscaling. In this perspective, strategic and service design seem to be more relevant than other design areas, especially because they are useful to improve the quality of interactions and to support the creation of innovative and unprecedented partnerships. Not by chance, social innovations are characterised by the collaboration among a variety of actors, ranging from active citizens and local associations to private organisations, institutions and social enterprises.

These collaborations should create new relationships and new roles, making better use of assets and resources, supporting mutualism and developing capabilities: in this scenario especially social enterprises can play a crucial role, as they are 'natural' participants to the social innovation process. In fact, as Defourny and Nyssens (2013, 1) state, when dealing with social enterprises, social innovation not only refers to the satisfaction of human needs, but also to the relationships between different social groups in the entrepreneurial process (users, workers, volunteers etc.) and to the empowerment of users trying to fulfil their needs.

This means that social enterprise should have a key role in enhancing a virtuous circle of relationships and promoting more sustainable ways of living (Manzini and Tassinari, 2013). To achieve these aims, social enterprises can be supported by design-driven approach: this is the main object of investigation of this paper that we defined as 'design for social enterprises'.

2. Design for social enterprises

We already highlighted that social enterprises are 'natural' participants to social innovation and that design can contribute in supporting their participation. Despite such vocational role, social enterprises are currently facing difficulties in becoming agents of change within these processes and they often limit their contribution to act as mere service providers (Zandonai and Venturi, 2012), loosing the awareness of their relational peculiarities (Borzaga and Santuari, 2001) and their connections with the local community. What is occurring is that numerous social enterprises are too much centralised and inflexible and with a high level of bureaucratization. We observed that in some cases they seem to work especially to follow the rules of public administrations (top-down level) rather that addressing the needs of citizens (bottom-up level). Differently, we have already stated how social innovations are strictly connected to the bottom-up, with active communities of individuals that are able to find solutions to their daily lives by solving what is already there, without waiting for top-down interventions. In a way, if social enterprises aim to become protagonist in the social innovation process, they have to re-connect with their local communities and this can occur by using a design approach.

Building upon the idea of design for social innovation previously described, we can define a parallel and interconnected field, that of 'design for social enterprises', which does not create a brand new design discipline, but suggests a combination of design approaches, methods and tools that support innovation within social enterprises. This means essentially to sustain a cultural and organisational change that places users at the centre of the entrepreneurial process, enhancing a virtuous circle of relationships between all the actors involved, from workers to citizens.

According to the authors, 'design for social enterprises' deals with two of the four design areas traditionally identified by Buchanan (1992): one is the design of processes, activities and services (mainly interaction design and service design), the other is about systems and environments (mainly planning and organizational design). These are the most complex areas, in which the role of design is on one hand to create "an organic flow of experience in concrete situations, making such experiences more intelligent, meaningful, and satisfying", and on the other hand "to sustain, develop and integrate human beings into broader ecological and cultural environments, shaping these environments when desirable and possible or adapting to them when necessary" (Buchanan, 1992).

In this perspective, 'design for social enterprises' may be intended as a way of reconsidering social enterprises' role and activities by using a design thinking approach, which is above all a human-centred approach to innovation, as also suggested by Brown (2009). Here we wish to highlight the importance of placing individuals at the centre of this process, and, thus, to develop empathy with people and their environment, which should be particularly meaningful for social enterprises, as they are traditionally highly connected with their local context. More specifically, by adopting a "community centred design" approach (Meroni and Manzini, 2012), social enterprises should be able to re-build their social ties and to reinforce the diffused capacity of a context to find solutions to people's needs.

In this paper we present two case studies of 'design for social enterprise', both occurred in Italy in between 2015 and 2016. The first one – named 'The Collaborative Social Enterprise', was essentially a strategic design experimentation, the second one - named 'Service Design: change to innovate' was a programme of continuous education to learn how to improve a set of existing activities by using methods and tools of service design.

Both experimentations have in common the adoption of a co-design approach, because they included a great variety of actors in the process, especially citizens, by considering them as actual assets rather than as mere users of the services (Manzini, 2015). In this perspective, 'design for social enterprise' may be intended as a way to support such enterprises by combining strategic and service design with co-design, in order to enhance an extensive and fertile collaboration between all the actors, including workers, users, volunteers, public servants and policy makers.

3. Two experimentations: co-design with social enterprises

The two case studies that we are going to describe are placed within the Italian context, and, more specifically, they are connected to the Emilia Romagna region which is characterised by a strong cooperative tradition and by a pioneering activity in the experimentation and definition of the 'social enterprise' concept, introduced as a legal form in 1991 by the Italian Parliament (Borzaga, 2004). The rapid growth of social cooperatives, mainly supported by the public administration, and the creation of consortiums and national organisations contributed to the institutionalization and bureaucratization of this sector, which now faces a critical phase and a crisis of the traditional models, experiencing difficulties in introducing innovative elements able to reconfigure the existing offering and networks. The two experimentations were organised precisely to explore new ways of tackling these challenges, and, as designers, we were called to conceive and lead various activities, mainly co-design workshops with different stakeholders.

3.1 Case Study 1: "The Collaborative Social Enterprise"

The first experimentation, named "The Collaborative Social Enterprise" was conducted at Sharitaly[1] 2015, with the idea of involving the social enterprises' sector in rethinking their role within the paradigmatic shift promoted by the sharing economy (Botsman and Rogers, 2010).

The extended Italian name of the workshop, *l'impresa sociale è (anche) collaborativa* – the social enterprise is (also) collaborative – expresses the main idea of the authors: to explore the distinctive DNA of cooperatives, which is based on participation, inclusion, trust and collaboration. Principles that also "guide the sharing economy" (Selloni, 2014a) and that in our hypothesis play a strategic role in reframing both the role and the offering of social enterprises. This experimentation is indeed a strategic design action, whose aim is to investigate the visions that drive collaborative processes and that align the interest of multiple stakeholders.

For this purpose, we selected 4 different fields of work: childcare, elderly care, tourism & hospitality and youth employment, being them the most important sectors of the Italian social cooperatives (Zandonai and Venturi, 2012) For each of them we developed a Collaboration Challenge, inviting 4 groups of participants to step into the shoes of 4 social enterprises, adopting collaborative processes in their way of working. Among the 34 participants to the workshop, most were members of Italian social cooperatives, while few of them were social entrepreneurs themselves. Their presence played a crucial role in grounding the work to real contexts, backgrounds and experiences.

The workshop was organized into 3 main phases: exploring the barriers, identifying the stakeholders and activating the collaboration. We will here focus the discussion mainly on the third part, developed to explore the mechanisms that could boost such processes.

Phase 1: Exploring the barriers: **why is collaboration so difficult?** The first analytical part involved participants in understanding which are the main obstacles that social enterprises face when setting up collaborative processes. We proposed a set of barriers-cards in order to facilitated the identification and the evaluation of hurdles, that we grouped in 4 areas (Figure 1): *software*, related to the lack of competences, skills, attitude and knowledge; *hardware*, associated to the need of physical tools and infrastructures; *network*, related to the absence or scarcity of connections and relationships; *feasibility*, associated with economical and legislative obstacles. As an example, if we look at the results within the care sectors (both child and elderly), collaboration appeared not to suffer from hardware's unavailability, but mainly from legislative obstacles emerging when experimenting new collaborative service models.

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[1] Sharitaly, organized by Collaboriamo.org, is the main Italian event on sharing economy and collaborative services.

Figure 1. The barriers' cards supported participants in exploring obstacles to collaboration.

Phase 2: Identifying the stakeholders: with whom may we collaborate? The second part was focused on the system of actors and the forms of relationship that can support collaboration. Participants were invited to select relevant stakeholders from a set of actors-cards and to discuss on their motivation in participating to the system. The aim of this session was twofold: on the one side, to explore the rich and under-exploited network of social enterprises (Borzaga and Santuari, 2001) scouting for "unexpected or unusual actors" relevant to the scenario; on the other side to invite participants to explore different roles for each subject involved, with the aim of increasing the overall level of participation to the solution, thus moving from informative or consultancy stages to the co-design, co-production and to the co-management of services (Selloni, 2014b).

Phase 3: Activating the collaboration: how to collaborate? The last part aimed to co-design a set of strategies useful to activate the collaboration between social enterprises and their stakeholders and to select a set of tools, capable to implement it. This session proposes a way to define, collectively, what collaboration means, by identifying the activities and the resources that may organize it.

Building on the concept of sustainable qualities as defined by Manzini and Tassinari (2013), the authors developed a set of "collaboration's keys", which can be defined as actions that work in activating and supporting collaborative processes. The collaboration's keys were grouped into 5 clusters: quality of the strategy, concerning ways to create synergies and shared visions; quality of the context, related to the use of existing resources; quality of the participation, connected to the involvement of the users; quality of the governance, regarding responsibilities, roles and decision-making processes; and quality of the service, related to collaborative services and more specifically to disintermediation and transparency (Table 1).

Table 1. The collaboration's keys organized in clusters according to 5 sustainable qualities.

Quality of the Context	To use existing resources: to reduce the need of new.
	To share existing resources: to use the same resources, to create economies of scope.
	To bring together things and people: to reduce the need of transportation and relocation.
Quality of the Strategy	To be open to the implementation of the service by multiple actors.
	To create synergies with unusual actors.
	To create networks: to sustain decentralized and flexible organizational models.
	To facilitate investments.
	To raise awareness on the importance of collaboration.
Quality of the Service	To dis-intermediate demand and supply.
	To be transparent: to show what is behind the scenes.
Quality of the Participation	To include final users in the co-design.
	To include final users in the co-production.
	To include final users in the co-management.
Quality of the Governance	To take decision together: to distribute the power among multiple actors.
	To renegotiate: to create an open system, to continuously redefine roles and rules.
	To share responsibilities: to distribute the power and its side effects.
	To regulate: to create mechanisms that regulate collaboration in easy and feasible ways.

Moving to the level of actions is a way to focus the discussion on the concept of collaboration, which is usually difficult to manage and to translate into a process. Moreover, beside the keys, participants were given also a set of operational tools: existing resources to be used in order to set in place and structure the strategy. Examples were ranging from digital sharing platforms to online and offline meeting formats, flash mob campaign, co-design tools, crowd-sourcing and crowd-funding programs, etc. (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Participants selecting the collaboration's keys and the operational tools to create a shared strategy.

The process of negotiation and selection of the "collaboration's keys" allowed participants to shape a preliminary strategy, representing their interpretation of how to start and maintain collaboration within the assigned field of work. It can be read as a set of design principles to be considered as guidelines for the future co-design of collaborative services.

This shared strategy, composed by a series of small initiatives and matched with the operational tools, contributed to create a kind of initial action plan that social cooperatives may further improve and test. It also contributed to give practical evidences on how to overcome the initial barriers and to involve local stakeholders, thus reframing the concept of "collaboration".

3.1 Case Study 2: "Service Design: change to innovate"

The second experimentation is a programme of continuous education named "Service Design: change to innovate", promoted by Consorzio Solidarietà Sociale Parma[2] (CSS) in collaboration with Euricse[3]. The aim of this programme was to empower social enterprises to re-combine in innovative ways their high-valued competences, assets and local networks. The authors carried out co-design sessions and designed ad-hoc tools to support members from local social enterprises, their users, local policy makers, and young volunteers in re-design their services in a more customized and collaborative form.

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[2] The Consortium includes 37 cooperatives, active mainly in the health, social and educational sectors (A-type cooperatives) and in job inclusion and employability of disadvantaged workers (B-type cooperatives).
[3] EURICSE – European Research Institute on Cooperative and Social Enterprises- www.euricse.eu

The workshop consisted of a preparatory phase and 2 full-day co-design sessions: one dedicated to services within the family care sector, with the aim of conceiving solutions for the education and care of both young families and children; the other dedicated to job training and autonomy programs, exploring new and more proactive roles for people with disabilities.

We will now present the process that the authors developed to set up and run the workshop by describing it in 5 phases.

Phase 0: problem setting. The initial activities were dedicated to clearly understanding the opportunities in a crowded and often confusing area, with overlapping services and uncoordinated actions promoted simultaneously by various cooperatives. By conducting a series of interviews with CSS members, we immersed ourselves in the context and formulated a first design question for each of the 2 sectors. These questions emerged as a combination of the needs expressed by those interviewed and the capabilities of the designers to read the promising signal of innovation in a context. In addition, we built 2 visions (Table 1), describing future situations that could answer design questions, but were still wide enough both to allow the design of multiple solutions and to gather the interest of different stakeholders (Zurlo, 2012).

Table 1 – Design questions and visions developed for each field of work.

Phases and tools	Services for people with disabilities	Services for family care
0 – Problem Setting Tools: Rough visions	Design Question: how to innovate the job inclusion and autonomy programs by exploring new and more proactive roles for people with disabilities. Vision: "An extended and diffused laboratory": a multi-service project, spread over vast areas and extended to various time bands, guided by the idea that disabled young people involved in social and occupational inclusion programs should as much as possible earn independence spaces from their families 2 sub-sectors: job inclusion & free time	Design Question: how to conceive solutions for the education and care of both young families and children, by expanding the community and by reactivating the various resources inside and outside the educative centres? Vision: "An extended and diffused community of care and education": a multi-service project, flexible and customizable thanks to the connections between the inside and the outside of kindergarten, between professional educators and families, between cooperatives and local communities.

Phase 1: warm up. The co-design days were both introduced by a warm up session, to familiarize with the new approach and to support participants in encountering a new methodology of work and a new typology of services. We introduced firstly a set of design principles working as compass points that orient the design action (Table 2). The design principles helped the participants to keep to the route, decreasing the risk of working on old models of interaction, maintaining the focus on the user and the communities, promoting collaborations and partnerships, valorising existing resources and assets.

Table 2 – Design principles: compass points that orient the design action.

Enabling services	Users have an active role in each phase of the service, even creating peer-to-peer mechanisms in which the expert users support the beginners.
Collaborative services	Main users are involved in both the front- and back-office of the service, participating in the co-design and in the decision-making processes.
Contemporary services	A strong contemporary dimension in the way they use technology, in the contents they propose and in the ways in which they involve the users and pursue the aim of the service.
Personalized services	Designed ad-hoc for the users, they promote a high degree of customization making the services adaptable to different users, abilities and changing everyday needs.
Open services	Designed to be implemented, modified and upgraded by multiple actors, they are therefore designed in an open and participative way. They are inclusive and dynamic; they evolve in time and are therefore flexible and easily adaptable.
Integrated services	They are based on a holistic approach that moves from a logic based on performances to an integrated one. They enable a dialogue between similar and complementary services, also activating collaboration with the private and public sector

To facilitate the interpretation of the case studies and to guide the following generative phase, we developed 2by2 diagrams obtained by crossing two critical service features. In Figure 3, as an example, we introduce the 2by2 diagram developed for the area of job inclusion of people with disabilities.
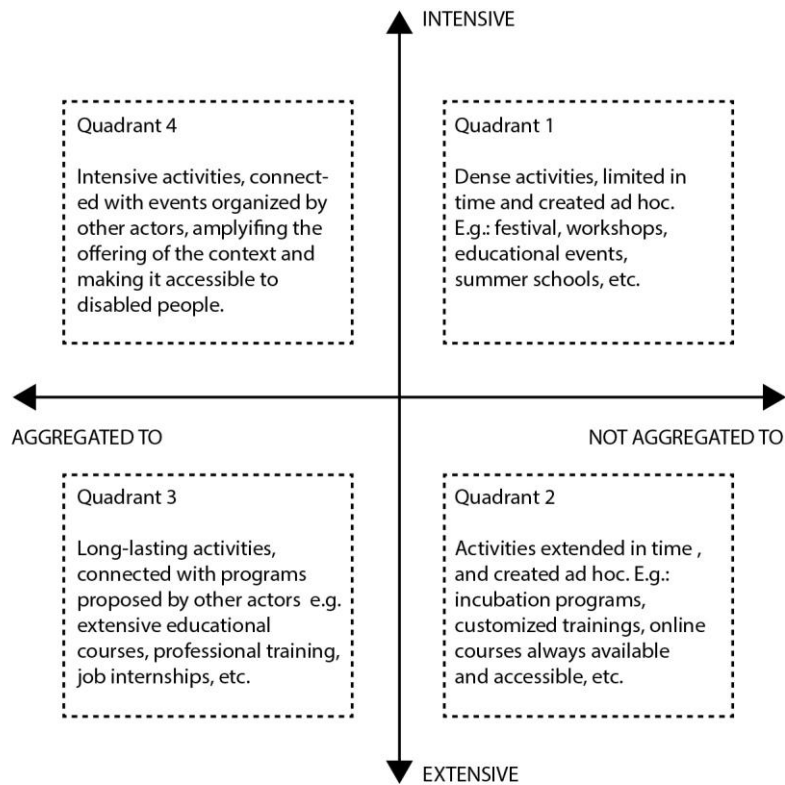
Figure 3 - The 2by2 diagram obtained for the sector of job inclusion of people with disabilities.

Participants were invited to discuss the case studies in relation to their personal experiences (as users, providers, relatives, public servants, citizens) and to integrate the diagram with the existing services promoted by the social cooperatives. By placing them on the axis we could immediately visualize the empty spaces and the crowded ones, and therefore start identifying promising areas of work.

Phase 2: Ideas generation. The second phase entered the generative dimension of the workshops. The authors asked participants to start an individual brainstorming session. This was a creative session guided by 2 precise tools: the 2by2 diagrams and the design principles, which also were used to assess clusters of ideas that emerged from a collective discussion.

Phase 3: Service development. The third part of the sessions was dedicated to the development of the ideas, from initial concepts to real services. In this phase, we followed a 3 step progressive process guiding the participants through the use of design tools:

- the offering map, to identify and visualize the value proposition;
- the actor map, to investigate roles and partnerships (Figure 4);
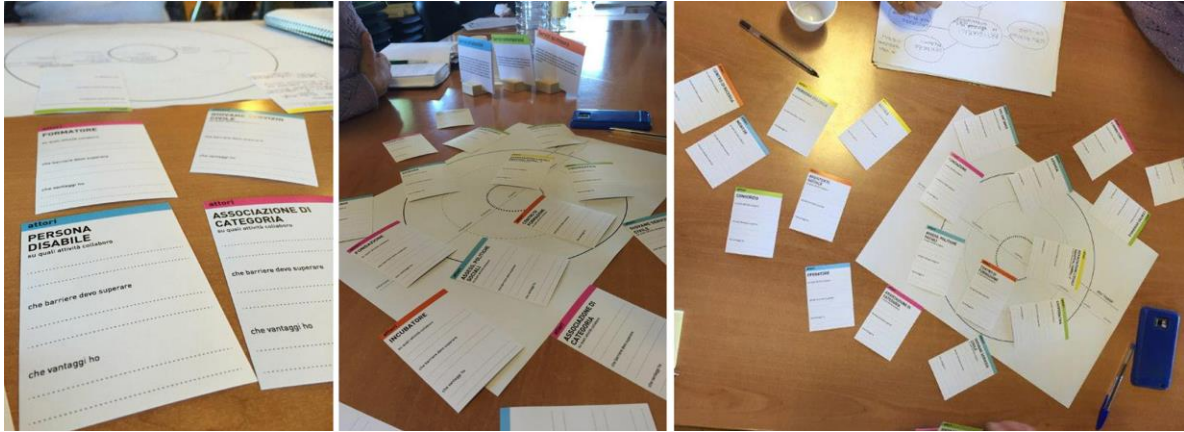- the community journey map, to design the system of interactions.

Figure 4 – The cards and the map to investigate the roles of the actors.

In particular, the Community Journey Map facilitated the design of the interactions in customized and collaborative services, which, by introducing a multi-stakeholder dimension, blur the line of visibility (Selloni, 2014b) and increase the complexity of interactions, thus requiring specific service design skills (Corubolo and Meroni, 2015).

The tool designed ad hoc for the workshop, (Figure 5) combines a customer journey map with a interaction storyboard, considering 5 main stakeholders and visualizing the stages necessary to accomplish each task of the service and the relative actions. Moreover it also asked participants to evaluate the level of actors' involvement (line of participation), the shared and acquired resources (material and immaterial ones), the touchpoints and the kind of interaction. This last part refers to the quality of encounters as defined by Cipolla and Manzini (2015) when taking into account relational and collaborative services. Thus the need to balance the efficacy and efficiency of the services with their relational and convivial dimension. We defined 2 polarities: on one side, an interaction oriented towards the performance, based on efficiency and with the goal of accomplishing a task or solving a problem, on the other side, an interaction based on relations, focusing on the quality of the relationships.
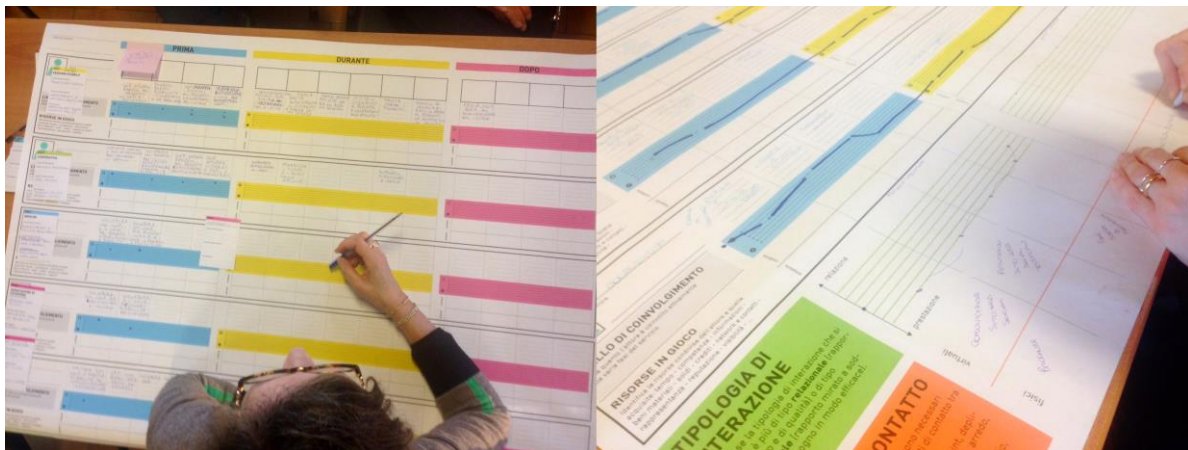
Figure 5 – The participants working on the Community Journey Map.

Phase 4: the collective assessment. The last session of the workshop focused on the evaluation of the service ideas, through a peer-to-peer feedback session and using an ad-hoc design tool, named "The Collaborative Organization Model" (Figure 6). It main objective is to give a succinct visual representation of the effort required to align the organization to the services.

The radar chart consists of 3 main clusters of rays:

- internal factors: meaning actions related to the organization and its internal structure.
- external factors: meaning the relationship between the social enterprise and the stakeholder;
- infrastructures and tools: meaning the need for investments in hardware or software resources.

Collaborative services challenge the traditional form of delivery, proposing new roles and calling for new skills and tools. Thus they often require an organizational change. In this last part, we aimed to start a reflection on the impact of this new kind of service on the social cooperatives' organizational structure.
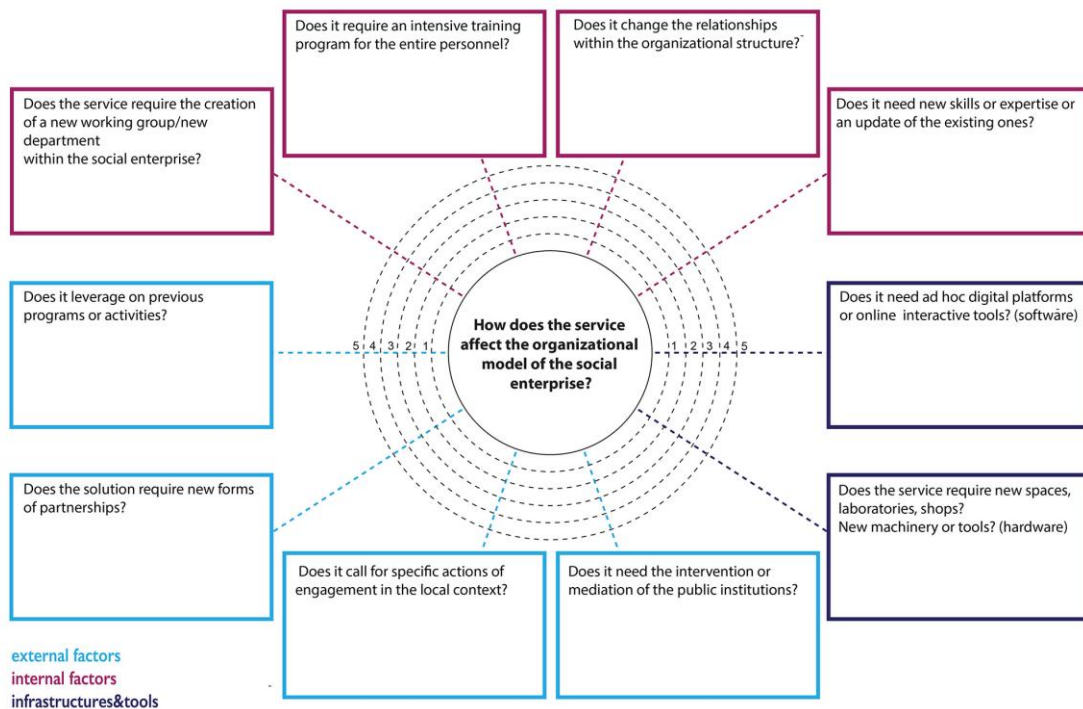

Does it require an intensive training program for the entire personnel?

Does it change the relationships within the organizational structure?

Does the service require the creation of a new working group/new department within the social enterprise?

Does it need new skills or expertise or an update of the existing ones?

Does it leverage on previous programs or activities?

How does the service affect the organizational model of the social enterprise?

Does it need ad hoc digital platforms or online interactive tools? (software)

Does the solution require new forms of partnerships?

Does the service require new spaces, laboratories, shops? New machinery or tools? (hardware)

Does it call for specific actions of engagement in the local context?

Does it need the intervention or mediation of the public institutions?

external factors
internal factors
infrastructures&tools

Figure 6. The Collaborative Organization Model.

The tool hereby presented does not seek to apply the competence of change management to assess the organizational mechanisms. On the contrary, it aims to open space for reflection and discussion on the innovative potential of the solutions on the cooperative itself. We consider it more a design tool, since it allows social enterprises to empower and reinforce latent relationships and to reflect on innovative ways of reactivating assets.

During the 2 full-days, the groups designed 8 new services. Due to its brief duration, this can be considered as a preliminary phase: a test to measure the creativity of the small community created ad-hoc, to select promising ideas to invest in, and from there develop a longer design-led program applied to a real, framed context. Without claiming to be an exhaustive design process, the workshop offered the social enterprise and its community with some tools and an approach that made them perceive the innovative capacity they can generate when co-designing together. It also set the basis to set up a new extensive design process that in 2017 will re-think the services for disabled people, within the vision of designing a School of Autonomy.

4. Conclusions

From the case studies described one main reflection emerged: social enterprises need to experiment with diverse forms of collaboration in which a design-driven approach may play a crucial role, making such collaborations more productive and innovative.

We actually observed that these collaborations disclose a disruptive potential: it is exactly by involving communities of users and other types of local actors that social enterprises have the chance to raise awareness about the importance of fostering a change both from a cultural and a n organisational point of view.

In the two experimentations, our main contribution as designers has been that of bringing a new perspective, a new language, a new way of making things happens, i.e. a new culture.

Manzini, in his book, '*Design, When Everybody Designs*' (2015), describes the importance of the 'cultural role' of designers, by firstly proposing a distinction between 'expert design' and 'diffuse design'. He bases his reflection on a simple statement: everybody is endowed with the ability to design, meaning there is a natural design capacity in all of us that we can use to tackle a problem and find a solution. However, not all are competent designers and only few become design professionals. Hence there is a type of design, which is put into play by 'non-experts', and that Manzini defines as 'diffuse design', while 'expert design' is performed by "people trained to operate professionally as designers, and who put themselves forward as design professionals" (p.37). In the social enterprises involved within our experimentations, we observed the presence of a wide range of 'non-experts' designers who already developed numerous projects. Hence, there was a diffused capacity of doing things, but it was missing a specific contribution from expert designers able to supporting, accelerating and democratizing an innovation process.

This innovation process should invest firstly the social enterprise itself: not only 'externally', by reconnecting with their communities and other types of local actors, but also 'internally', and thus fostering a change on their organisational model. Such twofold change needs to be co-designed and to be put in place by experimenting diverse forms of collaborations that range from co-design, to co-production, to co-management, leading to the development of a more collaborative model of governance. Here, we are referring to a more open and collective governance, similarly to the participatory governance described by Fischer (2012) and the collaborative governance outlined by Donahu and Zeckhaus (2011), and, in a way, this means to come back the very nature of the social enterprise, especially in the Italian context. In fact, the social enterprises involved in our experimentations originated from the great history Italian cooperativism (especially in the Emilia-Romagna region), which is characterised by the combination of many diverse types of stakeholders in their membership (paid workers, volunteers and other supporting members, etc.), whereas traditional co-operatives are usually single-stakeholder organisations (Borzaga and Santuari, 2001). Hence, the original DNA of Italian social enterprise was precisely characterised by the establishment of unprecedented collaborations, creating consortiums at local and national level and advocating for the recognition of their role as 'connectors' also towards public administrations. This role can be supported by expert designers, who may act not only as cultural operators, but also as 'advocates' that build a bridge between the bottom-up (citizens, community of users) and the top-down (institutions) (Selloni, 2014b). This is a work of mediation that is not only a matter of facilitating, but, above all, of envisioning, supporting and, thus, advocating in a proactive way.

Hence, in our attempt of defining 'design for social enterprises' the role of expert designer can be both that of 'cultural operator' and an 'advocate', fostering an internal and external change that, to be actually achieved, needs more long-lasting and intensive experimentation. Here there is room for

further research: in our experience, the encounter between design and social enterprises has ben particularly meaningful and it may have benefits for both parties. On the part of designers, it is about learning how to work with a 'new' sector, dealing with organisations that are not traditional private for-profit firms; on the part of social enterprises, it is a willingness to question their traditional schemes and to welcome a new (design) culture.

As stated, our reflections in this paper represent just an initial exploration to understand the potentialities of the design contribution in this field, which is why we are currently preparing the ground for a new and more extensive experimentation with CSS and Euricse.

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