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Book

From "Social Impact" to "Social Value" : a holistic approach to the SSE Worth' Measurement

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Working Paper

**From “Social Impact” to “Social Value”.
A holistic approach to the SSE Worth’ Measurement**

Andrea BASSI

CIRIEC No. 2022/06

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Andrea Bassi**

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Abstract

After the financial-economic crisis of 2008 there has been an increasing diffusion of discourses by international institutions stressing the necessity towards the adoption of *impact evaluation methods* both by for profit and SSE organizations. This craze for *impact measurement* is generally led by the need of the stock exchange to find new financial markets (demand) for an increasing offer of socially or environmentally oriented financial products (such as the Social Impact Bond).

This pressure had the effect to spread terms and concept typically of the financial world to other domains, such as the welfare policy (Social Investment State) and the traditional philanthropic sector (Social Return on Investment). Even the SSE has not been immune from this “epidemic” of measurement, standardization, quantification of its activities’ effects (Salathé-Beaulieu, G. in collaboration with M. J. Bouchard & M. Mendell, 2019).

The paper’s main aim is to argue in favour of the adoption of a broader conceptualization of the SSE contribution to the local community (and to the society as a whole) that the one implied by the term “impact”. It proposes a conceptual framework based on the “social value” notion, which requires to consider the worth (Bouchard, M. J. ed., 2009) linked to the presence of the organization itself and not only of its activities/ programs/services.

The paper will illustrate and comment the main results from an empirical research on the Social Added Value Evaluation of an umbrella recreation association in the Emilia-Romagna Region. The inquire adopts an experimental design based on qualitative methods such as: focus groups, face to face interviews and on site observations, in order to build a consensual system of social value/impact evaluation to be adopted by the local branches of the regional association.

Keywords: Social Value, Social Impact, Social Economy, Third Sector, Associations, Evaluation

JEL Codes: I2, I3, L3, L31

Introduction

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Introduction

After the financial-economic crisis of 2008 there has been an increasing diffusion of discourses by international institutions stressing the necessity towards the adoption of *impact evaluation methods* both by for profit and SSE organizations. This craze for *impact measurement* is generally led by the need of the stock exchange to find new financial markets (demand) for an increasing offer of socially or environmentally oriented financial products (such as the Social Impact Bond). This pressure had the effect to spread terms and concept typically of the financial world to other domains, such as the welfare policy (Social Investment State) and the traditional philanthropic sector (Social Return on Investment). Even the SSE has not been immune from this “epidemic” of measurement, standardization, quantification of its activities’ effects (Salathé-Beaulieu, G. in collaboration with M. J. Bouchard & M. Mendell, 2019).

The article’s main aim is to argue in favour of the adoption of a broader conceptualization of the SSE contribution to the local community (and to the society as a whole) that the one implied by the term “impact”. It proposes a conceptual framework based on the “social value” notion, which requires to consider the worth (Bouchard, M. J. ed., 2009) linked to the presence of the organization itself and not only of its activities/programs/services.

It must be said that there are many definitions of *social impact* in relation to the different sphere of social relations. There is a “legal” definition (by national laws), an “official” definition (by international bodies, such as European Union, etc.), a “technical” definition (by think tanks and other experts’ bodies), and finally there are many “scientific” definitions, at least one for each discipline (economics, political sciences, sociology, psychology, etc.)

In this article I will refer, mainly, to three definitions. The first one is the European definition elaborated by the Sub-group on Impact Measurement of the GECEs (European Commission expert group on social business)¹:

“The reflection of social outcomes as measurements, both long-term and short-term, adjusted for the effects achieved by others (alternative attribution), for effects that would have happened anyway (deadweight), for negative consequences (displacement), and for effects declining over time (drop-off).” (Geces, 2014, p. 7)

¹ GECEs Sub-group on Impact Measurement (2014), *Proposed Approaches to Social Impact Measurement in European Commission legislation and in practice relating to: EuSEFs and the EaSI*, Brussels.

The second definition of social impact came from OECD²:

“Social impact is usually defined in reference to four key elements:

- the value created as a consequence of someone’s activity;
- the value experienced by beneficiaries and all others affected;
- an impact that includes both positive and negative effects;
- an impact that is judged against a benchmark of what the situation would have been without the proposed activity.” (OECD, 2015, p. 3-4)

Finally the third one is the “legal” definition stated by the Italian Law on Third Sector³:

“Social impact assessment means the qualitative and quantitative assessment, in the short, medium and long term, of the effects of the activities carried out on the reference community with respect to the identified goal.” (Law 106/2016, Art. 7, Subsection 1, Letter o) (Translated by the author).

The above mentioned definitions (technical, official and legal) have in common the fact that the “social impact” is strictly referred to the “activity”, or a “project” or a “program” or a “service” carried out by a social economy organization and not to the overall “impact” (effects, consequences) that the mere existence of the organization itself produce in the community in which it operates.⁴

It is more than ten years that a research team at the Department of Political and Social Sciences – University of Bologna under my supervision, works on the topics of “Social Innovation”, “Social Value”, “Social Investment” and “Social Impact”. Through several empirical research and theoretical reflections, we develop a *holistic approach* to social impact measurement called SAVE – *Social Added Value Evaluation* (Bassi, 2013, 2014, 2015).

² OECD (2015), *Policy Brief on Social Impact Measurement for Social Enterprises*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2015.

³ Legge n. 106 del 2016 “Riforma del terzo settore, impresa sociale e disciplina del Servizio Civile Universale”.

⁴ For instance we can take into consideration the “impacts” that the presence of a recreational association for the elderly may have on the community. Strictu sensu the “elderly club” does not carry out any specific “activity”. It is simply a “space” where the elderly can go in the afternoon and early evening playing cards, or board games or to play bowls, etc. But this centre has several positive effects (micro, meso and macro) on the local level: a) for the members of the association, increasing their social contacts and decreasing their loneliness; b) for the local community, increasing the social cohesion; c) for the society as a whole, increasing the wellbeing of the elderly and reducing the cost of NHS (active ageing, etc.).

We found several similarities to the research paths of other colleagues such as the *contingency framework for measuring social performance* of Ebrahim, A. and Rangan, K (2010) at Harvard Business School and the *systemic social impact model* elaborated by Jane Onyx and colleagues (2000, 2012, 2014, 2015) from the University of Technology, Sydney.

The originality of the present research rest in the application of the SAVE framework - that has been elaborated in previous works mainly in relation to social cooperatives and social enterprises - to the associational/associative sector. This extension (new implementation) implied the necessity to redefine the weight of the internal dimensions of the index (see section 2 below) and the selection of the meaningful indicators (see section 3 below). The attempt is to be able to better understand and valorise the peculiar contribution of the association's sphere (associationism) to the common good.

The article will illustrate and comment the main results from an empirical research on the *Social Added Value Evaluation* of an Umbrella association of "leisure and recreation" in the Emilia-Romagna Region. The inquire adopts an experimental design based on qualitative methods such as: focus groups, face to face interviews and on site observations, in order to build a consensual system of *social accountability* (social budget) and of social value/impact evaluation to be adopted by the local branches of the regional association.

1. The Social Value (worth) of SSE Organizations

Taking into consideration the different contributions that SSE organizations can generate for the society at the micro [personal – individual level] (*sense of responsibility* = belonging, autonomy, participation, solidarity), meso (organisational level) (production of *relational goods*) and macro (systemic) level (reinforcement of *social capital*), we elaborate a theoretical framework for the evaluation of their functioning in term of *social added value*.

We will apply the heuristic tool called the *value creation chain* model based on five dimensions (or steps of the analysis): inputs (resources), activities (processes), output (products), outcome (results), impacts (effects). The SAVE framework identifies a criterion for each of these dimensions, such as:

- a) transparency and fairness;
- b) level of (internal and external) stakeholders' participation in the governance;
- c) level of beneficiaries' involvement;
- d) effectiveness of the activities/services;
- e) degree of social change.

In synthesis the SAVE model is based on a theoretical framework articulated in four “poles” or focal points (like a compass): resources; governance; activities and impact; for each of them several indicators are elaborated (throughout a long co-production process with the representatives of SSE)⁵ in terms of “ability or capability to...” obtain or reach a certain goal or level of a specific property, whose variation can be measured at a yearly base.

Finally, these indicators can be aggregated in several indexes and eventually they can be synthesised in four macro indexes:

- (a) sustainability (resources);
- (b) participation (democratic governance);
- (c) involvement and effectiveness (output and outcome);
- (d) long term (or systemic) change/impact.

Given its high level of flexibility, adaptation and generalisability (ideal-type form) it can be used in many organisational settings (social enterprises, social cooperatives, associations, federations, etc.) in many fields of activities (health care, social policy, recreational and leisure, cultural heritage, environmental protection, etc.) and in several socio-political-economical-cultural contexts worldwide.

The general “philosophy” implied by the *impact measurement approach* is limited (very narrow) because it stresses the focus mainly on the “results” (outputs and outcomes) of the SSE actions (or activities) and it underestimates the “processes” (decision-making, implementation, monitoring, etc.) that produce these results. It puts the attention on quantitative “measurable” outcomes (*How much?*) and it undervalues the processual dimension of the organizations (*How?*). In other words, we can say that it is more an “ex-post” evaluation approach (summative) than an “itinere” evaluation approach (formative).

⁵ The model works as such: first of all there is the establishment of a *Steering Committee* composed by members of the “Research Team” and of the third sector organizations involved in the action-research project. Often there are one or more representatives for each second or third level organizations. For instance if the experimentation concerns the associations belonging to a federation, usually in the Steering Committee there are chairs of the board of municipality, provincial and regional association’s levels. Then the research team presents the four dimensions theoretical framework, and after that it starts a conversation during which the association’s representatives discuss the indicators proposed for each dimension. The Steering Committee can meet several times until it does reach an agreement on the indicators best suited in order to “measure”, let emerge, the proper “social value” of that specific typology of third sector organization (such as: association or social enterprise, or social cooperative, etc.).

Another limit of this approach consists of the concentration on an organization's single program or service, and it does not take into account the fact that usually in the SSE field the realization/implementation of a service (its "quality") implies the collaborations of a significant number of actors (interrelations, networks, partnerships), and it is often very difficult to extrapolate the contribution of a single organization from the overall inter-organizational network of actors.

Our approach "the Social Added Value" framework assume this complexity of the services delivering system at the local level, that is why it can be defined as a "multi-criteria" theoretical and analytical frame⁶.

The SAVE model is based on the hypothesis that the SSE actors produce a certain level of "relational goods" (goods that are not merely public nor private) and generate a certain amount of "social capital" in the socio-economic environment (community, territorial context) they are embedded. So, the level of "social (added) value" that an SSE actor creates depends on its capacity/ability to "produce" the two above mentioned societal resources.

As far as the question of the "metrics" to be adopted in order to give "visibility" to the *Social Added Value* is concerned, our approach does not show a preference for a specific unit of measurement versus others. We adopt in the first instance the principle of "*adequacy*" or "*fitness for*" or "*appropriateness*" or "*congruity*", meaning that the metrics (monetary or non-monetary one) should correspond to (be coherent with) the mission (core identity) of the SSE actor involved⁷.

⁶ "Multi-criteria" means that the "added value" is composed by four dimensions: the resources' acquisition and management; the decision-making process; the services/activities delivering function; and the level of embeddedness of the third sector organization under scrutiny in the local community. Whereas the "social impact" approach is a mono-criterium framework since it takes into consideration "only" the final results (output, outcomes, effects) of the organization's activity. It focuses the analysis on the "what" and not on the "how". Whereas the "how element" is a key point in the evaluation of third sector actors. It is the "difference that makes a difference" in comparison to public agencies and for-profit corporations.

⁷ The fact that the theoretical framework does not "prefer" (it is not dependent from) a specific unit of measurement; it does not mean that we do not use any "metrics". But simply that the metrics is a matter of agreement that it will be decided during the conversation with the third sector organizations' leaders involved in the evaluation research (see footnote n. 6). For instance a type B social cooperative could prefer a monetary metrics (in euro) in order to show the impact of its work inclusion's activity in term of cost saving for the public administration. Meaning the cost that the public authority should have sustained if it would have taken care of the disabled or mentally ill adult person. Whereas an organization of volunteers would prefer a scores metrics based on a scale 1 to 100.

Secondly, we adopt the principle of “*proportionality*”, meaning that the metrics should be proportionate to the organizational dimension (membership, economic-financial, etc.) of the SSE actor, in order to avoid an excessive burden in term of data collection and analysis⁸.

The set of indicators (variables) and indexes (second level) to be adopted in order to “measure” the social added value of an SSE actor, should be co-designed in a (long time consuming) iterative process⁹ involving all the actors concerned (public, private, non-profit), meaning the stakeholders operating in a specific eco-system.

The actual result of a *social added value* evaluation process could be a final report (social or mission budget, moral report, etc.) with narratives and numbers (graphs, histograms), that offers a representation of the overall “impact” that an SSE actor produces in its environment(s).

It is also possible to agree on a specific “score scale” (on a “0 to 1”; or a “1 to 5”; or a “1 to 100” extension) for each indicator in order to achieve an aggregate score for specific *social value*’s dimensions or sub-dimensions or even a final *social added value* aggregate overall score. The attribution of the single score on a specific indicator is done by a consensus procedure among the actors involved, with a “validation” from an external actor (third party), usually a university research centre.

⁸ The principle of “*adequacy*” states that: “each third sector organization typology should be evaluated in a way that do not hit (damage, distort) its identity, specificity, peculiarity”. For instance the exercise to monetize the value of the time-work produced by volunteers is a negative example, because it distorts the very basic principles and values of volunteering (meaning the free choice to offer – gift – a portion of a person time – after job and family – to the wellbeing of the community). It introduces a *code of meaning* (language) that is in contradiction with the code of “free gift” and that, in the long run, it colonizes the engagement’s motivations of the volunteers.

The principle of “*proportionality*” states that: “the tools utilized in order to evaluate a specific third sector organization typology should be calibrated in relation to the dimension (size) in term of membership, economic resources and human resources. Otherwise there is the risk to introduce a distortion in the day-to-day organization’s functioning. Very complex measurement system can create a dependency towards market-oriented consultancy companies and often are absolutely not necessary for small and medium size organizations (that represent the great majority of third sector organizations around the world).

⁹ See footnote n. 5.

2. The Research Design

Objectives

This survey took place in the period January - August 2018. Its main goal was to experiment with a social impact assessment system suitable for *pro-social associations* (PSA)¹⁰, capable of grasping their characteristics and specificity, enhancing their distinctive and qualifying elements.

In particular, it concerned the associations belonging to the ARCI - Emilia-Romagna system, with the aim of taking a first step forward in the path of a progressive approach to the objective of preparing a corresponding Social Impact Evaluation (SIE) model (*principle of adequacy* and *principle of proportionality*) to the identity peculiarities of the organizations that belong to the membership network.

The research-action has used a wide range of qualitative and quantitative investigation tools.

Firstly, three Focus Groups (of fifteen participants each) were carried out with representatives of the Arci system (five for each Province involved) in order to bring out the key dimensions on which to set up a system of indicators for assessing the social impact of the local units and Provincial Committees.

The three Focus Groups (lasting about three hours each) were organized as follows:

- 1 - East Emilia-Romagna (Ravenna, Forlì-Cesena and Rimini) [Tuesday 13 February 2018];
- 2 - Emilia-Romagna Centro (Ferrara, Bologna and Modena) [Monday 19 February 2018];
- 3 - West Emilia-Romagna (Reggio Emilia, Parma and Piacenza) [Monday 26 February 2018].

Secondly, on the basis of what emerged during the Focus Groups, the survey questionnaire already used in a previous survey (2017)¹¹ was updated.

¹⁰ By “*Associazioni di Promozione Sociale*” (APS), in the Italian law we mean recognized and unrecognized associations, movements, and other social aggregations (non-profit) set up in order to carry out activities of *social utility* in favor of their associates or third parties [Law 383 of 2000]. According to the national census data on Italian Nonprofit Institutions, these associations represent more than 80% of the 350.492 nonprofit organizations active in the country in 2017 (ISTAT 2019).

¹¹ Bassi A., Cuccinelli A., Miolano P. (2017), *Il Valore aggiunto sociale delle Associazioni di Promozione Sociale in Emilia-Romagna*, Rapporto di Ricerca, Bologna, giugno 2017.

Thirdly, a sample of the approximately 850 Arci clubs in the Emilia-Romagna area was identified, using some structural variables.

Fourthly, the questionnaire was administered to the aforementioned sample. The collected data were subjected, after careful verification, to mono-varied and bi-varied statistical processing.

A first presentation of the main findings that emerged from the survey was illustrated in the context of the Arci Emilia-Romagna Regional Congress held on 19 May 2018 in Reggio Emilia.

The survey was carried out in the period January - August 2018, for a total duration of eight months, and it was divided into six operational phases.

The first step of the exploratory investigation consisted in carrying out three Focus Groups, between the second half of February and the first decade of March 2018. The *Focus Group* is a qualitative social research technique [Corbetta 2015], consisting of the meeting of a group of people, selected on the basis of categorical homogeneity criteria, who must interact and discuss on certain issues under the guidance of a moderator (or facilitator). The latter develops and guides the interaction based on a template of questions/topics previously prepared [Bloor 2002: 20; Krueger 2002: 11]. The moderator is supported by one or two assistants who take note of the interaction, with the help of an audio recorder or a video camera.

The writer performed the role of facilitator in the three Focus Groups, while Paola Miolano and Alessandro Fabbri took on the role of assistants, with the help of an audio recorder. The template of questions/topics was elaborated on the basis of the documentation previously collected and analyzed, as well as the results of the research on the Social Added Value of the PSA in Emilia-Romagna (2017)¹².

In light of the results that emerged from the Focus Groups, it was possible to modify the structured questionnaire in order to be better suited to grasp the specificities of the local units involved in the research, namely: the Arci clubs of Emilia-Romagna.

Population and Sample

The selection criteria used in order to obtain a sample that is as "representative" as possible of the regional ARCI reality were two:

Bassi A. e Miolano P. (2017), *Approfondimento del Rapporto "Il Valore aggiunto sociale delle Associazioni di Promozione Sociale in Emilia-Romagna": le APS affiliate ARCI*, Rapporto di Ricerca, Bologna, ottobre 2017.

¹² See footnote n. 11.

- a) the Province or ARCI Territorial Committee of the local associations involved;
- b) the number of members for each local association.

The intent was to reproduce in the sample analyzed the same distribution on the territory (criterion of the Province) of the universe of the clubs, also taking into account their size, observed on the basis of the number of members registered in the year 2017 (criterion of the classes of associates).

Once the universe was defined (see Table 1), it was possible to proceed with the next stage of sampling. We opted for the construction of a sample of 200 units - to whom we administer the questionnaire - so as to obtain a significant number of representatives of the reality studied: the goal was to involve about a fifth of the total population. For each Province and each class of associates, respecting the real division of the population according to these criteria, the number of circles to be interviewed was calculated proportionate to 200 units (see Table 2).

As often happens in empirical investigations, once the invitations to fill in were distributed through the channels of the territorial committees, some organizations consulted did not respond.

At the end of the data collection phase - prolonged compared to the initial plan - it was possible to reconstruct the real sample on which the investigation was carried out. The final respondents amounted to 120 units, since it represents 14% of the population analyzed (see Table 2).

In light of the numerous information and reflections that emerged during the three Focus group sessions, the questionnaire was updated and enriched with new and more specific questions to be addressed to the respondents. In any case, like the previous one, it is a standardized questionnaire, i.e. the same for all the interviewees, and structured, i.e. consisting mainly of closed (both single and multiple choice) and semi-closed questions.

We have chosen to proceed with the administration in digital format (CAWI - Computer Assisted Web Interview), and this has made it possible to simplify the entire process of sending, administering and collecting data as well as the construction of the data matrix.

Given the digital format, the method of administration was self-compilation by the participants. This choice represents an advantage for the quality of the data collected because it ensures that the respondent is not subject to the influence of the interviewer and can respond freely and completely to the questions asked. In addition, the administration time is greatly reduced.

On the other hand, leaving the selected sample the power to decide the timing and ways of responding may have lengthened the questionnaire collection phase

and increased the risk of defection by some. However, it was decided to guarantee support both in the digital compilation phase, and by allowing the possibility for some clubs to send their questionnaire in paper format and proceed internally with the online entry of data.

Table 1 – Population – by number of members and Province

	Until 50	From 51 to 120	From 121 to 250	251 and more	TOTAL
Bologna	43	30	15	32	120 (14%)
Ferrara	36	23	20	13	91 + 1 (11%)
Forlì-Cesena	48	36	15	18	117 (13%)
Modena	36	50	24	55	165 (19%)
Parma	0	0	0	0	99 (12%)
Piacenza	9	7	1	7	22 + 2 (3%)
Ravenna	42	28	12	9	91 (11%)
Reggio-Emilia	39	30	16	32	117 (13%)
Rimini	8	17	2	3	28 + 2 (4%)
TOTAL	261	221	105	169	855 (100%)

Table 2 – Confrontation between the “Ideal Sample” and the “Real Sample”

	Ideal Sample	Real Sample	Diff.
Bologna	28 (14,0%)	21 (17,5%)	+
Cesena		17 (14%)	
Forlì		5 (4,5%)	
Forlì-Cesena	27 (13%)	(18,5%)	+
Ferrara	21 (11%)	20 (16,5%)	+
Modena	39 (19%)	24 (20%)	=
Piacenza	6 (3%)	6 (5%)	=
Ravenna	21 (11%)	16 (13,5%)	=
Reggio-Emilia	27 (13%)	10 (8,2%)	-
Rimini	7 (4%)	1 (0,8%)	-
Parma	24 (12%)	--	--
TOTAL	200 (100%)	120 (100%)	- 80 units

Research tools: The Questionnaire

The contents of the questionnaire were defined, by the research team, from the review of the 2017 template¹³, based on the results that emerged during the focus groups. The primary objective being that of being able to collect as much information and data as possible for the final analysis. With the aim to find out

¹³ See footnote n. 11.

the trend of the ability of the clubs to create social value both internally, towards the members, and towards the outside, in respect of the community in which they are embedded.

Following the changes made, the questionnaire used in this survey was divided into five homogeneous sections by theme and consisted of 44 main questions, some of which have (open) sub-questions in order to better specify the answer provided in the main question.

Below is the new structure of the 2018 SAVE questionnaire:

- A. Structural data (questions 1-7)
- B. Activities (questions A1-A13)
- C. Governance and Association Life (questions B1-B11)
- D. Impact on the community and social empowerment (questions C1-C8)
- E. Sustainability and reporting (accountability) (questions D1- D5)

3. The S.A.V.E. Index

As for the experimentation carried out in 2017¹⁴, the *Social Added Value* Index was also used for the current evaluation project as a useful tool to track the progress of the work of the local ARCI affiliated organizations.

In fact, as has been underlined in the conclusions of the previous report - beyond the problems of data collection - the experimentation of an index on a 0-100 basis represents the most significant result of the work done¹⁵.

¹⁴ See footnote n. 11.

¹⁵ It may be useful to clarify how the scores are calculated. First of all the Steering Committee (see footnote n. 5) should agree upon the metrics. In our case the Presidency of ARCI decide to utilize a 1-100 score scale. Then the committee should define the distribution of the score among the four main dimension. In our case we decide to give 20 points to the *Resources' adequacy* dimension; 30 points to the *Democratic' Governance* dimension; 30 points to the *Social Empowerment* dimension and finally 20 points to the *Impact on the community and Networking* dimension. The next step consists in the identification of the indicators for each dimension. Let us make the hypothesis that we identify six indicators for the third dimension (*Social Empowerment*) concerning the activities of the local clubs. Then the following phase is the attribution of a score for each indicator. In our case we decided to give 1 point if the property of the indicator was low, 3 points if it was medium and 5 points if the property was high. For instance the indicator about the *multi-activity* works as follows: 1 point if the local club delivers only one activity (mono-orientation), 3 points if it delivers "from 2 to 3 activities" and 5 points if the local club carry out "4 or more activities". The next step consists in the aggregation of the score of each indicator in a single index. In the above mentioned case the score goes from a minimum of 6 (if the club had a low level for each indicator) to a maximum of 30 (if the club had a high level for each indicators).

The main advantage of using a *standardized index* is undoubtedly the high degree of comparability of the results that it allows, as well as the *flexibility* and *adaptability* in the internal composition of the single indicators¹⁶, in the face of the great variety of realities that populate the ARCI universe. Even in this new trial, the objective of preparing an *assessment index* suitable for medium-small associations remains twofold:

- provide evidence and information of the *processes, activities* and *impacts* that an organization creates thanks to its daily work (external function);
- constitute a useful tool for *control, planning, and continuous improvement*; that organizations can strategically adopt in a medium-long term perspective to evaluate themselves and assess the coherence between their operations and social mission (internal function).

In light of the above considerations, the basic structure of the SAVE Index has been maintained, which is made up of four sub-sections, each of which identifies a fundamental dimension of identity that connotes local territorial associations. In turn, each sub-section is the "weighted" result of a number of variables selected on the basis of their significance with respect to the indicated dimension.

The four dimensions and the relative indicators are divided as follows (see Table 3).

The *first dimension* aims to assess the solidity of resources on which the association can count to carry out its characteristic activities; it also takes into consideration the presence of social reporting tools. In fact, if it is necessary for third sector entities to be able to rely on stable resources, it is equally important to convey *responsibility* and *transparency* in their management.

For this reason, we have named Index_A "*Index of adequacy of resources*"; we attributed a maximum weight on the total of the Index_SAVE of 20 points.

¹⁶ It would be better to clarify how it is possible to balance the construction of a *standardized index* with the *flexibility* and *adaptability* of the SAVE model to different third sector organization typology. Let us hypothesize that another "culture and recreation federation" will ask to our research team to experiment a SAVE process towards their associates. As usual we will set up a Steering Committee. Let us assume that the federation representatives will choose the 1-100 score scale, but that for them the fourth dimension (*Impact on the community and Networking*) is more important than the third one (activities/services). In that case we will agree to assign a score of 30 points to the fourth dimension and a score of 20 points to the third dimension. In so doing we will have a total 1-100 score points that is comparable with the one adopted in the research presented here, but it assigns a different weight to the internal dimensions of it. The final result will be that we create a *standard* which is *flexible* and *adaptable* to the peculiarities of specific third sector organizations.

The research team identified four variables to be examined based on the reality of the pro-social associations (PSA):

- *Economic-financial resources*: assesses the performance of revenues (turnover) and the operating result (surplus/deficit) over the past three years;
- *Human resources*: evaluates the evolution, also in the last three years, of the participation of members, taking into account the number of members, the number of volunteers and the number of workers;
- *Material resources*: assesses whether the organization has a permanent location and whether this place represents a stable resource or not. We found it important to include this new variable as it was emphasized by the representatives of the local clubs as the presence of a space as a meeting place and sociability is a distinctive feature of the ARCI identity;
- *Reporting capacity*: assesses the presence of more or less elaborate tools adopted by the association in order to transparently communicate the process of use of resources.

The *second dimension* is aimed at highlighting how the association promotes transparency in the management of institutional processes and how it aims to actively involve the largest number of people within it. On the one hand, the degree of participation of the associates in the life of the organization is examined on the other, what are the mechanisms it uses to increase the transparency of decision-making processes.

Index B called "*Governance Democracy Index*" was assigned a maximum score of 30 points on the total of the SAVE Index and therefore has a significant weight on the final evaluation. The level of participation in the decision-making process is fundamental to define the degree of *effective democracy* exercised within the Third Sector organization, which remains a cornerstone of the distinctive identity of the whole non-profit world. In this regard, it is important to know the methods of involvement that are adopted towards the members (old and new ones).

The index is composed of seven indicators (variables), divided into two macro-dimensions:

- *Democratic nature of institutional bodies*: focuses on the two main governing bodies of associative life, that is, the members' Assembly and the Governing Council, noting the periodic frequency of the assemblies, the percentage of participants and the number of meetings of the Council in the last available year.
- *Involvement and transparency*: it includes the type of actions taken by the organization to involve members: it detects how members are informed about the convening of association meetings and if there are moments of reception

for new members. Furthermore, it takes into account the "internal institutional disclosure level", that is, whether there is a memory of the important documents concerning the organization; as well as the methods by which the Association's Bylaw is made known at the time of membership.

Table 3 – SAVE Index Sub-dimensions

INDICATOR	MEANING	QUESTIONS- VARIABLES	SCORE
INDEX A – <i>Resources' adequacy</i>	Evaluates the stability of the economic, material, human and reporting resources on which the organization can count.	D3a, D4a, D5a, 6, D2	20
INDEX B – <i>Democratic' Governance</i>	It highlights the degree of democracy, especially the members' inclusion in the institutional processes of the organization, such as: assemblies, elected elections, visibility and information of documents relating to associative life.	B1, B2, B4.2, B7, B8, B9, B10, B11	30
INDEX C – <i>Social Empowerment</i>	It traces the creation of social value within the organization and its ability to involve and promote its activities towards old and new associates.	C8, A13, A7, A1, A9, A10, A11, A12	30
INDEX D – <i>Impact on the community and Networking</i>	It indicates how much the organization is able to open up to the external environment and to involve partners with the aim of expanding its ability to impact on the surrounding community.	C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, C6, C7, A8	20
SAVE INDEX			100

The *third dimension* focuses on the analysis of the peculiar activities of the ARCI affiliated associations, which is intended to assess how the management of spaces and initiatives is consistent with the identity declared by the network.

As we have seen, the prevailing mission of the ARCI association aims to encourage the enjoyment of culture, sport and entertainment as a means of *socialization* and *civic education*, while promoting *solidarity* values, such as *equality*, *equity* and *inclusion*.

In trying to highlight these aspects, we created the *Social Empowerment Index*, which was assigned a maximum score of 30 points on the total.

It examines eight (8) indicators (variables), divided into three main areas of investigation:

- *Activity development*: the organization's ability to pursue multiple association purposes is analyzed through: a) the promotion of multiple and different activities, b) the ways in which these initiatives are promoted and c) the attention paid to the detection of the satisfaction of the participants;
- *Multi-users*: detects which categories of beneficiaries of different age groups attend the club and participate in the association life; we try to bring out the association's ability to create opportunities for *intergenerational* exchange;

- *Conviviality*: examines the availability of the club to host moments of meeting and socialization open to groups of informal people or other non-profit entities, thus promoting knowledge of the club and more generally the link between it and the social fabric into which it is embedded. In fact, it is important to remember that another distinctive feature of the ARCI network is being a “point of reference” in the territory where it operates.

The *last dimension* focuses on the degree of openness/closeness of ARCI affiliated clubs, or the ability to network with other third sector organizations. It has now been established in the literature (Abdel Samad Z., 2004) that collaborating with other subjects can broaden the *social impact* on the community of reference. By combining efforts and resources: a) better results are often obtained in terms of the beneficiaries involved and of b) the achievement of the planned social objectives. Consider, for example, the case of fundraising campaigns or public events in which a space is managed jointly by multiple associations acronyms. Furthermore, a comparison with other realities often reveals a *positive contamination* of practices and interests which can sometimes lead to the development of new initiatives or services.

The Index_D, called "*Impact on the community and Networking*", aims to bring out the link between the presence of a network and the ability to impact on a wider audience of beneficiaries.

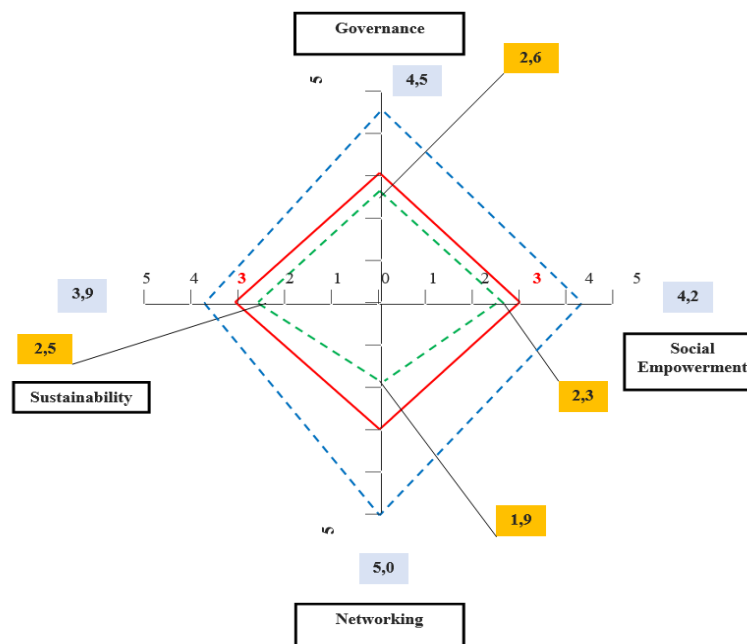
It weighs 20 points on the total of the SAVE Index, and is divided into three main areas of investigation, thanks to the contribution of eight (8) indicators (variables):

- *Developing Network*: notes the extent to which the organizations interviewed collaborate with other non-profit entities, distinguishing the other associations between ARCI and non-ARCI affiliates. It also allows you to understand how strong the link is within the network in question;
- *Innovation*: notes the degree of propensity of clubs to develop new services, initiatives and activities based on the observation of the needs of their members;
- *Relationship with the public*: identifies the degree of collaboration with public bodies, both in relation to relationships governed by agreements, and with reference to participation in specific co-planning tables for the provision of public services.

The SAVE diamond

The scores of the four sub-indices of the SAVE index were parameterized on a scale from one to five, in order to provide a graphical representation through the "SAVE diamond" (see Fig. 9).

Figure 9 – SAVE Diamond - ARCI Emilia-Romagna



LEGEND:

Red Line: benchmark (Value 3)

Green Line: average values of ARCI local units' sample

Blue Line: maximum values in the ARCI local units' sample

The image - with evident heuristic power - allows us to "view" in a simple and immediate way the positioning of the sample studied (and eventually of each individual organizational unit or "sub-sets" of them) with respect to the four dimensions analyzed.

4. Data analysis

4.1 Structural data

In this section we would like to illustrate and comment some structural data of the associations included in the sample.

As we can see from Table 4 as far as the *legal form* is concerned the great majority of our sample is constituted by "social associations" (Italian Law n.383/2000), some others indicate others legal forms (eventually "Social Cooperatives" Italian Law n.381/1991, Foundation, etc.) and very few "Organizations of Volunteers (Italian Law n.266/1991).

Concerning the *year of constitution* (see Table 5) almost half of the sample is composed by organizations born in the new millennium. Around one third is born in the last two decades of the last century, one fifth in the thirty years

after the second war world and less than five per cent in the first half of the last century.

Regarding the organizational size in terms of *number of members*, as we can see from Table 6, the sample is equally distributed in the four established categories with a slight prevalence of the smallest (less than 50 members) and the biggest one (more than 250 members).

As far as the number of *paid staff*, see Table 7, more than half of the sample (57,5%) does not have any. Since we have a significant level of missing data (15%), we must say that only slightly more than one fourth (27,5%) of the selected organizations declare to have at least one unit of paid staff. Only 5% have more than 10 units of paid staff.

Conversely the great majority of the sample is involving active members as *volunteers* in order to carry out its activities. Only 5% declare to not rely on volunteers. The majority of the organizations (36%) is able to activate from “10 to 30” volunteers. Also, in this question we register a high level of missing data (15%).

Concerning the *annual income*, we can see (Table 9) that our sample is constituted by “very small” or “small” organizations. One third of them have annual budgets that do not exceed 15 thousand euro. And two third are below 50 thousand euro. Only a minority of organizations (17%) overcome the threshold of 100 thousand euro per year. The mean value is 78.300 euro whereas the median value is 28.500 euro.

Taking into consideration the *internal structure of the income portfolio* of the selected organizations, we can see (Table 10 and Figure 1) that the prevailing *sources of income* (more than the half of the annual budget) come from members (either in the form of annual membership fees or of payment for services received), around 58%. The remaining sources are far lesser important: “donations” (9%) “from the public administration” (8%), “commercial activities” (4%), and “other sources” (such as financial management) around 11%. To be mentioned the high level of missing answers/data to that question.

This configuration is very atypical in respect of the Italian SSE sector as a whole, whereas the income coming from “contracts with the public authority” and from the “sale of goods and services” are much higher.

The last two variables that we would like to illustrate are the “territorial area of activities (see Table 11) and the “affiliation to second level organizations” (see Table 12).

As we can see more than half of the organizations included in our sample (52%) indicate the *municipality* as the territorial context where they operate. More

or less the same size (16%) is active at a smaller level (Neighbourhood) or at a bigger level (Province). The other territorial dimensions are residual: 6% Health District, 3% Region, and 6% other.

Finally, as far as the affiliation to a second level association (federations, etc.), in addition to the ARCI network, only a (minority but significant) of our sample gives a positive answer (27%).

After the elaboration of the four main indexes (sub-dimensions)¹⁷ it has been possible to aggregate their scores in a composite index called SAVE Index, that has a score range from 0 to 100 points.

As we can see from the statistics of Table 13, it goes from a minimum of 20 points to a maximum of 70, with a means of 46,9 and a median of 47,3.

Table 4 – Juridical Form

Typology	Value	%
Organisations of Volunteers	6	5,0
Social Association	96	80,0
Others Forms	18	15,0
Total	120	100,0

Table 5 – Year of foundation

Year	Values	%
1905-1950	5	4,2
1951-1980	24	20,0
1981-1999	38	31,7
2000-2017	53	44,2
Total	120	100,0

Table 6 – Associations' members

N.	Values	%
1 - 50	34	28,3
51 - 120	26	21,7
121 - 250	27	22,5
> 250	33	27,5
Total	120	100,0

¹⁷ As far as the internal composition of the four main indexes is concerned, see Table 3 above.

Table 7 – Paid staff numbers

N.	Values	%
None	69	57,5
1 - 3	18	15,0
4 - 10	9	7,5
11 and more	6	5,0
Total	102	85,0
Missing info	18	15,0
Total	120	100,0

Table 8 – Numbers of Volunteers

N.	Values	%
0	6	5,0
1 - 9	34	28,3
10 - 30	43	35,8
31 - 60	16	13,3
+ 61	3	2,5
Total	102	85,0
Missing info	18	15,0
Total	120	100,0

Table 9 – Class of annual income

	Values	%	Valid %	Cumulate %
1,00 Until 5.000 euro	20	16,7	17,9	17,9
2,00 From 5.001 to 15.000	19	15,8	17,0	34,8
3,00 From 15.001 to 50.000	34	28,3	30,4	65,2
4,00 From 50.001 to 100.000	20	16,7	17,9	83,0
5,00 100.001 and more	19	15,8	17,0	100,0
Total	112	93,3	100,0	
Missing info	8	6,7		
Total	120	100,0		

Statistics		
N	Valid	112
	Missing	8
Means		78.300
Median		28.500
Mode		3.000
Minimum		250
Maximum		811.000

Table 10 – Sources of income (51% and over)

N.	Values	%	
Public subsidies		6,1	
Public contracts		2,0	8,1
Membership		6,1	
Service to members		51,6	57,7
Donations from individual		3,0	
Donations from enterprises		4,0	
Donations from other NP		2,0	9,0
Sale of goods and services		4,0	
Others		11,2	
Base	99		
Missing	21		
	120		

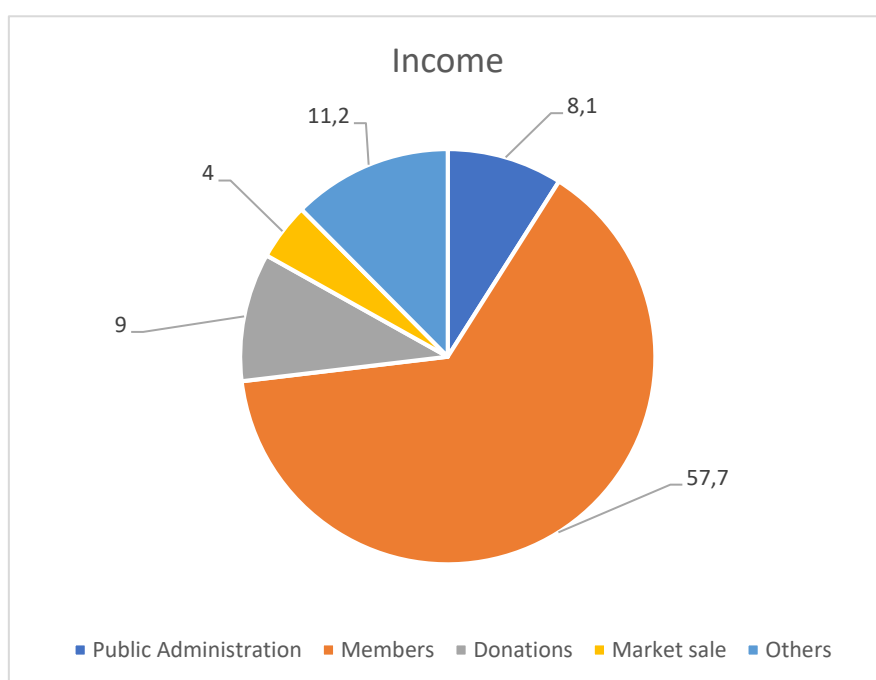
Table 11 – Territorial Area of Activities

	Values	%
Neighbourhood	20	16,7
Municipality	62	51,7
Health District (group of municipalities)	7	5,8
Province	19	15,8
Region	4	3,3
Others	8	6,7
Total	120	100,0

Table 12 – Affiliation to umbrella's (second level) Associations

Affiliated	Values	%
Yes	33	27,5
No	86	71,7
Total	119	99,2
Missing	1	0,8
Total	120	100,0

Fig. 1 – Sources of income (51% and over)



Taking into consideration the distribution of our sample in deciles (see Table 13), it emerges that the majority of the selected organizations (37%) are included in the fourth decile (from 41 to 50). In the fifth decile (from 51 to 60) encompasses around one third of the organizations (31%). Whereas the first three deciles (until 40) aggregate one fifth of the sample (21%) and the six and last decile (61 to 70) one out of ten organizations. To be stated that around 10% of the respondents are missing.

Given the above mentioned distribution we build a synthetic Index articulated in three degrees: low (score from minimum to 36,6), medium (score from 36,7 to 53,32) and high (score from 53,33 to highest), see Table 14.

Table 13 – Categories of SAVE Index - Until 40 = ("Until 30" = 6 + "From 31 to 40" =17)

	Values	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Until 40	23	19,2	21,5	21,5
From 41 to 50	40	33,3	37,4	58,9
From 51 to 60	33	27,5	30,8	89,7
61 and more	11	9,2	10,3	100,0
Total	107	89,2	100,0	
Missing info	13	10,8		
Total	120	100,0		

Statistics

Valid N.	107
Missing	13
Means	46,94
Median	47,28
Mode	40,25
Minimum	20,00
Maximum	70,00

Table 14 – Degrees of SAVE Index (Low = <36,6; Medium = <53,32; High = > 53,32)

	Values	%	Valid %	Cumulate %
1 Low	16	13,3	15,0	15,0
2 Medium	64	53,3	59,8	74,8
3 High	27	22,5	25,2	100,0
Total	107	89,2	100,0	
Missing info	13	10,8		
Total	120	100,0		

4.2 Cross tabulations

In this section we would like to illustrate and comment some bi-variate analysis that we have realized in order to find out correlations between the SAVE Index and the *structural variables* observed in the previous section.

In the following graphs we show the distribution of the data of the organizations that scored “high” in the Save Index, inside (in relation to) each category of the structural variables analyzed.

As we can see from Fig. 2, it seems that the *oldest clubs* score a high level of SAVE compared to the new ones: around 40% of the clubs borne before 1980 in comparison to the 23% of those constituted in the new millennium.

The *number of members* seems to be positively related to a high score in the SAVE Index (see Fig. 3): indeed almost half (45%) of the clubs with more than 250 members fall in that group; a level more than double in comparison with the scores of the smaller size’ clubs.

A similar correlation seems to exist respect to the *number of volunteers* (see Fig. 4). Indeed the proportions of clubs with a high SAVE score grew from the “very small” to the “small” until the category of “medium size” clubs (from 13.8% until 50%); but then it decreases for the “big” clubs in terms of volunteers involved (to 33.3%).

Also the *number of paid staff* seem to affect the SAVE index (see Fig. 5). Actually there is an increase from 23.7% of the clubs without paid staff to 83.3% of those with more than 10 units.

As far as the *amount of revenue* is concerned, it is possible to detect the presence of a positive relation with a high level of the score SAVE index (see Fig. 6). The proportions of clubs that score high, grew from the 21.6% of those with “small budgets” to the 39,5% of those with bigger budgets.

If we take into consideration the *territorial area of activities* (see Fig. 7) we realized that there is a positive relation until a certain dimension (Health District: a plurality of municipalities): from 11% to 57%; than we observe a fall as far as we move to a bigger dimension (16.7% and 25%).

Finally, there is no doubt about the fact that a high score of the SAVE index is positively correlated to the clubs’ *networking capacity*, meaning the “affiliation to federations (second level associations)”. As we can see from Fig. 8, it represents the 38,7% of the affiliated clubs compared to the 19.7% of the not affiliated ones.

Fig. 2 – % value of SAVE score “high” by year of foundation

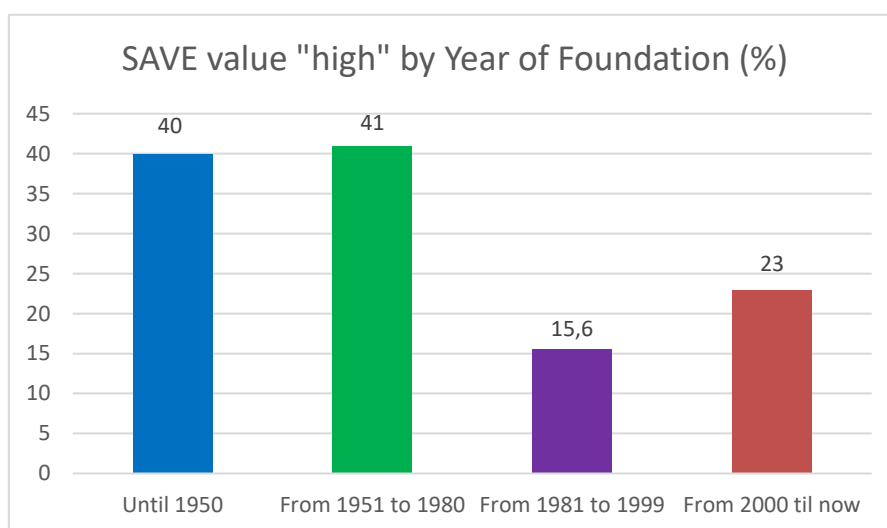


Fig. 3 – % value of SAVE score “high” by number of association’s members

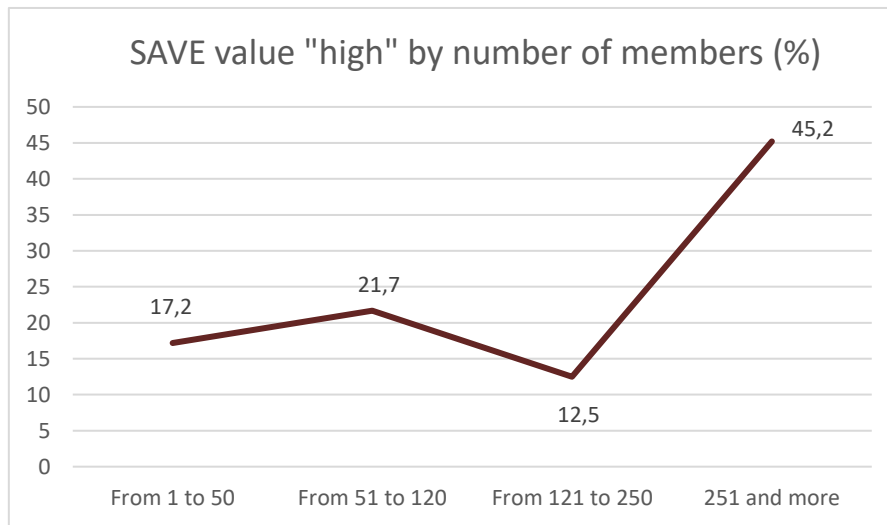


Fig. 4 – % value of SAVE score “high” by number of association’s volunteers

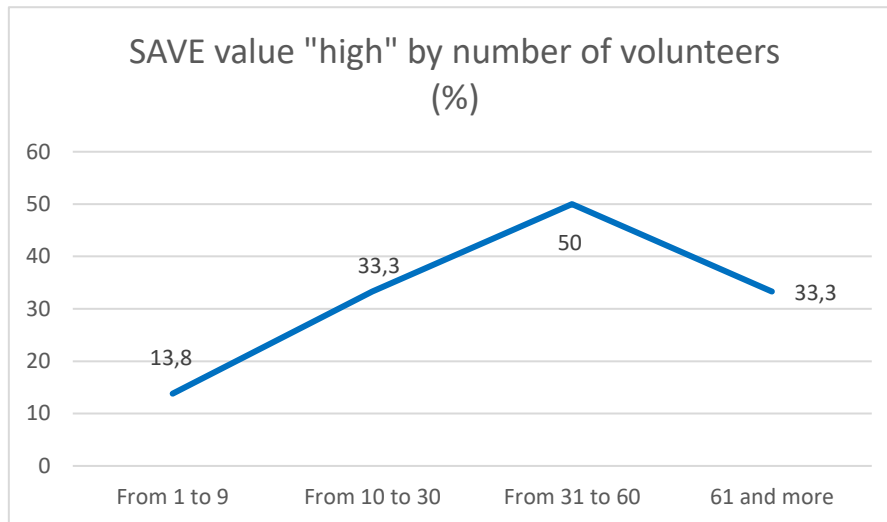


Fig. 5 – % value of SAVE score “high” by number of association’s paid staff

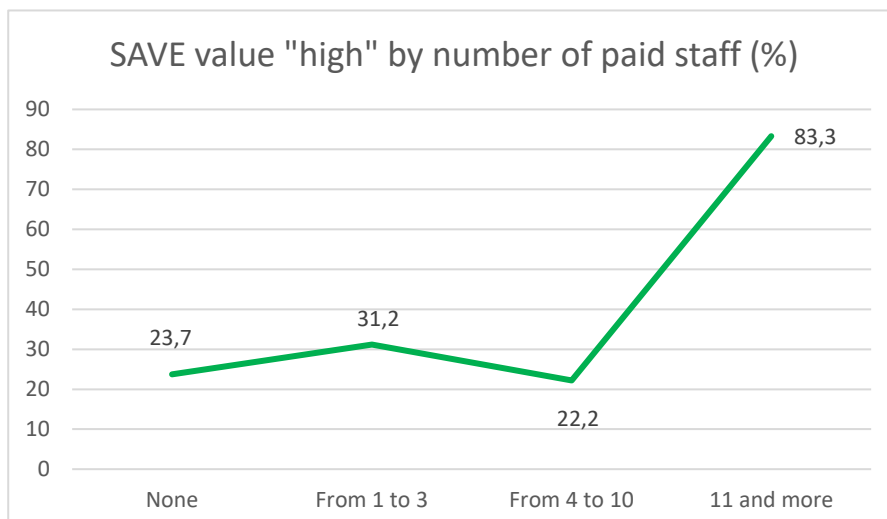


Fig. 6 – % value of SAVE score “high” by class of income

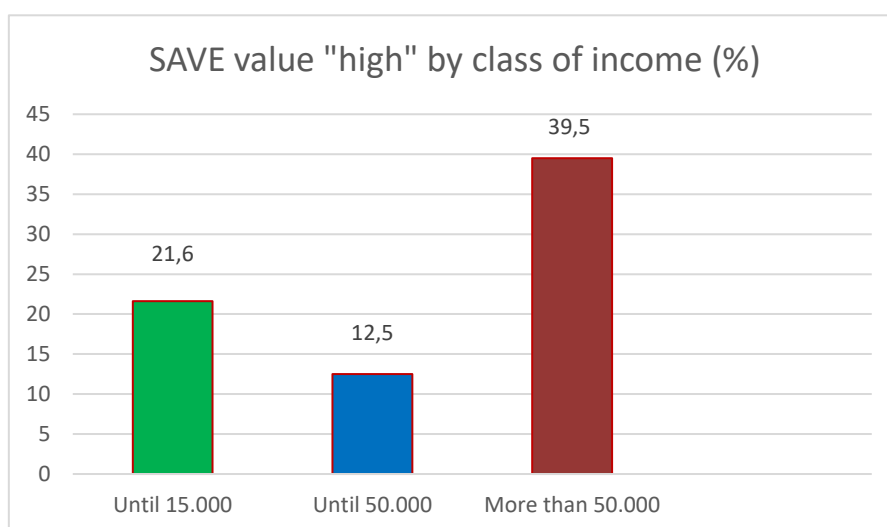


Fig. 7 – % value of SAVE score “high” by territorial area

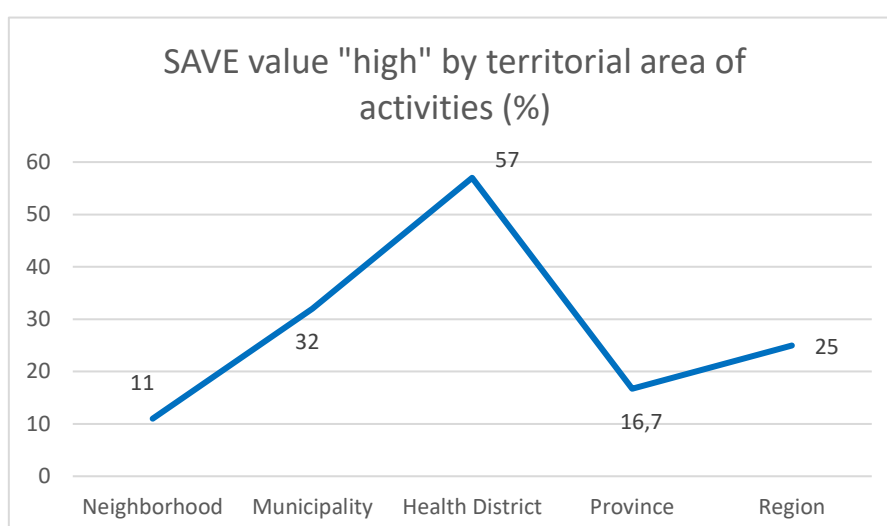
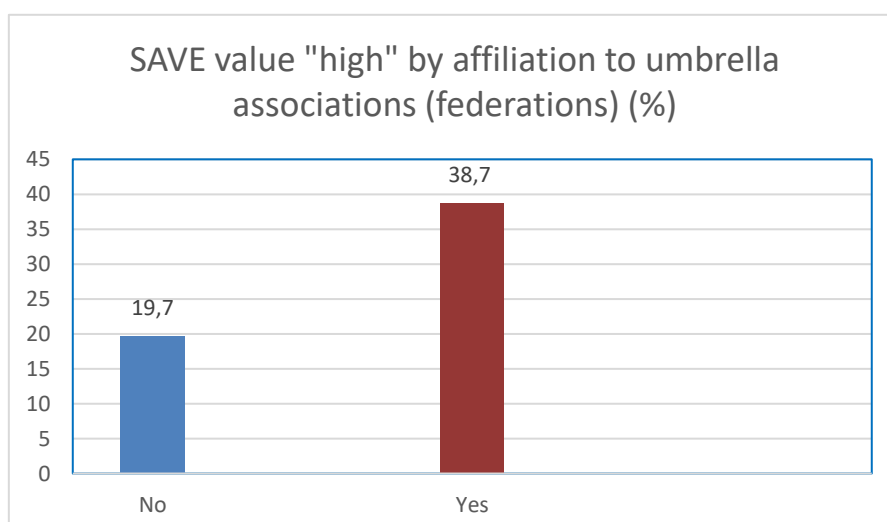


Fig. 8 – % value of SAVE score “high” by affiliation to umbrella associations (federations)



In conclusion, from the available data, we can affirm that it is more likely to find a high score SAVE index among the clubs with the following characteristics: old age constitutions; big members' size; medium volunteers size; high paid staff size; high budget dimension; medium size area of activity; and affiliated to second and third level associations/federations.

5. Comments: Strengths and weaknesses

From the analysis of the aggregated data, it is possible to affirm that the areas of strength of the associations affiliated to the ARCI-ER network are the following:

- the ability to involve its associates in the life of the organization, thus promoting the creation of internal *social capital*. The concept of a "democratic and inclusive gym" of which the ARCI managers spoke during the Focus groups returns. It is therefore confirmed that one of the distinctive characteristics of ARCI affiliated clubs is the role of safeguarding *socialization* for the community to which it is addressed;
- the variety of (multiple) activities that are proposed within the overall offer of the regional network, thus guaranteeing space for the use of cultural, sports or entertainment services, often free of charge. The issue of *accessibility* to services of this kind is actually a critical aspect of modernity, especially when we refer to some less urbanized areas or to some categories of beneficiaries, such as the elderly and young people. It is probable that if the offer of these associations were to cease, their associates would not be able to find equally valid alternatives and would simply remain excluded from these fundamental services for the civic and inclusive growth of a community;
- *sound and sustainable management* of the resources available over time. We refer here to the economic ones and the opportunity to take advantage of spaces often free of charge or at a discounted price. It is intuitive to think that the possibility of using these resources is a right that must be protected within a civilly developed society, but it also represents a responsibility to be managed for the benefit of the whole community.

On the other hand, some elements of the system's weakness also emerge, including:

- the propensity to adopt *tools for assessing needs* and *detecting satisfaction* concerning the activities carried out is still too weak. It is probable that an increase in attention to these issues would result in a greater ability to grasp

new needs and attract new associates/beneficiaries, improving the overall quality of the activities carried out;

- in many cases the *degree of openness* to the “outside” (external environment) is still an underutilized (potential) resource, which could help local associations to reinforce their territorial roots and also the effectiveness of their social impact. The comparison with other realities also has positive effects in terms of the services’ innovation capacity and a more effective resources’ management;
- *the ability to renew and attract new associates and volunteers*. Each organization of a local nature has always had to deal with the need to guarantee the continuity of its associative life thanks to the *intergenerational* exchange. Today more than yesterday, the issue of social and civic participation turns out to be a very complex aspect. The decision of a person to devote part of their time to social activities is the result of multiple factors that affect their preferences/motivations and the possibility of being able to freely decide how to invest their time.

From the data collected during this exploratory and experimental investigation, it emerges the need for the Arci network not to underestimate this criticality. As well as the urgent need to implement adequate organizational measures to stem, as far as possible, associative disaffection, a growing phenomenon and unfortunately increasingly shared by many other third sector organisations.

Final Remarks

At the end of our journey, it is perhaps appropriate to briefly recall the main findings that emerged during this investigation.

The article illustrated and commented the main results from an empirical research on the *Social Added Value Evaluation* of an Umbrella association of “leisure and recreation” in the Emilia-Romagna Region.

The SAVE model is based on a theoretical framework articulated in four “poles” or focal points (like a compass): (a) sustainability (resources); (b) participation (democratic governance); (c) involvement and effectiveness (output and outcome); (d) long term (or systemic) change/impact. For each of them several indicators have been elaborated (throughout a long co-production process with the representatives of SSE).

The originality of the present research rests in the application of the SAVE framework - that has been elaborated in previous works (Bassi 2013, 2014; Bassi and Vincenti 2015) mainly in relation to social cooperatives and social enterprises - to the associational/associative sector.

A first result of the research consisted in having *recalibrated* the SAVE index in relation to the type of target subjects - the clubs affiliated to Arci/Emilia-Romagna - integrating and sometimes modifying the indicators developed in the course of previous experimental surveys.

This led to a reallocation of the "weight" of the four main dimensions into which the SAVE index is divided: a) adequacy of resources (from 15 to 20 points); b) governance and internal democracy (from 35 to 30); c) characteristic activities/social empowerment (from 20 to 30); d) impact on the community and networking (from 30 to 20).

Secondly, a precise *redefinition* of the single indicators that make up the four main indices/dimensions of the SAVE was carried out, also in light of the advices that emerged during the qualitative survey carried out in the first part of this research through the focus groups.

We should also mention the *limits* of the inquiry. Firstly, not all indices were built with the entire sample of analyzed clubs as a basis. In particular, the first index, relating to the "adequacy of resources", presents a certain number of missing data (107 circles out of 120 studied answered). Secondly, the average and median data of the scores achieved by the sample as a whole vary significantly from index to index, showing a higher score for the "resource adequacy" (10.1 out of 20) and "internal democracy" indices (15.7 out of 30) and lower for the "social empowerment" (13.6 out of 30) and "networking" indices (7.4 out of 20).

The usefulness of the SAVE index - if applied systematically and continuously - is mainly represented by the possibility of checking the *trend* of the organizational performance over time. Therefore, its effectiveness can only be assessed by carrying out regular (annual or biennial) surveys.

The comparison between the experimental investigations carried out in 2017 and 2018 allows to make a first judgment about the *reliability* of the instrument. In fact the average value of the SAVE index in the three samples analyzed does not present significant deviations: 46.1 points in the PSA 2017 survey; 46.9 points in the ARCI 2017 survey; and finally 46.9 points in the ARCI 2018 survey. Just as there are no significant deviations in the average scores of the four sub-indices that make up the SAVE index, there is a substantial continuity in the values recorded, with a slight improvement in first three indices and a worsening in the fourth index. This indicates, in the writer's opinion, the validity of the instrument

proposed and tested here, especially for the purpose of *comparative analysis* of a longitudinal nature.

In conclusion, it seems possible to affirm that the present survey may constitute a significant step forward in the elaboration of a heuristic, precise and flexible tool for the detection of the *Social Added Value* that the organizations studied - in our case a sample of Arci clubs in Emilia-Romagna Region - they produce for the surrounding community and for the society as a whole.

There is still much to be done to arrive at the elaboration of a comprehensive model applicable to the various types (families) of Third Sector organizations operating in Italy. The effort that has been made here, has been aimed at developing a *conceptual framework* and at "testing" its validity and reliability through a practical application.

But, above all, to develop a tool that is "suitable" to grasp the specificity of a particular type of third sector organization, meaning: the *pro-social associations* (Social Promotion Associations); a tool based on the principles of "adequacy" and "proportionality". Principles which should be the foundation of a "promotional" and "subsidiary" legislation/regulation concerning the organized civil society's actors (Bassi 2017b; Bassi 2018) in modern democracies.

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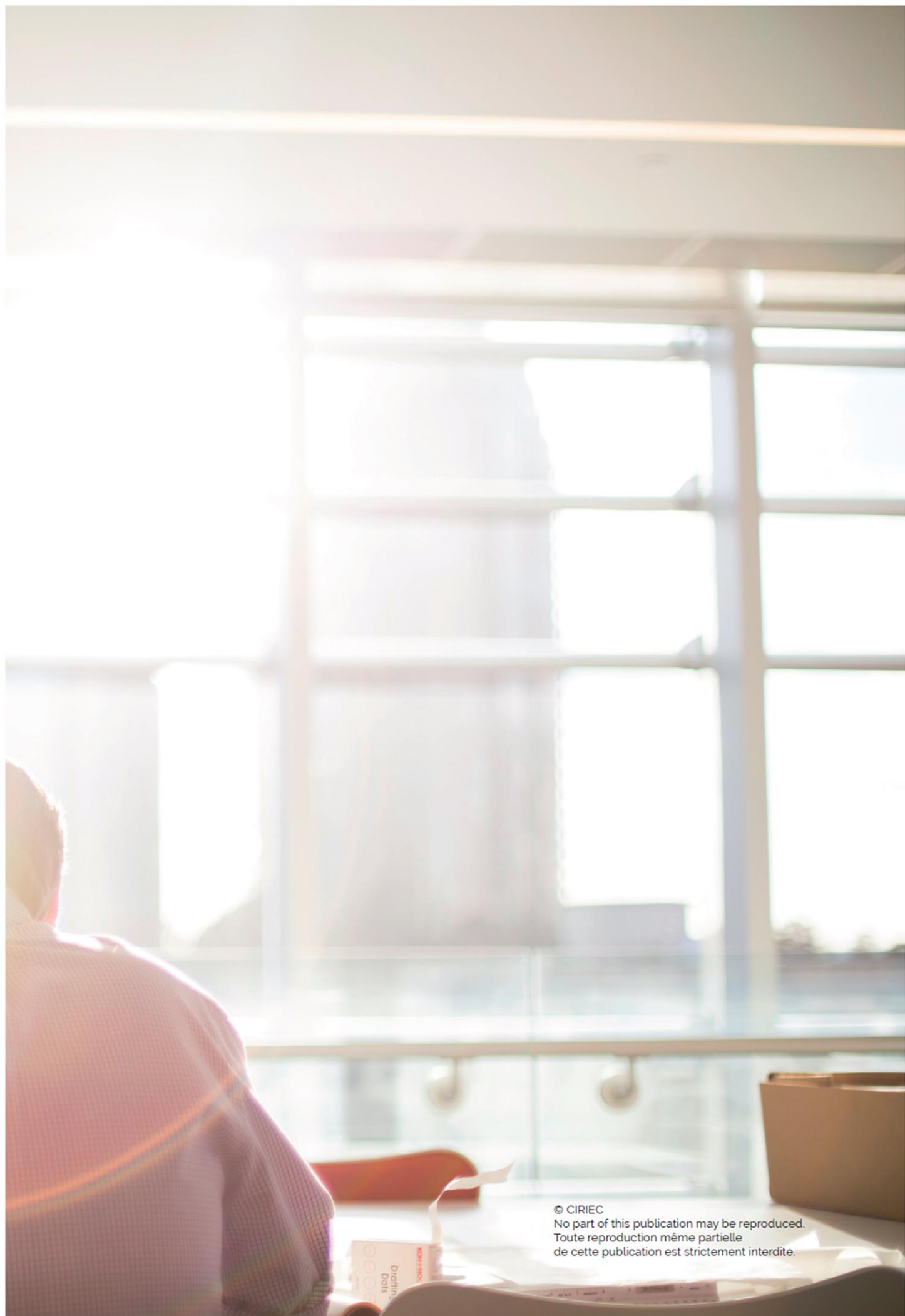
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