Sharing and Caring
COST ACTION CA16121

Member Countries Report on the
Collaborative Economy

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Sustainability is promoted by the urban sustainability group and by other grassroots organisations. It is not systematically regulated by the government.

Prior reports and research

There are two limited reports in Israel – one by the Weconomize group and the other by the Urban Sustainability project. Both reports are limited to the urban environment. The urban sustainability project is an experimental endeavour that researches opportunities for supporting trust and collaboration in cities.

Shelly Kreiczer-Levy is currently conducting a study on the sharing economy in Israel and mapping the various local institutional arrangements. Preliminary results will be available for the next version of this report.

ITALY

Italy has been historically characterised by interesting experiences of social mutualism, such as the Workers' Mutual Aid Societies founded in the second half of the XIX Century. At the turn of the millennium, other experiences emerged under the pressure of the financial crisis and cuts in spending on the institutional welfare. They include ethical purchasing groups, free software communities, co-housing, self-revitalisation projects of old/abandoned buildings, Fab Labs, co-working spaces, time banking, social cooperatives, ethical finance, urban vegetable gardens, and self-organised gyms. These bottom-up initiatives aim to develop new social relationships together with alternative forms of economy and cooperation. According to Carlini (2011), they have brought forward the "economy of us": a set of experiences based on social bonds in which groups of people seek community-based solutions to economic problems on the basis of principles of reciprocity, solidarity and sociality.

Types and models

Several virtuous examples were identified; we summarise them in this report grouped by their main target: **purchasing, collective finance, housing, sport, culture, health and well-being.**

Purchasing. Solidarity purchasing groups (Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale, GAS) are the most common collective purchasing organisations in Italy. They form alternative networks managed by groups of citizens who come together to buy food and other goods at wholesale prices and/or from small local producers, to be redistributed between members. Founded in the '90, they reinforce and celebrate ethical values, respect for the environment, and solidarity between consumers and producers. The number of GAS registered a growth of almost 50% per year between 2011 and 2014, when they reached the total of 2000 (Carlini, 2011). As by 2014, these groups involved more than 400,000 people, which caused a notable drop in purchasing from large retailers and hypermarket chains (Tozzi, 2014). GAS members usually

meet up in schools or offices. They are neighbours and/or friends often involved in the activities of a social centre. GASs are geographically distributed in rural and metropolitan areas alike. They exploit an array of computer-mediated communication tools including email and digital platforms alongside with word of mouth, and they leverage social networks both for organising transport and for supporting local agricultural projects. In 1997, the Italian Online Network of GASs was created. It aimed to put groups in contact with each other, thus encouraging the exchange of information and the sharing of practices and management models, promoting a philosophy of ethical consumption. Nowadays, there are over 1,000 groups registered with the Network. Over the years, GAS have become a powerful tool in counterbalancing the economic power of the Mafia in Southern Italy. A successful example is the Libera Terra initiative, which includes different social cooperatives run by young people who developed several social projects exploiting assets and lands confiscated from criminal organisations. Their mission is to restore dignity in territories with a strong Mafia presence, by creating autonomous and cooperative farms that are self-sufficient and capable to create jobs.

Collective finance. Interesting examples of collaborative economy in Italy are the Mutual Aid and Ethical Finance Groups (MAG). MAG are financial cooperatives supporting job creation and company development through fundraising and the use of private capital. Such companies are legally registered as cooperatives or associations and operate in respect of high ethical values (e.g. solidarity, ecological, cultural and environmental values). MAGs collect money from shareholders as share capital to finance social projects by providing loans with favourable interest rates and repayment conditions. Once funds are returned, they are immediately reused. A paramount example is the case of the Tomasoni's organic dairy farm in Brescia that was saved from bankrupcy thanks to the members of 90 ethical purchasing groups that together raised the necessary money through the *Mag2 Finance* in Milan (Carlini, 2011, p. 10). These bottom-up micro-credit experiences are numerous, such as the Ethical and Social Fund of Piagge, founded in a suburb of Florence, which in 10 years has granted 141 loans worth 315.000 Euros in total. A different example is Rimaflow in Milan, where a group of workers who had been laid off by the Maflow automotive factory, due to its closure in 2012 have reconverted the factory into a "citadel of the other economy", where electrical equipment is reused and recycled. Similar experiences can be found also in other cities, such as Officine Zero in Rome.

Housing. In Italy, and particularly in Rome, there are several **"squat houses"**, many of which have been transformed into social and intercultural laboratories partially because of the presence of different migrant communities. A typical example is Porto Fluviale, a military warehouse which was abandoned for years. Since 2003, 450 people from three continents live there and the environment has been refurbished by the inhabitants. The external walls are covered with murals by the street artist Blu, who turned them into an immense work of urban art. Inside the building, there is a space for socialising and sharing experiences called "Fronte del Porto". Other experiences are **self-revitalisation projects and co-housing**. Over the last 12 years, in Rome, the 100 members of the cooperative Inventare l'Abitare (Creative Living) have co-designed the refurbishment of 8 abandoned public places, now devoted to residential purposes, through an open and collaborative approach.

Sport. Community-based and **self-organised gyms** are popular. They are often located in places also hosting other social activities, but sometimes they emerge as isolated "strongholds", providing new places of encounters between concrete buildings and degradation. Most of them have been opened up with the help and support of the neighbourhood. Such gyms have spread exponentially (at least 20 in Rome, and 60 throughout Italy). They oppose the commercialization and commodification of sport, with pricey branded equipment and exclusive premium memberships, and promote sport accessibility to all, as demonstrated by very low course fees. They have courses for children and the elderly, carry out parallel cultural activities for the neighbourhood, and organise boxing and martial arts events.

Culture. There are several collective initiatives in the Italian cultural context. The most paradigmatic example was **Teatro Valle** in Rome. The building dates back to 1727 and was closed in 2011. At that point, it was suddenly occupied by craftsmen, artists and citizens, becoming one of the most interesting cultural sites of the city up to 2014 when it was closed by the municipal authority. Another example is **Macao** in Milan an arts, culture and research centre occupied by artists and cultural workers.

Health and well-being. The **Ambulatorio Medico Popolare** in Milan aims to respond to the increasingly privatisation of the healthcare system and react against the economic impoverishment of people. There are also many **grass-roots schools** for migrants that provide free Italian classes, as well as experiences of **self-organised crèches** for precarious workers, such as L'Alveare in Rome, a co-working space for children, where many projects are carried out in support of parenting, training activities and cultural events.

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