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## STRONGER TOGETHER: HOW COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS IN ITALY ARE COLLABORATING TO TACKLE EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGES AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES



*In 2016 Italian banking origin foundations, represented by Acri, the Government and the National Forum of the Third Sector created “Fondo per il contrasto della povertà educative minorile”, a fund with the aim of tackling educational disadvantages in Italy. Since that, community foundations have partnered up to develop shared projects in collaboration with national and local actors. In this piece, we will explore in depth two projects Batti il cinque! and Ecologia Integrale per I Diritti dell’Infanzia, their objectives, the results achieved so far and the benefits of these partnerships among community foundations.*

In 2016, Italian banking origin foundations, represented by [Acri](#), the Government and the National Forum of the Third Sector created “Fondo per il contrasto della povertà educativa minorile”, a special fund which aims at tackling educational disadvantages in Italy. This initiative provides resources for projects throughout Italy and it has represented a great chance for community foundations to come together and collaborate on shared projects on this subject.

Within this framework and aligning with the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning), community foundations across Italy have started to collaborate and have given life to a whole variety of projects, two of which are described below.

### **BATTI IL CINQUE!**

For the first time in Italy, five community foundations, [Fondazione Comunitaria del Lecchese](#), which leads the partnership, [Fondazione della Comunità Bresciana](#), [Fondazione di Comunità di Mirafiori](#), [Fondazione di Comunità di San Gennaro](#) and [Fondazione Comunità di Messina](#), teamed up, with the support of



Assifero, and launched “*Batti il cinque!*” (in English: High Five!). This 3-years collaboration is coordinated and guided by the five community foundations and entails 47 partners (CFs included), on a local and national level.

The project’s objective is to prevent and counteract educational disadvantage phenomenon, by providing, within the five different territories, to disadvantaged young people (between 5 and 14) and their families more learning opportunities and giving them access to a wider network of relationships.

To achieve this, *Batti il cinque!* entails three types of actions: integrating the existing educational activities, carried out by schools, with new laboratories and experiences for the students, developing “educational agreements” with the families, supporting parents in fully embracing their role, and, lastly, enhancing Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) activities and facilitating exchange experiences among young people involved.

In its first year, the project has involved overall over 2,400 students, 128 families and almost 300 between teachers and educators.

*Batti il Cinque!* is a clear example of what community foundations can achieve by collaborating, without losing their identity and local features. Indeed, even though the general objectives are established and shared by all the organisations, the ways in which they are achieved differ in each territory. Activities and initiatives are tailored and crafted based on the expressed and emerging needs of the community and its characteristics, thanks to the involvement of local actors. Approximately every four months, the main partners meet to discuss the progress made by each one of them, to share problems encountered on the way, to gather cues and to learn from each other experience.

## **ECOLOGIA INTEGRALE PER I DIRITTI DELL’INFANZIA**

*Ecologia Integrale per i diritti dell’infanzia’s* objective is to counteract educational disadvantages among children, aged between 0 and 6, located in two very different cities: Messina and Brescia. It is an innovative 4-year experimental project that aims at testing a new paradigm of policy that revolves around the idea of providing to people an initial stock of wealth, able to create an external “shock”, rather than providing them a continuous flow of resources.

The project entails a tight collaboration of two community foundations, Fondazione Comunità di Messina, who leads the partnership, and Fondazione della Comunità Bresciana, and several other actors: local social cooperative (e.g. [Cooperativa Sociale Cauto](#)), local institutions (the Municipality of both Brescia and Messina), universities, national partners, like [Assifero](#), [CEVAS](#), and international ones, like [REVES](#).

Ecologia Integrale per i diritti dell'infanzia is a highly innovative project that deploys on three different levels:

- **Universal level**, that aims at promoting the health and cognitive development of the newborns in the related territories. As soon as a new child is born, the operator brings the greetings from the whole community by visiting the family at home. By meeting in person, the professional is able to identify and assess more sensitive and struggling cases that will need to be treated further. This universal level revolves around the idea that it is necessary to intervene on all the aspects - social, educational, sanitary, economic - that influence newborns in their first 1,000 days of life, the period in which they develop more.
- **Community level**, whose objective is to involve the newborns and their families in engaging activities, actively joining participatory spaces on different topics such as educational, cultural and networking ones, offering them the opportunities to belong and be surrounded by the community.
- **Personal level**, that aims at developing ad hoc solutions based on the needs of the respective families, mostly identified during the home visiting.

And it is exactly in this last level that the most innovative element of the project unveils: the *capitale personale di capacitazione* (in English, personal capital for individuals' empowerment). After signing a shared agreement with the individuals, the community foundation provides them a stock of wealth, i.e. the *capitale personale di partecipazione* that generates long-term opportunities and advantages. This one-off budget can be invested according to the person's needs in, for instance, living in a chosen house; supporting access, maintenance and reconciliation of the parent work in collaboration with the social economy of the territory; establishing a scholarship for the future of the child, and/or to facilitate for one parent the acquisition of a set of work skills; determining a health budget to support in the long term any gaps in the parents' autonomy.

As of November 2019, the two community foundations have issued 27 personal capital for individuals' empowerment, invested for a wide variety of needs, such as support in buying a home, access to psychological care, support in accessing the job market. Since the beginning, 74 home visits have been carried out and 2 "times for families", participatory spaces that involve both children, who can use play areas with others, and parents, giving them quality time with their children and networking and educational opportunities, have been opened.

Given its complexity, trainings have been offered to the operators to enable them to better identify and tackle difficult situations and enhance their abilities to accompany people during the whole path.

Even though the main strategy is shared between the two community foundations, the way in which it is implemented in the territories is different, based on the individual needs, and the acquired knowledge by the community foundations and local actors. For instance, in Messina the personal capital for individuals' empowerment has been used mainly to support the buying of the house. There are two reasons: on the one hand, housing is one of the most pressing issue in the city, along with employment. On the other, this money has a multiplier effect and the most impact on people's life since Fondazione Comunità di Messina had an existing project, Capacity, focused on this matter. In Brescia a pressing priority was the access to the job market: therefore, the *capitale personale di capacitazione* has been used to provide trainings and finance internships for individuals in need and engage with a specialized employment agency in order to support the person in finding a job.

Another interesting element of Ecologia Integrale per I diritti dell'infanzia is the complex system, formed by local partnerships among the community foundations, local cooperatives and local institutions, put together to acquire insightful information on individuals.

Finally, another valuable result has been the active participation and the involvement of the community itself. For instance, in Brescia, Cooperativa Cauto has involved local associations of women, [Viva Vittoria](#) and Ricuciamo la solidarietà, that have voluntarily knitted over 250 wool covers that local operators bring to the newborns during the home visit.

Francesca Mereta, Assifero

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For more information: [Assifero](#) (only in Italian)