

THE SOCIAL INNOVATION OF SOCIAL COOPERATIVES OPERATING ON CONFISCATED MAFIA PROPERTIES: SUPPORT FACTORS AND CRITICAL ISSUES

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Abstract:

In recent years, the theme of *Social Innovation* (SI) has gained significant importance both in academic studies and in policy. In the many definitions of SI proposed by scholars the aspect of change seems to be central. Making social innovation means to find and to provide new solutions to the social needs of individuals and communities; to develop and to introduce changes in the relationships between individuals and institutions; and again, to redefine the priorities of the economic and social development. In this paper we focus on a particular form of SI realized by social cooperatives operating in Italy on assets confiscated from the mafia. Thanks to a law of popular initiative these goods can be allotted to social cooperatives to carry on entrepreneurial activities, involving also disadvantaged people at the risk of social exclusion. In this way it is possible to generate employment and to increase social, cultural and economic development of the affected local communities. The social use makes such goods productive and allows a redemption from the mafia. The very existence of these cooperatives has an important symbolic value affirming the presence of the State and enhancing the credibility of the Institutions. The aim of this paper is to identify the factors that support this kind of entrepreneurship generating SI and difficulties to overcome for its diffusion in the country. To this end, the SI literature and the Italian set of rules concerning confiscated assets will be analyzed. The analysis of institutional documents of associations and institutes involved in the creation process of the social cooperatives, integrated by interviews to key actors, will complete the theoretical phase. Then, a case of entrepreneurship in the Sicilian country will be presented with a qualitative approach adopting the representative single case method. The study shows the importance of certain factors supporting the development of this kind of entrepreneurship, namely: a network of actors involved in the creation of social cooperatives; a synergic collaboration among the different actors around a common purpose; an extraordinary commitment and the cooperation between institutions and anti-mafia associations. The critical issues that limit its diffusion in the country are represented by the following aspects: the assignment times of confiscated assets (still too long); the lack of financial resources to ensure a timely and effective use of the assets; the difficulties of access to credit for cooperatives.

Keywords: innovation of social cooperatives, social innovation, inclusive society, social entrepreneurship; legality; sustainability

1. INTRODUCTION

The process of increasing the society welfare needs to stimulate a virtuous entrepreneurship generating development, the latter understood not only as economic growth but also as improvement of the quality of individuals' life and enhancement of the opportunities provided. The deterioration of economic and social conditions of entire communities causes forms of social distress (poverty, marginalization, exclusion of certain categories of people, etc.) and originates new social needs it is important to provide adequate responses to. In a situation of severe crisis of traditional welfare systems and relevant constraints on public finances, we are witnessing the implementation of new policies promoted by governments and/or new initiatives undertaken by individuals and organizations (Defourny & Nyssens, 2010; Kerlin, 2010), more and more often focused on the participation of citizens and on the activation of a plurality of resources from subjects of different nature (public, private, profit and non profit). This is, in essence, the field of action of the *Social Innovation*. In recent years, this theme has become increasingly influential in both scholarship and policy. It refers broadly to innovation in meeting social needs of, or delivering social benefits to, communities through the creation of new products, services, organizational structures or activities that are better or more effective than traditional public sector, philanthropic or market-reliant approaches in responding to social exclusion (Moulaert et al., 2013a).

Social enterprises are considered a major actor able to trigger dynamics of social innovation. This stems from the critical role that they play in addressing social problems and contributing to the well-being of individuals and community. These enterprises carry out an economic activity aiming at producing benefits to society and/or to particular categories of disadvantaged people, then combining the entrepreneurial dimension and the social purpose. The social mission is essential and is the key element that distinguishes the social entrepreneurship from other forms of entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurs and their activities are driven by social goals, that is, the desire to benefit society in some way (Peredo & McLean, 2006). These entrepreneurial ventures often target problems that have a local expression but global relevance, such as people's health, social services or re-integration of individuals into the workforce. In this sense, they may be considered as a response to the exclusion of certain categories of people from economic and social life (Wronka, 2013).

In Italy, recently we have witnessed new forms of social entrepreneurship able to combat social exclusion and to contribute to community development. In particular, by virtue of a specific law passed by the Parliament in 1996, it is provided that assets confiscated from organized criminality can be assigned for social aims to *social cooperatives* involving disadvantaged people to carry on different economic activities. The phenomenon is recent and worthy of interest for the social value generated by those social enterprises. The studies on the topic have shown the success of such entrepreneurial initiatives, exploring their contribution in the fight against organized crime (Di Maggio 2012a; Frigerio 2009), in the development of local communities involved (Fondazione Libera Informazione, 2009; Frigerio 2010; La Spina, 2005; Picciotto, 2012), their ability to implement effective and innovative business models (Picciotti, 2013).

Our intent is to offer a further interpretative key departing from the assumption that these enterprises have the potential to catalyze social and civil change in the territories oppressed by the presence of the Mafia. This paper aims to highlight the dynamics of social innovation triggered by the social cooperatives operating on confiscated mafia properties and to examine their creation process (Bygrave & Hofer, 1991; Churchill & Muzyka, 1994) in order to understand what are the factors that support this kind of entrepreneurship and the critical issues to be solved for its progressive diffusion in the country. In this exploratory study we propose to highlight that the establishment and consolidation of these socially innovative activities depends on the occurrence of a set of favorable external conditions since it is a form of entrepreneurship promoted by institutions and antimafia associations. In this case, in fact, there is not a cohesive group of people united by personal ties who decide to set up a business to address a social problem but the economic initiative is governed from the outside. For this purpose, the paper is divided in three main sections. The first concerns a brief review of the literature, the second proposes a representative case study of the phenomenon that can significantly contribute to its understanding and the third presents the results of the research and some concluding remarks.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. On the concept of Social Innovation

Over the past two decades, the social innovation has attracted a growing attention among researchers, policy makers and practitioners. There has been a proliferation of literature on the topic and in every continent also public institutions are introducing new programs to promote initiatives of SI (Klein, 2013). The concept of «social innovation» is gradually acquiring a plurality of meanings that could lead to a situation of substantial ambiguity (Bernardoni & Picciotti, 2014). However, from a joint reading of the main definitions of SI developed in recent years (see Table 1) it is possible to identify some common aspects.

Firstly, the main purpose of social innovation is to identify and meet the social needs (or social problems), ie the needs of contemporary society linked both to situations of distress (poverty, alienation, exclusion of certain categories of persons) and to new social demands (sustainability and quality of life). Secondly, the output of social innovation can be different as it may lead to the creation of new products or new services that previously did not exist or that they were not able to meet adequately certain needs; at the same time, social innovation can lead to the generation of new ways of production organization based on organizational collaborative relationships. Thirdly, any public or private actor, profit or non-profit in nature, can undertake initiatives of social innovation.

Table 1: Some definitions of Social Innovation

Authors	Definition
Mulgan et al. (2007)	Innovative activities and services that are motivated by the goal of meeting a social need and that are predominantly developed and diffused through organisations whose primary purposes are social.
Phills et al. (2008)	A novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than existing solutions and for which the value created accrues primarily to society as a whole rather than private individuals. A social innovation can be a product, production process, or technology (much like innovation in general), but it can also be a principle, an idea, a piece of legislation, a social movement, an intervention, or some combination of them.
Murray et al. (2010)	New ideas (product, 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.
OECD (2010)	Social innovation seeks new answers to social problems by: identifying and delivering new services that improve the quality of life of individuals and communities; identifying and implementing new labour market integration processes, new competencies, new jobs, and new forms of participation, as diverse elements that each contribute to improving the position of individuals in the workforce.
Caulier-Grice et al. (2012)	New solutions (products, services, models, markets, processes, etc) that simultaneously meet a social need (more effectively than existing solutions) and lead to new or improved capabilities and relationships and better use of assets and resources. In other words, social innovations are both good for society and enhance society's capacity to act.
European Commission (2013)	The development and implementation of new ideas (product, services and models) to meet social needs and create new social relationships or collaborations. It represents new responses to pressing social demands, which affect the process of social interactions. It is aimed at improving human well-being. Social innovations are innovations that are social in both their ends and their means.
Moulaert et al. (2013b)	Finding acceptable progressive solutions for a whole range of problems of exclusions, deprivation, alienation, lack of wellbeing, and also to those actions that contribute positively to significant human progress and development. SI means fostering inclusion and wellbeing through improving social relations and empowerment processes; imagining and pursuing a world, a nation, a region, a locality, a community that would grant universal rights and be more socially inclusive. Socially innovative change means the improvement of social relations – micro relations between individuals and people, but also macro relations between classes and other social groups.

Source: Own elaboration

In the many definitions of SI proposed by scholars the aspect of change seems to be central. Making *social innovation* means to find and to provide new solutions to the social needs of individuals and communities; to develop and to introduce changes in the relationships between individuals and institutions; and again, to redefine the priorities of the economic and social development. The key feature is that social innovation deals with improving the welfare of individuals and communities through employment, consumption and/or their active participation.

As mentioned above, it is believed that any organization, public or private, profit or non-profit, can promote and carry out initiatives of social innovation (Mulgan et al., 2007). However, it has been highlighted a peculiar vocation of *social enterprises* to implement forms of social innovation and to assume the role of proponents of social change. In fact, social innovation is a concept closely linked to social entrepreneurship, which integrates practices triggering social change in social services, local community building or the social economy (Eschweiler & Hulgård, 2012). The reasons for such a perspective are related to the specific characteristics of these entrepreneurial experiences, which are distinguished by their close ties with the local community. In the next paragraph we look at that profile, then focusing on a particular type of social enterprise that is the object of this paper.

2.2. The social entrepreneurship and its aptitude to generate social innovation

Social entrepreneurship, commonly defined as “entrepreneurial activity with an embedded social purpose” (Austin et al., 2006), has become an important economic phenomenon at a global scale (Mair & Martí, 2006; Zahra et al., 2008; Kerlin, 2010; Santos, 2012). The first initiatives were born at the end of the last century in various country primarily in response to social needs not adequately met, or not met at all, by public services or for profit enterprises (Borzaga & Defourny, 2001). The social enterprise is an organization of the «third sector» which is able to offer original solutions to various social problems by adopting a business model. Indeed, it provides goods and services of social utility for particular segments of society. More precisely, according to the definition developed by Network EMES, the social enterprise is a private legal entity and independent by the Public Administration, which plays a productive activity according to entrepreneurial logic and directed towards an explicit social purpose, which results in the generation of benefits in favor of a local community or particular disadvantaged people (Borzaga & Defourny, 2001).

Although social entrepreneurs usually start with small initiatives, they often target problems that have a local expression but global relevance, such as people’s health, social services or re-integration of individuals into the workforce. A social entrepreneur aims to increase the “social value” contributing to the welfare in a human community. Making a profit may be part of the model but it is only a way to achieve a social purpose and to ensure financial sustainability of the economic activity. Therefore, social entrepreneurs are driven by social goals and their intent is to generate benefits for society in some way (Peredo & McLean, 2006).

Some scholars have examined the potential of social entrepreneurship to address social problems and explored its implications for wealth creation and local development (Austin et al., 2006; Borzaga & Defourny, 2001; Seelos & Mair, 2005). Social enterprises provide goods and services which the market or public sector are unwilling or unable to provide, creating employment and enhancing civil public involvement (Smallbone et al., 2001; Cornelius et al., 2008). Furthermore, such enterprises combat social exclusion and revitalise deprived areas, having significant relationship with local community (Borzaga & Zandonai, 2009).

Others scholars have underlined that social entrepreneurship also offers innovative solutions to complex and persistent social problems by adopting business models and market-oriented models (Peredo & McLean, 2006; Spear, 2006; Zahra et al., 2009). In this regard, several scholars believe that the social enterprise is a subject particularly suitable to generate forms of social innovation by virtue of its characteristics, in other words, it has a “vocation” that certainly makes it protagonist in this field. In accordance with this idea in some studies it is stated that the social enterprise, thanks to its peculiar institutional structure, shows an ideal and spontaneous ability to propose, start and support the dynamics of social innovation (Borzaga & Bodini, 2012; Picciotti, 2013). In this sense, Defourny and Nyssens (2013) point out that certain structural aspects of social enterprises in the EMES approach (a continuous production of goods and/or services, an explicit aim to benefit the community, a participatory governance) makes them a natural vehicle of social innovation. Other scholars point out

that the social enterprise create a favorable climate to innovation as it improves the quality of life of the territorial systems (Flora, 2010).

In other studies it is emphasized that the social entrepreneur acts as an agent of change (Dees, 1998; Mair & Martí, 2006; Sharir & Lerner, 2006). According to Dees (1998) social entrepreneurs make fundamental changes in the way things are done in the social sector, often attacking the cause of problems and reducing the needs. So they have a fundamental role in the functioning of modern society, identifying neglected problems with positive externalities and developing mechanisms to incorporate these externalities into the economic system (Santos, 2012). Mair and Martí (2006) view social entrepreneurship as a process involving the innovative use and combination of resources to pursue opportunities to catalyze social change and/or address social needs. Moreover, the social enterprise is characterized by close links with the local community to which it belongs (Borzaga & Zandonai, 2009) and this enables it to capture and interpret emerging needs and, therefore, effectively meet the demand from the local community.

The potential of social enterprises to enhance the community capacity and quality of life has been recognized by governments who have sought to both encourage and foster their activities (Defourny & Nyssens, 2010). For example, in many countries, there has been a significant development of specific public programs designed to promote social enterprise in the field of work integration (the so-called WISEs). As pointed out by Defourny and Nyssens (2010), the main objective of “work integration social enterprises” is to help low-qualified unemployed people, who are at risk of permanent exclusion from the labour market. The mission of the WISEs is to integrate these people into work and society through a productive activity. In this paper we consider these social enterprises and, in particular, we refer to *social cooperatives* that provide work integration for disadvantaged people at risk of social exclusion. Specifically, we focus our analysis on social cooperatives operating on the assets confiscated from organized crime, a new form of entrepreneurship able to generate significant dynamics of social innovation that make it worthy of interest.

2.3. New forms of social entrepreneurship in Italy: the social cooperatives operating on confiscated mafia properties

Social cooperatives are one of the first examples of social enterprise developed in Western Europe (Defourny & Nyssens, 2010; Kerlin, 2010). Italy, in particular, is characterized by a strong cooperative tradition. The first initiatives began to develop at the end of the 70s of last century as a result of a growing gap between social needs and characteristics of public intervention (Borzaga & Santuari, 2001). Over time they have gained an important role in the Italian third sector (Thomas, 2004) due to their ability to respond in innovative ways to a variegated and unmet demand of social services. Their legal recognition took place in 1991. Article 1 of the law n. 381 states that social cooperatives aim to pursue the general interest of the community to promote human and social integration of citizen through: a) the management of health and social services and educational services (“A-type social cooperatives”); b) the carrying out of different activities – agricultural, industrial, commercial or services – aimed at providing employment for disadvantaged people (“B-type social cooperatives”).

Social cooperatives are not-for-profit. These companies have legal personality and a social structure that may involve different types of stakeholders: working members who receive a remuneration; members who use the services of the cooperative; members working in the cooperative as a volunteers; funding members and public institutions. This peculiarity of the social cooperatives affect their corporate governance processes: in these firms the various stakeholders (workers, volunteers, financial partners, users and institutions) can participate actively and democratically in decision-making (Borzaga, 2002). The characteristic organizational and management model «multi-stakeholder» thus allows the consideration of the interests of various organizations and institutions (Evers, 2001). Several actors contribute to the definition and the achievement of the institutional mission, therefore, dialogue and stakeholder involvement in management decisions are fundamental elements in these firms (Costa & Ramus, 2010). After all, the long term durability of the firms - especially those *non-profit* - depends on their ability to understand and meet the legitimate demands of the various stakeholders influenced by the economic activity (Freeman, 1984; Clarkson, 1995).

Social cooperatives deliver services that promote social cohesion by activating human and financial resources for the benefit of the community or particular disadvantaged citizens (minors, elderly, disabled, unemployed, drug addicts, ex-prisoners, etc.). They are one of the most important expressions of social entrepreneurship and make a significant contribution to the community by

combating social exclusion (Borzaga & Santuari, 2001) and by encouraging local development with job creation. Furthermore, these cooperatives are one of the most characteristic manifestations of that propensity to create relationships and trust that underpin social capital (Evers, 2001; Sabatini, Modena & Tortia, 2012). Even the typical possibility of involving volunteers in carrying out the activity contributes to the generation of social capital as this strengthens civic engagement of citizens. Social capital refers precisely to elements such as trust, civic spirit, solidarity, the propensity to the associative life, to the construction and maintenance of the community (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993). In literature, the fundamental contribution of social capital to economic development, social and civil, of a territory or country has been highlighted and two complementary dimensions of social capital have been identified: one concerning the trust in people, values and social norms (Putnam, 1993; Fukuyama, 1995) and one that invests relations and social networks (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). The aptitude of social enterprises to generate social capital emerges especially when they are focused on issues of common interest and promote services in favor of social groups in conditions of particular need (Evers, 2001). In this case new partnership relations among actors (public and private) of the territory are created in order to achieve the employment of disadvantaged people.

Recent opportunities offered by the Italian legislation broaden the activities of social cooperatives and enrich the social mission, opening up new ways to contribute to the welfare of the community. In fact, thanks to a popular campaign promoted by *Libera. Associazioni, Nomi e Numeri contro le Mafie*¹, the Italian Parliament approved in 1996 the Law 109 which provides for the use of goods and estates confiscated to organized criminality for social aims. These goods can be allotted, among different subjects, to social cooperatives to carry on different activities (agriculture, social services, responsible tourism, etc.), involving also disadvantaged people at the risk of social exclusion (in case of “B-type social cooperatives”).

Everything stems from the widespread and spontaneous movement of rebellion of civil society against the Mafia to the occurrence of the terrible slaughters of 1992, in which the judges Falcone and Borsellino were killed. In 1995 the *Associazione Libera* was founded and organized a petition across the country in support of a bill which would allow the social re-use of resources confiscated from the mafia criminality. The sense of the proposal was to use such property for the benefit of the community, enhancing the potential of use and exalting the symbolic value. The Law 109/1996 states that the goods have to be used for collective purposes, related to the social rehabilitation and to the promotion of legality culture. It expressly provides for the possibility to assign the real property to *social cooperatives*², thus promoting social entrepreneurship in the country. The phenomenon is rather significant even in economic terms and quantity. According to data of the Demanio Agency, the goods confiscated from the mafia in January 2013 are about 13.000. Specifically, it is about 11.237 real property and 1.707 companies (www.benisequestraticonfiscati.it). They are mostly concentrated in Southern Italy (around 80%), mainly in Sicily, Calabria, Campania and Puglia. The prudential assessment of such goods would attest to the overall value to about 20 billion euro (Di Maggio, 2012b). The majority of these assets is transferred to the unavailable heritage of Local Authorities (ANBSC, 2011), in order to find appropriate destination after. There is therefore a significant amount of resources that can be re-inserted in the circuit of legal economy and be placed at the service of local communities.

This new form of social entrepreneurship is social innovation *per se* because it configures a new institutional model of enterprise that meets the needs of legality and social redemption of contemporary society. In other words, in this case social innovation is intimately linked to the creation itself (and, before that, the conception) of “social cooperatives operating on assets confiscated from organized crime”. In this sense, social innovation is represented by the same business idea (Phills et al., 2008) for the social re-use of such assets, strongly affirmed during the anti-Mafia social movement of the early nineties. In addition, these cooperatives with their activities generate dynamics of social innovation, which can be fully understood with the following case study.

¹ The aim of the association is to enhance civil society in the fight against mafias and promote legality and justice.

² Specifically, the law provides that the *real property* may be held by the State and used for institutional purposes (justice, public order, civil protection) or transferred to the municipality in which they are located. Then the latter decides whether (a) to administer them directly, or (b) to assign them in concession, free of charge, to communities, institutions, voluntary organizations, social cooperatives, therapeutic communities and rehabilitation centers for drug addicts.

3. THE SOCIAL INNOVATION OF SOCIAL COOPERATIVES OPERATING ON CONFISCATED MAFIA PROPERTIES: THE CASE OF SOCIAL COOPERATIVES *LIBERA TERRA*

The case study here proposed refers to the project «Libera Terra», a project conceived and coordinated by *Libera. Associazioni, Nomi e Numeri contro le Mafie*, which today distinguishes itself for the networking of different experiences of social cooperation on property confiscated from the mafia in the Southern Italy. It can help to understand the specificity of these social enterprises and their ability to create social value, as well as the support factors and the critical issues to be solved for their progressive diffusion in the country.

3.1. Methodology

Qualitative research is particularly appropriate to investigate the practices of social innovation that emerge from the reality, having to learn from the actors involved the purposes and the characteristics of the initiatives undertaken (Konstantatos et al. 2013). In view of this, we study a case of innovative social entrepreneurship in a specific territorial context with a qualitative approach adopting the *representative single case* method (Creswell, 2009). The case study method is useful when you want to analyze a contemporary phenomenon in depth in the real context in which it occurs (Yin, 2009). We believe that a representative case of an important enterprise can offer interesting insights for scientific reflection. We will focus, in particular, on the creation of the Cooperative «Placido Rizzotto», an important example of this reality because it is the first entrepreneurial experience realized in the Sicilian country, characterized by a mafia phenomenon rooted in the territory and a significant lag in the development. More specifically, this case is deemed representative for the following reasons: a) it is the first entrepreneurial experience realized within the Project *Libera Terra*, b) it is the first agricultural cooperative operating on property confiscated established in Southern Italy, c) the project for its creation has become “pilot Project” of the Ministry of the Interior, to be implemented in other regions of Italy; d) the cooperative has become a successful business model for the creation of other cooperatives.

The case was developed by combining different methods of data collection (Eisenhardt, 1989) and resorting to a variety of data sources, in particular: i) Italian legislation; ii) documents and information available on the websites of public institutions, local authorities, antimafia associations, associations of cooperatives, local associations and any other actor involved in the process of creation of the cooperatives; iii) corporate documents of the cooperative Placido Rizzotto; iv) a visit to a confiscated property (participant observation); v) interviews with key informants; vi) interviews and public statements of the founding members, of the representatives of institutions and associations concerned; vii) newspaper articles.

To focus our analysis, we adopted a strategy with three steps. In a first step, we reviewed the academic literature on the Mafia (Arlacchi, 1986; Gambetta, 1993; Anderson, 1995; Daniele, 2009; Vaccaro, 2012) and documents of experts on the antimafia (Frigerio, 2009, 2010; Di Maggio, 2011, 2012a). This step provided detailed preliminary information on the Mafia and its links with the territory and institutions, its impact on local development and civil society, on antimafia movement, on Association Libera and its mode of action. In a second step we examined the publicly available data, such as the laws, the relations of institutional bodies responsible for the management of confiscated property, the documents and official communications of the Association Libera, the declarations of some founders of the cooperatives, the official statements of the representatives of the associations of cooperatives, newspapers and magazine articles. This step allowed us to acquire more specific information on the characteristics of the entrepreneurial process investigated. The success factors and critical issues were subsequently explored in the third step, in which we carried out the semi-structured in-depth interviews to persons actively engaged in the establishment and initiation of social cooperatives, also acquiring corporate documents. The interviewees are Dr. Umberto Di Maggio, Regional Coordinator of Libera Sicilia, member of the National Office of Confiscated Goods of Libera and member of the Support Bodies in the Prefecture in Sicily, and Dr. Valentina Fiore, Vice President of the Cooperative Placido Rizzotto and CEO of the Consortium «Libera Terra Mediterraneo». The latter interview was preceded by a visit on the farm, acquiring information about the birth of the cooperative and its activities. During the interviews one hour long we also took notes about what was perceived to be relevant.

Specific procedures to ensure the trustworthiness of our research (Shenton, 2004) have been developed. In particular, the strategies employed were: a) multiple methods of data collection; b) triangulation of data from different sources; c) interviews with key players in the entrepreneurial process; d) near verbatim transcripts of recorded interviews; e) member checking (a dialogue with informants interviewed about our personal interpretations of reality as a way of checking the data correctness).

3.2. The project *Libera Terra* and the creation of the Cooperative «Placido Rizzotto»

The *Libera Terra* project intends to restore dignity to the territories oppressed by the Mafia presence with the creation of autonomous firms, self-sufficient and durable, able to give employment and contribute to local economy. Its aim is to promote a virtuous economic system based on the legality and social justice, ensuring the development of the communities concerned. The project has originated in the Palermitan context where there were confiscation of agricultural lands located in different municipalities. It was necessary to use these lands productively and for social purposes. *But Libera could not take them. The association does not manage terrains but is concerned to promote the social use. [...] We had to promote a path [...] and we could not do it alone* (U. Di Maggio, our translation). The Prefect of Palermo³ (R. Profili) had a brilliant idea: the creation of a «consortium of municipalities» to manage the confiscated goods in a coordinated manner, forming a real estate large enough to justify an entrepreneurial venture. *You create a collective. [...] This is the strong pass. There had to be a strong support from the local authorities that they must have all the convenience to be together* (U. Di Maggio, our translation). And so in May 2000 the Consortium of Municipalities «Sviluppo e Legalità» (Development and Legality) was born, bringing together eight municipalities of Palermo⁴ to administer the confiscated goods in a partnership. Its objectives were: a) to recover the assets confiscated from *Cosa Nostra*, consisting of agricultural land unused and in a state of abandonment for the lack of an effective and economic management during the seizure and confiscation; b) to create social cooperatives, through a public selection open to the unemployed youth of the area, in order to prevent and recover the conditions of discomfort and alienation, promoting a healthy and legal entrepreneurship; c) to contribute to the sustainable development of the territory, creating new jobs and realizing an integrated system of biological productions of high quality; d) to carry out activities aimed at disseminating the culture of legality in a difficult territorial context (www.sviluppolegalita.it).

The territorial context shows, in fact, a lag in socio-economic development, with a high unemployment which feeds situations of social distress (Franco, 2010; Istat, 2013), moreover, it was negatively affected by the strong presence of the mafia crime which has long mortified its enormous growth potential.

The project began in July 2001 with the publication of a call for the selection of 15 young unemployed people in order to create a social cooperative. In November, after a training course, the young people selected constituted the «Cooperative Placido Rizzotto - Libera Terra». It is a B-type social cooperative which employs people with disabilities in its activities (to date, 48% of the total workforce). Given the complexity of the initiative and its socio-economic relevance, the Prefect of Palermo involved in the process of creation - in addition to the Association *Libera* - also two publicly owned companies: *Italia Lavoro S.p.A.* and *Consorzio Sudgest*. The first has implemented the actions of selection, training, mentoring, knowledge transfer and support to the professionalization of young people interested in the management of property entrusted by the Consortium (www.sviluppolegalita.it). The second has prepared the operational project for the recovery of land and structures confiscated located in the Municipalities of *Alto Belice Corleonese*, and the activation of agricultural production and biological agri-food. It also assisted the cooperative Placido Rizzotto during start-up (www.sudgestaid.it; www.sviluppolegalita.it).

³ The Prefecture has been the institutional organ responsible of the final destination of confiscated property before it was instituted the National Agency for the administration and the destination of the goods seized and confiscated from organized crime (ANBSC) in 2010.

⁴ Altofonte, Camporeale, Corleone, Monreale, Piana degli Albanesi, Roccamena, San Cipirello and San Giuseppe Jato.

In addition to the hostility of the social context⁵, the young cooperative members initially faced financial difficulties. In fact, they did not have adequate resources and the necessary machinery for the cultivation of the lands, nor they had the possibility to offer real guarantees for loans to credit institutions (not being confiscated assets owned by them). The start of the agricultural activity has only been possible thanks to donations from the cooperative world and funding provided by the ethical finance, in particular: a donation and a loan from *Coopfond*; entry into the capital of *Coop Adriatica* as financing member; a loan of *Banca Etica* guaranteed by the Consortium «Sviluppo e Legalità». Overcoming the difficulties and after years of abandonment, in July 2002 there was the first wheat harvest (the “grain of hope”) on the confiscated lands to the presence of national and local institutions. Since then, their cultivation ensures a variety of agricultural productions that have a positive response on the market, and that are conferred for processing, the transformation and the commercialization to the Consortium «Libera Terra Mediterraneo» (specifically established in 2008)⁶. To meet the growing demands of the market, transfer agreements have been signed with some organic farmers in the area. Sharing the spirit of the project, other experiences of cooperation have asked to participate, that is why the brand of quality and legality «Libera Terra» was born by identifying products from the confiscated lands. Such products, typical of the region and pursuing excellence, are sold through the distribution networks of the Coop (especially *Coop Adriatica*), the shops of Fair Trade and the *Botteghe dei sapori e dei saperi della legalità* (shops of flavors and knowledge of the law). *Coop Adriatica*⁷ has included *Libera Terra* products in its stores since the beginning (www.e-coop.it/web/coop-adriatica) by virtue of an established relationship with *Libera* and a sharing of values and ideals that inspired its project. This led to a collaboration with young cooperators: it is promoted distribution of products, despite some problems of quality and supply, in front of a commitment to enhance the technical and professional skills within the cooperative system [interview to S. Fabbri, coordinator of the agency *Cooperare con Libera Terra*, in Picciotti (2013)]. Over the years, other initiatives have been grafted on agricultural activity making the presence of the cooperative on the territory more active (wine production, tourism activities, education and promotion of legality).

3.3. The diffusion of the business model in other regions of Italy

The cooperative Placido Rizzotto becomes a successful business model for its ability to combine social instances, economic activity and commitment to the legality, that is why this experience is being replicated in other regions of the South Italy. And so the cooperatives «Valle del Marro» (2004) in Calabria, «Terre di Puglia» (2008) in Puglia, «Le terre di Don Beppe Diana» (2010) in Campania, and again, the cooperatives «Pio La Torre» (2007), «Beppe Montana» (2010), «Rosario Livatino» (2012) in Sicily and «Terre Joniche» (2013) in Calabria were born. The cooperatives *Libera Terra* cultivate hundreds of acres of land, generating revenues of over 6 million euro, and currently employ about 150 people of which over 30% are disadvantaged workers. They offer the opportunity for young and disadvantaged people to do business in their territories, preventing or eliminating states of unemployment and social distress aggravated by the strong presence of the Mafia. Damage and intimidation have not stopped but these difficult moments are overcome thanks to the network of alliances, partnerships and solidarity that in recent years the Association *Libera* has managed to build around them. It constantly offers its moral and civil support to cooperatives as it appears from the words of its founder Don Luigi Ciotti (2012): *The recent incidents of vandalism against goods confiscated from the mafia, from Puglia to Sicily, from Lazio to Calabria do not leave us indifferent. Those goods are not only a slap to criminal organizations, a tool to weaken in what makes them strong: the illicit accumulation of capital. They are job opportunities, opportunities for a healthy and transparent economy and even before cultural change* (our translation). The results obtained are also important from the symbolic viewpoint: these entrepreneurial experiences “are changing the heads of citizens” because they demonstrate concretely that it is possible to take away the riches of the Mafia and return them to the community (G. Faraone, President of the Cooperative Placido Rizzotto. In www.liberaradio.it). In this sense, the Project *Libera Terra* is getting progressively social legitimacy in the territory. The agricultural laborers, who initially refused to work the land seized, today make the “queuing up” to get a contract of fixed-term employment at Placido Rizzotto. This happened because the project has become a «process of people» (Interview to U. Di Maggio), providing concrete

⁵ The cooperative suffered damages and intimidation by the local mafia bosses, seasonal workers refused to work on land confiscated and the agricultural entrepreneurs of the area were not cooperative for fear of retaliation.

⁶ Revenues from sales and services arising from these transfers amounted to € 896.061 in 2013.

⁷ It is one of the nine major cooperative of the cooperative system and the most important Italian distribution chain.

opportunities to the community. The laborers recognize that their work is rightly paid and is legally protected compared to other realities. This is what matters to people in need.

The experience gained by the Cooperative Placido Rizzotto over the years “has been put to good refining some of the mechanisms that originally had created some difficulties in the establishment and start-up of its business” (Interview to V. Fiore, founding member). In particular, it was decided to develop more accurate professional profiles and responsive to needs of the nascent cooperatives, specifying them in the notice of public selection⁸. This choice was motivated by the intention to avoid or reduce departures, partly physiological, of some members due to disagreements about the “way” of doing business once established the cooperative. The potential conflict among the members and their entrepreneurial vision represent a unique element of complexity of the start-up phase of these enterprises. This is related to their creation process, which originates from the legislative and environmental opportunity rather than by the desire of a group of people who know each other to pursue a business project shared.

Over time there has been an evolution of the network of actors involved in the creation of social cooperatives. A critical step was the establishment in 2006 of the *Agenzia Cooperare con Libera Terra* in order to support the creation and activities of the cooperatives operating on confiscated mafia properties. It was founded on the initiative of some major cooperatives of *Legacoop* with a twofold mission: a) to consolidate and support the business development of the cooperatives through the transfer of know-how, as much as possible free of charge; b) to create initiatives for mutual knowledge among members, cooperatives and local communities, encouraging a crossing of paths among different realities in order to strengthen the cooperative spirit. The sharing of social and economic problematic has also given rise to a fruitful collaboration with the *Association Addiopizzo* of Palermo, an important organization engaged in the fight against the Mafia. The Association creates a positive cultural climate in the territory and actively supports the activities of social cooperatives indicating suppliers (of goods and/or services) present in the “Addiopizzo list”⁹ from which to obtain supplies. Finally, there are the *category associations* that support more and more the cooperatives *Libera Terra* in their path, promoting visibility at national and sectoral level since their establishment. They also promote public initiatives which encourage the reaction of civil society on the occasion of fires and acts of vandalism.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

The analysis carried out highlights several dynamics of social innovation triggered by the cooperatives under consideration, which can be summarized as follows:

- Cooperatives exhibit a kind of “total innovation” (Fazzi, 2012) as they offer new goods with a strong symbolic value (branded “Libera Terra”), through production and distribution processes based on inter-organizational relationships (Murray et al. 2010; European Commission, 2013), satisfying a new category of social needs (the “ethical needs” of legality and social redemption) and exploring new sectoral contexts (social agriculture inclusive of the weakest). These needs have occurred especially during the campaign organized by *Libera* (more than a million of signatures collected throughout Italy) and arise from the social distress of civil society for the strong presence of criminal organizations in the country (SVIMEZ, 2013).
- Social innovation is realized also at the level “inter-organizational” (Picciotti, 2013) in relation to the ability of cooperatives to establish agreements and to build networks with external stakeholders, both public and private, for the implementation of the project. The collaboration with the *Association Addiopizzo* is an example. The creation of such partnership generates new dynamics of local development, in addition to configure a new way of production organization.
- Thanks to the activities of cooperatives confiscated assets are used for social purposes returning them to the community, therefore there is a better use of territorial resources

⁸ The candidates must belong to specific categories (unemployed young people, disadvantaged people, etc.) and are chosen on the basis of their motivation and expertise by a special committee coordinated by *Libera*. In the phases of selection, training and start-up of the social cooperative there is an active collaboration with other actors, according to different circumstances (municipalities, local associations, cooperative associations, etc.).

⁹ The list contains Sicilian firms which have signed a document to join the association in which they state not to pay the *pizzo* (slang term for extortion), formally committing themselves not to pay it in the future (www.addiopizzo.org).

(Caulier-Grice, 2012). Until the approval of L.109/1996 these goods were accumulating in the State assets since there were no legislative indications on their use and some of them even risked of becoming unproductive.

- With their activities the cooperatives contribute to the welfare of individuals (especially disadvantaged workers and unemployed youth of the territory) and the local community (from the perspective economic, social and cultural), improving their quality of life (OECD, 2010; European Commission, 2013).
- With their activities the cooperatives help to improve social relationships (Moulaert et al., 2013b), on the one hand, because in the places where they operate is reaffirmed the presence of the State and the credibility of the Institutions, on the other hand, because the possibility of using voluntary labor increases the political awareness of the problems associated with social exclusion (Borzaga & Santuari, 2001).

The study shows the importance of certain factors supporting the development of this kind of entrepreneurship, namely: i) a network of actors involved in the creation of social cooperatives; ii) a synergic collaboration among the different actors around a common purpose; iii) an extraordinary commitment and the cooperation between institutions and anti-mafia associations.

In particular, entrepreneurial experiences here presented highlight that the social re-use of confiscated property has been carried out through the participation of several actors and the creation of a network of relationships to promote a model of social economy founded on legality. Without a doubt, an element of strength and innovation that has characterized the management and re-use of confiscated assets was the establishment of the «Consortium of Municipalities». By using it, cooperatives were put in a position to make better social enterprise by virtue of a greater share of land not confined within the boundaries of a single municipality. The actors who participated in the constitution of the others cooperatives, under the direction of the *Association Libera*, have sometimes been different depending on the specificities of the situation and the characteristics of the areas concerned. Anyway, the success of the project *Libera Terra* stems from the ability of the actors involved to network around a shared purpose with significant value. Therefore, agreeing with Borzaga and Santuari (2001), we can state that these cooperatives have benefited of the available resources of social capital (strong social relationships and ability to work in partnership with a broad range of stakeholders) and, at the same time, they have favored the production of social capital by promoting an important social initiative by mutual agreement (Bowles and Gintis, 2002; Putnam, 1993). In this sense, the analysis carried out shows that the synergic collaboration among the actors has been the determining factor that allowed the cooperative Placido Rizzotto to emerge and to overcome the various difficulties that have occurred over time. Then it becomes a successful business model for the affirmation of other enterprises in the Southern of Italy. The conception of such model was finally possible thanks to the extraordinary commitment and cooperation between the institutions and antimafia associations, first and foremost, the Consortium «Sviluppo e Legalità», the Prefecture of Palermo and Association *Libera*. This fruitful cooperation is born out of a spirit of sharing of economic and social problems of the area.

The analysis carried out highlights, however, also some critical issues that limit the diffusion of this kind of entrepreneurship in the country, such as: i) the assignment times of confiscated assets (still too long); ii) the lack of financial resources to ensure a timely and effective use of the assets; iii) the difficulties of access to credit for cooperatives.

As regards the first aspect, the complexity of administrative procedures and issues relating to goods increase the period of time that elapses between the phases of seizure, confiscation and destination. It was estimated that normally it takes from eight to ten years to see the property used (Frigerio, 2009). In the case of the cooperative Placido Rizzotto the lands assigned have long been abandoned after the confiscation of the property. In general, there are often “structural problems” related to the nature of the goods subject to confiscation: mortgage banking and legal matters that preclude immediate use, abusive occupation of relatives or persons close to the mafia, state of total abandonment (see Di Maggio, 2011). A decisive step forward to make the system more effective and functional has been made with the establishment of the National Agency for the goods seized and confiscated from organized crime. The Agency is responsible for the process of managing assets during the judicial and administrative phases. However, it is not yet fully operational and further institutional interventions are necessary for the fulfillment of its objectives, being its financial and human resources very limited (ANBSC, 2011). Considering the too restrictive timing and the risk that not assigned goods are sold,

also a cooperation with the Local Authorities and associations involved may be useful in order to identify appropriate solutions to various problems.

To the complexity of administrative procedures it is added the lack of financial resources to ensure a timely and effective use of the assets. The municipalities often do not have the necessary funds to implement the restructuring interventions of the goods to make them fit for use or usable, or do not express their interest for the assignment of the property to the competent authority. Currently, the resources used to finance the creation of cooperatives come mainly from the mutuality funds of the associations of cooperative, from national and European structural funds (Security PON measures), by Banca Etica, by private foundations, by local associations, and financing members. Often resources are not sufficient and the feasibility of the projects is therefore entrusted to the solidarity of citizens and local authorities. This confirms the view that a significant level of social capital is absolutely critical for the survival of these social and civil organizations (Evers, 2001). It would be appropriate a structural approach, with the creation of a permanent national fund in which to transfer money and securities seized from the mafia, as well as revenue from the management of assets not yet allocated (Frigerio, 2009).

Another related issue is represented by the difficulties of access to credit considered the legal status of the property. The assets are entrusted under concession and can not therefore be the subject of guarantees. With reference to social cooperatives, they receive free goods on loan for use, but can not rely on them to get funding. Within the Project *Libera Terra*, this difficulty has been overcome with the activation of a network of actors mobilized by *Legacoop* which favored the granting of loans. For the future, specific institutional interventions in support of this form of entrepreneurship would be desirable. After all the opportunity to adopt a «collective orientation» to social innovation has been emphasized, according to which the action undertaken by independent and autonomous subjects should be supported by adequate policies (Venturi & Zandonai, 2012). On the other hand, the amount of confiscated properties and the business volume that flows from it would justify greater attention by the legislative bodies. These goods are a tangible economic value - about 20 billion Euros the total estimated value - which, if properly used, can contribute to economic growth and social development of entire communities. Another possible way could be the access to the financial resources of international organizations engaged in the promotion of social entrepreneurship (as the famous Ashoka). It remains the hope that one day even the traditional channels of the banking system are viable, in addition to the current contribution of some of its foundations. Furthermore, there should be a general awareness of the problem of bank mortgages on the assets of the mafia, demonstrating the necessary sensitivity during the administrative procedure with concrete actions.

5. CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

Libera Terra cooperatives operating in the Southern of Italy, using productively the assets which previously belonged to the Mafia bosses, are the more authentic witness of a possible social change. Thanks to them it has been possible to generate employment and to increase social, cultural and economic development of local communities. These initiatives provide valuable opportunities for the re-integration of disadvantaged people into the workforce and for the improvement of their quality of life. Moreover, the reuse of confiscated assets generates a social entrepreneurship guided by ethics and legality. Therefore, thanks to the opportunity presented by the Italian legislation it has been possible to use these assets to generate social value. It seems important to point out that in other *non profit* firms the social value created is such only if it is perceived by those who benefit from their services (Costa & Ramus, 2010), or if it is acknowledged by the various stakeholders involved (Balser & McClursky, 2005). In the case of cooperatives here studied, the social value is generated *per se* with their establishment because this is the way to realize the social reuse of confiscated assets from organized crime for the benefit of local communities. This entrepreneurial phenomenon can spread to other regions of Italy. In any case, such a path will lead to positive results in the future to the extent that solidarity actions will be accompanied by a political sensitivity heralding of appropriate institutional policies. In particular, the public partners should give attention to the necessary conditions to ensure the development and consolidation of these firms, acknowledging and encouraging their ability to generate social innovation as well as to activate social capital. In this regard, it seems important to highlight that this type of cooperative contributes to the generation of social capital with reference to both the dimensions identified in the literature, namely: i) the activation of a *network of actors* for their establishment as well as a set of *relations* (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988) (productive, commercial and social) with a variety of stakeholder, local and national; ii) the promotion of *values* of legality,

honesty and social justice and, in this way, the spread of «social virtues» (Fukuyama, 1996) in the territories concerned. Moreover, the promotion of this form of entrepreneurship contributes to the affirmation of a social economy (Martone, 2014; Musella, 2012) able to generate a virtuous social capital which can affect the “mafioso” social capital¹⁰. In particular, the network of agreements and partnerships among public, private and third sector for the social reuse of confiscated property can weaken over time the dense network of collusive relationships (Cavadi, 2010; Zamagni, 2009) on which the Mafia has its roots. These entrepreneurial activities make it possible: to promote the values of civil life (Baldascino & Mosca, 2012); to generate a widespread trust in the territories oppressed by the Mafia (primarily towards the institutions) and to foster cooperation among the actors of the community; to undermine the economic power of organized crime effectively integrating the judicial action (Martone, 2014)¹¹. In view of this, we agree with the vision that social entrepreneurship on confiscated property, involving economic, cultural and social variables, can affect the mechanisms underlying the genesis and the reproduction of social consensus of the Mafia (Sciarrone, 2006).

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¹⁰ The “mafioso” social capital is made of a nebulous network of relationships of trust, of occult exchanges and collusive agreements that affects the political and economic spheres (Sciarrone, 2011) and allows the Mafia to exercise its power.

¹¹ The productive action of social cooperatives generate positive effects for the communities consistent with the nature of “public good” of the social capital (Coleman, 1988) whose benefits can be enjoyed also by those who do not invest in it.

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