

Educational Poverty and Social Impact Assessment. The SROI evaluation of a project against educational poverty in Rome (2018-2021): lessons learned for future policies

Cristiana Di Pietro (Libera Università Maria SS Assunta, Roma)

Background. Educational poverty is «a polysemous and multidimensional concept which refers to an evident correspondence between material poverty, social exclusion, marginalization and total or partial lack of formal education» (Digennaro, 2020, p. 38). It is a complex phenomenon related to economic poverty, i.e. the lack of economic resources that allow access to educational opportunities (Evans, 2004); to ecological poverty due to the lack of structures and/or services of educational value (Save the Children, 2017); finally, to pedagogical poverty, i.e. the ability of educators not adequate to offer educational opportunities that respond to the actual needs of people and the community (Digennaro, 2020; Alivernini, Manganelli and Lucidi, 2017).

As a complex phenomenon, even the policies against educational poverty require a plurality of actors who are able to carry out effective integrated interventions in offering services and opportunities that guarantee young people the full development of skills and talents (Boccacin, 2007; Cimagalli, 2013; Rossi, 2008; Stratton, 1989).

"The Fund Against Educational Poverty In Children and Youth" programme, created in 2016 (social enterprise Con i Bambini, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the CON IL SUD Foundation, in collaboration with ACRI, the Italian Government, and The National Forum of Organisations in the Third Sector), has been supporting this perspective by investing in innovative projects and by promoting debate on the educational policies. In this framework, a project preventing educational poverty of single mother-child families in difficulty has been developed in Rome from 2018 to 2021.

Objective. This paper aimed to describe the social value produced by the project, providing the vision of change generated for its stakeholders (single mother-child families and social workers) the possibility of understanding how to enhance the impact and increase the overall value of the interventions for public policies in the field of educational poverty.

Methods. The social impact assessment took place "in the final balance" and was based on the outcomes already achieved by the integrated social interventions against

educational poverty. Among the social impact assessment models in the literature (Grieco, Micheli, Iasevoli, 2015), this paper has used the social return on investment (SROI). This method goes beyond the synthetic index of social value by trying to investigate, in qualitative terms, what changes and the long-term effects – expected and unexpected, positive and negative – of the project activities carried out. Therefore, the SROI aims to distinguish and measure what is produced by the examined intervention and what, instead, by external factors to the project; for this reason, the dimensions of deadweight, attribution, displacement, and drop-off are also taken into consideration.

Findings. The total net value of the social benefit created by the project preventing educational poverty of single mother-child families in difficulty shows a higher estimated impact for individual stakeholders: the SROI ratio is 3.75 euros per year. The credibility of the latter value has been further investigated through sensitivity analysis.

Moreover, the SROI analysis shows that the project generates a significant positive impact in terms of social value (support in personal, parental and professional development) and psychological (well-being). In the ratio composition, the most significant weight is that of single mothers and operators.

Conclusions. The project has overcome the old logic of the division of services responsible for taking care of mothers under challenging conditions and those for minors, experimenting with an intervention model that addresses the issue of the autonomy of mothers and children in a multidimensional and integrated way. Furthermore, the analysis carried out deepened the evidence collected. It showed, also through the SROI ratio, the effectiveness of the project in generating positive effects for single-parent households, operators and third-sector organizations with the same social mission. Therefore, it is possible to draw some recommendations that can guide the future political-social planning of interventions to support single-parent families in social vulnerability conditions and prevent the risks of educational poverty in the family unit.