



Fostering
Social
Justice



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TOOLS AND METHODS

MUTUALISM

Italy 2021



IFS FOSTERING SOCIAL JUSTICE

TOOL'S SUMMARY

Tool/method name	Mutualism
Tool/method summary description	Mutualism is a way to organise the individuals to act as political beings for the civic society
Country observed	Italy
Year observed	2021
Programme area	Social Inclusion, Active Citizenship, Fighting Inequalities, Enforcing Equity
Tool type	Methodology
Specific topic:	Barrier-free access to basic rights
Beneficiaries of tool:	Local Communities, Community Centers, Disadvantaged groups
Can this tool be applied to other beneficiaries: yes/no	This tool can be applied to any community
What type of beneficiaries: ALL, or specific ones?	ALL
If specific ones, which?	Non-Specific

Method full description

Mutualism is a way to organise the individuals to act as political beings for the civic society by enforcing the sense of making one's own decision and the right to access and choice while advocating for oneself and communal equity.

Mutualism is based on the core belief that fighting for equality is a right that is co-configured and not an action based on assistance, creating a link between the condition of a person or part of society and human rights.

In terms of the context under which ARCS and Arci are acting in relation to mutualism one notable point would be that change, and solidarity matters when society acts according to a person's needs and fosters through understanding individuality within the community, especially within social groups that have been systematically excluded.

For example, Arci Roma (local committee of Arci) is supporting migrant women offering its services according to their needs after initially covering basic ones and throughout a feminist approach. Nonna Roma (an Arci Club) is providing support to people in a state of vulnerability, building a network of solidarity and mutualism, regular and lasting, based on dialogue, support, and mutual aid and capable of overcoming the sporadic and emergency nature of "one-off" intervention, innovating the solidarity process towards a broader and more differentiated approach to care.

The approach of mutualism intends to give assistance to meet the basic needs of people in conditions of serious poverty and marginality but the ultimate aim is to overcome assistance, or rather welfarism, understood as the provision of services that keep users in a "passive" situation, in a state of need, in order to look, instead, towards overcoming the need, with a view of promoting the existing resources brought by the community and by the people themselves, and emancipatory with respect to the state of need.

It is essential to keep in mind that the need for mutualism, in the Italian context, comes from the lack of provisions from the state answering to the callings of capitalism and neoliberalism that created exclusions in society.

Mutualism in every context is reciprocally providing with dignity, erasing barriers, and fostering equality.

"Come with us and use your voice and we will figure out things together."

Could it be used in other contexts? If yes, which ones?

It could be used in any context with any sense of community.

What is innovative about this method or tool?

In mutualism we find an extremely interesting circular schema of Beneficiaries to Volunteers to Beneficiaries. This means that there is no fixed role of the people included in a mutualist system, as you can have multiple identities in the system of either a practice or the very notion of it through a deeply political sense. You do not have to have a specific profile to approach things through mutualism.

One other hugely innovative aspect of mutualism is that the methodology is built around capitalising on an attitude and a sense of many different approaches. We find the quote below, by one of the participants in the study visit, that summarises how mutualism in the actions of ARCS and Nonna Roma, through its experience:

“Mutualism is not exactly symbiosis or cooperation or solidarity. It is those things with the notion of equity at its center -creating a cooperative, equitable and sustainable network with a common goal where one empowers the other and everyone can try and reach their full potential and be self-sufficient and independent but still part of a group (a society)” - Anastasia Gkotsi, Cyclisis | Participant in the Study Visit.

Detailed Methodology

In concern to practically using mutualistic methodologies the participants of the study group observed the Arci Club Nonna Roma, an essential action to the local community bridging the gap created to minimal access or fear to social services.

NONNA ROMA is a club of Arci Roma which is a local committee of the Arci national association. Arci Roma is a network of 63 clubs based in Rome and it also deals with support, inclusion and empowerment activities for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.

They have and organise popular schools of Italian language and culture, legal help desk support and socio- economic autonomy support programs.

Nonna Roma has a specific focus on nutrition and problems related to access to necessities, therefore it is structured primarily as a food bank for mutual aid for equalization purposes, collecting and distributing food and personal hygiene products to families in conditions of absolute or relative poverty. Starting from food as a point of access and interception of the community's need, the association has activated a network of services around the person, to allow users to get out of a condition of discomfort and economic and social marginalization.

To this end, a legal advice desk has been set up which mainly deals with the housing issue and the right to housing, following free of charge the eviction practices of families and acting as an intermediary between individuals and institutions. Free legal assistance also extends to the resolution of other legal and out-of-court problems: in collaboration with the Caf and Inca Cgil services, social security assistance and handling of bureaucratic procedures are offered.

Specific advice for staff/volunteers/adult educators

- Have the courage to show the values based on everyday work, even politically.
- Understand that mutualism and not in assistentialism.
- Reaching the people of the neighborhood, bringing them together and hearing their voice.
- Attitude to act when you see injustice that you can decrease or delete and increase welfare.
- Promoting gender inclusivity using feminist approaches.

- Direct democracy and dispel the line between workers and beneficiaries.
- Progress from beneficiary to human agency.

For more resources and information

<https://www.arci.it/> , <https://www.arcsculturesolidali.org/> , <https://nonnaroma.it/>,
<http://www.arciroma.it/>

<https://nonnaroma.it/2021/10/23/nonna-roma-social-market-3-mesi-di-emporio-solidale/>

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