



Fostering  
Social  
Justice



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## STUDY VISIT REPORT



**From mutualism to active participation of  
people “at the margins”.**

# BACKGROUND

Arci association and ARCS, its NGO, have the mission to create communities, build share and support every form of aggregation promoting anti-fascism, democracy, participation, solidarity. The week's programme will be a journey through examples and - hopefully – good practices and everyday efforts of mutual aid to empowerment practices for people at the margins, to permanent pedagogy.

## ARCS Arci Culture Solidali APS

It is the NGO of one of the biggest and oldest secular associations in Italy, Arci, with more than one million members and around 5.000 cultural clubs. ARCS was created in 1985 to spread abroad the mission of Arci: the involvement of citizens to enhance civil aggregations and strengthen their democratic ownership through international cooperation, volunteering, education to active citizenship and humanitarian aid. It implements projects and activities of international cooperation and humanitarian assistance in Central and South America, the Middle East and the Mediterranean countries, Africa and the Balkans. Cooperating means for ARCS involving communities, weaving relationships and partnerships between territories, people, and organizations to enhance the affirmation of human rights, peace and dialogue, and promote active citizenship and democratic participation. ARCS is also committed to education to active citizenship activities and international volunteering and mobility projects for youth.

The main headquarter is in Rome (Italy), and it has branches in Colombia (Bogotà), Bosnia Herzegovina, Brasil, Cameroun, Cuba, Jordan, East Jerusalem, Kosovo, Lebanon, Mozambique, Tunisia and Senegal.



## Arci Roma

It is the local committee of the Arci national association. It is a network of 63 clubs based in Rome. It also deals with support, inclusion and empowerment activities for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers: popular Italian language and culture schools, legal help desk support and socio-economic autonomy support programs.

<http://www.arciroma.it/>

## Nonna Roma

It is one of the 63 clubs of Arci Roma. In the collective imagination of Roman culture, the grandmother – “nonna” - is that somehow gruff figure but always ready to welcome you when you need to feel at home. The association Nonna Roma is a mutual aid bank that, through the distribution of food and necessities, concretely helps many families in conditions of poverty. Today the association has activated a network of services and empowerment activities around the person to allow users to get out of discomfort and economic and social marginalisation.

<https://nonnaroma.it/>

## Lab!Puzzle

Lab!Puzzle is an experiment in mutualism and welfare. A common space for students, precarious workers, and citizens to gather and organise themselves to tackle instability and social exclusion, escape the big cities isolations, experiment and spread democracy and culture from below, generate critical sense and respond to the needs of all; It is a multifunctional space for events, presentations, screenings, workshops, a school of Italian language for migrants, a community college, a school of comics and illustrations, a social secretariat, a coworking space, a study room, a biblio-media library, a Repair Café, The Dar Bazar free shop and a co-housing space.

# OBJECTIVES



The main objective was to show participants the diversity of Arci and ARCS, concerning non-formal education for adults and active citizenship, from work accomplished at the national and international level to the daily activities of some of the Arci clubs.

The *fil rouge*, the main topic, was mutualism and the activation of citizens with this undergoing question: how is it possible to engage people when they live in a condition of poverty? What is necessary to bring back people involved in taking care of society, changing their attitude towards politics, and engaging the associations more and more to be heard by the institutions?

## Highlights from participants

- Non formal education can be found in the smallest things
- The “we don’t give up” attitude
- A wide range of activities despite limited resources
- The time, effort and energy people give, literally and figuratively speaking in the ARCS network
- The level of activism in the youngsters

# QUOTES FROM PARTICIPANTS

“We visited very interesting and versatile organisations and projects during our stay in Rome. Presentations and discussions were eye-opening to me. NGO’s live in a very different world within Europe regarding recognition, ability to act, viability and funding. I saw the amazing work done by volunteers and activists, and I give it all my respect. I feel sad that some of the projects are not valued by institutions, and the funding might be extremely short term or none at all.”

“Informal education through art is a very important point for Arci Roma and a point I retain. Also, I retain that in the « clubs » or « labs » we met young people very very involved in what they do and believe. I was surprised by the fact that they do not wish to be called « volunteers » but « activists » or « militants » which proves the high level of their involvement .”

***“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, Greece***

# METHODS RETAINED FOR CAPITALISATION

**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. This tool can be applied to any community.

Mutualism is based on the core belief that fighting for equality is a co-configured right 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 Archi Roma is acting with mutualism, one notable point would be that change and solidarity matter when society functions according to a person's needs and fosters through understanding individuality within the community, especially within social groups that have been systemically excluded.

For example, the Arci Roma that is supporting migrant women offers its services according to their needs after initially covering basic ones, while the Archi Club Nona Roma provides support in the beginning. However, the idea is that this support is given because it is necessary and a fundamental need, but the aim is to transcend that so that everyone becomes part of the movement and understands that they have rights they can act towards.

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."**