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CRC - CENTRO RICERCHE SULLA COOPERAZIONE  
E SUL NONPROFIT

WORKING PAPER N. 15

**The state-of-the-art of Italian  
foundations' frameworks  
and methods to measure impact**

Elisa Ricciuti, Francesca Calò

**VP** VITA E PENSIERO

Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore

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Elisa Ricciuti, Francesca Calò

*Elisa Ricciuti, Centre for Research on Health and Social Care Management (Cergas), Università Bocconi, Milan, Italy; ela.ricciuti@unibocconi.it*

*Francesca Calò, Yunus Centre for Social Business and Health, Glasgow Caledonian University, Glasgow, UK.; francesca.calo@unibocconi.it*

✉ cooperazione.ricerche@unicatt.it

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## **Abstract**

*Impact evaluation is a mantra for nonprofit management studies in recent years, both among academics and practitioners. The reasons for the increasing attention on impact evaluation rest in the professionalization of the nonprofit sector since the early Nineties, and in the increasing accountability pressures from donors and citizens, who ask nonprofits to demonstrate they can address complex social problems. Recent contributions argue that foundations are better positioned, compared to other nonprofits, to measure the systemic impact of social projects.*

*Although few studies exist on the impact evaluation performed by US foundations, the impact mantra has recently spread throughout Europe and Italy too. Building on previous knowledge, this research project aims at drawing a map of the different impact evaluation frameworks and methods used by Italian foundations. Through a mixed method analysis the paper draws a map of different impact evaluation frameworks and methods used by Italian foundations and investigates the reasons and the ways impact evaluation is meant and managed. A desk based analysis of 196 foundations and semi-structured interviews to 10 key informants have been conducted.*

*Results show that a low degree of disclosure prevails on impact evaluation methods and tools. Moreover, in contrast with the main literature, the motivation behind impact evaluation is primarily based on internal strategic management considerations. Furthermore, one of the strongest barriers in conducting impact evaluation is the lack of staff dedicated and specific skills necessary to provide evidence-based data. Finally, the necessity to connect communities and foundations in sharing needs and understanding impact is considered fundamental to foster dialogue and create more participatory instruments.*

**JEL codes:** L31, L39

**Keywords:** Impact evaluation, foundations, strategic management, Italy.

## ***1. Introduction***

Impact evaluation is a mantra for nonprofit management studies in recent years, both among academics and practitioners (Brest & Harvey 2008; Crutchfield & Grant 2008; Worth 2014). The reasons for the increasing attention on impact evaluation rest in the professionalization of the nonprofit sector since the early Nineties (Worth 2014), and in the increasing accountability pressures from governments, donors and citizens, who ask nonprofits to demonstrate they can address complex social problems (Zadek & Radovich 2006; Saxton & Guo 2011). Thus, nonprofit organizations have been requested to show what results they achieve in addressing complex social problems, such as reducing poverty, inequalities and injustice (Ebrahim & Rangan 2014).

For nonprofit organizations, the relevance of impact evaluation is twofold: first, it helps the strategic management process, by giving inputs for the allocation of funding resources (Flynn & Hodgkinson 2001). Second, it helps the due diligence and commissioning process, for those organizations that operate in a strong relationship with private partners and are required to monitor and evaluate their partners' activity (Perrini & Vurro 2013). In the last years, different instruments have been developed in the nonprofit management, social entrepreneurship and programme evaluation literature to understand the results and contribution of social enterprises (Bagnoli & Megali

2009; Epstein & Klerman 2012; Leeuw & Vaessen 2009; Kroeger & Weber 2014; White 2014).

Recent contributions argue that foundations are better positioned, compared to other nonprofits, to measure the systemic impact of social projects (Ebrahim & Rangan 2014). Previous research on US based foundations also confirms that while foundations are increasingly interested in impact evaluation, for most of them this is a reaction to external pressures, more than to internal considerations on strategic planning needs (Lyon & Arvidson 2011). Although few studies exist on the impact evaluation performed by US foundations, the impact mantra has recently spread throughout Europe and Italy too. The reasons for this rest in higher external pressures for accountability and social reporting (Barresi 2013; Battilana & Lee 2014), as well as in the fact that foundations are flourishing in a context of economic crisis and reconfiguration of welfare systems (Barbetta 2012; ISTAT 2013). Moreover, further attention to the topic has been given by the launch of the Social Business Initiative of the European Commission that identifies Social Impact Measurement as one of the key policy actions linked to the European social economy, which accounts for 6% of total employment in the European Union including cooperatives, foundations, associations and mutual societies (European Commission 2011). However, we decided not to provide any specific definitions of impact evaluation before the stage of data collection, in order to collect the perception of foundations'

managers on what impact is, and how it influences the design of impact evaluations, favoring an inductive approach both based on desk analysis and interviews, rather than a deductive one (David & Sutton 2011).

Foundations in Italy have grown by 154.7% from 2001 to 2011 (ISTAT 2013). Italy scores at the first place among European foundations for the total asset size of foundations – undoubtedly for the size of foundations of banking origin (The European Foundation Centre 2008). However, a lack of contributions exists on the emerging responses of Italian foundations in adopting impact evaluation methods – with few exceptions such as Fondazione Cariplo, the largest Italian foundation. A first attempt to explore the frameworks and methods used for impact evaluation by Italian foundations has been performed through a content analysis of foundations' documents available online, thus on a web-based approach (Ricciuti & Calò 2014). Findings from this research study form the basis for the current research project.

Building on previous knowledge, this research project aims at drawing a map of the different impact evaluation frameworks and methods used by Italian foundations. The goal is not to increase the adoption of impact evaluation practices per se, but to explore the state-of-the-art and the reasons why foundations perform this activity, with a potential to increase foundations' accountability and legitimacy towards their stakeholders.



Specific objectives of the current research study include:

1. To draw a map of different impact evaluation frameworks and methods used (desk-based documentary analysis);
2. To get to understand the reasons and the ways impact evaluation is meant and managed in Italian foundations (in-depth interviews).

## **2. Methodology**

The paper builds on the content analysis previously performed on a sample of Italian foundations that declare (in their web pages or in the documents they publish online) to perform impact evaluation (Ricciuti & Calò 2014). To respond to the first specific research objective (drawing a map of impact evaluation activities), the previous content analysis has been expanded to a population of 196 foundations: this sample represents the total Assifero members (including some of the ex-members)<sup>1</sup> and the total ACRI members<sup>2</sup> as at 15th of September 2015. Therefore, the sample includes private/independent/family foundations, corporate foundations, community foundations and foundations of banking origin. Despite the sample is definitely far from being representative of Italian founda-

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<sup>1</sup> *Assifero is the Italian Association of Foundations and Grant-making Bodies and includes different types of foundation, with the mission of supporting and connecting foundations across the country, as well as promoting international network-building and other sorts of educational activities for members.*

<sup>2</sup> *ACRI is the Association of Italian Banking Foundations and Saving Banks and it represents the Foundations of Banking Origin across the country. It aims at representing and protecting the interests of its members, supporting the implementation of common-interests projects and promoting national and international networking.*

tions (more than 6,000 according to ISTAT 2013), they still represent the largest freely accessible databases on foundations in Italy.

For each Foundation, we navigated the website and downloaded all available documents, supported by the social research tradition which uses texts as fundamental tools to frame organizational models and structures as well as information disclosure (Bernard & Ryan 1998; Philips et al. 2004). We acknowledge that the choice to analyze only online documents may represent a significant limitation to this analysis. However, in an era where technology has so profoundly changed the relationship between organizations and individuals, acting as a communication facilitator as well as a tool for citizens' empowerment, we support the view that the use of internet technology is a proxy of the communication strategy of foundations towards all their stakeholders, allowing a far greater reach of potential grantees too (Hackler & Saxton 2007). For this reason, websites are reasonable sources to be analyzed, as the first mean of communication between organizations and stakeholders, though not the only.

We started our analysis by reading all web pages of the foundations, where those were available. Then, we downloaded all available documents, including: a) annual reports, social reporting documents and/or strategic plans b) documents or online descriptions available on the grant-making process (typically funding guidelines or similar) c) monitoring and evaluation documents or guidelines (typically included in social reporting documents) d) code of ethics where exist-

ent. We used foundations' websites to collect online available information on foundations' disclosure according to the framework presented (authors are willing to share the database of information collected upon request). Data related to grants volume and governance structure were extracted. Moreover, we performed a content analysis based at first on a simple word frequency count, before reading the whole document (Stemler 2001). The word frequency was done looking for "impact", "evaluation", and "needs" (in Italian "impatt\*", "valuta\*", "bisogn\*"). The decision to include the word "needs" aims at reflecting the view of the majority of nonprofit sector economic theory, which state that nonprofit organizations try to address needs not covered by other players (Weisbrod 2009). Therefore, we assumed that the terms related to "needs" could be easily found in the same sentences or in conjunction with terms, like "evaluation" or "impact", which are linked to the results achieved by Foundations in pursuing their mission. The documents including those terms have been read through entirely, and main themes related to impact evaluations have been extracted. Finally, for foundations of banking origin, we analyzed the methodology of impact evaluation, understanding if and how concepts related to outputs, outcomes and impacts have been described and applied. All desk-based data have been collected and tracked in a dataset (an Excel spreadsheet). We then triangulated documentary data and obtained missing information through in-depth interviews and other documents made avail-

able by foundations' informants – e.g., the ratio between projects' applications received and projects founded, the average amount of grants given, the description of the grant-making process and its link to the foundation's strategy life cycle.

To respond to the second specific research objective (understanding the concepts of impacts and the reasons behind evaluation), we performed in-depth interviews to foundations' executives – presidents, CEOs, or staff specifically dedicated to the evaluation process. The objective of the interview was to discuss the reasons and the ways through which impact evaluation is meant and managed, starting from those foundations that have mentioned “evaluation”, “needs” or “impact” in their online documents. We chose in-depth interviews as the preferred method for data collection, since they allow accessing to individuals' knowledge to a level of depth and complexity that is not possible to achieve through other methods (Byrne 2004).

A total of 15 foundations have been selected for the interview: 1 foundation was not available to participate in the research, 2 foundations declared they do not perform any kind of evaluation activity and refused to be interviewed and other 3 foundations were involved in the same impact evaluation project (consequently, only 1 has been selected for the interview). Consequently, 10 interviews have been conducted. All interviews but 2 were face-to-face (the other 2 via telephone); and all of them but 2 have been recorded, for a total of 12

hours of recordings. Transcripts have been coded following a thematic content analysis (Saldana 2009).

### ***3. Findings - Desk-based analysis and the construction of the database***

Description of the sample - Of the 196 foundations mapped, 142 are based in the North of Italy, 44 in the Centre and only 10 in the South. 46% of these are concentrated in Milan (33 foundations) and Brescia (18 foundations), followed by Rome (12), Turin (7) and Venice (5). Figure 1 shows the different origin of foundations in our sample<sup>3</sup>. Most foundations are of banking origin (88 out of 196), followed by independent/private or family foundations (44 out of 196), community foundations (28 out of 196), and corporate foundations (22 out of 196), two of which include public participation too (A2A and AEM)<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, 12 organizations are classified as grant-making organizations, with different governance structures (e.g., associations or committees), or generally described as “onlus” (which does not

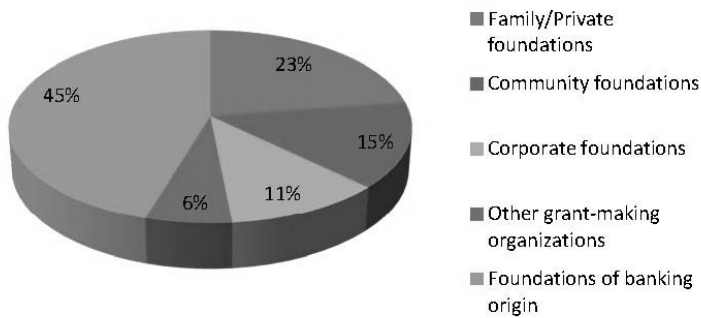
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<sup>3</sup> *Origin and nature are intended as follows: the nature refers to the type the activity and can be grant-making (giving grants to others), operating (managing own projects), or mixed. The origin is meant as the primary source of endowment: from corporations (corporate foundations), from individuals, families or trusts (independent/private foundations), from the community (community foundations), or from saving banks according to “the Amato Law” (1990) (foundations of banking origin) (Ricciuti & Calò 2014).*

<sup>4</sup> *A short description of each type of foundation (by origin) is reported later in the section on interview data analysis, since the differences among foundations have been considered relevant to give a proper interpretation to the interviewees’ accounts.*

give any information on their governance or management structures) – and the explicated purpose of distributing funds collected through individual donations. Finally, 2 organizations could not be classified due to the lack of information given.

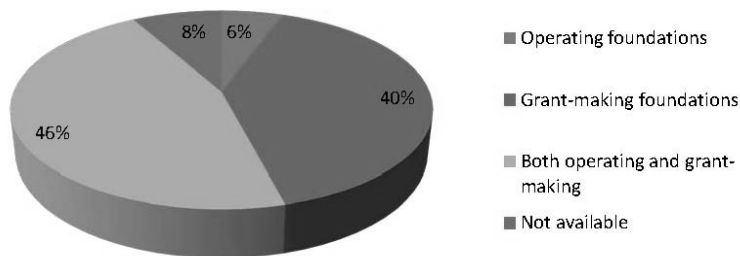
**Figure 1 - Percentage of foundations according to their origin**



In terms of the nature or type of activity (Figure 2), the majority of foundations perform both grant-making and operating activities with a different range of intensity for one activity or the other (90 out of 196), 79 out of 196 are grant-making organizations, 11 out of 196 are primarily operating foundations, thus managing their own projects, alone or in partnerships with other public or private players. 16 Foundations out of 196 have no available information on their activities – their websites are inexistent or inactive. The type of activity is

not significantly correlated with any type of foundations, with the only exception of community foundations, which are all grant-making due to their specific scope – collecting resources from their own communities in order to redistribute these resources for specific areas of needs in the same communities. Foundations of banking origin provide mainly a mix between an operating and a grant-making model. Finally, it was impossible to get any kind of access to the websites of 10 foundations; either they have their web pages not working, under construction, or they have no website at all. Only 1 foundation has an access web page, where a username and password are required to login to the foundation’s website.

**Figure 2 - Percentage of foundations according to the type of their core activity**



Analyzing the number and size of funded projects, only 71 organizations out of 196 highlight the number of funded projects. The range

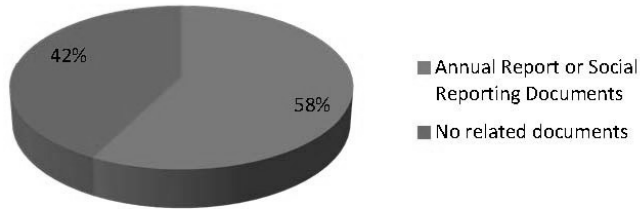
of funded projects is large, going from 19 projects to 1,518. The same heterogeneity is reflected in the average amount of grants given for single projects, going from 3,124 euros to more than 160,000 euros. The usual sectors where foundations invest are education and research, arts and culture, health, environment, social care. However, due to the high differences of foundations included in the sample and to the ways of tracking grants which is ad hoc in each foundation, it is extremely difficult to assess what kind of sector foundations are mainly investing in only based on a desk-based analysis. A deeper analysis would be required to find suitable categories among grant destinations, and then re-collect all grants' investments from foundations' databases into a common classification.

Before going into the exploration of the content analysis results, we report that the overall degree of disclosure is low, as previously reported on a smaller sample (Ricciuti & Calò 2014). 15% of the organizations do not publish any document on their websites, 70% of these foundations are family or private foundations. Among those foundations that disclose documents online, strong differences exist in the amount and the ways information is given. However, 8% of the organizations disclose all documents searched for. All these foundations are of banking origins, suggesting that the nature of foundations may be correlated to the amount and depth of information given. Nonetheless, rarely specific documents on impact evaluation methods or tools are reported on their websites.



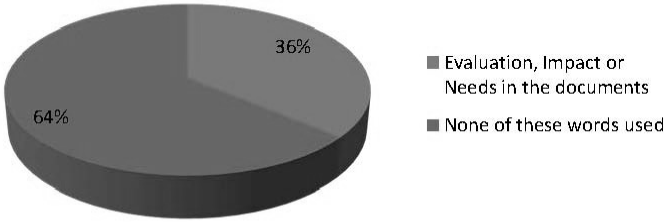
Content analysis and social impact evaluation - Of the 196 foundations mapped, 113 publish an annual report and/or a social reporting document on their websites (Figure 3). In comparison with a previous study (Ricciuti & Calò 2014) the inclusion of foundations of banking origin in the sample has increased the number of organizations that disclose results.

**Figure 3 - Percentage of foundations which present annual reports or social reporting documents on their website**



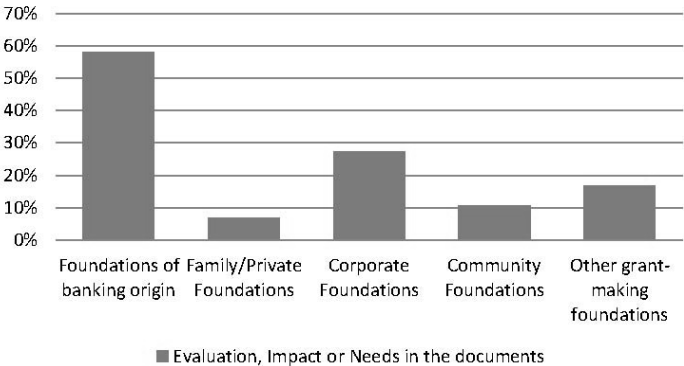
Overall, 71 foundations out of 196 mention at least “evaluation”, “impact” or “needs” in their documents, including strategic plans, social reporting documents, annual reports, codes of ethics or funding guidelines (Figure 4). An overview of the content analysis performed is reported at the end of this section (Table 1). Foundations are identified in the Table with a letter (A) and a number, in order to guarantee their anonymity.

**Figure 4 - Percentage of foundations which mention at least once “evaluation”, “impact” or “needs” in their documents.**



If we consider the nature of foundations correlated to the use of the terms “evaluations”, “needs” and “impact” in their documents, foundations of banking origin are more open compared to foundations of a different nature (Figure 5).

**Figure 5 - Percentage of foundations divided by nature which mention at least once “evaluation”, “impact” or “needs” in their documents.**



47 foundations out of 196 mention they perform an evaluation in their documents, mainly in their annual report or strategic plan, underlining that they are exploring the impact of the organization. 37 foundations out of 196 use the word “impact” on all the available foundations’ documents and 29 foundations out of 196 include the word “needs”. However, only 13 Foundations declare to use different approaches for evaluating their performance and the impact achieved. 1 grant-making foundation reports that it performs monitoring and evaluation in its charter, but then “evaluation” is described in the funding guidelines as the process of review of project proposals, and not as the impact evaluation of grantees’ or foundations’ projects [F1 in the Table]. This foundation interprets the concept of impact as “the involvement of other public and no-profit organizations in pursuing together the community objectives”. Another grant-making foundation, in its funding guidelines, states that an impact evaluation is conducted at the end of every project funded, in order to allow for a better planning of future interventions. The evaluation is referred to as a “systematic” process and it is conducted on the solidity of the partnership too. Moreover, “beyond the typical role of a grant-making foundation”, the document states the foundation performs a systematic role of “coaching” to local partners in the different stages of implementation, monitoring and evaluation of their projects [F2]. This foundation mentions impact both as social impact (stating that it is what grantees have to demonstrate from their inter-

vention) and as the impact of the activity of the foundation's volunteers, described in the annual report and measured against the value of the same work done by consultants. No other details are given on the criteria used to perform evaluations, or on people involved or on any other related detail. Other two foundations write in their social reporting documents that they "guarantee transparency in allocations and the evaluation of projects' results" [F3] and more broadly that an evaluation of projects "will be conducted" [F4], without any further detail. Finally, another foundation reports that donations must be seen as investments, "able to give an important return in terms of social impacts" [F5].

Only three foundations describe a specific approach to projects' evaluation, at least giving some criteria for the evaluation, or even a specific impact evaluation framework. One is a corporate foundation, which reports that an ex-post evaluation of projects will be conducted according to four criteria: "impact, effectiveness, efficiency and concrete sustainability" [F6]. Despite this, any detail is given in any other document. Another corporate foundation adopts "sustainability" as the criterion to evaluate projects funded. In its social reporting document, the foundation states that a "real and deep analysis (...) of projects which have continued to produce results autonomously even after a long time" have contributed to frame the concept of sustainability as formed by 5 criteria: solidarity, subsidiarity, fraternity, gratuity and active participation [F7]. The same foundation links the

evaluation of sustainable projects to the concept of “social impact”. In fact, it also gives a set of criteria for its construct of “social impact”: in a section of the social reporting document called Social Impact Evaluation, the foundation mentions that “giving people motivations for doing good would increase the number of volunteers in the community that can generate welfare, and these are the expected returns of the foundation’s investments and will be measured with a continuously increasing rigor and tools”. It also reports that “thank to the new guidelines set by the Foundation’s board, it has been possible to finalize resources better and to focus on those with a higher social impact”, though without mentioning the criteria set in these guidelines. Only 1 foundation proposes an own, sophisticated model for impact evaluation, based on seven criteria and the relative measurement indicators. This model, coming from the US tradition of strategic philanthropy (Morino 2011) has also a value for organizational planning, since it is designed “to evaluate the characteristics of a philanthropic action before it has been carried out, during and at the end of its execution” [F7]. A corporate foundation mentions the concept of “impact” to describe the effect on other organizations in partnering with the foundation itself – the impact of the foundation’s funding is correlated to the impact generated on its grantees, without any more detail [F8]. The concept of impact has been linked as well to the role of philanthropy in the community. One organization states that “it is impossible to have a real impact on the fragility of the

community without specific knowledge and awareness of the role of a modern philanthropic activity” [F10] while another underlines that community foundations are demonstrating to be “powerful ways” to start initiatives of collective impact, where the objectives to be pursued are the objectives of the whole community, involving multiple players of different nature [F9].

One foundation mentions the assessment of needs in every project related document. In the presentation of a foundation initiative, it is also reported that “an expert group will be formed in order to identify the social challenges of the community, consistently with the social needs assessed locally and the availability of resources” [F6]. The same is reported on a specific project where the methodology used is a case-by-case approach, where “social operators measure single interventions on the basis of specific family needs” [F10]. A foundation writes about “social impact” in its annual report (in the section dedicated to financials and allocations), reporting that the foundation’s Strategic Committee sets the financial management objectives, oriented “to the maximization of social impacts of funded projects” [F11]. The same foundation reports that the strategy starts from “a participatory needs assessment in order to identify development actions within the community”. Finally, a community foundation mentions the constitution of a Needs Assessment Committee, which “periodically updates and refines the community needs”, which are constantly observed with a “periodical monitoring of the community

needs” [F12]. Nothing is reported, in all these cases, on the methods used for needs assessment.

If we consider only foundations of banking origin, the information disclosure appears to be higher. In fact, 40 foundations explore the issue of evaluation in the documents they provide, highlighting the importance of understanding the impact of their action and assessing the needs of their beneficiaries. Most of these organizations explore the possibility of creating ad hoc committees for measuring projects, using cost-benefit analysis, understanding the projects’ added value, implementing qualitative and quantitative indicators and comparing projects’ results. However, no methodology or methods are further explained. Only 3 foundations has explored and developed mixed methods for evaluating the output, outcome and impact of their operations (the next section will offer a focus on the methods, drawing on the analysis of in-depth interviews). The first of these foundations of banking origin defines evaluation as the possibility of “analyzing quantitatively and qualitatively our own projects”. Qualitative and quantitative indicators are proposed with the goal of measuring specific and general impacts [F13]. A second foundation declares to use instruments for understanding the impact on the community, the achievement of specific goals and the exploration of the results. However, it reports mainly qualitative analysis based on interview data collection [F14]. The third foundation of banking origin has developed a more sophisticated system of analysis, where the evalua-

tion process involves specific funding areas and it is considered fundamental to have an impact on policy-makers and on the internal strategic management process. Even if social impact is not explicitly mentioned in the documents, they explore methods for understanding causal relation and supporting the understanding of achieved outcomes [F15]. These 15 organizations constitute the sample of analysis of the second part of the paper, that through a qualitative approach will try to understand the perception and decision behind impact evaluation.



Table 1 - Overview of findings from the Content Analysis of “Evaluation”, “Impact” and “Needs”

Foundations	Evaluation	Impact	Needs
F1	“Evaluation” is referred only to the review of project proposals (funding guidelines).	“The foundation works for the promotion of the collective impact, meaning the involvement of other public and no-profit organizations in pursuing together the community objectives” (strategic plan for 2013).	
F2	“Beyond the typical role of a grant-making foundation, the Foundation performs a systematic role of ‘coaching’ to local partners in the different stages of projects’ implementation, monitoring and evaluation” (annual report) “The systematic evaluation is done on the obtained results and partnership perspectives. This evaluation is at the basis for future planning” (funding guidelines).	“The impact of the volunteers’ activity is comparable to at least 140 days of external consultants” (annual report). Mention of social impact in the final report grantees must hand out to the foundation (the funding guidelines).	
F3	“guarantee transparency in allocations and the evaluation of projects’ results” (annual report 2012).	“donations must be seen as investments, able to give an important return in terms of social impacts” (annual report 2012).	
F4	Monitoring and evaluation will be conducted (web page).		
F5	“an ex-post evaluation of projects will be conducted according to four criteria: impact, effectiveness, efficiency and concrete sustainability” (strategic plan).		
F6	“The foundation has performed a real and deep analysis (...) of projects which have continued to produce results autonomously even after a long time”. Sustainability has been framed through the use of 5 criteria: “solidarity, subsidiarity, fraternity, gratuity and active participation” (social report 2011-2012).	“...giving people motivations for doing good would increase the number of volunteers in the community that can generate welfare, and these are the expected returns of the foundation’s investments and will be measured with a continuously increasing rigor and tools” (in the Social Impact Evaluation section of the social reporting document).	
F7	Propose a sophisticated model for impact evaluation,	based on seven criteria and the relative measurement indicators.	
F8		Measurement of the impact the foundation has generated on its own partners (strategic plan).	

F9		"community foundations are demonstrating to be powerful ways to start initiatives of collective impact (annual report).		
F10		"it is impossible to have a real impact on the fragility of the community without specific knowledge and awareness of the role of a modern philanthropic activity" (annual report).		"an expert group will be formed in order to identify the social challenges of the community, consistently with the social needs assessed locally and the availability of resources" (...) "social operators measure single interventions on the basis of the specific needs of every family" (operating model).
F11			"the foundation's Strategic Committee sets the objectives of financial management, since it has a strategic role, oriented to the maximization of social impacts of funded projects" (annual report).	The foundation performs "a participatory needs assessment in order to identify development actions within the community" (strategic plan).
F12				"The Needs Assessment Committee periodically updates and refines the community needs", which are constantly observed with a "periodical monitoring of the community needs" (operating model).
F13	"Since 2012 Board of Directors has adopted some criteria for analysing quantitatively and qualitatively our own projects" (annual report)		"There are two different types of impacts: specific and general. Specific impacts are the effects directly related to the actions. General impacts are long-term impacts that affect a larger population. Measurement of these impacts is very complex and it is difficult to establish a causal relation" (annual report)	"It is important to measure the achievement of specific objectives on the base of the assessed needs" (annual report)
F14	"Foundation uses some instruments for exploring the results of project, the achievement of goals and the impact on the community" (social reporting document).			
F15	Three different goals of evaluation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be accountable to stakeholders in terms of input and output</li> <li>Critically analyse the strategy</li> <li>Disseminate policy effects of Foundation actions</li> </ul>			

#### **4. Findings - *Qualitative interviews***

Description of the sample - The sample of interviewed foundations is represented in Table 2 below. Foundations are listed according to their nature and origin with main background data. Background data are essential to understand the way foundations perform impact evaluations and the reasons behind it. Due to an extreme variety of motivations and different sizes of grants, findings will be presented after a short background is given on the different nature of the foundations' activity and origins. Moreover, other pieces of data have been collected to allow for a better understanding of the sample of foundations explored, as a way to acknowledge their differences. Data on the ratio between project proposals received and projects funded, the total contributions given each year and the average amount of grant given, and the average length of grants given is reported in the Table. Major differences emerge in terms of funding capacity – due to the different nature and size of the foundations in the sample.

Despite this is not the proper place to describe each type of foundation, a short premise is necessary in order to discuss the complex topic of impact evaluation. The different origins and nature of the foundations explored have a considerable influence not only on the organizational structure and the planning capacity of foundations, but also on our understanding of the objects of analysis of the impact evaluation activities performed. For this reason, the next paragraphs will explore some major characteristics to be considered as an intro-

duction to the research findings. These considerations are reported here because they were relevant to properly interpret the findings emerged from interviewees' accounts.

Despite their differences, all corporate foundations in the sample have in common that their sustainability is depending on the company they belong to. In concrete terms, their endowment increases through the donations of the parent company. This donation may occur in two ways: either the company gives a fixed, predetermined percentage of its profits to the foundation every year (I1)<sup>5</sup>, or the company gives a donation which is an ad hoc sum, determined at the end of each year and based on the company's profits and future trends (I2, I3). In each of these scenarios, the uncertainty of funding correlated to the economic situation of the company is a threat to the foundation, which often finds it extremely difficult to have a multi-year planning and funding strategy. This may have consequences on the reasons why corporate foundations perform impact evaluation as well as the methods they apply. In general, corporate foundations strongly depend from the interest, the vision and the sensitivity of executive levels, who change often frequently.

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<sup>5</sup> We chose the letter I (for Interviewed) instead of F (for Foundations) to clarify that the foundations in Table 2 are different from the ones explored in Table 1. The foundations listed in Table 2 are those which have been interviewed: thus, for the reasons explained above, they do not overlap completely with the foundations included in the desk-based analysis, and the order in which they are described in the text is different.

Community foundations are completely different. Beyond their grant-making nature, their mission is to promote a culture of giving, contributing to build up a “community endowment” which is participated by the local community to support community nonprofit organizations. All community foundations in our sample are based in Lombardy and have been set up with a start-up investment by Fondazione Cariplo. According to the community foundations’ model (imported from the US), this initial sum would work as an incentive for community foundations to raise further donations from their community – up until a certain, predetermined amount which would let them be autonomous. Due to this particular incentive mechanism designed to promote a culture of giving (called “The Challenge”), community foundations are often deemed as a sophisticated and innovative philanthropic model.

Private or independent foundations rarely have something in common. The foundations in our sample are dependent on a trust (I9), donations from a family and public fundraising (I7), and public fundraising alone (I8). The main difference within this group rests in the nature of their activities, more than in their origin. Two foundations are only (or primarily) operating, meaning that they act as grantees rather than grant-givers, managing own projects and not looking for other grantees. In particular, one of these foundations has a long experience in the field of international cooperation (acting similarly to

a NGOs), which also has an impact on the type of methods and tools used for impact evaluation related activities.

Finally, only 1 foundation of banking origin is included in the sample. In fact, three of the foundations of banking origin selected for the interview were involved in the same impact evaluation project. Second, since guidelines for impact evaluation activities of foundations of banking origin are currently under elaboration, in the attempt to make impact evaluation methods and tools uniform, we interviewed the foundation of banking origin that is more active in terms of impact evaluation activities and it is mostly contributing to the development of impact evaluation guidelines. Foundations of banking origin are quite different organizations from the others. The history of the 88 members of ACRI, as well as their uniformity of structures and rules, is quite peculiar, compared to the vast difference among the 103 members of Assifero. For this reason, we initially considered the option of treating them separately. However, the reason for the final inclusion of foundations of banking origin in the research design is based on two considerations. First, they helped the researchers to increase quite dramatically the numbers of foundations studied, and second, they represent a peculiarity of the Italian landscape of foundations, which in the end deserves to be acknowledged and highlighted, rather than excluded for their diversity. This is even more relevant considering the exploratory value of this research based on an initial, broad research question. In the case of a deeper

analysis and a narrower research question in the future, we will consider the possibility of making a separate analysis only focused on foundations of banking origin.

**Table 2 – the sample of interviewed foundations**

	Type of foundation (origin)	Type of foundation (nature)	First year of activity	Proposals received (per year)	Projects funded (per year)	Average contribution (per year)**	Total contributions per year	Average contribution length (months)
I1	Corporate	Grant-making	2009	192	112 (58%)	9.500 €	937.490 €	12
I2	Corporate	Grant-making	2001	114*	26* (23%)	34.300 €*	892.744 €*	12-24
I3	Corporate	Grant-making	2006	800	257 (32%)	2.400 €	1.924.960 €	12
I4	Community	Grant-making	2007	163	80 (49%)	11.682 €	934.600 €	12
I5	Community	Grant-making	2001	approx. 250	148 (59%)	7.682 €	1.137.034 €	18
I6	Community	Grant-making	2006	180	118 (66%)	5.115	603.582 €	12-18
I7	Private/Independent	Operating	2000	–	190	–	4.876.427 €	10-12
I8	Private/Independent	Grant-making	2007	632	184 (29%)	132.244 €	24.333.006 €	na
I9	Private/Independent	Operating	2010	–	–	–	–	–
I10	Of banking origin	Grant-making	1990	na	1047*	132.603 €*	138.835.352 €*	na

\* For F2 and F10 data refer to 2013. All others data refer to 2014 annual reports, or information given through interview data.

\*\* The project variety is so high in terms of average contribution that this piece of data must be taken with the right precautions. Further analysis could be proper to distinguish the types of projects according to their focus areas and dimension to offer data closer to reality.



Concerning the grant-making mechanisms of the foundations under investigation, all of them, although to a different extent, fund their projects through a mechanism of co-financing. Co-financing from the foundations goes from a minimum of 25% of the project value (I4) to a maximum of 80% (I8) and it is often given in multiple tranches (starting at the beginning of the project), and rarely given all at the end of the project, after the interventions have been fully realized (I1 and I5) . This is valid for projects presented through Calls for proposals, which are the main way to collect project proposals for all grant-making foundations in the sample (with the exception of I2 that operates through the publication of general guidelines, followed by ad hoc meetings with potential grantees). Beyond calls for proposals, all foundations retain a further line of grant-making which are micro-contributions (also called “direct interventions”), and/or patronages and sponsorships. These investments are usually small and targeted to a single specific intervention (i.e., restructuring of a church altar or a school library, sponsoring art exhibitions or street events, building access lifts or platforms for disabled people, and so on). These specific interventions do not require a multi-year sophisticated planning capacity, and their realization is rather quick. This is partly the reason why the average length of contributions showed in Table 2 rarely exceeds 12 months: it would probably be higher if micro-contributions were excluded from the average count.

## Impact evaluation: concepts, methods and tools

Due to the variety of foundations under study, we expected this investigation to account for a wide variety of meanings of impact and a complexity of impact evaluation practices. This expectation has been confirmed: Table 3 shows the main impact concepts or definitions as they were given by informants. Also, the Table reports the methods or tools used for impact evaluation, the time where impact evaluation measurement has started, the main nature of information collected for evaluation and the number of projects evaluated (in 2014).

As a fundamental premise to all the subsequent analysis, we have to clearly define the boundaries of what we mean with impact evaluation in this analysis. As mentioned in the introduction, we purposively decided not to provide a definition of impact evaluation before the interviews, to allow informants to express their view (concepts and definitions) of impact. All foundations in the sample perform some kind of evaluation, assessment or monitoring. Very often, these terms are used as synonyms or to indicate different moments in time where the same activity is performed. In fact, all foundations perform an evaluation of projects received through calls for proposals or unsolicited applications. This is generally intended as an eligibility check (at a minimum) to verify that the potential grantee and the project proposed are consistent with the foundations' objectives, or even as a tutoring and mentoring related activity (at a maximum) on how to present projects properly and, at the same time, an assessment of the

eligibility of the projects along the line of the foundations' interests. Moreover, foundations often perform regular checks on the grantees' activities, during the project (usually called ongoing monitoring) and at its end. In this case, "primitive" quantitative information is often collected (e.g., number of outputs realized, number of people reached by the intervention, etc.). Rarely these numbers are expressed as indicators (ratio), often they are expressed in absolute terms, with some notable exceptions which will be discussed below.

None of these two types of evaluation activity has been considered here or reported in Table 3. In fact, according to the objectives of this research and the supporting literature, we focused on impact evaluation as all those activities that follow the end of the project. The time of measurement and observation has been used as the only criterion to distinguish impact evaluation from ongoing monitoring activities, often linked to the need of verifying the degree of compliance of the grantee with respect to the foundations' rules. This has been done in the attempt to distinguish a "smart account of facts" (I10) – necessary to accomplish the final procedure and reports to be produced by grantees – from the strategic question of what I have contributed to achieve in my community at large. For this reason, in-depth interviews were useful to clarify that 3 foundations in our sample (I1, I4, I6) do not currently perform any impact evaluation activity after the end of the projects funded. We can then conclude that the final sample of foundations actually implementing impact evaluation is of 7

foundations. The time of measurement is reported in Table 3 (in some cases, there is not a specific rule to decide when to perform evaluation activities, as it is done generally some months after the project, depending on the foundation's needs and staff availability). Finally, only 1 foundation in our sample (I10) holds a specific office dedicated to monitoring and impact evaluation activities. For the others, the evaluation activities are part of the daily activity of staff members, who are full-time or part-time project managers (for operating foundations), or full-time or part-time executive members of the foundation (for grant-making foundations).

Table 3 – Overview of main concepts and methods of impact evaluation

	IMPACT CONCEPTS/DEFINITION	TIME OF MEASUREMENT (MONTHS AFTER THE END OF THE PROJECT)	METHODS AND TOOLS	QUANTITATIVE/QUALITATIVE NATURE OF INFORMATION	NUMBER OF PROJECTS EVALUATED (2014)
I1	The capacity of beneficiaries to replicate the project alone	NO IMPACT MEASUREMENT			
I2	The capacity of beneficiaries to manage sustainable and replicable projects	From 8 to 12 months after	Follow-up Questionnaire In-depth interviews	Mainly quantitative	13 (2013)
I3	The ratio between input given and value created	12 months after Months after Both at the end of the project and months after At the completion of the project and months after	SROI Follow-up Questionnaire Site visits (Observational participation) In-depth interviews	Quantitative (ex-post data) Mainly qualitative (narrative) Qualitative Qualitative	3 projects (pilot) All All Some
I4	The evolution of beneficiaries' project management capacities	NO IMPACT MEASUREMENT			
I5	The decrease of the social need tackled (in the community)	Months after	Follow-up Questionnaire	Mainly quantitative	All
I6	The effect you have on your community	From 24 to 36 months after	In-depth interviews	Quantitative (indicators); qualitative (narrative)	All in the Social area (not Arts&Culture)
I7	The outcome generated against your initial objectives	NO IMPACT MEASUREMENT Months after Months after Months after Every year for every programme Both at the end of the project and months after	Follow-up Questionnaire Site visits (Observational participation) Counterfactual analysis (SM) "Strategy refresh" Site visits (Observational participation)	Mainly quantitative Qualitative (report by volunteers) Quantitative Mainly quantitative Mainly quantitative	All All 1 project All programmes
I8	The social change generated against your initial objectives	From 24 to 48 months after	Follow-up (online) questionnaire	Quantitative (indicators); qualitative (narrative)	All
I9	The social change generated against your initial objectives	Years after Months after Optional (when needed)	SROI Counterfactual analysis (RCT) In-depth interviews	Mainly quantitative Quantitative Qualitative	1 project 2 projects (1 completed) 1 project
I10	The potential outcome of your intervention	Every year for specific programmes	"Strategy refresh"	Quantitative (indicators); qualitative (narrative)	2 programmes

The variety in the definitions of impact used by interviewees has been confirmed, although two general streams are easily identifiable: some foundations relate the definition of impact to the observation of their beneficiaries' activities and capacities, while others relate the definition of impact to their strategic management and planning, as a measure of achievement of their activities and objectives.

In the former case, foundations declare they have an impact "if the projects funded have the potential to replicate themselves without further contribution" (I1), if the projects funded demonstrate to be sustainable over time (I2, I3) and if they demonstrate to generate value, which means that "grantees themselves acquire the capacities to be able to help other beneficiaries" (I2, I3). Similarly, an informant from a community foundation defines impact as "the effect you have on your community" (I6), and another one declares the foundation is impactful if it is able to increase the project management capacity of its beneficiaries: "our impact is demonstrated in the evolution of the capacities of our grantees in writing, obtaining and managing complex projects" (I4).

In the latter case, impact evaluation is considered possible only if a set of objectives and relative indicators are planned a priori, in a strategic management or project cycle management view<sup>6</sup>. Overall, in-

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<sup>6</sup> What we call here "strategic management view" or "project cycle management view" refers to the logic chain between needs-activities-outputs-outcomes-impacts that has been addressed in different ways during the last decades. In fact, while in recent years the expression "Theory Of Change" (TOC) or "Impact Measurement

interviewees approaching this logic make explicit reference to the literature on strategic management or impact measurement. As an informant reported, “yes, we know the literature and the difference between effect, result and impact, but the truth is that they are all confused and people mash them up...(…) It depends on how you use the definition of impact: impact, for us, means that the social need you are tackling has decreased” (I5). Another informant reports that they use “the classical three layers of evaluation suggested by the LFA<sup>7</sup> approach: output, outcome, and impact” (I7). Nonetheless, they have elaborated a set of indicators to measure outputs and outcomes, suggesting that the responsibility to measure impacts is not on foundations, nor on the beneficiaries, but on governments or local administrations depending on the field of action. Another informant defines impact as the “potential outcome” (Rubin 1974), thus “what would have happened to those beneficiaries if our intervention did not exist” (I10), paving the way to the application of the so-called counterfactual methods. As another informant declares, “impact is the ratio between the input you gave and the value you created” (I3): when challenged on how the value created is measured, the informant replied that the project is evaluated on its degree of sustainability and

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Logic” has spread out, especially in practitioners’ debates, this theory has old roots in project management training (for example, in the field of international development and cooperation). It was better known as “intervention logic” or “activity-results-outcome model”. In terms of managerial tools, the TOC is expressed by the Logical Framework for Action (LFA) (in Italian, Quadro Logico).

<sup>7</sup> See previous note.

generativity. Similar to this, a foundation's informant declared being impactful means realizing the Theory Of Change (TOC), thus "achieving the change you have planned at the beginning...to do this, a set of quantitative indicators would be desirable" (I9).

When the object of analysis is the grantee, the concept of impact is completely dependent on the grantee and its improved capacity, disregarding whether the foundation has designed a set of indicators to measure these phenomena. In this sense, the foundation is impactful when it contributes to generate value: the foundation's grant is impactful (thus, worth giving) if it goes to projects with the potential to be sustainable, replicable and generative. This potential is not always assessed after the completion of the project: it is sufficient to "critically observe" (I3) the activities developed by grantees through their grants.

In terms of the methods and tools applied, Table 3 shows also, for every foundation, the tool used to collect mainly quantitative information, or qualitative information (or both). In this respect, Table 3 contains a specification where quantitative information is reported to be used in the form of indicators, thus as a ratio between two numbers (usually the collected piece of data related to the initial objective and/or to the initial need to respond to). Otherwise, quantitative information is collected and reported in absolute numbers. Only two foundations have started to apply a Social Return on Investment (SROI) logic to communicate the impact of the projects funded. A



corporate foundation (I2) have piloted a SROI application on 3 completed projects, thus basing the analysis on real, ex-post data and not on provisional data, which is a typical way of using SROI indicators to produce esteems on the value of a potential project to get funded (SROI Network 2012). The second foundation (I9) has contributed to a SROI calculation of a project managed by a third party. The project was based on real, ex-post data on 4 years of activity (longitudinal study). In the first case, the SROI analysis have started 12 months after the conclusion of the selected projects, while in the second case some years after. Finally, only two foundations in the sample have piloted

impact evaluation methods that can be identified under the umbrella of the so-called counterfactual methods (European Commission 2012). Broadly intended, counterfactual methods aim at measuring the outcome of an intervention against a proxy of the effect that would have been generated without the intervention. It is an esteem that can be obtained in different ways. Two foundations in our sample have experimented counterfactual methods. I10 has applied a Randomized Control Trial (RCT) method, by comparing measures of outcome on a selected group of beneficiaries (people) of the foundation's intervention, against the outcome observed on a selected control group (people with the same characteristics of the first group, but not beneficiaries of the foundation's intervention). These methods require a sound and sophisticated research design long before the ac-

tivation of the contribution. The same foundation is now applying a similar method to a second project (still ongoing). A counterfactual logic has been also applied by another foundation (I7) using a sort of Statistical Matching (SM). In this case, the comparison has been built ex-post: the outcome of a group of beneficiaries (organizations), in terms of effectiveness and quality of the service offered, has been compared to the outcome of a group of the same kind of organizations with similar characteristics, but with no intervention from the foundation. The statistical matching has been used purposively (and ex-post), but still a counterfactual logic can be identified in this evaluation process.

Concerning qualitative information, it is often reported in a narrative form (blank spaces to fill out in case of questionnaires; open, unstructured questions in case of in-depth interviews). Nonetheless, differences emerge in the questionnaire design and planning and consequently on the questions asked to beneficiaries. Beyond overarching questions around the project implementation (i.e., would you describe the outcome of your project? What would you do differently? Which positive implications have emerged?), some foundations have elaborated a structured questionnaire asking about the capacity of the project to generate a positive change on the community (I3, I5, I7), the potential replicability of the project in other contexts (I2, I3, I5), and the contribution of the project to a decreased social need in the community (F5, F7). Furthermore, three foundations use site visits

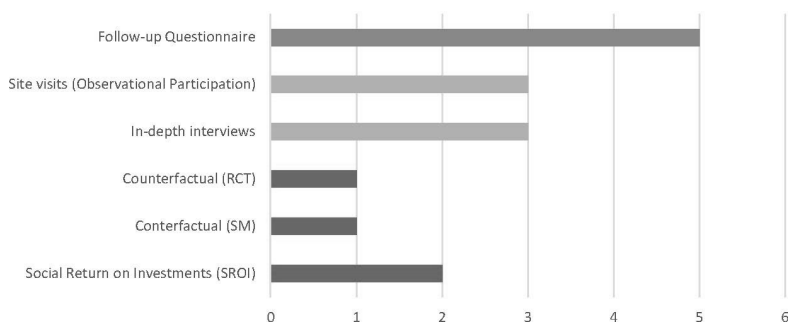
and observational participation as the main tool to collect qualitative information (I3, I7, I8), usually performed by foundations' staff or volunteers and originating an ad hoc qualitative report, often coupled with interviews and/or a questionnaire. The focus of observational participation is varied, and strictly depends to the concept or idea of impact expressed by foundations. For example, I3 concentrates its efforts on defining impact as the value created: in specific projects, the value generation of the foundation is intended as the capacity to stimulate volunteering activities in the community. Thus, projects' evaluations contains a narrative of how volunteering has been fundamental to the growth of the community and the projects themselves (i.e., how many new volunteers activated, how many previous volunteers involved in the project, their experience, failures, successes, and so on). In this sense, the informant from I3 explicitly state that the relational and social capital generated in the community thank to the increasing presence of volunteering activities is one of the most important impacts the foundation was able to get. Other foundations include a specific observation of the satisfaction of all people involved in the project: beneficiaries, their families or kins, and even the grantee organization's employees (I5).

All the methods described are not mutually exclusive and several foundations may use one or more of these in case of need. Two foundations that use primarily quantitative techniques declares that qualitative methods of data collection, such as interviews or site vis-

its, should be performed only when the quantitative method used (either SROI or counterfactual) gives results which are far from those expected (I9, I10). In other words, if numbers show that things have gone wrong, a deeper analysis through interviews or site visits is required to understand the reasons and the limits of the intervention (or of the method used). Figure 6 reports the occurrence of methods used (red for methods implying mainly a quantitative data collection, blue for methods applying a mainly qualitative data collection, green for the questionnaire which are typically used to raise data of both nature).

Finally, two foundations in the sample perform what we have called “strategy refresh” (I10, I7). In these cases, impact evaluations are not applied to single projects, but to call for proposals or programmes, meaning the whole funding streams that include more than one project. This is done every year for every programme in I7, mainly due to its operating nature. For I10, this is done every year on some specific programmes, mainly those with the highest amount of resources invested.

**Figure 6 - Methods and tools used for impact evaluation  
(number of foundations)**



### Impact evaluation: learnings, challenges and barriers

The interview data collection has generated information on the motivations pushing foundations to perform impact evaluations, on the main learnings got from impact evaluation activities and on the main challenges and potential barriers to it. Starting from the last point, the main challenge according to most informants is a proper acknowledgment of the qualitative part of evaluation, both in internal reporting and in dissemination and communication activities (I2, I3, I5, I9, I10). The set of qualitative data is generally intended as the richest set, but too difficult to reduce to numbers. In particular, a foundation's informant is very critical of the attention given to measurable indicators, seen as an attempt to reduce the richness of the intervention (I3). At the same time, storytelling and narratives are enriching and useful, but not for foundations' decision-makers, who are more

sensitive to numbers (I2, I3, I10). Moreover, quantitative analysis on large sets of data are necessary to show the trends of phenomena, which are fundamental to base decisions on evidence, although, according to two informants, there is no culture of evaluation in Italy (I2), evidence-based policy is still a very early debate, and ideological positions are preferred (I10). Obviously, all sorts of considerations come as a trade-off: “accepting the challenge of measurement, I am able to give you a trend with a certain statistical significance, but I also accept that what I am losing is the destiny of the individual” (I10). Furthermore, an informant admits that the qualitative part, starting from a proper need assessment and beneficiaries’ listening, is severely under considered in evaluations, although it is a stage where the potential for innovation is higher: there is a big need of new tools to involve beneficiaries and engage them in sharing practices of evaluation (I9). For the 3 community foundations in the sample, the challenge of measuring impact is enormous. On one side, 2 out of 3 do not feel they have the legitimacy to perform impact evaluations, due to the small amount of grants given on average to single projects. In this sense, the foundation itself, due to the specific nature of community foundations, is a measure of impact: as anticipated, all community foundations mention the promotion of a culture of giving as the impact of the foundation itself. Only 1 foundation (I7) mentions language barriers as a challenge to overcome: the different ethos, culture and language spoken by foundations, their donors, and

their beneficiaries, is still at the basis of all misunderstandings related to the meaning of impact evaluations, the need of objective and measurable indicators, and the reasons why impact evaluation activities are carried out.

7 foundations out of 10 state the main reasons why they do impact evaluation is for internal learning (I2, I3, I5, I7, I8, I9, I10), mostly to get internal knowledge, to “start a reasoning about the concept” (I2). 4 foundations explicitly mention the value in helping the strategic management process, by linking the results of impact evaluation activities to planning in a more structured and transparent way (I5, I7, I9, I10). At the state-of-the-art, impact evaluation activities in Italian foundations are still at a very early stage, and the value of these is for learning, both in terms of methods and in terms of planning capacities. However, 2 corporate foundations (I1, I2) reports they have also external pressures to do impact evaluation, due to external, political factors: the need to gain more space and power within the company and the need to respond to the requests of information from boards and executives of the group. Only one foundation’s informant suggests that impact evaluation activities are performed for reasons related to the external context: resources for philanthropic aims are scarce and performing a sound impact evaluation is a way to distinguish from other “competitors” (I9).

Questions around the barriers to impact evaluation activities have generated quite uniform responses. For all foundations but 1 (I10),

the barriers are related to the human resources involved. For 8 informants this is referred to the lack of staff (between 0,5 and 2 staff each, often part-time and/or volunteers); for others to the background, skills and competences of the foundation's staff involved in impact evaluation (often volunteers or interns, I7). Only 2 foundations raise the issues of the cost of evaluation as a barrier, especially in those cases where qualitative investigations are the primary way of data collection (I10, I7). In fact, both interviews and observational data, if well managed and planned, have a high cost of collection (both in terms of the opportunity cost of the staff involved, or if an external consultant is hired). Quantitative data are generally easier to collect, though they require a bit more familiarity with concepts, indicators and the measurement of impacts.

Overall, considering the amount of data collected, the underlying idea of impact emerged – on the grantee, on the community, on the territory, depending on the objects of analysis – refers to all those phenomena which may have been happened thank to the grant given, and have a longer-term breadth from the end of the project. Although several foundations perform monitoring activities which are needed for reasons of compliance to the grant-making process, raising useful information for further analyses, this has been not intended as impact: all the impact related concepts expressed by informants – generativity, sustainability, replicability, potential outcome, value generation, effects and objectives – depend on the vision of foundations'



boards and leaders and on the perception of their role in the community. In this sense, several interviewees described the role of their foundations as “facilitators” (I1, I4, I9), “pioneers” of new approaches or values (I2, I3, I10), drivers of economic and social development (I8); “advocates” to their community needs and, to some extent, “policy-makers” (I10). We believe the concepts of impact cannot be disentangled from the role foundations want to play, either more explicitly or implicitly embedded in strategic plans or funding guidelines.

### ***5. Final considerations: what’s next?***

This research aims at increasing knowledge on the impact evaluation performed by foundations in an era where it seems to be highly discussed, but less often proved through empirical analysis: the analysis can contribute to narrow the gap of empirical data needed on this topic. This section offers a summary of the main findings emerged as well as potential suggestions for further research or for the practitioners’ debate.

Impact evaluation has strongly emerged as a way for foundations to enhance their strategic management process and foster dialogue with their stakeholders. In this respect, this appears in contrast with a body of literature that identifies external pressures to evaluation as the main reason why impact evaluation activities have spread in recent years. A reason for this might be that most of the literature is

grounded in the North American tradition of philanthropy, where the tradition of philanthropy is rooted and long lasting, and foundations are more attuned and sensitive to the topic of impact measurement. The database originated from this research is ready to be expanded, to allow statistical analysis on the variables influencing both the information disclosure and the presence of impact evaluation methods. Moreover, further analysis can be done (i.e., through a semi-structured survey) to elicit responses on current impact evaluation analyses or experimental projects, overcoming the assumptions made with this research that online desk-based investigations can be sufficiently justified.

Second, a lack of dialogue between foundations and the communities emerges in both impact evaluation concepts and methods. Moreover, as a foundation's informant points out, the ideas and motivations behind impact evaluations and the methods and tools used should be participated and shared with the community of beneficiaries, with a twofold value (F5). On one side, to build a common view and knowledge of impact, narrowing the gap of communication between funders and grantees. On the other side, to build methods jointly, increasing the commitment to the evaluation process itself.

Third, the staff dedicated and its skills and capabilities emerge as the major barrier to impact evaluation. These considerations open a question for foundations in terms of both recruitment and training, given the budget constraints that many of these foundations face. In

this respect, sharing practices among staff dedicated to evaluation would be desirable. A concrete action in this direction could be the establishment of a learning network on impact, participated by foundations' staff, with the double value of increasing the collaboration and cooperation among foundations acting on the same communities and needs. As a further step and concrete output of this network, a database would be set up, with periodic (i.e., yearly) maintenance, where data are updated starting from the amount of information already collected through this research study, fostering a collaborative network between philanthropies.

Finally, evaluation seems costly both in its implementation and in the practice of sharing results. However, a proper cost-benefit analysis of the adoption of impact evaluation practices must be performed to fully acknowledged also the advantages of having an impact evaluation process embedded in a wider strategic planning and management process. Discussions about who should bear the cost of evaluation and how it would be possible to maintain independency in the process, should be shared with policy-makers and stakeholders of the organizations. It is fundamental that the costs of adopting impact evaluation practices does not get to overcome the benefits of the results.

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