

# When the civic-participation play a crucial role on urban sustainability. The case study of the University of Rome “Tor Vergata” and the project “A playground for Aurora”\*

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**Abstract**— The sustainability has become a priority and playing an important role in the strategic choices of all actors, which look for economical, social and environmental sustainability to preserve “well-being” for future generations. The research focus is on the new role of University as a driver for sustainable development through social responsibility in urban scenario. The research goals are: to develop a conceptual framework on the role of education at University level in promoting sustainability, according to the Third Mission approach, and to define the role of high Education in Urban Sustainability. The research is enriched by a case study called “A Playground for Aurora”, where the Department of Management and Law of the University of Rome “Tor Vergata” and the Government and Civil Society Research Group (GCS) played a crucial role to build and to regenerate an inclusive playground (with games accessible to disabled children). The case study is a specific example of student engagement, the importance of partnership, co-design and civic-crowdfunding with a view of Sustainable Developments Goals.

**Keywords:** civic-crowdfunding, urban sustainability, University, Third Mission, social engagement, regeneration.

## Introduction

On September 2015, the United Nations formally adopted a new sustainable development agenda, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including a set of goals, called the Sustainable Development Goals – SDGs. These are the most significant and unprecedented global commitment to eradicate poverty, improve the quality of people’s lives, ensure environmental sustainability, provide inclusively and equal quality education opportunities for all, building sustainable partnerships and so on. Sustainable development is an important global objective to overcome the economic, environmental and societal crises in many countries. One of the main instruments to develop smart, sustainable and integrated growth (European Strategy 2020) is through R&D, climate change and energy sustainability (greenhouse gas emissions 20% lower than 1990, 20% of energy from renewables, 20% increase in energy

efficiency), Education, fight poverty and social exclusion able to promote inclusively and sustainability (section 1). The Higher

Education can contributing to sustainability social change (Scholz et al., 2006; Filho, 2000; Scholz et al., 2000) in strategically level (visioning and setting long-term strategy), tactical level (facilitate the cooperation with different stakeholder) and operational level (higher education can implement change in the curricula, researches and in their campus). In doing that, alongside the traditional missions typical of Italian Universities (education, research and the relationships with institutions and companies operating in their reference territories).

The findings of the project are inductive to develop a dynamic bottom-up model of learning and education dissemination on the sustainable development in urban areas (section 3). The model allows to: (1) sensitize students to be active and shape their future, (2) create the profile of “local ethical promoters”, (3) create and strengthen the local territorial networks, connecting the networks for local development with those for social inclusion and training. The Department of Management and Law and GCS promoted a civic engagement campaign in the University to promote the “Ethical Cash Mob-Great Challenge *Fairtrade*” organized by the student on 14 April 2016 in the University (section 3). The research methodology (section 2) applied to the case study, mainly qualitative, is based on the document analysis (Bowen, 2009) and it is enriched by a survey of the participant of the cash mob and other people (section 4).

## I. LITERATURE REVIEW

The civic mission is recognized by the universities as an institutional mission, which joins the traditional missions of training and research. In particular, the term of “Third mission” refers to all the activities with which the universities activate processes of direct interaction with the civil society and the company, with the aim of promoting the growth of the territory

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and civil society too, offering services and facilities, in this way the knowledge becomes an instrument for obtaining production outputs (Novelli G. and Talamo M., 2014).

To the Universities are asked to promote social cohesion and equality: a re-think of the role of education as a mechanism to promote social mobility and the academic environment as a model of tolerance of ethnic and cultural diversity. The concept of the third mission of the university is part of the transition from the theoretical model of the knowledge society, characterized by the “triple helix”, in which universities, industry and government collaborate for socio-economic development (Etzkowitz H., 2008), to the model of “Open Society” (figure 1), characterized by the “Quadruple Helix”, where government, industry, university and civil society work together to co-design a sustainable future (European Commission, 2015). To achieve this goal, universities are increasingly being asked not only to be the main driver of economic development processes (to act as “entrepreneurial university”) but also to be an active part in other areas which local communities are paying more attention, such as: sustainability, social and environmental.

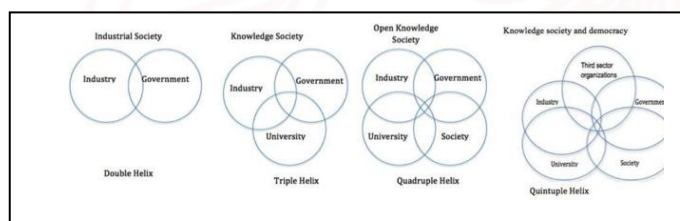


Figure 1. The evolution of Knowledge society.

The origin of University's Third Mission in Europe start in 1963 with Clark Kerr, Rector of the University of California, who, during a class at Harvard, replaced the word “University” with “Multiversity”, meaning a community university able to value the differences of society and to respond to the changing cultural and economic needs of a given period without forgetting the future perspective. The word “Multiversity” wanted to urge American universities to take in consideration the responsibility of “saving society”. It is now possible to distinguish two configurations of the third mission:

a) *The first is represented by the third mission of economic valorization of knowledge*, in which the third mission aims to promote economic growth, through the transformation of knowledge produced by research into knowledge useful for production purposes (third party research, relationships research-business world, management of brokerage and support structures, etc.);

b) *The second one is represented by the cultural and social mission, in whom public goods has been produce, that increase the welfare of society*. These assets can be considered high cultural content through operations carried out also in

collaboration with the territory (museum centers, archaeological excavations, scientific dissemination, organization of exhibitions, exhibitions, conferences and readings, etc.); goods can also be considered as educational value through regional, national and international projects with schools of various types and levels. Finally, goods can be considered with a more strictly social orientation through voluntary counseling addressed to the community for individuals and groups that are marginal or in difficulty.

The European Commission through the communication “Innovation in a knowledge-based economy”<sup>1</sup>, to the European Parliament, establishes the overcoming of the role played by universities, not only in training and research, but also in the promotion and dissemination of knowledge and technologies, especially in the local business environment. In Italy the concept of the Third Mission arrived very late due to cultural and regulatory difficulties. The motivations that have determined the progressive interest of universities for the third mission can be traced to both long-term changes in the organization of scientific research and in the development of technologies, and the needs of its main stakeholders. The third mission has been fully included in the Italian universities thanks to the Legislative Decree n. 1988/27 January 2012, which defines the principles of the “Autovalutazione, Valutazione periodica e Accreditamento” (AVA)<sup>2</sup>, and subsequently the Decree No. 47/January 2013 of the Minister of Education, University and Research (MIUR), which identifies the indicators and parameters of periodic evaluation of the research and of the third mission. Universities must assume a more direct “entrepreneurial role” by providing investments in applied research that are functional to their economic impact, favoring institutions of excellence capable of producing innovative knowledge, assessing and measuring the cognitive performance of individual universities.

In the universities there are skills, professionalism, ideas, projects, which if outsourced, they can have a huge value of “reputation”, an economic value, a value for the improvement of everyone's life. To outsource these skills outside the university borders, means to enhance and transfer the work of innovation and production of knowledge on the territory by creating new economic opportunities, work and social improvement, with a view to creating shared value (Porter e Kramer, 2011).

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The assumption of the research starts from a theoretical analysis elaborated on the Third Mission of the University and in particular on the collaboration of multiple-stakeholder to promote the sustainable development on local territory (section 1). However, the aim of the research is to analyses what kind of sustainable development model has been created in a project in Rome: “A playground for Aurora”. In particular, the case study is a project that see involved different stakeholders (University, Company, Non-profit organization and Civil Society) to built a

<sup>1</sup> [www.europafacile.net/Formulari/POLITICHE/RICERCA/com2000\\_567.pdf](http://www.europafacile.net/Formulari/POLITICHE/RICERCA/com2000_567.pdf) (Consulted: 09/15/2017).

<sup>2</sup> AVA is the self-evaluation, periodic evaluation and accreditation system of the University, established by MIUR the Ministry of Education University and Research.



playground for disabled children (section 3) in a suburb area of the city close to the University of Rome “Tor Vergata”.

The principal methodology used to find the fund to finance the project is the civic-crowdfunding. The civic-crowdfunding qualifies as a collective funding of public works and projects (outside the budget of the administration), carried out by citizens, organizations and private companies, sometimes in collaboration with the same public administrations, in this specific case the promoters of the initiative in the Roman University were a group of students in collaboration with the GCS research group, Department of Management and Law, the profit (Ecozema, VeioGas, Fairtrade) and non-profit organizations (Next). The promoters used two instruments for the fundraising:

a) Create the campaign of civic-crowdfunding on web platform called “Eppela”, thanks this campaign was possible collected the first found (€2.500,00) from the web.

b) Create the cause-promotion campaign thanks the Ethical “Cash Mob Fairtrade” (see Box1). Thanks to the “World Fairtrade Challenge” promoted by *Fairtrade*<sup>3</sup>, the students create and promote an “Ethical Cash Mob to sell Fairtrade Caffee” and devote part of the money to the social project “A playground for Aurora”.

In particular, the cash mob has had three main objectives:

b.1) Support *Fairtrade* in the sale of certified organic coffee by accepting the campaign launched by the same “World Fairtrade Challenge”. It is an excellent opportunity to share the following message: “Choose Fairtrade means supporting coffee producers in their fight against climate change all year round”;

b.2) Support the most disadvantaged producers in developing countries, in this case Haitian farmer. Climate change is already affecting millions of coffee growers with abnormal weather conditions with the emergence of new diseases and pests. By drinking, also symbolically, a certified cup of coffee, *Fairtrade* has the ambitious goal of reaching the record number of cups of coffee drunk in three days, to help producers fight the effects of climate change;

b.3) Devolve part of the funds for the construction of the playground (for the project “A playground for Aurora”). For this objective the price of the *Fairtrade* coffee was €6.00, € 4.60 represents the cost of the purchase of a *Fairtrade* certified Haiti coffee package and € 1.40 the standard participation fee funds for “A playground for Aurora” project, in this way with a unique action (to buy a *Fairtrade* certified Haiti coffee package) the stakeholder contribute to the two campaigns, support the Haitian producers and support the realization of the playground for disable children.

The research is enriched by survey that the authors have had with key stakeholders of the Roman experience. In order to study the sensitivity of the participants and non-participants to the “Ethical Cash Mob”, the authors create a survey composed of 17

questions, structured in order to obtain information on the degree of interest on the issue of sustainability, knowledge of initiatives and their thinking administered during the cash-mob (on 14 April 2016) and online. The total of the answers obtained was equal to 230, having been found a discrepancy in the answers provided in some questionnaires, the significant sample is equal to 215. The Google Docs platform was used to draw up the survey (section 4).

### III. CASE STUDY ANALYSIS: "A PLAYGROUND FOR AURORA" (ROME, ITALY)

#### Box 1. Brief-background of the “Ethical Cash Mob”.

The ethical cash mob is an initiative of animation and mobilization of citizens that takes place in a specific territory and whose goal is to relate responsible citizens and businesses. One of the most popular mobilization activities is the Flash Mob, created in a single action and with a purely recreational purpose. This activity differs from the Cash Mob, which is realized on the basis of three points:

- Identify the deserving exercise to be supported in order to reward its work. The substantial difference lies in the fact that in Italy such initiatives are both supported and gratified, on the contrary in America they are sustained independently of the merit of the activity;
- On the date established, the majority of people to participate in the event organized in the store are invited through the use of channels such as word of mouth and Social Network;
- Customers are invited to purchase products by setting a minimum spending threshold. In this way we reward a particularly important activity for the local community, trying to bring it back into the economic circuit, feeling an active part of a change. It is important to underline the ethical dimension of Cash Mob, originally conceived by Next (New Economy for All), an association of civil society and a network of organizations with whom we have had the pleasure of collaborating for the realization of the event.

All the Cash Mob revolves around the figure of the citizen who, taking an active part in the realization of this initiative, uses his purchasing power by choosing which activities to support.

University of Rome “Tor Vergata” is committed to make the “sustainable development paradigm” central to all its activities, a choice fully in line also with the strategic directions developed by the Italian Rectors to build the “Universities of the Future”. The new mission and vision of the University of Rome “Tor Vergata” aim to contribute to people’s education and training, to scientific research and technological, organizational and social

<sup>3</sup> Fairtrade is an international organization that through FAIRTRADE’s certification ensures better living and working conditions for farmers and workers in developing countries (<http://www.fairtrade.it/>). The certification

Fairtradeb assures the Fairtrade Minimum Price and Premium. The purpose of Fairtrade Minimum Price is to cover production costs and provide economic support when the market price falls below the level of economic sustainability.

innovation needed to achieve the SDGs approved by the UN September 2015, with a view to Third Mission. The University of Rome “Tor Vergata” aims at playing a leading role in research and education, as well as in technological, economic, organizational and social development in order to become not only a sustainable University but also one of the best European Universities by 2025.

The University of Rome “Tor Vergata” has more than 30,000 students, it has ranked is among the top 100 in the world in 2017 ranking by THE (Times Higher Education) which only considers top universities founded for less than 50 years and it is the only Italian University in the “QS Top 50 Under 50”, a ranking of the world’s top 50 universities established within the last 50 years. Its aim to be a real promoter of the territorial sustainability and to straightening the collaboration with the private and public sector, third sector organization and investors, at national and international level. From 2014, was released a Sustainability Plan, including the actions required to reduce long-term negative externalities (with particular reference to greenhouse gas emissions) generated by the University’ activities. More recently, in February 2016, in collaboration with the *Unipolis Foundation*, proposed the creation of the “Italian Alliance for Development Sustainable” (ASviS) with the intent to grow the awareness in Italy of the importance of the Agenda 2030 and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Furthermore, the various public-commitment initiatives, intended as non-profit activities with educational, cultural and developmental value of the society, are of particular interest for the University. In fact, through its Departments, it aims to develop new services for the university community and the territory, based on the needs that emerge from civil society.

A case-study of public-engagement and civic-crowdfunding supported by the Department of Management and Law of the University of Rome “Tor Vergata” and the GCS Research Group was the event that generated the launch of a project strongly shared and participated at the local level, but whose resonance has also arrived overseas. The university initiative was to support the project linked to the appeal launched by two “brave-parents”, who have been able to transform into “good” something that has “nothing good”: the premature death of their child, Aurora. She was born on 29 April 2015, third of three children, and grew up beautiful and joyful, without problems until October 22, 2015, when the baby was rushed to the “Ospedale Bambin Gesù” (Roman Hospital), with a diagnosis of a very rare form of brain tumor (Atrt - Atypical tumor), which affects almost exclusively children (in Italy there are 5-10 cases per year). Aurora was operated several times and dies at the age of 7 months on December 1, 2015. The story of the *Troianelli* family (Aurora’s parents) does not end. In January 2016, they launched a fundraising campaign on Internet, aimed at recovering a land of 4000 sqm abandoned (SDG 11 - Agenda 2030) to turn it into an inclusive public playground (SDG 10 - Agenda 2030), that is, accessible also to disabled children, in memory of Aurora. The idea was to create this park in the suburb

of Rome, in a neighborhood called “Tor Bella Monaca”, one of the main neighborhood in Rome with serious economic and social problems, very near at the University. Thanks the collaboration with University of Rome “Tor Vergata”, in particular students, the Department of Management and Law and GCS Research Group, the initiative became a project promoted inside and outside the University and different stakeholder start to be involved.

#### A. Results of the case study

The data related to the contributions and participation of the cause “A playground for Aurora” and “The word Fairtrade challenge” were collected in an Excel file, structured in order to report the various quotas paid by the subjects involved (Table 1). The data are divided in: Internal, External and Data Processing. The first two indicators (internal and external) are differentiated on the basis of belonging to the Faculty of Economics of University of Rome “Tor Vergata”.

In particular:

a) *Internal and External*: the participation in the initiatives took place on the basis of two methodologies, individual purchases and group purchases (collective payment), highlighting for each purchase the personal data of each taxpayer and highlighting the role held by each participant within the “Tor Vergata” Faculty of Economics. Then the data analysis report the number of packages purchased, the total unit cost, the actual participation in the campaign and the sums allocated to the two projects. Please note that the standard contribution for the purchase of a coffee package was € 4.60, while for the support of the “Un Parco per Aurora” initiative € 1.40. Finally, the presence or absence of the contributor has been reported; in this way the value attributed to the concept of voting with the portfolio was highlighted, underlining the importance of active participation in events with a strong social impact.

b) The second step is the data processing of the:

- participants in the initiative, a useful starting point for the analysis of the administered questionnaire;
- participants in the event, in relation to those who contributed and those who did not, thus enhancing the figure of the “*consumAttore*” (Consumer + Actor)<sup>4</sup>;
- the total amount of coffee purchased, both in terms of quantity and in terms of spending, to highlight the contribution made to the realization of the Great Fairtrade Challenge;
- the contribution to the “Un Parco per Aurora” project.

The survey data analysis was developed by reducing the observed sample to a significant data sample of 215. When analyzing the sample, it was important to emphasize the difference between the internal and external participants in the faculty in order to observe the value of both the marketing campaign and the collaboration with the private partners. From

<sup>4</sup> Consumer who actively participates in a moment of purchase of a responsible product, is defined as consumer + actor. Theory of the “Voting by the wallet”, (Becchetti, 2010).

the sample analysis, we note that 63% of the total is composed of subjects within the Faculty of Economics, so partnerships with private partners and marketing campaigns have been quite effective. Data analysis allows us to say that the consumer of our sample is a very sensitive subject to the theme of sustainability and we see a real contribution. The feedback obtained is positive; in fact, 68% of the sample reported a high degree of susceptibility to sustainability, the 72% bought coffee and the 94% confirms the merit of the initiative (Table 2).

**TABLE I.** RESULTS OF THE CASE STUDY

<b>Participants of the initiative (payers)</b>	<b>159 (contributors)</b>
of which:	
a) Inside the Faculty of Economics	155
b) External to the Faculty of Economics	44
<b>Participant of the event Ethical Cash Mob (payers)</b>	<b>40 (of the 159)</b>
of which:	
a) Inside the Faculty of Economics	29
b) External to the Faculty of Economics	11
Participant at the event (payers and not)	175
of which:	
a) Inside the Faculty of Economics	145
b) External the Faculty of Economics	30
<b>Coffee purchased (total number of package)</b>	<b>161</b>
of which:	
a) Inside the Faculty of Economics	90
- Single purchase	66
- Group purchase	24
b) External the Faculty of Economics	71

<b>Contribution of the “The World Fairtrade Challenge”</b>	<b>€740,60 (161x€4,60)</b>
of which:	
a) Inside the Faculty of Economics	€414,00
- Single purchase	€303,60
- Group purchase	€110,4
b) External the Faculty of Economics	€326,60
<b>Contribution of the “A playground for Aurora”</b>	<b>€240,40 (161x€1,40=225,4, someone give some money for the cause)</b>
of which:	
c) Inside the Faculty of Economics	€131,00
- Single purchase	€97,40
- Group purchase	€33,60
d) External the Faculty of Economics	€109,40

The analysis of the results of the question on the utility of certification has achieved a positive result for the 59% of the total, specifically: 37% believes that the *Fairtrade* Standards are a form of protection for small coffee makers; 32% believes that the standard is useful for promoting fairer trading conditions, not just related to market trends; 16% supports its usefulness in promoting respect for ethical principles at work; 14% feels in this way safer in the purchase; 1% other. It was also decided to analyze the awareness that the consumer has about its role as a consumer, able to operate in the market through the portfolio's vote (see section 1). Data analysis shows a greater awareness of the female consumer (72% of female subjects recognize the importance of “*consumAttore*”) than male (57% of male subjects recognize the importance of the “*consumAttore*”)

**TABLE II.** RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AGE AND DEGREE OF SENSITIVITY TO THE THEME OF SUSTAINABILITY (1-LEAST SENSITIVITY TO THE TOPIC OF SUSTAINABILITY, 5-HIGHEST SENSITIVITY TO THE TOPIC).

Degree of sensitivity	Age			
	<18	19-25	26-40	Over 40
1	22,22%	1,48%	1,03%	2,44%
2	11,11%	7,35%	5,16%	9,75%
3	56,56%	36,76%	16,49%	7,32%
4	0	22,06%	41,24%	29,27%
5	11,11%	32,35%	36,08%	51,22%

#### IV. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The university actions are determined in coherence with the guidelines and strategic objectives envisaged in the field of sustainable development by the Global Strategy “Agenda 2030”, approved five years ago. All the countries of the world and all the elements of society are called to collaborate (SDG 17- Partnership for sustainability) in order to bring global



development on a sustainable path, in economic, social and environmental terms, without any distinction between developed, emerging and developing countries. The University is called to play an important role, as a privileged place for the elaboration of new kind of co-design model that see in social innovation and collaboration with different stakeholder the power of changing in a sustainable perspective. The University has a driving force for the development of the territory in which it operates and in the International country, through the collaboration with international networks. The case-study “A playground for Aurora” is an example of good and proactive practice of social responsibility in the territory and collaboration for the sustainable regeneration of abandoned land in the Roman suburbs, in line with Sustainable Objectives promoted by United Nation (Agenda 2030): 17 (Partnerships), 11 (Cities and sustainable communities), 10 (Reducing inequalities), 3 (Health and well-being) and 4 (Quality education).

An important aspect plays the civic-crowdfunding (section 2). The form of active citizenship sees in civic-crowdfunding a form of government-participation which citizens can be decided, through a proposal of a projects and mechanisms of voting the destination of money and funds for supporting a social project. The keys aspects of civic-crowdfunding in this case are:

- 1- lack of funding from local governments to regenerate a public space;
- 2- more attention to the territory, the community and the common well-being coming from civic projects;
- 3- strengthening of ties in the communities, greater sense of belonging and ownership of public places of the citizen in order to increase respect and conservation of the same.

Crowdfunding is the most widespread form of financing entrepreneurial, creative and social projects. In fact, it was the main instrument used by the promoters of the playground project belonging to the University of “Tor Vergata”. They have adopted this tool within another tool, the Ethical Cash Mob, thus linking a collection funds for an active moment of social action linked to responsible consumption. In addition, Aurora's parents' project arrived overseas thanks to the web by extending the civic-crowdfunding campaign, create at the beginnings in the University, beyond the national borders. This has allowed the fundraising to expand to a global audience and citizens have had a tangible return on the use of contributions seeing the realization of the public work, this underlines the win-win logic of this tool and initiatives.

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