



Project evaluation

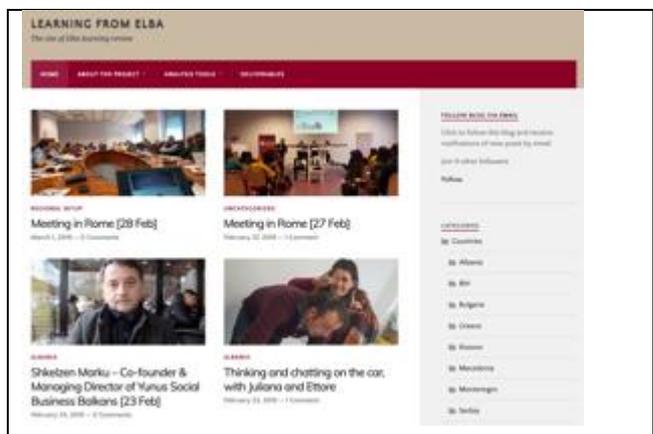
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# About this report and about this evaluation

This report presents key ideas emerging from the Elba Evaluation (February 2019). It is not the usual evaluation report. It is short and practical. Why this? Because this evaluation focused on *the process* and not on *the report!* Evidence, ideas have been presented in many different ways along the process.

	
<p><b>A blog (<a href="https://learningfromelba.wordpress.com/">https://learningfromelba.wordpress.com/</a>)</b></p> <p>A blog was produced real time during the evaluation. It shared openly the evidence collected and preliminary ideas. In February – as the evaluation took place – it had 443 Unique visitors, 3103 Page views (7 pages per visitor). This is a much higher information sharing than many reports! Users had the opportunity to comment real time. And to gain a much deeper perspective than what a report would usually allow for: they could read full case study, look at pictures and videos.</p>	<p><b>Presentations, meetings</b></p> <p>Beside informal interactions in countries, the evaluation key findings were presented in the Elba meeting in Rome (27/28 February), in a seminar bringing together project coordinators, but also participants on other Caritas initiatives – about social enterprises in Italy. It was a rich opportunity for discussion and sharing. The findings could be immediately applied to the discussion on Elba 3.</p>

This report does not seek to capture all the evaluation findings: many have been shared also in other forums (see the table below for pointers). It focuses on key highlights, and to provide frameworks and tools to support future programmes – and linked initiatives.

<p><b>Preliminary discussions with the evaluation manager</b></p>	<p>The evaluation approach was defined with the evaluation manager (Elnara Petit - Secours Catholique). We</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>discussed the best ways to gather evidence (focusing on participatory interactions, mainly qualitative)</li> <li>identified what countries to visit (based on an assessment of their achievements so far and taking into account diversity of context)</li> <li>established the evaluation focus (appreciating regional dynamics, capturing significant learning from the existing enterprises)</li> </ul>	<p>The outcomes of these discussion are in the <a href="#">analysis section</a> of the blog</p>
<p><b>Interviews with programme coordinators</b></p>	<p>Interviews with programme coordinators happened on skype (countries not directly visited) or face to face. The focus was to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>gather their perspective on the programme as a whole</li> <li>exploring challenges and successes of the regional setup</li> <li>mapping existing interactions.</li> </ul>	<p>Notes and findings from the interviews are <a href="#">regional setup section</a> of the blog. The interaction amongst coordinators is tracked in a <a href="#">social network map</a></p>
<p><b>Fieldwork in 4 countries</b></p>	<p>It took place in BiH, Greece, Kosovo, Albania. In each country:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the local coordinator accompanied visits to enterprises, and engaged in discussions (in BiH the visits were accompanied by the Elba coordinator)</li> <li>other enterprises, initiatives, actors - offering relevant insights for the project were also visited (from other Caritas projects in BiH and Greece; from other social and solidarity initiatives – in Greece, Albania)</li> <li>government actors were also approached (e.g. in Kosovo)</li> </ul>	<p>The blog contains detailed notes from the interactions and visits and relevant “food for thought”</p>
<p><b>Final presentation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The final presentation was held in Rome on the 27 February.</li> <li>Further input on the framework used was shared at the Elba Meeting following the presentation (28th February)</li> </ul>	<p>The <a href="#">presentation is archived on the blog</a></p>

## Why this approach? What did it reveal about the program?

Many evaluations are mainly a way to check on expected results and reporting on it. The main orientation is then control. Accountability is to the top management and donors. This one was mainly oriented to learning, and to create stronger foundations for accountability to diverse stakeholders: it set a space for critical reflection and to voice diverse perspectives and concerns. The evaluation approach was a good fit with the program one. And, as shown in the following table, the evaluation approach also helped to emphasize and reveal key characteristics of the programme – which might have remained unnoticed or unaddressed with a more conventional evaluation.

	What does it mean?	What did it reveal about the program?
Focus on learning	<p>The main purpose of many evaluations is to <i>check</i> if results were achieved. They emphasize <i>control</i> and <i>adherence to planned outcomes</i>. This evaluation focused on <i>learning</i>. It was an opportunity to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• dig deeper into the achievements;</li> <li>• unveil opportunities and challenges (they should not be hidden, but seen as a resource).</li> <li>• Identify novelty, innovation (the project tried to pilot new approaches!)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Need for stronger documentation.</b> A lot of learning from the project had gone undocumented. The field visits were an opportunity to capture and reveal options and possibilities for social economy still untracked.</li> <li>• <b>The project had really a strong learning focus.</b> The project had, by nature, a strong focus on learning: providing knowledge, testing new approaches, changing mindsets.</li> <li>• <b>The project succeeded in creating a learning culture.</b> An evaluation focusing on learning requires that participants engage openly and critically. It found fertile ground in the project, because such learning and critical spirit had indeed been promoted. Coordinators shared challenges very openly.</li> </ul>
Systematization	<p>Systematization is a process that seek to discover what is the “skeleton” of good practices. What are the emerging models? What factors seems to lead to good results? What frameworks, theories of change can best be used to capture the work done? A systematization approach helps when diverse programmes evolve adaptively: it allow to reveal underlying commonalities and models ing use.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Adaptive programmes are hard to “pin down”!</b> Elba evolves adaptively, in many countries – with different contexts and appreciation of “social enterprises. It has been challenging to bring this all together, alongside the programme. Can internal communication be strengthened to effectively capture not only activities, but also diversity of options and emerging models and patterns?</li> <li>• <b>Frameworks are useful... and more are needed.</b> Elba had already effectively shared concepts and ideas (e.g. the ecosystem concept has been well absorbed). But further operational frameworks are needed, and the evaluation was an opportunity to systematize them.</li> </ul>
Curiosity, innovation	<p>A learning evaluation recognizes that reality is different from plans... and this is simply “part of the game”. The evaluation was an opportunity to exercise curiosity: to look deeper in what had happened, to look for the unexpected. The evaluation fished for ideas, interesting issues to follow up.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Diverse, interesting models.</b> As described in the following frameworks, the programme generated many different forms of social enterprises.</li> <li>• <b>The importance of strengthening monitoring.</b> It is key, for the program, to develop tools that do not stop at checking, generically, outputs for reporting. Monitoring should evolve to <b>capture innovation</b> and emerging models an ideas.</li> </ul>
Transparency, communication	<p>The evaluation put findings in the open, to encourage engagement, debate. The blog was open to all participants, including the stakeholders interviewed. They could check what evidence was captured, and correct misunderstandings (and some stakeholders did engage proactively!) The blog demonstrated that <b>further options for communication</b> are needed and welcome</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>A need for better communication. Internal and external.</b> The programme has so far, lacked communication platforms and skills to share achievements across participants and with external stakeholders. Documents, reports are shared amongst all programme coordinators on Google drive, but this is not enough. Work on this is ongoing, for example with the establishment of a website.</li> </ul>
Real- time	<p>Too often, by the time a report is produced, momentum is lost. In this evaluation, ideas and feedback were shared real time.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The programme has a strong adaptive approach.</b> An adaptive approach involves the capacity to promptly react to challenges,</li> </ul>

	<p>Evidence and preliminary ideas were shared on the very day it was collected. This allow interaction on emerging ideas</p>	<p>opportunities. The evaluation findings were presented as part of an Elba meeting. The whole setup showed the eagerness of the programme to proactively react on insights and inputs. Elba has clearly a strong <b>adaptive culture</b>.</p>
<p>Participation</p>	<p>The process will be participatory. The external evaluator facilitated evidence collection, thinking, learning, always involving local actors. The key was to avoid “judgement” and support, encourage the sharing of experience. Program staff was involved actively in the visits, and they helped to shape the evaluation and the findings with their ideas and insights.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>A horizontal management.</b> The programme has a participatory culture: management is horizontal, relaxed. It encourages contribution by all actors.</li> <li>• <b>Donors / recipient Caritas collaborate participatively.</b> The participatory, collaborative culture also extended to the relationships amongst “donors” and “recipients”. It was evident – during the evaluation that mutual perceptions had evolved, and. that local managers were supported in gaining confidence and decision-making power.</li> <li>• <b>Participation of local enterprise managers.</b> it was also evident that social enterprises actors had been actively involved in the development of the enterprise and had a voice.</li> </ul>
<p>Forward looking</p>	<p>The evaluation did not stop at checking what had happened. It was an opportunity to devise “thinking tools” to better shape future work. Such tools were not pre-established ones: they emerged from the project, to consolidate ideas that had evolved so far. In the final presentation, they resonated well with participants: proof that they are, themselves, a finding of the project.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Social enterprises are a reality and part of Caritas thinking.</b> All participants are confident that – whatever the future setup for Elba – social enterprises are there to stay within Caritas work. They are now a reality in many countries, and capacity to support them is evolving. Tools, approaches are being sharpened, and Elba has a strong potential to continue to be part of this movement.</li> </ul>

# Key achievements of the project

This section highlights the key areas of achievement of the project. It then suggest how they can be further fostered and improved.

	Achievements	What can be improved?
Social enterprises: a new, relevant concept	<p>The project put on the table the idea of social enterprises. This concept was new for Caritas in the Balkans and challenged existing approaches. A lot was invested, by the programme, to raise aware of it: by bringing in substantial expertise, by sharing external practices.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>From charity to dignity:</b> The idea of social enterprises has the potential to shift the approach of Caritas, towards more empowering approaches.</li> <li>• <b>Transforming mindsets:</b> engagement in the programme was a major shift for participants. It helped them to challenge their own approaches and transform their way of working.</li> <li>• <b>Creating connections:</b> working on social enterprises connected likeminded people, within and across Caritas, opening new possibilities and partnerships.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>From “project” to program”.</b> Working for a paradigm change is a long-term investment. It is essential than Elba is not seen as a project, but as a program, a sector of intervention. This is already clear to management and they are working in this direction. But it is key that Caritas, as a whole, support this direction.</li> <li>• <b>Internal advocacy:</b> The project has been busy, until now, to set foundations: creating enterprises, building understanding. It is now reaching a stage where it has enough to show for doing needed internal advocacy (within Caritas and the Church). Elba should start a sustained investment to make the project visible, and to illustrate the value of approach to these not yet aware/convincing of the potential of these modalities of engagement.</li> <li>• <b>Further investment in networking.</b> Connection with likeminded people has been key do get support and develop ideas. Strengthening linkages, ecosystems should be a priority, in particular with external actors (helping Caritas to “work beyond the Church garden”)</li> </ul>
Creation of regional linkages	<p>The program brought together countries in a region that lacked other mechanisms for coordination. Achievements and challenges of the regional setup will be examined more in detail in a further section.</p>	
Setup of new similar projects	<p>Elba broke new ground. New projects were established building on the know-how, on the network, on the synergies put in place by it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>New projects:</b> following engagement in ELBA, Caritas set other social enterprise projects – attracting external / institutional donor funding.</li> <li>• <b>Synergies with other initiatives:</b> ELBA created connections with other organizations, and the potential for joint action / projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Learn from other projects!</b> The new projects offer many opportunities for learning. After having helped to set them out, Elba can now learn from them! And learning is happening. For example, on diverse options for enterprise setup. Or for improved participation in project design. Cross fertilization shall be strengthened with a <i>programme approach</i>, connecting all initiatives.</li> <li>• <b>What is the niche? Adaptiveness, breaking new ground.</b> Compared with other projects, Elba seems to have a higher degree of flexibility and adaptiveness. Its added value will then be to identify what other projects cannot do, what opportunities are untapped, what promising areas of action cannot fit in existing blueprints. In other words, it should work in synergy with other projects by continuing to break new ground. Elba can explore the spaces where others cannot venture. And other projects can then consolidate promising options, practices.</li> </ul>
Learning, exposure for all people involved.	<p>Elba did not plant an abstract concept in the Balkans, but a concrete idea. And it was not a set one, but allowed to evolve. It did so by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Concrete opportunities for exposure.</b> ELBA invested in field visits, highly valued by participants, as they provided tangible, concrete ideas.</li> <li>• <b>Seeking to balance direction / adaptation.</b> The project had to mediate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Support learners:</b> It was not always easy for the people involved in the programme to work without a clear blueprint of what a social enterprise is. Adaptation requires considerable skills and entrepreneurships by the staff themselves! Remember that the zone of learning might feel uncomfortable (it lacks standardized guidelines, an easy to follow procedures) and – and this has been a challenge in the project.</li> <li>• <b>Harvest learning:</b> opportunities to take stock on</li> </ul>

	<p>two apparently opposite needs 1) establishing clear, common principles to ensure convergence [focus, alignment, conformity] and 2) allow space to experiment different models [adaptation, innovation]. The success of the project depends on finding the soft spot amongst these diverse needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Acceptance of challenges.</b> The management style of ELBA was coherent with its emphasis on learning: it really created a culture where “failure” – and need for adjustments - was accepted as part of the game.</li> </ul>	<p>achievements have been limited within the project. Results, models, challenges have been little documented. Most of the learning still remained implicit. This is very risky: if current staff would leave the project, most of the experience would go with them.</p>
Setup of social enterprises	<p>Last, but not least.... the project demonstrated the value of social enterprises by practically working on it. It set several social enterprises – or strengthened existing ones. The next two sections will look in detail at learning on 1) the practical management of creation of social enterprises and 2) the different types of social enterprises generated.</p>	

## Learning on practical management of social enterprises.

This section looks at the practical aspects of the management of social enterprises. The point below emerged consistently across enterprises in diverse countries.

Color coding  Good achievements  Space for improvement  Needs attention

Identification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Lean procedures for application.</b> The application forms and procedures were really heavy – involving long and detailed proposals. Detailed proposals help applicants to clearly formulate their ideas, but to a depth that seems excessive for an application stage. Such depth should rather be developed incrementally, once they are selected and develop. The capacity needed to develop such proposal is also probably beyond the applicant’s one. (and we were informed that, in some countries, there is a market for proposal writing!). Long proposals also contributed, in some countries, to excessive selection times. Leaner options (few pages, focusing on the core idea) should be considered.</li> </ul>	<p>Revising proposals – towards leaner options – should be a priority.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Cherry pick your projects!</b> Caritas had open call for proposals, but is this always the most effective way forward? Open call required an investment in time and administration that was simply not justified by the scale and scope of the projects. And it had not always lead to pick the most interesting options (the evaluation visited applicants left out which were far more innovative than successful projects). The selection process – given the dimension of the programme – should be more linked to a mapping process and to a strategic “cherry picking” of relevant enterprises.</li> </ul>	<p>Are open call for proposals the best way to go? Pre-screening invited applicants might lead to more purposeful selections.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Validation by local actors.</b> Local coordinators lamented that, in some cases, the externally driven selection process lacked contextual analysis. It is essential that local coordinators are involved in the selection. In Kosovo staff was involved in checking the viability of enterprises and applicants, and this lead to select quite interesting proposals. In Greece, limited of involvement resulted in challenges.</li> </ul>	<p>Involvement of local coordinator in selection is key.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Think “Chains”/Maps.</b> It is key that enterprises are not just seen as an end in themselves. Caritas should choose strategically the enterprises that can have a pivotal role within promising ecosystems and chains.</li> </ul>	<p>Ecosystem, chains, maps are increasingly appreciated, but they had not been a criterion in most enterprise selection.</p>
Setup and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>More practice, less bureaucracy.</b> Considerable support was absorbed by bureaucratic issues, and most of Caritas time was devoted to this. Some issues e.g. – concerning national registration – are hard to avoid. They require investment by Caritas in better understanding local legislation ;and/or lobby for adaptation; and/or devise ways to formalize</li> </ul>	

	<p>enterprises only as they had passed a test stage. Some issues were generated by Caritas own procedures and bureaucracy and could be tackled by adjusting internal procedures. In all cases, it is key to ensure that technical support can always be provided – beside the administrative one (the case of <a href="#">Te Mullini</a>, where Caritas dealt with bureaucracy, but also found a mentor for technical skills, is a good way forward).</p>	<p>national legislation still limited – but steadily improving.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Less business plans, more incubators.</b> The “business plan” is still seen as the main tool for planning. Yet it has many limitations: it ends up being a technical document that is not adapted, referred, owned. More agile models for support and incubation (e.g. light canvas rather than fully fledged plans) should be considered</li> </ul>	<p>Caritas is aware of the issue but is at the early stages of transitioning.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ensure strong, continued accompaniment.</b> There is a risk that support for enterprises peaks in the setup phase and then declines as new ones and new projects are started, at a time when assistance is still needed. Strong options for accompaniment should be put in place . For example, each new project should also include dedicated time to maintain contact, monitor, support enterprises supported in previous ones. Caritas staff is already very stretched. Long term support takes more time, and this need to be factored in their workplans.</li> </ul>	<p>Initial support has been valued Provisions for long-term accompaniment should be strengthened.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Infuse learning.</b> There has been limited sharing of learning and of existing practices across entrepreneurs.</li> </ul>	<p>Strategies, resources to share learning still lacking</p>
<p>Follow up</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Think long term.</b> Setting enterprises takes time and cannot be achieved within the space of a project. Elba needs to be run as a programme. The Elba team and donors are aware of this. Funding, support mechanisms must be planned for long-term, continuous support.</li> </ul>	<p>Caritas aware and investing in this direction</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Guarantee “safe fail”.</b> Setting enterprises does not always lead to good results. Some might fail (and some, indeed, did fail – which is normal in an innovative programme). Stronger contingency measures need to be put in place to ensure that, if they fail, they fail safely. (i.e. without damaging – financially or psycho-socially - the people involved in them). And to learn on such failures.</li> </ul>	<p>Caritas did not shy out from sharing learning from failure. Contingency needs improvement.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Share learning.</b> Ensure that monitoring can capture developments, challenges, opportunities, innovation and effectively consolidate learning to feed into the programme and to be shared across interested stakeholders – including the enterprises themselves.</li> </ul>	<p>Mechanisms for learning are still weak</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Map and Build networks.</b> As much as possible enterprises should be connected and lead to network creation - so that social enterprises are not isolated instances, but a thriving ecosystem and economy alternative. Mapping and network creation is as important as enterprise creation, and in some case mapping might actually be the added value of caritas.</li> </ul>	<p>Enterprises are still largely isolated. More investment needed in networks / mapping</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Sustainability does not stop with financial one.</b> Sustainability is understood as a core achievement for a social enterprise. But there is often an emphasis on “financial sustainability”. It is key to <a href="#">broaden the understanding of sustainability</a> so that it includes all capitals: money but also relations, skills, motivation, institutional support, values... etc</li> </ul>	<p>Caritas is already working on several capitals, and need to do so more explicitly</p>

# What is a social enterprise?

The word “enterprise” has two meanings ([Merriam-Webster](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/enterprise) dictionary, online).



a project or undertaking that is especially difficult, complicated, or risky.

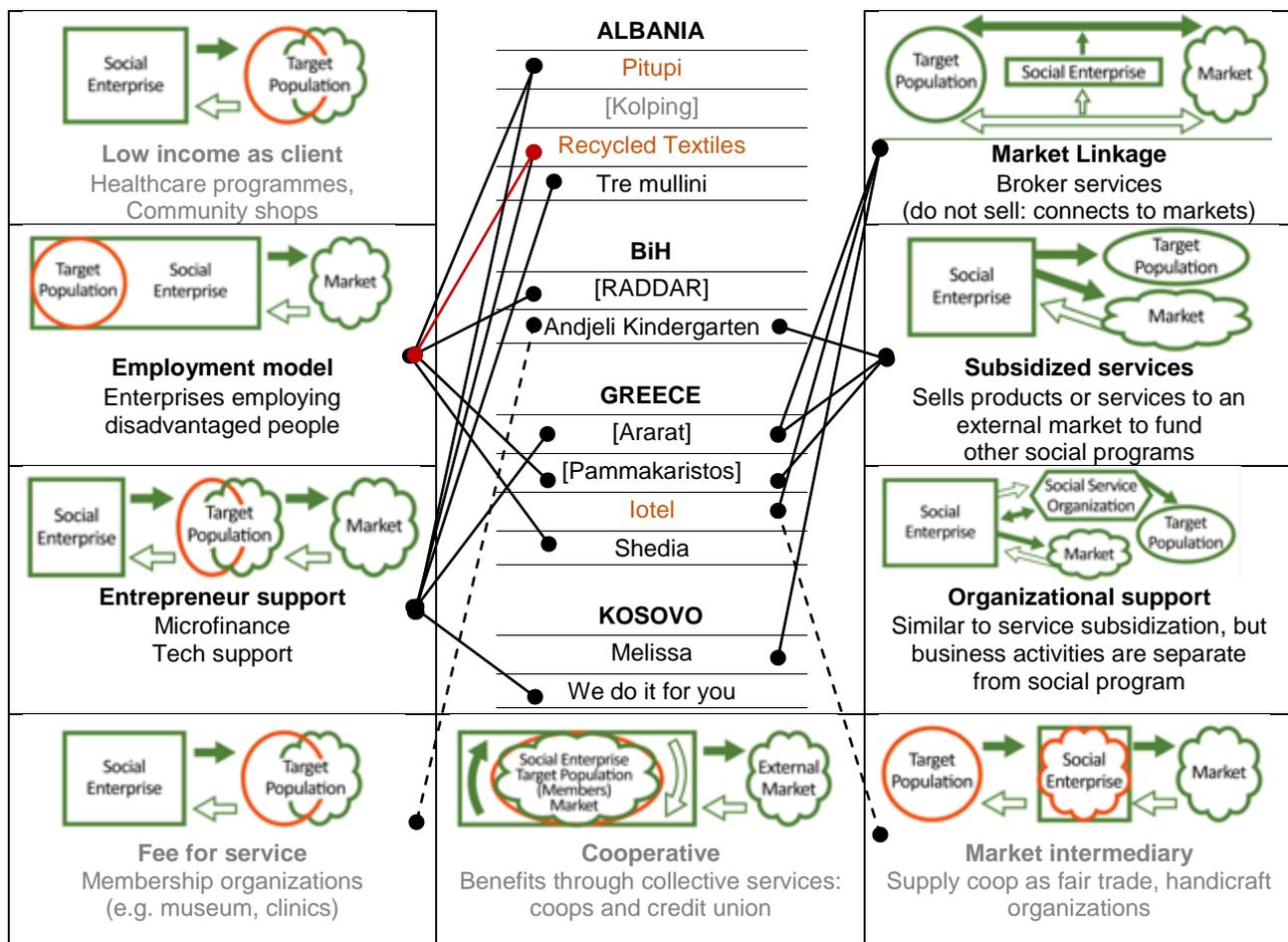
a unit of economic organization or activity; e.g. a business organization



Attempts to define “social enterprises” within Elba tended to lean towards “*enterprise* as a business unit”. But, in the practice, some models tested or shared by the project (e.g. time banks, neighbourhood initiatives) should better defined as “challenging undertaking” rather than business.

The evaluation had initially planned to start from a working definition of social enterprises - to then check adherence of practices to it. But it then decided against this. It was more important to capture the diversity, the possibilities... rather than trying to sum it all in one definition. The richness of Elba is to allow for variety, the challenge is then to document it. The evaluation now proposes a catalogue of models. The scheme below shows how the enterprises visited in the evaluation relate to different models – defined re: their connection with the market and their target users.

	Each enterprise visited is connected to applicable models. An enterprise can be a combination of several ones! Some connections could be debated (and it would actually be really useful to do so!)
	Potential: they indicate that an enterprise could evolve to incorporate characteristics of other models.
	Challenges. For example, a different understanding of the model by different stakeholders.
[brackets]	Enterprise with a tendency to remain in the “Caritas garden”, with minor connections with external actors.
Orange	Enterprises which ceased to function or are encountering challenges.
Gray	Existing enterprises where Elba engagement did not have a significant impact in transforming activities or opening up new possibilities / partnerships.



Source: 9 fundamental types of business models for social enterprises (by W.Grassl) as adapted in How to choose a proper business model for social enterprise <http://socialinnovation.lv/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Business-model-webam-small.pdf>

## Some learning about the models

Many insights about the individual enterprises – together with “food for thought” are shared in the blog. The table below sums some actionable learning points. Worth stressing here that there is not one best model. The way forward for Elba is actually to identify what is the best **enterprise mix** that the programme should support.

	<p><b>Not all the possibilities in the catalogue were explored.</b> There were no examples of “fee for service”, “low income as a client”, “market intermediaries”, “cooperatives” (whilst Caritas itself, with this programme, is an example of “organizational support”). The evaluation does not suggest that Elba should “try everything”. It rather recommends <b>exploring possibilities in a more structured way</b> (this catalogue is a useful starting point). Some of the missing models have been piloted by Caritas outside the Balkans, so there is potential for shared learning.</p>
	<p><b>Cooperatives</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The idea of cooperative is a loaded, challenging one.</b> Whilst cooperatives might be well suited models for social enterprises, Elba made probably a good choice is staying clear from it. The idea of “cooperatives” is a loaded one given the economic history of the region. People have experience of it, but often connected with negative feelings. It was also pointed out that functioning cooperative require a strong “<a href="#">investment in democracy</a>”, and the programme is probably yet not strong enough to support their creation (but it could be a possibility in the future)</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Entrepreneur support</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Entrepreneur support requires investment in leadership and governance.</b> Several enterprises were based on this model (e.g. shops in Albania and Kosovo, cleaning service in Kosovo, a travel agency in Greece), but many encountered challenges related to uptake and governance. As we learnt from the experience of a <a href="#">solidarity enterprises incubator</a>, ensuring adequate leadership and governance, is often and underlooked challenge. This aspect was overall still weak in the project.</li> <li>• <b>Entrepreneurship can compete with existing activities.</b> Micro enterprises can compete with existing ones (as in the case of second-hand shops: similar ones already exist and are a livelihood for low income people). Investment in models competing with other should be avoided, and it is better to focus on testing new models or targeting new users / clients.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Employment model</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Beware of the risk of sticking with past setups.</b> Many enterprises employed disadvantaged people, pursuing a model already established within Caritas. So they often ended up being little innovative. In some cases, funds opened up some new possibilities (e.g. a <a href="#">communication strategy</a>) but elsewhere money actually went for <a href="#">paperwork to support existing activities</a>.</li> <li>• <b>Cross fertilization for learning is key.</b> The fieldwork revealed that it is challenging to be an enterprise and employ disadvantaged people (and that the legislation is sometimes not optimal). But initiatives in Elba – and in other linked projects (e.g. Societies) are demonstrating possibilities. Learning, cross fertilization is key.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Entrepreneur support vs. employment models</b></p> <p>The project revealed a risk of mismatching these two models. For example, when setting shops, Caritas expected entrepreneurship (people would manage and run the shop), people saw themselves as employees. Lessons to learn are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Check expectations.</b> Clarity on the model in place matter, amongst all participants involved, from the start.</li> <li>• <b>Not everyone is a entrepreneur!</b> Entrepreneurship is a mindset that not only need to be fostered... but that should not be given for granted! Entrepreneur support needs to target entrepreneurial people. Two directions to consider are: 1) strengthen the initial identification / support phase (which seems the take of new projects, such as Your Job); 2) question if entrepreneur support is the best model in a context (or of other forms of social enterprises could be a better option in context). <a href="#">As an informant put it</a>, NGO staff often had never been entrepreneurs themselves, and they expect others to become one!</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Market linkages</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Connectors have the potential to create strong dynamics.</b> A very interesting example was <a href="#">found in Kosovo</a>: an individual “change agent” set her own organization and brokered relations amongst local farmers and a herbs-processing industry.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Subsidized services:</b></p> <p>The kindergarten supporting the youth centre... the shops selling produces made by people with disabilities are examples of initiatives subsidizing linked services.</p>

- **An untapped space for innovation.** we found initiatives (in the end not supported by caritas – such as [consulting services promoting early stages of enterprise support](#)) which indicate further innovative options for this type of engagement.



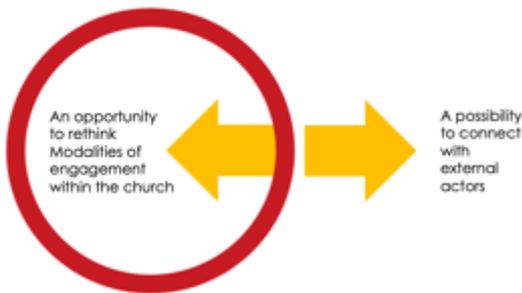
**Fee for service vs subsidized services.**

- **Kindergarten as a “cash cow”. Or else?** The kindergarten visited helped, with revenues, to support the youth centre. Such model requires that most children will be affluent enough to pay fees that can also subsidize other services. The risk is then to reduce the inclusiveness of such initiatives. What is the best balance? A service that can pay for others (but being less inclusive?). Or a lesser capacity to generate revenues (but resulting in proactively inclusive setups)? There is not a clear-cut solution, but the program should better pinpoint such dilemmas.

**A balancing act.**

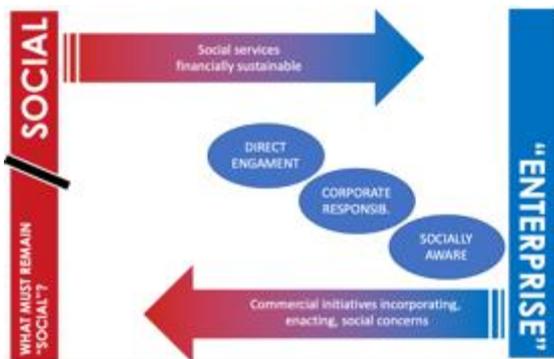
When considering what mix of enterprises could better suit a context, it is also important to relate to contextual issues. Three main ones have been identified.

**The enterprise vs: the Church**



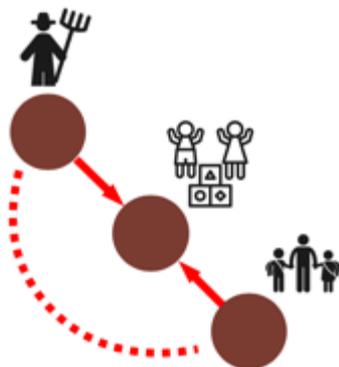
- **Reaching out of the church garden.** Elba already recognized the risk of confinement within the Church garden - when setting enterprises. Some had struggled to involve external actors, or to produce significant changes in existing modalities of action. Notwithstanding the importance of involving the Church, innovation lies in reaching out of the church garden.
- **An opportunity to change existing mindsets.** Many actors involved in Elba recognized the need to change existing mindsets: from charity as “giving to these in needs” towards “empowering them”. But Elba also discovered that it is not always easy to shift this mindset within the Church, the Parishes. The project is now at a stage where it has something to show to its own main constituency. Internal advocacy should start to be considered.

**Social vs enterprises**



- **From social to enterprise... and viceversa!** Elba mainly looked at how to set “social enterprises” starting from the social side (i.e. ensuring that social initiatives become more entrepreneurial). But it is also possible to make business more social! For example, by: making brands more socially conscious, advocating for social responsibility, supporting business to set social initiatives (e.g. mentoring new entrepreneurs, setting pro-bono support for small producers). Should Elba/Caritas also support enterprises to get social?
- **When social cannot be an “enterprise”.** There are, increasingly, demands that welfare and public services are run as enterprises (including making them financially sustainable). Caritas and Elba must be very clear about – and voice strongly - what social services can be improved through “social enterprises” and which services are non-negotiable and will always require support by the taxpayer.

**The enterprise within the chain**



- **Enterprises are not islands: longer chains, higher value.** The concept of “ecosystem” is now owned, but it remained sometimes abstract. Value chain analysis could make it more practical. (Whereby “value” shall not stop at financial capital / physical assets but also include other capitals). “Thinking chain” will help Elba not to narrowly focus on individual enterprises but to generate longer chains. For example, the kindergarten [exposed a group of parents to new ideas](#) (e.g.: locally produced food). This could create a chain of economic alternatives: setup of ethical purchasing groups.
- **Invest in the chain or in the enterprise?** in some countries the idea of social enterprises is already well established, and other actors are making considerable investment in social enterprises. What is then the added value of Caritas? In some cases generating a map, focusing on strengthening linkages and collaborations – rather than just setting one more enterprise – can be the added value of Caritas (a possibility that is not yet strongly emphasized by the project). Caritas could be well positioned to do so – because of its capacity to network

## Rethinking economy.

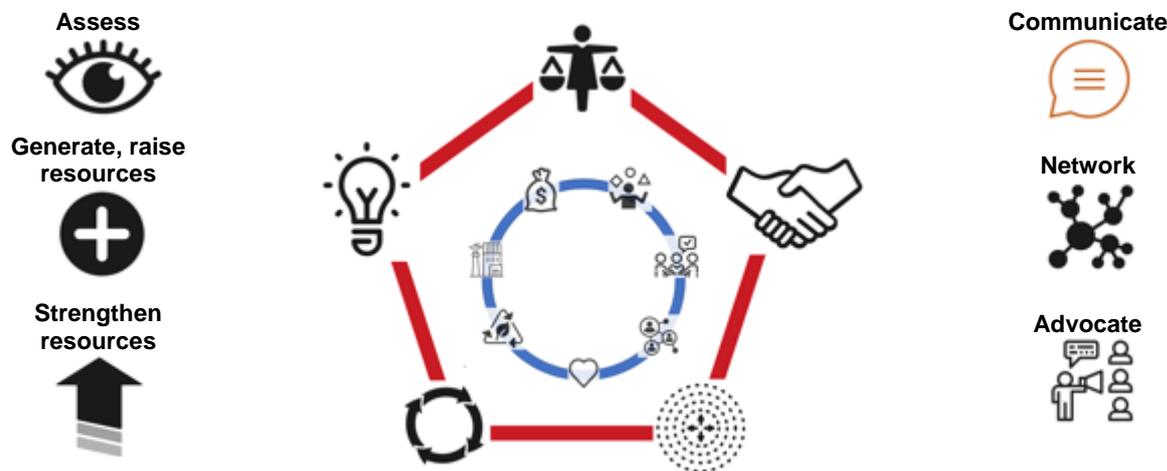
Elba is a project with a great potential: to help the people involved to change their mindset about economy, and to help rediscover its authentic meaning. **Economy does not mean “sharing money”, but to generate and manage well diverse resources.** Shifting perceptions on economy is of course a very ambitious goal. It is not stated in the project, but it seems to be the – still untold - vision animating many of these involved. It is indeed clear that the project managers and local coordinators are not just committed to set some enterprises, but they want to achieve meaningful change in the way Caritas itself operates and in the communities where they work.

Elba, as a project, can realistically just start the walk towards this shift. But it will do it more powerfully if it clarifies and share its vision and thinking with stronger tools for action and planning.

The evaluation – building on diverse frameworks for empowerment and resilience –articulated a framework for Elba that seems to be consistent with the work done. It is a new framework for the project, but, since it emerged from a systematization work, it is not alien to the project. Proof is that it was used immediately after the presentation in Rome, and it resonated with project staff.

It is composed by 3 sub-frameworks:

- 1) **Capitals:** it acknowledges that economy is about generating sharing resources (not just money), so it is important to highlight what such resources are.
- 2) **Principles:** resources can be shared with diverse attitudes and purposes. This framework highlights what principles seemed to guide the work of Elba.
- 3) **Areas of action:** when supporting and promoting social enterprises and the purpose of the project, Elba engages in several, complementary areas of action. Are they effectively supporting values?



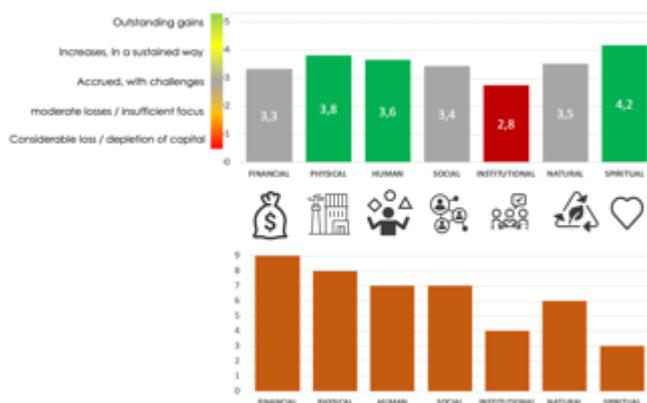
## Capitals

The first framework helps make explicit that economy should not stop with “managing money”, but need to consider several capitals. When looking at what capitals were used, and how, the evaluation learned that:

	<b>Learning about capitals</b>	<b>Where is Caritas?</b>
	<p><b>Several capitals have been used.</b> The project and the enterprises employed diverse capitals – not limited to financial and physical assets - as captured in the following table.</p>	<p>Elba demonstrated capacity to use diverse capitals. It is a great bases for action, worth building on.</p>
	<p><b>Soft, invisible capitals are key when setting social enterprises.</b> The analysis of Elba enterprises demonstrates that “invisible” capitals (e.g. social, human, institutional, spiritual) are often the ones making the</p>	<p>Most enterprises leveraged soft capitals, but they tended to be less emphasized than</p>

	difference. They translate in meaningful improvements for the clients / the community served.	“hard, financial ones”
	<b>Showing invisible capitals (and “externalities”) matter!</b> Traditional economy is apt at monitoring financial capitals and physical assets. Other capitals tend to remain unaccounted for, as “externalities”. Shifting economic models requires that externalities are made explicit: negative ones (e.g. the cost of depleting natural resources) as well as positive ones (e.g. benefits in social cohesion). But they are hard to “measure” and the project (as many other developmental initiatives) struggled with this. The evaluation stance is that, before measuring, it is important to “reveal and understand”. It might not be possible to associate a measure to social capital for example. But it is very possible to show what it translates into, with examples, case studies, stories. And this is already very powerful in showing, capturing aspects that too often, in conventional economy, remain hidden. And need to be revealed, communicated, advocated for.	The project can monitor assets and financial capitals, but other ones are harder to reveal and make explicit. It is important to invest in tools for monitoring capitals feeding into learning, communication, advocacy.
	<b>Capitals must flow!</b> Economy is about managing capitals, and making them “flow”. Investment of one capital (e.g. human capital: supporting individual confidence) can increase other ones (e.g. institutional capital: people can then negotiate better with their local institution and leverage policies). A well-rounded project needs to consider and link all the diverse capitals. The change process, the impact of a social economy project is best gauged by looking at how capitals flew.	Elba started to connect capitals, but not consistently. It also lacks tools to track how they linked up.

The evaluation made an [analysis of capitals](#) – looking at each enterprise visited. It assessed 1) accumulation of capital (i.e. if capitals depleted or increased) and 2) capital use/focus (i.e. if such capitals were actually considered and leveraged – or if they were not recognized).



The graph above shows capital gains (from 1, loss of capital to 5, outstanding gains), across enterprises. The one below shows what capitals have been explicitly considered by the enterprises. Both assessments are impressionistic and debatable. But they can nevertheless open discussion about capital use within Elba.

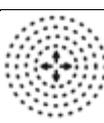
The capitals in the table below are presented arranged by capital use.

	<b>What is it?</b>	<b>Some thoughts about its use within Elba project</b>
	<b>Financial</b> Money and other financial assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Financial sustainability was the <b>main concern</b> for many enterprises. This revealed a pre-eminence of the financial capital within Elba.</li> <li>Not all enterprises had reached financial sustainability –some failed. The ones still active might still be struggling but seems to be <b>gradually improving</b> their financial capacity.</li> </ul>
	<b>Physical</b> Physical assets, infrastructures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Elba support often translated <b>directly into physical assets</b> (cars, machineries for production, cleaning products). Some other could be provided <b>pro-bono</b> (e.g. office space, venues).</li> <li>Not necessarily physical assets should always be the <b>starting point</b>. In a project, for example, support for enterprise registration (institutional capital) + idea sharing about possible options (human capital) is leading to <a href="#">use underutilized physical assets</a>.</li> </ul>
	<b>Human</b> The “power within” individuals: strengths, knowledge, attitudes, skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Elba supported the <b>capacities of its own staff</b> – with considerable investment in training, learning – which had translated in increased capacity to support.</li> <li>The project used <b>many diverse options</b> to strengthen human capitals (formal training, <a href="#">mentoring</a>, ongoing support). Such support was valued</li> </ul>

	<p>by recipients.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some projects impacted on skills, capacities of very <b>vulnerable groups</b> (e.g. people with disability, <a href="#">homeless</a>, women <a href="#">living in remote locations</a>, etc). It is very positive to see that some are helping to <b>shift from support to empowerment</b>. (this shift, albeit starting, is still little monitored and documented. It deserves more attention!)</li> <li>• Other connected projects (e.g. Your Jobs) have a potential to further enrich the avenues to strengthen human capital. For example, with a <a href="#">“funnel approach”</a> working on capacities of a broad group and then narrowing down to support the most promising entrepreneurs.</li> <li>• <b>Leadership</b> would require more investment. It is an attitude/skill essential for entrepreneurship, but so far little addressed within the project.</li> <li>• Skills built within failed projects do not seem to have been put to use. Investment in <a href="#">transferrable skills</a> should be a concern within contingency planning.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Social</b> The “power with” others: linkages, connections, partnerships, networks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elba has <b>greatly expanded Caritas networks</b>. In “minority countries”, it has significantly <a href="#">broadened connections, visibility, options</a> for Caritas.</li> <li>• The importance of social capital has been strongly stressed by the project (emphasizing the importance of the <b>ecosystem</b>). But, in practice, leveraging social capital has not been a priority.</li> <li>• Some Caritas projects indicate that social enterprises can <b>thrive on and create stronger linkages within communities</b>. (e.g. a <a href="#">Societies project in Bosnia</a>, the project lead by a <a href="#">change agent in Kosovo</a>. This is a direction worth pursuing.</li> <li>• <b>Desire for connection</b> is a commodity that could be more exploited by social enterprises. Elba saw, for example, potential in <a href="#">solidarity tourism</a>.</li> <li>• Elba is creating <b>linkages</b> with really interesting enterprises and networks (e.g. youth organizations in Kosovo, linkages within the solidarity economy movement in Greece). They are not yet been exploited yet, but they point to the possibility of <b>innovative partnerships</b>.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Natural</b> The environmental resources.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some <b>enterprises explicitly addressed natural capital</b> (e.g. energy saving through <a href="#">solar panels</a>, organic <a href="#">production/</a> linkages with <a href="#">local producers, upcycling</a>, etc.).</li> <li>• Projects which had not an explicit “environmental focus”, however, did not consider much this capital (<b>either there is a strong focus... or very little</b>)</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Institutional</b> The “power over” institutions (formal or informally normed bodies): norms, policies, law.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The lack of policies and institutional support was often lamented by coordinators. Yet some enterprises (for example in Bosnia) are benefitting from <b>existing legislation</b>, and there <a href="#">seem to be the space to get more support</a>.</li> <li>• When projects are happening “within the caritas garden” there is sometimes a risk that <a href="#">governance is blurred</a>.</li> <li>• <b>Linkages with the Church</b> are a mixed bag: more often than not the coordinators <b>highlighted challenges in bringing parishes on board</b> with projects or with this approach. Advocacy is needed.</li> <li>• Some engagement with <b>government institutions</b> had happened (e.g. re: <a href="#">advocacy for new social enterprises law</a>). But where and what advocacy is fruitful need to be further discussed within the project.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Spiritual</b> The power generated by deeper values, faith, beliefs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When spiritual capital was considered, it usually scored high: the importance of advancing higher principles was then emphasized. But, interestingly, <b>spiritual capital has not always been an explicit feature of the projects</b>.</li> </ul>

## Principles

Capitals can be used for different aims, and by different actors. Each actor has her/his own principles. Some might want, for example, to maximize individual profit, and prioritize financial gains (which is often the case of conventional capitalistic enterprises). What are then the principles guiding Elba and its social enterprises? The principles shared below are derived from project document and research. The principles have been ordered by strength/focus on the principles, from the ones most commonly applied and referred to (sustainability) to the weakest/less mentioned ones (good governance / accountability)

<i>What is it?</i>	<i>Thoughts about these capitals within Elba project</i>
 <p><b>Sustainability</b> Ensure that what is set can continue and evolve, and do so without jeopardizing the enjoyment of resources of other groups, other species and/or of the future generations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Sustainability is not only financial.</b> Sustainability has mainly been understood as “financial sustainability”. But there are many other facets that needs to be sustained (corresponding to all the diverse capitals). The evaluation encountered innovative frameworks for <a href="#">sustainability analysis</a>, worth incorporating in the project.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Social justice</b> Contribute to a fairer, better world, where inequalities and marginalization are reduced, and all individuals can enjoy and fulfil their rights.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Social justice matters... but target is sometimes unclear.</b> All these involved in the project are very clear that social justice matters. But a clearer focus on inclusion is needed. In some case vulnerable categories are clearly targeted (e.g. people with disabilities), but in some cases targeting has been vaguer. For example, a project might be set to work in “remote regions”, or to work with quite generic categories of people at risk of marginalization (e.g. the students). But there is then not much thinking about who could be most vulnerable within them.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Innovation</b> Break new ground. Ensuring that the project can test new ideas, new approaches and/or lead to diverse results.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>A mixed bag!</b> Re: innovation, the project was a mixed bag. In some cases, it had supported established ideas which were just “more of the same” (e.g. shops for products made by PWDs). Elsewhere it tried very innovative approaches (e.g. the support of an “agent of change” in Kosovo, the accompaniment by an established entrepreneur in Albania).</li> <li>• <b>Make sure that some innovation is always present.</b> In a context where social enterprises are likely to get funding from other donors, the added value of Elba is to break new ground, to innovate – rather than just replicate what works.</li> <li>• <b>Recognize that innovation might fail.</b> Innovation requires a start-up mentality: consciousness that initiatives can fail (but should fail safely).</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Scaling, disseminating</b> Focus on enterprises that, once set, can grow or spread. That can be disseminated and/or adapted.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Models for upscaling, dissemination.</b> Some countries (Bosnia in particular, amongst these visited) has now a strong expertise on social enterprise setup - whilst others are still at early stages. Collaboration amongst countries for sharing existing expertise (and learning from donor countries) has been highlighted as one of the strongest assets of the programme.</li> <li>• <b>Learning, communication, advocacy.</b> Upscaling, dissemination are closely connected with advocacy communication, networking.</li> <li>• <b>Linking to long chains: scale across.</b> One informant emphasized the need to “scale across”, i.e. to drive change along a chain (adding value to it) rather than embracing a paradigm of “growth”.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Governance / accountability</b> Ensure that all these having a stake in the enterprise -- can have a say in decision making.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Centralized decision making.</b> Most enterprises set did not challenge existing models for governance. They relied to conventional modalities for centralized management. And they did not actively promote transparency. This was also true for projects within the Church structure: decision making lines had sometimes <a href="#">remained blurred and not properly streamlined</a>.</li> <li>• <b>Mechanisms for accountability.</b> The project still lacks a practical toolbox of mechanisms for accountability (in particular for accountability “downward” – to the beneficiaries). This include,</li> </ul>

for example, transparent budgeting, clear and participatory decision-making procedures. Also, the tools used for setup and planning (e.g. the business plans) risk to be overcomplicated and to remain a piece of paper rather than a practical tool for engagement. More agile management tools should be used.

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## Areas of action

Areas of actions relate to the activities done by Caritas - as a supporting organization - to plan and manage support. This is how Elba project sustain the enterprises and drive towards positive impact and change. The areas of action presented were identified to facilitate discussion in the workshop in Rome. They have been defined not to directly overlap with the conventional organizational functions / departments (of Caritas, of likeminded NGOs). The purpose is to look at these areas of action with fresh eyes: who should do what, how to address them? Do existing structures, ways of working require adjustments, improvements?

An important note: whilst capitals and principles rest on substantial analysis (adaptation of empowerment and resilience frameworks, literature reviews on social enterprises – and, of course, fieldwork) the choice of “areas of action” has been the result of a quick brainstorming. What areas of action would fit better Caritas / Elba project should be openly discussed. This set is captured here as a way to share some findings relating to Elba support.



### Assess

Activities helping to understand the context and the change within it.

- **Understanding change: improving the monitoring framework.** Enterprise monitoring has been a challenge of the project and it is now being overcome (with a monitoring framework, with a website). The monitoring framework – and, more in general, the approach to monitoring – has still [room for improvement](#) (and the frameworks used in this evaluation can help thinking the way forward).
- **Assessment: getting the broader picture.** Elba still lacks strategic assessments of the national contexts where it operates. But the project is moving in this direction. The ecosystem context has been appropriated, even if it has now been linked to practical tools (for example: could social network analysis be used?). Caritas – through Elba and other projects – is also starting to produce significant mapping (as demonstrated by the Societies presentations in Rome): this analysis shall feed into strategic thinking.
- **Support for contextual knowledge is increasing.** Each country has its own challenges and possibilities. Project coordinators now are engaging with diverse platforms, actors, networks. They need support to make their analysis more explicit and to incorporate it in the programme, This is starting to happen with more participatory planning approaches (e.g. Your Job).
- **The richness of diverse worldviews.** Monitoring, assessment does not stop at gathering some basic facts, but shall appreciate diversity of approaches, policies, perspectives, worldviews. The countries where Elba operate can offer many, diverse interpretations of what social enterprises are, building on diverse histories and influences (e.g. the real socialism legacy, the raise of solidarity economy in Greece, the EU donorship models, etc): Elba should more consciously take them into account when building its own models.
- **Monitoring for adaptation, monitoring of principles.** Monitoring is usually linked to checking results. But new approaches to M&E emphasize focus on adaptation and innovation (developmental monitoring) or on principles (principles-focused evaluation). Elba should, in alignment with a focus on more adaptive management, stir towards these.



### Raising resources

Activities contributing to generate resources for the project

- **Flexibility in funding from Caritas.** Elba is funded through the Caritas network, and this allowed space for innovation within the project.
  - **Resources did not stop with money!** Caritas network does not only provide money! Learning, knowledge, existing networks also proved to be very important resources to tap on (e.g. with field visits).
  - **Raising “soft” resources locally.** There are some examples of local “soft” resource raising. For example, Elba had mobilized local actors for mentoring in Albania. Or it is strengthening linkages with a network of solidarity economy actors
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– providing ideas, inspiration - in Greece.

- **Increasing capacity to get external support.** Elba set new ground. Building on this, Caritas is now funding other social enterprises with the support of other external donors.
- **Getting local church support.** The local church still tends to see Caritas as a body providing assistance. Elba is calling for a different approach, whereby local churches are also asked to mobilize local resources and get engaged. This shift is still in the making and national Caritas need to promote it.



### Strengthen capacities

- **Support tends to be “administrative”.** The support to the enterprises had often tended to be administrative (sorting out the bureaucracy). It is important to strengthen technical support..
- **Sharing of learning across enterprises: the need for a strategy.** Elba has struggled to setup learning processes for enterprises – despite some initial dedicated investment - and existing untapped expertise. Rather than just a training curriculum, it will be important to design a broader learning strategy (which could include events like training, exposure visits, but also ongoing processes, for example for information sharing, helpdesks). Such strategy shall be oriented to capture and share the expertise of the entrepreneurs, across Caritas projects – not only Elba (we saw a rich potential for this!)



### Communicating

Activities to inform internal and external audiences about the project, its activities and the changes it creates.

- **A limited capacity to communicate.** Capacity to communicate results (as well as approaches) has been so far limited in the project. Elba started addressing this (e.g. with the blog) but more substantial investment in communication is needed (as well as a communication strategy)
- **Internal communication.** Elba setup opportunities for internal sharing (periodic meetings, shared documents). But the strongest achievement was to create a friendly environment. Exchanges of ideas and support are now happening across the countries, and beyond the project. The coordination is swift, horizontal, friendly and encourages ongoing dialogue.
- **Communication shall seamlessly feed into learning, advocacy.** As Elba strengthens its capacity for communication, it has the opportunity to go beyond shallow modalities too often put in place by NGO (“look, we did these good things”), to a deeper one (“this is how we work, this is why it matters, these are the challenges and the opportunities”). Deeper communication will seamlessly link to learning, advocacy.



### Network

Activities supporting the creation of new relations and strengthening existing ones.

- **Creation of a regional Elba network.** The project helped to strengthen coordination in the region, beyond the project itself: this has been pointed out as a main achievement.
- **Build local networks of social enterprises.** Work on the enterprises had so far prevalently focused on individual ones. As already mentioned, Elba still lacks the tools to strengthen local ecosystems.
- **Think network from the start.** Network building could be a criterion for enterprise selection: giving priorities to the ones that not only have potential to succeed individually, but to link to a broad network or to support chains.



### Advocating

Activities seeking to influence and convince others to adopt policies, practices to better support social economy.

- **Legislative frameworks: when are they good enough?** Local coordinator often lamented the lack of effective legislative frameworks/policies to support social enterprises, but – especially when it comes to the employment of people with disabilities – some good national setup already exists (e.g. in Bosnia) and sensitivity to these issues seems to be on the increase. The approach to advocacy needs to be more strategic and able to pinpoint what works and what specific issues need to be advocated for
  - **Lobbying for national change:** Elba coordinators had, for example in Kosovo - been actively involved in the setup of national policies, and their contribution has been positively acknowledged. Lobbying and policy change, however, will not probably immediately translate in options for change.
  - **Multi-level advocacy:** advocacy does not just involve changing national level policies: it can happen at different levels (e.g. the municipal one) and with different purposes (e.g. lobbying to ensure that law provisions can actually be implemented or find room / opportunities to pilot and scale up promising approaches). Elba should become more opportunistic in finding options for engagement with clear potential for advocacy / factual collaboration with institutions.
  - **Lead by example:** setting an example might be very powerful to lobby for policy
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change. If Elba wishes to influence policy, it needs to strengthen its capacity to lead by example.

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## Regional setup: coordinators' perspectives

The regional coordinators were individually interviewed to gain their views about the overall projects, the regional setup, existing linkages. The key findings are summarized here. Many echoes key findings already presented.

### The project, overall: benefits and challenges.

#### Benefits



##### **Exposure to a new, relevant concept: social enterprise.**

Elba broke new ground, introducing a concept (social economy / social enterprise) which was not known / not in use in the national Caritas. The concept proved to be relevant and useful.



##### **Exposure to practices.**

The concept shared was not a theoretical one. Participants emphasized how important it was to have direct exposure to new practices and ideas, through field trips.



##### **From relief/charity to empowerment.**

Elba is more than a project: it is a shift in approach and mindset. It is helping to change modalities of action against poverty: from "delivery" approaches to empowering ones.



##### **Innovation.**

Elba helped to work differently. Not only social enterprises are a new option: but, within this, many different models are possible. The potential for innovation is palpable



##### **Tools and concepts.**

The project is starting to provide useful tools to support action (for example, the idea of ecosystem, the monitoring frameworks). Tools did not materialize straight away, and are not yet solid enough, but they are an important step forward.



##### **A broader network.**

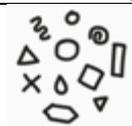
Engagement in Elba helped to connect with new actors and institutions. These new connections can expand the remit and capacity of Caritas. They allow to work on social change with new allies, and with more capacities to lobby diverse actors.



##### **Generation of other projects.**

Elba led to other projects, within the region, on similar issues. Projects like "Your Jobs" would not be existing without Elba.

#### Challenges



##### **Same region, different contexts.**

East Europe, the Balkans are a context hard to pin down. Some countries are part of the EU, some are not. This impact on legislation, funding streams. Fragmentation also exist within countries (e.g. coastal vs mountain region, urban vs rural environments). Aligning approaches is hard, and experimentation is needed.



##### **When can "sub-regional work" be more suitable?**

Some components or initiatives could work better when implemented / agreed within sub-regions. Elba could consider sub-working groups for specific issues (e.g. cross border cooperation, advocacy on common issues). This is starting to happen through the setup of other projects, but Elba itself- as a programme, should encourage this flexibility.



##### **The risk of remaining in "Caritas Garden".**

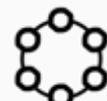
Not always the shift in approach, the need for connection with more partners was fully achieved. Some projects had therefore remained "in Caritas Garden".

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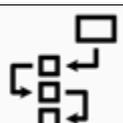
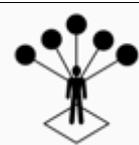
	<p><b>“Thinking business” is an alien mindset.</b> Working on social enterprise – and, in particular, on the financial and financial sustainability aspects – requires a mindset and an expertise that are often lacking amongst people working in traditional social projects. It has been hard for many to fill this gap.</p>
	<p><b>Resistance to new practices.</b> Promoting the approach was hard, also because some parts of the Church remained strongly anchored to more traditional views of support to poverty – more charity oriented.</p>
	<p><b>The heritage of old practices.</b> Some social enterprises setups echoes strictures set by the Socialist regime (e.g. cooperatives), and it might be hard to avoid the perception of “selling old wine in new bottles”.</p>

## The regional setup: achievements and challenges

### Achievements

	<p><b>A regional structure - where there was not one.</b> There was not an existing structure for regional work, and Elba created, de facto, a new one. Aside the meetings people could discuss also activities, concerns of regional relevance. Regional linkages also lead to the generation of other projects.</p>
	<p><b>A genuine learning culture</b> The project promoted and embraced a learning culture. Challenges, failure should not be hidden: they should be shared and looked into. Staff was not demotivated by challenges but took them critically as a motivation to do better.</p>
	<p><b>Donors vs recipients: changing perceptions.</b> Perception and relations amongst donor and recipient countries shifted. Elba helped to understand that donors were not just “these giving money” ... They also had a lot to offer in terms of experience, practices. These practices and exchanges were useful and inspirational.</p>
	<p><b>Long term timeframe.</b> Despite being designed a short project Elba had, from the start, a long-term perspective. It did not just focus on “the low hanging fruits”. This long-term approach helped to invest in substantial issues, to overcome history (e.g. existing challenges, fragmentation) and to build trust, openness (which are now deeply part of the culture of the project and of the team)</p>
	<p><b>Investment in learning.</b> There was a good combination of theory and practice, and the team developed a sense of “speaking the same language”.</p>
	<p><b>Equal partnership amongst members.</b> The setup was really collaborative. Decision making processes were open and frank. Coordination was effective and friendly. And participants have a strong sense of not being only colleagues, but also friends to rely on.</p>

### Challenges

	<p><b>A hard-to-define region.</b> Caritas has not a regional dimension, so what “regions” are get to be defined by the projects. This region is quite an elusive one: Elba is a regional project, but what is the region, really? On one side, there is the issue of fragmentation, mentioned above. On the other side, some countries could be missing: some other “regional projects” within Caritas-operating in the same area - chose a different mix of countries.</p>
	<p><b>Need for more structure in management.</b> A clearer, more effective decision making and management structure is needed. Adaptation and responsiveness were praised, but there was also a risk of decision being taken last minute (or with not enough clarity about them) More clarity on roles and responsibilities (and of mechanisms to make people really accountable to them) was demanded.</p>
	<p><b>Having to learn to work together, getting ownership.</b> The project started as a “donor funded” one and evolved as a more collective, participatory one. The project was not always an easy ride. It required to gradually redefine roles, responsibilities, modalities of work. But there seems to be improvement: the work towards Elba 3, the setup of other projects (e.g. Your Jobs) are modelling better ways for participatory decision making and ownership of the projects.</p>

	<p><b>Having to learn “a new language”.</b> Elba was very different from existing projects, and for some, it was challenging learning this new language. Respondents emphasized that this was indeed a challenge, but also a welcome one!</p>
	<p><b>Support for internal communication can be improved.</b> The project emphasized a lot face to face meetings (to the point that travelling become too heavy for some). Documentation was shared on a drive, but it looked sometimes overwhelming: more user friendly, effective communication options – beyond file storage – seem to be needed.</p>
	<p><b>Monitoring, learning, communication</b> feel, overall, weak (and all these activities of course interlink). For example, a lot was invested in learning from external models, but the learning on the actual enterprises set by Elba was far too limited.</p>
	<p><b>Clashing engagements.</b> Most regional coordinators had to juggle much more than Elba! It is obviously hard to work on more projects at the same time, but this was the rule especially in the smaller Caritas. A realistic assessment of what time / resources are available need to inform planning / demands.</p>
	<p><b>Adaptation in context.</b> Field visits, exposure helped to share many different models and ideas. But it was then challenging to adapt them. More support for adaptation (e.g. space for discussion, options for coaching, peer support) should be provided.</p>
	<p><b>Logistics, travels</b> Bringing physically together people in a region poorly interconnected was a challenge. It was very demanding in terms of time and energy. Some also had visa challenges, which further complicated issues.</p>

## Analysis of existing relations.



- **Champions.** Two counties emerged as key for support and learning: BiH and Serbia. Their expertise and their work were important references for everyone.
- **Sub-regions.** Some sub-regional coordination emerged –the setup of cross-border projects strengthened it.
- **History and location matter!** Historical linkages, geographical proximity also played a role in the connections established.
- **Deepening relations with donors.** Learning visits helped to establish closer relations also with donors countries. And it was a pleasant surprise to discover that they did not only have money to offer, but also interesting learning and practices!

- **First and latecomers.** Coordinators that started collaboration since Elba 1 have a stronger connection with each other than with the newcomers. This is of course a normal outcome of longer friendship and working relations, but it is important that this gap is addressed.
- **Seamless coordination.** When plotting the map it emerged that Caritas Italy (and its coordinating / support role) does not appear in it! The reason is probably that everyone just gave it for granted: the value of coordination had been highlighted by everyone! It was usually recognized that the coordination was friendly, supportive, cooperative: all virtues that certainly contributed to the success of the project.

# Recommendations

The recommendations provided are broad ones because the spirit of this report is to be a thinking tool rather than a set of solutions. There is probably nothing really new in the main recommendations, as Elba seems to be quite aware of them. Please keep in mind that the richness of this report is rather:

- Identification of many practical points for action, issues for consideration, food for thought highlighted throughout the report (and also on the blog and in the final presentation).
- consolidation of frameworks emerging from the programme.

## Shift from project to programme.

If the project is only about creating a few social enterprises, then... close it! There are many other initiatives doing this. But if the project is about building social enterprises as a trojan horse to change the approach in use (from charity to dignity and empowerment) and to articulate a richer vision of economy (from money to a broad array of resources), it is then highly relevant – for the context and for Caritas, and worth continuing.

## Continue to invest in collaboration across countries.

The programme demonstrated the value of collaboration across different Caritas. Within the Elba region, they could share experience, create partnerships – which lead to relevant work within Elba and in further projects – which Elba contributed to setup. Elba also contributed to stronger, more interactive and participatory relations amongst “recipient” and “donor” countries, which transformed the usual money driven relation in richer engagements.

## Strengthen key functions

Elba needs to strengthen some key functions. In particular, monitoring / learning / communication / advocacy. They are all interconnected. The programme so far created a culture that can be supportive of these and it is aware of innovative ways of addressing them (e.g. advocacy by leading by example; learning options emphasizing peer-support and networking). But it has not set strategies and processes to really strengthen and streamline such functions. For example, the language, the critical reflection and openness needed to strengthen learning are acquired, but, in the practice, learning from and across the enterprises setup had not yet happened. Elba is aware of this and of a delay in setting such systems. A new programme shall be an opportunity to strategically invest in these areas.

## Continue to manage adaptively

The programme was managed adaptively, taking into account opportunities and challenges emerging from the context and within the regional setup. Whilst adaptive development is very effective in programmes with a strong emphasis on learning and innovation, it is often hard to practice it – given restrictions of donor funding. As mentioned also in the previous points, there are certainly areas where adaptiveness can be better structured and supported. And processes of change should be better outlined and tracked, for learning and mutual accountability. But there is progress on this. All the Caritas supporting the programme need to be praised for having created a space for adaptation and for having contributed, with their support and insights, example, to improve it.

## Strengthen frameworks showing relevance, value of a diverse approach

Elba calls for a different way to support communities: by setting enterprises where people are empowered to become self-reliant. Enterprises that can function and be sustainable within a market society. But also, enterprises that are inspired by values challenging the tyranny of an increasing market orientation. Elba can demonstrate the importance of invisible capitals (social, human, spiritual, natural) which are very needed, today, to reorient economy and to address growing inequalities. This evaluation tried to make more explicit frameworks helping to articulate this approach to change. It is key to build on them to better recognize – and to help other to see – the meaningful impact of the programme: which is not only about setting up enterprises, but to also rethink economy and society.