

THE SOCIAL RETURN ON INVESTMENT (SROI) OF THE INTERCULTURA EDUCATIONAL PROJECT



INTRODUCTION

In 2020 Intercultura (AFS Italy) and Fondazione Intercultura asked an independent external assessor (Human Foundation in Rome) to determine the social return on investment (SROI) of the programs and activities of our organizations.

Human Foundation defines itself as a “Think tank for social innovation” and it is a research centre associated with “Social Value Italy”, a network specialised in measuring the social impact of not for profit organisations in Italy.

The lengthy report on Intercultura is divided in two parts:

PART 1 measures the outcome of the student exchange programs and compares its economic value with the cost of running the program.

PART 2 measures the impact of Intercultura’s activities and programs, over 50 years, on the internationalization of the Italian secondary school system.

This paper is a very short summary of the full report, which is available in Italian.

PART 1- Assessment of the students exchange programs outcome

The SROI methodology is widely known internationally and it examines tangible and specific outcomes. Every outcome is associated with a financial value which, in turn, is compared with the initial investment that was made to implement the program. In short the steps are:

1. **involve stakeholders** to make sure that what is being measured is what the participants themselves define as an outcome
2. **understand what changes** and how the change is created and evaluated through evidence gathered, recognising positive and negative changes as well as those that are intended and unintended.
3. **assess the monetary value** of the changes through comparisons with other activities on the market that are likely to generate the same change
4. **only include what is material** determining what information and evidence must be included in the accounts to give a true and fair picture, such that stakeholders can draw reasonable conclusions about impact
5. **do not over-claim**, claiming only for the value that activities are responsible for creating
6. **be transparent** in any phase of the process to guarantee the soundness of the results
7. **double check** the results to eliminate elements of subjectivity

Along these lines, part 1 took into consideration:

- the relevance of the AFS mobility programs as perceived by former participants through focus group discussions;
- the implementation process to identify strengths and weaknesses of the programs;
- the effectiveness of the programs in comparison with other ways of achieving similar transformative results for the participants;
- the social impact of the changes that may be considered a direct consequence of the experience abroad, in contrast with other changes that would have occurred anyway.

The focus groups were formed by AFS students involved in the year program 2018-2019. Human Foundation used also the results of a survey with 900 AFS returnees from the year programs 1977 – 2012, done by another independent research agency, IPSOS, in 2016. The following outcomes were identified as the more relevant ones:

1. increased interpersonal skills
2. development of critical thinking
3. greater self confidence and awareness
4. more open mentality
5. increased flexibility and adjustment ability.

Through a standardized process, each outcome was weighted against the results that would have happened in any case, as a natural evolution of a growing teenager, and against other changes that could be attributed to events other than those organized by AFS and Intercultura. Negative elements of change were also considered as well as the length of the effects of the AFS program (as reported by AFS participants from 20-25 years ago).

After considering the total investment made, that is:

- financial and staff time input
- promotion cost of the AFS program
- the program itself as implemented by AFS/Intercultura
- the outcomes induced by the mobility program
- and the long term impact of the experience abroad

Human Foundation calculated that the social return on investment gives a ratio of

€ 3,13 : € 1,00

meaning that **every Euro invested in the mobility program generates a net positive social value of € 3,13.**

PART 2 - The impact of Intercultura's activities and programs on the internationalization of the Italian secondary school system

Human Foundation investigated all the activities that Intercultura (AFS Italy) since 1978 and Fondazione Intercultura since 2007 have done for and with the Italian secondary school system. The investigation included statements by school principals, ministry officials, officials of the European Commission in Brussels and of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, reports from workshops for teachers and principals, researches on internationalization of schools, other activities in presence or on line.

One of the first items to be assessed was the web site called "National Observatory on the Internationalization of Schools and Pupils' Mobility", established by Fondazione Intercultura in 2009. This site (among many other items) presents an *index on internationalization of schools* that allows principals to assess where their school stands in this process.

Another item was the recent (2017) *Assessment Protocol of the intercultural competence of students after a year program abroad*, developed by Fondazione Intercultura with the University of Udine and the active involvement of 113 secondary schools in the country.

Other areas were:

- the Intercultura system to integrate foreign AFS students into the Italian classrooms, with the purpose of involving and motivating the whole school, the class and the teachers, to see the difference between teaching natives vs. teaching foreigners.
- the over 600 training sessions and workshops on pupils' mobility organised for teachers and principals since 1979.

On the local level Human Foundation reviewed the activities of the Intercultura chapters with the schools of their region. It made a cautious estimate that in the last 20 years the local volunteers may have reached over 100.000 people in secondary education.

These local activities included:

- the Day of Intercultural Dialogue each September
- school presentations of the AFS mobility programs in September - October
- exhibitions for the Centennial of AFS in 2014-2016
- activities with the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development (from 2017)

At the national level Human Foundation noticed especially the lobby activities of Intercultura with the Italian Ministry of Education, in the course of several decade since 1975. They led to a legislation that recognizes the validity of school periods abroad and allows students to continue their courses in Italy without "losing" the year they spent in another country.

Finally Human Foundation reviewed the many researches in the field of pupil mobility, beginning with Roberto Ruffino's "15 studies on pupils' mobility" in 1981 for the European Commission. The biennial conferences on intercultural topics of international relevance and the annual researches on international education, (sponsored by Intercultura and conducted by IPSOS) increased the trust of the school authorities towards Intercultura, seen as a true educational agency. The work with the European institutions was an important step in this recognition and it prompted a EU Director General for Education (Domenico Lenarduzzi) to write that "without you realising it, you have been at the origin of many of our European programs, such as Erasmus, Youth for Europe, Leonardo, etc."

The Human Foundation report quotes other official documents of the Italian Ministry of Education to show the impact of Intercultura's work and it concludes that "*without any doubt Intercultura has given a great contribution to Italian school and society in terms of internationalization and training. Its work for common good helped to widen the vision and the role of school life in an intercultural perspective and to give young people the competences that are necessary to grow as adults open to other world views.*"