

Working in a socio-economic research institute

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What characterizes an applied socio-economic research institute/1?

- It is *different from the academia* because :
 - it combines applied research with consulting and technical assistance (no ivory tower)
 - It is a “firm” operating in competitive markets, with strict deadlines, budgets constraints, market approaches
 - even if strong links with the academia.
- It is *different from consulting firms*, because it maintains a research focus adopting theoretical models, research methodologies and analytical tools to produce new ideas and knowledge.

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What characterizes an applied socio-economic research institute/2?

- Usually it is a *no profit organization* with a core team of researchers and an extended network of external consultants (often from the academia)
- Increasingly *multidisciplinary*, combining economics, sociology, urban planning, policy and evaluation analysis in different research fields
- Working mainly for *public administrations* at the local, national and EU level
- increasing role of *tendering procedures* to get work, rather than social networks and political affiliation
- Increasing creation of *umbrella organisations or stable networks* of research institutes

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Working in a research institute/1

- Working in a research institute means to learn how to combine rigorous analytical tools with entrepreneurial and managerial approaches
- The recent years have seen an evolution of the applied research market:
 - the consultancy component for public administrations is increasing (research-action)
 - International competition is increasing
- This evolution is challenging and requires specific skills among researchers, besides good analytical background

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Working in a research institute/2

- The capacity to combine strong technical and research skills with the capacity to interact with “clients” (public administrations), to understand their needs, to provide useful answers (effectiveness, utility and feasibility), within the pre-defined deadlines and budget allocation (efficiency)
- The capacity to work in multidisciplinary teams, exchanging comments, suggestions, criticisms which improve the products' quality
- The capacity to be innovative and “entrepreneurial”: exploring new areas of research and new innovative products, new potential clients, new potential partners
- Research management capacities: capacity to set up research teams and train young researchers; to stay within the set timing and budget; to find new “research markets”
- The capacity to work in large international networks and to compete in the European and international applied research markets

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IRS as an example

- IRS is one of the few independent research centres operating in Italy since 1972. It is a non-profit cooperative currently counting 60 members. At present, more than 40 researchers and a network of consultants.
- IRS is a multidisciplinary research centre with economists, sociologists, urbanists, policy analysts, statisticians, jurists.
- Our activities range from applied research, consultancy, evaluation and training. IRS is part of international research networks and closely collaborates with universities and qualified experts
- IRS is working mainly for public administrations: the European Commission, National Ministries, regional and local authorities on labour market and training policies, urban policies, social and health policies, public administration policies.

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Main activities

- **Applied research** is interdisciplinary, integrating the competencies of diverse teams, and finalised on research-action, combining research and consultancy to answer specific needs of public administrations.
- **Policy evaluation** is designed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public policy interventions through analysis of the implementation processes (eg audit processes, quality control, and staff performance evaluation) and the quality of the results achieved. Institution Building is the aim, including change management and the planning and analysis of institutional and administrative innovation.
- **Training activities** are aimed at defining and forming professional roles and profiles, developing organizational behaviours which facilitate the achievement of production and quality goals, promoting initiatives or new services and developing planning, monitoring and evaluation competencies
- Irs experience in the field of research, evaluation and training qualify **consultancy and technical assistance activities for Public Administrations**. Our consultancy approach is participatory. The emphasis is on the development of the client's competencies, knowledge and resources.

Examples of activities

- *comparative analysis and benchmarking;*
- *monitoring and evaluation of public policies* (ESF, employment policies, equal opportunity policies, industrial policies, administrative policies, social policies, urban policies,...) with a capacity building approach (learning evaluation)
- *Participative policy planning* which puts together competencies in the field of urban planning, sociology, policy analysis, and where the researcher role becomes that mobilizing competencies, networking, capacity building.

Networks

- Strong links with universities both at the national and European level:
 - many of us are university professors (full professors, university researchers, lecturer)
 - many academics collaborate with us on specific research projects
 - many researchers have links with universities
- Strong links with other research and consultancy centers (national and European)
- Many researchers have been working in IRS: some have stayed, others have been moving on other professional paths in universities, in public authorities, in public administrations,...

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Internal Structure

- IRS is organized by research areas each with a director, a team of researchers and a budget; in recent years increasing collaboration among areas:
 - The Labor Market and Industrial Relations
 - Nonprofit organizations and policies
 - Administrative Policies
 - Training and Labor Policies
 - Enterprise and Industry Policies
 - Social and Health Policies and Services
 - Urban Policies
- Junior researchers have usually a degree in sociology, economics, statistics, policy analysis, urban planning. We offer stages and collaborations on research projects at the beginning.
- The internal professional career is strongly based on research and entrepreneurial skills, going from junior researcher, intermediate researcher, senior researcher, project and line manager, area director, vice president and president.

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