

## - I'M WORTH TOO -

### results of the first survey - census on social-catering in Italy



#### Introduction

I would point out immediately that the Italian legislation, as far as job placement, is totally "INCLUSIVE": people with disabilities are placed in normal working environments and not in separate paths as usually happened in other European countries (think for example to factories in Germany or to the ateliers in France).

Our legislation, once again, out of school and work is "UNIQUE" and is at the forefront in Europe.

For many years the Italian model was the "MODEL" for many others, in fact many have come into our reality, to imitate and study us.

Unfortunately, the current Italian situation, is getting worse, because politics does not invest more in culture.

What a pity and what a shame!

The economic crisis that is going through my country, Italy, our Europe and the world entire, binds to and is one of the causes of a consequent social crisis, which worsen people life conditions. The stagnation of the labour market and the consequent growing poverty increase problems in the situation of families and cause a worrying escalation of criminality. If even in a situation of economic "normality", many difficulties occur in the integration of people on the fringe of society, in the crisis of today the possibilities for them to find a place in a working environment are very small.

I mean the socially excluded, young people from disadvantaged families with complicated backgrounds, who are in places of social rehabilitation; I mean women who have to grow their children alone, single mothers without the support of families; people with disabilities who, due to life circumstances and personal background, develop frailties or who experience break down periods compared with the supposed "healthy" evolution of individuals. For all these people, being the crisis or not, the doors of labour market are too often closed, not allowing integration in the society that, due to the economic crisis, becomes even more impenetrable. This is the argument that I would like to discuss with you today: professional integration of disabled people.



## **The numbers of work inclusion and not inclusion**

Work. Never easy to find. Now more than ever. The labour crisis seems to concern everybody now, we are a country of occasional workers!

“Young people” and “job” seem to be two words incompatible and diverging, and this risks the future of all: the youth unemployment in the second quarter of 2012 is 33.9% (in the first quarter of 2011 had risen to 29.6%) If you are disabled, the problem becomes three, four times more serious.

In the range 15-44 years, employed disabled people are 18.4% ([www.istat.it](http://www.istat.it)) while in the rest of the population in the same age group is employed the 62.5%. The job inclusion, supported by law 68 of 1999, very innovative in the international law system, has by now suffered an abrupt stop.

So, in the country's economic emergency, the job inclusion of persons with disabilities may seem like a luxury or a problem to be faced in better times. But the difficulty in finding a job is just one of the symptoms of the failure of social inclusion of people with disabilities.

Job remains a "forbidden" dream that could give flavour to life and become, as for everyone, a unique opportunity for the future.

According to the Institute for the Development of Vocational Training of workers (ISFOL), in 2010, the labour market integration of people with disabilities fell from 31,000 in 2007 to 20,800 in 2009, less than 34% ([www.isfol.it](http://www.isfol.it)). It was lost a job placement on three in just three years. To this must be added that almost half of the employment contracts (48%) is time-limited.

The employment of disabled people is an important commitment in the context of active inclusion policies, more in times of economic crisis, in which are drastically reduced the resources available for interventions in support of the people more distant from the labour market. The data on the employment situation of people with disabilities, in particular persons with mental disorders, are rather lacking also at the international level, but show how difficult and complex is the inclusion in labour market, especially in the private one, even if there are support policies that oblige companies to employ a minimum quota of disabled workers. Often due to prejudices deeply rooted and difficult to fight, companies tend, indeed, to elude the problem, fearing that the presence of disabled workers can negatively affect the productivity of the company.

## More than taverns: bets. To know and enjoy!

Since the early '80 many associations of Italian civil society, such as the Community of Sant'Egidio, the A.n.f.f.a.s. (National Association of families and teenagers subnormal) and the Community of Capodarco, began to manage the very quick process of changing that just started with the so-called Basaglia law n. 180 of May 13 of 1978 (Closing of mental hospital). Since that moment, inspired by the dream of a different future co-built together, in the encounter between social workers and people with physical and mental disabilities, we have tried to cooperate for the deinstitutionalization, the socialization, the defense within the social, scolar and working system of people on the fringe of society.

With the law number 381 of 1991 these realities that previously were already active in the third sector have gained the recognition of social cooperatives.

One of the most sensitive issues faced by many newborn social cooperatives in Italy was that of job.

The more common experience was infinite training: internships or training courses that eventually led to no job opportunities. How to answer, then, to a question about the future, more than to the research for a job?

In the twenty years, in Italy we tried to answer this question in a serious and responsible way. In fact, today there are many realities that decided to focus on one of the leading sectors of the national economy, the restaurant industry, offering training as an investment for the disabled, disadvantaged children, to people from mental health and homeless.

Believing in the potential of growth and excellence of people with disability means to invest in training. Since the beginning a number of courses were organised involving disabled people of different origins: from catering schools, local services, as well as from associations dealing with disabilities. The teachers are all qualified catering workers.

Each course ends with an apprenticeship at The Friends' Trattoria. Some of the apprentices are now employed by a number of restaurants in Rome. This is the primary objective of the training. The on-going updating of the training of workers already employed is equally crucial. "Formation on the job" eventually provides a further level of preparation.

Many are the restaurants born to give a job to people with mental or physical disabilities, which over time have decided to focus on good food. Originally created by associations, mostly composed by family members, to give a future to their children, today these projects, in addition to the social value of the initiative, focus more and more on a fine food believing that in order to be sustainable economically a restaurant needs to offer a good level of catering.

From Piedmont to Tuscany, from Emilia Romagna to Sardinia, from Veneto to Lombardia, from Abruzzo to Campania, passing through Lazio and Umbria, in the country of the sun there are more and more trattorias, pizzerias, taverns, farmhouses, hotels, the self-service, cafes, pubs and restaurants where members, cooks and waiters have a disability. And who decides to try them, come back again, not only for the social value of the project, but also for the pleasures of good food.

These are only some of the stop-over: Milan, Lecco, Como, Trieste , Pordenone, Turin, Asti, Venice, Padua, Desenzano del Garda, Solara Bomporto, Rimini, Sasso Marconi, Perugia, Lucca, Borgo a Mozzano, Pisa, Florence, Prato, Campi Bisenzio, Arezzo, Rome, Giulianova, S. Cipriano d'Aversa, S.Teresa di Gallura, which I reviewed as customer gourmet but mainly as Professional Educator. The reviews have been collected and published in a monthly magazine for social workers "Animazione Sociale", published by Gruppo Abele of Turin ([www.animazionesociale.it](http://www.animazionesociale.it)). Thanks to all the other social and health workers, especially ANEP Italy.





## Educator or client?

My survey to discover the social taverns started from my hometown, Rome, from the Friend's Tavern ([www.trattoriadegliamici.org](http://www.trattoriadegliamici.org)), located in the 'ancient Roman quarter of Trastevere and managed by the Community of Sant'Egidio, of which I am a member. For many years I had the honour to serve in this place, here I was able to sharpen my glance on social catering, experience work side by side with people with disabilities. My curiosity led me to pass the boundaries of my city, and my pen has undertaken a journey to discover the most interesting projects focused on quality catering as working reintegration, involving people belonging to different contexts of disability (autism, Down Syndrome, physical and mental disabilities), social marginalization (foreign teenagers and teenage mothers) and mental health (former psychiatric patients, ex-addicts).

I went to the different restaurants, mingling with customers, tasting the food, interacting with managers and workers. In order to write the review I made some semi-structured interviews to the staff, managers and customers. Listening to their personal stories and to the stories of the early beginning of the activity. The beauty of the interiors, often enriched with exhibitions of the art works realized by the workers and the good food served meet together.

I then observed the surrounding context, the position and functionality on the local territory, stressing the relations with the social network. Finally, after six months, I took note of any changes and unfortunately also of the possible closures.



## **A repeatable model**

The social taverns are a replicable model in particular the Friend's Tavern of Rome, where the 'secret ingredient in the mix is more labor-friendliness supported by the charisma of the Community of Sant'Egidio ([www.santegidio.org](http://www.santegidio.org)).

Profitability, competition, productivity are elements present within this realities, but they do not define the quality of human relationships.

They are the same in any workplace, where everyone has his/her job, his/her task, but there is an extra ingredient: friendship, which has a surprisingly explosive effect.

Friendship does not hide the presence of disability and does not eliminate the problems - social, organizational, administrative - that carries, but focuses on competence at work and aims to success, human and economic. A friendly environment at work puts everyone in the conditions to express the best of him/herself.

Friendship is a multiplier of productivity and a response to the request for social and dignity recognition of workers, because it creates a work environment in which everyone is in a position to develop his/her own potential.

**Conclusions:** Even when there is a crisis working is possible!

Very often I found myself in front of what workers say:

A. "My job gives me an opportunity of comparison and contact with others unmediated by family members, a gesture of profound freedom and autonomy"

C. "I did a stage in a canteen, but, of that period, I keep a bad taste in the mouth"

A. "I can do and only this, but I know it well"

D. "I'm Worth Too"

-Managers:

G. "A place rich in traditions and exchange, where it's possible to meet diversity"

D. "At the beginning the project has not started on the right foot: money have been spent in a bad way because there was any business planning"

P. "When she first get in the restaurant, she could not even speak, but today she is a great help in the kitchen."

-Customers:



B. "It feels like home"

E. "include diversity in everyday life"

V. "A restaurant can stay on the market only if the food is good"

-Cooks:

G. "At some point in my life I decided to make a choice, investing in a job that had behind also a project of solidarity"

These experiences have revealed clearly that disabled people are a resource in our society.

They can work in a professional way with motivation and productivity and offer their contribution to building a people-oriented society.  
The proposal is to work together to create job and promote a new culture of disability.



### **Disability: an added value**

The disabled who work in the restaurant industry live a serenity and a passion that might affect their performance greatly. Arrive punctually, often well in advance, even if they are coming from the other side of the city.

They are reliable and grateful workers, kind waiters, ready to correct or to learn what they do not know yet: they are ready to improve.

To see recognized their dignity as persons, lead workers actually to identify with the company, to feel it as something that belongs to them and to live their job with sense of responsibility.

In economic terms, this increases productivity.

The sense of belonging makes all the workers to feel themselves part of a common work for which it is worth spending their energy profusely.

Sympathy, taking care in serving well the tables often become an opportunity for dialogue with the customer and help to retent the customer.

Starting from a new culture which sees the disabled person as an opportunity, emerges from the experience a model that has something to offer both to the world of solidarity that to employment.

The taverns are, for all these reasons, without any doubt, a best practice for social inclusion and an effective productive activity, but above all, they are part of a larger project. It is a proposal for facing two delicate scenarios of contemporary world: the relationship between different and a labour market less and less people-oriented.

It proposes a model of work organization not competitive, but that does not renounce to search for profits and provides a model of social relation that puts people in the center and that is built starting from the particularity of everyone.

The experience of these realities is a proposal for the city and for the world: let's learn again the art of living! The challenge is to create a city for all and discover again the work as an opportunity for dignity.

In this perspective, the real overcoming of disability, defined as inability to interact with society, making the most of everyone potential, it is friendship that "puts no one aside and pulls out the best that there is in everyone."

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