

LET'S DO IT BETTER

improving quality of education for
adults among various social groups



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NICE MEETING 14-15 JUNE



DEFINITIONS OF TWO CONCEPTS:

POPULAR EDUCATION AND SOCIAL MEDIATION

"Let's do it better" Project refers to two concepts: popular education and social mediation.

Define in a few lines these two concepts according to the point of view of Onda Urbana, Italy:

1 / popular education:

With the expression popular education our association refers to that particular learning process in which, as Paulo Freire said, "No one educates anyone, and nobody is self-educated; all of us learn from each other, mediated by the world we live in". During these 5 years of work with the association, education has meant trying day after day to overcome the artificial border (created by habits or even worse by power relationships present in our society) between operators and users, who normally in the field of social work represent the main characters. In our opinion, these two categories are the consequence of the conservative and reactionary mindset which rules the society and which is bound to rule it also in the future. We want to eliminate this border. Since the onset - we hope not in a rhetorical way but perhaps with a touch of romanticism – the meaning of our work has been based on a non-hierarchical meeting of people who every other project would have called and divided between operators and users but who we called friend, fellows, partners. The choice of using this approach and organization made us explore an original association path, based on horizontal democracy, on decisions made by agreement and not by majority rule, on the identification of that fundamental resources which cannot be translated into professional terms. All this has enabled our organization to develop democracy, solidarity, sharing and valorization of important and original factors of social work.

The approach that we have briefly mentioned can also be seen in the type of projects and social actions that we have realized and in the way we have carried them on. The choice of working on time-bound projects instead of realizing permanent services, which is one of the main condition of an association based on volunteer work, let us create our own projects instead of being forced to create them on behalf of a third party. These ones are usually characterized by high level decisions and created in the office of a bureaucrat or a bank institution rather than coming from the real needs, wishes and dreams of people. This choice enabled the people we met never to act as users, that means play a passive and welfare role. Our work "forced" them to take up the challenge and begin something standing on their own feet. What we have explained until now, together with the type of social actions we made, the

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fellows we chose and the relations we created, represents the original idea of a shared popular education shaped by our organization, a popular education as a working tool to develop the rights of that part of the population whose rights are being trampled, humiliated and not even considered. A real popular education isn't aimed at creating visibility but at realizing micro-process of changing which are mostly invisible even in projects reports but that represent a concrete progress in people's life, both in material, cultural and deep knowledge terms.

2 / social mediation:

The idea of mediation, social and not cultural, helps us to underline the material and concrete aspects we can find in relationships, of comparison or conflict, between people and communities.

In the Italian context it could be misleading talking about cultural (or intercultural) mediation because of root ideas or wrong policies carried out by public or private administrations. This kinds of policies which we can define as intercultural ideologies are in fact intellectual élite productions, where people are not analysed through a real "cultural standard" and the real conditions they carry on are not taken in exam at all. With the convenient aid of different private associations we succeeded in organizing aperitifs, dinners, poetry, pray and reading meetings. Even if considered interesting, these moments of comparison have often been attended by inner circles of people already opened, curious and ready to stake. Our association challenge is to create moments of meeting between people that, by nature, are not so curious or open to come across other cultures. In our opinion, everyone is carrier of his culture but also of material needs. Public concern always put the satisfaction of these needs in contrast of interests between people (Italian and foreign, rich and poor). We want to recognize daily and material aspect of life, more than different culture, as the real topics of discussion between ancient and new Turinese citizens. This means trying to develop projects in agreement with the social mediation idea. Starting from this, we wanted to create projects not focusing only on cultural terms but also enhancing and stressing steady and similar elements between people.

Social mediation must occur not through outside professionals but thanks to involved citizens who, moved by strong intentions, try to come upon the professional instruments needed. Peer operators are the key of this kind of interventions, which aim at creating a relationship between people sharing the same problems. Our goal is to see these people solving their difficulties working all together with no outside help. Trying to solve a problem alone is selfishness, working it out together is politics.

What we said both about social mediation and popular education found its great success in particular in projects self-fostered by institutions, announcements and formal deadlines (for example Italian courses for women with children, works with illegal aliens or convicts in CIE, centres for immigrants detention) while were not so successful in the few funded projects where the attention to some formal aspects was likely to weight down the intervention effectiveness.