



Latent Potential :

Tapping Human and Social Capital to promote and support Gender Equality in decision-making



ILARIA CONTI

PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

Current Work	Coordinator of the Community Development Unit of the Local Development Agency "The Gate"
Area	Porta Palazzo, Torino (IT)
Education and Professional Training	Two years Master Degree in Organisational and Development Psychology Two years Master in Active Training Methods Training in Conflict Resolution (currently in the process of taking a Degree in Psychology)
Professional areas of interest	Community Psychology
Areas of Expertise	Participation and Empowerment process, Workgroup facilitation, Action Research, Social Net Working

PROJECT PROFILE

Participant	Ilaria Conti, Association "The Gate"
Area	Porta Palazzo, Torino (IT)
Project	Visibaloon
Theme	Female Participation and empowerment

Socio-economic context

The action has been carried out in the Porta Palazzo's urban context, area which is next to the historic centre, and characterized by the presence of immigrants, during the 60-70 coming from the south of Italy (and backbone of the steal industry in Torino) and nowadays coming from third world countries; the people coming from outside the EU reach here the rate of 19,2% of the whole population, versus the 2% of the average in the rest of the city.



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The immigrants' population is mainly composed by Moroccans, then by Romanians and Chinese, and thirdly immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa. This sector of the population, traditionally employed in the industry, has now set up also a network of small businesses, shops, trades, which are very common here in this area. Among them we find Islamic Butchers, Chinese bazaars where the merchandise is sold very cheap.

Heart of the local economy and also of the community life is the Porta Palazzo's market, composed by a very extended outdoors area, and four indoors blocks: the dealers concerned are more or less a thousand, 40000 customers every day, with a peak on Saturdays of 100000 customers, 15 tons of rubbish produced every week.

The neighbourhood is affected by crime, linked especially to the drug market, managed especially by immigrants. This social wound creates tensions with the area inhabitants.

The other pole of tension is integration, due to lack of trust among the Italian population on one side, but also due to the lack of a recognized leadership on the immigrants' side; their communities are not very structured and are often led by leaderships very little authoritative and broken by internal fights.

From the urban and socio-economic point of view the area is very heterogeneous, old and decent buildings mix up often with very poor, dirty and deteriorated. Next to the market there is the Baloon, little second hand market with very old tradition from the XVIII century, taking place on Saturdays in the Borgo Dora's area. Till 2001 the legal frame of the market dealers was ruled by art. 121 of TULPS, which ruled a few street professions like rag traders; they were allowed to work with a special permission delivered by the council. After a while the TULPS was repealed by the government, causing a lot of legislative inconvenience and confusion, which left 250 street with no working permission. Mainly belonging to very weak categories (three rom families, drug users or former drug users).

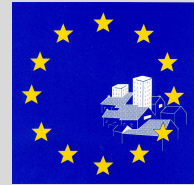


In the beginning the Council pressured them to apply for the regular selling permission, then it gave up voting a decision in 2003 which delivered these non professional traders the status of free dealers in order to save the history and tradition of the neighbourhood, recognized as a common patrimony of the community.



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Project description and objectives

Issues to be addressed

At first the problems which were identified concerned:

- the lack of control, shared and recognized rules in the market area, which caused a lot of conflicts, insecurity affecting also the dealers as they were exposed to the law of the jungle, where the stronger is the most powerful;
- the uncertain legal identity of people who used to be traditional dealers and who became all of a sudden "illegal";
- the residents' frustrations (noise and night inconvenience due to the fact that the dealers were stopping by the market, in front of houses, from Friday night in order to secure their space).

The identified risks concerned the rejection of the dealers, with very negative consequences on the waste of traditions of the area and degeneration of the conflicts.

The action has been conceived in order to promote the empowerment of these weak categories and stimulate their participation to the decision making process: they were supposed to become in this way a negotiating interlocutor for the institutional power, and the public administration.

In the beginning (end of December 2000) we have worked on the anthropologic observation in order to map the relationship between the actors working in the market, then we proceed in confronting and discussing the different issues.

This interaction has resulted in creating an association, Visibaloon, representing the dealers' interests, and which has immediately started acting as the public interlocutor in order to negotiate with the Council the conditions the market had to move to another area (may 2002) and the new position of dealers with no permission in a new area. The public administration has then charged the association of the management and control of this market area in exchange of a financial contribution (from November 2003).

Objectives delivered and actions taken

The objectives identified were:

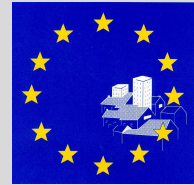
- to increase the sense of responsibility of all actors concerned, and notably the street dealers, expected to be implied in all decisions making and managing processes, and the public administrators, expected to contaminate with a different sensitivity and to get a new consciousness about the ruling process;
- to imply in a participative process the street traders and to get to a new legal frame ruling the selling activity in an outdoors market;
- to reduce social conflicts, uncertainty, inconvenience and fears in the area;

These objectives have been achieved using several means:



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- through a participated observation;
- through the organization of meetings and implying the various actors concerned;
- by creating an association which was able to be the interface and the interlocutor with the public institutions: from an unshaped group of subjects at the margins it originated a structured leadership and an association recognized by the other traders and by residents: this association then took a great direct responsibility in the dialogue and interaction with the administrators and in front of the community;
- by drafting the regulation on the market area, which was negotiated and concerted with administrators, traders with legal permission and traders with no permission. The negotiating process which brought to this regulation has lasted six months time, with meetings, talks, negotiations, and now it should be included in a Council decision;
- through self management and control by the street dealers over their area: now all the entrances to this section are controlled and each dealer is identified with a badge.

“The Gate” works as an agency for local development and promotes the responsibility of the actors concerned accompanying the process and creating a new collective and public subject, and not replacing it.

Resources (financial and human)

The project has been funded by the budget of the association “The Gate”, but it was not covered by a fund “ad hoc”, as the action has been carried out within the social accompanying measure set up by the Gate unit managed by two people working 20 hours a week in total (10 each) in the period of time 2000-2002, while they have been working half of that time in the next period (2002-2004).

To the two operators from “The gate” it has to be added some volunteer expert in training and creating the association: the association itself is composed by volunteers.

The local government funds the clerical work corresponding to 25 weekly hours and six operators (12 hours each) for managing the market. In exchange the Council gets the income from the use of the public soil, paid by the dealers (prior to that they did not get this money) and they have less expenses for managing the traffic and solve the previous inconvenience.

Results, evaluation and obstacles

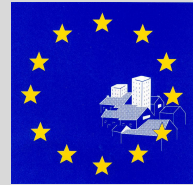
Formal and structured evaluations haven’t been done, nor a systematic results collection. “The Gate” has just discussed and analyzed in internal meetings the development of this action, and monitored it progressively, collecting data when needed and with the contribution of the Council welfare services; its evaluation cannot then be separated from the work on the field.

In order to have a formal and structured evaluation we would need resources which were not available.



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We can assume as quantitative indicators the number of the persons concerned by the project, or those who participated to the meetings, while several are the possible qualitative indicator:

- the people's desire to get a leading role and to participate to the decision making process;
- the increase of solidarity and mutual help among traders;
- the promotion of "the Gate" in its role as a visible reference in the entire process.

Lessons learned

The lessons to learn from an experience of such a social action based on the dialogue and interaction/cooperation with several social actors are many, among them the most important are:

- **Sequentiality** of the project: it is a progressive process, and each stage is necessary and cannot be skipped if you want to act deeply on the ground and produce real changes lasting over the time;
- need of the **commitment/support** given **by public institutions**: the participation of the public sector is fundamental as it legitimates the process and it is contaminated itself in this process, in a very creative feed-back. The public administrators have to be involved as political decision-makers but also providing technical experts.
- you have to set up the basis of a solution to a problem taking it **from the problem and the concrete situation**; this collective and mutual work creates solidarity and mutual trust, which become the factors of complexity reduction: through trust and social link created between social and public actors who previously didn't know one another, you can deal with complex situations.