

Commission for Social Development
45th Session, February 7-16, 2007



New Humanity Presents

A Side Event on:

Employing Challenged Populations: A Public-Private Partnership

1:00 to 3:00 PM

February 15, 2007

Conference Room C (Main Building)

The Tassano Consortium, of Casarza Ligure, Italy, an Economy of Communion business, employs and retrains challenged populations including: people with disabilities, recovering drug addicts and released convicts.

- Moderator:** Alberto Ferrucci, President, New Humanity
- Remarks by:** H.E. Archbishop Celestino Migliore, Apostolic Nuncio, Permanent Observer of the Holy See
- Panelists:** Dr. Maurizio Cantamessa, CEO, Tassano Consortium, Italy
Massimiliano Costa, Regional Vice President, Liguria, Italy
Paolo Veardo, Counselor for Solidarity within the City, Genoa, Italy



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New Humanity Presents:

Employing Challenged Populations: A Public-Private Partnership

The Tassano Consortium, of Casarza Ligure, Genoa, Italy, is an Economy of Communion¹ Company, consisting of 62 cooperatives working in solidarity to employ and retrain people in challenged populations. Taking advantage of work orders offered by private companies and partnerships with the governments of the Liguria and Genoa provinces, they employ people with various disabilities, recovering addicts, and released convicts.

The consortium as a whole employs 1300 persons. Three of its cooperatives are "social cooperatives" primarily funded by the rest to employ 130 persons with various characteristics making it difficult for them to find jobs. This stems from the awareness that a protected but productive job can be a vehicle to restore a sense of self-confidence to persons who for a variety of reasons have become marginalized from society and for whom public institutions often lack supportive resources.

The public social service providers of the Liguria Region, together with the Province of Genoa and all the towns in the area, have realized the social value of this work and the costs that they avoid by supporting it. In turn, they created a foundation to help fund the program. They also provide psychological counseling and specialized assistance necessary to help these disadvantaged workers reenter the workforce.

For more about this pioneering project, come to Conference Room C on the lower level of the Main United Nations building on February 15th, from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

¹ New Humanity is an NGO of General Consultative status at the United Nations, supporting various social initiatives including "Economy of Communion" (EoC). The EoC Project, which comprises 750 companies worldwide, promotes businesses organized to alleviate poverty, by giving a portion of their profits to the poor, and by working whenever possible to get unemployed persons back into the workforce.

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The experience of ‘Consorzio Roberto Tassano’

Maurizio Cantamessa

We have to go back to the years just before 1989. Two friends, Giacomo and Piero, were running a small but profiting business for household appliances maintenance in Sestri Levante, a small town in the north of Italy.

Work was going well but both of them were not feeling fully realized; this uneasy sensation was born by the fact that they were not able to ignore the many cases of social problems which surrounded them.

They had offered jobs to some of the needy people even when the job was not actually needed, but they faced their impotence in front of many other situations.

They decided to transform their business into a co-operative, partnering with many other people who shared the same need to build solidarity made of ‘facts’.

With a capital of 2.000 € (about 2.600 \$) and 26 partners in 1989 they formed the ‘Co-operative Roberto Tassano’ from the name of a friend of theirs, a hospital attendant, who died suddenly exactly in the period when the co-operative was being born.

The real capital of this new business was, in fact, the way it was born: a gift, may be naive even, from two persons who decided to renounce to the security of their small but sound company to start with others a work opportunity for many. The co-operative was born also with the help of a broad-minded chartered accountant who did not question the intention, rather unusual, to adopt a MOA (Memorandum of Association) open for any kind of activity, both in Italy and abroad.

Giacomo and Piero and the first partners contributed with their gift; this gesture started a chain of solidarity from many and fruits were now coming back with the hundred folds. At the same time, Chiara Lubich, launched the project of Economy of Communion; the Tassano partners immediately felt that this initiative was perfectly expressing their objectives, even more extending solidarity at a world level: as a consequence they adhered immediately to it.

Today the experience of the co-operative is made by almost 1.300 people working in 62 co-operatives which are organized in four Consortia and a fifth one is now being born.

All co-operatives, which are part of the Consortium, have adhered to the “Guidelines to manage a venture of Economy of Communion”. These guidelines were set out in 1997 by the International Bureau of Economy and Work and while forming the Consortium, the Tassano people have included them in their of Memorandum of Association as a qualifying element of their goals.

The Memorandum underlines the will of the partners to share the profits of their work with the needy and to help the spreading of this way of working in the world; at the same time and more in details, it sets out ‘how’ to act in a market economy.

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The Memorandum sets out also the lines to be followed towards public administration: taxes have to be paid but not bribes; moreover it is specified that the company goal is not only to reach an immediate profit but also to grow in harmony with the needs of the civil environment in which they work, trying to promote the creation of new productive activities.

The Consortium turnover is now of almost 50 million € (65 mil \$): only 10 years ago the group had merely 100 people organized in two co-operatives; we can easily imagine then, the effort undertaken in these years by those who believe and work for this reality.

We spoke with many economists of various Universities and everyone of them has agreed to state that there must be an extra element which justifies a growth of almost 70% per each year. Somebody calls it 'providence', others use different names; what is certain is that the strong feeling which exists among those who work in the different initiatives of the group, stands at the root of it.

There are various kinds of activities:

13 structures are destined to welcome aged people or people coming from psychiatric hospitals with a total of more than 700 beds managed. 3 more structures will shortly start their activity

Other activities of the group are a co-operative of people engaged in education, a printing house, one civil work co-operative.

200 partners are engaged in assembly activities on account of third parties; these activities are industrial ones but they put at the first place the importance of the human element. Among these 200 people, 70% of them have social problems (physical or mental disabilities, drug experiences and previous periods spent in prison).

This last activity is the social core of the system, "a decent job for all of us" is the topic of this week and the reason why we are here.

Packing and assembling products (electrical and nautical material...) is the work of 200 people who with their disabilities compete with the prices of a private market and with Asian competitors.

Our social activity intent is not only taking care of increasing employment but also give the opportunity through a job, to people who, because of their inconvenient situation, could not have any other possibilities of integration in the community. A worker who, after a recovering period working within our system, finds a job outside is for us a great success.

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Some meaningful numbers:

350 recruitment performed throughout 10 years

200 current employees of which about 140 with social problems

25 people who manage the job, managers, psychologists and doctors, professional teachers, a hard job on a complex social medley (ex prisoners, drug-addicted, physical and mental disabled, ordinary unemployed people one close to the other).

300.000 € (about 400.000 \$) invested recently in high technologic machinery (digital cut work bench) offer the best competitiveness to contrast the competition on the market.

300.000 € (about 400.000 \$) the annual economical deficit which derives from the social activities and which is in part recovered by other activities of the Consortia themselves and in part thanks to the help of public Institutions which recognize the value of the project.

This social commitment has found the collaboration and a real help from the most various people, from private to customers and suppliers, from sanitary to political and trade institutions. Consciousness certainly move all these people but we prefer to see all these aids responding to the Providence plan.

My previous working experiences and my own personality brought me to define an idea for company management and economy itself: a system where the economic success of a business greatly depends on the constant search for optimisation of resources and of productions.

As an example, I worked in the oil sector where the high volumes of raw material transacted, justify even a small correction of the parameters linked to production which can result in enormous advantages. Standardization and automations are therefore essential in this field. Nevertheless, these production increments cannot create new working places.

Right from the very early stages of activities with the Tassano group, I realized that the economic and productive laws which I had applied till then, were to be focused around dynamics which had as a central point the human person; not machinery any longer, productive standards or automation but supply of services with the human element as the absolute protagonist of the business.

It is not easy to always respect and keep up with these dynamics, because we live into an economic culture of globalization which would take us toward a completely different direction; every day we are given reasons by this mentality to betray our commitments.

The economic management of all our co-operatives pursues therefore every day a difficult equilibrium between market laws which must be respected and solidarity spirit which the group follows. In the principles of the Economy of Communion we find that extra gear, that 'turbo' gear compared to a traditional engine.

Being the Administrative Director, my duty is to make sure that at the end of the year accounts square up and to my surprise I realize that often good accounts are the result of the atmosphere of trust and great sharing which are born around a project of great ideals, like the Economy of Communion.