

Looking heavenwards

The many novelties of the Tassano Consortium



The Consortium today

The productive and service activities as a whole of the so-called Roberto Tassano Consortium include, besides the aforementioned Consortium which lies at the origin of it all, also the Campo del Vescovo Consortium, the Gianellinrete Consortium, and the Alpe Consortium.

The *Campo del Vescovo* consortium manages various pension houses and therapeutic centres for the mentally challenged in buildings owned by the curia of the La Spezia region. It is an important reality under the profile of social health in the district. It operates in close ties with the Tassano Consortium that helped it to come into being, to grow, and to get acquainted with the spirit of EoC.

The Gianellinrete consortium too began at the suggestion of the Tassano Consortium with the purpose of keeping alive the schools run by the Gianelline religious order, which otherwise would have had to shut down.

Finally the Alpe Consortium is entrusted with the management of the personnel, administrative, and fiscal realities of the three consortiums.

Three years ago, in December 2000 (see issue nr. 13), Maurizio Cantamessa, the managing director at that time, had described the tremendous growth of the Consortium which, from a membership of 26 associates in the first cooperative had by then arrived at employing 663 persons in a matter of a few years time.

Today there are altogether more than a thousand workers, a good number of whom are associates. Notwithstanding the general economic slump the growth has continued also in these last few years. Recently the Consortium felt the need to equip itself with a new organizational structure, which was compatible with the complex dimensions it had acquired and the social objectives of the founding members. It's natural to ask ourselves whether the Consortium was capable of maintaining, in spite of this remarkable growth in size, that culture of communion which had inspired it right from its very beginnings.

The training program at the Consortium

We'd like to carry a short report by Paolo Favero, a student of Business Economics at the University of Venice, which is significant in this regard. It was his first contact with an EoC project company and recently he attended a training program at the Tassano Consortium as part of his study course.

"Last September I attended a training program for the period of a month at the Roberto Tassano Social Cooperative Consortium. This experience gave me the possibility to analyze as an external observer the functioning of a firm that adheres to the economy of communion.

The two aspects which particularly struck me, and which I consider as being among the characteristic features of the Consortium, were:

- *the drive to establish human relationships with all the persons that came in contact with the firm, be it competitors, customers, suppliers, trade unions, etc.*

- *the quest to give dignity and a future to the most marginalized people in our society not only with welfare activities but most of all to overcome hardships and to salvage the marginalized person.*

The first characteristic, which is one of the EoC values, leads the workers of the cooperative to develop human relationships aimed at fostering friendship and collaboration, in the attempt to create a harmonious atmosphere in which everyone can carry out one's particular function at one's best.

Definitely it's not easy to reach these objectives especially now that the Consortium has undergone a huge expansion and provides employment to hundreds of workers. Thus creating an atmosphere of communion among all in this moment is more difficult than it was at the beginning when there were a few tens of associates.

However as far as I could observe the efforts made to reach these objectives were remarkable, thanks also to the formation courses at the EoC school which are attended by the managers.

The other aspect that I consider as important for the Consortium is the activity of salvaging disadvantaged persons. This end lies at the basis of the first cooperative that came into being following the desires of the founding partners to give employment and dignity to those who found themselves in a socially disadvantageous situation (the handicapped, the psychic ill, ex-drug addicts, etc.).

The firm's philosophy considers work as a therapy that could bring about a reduction in the uneasiness and in some cases bring about the reinsertion of the disadvantaged person on the work scene through making one more responsible. The respect for work hours, rules and personalized programs for salvaging,



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which take into consideration the difficulty of every individual worker.

From this training program, I had the proof that a firm can remain in the market and report constant economic growth rates, even whilst following as its principal goal the assistance of the weakest section of people. It's an encouraging case that shows how the Economy of Communion can be lived in the social sector. This can serve as an example to other non-profit firms that by means of the EoC can acquire further stimuli and a greater conviction to go ahead with their social commitment."

The farmer and the heavens

I think that this analysis is a confirmation of the fidelity of the Consortium to its original objectives notwithstanding its growth: the first place being given to the communion among all and to the human promotion of the most disadvantaged persons, also in economic practice.

The Consortium by now was so vast and so spread out on the territories of four North Italian regions, that it felt the necessity to create an internal means of communication: a good newsletter. We would like to quote in full the editorial section of the same written by the president Giacomo Linaro:

"I participated in the month of May (together with 40 other associates from the three Consortiums) at a meeting of firms that adhere to the Economy of Communion project. And out there I understood something that I wish to communicate to everyone because it brought back into focus the sense of the work of many years.

I thought of the farmers of the times when there were no means available like today to carry out a good cultivation of the land. And one placed his trust on heaven to avert sicknesses, to send the rains, the sun,

good weather for the harvest...

We too were like those farmers when we came into being as a cooperative: without any experience, without a manager (I am a worker), without assistance; we used to pray to the heavens to send its providence on our fields (the work) to enable us to go ahead and to hope in a good 'harvest'.

Today that we have experts, professionals, managers, I feel that we should not forget to continue 'looking heavenwards' to always keep alive that typical spirit of ours which lies at the origins and the very root of all the Cooperatives.

How often we experienced heaven watching over us! How many interventions of Providence stud our experience! How many difficult situations resolved in unexpected ways! How many people could be assisted for having believed and asked (the heavens) for the help of Providence!

How many friends (also from completely different cultures) believed (and still believe) in this our commitment for man, and work with us!

Today that we are better equipped, when there are graduates and professionals among our managers who are better disposed to run the Cooperatives and the Consortiums, when we have been able to give work and dignity to over a thousand people, when the applause of many would speak of success, etc., I would like to bring back to mind the image of that first experience, of that faith, of that commitment to be concerned about the others with the consequent and timely intervention of Providence.

Today we make sense only if we continue to follow this 'social dream'! By the way, there is a place for everyone in this project; there is a place....also for you."



he new organization

As Giacomo Linaro was saying the Consortium, born from the desire to express solidarity of two workers who had wanted to place their work activity of repairing household appliances in common with 26 partners, at this point is equipped with the necessary professionals to manage the most varied functions in a market economy: from social services to the manufacturing activity for private firms, to schools with formation courses, successfully maintaining the economic equilibrium on the whole and also achieving modest monetary gains. All this however within the commitment to always give the first place to the communion with the person of the worker, the client, the supplier, the public administration official, the competitor.

Being the first among EoC adhering firms to have reached such dimensions the task of the Tassano Consortium managers is not easy. Thus their search for an organizational summary that safeguards the multiple company objectives merits a special attention.

Until recently the entire organizational structure of the Consortium was based on an Assembly of Associates comprising a President, a Board of Directors, and a Board of Internal Auditors.

In this structure, even though the directors of the various sections of the consortium were delegated with powers of attorney, the ultimate responsibility and the executive powers lay with the President, who saw that this was no longer tenable considering the growth of the group.

In particular it was not tenable for an EoC firm, wherein not only was the economic performance important but also equally (if not more) important was 'how' this economic performance was realized.

Thus it was seen important that the Assembly entrust the President in particular with this attention to the 'how' of operations in the group, and that all the various productive activities of the Consortium were always in accordance with the behaviour proper to an EoC firm; that behaviour

which the Consortium had expressly adopted, by including the 'Guidelines for managing an EoC enterprise" in the preamble of its articles of association.

Alongside this specific function of the President it was also necessary that the Council nominated a Managing Director as the chief responsible for the management of the firm and the administrative control, and an Executive Committee that would help the Managing Director in the day to day running of the consortium.

The Assembly of Associates approved the new structure confirming Giacomo Linaro as President and Maurizio Cantamessa as Managing Director. They elected the Executive Committee to include Giacomo Linaro once more as the immediate responsible for the Commercial Division and Public Relations, Lorenzo Tassi as responsible for the Social Services division and for other activities, and Diego Ferri as responsible for Human Resources and Secretariat.

Broadly speaking this new structure thus views the President also as the guarantor of the firm's identity, with the power to convene the assembly, in the case that he assessed the management of the Consortium not to be in accordance with the spirit of the EoC, and to ask for the election of a new administrative council. The President also has to delegate the day to day management of the Consortium to others.

Giacomo Linaro nevertheless is part of the executive committee as the responsible for the commercial division, and thus under this aspect he reports to the Executive Committee in which the Managing Director has the final say.

An equilibrium, a submission of oneself to the other in a play of roles, driven by love, which is a novelty, and which was accepted by the president and everyone precisely because the common goal is communion in the firm, which cannot but be born other than from the communion also at the level of the firm's management.



Maurizio Cantamessa



Lorenzo Tassi



Assistance between the Cooperatives

One of the more innovative aspects of the group and also critical under the economic profile lies in the fact that it hosts a very consistent reality of social Cooperatives that provide employment to persons who are disadvantaged due to physical, psychic, or psychological handicaps from tormented mishaps in the past. Thus its level of efficiency, despite being considerable, cannot obviously be compared with that attainable from a firm with people without handicaps.

And yet the social Cooperatives must compete with normal companies in the market, not only in Italy but now, with the existing globalization of the labour market, also in Eastern Europe and outside of Europe, wherein the salary levels are much below the minimum wages applicable in Italy.

In these years the lack of efficiency of these sectors were somehow compensated by the solidarity of the other entities of the consortium. But in recent years even they had to make sizable investments to consolidate themselves, and this reduced their possibilities to collaborate in maintaining the economic equilibrium of the Social Cooperatives.

Practically in these years the Consortium shouldered at its own expense the responsibility to create work opportunities capable of redeeming disadvantaged persons of their region from marginalization. In this way it became a public good, rendering a 'public service' at the expense of private individuals.

How true and appreciated all this is, can be testified by the officials of the Municipalities, the ASL (local health care) companies, and other general government administrations particularly that of the Ligure region, which often direct the difficult cases that they encounter in their work to the Tassano Social Cooperatives.

The importance assumed by this service became evident when the Municipality of Sestri Levante decided to go ahead with the town-plan that foresaw the demolition of the complex of sheds in which these Cooperatives operated; without these sheds the Cooperatives, having no place to work, would have had to close down. And so the trade unions and the local administration authorities, despite their different political inclinations, came together and decided to create a Foundation financed by them to the tune of two million euros, to build new sheds in a neighbouring Municipality.

An obvious proof that this EoC firm, although belonging to private individuals, is a 'public good'. However it is now necessary that there be a greater cooperation between the public administration and the Consortium to complete the process of getting under way the external work for the disadvantaged reinserted into the work scene, by reserving a part of the contracts, which they accord to external realities, for the small firms in which they could work.

The president, Giacomo Linaro, is entrusted to promote this awareness and this new sector of activity of the Consortium, and is helped in particular by the founders of the Sentiero di Arianna, one of the Cooperatives of the Consortium, which in spite of originating from a cultural background different from that in which the Consortium was born, since years now share the spirit of the economy of communion and is oriented towards it in their functioning.

I feel that the Tassano Consortium in the course of its development is opening a pathway which is new in some aspects and in any case rich with cues for one who is interested in a practice within the market economy that takes into account the person, solidarity, and communion.



Diego Ferri



Clemens Reiss

