

ASSOCIAZIONE CONCA D'ORO

Our points of view about social farms' role,
educational and training paths



ASSOCIAZIONE
CONCA D'ORO ONLUS
FATTORIA SOCIALE

Social farms' role

- A social farm is a real agricultural enterprise which produces an income (It must be on the market) and provides services to the local community.
- There must be formal and informal links with the local community.
- The local community must feel the social farm as its own. So the rôle and help of volunteers are essential
- Whatever is the disability of persons included, their activities must be meaningful for the farm and useful to it.



WORDS ARE STONES

- What name for the persons included in a project of social farming? Users? Clients? Patients? Beneficiaries?
- Each name puts them and the professionals in a precise rôle: the one who takes care of and the one who is taken care of, the one who gives and the one who receives, the one who helps and the one who is helped.
- We have chosen: **Apprentices**. They start learning doing a meaningful and useful work. They are helped helping.
- Why not “farmer’s helpers”?



CONTRASTS

- **Psychiatrist: Tomatoes are a tool.**
- **Social worker: No, tomatoes are the aim.**

Thinking of a young adult first of all from a therapeutic or rehabilitative point of view means to compare him/her to a car perpetually under repair.

Mental disability is not an illness. It is a state of the mind.

- This influences the social image of disables, their self-perception and self-esteem.

SOCIAL DISTANCE

- Social distance means to identify the other one more for the differences than the likenesses.
- The risks are:
- Thinking of him/her as a bearer of needs instead of a bearer of stories.
- “Changing human goals into technical-medical goals” (Canevaro).
- Endless dependence and de-responsability of disables
- Medicalization of farming (metaphorical white overall).



CHOICES

- **Tomatoes or cabbages are not therapeutic**
- If the main or only aim is therapeutic, very likely it will have less therapeutic outputs than if the main aim is a productive and shared activity.
- **Therapeutic outputs** are the beneficial by-products of a progressive responsibility of a useful and shared task aimed at the production of goods and services.



AN EXAMPLE: AUTISTICS

We have a small project for four autistic adolescents (14-16 years). So the aim cannot be work training or work inclusion.

The aim is to improve their autonomy and social intelligence, putting them in touch with real life in a complex and productive environment. We **don't simplify** neither the environment nor the tasks.

- Of course they are not productive (2 therapists for four boys!) but the activities they do are coherent and useful to the farm. For example: once a week they make pasta for the restaurant



OUTPUTS

- More adaptability and adjustment to the social environment and to the others.
- Coming out of unforeseen competences and abilities.
- Lengthening of time dedicated to an activity.
- Decrease of stereotyped behaviour and isolation.
- They look for one another. They imitate. They make jokes. They play together.
- These are therapeutic outcomes thought of but not looked for.



PRACTITIONERS' TRAINING

- Different professional backgrounds: agrarian, psychological, educational, social.
- They must feel to be authors of the project, not just performers of others' choices and decisions.
- Close observation of the interaction between practitioner and disabled, between disabled and of the working action.
- The most revealing and interesting aspects of the action and interaction are the less conscious, automatic ones (change in posture, a glance, etc.). They can show the way the practitioner feels and thinks, the difficulties and abilities of disabled better than words.
- They must learn to distinguish between competences and characteristics of the disabled.
- To be the external motivational engine for the disabled

Competences and characteristics

Competences are what disabled people are able to do.

Characteristics are how they “interpret” their own disability. It mostly depends on their educational stories. Examples of characteristics are: reliability, mood, perseverance, dependence, etc. Which are all relational and social qualities.

Many difficulties don't come from poor competences but from characteristics which hinders them in social inclusion and work training.

PRACTITIONERS' RÔLE

- Not the rôle of therapist or instructor
- First of all, I am your colleague and foreman then, perhaps, your friend.
- Working side by side with disables in the same task (direct observation, stronger motivation, direct correction)
- Bringing out what does exist and works.
- Not to anticipate the solution, the answer or make the task easier
- Working with the “proximal development area” (Vygotskij)
- Division of tasks among practitioners, not division of rôles towards disables.
- When is possible: rotation of tasks
- In the fields or in the kitchen, the professional is the farmer or the cook, not the educator or the psychologist.



DISABLES' TRAINING

- Being treated as adults.
- Everything must carry the meaning that we are working seriously not for the sake of doing it.
- Learning to work, which is different and more complex than to learn a work.
- They must feel that the farm is also theirs and their work is really useful.
- Learning by doing. Limited formal learning. It must concern their working experience.
- Responsibility of tasks and times .
- Turnover of tasks.



ORGANIC AND SOCIAL FARMING: THE SAME LOGIC

- Close observation of what is going on.
- Safeguard of what does exist. Vocation of: soil, plants, biodiversity, etc. for the farming. Cognitive, manual, social, working abilities etc. for the disables.
- To improve what does exists.
- There is not a single/simple answer for a complex problem.
- Why what works here, doesn't work there?
- Discovering/Understanding the why is already an answer.
- Differentiate the approach, the answers.

