

DOING ENABLING CO-PLANNING.

Thinking about the dream

The work of implementing the Enabling Co-planning methodology was accompanied by the periodic collection of documents in which each team partner of the HOOD project developed and wrote reflections starting from the ongoing experience. The UNITO scientific team gathered and analyzed the data that emerged, which was then shared among all partners. These documents collect reflections, doubts, dilemmas, and learnings that each team have developed during the HOOD project. In this one and in the bite n.16 we want to share some of the themes that came up, to exemplify the challenges and learnings that in practice can be. These are not lessons, nor operational indications, but rather questions and issues that emerge from the practice and which often remain open.

Struggle for a dream



One of the most debated topics by the teams was the tool of the "dream", used by taking up the Anticipatory Dialogues developed in the Open Dialogue approach. Klimaka, especially, found many difficulties in dealing with the theme of dreams. According to the Greek social workers, "homeless people sometimes are not even able to think of a joyful future". A strategy used by various teams with those who had difficulty projecting themselves into the future consisted of starting from the past: searching in memory for a moment of past happiness, in order to be able to imagine building that happiness again in the future. For many homeless people met by the Greek team, however, even the memories are often bad, ugly, painful, or even traumatic. According to Klimaka, "the ability to envision future scenarios is closely related to the ability to recollect episodes from the past", which however becomes particularly difficult for those who have a compromised past.

Moreover, Greek social workers say, "many homeless people have lived in environments and situations that have not allowed them to build their own dream or to discover their dream. The experiences and opportunities which allow us to build a dream are missing or have not even appeared once in a person's life". People who face social exclusion, mental health problems, and homelessness struggle to own a dream.

Also the Projket Udenfor workers recognize the difficulties "to focus on the dream when the person in question is in a very difficult physical and mental state", as it often happens with rough-sleeper people. Doing outreach work, the focus on the troublesome present could be overshadowed because of acute situations needing action here and now. The relationship between social worker and the beneficiary has been affected by this situation of 'putting out fires'.

SJD encountered similar difficulties too. In carrying out the initial meeting with a migrant person, he said that he tried to avoid projecting himself into the future because he feared experiencing greater frustration if he failed to achieve the goals he had set. Conversely, another person, also a migrant, ended the meeting about the dream feeling very excited. The person was experiencing a situation of administrative irregularity, after starting the migration path

several years earlier. Projecting himself so far into the future has allowed him to remember again why he embarked on the migratory path. In recent years his dreams had been replaced by reality and his expectations had significantly reduced. Being able to think about the future and a happy dream was something very powerful for him.

Building the dream's blocks

Every organization has created strategies in the face of these difficulties. SJD, for example, uses the time horizon in a flexible way: with some people, it is necessary to bring the future closer, to work on a time that seems closer and more real to the person, in order to start moving.

Udenfor, when talking about a happy future seemed impossible, started to do some activities not related to the person's difficulties here and now. For instance, the social outreach worker planned to make some positive activities with a person during the week, such as going to the cinema, a museum or something like that, to introduce some positive experience in everyday life that has nothing to do with the troubles of the persons. The idea is to take a break from the troublesome present to rebuild a good relationship so that the dream can be a topic for conversation again.

On the other hand, Klimaka recognizes that social workers have the power to "destroy" the person's dreams, overall if they are so frail. By defining the other, pronouncing statements on their lives or interpreting the meaning of what they say, social workers exert power over the other. Hence, Klimaka's social workers followed a process to actively give up power to enable power redistribution and allow the persons to share their dreams.

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The reality check



Many of the reflections shared by the Ufficio Pio team have to do with what happens when dreams collide with reality. In several cases collected by the team, it is thanks to the direct comparison with real experience, supported by the accompaniment of the social worker, that the process becomes an opportunity to increase people's awareness. As a result, the dream is readjusted.

For example, D., 22 years old, wanted to get a degree in computer engineering. After embarking on the university path, he understood that it was something too long and complicated for his current condition, as well as too unbalanced in theoretical training. For this, he evaluated alternative training courses and subsequently activated an internship in a company with IT tasks.

M. has also followed a similar path: after enrolling at university, to follow the dream of becoming an established writer, she began to experience strong dissatisfaction. She left his studies and activated an internship in a hotel as

a receptionist. Subsequently, she changed her plans again, planning to move to France to obtain a degree more expendable and more inclined to her aspirations.

Thanks to the HOOD project, the social workers of Ufficio Pio began to welcome these changes of direction with a new attitude: they were no longer interpreted as a person's lack of ability to maintain a project but as signs of activation and an expression of learning. The social workers, therefore, tried to support people's choices, but helping them to carefully evaluate the pros and cons of each change of direction, encouraging the development of awareness for the entire duration of the process.

This job isn't always that simple. The Ufficio Pio team highlights how social workers, when faced with certain simplistic ideas, are tempted to stop them in the bud to avoid disappointment and future failures for the person. For example, a homeless man was certain that he would obtain funding from various local realities to build an IT project. The man probably had a simplistic idea of how project funding works. However, the team decided not to replace reality, but to accompany him on this journey: the man wrote a project, expecting it to be financed. Direct experience, disappointing in this case, has taught him the complexity of the world of projects of which he had a superficial idea. However, the Ufficio Pio team underlines how avoiding a direct encounter with reality - for example, explaining in advance that the project would probably not have obtained funding - does not allow the awareness that it is fundamental for personal development. Also because the opinion of social workers regarding people's mains can be fallacious.

Also Projekt Udenfor workers recognize the importance of the changes of direction. According to the Danish team, the dream becomes a tool for reflection and also allows one to readjust life choices already made of which one is no longer convinced. It also has three effects: it allows choice support. The person gains power because he is supported in his choice. If he is supported, he can implement a change of direction. The final effect is an assumption of responsibility which becomes activation. Hence, there is a process of "empowerment/responsibility over the choices" accompanied by a request for support.

Conclusions

The dream, therefore, remains a problematic element: it is not always easy to project oneself into a happy future, starting from a condition of extreme vulnerability and social exclusion. Basic existential conditions are necessary to dream. To deal with this problem, the teams have adopted different strategies: from trying to retrieve memories of happiness, to living "happy" experiences and reading in the present, to help the person project himself into the future. However, the dream can be a powerful tool and becomes, as described in the HOOD methodology, an engine for the person to start activating. The process itself will build experience, learning and awareness for the person. However, it is important to accompany this process, without replacing reality: as emerges from the experiences gathered, the "reality check" must be experienced directly by the person in order to develop awareness. Social workers accompany the process, helping to deal with frustration and disappointment, and supporting changes in direction.

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