

EXPERIENCES OF ENABLING CO-PLANNING

Chieri's public social services

Learning a new working method, training a gaze able of observing one's own established professional practices and questioning them, experiencing something that seems uncertain and not always clear is a difficult path. Thus, it is for us, in our transnational partnership of the HOOD project, which since January 2021 has been adopting the methodology of enabling co-planning in the daily work with people in conditions of homelessness. Adopting and adapting the enabling co-planning to our social work is a tricky path, but a path that others before us have already travelled. In this phase of the project, we met and talked with two realities from Piedmont – the Vedogiovane social cooperative and the public social service of the city of Chieri – which have been trained to the enabling co-planning approach and are adopting it in their work with people with disabilities.

It is precisely in this context and, specifically, in the heat of the radical reflections on independent life and rights recently rose into the transnational community of people with disabilities and their families (first and foremost the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities), that the enabling co-planning was born and was finetuned by the working group of the DiVI Study Centre, partner of the HOOD project. The comparison with social workers from the Vedogiovane cooperative and from the Chieri social service gave us material to reflect on, insights to cultivate and the perception of participating, albeit in a different way, in an ongoing cultural change. At a first reading, it could be argued that the reality of disability is very distant from that of homelessness, problems and resources encountered are different and for this reason what works in one area will not necessarily work in the other. Faced with these objections, we invite you to change your gaze as the social workers we met have told us: to start thinking in terms of unconditional rights – regardless of one's condition, situation, or ability – to be part of everyone's world, to live a full citizenship and to decide for themselves.

In these two "bites" (the number 9 and 10), as the nature of these documents requires, we would like to share with the reader some "bites" of these dialogues, making public the valuable reflections that the practical experience of these social professionals nourishes. All the names of social workers and people with disabilities in the text are fictitious to respect the privacy of the persons interviewed.

Chieri's social service

The public body often appears as a rigid and very slow machine in promoting change. At the same time, the transformations that take place within the public institutions have an extremely more fruitful power: they can reach everyone, levelling the differences in each one's economic and cultural resources. They can introduce transformations in the institutional culture and in the supporting structures of collective life. The Chieri social service has chosen to review its operational tradition in a constant dialogue with the DiVI Study Center, experimenting with the adoption of the enabling co-design approach. The experience of the Social Service of Chieri was told and

discussed by Paolo, an educator who has been working in the consortium for years and who, together with his colleagues, has been experimenting in his daily work the methodology of enabling co-planning, benefiting from the constant supervision of the DiVI Study Center, partner of the HOOD project. Below, we will report some of the reflections that Paolo shared with us and they seem to us to be of greater inspiration and interest for those who, like us, are venturing in this direction.

Subverting the work



Paolo described the meeting with the DiVI Study Center as something that changed their way of working with people with disabilities. A criticality of the work in the public services is the overload of work: the operators find themselves responsible for a very high number of cases, a fact that over the years has led to the practice of giving priority to the most complicated situations. For the others, the working practice consisted in offering “pre-established opportunities to respond to the needs of the family and of the person, but without thinking of the person from the point of view of a life plan”. We tried to “offer something”, without exploring the desires or expectations of the person himself. Paolo tells us, for example, that one of the first people with whom he began to build an independent life path is Flora. For 8 years Paolo had activated the possibility for Flora to carry out a PAS, a specific stage for people with disability or other fragilities. Flora seemed serene and peaceful, but there had never been the space and time to deepen her desires. Starting to explore her desires, embarking on the path of the life project as suggested by the enabling co-planning, opened scenarios that Paolo would not have imagined and led him to get to know Flora and her family in a different way. “We started from the dream, from how she imagined happy in the future, up to: but how do you think these things can be achieved? She told things in a confused way, we gave an order to her words, slowly we unravelled that skein together”.

Preparing the context



Flora, after 8 years of ad hoc internship for people with disabilities that had never translated into a job, had expressed the desire to find a real job. A part learned in the work with the Study Center was, according to Paul, the work aimed at “preparing the field for the people”. That is, going to the workplace, promoting a cultural transformation of the working environment aimed at recognizing the adulthood of the person with disabilities, unlike what often happens in social contexts filled with ableism. Preparing the context, in the case of work, also means building ad hoc tasks, which are at the same time useful for the company and shaped on the abilities and possibilities of the person. It also means looking for work contexts in which the internship is actually aimed at a recruitment and not just an objective in itself.

I stopped doing things by myself

To look for the hiring opportunity, Paolo did not move as he would have done before the beginning of this learning process. The main change that took place in his way of working was precisely to stop acting by his own, in place of Flora and the other people in charge of the social services. “The Study Center advised us to go and look for companies that mandatory should hire people with disability. Indeed, according to the Italian law, companies with more than 15 employees are obliged to hire persons with disability or to pay a fine. The employment center gave us a list. But I didn't go, I didn't choose the companies from this list. I cooperated with Flora to understand where these

companies were located, what they did. We chose together, we decided starting from her priorities". Paolo stopped working on his own and offering people pre-set solutions, he began to involve people in every step of their path. In Flora's path, for example, later the possibility to activate for her a young support figure arose. Thanks to a widespread project in social services in Piedmont, this person could have supported Flora in several activities related to socialization. In the past, Paolo would have selected the person alone. In the enabling co-design process, it was Flora who met the three candidates and chose the one she felt most comfortable with. Taking a step back, "stop doing things alone", is a fundamental step to allow people to take the lead in their own life projects. Paolo also recounted how this also meant putting himself in a position to let people take paths that he considered unsuitable. He has learned how much, in an enabling context, even taking paths that prove not to be pursued becomes important "because it helps in terms of awareness". Furthermore, "it happens that you do things in the direction of the person and then new windows open, opportunities come up, you make contacts... and it happens you can draw from where you did not expect and also the person modifies his dreams. She too goes to touch other contexts, things that she might not have imagined".

"Stop doing things alone is a fundamental step"

Nourishing the self-confidence



"Finding work is an epochal change for a person with disabilities, they feel part of society, capable of responding to his needs and managing his life". It is not only the results - finding a job, going to live alone, enrolling in a sports course - that contribute to the growth of people involved in independent life paths. By becoming the true directors of their own path and doing things together, as Paolo said, people began to become more and more self-confident in relationships, areas and occasions that would have previously intimidated them. It is the case of Giorgio, a young man who initially struggled even to phone to the social service, while over time he gained confidence in himself and is now able to send emails, documents, doing phone calls. "Amazing, sometimes I have to stop him!" smiled Paolo. This happened because Giorgio and his family felt stronger and more listened to in this different kind of encounter with social services.

A change you bring with you

The path taken is not free from criticalities. As already mentioned, the overburdening of work is a serious problem, which clashes with the needs of enabling co-planning. At the moment, Paul sees the time limits as a serious obstacle to the possibility of adopting this approach with all the people he is responsible for. At the same time, Paul stressed that what he is experiencing is a powerful and profound change. "There is great satisfaction for the person, the family and social workers". The hiring of Flora was a moment of great joy and professional satisfaction for him. He recognizes how enabling co-design is effective in promoting "real life changes for people" which also correspond to his "greater professional satisfaction". The dimension of professional satisfaction of social workers is an issue that is often overlooked, but which instead constitutes a major problem for the well-being

"There is a great satisfaction for the person, the family and social workers"

and work quality of both operators and services recipients and to which due attention must be paid. Although for now the number of people with whom he is adopting this approach is small, due to working hours, Paolo recognizes how this process is also changing his more general way of working. “I carry with me a different way of thinking, and this is already a lot, it's a different approach to people. I will bring this to my life, I have upset my way of working with people with disabilities. I didn't learn it in books, I learned it in this experience”.

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