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"Trieste - The Zig Zag Project"

" The frontier which protects the autonomy of any living being from the universe which surrounds him, acquires a meaning only if, besides being a barrier, it is also a means of exchange and can be crossed."

Henry Atlan.

Newport (U.S.A.). Summer/autumn 1983.

For the first time, the "America's Cup" is snatched away from the Americans in the classical competition of 12 m. sailing boats (by the Aussies!!).

For the first time Italians take part in the competition, with the boat "Azzurra".

Economic, cultural and advertising interests, tactical capacity and group dynamics, as well as advanced technology, all come into play.

In Italy, the crew of "Azzurra" become famous overnight. The faces of Cino Ricci, the skipper, and Mauro Pelaschier, the helmsman, become familiar to everyone.

Trieste (Italy). Autumn 1983.

I mention an idea I have to a friend of mine who has done a lot of sailing.

The idea is a sailing boat for the patients of the Mental Health Services (MHS) and for the young drug-addicts coping with detoxification.

To widen horizons, to participate in sailing races and long voyages discovering the world and/or re-discovering ourselves, to fish, to learn how the boat works....

My friend comes from Monfalcone, 30 km. from Trieste. Mauro Pelaschier, the helmsman of "Azzura", comes from Monfalcone too.

As a matter of fact, my friend and Mauro Pelaschier used to go sailing together when they were younger. So we decide to contact him, and he likes the idea.

Not much talking needs to be done with Franco Rotelli, pupil, friend and successor of Franco Basaglia as the manager of the MHS, not even as much as to specify that it is not a new therapy, but an attempt to create new opportunities, new moments of well-being.

To extend the patient's environment, his relationship with the person who "take care" of him and at the same time reach out to whole new aspects of society, to new people. To bring about experience together and, when necessary, mediate the meeting between the healthy and the ill. To reach the forgotten and abandoned territories, those of the healthy.

Franco Rotelli speaks about the project to Michele Zanetti, former President of the Province of Trieste, who had called Basaglia to Trieste, and at present President of the Port Authorities. Rotelli also speaks to the General Manager of the Health's Department of Trieste (HDT), the body that controls and promotes the health of the citizens of the Province of Trieste.

The staff of the various MHS discusses the project, either incredulous or enthusiastic, and in some cases sceptical as far as the feasibility is concerned.

But the feasibility may be ascertained only practically.

One of the first steps is to find the right boat, and once again thanks to a friend, we find out the blue, exactly what we are looking for. A wooden schooner, solid and spacious, with a sturdy engine and a classical design: the "Califfo". Cost: 30 millions Lire. Plus the interest on the leasing and the T.V.A. Total 49.500.000 Lire!

A Social Co-operative - "Il Posto delle Fragole" - allocates us all its available funds: 200.000 Lire!

Invitations cards for the Press Conference at which the **Zig Zag Project** is to be presented are sent out to all the prominent figures in the political, economic and cultural world of the town. Regional and private radio stations, local and national newspapers inform the general public.

The Painting Workshop of the MHS produces hundreds of posters as well as making a float for the annual Carnival Parade, a float in the shape of a multi-coloured boat symbolising our dream.

February 1984.

The crowded Press Conference, instead of being a meeting intended to explain the **Zig Zag Project** to the journalists, turns into a meeting of people intent on collaborating together to bring about our dream, despite the obvious difficulties.

The General Manager of the HDT stresses how complex the question of human health is and the need to find new ways especially for young drug-addicts, of creating a different relationship with the world as a whole and with themselves in particular. He emphasises that the point is not to spend more, but rather to spend differently, and he talks of measures which would not simply "remedy" a situation, but which would "promote" well being.

Mauro Pelaschier and the Chairmen of several Yachting Clubs speak about the joy and the profound emotion that one experiences at sea, about the discipline and self-discipline that nature imposes on one, about the great responsibility one takes on and which one must teach others to share, with regard to safety at sea.

Someone speaks about the vast amount of knowledge acquired by the old ship's carpenters, which is slowly being lost and about the projects, already well under way, for the constitution of marinas for the nautical tourists in Trieste. Every three new berths mean one job.

Vocational courses are discussed as well as seafaring traditions, fishing and sunshine.

Unexpectedly, the Vice-President of the Italian Naval League announces that the statute of his association (with over 10.000 members in Italy) also provides for encouraging handicapped people to practice water sports and is thus prepared to contribute the first million Lire towards the purchase of the "Califfo".

Everyone is given the number of the current account of the Co-operative "Il Posto delle Fragole", a number repeated later on TV, on the radio and in the press.

At the same time a public subscription is raised, and we start to look for a sponsor.

A pebble in the water thus produces round and centrifugal ripples on the surface and to a certain depth.

During the days following the Press Conference we keep a constant eye on our current account at the bank. The initial contributions, after two months, run to about a hundred, and range from a minimum of 1.000 Lire to a maximum of 100.000 lire, giving a total amount of 1.500.000 Lire.

A young lady contact us: she knows many painters and art-gallery owners, and she thinks we could ask them to donate some of their paintings, organise an auction and dedicate the profits to the **Zig Zag Project**. We photocopy a letter of presentation. A colleague allows us the use of his car.... and we realise that it can be done....

This is the first time that both famous artists and unknown ones, well-established and enthusiastic amateurs alike have accepted to exhibit their paintings together: in the very process of its being fulfilled, **Zig Zag Project** has already started to realise the main objective: that of bringing people together. Even the politicians, from all the different parties, are in favour of the project (and at a later stage most of them show their approval in a concrete way). This is certainly not something that happens very often.

On the day of the auction, at the pre-arranged hour, there are so few people that the auctioneer suggests postponing the whole thing! Initially we decide to give those people, who have come to buy a specific painting the chance to do so, but the room begins to slowly fill and the atmosphere warms up. When the auction is over, thirty paintings have been sold and 6.000.000 Lire taken!

June 1984.

Three months have already passed since the day when the project was first launched and we are still very far from fulfilling our objective. We have only 7.500.000 Lire. Everyone is talking about the project, but we feel at a dead end.

The HDT guarantees us some backing, but it cannot risk being criticised for financing something that could be seen as superfluous. In order to be able to give us financial support, we have to find at least half of the necessary amount ourselves.

But the decisive, unexpected event is just round the corner.

We are invited to speak about **Zig Zag Project** at a highly popular TV show about culture and entertainment.

Mauro Pelaschier, who once again comes to support us, declares: "When we said we wanted to take part in the America's Cup, people started at us as if we were crazy as well! and yet, we made it!".

The showman invites TV-viewers to contribute to the subscription, looks slyly at Pelaschier and says: "You Pelaschier, with that sea-dog look of yours, and that beard, and your long hair...hasn't anybody ever suggested you advertising something like a brand of tuna-fish?" Pelaschier hedges. But...all the TV-viewers immediately think of "Tonno Nostromo", an old brand, well known to all Italians, with the image of a bearded sailor at the helm of a boat on its label....

The advertising Director of "Tonno Nostromo" is watching TV in that very moment, and rings up the owner of the tuna-fish factory. Some days later the two men see a video of the show again and contact us from Milan.

Unintentionally, we had given them some good publicity; they like our project, their oldest factory is at Grado, about 40 km. from Trieste and their family comes from this part of the country.

They promise to us a contribution of 10.000.000 lire (+VAT!).

Have we made it? Yes, we have.

To celebrate the event a coach with 60 people between patients and staff leaves to Marina di Ravenna. The crew of the "Azzurra" has invited us to spend a day together, out on the sea!

July 1984.

The Co-operative "Il Posto delle Fragole" draws up a leasing contract for 37 instalments of 1.380.000 Lire each. Last instalment: January 1987.

Under the direction of the former owner we pull the boat ashore on the quay, made available to us by a Yachting Club. Fifteen patients volunteer to learn and in fact do learn to carry out the maintenance jobs. They work up to eight hours a day to be sure that the boat is ready for the day of its inauguration.

We eat at the Club restaurant among the Club members; we work close by to the mothers and children relaxing on the small Club beach. Some members are sceptical, some mothers are worried and this first impact is a bit contradictory. Which is quit normal. We think that the important thing is that there should be an impact, and that we should do our best to make it as rich as possible for everyone.

On July 7, inauguration day for the "Califfo", there is a great celebration at the "Barcola" Mental Health Service; there is joy and emotion in the air.

A theatre group of patients and professional actors performs in the garden.

The Painting Workshop has organised a wonderful exhibition.

There is music and dancing, and the barbecue in the garden....

Again and again, overloaded with patients, politicians, journalists, friends, the "Califfo" leaves the moorings.

The Major of Trieste is there, visiting for the first time one of the MHS, which have been open and working for the past seven years.

"Basaglia is the only one missing - says Franco Rotelli - he would be happy today."

August 1984.

But does the fact of finally have the boat live up to all the expectations and hopes that so many people had envisaged?

Every morning the "Califfo" leaves its moorings: in the little harbour of Barcola. In these little harbours one becomes a member of a kind of family, much more quickly than one could imagine.

The crew consists of two social workers, one or two volunteers and five or six patients referred to us by the MHS or the CMAS.

These daily boat-trips in the gulf of Trieste continue for nearly a month and a half, and about hundred people passed through our hands. Some of them look smiling out to the sea while others dig up the old reminiscence from their past. Some ask if the boat will capsize, while others have trouble keeping their balance, and then realise that what's needed is a new kind of balance.

There is an atmosphere of surprised pleasure, of teamwork, of playfulness, alongside some people's loneliness that is too profound to be invaded. The odd person, very rarely though, talks about his illness.

Every morning the group that comes aboard decides the daily program and the route.

One day is spent on the beach in the little Bay of Sistiana. Mrs. H has a swim, and incredible as it may seem, it's has been fifteen years since she had a trip to the seaside.

B. comes and smiles. B. underwent a lobotomy in the sixties, when she was just a girl.

Then there is F., who lives in a flat in the grounds of the old Psychiatric Hospital, and hardly ever says a word. When I take him "home" in the car, I'm amazed to hear him say: **"Here we are again in the madhouse!"**.

Everyone is offered a turn at the helm and it's good to see the pleased look of surprise and understanding when the boat ploughs ahead with the wind.

We are incredibly worried about safety precautions, and really aware of our responsibilities. Everything is so new.

People on others boat says hello and offer us a bottle of wine (with some water inside!), or some fish as a present.

Everything is so normal; we are part of life.

A young drug-addict writes to us from another town, and comes to spend a day with us. He can't believe that such a project actually exists, and tell us that in the last seven years he's only been able to kick the habit once and that was when he spent eight months on a boat. That evening he goes back home, but only because he has to. (He comes back to Trieste in 1985 and starts to work with the Califfo's group. And he's still living and working in Trieste, in a shipyard.)

For G., on the other hand, the coming months of activity on board the boat coincide with the final step of a long process of suffering and maturation. He works hard, for over a year, he stops mainlining.

There are endless little jobs to be done on the boat, and every evening when we come into the port people crowd aboard - fishermen, boat-owners, and people out for a stroll along the harbour-wall.

We re-discover an old-fashioned way to tie a mooring knot, we exchange secret tips about fishing, and we plan our participation to the Autumn Regatta, in which over 500 boats usually take part.

Someone keeps a discreet eye on things from the *terraferma*.

These initial months of activity allow a small group of patients to get to know each other, get to know the boat and begin to understand the problem behind the running and the maintenance of it. The main mast has to be replaced, the engine has to be carefully overhauled, the electrical system needs looking at, and the equipment needs checking so that any faulty pieces can be substituted or repaired. The hull should be completely stripped, and the caulking in the timbers inspected then the painting and varnishing has to be done.

April 1985.

After nearly a year of meetings and correspondence the Co-operative finally signs an agreement with the Provincial Government that controls the purse-string of a European Social Fund for the integration of handicapped people.

By now and for three months we have three qualified instructors at the disposition of twenty patients. The patients are of all ages, with the most varies case histories and diagnosis. Two social workers are assigned to work with them full-time.

Ten people start stripping the hull under the direction of Arrigo Petronio, the carpenter who has helped to realise many of the design of Sciarelli, a famous naval architect. The other ten start dismantling the engine and the electrical system.

Then there is the firm that provides the crane for beaching free of charge, the Sailing Club that lends us the wooden cradle and another which connect us up to water and power supplies.

A whole range of people are coming and going on the wharf: experts, friends, curious onlookers, and ourselves, blissfully unaware of just what we have taken on, and convinced that we shall be able to do the job well and benefit everybody's health in the process.

Twenty people who are usually isolated, measure up to one another, and gradually become a group. They feel they're observed for what they are capable of doing, and they come up against the problems of organising the work they have to do, as well as using the technical and human capabilities of the instructors to full. The youngest among them are full of spirit of emulation and we work hard, hoping that the emulation will become self-emulation.

Some of them give up.

In the Naval Headquarters of the Customs Office (whose help we have asked), the engine is dismantled and re-assembled. Below-deck, Customs Officers and drug-addicts pass each other spanners and chat about odd moments in their lives.

Some people come along to ask us if we do the careening of their boats because they haven't the time, while others keep their distance. Sometimes there are arguments and misunderstandings.

Everybody is surprised by how much there is to learn, and by what a heavy task we have taken on, but they are convinced that it's right, that it should be done.

We finished everything in the three months allotted for the work: many people have worked solidly eight hours a day. Two patients go to work for the instructors in their yard or in their workshop.

Now we have a month to try the boat out and try ourselves out as well.

The night of the full moon in August, after advertising in the papers and on the radio, the Califfo takes scores of people on board in small groups. This goes on nearly all the night. It's our way of letting people know what we are doing.

About a hundred people and thirty patients take part in a fishing competition organised jointly by the Sea Sport Federation and one of the MHS of Trieste, and sponsored by shopkeepers of

the town. The "Califfo" carries the fishermen and the numerous spectators out to the breakwater where the competition takes place.

Until the beginning of October, a social worker and those patients who have taken part in the vocational courses, take other patients out in the boat nearly every day.

The 28 September, the "Califfo" sets off on his first cruise, to Rimini, on the Adriatic Coast, where we've been invited for a day of discussion and celebration. On board there are five patients, two young people who have helped us with the work and two social workers. Fabio Apollonio, from the crew of "Azzurra" is at the helm. Most of the journey is made under sail, because the engine is plying up, and at night too, and it's an experience, both navigational and in real life terms. Three days that help us to grow a bit more.

Trieste. Six years later.

From that moment onwards, a little group began to gather around the "Califfo".

Both young and older users, with a job training grant, went to work with ship carpenters, ship mechanics and nautical supply shops in order to learn a trade but, above all, to learn, or learn again how to rely on their own strengths and abilities in order to live in the world.

Thus, while sailing classes were being organised and a number of users obtained their licenses after passing the exams of the Harbour Office, the "Califfo" was rented out to private parties and institutions, and the project began to transform itself.

It transformed itself in the sense of becoming the history, or part of the history of a number of persons. And with the conflicts that arose primarily because, by participating in the real world, in real life, people, users, began to express increasingly pressing needs. Needs and requests which could not necessarily be satisfied or find a response within the Zig-Zag project.

Thus, people, users, begin to look for responses **elsewhere**. They began to look within real life, that life within which we have tried to accompany one another, using all those channels, itineraries, persons and institutions which we began to explore together and with which we tried to create exchanges.

Some people invented itineraries which were absolutely personal and new.

Others found themselves alone once again, with perhaps a more distinct awareness of what they wanted, of what it was their right to desire.

Passing through normality, has shown us all of its richness, but also its negative aspects.

It has shown us something which was elastic, changeable and expandable by means of a specific practice, precisely because it was nothing other than ideology, a false consciousness imposed and self-imposed.

Cino Ricci declared that he was more pleased with the inauguration of the "Califfo" than with that of the 'Costa Smeralda' Yachting Club, and acted accordingly.

Rehabilitation appears to us as being linked less and less to a place which is specifically therapeutic, and increasingly tied to **a practice of the intelligence of the real**.

It does not involve learning professional skills and social rules, which is a form of learning that measures the level of adaptation, but instead learning the uses of freedom.

'I've stopped drinking because it's a good thing for me to do now, and certainly not because drinking is harmful or because I cause problems'.

Or:

'Don't ask me to adapt, because the reasons for my lack of adaptation are, for me, real and true. But I am trying to change because this work, this group, these relationships and these battles which I must fight, give me more than they ask me to give up.'

At this point, the intrinsic limits of any rehabilitative therapy which is not a **practical construction of practicable spaces for the exercise of rights and self-negotiation** appeared to us more clearly. The intrinsic limits of any ergo-therapy, occupation therapy or centre of work adaptation. This limit does not consist in the place, repetition, misery and exploitation, but in its being a **fiction**, and in its being intimately perceived as such by the person involved, the person who is 'adapting'.

It is a fiction because it lacks goals, advantages and/or desire for advantages, exchange and/or the possibility of exchange. What is missing are **exactly** those things with respect to which people found themselves unable to act, or did not have the possibility of acting. And with respect to which one must know how to act, and be able to act.

Joseph Conrad, who was not a psychologist, but who understood people and their relationships with one another and with nature, once said:

'Ultimately, the problem is not how to heal oneself, but how to live.'

Look at the photos in the cd-rom!