



Mission Responsible: A Perspective from Sicily

Study visit in Sicily, Italy | 9 – 30 October, 2017

1. Introduction

Mission Responsible as a capacity building project is aiming at the establishment of quality standards for youth work through the exchange of experiences between 7 youth organizations from Greece, Italy, Senegal, Togo, India, Nepal and Vietnam. The study visit in Italy examined the challenges and experiences in the south of the country and specifically in the multicultural mosaic of Sicily.

The importance of this region in terms of youth work can be highlighted by the fact that almost 30% of all proposals towards the Italian National Agency stem from Sicily. Additionally the significance of Sicily regarding the scopes of the project in comparison to other regions of Italy can also be pinned down to the fact that it has a comparatively higher percentage of active associations.

Also another aspect of the Sicilian perspective is the relatively weaker ties of those youth work associations with the various municipalities in opposition to the rest of the country, which augments the challenges that the youth workers have to face on a daily basis. Although sometimes the predicaments of youth work may occasionally have overlapping characteristics throughout the world, Sicily maintains some uniqueness due to the enduring operations of the Mafia.

However, through the difficulties emanating from the omnipresence of the underworld in the social fabric of Sicily, at the same time opportunities have emerged that offer remarkable sustainable models of youth work and social entrepreneurship.

Nevertheless, the most important lesson that the Sicilian context offered is the realisation that best practices are not always about learning from the success stories of your colleagues, but also learning from their mistakes and their negative experiences.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research approach

In order to meet the aims and objectives of this study, the field research team members, constituted by Fausto Amico (Italy), Yagya Raj Aryal (Nepal), Linda Maria Vetrano (Italy) and Nicholas Rossis (Greece), have decided to use a rather mixed research method. The study primarily made use of quantitative research methods such as a questionnaire coupled with the empirical data, gathered from the primary research.

The overall empirical research strategy of the study visit allowed to the interviewers to obtain firsthand accounts from the respondents and -at a certain extent- permitted them to verify the validity of the responses. The structured questionnaire format was chosen as an approach to ensure that the most important aspects of the quality standards regarding youth work will be identified throughout the study visits of the entire project in order to provide linear, codifiable and comprehensive results from all the participating countries.

2.2 Sampling

A total of twenty one (21) respondents have been attracted in order to secure results which are representative and valid from the wider spectrum of activities and practices related to youth work, including in such manner interviewees from actual youth work organisations and associations, as well as policy-makers and entrepreneurs related with youth work in Sicily. The sample carefully selected to be representative of youth workers, policy makers and entrepreneurs of all ages from different nationalities –even though Italian respondents have a more prevalent presence-, gender and field of expertise. The questionnaire participants have been also operating in different areas and they were also from relatively different youth work programmes ranging, for example, from social entrepreneurship to underage refugee welcoming centers. Most questionnaires have been distributed by the researchers in the premises of each participating organisation, with only few exceptions, where it has been deemed better to be avoided in order to not disturb or distract the modus operandi of youth work activities conducted there.

2.3 Data collection

2.3.1 Questionnaire design

In order to explore the awareness about youth work in policy making and extract as much as possible feedback from the best youth work practices taking place in Sicily and at the same time ensuring that the results of the study visit can be comparable with the rest of the field research of Mission Responsible, the script of the questionnaire remained identical. However, the three different categories of the respondents, meaning: a) youth workers, b) policy-makers and c) representatives from various small and medium sized businesses, had a specific tailored made set of questions related to their field.

2.3.2 Reliability and Validity of Method

The structured format of the questionnaires allowed the researchers to approach any certain topic directly and additionally, the data they provide are easy to code and to interpret. Obviously, it was an imperative to make use of a standardized questionnaire, because all participants would have answered the same questions as this also increases the chance to produce valid and generalizable results. However, in order to enhance the data collection and processing in the latter stages of the research, the questionnaires have been practically used as a stepping stone to a more comprehensive understanding of the issues in question, as a second wave of impromptu follow-up questions that complemented and validated the information and figures gathered during the process.

Additionally, as part of the empirical research the team has also visited several organisations and ad hoc activities without necessarily including them in the sample of the questionnaire. Those observational visits in Trapani, Caltanisseta, Prestianni, as well as in the suburbs of Palermo offered additional validity to the situational analysis of the entire study visit due to the more holistic outlook on youth work.

2.3.3 Limitations of the research instruments

There was not a single interview conducted on an anonymous basis and this may have provided stipulations regarding the confidence of the answers. In order to overcome the general inability of the questionnaires to capture complex and abstract aspects, on occasion the researchers –as mentioned also further above- requested for more in-depth analytical insights, however, this often proved to be unattainable due to the limitations of the respondents knowledge, jurisdiction and sensitivity of the topic. The questions had to be very carefully selected and followed a particular order, to make sure that they were not misleading or biased. The contrary would have rendered the results of this study invalid. Additionally, the language barrier, despite the constant presence of team member with native speaking linguistic capacity, some of the themes related to youth work emerged as difficult to become clearly understood by the respondents. Thus, repetition and additional clarification of the same

question with different wording was integral part of all the interviews. This seemed to occur due to the still unclear overall perception of what really constitutes youth work, even among the very same people who exercise it on a daily basis.

Apparently there are many aspects of youth work which could not be captured in the format of the questionnaire, and thus have remained unexplored, such as the tangible methods of measuring the impact of youth work on the professional and personal level of the youth workers and the relevant stakeholders and beneficiaries, as well as the methods depicting the outcome and the effects upon the social web on the local level. As a result, several new questions have emerged but they remain as a topic of further research.

2.4 Data Analysis

As part of the quantitative data analysis, the results from the questionnaires were codified and analyzed manually, in order to produce coherent and linear results. The analysis over the answers attempted to identify distinct concepts and categories in the data, which will form the basic units of the conclusion. Also for the classification of the results, each question has been analysed separately and put in separate tables to produce the coding patterns characterised by similarity, difference, frequency, causation and positionality.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

This research has met the ethical standards set by the Mission Responsible project and all the participating organisations. The names of the participants in the survey have been kept and their questionnaires were used only for the purposes of this research. All of the participants were given all the necessary information about the aims of the project and have explicitly provided their consent to take part in the survey as well as in future relevant academic research. Although this research did not involve any participants known to be vulnerable, all the participants were free to withdraw from the survey at any time.

3. Youth Work In Sicily

Interestingly, despite the fact that the term “youth work” has earned a more widespread recognition as an umbrella term concerning social support, inclusion and welfare of the youth, it is also noticeable that the vast majority of the population still links it with child labour. Nevertheless, youth workers recognize that the Italian term “*laboro giovanile*”, even though it cannot be adequately and simply translated, youth work as a concept is increasingly emerging in the collective consciousness.

An additional problematic regarding terminology is the lop-sided understanding regarding the skills of the youth workers, as sometimes the respondents would exclusively refer on personal qualities and attributes of the youth workers, while others would solely refer to soft skills related to interpersonal interactions and very rarely on the vocational, managerial or professional expertise.

An astonishing aspect regarding the training of the youth workers is the fact that the overwhelming majority of them obtain their training in the “*strada*”, meaning in the street as well as by participating in relevant youth work projects. Despite the fact that the need for more youth workers with particular sets of skills is quite ubiquitous - especially due to the constant influx of refugees and underprivileged migrants-, training remains a matter of personal involvement in the field of youth. The beneficiaries, the target groups and the stakeholders may emerge as skilful youth workers from their respective communities by simply being drawn into youth work, meaning that there is not a horizontal institutionalised initiative in Sicily that deals with the preparation, the guidance and the edification of the actual youth workers.

Without being unique in the Sicilian context, youth workers also may be deemed those who possess the technical capacity to attract resources from various funding platforms and

facilitate the implementation of a particular project, as well as the people who do the actual work on the field as social support workers, trainers etc. Because of that fact, in several instances it has been observed that youth work involvement and being part of an association is considered as pretence for resource squander and misuse by particular elites and due to that perception frequently parts of the society may even adapt an apprehensive attitude towards it.

Even though measuring the social impact of youth work in Sicily is not the scope of this project, it would be unfair not to mention that youth work on a rather steady pace has noticeable positive results upon the Sicilian social web and it vastly contributes to the personal and professional development of the youth.

For example, in San Massimiliano (Il Genio di Palermo) with the use of the Abreu method as a social tool, they attempt to keep underprivileged children and adolescents out of crime or drugs. The Abreu method is an instrument for advancement of underprivileged youth through music and education that ultimately aims to community building. With the use of a closed network of sharing experiences the Abreu method evolves to adapt to the constantly changing social context in Palermo and the “in-house” training offers them a sustainable stream of youth workers, yet exclusively dependable on the local level accomplishments. Interestingly, according to the General Director of San Massimiliano, Nicole Oliveri, the implementation of an institutionalized version of the Abreu method in schools has completely failed, as well as a perspective that involves fees to deal with the issue of long-term participation. It can only properly function as a free social tool and even then, due to the religious background of the organisation and the fact that music is not perceived as vocational training for the youngsters, families and cultural differences more than often are the main obstacle to larger scale achievements

Another example stems from Mazzarino, in the south of Sicily, where the organisation of “I Girasoli” operates as a hub for hosting, supporting and integrating refugee families in the local level, as well as welcoming center for unaccompanied underage refugees from war-torn countries. A big component of youth work in Sicily is the re-use of farmland confiscated from the Mafia that aims to agricultural growth. According to the project manager Calogero Parisi, vocational training starts from being a “guest”, a “user” or an “operator” first and then as an “expert” you may be able to disseminate. In light of this approach many guests the last few years are being taught for example new crop techniques and obtain various new professional skills that allow them a swift integration into the social fabric of Sicily. However, according to Omar Susso from Gambia and Remo Camara from Senegal who both live and work in Mazzarino, a new aspect of youth work is fast emerging. As guests of I Girasoli both obtained all their youth work competences from fieldwork and now work as intercultural mediators. For all the guests of I Girasoli “listening” is the best skill a youth worker could have and that paves the way to the emergence of the “intercultural mediator” who may act as a facilitator for obtaining documents and translating as well as someone who upon arrival explains how things work in Sicily, due to the fact that the local actors show limited interest for welcoming the refugees. Unfortunately, the frequently horrifying experiences of the many refugees before or after their arrival at the first hosting country, on the one hand highlight the immeasurable importance of intercultural mediators, but on the other hand also point out that the current size of influx and the profound traumas experienced require far more skilled youth workers as many cannot cope with the pressure and the psychological impact.

From a different perspective, judging by the experiences of CEIPES, an organisation with international presence, despite the fact that they operate almost exclusively at urban level in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and parochial communities, the undying presence of the Mafia still inadvertently dictates the course of their activities, as CEIPES promotes youth empowerment by offering capacities on social and personal level. Even the spacious premises of the organisation, where much of their community development activities take place like cinema, theatre, puppetry exercises etc, used to belong to a convicted Mafia boss.

Despite the international character of CEIPES, according to Fulvio Grassadonio and Eddy Sanfilippo, the entirety of the training of their youth workers stems from SALTO Youth activities and tools and relevant experience is actually obtained by participation in various training courses that may occur around Europe. For this very reason, Grassadonio and Sanfilippo, also highlighted that there is a significant difference for all the youth work funded by European Union institutions and the youth work that actually takes place in the streets. In any case, the work of CEIPES, under the umbrella term of social inclusion has shown special care for the local communities as well as for the vocational training of refugees and it has significantly promoted the concept of volunteering that also led to the establishment and oversight of projects that entail repairing furniture with disabled children up to the development of music software.

However, one of the most important elements of youth work in Sicily is its contribution to the slowly shifting attitudes not only towards different cultures, but also towards organised crime. Emerging from the winds of change after the assassinations of the renowned judges Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino in the early 90s, a grassroots organisation was born out of need to stop racketeering. As after 2004, the culture of "*omerta*" was thinning out and people started reporting incidents of racketeering to the police, the realisation that buying from businesses that pay protection money to the Mafia is like actively supporting the underworld, paved the way to the creation of network of businesses that publicly declared that they denounce this practice and that will not pay protection money to the Mafia. The primary aim of this organisation is to say goodbye (*addio*) to racketeering (*pizzo*), thus the name Addiopizzo. The emergence of a campaign for "*consumo critico*", meaning for critical consumers raised awareness and prompted citizens to purchase commodities from businesses that do not pay the "*pizzo*", meaning protection money. It is estimated that the Mafia extorts more than 160 million euros per year from small and medium sized businesses (SMEs) in the Palermo region alone, while the whole of Sicily is supposed to be paying 10 times that figure, as around 80% of Sicilian businesses still pay up a *pizzo*.

The initial campaign resulted in more than 3500 citizens declaring their willingness to support the businesses who wished to stop being part of this practice. This was necessary for the business owners, as they needed to realise that there is a pool of people willing to support them. After that, 100 businesses declared their intentions. This eventually led to the creation of a catalogue with more than 1000 SMEs. Addiopizzo's lawyers are now part of many trials representing victims and that has offered them privileged access to many revealing legal documents and it opened a non-formal dialogue with various judges and the police. The creation of transparent network with the help of volunteers has been established as tool that prompts citizens to report when a business falsely declares its unwillingness to pay up the *pizzo*.

The major victory in shifting the public opinion was the fact that paying up protection money and being extorted is not a crime and as a result people were sympathetic with the victims and it highlighted the responsibility of the citizens. Now the victims are stigmatized, as an alternative exists and more and more businessmen come out in the open. Surveillance tapes have recently revealed that the Mafia has difficulty to approach SMEs belonging to Addiopizzo and as an added result youth workers now promote the message of responsibility in schools, something that also boosted participation. As Addiopizzo expanded its operations outside of Palermo and some owners attempted to join the network, many local communities actively obstructed the police from visiting the establishments (like in the case of bar owner Giorgio Simeca in Caccamo) to manifest their support to the Mafia. Addiopizzo supported those businesses by creating a network of young people who as clients visited the establishments at least every Saturday until normalization has been achieved and to this day most of those businesses still thrive. It is rather interesting for someone to walk around Palermo and try to count how many shops, bars and other businesses bear the sticker of Addiopizzo on their doors.

4. Policy-making in the field of Youth

Italy has a dedicated youth policy for domestic and international projects and activities via the Servizio Civile Nazionale with constantly increasing admission requests especially after 2000, but funding -oddly enough- at the same time has been dramatically diminished from almost 300 million euros per year in 2008 to less than 70 million in the recent years.

The policy-makers from Sicily who have participated in the interviews interestingly hold various opinions even regarding the very existence of national programmes in the field of youth. According to the elected representatives that we interviewed, in regional and local level there is no proper structure or strategy and the links between municipalities and associations often are unclear and capricious due to partisan differences and interests, as Councilwoman Vitalba Larussa from Trabia mentioned.

The awareness of the local political actors regarding the needs and the wishes of the youth are often remarkably out of touch and many policy makers are also unaware of most of the funding options available to them. Channels of communication also according to the statements tend to be problematic as fights, complaints and unrealistic demands, often lead to total disillusionment. The respondents mentioned that in other municipalities consulting with the citizens can be more successful or simply more peaceful, however the result is often the same.

The consolidation of the policy-makers' personal views may be enhanced by the frequently disappointing results of their limited and unstructured efforts which unsurprisingly could lead to the complete disinterest of the youth towards those initiatives. However, it has been also observed that national policies may not be in line with the local needs. Interestingly though, the "needs" in question may not be the actual local requests but the desires of the local representatives according to the respective political and ideological manifesto of their party. As Termini Imerese Vice-Mayor Licia Fullone added on the matter "on occasion there are no competences on municipal level, as for example, suddenly a dentist is required to act as social worker".

In any case, due to the lack of structure in policy-making, according to Councilwoman Anna Amaroso from Termini Imerese their policies respond only to emergencies and short-term needs, while long-term implementation of policies is virtually non-existent due to the temporariness of the local representatives. This situation may lead, as Fabio Malatia also from Termini Imerese mentioned, to the frustration of the officials as on the one hand they cannot confront national policies and on the other hand they cannot materialise their ideas due to the lack of funding.

For this reason all of the policy-makers without exception recognised the importance of the various local associations as in essence they fill the gaps in youth work and offer programmes and actions that the municipalities cannot. However, the lack of infrastructure outside of the main cities of Sicily may render implementation of youth work -even from private initiatives- problematic as in some areas there is even lack of suitable buildings to host activities.

Whatever the case may be, local governments tend to be very accommodating to the associations who have the capacity to tangibly attract resources that may lead to growth and development like in fishing tourism. But youth work and social development do not always offer such easily measurable and quantifiable opportunities to the local context and it is much harder for many elected policy-makers to support initiatives they cannot utilize politically.

The major issue for most of the policy-makers is to make people be more involved and the realistic identification of needs on the local level, but this obviously can be strongly contested. Additionally, they also point-out that the lack of meritocracy and sometimes political corruption does not allow significant improvement in youth work and it takes time to present progress in the community.

5. Social Entrepreneurship and the Role of Small and Medium Sized Businesses

While there is no firm definition on social entrepreneurship it is widely accepted that socially-oriented entrepreneurs complement national and European activities and initiatives throughout Italy and provide vocational training to young people as well as lifelong learning. Organisations like Promimpresa literally sell competences while they develop professional skills as well as soft skills. While they provide recognised public qualifications –as it is accredited with the Ministry of Development and Health- in the medical and the industrial sector, the situation in Italy at the moment manifests that the youth still is in absolute need for advanced linguistic capacity and computer skills. Promimpresa basically operates as job agency as it connects job seekers with potential employers via internships and stage programmes, but also provides tailor made training courses to businesses, while at the same time it attracts funds from the European Union for various projects for formal and non-formal education activities. In a way, Promimpresa complements youth work efforts and initiatives as it also acts as a host for mobility programmes like the Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs and it maintains professional ties with the University of Palermo, Bologna and Catania among others.

On the other hand organisations like Libera operate from a completely different perspective as at the same time they promote social entrepreneurship but also call for social change. Interestingly, Libera, which is practically an umbrella organisation for over 1600 associations and co-ops has successfully campaigned for the social re-use of land confiscated by the Mafia. Even though the Anti-Mafia law was in the making since the 60s, it was only in 1996 that it got the approval from the Italian Parliament and in 2014 the EU Parliament and the Council approved a Directive on freezing and confiscation of crime proceeds in the European Union, underlining the priority of a more effective identification, confiscation and re-use of criminal assets. Libera puts pressure on further amendments of the law and new additions have taken place only recently, in October 2017.

Libera in Sicily, apart from educational programmers and international projects related to reducing trafficking, corruption and all illegal activities, also sells products from the confiscated lands from the Mafia like wine, olive oil and honey and it brands those products with the names of important politicians, judges and activists, who have been assassinated by the Mafia. The efforts of Libera has been expanding abroad as the activities of the Mafia are not local anymore and Libera tries to export its methodologies and implement the law of confiscation and social re-use to other countries too. The utilization of Mafia property, according to Carmelo Pollichino, promotes active citizenship and offers alternatives other than the life of crime to local communities. As Pollichino characteristically mentioned “everyone wants to eat and have a better life” and the social cooperatives under Libera create a new option for many youngsters by also offering to them both technical and social skills. From the point of view of Libera associates, corruption limits opportunities and by re-utilising the Mafia land and selling those products to the world has also made possible to even talk about the Mafia as several years ago it would be inconceivable to openly talk about it.

Also Libera has a dedicated department to youth work and invests most of its resources to prevent youth criminality with non-formal education at underprivileged neighbourhoods throughout Italy. Even though in the recent years criticism over the elitist practices of Libera

has been intensified, the pressure they applied to the state for changing legislature and their capacity to promote a vastly successful model of social entrepreneurship cannot be underestimated.

6. Wrapping up of the study visit

The culmination of the study visit materialised in the form of a conference called “*I Giovani e il mondo: opportunità dai programmi Europee*” (Young people and the World: Opportunities from European programmes). The local event took place in Museo Civico of Termini Imerese, which was kindly booked by the municipality exclusively for the team of Mission Responsible project and hosted by Vice-Mayor Licia Fullone. After a short presentation at the local TV station, the event was broadcasted live, where Fausto Amico, Alessandro Melillo, Nicholas Rossis and Yagya Aryal shared their experiences from Erasmus+ programmes with young as well as senior citizens of Termini Imerese in an interactive discussion, which highlighted to the local community and policy makers the options and opportunities provided through various European programmes such as the Erasmus+.

Video of the conference:

- <https://www.facebook.com/himeraweb.it/videos/142139753094552/>

Mission Responsible in the local news:

- <http://himeraweb.it/2017/10/20/termini-imerese-un-convegno-sul-tema-giovani-mondo-opportunita-dai-programmi-europei/>
- <http://himeraweb.it/2017/10/27/termini-imerese-due-prestigiosi-ospiti-citta-dalla-grecia-dal-nepal-la-conferenza-giovani-mondo-del-28-ottobre/>

INDEX 1.

Mission Responsible Interviews		
Youth Workers		
Name	Organisation	Age
Nicole Oliveri	San Massimiliano – Il Genio di Palermo	36
Luiza Costa	Per Espempio (Balaro, Palermo)	32
Calogero Santoro	I Girasoli (Mazzarino)	44
Omar Susso (Gambia)	I Girasoli (Mazzarino)	28
Remo Camara (Senegal)	I Girasoli (Mazzarino)	20
Dario Ferante	Danilo Dolci - CESIE (Palermo)	45
Fulvio Grassadonio	CEIPES (Palermo)	29
Eddy San Filippo	CEIPES (Palermo)	35
Danielle Maranano	Addiopizzo	32
?	HRYO	
Policy-Makers		
Vitalba Larussa	Youth and Sports Councilwoman (Trabia)	
Francesco Grunta	Mayor (Termini Imerese)	
Licia Fullone	Vice-Mayor (Ter.Im.)	
Clorinda Di Franco	Social Policies Councilwoman (Ter.Im.)	
Rosa Lo Bianco	Social Policies Councilwoman (Ter.Im.)	
Anna Amaroso	Social Policies Councilwoman (Ter.Im.)	
Fabio Malatia	Social Worker (Ter.Im.)	
Crocifissa Vailardi	Cultural Affairs Councilwoman (Ter.Im.)	
Sebastiano Piraino	General Secretary (Ter.Im.)	
SMEs		
Cataldo Riggi	Promimpresa	53
Carmelo Pollichino	Libera	36
?	Molti Volti	

INDEX 2.

Participating Organisations	
San Mamiliano- Ass. Talità kum http://www.onlustalitakum.it/	Project of social inclusion, economic and cultural growth
Per Esempio Onlus http://peresempionlus.org/en/	NGO involved in youth mobility, social inclusion and networking
I Girasoli - Mazzarino https://www.facebook.com/girasolionlus	Association involved in helping refugees
CEIPES http://ceipes.org/	International no profit organisation in the area of human rights and multiculturality
Promimpresa http://www.promimpresa.it/it/ https://www.facebook.com/PromimpresaPalermo/?ref=br_rs	Firm providing training courses in different fields
Addiopizzo http://www.addiopizzo.org/index.php/who-we-are/	Independent organisation born to fight the phenomenon of racket and protection money
HRYO http://www.hryo.org/en/	Organisation operating in human rights, multiculturality and exchange
Libera http://www.libera.it	Cooperative engaged in civil courage