



Recovery and Social Integration in Drug Policy

*by Elisa Rubini**

San Patrignano has been working in the field of drug rehabilitation for almost 40 years. It started as a private response to the drug epidemic of the late 70s, and gradually became a place and home of hope for many youngsters and adults who want to get rid of their addiction. The path to recovery initiates with individual choices, with people asking for help. Since 1978 the community has welcomed more than 25.000 individuals suffering from drug addiction without any religious, ideological or social discrimination and completely free of charge. The drug rehabilitation programme of San Patrignano is drug-free, long term and residential. Our approach is tailored on individuals, providing a place and space for their personal and professional growth building a drug-free life and assisting also in the social reinsertion upon completion of the programme. We invest in education and job training as viable ways to self-support the residents in their future life as productive members of society.

In the San Patrignano community people with special needs are also hosted. Among them there are minors, pregnant women and mothers with kids. Special housings have been created for them to be able to better respond to their needs. In accordance with Italian drug laws, San Patrignano also welcomes offenders for an alternative setting to prison, offering a real option for treatment, recovery and social integration, providing support, education, job trainings and life skills. Since its early beginnings, San Patrignano has been learning from its own experience, constantly improving the rehabilitation programme, making it fit for purpose and strengthening the community base and peer-to-peer approach, which are the pillars of our drug-free rehabilitation methodology.

Based on the San Patrignano experience at the grass root level, we also participate at international events and fora, sharing our views on recovery. We were among the founders of the Recovered Users Network, RUN, promoting the concept of recovery and social integration, and advocating for international drug policies that take into consideration the voices and the will of drug users who want to put an end to their dependence.

As part of our international commitment we regularly attend the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in Vienna and we have been collaborating with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). In this context, we familiarized ourselves with the drug situation in the Americas and we got to know the concept of shared responsibility and the alternative development projects implemented by UNODC and Members States in drug producing



countries around the world.

Such alternative development projects, for instance in Peru and Colombia, are focused on providing sustainable livelihoods to the farmer of illicit cultivations, to help them in the transition to licit economy. It is an admirable and necessary effort to help the communities tackling the real causes that lead to the drug production and trafficking and marketing, such as lack of opportunities, lower level of education and poverty. It has been highlighted that, in order for these projects to continue, international cooperation is crucial, as well as an embedded self-sustainable mechanism that links the production to the local and international markets, securing long-term success and economic return for the communities.

Although, historically, in drug policies, the supply and demand sides have been handled as separate issues, they are actually two complementing sides of the drug problem. Furthermore, especially in the Latin American context, the drug problem has acquired many facets, embracing crosscutting issues such as drug trafficking, crime related to drug abuse, violence and recently also drug consumption. The so-called producing countries, are gradually realizing that drug consumption is increasing within their own borders and starting to be concerned about the health and social consequences of addiction and the best way to handle them.

We believe that the close cooperation between Latin America and Europe would be truly beneficial, especially in the areas of treatment and rehabilitation. As San Patrignano, we are answering to the numerous calls for help, offering counseling to those who are interested in our model, who want to get an insider view on recovery and how to handle it. This is the reason why we created the international workshop, providing hands on experience on the daily life and functioning of the community, combining it with lectures on the model and challenges San Patrignano has experienced. We believe that an approach based on the community life, inspired by the model of an enlarged family, could very well work and be adapted to the Latin American culture.

Moreover, the idea of self-sustainability as well as the life and job skills learning model, which are also at the core of San Patrignano, could be useful for both, recovering addicts, and for illegal farmers wanting to quit crops growing and transitioning to the licit economy. Especially in Latin American countries, it could make sense to take the community approach to the next level and create an all-around service taking care of the recovering addicts and of the illicit farmers, creating integrated responses for the entire communities and having on-site sustainable livelihoods and treatment projects, empowering individuals and their families in the transition. In this way, the community-



based approach could respond to broader social needs, not just to drug addiction.

As our founder Vincenzo Muccioli, used to say “*San Patrignano is A way, not THE way*”. We believe that the true inspirational journey starts and ends with individuals, with their passion, their ideas and we are just nurturing their talents and providing opportunities, as a family, with LOVE.

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Ms. Rubini holds a Master degree in Philosophy from the Catholic University of Milan (2003), a Master in International Relations from the Vienna Diplomatic Academy (2006), an Executive International Master in Communications and Strategies of Intervention in Drug Addiction, Prevention, Enforcement and Social Integration from IULM University of Milan (2008), and a Post Graduate Degree in Philosophical Counseling from Gesellschaft für Philosophische Praxis e.V. Dr. Gerd Achenbach, Cologne (2011). Since March 2011 Elisa is Adjunct Member of the American Philosophical Practitioner Association (APPA). Visit the official website of San Patrignano Foundation: <http://www.sanpatrignano.org/en>

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