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# Public Private Interfaces The Robert Tassano Consortium of Social Cooperatives in Italy

An Economy of Communion Business  
New Humanity  
Focolare Movement



# Robert Tassano Consortium Group



**ROBERTO TASSANO**  
Gruppo di Imprese Cooperative

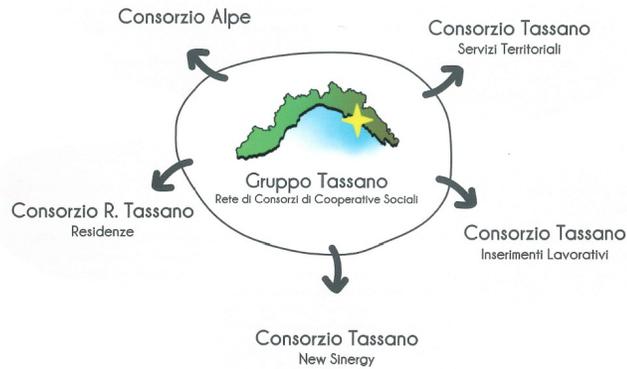


Tassano Consortium Group is located near Genoa, Italy

- The group consists of 5 sub-consortia and 33 cooperatives (2016 data)



# How the Tassano Consortium Began



- In 1989, Giacomo and Piero, who operated an appliance repair business followed a long-held dream to do more about the social problems facing their community.
- They invited 26 members of New Humanity to join them as partners in forming the Robert Tassano Cooperative and they invested \$2,000 as seed money.
- They got their first contract to deliver meals to 5 hospitals and scrambled to make it work.
- Soon, they won a contract to manage a nursing home. Other contracts quickly followed.

# The Inspiration for Starting a Social Enterprise



- The entrepreneurs of Tassano Consortium are members of New Humanity which takes its inspiration from the spirituality of the Focolare Movement.
- The Focolare is an interfaith movement with the goal of fostering unity and fraternity among all people, so that all people may become as one.
- Chiara Lubich founded the Focolare in 1943.
- 800 businesses in 55 countries apply these principles as part of New Humanity's Economy of Communion Project. They use 1/3 of their profits to assist people in vulnerable situations and 1/3 to develop and spread the E<sub>4</sub>C Project.

# 1991 Law on Social Cooperatives Helped Tassano Grow

In 1991, Italy passed a law (381/1991) in support of Social Cooperatives.

The law reoriented the purpose of the co-operative from mutual benefit for members to primary benefit to the local community...<sup>1</sup>

“to pursue the general interest of the community in the human promotion and social integration of citizens”. (l.381)

This law recognized and supported social cooperatives like Tassano and stimulated further growth thru financial incentives.

Tassano Consortium continued growing at a rate of 70% per year.

<sup>1</sup> Excerpted from Wilda M. Vanek. Italian Social Cooperatives. ©2001 GEO, 177 Kiles Road, Stillwater PA 17878, USA.

# 1991 Law Defined Type A and Type B Social Cooperatives

- *Type A: offering “social services, i.e., health care, elder care, and education;*
- *Type B: Creating employment for certain vulnerable groups: physically or mentally handicapped, psychiatric patients, drug addicts, alcoholics, youth from troubled families,” and prisoners in work-release programs.*<sup>2</sup>

## **Tassano Employee Population – 2016:**

- Social Service Providers in 19 Type A Co-ops.: 790
- Non-Vulnerable Employees in 14 Type B Co-ops.: 172
- Vulnerable Employees in Type B Co-ops. (Type B ratio = 91%): 156
- Total Employees: 1118

# Growth of Social Cooperatives 1986 to 2005

- A 1986 survey identified 500 social cooperatives serving 35,000 people.
- By 1996, Italy had 3,000 active social cooperatives with 100,000 members serving 400,000 people.
- In 1996, social cooperatives comprised 4 percent of the broader Italian cooperative sector, and provided employment to 10 percent of persons in the cooperative sector.<sup>3</sup>
- A 2005 study reported 7,300 social cooperatives employing 244,000 members.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Wilda M. Vanek. Italian Social Cooperatives. ©2001 GEO, 177 Kiles Road, Stillwater PA 17878, USA.

<sup>4</sup> Carlo Borzaga, Giulia Galera and Flaviano Zandonai. Social Enterprise in Europe: Recent Trends and Developments. Jacques DEFOURNY and Marthe NYSENS (eds.). European Research Network. Work Project 08/01.

# Italy Expands the Law on Social Enterprise (118/2005)

In 2005, Italy revised the law on social enterprise and identified new fields of business activity called fields of social utility:

- a) welfare; b) health; c) welfare-health;
- d) education, instruction and professional training;
- e) environmental and ecosystem protection;
- f) development and cultural heritage;
- g) social tourism;
- h) academic and post-academic education;
- i) research activities and delivery of cultural services;
- j) vocational training; and
- k) support for social enterprises.

In addition to the categories provided for by law 381/91, the long-term unemployed are also covered.

# Tassano Creates Employment for Vulnerable Persons



- Tassano prepares vulnerable workers for private sector jobs.
- Workers can continue working within the consortium as long as they want.
- If a new job does not work out, they can always come back to work within the consortium until another opportunity arises.

# Rationale for the Robert Tassano Social Cooperatives



- Rationale: A productive job in a protected, loving environment helps to restore self-confidence to persons who have been marginalized from society.
- Social cooperatives save money for the government by reducing the demand for the public services.
- Entrepreneurs gain personal satisfaction by creating a culture of giving vs. having.

# Support Provided by Local and Regional Governments



Assembly Work



Maintaining the Environment

- The social service providers of the Liguria and Genoa regions have realized the social value of this work and of the costs that they avoid by supporting it.
- They created a foundation to help fund the programs of Tassano Consortium.
- The foundation provides funds for psychological counseling and job placement assistance.

# Public – Private Cooperation Benefits to Society



Drug Rehab Center

- Public institutions provide only the services that the civil society cannot organize or sustain.
- The public private partnerships promote social cohesion, an objective of the government
- Cooperatives often carry out the work more economically than the government agencies.

# Social Cooperatives Receive Special Consideration from Larger Business Enterprises



- Large local businesses subcontract simple assembly work to the social cooperatives.
- For example, one cooperative assembles life jackets for various cruise ships built in the Ligurian region.
- Other cooperatives assemble spear guns and deep diving suits.

# Fishing Together Brings Lasting Change



- “Teaching people to fish” does not necessarily teach the value of work or a work ethic.
- Fishing together and building relationships of reciprocity and fraternity has more lasting results.
- At Tassano, workers participate in the decisions and in their implementation and this helps to build a sense of family.
- Tassano has built an atmosphere of fraternity with the workers, and with colleagues in government, business, the community, and with the managers.

# Services Offered by Tassano Consortium



Rehab Center for the Elderly



School meals

- Tassano manages 16 locations for the elderly or psychiatric patients
  - Over 700 beds managed.
- Cooperatives for education, a printing house, and one civil works cooperative.
- Type B cooperatives emphasize the development of human potential before concerns about productivity.

# Statistics

- 350 vulnerable persons placed in jobs over 10 years
- 156 vulnerable employees (48%) in 14 Type B cooperatives
- 25 staff members: managers, psychologists and doctors, professional teachers, to manage a complex social mix of workers: ex-prisoners, former drug addicts, physically and mentally disabled, elderly, ordinary unemployed people, all working side by side.
- The Consortium had revenues of 25 million € (\$30 million) in 2016.
- Any financial deficit in the social programs is covered by contributions from the businesses of the consortium or from government sources

## Conclusion

As with other Economy of Communion Businesses around the world, the entrepreneurs of the Tassano Consortium seek to build relationships of fraternity and reciprocity with all whom they meet in the course of carrying out their business.

The entrepreneurs of Tassano Consortium have found that partnering with state-run institutions has helped them to contribute towards a more united world for the benefit of the people in their community, particularly the most vulnerable among them.

Cooperation between Italian social cooperatives and local and regional governments in Italy provide a model worth studying for those interesting in strengthening public private partnerships elsewhere.