

Synthesis of

# The Community Seen from the Bottom

## Children at San Patrignano

by

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*This synthesis of the research does not pretend to be comprehensive, but merely intends to provide general (and inevitably brief) indications on the primary results attained by the research. To fully understand these results, it is recommended that one read the unabridged version. No conclusions drawn from the results of this research based exclusively on this synthesis can be considered legitimate.*

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## **1. The study: subject, aims and methods**

This study, conducted in the San Patrignano drug rehabilitation community, examined the condition of minors born to couples living in the community. At the time of the study, 150 minors lived at San Patrignano, a substantial sample of which was involved in the study.

San Patrignano provides medical, educational and recreational services and structures for minors. A large group of male and female workers dedicate their efforts to the socialization of these minors. Children between 40 days and 5 years of age attend the community's on-site nursery school while their parents work. Children attending the nearby state-run nursery school are also accommodated in the community's nursery every evening from the time of their return until their parents finish work, and during holidays. During the school year, children attend after-school study sessions, and participate in extracurricular activities at the gymnasium, theatre, outdoor swimming pool, riding ground, outdoor areas and outside the community. Educational, recreational, cultural and sports activities are included, with workshops as well in summer. For primary-school children, educational activities last from 3:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. followed by organized individual activities (ballet, football, music etc.), group activities, indoor and outdoor games, and recreation in the theatre (films, cartoons, documentaries) until 6:30 p.m. Children attending middle school receive help with homework and study from 3:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. Secondary school students receive individual lessons from teachers, take part in athletic activities and workshops with adults, and often leave the community to meet with friends.

Our study attempted to assess the quality of socialization of these minors. To this end the following were carried out and analysed: a) 39 interviews with couples and 69 individual questionnaires to families; b) 21 interviews with internal workers and external teachers, 15 individual and 6 in groups; c) 5 individual interviews with adolescents; d) 3 group interviews with preadolescents and children at after-school activities; e) 60 hours of video-observation at the community's nursery school, in external nursery schools (for comparative purposes), in the state nursery school, in after-school activities; f) 36 school essays by minors-between 8 and 13 years (as well as those of their classmates).

## **2. Condition of the children before entering the community**

Many minors living at San Patrignano have lived with drug-addicted parents. Many couples which were formed before entering the community were characterized by the drug addiction of both partners. These relationships were characterized by a their lack of basis in reality and by a kind of drugged affectivity. This created a form of co-dependency- a structure of expectations in which one partner becomes dependent on the dependence of the other. Each partner simultaneously sustains the other's dependence, and is himself dependent on this dependence. A co-dependent relationship is

based on a form of communication which entails a reciprocal obligation, to which both partners are bound.

Each partner, therefore, depends on the other's dependency. The relationship becomes the object of dependence and becomes a heroin-surrogate, which acts as a support for the relationship. At the same time, the relationship of co-dependency serves to sustain the drug addiction. A vicious circle is thus created between the co-dependent relationship and the drug addiction, in which one sustains the other.

Love is purely an illusion, because all communication becomes solely an instrument for the maintenance of the addiction, and what is created is not a reciprocal confirmation of the persons but a reciprocal confirmation of the addiction. Communication is based on reciprocal co-dependency and not love. The drug sustains not love, but co-dependency. This simulation of love gives a sense of continuity and support to the couple: the drug is a catalyst for the simulation, and the simulation creates the illusion of personal gratification.

In cases in which only one partner (the man) is drug-addicted, an unequal co-dependency is created. In these cases, the man depends on a substance and the woman is dependent on his dependence to drugs. The woman helps the man, and by doing so fosters the dependency. The woman's involvement permits the construction of co-dependency and the continuation of the man's dependence. In these cases, there is also the risk that the woman becomes subsequently addicted to heroin.

When the honeymoon with heroin ends, the illusion of love also collapses. The heroin eventually succeeds in becoming a surrogate for communication, which is reduced to that which is necessary to procure the drug or to cope with daily life and its problems. All stories of co-dependency end in the crisis of communication, determined by the devastating effect of heroin.

The birth of children to co-dependent couples presents three fundamental characteristics: a) a reversal of the usual situation, through which the parents expect to be saved by their children, instead of being their protectors; b) a tautological orientation to the internal problems of the couple; c) incapacity to adopt an orientation towards the child as a person.

The structure of co-dependency creates the expectation that the birth of a child will be an event of regeneration. It seems to offer new lifeblood for the simulation of love. The child is interpreted as an instrument of change, a chance to stop using heroin. Salvation and change are expected from the children. The child however turns out to be nothing but an instrument that reinforces the co-dependency, and its presence pushes co-dependency in the direction of inequality, subjecting the woman to the bond of maternal responsibility. In couples with unequal co-dependency, it is the woman who wants the birth of the child, in an attempt to restructure the relationship. The man generally refuses it. The attempt however backfires on the woman, making her dependant on the child.

The presence of the child becomes an ulterior element of crisis in the co-dependency, making a substantial impact on parental communication, which takes three distinct forms: ambivalence, feigned commitment and silence (in the form of abandonment). Ambivalence characterizes couples incapable of coping with their children. The mother, although always physically present, is psychically absent either due to her state of intoxication, or to her complete apathy. The father, often absent,

assumes a more affectionate attitude. Feigned commitment is dictated by the sense of guilt and the incapacity to contribute towards intensity, and the child is filled with superficial attention intended to compensate for the lack of affection from the parents. Silence sets in when the couple, overcome by heroin, abandon the child to its destiny. It also however becomes internal to an ambivalent structure characterized by the constant attempt to reactivate the relationship.

Briefly, a kind of socialization is produced, that oscillates between silence and emotional dependency: a) the presence of the parents renders the children dependent on their parents' affection; b) the absence of the parents concretizes silence and abandonment. This ambivalence favours the construction of emotional fragility in the child, who becomes afraid every time a choice must be made. In addition, from the moment in which they are able to make comparisons, children socialized towards ambivalence feel abandoned, at their own mercy, and socially impotent.

### **3. Families in the community**

When the codependent relationship finally breaks down, silence takes over, and this cannot be remedied by giving the child to its grandparents, to other families or to protective services. The grandparents become the object of relational games with the co-dependent couple, in which they involve the grandchild. Other families or other institutions are unable to replace the family of origin, because ambivalence has made the child completely dependant on the parent's affection. Even in cases of unequal co-dependency, the non-addicted mother is tied to her partner and cannot cope with her child by herself. An alternative course of action consists in constructing a new type of family communication under different conditions, substituting real love for co-dependency as part of an attempt to rebuild families on the basis of parental love. This is what the community of San Patrignano tries to do, using co-dependency as the starting point for the process. Bearing in mind the risk of co-dependency, initially the community keeps the partners separated for an indeterminate period, to allow the basis for a new form of communication to be constructed. Each individual is invited to follow his or her own course in constructing a personal independence, before being able to take part in intimate interpersonal communication founded on love. The period of separation serves as both a period of individual socialization (which fosters personal independence) and as a time in which a system of communication may be rebuilt. Looking at it from this second perspective, the process is a test for the capacity of self-transformation from co-dependency to love. Naturally, separation also involves a degree of risk for the couple's communication. In fact, in the reunification phase there are frequently conflicts or difficulties in communication. The greatest risks come from discrepancies in the process of self-socialization, as one partner may need more time in which to change and mature. In couples characterized by unequal co-dependency, there can sometimes be a period of separation in which the woman leaves the community. In these cases, the difficulties become even more evident. The successful reunification of the couple is facilitated by their new life together, in their own home. This creates a calming effect, due to the routine typical of settled and established families, which

offers continuity for interpersonal communication. This success becomes apparent in a routine of family tranquillity - not passionate but stable, not without its problems, but nevertheless capable of creating the conditions to overcome them. The factor which provides fundamental support for the development of this love is an personal commitment to the roles within the community. Making a personal commitment to take on a helping role deeply involves the person, helping him/her withstand the demands which being part of a couple entails. It allows both the importance of the person as an individual to be emphasized and the intimacy's impact to be softened. It is probably true that at the base of this all-encompassing commitment lies a situation of limited personal independence, in which an exclusive, intimate relationship would be difficult to handle.

This identification in both a specific role and as an individual, although not completely without its problems, becomes a considerable support for the couple's intimacy. Involvement in a helping role, however, also creates collateral problems - different according to gender. Men suffer more often from the disenchantment of women for love, while women suffer more often for the attachment of men to the community.

New couples are also formed at San Patrignano. In these cases the problem is not related to a passage from co-dependency to authentic love, but to avoiding co-dependency. These couples are also sustained with an involvement in individual roles, which in these cases are particularly solid.

Briefly, the couples analysed present: a) a moderated form of intimacy; b) consequent prudence in personal self-revelation; c) a low level of open conflict; d) a low level of internal asymmetry; e) a certain frequency of refusal. On the whole, couples living at San Patrignano show neither less nor greater difficulty in communicating than couples formed in the 'outside world'. The recourse to support in involvement in a determined role creates a reduction in the intensity of love, but also opportunities for greater duration. Reduced intimacy is the price to pay for a more stable relationship.

Children are often a decisive factor in a couple's reconstruction. In fact, the children are often object of a form of love that is more intense than that which links the adult partners. The community also tries to promote parental love, in which the child has the role of an individual protected by the parents on its road to personal independence. Attempts are made to prevent ambivalence between mother and child, simultaneously facilitating the welfare of the child and the rehabilitation of the mother.

The situation of children which have been separated from their parents for a long time or accustomed to ambivalence is particularly difficult to manage. Often a change in conditions outside community can cause behavioural problems in the children. This can endanger the mother's recovery, seeing as she generally has custody of the child. In fact when the couple is separated (in the beginning), the father does not live with the child. He can see the child, but is rarely involved in a significant way in its care. This division of parental roles can create problems, catalysing a more affectionate and playful communication with the father and a more run-of-the-mill and, paradoxically, impersonal communication with the mother.

The conditions favourable for the construction of intimacy between parents and children can be divided into four types: a) very early arrival of the child, without a history of problems before

entering the community; b) arrival at a preadolescent age, sustained by a previous construction of a sense of belonging to the family; c) the absence of prolonged absences in the past, in combination with the presence of an adequate presence in the present; d) the habit of broader socialization.

These four conditions represent four catalysts for the child's personalization.

Children born in the community obviously have no problems linked to their arrival, and do not risk a relationship of co-dependency with the parents, even though the structure of love within the couple is not always satisfactory. The parents adopt a primary orientation towards the child as a person, despite limits and uncertainties, and respect the importance of affective intensity in their communication. Only on a few occasions does a degree of ambivalence develop. Nevertheless, the results of personalization are less doubtful than those present in the families of former co-dependents.

In overall terms, problems with parental communication are not common. Silence is infrequent, and only a moderate level of ambivalence is present in the parental relationship.

Children also seem to be generally free of problems. With regard to aspects like participation in communication, the behaviour of parents, conflict, freedom of expression, help, a sentiment of comprehension and love, a sense of tranquillity and the sense of the family, primary school children who live at San Patrignano do not show difficulties greater than those of their peers attending the same school. Problems were more widespread among the preadolescents, but when the study was carried out there were only eleven of them, almost all of which had recently arrived in the community, and all of which had a quite difficult past. Taking into account their histories, these preadolescents had relatively few problems. Family socialization inside the community was relatively problem-free for the adolescents, characterized by a positive vision of the family. Communication emerged as being positive and affective, and the adolescents have constructed a satisfactory combination of a strong and stable sense of the family and a sense of personal independence, indicating successful resocialization.

Considering the results of our study, we can conclude that the conditions of family socialization produced in the community generally foster personal independence. However, as is obvious in any situation, success is not automatically guaranteed. Bearing in mind the general difficulties of parenting in modern society, the families present at San Patrignano do not present particularly difficult situations. The community's success depends on the construction of the person as a means of communication, both in the parents and in the children. The community promotes the children's welfare indirectly by promoting interpersonal communication within the family. This occurs through the combination, in the protected context of the community, of person and role, which has a twofold effect: a) it limits the risks of the return of co-dependency, or of flight from intensity; b) it introduces a sense of personal independence, bolstered by responsibilities in the family and at work, which call for great personal involvement.

#### **4. The action of community**

At the nursery school and in after-school activities for the primary-school children, the fundamental form of communication is testimony, (in the form of an interactive relationship between the educator and the child) and the promotion of peer socialization. Testimony consists in a form of communication in which the educator, while maintaining her role, presents herself primarily as a unique and specific individual, and orients herself towards the child as a unique and specific individual. Promotion consists in stimulating interpersonal communication and the communication of enjoyment between peers. The common element in 'testimony' and 'promotion' is that they are forms which refrain from offering an explicit formation of the individual personality and distinctions of value in communication.

The community's objective is to promote personalization. This leads to a rejection of cognitive performance as a primary criterion. The main problem is in fact motivation bound by affectivity. In the passage from nursery school to after-school activities, the community's role becomes more complex as the need for help with schoolwork arises. Nevertheless, after-school activities do not intensify the impersonality of communication. On the contrary, orientation towards the person continues to be seen as a decisive factor, and the function of after-school sessions thus becomes distinct from that of the external school.

Action involves testimony, and help with schoolwork is relevant only in the context of the general promotion of the personalization of the child, aimed at constructing tranquillity and serenity. All the teachers were asked to describe how the children maintain their relationship with them. Their reply: "Friendship." The children study, play and communicate serenely in the presence of adults always ready to cuddle, reassure and put them at ease. In their school essays, the children speak of their personal relationship with the educators. The promotion of socialization between children is considered to be fundamental, because it increases understanding, security and a sense of solidarity. The richness of these encounters is conducive to broader socialization, which starts to take on an intense interpersonal significance. The children's essays underline the importance of this peer communication.

As a consequence of this approach, within the community it becomes possible to cope with problems that are a cause for crisis in external educational systems, which often reveal themselves to be inadequate in dealing with problems which have already emerged.

The fundamental premise of the community's objective is to treat what were previously considered to be anomalous situations as 'normal'. Children and their families are consequently regarded positively, and the educators' testimony normalizes even the most serious problems.

Relations between educators and families are based on the high level of trust on the families' part, systematic and frequent meetings and the construction of a close and systematic personal relationship. Problems are discussed and faced as they arise. The capacity to construct continuing and effective interpersonal communication between parents and educators is particularly important in after-school activities, as children also participate. Difficulties in relationships with the family are

always possible, and indeed, the particular conditions of some parents can make their problems particularly serious. Nevertheless, testimony and the promotion of socialization are effective means of treatment.

The move to primary school makes it necessary to introduce a new set of rules. In addition, new arrivals create greater problems, as these are children who have been socialized for a longer time in difficult conditions. Finally, the greater educational demands bring the children into contact with rules external to the community in a more significant way. The community's role in after-school sessions subsequently becomes more differentiated, although testimony remains the basis for educational achievement as well. A combination of education and oral testimony is thus produced, based on a situation in which role and person are unified and which is enhanced by the promotion of socialization. This allows communication between children to develop an early orientation towards the person. It is even more important that a setting is created for intergenerational socialization, in which children and adults living in the community can participate together. Children are thus socialized towards interpersonal communication in general.

Children which entered the community at birth (or those who have lived there for several years) are able to enjoy a continuity of communication (which has a calming effect) in the form of a synthesis between role identity and the individual. Even for children arriving at the community later on in more difficult conditions, this method of testimony and promotion can ease many problems, increasing the probability of resocialization and progressively undoing the aftereffects of co-dependency. The significance of the person can take shape, coming from a sense of affective dependency, and this awareness of the person helps to break the silence, both in relationships with adults and in those with peers. Success is not always assured. Nevertheless, our study shows that the community has a high degree of success.

One of the most impressive aspects is the extraordinary liveliness of the children. We observe the paradox of socialization against uncontrolled and uncontrollable sociality, and San Patrignano's reputation of being hyper-regulated. On one hand, San Patrignano propounds a highly organized form of socialization. It coordinates and simplifies family life, socialization between peers, scholastic education, assistance with schoolwork, and leisure activities. On the other hand, the result is an extraordinary vivacity. What may seem to be a hyper-organization of the children's time allows instead an increase in opportunities for autonomous socialization. Thus, interpersonal communication is considerably expanded.

Interpersonal communication is conducive to vivacity, and testimony fosters this exuberance and interpersonal communication between children.

For the entire initial phase of the children's lives, these continue to be the fundamental guidelines. Nevertheless, impersonal communication makes increasing demands, and social roles become increasingly burdensome. This emerges with particular clarity in preadolescence and the middle school years. Society indicates an ever-increasingly marked distinction between persons and roles, above all in the educational system. The child enters preadolescence by becoming accustomed to these communicative conditions.



An important transformation takes place at San Patrignano. The community's activities during preadolescence introduce a clear educational model, aimed at creating a sense of responsibility. The supervisors speak the same language as the employees at after-school sessions, but with a radically different point of view which aims to introduce education. The aim is to address the formation of the person with resolve and precision, assessing the risk of personality distortions caused by the parents' drug addiction. This accompanies the idea that it is the passage to a rigorous fulfilment of a role that ferries the preadolescent towards maturity. Testimony develops into education, and the idea of personal independence is made to coincide with that of commitment to role. This form of action produces an ambivalent treatment of preadolescents. If on the one hand these persons are still protected, on the other they are contained, rationalized and integrated. Affective personalization is at least in part replaced by an invitation towards responsibility and the fulfilment of social roles.

This new approach is founded on fear for the development of a superficial individuality, capable of observing only material incentives and demands for the immediate gratification of needs, legitimized by a society with a culture that is dominated by consumption and competition. The attempt to differentiate with respect to this culture determines action that is characterized by a form of interpersonal education, in which persons are subordinated to roles and organizational programmes. But this form of action does not foster processes of personalization that have already begun.

Preadolescents continue to utilize the opportunity to meet many other adults. The richness of interpersonal communication increases proportionately with the possibility of increasing its intensity. In interviews, the children confirmed the positive nature of their relations with the adults of the community, regarding persons not directly involved in the operating process.

In contrast, however, even though the stories of the individual preadolescents are different, difficulties in relating to interpersonal educational action are generalized. These difficulties are amplified in the most serious cases. The preadolescents thus experience a discontinuity inside the community. The passage from testimony to interpersonal education is brusque, as the approach employed is quite the opposite.

The passage in question is that from attention towards the adolescent, as is natural for the worker, to attention towards changes in the child, stimulated by an educative role. San Patrignano thus risks, at least according to some people, of becoming a place in which the person is enclosed in a restricted formative world without alternatives.

Nevertheless, the interviews held with adolescents, although not statistically significant given the low number of subjects present in the community when the study was conducted, indicate a positive evolution in relationships. Free to move and communicate inside and outside the community and subject only to the jurisdiction of the family, the adolescents show that they have developed a strong sense of attachment to the community, and an intense form of participation. All things considered, their personalization has been a success, and has created a balance between a sense of personal independence in choices concerning education, affectivity and prospects for the future (almost no one intends to stay at San Patrignano indefinitely) and an emotional attachment to the family and the community.

## 5. Relationships with school

The children of San Patrignano have frequent and significant relationships with the state's educational system. In after-school sessions they give a positive assessment of these relations. Nevertheless, there are problems in the relationship between the community and school, deriving from the fact that scholastic communication, above all starting from primary school, assumes an educational form in contrast with the testimonial form present in the community. While in the community the educational role is subordinated to testimony, at school the educational role, increasingly depersonalized, becomes central.

In the state-run primary school, impersonal education becomes the primary method. The educational project of the middle school continues where that of the first school left off. However, the middle school does not so much accentuate the educational orientation as stabilize it. Middle school teachers, or at least some of them, avoid the accentuation of the educational impact with respect to primary school.

At primary school, the children of San Patrignano are regarded, albeit with different distinctions and emphases, as being different from the others and inherently problematic. The presence of these children provokes traumas and failed expectations. Despite the obviously different life histories of the community's children (differences between the children of workers who have never been drug addicts and children who arrived just a few days ago), at a primary school these "San Patrignano children" are categorized, given a negative label; they are thought to cause disturbance and (for the teachers of the fifth and final year of primary school) are considered deviants. The generalized vision is of separated parents, affective deficits that trigger ambivalent attachments and exuberant behaviour, and problems of socialization that manifest themselves in aggressiveness and the incapacity to develop relationships. Even affectionate behaviour that is normally considered positive ("they're impulsive, they hug you, they're very spontaneous") is categorized as pathological, despite the sense of protection that it provokes.

This categorization brings out the difficulties that the school system has in coping with individual conflicts. The negative evaluation of the community's children does not regard cognitive aspects, but motivational and behavioural ones, and the school is particularly willing to admit its difficulty and lack of competence for these aspects.

The categorization of the children of the community is different in middle school. The principal and staff reject the idea that there are substantial differences between the community's children and the others, thus minimizing the problems, and creating a situation in middle school which is often the opposite from that of the primary school. The reasons for this difference can partly be attributed to the significantly smaller number of schoolchildren. However, the difference lies mainly in the fact that there is an orientation towards the person and an attention to motivational problems that are not found in primary school.

The categorization developed in primary school also regards the community. Although the community's merits in the important function of drug addict rehabilitation are acknowledged, two important problems for the socialization of minors are also raised.

The first problem regards the supposed unsuitability of this kind of community for minors. The idea is that a community for drug addicts is not an adequate social environment for minors. The first and gravest fault of the community is considered to be an excess of rules and organization. The second fault regards the presumed lack of closeness with the parents. The third fault would be that the children have no time for themselves, as they are always compelled to stay together inside the community. The second problem regards the educational insufficiencies of the after-school activities, badly organized and lacking in proficiency.

The community is thus attributed with part of the responsibility for the problems of the children.

However, there are clear contradictions between the observations of the school and our own observations. Many of the affirmations on which the criticisms made by the school are based are totally unfounded in the reality of the community, and it is clear that the school knows little about the organization of family life and that of after-school activities.

The community's children are thus classified as having problems of disturbance or deviancy or social inadequacies requiring external technical assistance. In the eyes of the children only one thing is clear: that they are different, with unsolved and unsolvable problems in their individual progress towards socialization. This is a process in contrast with that of the community, which hinders the attempt to make the children understand that despite everything, they are normal. To assess the behaviour of the minors with regard to the school they attend, one must keep in mind that there are without a doubt children who have arrived only recently, or who have particular family difficulties and suffer problems of neglect. Nevertheless, the behaviour of other children is without doubt guided by comparison between the community and the school.

The children of the community can make comparisons because they live in two social situations that are organized differently. This can produce a syndrome of *laissez-faire*, which can explain the refusal of behavioural exceptions. People who are strongly bound to a socio-cultural context respect its rules because they feel at home, but when they move out of this context, they lose interest in the rules and feel they have the right to disregard them. In the world immediately around us we feel at home and therefore bound to respect the rules, while in the depersonalized world, in which there is little interest, a condition of disregard towards the person is dominant, which releases deviant behaviour. This syndrome affects above all people with a protected identity, founded on a particular communicative closeness.

During primary school, children begin to notice the difference between a form of testimony in the community and a form of impersonal education at school, and thus conform to the testimony and deviate with respect to educational expectations. Without the testimony there would be no deviancy with respect to education: the children react negatively to the setting in which they feel lost. In middle school comparison produces effects that are partly inverted, because impersonal education is not further intensified, and the community's action becomes educational. The result is that there are no

longer generalized motives for the existence of the laissez-faire syndrome, and there is a reversal of behaviour, relatively deviant in the community and relatively compliant at school.

The laissez-faire syndrome alone is not however sufficient to explain problems at school. From essays written by primary school children it seems apparent that no differentiated motivational structure exists, and neither is there a greater dislike for school in comparison with peers from the surrounding area. The lack of correspondence between the viewpoints of the children and those of the teachers is evident. By contrast, the situation that emerges from the essays of middle-school children confirms the perceptions of the teaching staff. The children are generally normal in their expectations and orientations in comparison with their classmates, and for many of them the laissez-faire syndrome is not activated.

Another essential factor however is social categorization. At school, negative categorizations are generated with respect to the community's children and to the community itself, correlated to the depersonalized educational form of communication. Social categorization also leads to a lack of belief in the possibility of communicating in a personalized way at school, and manifestations of affection are replaced by provocative behaviour. Social categorization amplifies the problems and makes the primary school blind with respect to differences.

The problem consists in the lack of effective coordination between the community and the school. The school fails to adapt to facilitate coordination, and the community fails to make the outside world understand the significance and forms of its operating processes with its children. The school therefore needs to develop greater sensitivity towards motivational problems and towards an adequate understanding of the problems and the ways in which they can be handled, while the community needs to make the action it undertakes more transparent.

## **6. Conclusions**

Our study has provided us with a quantity of information that allows us to make a number of general conclusions.

The results of the resocialization of children born outside the community depend on their age on arrival and on the length of time spent in ambivalence. Early entrance in the community allows many problems of socialization to be solved, except in those rare cases in which there is no breakdown of co-dependency. Arrival at an older age creates more problems, as previous experiences are more evident. There is an impact with a greater complexity of roles, thereby creating the risk of the laissez-faire syndrome and of labelling, and there is less time in the community for testimonial action and for the promotion of parenthood. However, even in these cases the community succeeds eventually in producing beneficial effects for personalization. The most difficult period of arrival is preadolescence, when personalization is in its most critical phase, when previous processes of socialization have been very long, and when the community's form of communication is educational.

Nevertheless, adolescents appear to be without problems, despite some difficulties in their scholastic progress.

There are so many adverse factors: disastrous starting points, grandparents' opposition, the difficulty of the parents in getting to know one another, possibilities of comparison that create a laissez-faire attitude, labelling by schoolmates and teachers. Despite all this, the process of resocialization is often successful as a result of the daily practice of promotion and testimony. Nevertheless, success does not necessarily mean compliance, and successful socialization in the community can create problems at school, while conflicts can also arise in the community.

The process of socialization, despite the difficulties of preadolescence, terminates in an adolescence in which an identity is stabilized, contingent and unstable but nevertheless structured in some way, so that minors are able to construct their personal independence.

The secret of success lies primarily in the fact that at San Patrignano it is possible to construct functioning forms of the family, founding them on love sustained by commitment and personal involvement in a helping role, (testimony). Second, it lies in the fact that testimony is generalized in relationships with minors.

The conclusion could be that the San Patrignano Community is successful when and if it does not educate. The employees certainly intend to educate, but in practice their educational intentions are transposed into testimonial communication. The community places the person before the role, and children can accept and at the same time have no fears of rules, safe in the knowledge that they are protected. In the community, the culture of testimony lies in practice and not in explanations. This is why education can also be produced, as occurs with preadolescents. Where testimony is absent, the educational method puts a chill into the heart of the minors, relegating them to history and news reports as a compact group of deviants or disturbed individuals. In this way, the community creates a culture of normalcy. Generally the minors of San Patrignano do not suffer, unless a social categorization of disturbance or deviation is applied to them.

Naturally, not all the minors are happy and content in the classical meaning of the words, because some of them have difficult conditions of life, walking a tightrope, restructuring and crises in their affective relationships. But even those minors who are not happy and content are normal, in the sense that it is perfectly normal that, in their particular conditions, they have problems. They have no need for special help or therapeutic techniques. What they need instead is the construction of loving and testimonial intensity, which allows them to recuperate some kind of meaning in life.

The liveliness of the children is a manifestation of this normality, inasmuch as it manifests their emotions. Liveliness can certainly be the result of ambivalence, as behaviour that challenges a hostile world. However, it is more often linked with intense socialization, peer interaction, testimony, and with broader relations with the adult world of the community. This vivacity is denoted by a warmth of character, and is an indicator of the personalization produced in the community, which facilitates the acquisition of affective sensitivities, meaning a sensitive type of liveliness.

Children who are allowed to be lively are capable of using their impulses, and of coming to love the social situation to which they have adapted. The sensitive liveliness structured in the community demonstrates that testimony is successful, and that the children are therefore able to cope

with the difficulties of the world, sustained by the possibility of being able to learn to love the situation that socializes them. The progressive transformation of the vivacity of the breakdown of co-dependency into 'sensitive liveliness' is a result of the community's action, and demonstrates success: sensitive liveliness is an antidote to disturbance.

Obviously, failures are also produced at San Patrignano. A prime motive for failure regards the transformation of couples, when the individual partners fail in the construction of personal independence. In these cases, the relationship between parents and children inevitably suffers. A second motive for failure regards the transformation of testimony in education, which creates conflicts and suffering. The third motive for failure regards the relationship with the school. For this last aspect, which is the most important, there is a lack of testimony towards the outside world. .

The reality of San Patrignano is coherent with the society in which it is produced, and is harmonized with its values and its most advanced programmes. It is no surprise therefore if it produces normal lives, both for the couples and for the children who live there. Nevertheless, it is not the right place for people who have been successfully socialized towards personal independence in the outside world, because the normal conditions of the outside world are not those of San Patrignano. Although San Patrignano is not in any kind of opposition to the outside world, it is a place where an unusual form of communication is generated, a testimony that depends on the unification of role and person, abolishing the moderated differences between role and person.

San Patrignano is a testing ground in which modernity attempts to overcome its problems of social participation. Through the socialization of minors this laboratory provides a means of prevention, in the form of the testimonial promotion of personal independence. San Patrignano is however a laboratory, not an experience that can be exported into society as a whole.

What can we say therefore to a judge who must decide what to do with the children of drug addicts? Although there can be no definitive reply, since every single case remains unique and singular in its circumstances, there are two considerations to be taken into account. First and foremost, while someone who has been able to construct an independent Self has no need whatsoever to live at San Patrignano, someone who has not thus succeeded or who runs the risk of not succeeding can truly find some hope in living there. Secondly, San Patrignano is not a refuge from society, nor does it create an alternative model to society. What it does do, however, is promote and protect normal lives in exceptional conditions of communication, distinguished by the creation of an independent Self which follows a course that is different from but comparable to the course of the independent Self in the world outside.

## **Seen from the bottom**

*by Giuliano Piazzi*

"Seen from the Bottom" can be summarized in ten points.

**1)** The way of being of individual drug addicts cannot be studied, observed, investigated or even communicated.

It can only be experienced.

If it is not experienced, it is futile to attempt to interpret or understand it.

**2)** *Experiencing this way of being of the person* means:

This is a starting point which takes form in the intimate depths of this way of being, that intelligent ideas are born, not the other way round.

If there are ideas on the drug addict and on their suffering, then these ideas can come only from these experiences - not from somewhere else, to be then applied there.

**3)** In this case, the ideas are the result of an emotional knowledge.

This is a deep knowledge that comes from very far away, and that is activated in an unknown way, or by an unknown cause.

**4)** Emotional knowledge that produces a new intelligence of ideas.

Saying this means saying something very simple, perhaps natural.

It means saying:

- you need to reconsider life, and give value to it as an experience of matter;

- reconsidering life in this way means rendering life a value solely for the fact that it is the distinction from that which does not live.

In this way, life is thought of and sustained solely because it is matter that is distinguished from physical-chemical matter, from matter that is unable to live.

- Life understood in these terms is the absolute value. This simple and humble distinction is the only distinction that today can be absolute.

And it is self-legitimizing.

There are no doubts, no contingencies to be respected.

This concept is so absolute that it can become a new principle of conscience, of morals, of culture.

**5)** Why?

Why this absoluteness?

It liberates itself from the metaphors with which it is covered through its social forms.

It remains alone, for that which it truly is.

It makes the whole body understand that this is the only value.

It makes it understood that false tenets on life lead to destruction.

This is the way it is for the following reasons:

- in the simple distinction from physical-chemical matter lies the great leap forward for the life and dignity of the human being;
- there is here, and not afterwards. It is not in the successive differences between one form of life and another, between a simpler form and one that is more complex, between biological life and person, etc;
- this evolutionary leap that is so simple, in reality contains the entire condensed story of the human condition.

In matter that is distinguished from matter that is not life, all the memory and extraordinary bio symbolic wealth of the human circumstance is already collected;

- precisely for the above reasons, this simple distinction constitutes decisive knowledge.

And it is decisive because it is a kind of knowledge that exists exclusively as a function of a life that, inside every single individual, is an end in itself.

which means: as a function of a state of health of the individual that draws inspiration solely from the rules imposed by the distinction between life and non-life;

- and not as a function of a life that must then come out from itself.

And "come out from itself" means to become a body, an awareness and a state of health in the way requested by social life.

A social life that is -and this is the point- a plan of the world that transcends being the matter itself of life, with other duties, purposes, needs, etc.

**6)** An individual drug addict is all this.

Living this person means, then, *feeling* that this extreme value of life is implicit in the truth of his or her condition.

This person makes us understand in a very strong way that the true life is only this one here, only in this way of being is triere distinction from non-life. And that as such it demands to be the determinant, creative value.

**7)** In the individual drug addict, the presence of the distinction between life and non-life is revealed as memory that is objective and not sublimated.

In its pure form.

The other values that differentiate one form of life from another become totally marginal.

This is a hard fact of life in itself.

The awareness and conduct of the person have nothing to do with it, these things are nothing to be relied upon.

In the person, in his or her deepest organic unconscious, life reveals itself for what it is.

It liberates itself from the metaphors with which it is covered through its social forms.

It remains alone, for that which it truly is.

It makes the whole body understand that this absoluteness is the only value, and nothing else.



It makes this understood to a body that false tenets on life are leading to destruction.

But this is the way it is.

Heroin isolates the body and the mind, impeding socialization. It denies that the body and the mind can have a social form of their own.

In this way, the extreme value of life is not socialized.

Not only , but moreover, this extreme value can start to establish itself for what it really is

A simple distinction from that which does not live, without any added value.

**8)** This is the most painful and absurd contradiction.

In the individual drug addict, life frees itself from its false representations.

But then this very life is destroyed, and more with it.

Left at the mercy of heroin, life annuls itself in *non-life*.

**9)** And it is here -inside this extraordinary contradiction- that San Patrignano's idea takes hold.

Heroin makes available and at the same time destroys the creativity of the distinction between life and non-life.

so this creativity is rekindled by the San Patrignano. And there it is made to grow for what it is.

*Protected* -and this is not denied- and guaranteed exclusively as a function of itself.

San Patrignano -and all other places that are similar- does not ask life to come out from itself to assume nobler social forms.

San Patrignano -and all other places that are similar- is not a *system that emerges* with respect to the life/non-life harboured inside every individual person.

It does not transcend the state of being the matter of life. At San Patrignano -and at all other places that are similar- growth and health are totally within the individual, meaning that they are entirely inspired by the rules that distinguish life from death.

**10)** This what "seen from the bottom" is. The culture of things seen from the bottom.

Being a child at San Patrignano also means growing within this culture.





