Synthesis

San Patrignano
Environmental Therapy and City Effect

A study of biographic paths conducted on community residents

by
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1. The research we're talking about

The research which we present here has been carried out in a very particular moment in time. It was initially conceived when the San Patrignano Community was still headed by its founder. The research was completed and published in his absence. This very important detail brings up two methodologically and theoretically relevant questions concerning the *philosophy* of our undertaking which focused mainly on the history of the community and its achievements. In addition, we also took into account the *stabilization of the model*, or whether a certain amount of knowledge and practical experience accumulated during these years would grant the possibility of its persistence.

These two questions represent two sides of the same coin, and influence each other reciprocally. As confirmed by our research, San Patrignano's operative model can hardly be simplified and reduced to a set of pre-defined rules, behaviors and therapeutic cycles, as generally happens in these cases. The scholar, of course, has a more difficult task in this case and must face (at least on first impact) a lack of significant points of reference. This lack of formal schemes, however, simplifies the work of the researcher who happens to be involved into a wide-ranging hypothesis, free from any restrictions or pre-defined schemes. San Patrignano, as it has been underlined, is an entity which has naturally and gradually 'matured', showing great adaptability. Because of this fact, San Patrignano has been able to interact continuously with the outside world, accepting both the need to relate to and comprehend many contradictions which characterize it, and the persistence of certain basic ideals which are inalienable components of its existence.

The investigation of how these two aspects combine and how certain conflicts have been resolved represents, therefore, an indispensable starting point in order to understand the history of the Community and its possible evolution. From this viewpoint, San Patrignano is open to innovation - to new social situations and events. This becomes particularly evident when newcomers arrive and are accepted *without any type of selection process.* It is also substantiated when every kind of knowledge, even the most technologically advanced, is acquired and used in the management and functioning process of the Community itself.

An understanding of San Patrignano probably begins from the concept of acceptance of all that is *new* and, conversely, the persistence of its *basic identity.* This means the capability to combine principles of *autopoiesis* and *functionalist* strategies. This is also the most common challenge today to single social systems, which must fight for their own *survival* – not only as specific and unique entities, but also for their *competitiveness* in the marketplace. A *whole* and a *part,* an *inner* and an *outer* in constant competition with each other. The problem of these two life models and conditions, as well as that of their possible or necessary comparison, is both the starting point of our inquiry and a way to once more open the debate about the challenge which every model of utopian society has had to face in the past.

Utopia ceases to exist, so they say, when the relationship between the *inner world* and the *outer world* is no longer manageable, i.e. when the prevalent trait of a certain moment can no longer be used to compare the social in its entirety and utopia in its specificity. *Complexity* affects and distorts

any type of social aggregation, becoming the most relevant problem. Our society, especially the new generations, must compete with the strategies of involvement in *complexity,* in that intricate and diverse system of situations which unavoidably seems to be the assumption of any relational approach. That is why we devoted so much attention to this topic both in the final questionnaire and in the initial phase of our research. The entire first part, in fact, is in accordance with this line of thinking.

After a first approach to the space, the production and the visual perception of San Patrignano, our research moved to what can be the fundamental exchanges between *outer* and *inner world*, with specific reference to *complexity*. The letter appears less and less definable as a mere sum of its parts and the opportunities offered for the satisfaction of each individual increasing expectation. If that were the case, in fact, a theoretical condition would occur where expectations could be never satisfied. The theorization of *complexity model,* therefore, cannot leave out of consideration a necessary reference to the concept of *limit,* a concept which turns out to be a *leitmotif* in drug-addiction research. This is the crucial shift every comparison must go through between *centre* and *periphery,* as places where different *complexity models* can be developed.

According to the traditional parameters, the centre is *dominant*, the image of *complexity* referred to the periphery comes out imperfect, and every attempt to compare the two becomes inadequate. So the traditional approach is hopeless because is unable to go beyond the limits of mere comparative analysis applied to the specific *structural opportunities* offered by the two contexts.

Throughout our research, the "classic" *complexity* problem has been put into an increasingly critical position by the emerging of a new condition, that principle of *latent potentiality* which can characterize a society by giving inner structural features an acceleration and a direction of its own. *Complexity,* thus, is seen as the result of a series of variables where the structural elements are but a part of the picture, and the role played by the conditions for the fruition of the opportunities acquires an increasing significance.

From this viewpoint, the problem is no longer that of comparing the centre with the periphery, or that of accepting some *dominance* conditions. Any social context is theoretically capable of producing *complexity*. The theoretical hypothesis of an unambiguous *complexity* model must give way to a new one, where several aggregation patterns are differently oriented, in order to give specific answers to that series of solicitations once necessary to produce a unique and highly motivating model of society.

2. The meaning of environmental therapy

What is at stake in this research is the *city effect.* In our previous book entitled *San Patrignano - between Community and Society,* we defined the *city effect* by the way it affected the Community's resident's therapeutic program and the image they had of it after they left San Patrignano.

Our attention mainly focused on the way some of San Patrignano's characteristics, i.e. the very thing we defined as *city effect,* enabled the Community's members to undergo a significant change.

Conversely, our latest research was aimed at giving a more precise definition of what the *city effect* was, how it was. What was its 'chemical formula', its structure?

In order to examine the 'formula' or method of *city effect*, one must enter the program and live with the Community's residents. We referred back to the results of our previous research and tried to understand the most intimate ties between the therapeutic program and the most critical aspects of San Patrignano.

When referring to the concept of *city effect* we allude to the therapeutic potentiality (from the viewpoint of the *environmental therapy*) that San Patrignano's large scale and strongly society-oriented life style has for the people who lived there.

San Patrignano shows several points of dissimilarity with many other communities. One of these points deserves particular attention: the lack of a written therapeutic program with preordained phases and duration.

At first glance, this lack appeared to contradict the atmosphere of efficiency and accuracy of the Community, particularly if compared with that of other communities in Italy and abroad where very detailed, written programs with prescribed steps, situations and times were the norm, and above all where certain therapeutic steps were considered as requirements for the passage to each following phase of the therapeutic experience. Also where the length of the experience was generally standardized.

Nothing like this happens at San Patrignano. Here, in spite of the *meticulousness* which pervades daily life, from the involvement of a newcomer in a certain task area to the actual therapeutic experience, no one knows exactly how the program will unfold. What follows is our attempt to understand the true reasons for this type of situation, tracing it back to the most unique aspects of the Community itself.

3. Some information about how our research was organized

Our work is subdivided into *five parts.* The first part aims at defining our general approach to the Community, particularly as for the organization of the community's areas, with the help of some well-established models of *background analysis* widely used in classical sociological literature. The second contribution of this first part regards the way the residents themselves describe San Patrignano's everyday life through their own photographs. The third contribution concerns the *organizational model* on which the Community rests in the various aspects of its life as well as to its productive process.

In the second part of our work, the methodology used in the preliminary phase of the research is outlined, as are the different steps which led to the definition of the final questionnaire. Following the in-depth-interviews, the first "tool" used in the research, we then moved on to the *intermediate questionnaire,* which we administered to a sample of 200 people. On the basis of the data provided and the indications suggested by the results of this *intermediate* phase of our research, at last we

constructed the *final questionnaire-interview* (consisting of 156 questions which included 9 open topics) and administered it to all the available residents (except those temporarily absent for work and those who were ill or otherwise unable to participate) who were in San Patrignano at that moment. A total of 1,450 people filled out the questionnaire; they were all guests of the community at Ospedaletto di Coriano (Rimini), not in the Pergine Val Sugana (Trento), Novafeltria (Pesaro), or Sacile (Pordenone) branches.

The third part of our work deals with the interviewees, their characteristics and statistical data, as well as with some basic structural features of the sample. One chapter deals with the time variable as it was perceived during our research.

The fourth part is the very core of the work, spanning from chapters 7 to 22.

The fifth part regards some specific research techniques and the construction of indicators and/or scales used during the research.

4. The research hypothesis

We began with a very general hypothesis. This was an attempt to gather into a hypothetical conceptual frame some observations resulting on the one hand from the sociological theory and, on the other, from the empirical results of our *follow up* research published under the title *San Patrignano between Community and Society.* This research, carried out on a given number of former residents of San Patrignano, suggested us the possibility that the specific kind of structure of the Community played a significant role in the change each individual experienced during their stay. The Community's structure, in fact, though preserving features and ideals typical of a similar experience, demonstrated some aspects of urban life due to its increasing complexity. The doubts were with regards to the significance and the effectiveness of a facility which, according to some, had largely exceeded in size what we supposed to be the best model of a therapeutic community for drug-addicts. Conversely, this was exactly what seemed to have such a positive influence. This assessment was, and is, the hypothesis on which we based our work – not a definitive judgment on the effectiveness of San Patrignano. We aimed to find out which conditions occurred when the phenomenon we defined as *city effect* played a role in the *change* experienced by the Community's members during their therapeutic route. The number of guests in a therapeutic community may increase for many reasons. However, if it gives rise to an increasing inner complexity, to a division of social work and functions, this development can no longer be considered as a mere quantitative fact. It cannot be merely attributed to the number of guests - it must be analysed from the viewpoint of all the qualitative modifications it produces, as well as of the effects it causes in the life conditions of the residents. This is why, in our attempt to get a closer look at this problem, we borrowed the concept of *city effect* from urban sociology. In sociological texts this concept refers to those contexts where the urban features of a certain environment are either questioned or inadequate to match the needs of individuals motivated by some expectations in their life.

5. The final questionnaire-interview

The final questionnaire-interview used in our research was subdivided into the following sections:

1. Basic characteristics of the interviewees and their condition at the time of entering the Community
2. Perception of the 'urban' features of the Community
3. Evaluation of urban complexity at San Patrignano
4. Evaluation on the amalgamation of Community/Society which characterizes San Patrignano.
5. Inclusion in the Community
6. The image of San Patrignano
7. Dynamics of the therapeutic route

6. The sample examined

The sample examined was made up of 78.2% of males and 21.8% females. The interviewee's average age was about 30 for the males and 28 for the females. However, a more significant datum is the *range* in the interviewee's age, spanning from a minimum of 14 to a maximum of 53. Also, the overall data highlighted this wide variation within the sample. As reported in the following table, 90 interviewees were in the "21 and under" age group and 111 in the "38 and over" group.

The analysis of the cumulative data in the groups divided by age/gender showed that the youngest age group (21 and under) was also the largest (37.8%). As for the males, the majority was in the "38 and over" age group, for a total 87.4%. The general trend, as shown in Table 1, was therefore a progressive and steadfast reduction in the number of females as age increased.

Table 1 – Age of the interviewees (by group) / gender (percentages and absolute values)

	Males % (No.)	Females % (No.)	Total (No.)
21 and under	62.2 (56)	37.8 (34)	(90)
22-25	72.9 (194)	27.1 (72)	(266)
26-29	76.8 (294)	23.2 (89)	(383)
30-33	81.4 (324)	18.6 (74)	(398)
34-37	83.5 (167)	16.5 (33)	(200)
38 and over	87.4 (97)	12.6 (14)	(111)

As far as the interviewee's *place of origin* is concerned, two types of information were available: the interviewee's *birthplace* (which was recoded into three categories according to its size), and the interviewee's *birth province*. The information about the size of the city of birth was subdivided in the following three classes: "large cities", "medium-sized cities" and "elsewhere". Bari, Genoa, Milan, Naples, Palermo, Rome and Turin were considered "large cities"; all other capitals of a province were considered as "medium-sized cities". Finally, all the cities which were not capitals of a province were included in the "elsewhere" class. The distribution of the interviewees into these three categories was significant in that 20% of them were born in a large city, 37.8% of them in a medium-sized city, and the remaining 42.2% in a municipality which was not a capital of a province. Though only the information as to the interviewee's birthplace was available, and a further evaluation of it on the basis of possible migration phenomena occurring after the interviewee's birth had not been taken into account, it was nevertheless significant that 42% of the interviewees came from a town which was not a capital of a province. From the analysis of the available data, which obviously refers only to San Patrignano residents, drug addiction seemed to be a wide spread phenomena, *not necessarily connected with some urban or metropolitan context.* Such a trend could be further analyzed by cross-referencing the size of the city of birth and the geographical area the interviewee came from. As shown in the following table, the percentage of interviewees who were born in a large city was higher among those who came from Southern Italy (27.5% compared with 20.5% of those who came from Central Italy, and 15.8% of Northern Italians). When we also took into account the interviewees who came from a foreign country, the percentage of those born in a large city increased to 30%. From a global analysis of the following table, however, we could state that the geographic area had no significant effect on the above mentioned general trend. In this sense, the interviewees who were not born in a capital of a province (included the "elsewhere" class) represented a significant majority in each of the three geographic-areas examined as well as among those who were born in a foreign country[1]

Table 2 – Size of the interviewee's birthplace/geographic macro-area where the interviewees were born (percentages and absolute values)

	Northern Italy	Central Italy	Southern Italy and islands	Foreign country
Large cities	15.8 (125)	20.5 (54)	27.5 (87)	29.9 (23)
Medium cities	40.8 (322)	37.6 (99)	33.2 (105)	27.3 (21)
Elsewhere[2]	43.3 (342	41.8 (110)	39.2 (124)	42.9 (33)

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[1] As far as the interviewees who were born in a foreign country are concerned, the cities with more than 500.000 inhabitants were considered "large cities", the cities who had 100.000 to 500.000 inhabitants were considered "medium sized", whereas the "elsewhere" category included the towns with less than 100.000 inhabitants.

[2] The "elsewhere" category included all the italian towns which were not capitals of a province and all the foreign towns with less than 100.000 inhabitants.

The information about the *province where the interviewees were born* enabled us to implement the above illustrated analysis. Ninety-one Italian provinces were represented inside the sample, testifying a wide variety of origins among the persons living in San Patrignano at that moment. Such a variety reflected also the distribution of the origins which covered the whole national territory. It must be underlined that, as the following table does, here we referred to a more analytical classification than the one used above (North, Centre, South). This new classification was subdivided in 8 geographic areas, so that we could clearly understand the distribution trend.

By reading the table, we could note that none of the 8 geographic areas was represented inside our sample by a percentage lower than 5%. Emilia-Romagna, which was the only independent region represented in our classification, had obviously the highest number of interviewees due to the location of San Patrignano. The rate of interviewees who were born in Emilia-Romagna amounted in fact to 17.8%, a datum which of course was significantly higher than the one which included Val d'Aosta, Piedmont, Lombardy and Liguria or the one with Veneto, Trentino and Friuli. Finally, it must be stressed that a significant percentage of interviewees were born in a foreign country (5.5%)

Tab. 3 – Geographic areas where the interviewees were born (percentages and absolute values).

	No.	%
Val d'Aosta, Piedmont, Lombardy, Liguria	266	18.4
Veneto, Trentino Alto-Adige, Friuli Venezia Giulia	266	18.4
Emilia-Romagna	259	17.8
Tuscany, Umbria, Marches	154	10.6
Lazio, Abruzzo, Molise	109	7.5
Basilicata, Apulia, Campania, Calabria	242	16.7
Sicily and Sardinia	74	5.1
Foreign country	79	5.5

Our analysis then moved to the data concerning *parenthood* and the interviewees' *educational level*.

Here we examined whether our interviewees had any children when they entered the Community (see table 4) our We obtained some significant results: 329 of them, (22.8%) of the sample examined had *at least one child* when they entered San Patrignano; 53 of them (more than 4%) had at least two children.

Table 4 – Number of childrens upon entrance at San Patrignano.

	No.	%
No children	1117	77.2
One child	266	18.4
Two or more children	63	4.4

The percentage of women who had children (37.7%) was higher than that of men (18.7%). By then cross referencing the data concerning parenthood upon arrival and the interviewees' age at the time of entering the Community, the results showed a tendency towards an increase in the likelihood of having children as age increased (45% of the 32-and over group). Such data significantly increases if our attention focused solely on the females (66.7% of 32 and over females). The data shown in the following table referred to females only. Of the interviewees who were under 24 years of age, 22.5% had at least one child when they entered the Community.

Table 5 – Parenthood/ Age upon entering San Patrignano – Females (percentages and absolute values)

	23 and under	24-27	28-31	32 and over
With children	22.5 (25)	34.1 (31)	60 (36)	66.7 (22)
Without children	77.5 (100)	65.9 (60)	40 (24)	33.3 (11)

As far as the interviewees' *level of education* was concerned, the data about the last year completed before entering San Patrignano was divided into five groups. The first and second groups included those who had and those who had not attained a middle school diploma, respectively. The third group included those who had left secondary school before its completion, the fourth those who held a secondary school diploma and the fifth those who were attending a university and/or had previously obtained university degrees when they arrived at San Patrignano.

The analysis of the data displayed in Table 6 showed that most of the people included in our sample (approximately 40%) had attained a middle school diploma when they joined the Community. The most remarkable result, however, was regarding the percentage of interviewees who left school before completing compulsory schooling. This percentage amounted to 11.6% (88.3% of which were males and 11.7% females). As for the geographic area of origin, it must be underlined that the majority of the interviewees who had not attained a middle school certificate came from southern Italy (17%). Only a small percentage came from Central Italy (13%), or Northern Italy (9.5%) or were born in a foreign country (5.1%).

Table 6 – Level of education upon entering San Patrignano (percentages and absolute values)

	No.	%
Left middle school before completion	164	11.6
Middle school certificate	576	40.7
Secondary school left before completion	392	27.7
Secondary school certificate	208	14.7
Some college/University degree	75	5.3

In order to acquire a complete picture of the interviewees' situation, we decided to deal also with the information about their fathers' occupations at the time our guests entered San Patrignano. The trend shown by the data concerning the fathers' occupations further confirmed the huge inner differentiation of the sample under study. Our interviewees indicated 150 different occupation, scattered along the widest range of professions. The following table displays all the occupations which received at least 25 answers.

As it can be clearly seen, the most common occupation was that of laborer (10.9%), followed by shopkeeper (7.6%).

In order to compare the data collected to the *national trends concerning the working population* provided by the Italian Statistic Institute (Istat), we had to reclassify our data so that they could be as uniform as possible with the Istat criteria. The comparison showed that our data, as far as the fathers' occupation was concerned (the items "father deceased" and "father unknown" have therefore not been calculated), generally showed a trend which was by no means significantly different from the data published by Istat with reference to the national average of 35 to 70 yr. old working population.

Table 7 – The profession of the interviewee's father at the time he/she entered the Community (absolute values and percentages only for the items which received at least 25 answers)

	No.	%
Salesman	25	1.8
Artisan	29	2.1
Driver	30	2.2
Lorry driver	38	2.8
Farmer	25	1.8
Shopkeeper	105	7.6
Civil servant	67	4.9
Office worker	41	3.0
Entrepreneur	34	2.5
Mason	79	5.7
Laborer	150	10.9
Deceased	214	13.6
Unknown	26	1.9

The data concerning the occupations of our interviewees' fathers could also be considered an indication of the background of the people included in our sample. We therefore designed a new, *ad hoc* classification of the 150 professions represented from the standpoint of their *social status*. The 150 occupations were classified again and divided into three categories, according to the educational level generally connected to the profession stated.

Here below are the three categories:

- The *first category* (high status) includes for the most part professions requiring a university degree (e.g., lawyer, physician, engineer). Also included are professions such as entrepreneur, not necessarily requiring a university degree, but nonetheless denoting a high socio-economic status;

- The *second group* (medium status) included those white-collar occupations which generally required a secondary school certificate, as well as professions such as retailer or dental technician, or those professions which do not require a university degree (e.g. designer or surveyor)

- The *third category* (medium-low status and low status) included those occupations generally associated to a low educational level (e.g. laborer, plumber, lorry driver, mason)

  As illustrated in the following table, most of the fathers' occupations represented in our sample were included in the third class.

Table 8 – Profession of the interviewee's father at the time he/she entered the Community divided by socio-economic status (absolute values and percentages)[3]

	No.	%
High status	119	10.5
Medium status	347	30.8
Medium-low/low status	660	58.7

The question concerning the fathers' occupations permitted us to acquire another particularly significant piece of information. This is a noteworthy result from the analysis of Table 7: 214 (15.6%) of our interviewees entered the Community when their fathers were already deceased. It is to be noted, that this percentage represents the highest per cent rate in our sample.

The social statistic picture outlined suggested an initial, general consideration. The trends of the variables examined clearly illustrated a marked inner differentiation inside San Patrignano. Due to this differentiation, San Patrignano did not fit in any rigid, sociological model.

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[3] The percentages have been calculated on the 1,124 cases where father's occupation was stated; the interviewees whose father *was dead, unknown or unemployed* at the time of entering San Patrignano and, of course, the missing answers have not been calculated.

From the viewpoint of its members' basic characteristics, could be considered as a "micro-cosmos" reflecting the larger social reality.

1. Let us now briefly summarize some trends emerging from the analysis of our data which strengthen this thesis and give a hint of the multiplicity of life situations inside San Patrignano.

2. The age of the residents spans between 14 and 53 and, as it can be observed by analyzing the aggregate data, the age groups "21 and under" and "38 and over" are significantly represented inside the sample examined. That means that everyday in the Community persons live together who have experienced radically different social cultural models. Imagine just the difference between the cultural models of the sixties and those of the eighties, both represented in this study, considering the interviewees' distribution in the age groups.

3. As far as the origins of the people of San Patrignano is concerned as well as the size of the town and province/region were the interviewees were born, it must be underlined that in the examined sample large towns, medium towns and small towns are significantly represented, and so are almost all Italian provinces and regions. In addition, 77 interviewees were born in a foreign country.

4. Approximately 30% of the interviewees had children when they entered San Patrignano. As the environmental analysis carried out in the preliminary phase of our research and the interviewees' answers to some open question of our questionnaire-interview have highlighted, most of these children sooner or later are reunited with their own family inside the Community. Vincenzo Muccioli said: "if some of them have children, we do our best to let the family be reunited, as soon as their condition makes it possible"[4]. After all, the family reunion is an explicit element of the Community philosophy: "to separate a couple, taking one of them into the community and leaving the other outside, particularly if any children are already there, is not a good idea and causes a great pain"[5].

5. The information about the interviewees' parenthood at the time of their entrance at San Patrignano therefore permits us to underscore that not only individuals but also families living in the Community are indicative of the inner complexity of San Patrignano.

6. Inside the universe which we are studying we can see that there is an extremely diverse cross section of fathers' occupations (exactly 150). What's more, the distribution of these occupations does not significantly differ from the trend expressed by the Istat data on the 35 to 70-year-old working population.

From the viewpoint of the residents' social background, as it appears through the data on fathers' occupations, the Community can be considered as a mirror image of the outside world.

When we analyzed the data, we were led to make some further observations through which the general picture could become more complete. San Patrignano can be considered, on one hand, a "micro-cosmos" - a mirror image of the world outside.

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[4] V. Muccioli, *My Battle* …, cit., p. 92.
[5] V. Muccioli, *My Battle* …, cit., p. 92

On the other hand, some characteristics of San Patrignano's residents can be said to be unique. Specifically, at least three elements stand out from the data mass. One example is the high percentage of individuals who had not attained a middle school certificate at the time they entered the Community – they account for more than 11% of our interviewees. Second, by analyzing the information about the fathers' occupation, we can affirm that most of our interviewees came from a setting which could be defined as "working class". Finally, 15.6% of them stated that their fathers were deceased when they entered the Community.

As for the data concerning those who left compulsory schooling, our task is to understand through our analysis whether the low level of education is associated to a more stressful social condition of marginalization than that of the interviewees with a high educational level at the time they entered the Community.

The data collected about education tended to suggest a possible condition of social marginalization. The high rate of individuals whose father was deceased indicates, though not considering the psychological side of the problem, a relative lack of family resources which could be useful in facing the drug-addiction problem. Both elements, though, different from each other, if implemented with further data concerning the condition of the interviewee at the time of admission, reveal the *universal* and *not selective* character of the San Patrignano Community. Any disadvantage resulting from the *family situation* or the *cultural background* cannot preclude the chance of being admitted in San Patrignano. On the contrary, as we have seen, particularly as far as the educational level is concerned, the "disadvantaged" are more represented inside the Community than they are in the outside society.

Besides, also the third datum seems to confirm this statement; the "humble" origin of most our interviewees strengthens the idea that San Patrignano has a universalistic and not selective orientation.

Inner complexity and *universality* are therefore two basic elements that stand out from the analysis of the interviewees' life situation. However, only a universal approach can reach the multiplicity and variety of social origins directly witnessed by the analyzed data. The universalistic approach can therefore be considered the element which, through the course of time, favors a *natural process of growth in the Community.*

The data concerning the condition of the interviewees upon their admittance in San Patrignano can further enrich the picture in relation the *universalism-inner complexity*.

6.1 Condition of the interviewees upon admission: age upon admission and duration of drug-addiction

When considering the *interviewees' age upon admission,* we can note a wide range (spanning ages from *12 to 52).* The average age of admission to San Patrignano is 27 for males and 25 for females. If we consider how the data is distributed in age groups, (see following table) we can note that each of the two "end" groups ("19 and under" and "36 and over") gather 6.5% of the interviewees (for a total of approximately 200 individuals). This datum confirms that the wide range of age variation

is not due to some isolated cases: it must be furthermore stressed that the age group which collects the highest number of individuals is the group " ages 24-27".

Table 9 – Age upon admission in San Patrignano (Absolute values and percentages).

	No.	%
19 and under	94	6.5
20-23	310	21.4
24-27	431	29.7
28-31	355	24.5
32-35	163	11.2
36 and over	97	6.7

The information about the interviewees' age upon admission further confirms the universalistic orientation in the Community, in the sense that the age doesn't seem to represent a hurdle for the individuals' admission. Some of the interviewees were admitted when they were 12 and some when they were 52 - the "19 and under" and "36 and over" age groups are represented in the sample by a total of approximately 200 individuals.

Table 10 – Age at the admission in San Patrignano / gender (percentages and absolute values).

	Males % (No.)	Females % (No.)
19 and under	4.7 (53)	13.0 (41)
20 – 23	19.6 (222)	27.9 (88)
24 – 27	29.8 (337)	29.2 (92)
28 – 31	25.9 (293)	19.4 (61)
32 – 35	12.6 (143)	6.3 (20)
36 and over	7.4 (84)	4.1 (13)

The distribution by gender of the age upon admission highlights that 41% of the females entered San Patrignano when they were under 24 (the percentage of males who entered the Community when they were less than 24 years old amounted to 24%). The situation changes when we examine the interviewees who entered San Patrignano when they were older. Over 20% of the males and. approximately 10% of the females entered San Patrignano when they were at least 32. Almost the same percentage of males and females are included in the 24-27 age group. This is the most numerous age group (over 29%), for males and females in the sample examined.The second aspect concerning the interviewee's condition upon admission in San Patrignano was the duration of the drug-addiction (expressed in years by the interviewees).

Also here it was particularly important to refer to the *range of variation* of the variables under study. In fact, our group included individuals who had been drug-addicts for "1 year or less" (41) but also individuals who had been drug-addicts for "over 20 years" (27). This wide range shows that the duration of drug-addiction is not criteria for exclusion from the program. Our data shows clearly that San Patrignano admitted individuals who had been drug-addicts for only a few months as well as individuals who had been drug-addicts for twenty years. Over 94% of the interviewees (1,330 individuals), however, had been drug-addicts for at least three years and about half of them had been drug-addicts for at least 10 years. Of those who entered San Patrignano when they were 36 (or over), 73.3% (63) had been drug-addicts for at least 15 years.

Table 11 –Duration of drug-addiction by group (percentages and absolute values) [6]*.*

	No.	%
Up to 2 years	87	6.1
3 – 9 years	693	48.8
over 10 years	641	45.1

The distribution of the analyzed phenomenon according to gender shows a trend in women, who generally had shorter periods of addiction. Actually 10% of the women fell within the range "up to 2 years" (as compared to 5% of the males) and more than 61% of them was within the range of "3-9 years" of drug addiction (as compared to 53% of the males). The percentage of women who said that they had been drug-addicts for more than 10 years before coming to San Patrignano was however quite high (about 39%). The following table shows the general distribution, per gender, of the drug-addiction period as declared by the interviewees.

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[6] This variable registered a percentage of missing data of 2%.

Table 12 – Drug-addiction years / gender (percentages and absolute values).

	Males % (n)	Females % (n)
Up to 2 years	5,0 (56)	10,2 (31)
3-9 years	48,1 (536)	51,0 (155)
Over 10 years	46,9 (522)	38,8 (118)

As for the geographical areas of birth it can be observed that, among those coming from abroad, there was a higher percentage of subjects with a drug-addiction experience shorter than 9 years, i.e. over 66%, as compared with percentages not exceeding the 55% for those born in Italy (the difference among Northern, Central and Southern Italy appears to be scarcely relevant).

6.2 Subjects' condition upon admission and universality

The analysis of the interviewees' data show that the dual concept of *inner complexity - universalism* represents an important key to understanding the San Patrignano Community. Moreover it has been underlined how the universal approach, of which the interviewees' data represent a first clear empirical evidence, can be considered the "engine" which has led to a *natural growth* of the Community and to the achievement of an inner level of complexity which at present time is its characteristic feature.

These considerations can be sustained with empirical results emerging from the study on the "condition of the interviewees upon admission to San Patrignano".

Specifically, some fundamental elements are illustrated here which help to strengthen the idea that San Patrignano does not have specific criteria for selection. We refer to:

- The interviewees' age when they entered San Patrignano, as we have underlined, among San Patrignano's guests there are subjects who entered at 12 and other at 50 but, apart from these extreme" cases, about 200 people are included in groups of people ages 19 and under and 36 and over;

- The duration of the interviewees' drug-addiction up until their moment of entry at San Patrignano ranged from few months to 27 years. It is also necessary to bear in mind that, excluding the most "extreme" cases, 209 subjects had at least 15 years of drug-addiction behind them. It is worthwhile to emphasize that 63 subjects were over 36 years old upon admittance and had at least 15 years of drug-addiction behind them;

- The situations of "significant" social marginalization were described by the 105 subjects coming directly from prison, by the 46 who were homeless and by the 273 subjects who entered San Patrignano under house arrest. As for the latter aspect it is worth noting that for 139 subjects the sentence of detention or residual sentence to serve in the Community was over two years.

With reference to the interviewees' data, it is important to emphasize that, among those who had not attained the secondary school diploma, there was a higher percentage of jobless, of people coming directly from prison, and entry in San Patrignano under house arrest. We have to bear in mind that there is a higher proportion of "disadvantaged" subjects (with regards to educational level) in San Patrignano than outside.

Therefore, the universal approach of San Patrignano, which had already emerged when analyzing the interviewees' data, seems to be confirmed in the data concerning the subject' condition on their entrance in the Community.

If we consider the data included these three points, we are lead to believe that the idea of someone being "hopeless" is totally alien to San Patrignano's philosophy, regardless of the lack of selection process of "ideal-types" of users, and the lack of selectivity upon admission.

7. Inner time and redefinition of biographic paths

Individuality is a major part of the *process of redefinition of biographic paths,* experienced by the interviewees during their stay in the Community. Exactly for this reason, the *process of redefinition of biographic path* does not simply come to an end with a change in the lifestyle connected with steps and above all with *standard* timing valid for everyone. These considerations can be empirically supported and implemented on the basis of the results of the analysis carried out on the dimension of time. The significance of the "time" dimension for our analysis is linked with two meanings of time itself: the "objective" *outer time* (actual period of permanence in San Patrignano) and the "subjective" *inner time*, basically expressed by the *self evaluation of one's position on the professional training path,* but, as already specified, not only by this variable. Having made a distinction, already at level of the construction of the administered questionnaire-interviews, between *outer* and *inner time* has then allowed us to focus our attention on the *discord between outer and inner time.*

Let's now reassume some empirical results. As far as the "objective" meaning of time is concerned, it is important to refer to the *actual length of time which the interviewees spent at San Patrignano.* The data on the actual stay is already significant in light of the fact that in San Patrignano the *program does not involve pre-defined time limits or steps.* This observation is confirmed by the trend of the mentioned variable. It was observed how the variation range of the stay in San Patrignano varies from a minimum of few days to maximum of 15 years; 227 subjects had been living in the community for over 3 years (the stay in the community lasted more than 5 years for 121 of these subjects).

It must be however noted that *real or actual stay* does not necessarily mean a *continuous stay* in San Patrignano. The datum about the possible *periods spent away from the community* is a good example in this sense. Within the analyzed data, 470 subjects (about 32%) had spent a period of time outside of the community. Certainly this percentage rate increases in direct relation to the length of the stay at San Patrignano. The "period of absence from the Community" is also significant because,

though the period of absence is related to a variety of situations, we were able to reconstruct (by comparing some variables), in an approximate manner and with the above illustrated limits, that often the periods of absence are linked to interruptions in the therapeutic program and may lead to "relapses". Specifically, with regards to the group of subjects which had "long stays", it could be noted that these two situations (interruptions and relapses) involved approximately 30% of the 277 subjects making up the group. Interruptions of the program and "relapses" are significant in light of the fact that the routes of *redefinition of one's biographic path*, required to escape drug-addiction, are all but linear and standardized and as a consequence they elude defined timing regularities.

However, the reference to *outer time*, though indispensable, represents a foundation of the analysis which calls for a further investigation. This is possible if we take into consideration the empirical results of the *subjective dimension of time* and of the *inner/outer time discord.*

The attention devoted to the *inner time* permits us to understand how most of the interviewees think that: "there is not a specific time required in order to break with the past". The subjects who underlined these facts in their answer to the question "After how many months of living at San Patrignano do you feel that you finally broke with your past", are certainly underestimated within the examined universe because the question text itself induced to yield an answer which described a defined time span (namely: 2 months, 2 years, etc.). However, in spite of the question's wording, the two items here described resulted as the most common among the interviewees. Whereas the answer "there is not a precise time" confirms that the path to recovery cannot be broken down into pre-determined time or pre defined phases, the answer "never" introduces an important element in our analysis. *It is a matter of accepting one's past. Redefining the biographic route* during the communitarian experience does not mean, in this sense, to build *ex-novo* and starting from zero, but to modify, through a process of maturation, the idea that drug-addiction is in any case a indelible part of one's *life path. It is clear that we are very far from the idea of the communitarian path as a simple change in life style.*

Again as for the internal time, we must note the relation between "perception of one's state along the therapeutic path" and "perception of one's level of professional training" which testifies a conception of work, among the interviewees, connected with a maturation path which goes far beyond the technical-professional skills of the job in itself. This aspect, which has emerged empirically from the data, has a remarkable importance because it allow us to emphasize how a traditionally sociological indicator has a richer and broader meaning inside the community, having much more to do with the subjects' maturation path than with the achieved professional skill.

The *self-evaluation of one's level of professional training* is therefore important for the measurement of inner time, not because the questionnaire-interview required a perceptional answer, rather because the answers are to be considered as indicative of the subject' maturation path. As a result the importance emerges of a truly individual dimension, which refers to maturation dynamics "inherent" to the single subjects, in the *redefinition of the biographic path* even where one should expect to find exclusively sociological indications in the strict sense, as in the case of work.

It is above all the *difference between inner time (self evaluation of one's position on the professional training path) and outer time* (actual length of stay in San Patrignano) that was the central

point of the present analysis. Here it is underlined that this discord assumes, among the interviewees, an oscillating trend in the sense that it involves 45-50% of the subjects with an actual stay in San Patrignano of less than 10 months, and then it drops to about 20% in the subjects who stayed in San Patrignano between 10 months and 2 years, rising again in the subjects with a stay longer than 2 years (32.6% in the stay class "from 2 to 3 years", 42.3% in the "3-5 years" class, and finally, 48.7% in the "over 5 years" class). It is fundamental to make some important considerations as for this trend, though always bearing in mind that the communitarian routes are basically individuals paths, as testified by the fact that in each class of stay in the community (ranging between few months to over 5 years) at least 6 of the 7 levels of self evaluation of one's position on the therapeutic path are represented. The *inner/outer time imbalance/discrepancy* among those who stayed in the community less than 10 months is connected to an inclination to "overestimate" one's position along the therapeutic path. Possibly in these subjects there is not yet a full consciousness of the fact that, in order to substantially redefine one's *biographic route,* it is not sufficient to simply change lifestyle, hence the inclination to "overestimate" one's position along the *therapeutic path*. The *inner/outer time gap* tends to fill in the subject who stayed in the Community between 10 months and 2 years. It can therefore be hypothesized that the constant exchange with others, the ability to recognize oneself in others - two important aspects of life in the community - can finally constitute what one may call a "principle of reality", inducing the subjects to display a more realistic level of *self evaluation along the therapeutic path.* Finally, with reference to the subjects who stayed in San Patrignano for over two years, *inner and outer time* tend to be in accordance again for a part of subjects, increasing progressively in relation to the length of stay in the community. It must be noted that the latter is a *imbalance* which *qualitatively differs* from the one observed among the subjects with a stay shorter than 10 months. Actually in a remarkable part of the subjects with a "longer stay", especially those with over 5 years in the community, it was noted that they tended to place themselves along the therapeutic path at a lower level than the identified "foreseeable range". For these subjects the route of *redefinition of one's biographic path* does not seem to have a precise time limit. They do not set any rigid or pre-defined goals for themselves, nor end–of-the-therapy diplomas or licenses. It is therefore no wonder that precisely in this group there is the highest share of subjects who think that they will "never" break with their past, which could also mean that there is a total retrieval of one's experience, even of the most negative aspects, and also that the need has been overcome to remove unpleasant incidents, by "processing" them as learning experiences *(errando discitur).*

Therefore, the inclination expressed by this group of subjects is not to consider themselves at the conclusion of their program. Precisely this aspect allows us to underline once again that these life changes have matrixes which are essentially psychical and deep. However, this statement requires some further considerations. As already highlighted by G. Pieretti in the research *San Patrignano between Community and Society,* every psychological therapy has to consider the definition of the term "healing" and therefore, in terms of our questionnaire-interview, the end of the therapy. On this point G. Pieretti writes: "whereas in medicine, especially in the traditional medicine of therapy, it is possible to give, for a specific pathology, an almost standard definition of the parameters indicating the healing, and therefore there are diagnostic instruments (…) to check whether healing has been

achieved, and it is possible to foresee the average length of the therapy, or of the whole of the therapies required to achieve the healing itself, the same does not apply in the therapies of psychological type". And the basic point is that "within these areas, healing and therapy duration assumes a strongly individualized meaning, varies from person to person, even though this does not absolutely mean that the two terms are transitory and unsuitable for the specific field in discussion[7]". If there is one point which seems to emerge from the body of data on the item "time", and especially from the *discord* occurring between *inner and outer timing,* is that the idea of medical healing – but also a sociological one – with precise steps and defined timing, does not allow to grasp the peculiarities of the communitarian path of the interviewees, precisely because the *therapy time*, as well as the *length of the redefinition of one's biographic path* are first of all a matter of psychic time, which is singular, personal and unrepeatable.

The last observation results at this point as legitimate. Previously it was possible to illustrate that at San Patrignano no selective access criteria is present- there is no barrier at the entrance. Now another type of universalism emerges, associated with the universalism of access to the community: the *possibility of changing, of redefining one's biographic path, in one's own time, specific and individual.*

The emerging of a *psychological dimension* as an element characterizing the *biographic path* of the interviewees permitting comprehension, precisely because many and continuous comparisons were made, that the logic of comparison is extraneous to the life paths of the community' residents. Each life path is unique and, if it can be useful to analyze them by gathering and comparing them according to some criteria, it is however necessary to notice that each one emerges with *a unique and distinct story.*

Among the many analytical routes touched upon by this research, many interpretations emerge - deriving from the analysis of the "open topics", which are here schematically reported.

8. "Verba manent" and environmental therapy

Two basic aspects emerge. The first one concerns what differentiates San Patrignano from other communities: San Patrignano does not posses any theoretical *summa*, nor does it print a brochure or *dépliant* describing the therapy and establishing steps, deadlines on the necessary time, or specifics on the goals to be achieved. This certainly surprises the observer, and this aspect can cause some questions to arise even in those who know San Patrignano well - questions which are possibly reinforced by the fact that what is missing is certainly not the possibility of writing (and, if they want to, even to print) or of publishing (San Patrignano issues, as is well known, a monthly magazine).

After some reflection, we begin to suspect that it is a matter of choice, i.e. that it has been chosen, consciously, not to "set" in a writing – not even roughly – phases, timing and methods characterizing the therapeutic work (or educative process) carried out by the community. This is

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[7] P. Guidicini, G. Pieretti, *San Patrignano between Community and Society*, Angeli, Milano, 1995

surprising when this practice is compared with the action of many other communities, where there is an abundance of written material describing what, how, and why things are done.

The second, crucial aspect, which emerges from the main body of the present research is the *ability to see oneself reflected in others* 24 hours a day, every day - an intensive form of environmental therapy. Building relationships with others means not only shallow relationships typical of the metropolitan social environment, which always tend to be subtly competitive, but allowing yourself to see yourself clearly, as you really are, through the eyes of those around you. This does not mean that the subject must seem an ideal, model resident of San Patrignano. Conversely, there is an authentic assessment of what one really is: a kind of *permanent refraction* is involved. The community serves to make the subjects understand, through environmental therapy, that no one can face "the ghosts of his past" alone, and that it is indispensable that he become part of a group to find the true direction of his biographic route - a route which is unique, unrepeatable, and incomparable. We can note that a coherent therapeutic path can have no codified or rigid passages, and above all that it is necessary to carry out, a veritable "tribute to imperfection" to thoroughly understand the reasons why a therapy is efficient.

9. Universalism in San Patrignano

It has been noted that one of the decisive characteristics of the San Patrignano Community is universalism - the most absolute lack of any selective criterion or principle. This can be observed in many aspects, and among these:

1) the dilemma of giving new members access to the Community (especially the apparently problematic ones)
2) the course: there is no written indication;
3) the models or ideal-types to refer to: there are none;
4) the definition of "health" and the related policies;
5) the duration of the program;
6) the placement in working and/or housing sectors;
7) the option of creating new working activities if the Community residents call for them

One of the general characteristics of the community - universalism (lack of selectivity) – creates the conditions for a unique and inimitable therapeutic course. This, far from being a contradiction, is an aspect closely linked to the idea of life in San Patrignano, which is one of *continuity* and *individuality.*

It has to be understood that, in the life of therapeutic (in the etymological sense) community, no comparison practice, no – more or less natural – selective criterion occurs, exactly because there is respect for the practice of life and for the idea of life which involves in itself diversity, a diversity totally devoid of any experience of verification through confrontation or comparison.

There is no policy of comparison in the community, of competition (overt or implicit), and above all *there is no selection.* This happens because there is no selection criterion allowing to establish value

differences among the individuals and their experiences. Once again, the lack of selective criteria and the absence of a comparison policy is a direct and linear way to be tuned in with life and with a culture of life, because it is important – for anyone and above all for those who have lived through drug-addiction – to know that one does not have to get close to an *ideal-type,* that there is not a yardstick in respect to which one's measures are to be compared, but on the contrary it is fundamental to take one's measure, according to one's timing and one's own way, helped by the community. All this is, however, possible if – and only if – one finds oneself inside a *knowledge of life.* Actually, a *knowledge of life* "knows" very well that the competitive confrontation involves serious consequences on each living individuality, precisely for the fact that it is what is most extraneous to life itself.

10. Therapy and therapist

The etymological dictionary unveils the original meaning of the term *therapy;* to care for, show attentiveness, give assistance to, be absorbed by, hold in regard, honor and then, finally, to treat in a medical sense. Its primary meaning is *to serve.* Therapy means service, assistance, or care - something which seems to have to do less with duty and more with feelings of care and affection.

Above all, the origin of the word seems to suggest that the therapist is not a person rendering a professional service, but a person who serves, who assists, who cares. The word origin suggests nothing to us like the sterile attitudes sanctioned by some diploma. This term definitely refers to a *service -* the *therapist offers a service to the patient,* the one who suffers and needs assistance and loving care.

In this framework, the patient faces another element which is difficult to accept: the absolute lack of certainty about the length of the therapy. Even and especially at this stage the keys are in the hands of the therapist, i.e. the individual, the small group and the community as a whole. The keys are not certainly in the patient's hands. Taking also this control elements away from the hands of whom enters a therapy means to show the patient a path of further and significant, but healthy, destabilization. Accepting not to know *ex ante* when the therapy will end means to make a good therapeutic agreement, which has the sense of relying completely on the therapist, an important directive. Continuing in time to maintain such a mandate without knowing exactly when the "game" will end means also that one considers the experience in the community of San Patrignano not as a kind of holiday, more or less compulsory (maybe to settle troubled waters and to tranquillize the family) or as a stay in a boarding school or institution.

Not knowing when it will end, and learning to live with this element of uncertainty means also learning to abandon the seductions of drugs, it means learning to surrender to life and to its reality, and rediscover life itself in its daily occurrences.

The therapy becomes twofold: both patient and therapist are in the game. Not knowing precisely when the therapy will end helps the patient to surrender to the therapist (in a collective sense) and to the environment. But it also means that the patient is invited to give an active

contribution, perceive him/herself less and less as a patient, to assume more and more a realistic viewpoint on him/herself, an action made easier by the *mirror* made of the collective therapist, i.e. the community. It is getting progressively clearer for everybody as time passes, that the therapy is divided in two parts - to the extent that, as for the decision on the end of the communitarian path, is the "patient" who can express his/her opinion and is received with increasing consideration.

What is relevant here is the *collective management of the individual breakdown.* This is what clearly emerged in our research, together with multiple life paths and very individual therapeutic paths. On the one hand, the communitarian alliance in San Patrignano shows a *culture of sharing* which takes concrete form in the idea-force according to which *one can't get along by himself.* The collective dimension, the group dimension, has a real healing power. On the other hand, the idea stands out that the dynamics of the therapeutic path are peculiarly individual, incomparable, opposite to a confrontational, competitive logic.

It is therefore no wonder that the radically alternative character of some drug-addiction communities has been noticed, when compared with the outside society. An evident contradiction to the criteria dominating the outer society is there: the "collective management" and the "thousand ways out, one for each individual". In our society these two aspects are considered as opposite to each other, they are thought in the *out-out terms.* Our task is to understand why, on the contrary, they are thought in *et-et* terms.

We must ask why this pairing is considered as incongruous. Group and collective dimensions give life to a moral dimension, and moral life is the requirement of a *culture of sharing,* i.e., of not a competitive culture, where there is no hierarchic evaluation of human experience. Where there is no hierarchic evaluation of human experience, also the ideal types, the measurement standards lack and there is no need to imagine one and only one way out: there is no ideal type and so there is no need to standardize, because the standard is exactly what lacks.

The thousand ways can exist only where there is no standard to achieve and these ways can be made of a mosaic of experiences, trajectories, transitions.

It does not only mean that the *et-et* is possible where there is a collective management of the individual breakdown, but also that the thousand ways must be structurally associated with the most advanced situations of collective management of the individual breakdown. Our culture does not seem to understand the individual breakdown can be only overcome in a collective way, except when it concerns a neurotic situation which can be managed through individual treatments.

The Community's environmental therapy consists in making people realize that they can live without confrontation, without competition, without narcissism, in a dimension which conciliates "sense and sensibility". There's no place in the Community for narcissism because it means *affective immaturity.* In the Community a process of maturation develops which finds its most evident and touchable aspect in affectivity.

The analysis of our data mass confirms, beyond any opinion, this interpretation.

11. The therapist in San Patrignano

Must the therapist (in this case the people living in San Patrignano) be "perfect", "infallible" in order to be a real therapist, considering that he/she does not need to have a diploma?

In any *people processing-like therapy* a common attitude by the patient is often to be noted: the patient expects the therapist to be omniscient. The patient often views the therapist as a sort of shaman, whose presence and actions are the direct cause of the patient's recovery.

This is one of the greatest obstacles to recovery. If the therapist is omniscient, the patient does not have to commit himself with all his/her being. Attributing the therapist omniscience, perfection and supernatural powers means to delegate the recovery to him/her: "Do as I know you will do right: I will wait for you to tell me I am all right again". The analysis of our data mass suggests that the practice in San Patrignano does not favor this attitude on the side of the "patient", but, on the contrary, it discourages it. Nobody, not even the founder of the Community, has ever surrounded himself with a halo of perfection or infallibility. It cannot be underestimate that San Patrignano therapists are ex-drug-addicts just like their patients.

This choice has not been dictated by opportunity, but is a fundamental element of the unwritten therapy based on the breaking-up of the patients' prejudices.

To put him/herself in an ex-drug-addict's hands means to a drug-addict that drug-addiction is a challenge he/she can win; it gives him/her self-confidence. But he/she must understand that the path he/she is beginning is not a specialized or aseptic test, but a human experience. The therapist/patient duality is not only the therapist's responsibility, but also the patient must do his/her best.

San Patrignano's therapist has no halo of mysticism, magic, shamanism or almightiness: he is just like you, only he went through this before, and you too must help him, no matter how deep you have gone into your degradation. Your failure would mean his failure; he is doing his best for you, with all his limits and weaknesses. Accepting the therapist's imperfection is one of the determining aspects in every *people processing-like therapy*: not expecting the therapist to be perfect means, among other things, you don't expect yourself to be perfect. In this way you can partly overcome the desolation of feeling inadequate, of feeling not good enough (becomes futile).

The San Patrignano therapist is a former drug-addict. This establishes three things: *first,* it proves that one can overcome drug-addiction; *second,* it means that the therapist is no shaman, but a normal human being with weaknesses and the patient must help him in order to get over drug-addiction; *third,* if the therapist himself is weak, then no wonder the patient is weak. Thus, the patient has the chance to get over the illusion of omniscience and the desolation caused by his/her limits. Obviously, seeing one's limits is cause for desolation only if one thinks to be perfect: a maturation process, particularly for a drug-addict, means to get over the illusion of immortality and omniscience.

The Community offers acceptance, companionship, sharing; the Community is where everyone can find his/her points of reference *not as a person* (what appears) but *as an individual* (what he/she is, can be or is about to become, once his/her potential for evolution will be set free). There is no difference, in the Community, between the educator and the educated. The latter is*" just*

like me" in the Community. Almost all educators have, in their turn been "educated". Once they were drug-addicts, they experienced the pain, the difficulty, the hurdles of therapy. There is no *ontological distinction,* no wonder, no aseptic distance. What is there is empathy.

12. City Effect

The choice to be open to experimentation represents a significant continuity and openness when compared to outside society. Experimentation means openness; this is the other relevant facet of the *city effect* in San Patrignano. City effect is pluralism, complexity, possibility of *being-like-this but-also-like-that.* Moreover, it is the possibility of finding a *sense of meaning,* and some individual and unique *trajectoire de vie*.

San Patrignano offers no *standard package.* Even the admittance practice itself varies from individual to individual, from situation to situation, from time to time, as shown in our preliminary research - this is evident in each experience within the Community. As we have already said when we dealt with what we defined as the *verba manent* aspect, there is nothing predefined or standardized in San Patrignano Community. The Community offer itself is a situation where the "client" choices what he/she needs on the shelves. Not all products, however, are available and suitable at any given time, so if the number of possibilities is very high, the choices available at any given time or in any given situation depends on inner and outer factors.

This is *city effect* in the truest sense of the word. San Patrignano is both Community and Society, because life in San Patrignano means *continuity* and *singularity,* because here a *collective awareness* can be found which is missing in the outside, so-called civilized society. In the world outside the Community thousands of individuals live alone and in anonymity, facing a constantly shifting and increasingly confused social climate; individuals who find it harder and harder to make sense of things, because there is a lack of a true collective dimension. They look in vain for that warmth which only a group/family can give and which can make a less self-centered existence, i.e., a moral life, desirable and necessary.

Such dimension is, however, not only the result of a casual development of the Community, even though it has always had an experimental and flexible attitude.

But the belief in the group, the conviction that one individual cannot make it alone against a world such as ours, that only collective solidarity can permit the people to take off the mask (*persona* as Latin said) and free themselves from their protective armor made of self-reference and cynicism: that has always been the choice of the Community, and its constant idea-force.

San Patrignano is a group, a *collective moral individual* from which the warmth emanates that only a collective dimension can give off. If compared to the outer society, San Patrignano is a *radically alternative fact*, a tough alternative to the individualistic culture dominating our world.

13. Life as latent structure of the community

Many elements of the Community make the impact with it traumatic and astonishing. The strongest and most significant of these aspects is that life - any life - is allowed to express itself without the pressure of confrontation, comparison, competition. There are no ideals or models of perfection to imitate in order to define your identity.

The impact with San Patrignano is, however, *catastrophic*. The lack of models means you are in the condition of "thinking for yourself" again as an individual, of looking for your own *irrelative dimension* inside, and not outside yourself - without any pressure from the environment. It means marching to the beat of your own drum in search of what you are inside your own bio-psychic individuality and not fitting in some kind of model, searching for what you are and what you are destined to be.

You can acquire a knowledge of yourself *only if* you give up the relationship-as-competition model, if you don't' aim for any ideal type, (which doesn't exist in the Community) accept the *community dimension,* which is a group dimension, a collective and moral dimension. It is a dimension where the consciousness does not need to submit to some model, but to find its own power inside itself.

14. The micro-physics of life

In order to re-connect with a knowledge of life you have to let your everyday life unfold again, finding pleasure and satisfaction in respecting life and in those gestures, moments and feelings which have nothing to do with the "dramatic over-excitement" of drugs and, on contrary, belong to the microphysics of life. Maturation means learning to appreciate the *micro-physics of life*, the concrete things of everyday life, once so despised because mediocre and insignificant. Now it is life that makes sense: "Finding pleasure in food", "eating three hot meals a day", "rediscovering the pleasure of sleep", "singing together at the top of your lungs", "remembering anniversaries", "respect and care for animals", "to appreciate art", "to try out for sport": all minor aspects of life which are appreciated again.

Another element helps us to understand why a drug rehabilitation community like San Patrignano is closer to the knowledge of life than the outside world is: thanks to the Community's culture of life, death is not hidden, death is present and is part of the life of the people living there. In the outside world, death seems as unreal as it is in the comics or in the movies, and your own death seems a highly unlikely event or, at the best, a continuous challenge. However, in the community, death is respected and honored. It is a common event, considering the high number of people who are ill with AIDS. The maturing influence of this aspect must be underlined: helping and taking care of people who are ill with AIDS, as San Patrignano residents usually do, means to look death right in the face. But for those who experience this practice it means also to learn to let those ill with AIDS help you, let them infuse into yourself their love for life, in its many forms.

Life, thus, is freed not only from a constant competition, but also of any need for "over-excitement": a person ill with AIDS does not need constant stimuli, just being alive is enough. Being close to someone who only wants live is really an extraordinary possibility, a decisive element of an *environmental therapy,* where life is closely tied to death.

Also the *real,* physical presence of death helps in founding a culture of life, on the one hand, and a real affection to the *micro-physics of life,* on the other. This stands out clearly from our data mass.

15. Community and collective dimension

San Patrignano speaks of a culture of life and this is important but, at a closer look, something much more dense and meaningful is to be discovered, that is the idea, which seems to be really revolutionary as for our society system, that links life to the impossibility – theoretical and practical, inside the community – of distinguishing between one life and another, between one human experience and another. It seems as if one cannot distinguish between good and bad, up and down, first and last; whereas the analysis of some functionally prevailing positions is to be seen.

Inside San Patrignano there is an acknowledgement of the common trait of imperfection and every one's limitations, of the missing ontological distinction between therapist and patient, of a role play justified *only and exclusively* in a differentiations of function and work division. There is – and it appears as a *radically alternative fact* in respect to outer society – an acknowledgement of the value of every one's existence, a value that is not placed on a hierarchic ladder. In San Patrignano there is no *hierarchic evaluation of human experience.* On the contrary, there is a deep respect for each experience, for each background, for each psyche. In other words, there is a *practical notion of human equality* underling the knowledge of life possessed by the community; and now we know that it could not be different. Possessing the knowledge of life means, necessarily, both to understand that life is *singularity*, and therefore intrinsically *difference,* and to take for granted that between life and life there can be no difference in value, and namely that life is also *continuity*. Lives are different and exactly for this reason they are equal.

It is important to understand the genesis of all this, which has absolutely nothing to do with an ideological type of path. The starting is not a (formal) acknowledgement of a (formal and therefore bourgeoisie) equality of everyone, and then it happens that a kind of "interior nature" in each one shows itself and "plays its game". The thing is more complicate and at the same time much easier and it has nothing to do with politics, with abstract "citizen's rights" nor with the *lab-lab* thought.

The fact is that each life, for each person is really respected, listened to and paid attention to - life shows up the most strange, incredible ways, but is always respected. When something *radically alternative* is noticed in this knowledge of life in respect to external society, we must specify that it lays on the two sides of the same coin: the careful and respectful acknowledgment of the singularity of each life on the one hand, and the other the incapability of considering life itself (any life) in vertical and hierarchical terms, and then of thinking of possible rewards or differentiate carriers – a thing which

is really far from the experience of San Patrignano Community. Although it is not an island in and of itself, San Patrignano does not look like outside society at least from this viewpoint: *because no difference is made between the value of a life and another.*

Within the framework of this analysis, this is the ultimate reason why in San Patrignano – though in the presence of an almost sacred faith in the human relationship – this way of "relating" is not noticed, where the weight of confrontation/competition is to be felt under the relations, however frank and direct they may seem, where the individual are considered from the viewpoint of *value of exchange,* by giving them a value, that is a price.

There are not carriers to run for, and those who have positions of "authority" receive a kind of *"mandate imperative",* revocable by the group in any moment in an informal form of direct democracy. This revocable mandate is an aspect which must not be underestimated because it is closely pertaining, also in terms of historiography, with a certainly non-formal vision of equality.

The conclusion which can be drawn is that if San Patrignano did not possess the sense of collective dimension to such a strong extent and a sense of collective awareness, the individual consciousness would find it very difficult to develop itself and learn to listen its deepest resources and changes.