

San Patrignano: distressing vision of the society of the future¹

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In May 2014, in response to an invitation from Jacques Attali, we² participated in the LH Forum on Positive Economy which was held within the premises of San Patrignano Community, near Rimini (Italy), place of residence for people with problems of addictive substances abuse. We want to share in this report our concern on the ambiance that we discovered during our short stay in this famous Therapeutic Community presented as a reference model for the future, and point out the reflections that aroused in us, the questions that emerge regarding the vision of the future of humanity according to this prototype of tomorrow's society.

This was the third Forum of its kind, the first two were organized in France and this was the first to be held in Italy.

Positive economy is a concept developed by Jacques Attali, economist and former adviser to French president François Mitterand. It aims, they say, to place human being at the center of the economy and to consider as necessary to take into account the future generations in any economic decision. Innovative projects that seek to promote or are living examples of this idea were invited to participate in this conference, and given only 15 minutes to convince the audience. Takiwasi is considered an “inspiring” project in this sense and particularly in the context of the subject of addictions which also concerns San Patrignano Community who welcomed us.

We presented a lecture titled “Ayahuasca and Traditional Amazonian Medicines in the Treatment of Addictions” in French with power-point presentation in English and simultaneous interpretation in Italian and English. It was broadcast live on the Internet and later uploaded in YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LUkJMejwnJ0>

<http://positiveeconomy.co/video/jacques-mabit-san-patrignano-2014/>

[http://www.citytower.com/ES/IT/Italy/Italy%20\(general\)/San%20Patrignano/2476870/tubes/](http://www.citytower.com/ES/IT/Italy/Italy%20(general)/San%20Patrignano/2476870/tubes/)

Mr. Jacques Attali congratulated us at the end of the presentation and asked for our publications on the subject. Overall, Jacques Attali and people from the PlaNet Finance Group were enthusiastic about our

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² Dr. Jacques Mabit and Dr. Rosa Giove, spouses and founding doctors of the Takiwasi Center for the Rehabilitation of Drug Addicts and For Research on Traditional Medicines, Tarapoto, Peru (www.takiwasi.com).

presentation, whereas the representatives of San Patrignano Community were not in favor of our proposals that turned out to be in complete opposition to their preaching. To such an extent that they requested for a debate between a doctor of San Patrignano and myself as representative of Takiwasi. I accepted, but it was later canceled due to lack of time (genuine reason or concocted one?). That reaction was not surprising when one describes succinctly what San Patrignano is and how Rosa and I perceived this Community.

San Patrignano has more than 25 years of existence and receives currently more than 1300 addicted residents at a time. It is described as the largest therapeutic community for addicts in the world. It is an entire village with hospital, school, swimming pool, dentist's office, a huge dining room whose kitchen is the biggest in Italy with capacity to serve 5000 lunches at the same time etc., and it even has a cemetery. They made us visit all the 47 production workshops where residents work with the aim of making high-quality products (fine wine, breeding of thoroughbred racehorses and Labrador Retrievers, hand-painted wallpaper, fine woodwork, toys, handicrafts, etc.). The philosophy of the Center is rehabilitation through excellence in work: there is no psychotherapy, there is neither spiritual orientation nor practice, there is no medication. All drugs, including tobacco, are confiscated at the gate. They claim to supply 70% of their needs (farms, bakeries, animal husbandry, vineyards, industrial cloth laundering, etc.). Residency is free. The printing house makes high-quality products and one of its colossal machines that works throughout the day has a market price of US 400,000 dollars. In other words, it's a million-dollar investment and San Patrignano has a support network all over Italy made of large companies, banks, financial companies, etc. Many CEOs of national and multinational companies and banks (Havas, Schneider Electric, etc.), all friends of San Patrignano, participated in the event. The patients live in huts and they are supervised in groups according to the place where they work. They get together for food in the huge dining room. The cooks and the waiters are also patients and they wear uniforms. The inaugural gala dinner of the event was held in San Patrignano's high class restaurant and coffee-breaks were also served by patients who were wearing neck ties and serving fine wine and delicious pastries. The environment is completely immaculate, the gardens perfect. The conference hall has cutting-edge technology, it has an all wood dovetailed design, plays of light and booths for simultaneous interpretation. The patients move around the Center in a relaxed but restrained manner. You do not hear exclamations, natural laughter, nor jokes. They all seem to be well-mannered and calm.

Seen from the outside it recreates a small paradise.

The treatment consists of only work, self-improvement par excellence, and abandonment of all types of drugs at the entrance. Minimum residency is for 3 years. However, it can extend to 4 or 5 years in some cases and some patients stay for life... There is no Internet, no cellphones or contact with the outside

world throughout their stay. Many patients are referred by the authorities as substitution for prison. They abstain from sexual relations throughout their stay. The women (around 50) work and live among themselves. After the first year of their stay they have right to receive a family visit. After three years they have permission to go home for 10 days and what happens is then is evaluated. We noticed only one patient of color among hundreds. Everybody has the same short haircut and they dress with San Patrignano t-shirt or simple yet clean clothes. When we asked them what they do, when they experience “troubles” or crisis, they answered that “they talk among the residents” and, eventually, with the person in charge of the group, and everything gets under control. In the worst scenario they can ask for a psychologist (they say that happens only 10% of the time) or to be hospitalized in the clinic at the Center. If patients of opposite sex fall in love, they ask permission to the persons in charge to evaluate whether to establish appropriate relationship. They report a success rate of 72% (undefined) that has been proved by a study of the University of Bologna and it is their only reference (we did not have this study in our hand). The non-ex-addict partners are indicated as volunteers (between 130 and 150) which is a very low rate (one per ten residents... to compare with Takiwasi where more than 40 persons work for 15 residents...) The residents have all their needs covered by the Center (they neither cook nor wash their clothes except the patients working permanently in these areas), and they do not receive salary for their work and therefore they can neither save nor spend their own money.

To have an idea about this meeting and the Community you can see a photographic reportage at the following link:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/sanpatrignano/14225774938/lightbox/>

Together with Rosa we observed the following aspects:

- The patients look identical with a sort of common, undifferentiated personality and are submitted to an implied pattern or model. The uniformity among the residents is striking; their personalities and characters do not stand out... as if their “spirit” had been removed from them. They are nice, revealing a sort of same humor without wit; they are neither “high” nor “depressed” but exhibit “normosis”, to say in the word of Pierre Weil, which is an indifferent and massifying normalization. Nobody laughs out loud or is annoyed by the dark joke of the other. One sees in it a kind of prefabricated happiness.
- There was rather an air of gloom in the girls' workshop, something “dead”, depressing, unreasonably “normal”.
- You do not see unattended patients or patients showing some kind of peculiar, personal, singular behavior, or something of fantasy, neither in their appearance (clothes, haircut, they don't wear

beard or mustache, bracelets, piercing...) nor in their personal style, behavior, manner of speaking, look... You cannot say that they are zombies, they neither look dull nor stupefied but nobody is sad, angry, irritated, agitated either. You cannot distinguish the Mafioso dealer consuming cocaine from the son of a wealthy family or the high marijuana smoker. You cannot guess their social origin or history. To sum up they lack life and distinctive expression.

- It is remarkable that the patients did not try to spontaneously strike conversation or make exchanges with us (like what you see in Takiwasi). There was no formal prohibition (at least for us and in a visible manner for the residents) but we found this lack of interest and curiosity that seemed to us unusual and suspicious. We could not have private conversations with residents as we were always walking in groups. The only two times we could directly interact with them were quite surprising experiences. The guide who was accompanying the visitors is a patient who has been living in the Center for 5 years, he speaks English and he is ready to leave and do the same job in an affiliated center to be established in Australia. Native from Kosovo, upon returning to his house after 3 years, he acknowledged he felt more at home in San Patrignano than with his family. When he was asked about his inner experiences (I asked him about his dreams), he admitted that before entering San Patrignano he was interested in understanding the oneiric content but he lost it... and suddenly the conversation was interrupted by the arrival of another group and it was not resumed. I asked a Swedish girl, who was guiding us at a later time, about her effective and emotional life... Tears rolled down her eyes and “opportunistically” a friend came to look for her. Coincidence? Maybe yes, maybe no...
- After my presentation which was attended by about one hundred (selected?) residents none took interest to ask about Takiwasi, shamanism, plants... I never saw this before in any other conference.
- They did not reveal in any moment any kind of rebelliousness or annoyance due to social isolation, long sexual abstinence, lack of visits and trips, presence of wine that they cannot partake (that they produce and serve to the visitors), absence of psycho-therapeutic and spiritual accompaniment.
- You cannot see any workshop of personal creativity: art is formal and intended to be sold in high level circuits of acquisition (wallpapers painted by hand are sold in New York, designer furniture is exhibited in galleries all over the world...)
- They raise animals but you cannot see a single companion animal or pet running around.
- The residents show neither impatience nor desire for going out. On the contrary, they return to what they consider a “big family”, moreover, you cannot identify paternal and maternal figures, keys or referents... except that of the founder who died still young and was accused of power abuse, sexual abuse and other judicial charges. They uphold that this belongs to the history of

the Center, that the abusers were excluded although the current president, Laetizia Moratti, is one of the co-founders.

- They allow people from outside to visit their workshops and they show their high-quality products and their entrepreneurial success, but you see nothing about community life itself, clinical histories, intimacy of what happens in this place and how patients are treated and above all how they confront abstinence syndrome, emotional crises, transgressions, spiritual infestations, psychic disorders (or psychiatrists that apparently they do not receive).
- Availability of large amount of money is confirmed and in a bulletin of the association you see that only in the first few months of 2014 they received donations amounting to some 200,000 Euros.
- We did not see a single symbolic, spiritual, religious or sacred sign... except posters of Pope Francisco blessing the Community of San Patrignano (in other words, admissible propaganda).
- You do not see outside students or researchers, they do not even make reference to studies made by people from outside the institution (except that of the University of Bologna whose authors' connection or not with the institution we do not know). A female doctor of the San Patrignano hospital who gave her testimony is a former patient and lives alone a short distance away from the Institution. Another young boy testified that he was raised by both parents in San Patrignano until, already a teenager, his parents left the Community and it did not take much time for them to fight and separate. The mother re-took a heavy drug consumption and her son had to look after her. Finally, this young man of 27 years without ever becoming addict decided to return to San Patrignano that he saw as the paradise of his childhood and outside he had a girlfriend who was waiting for him for 5 years! The dependence on the institution appears then very strong because this seems to represent a world isolated from the outside problems and where everything is organized and foreseen. There are no surprises. There are no risks.

These partial observations and accountable only to 3 days are contrasting to the first sight impression of a sort of perfect world. What can be better than boys and girls “lost” in drugs that are now calm, clean, working, smiling, self-supplying...? Moreover, they produce things of quality for the society and they bother nobody. It is really fascinating to see this miracle and that too without involving psychotherapy, medicaments, religion, spirituality... and above all everything is free and profitable! There is no need of specialized personnel. The majority of daily visitors who know nothing about addictions are amazed... and they take out their wallet. Many of them are CEOs of national and multinational enterprises.

It gave us the sensation of a perfect society that was hiding a huge shadow. A big functional, efficient,

well-oiled machine where human beings are enclosed without conscience in a unique, prefabricated, formatted mold. It made us think about Matrix and the soap opera “The Prisoner” where a man finds himself in this kind of society of compelled happiness but from which he cannot escape. The fascination inevitably evoked in us possible alienation. The uniform personality of the residents makes us think about some sort of undifferentiation opposed to the path of individuation and where functionality resembles a form of spiritual death. The guaranteed security eliminates all risk, including the risk of living his own life, of making mistakes, of failing, of daring to love, eliminates spiritual links, torments and happiness of discovering oneself. The separation from the outside “elegant” world, without barbed wire, without armed guards, to us evokes the psychic submission to a model so impregnated that they are not necessary for the contention.

In accordance with “humanist” capitalism, if the expression is not contradictory in itself, this model attracts economic investments, the interests of financial institutions, the admiration from financial experts. The positive economy wants to come out from short term joining together “capital and knowledge” (Andrea Illy, President and CEO of Illycaffè). The economic success is presented as sign of fulfillment: a famous Italian entrepreneur, Renzo Rosso, stylist and businessman, founder of the clothing brand “Diesel” (slogan: “For a Successful Living”; and perfume line: “Fuel for Life”) who started from nothing (he was born and raised in a farm) and became one of the richest men in Italy (his companies generate more than one billion dollars annually) by launching original series of torn, faded jeans, came to dinner... He is a humanist, admirer of the Dalai Lama, and created a Foundation (Only the Brave) that supports innovative projects in Africa. He could talk, seated on a table, to 1300 residents of the Center, being an example of success. The entrepreneurs that became the model of San Patrignano are numerous but apparently you cannot see psychotherapists knowledgeable of the problematic of addictions doing the same. There is a natural resonance between San Patrignano and the capitalistic archetype of efficient workers who produce lucrative products with a squared subsidized life but without salary, complaints, nor social labyrinths of laborers unions.

We think the logo of the meeting was very symbolic by representing a classic factory where a modern wind motor is added, thus evoking some sort of “ecological”, “soft” modernization, that is more presentable than the old factory where workers semi enslaved by this modernity work in the assembly line.



All of this reflected in some presentations³ that talked about “functional humanism”, “rational altruism” (Cedric Baucher), where “I win and you win”, where “altruism is an intelligent egoism” (Andrea Illy), where “the investment in the share is profitable” (Oscar Di Montigny). With a criticism of the “religions that delay the hope of happiness to the beyond” (Roberto Mondacci) and in this way “they crush the present with the duration (eternity)” (Jacques Attali). It would be necessary to liberate from these religious chains to find liberty and happiness here and now, to get rid of the conditioning religious determinisms, by re-taking a “positive philosophy” (Robert Mondacci).

These high-profile financiers teach us at the same time that “98% of the transactions are not based on real exchange of goods” and “the detaining of the assets currently lasts from some seconds to maximum of 4 minutes in 60% of the stock-market transactions” (Henri Lachman). They inform us that “90% of the world population does not have access to financial instruments” (Sébastien Duquet, Manager of ResponsAbility, world leader in micro finance). They recognize that “the GDP is not a valid indicator of subjective well-being” but the “cultural participation” is (Enzo Gussi, Fundación Braco). There are critical voices that point out that in “positive psychology” you know that “11% of the Anglo-Saxon youth from the age of 16 to 24 years show depressive periods” (Dona Boniwell, Positran), which “paradoxically the social networks isolate instead of connecting” and that “the more children you have, the more the sensation of subjective well-being increase in an exponential manner” (Roberto Mondacci). Just like “the parents have interest in the happiness of their children”, “the happiness of the future generations is in our interest (Jacques Attali). Somebody quoted Gandhi: “It is not the speed of your progress that matters but the direction” and Dostoevsky: “Beauty will save the world”; they affirmed, “the crisis results essentially of a lack of ideas”, that there is “a lack of secure references apart from the payment of taxes and death”, that the new economy must aim towards “the good and creativity”, that the “physical quantum and neuroscience show us that we are not isolated but exist in interrelation” (Oscar Di Montigny). The value of “resilience and interior well-being” must be rescued (Dona Boniwell). Another recommended to “start from the practice and return to it after applying critical thinking” (Roberto Mondacci).

3 All the presentations of the persons mentioned above are available in the website of San Patrignano, Movement for positive economy and in YouTube.

This ambiguity is reflected in this proposal of society without father or mother... only “brothers and sisters” or rather neighbors since there cannot be brothers and sisters without father or mother. Neighbors that are like copies, doubles, without the polarity of where love is born. The other is identical, there is no otherness that provokes attraction, friction, arouse provocation, sometimes fear, but there is a simile that is known, foreseen. There are not mixed couples and the libido is hidden in this surrender of oneself to the mold. Henri Lachman (CEO of Schneider Electric) rejected in an intervention the “compassion that humiliates” nor “believes in altruism” and he prefers “solidarity and responsibility”, because they say that the other is treated as poor and despised, when I actually consider that it is a confusion with false pity. It is affirmed that “the economic benefit (profit) can be full of virtue: independence, investment, durability... we can advocate for the search of the beautiful, the good and the reliable, but without God, from whom we can exempt ourselves, and even more its annoying “idea”. There is no love (feast), there are no individuals, there is only work, organization, perfection of the great machine to which one identifies with, merged and assimilated. As some sort of regression within a big comfortable womb where one is finally at peace and sacrifices his/her soul to this devouring Mother. A sort of cemetery peace with the death of the spirit. There were for us dreams with masons and Illuminati, the perfection of humanism without God evoked by Hitlerian dreams, the world of *1984* of George Orwell and *Brave New World* of Aldous Huxley. In short, a Luciferian society giving us a vision of what the present world could become if it follows the path towards negation of the soul and divinity and rejection to sanctity. We saw a sample of a society terribly seductive for its impeccability and efficiency... and that gives cold sweat for the death of the soul shaped behind it.

Dr. Jacques Mabit
Tarapoto, Perú, 2014