

Welfare Italia – the mark of good care

Comunità Solidali, a consortium of social co-operatives offering care services to elderly, disabled and mentally ill people, has created a registered trademark for co-operatives managing psychiatric residential homes. It stands for quality services at reasonable cost, planned and implemented in collaboration with local authorities, families and local communities.

Key messages and partners

Comunità Solidali is an example of replication of the vertical integration of the productive chain of care services provided by social co-operatives. The use of trademarks represents a recent innovation for social enterprises. In fact, the sector has been reluctant to use tools introducing elements of standardisation and homogenisation in the production process. Firstly, social enterprises have promoted their visibility and reputation mainly by campaigning for legal recognition of their specific legal form¹ and the fields in which they operate.² Secondly, they have emphasised the primacy of the individual experience through their statutes, mission statements, ethical codes and social accounts.

The recent and rapid dissemination of quality trademarks is probably linked to the need to affirm their identity not only in their statutes but also in their products. Only in this way can they clearly distinguish themselves to their stakeholders: users, partners and institutions. The use of trademarks not only helps to reaffirm the 'uniqueness' of social enterprises vis-à-vis their external clients but also their members and partners. There is a growing need to show the added value of specific features of social enterprises that are not laid down by law.

Comunità Solidali is part of the evolution of CGM, the main Italian consortium of social co-operatives. CGM represents 1,200 social co-operatives grouped in 84 local consortia spread all over Italy. They comprise 35,000 workers and have an annual turnover of €1 billion.

In 2003 CGM decided to create several trademark companies operating in different sectors (childhood, mental illness and elderly people, environment, labour policies) under the same trademark, named Welfare Italia. The purpose of Welfare Italia is to establish strong partnerships with citizens and organisations, public and private enterprises, in order to give concrete answers to citizens' needs, promote people's well-being and plan and offer quality services at an affordable price. All those companies are members of CGM co-operative group.

Comunità Solidali is CGM's trademark company operating in the field of mental health, handicap and elderly people. Its members are:

- 800 social co-operatives operating in 13 Italian regions
- 41 territorial consortia associating and supporting individual co-operatives

¹ Law 381/91 on social co-operatives and Law 118/05 on social enterprises

² Laws 328/00 and 68/99 give special advantages to social co-operatives providing social services and work for disabled people.

- One funding member (CGM)
- One foundation (Fondazione Betania)

History and content

Comunità Solidali is the result of CGM's ten years of experience in psychiatric care. Since 1994 CGM has undertaken projects to develop proximity services for people with mental illness based on:

- the satisfaction of the users and their families
- the direct involvement of all the actors concerned (public authorities, doctors, nurses, families and local communities) in order to promote the well-being and integration of mentally ill people
- the creation of small 'home style' structures (*case famiglia*) to host psychiatric patients
- personalised rehabilitation paths aiming at empowerment, autonomy and work integration of people with mental problems
- investment in training, research and innovation.

There are two characteristic elements: the trademark symbol of excellence and the orientation towards innovation and development.

The trademark aims to provide a positioning in the market and competitive advantages to all co-operatives managing psychiatric residential homes according to the rules and requirements contained in a manual. The manual has been created after a systematic evaluation lasting several years of the psychiatric communities managed by CGM co-operatives. This evaluation comprised both a continuous self-evaluation done by the co-operatives and an annual evaluation done by the national consortium. An important contribution was made by external actors – Caritas, the National Health Institute, the University of Verona and the Grana Padano Consortium (a consortium of cheese producers) – which helped to elaborate the trademark regulations.

Innovation and development means the promotion of 'broad solidarity' which means the creation of solidarity networks and the capacity to implement reciprocity and subsidiarity at local level, where local consortia act as strategic agencies to promote mental health in their territories.

In recent years, Comunità Solidali has extended its action from mental care to services for elderly and handicapped people. It has started developing trademarks and integrated care services (home care, residential care, day centres etc.) using the experience acquired in the mental care sector. It answered a clear need for support from social co-operatives operating in the care sector that needed to face a changing welfare system and increased competition.

In fact, CGM's social co-operatives traditionally operate in the market of home care services managed by public administrations through public procurement. This market is changing because of keen price competition from big co-operatives and profit-oriented businesses and the introduction of vouchers. Moreover, few CGM co-operatives manage or own residential homes, because of the high investment required, while the private (families and individual) market is mainly in the hands of individual workers (generally immigrants, often on the black market).

Results

Given the broad scope of its activity, the achievements of Comunità Solidali concern several aspects, such as the consolidation of the network, partnerships with other

actors, the creation of new psychiatric communities, the awarding of the trademark and the development of new services.

- **Consolidation of the network**

Comunità Solidali was created in 2003 by CGM and seven local consortia. The number of members has grown steadily to reach 41 in 2006. It has also opened membership to other actors, such as foundations, while for the moment the direct membership of co-operatives has been excluded, according to the general principle that the national consortium is a third-level organisation federating local consortia, which in turn federate co-operatives.

- **Partnerships**

Partnership with different organisations (for-profit and non-profit) is an important achievement in order to build a comprehensive system that can meet multiple needs in the care sector. Comunità Solidali's main partners are:

- Anfass, the national association of families of mental handicapped people, has joined with Comunità Solidali to set up a new company to promote residential communities to solve the "after us" problem of handicapped people (handicapped people's survival after their parents' death) (see the section on *Prospects* below);
- Fondazione Talenti, a grant-making foundation managing religious orders' properties. Presently, it is funding a research study on the "after us" services offered to families of handicapped people and the needs for legal changes to implement new services. In the future, they could make disused religious buildings available for conversion into residential homes for elderly, handicapped or mentally ill people;
- FISH, the Italian federation of disabled people, is a very important actor in the sector and is collaborating in the above-mentioned research study;
- Banca Intesa is a partner in Alfa, the new company created with Anfass, and will provide preferential loans to Comunità Solidali co-operatives or associations wishing to create "after us" communities for handicapped people;
- CGM Finance is a financial company in the CGM network providing financial support and services to member co-operatives;
- Solidalia is a mutual society recently created by CGM and Assimoco, a co-operative insurance company. Comunità Solidali has a member on the board with the aim of finding common solutions in the conception of a new public-private welfare system (care services paid for both by the public sector and by personal private insurances).

- **New psychiatric communities**

Twenty-five new small psychiatric communities have been created thanks to a financial contribution from the CEI (Italian Episcopal Conference). These communities replicate the successful model promoted by Comunità Solidali and have applied to obtain the trademark.

- **Trademark**

The trademark has been awarded to 46 psychiatric communities. In 2006, seven communities have obtained it "under reserve" and six have been rejected. These two groups will be re-evaluated in 2007.

- **New services**

Through specific projects, Comunità Solidali has launched research and experimentation in order to find innovative solutions for care services for elderly people and handicapped people, namely:

- Mondi Solidali ('Solidarity Worlds'), a project funded by CEI to raise public awareness of the problems and the need to include people with mental problems
- Filiera ('Productive chain'), a project aiming to create links between all the innovative projects in the mental illness sector operating in Lombardy
- Legami ('Links'), an experiment in innovative home care services, characterised by a strong involvement of local communities and users
- the "after us" issue: research and new company, already mentioned above
- Vodafone has supported experimentation with 'care houses' providing minor health care to elderly people in big cities.

Main difficulties

The development of the consortium takes a lot of time and energy. Financial and human resources are scarce. Fees cover only part of the cost of the national consortium, while most of activities are funded by specific projects and sponsorships. The latter are linked to specific conditions (territories to be involved, need for co-financing etc.) so they may not respect the priorities established by the board. As a consequence, not all the territories are involved in innovative projects and some priority activities lag behind because of lack of funding. Moreover the increased number of members, necessary to have a national coverage, makes it even more difficult to involve everybody.

Comunità Solidali, according to the rules of Consorzio CGM, has opened its membership to local consortia and not directly to social co-operatives. The reason is to keep a territorial level of co-ordination and to have an intermediary body that knows the global needs of the territory and is able to integrate different needs and actions. On the other hand, the local consortium could slow down the development of specific sectoral activities, because they may not be a priority for them. They also represent an additional link in the chain linking the national level with the users. The need to respect the principle of democracy and the need to involve and consult everybody before taking any decision makes the system very participative but slow to develop.

The political and institutional context represents a difficulty. At national level the welfare system is changing rapidly: public resources are scarcer and competition is increasing. The third sector has to face rapid changes with limited resources, while other competitors may have access to greater material resources. From an institutional point of view it is the regions that are responsible for health and social issues, which means that regulations and requirements may differ from region to region.

Success factors

- The **vertical integration** of the productive chain, which is a driving concept of the history of local consortia. Many of them were born and work to combine activities that meet different needs in the local population. A local consortium, through its member co-operatives, should be able to provide answers to different social needs: rehabilitation, care, education, work integration, etc. Similarly the trademark of Comunità Solidali covers the whole sector of services addressed to mentally ill, elderly and handicapped people, providing different solutions and services adapted to the specific needs and situations.
- The **evaluation system** based on scientifically recognised methodologies is an important added value element that Comunità Solidali communities can offer to users and their families. Moreover it helps the care scheme not to be self-referential.

- The **commitment and the enthusiasm** of the social entrepreneurs involved is the key factor that allows the network to progress. All the managers and staff of the national consortium come from social co-operatives working in the sector and have decided to devote part of their time and energy to developing the national consortium.
- **Collaboration with external actors**, not traditionally involved in social co-operatives, is providing a growing added value to the network. Even if some of them (Caritas, CEI, FISH) already had specific collaborations with individual co-operatives, the structured co-operation at national level provides a higher added value to individual projects and a better recognition of the role of each partner. Moreover, collaboration with national private companies and banks has been made possible by the size of the consortium and its recognition as a major national actor in the sector.
- The development of **innovative services** and the **research** on the new needs of the welfare system helps co-operatives belonging to the network to provide rapid answers to emerging needs and to be competitive.

Methods and tools

The trademark has been recognised at European level and is managed by the Comunità Solidali Consortium. Co-operatives that want to adopt the trademark send a request to the consortium and start the process.

The process consists of various steps, including an evaluation of documents and written materials and an evaluation in the field. The evaluation team is composed of eight experts: one co-ordinator, two psychiatrists, two ISO evaluators and three experts in mental health and co-operatives. All these people have undertaken specific training on the trademark manual and on the way to conduct evaluations (people to meet, timing, completing check-lists etc.). Each year they update their competences according to the results of the previous year's evaluation.

At the end of the process, the evaluation team writes a report for the trademark manager, containing a synthesis of the situation examined, a quantitative evaluation of the indicators and, if necessary, suggestions for improvement.

Those elements are transmitted to the board of Comunità Solidali who is in charge of attributing the trademark.

The procedure of attributing the trademark also aims to encourage the co-operatives that adopt it to keep in a state of a 'healthy tension' as regards continuous improvement, to compare their experiences with those of other similar organisations in order to get new ideas and, finally, to interact with external bodies that are able to give an impartial opinion on aspects needing to be ameliorated.

Two committees collaborate in awarding and managing the trademark:

- the Ethical Committee, composed of representatives of Caritas, La Sapienza University, and two prominent individuals
- the Scientific Committee, composed of a representative of the National Health Institute and two university professors

In term of **finance**, each member of Comunità Solidali has a share capital of €2,500, while CGM, as funding member, has a share capital of €35,000. Presently, each member pays an annual fee of €2,000, decided yearly by the General Assembly.

The fee gives members access to seminars and products, while all the innovative projects are funded from other sources: donations, public or private funding.

Given the limited amount of financial resources, Comunità Solidali relies upon its members. Its **premises** are located on the site of Consorzio SolCo Cremona, to which it pays a small rent. Its paid **staff** comprises a secretary, a person in charge of the trademark and a project manager. Its managerial staff (president and chief executive) are only partially remunerated by Comunità Solidali, being seconded by individual co-operatives in the sector.

Training is one of the main services Comunità Solidali offers its members. It consists mainly of short seminars on specific topics. They are addressed to co-operative managers and technical staff in order to provide updated information on specific topics or services. The methodology combines speeches by specialists with practical workshops. In 2006, 16 seminars were organised, with an average attendance of 65 participants.

The **monitoring system** is also a relevant tool the consortium offers its members. It is used to assign the trademark, but also to check the quality level of the services provided. The data collected are accessible at different levels by the different actors. If the evaluators use them to check the trademark requirements, co-operative managers can use them to measure their performance. Moreover, the scientific tests used to measure the progress made by patients are internationally recognised and can be used as quality indicators. Local consortia can also use aggregated data in their negotiations with local authorities.

Prospects

During the first phase of its development, the trademark has been used mainly to govern the relationships between organisations belonging to the same local and national networks. Now it is crucial to develop promotional actions addressed to the external world, potential clients, institutions and also the general public, in order to increase the visibility of the trademark, which is the main added the member organisations expect.

Comunità Solidali's original mission was to operate in the mental health field. Only in 2005 has it extended its action into the field of care for elderly people and the disabled. It is now starting to develop trademarks and integrated services in these fields as well. The principles are still the same (quality, locally based and integrated services, involvement of families and communities) even if the regulations and the situation are different. While disabled people have access to a panoply of services offered by the public sector or by associations, much elderly care is provided by immigrant carers, often working illegally, directly to families, without any specific recognition or qualification. There is a clear need to find new solutions that can meet multiple and diverse needs, but resources are scarce.

The issue of "after us" services is developing quickly. The fact that handicapped people live longer and survive their parents' deaths need innovative solutions. Together with Anfass and Banca Intesa, Comunità Solidali has created Alfa, a new company in the form of a social enterprise,³ in order to promote the creation of residential communities for handicapped people after their parents' death and to create a specific trademark.

Contact

Alberto Leoni – President
Maria Grazia Fioretti – Managing Director

³ one of the first in Italy, according to the recently approved law 118/2005

Via Bonomelli, 81
26100 Cremona
Italy
Tel: +39 0372 415629
Fax: +39 0372 415631
segreteria@comunitasolidali.it
<http://www.comunitasolidali.it>