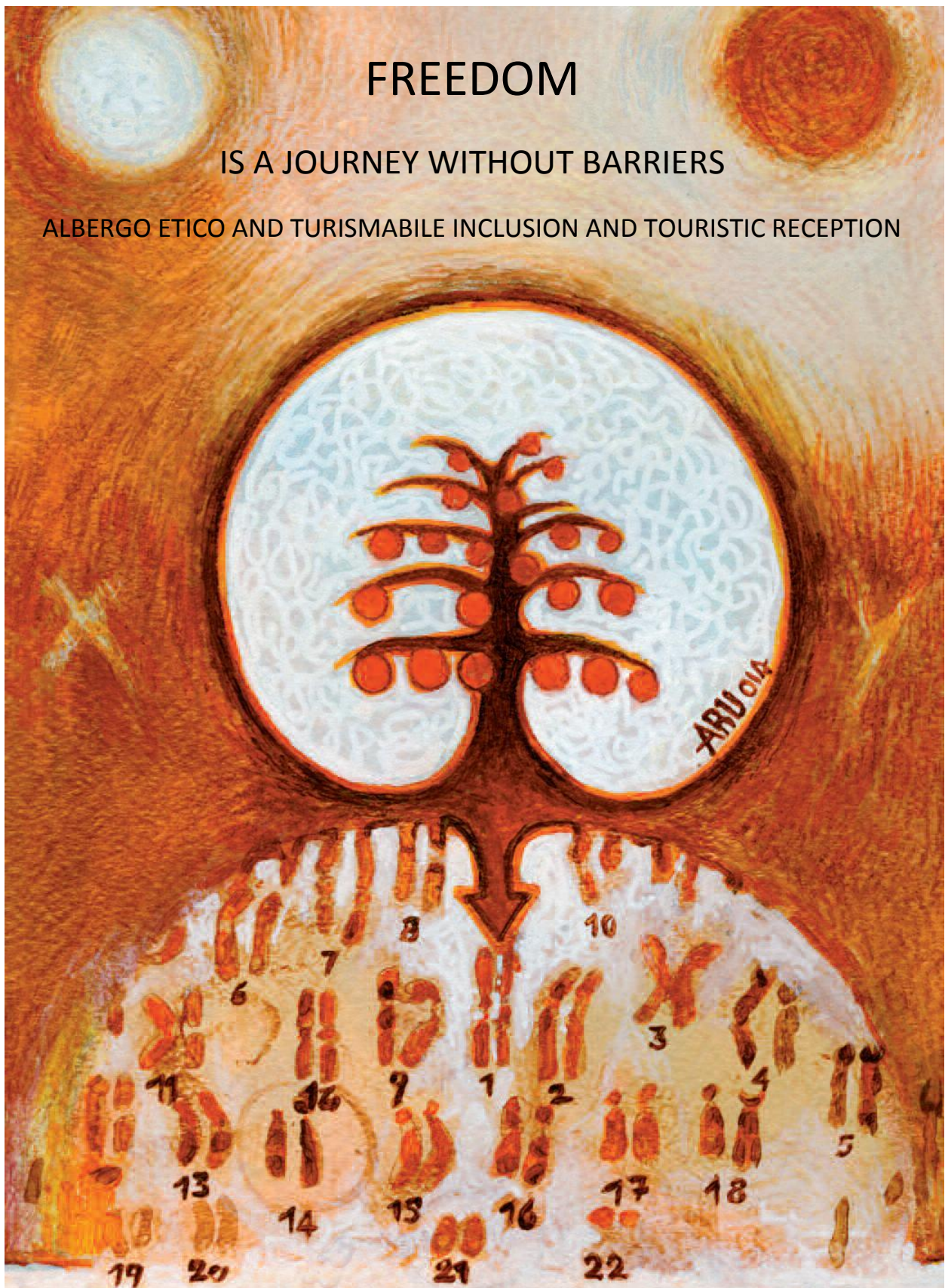


# FREEDOM

IS A JOURNEY WITHOUT BARRIERS

ALBERGO ETICO AND TURISMABILE INCLUSION AND TOURISTIC RECEPTION



“Of a town you don’t appreciate the seven or seventy seven wonders, but the answer to your question”.

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, 1972

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“Also the cities believe to be a work of the mind or of the chance, but neither is enough to keep up its walls. Of a town you don’t appreciate the seven or seventy seven wonders, but the answer to your question.”

This phrase by Italo Calvino, from his novel “Invisible Cities”, helps us in an extraordinary way to get straight to the heart of the matter discussed in a synthetic and pragmatic way in this document. Through the literary artifice of a dialogue between Marco Polo and the Emperor of the Tartars Kublai Khan, the great writer describes imaginary cities as symbols of the complexity and of the disorganization of the reality to show “the hell where we live every day, and that we create living together”. Then he suggests two ways to prevent from suffering. “The first is easy for most: to accept the hell and to become part of it to the point that you don’t see it anymore. The second is risky and needs continuous attention and learning: it is to look for and recognize, in the middle of it, who and what it is not hell and make it last and give it space”.

The (for now) imaginary city subject of this work approaches two key words, which are simple and immediate, and at the same time ambitious and complex. These two words are hospitality and inclusion. The city of this book includes really everybody, knocking down all kind of barriers, not only physical, but above all psychological and cultural. This city integrates and offers the same opportunities to everybody, with particular attention to work, also to those people who until now were excluded because of their disability.

The document deals in particular with the two main subjects of hospitality and integration by relating to experiences and innovative projects. On one side we have the problems of adaptation of the urban contexts to everybody’s needs concerning the accessibility and use of spaces and services, with particular reference to the project “Turismabile”. On the other side we deal with the introduction of young people with Down syndrome into the working world as a possibility of individual growth and self assertion through acquisition of autonomy, with reference to the project “Albergo Etico”.

These are two complicated subjects to which the promoters of this work found some essential answers that “the city”, or better the entire society, should give.

Two big themes, which are bringing us back to the journey, or to the tourism, as we prefer to call it nowadays, maybe with excessive simplification. We like the idea of the journey as research and occasion of discovery. With this work we want to go searching for a new capability to plan places which are able to welcome everybody and to allow everyone, without exceptions, to interact, integrating themselves with equal dignity.

Because freedom is also a journey. Without barriers.

Councilor on Tourism in Asti

Andrea Cerrato

The Mayor of Asti

Fabrizio Brignolo

## Accessible and inclusive tourism

This publication is born with the purpose to tell the experience obtained within the project “Towards an ethical city”, which is a project created to think about touristic hospitality in our territories. A touristic hospitality open to everybody, where the attention to the people with special needs must represent a responsible and conscious choice to meet, not only the always rising demand by the disabled people to travel and use the territory, but more in general the need to help a fairer and more inclusive economical development, also in the touristic field. Through the project “Turismabile”, the Consulta per le Persone in Difficolta’ (Council for the People in Difficulty) in Turin has been dealing with these subjects for years, promoting the culture of the “*tourism for all*”, through campaigns of sensitization and training the operators of the touristic field (hotel and restaurant owners, businesses, tour operators, and so on).

The experience in Asti of the Albergo Etico (Ethical Hotel) represents another development of this philosophy: the tourist sector opens up to the disability not only because it is organized to welcome the different tourist needs, but also because it intends to include young people with mental disabilities through training and work introduction.

Therefore, the final purpose of the tourism work area is the total accessibility and inclusion. To start the thinking and the testing of these topics it was necessary to face the public *decision makers* and the private receptive structures on the territory.

The Settore Turismo del Comune di Asti (Tourism Services of the Asti Municipality) was key and, as a leader of the project, favored the increase of the private and institutional networks linked to the touristic development of the territory. Furthermore, the participation of the Consorzio Turistico di Monferrato Langhe e Roero (Tourist Council of Monferrato Langhe and Roero, which is the geographic area where Asti is) made it possible to involve in the planning the operators and the private structures which are, in the end, the places where accessibility and inclusion must take place.

The extent of hospitality of a city is obviously determined by several factors. From the touristic point of view, a good hospitality is when the city is able to make its points of interest, structures and services more easily accessible to people with special needs. This challenge represents an opportunity of development by supplying quality services for everybody through an integrated system of hospitality.

Throughout 1900th, the tourism became a social phenomenon of extraordinary importance, capable to move millions of people around the world, especially in Europe. This became not only an unprecedented factor of wealth and economic progress, but also a decisive element for the improving of knowledge, communication, capability to relate, respect and peaceful relationship among citizens of specific countries. Tourism is a social need of extreme importance; this is why it is necessary that all the citizens could be able to use the touristic goods, independently from personal, social, economic, or other circumstances.

*Tourism for all* is respectful of the specific needs of the people with mental, motor and sensory disabilities. The concept of specific needs extends to the people with dietetic needs, food intolerances, allergies, and can include also elderly and those in disadvantaged conditions. Next to the concept of *tourism for all* we affirm nowadays the concept of global accessibility, which is a universal value valid for all aspects of the human societies. Accessible societies are the open societies which are tolerant and respectful of all diversities (cultural, social, individual) and of all human rights. Everybody's right to enjoy a vacation becomes also the need and the opportunity to make monuments, archaeological sites, as well as landscape, nature and historical centers more accessible, together with the touristic services linked to the hospitality system.

As you will have the opportunity to find out getting to know closer the experience of the Albergo Etico, the touristic sector is a preferential channel to introduce the people with mental disability to work. The hotel structure, with its reception, offices, restaurant, bar, breakfast room, kitchen, staff rooms..., is the ideal learning environment because it is the closest concept to the house, which is often the only place where these people feel at ease. The work organization between *front office* and *back office* – in other words, between activity with direct contact with the customers and activity with limited contact with the customers – is an essential element to the hotel structures and it is very useful to the young people to gradually improve their capability to interact with strangers.

This publication is centered, in particular, on the Albergo Etico project: after years of trials, it is the first time that the experience we achieved so far is being told in its entirety. This is done to stimulate a possible replication in other geographical areas.



# 1. The Albergo Etico (Ethical Hotel) project

## 1.1. ASSOCIATION PRESENTATION

The project “Download Albergo Etico” was created in 2006 thanks to a brilliant intuition of a group of friends in Asti who worked in different fields. Their professions were in the fields of restaurant, tourism and architecture, and later they were joined also by journalists, marketing managers and bankers; everybody with the same intention of contributing to improve the society where they live.

We started from the observation of the people going to the restaurant and we noticed the absence of direct experience with people with disabilities. Therefore the first trials were aimed to lead the disadvantaged people with the purpose of improving their capability of work and favoring their overall social growth. By the computer term “download” we want to describe the action of synthesis and simplification of the professional experience of the mentally and physical challenged people as an imaginary downloading of data between operative systems.

We wanted to allow Niccolò a young man with Down syndrome to finish his school degree at the Hotel Training School “Colline Astigiane” with an internship. For this reason, chef Antonio De Benedetto , who was an alumni of the school, enthusiastically accepted Niccolò’ in his restaurant. The internship was originally meant to last a few weeks and, to tell the truth, we didn’t expect great results out of it.

The environment which surrounded Niccolò’ had a incredible effect. Today that kid is the symbol not only of the restaurant Tacabanda, but also of a movement, of a process which is transforming the city of Asti, and not only that. He has a regular permanent working contract and is tutoring other young people with disabilities.

His internship lasted some months, first at the restaurant and then at a hotel in Valtellina (a mountainous area in the Lombardy region). The Council of the Tourist Operators in Asti believed in the project right from the start and in two years the number of the young people involved grew, as did the cooperation with the Hotel Training School. The partnership led to the catering and reception of the Salone Internazionale del Libro (International Book Showroom) and of the Salone del Gusto (Slow Food Taste Showroom) in Turin, of the Salone della Piccola Editoria and of the Monferrato Experience in Rome. Not only, the young people opened the



marathons in Turin, Reggio Emilia and Treviso, thanks to the cooperation which is still lasting with the “Sport Ambassadors of Asti”.

A process was triggered which leads families from all around Italy to come to Asti to understand what is going on, and other associations are also trying to understand what is the new system that we are proposing.

The working group grows thanks to the contamination that is going on. Besides Egidio who has been helping his brother Antonio in the restaurant ever since, other professionals in the fields are joining in: agricultural companies, cafes, ice cream parlors, butcheries, pizza places, restaurants, spas and hotels embrace the project, helping to generate diversified educational environments. This network created in time at this point doesn't only supply internships but also offers to keep the young people for short periods of time.

The model we are presenting in this publication is the results of a joint effort among professionals, young trainees and their families. The trial educational process and the constant observation of the kids made them the final beneficiaries of a model that they both shared in the creation and contributed to develop. This precious contribution generated a two-way benefit of the method for all the people participating in it. How the action was directed is also the result of theoretical learning. More precisely, Dr. Maria Montessori writings were a constant reference indicating us the way to go. The promoters of the “Download” project intended to develop an active and dynamic experimental way to fully value the potentials of the people with the purpose that they would find personal reasons to start their personal growth.

It was a lucky coincidence which allowed people with personal and cultural experiences so different to share an experience of development of ways to face the problems linked to “diversity” with a full opening towards new subjects, creating the environment where each individual brings his/her own experience as an element of discussion and experimentation. This environment is free from academic influences and far from protocols and rules, with the spirit of someone making a research starting from scratch, ready to test all the hypotheses, sharing the capability of “imagining and dreaming” that we can aspire to better ourselves and the others, also thanks to the positive and stimulating spirit that these young men and women taught us.

In the meantime, we began a relationship with the founders of the “La Capriola” Foundation in Davos, Switzerland, which is becoming closer and more important in time and which leads to a comparison between their methods and the experience in Asti.

A continuous comparison with other experiences, with the parents' stories, sometimes confronting the people in charge of the local social services, facing the flaws of a law about the

introduction to work of people with disabilities, but which is also sometimes ahead compared to other countries. A sensation which is sometimes of discouragement, because at times the institutions are distant from the project for a mixture of mistrust and fear of breaking the norms or the consolidated systems and balances. Fortunately, these moments alternate to others when the same institutions can become very collaborative and lead to the creation of specific measures to finance the training classes for these kids.

With the growth of the first group of kids, some self managed activities were created, such as the coffee corner at the Alfieri Theater, the stand of fresh eggs and the information corners of the “Download project” in the various exhibits. This kind of activities has the purpose to consolidate the personal independence strengthening the responsibility of the single kid toward the group.

We have many friends and supporters of the project, from the unforgettable Carlo Carosso to Marco Aru, who is the designer of the logo of the Association (a persimmon tree, which also in bad seasons succeeds to give fruits which are sweet and rich of vitamins) and of the cover of this book.

In 2015, in the Italian Pavilion of Expo2015, among the stories of “the Italy that made it” there will be one that we care particularly about: it is the story about Niccolò of the Albergo Etico in Asti.

## **1.2. WORK AND PERSONAL IDENTITY**

In everybody’s growth a decisive role is represented by work. In fact, to feel like a “grown up” doesn’t depend on what date you are born, but rather on the maturity of a personal identity that gradually grows through experimenting in new contexts, in extra familiar relations, which are constant changing, offering many and different images of themselves.

In fact, individuals form their own identity differing themselves from the others (and therefore through the elaboration of their own diversity) and keeping a continuity with themselves but, at the same time, having the need to be recognized by other subjects.

It is in this constant comparison between equality and diversity and between what is perceived as an expression of own individual experience and what is proposed or induced from the social environment that the identity gets formed.

Work, besides being a right for everybody, has such an essential role in the contemporary society to be considered one of the main values of each individual. It is not by chance that very often the question “who are you” translates into “what’s your job.”

Consequently, the introduction to work becomes an essential part for the social integration.

When we talk about the right of the person with disability to have a job we refer to the free market, in opposition to a protected environment. What do we mean? In the last ten years, the policies supporting the people with disability have been holding an important role favoring the introduction of these people to the free work market and increasing the job offer in “protected laboratories”. Even though we recognized the steps forward done by the institutions, there are still too few people with disabilities, in particular with psychiatric disabilities, who find a job outside the protected environments.

For years the people with disabilities have not been recognized as a resource to integrate into the working world, probably for the cultural rooted belief that disability means productive incapability. In some particular severe cases it could be true, but in this case it is wrong indeed to generalize. It is therefore important that there would be alternative forms of work, such as occupational experiences (protected laboratories, occupational centers with educational purposes...) with the purpose of a permanent stay in a working context without the goal of employment, but of self fulfillment and general well being instead.

In all other cases it is a matter of strategy.

It is important for everyone, but even more for the people with disability, to be able to create the conditions to guarantee opportunities of personalized work, emphasizing the strengths and the capabilities of the person looking for a job and reducing to a minimum the disability, satisfying at the same time the needs of the Company.

In other countries there are specialized professionals offering services of *job coaching*, i.e. accompanying services in the work market through the planning of personalized training courses, internships and experiences in different organized environments among the person with disability, his/her parents, teachers, the training staff and the hosting Companies.

The *job coach* has the goal to supply the people with more severe disabilities (the ones considered not able to work) with the necessary support so that they can work. An essential part of the activity is concentrated on the so-called “working negotiation”, that is to try to reduce the organizational obstacles on the working place, creatively solving the problems and supplying a strong operational support on the job, meeting that way the unique needs of each individual.

To this purpose, it could be useful to exchange the tasks between two organizational positions, to divide a job into two or more parts, or to give a job new functions which until then were of other jobs. In any case, the goal is to create personalized working opportunities, which would

value the strengths and the capability of the person, reducing to a minimum the disability and finding a solution that would satisfy a real necessity of the Company.

The creation of highly personalized working places is particularly effective, because it allows to put at the service of the Company the specific professional resources of the disabled person who, within a standard organizational chart, could go unnoticed or couldn't be utilized at their best, creating frustrations on both parties.

In our opinion a particularly effective way to favor the work introduction of people with disability consists of supplying them with examples in which all the subjects (the person looking for a job, parents, teachers, employers) effectively interacted, making the introduction to work possible.

### **1.3. THE FORMATIVE PROCESS**

The Download Albergo Etico process is a formative process, mainly based on the direct experience of the subject, the so called *learning by doing*, with independence as the person's ultimate goal. A personal independence that is reached by progressive steps through the cutting of the umbilical cord with the family, with the acquisition of specific professional skills, the capability to align the skills learnt at work with the private life and the maturation of the capability to relate with strangers.

It is a stretched teaching process, which concerns not only the learning person, but also his/her family and, more in general, that part of society which, as customers, chooses to use the Albergo Etico's services.

The role of the family in this growing process is decisive. In fact, also the family has to grow and find the way not to keep on repeating the mechanisms, if any, of excessive protection or help, which risk to fall into servility.

In the disability world there are many emotional and cultural factors which crossing among each other (most of the times unconsciously), generate servile attitudes, leading to the predisposition to continuously replace themselves to the person with disability, up to arrive to compromise the possibility to reach a real individual autonomy. Even though these behaviors are generated by deep love and sense of protection, they represent an obstacle that must be removed.

Therefore, it is very important that the family can see how the kids move in a working place, which tasks they can perform and how essential is to leave them room to execute their experiences also at their homes.

When the trainee goes back home, he/she will want to show the acquired skills, above all the ones that until then were forbidden to them, such as the use of knives or food processors with sharp blades.

To cut their capability of expression off would be detrimental, because instead of improving their self esteem, it would damage it and the training process would be inevitably slowed down.

Therefore, the family must be an accomplice and must accept the new role of the young man/woman, understanding that only letting him/her experimenting new situations the personal independence will take place.

The ways to include the family in the growth process of their own son/daughter are many and can be used according to the various occasions: from the direct participation to lessons and exercises (which even though very appreciated by the families, they alter the teaching climate and setting), to video reporting and to the meeting with the teachers.

## **Supermoms**

Until now we told the story of how families, often unconsciously, are resistant and slow the independence path of their children down. On the contrary, there are moms who, as a reaction to the impossibility to exercise their full right to maternity for lack of support and of adequate services - that a society should guarantee - become paladin of the cause and with extreme courage, determination and strength, succeed to achieve goals which seemed impossible. We call them “supermoms”.

The “supermoms” understood how the road to the autonomy of their own son/daughter is actually the only one to pursue and for this reason they seek possible paths with tenacity, persistence and imagination. Among the moms that we had the opportunity to meet, many lived experiences with Associations of support to disabled people, from which they felt driven away. There are many associations which, with their capillary presence in all Italian regions, represent a reference for families who, after the birth of a son/daughter with Down syndrome, find themselves “catapulted” into a parallel world, most of the time unknown, ruled by procedures, rules and norms, which are not always understandable. The work, most of the time voluntary, is being done by the parents of the people with disability, who often manage the activities, promote fund raisings and create support groups.

There are situations in which parents look for and want more and want to find an active role in the society for their son/daughter. As soon as they achieve the first results and their enthusiasm and expectations grow, it is possible that also the first frictions are created, with

phrases such as “you are lucky, you should be satisfied”, or their hopes can’t be met and a slow alienation/self alienation from the group starts.

Many of these moms arrived to the Albergo Etico. They travelled thousands of kilometers to give their children the opportunity to get internships and they say to have found in this experience the answers they were looking for: the professionalization of their own sons/daughters and their capability to integrate with the society.

To get the most from this experience and to spread it as much as possible, in these years we have been trying to consolidate certain activities:

- The creation a national network of supermoms. This network, which also includes the participation of some Swiss moms, favors the exchange of good practices, experiences and information. Exchange of visits among families and sons/daughters also happens, satisfying this way another important need, which is the overcoming of isolation;
- The support to the moms in order to let them become promoters of new experiences similar to the ones of the Albergo Etico in other territories. The effort to describe the experience of the Albergo Etico and of the Academy in this book has the goal to make it reproducible.

The “Welcome to the family network”, that has as a goal to test the autonomy capabilities of the kids who are trying to become independent, is a real experience, stemming from the national network of the supermoms. The kids have the possibility to travel around Italy, living for some days in a city they don’t know, confronting other families which are available to host them and who allow them to test themselves, respecting their timelines and supporting them in difficult moments, should they ever come. This action has rules.

Another activity we would like to involve the supermoms in the future is a project of support to the new parents of children with Down syndrome. In particular, we think it would be useful that starting from the hospital the new mother could receive the visit of another mother with her son/daughter with Down syndrome. It is a gesture of lending a hand, to let her know that she is not alone and that, besides Health and Social Services, there are also friends who have already faced similar situations and for this reason they can represent a reference.

## **Environment**

The hotel structure – with its reception, offices, restaurant, bar, breakfast room, kitchen, warehouse, rooms, wardrobe, laundry room, iron room, elevators, conference room, swimming

pool, gym, wellness area, staff rooms – is the ideal learning place where to send and to raise the kids, because it is the place the most similar to the concept of house.

When we talk about environment we don't only refer to the physical space, but also to the mental, cultural, organizational and emotional/affective space which create, all together, the "activity space" that professionals and kids share.

The life in the hotel, which develops over a 24-hour cycle, has some activities which are similar to the domestic ones; that is why it is an environment that is very suitable to host the kids.

The Italian term "ambiente" (environment), from the Latin "ambire", meaning "going around, surround", gives the idea of the elements defining the space where the learning takes place, intended as physical place and the whole of the structured activities, "intentionally" arranged by the teacher to stimulate and support the building of knowledge, ability, motivation and attitudes.

It is strategic also to have the possibility to exploit an immediate and charming element such as food in all its forms and rituals.

The teaching method of the Albergo Etico which was formed on the field finds big theoretical links in the psychological concepts of constructivist matrix.

In fact, this psychological branch emphasizes the learning as an active and constructive process and not as an acquisition or reception of knowledge. The result is that the training will be a process of building knowledge and not a transfer of knowledge from the teacher to the student.

Therefore, the environment is a whole of educational situations characterized by activities implicating teachers and students within a frame of reference involving a considerable number of components made by resources and rules. Students and teachers work together with common goals and the learning happens in physical contexts that have a proper relevance and influence on the whole process.

The cared for and surrounding space of a hotel, studied to host customers and where every detail is thought to make the guests feel at ease, becomes a place where the boys and girls could feel enveloped and stimulated. Paintings, frescoes, temporary exhibits become important cultural, meditative and emotional media through the representation of the "different" person and of the experimentation. Order and perfection earn without doubts admiration, but remain abstract and distant dimensions, without provoking any deep feeling or uneasiness; they don't make vibrate any hidden cord of the soul.

Rita Levi Montalcini believes, in her essay-biography "In Praise of Imperfection", that "imperfection has always allowed continuous mutation of that wonderful but imperfect



mechanism that is the human brain”. Therefore, we believe that the personal maturation happens also through the reflections on the imperfections represented by art.

The organization of the work between *front office* and *back office*, i.e. between activity with direct contact with the customers and activities with limited contact with the customers is an essential element of the hotel and is very useful to gradually take the kids to have relationships with strangers.

Through the managing of the activity of *back office* (prepare meals, clean the room, manage the laundry services...) the kids develop the preparatory competences to face the external world.

In this phase they learn how to move within the spaces, they get familiar with tools that can be also dangerous and they learn to avoid the ones that are too difficult.

It is important that the kids aren't be denied the use of potentially dangerous tools, in order not to feed self-limiting mechanisms, due to a strange destiny of life where weak people would seem condemned to get weaker because they are considered incapable a priori.

The young people, through the practice which is at the beginning routine and that only with time can lead to autonomy, learn safety and control of the base techniques. The skills that they gradually master will enable them to manage also unforeseen situations where they will have to improvise.

When the level of autonomy and safety of the kid allows it, the activity of the *front office* will be useful to do another step, interfacing with the external world (the customers), keeping at the same time the necessary distance that the role requires.

Wearing an uniform, and having rules dictated by the role in which the relationship with the others must be carried out, allows to begin to have a relationship with the external world in a filtered and protected way.

Furthermore, to know that you have the obligation that the role demands is the best way to control the emotions and the displays of affection and to overcome states of extreme shyness.

It is important that the practice is constant, so as to gain a certain automatism in the actions. The confidence improves self esteem and push to reach always new goals. To have three environments (Hotel, Academy and their own home) where to experiment the learnt skills allow them to understand how each action ought to be performed depending on the place they are.

## **Principles of the formative interaction**

The role of the teacher is central and essential, because he/she becomes the reference for the young people, becoming the center around which the kids move and look up to know which would be the next step or to receive a feedback about the performed actions.

It is a role of big responsibility, where it is essential the capability to understand the limits beyond which the kids are able to go, the stimuli that work the best or when, instead, it is time to stop, allowing the kid more time.

The most delicate aspect is not to transfer knowledge and procedures, but instead to teach them responsibility: let them develop the understanding of doing well through a gradual experimentation of their own freedom of action. Through observation it is possible to understand the degree of acquisition of the professional skills, but also to highlight the emotional weaknesses on which it is necessary to work.

The teacher role is essential in the teaching process also for the role of promotion, comparison and synergy that has to be built with the other professionals who interact with the apprentice: not only the family, but also social workers, doctors, teachers of all classes that the kid goes to, members of associations promoting activities the kid participates to.

Knowing the relationship network of these young people and understanding how these networks function is important to begin to know the kids and understand how to welcome them.

Not only, getting to know the educational figures of reference of the kid allow to set a shared teaching plan which, with everybody's help, can be reinforced and also in certain cases speeded up.

The passage from school to work is a process which has to be eased up through a precise planning, shared by the family and by the different teaching figures acting around the kid.

This planning doesn't have to be complicated or hard but is for sure demanding as it requires availability, mutual trust (there are families who tend to limit their kids' actions), determination from all involved subjects and, above all, a certain degree of creativity.

Creativity is fundamental; in fact among the many introductions to work that we followed until now, none was equal to another one. It is for this reason that it doesn't exist a unique precise model of accompanying to work, according to which we can identify certain essential points, but the processes leading to the reach of the goals can be of different kinds.

The welcoming phase is not only the first meeting, but a more complicated phase made by paying attention, listening and respecting the needs (expressed and silent), of the rhythms and timetables of the young person. It is a phase of listening and observation in which the teacher has to understand the individual characteristics of the person, his/her resistances and his/her talents. A phase when the teacher must understand which are the main difficulties that the young person will meet doing things, in order to be able to suggest him/her the easiest solutions. It is the moment in which the kid's potentials must be sought.

Respecting the personal inclinations, the first activities will be chosen by the kid and then, with time, we will introduce the concept of different-task rotation. It is important to understand that at the base of the rotation among different positions there are organizational and managing reasons and that this rotation is necessary to favor the process of mutual help and interdependence among roles; this is why the rotation shouldn't be seen as an imposition.

The way to "get in touch" with a new student are many, some very simple as a discussion about sport or a series on TV. Reviewing through telling a story and the exchange of points of view about scenes seen on TV has a very strong teaching value.

The most important job the teacher has is the relationship with the kid, that will allow him to establish a relationship of trust leading to define goals with short, medium and long term during the phase of his/her path towards autonomy. The teacher is a ring linking all the figures rotating around the boy/girl during his/her phase of formation and introduction to work, but not only. The teacher's role doesn't end with the achievement of autonomy and the work introduction outside the Hotel, on the contrary it becomes more strategic when the young person will try to face his/her life outside the context where he or she was formed (Albergo Etico, Academy of Independence). The teacher will always be a reference not only in moments of difficulty, but also and above all will share moments of small achievements and recognitions that in life are always around the corner.

The people with disability that we encountered in our experience present some personal characteristics and attitudes which can be divided in three main behavioral categories:

- Passive: young people educated to immobility, passivity and obedience
- Restless: young people who are confused, agitated, with peaks of strong hyperactivity
- Eager: quiet young people, with power of observation and will to experiment new activities.

Independently from the main attitude of the young people, in the first moment of introduction in the structure, a very strong emotional status prevails, sometimes even paralyzing, due to the fact that they face a new environment, not comparable to the ones they knew before then.

In our experience, two are the elements that are immediately introduced to create an atmosphere of camaraderie and to stimulate aggregation:

1. **Wearing a uniform.** The uniform of the Albergo Etico is made of a black beret, white shirt, black bowtie, orange sweater with the association logo, black pants and black shoes.

Wearing a uniform is useful to create a team spirit, to feel as a part of a group and to generate mechanisms of reinforcement of their own identity.

The uniform also gets recognized by the external world: the young people get recognized and greeted on the street or during their service in a café in the theater or catering during a fair. Often this leads other kids to ask their parents to be able to do the same experience.

2. **Discipline.** There cannot be freedom and autonomy without discipline. At the beginning of every service (where they learn the job) everybody stands in a semicircle and they observe each other to check that the uniform is in order. It is a matter of a few minutes that are very important: if they are part of a team, each of them represents everybody else, therefore everyone must be in good order and clean. It is incredible to see how with time the presence of the teacher becomes useless and how the kids develop critical sense and attention to particulars. It is also the moment in which every kid present him/herself (the composition of the working group changes in function of the days and of the activities) and can express his/her own mood at that moment.

Depending on the personal characteristics and of the specific moment there is who cheers for the group, who mumbles incomprehensible phrases, who expresses his/her mood and also who cannot speak due to emotion. The information and the proxemics heard from the young people are important for the teacher to understand which elements of turbulence or which emotional blocks will influence the day.

**Furthermore, discipline is synonymous of safety.** Working in touch with situations and tools that are potentially dangerous, we decided to introduce an immediate stop order. It is a word that if said aloud and firmly must literally block any action that the kid is doing. At the beginning it is a word, then in time it becomes a strong visual action. This is essential to avoid dangerous situations.

Discipline also helps to contain temper tantrums. When the required commitment is perceived as too hard, some kids activate attention seeking mechanisms that become real temper tantrums. It is the same mechanism activated by any child who doesn't want to obey an order given by his/her parents.

The “temper tantrum” is a consolidated practice in these kids’ behavior; in fact, they have been using this technique for years: even if only for exhaustion it is natural as an adult after a while to give up instead of keeping his/her position and to insist to obtain what was requested. It is a transitioning phase many go through, and it is easier to deal with by people who aren’t relatives.

The kids who find themselves in a protected and welcoming environment, but a working place nevertheless, know that they can ask the teacher anything, but they realize how the affectionate bonding with the teacher is different from the one that they have with their parents.

The temper tantrums can be of various natures: they can be feelings of sadness, pain, loneliness for personal situations as death, abandonment, sickness of relatives (even when these happened many years before or the sickness completely healed). In other situations, the kids blame others on the work place for their uneasiness or inadequacy feelings with phrases like “Michele treats me badly” or “Simona said I am stupid”.

These mishaps must be verified all the times, but none of these is the real reason why the kids have to sit every ten minutes or is the cause of sudden crying spells.

The relationship with the teacher/professional, set up from the beginning as a relationship between adults, is based on the professionalism and sincere dialogue more than on sensitivity, helps to instill in the kids the idea that if you want to be considered as an adult you have to abandon those behaviors and mature.

## **Practice**

Every working activity is made of two dimensions: the performance, i.e. the capability to perform the tasks and the interaction with colleagues, bosses, customers, etc.

Let’s start to consolidate the simpler dimension of the two, the performance; to supply the sense of security necessary to the young person to enable him/her to open up and work also on his/her own relationship capabilities.

In our experience the best teachers are those who use few and carefully chosen words to explain how to perform an operation or an activity. Repetition often confuses. Precise, prompt and simple messages must be given so that the information be clear and unmistakable.

The teaching process is mainly practical: the student mimics the action of the professional until the action is carried out in a satisfactory way. The professional watches and intervenes showing the operation again or introducing a way of doing it more suitable to the characteristics of the student in order to obtain a result which would be the closest to the expected one.

In the practice phase the teacher/student ratio is one to one. The professional observes and relates only to one student.

The intrinsic characteristics of the restaurant job are particularly suitable to develop and educate all the senses which, necessarily, must be used all together to obtain the best results: it is not enough to learn how to properly cut a zucchini, but it is also necessary to touch it to evaluate from the consistency the degree of ripening and/or decomposition, or to smell it to evaluate the degree of sweetness. The kitchen is full of noises (the oven timer, the acoustic alarm of the dishwasher, the whistle of the pressure cooker, the noise of the machineries that are on, knives beating on the working table). The practice will teach how to recognize these noises, to understand when they are different (for example to understand from the noise of the dishwasher if the washing cycle is blocked, or if the person who is chopping the parsley is doing a good job or if he is “pounding” it) and evaluating the priorities (if at the same time both the dishwasher and the oven timers ring, only one of the action can wait; if at the same time pressure cooker and the oven will ring he/she will have to ask the boss which one has priority). Obviously the sense of smell is also very important to recognize danger: gas leak, accidental combustion of plastic material and fabrics, the overflowing of the contents of the pots on the stove.

## Organization

The organization is an essential element of all hotel structures or restaurants and is an important instrument to facilitate the achievement of the kids’ autonomy.

In fact, an organized environment tends to simplify the vision of the context and allows to have a better orientation.

In the kitchen, knowing exactly where every tool is, helps not to “wandering around”, not to lose time and not to create confusion, above all in moments of intense work.

To learn how to keep the work place organized is not easy, but is essential. The use of pictures can be helpful (for example to show what must be put in a specific drawer), or also short videos, until the daily exercise will train the eye and will achieve the capability to perfectly organize the kitchen.

The achievement of the practice is reached through continuous feedbacks of reinforcement of the correct behaviors, but even more through the sharing what gets produced.

To prepare a risotto and let it be tasted by the professional is an important practical exercise, but it is not enough to involve the emotional point of view. To eat all together, at the end of the lesson, the cooked risotto helps to compare their risotto with the risottos made by the classmates and helps to understand the differences using all the senses (smell, taste and sight). Finally, to reproduce the experience in their own home and to serve the risotto to their relatives has an extraordinary emotional significance.

The *download* of what is learnt in the artificial nest (the hotel) is transferred to the home nest. The mechanism of *downloading* the learnt skills from the hotel to the own family environment

is continuous, because all the activities of a hotel are in some way reproducible at their home, for example to organize their room as they wish, to decide which products to use to clean the house, to use the washing machine or teach which fork to use according to the served dish. It is this way that the kid learns, in time, self esteem and capability of improvisation (the home kitchen is different from the professional one). The practice becomes, especially the one in the kitchen (where in the common imagination all the more dangerous operation are concentrated), a growing instrument not only for the kids, but also for the families.

The project of Albergo Etico foresees that the kitchen be organized in a way that the guests can see through a glass how the chef cooks.

As the open air kitchen of the restaurants with stars allow to involve the guests and let them witness extraordinary cooking techniques, the open kitchen of our structure allows external people to witness how a lesson is carried out, to catch the dynamics between professional and apprentices, allows cooking classes geared towards guests of the structure or guest taught by young chefs with disability, but above all allows the families to witness the improvements of their own kids, generating peace of mind.

It is not rare that the first time a mother or a father, while seeing their kid chopping parsley with a forty centimeter blade, would make grimaces, betraying their anxieties and fears.

The possibility to see how the acquisition of the techniques by their kids allow them to handle the most feared tools in a professional way, often even better than their moms, generates great emotion.

The moms will start to look at their kids with different eyes, and the autonomy process will accelerate.

There are no limits to the accessibility to places and working tools. Where the disability doesn't allow to master the action we seek a personalized technical and/or teaching solution to build the best working conditions. In the situations where the difficulty cannot be overcome, we will teach to develop a capability of mutual help among work colleagues.

Often when someone ask us to summarize in few words the experience of the **Academy of Indipendence**, as we call the three-year formation/working path in the Albergo Etico, we use the metaphor of the **centrifuge**.

The world of restaurants, as the one of the hotels, travels at a different speed than the daily life, the day develops among moments of absolute quietness and moments of sudden and long frenzy.

In the quiet moments there is the preparation, the organization, and the setting in place of the things that will enable to handle the moments of intense work.

For the kids to live the moments of intense work is not easy; on the contrary it is very hard, but with practice they succeed to handle better and better not only the activities that they have to do, the short time in which the actions have to be made, the interpersonal relationships with a multitude of strangers, but also the emotional baggage that all this brings.



It is a gradual path, where everyone answers at their own pace (for this reason it is important to stimulate them to overcome their limits without putting them in difficulty), and it is not necessarily for everybody: it is as demanding as stimulating.

There are kids who transform themselves, they blossom, and finally succeed to express their *joie de vivre*. There are families which support the process and succeed to be glad at the conquests of their kid and others that, shaken by the quick changes, tend to slow the process down, dampening the enthusiasm of the kid, trying to limit the days of work, because the kid “gets tired”.

Not only the kids get into the emotional centrifuge, but also their families. It is not rare that when the families have difficulty to keep the pace with the changes of their kid, it is their kids who reassure the parents. This represents a big goal and it is the best you can desire for your kid: he/she is becoming an adult.

Another element of the practice is the **body movement**, essential to reach the wellbeing and physical resistance necessary to face any kind of work.

The daily practice at the Albergo Etico is thought in a gradual way to guarantee to all kids to have enough muscle mass, movement control and balance to carry out all tasks in the best way possible, even the most difficult ones. Going up or down a flight of stairs with a tray (even more difficult with wine glasses) or to serve keeping the tray “the French way” (with only one hand) is very complicated. However, they are attainable goals.

The teacher has the task not only to proceed gradually, but also to teach how to shift weights according to the anti-accident measures and how to relax the body with muscle stretching exercises.

Carrying out the normal activities of cleaning, organizing, carpet beating, dining room preparation or food stocking, the muscles get stronger without getting stressed. The posture gets more erected, the resistance to stand or to carry out an activity increases, the self esteem improves.

The balance and the difficulties of movement are being gradually refined through gradual exercises until attaining the ability to manage a service in a completely dark environment. To manage their own movements, getting oriented and moving objects in a completely dark environment is extremely difficult, but also extremely gratifying and important for self esteem. Gradual pathways going through the practice in semi-dark environments allow the kids to learn how to manage also in total absence of light.

The restaurant of the Albergo Etico organizes every month “Dinner in the Dark”, an occasion when the diners are introduced in a completely dark environment where they can enjoy a dinner served by blind people who, for the occasion become waiters and *sommeliers* to sensitize the sighted to the necessities of the blinded and contribute to the building of a more integrating culture. The kids have the possibility to learn from the blind people how to move in the dark.

To be able to perform assistance to the customers in the darkness is a particularly difficult activity: the sensation of emptiness is total. It is a condition not suitable for everybody, there are some diners who cannot stay in the darkness for two hours non-stop, they need to take a break or, in extreme cases, they cannot finish the dinner.

The diners enter an unknown dimension and they often get out distraught by the stimuli and the suggestions generated, for the thoughts originated, for the high teaching value.

Many come back with children and friends. Some teachers suggested to propose the idea to their classes of teenagers as sensorial experience of sensitization towards a disability that often goes unnoticed.

The kids, through this experience, mature another awareness of their body, managing their movement and, above all, they feel stronger and more stimulated to face new challenges. They know that not many could do what they succeeded to do.

This experience of “immersion” in an unknown dimension, such as blindness, is an example of how every disability, in its own nature, contains a therapeutic opportunity for the young apprentices and, more in general, for the whole society that would be worthwhile to explore further.

The experience made until now with the kids allowed us to understand how there are some activities besides the working experience that help and favor the achievement of personal autonomy.

We strongly suggest playing a **sport** because it helps not only to strengthen the physical capabilities of the individual, but also the soul. The sport activity has been used for many years in modern psychiatry and psychology as instrument of investigation and study of the personality, as much as a therapy. Sport is seen as an instrument to be able to communicate with others, as a non-verbal language that allows to express oneself and let one know each other. Sport is a specific form of communication and summarizes various levels of motor, mental and social integration.

The degree of the activity intensity must be gradual and personalized for each person: sport such as *jogging* or *Nordic walking* are ideal to be gradually intensified. Long walks helped by walking sticks help to correct postures and load distribution; this will allow improvements not only in the posture but also in every day's life, through a better capability of mobility in all conditions.

Therefore, sport allows psychosocial integration through the participation and the possibility of discharge tensions such as sensitiveness or forms of block, strengthening the personality. In other words it makes the person more independent.

The physical activity is also an instrument to learn how to deal with and balance the moods of the soul, such as the instincts, the drives and the tensions that everybody have. The harmonious development of the personality is more balanced when the frustrations are minimal. In the subjects with disability the frustrations are permanent and to overcome them

somehow he/she has to channel them towards goals and activities which would give satisfaction. Among kids who practice sport the violent and aggressive behaviors are remarkably reduced. Among the sport experiences we had in the past few years we have been cooperating more often with the Judo Sport Center of Alpignano<sub>1</sub> .

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The Master Enrico d'Abbene is introducing many kids with Down syndrome and mental disability to a judo practice adapted for the disabled people, with great results in terms of improvement of body movement, balance and coordination. The study of the technique of falling is undoubtedly one of the most important exercises for judo, but not only: the capability of falling and getting up becomes an essential competence when they face the daily life.

In these years of experimenting we observed how **massage practices** are important for the physical and psychological improvement of the kids. The body manipulation stimulates the body tissues increasing the blood flow to the muscles. The improvement of blood circulation is helpful to eliminate the tiredness caused by the work fatigue and to relax the muscles. To learn how to self massage is important to gain a better awareness of themselves and to learn how to take care of themselves. The massage can be useful to alleviate a back pain, a neck pain or an articulation pain. The massage can help to stimulate the production of endorphins, which are natural pain relievers of our organism.

Above all when it is not possible to do sport, the massage becomes the only instrument for the people who suffers from chronic pain to the articulations to gain more mobility.

Massages, both made by specialized staff and/or self made by the person, help to manage stressful situations: the disabled people generally suffer from high levels of stress due to difficult circumstances such as pain, lack of full mobility, inadequacy feelings, or the incapability to express their difficulties. Often the person with disability is perceived as an eternal child, but he/she is not. Sexual drives, constantly repressed, hindered and not educated in their manifestations both autonomous or in relationship, produce a constant and progressive psychophysical stress with consequences, also noticeable, on health.

Probably there are endless activities that can help the kids to improve their self esteem and to express their personality. To keep on talking about our experience, we noticed that the **music therapy** has undoubtedly an incredible potential. The alternation of sound, rhythm, movement and silence has a freedom effect. The sensation of the sound waves produced echoing in their bodies create an interior massage that leads to calmness and serenity. The capability of letting go and coming back to silence when required helps to learn to concentrate.

Learning to listen the silence and to manage the apparent emptiness created by the silence are important exercises which are carried out during the work experience, but that they can be further developed through theater or music laboratories.

On our territory there are associations that promote free expression through percussions and favor the integration among adolescents using the impact and the energy of the rhythm generated in group. These activities proved to be important occasions to favor the mutual acquaintance between normal and disabled kids, to overcome with simplicity barriers, prejudices and unfounded fears.

#### **1.4. THE INDEPENDENCE ACADEMY**

We define with the expression “Academy of Independence” the three-year program of teaching/work at the Albergo Etico.

It is a gradual path through which the kid learns how to perform all the tasks at the hotel and at the restaurant (artificial nest) and he reproduces them in the family context (own nest).

The program was decided to be three years on the basis of the experience done that allowed us to understand how this is the average time necessary to reach a real autonomy.

The kids learn not to go back home to sleep, but to sleep in the rooms dedicated to the staff. This is another big opportunity to cut the umbilical cord with the family and to learn to live with their peers.

It is incredible to observe how these occasions of self-managing give them responsibility and motivate them.

In the small quarters of the Albergo Etico there are no assistants and/or teachers, but only work colleagues. The more expert or mature kids tutor the rookies. Giacomo, who came to do a 3-week internship, lived in a mini-apartment with Niccolò. After this experience, when he went back home, told his mother he was ready to go to live by himself.

It is obvious it isn't so, but this is, more or less, the thought of almost all twenty-year old kids nowadays. The mother had to face moments of fear and concern. Try to imagine your son ending his night shift at a restaurant in a city that he doesn't know, going for a drink with other colleagues and then going back to an apartment he shares with somebody else and, like a normal adolescent, forgets to call his mother. This mother, ever if she was reassured by Niccolò - who called to let her know that they had actually come home - had to overcome strong emotional moments.

This mother could have reacted withdrawing or be happy of the new autonomy of her son, encouraging him to surpass new limits...she chose this latter solution.

Daria, Guglielmo's mom, talking about the 3-week internship of her son at the Albergo Etico, defined the experience a "Erasmus" (which is an university program allowing young people to go to a foreign university for a year). They live in Switzerland and they looked for this experience, they organized it, and lived it as a moment to start to learn autonomy (just like an Erasmus). The mother moved for three weeks to Asti, but in an independent apartment. Once Guglielmo went back home, stronger and more confident in his resources, he looked at himself at the mirror and said "it doesn't look so much anymore that I have Down syndrome!" It is an experience that they considered very positive and that will try to replicate in Switzerland. This is the contagious spirit that the Albergo Etico wants to have.

The program of the Academy allows to make the jump from the child dimension to the adult one.

Who arrives to the Albergo Etico after high school never left the family before and finds him/herself "catapulted" in an environment that doesn't look at all like the ones that he/she has been experiencing so far.

It is a school, but it is a strange school, without desks, where everybody looks busy doing something and where people smile a lot and pay a lot of attention to how their uniform looks.

Until today, in absence of a specific structure to devote to the kids accommodations we rented special apartments and, therefore, because they are temporary, we couldn't make specific investments. In our idea, when we will be able to build special accommodations for the kids who work at the Albergo Etico, the environment will have to reproduce in principle the one already known of the Hotel (entrance with flower vases, table at the entrance with a computer, key hanger, communication boards, common and private spaces), and the spaces will have to be organized to contain all the necessary things, avoiding the superfluous ones: the basic idea is that the more organized the environment is, the easier it is to keep it clean and organized, without requiring external help. Colors and silhouettes can be used to help remember where to put the thing at the right place. The place will have to be taken care of, welcoming and beautiful to see.

A common element that we noticed in our experience is that the kids, even when they come from particularly caring families and interested in the development of the independence of their own child, show an image of themselves characterized by insufficiency, incapability, sense of inadequacy and scarce self esteem.

The persisting of these conditions leads to ascribe to the young people a role, socially shared, of eternal children. More often, mothers keep on using reinforcement verbal expressions such as

“be good”, “good boy/girl, that you did this”, “you are a good boy/girl”, which are suitable for children, but not adequate for young adolescents.

In the Albergo Etico the verbal reinforcement is secondary, the real satisfaction is generated by the same kids who witness day by day the objective improvement of the activities they perform or of the things they produce (a dish, the preparation of a table...), in particular when it is a matter of difficult and complex actions to which before they couldn't even come close (uncork an expensive wine, cut a piece of meat, use a blender to mix a sauce which is still hot...). When, step by step, the actions that are carried out are not only individual anymore, but they require the interaction with other subjects, to see how their own contribution allow the success of a broader action reinforce their self esteem even more and push them to be always more autonomous and careful to the surrounding people.

It is the moment when they start to get out from the phase in which they are only concentrated on themselves to begin to understand the importance of the relationship with the others.

An important step forward towards the direction of personal autonomy is to learn **to get oriented outside their own usual places** (home, school, Albergo Etico), to move in cities, take public transportation and cross the street.

In our experience we didn't encounter many adolescents with disability who in a really autonomous way get around the city, in spite of the fact that there are specific classes for the acquisition of autonomy. The reasons are many, from social ones such as the inclination by the parents to help and take away responsibility beyond necessary, to external ones, such as the big cities chaos or the fear to be approached by people with bad intentions.

The skills to acquire favoring mobility are of different types: of communication (being able to provide identification data and to use the cellular phone), of going around in the traffic (being able to use pedestrian crossings, to cross the road without pedestrian crossings and to use public transportation) and of getting oriented (read a map, ask for information, identify points of references or bus stops).

Some of the skills acquired during the activity in the Albergo, such as the improving of the motor capabilities and of the coordination, are useful as a starting point.

At the beginning every going out is lived as a mission: there is a goal to reach and there are fears and uncertainties to win in relation to the obstacles to overcome. It is important not to underestimate the uncertainties shown and intercept also those that we are not full aware of, finding the instruments that would give the necessary confidence to the kid.

The worlds of blindness and of the mountain hikers teach us that specific tools can help make the step safer: the stick or pole helps the people feel safer and more stable, but other tools can be used, such as whistles and “*lollipop signs*”(signs on poles to cross the roads). At first sight some procedures can seem to be excessive: it is the case of the kid who must cross a street with several lanes without stoplight and who is afraid not to be seen and to whom is suggested to use the whistle and to flag the lollipop sign high. In reality, if these practices help to gain confidence, why should we consider them a stigma? The main resistances come often from the parents. Is it better to see an adolescent taken by hand to cross the street? Maybe it is better accepted socially, because it is less visible or because we are more used to such protective attitudes, but for sure they are not helpful to achieve autonomy.

To wear the Albergo Etico uniform is another recognizing and safety element: people recognize the uniform, they greet the kids and reinforce the practice (“for sure when I cross the street with you I am not afraid not to be seen”). As in any other growth process, also in this case the maturing of the sense of security is not the same for all, but it is the kid him/herself who when he/she feels ready, asks to go out without help.

To learn how **to use public transportation**, also outside downtown, becomes important to reach the place of work independently. During our various experiments, we produced some practices foreseeing the capability to recognize intermediate “stops” where, in case of malfunction of the public transportation is possible to go to and where the kids know that they will be welcome and will find a telephone to inform about what is going on. Obviously, also to learn this skill we foresee exercises next to other kids who are already autonomous.

When the kids get to use the train, they really feel adult! Flavio, a boy from Turin, was the first among the kids in need to learn to use the train to reach the Albergo Etico. His determination, the parent support, the study of possible variables and, therefore, of the procedures to be activated and the practice made Flavio not only autonomous, but also a reference to accompany other kids, both on a train and on the subway.

Then there are particularly great cases, like Stefano, also from Turin, who got the driving license.

Our experience convinced us that the kids are naturally inclined to be careful in their choices: it is unlikely that they would “step too far” respect to their capabilities. They proceed slowly step by step, almost as they were immune from the tendency of the adolescents to rush into things. In fact, in spite of the fact that the example of Stefano is known to everybody, up until now nobody else showed any interest to reach the goal to obtain the driving license.

**To know the main touristic sights** of the town, to know some basic notion about the monuments and places representing the city, to know where they are in respect of the Albergo



Etico, allow to further develop their own autonomy under several points of view: it allows to have points of reference for their own movements, to welcome the customers and manage their requests of information and can also be useful to accompany a customer somewhere or join a tourist guide in special events.

In the Academy we try to offer several stimuli towards activities not necessarily job-oriented, which are also very different from each other, in order to enable every kid to choose the ones that better suit their talents and expectations.

During the years we did some experiments with some kids and we noticed how **gardening and vegetable gardening** can be important occasions of maturing.

Respecting the nature cycles and taking daily care of a vegetable garden or of small animals such as rabbits, chicken and donkeys allow to develop practical skills linked to specific tools and knowledge relevant to the seasonality of the products; for example it teaches how to sow, plant and cultivate them, but it also allows to develop abstract capabilities such as power of observation. Taking care of a sprout and making it a grown plant capable of producing plentiful fruits becomes a metaphor to understand what it means for a child to grow and become autonomous. It is a way to read the parents care toward them and to understand the role of the teachers and the role of the Albergo Etico from which, when they will be grown enough and ready, they will be able to “detach” to meet other experiences.

The kids can perform little activities of gardening both at the Albergo Etico, where there are flower beds, plants in vase and aromatic herbs, and in specific devoted external spaces. In particular, one of the projects that we would like to accomplish is the creation of a Bio Ethic Park, an agricultural area where the students of the Albergo Etico can handle a small vegetable garden and some farm animals. To favor the cooperation with the society, the Park could be managed in collaboration with volunteer associations, privates, elderly and schools. Some hypotheses are:

- Inside the city. This project would allow to redevelop a green area of the city and could be open to children and day care and primary school pupils and elderly who would make their knowledge and time available.
- Outside the city. The spaces could belong to private citizens who make available a portion of their property as a way to support the Independence Academy.

The solutions can be several; last but not least the availability by local farms to organize internships at the various production sites.

The expression of the Academy is useful to make people understand how Albergo Etico is made by people with different roles and tasks, where there is a hierarchy and a respect of the

superior figure which is indispensable, not only to learn to acquire the autonomy gradually, but also not to run into potentially dangerous mistakes.

At the same time the atmosphere that there is in the workplace is of strong camaraderie where, independently from the mistakes they can make or from the misunderstandings that can arise during the day, everybody shares the moment of the meal, that defuses all tensions and creates moments for a hug.

Exactly as in a military academy, they share an uniform and represent a “body”. The wide presence in the city of kids getting around in the uniform stimulates the collectivity to think and to ask questions.

It is a way to broaden the thinking of the introduction to work of kids with particular needs, and to increase the number of entrepreneurs available to welcome these kids to their staff.

Not only. The more the society knows about these kids, the better the capabilities of interacting and relating with each other become. Also this is a fundamental step to reach the personal autonomy.

To have other points of reference besides Albergo Etico, such as a café where they know they will find a kid like them, or getting an ice cream in a place where they will be served by a school mate, or to go shopping to make conversation with an ex colleague of Albergo Etico, is a way to create a network of acquaintances and of points of reference in town. It is also the way these kids “contaminate” the city; they finally become visible and achieve an active social role, encouraging other families to begin an autonomy path for their children.

The experience of the Albergo Etico lures the families of other territories who are taking their kids to do internships in Asti not only for the working experience, but also for the capability of the town to welcome them and let them feel an integrating part of it.

## **1.5. CONTAMINATE THE POPULATION TO GROW TOGETHER**

In a former paragraph we presented the educational process of the kids as an enlarged process, with includes not only the person involved in it, but also his/her family and, more in general, the society.

In these seven years of experience on the field, we saw how the people often tend to exclude the persons with disabilities for sense of inadequacy, for fear of not being able to handle the relationship, for ignorance and for misinformation. If the relationship starts gradually, through professional interactions, not strictly personal, the people “get used” to handle interpersonal

relationships with people visibly different from them and often become enthusiastic sponsors. There are many cases of people who never had the opportunity to enter into a relationship with people with Down syndrome and who now support the association, promoting new events and presenting this project to their friends. The opportunities of encounter with the kids of the Albergo Etico grow, as long as the number of students grows. The young people work in cafes, restaurants, butcheries, delicatessen shops, they manage the café of the City Theater, the catering for public and private associations, they participate to fairs and events. These occasions of reciprocal encounter are moments of “contamination”, occasions to approach the diversity.

Re-evaluating our experience, we seem to be able to detect some factors which favor integration:

1. **To be recognized.** The orange uniform of the Albergo Etico, always tidy, draws attention and it is the contrary of trying to hide a diversity through clothing made of anonymous shapes and colors. The formality with which the kids wear it generates curiosity and desire to understand. Performing their tasks, the kids confirm the identity of belonging to a growing path of autonomy through which a strong message of identification to the population is sent.
2. **The presence.** The uniforms become a constant presence in the city; at each contact generated between the kids and the people, the kids receive strong signals of the daily life. Any shop owner who is part of the teaching group makes his/her business a “posto tappa” (meeting point) useful not only to the student’s education, but also to the society. These shops become meeting points where the people learn, in time, to see beyond the disability and to start interpersonal relationships on an even level.
3. **Professional attitude.** The kids learn at the Albergo Etico the posture, the care for organization and cleanliness of the uniform, the politeness and the composure they need to relate to others. The style with which a service is performed become a persuasion element also for the most skeptical and exigent customers. The genuine smile and the never-judging glance break the fears, the rigidity and the inadequacy sense of anyone. This way of relating in social life generates also political attention which, if constantly stimulated, creates thinking processes by the local administrations leading them to make brave choices favoring a solid social inclusion.
4. **The dynamic processes of disability and relevant acknowledgment through convivial rituals. Living the diversity at the table.** Going to a restaurant is an occasion of partying, having fun and conviviality. The relationship between customers and staff is regulated by precise rules, which are part of a daily ritual which favors openness. Situations get created in which also people who never had any occasion to get in touch with diversity get comfortable with normal behaviors generated in the restaurant activity between

customer and staff. Most of the times at the end of the meal, provided that the courses are of high quality, all barriers have been overcome. The relationship becomes more personal and often we say goodbye with a hug. Many new customers come back with friends, others come back to appreciate the professional growth of the kids.

The contamination, intended as capability of integration and reciprocal acceptance happens through recognizing the role of the other person. There are teachers who brought their classes at the “dinner in the darkness”, others who invited the parents to take their children to the restaurant to make them understand what is integration. There are teachers who invited “Albego Etico” to teach a class. Young fiancés asked us to cater their wedding service, because through that nuptial reception they wanted to “contaminate” their friends and relatives.

An ethical and conscious city is judged also by the quantity of disabled people who are being able to go around, either autonomously or assisted.

## **2. Together toward a more ethical tourism, the “Turismabile” project**

A quick look can consider Turismabile and Albergo Etico two independent experiences, connected, even if in a different way, to the world of disability. On the contrary, the experience of the Albergo Etico, as we told in these pages, allows a broader thought capable to highlight the elements in common with Turismabile and, above all, the positive synergies that can be created from their contact.

If Albergo Etico considers the touristic context a privileged environment for the introduction to work of the kids with Down syndrome, for Turismabile the tourism is the vessel to promote the social inclusion of the people with disability. In fact, Turismabile considers the right to journey, the access to culture and to fun a substantial and indispensable element for a modern and sustainable society. Up until today Turismabile helped to significantly change the perspective on the accessible tourism stimulating operators, institutions and single travelers to a progressive cultural change able to consider and respect the needs of all travelers. This is an approach founded on the following assumptions:

- The absence of architectural barriers isn't the goal of the accessible tourism, but the fundamental basis of a destination that is welcoming and inviting for everybody;
- There cannot be accessibility without welcome, there cannot be a good welcome without overcoming prejudices, preconceptions and stereotypes relevant to diversity and disability.
- The accessibility cannot be limited to the cataloguing of the resources through a stamp. The stamp is not inclusion, but simplification. The stamp isn't a symbol of attention and quality if is not supported by guarantees of dependability. The stamp has no meaning if it isn't associated to a complete description of the use conditions to allow the traveler with disability the possibility to choose the structure that better meets his/her needs and expectations.
- The clear, complete and reliable communication of the accessibility and use conditions of a resource or a territory is the first element of welcome for tourists with specific

needs.

These concepts were not that common five years ago, but now instead are shared by a good number of operators of this sector. The stimulus to cultural change is undoubtedly one common element to both initiatives but there are several more aspects linking Albergo Etico and Turismabile:

- Both are strongly innovative realities, without precedents in the Italian society, with strong challenging values and undoubtedly capabilities to trace new paths and to drive to new goals;
- Both were born and grew in Piedmont, which is becoming the cradle of movements and initiatives which, grounded in the roots of Piedmont's pragmatism, are coming into being good practices at national and international levels.
- Both deal with fundamental rights of the people with disability (right to work and right to travel) in a modern and innovative meaning, capable to shake the "welfare" vision that too often characterizes the Italian people look on the disability world.

These common elements can be summarized in one only concept: both projects are initiatives that help to change the perceptions and the ideas of the operators and of the society; they are experiences that progressively contaminate the territory creating synergies, contacts, and collaborations.

In other words, they are successful experiments that are convincing both in their principles and facts.

Maybe their mutual connection and contamination was inevitable: as brothers raised in different countries who naturally understand when they meet that they are on the page and agree that together they can be stronger and winners.

The glance of Turismabile on the experience of Albergo Etico is that of someone who sees their horizons get wider, bringing new life to the theme and favoring the development of new strategies and opportunities.

In particular, if the Albergo Etico experience is read through the principles and foundations of accessible tourism, several are the connections and the potentials that can be developed to make territories, destinations and societies more hospitable and welcoming for everybody.

Among the innovative and meaningful elements, we have to mention the following aspects:

**The work inclusion of the kids with disability as an extension and evolution of the accessible tourism.**

The Albergo Etico experience, in the context of the tourism for all, proposes an innovative and modern concept of social inclusion. If, in fact, until now the tourism for all was about the principle of including the people with disability only as tourists and guests of a destination, in the Albergo Etico the inclusion is extended also to the operators. A 360° inclusion, where the attention and the strategies carried out to favor the full participation of the people with disability to the touristic offer becomes a reality for both visitors and service providers. Apparently it can look like an ordinary concept, almost given for granted or marginal, but in reality it is a small cultural revolution regarding both the tourism department – in particular the sustainable and responsible tourism – and the department of introduction to work of people with disability.

In fact, Albergo Etico shows a new concept of hospitality which, starting from the capability of the operator to welcome and value a worker with disability within its staff, confirms and enhances, in the eye of the guest, the credibility of the company in respect to the quality of the welcome and the capability to pay real and effective attention to the needs of the customers. Furthermore, the presence of a kid with disability in the staff of any business shows in a simple and immediate way the “social responsibility” of the company, which is a subject that is becoming more and more important also in the tourism field. The presence of a disabled person makes it clear in the eye of the public the capability of the operators to challenge themselves through innovation and the flexibility of thought to meet at best the demands, not only of the market, but also and above all, of the collectivity. This is a parameter that shouldn't be underestimated as an element of distinction of a society that slowly but steadily is aiming more and more to the sustainability and responsibility of all the actors.

In this context the attentions, the times and the models of approach and interaction adopted for the welcome of the worker with disability will be repeated with the tourists with specific needs significantly improving the quality of the hospitality.

A virtuous process able to destroy the prejudices toward the diversity and to encourage sincere and equal relationships which, re-proposed and applied to all guests, can only improve the quality of the relationship and of the hospitality.

This nuance is a strategic element for the operators of the tourism field because it can represent an element of qualification in the eyes of their own guests and contribute to their retention.

**The working inclusion of the kids with disability as an added value to the personal touristic experience and to the image of a territory.**

Each one of us travels to make new experiences, to see new places, but also and always more often to feel emotions, to discover and share stories, to be surprised and to establish



relationships. Probably, each one of us keeps among the most cherished travel memories, right those experiences which, more or less clearly, touched us deeply and supplied us with stimuli and food for thought. Those adventures that, in some way, helped us grow, widened our horizons or, maybe, looked at the reality with different eyes, changing our perspectives. Often of a destination we remember some particulars, some people, some images, some smiles that probably were not the purpose of our trip, but which are surely present in our memories and in the stories that we will tell about that place.

Today we travel, always more often, looking for stories, knowing that places are made of people. Imagine how can be positive for any tourist to be welcomed at the reception of a hotel or to be served in a restaurant by a person with disability. It doesn't matter the personal sensitivity about the subject, the direct knowledge of other persons with disability or if you are a social worker: for sure that kid will remain in the memories of the trip, if only because in the present tourism system it is still surprising, unusual and somewhat original to meet a kid with Down syndrome greeting you in a hotel. If afterwards you will have the possibility to better the acquaintance and the relationship, most probably for any guest the stay in the structure will be even more satisfying and enriching for the guests. Not only they will have stayed, but also they will have dismantled some preconception, some fear or, simply they will have filled that gap that too often separates us from diversity and disability in particular.

The encounter with a worker with disability will be for sure for all tourists a stimulus for deeper thoughts, a reason for curiosity for the territory and, above all, an emotion that will give an additional value to the trip.

In an era where the tourism of experience gets always more interest and acknowledgements, it can be strategic to broaden the traditional access in a way also including the comparison with new models of hospitality and social sustainability. If then, as in the experience in Asti, the working inclusion is present and visible all around the city (hotel, ice cream parlor, information point...) probably the tourist will extend and qualify the image and the memories of the destination also to ethical values.

If the tourists arriving for the first time in Asti could expect a territory characterized by prestigious landscapes and a wine and gastronomic offer of high quality, probably after the stay they will remember the hills around Asti also for having encouraged them to think about new forms of work inclusions, for having discovered new models of social responsibility and for having confirmed, with facts, to be really an ethical destination and hospitable for everybody. A hospitality of quality that transform in evaluation of territories and not only in commercial activities.

### **The working inclusion of the kids with disability as instrument of promotion of the touristic territory.**

Everything acting as a symbol through the promotion of certain values in the definition of the touristic image of a territory is communication and touristic promotion. Imagine the symbolic power of a brochure, a postcard or a catalogue where there are proposals like “Come to Piedmont, we will be happy to cook for you” with a selection of chefs, among whom some of them with disabilities. Or “I wait for you to let you discover the secrets of our wines” with the image of a *sommelier* with Down syndrome or, again, a postcard of a hotel claiming “Come back soon and see us again, you will find always our smile”, with the image of the staff in which there are also kids with disability.

There are no better images to send messages of welcome and hospitality to catch the attention, to bring up a memory and, above all, to distinguish from the advertising proposals that equate travelling to a simple commercial product.

The journey is emotion, discovery and sharing, also and mainly, of values. To invest on a modern touristic promotion capable to value the working inclusion of the kids with disability as a presentation of an authentic, hospitable and welcoming territory, can become a winning promotional strategy. A touristic communication that, from the beginning conveys emotions, values and is able to involve the tourist in a bigger story of sharing not only of places, but also of commitments and perspectives.

With proposals of this kind, until now yet unexplored, maybe it would be possible to better catch the eye of those tourists who are always more attentive to the many sides of a touristic destination and always more used to share values and messages, both with action and communication.

### **The working inclusion of the kids with disability as stimulus of the development of a new access of responsible tourism.**

Up until now the concept of responsible tourism was in terms of respect toward the destination where the tourist goes. The responsibility is the one of the traveler who makes choices and adopts respectful behaviors both toward the place (environmental sustainability), and toward the population (respect of the culture, local values and contribution to the welfare of the native population).

The experiences of Turismabile and Albergo Etico emphasize the need of a constructive debate about the widening of the concept of touristic responsibility to the field of operators and destinations. A remark that could overturn the perspective. Not only the respect of the

travelers in regard to the destinations, but also the respect of the operators in regard to the tourists, independently from the specific needs or abilities.

An ethical tourism amenable to the respect of the principles of accessibility, inclusion and hospitality.

An ethical touristic destination will be a place characterized by high levels of accessibility *for all*, a place where the touristic operators develop initiatives of working inclusion for people with disabilities and, last but not least, a thoroughly welcoming place in all and for all.

A destination which will be able to destroy fears and preconceptions related to diversity in favor of a culture of living together established upon respect, comparison, sharing and exchange of knowledge, in a cultural model where the people have equal dignity and even opportunities.

An ethical destination will be inevitably the ideal place of responsible tourists, but it will be also a place where the citizens, independently from specific needs or abilities will be able to become active protagonists and proud workers in the hospitality field and touristic promotion.

In conclusion, Turismabile is very satisfied to see other experiences being born in Piedmont sharing the same principles that, in other ways and with different means, help day by day to improve the tourism quality in a new, modern and innovative manner.

In these years Turismabile and Albergo Etico are tracing new pathways for a more ethical and sustainable tourism, also from the social point of view. It will be up to operators and institutions to embrace this challenge engaging in different ways in the implementations of more ethical proposals and paths, capable of meeting both the needs of new travelers and those of a civil society.

### **3. The boys and girls of the Albergo Etico**

#### **3.1. Questions about hospitality**

Here as follows we are introducing the real main characters of the experience Albergo Etico: the workers with Down syndrome. All of them participated or are still participating at the independence path described in the previous chapters. To some of them we asked some questions about the touristic system or about their direct experience.

**Flavio, from Turin**

**What can we propose to two tourists coming from a different region for a two-day stay?**

The tourists arrive by trains, private coach buses, airplanes, taxis.

I am going to pick them up by subway if they arrive by train or private coach bus and I take them to a hotel in Turin where they will spend the night.

The day after I am going to pick them up to show them the main sights of Turin: the murazzi, the Po river, the Egyptian museum, the Madama Palace, Piazza Castello, Piazza Bengasi, Porte Palatine, the Regio Theater, the Museum of the Cinema with its panoramic elevator, artist lights.

I would take them to Asti to eat and drink well. In Asti there are delicious wine and food.

Then, once back in Turin, I will take them to drink a good coffee at the *Bicerin* and to eat good gianduia (paste of cocoa with hazelnuts) chocolates, which made this town famous.

I would take them to visit the museum of Pietro Micca, who succeeded to protect the city with his life from the French invasion.

**Giacomo, from Rome**

**How do you handle at the restaurant people with different needs?**

I never served a customer on a wheelchair, but it is right to put slides in all shops and restaurants to let the customer get in and out and reach the table more easily. The difference is that the customer without wheelchair can move more easily, while you have to meet and accompany the one in a wheelchair.

If a customer is celiac or vegetarian, I say “Wait, I go to the kitchen and ask the chef for a different menu”, if a customer asks for the accessible toilets, I will show him/her the restroom with the drawing of the wheelchair in front of the door.

**According to you, what is accessible tourism?**

Large sidewalks, museums with slides, restaurants with slides, buses with slides, subways with slides and trains with slides.

**Jessica, from Asti**

**How do you handle at the restaurant people with different needs?**

I already served a blind customer, it is a beautiful experience. The experience that I would like to tell you about is the dinner in the darkness with the Blind Association. It is a fantastic thing because you get in touch with the vision that they have every day. And then it lasts about two hours.

P.S. try it. It is a beautiful experience.

**If a customer is celiac or vegetarian, what do you do?**

I suggest him/her to look the menu where there are symbols on some foods.

**Niccolo', from Asti**

**How do you handle at the restaurant people with different needs?**

I suggest him/her the right food that they can eat. For example, vegetarians cannot eat meat.

We have to take the blind customers of our restaurant downstairs arm in arm, being careful on how you take them. It is difficult to explain where the silverware is and it is useful to stay close to them in order to take away the dish that you served. We need to make them understand how to go to the bathroom.

**Marcellina, from Marmorito di Aramengo (Asti)**

**How do you present the menu of the restaurant?**

I make you taste our typical dishes from Piedmont, that are: white or black truffle meatballs, the chopped beef a la monferrina, the pasqualina pie, the fresh pasta, the safran risotto, the polenta, the cheese from Piedmont, the desserts, such as panna cotta and Piedmont bunet.

### 3.2. PHOTOGALLERY



*Il Presidente della Repubblica italiana Giorgio Napolitano con il gruppo Albergo Etico  
il 3 dicembre 2010 al Quirinale*



*L'Assessore alla Sanità della Regione Piemonte, Antonio Saitta,  
con i ragazzi dell'Albergo Etico*





*Salone del gusto 2014 stand lavazza, partner del progetto "Vagabondo per il mondo"*



*Il presidente della Regione Piemonte Sergio Chiamparino  
con i ragazzi di Albergo Etico, 2014*



*Il prefetto di Asti Pierluigi Faloni con i ragazzi dell'Albergo Etico*



*Albergo Etico ad Assisi 12 aprile 2014*





*Il Consigliere Regionale Angela Motta con i ragazzi dell'Albergo Elico*



*Alberto e Alessandro con il barman Davide Ragucci*



*Sergio Cherubin in una lezione di percussioni*



*Partenza del Vagabondo per il mondo Mauro Dagna*





*Giorgio Faletti, il Presidente del Consiglio Matteo Renzi e  
il Sindaco di Asti Fabrizio Brignolo con lo staff di Albergo Etico, 2013*



*Gruppo di Albergo Etico in Vaticano*



*Visita alle distillerie Rovero di Asti*



*Asti Expo, l'Albergo Etico punta sull'accoglienza innovativa*





*Dimostrazione di judo adattato in centro città a Torino*



*Super Mamme*



*Buffet di fine corso al Centro di Formazione Professionale Colline Astigiane*



*il pizzaiolo Ivan Nobile con l'allievo Daniele*





*Markiz e Domenico Saladino della Fondazione la Capriola (Davos - Svizzera)  
incontrano l'Albergo Etico*



*Foto di gruppo al Teatro Alfieri, Asti*



*Elena e Jessica brindano con l'Asti DOCG*



*Il patentato Stefano ad un controllo dei Carabinieri*





*Il Maestro gelatiere Giorgio Zanatta con Alessandro*



*Niccolò con Cristina Acquistapace,  
suora laica con sindrome di Down*



*Il presidente del Parlamento Europeo  
Martin Schulz, consegna il premio  
"cittadino europeo" ad Antonio De Benedetto*



*A Maranello, Museo Ferrari, per la consegna del premio Spadolini*



*Asti, festa con i bersaglieri e Marco Versè*





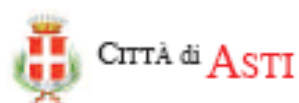
*Premio Borelli - Fondazione Goria a Marco Boglione,  
presidente di Robe di Kappa e Superga*



*Dicembre 2014, l'Albergo Elia raccontato  
al sottosegretario del Ministero del Lavoro on. Luigi Bobba*



## Verso una Città Etica



CITTÀ di **ASTI**



progetto **ONDA** band



Albero Etico



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