

Dear all,

first of all i would thank COE for this event, and the possibility for an organization as LIBERA in the frame of the wider LIBERA Project named "Libera Terra" to promote and enhance a project, a reality, a new model of society as Cooperative Placido Rizzotto in Alto Belice Corleonese in the depth of astonishing Sicilian landscape. The rebirth of Alto Belice Corleonese is based on the recovery of land confiscated from the mafia organizations. Founded in 1995, currently Libera is a network made of more than 1,600 associations, groups and schools, committed to create organizational synergies between the political and cultural local realities willing to promote a legal and peace culture.

I will start by making a few clarifications to the argument. The law on the social use of the real estate confiscated from organized crime, the education on democratic lawfulness, the fight against corruption, the voluntary camps, the projects at field, the development and anti-usury activities, are some of Libera's concrete commitments. Over these years the activities and actions carried out by Libera on confiscated land has led to experimenting organizational and managerial models, eventually converging into the Libera Terra Project, favoring the creation of social cooperatives working on confiscated lands, got free from the mafia oppression.

The cooperatives working on confiscated lands every day represent the "sustainable" answer to the "no sustainable" actions of mafia organizations. They are one of the best expressions in Italy of efficient and quite work, far from clamor and near to people needs and desires. They represent the clearest example of a new spirit, a sense of identity, of community belonging and pride for local territory, finally perceived as "common good", a common heritage to be shared. Those cooperatives are communities that create an innovative environment and turning it into real work, facilities and hospitality services. In the Libera perspective, the fight against mafia represents a method for local communities to make real the opportunity to be "leaders" in the transformation's processes of their territories.

The Libera Terra's mission is to enhance the lands confiscated from mafia organizations starting from the process related to asset's confiscation in territories where mafia's presence is strong, ending to the creation and empowerment of social independent cooperatives enabled to sustainably manage their business activities thus also contributing to the creation of induced employment as well as the spreading of a virtuous economic system.

This project aims at increasing the value of high level landscapes characterized by either rural and harsh natural environments, by some issues. The social and productive recovery of confiscated mafia assets, the improvement of local economic development through high level products cultivated with environmentally friendly methods, don't forgetting' olden tradition's respect and by respectful means of historical landscape and of dignity of person. Indeed, it has an active role on the whole territory, re-involving other producers who share same principles and forwarding biological cultivated lands.

The activity combines also education and diffusion of democratic values, promoting public occasions of meeting and spread of made actions. Voluntary camps represent one of the greater forms of democratic participation, collaboration and commitment aimed at real rescue of confiscated goods, on behalf of young people, who are eager to have an experience of high social value. Every year, currently, more than 5000 boys and girls, coming from many regions of Italy and from abroad too, participate in the work-camps.

In our case "Alto Belice Corleonese" covers an area of a square kilometer and includes 25 villages. The territory is marked by water catchment areas in the South of Alto Belice and in the North of Oreto area. The wooded heritage counts about 4000 hectares, equal to 23% of the Sicilian province, particularly in Palazzo Adriano, Bisacquino, Altofonte and Monreale areas.

The intervention regarding Placido the Rizzotto-Libera Terra's cooperative, has concerned the recovery of the area, before the implementation of the recovery plan, these areas had became illegal dumps or property of mafias families, other areas presented were abandoned crops. So Libera has promoted a recovery and re-qualification action on the aforesaid goods (lands and properties) focusing particularly on enhancement in terms of nature maintenance and protection, rural and landscape recovery.

For this reason we call it a rebirth, considering the retrieval of lands seized from mafia has been possible through the promotion of law n. 109/96 which provides for the granting to third parties — private organizations; cooperatives; municipal, provincial and regional administrations of all property acquired through illegal activities. After years of phasing-out, lands confiscated to mafia bosses from Corleonese, have returned to being farmed, thanks to "Libera Terra" project, promoted by Libera and the Prefecture of Palermo.

The cooperative is dedicated to Placido Rizzotto, a mafia-killed farmer from Corleone, who chose the way of trade union commitment. New working techniques based on

the recovery of local traditions have been recently introduced: since the inception of the project the chosen cultivation method was the biological one and all productions are handmade, so to ensure good nature and quality of products which can save the olden flavour of Sicilian tradition.

This method, in turn, led to the environmental re-qualification on one hand and to the reinstatement of landscape identity in a territory which had been in the most part abandoned on the other.

The Libera Terra Project started in July 2001, with the recruitment of 15 unemployed young people grouped on the basis of the different required profiles. The number of responses to the vacancies was much higher than expected and many boys and girls have participated to the recruitment. After three months of keen training course, 15 selected youngsters settled the Libera Terra social cooperative called Placido Rizzotto on 21<sup>st</sup> November of 2001, and they received confiscated mafia lands from the Consortium of Development and Legality, as an extended free loan.

Ever since, despite many difficulties, thanks to obstinacy of partners, guys of cooperative keep on believing and taking on the project which is considered guiding on an European level, for numbers of involved subjects, for economical dimensions, for the amazing State intervention, for the sustainability of it in other geographical contexts. The main distinctive feature of social cooperative activity is represented by work inclusion of disadvantaged people who, otherwise, would hardly get a job and a social integration in a marginal and economically laid low reality, as it is Alto Belice - Corleonese.

Through this organizational model it has been possible to both recovery and assess again the beauty and the great asset of landscape as well as recover genuine traditions linked to rural and productive activities, particularly connected with agriculture (forwarding typical crops).

Productive activity also involved other local farmers in order to spread biological raising methods, to watch over territories and to reduce the environmental impact of agriculture. It fostered economic sustainability of activity assuring a fair income for farmers in order to reduce the abandon of lands. The productive activity has involved local manpower in the agricultural and food sector recovering and appraising handmade products such as dry durum wheat-pasta, wines, etc. Activities for recovering local traditions, in order to pass to next generation with retrieval of artefacts, and activities for recovering the typical Sicilian landscape, has increased the proud of affiliation, with the wish of exporting abroad both biological local

products and the Sicilian history with its literacy of setting a new historical drift.

Cooperative's funds for this project are dislocated on 6 Municipalities (Camporeale, Corleone, Monreale, Piana degli Albanesi, San Cipirello, San Giuseppe Jato), thus reaching different ecosystems, in the Alta Valle del Belice.

Chosen crops are mainly arable, in addition to vineyards and olive groves. The area is characterized by mountains and chalky and sandstone hills, the impressive landscape is enhanced by the beauty agriculture panorama as long-established practices, typical of Sicily in the Feud period. The settlements have a medieval feature where the urban development starts in Spanish period (sec. XVI - XVIII), characterized by titled buildings, churches and cloisters. Some of cities established in the XVI sec., are still inhabited by the Albanian settler's descendants fleeing from Turkish invasions, populations that conserved the language, traditions and the Byzantine religious ritual.

In lands whose slope is more than 5%, plowing is executed crosswise with respect to maximum slope lines and further crops are placed along level curves in order to prevent erosion. Such proceedings generate favorable outcomes in terms of soil productivity as well as positive effects on landscapes of the areas covered by these activities.

Ancient soils arrangements, directly related to local traditions of land-use, are used for agrarian settlements. Furthermore, such cultures aim at respecting environmental sustainability, with a view on energy and water saving. Ancient rural instruments were retrieved and renovated in order to avoid new productions and to preserve the traditional landscape. The Cooperative is equipped with its own car fleet and with agricultural equipments that allow it to implement a cultivation system consistent with the "rules of good agricultural practices" and with the "Mandatory Action Plan for vulnerable areas to nitrates originated from agricultural lands". Techniques differ according to the type of crop, as described below:

Furthermore the Cooperative promotes the initiative "*Libera il g(i)usto di viaggiare*", a Libera project for responsible tourism. Specifically elaborated for tourism in the Alto Belice Corleonese area, direct tour allow to discover the rich heritage of traditions and knowledge, and at the same time represent an occasion for testing and thinking. The itineraries offer the possibility to appreciate the unique and specific aspects of territory, tasting the gourmet food and wine specialties and appreciating artistic and cultural treasures. **The pilot project of Placido Rizzotto Cooperative**

**is a model that can be employed to similar situations, proposing active strategies able to take into account the nature's productive peculiarities: social, economic and cultural from other territories where Libera is active.**

Indeed the presence of confiscated assets from mafias is at National level, regarding in particular the southern region of Italy. The state in which such goods are lying is always similar to the initial state of the goods reused in Alto Belice Corleonese. The revival of the organizational model has therefore led to the emergence of Cooperative Placido Rizzotto, which allowed and will start similar projects in other areas.

Through its International network of Libera, it was possible to spread Europe wide issues related to the confiscation of property from the mafia and their social re-use, which led the Community institutions to be sensitive on these issues and to make efforts on the dissemination and implementation between countries members. In addition, the local people were involved in activities with a new model of development and employment based on the rule of law and democratic sharing. All of this strongly support the idea that values have redeemed the negative image that mafias had impressed. Since 2008, there is a new business entity, the Consortium **Libera Terra Mediterraneo**, which includes the cooperatives Libera Terra and other economic realities, that aim at creating collaborative processes in the direction and coordination of activities.

To develop territories is necessary to create conditions for raising their business dynamism. Carrying out this project won't be possible without the full engagement of young people, especially the most committed and experienced.

Thank you so much for this occasion to share best practices, and listen what the better experiences do in Europe to safeguard our landscapes.