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GUIDELINES TO THE FIRST STAGE OF ACTION RESEARCH

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Valorização Intergeracional
e Desenvolvimento Activo



*“What’s essential
is invisible to eyes”*
Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Executive summary

This document aims at the description of the main aspects which characterize our project AMISL, that is necessary to know for introducing in the management of the various phases.

As you know the project entails the development of a social research, finalized at performing a model for evaluating the services for older people and recognizing the informal and non formal learning of the operators. The method we choose in order to develop the research is the Action Research method (hereinafter “AR”), a method of participating social search. Scope of the document is:

- i) sharing the scientific fundamental of the project;
- ii) defining the method we adopt and its principles;
- iii) adapting the AR method to our scopes;
- iv) illustrating the concrete functions, instruments and tools we’ll adopt in the AR, in order to activate the first project tasks allocated to the partners.

The documents contains in the first paragraph a large theoretical introductions to the project in which it is explained why the quality evaluation must be assured by a very shared and inter subjective process. In this introduction it is also explained what is the nature of the object of the search, and the epistemological presumption of the chosen method. The second paragraph contains a descriptions of the AR method, applied to our project. The third paragraph explains what are the functions and the instruments both of the AR in general and of our project in specific; than it introduces to what is necessary starting to do, in this preparatory phase of our project up to march.

At last there is an appendix, containing an information questionnaire about the partner’s services; would You please to fill the questionnaire and send it again as soon as possible to the Staff AMISL IRSM in Rome.

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*“What’s essential
is invisible to eyes”*

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1. Introduction

The main purpose of this first stage of our AMISL project consists in the formulation of a common definition of a model of Quality (hereinafter “Q.”), applicable to our assistance and educational services for elderly people. All our efforts of surveying, turned to the definition of the expected competences, to the survey of tacit knowledge, to the identification of the areas, dimensions, sub dimensions and pointers of appraisal of the services, are, as a matter of fact, direct to formulate one common definition of Q. and of the suitable instruments to its appraisal. Instruments that shall be as much as possible close to our daily work and relational activities with the elderly people.

Why is considered necessary to provide an innovation in the methodologies of appraisal of Q. in the services to the person, and in the specific ones to the elderly people? Why should we not be pleased with the methodologies and the already existing and experimented protocols, some of which are also very analytic and well-constructed, applying them directly to our situation? Let’s try to reflect shortly on the ordinary concept of Q. and on its more common use; as Evert Gummesson observes the main mistake in considering a service is that the service it is not really taken into consideration. As a matter of fact, if we look from closer the main, appraisal models of Q. already applied to the services, we will notice that *the greater part of the ideas that regard the service has been imported from the ideas that regard the production*¹, as if a good service could be defined only with reference to the criteria of the productivity. The productivity must satisfy requirements of efficiency, inexpensiveness (ratio costs/benefits), respect of the expiry dates, safety, profits. The feature common to all these requirements is the fact of being measurable elements; all of them, may be objectified, quantified and correlate by means of mathematical procedures, more or less complicated, with a high or small degree of approximation. For that aspect they can be considered descending from the modern scientific thought, moving from Newton, that has supplied a new idea of the world by the breaking up of mathematical and analytical factors into constant forces and dimensions and into quantifiable measures.

This is not the place to examine why this epistemological formulation is today much more problematic than in the past, also in the field of mathematical and physical sciences. Let’s only think to the reversal of scientific paradigms occurred with the introduction of the quantum theory and with the Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle (1927). However such procedures, applied to the world of production, work well, and they concur to define “standards” and constant factors, that is to say protocols and algorithms that do not change in the surveying field, or that, at least, show a good tolerance to the introduction of new variables in their field of application.

Therefore a company that, as an example, produces upper for shoes, will be able to measure its own levels of efficiency and output by the application of the measuring models of Q., in a process that will certainly require a time (from a minimum to a maximum) to consent their adaptation to the specific situation, but however is an ended process. The point is, that at the end, the results of the survey may be published, either inside or outside the company, and the several stakeholders will be able to draw up the consequences and bring their own personal adjustments.

¹ Evert Gummesson, *Service Productivity: a Blasphemous Approach*, Dept. Of Business Administration, University of Stockholm, 1992

Therefore, the final purpose of the processes of appraisal of Q. for the productive spheres, seems to be to apply standard patterns, procedures and testing schemes to the own situation to gain useful information to orient the decisional processes that are typically part of the manager specific responsibility. The enquiry field inspected by the survey process – human resources, adopted procedures, organizational resources introduced in the productive cycle, organizational structures, middle management – is characteristically passive and has not been modified, both in the process of survey of data, and, in the great part of cases, in suffering the decisions next to the appraisal. Indeed, such immobility, such fixity of the surveying field seems to be one of the fundamental features of the scientific nature of the survey that it must be limited to reflect and to codify the situations without influencing them by means of its own methods of surveying.

The necessary conditions in order to guarantee the effectiveness and the scientific nature of such approach can be easily listed as it follows:

- i. a specific productive situation is an ended and reasonable field of surveying, in which is possible to isolate units and dimensions in a highly standardized way, in order to make them comparable with specific operative models;
- ii. there are models and general output standards of efficacy and efficiency that do not change inside their field of activity, and which allow to value with a deductive method the performances of a specific situation;
- iii. a specific productive situation represents a survey with specific structural steady features; and the adopted observation point must only represent and describe those features, in order to avoid that the observer and the observed one may be mutually and simultaneously influenced. Only at the end of the process it will be possible, rather than necessary, that the observation process produces pragmatic effects upon the enquired situation by means of suitable decision-making intervention.

Let's now consider: such approach may in its entirety be effective also for the services to the person? The question is not to understand if similar protocols may be effective in order to value the Q. of a service; in these terms the answer must clearly be affirmative. The larger part of our situations is, more or less, submitted to public norms which regulate the operability of the aforesaid situations. Therefore it is clear that, first of all, the appraisal shall, and in some cases must, point out if the services can satisfy the requirements provided by laws and regulations. We are in the field of measurable dimensions and objective data which do not require an effort as the one that we will engage together. However is worth to understand that this sort of appraisal, largely adopted in public inspecting procedures, can only go to below the external surface of the problems without going in depth and without understanding the real essential being and the meaning of a service and its real correspondence to its purpose.

The first feature of a service directed to a person is to be made by persons. Its essential characteristic is that each element present and performable – procedures, internal protocols, functions, roles, duties, hierarchic level, administration of the information, equipment – is based on the person. From the top, to the end, we only deal with persons and relational systems. It is easy to obtain the verification: let's try to remove from the business organization the persons in their concrete entities – the operator, the assistant, the educator, but also the disabled person, the elderly people – replacing them with impersonal functions, hardware and software, at the end we'll have only an amorphous context unable to operate.

The model of the productive cycle mostly adopted in our western economy - “high tech-low touch”² - is perfectly contradicted in our operative systems. The only lugubrious example that we have of job organization for the treatment of human person, based on high levels of process engineering methods and low levels of personal contact, it is sadly represented from the crematorium of Treblinka, about which tells to us with horror Gitta Sereny in 70 long interviews to Franz Stangl, director of the Totenlager³. All it worked there with pitiless efficiency and brutal rationality – of course the effort was enormous, for what Himmler had to define “the enormous task that we have of forehead”⁴ – provided that the operators accepted to lose their own personality, acting like gears of a mechanism, today we would say like algorithms of a software. The defensive line that the great part of them assumed in the process of Nuremberg⁵, it was the refusal of responsibilities, the abjuration of their own human responsibility and ethics in name of the whole political system.

The example is mentioned because if, for pure paradox, in the appraisal of Q. of the services to the person we should stop to the measurement of the sole efficiency, Treblinka could become a possible model of management. Why that? Because the appraisal of the efficiency – of a certain type of efficiency, based on scientific and technological rationalism – does not go into the depth of the identity and into the sense of the organizations, it does not analyze the aims, does not reflect on the cultural individual and collective meanings acted by the company. It does not distinguish. It does not enter in the concrete meaning of the question. And entering in the real meaning, in that virgin and unexplored earth where everything is individual and little or nothing can be generalized, is the task of the appraisal of Q. in the services to the person.

A system of persons who work for other persons is not an ordinary surveying field. First of all it is a strongly idiosyncratic system: this means that it changes in space and it evolves constantly in time. It is worth for the relational systems to mention the metaphor of Eraclito: it’s impossible to bath oneself two times in the same river. Even two services completely homogenous for typology and target of beneficiaries, if observed closely and from the inside, will show a certain number of differences and alterations, that will make much problematic a deductive procedure, that is a procedure that applies to the situation schemes and conceptual patterns which are standard and pre constituted. As a matter of fact, all the systems, also those to which successfully are applied the traditional models of appraisal of Q., show their own idiosyncrasies and specificities. The fundamental difference, between the services and the services to the person, is that, in the services such specificities, within a certain limit, may be neglected in the analysis process. In the services to the person instead these peculiar characteristics constitute the identity of the service that the appraisal of Q. must deepen. It is easy to decide if a determined handmade article is, or not, a table: we may simply compare the article with the cultural idea that we all have of a table and verify if it satisfies all the essential requirements: a flat surface that holds on four legs. It will be needless to verify if the table is in rosewood, with the plan in marble or Formica; if it is in Empire style, Bauhaus or minimalist; the judgment, if that handmade article, is or not a table, will not change.

Let’s consider instead the hypothesis of a skillful counterfeiter, this one has produced one nearly perfect copy of the Gioconda of Leonardo da Vinci; the art critic shall then pay attention to the minimums details, nearly to the limit of the human perception, in order to decide which of the two exemplars it’s the original one: the art critic shall pay attention to the coat of the painting, the thickness of the brush-stroke, the grain of the painting cloth. And where he will not be able to make

² Cfr. James Hilman, *Kinds of power* (tr. it. *Forme del Potere*, Milano, Garzanti, 1996, pp.58-70)

³ Cfr. Gitta Sereny, *Into that Darkness*, New York, Random House/Vintage, 1983 (tr. It. *In Quelle Tenebre*, Milano Adelphi, 1975)

⁴ *Ibidem*, pg. 98

⁵ Cfr. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A report on the Banality of Evil* (tr.it. *La Banalità del Male: Eichmann a Gerusalemme*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1993)

reference to a standard – an abstract scheme, a “type” (“type”) that reproduces all the fundamental features of the original Gioconda to which leading back the specific occurrence (the “token”) – he will rely on the judgment of his own “ aesthetic taste” and he will formulate a judgment of value as an art critic, expert of that certain kind of beauty. He shall, in other terms construct a concept of Q. that it is at the same time, the kind and the case of which the copy represents the kind.

This is just the kind of problem that comes to the appraisal of Q. in the services to the person: applying schemes type/token to the inquired situation, dealing it like a mere copy of a wider class, leads only to consider superficial aspects. It does not bring us more far than a merely inspecting approach. What we really mean to explore is instead the human element of the organization, and is just this element – sole, unrepeatable, individual and idiosyncratic, that constitutes, in last analysis, the core of the problematic appraisal process.

Since, as we said, the services to the person invert the paradigm of our systems of advanced production “high tech-low touch”; since by now the quality of a service to the person measures just on its contrary, “high touch-low tech” – someone to speak with, who is able to listen, who can understand and interpret the others persons needs, who is able to deal with them also considering the emotional factor – this one is just the human element to take in consideration, assuming in advance that the appraisal of his/her abilities, of his/her competences, his/her implicit knowledge individual or collective, does not end in a series of quantitative data to be simply inserted into a system.

If we want to make up an adequate idea of how a specific service works, and why it works, and how it could work better, we must abandon the idea of Q. as a standard to which our inquired situation is adapted or not, and we must assume the idea of Q. as a concrete ideal, and we must as well assume the idea of the service as an art work: one lacked and incoherent tension, an aggregate of parts or one harmonic realization, with its own principle of coherence of the parts, correctly realized. This brings us deep into the real situation, it allows us to watch it in transparency from the inside, being involved in it with our prejudgments, our mental schemes. To define the appraisal of Q. in the services to the person we can mention the Gadamer thought with reference to the interpretation of a text: important is not the experience that a reader makes from a specific text, but the experience that the reader makes with himself. The crux of the matter is to interpret the real situation not just reflecting it, in an objective way, but inspecting it and questioning it from many points of view, making step by step a suitable idea of it, and allowing that this experience modifies at the same time us and the inquired situation. The understanding and the appraisal process consist all in this. The process obviously is often revised considering what turns out from the enquiry of the situation.

The scientific nature of surveying, not more based upon the ingenuous model subject-object and upon the presumed objectivity of the survey method, instead is guaranteed from a progressive inter subjective analysis of the results: the tenuous, thin aspects that belong to the relational systems can be only pointed out through, a dialogic shared work, based on the epistemological idea that the meaning of a service is not a physical data that is possible to control and to represent by means of scientific procedures of positive type, but an extremely complex element, that it is necessary to formulate and to elaborate, by means of an extended multilateral and interpersonal consideration.

One last consideration upon the subjects of the surveying: since, as it has been said, the Q. of a service to the person is valued on the “high touch-low tech” model, in which the human resource is the fundamental element while others are only additional, the relational aspects, the tasks and the cultural meanings immanent to a service, the informal competences connected to the management of the human relation represent a field of essential surveying, that the process of appraisal of Q. must bring to evidence. The characteristic of such elements is their being immaterial: in other words

they are not physical objects, than can be represented and described by means of the appraisal process, in an aseptic and neutral way, in an impersonal way. The representation of these elements must instead be formulated step by step, through interpretative procedures shared from all the subjects of the process, and therefore in a personal and highly inter subjective way.

This statement must be justified and understood in deep in its methodological implications. Since our survey does not deal with objective entities, the description we make cannot be objective; or at least, its objectivity will not be the one adopted by the positive sciences, that is simple correspondence of the descriptions to the reality. The reality, in the descriptions that we will make will not be inert and set apart, like a pure object, passive and separated from us, ready to be represented in our concepts and speeches. This model – simple, but also much ingenuous, as good part of the contemporary continental thought has evidenced, – is not suitable to our job. Our search instead will influence the reality, will model it under many aspects in our representations, and at the same time will modify also us as researchers/operators, insofar as we will be involved ourselves with our tasks, our habits and our prejudgments. Through the search, we will modify our knowledge in the environment we work inside, and also inside ourselves as workers: operators, nurses, educators, supplying new answers and new solutions.

This mutual influence between searched truth and searching intelligences, this peculiar circle of practice and theory however must not be thought like a vicious circle, neither must make us think to it as a limit of reliability of our process, on the contrary we shall consider it as an authentic opportunity, as a further possibility that comes to us by means of the adopted procedures. The kind of objectivity that we look for is, in fact, a inter subjective point of view, than it does not leave unchanged the terms involved in the process, neither with reference to the inquired situation, neither with reference to the subjects involved in the search. The inter subjective point of view – construction of a common, dialogic and shared vision – is a dynamic and procedural result, that derives by investigating the reality in a personal way, as if were You the investigator, asking to the real situation the questions and allowing that the answers act retroactively onto the questions, re-orienting them and deepening them, estimating point by point, each meaning that, during the survey, will be acquired as a common shared meaning.

Since the subject and the object of surveying – the “We” of the project (but also the several “we” of the single searches activated locally from the groups) and our services, picked in their own relational organizational and cognitive structures- are not, as we saw, really separate, but mutually interdependent, it will be worth to assume by now this “We”, and the characteristic circle in which it is inserted, not like a tie and a limit to objectivity, but like a completely productive possibility through which is possible to understand the services in which we operate, their points of weakness and their points of power, their ties and their opportunities, the Q. that they express and the Q. that they could express toward their beneficiaries.

This “We” that inquires, reflects, interprets and understands – so characteristically implied inside the situation and however also able of critical outdistancing – shall, as much as possible, be widen toward the real “Us” who effectively populate our services, both on the side of the ones who distribute the services (manager, operators, nurses, educators) and both on the side of the ones who receive the service (elderly people and their relatives). Because of that approach, the methodological approach will be moved from the search of the objectivity, typical of the classic searches based on a quantitative approach, to the search of the maximum inter subjectivity, that represents the way in which the groups will be constituted. If, as we will illustrate in the analysis of the methodology, these search groups will be enough cross-sectional and interdisciplinary, the appraisal of the service that they will provide, will be effectively the own self-appraisal of that service, carried out in the light of pointers and dimensions that the groups themselves, shall

characterize. In this case the self-appraisal will coincide with the process of critical conscience that the service makes of itself, with the improvement effects of emancipation and development that a similar process brings out itself, for the service and for all the operators who have participated to it.

2. The method of the Action Research

The Action Research⁶ Method is, in absolute, the method of social search that more than every other seems to apply the aforesaid assumptions. The AR is “a methodology that stretches to conjugate theory and praxis, finalizing the research to an action and undertaking this action with the aim to produce a transformation inside the educational, psychological and social contexts, according to structured criteria, that concur to calibrate this transformation, being aware of it, checking it, estimating it and redefining it periodically in order to render it more and more effective”⁷.

The AR stretches therefore to interlace or to understand how theory and praxis, or in other words subject and object, thought and action, judgment on the truth and transforming intervention are interlaced. Where classical searches separate the two moments, acquiring before a neutral description of the reality as the basis of the intervention, the AR is based on the assumption that subject and object of surveying are not two separated entities, but, paradigmatically, two fires that constitute one the other in the same discovery process, in which every single step in the knowledge, it is followed by a step in the inquired reality.

These concepts will be better explained applying them to our specific case. Also we have in our project a double order of aims, both of theoretical and practical type. Theoretical aims are:

- A₁)** to characterize the already available relational informal competences of the operators in a certain service, and those still to acquire; to elaborate a model for the analysis of the cognitive elements and for the analysis of the formative needs of a service;
- A₂)** to elaborate an analysis of the areas, dimensions, the sub dimensions and of the pointers to adopt in the appraisal of the services to the elderly people; to elaborate therefore a methodology and a model of appraisal of Q. for the services to the elderly people.

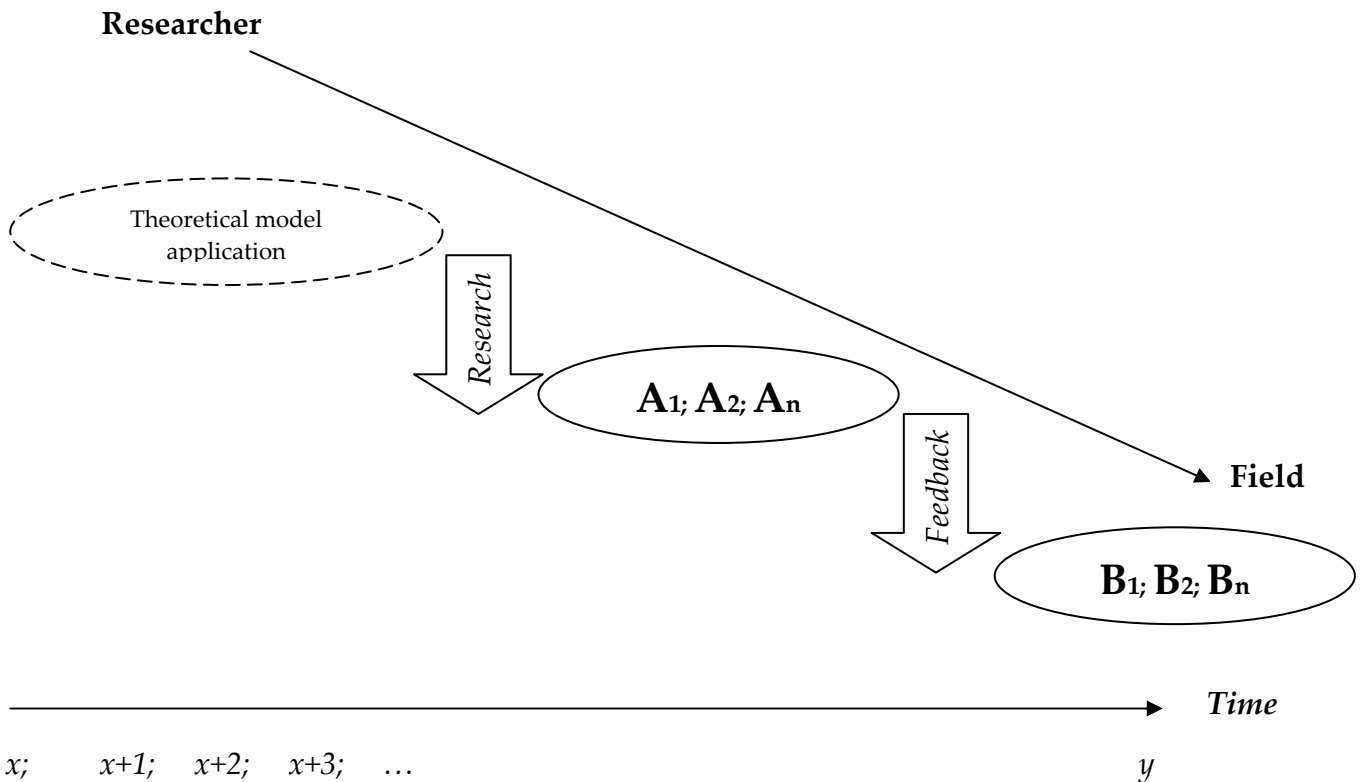
Practical aims instead are:

- B₁)** to activate a formative process for all the persons been involved in the AR;
- B₂)** to promote the improvement of the service in the various dimensions that will be characterized.

In an evaluation search of deductive linear type the formulation of the process could be following: application of pre-constituted models and protocols to one determined situation → acquisition and codification of the information in the light of the applied models → synthesis of the appraisal in shape of report (**A₁** and **A₂**) → feedback on the surveying object (service) by means of assumption of aimed decisions (**B₁** and **B₂**):

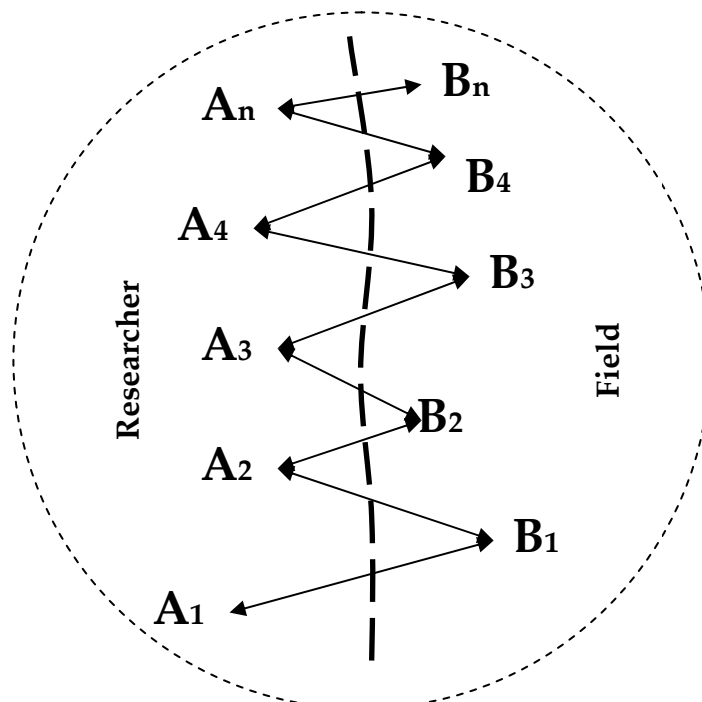
⁶ See Anna Aluffi Pentini, *La Ricerca Azione Motore di Sinergia tra Teoria e Prassi*, Bologna, Pitagora ed. 2001

⁷ *Ibidem* pg.1



It's clear that, the traditional appraisal search is a diachronic linear process. That means that the action of interpretation and description of the field of surveying (A1 and A2) and the one of decision and transformation of the same field (B1 and B2) are distinguished, individual and discontinuous events, that follow one the other, because of a causative connection in a determined period of time $x; x+1; x+2; x+n\dots; y$, without chance to invert the direction, placing as an example B1 as cause of A2.

In the AR that we are going to engage in, things are instead much different. We will assist in fact to a continuous coming and going of practice and theory, acquisition of descriptions and consequent influence of the field of surveying, cognitive elaboration and pragmatic consequences not unidirectional and not linear, but – in terms of one possible graphical representation – we could say with a spiral form -. Actually, any AR it is a whole of different pressures, a constantly unstable equilibrium toward the praxis:



Our search will begin proposing to the various groups to reflect upon the concepts of “mission” and “vision” of the services they belong to; the codified acquisition of informative and cognitive data on such elements (A_1) will produce an alteration of the consciousness of the participants relative to their service, that is to say a different individual and collective self-consciousness. We can imagine that this experience will cause a first repercussion on the praxis (B_1), modifying at least in part the relationships inside the service, the way in which the manager, the operators and the beneficiaries act inside the service, the mutual systems of expectations and whatever characterizes the individual and collective sphere. This will orient the reflection towards the competences that, regarding one determined mission and vision, the service operators must possess (A_2). Such reflection will contain both an assessment of the informal competences already activated, and also a preliminary analysis of the formative needs. A similar process of progressive explicitness and codification of the tacit and unconscious elements, able to undermine the concept that every operator has of him/herself, constitutes a formative dynamic of those aforesaid knowledge (B_1). We can't exclude that, at the end of the process, the final results will turn back on the departure data, leading to a redefinition of mission and vision. Wishing to provide our course with a strongly theoretical model, we could compare it to a dialectic flow, in which every cognitive moment turns back to the practical moment, recognizing the first one in the second one and exceeding itself in sight of the next step.

Of course at the end, we will be able, to separate the stages of the process, distributing on one side the cognitive and methodological elements, and on the other side the operative effects developed on the services. We will call these data “*project results*”. However we must not forget, as methodological shrewdness, than *the true is represented by the entire*. In our concrete project, Q. does not constitute an abstract formulation – than however we will provide in the final definition of the Models – neither may be identified with the transformations taking place in our operative contexts, but it is the whole process that shall be defined in its formal elements in order to allow to be generalized to other contexts. Obviously we speak about formal elements, and not material ones, because we know that every context it's a self-context, and what is worth for one is not necessarily worth for another. Instead the concrete procedure through which an organization consider itself, defines the macro spheres of the appraisal, codifies its own knowledge and its own competences, examines its own formative gaps, it may be usefully codified and set into a model. And this is our final purpose.

3. AR Methodological principles

Having characterized the assumptions of our job, we will now expose the methodological principles that will guide us in our search. They can easily be characterized as it follows:

Roles in the AR

The consequence of the crisis of the traditional paradigms of social search, based on the rigid separation of subject (investigator or team of investigators) and object (surveying field), is that also the traditional roles of a surveying project are confused. In our case we will not have, on one side the active investigators who elaborate a search hypothesis, isolate the variable elements and plan the data collection, while on the other a passive field of surveying, composed by operators and operative contexts that only provide to answer to the questions and supply the necessary data to the project, without recognizing the aims and the premises. In our case the experts are instead operators really present in the situation, while the investigators shall provide only a help, a mediation inside the job group and shall provide also a shared synthesis document of the materials. They are, in other words, methodological operators. Also who is writing in this moment wants to be anything else but that: a methodological operator that limits its contribution to provide to *how* formally the job must be carried on, without considering *what* must effectively be made. This does not mean that the project will proceed in an arbitrary way, according to the case and without a precise guide. Otherwise the title of this document would not be “Guidelines to the First Stage of AR”. It must to be clear however that every stage that we will program provides a sharing of knowledge and competences that come from the bottom, not from above. In the AR in fact the Investigator (the “Who” of the search: who inquire, reflects, collects data and analyzes them) and the Field of Surveying (the “Thing” of the search: what is inquired, which is the object of consideration, in which context or situation, toward which subjects) stretches to lay one on the other and to coincide, shaping one sort of “self-research” and “self-reflection”. In such situation, the external contribution of methodological type may vary, from a minimum to a maximum. In our case the external methodological element will be enough consisting; our search will be planned, structured and monitored in a rather rigorous way, as it is necessary in a project financed by the European Commission. Without however hiding the aspect of participation and sharing, that it will be evidenced during the planning of the search that it is carried out in a shared way with the involvement of interlocutors that represent each of the five partners.

AR functions:

a AR provides ordinarily to a plurality of functions, that cover the entire space between the Search and the Action occupying some several middle positions. Let’s analyze some of them:

- Descriptive/heuristic function: the AR aims to the acquisition of knowledge on a specific topic in order to orient the action or to carry out a monitoring of the general situation;
- Modifying function: the AR aims to realize an intervention of substantial modification in a specific context, pursued by means of the shared search;
- Mediation theory/praxis: the AR aims to the application of specific theoretical topics in concrete contexts, by means of appropriation of those topics from the final beneficiaries;
- Explanatory/maieutic function: the AR aims to the exploration, location and explication of elements and silent knowledge, unexpressed potentialities, informal and not formal competences;

- **Organizational/therapeutic function:** the AR aims to the improvement of the functional inner characteristics of an organization, by means of a specific intervention on the work groups oriented to remove the relational blocks and relational and communicative obstacles. The search can also be oriented to the strategic dimension of the organization, improving the institutional relationships of the organization with the environment (community, territory, institutional interlocutors etc);
- **Political/increasing function:** purpose of the AR is the involvement by means of the search of external actors fundamental for the organization's life (typically political decisions and other institutional stakeholder), of persons to dialogue with; in some cases the search may also be an instrument of political negotiation;
- **Critical appraisal function/and critical friend:** the AR searches the activation of a critical reflection of a certain organizational context on its own output , also by means of the contribution of external advisers who help in the reflection process, in order to provide one aware vision of itself and of its own improvement possibilities.
- It is clear that our job will embrace all these functions, as this is one feature of AR. To indicate to which of the different function the AR will be more oriented in a more aware and methodologically controlled way, we can say that our AR will mainly acquit to one both critical/appraisal, explicative/maieutic and increasing function. Our AR aims in fact to acquire in a critical way not only the information on the quality that each of our services expresses, but also to individuate how it may be possible to carry out an appraisal of the quality in the services to the elderly people. Moving from the tacit knowledge and from the unexpressed competences of the operators, our AR acts with the purpose to render them conscious and self-critical, and therefore able to activate independently formative projects. It will consider not only the inner environment, represented by our organizing places, but also the external contexts (political context, local communities, administrative contexts and more over up to the European general context) toward which it is aiming to offer appraisal instruments more suitable to the field of the services to the elderly people, modifying at least only in part, the currently adopted praxis.

AR subjects

The AR is a search flow mediated from the intervention of some specific subjects. They can vary for number and functions carried out in the project. On the whole they are:

- **The customer:** is the one who asks for the services and finances the AR; it is moreover the one to whom will be delivered the final results of the search. The customer is also the one who means to promote a certain change in the contexts in which the AR is applied. Generally the interests of an institutional customer are well distributed between search and action;
- **The project responsible:** except for self commissioned AR, in which this figure coincides with the coordinator investigator (see relative paragraph), the project responsible is the subject appointed from the customer of the general responsibility of conduction and coordination of the job. In case of self commissioned AR the project responsible is normally responsible of the area, division or service that promotes the AR;
- **The investigator coordinator:** is the one who provide his help to the group, the one who, inside the search groups, assumes the task to examine the dynamics, to coordinate the job and to facilitate the results sharing. Is the AR methodological expert
- **Operators:** the subjects that act with operative tasks: in a school they are the teachers, in a factory the workers, in a hospital the sanitary staff. In a AR project the operators are actually

the true investigators, that is to say the main actors of acquisition of the knowledge and mediation of the changes. In their comparisons the investigator coordinator has tasks of methodological advising and facilitation in the management of the group dynamics;

- **The objects of the search:** the beneficiaries/receivers of the project search of which, with traditional terminology, we would say constitute the target. In the AR the search objects typically coincide with the subjects of the search, that is to say with the investigators;
- **The privileged witnesses:** the subjects external to the search, but that the group may consult in order to acquire information (but also prejudgments, states of mind, attitudes...) that they detain.

Let's analyze now how all these subjects cooperate specifically in our project:

- **The purchaser:** the purchaser of our project is hybrid: the project in fact is co-financed by the European Commission, in a structured and articulated program based on principal and secondary aims, and typologies of intervention (our project belongs to the Life Long Learning plans, specifically Grundtvig, for the education of adults). The extensive planning to which our project is subordinated comes from the aims fixed in the Strategy of Lisbon, directed to make of the European Union "an economy based on the most competitive and dynamic knowledge in the world, able to realize one sustainable economic increase with new and better workplaces and one greater social cohesion"⁸. It is obvious that the planners, in formulating the planning idea, have taken in consideration the context in which their proposal had to act. On the other hand the strategy of intervention adopted by the European Commission promotes, by means of the emanation of specific public announcements, the influx of ideas from the bottom, that is to say ideas elaborated directly from the ones who work inside the organizations and services, public or private, and take care of the concrete operative context and of its specific needs. The request of a co-financing to the promoters is a clear symptom of this strategy, whose consequences are the possibility to mediate the general interests defined by the European Commission with the aims of the promoters, and to avoid the expropriation of the final results of the project from the ones who financially guarantee the functioning of the whole project.
- **The project responsible:** our project contains a great level of complexity higher than the one normally required in other AR. In fact it does not consist of a single search plan, but it consists of more AR carried on independently and side by side from a transnational partnership (Italy, Portugal, Greece and Czech Republic) and based on a unitary plan. In order to manage such complexity it has been appointed a leader, the Roman Institute of Saint Michele, responsible as well as of the administrative aspects toward the European Commission and of the coordination of the search program. The Saint Michele Institute therefore has appointed an internal leader and also an investigator. The first one verifies the general state of advance of the program and provides the relations with the European Commission on behalf of the partnership; the second one instead has the responsibility to plan the AR, or better the several AR, acting as a referent for the others 4 investigators coordinators, and to follow at his place in Rome the assigned AR. It acts therefore both as project responsible and as investigator coordinator.
- **The investigators coordinators:** they are the coordinators of the single AR that shall be implemented in the next few months in Rome, Oporto, Prague and Patras. The present Guidelines are written in order to facilitate them in their task that will consist in the

⁸ "To make the EU the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and a greater social cohesion, and respect for the environment by 2010", European Council of Lisbon March 2000

management of the groups of AR. Everyone will act in fact like entertainer of the groups, acquiring the methodological principles here defined and applying them in the specific contexts. The investigators coordinators will convene the groups and will provide the layout of the various search activities. They will provide the sharing....., the shared elaboration and the drawing up of various synthesis documents for the intermediate and final stage. They will discuss moreover the problems that may emerge as well inside the groups and inside the enlarged project staff composed by the investigators coordinators of the other countries and from the project responsible.

- **The operators:** in our case they are the professional figures that, being employed with various titles, roles and duties toward the partner services, will participate voluntarily to the groups of AR. The operators are the real project researchers, according to the specific meaning given to the “search” in the AR, and with their own informal and not formal competences, their own knowledge and the own abilities constitute the specific field of surveying of the search.
- **The objects of the search:** for objects of the search in our specific case we mean as well the surveying field, that in our case is characterized as the single service in its human and relational aspects, and that coincides therefore with the staff and the work groups, and as the operative project aims that are: I) the achievement of a model of appraisal of Q. for the services to the elderly people; II) the achievement of a model of analysis of the formative needs of the staff; III) the achievement of a methodology of survey of the competences and of the tacit knowledge (informal and not formal) of the operators of the service.
- **The privileged witnesses:** our AR project may take advantage of external contributions, as contributions of experts in the appraisal of Q. that may be consulted by the work groups during the search. Moreover in Rome during the last stage of the activities is provided, the experimentation of practices of educational intervention with elderly people, practices that shall be leaded by external pedagogues involved in the search activity.

The AR instruments

The considerations and the analysis carried out by the various local groups of AR (in Rome, Prague, Oporto, Patraso) will be supported with various instruments and protocols now being drawn up. The project coordination staff in fact deemed it necessary not to provide straight to the achievement of these instruments, as it would be usual in a traditional search, without starting before a wide consultation and co-planning both at a local level and, during the next few months, between the partners of the project. What we deem necessary from right now, is

- to lay down a “road map” of the AR, with the detailed planning and the number of meetings to take at the partners services;
- to establish the topic of each meeting, the methodologies and the specific instruments that will be adopted during the analysis and the comparison with the members of the group;
- to establish the specific output that every job session shall carry out and to establish therefore the way in which such output will be recorded and registered (report, day-book, audio recordings, etc.).

If on one side is impossible to leave the initiative of the planning and such a detailed settlement to the single groups of AR, under pain of loss of the unity that the project must keep, on the other side is not advisable to centralize the planning, and to apply it to the organizations and services from the outside.

As it has been said, in a AR project is important that the search planning comes out as a possible output of the groups that will implement it, rather than being acquired from the outside. Therefore “the happy medium” seemed us to consist in the arrangement of a task force in Rome, represented by the search coordinators and by the delegations of the services operators of San Michele Institute and San Saturnino cooperative society. Such task force will submit its own elaborations to the comparison and to the integration of the other partners, that shall activate a joint committee represented by operators and coordinators to which submit the outputs of this first preliminary stage, in sight of the transmission of observations and feedback to record in the final elaboration of the instruments. We postpone the detailed analysis of such critical point of our search to a next synthesis document that it is being drawing up.

For the aforesaid, is imaginable that the topics that the groups shall discuss will be the ones already carried out in the project, that is to say: definition of the service mission and vision, analysis of the cultural meanings related to the service (specially the self-sufficiency and non self-sufficiency concepts that each service bears), analysis of the expected competences, survey of the possessed competences, location of the areas, dimensions and sub dimensions of the appraisal of the service, location of the pointers of Q. related to each area, dimension and sub dimension, appraisal of the ability to listen both actively or passively expressed by the service to the advantage of the beneficiaries.

The adopted instruments will be those typical ones of the qualitative searches, and in particular of the AR: search journals, interviews, open field questionnaires, recordings and audio-recordings, meeting reports, reports. The techniques adopted will be: brainstorming, autobiographic narrations, focus group. It will be fundamental, considering the distance between each search group, to record carefully each meeting on purposely arranged format, in order to share, step by step, the own outputs with the ones of the other search coordinators.

The composition of the local groups of AR:

With reference to the aforesaid presentation of the methodology, it should be clear that the group of AR is the fundamental asset of all our job: it represents in fact both the subject and the object of the search, the instrument and the customer of the surveying, the source and the addressee of the information. The care took in its composition is in our project of crucial importance. First of all, it must be representative of the services. On one side it must be composed by operators in different fields of knowledge (if, as an example, a service is composed by a doctor, a psychologist, a nurse and an assistant, the search group shall be composed by a doctor, a psychologist, a nurse and an assistant); on the other side it must be representative of the organizational complexity of each service (if, as an example, a service organization is based on three levels, management activity–coordination activity–execution activity, the search group organization shall be based on these three levels). Only this inner setting seems to protect the research work from dangerous unilateral situations, and on the other hand to guarantee the necessary ability of the group to point out the cross-sectional competences, that is to say those abilities owned by the service, apart from the in the various professional activities that are part of it.

At last it is fundamental, although is perhaps superfluous to say it, that the group is composed by persons strongly motivated to the job they shall carry out. Even if this consideration seem to be banal, however it points out one of the critical aspects of the project, that is the absence of profit incentives for the ones who will participate to the groups of AR. It could be worth to provide incentives which are alternative to the profit ones, as an example introducing the participation to the search groups as a formative project, that is to say proposing the participation to the AR as a

process of entrusting of the workers to the own organization, able to compensate the efforts given by the workers in terms of improvement of their working environment.

Apart from the adopted solution, is important that the organizers and the coordinators provide by now to conceive a strategy of involvement of the operators, in order not to have to face later on with disagreeable mass-desertions of the fixed meetings, and also in order to correctly quantify, in this preliminary stage, the effort that realistically is possible to ask the various groups of AR.

Attached to this document there is a short questionnaire, containing some simple and short questions related to the own services. This information are necessary to us in order to understand clearly the various contexts in which we will implement the AR, and to organize correctly our planning.

Good job to all!

The AMISL Staff IRSM
Research Group

APPENDIX No. 1: Information questionnaire about the partner's services

Dear partner,

in order to perform as best as possible the preliminary stage of the search, we need some short informations about your services, or about the services in which you'll implement the research entailed in the project. Please fill clearly the fields below.

- 1) Number, denomination and location of the services

Please specify the exact number of the services in whom you'll implement the research, where they are located and their denomination:

- 2) Typology of the service(s)

Please explain shortly to what typology your services belong to (rest home, health care, home care, educative service centre...):

- 3) Typology of beneficiaries

Please describe to what typology of beneficiaries belong to the elderly people joining your service(s) (up to 60 years hold, up to 70 years hold, aged people in economic needs, aged people in disease, male or female and so on):

4) Number of employed

Please quantify the number of people involved in the service(s) in which you'll implement the research:

5) Professional profile.

Please describe what are the professional profiles involved in your service(s) (registered general nurses, educators, teachers, psychologies, other operators...):

Name of the organisation: _____

Name of the referent (or who has filled this form): _____

Thank you!