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**‘Running’ a Fair Trade business: seeking fairness amongst the
members of a socially-committed enterprise.**

Abstract

This paper is about an ethnographic research carried out into a “not-for-profit” cooperative organisations engaged in Fair Trade in the city of Turin with the aim to understand the moral, educational and organisational culture(s) supporting such an enterprise. The research questions will be explored through ethnographic research that began last October and will end at the end of 2010. I am particularly interested in (1) human resource management in a cooperative organisation: in particular my focus is on the selection and training process for people who decided to work in this field and actually are employed in Fair Trade stores; (2) the store context understood as a cultural and educational environment for customers and employees. For instance, in Turin Fair Trade stores customers are greeted by sentences like: “We work to grow ideas and values”. During the day, some of the employees might be heard to say: “We must engage ourselves in taking care of the future of earth”, or “We should be aware of how we consume goods and available resources” (from my fieldwork notes). During fieldwork I will also take into account the fact that those I have here described as employees are rather members of cooperatives and thus stakeholders in their organisations.

I will explore how not-for-profit organisations deal with the tense relation between the economic and the social dimension, and with the choices that are required to be fair and to stay on the

market. Members of Fair Trade cooperatives necessarily work for increasing their trade outcomes and must work according to the rules, as the motto “you must invoice!” stuck on the back room wall of Fair Trade stores reminds employees/members (from fieldwork notes), while they fight international trade regulations that go against just and clean social and environmental world. Additionally, the Fair Trade culture is especially relevant to those involved in social justice: I will present my reflections on social justice underling how it can be attained through non for profit cooperative specific “organisational” ways.

(outcomes) Besides sharing the findings I will collect until early summer, and providing an first interpretation of them, I will reflect on some of the questions raised by critics within the “service work” (Korczynski and Macdonald: 2009). In addition I will take into account (1) the challenge of how to achieve meaningful Fair Trade either for third world producer and local customers or for Fair Trade employees, (2) the debate on the nature of social justice in “non profit” enterprise as they have to accord with some tenets of neoliberal economics.

The theoretical picture.

In social contexts such as those of today, the main aspects are formulated in the light of recent theoretical contributions, social justice is conceived as a question of acquired rights and equal opportunities concerning people in the fields of economics, production and consumption. The organisational dimension which seems significant is that concerned with the training and learning capable of changing our way of living.

The research is on the lines of an organisational ethnography, aimed at understanding the organizing and educative values of culture which enhance the spread of knowledge about the products and development.

There are four interrelated questions that guide this ethnographic study:

- 1) The social enterprises considered operate within the Fair Trade circuit. Regarding the organisation, do they reflect a degree of training and instruction aimed at social justice and sustainable human development?
- 2) How is the managerial board of the social enterprise made up and what part does it play in the training of the personnel employed in the enterprise?
- 3) Is there any valid significance in the day-to-day working of the enterprise of such expressions as: ‘enlightened spending’, ‘reflective spending’, ‘alternative spending’? Do they represent lines of thought shared by all the personnel?

4) Fair Trade enterprises should organise training courses to instruct in the concepts of sensible and altruistic buying. Is this possible when today's society considers 'goods' more and more as indications of 'well-being' and the buying and selling takes priority, even in the fields of education and training?

Three recent concepts in scientific literature help to define the theoretical picture of this research in a more precise way. The first two describe the global context, the analysis of which has today become a necessary process for whoever intends to carry out research in topics such as market, consumption and development. The third concept shifts the focus directly on the theme of organisational cultures.

The first element is the concept of 'world-civilization', as suggested by the sociologist Luciano Gallino in a document in October 2009¹, which follows up what was previously said by Gallino (2009). The different kinds of human societies which in time have characterised the presence of human beings in the world, have today, according to this analysis, been replaced by a single civilisation that covers the whole planet. This is only partly due to the 'westernization of the world': the structures of western society have certainly spread to the extent of completely taking over other civilisations, but these structures have also undergone radical changes on the way. One may recognise three principal elements in the 'world-civilization' of today:

1) The borders of the classic social sub-systems² have gradually faded, overlapping each other to the point where the economic system seems to prevail and shape the other three;

2) The physical space in which human beings carry out their 'world-culture' activities coincides with the whole space available on the planet. The resources needed by such a society can no longer be taken from other kinds of societies. Thus only two approaches are possible: either consumption is limited to the resources available at present, or, whenever these are not sufficient, they will be taken away from the future generations by eroding those elements of the planet which cannot be regenerated.

3) Information technology has accelerated the irreversible global process of interconnection between economy, work and culture that started in the middle of last century. However, information technology has only:

... represented a facilitating factor and not the principal cause. A much greater role has, in fact, been covered by hundreds of thousands of subsidiary enterprises under the control of

¹ Luciano Gallino (2009), *La crisi economica come crisi di civiltà*, written on request for DGIII European Council of Social Cohesion, October 2009

² Luciano Gallino refers to Talcott Parsons' work, revisited in 1984 by R. Munch in *Die Struktur der Moderne. Grundmuster und differenti elle Gestaltung des institutionelles Aufbaus der moderne Gesellschaften*, Suhrkamp, Francoforte

transnational USA and EU companies; commercial exchanges carried out by the World Trade Organisation and innumerable international agreements; the world-scale distribution of mass-culture products, mainly of North-American origin, such as cinema, television and music, which although started in the middle of the twentieth century, has been intensified and accelerated by the Internet.
(Gallino 2009: 2)

Today, any event that is seen as interesting from the mind of the 'transnational capitalist class' (Gallino 2009), spreads across the 'world-civilisation' in very little time. On the other hand, any human dimension contrasting with the priority of 'making money' through financial speculations is, at the best of times, marginalised and localised, when not openly contrasted. Financial capitalism seems to have completed its metamorphosis, which has turned all citizens into consumers:

An in-depth analysis of this has recently been carried out by Benjamin R. Barber, in Consumed, the title of which is self-explicative.³ As Barber points out, contemporary economy produces too many goods and too few consumers – people who can afford to buy those goods. In 2009, almost 550 billion dollars were spent in advertising around the world, in order to breach the gap between the amount of goods produced and the lack of consumption. A similar, or even higher sum, was spent on gadgets – that vast ocean of superfluous micro-objects which have become part and parcel of any macro-object reaching a certain degree of popularity, be it a film rather than a book, or a toy rather than a television series: a form of portable adverts, the cost of which is paid by the consumer. Such a total, as we may notice, is the equivalent of four times the annual sum necessary to achieve the Millennium Development Goals 2015 that were launched by the United Nations in 2000 – half of which, we are now certain, will not be achieved by about half of the nations involved.⁴ The fact is that, if the manufacturing of needs rather than goods is one of the main goals of capitalist consumerism, as Barber says, the huge sums spent on advertising and marketing are understandable⁵.

(Gallino 2009: 15)

The analysis of financial capitalism, and the process by which this influences the economy, represents the global background in which reflections on themes such as the market, the enterprise and consumption, need to be placed.

As a second element, it may appear interesting to analyse the representation of an 'anthropologic transformation' that has produced a new 'human species': the consumer. Whoever intends to reflect on themes involving markets, enterprises and social justice or consumption and development cannot easily avoid the following interesting, but at the same time complex, question: within the global picture of financial capitalism, is a single or

³ B.R.Barber, *Consumed. How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults and Swallow Citizen Whole*, Norton, New York, 2007

⁴ On the costs of MDG in L. Gallino, *Tecnologia e democrazia. Conoscenze tecniche e scientifiche come beni pubblici*, Einaudi, Torino, 2007, p. 290 et seq.

⁵ Barber, po. Cit., p. 11

associated human being capable of maintaining a minimum level of freedom to allow him to choose his or her approach when confronted with the production of goods and services and consumption? In other words, does the influence of the global market render phenomena such as Fair Trade and Critical or Responsible Consumption only to appear 'critical', but in reality makes them perfectly aligned with the principles of financial capitalism?

These themes have recently been discussed by Zygmunt Bauman (2008, 2009, 2010):

The consumer's life does not consist in purchasing and possessing but it does not even consist in getting rid of what was bought and proudly flaunted the day before. But it consists, above all, in keeping on the move. If Max Weber was right in saying that the producer's ethical principle was (and still is, whenever a new life wants to become a life of production) the postponing of gratification, the ethical principle of the life of a consumer (if ever it is possible to formulate his or her explicit ethics), would have to deal with the impossibility of remaining quiet and satisfied. The principal threat for a society that boasts about client satisfaction as being its main aim is a satisfied consumer.

(Bauman 2008: 118)

His analysis puts into a close relation the reflection over consumption and consumer's freedom with a consideration of security and the very meaning of democracy in the world of today:

However, the truth is that we cannot realistically defend our freedom here at home by going against the rest of the world and caring only about ourselves. There are valid reasons to believe that in a globalised world, where anyone's fate, wherever one may be, influences the fate of everyone else and, at the same time, is also influenced by everyone else's fate, it is now impossible to live in a 'separate' free and democratic way – in isolation, only within one or certain countries. The destiny of freedom and democracy in any land is decided and established upon the global scene, and only there can it be defended with some realistic chance of a lasting success.

(Bauman 2008: 215)

At last the third element leads back to the analysis of the theme of organisations, shedding light upon their ambivalences in relation to the project on the emancipation of women and men workers in the 'post-Ford' era (Rossi 2008).

The conceptual picture can reasonably be constructed by starting from the 'world-civilisation', which has amongst its own features that of 'financialising' work itself, causing the loss of 'salary percentage points in favour of capital gain' (Gallino 2009: 12); it can continue through the reflection which recognises within work the sole function of being an instrument in becoming a part of 'homo consumens' civilisation (Bauman 2010), and it can reach the critical analysis of a neo-humanistic organisation system (Rossi 2008). This

represents an interesting key structure, by means of which one can rethink the model of a social enterprise.

Field research.

The field of research consists of a social cooperative called *Mondo Nuovo*. It is an organisation that runs five Fair Trade “*Botteghe del Mondo*”, the stores where the Fair Trade products are sold, three of which are in Turin and two in the inner suburbs. Out of 350 members, 17 are paid workers and about another 100 are voluntary. In order to follow the ethnographic path inside the organisation, the researcher found himself engaged within the four areas constituting the cooperative’s every-day work:

- The meetings of the Administration Board;
- The meetings aimed at the training of the working members and employees;
- Two of the five *Botteghe del Mondo*;
- The school, in which the cooperative carries out an educational campaign on responsible consumption by introducing the principles of Fair Trade.

The earliest ethnographic data collected will be presented and discussed here.

Can a ‘top down ‘ entry into the field become an issue?

On his access into the research field, the researcher was ‘escorted’ by the President of *Mondo Nuovo*. The former had previously used his personal network to reach the latter and present him with the ethnographic theme and pathway, during a one-to-one meeting. As a result, the president made a formal request addressed to the Administration Board and, on obtaining permission, he contacted the various sections of the cooperative in person. In this way, the time of approach and settling into the organisation was shortened, but on the other hand, it could have jeopardised all the following work: the researcher may easily have been perceived by the cooperative workers as some kind of ‘consultant’ sent by the Administration Board to give advice on how to improve the work process.

V. introduces me to A. whom defines me 'the observer', then she leads me inside the store and, once in the office at the back, starts questioning me on what I shall be doing. Besides being interested in my research, she asks whether I shall be giving some advice on the organisational aspects of the cooperative, in order to 'improve the service'. I try to explain I am not an organisational consultant, but a researcher who studies 'the culture of organisations', and that, anyway, I shall certainly 'exchange' some of my experience with them, in a mutual-sharing relationship, but I don't think it will be 'operative advice'.

(From the fieldwork notes, Bottega del Mondo – Torino, via XX Settembre, 3/11/2009)

In time, the persistence of this view of the researcher, as directly connected with the president and the Administration Board, would certainly have created a barrier for him or her when trying to communicate with the workers on a daily basis. This problem was, in fact, resolved as soon as the researcher started sharing their same daily chores:

I introduce myself as a PhD student who is carrying out long-term research inside the Mondo Nuovo Cooperative by spending time in the stores, working shoulder to shoulder with the employees and voluntary workers as if I were one of them.

(From the fieldwork notes, Bottega del Mondo – Turin, via San Marino, 4/11/2009)

Local or international cooperators? The training towards solidarity both inside and outside the Mondo Nuovo Social Cooperative.

Working in the field gave the researcher the opportunity to understand the workers' representation (Van Maanen 1995) on their job, both from their point of view as members of a social cooperative, as most of them are, and from that of the work itself, which is connected to the world of Fair Trade. An initial interpretation of the data may be made starting from the fieldwork notes, which were taken during the everyday activities in the stores, including two meetings between the administration board and all the cooperative workers.

An interesting reading is that which enables us to divide the cooperative-member workers in two distinct categories, with a significative area of intersection. On one side we have the cooperative members who show an almost-exclusive interest in the Fair Trade theme:

V.: 'I did not know about the principles of cooperation, yet, through what I am able to understand about these now, I believe Mondo Nuovo is following them unconditionally. However, I did not choose the latter because of this, but rather because of the fact that it operates within the Fair Trade circuit'

S: 'The creation of new jobs is not a specific aim of this organisation, and it is even less when it comes to jobs for its own members: it is a means for a different purpose' (understood in the speech as being connected to the previous sentence: the Fair Trade)
(From the fieldwork notes, members and cooperative workers training day, 8/11/2009)

The existence of such an idea within Mondo Nuovo's social matrix appears to be confirmed by another important element. Amongst the issues discussed, during the training day, one stands out as undermining the career path which the present members foresee for themselves. When asked what working position they imagined themselves covering in a decade, ten out of the twenty people present at the meeting answered that they foresaw themselves as having left the cooperative and opened a business on their own: rather than on leaving the Fair Trade sector, they emphasise the need for a more personalised way of organising the work. This seems like the failure of the classic notion of cooperation as a 'form of associated autonomy', and the rise of the notion of an organisation which employs workers at decent conditions but mostly of very young age, and only for a short time. Furthermore, in the case of the paid member, there seems to be a relevant preference for working within Fair Trade, rather than for the social matrix. The training requests made by such members are focused on the purpose of the work: the aim is to constantly improve Mondo Nuovo's approach towards Fair Trade, international solidarity and the relations between North and South of the world.

On the opposite side of the fence, we find some members who consider social cooperation as the stronghold of their working activity:

S states: ' I came from a social cooperative that works with mentally-ill patients, then I changed to work in the hyper-profit world, for a marketing company in Milan. I left because I am interested in being my own enterprise. A concept...which in reality is very cooperativist. But what about the 'nine to five' working day of which we have a priority? I believe my work does not finish when 'mine does', but when 'ours does': this is why I have chosen cooperation!'
(From the fieldwork notes, members and cooperative workers training day, 8/11/2009)

As far as this group is concerned, the social agreement which binds workers as members is of fundamental importance, whereas the work in itself becomes less relevant. They consider the core principle to be the freedom of an autonomous job within an associative relationship with others. The main tendency of this group appears to be that of singling out and emphasising the contradictions inherent in the system in which they operate, in particular the inconsistencies arising when comparing the ideals and effort with the retribution (Borgaza and Musella 2003)

S states: 'in the face of such choices, I question myself on the real nature of Fair Trade, when it does not provide its own employees with enough means to pay the rent'...Furthermore: 'Are we employees or entrepreneurs? Our wages are the same for all, but who decides the retribution policy in the Mondo Nuovo cooperative? With things remaining as they are, one is only left with two options: either to find another job on the side or to leave'.

M.: The issue develops into how the Mondo Nuovo Cooperative applies its own reference ideals to its company strategy. Hence the principal problem becomes that of the consistency of the values applied to the management of the cooperative's everyday activities.

(From the fieldwork notes, evening meeting between the Administration Board and paid members)

A third position of the cooperative working members is expressed at its best by the following words:

M: 'In my opinion the words Mondo Nuovo, Fair Trade and cooperation are as unified as the Trinity; sure, maybe social cooperation arrived later, but the cooperative choice was implied all along: we are active members of the Italian Fair Trade movement (...). The cooperative choices follow in many of their values those of Fair Trade, however, it has also its own separate dimension. The commercial dimension intersects with the informative, cultural and educational ones: I believe this to be of fundamental importance. The no-profit factor is an essential element for us: in our company the dividends are not shared amongst the members but reinvested in the activities.

(From the fieldwork notes, evening meeting between the Administration Board and paid members)

The close relationship between the Fair Trade principles and those expressed by the Mondo Nuovo paid member above find direct correspondence with the report by a producer, Prem Tamang, Director of the Tea Promoters of India (TPI)⁶:

'As TPI, we were the first in joining the Fair Trade circuit in 1994: thanks to this TPI has benefited from extra profit and awards for its activity. This money is sent directly to the cooperative of workers, on a separate bank account. Hence, together with their community, the workers can decide democratically in which socio-economic projects they should invest. The first project to be financed with this money was the school in the Darjeeling Tea Garden, the B.M. High School, which is attended by many children who come from other regions. It is a solar-powered school – the energy is produced by solar panels as it is not connected to the electrical network. The school is provided with an IT classroom and a school bus to reach the pupils who live in the more remote areas. In addition, the community has created a scholarship system for students. Through the 'Fair Trade Premium Impact', the community has successively given birth to many initiatives for women and mothers. More recently, it has also started microcredit projects⁷ for the unemployed, who have been made redundant by the big agricultural companies, so that they are encouraged towards taking up autonomous forms of cattle farming, agriculture and commerce.'... 'In Darjeeling there are other kinds of cultivations but they are difficult: TPI helps those cultivators who want to make

⁶ TPI works in close relationship with the Potong Tea Welfare Committee, which is a cooperative that unites over 300 tea cultivators in the Indian Darjeeling region. This cooperative was founded by farmers who decided to become the owners of some uncultivated plantations and work on them following the principles of social and environmental sustainability.

⁷ The relationship between Fair Trade and microcredit is very close. They are, in fact, often correlated in literature (Guadagnucci and Gavelli 2004: 125).

the transition to the Fair Trade project. TPI is in contact with several cooperatives in the area and supports such a change. The cooperatives that cultivate tea believe they should not create small oases of happiness surrounded by desperation, thus they try to bridge the gap between them and their surrounding realities.'

(From the fieldwork notes, training meeting 'territorio della circoscrizione due', Turin 22/10/2009)

The close connection between the Fair Trade principles and those expressed by the previous Mondo Nuovo working member is strongly reminiscent of the accounts given by producers belonging to the Fair Trade circuit, for whom the cooperative form of enterprise is the most widely diffused for at least two reasons:

- 1) It allows close contact with the surrounding community, which collectively receives the benefits of the activities of the enterprise;
- 2) It allows the workers to overcome the colonial form of production under large land-owners (either a single individual or a multinational company) by purchasing small pieces of land, which are often overlooked by big companies, and uniting with other small producers in cooperative forms.

As far as the impact of Fair Trade on the productive structure in the countries of origin is concerned, one needs to consider the critical data provided by Arce (2009): the work underlines certain 'neo-colonial' aspects within the procedures required for the international certification needed by the Fair Trade system, which pose the risk of 'fracturing and fragmenting' the system of life in the production areas.

The Administration Board: between voluntary work and financial dichotomies.

The Administration Board of the Mondo Nuovo Cooperative consists of six members, five men and one woman: four of its members, including the president, are cooperative voluntary members and two are paid members, a man and a woman. The board is coming to the end of its mandate so new positions will be assigned in October. This will be the central theme of this debate, which extends far beyond the Administration Board to all the members of the cooperative. The second topic of this debate concerns the discussion of the eventuality of hiring a coordinator/technical director.

In relation to the purpose of this research, it is interesting to notice two dichotomies that pervade both the topics above:

- The relationship between voluntary members and paid members in the management of a social enterprise;

- The dynamics which take place between paid members and cooperative employees within the social enterprise.

Both these points are directly related to the opinion the workers have of the cooperative: in this study the ethnographic data will be crossed in order to compare and contrast the administrators' thoughts and cultural backgrounds with the workers' ones.

The Administration Board has started a renewal process of the inner social positions by taking particular care of making democratic choices within the cooperative. All the members of the board divide in pairs, excluding the president, meet the members involved in the various services run by the cooperative to present the outcome of the last board mandate. Through this process, the Administration Board intends to share the information and knowledge which could be helpful to those new members who may want to step forward as candidates for the next mandate. This approach highlights two separate visions the board has of its work. On the one hand, one can recognise a relevant element of democracy within the cooperative, according to which all members are considered equally as potential candidates for the position of administration chairman. On the other hand, while the present chairperson is sharing personal information and experience with future candidates, no particular mention is made of the power and influence a person would acquire by attaining his position. In fact, such a 'universal opening' to becoming a chairperson underlines the administrators' lack of understanding of the skills needed by a person to run a structure like a social cooperative: the fundamental message communicated during the preparation of these meetings highlights that:

'a fair amount of good will and some free time are the basic prerequisites for the position'. (From the fieldwork notes, an Administration Board meeting, 22/06/2010).

Therefore the administrators express the ability of the social cooperative to maintain the *multistakeholder* property (Borzaga and Ianes 2006: 247), which is an element present in scientific literature. However, this point does not seem to be supported by the high degree of competence needed to run a social enterprise nowadays.

The symmetric data appears to be equally interesting. This is represented by the members' feedback on the pathway activated by the Administration Board. Changing the board members of the Mondo Nuovo Cooperative appears to be wrought with difficulty. The voluntary members at present active in the activities of the "*Botteghe del Mondo*" stores do not seem very interested in the cooperative dimension and its management: as also mentioned in the literature (Borzaga and Musella 2003: 351), their interest is mainly

focused on the content of the activities, in this case on Fair Trade and their relation with other members and store workers.

Paid members are usually rather hesitant in seeing themselves as future candidates for the position of Administration Board Chairman: the present board is made up for two thirds by voluntary members and one third by the headquarter's office workers. This state of affairs seems to be accepted as a shared representation of the social basis, and at the same time presents itself as an element which 'alleviates from the burden of responsibility', especially when it is supported by the workers' satisfaction for their roles in the various services offered by the cooperative. Such considerations seem to agree with what was highlighted earlier about the paid members: a personal involvement of the Administration Board is considered more positively by those members who place the cooperativistic dimension at the centre of their action, while this is less highly considered by those whom are particularly concentrated on the Fair Trade activities.

The ethnographic data relative to the Mondo Nuovo social cooperative highlights a second issue, in many respects similar to the first and which is also widely diffused within the cooperative: the relationship between the dimension of being a member and that of being a worker. Recently, the researcher has been able to observe this interaction during a meeting between the Administration Board and all the cooperative workers, aimed at discussing the bonuses for employees. Two of the workers present at the meeting put forward an interesting argument on the uniformity of retribution within the cooperative: apart from the years of service, all levels and retributions are equal for all workers. This factor is considered ambivalently, especially by older members who do not belong to the Administration Board: on the one hand, in fact, this aspect is seen as a sign of the authenticity of Mondo Nuovo's intents, from an egalitarian point of view, but, at the same time, this uniformity is criticised because it does not take into account the different levels of professional competence, both in terms of amount of responsibility and of acquired and delivered skills, throughout the various daily commitments.

However, as soon as the Administration Board suggests the idea that rewarding the workers achieves better results in cooperative activities, two points of view emerge: the issue of control and that of changing the rule by which all members must receive the same treatment.

Both paid members and administrators agree on the fact that introducing a meritocratic system amongst the cooperative workers constitutes a delicate process, which requires clear objectives, shared strategies and pathways on two levels: horizontally across the

services and vertically with the board and defined evaluation tools and systems. Yet, paid members point out two considerable flaws. Firstly, the fact that the evaluation will be carried out by members of the board who are mostly voluntary workers that are not involved in the everyday activities of the cooperative. Secondly, they believe there are not sufficient elements at present for an effective and objective evaluation, thus the voluntary workers may easily be influenced by the status of workers within the cooperative, rather than by their professional skills.

*S: 'At times I feel like I have gone back to the Parish, as if the cooperative were run like the church youth group. What you can do and how long you have been doing it for do not seem to count so much, while connections are much more important'.
(From the fieldwork notes, evening meeting between the Administration Board and paid members)*

It is during this phase that the reference to a director, or coordinator, on which the cooperative is reflecting at the moment, makes its appearance. The paid members who intervene during the debate recognise in this managerial-type figure an adequate person with whom they can relate to discuss bonuses and a system of differentiated retribution. The Administration Board, at least in its present configuration, is not considered as an adequate interlocutor because of the reasons mentioned earlier, as it is mostly constituted made up of members.

The collection of further ethnographic data from the continuation of the field work will help to deepen this aspect of the research.

The store as an 'educational space'

On entering one of the Fair Trade stores run by the Mondo Nuovo social cooperative, customers' eyes alight on a few posters from an exhibition on the distribution network of Fair Trade products, which was held by 'Consorzio CTM Altromercato' – the most important organisation dealing with the distribution of Fair Trade products in Italy. The main poster illustrates the fundamental principles of Fair Trade.

Furthermore, three amongst the ten posters in the store were particularly interesting for this research study. They said:

- 'We sow ideas and values in order to create new rules for international trade'
- 'We build a fairer world and a sustainable economic development'

- 'We produce social and economic justice every day'

The store intends to present itself as an 'educational environment' where everyday human work activities are reconnected within a context of fairness in the world system.

During their selling activities, the store employees say that:

'We must take care of the future of the planet'; 'We must concern ourselves with how we consume available goods and resources'.

(From the fieldwork notes, Bottega del Mondo – Turin, via San Marino, 13/01/2010)

The same concerns emerge from the paid cooperative members during the training day mentioned earlier. The following are among the most frequent answers they give when questioned about the meaning they give to their work in the cooperative Mondo Nuovo:

'Within the cooperative there is widespread concern about the reality of life in the southern hemisphere' and 'Through our work, we are able to create more justice and ness between the northern and southern hemispheres'.

(From the fieldwork notes, cooperative members and employees' training, 08/11/2009)

However, two ethnographic areas of data render ambivalent this relative dimension of the cooperative. The first piece of data is brought to light by some words written on the wall in the back-room of one of the stores in via San Marino. It says: 'you must sell!'. This stands out as an imperative for the survival of the commercial process that is at the very centre of the store's activities. In fact, the cooperative needs to safeguard a delicate economic and financial balance, and the employees' jobs depend on the profit made by the stores. From this point of view, the store functions as any other commercial activity: it must increase its sales as much as possible, to be able to pay off all the expenses, so as to enable its survival. Hence, despite being mitigated by the no-profit approach, the cooperative's stores are also, albeit unwillingly, perfectly integrated within the market economy.

We find ourselves at the heart of the strong criticism made by Serge Latouche on market economy, where he also mentions no-profit enterprises:

In these years we have seen the flourishing of a myriad of no-profit organisations (or, at least, not exclusively interested in making a profit): independent cooperative enterprises... Fair Trade organisations...The possible economic 'failures' in this world present us with a series of issues. Besides producing jobs for their promoters, these organisations also create work in the services (...) or in outsourcing, and from this point of view they cannot avoid being included within an integrated dynamic, as they depend on the economic development of the world market (with state and European subsidies)...Such enterprises are then, sooner or later, doomed to either disappear

or merge into the dominant system. As a result, they lose their original spirit and end up by being 'manipulated' by public powers, their clients, their own workers and voluntary 'militants' (in search of a significant experience of training). Without a deep decolonisation of the imagination, these enterprises, instead of inventing an art of good use and consumption of the other, fall back into the mercantile logic, even when they are on the edge of the market.'

(Latouche 2006: 130.)

A second group of ethnographic data collected between the second half of November and the end of December seems to confirm the ambivalence described above. Two brief field work notes, collected from store-workers and the experience of voluntary workers, summarise effectively the subject matter.

During a meeting with the voluntary workers, S says: 'on 25th December I and P. Are leaving for Honolulu, after having won at 'win for life'... I and P. always play and if we win...'

Another worker leaves a written note saying: 'Why doesn't Christmas come every two years?'
(From the fieldwork notes, Bottega del Mondo, Turin via San Marino, 4/11/2009)

From the commercial point of view, Christmas represents a key period for the cooperative: a third of the annual sales is made during Christmas-shopping time. But if we analyse the data relative to the sales of crafts, thus excluding food products, the percentage is even higher: almost 50% of sales is made at Christmas. Even from this point of view, the Mondo Nuovo 'Botteghe del Mondo', are perfectly integrated into the commercial system before Christmas. Although the nature of the consumed object is different, the process reveals itself as being identical. Consequently, the opening hours of the cooperative stores are prolonged, forcing the workers to do week-end shifts, just as happens to workers in other shops and shopping centres. The reasons paid members and administrators give for the decisions made about the prolonged opening times seem to be of a mere commercial nature:

Concerning the beginning of the Sunday openings, S. Says that they will start from the first Sunday in December: 'Last year we were open on the last Sunday in November, but it wasn't compulsory so we didn't sell much as all the other shops around us were closed'.

(From the fieldwork notes, Bottega del Mondo – Turin, via San Marino, 4/11/2009)

This reflection is of a very commercial nature, however, in the context of the 'Bottega del Mondo' in via S. Marino, which is situated in an area where there are still many small

shops, it also shows particular attention to an environment that offers 'integrated' services to its inhabitants.

Christmas is also the time when the cooperative needs its voluntary workers most:

P. tries to find some voluntary workers to check the hundreds of nativity crafts from Africa, Asia and South America, saying that it could be done in one afternoon if they met altogether... 'at first we thought of doing it one evening, but then we reminded each other that we were already having to work that Sunday, and there was going to be the commercial evening on Monday, so we all opted for an afternoon instead'. The group accepted the decision willingly.

(From the fieldwork notes, Bottega del Mondo – Turin, via San Marino, 4/11/2009)

In addition:

At this point the president and the store's female workers organise the shifts for all the workers during Christmas time. The president announces that the cooperative will invest more on staff by taking on an extra full-time employee for the Christmas period. 'Besides', he adds, 'a larger number of voluntary workers will be present, because those that used to go to via Bianchi⁸ will now come here'. V. Adds: 'During the Christmas period we should try and ask some voluntary workers to come when the shop is closed, so they could help us with the cleaning and tidying up'.

(From the fieldwork notes, Bottega del Mondo – Turin, via XX settembre, 3/11/2009)

It may now be useful to go back to what is indicated in the Mondo Nuovo Cooperative's electronic identity card: members write in the 'who we are' space of their own homepage that they have the aim of:

'Making people become more sensitised to the life and working conditions of people in the southern hemisphere, and making people reflect on the socio-economic and environmental impact that our society's consumption has on the whole world, promoting Fair Trade and responsible consumption as concrete tools for creating an economy of justice'⁹.

In the Mondo Nuovo cooperative there seems to be a greater reference to the commercial nature of Fair Trade activities, as expressed by, for instance, by Viganò (2008):

"Fair Trade represents a particular form of exchange relationship, which started with the principal objective of offering opportunities for development to disadvantaged producers, by operating in the poorest countries in the world, which have great difficulty in accessing the international commercial circuit" (Viganò 2008: 9)

Furthermore:

⁸ It refers to the first Fair Trade 'Bottega del Mondo', or store, in Turin. It was situated in the Parella quarter, and was closed at the end of last year after fifteen years of service.

⁹ <http://www.mondo-nuovo.it>. Link: "Chi siamo", access on June 2010

'This way, Fair Trade contributes to the promoting a model of conscientious purchase, through initiatives aiming at increasing developed-countries citizens' sensitivity towards the potential of their actions as consumers. This serves to redefine the rules of international commerce and the commercial and cooperative politics, and carries out advocacy actions (sensitisation and information campaigns) and lobbying (exertion of political pressure) of institutions.' (Ivi: 10)

The structure of the 'Bottega del Mondo', well performs the needs expressed above. However, in this phase there is less evidence of the educational and cultural dimensions that can hold together the development of Fair Trade and the containment of the urge to consume.

Conclusions

The ethnographic data collected until now reveal some of the ambivalences that may be interesting for one who intends to reconstruct the cultural dimension of the organisation.

The paid members of the cooperative draw attention to problems connected with the sustainability of their own work in their local environment, such as work shifts, instability and continuity and salary dynamics. These are the factors that most interest them in their everyday activities. When considering the work in the stores, it is the commercial dimension that comes to the forefront: the 'behaviour' is similar to that of other businesses so, in order to be efficient and effective, it needs to be managed by adopting a strong market-oriented approach. The work rhythms are cyclic and linked, for instance, to festivities and consumers' times. The continuity of a working post through time is directly related to the profit made by the stores and the other cooperative services. Last January, a store in a small town just outside Turin became financially unsustainable and thus it had to close: as a direct consequence of this, the cooperative had to interrupt the workers' contracts. Even the salary dimension is perceived by some workers as 'unsustainable', especially when the cooperative should be operating to bring 'social and economic justice every day'.

The cooperative's 'sustainability' is presented and discussed within the Administration Board according to its economic and financial features: this kind of representation of sustainability is perfectly integrated with the market processes and runs the risk of not differentiating the overall analysis of the no-profit organisation from the dynamics of profit enterprises. Especially the workers, who are sacrificed to the financial dynamics of

performing in the services, lose visibility (Korczynski and Macdonald 2009). At this point, the analysis of the workers' ethnographical data becomes interesting: during the meeting, the semantics was completely focused on the money aspect of the bonus and on the relationship between evaluation of workers and financial retribution. Research (Borzaga and Musella 2003), however, sheds light upon a plurality of meanings relative to giving workers incentives in no-profit contexts, which is probably less noticeable in a commercial context such as a store, even within the Fair Trade circuit.

One limit clearly emerges from the research. The present ethnographic data collected seem to overlook the associative-work dimension inside the cooperative. This aspect, in fact, does not even emerge particularly in the work in the stores or in the outside activities. It does not appear to be a 'mythology of belonging' (Gagliardi 1986). Nevertheless though, the Administration Board keeps placing it amongst the management and training priority of the members of the cooperative. As the ethnographic data is not 'saturated', this still gives the impression of being a 'hot' theme. In its present state of affairs, the Mondo Nuovo social cooperative appears to be seeking new strategies to bring together the administrators' representations with those of all the members, both paid and voluntary.

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