

5 examples to inspire REconomy in Italy



Transition Italia looks at the budding world of business in transition

By Giulio Pesenti Campagnoni, translated into English by Deborah Rim Moiso

www.rieconomv.it

What we went looking for

Our aim is to present a small collection of ideas, visions and actions which point the way towards an alternative view of the economic and business world. Is it really possible to re-think production and commerce, going in the direction of humanity, sustainability, resilience and local prosperity and, at the same time, turning the global tide? We decided to go looking for possible first steps along this path, collecting examples along the way.

The five tales we have to tell have direct relevance to the livelihoods of 43 people. Their collective turnover comes up to about 900,000 Euro per year. We hope that these stories might provide a starting point to understand how a local transition might look in the world of production and commerce. And, perhaps, provide some inspiration for others.

| Company | Location | Industry |
|-------------|-------------------|----------|
| ARVAIA | Bologna | Food |
| CANAPUGLIA | Conversano, Bari | Services |
| MELPIGNANO | Melpignano, Lecce | Services |
| RESEDA | Rome | Energy |
| WOLLYFLOWER | Santorso, Vicenza | Textiles |

All these companies work in ways which are radically different from the “business as usual” model. Their work is sustainable, and they enrich their community threefold: socially, environmentally, and economically. Some but not all are cooperatives. All supply essential goods and services to the local community, offer paid jobs as well as volunteer opportunities to local inhabitants and interact with other local businesses. Some of the people involved have been inspired directly by the Transition movement, others share its worldview and ultimate aims.

Individually, they are all great examples to dwell on. That said, their full potential would only be unleashed if they worked in the same territory. Some of the essential needs these five companies fulfill are food, clothing, energy, local building materials and opportunities for socializing and participating. These are the kinds of companies we desperately need in all our local communities: businesses able to create jobs, prosperity and strong relationships.

These companies embody a new kind of economy. Its basic features are community-led management and strong local roots. The simple fact that every day people work in such places must mean that a new economic model is in existence, is feasible, and may even be replicable. We are looking at great opportunities of re-localising the economy with new, thriving, independent businesses, providing us with the things we actually need.

This document is a small collection of examples: companies which have managed to see the budding opportunities of a transition economy, and build upon them. Our hope is that they will inspire administrators, investors, entrepreneurs, the Transition movement and any other group or organisation interested in realising the enormous potential of a resilient new economy.

How we got here

These five examples include coops, charities and individual entrepreneurs. What they have in common is a powerful vision, harnessing passion and creativity in the attempt to create a new, sustainable business model. In the process, these innovators are trying to change their local communities, local economies and, one step at a time, are changing the world.

In each of the following case studies, we asked innovators to share their vision of the business world, how they re-invest profits and how they interact with the local community, in social and environmental terms.

We found five commonalities which might be used to identify what, exactly, makes a company a Transition Enterprise (TE).

1. Resilience

A TE contributes to increase the resilience of its local community in the face of financial and energetic insecurity, resource depletion and the impact of climate change. A TE also looks at its internal resilience, finding ways to be economically sustainable and as independent as possible from distant sources of resources and investments.

2. Wise Resource Use

In a TE, natural (including energy) and human resources are used wisely. Limits are respected, and the production of waste is minimised. The use of non-renewable resources is progressively reduced, insofar as possible, with a post-oil future in mind.

3. Appropriate Localisation

Transition Enterprises are good observers of their context. They seek balance and harmony with their social and physical milieu. They try to apply resilience, sustainability and fair-share principles to their supply chain and to the web of relations they hold with the rest of the market economy (producers, consumers, and so on).

4. Beyond Profit

TEs supply sustainable, affordable products and services. Their aim is to serve the community's needs, rather than reap profits for distant shareholders. Proceeds are generally re-invested in the local area, rather than in the stock-market or in other financial products.

5. Community First

Every TE is working for the common good. It is, insofar as possible, managed by its own employees, collaborators, clients and community. Business and management practices are transparent, self-governing, equitable, democratic, inclusive and responsible. Relations with other local stakeholders are infused with cooperation and synergy.

What guided our choice

The limits of choosing only five companies are self-evident. We tried to find examples which either work in strong synergy with a local Transition Initiative or share its ideals and methods, e.g. by serving local needs and offering alternatives to "business as usual".

Besides providing goods and services, of course, these companies create jobs. Not all have paid full-time employees (at least not for the moment), but most give work to at least one or two people.

Voluntary work is often a starting point for companies as they build their economic base. For others it is a permanent choice, a form of cooperative economy. Most of these businesses are generating a turnover which is higher than the initial investment and have a positive net income: quite an achievement for a "new" economy!

We tried to assemble examples from different industries: textile, energy, agriculture and food production, local development. There is great potential for a whole host of new resilient businesses to develop. What we hope to offer is an initial inspiration.

Small is beautiful

As they push forward in unexplored territory, of course the first pioneers of a new economy may find themselves travelling alone, especially at the very beginning. The first assistance often comes from close family or friends.

Looking just a little bit farther, one may find a vast ecosystem of other tiny businesses, people willing to invest creatively into satisfying each others' needs. **Woollyflower** was able to re-think the local economy by seeing local wool from Vicenza as a precious resource.

Old tools were dusted off and traditional skills re-discovered and put to work to create clothing, accessories and other goods in wool and felt. And this in a world in which shepherds are "normally" expected to pay an incinerator to dispose of their wool!

Valeria is an innovator who looked at waste, saw value, and gave it new life. Her business is just beginning: she only works in winter and is uncertain as to what direction this work will take her in.

Headfast and trusting, she is building new opportunities for herself by giving workshops in museums and schools, working to strengthen a growing network of relations among young entrepreneurs, farmers and craftspeople.

Wherever you are, take a good look around: you are bound to find, somewhere close, someone breathing new life into old crafts.

Collective energy

Some businesses are centred on a single person and his or her ideas. Others take it one step further, connecting people united by similar projects and visions. This allows for the creation of beneficial relationships: projects expand, new possibilities arise, complexity increases.

In 2013, a group of people from the countryside around Bologna founded **Arvaia**, a cooperative working on fallow public land, made available by the Municipality, to grow organic vegetables for its members and for sale. Their business model is known as CSA, Community Supported Agriculture.

An assembly of growers and consumers presides over future tasks and investments. Some members of the cooperative work there, others join in order to benefit from its services, knowing that, in the process, they are supporting local jobs and a more ethical, sustainable economy.

Another cooperative, **Reseda**, works in the energy field. Its story began 15 years ago, well before the Transition movement was founded. Today it has over a hundred collaborators as well as 15 employees, some of whom have also joined the Castelli Romani Transition initiatives.

In fact, the cooperative has adopted decisional and organisational methods learnt by interacting with Transition, and applies them to the planning and implementation of local and international projects.

Among the cooperative's many activities are classes in schools, the installation of photovoltaic panels, permaculture design, repair and re-use of waste equipment and materials, technical and scientific training. All this (and more) can happen when over a hundred people work together with shared goals.

Re-localising an entire economic basin

Donella Meadows wrote that the hardest—and most powerful—way to change a system is to create an alternative version of it, in people's minds.

If this idea is attractive enough, it can spin people's energies in a self-reinforcing loop that finally manages to transform the entire structure from the bottom up. Vision is fuel for change.

In only three years **CanaPuglia** managed to spread the vision of a new economic system designed to remedy and repair the environmental damage associated to the current one. From its birthplace in the southern region of Puglia, the idea of using hemp (once commonly grown in Italy) to regenerate depleted soils while producing fibre for the building industry as well as for food, medicinal purposes, textiles and paper, spread throughout the peninsula.

Despite being “only” a small charity organisation, CanaPuglia has filled farmers, businesspeople, research centres, entrepreneurs, the public opinion, administrators and the local community with enthusiasm. The potential for this idea to spread and create real change is massive.

Sowing and growing hemp has been proved to regenerate even contaminated soils; somewhere beyond sustainability, and into a regenerative economy, is also the place **Melpignano** is headed.

This is a Community Cooperative working to restore human environments abandoned following the exodus of people from the villages to urban areas. Melpignano, also in Puglia, is the first such organisation in Italy.

The cooperative’s mission is to create job opportunities in a rural area by increasing participation, satisfying local needs and spreading an ethic of environmental consciousness. Its projects, which include photovoltaic installations and “water houses”, give jobs to local builders.

Any profits are reinvested in other projects, setting in motion a beneficial cycle which touches every dimension of village life.

1 + 1 = 2 and a bit

The companies and organisations we describe could work in even more ideal conditions if they were all cooperating with each other in the same territory. Imagine how life would be if you lived in such a place.

Benefits to reap would include jobs, increase in self-empowerment, creative talent and education, experience, and a general revitalisation of the local economy. Add to the mix some extra social cohesion, harmony and well-being. 1 + 1 would make 2... and then some.

Why should we “re-localise”?

We believe these new types of company can be seen as building blocks of a new local economy. They can help us envisage the true potential of a re-localised economy, in which as many goods and services as possible are produced and circulated among local, independent businesses.

The impact that money spent in this type of business has on the local economy is very different from the impact of the same amount of money if it is spent, say, in a supermarket. This is known as the “local multiplier” effect. Money spent in local businesses continues to circulate in the local economy, enriching it. On the other hand, while some money spent at an international chain might trickle back to the local economy in the form of salaries, all the rest will be shuttled elsewhere.

This mechanism is sometimes described as an “extractive economy”, in which resources are extracted from the local community and invested on the financial markets or in global economic systems which are certainly unconcerned by local interests, if not downright damaging.

Re-localising as a Business Strategy

One of the main objectives of the Rieconomy¹ project is to analyse the current local economic scenario by providing detailed data and painting an accurate picture of the situation. This, we hope, will facilitate the task of uncovering new opportunities to answer local needs. A good example of such a study is the Totnes Economic Blueprint issued in the UK

National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) data from Italy describes each household spending about 900 Euro/year in fresh fruit and vegetables, and 1,900 Euro/year in preserved foods or staples.

When we applied this data to the small town of San Giovanni in Persiceto, where the first Italian experiments using the Rieconomy approach are taking place, we calculated that the community spends almost 10 Mln Euro/year for food. These resources are taken away from the community, never to return. Energy, in the same community, costs 11 Mln Euro/year. Add the cost of all those goods which cannot actually be produced in San Giovanni, various service fees, insurance costs, technology costs and so on.

With this much money being vacuumed away from the community, of course local economies are getting poorer! Can we imagine slowly re-directing a part of this flow towards local businesses? What would the benefits of the “local multiplier” effect be?

Such questions should not be confused with simplistic cries for autarchy or total self-sufficiency. But how could an area be at least more self-reliant, and how could prosperity be invited back in? Local economy re-design represents a great opportunity for spreading well-being across a community.

What comes next?

In Italy, 2014 is a year of first steps and trial runs in the field of Rieconomy. If you are among those looking for examples, ideas and inspiration, this is what we currently have to offer: ways to understand the economic scenario, real-world examples and case studies, practical tools for leading Rieconomy processes in your community, and a precious load of international contacts.

If you are involved in a Transition Initiative or community group (public administration, informal group, charity organisation and so on) and wish to take part in this collective experiment, please get in touch. We will do our best to help in developing effective pathways to local prosperity. Note: you can [download this report in Italian](#).

¹ [Translator’s note: *Rieconomy* in Italian is pronounced in the same way as the English *Reeconomy*].
Rieconomy Project, Transition Italia - www.rieconomy.it

ARVAIA Community Supported Agriculture Cooperative

www.arvaia.it

Mission

ARVAIA's mission is to take care of the land. The coop's members manage and farm on public property. The organisation is collective, from seed to table, and harvests are mainly distributed among members. It follows a model known as CSA, Community Supported Agriculture.

Are you connected to the Transition movement?

Many of our 175 members belong to Transition groups in and around Bologna (Lame, Bologna Dentro Porta, San Lazzaro, Calderara) and are variously involved in Arvaia.

Do you think your products and services can help the local community become more resilient? How?

True ownership of the food chain is essential for community resilience. In Arvaia, community ownership is everywhere: the members' assembly has the final word on what to grow, as well as on budget expenditures and all other aspects of farming and management. We work with organic, sustainable, peasant agriculture. Our use of fossil fuels is minimal, including for transport to the final consumer, since Arvaia is only 7 kilometres from the centre of the city.

How many people does ARVAIA employ?

ARVAIA opened last year with three employees, now we have four. Every member is asked to work for at least four half-days during the year. This might be work in the fields or in other sectors (packaging, distribution, processing....). Other activities, such as communication, outreach and administration, are run on a voluntary basis by groups of members.

Are you able to make a profit? And if not, when do you see this happening?

In our first year we registered a small loss, connected to the investments required to start a new business. We carried this loss over to 2014 and will probably register a loss for this year as well. We could, actually, be in the black if the number of members keeps growing as it has up to now, but we prefer to be realistic and prudent in our predictions. In these first two years, our turnover settled around 70-75 thousand euro. All four full-time employees have agreed to reduce their salary so that we could balance the budget and pay for start-up costs.

What type of business structure did you choose?

While we were investigating how to create a CSA, we looked into different models in other Countries. In the end, we decided to found a Cooperative, which in Italy is the best option available to combine social and business interests. The legislation states that cooperatives must represent the mutual interest of the group and of its individual members: this reflects the CSA ideal.



In a cooperative, one of the possible roles is that of “supporting member”, meaning someone can decide to join the coop in order to benefit from its services and goods, without having necessarily to help out with the work.

Is your business sustainable, financially speaking?

Absolutely! The key is to reach a number of members appropriate to the scale of production. Before this is achieved, activities must be planned in order to, for example, sell the surplus. Once the community is formed and stable, the CSA model offers a financial guarantee, because the coop’s members have pledged to support the farmers.

Can your work bring an economic benefit to the local community? What are your priorities (profit, social welfare, inclusion...)?

A cooperative cannot actually make a profit: any proceeds must be reinvested in its activities. Therefore, profit cannot be the motive: ARVAIA’s purpose is to increase the community’s well-being. Again looking at the law, cooperative businesses must enable their members’ “economic, social and cultural growth”. We try to encourage all members to take part in the community, for example by creating interest groups and supporting them through training and information events. Another idea is to pay working members in kind, also as a form of support to low-income families. We could imagine asking for a loan from our members, then paying interest in fruit & veg.

We’d like to talk about re-localisation. Do you supply, distribute, network locally?

Ours is a thoroughly local initiative. It is the shortest supply chain of organic vegetables in town. Consumers are producers and vice-versa. We also collaborate with another group of local organic growers (Campi Aperti) and take part in their weekly farmer’s markets. When we are choosing suppliers we always look for producers who are local or at least in the same region. Our consumers live in Bologna, and our suppliers are nearby: we try our best to make money flow in local circuits.

And what about your environmental impact? Negative, neutral or positive?

Totally positive. We talk about “peasant” agriculture to specify that we are attempting to create a low-input farming system, especially in terms of fossil fuel use. Our most positive environmental impact is on the soil itself. We believe that agriculture can be sustainable only if it increases organic matter in the soil. The land we farm is currently very poor: by increasing its carbon content we can lock a lot of carbon into the soil, and produce healthy food at the same time. We are “re-greening” at least 15-20% of the farmland, by planting hedges and trees. The resulting increase in biodiversity will, we believe, boost production and yields.

Is there anything else you want to share?

An important feature of this project is that we are farming public land. Our project is about 40 hectares, belonging to the City of Bologna. We share this space with other initiatives. The social element is very strong, and getting stronger; the synergy among all these different activities will certainly continue to add value to this public space.



CanaPuglia

www.canapuglia.it

Mission

To promote hemp as a resource for Italy's society, environment and economy, starting from the region of Apulia. To support research on farming methods, on the plant itself and on its numerous uses: pharmaceutical, textile, paper-making, food, energy, green chemistry, and so on.

Are you connected to the Transition movement?

We don't have a direct link with the Transition movement. We have a lot in common though, as hemp represents economic self-reliance, giving local economies the ability to produce thousands of useful products in a sustainable fashion. Hemp stands for progressive thinking, for respecting natural limits and for the attempt to regenerate healthy human and economic relationships.

Do you think your products and services can help the local community become more resilient? How?

If we look at the environmental side of things, hemp grows without chemicals, it needs no pesticides or weed-killers, and it improves fertility rates wherever it grows. Talk about a resilient plant! We began our work 3 years ago and now network with about a hundred businesses, including retailers, entrepreneurs, investors, associations and farmers. In only three years, hemp-growing has expanded from one to 120 hectares in Apulia. This improves community resilience by enabling people to return to sustainable agricultural practices and by enlivening the local economy.

How many people does Canapuglia employ?

CanaPuglia is set up as a nonprofit. All our collaborators are volunteers. In the future we plan to found a cooperative, so that we can create paid jobs. Delizie di Canapa (Hemp Delights), a brand which emerged from the project, is creating new business for small producers and local companies. We are certain that CanaPuglia will be able to hire employees soon enough, given the great potential and incredible feedback we have been receiving. Currently, eight people volunteer for the organisation.

Are you able to make a profit? And if not, when do you see this happening?

Currently, we can only refund expenses. After two years, I will start to see my own work repaid this year, through the Delizie di Canapa brand. Up to now, being somewhat privileged (I don't have rent to pay!) I have had the opportunity of serving the community for free.

CanaPuglia



Where hemp is re-introduced, many traditional businesses can make a comeback.

What type of business structure did you choose?

CanaPuglia is a nonprofit organisation, run as an "open-source", no-centre, circular structure. Information is shared and projects are managed by activating a network of groups, organisations, retailers, institutions and individuals.

Is your business sustainable, financially speaking?

CanaPuglia began in 2012 with a regional funding of 25,000 Euro. Since then, the project has relied on donations from about 250 supporters (individuals and companies). In 2013 we had a turnover of about 5,000 Euro. A cultural revolution can be kick-started with very little in terms of financial means. Of course it takes a lot of awareness and determination.

Can your work bring an economic benefit to the local community? What are your priorities (profit, social welfare, inclusion...)?

We feel we have set in motion a series of events which have been benefiting the local, and national, community in many ways. We have acted as consultants to companies which then decided to invest in the hemp industry. We assisted hundreds of sick people who needed help to access cannabinoid therapies. We helped increase participation and community building by organising activities involving families, businesses, community members and schools.

Currently we are cooperating with numerous research centres, such as the CRA (Research Centre for Agriculture) in Rovigo and Bari, as well as with the National Centre for Research (CMR). Some research goes in a very technical direction, such as laboratory work on how to develop hemp-based paper-making.

We'd like to talk about re-localisation. Do you supply, distribute, network locally?

That is the whole idea: to grow, process and distribute hemp-based products, creating local wealth, locally. The company Delizie di Canapa works with local businesses exclusively, manufacturing pasta and breads using hemp as a raw material. The first 120 hectares are mostly experimental: we ran research projects, experiments and sampling. We are recovering the know-how needed to grow and process hemp, knowledge which has been all but lost in over 50 years of prohibition.

And what about your environmental impact? Negative, neutral or positive?

Our impact on the environment is positive: the hemp fields we grow sequester about 8 tons of Co2 per hectare! Our project is a small contribution to improving the health of Humanity and of the Environment. Everyone should bring their talents to this task, be it an individual, an institution or a company.

Is there anything else you want to share?

Here in Apulia we are completing what will be largest building project in hemp and lime in Europe: 60 energy-plus apartments, entirely built with recyclable, non-toxic materials. Another success was our contribution in rediscovering a heirloom variety of hemp once common in Campania. Before the post-war boom, every region of Italy had its own varieties of hemp, and all this richness is now lost.



CanaPuglia plans to found a cooperative.

Melpignano Community Co-op

www.coopcomunitamelpignano.it

Mission

The Community Cooperative aims to enliven and promote a return to neglected and abandoned rural areas. The Melpignano Cooperative supports citizens in finding local answers to their needs. It raises awareness on environmental and ethical aspects and on the production of renewable energies. Members are assisted in finding opportunities to work at equitable economic, social and professional conditions. Citizens are called to be active players in their community's development, contributing to its social, economic and cultural growth.

Are you connected to the Transition movement?

There is no direct link between the Melpignano Cooperative and Transition initiatives, but we share the same vision.

Do you think your products and services can help the local community become more resilient? How?

A resilient future for Melpignano, in terms of job opportunities and active citizenship, is the cooperative's fundamental aim. For example we can look at our project concerning "solar rooftops". Local builders and technicians were employed to install photovoltaic panels on the village rooftops, for a total output of 179 Kw, which is quite a number for such a small settlement. We also decided the area should be served by what we call "Water Houses", public buildings where you can buy filtered, clean water for 5 cents a litre. This saves a lot of plastic, and the project gave work to local craftspeople and builders who are members of our co-op. For the near future, we plan to bid with the Municipality for other public services such as the management of school canteens, of public parks and so on.

How many people does the cooperative employ?

Currently we do not have any employees. Most associates are professionals who network to achieve common goals. There are also a few volunteers who do awareness-raising and communication: in the initial stages it is appropriate, we feel, to rely on voluntary work. Our hope is that as more people, institutions and businesses begin networking and working in synergy, new business ideas and activities will follow and thrive.

Are you able to make a profit? And if not, when do you see this happening?

The cooperative has been financially sustainable since its foundation, and we do make a profit. Our turnover is around 430,000 Euro.



Rooftop energy: the cooperative has built 34 photovoltaic installations, for a total output of 179 Kw, a project financed by an ethical finance banking institute, Banca Etica.

What type of business structure did you choose?

Ours is the first "Community Cooperative" in Italy. The aim is to create opportunities in the members' local community. There are many different types of cooperative (consumer coop, social coop, and so on) which can initiate all sorts of projects (managing business, providing medical and social assistance, caring for the environment, farming, promoting traditional crafts, producing renewable energy...), but what is really important is the core purpose. Ours is to improve life in the local community, particularly by creating job opportunities for youth, making village life interesting, attractive and sustainable.

Is your business sustainable, financially speaking?

The project supports itself. To found the cooperative, each member paid a 25 Euro entry fee. Today our social capital is 4,500 euro, and we have 170 members. The rooftop photovoltaic project was funded with capital from Banca Etica (about 300,000 Euro) and from the cooperative federation LegaCoop (100,000 Euro). We pay back the debt by returning to Banca Etica the incentives we receive from the State by producing electricity. Any profits are re-invested in new activities supporting the local economy.

Can your work bring an economic benefit to the local community? What are your priorities (profit, social welfare, inclusion...)?

As mentioned above, the cooperative's aim is to increase the well-being of citizens and the health of the local economy. Any profits made by the cooperative are reinvested in projects which are entrusted to workers from Melpignano. Members actively participate in taking decisions, assign tasks, ensure profits are equitably redistributed and promote community spirit and local heritage. When investing in the "Water Houses" project, the cooperative created job opportunities for local plumbers and builders, using local materials. And we have many more ideas up our sleeves!

We'd like to talk about re-localisation. Do you supply, distribute, network locally?

Certainly! Community Cooperatives exist to set in motion a virtuous economic cycle to support the local community. Members must be residents: this is a guarantee that the cooperative will work and interact on a local plane. We can of course collaborate and network with other institutions or groups in and outside Italy.

And what about your environmental impact? Negative, neutral or positive?

Very positive. We produce renewable energy (with 34 installations for a total output of 179 Kw) and have had great feedback from the "Water Houses" projects. Before they were built, it was common for villagers to buy water at the supermarket, in plastic bottles. Since their inauguration we have distributed 1 million 40,000 litres of water, and we estimate that 55,000 less plastic bottles have been used.

Is there anything else you want to share?

The cooperative has three different types of members. General members who might, for example, turn their terrace over to the cooperative to house a photovoltaic installation; Working members and Volunteer members.



To-date, the cooperative has overseen the construction of eleven "Water Houses" in and around the village.

RESEDA

www.resedaweb.org

Mission

To establish a business model combining solidarity and environmentalism, setting up eco-friendly productive activities and creating jobs for socially disadvantaged people.

The Cooperative supports and enables projects which aspire to:

- Personal growth for all those involved in working with, and benefiting from, the company's products and services;
- Supporting access to work, social life and tools or services for people currently excluded from the market;
- Reducing environmental and social footprints, safeguarding the environment, promoting a sustainable use of natural resources;
- Self-management, by promoting a deep cultural change through experimenting with participatory organisation of collective work and living practices;
- Solidarity among peoples and human beings, building non-violent relationships.

To realise its aims, the cooperative:

- Designs and manages technical and scientific training and environmental education activities, awareness-raising and community-building campaigns;
- Promotes the sales and use of fair trade, organic, ecologically and socially ethical products;
- Manages green areas using permaculture, reforestation, creating and managing new parks and gardens, botanical nurseries, organic gardens, school gardens, nature parks, "green" classrooms for educational purposes;
- Repairs, re-uses, recycles and refurbishes waste material, refuse and discarded objects;
- Builds renewable energy installations based on solar and photovoltaic technologies, wind power, biomass and other sources;
- Designs and manages projects aimed at energy efficiency, water conservation, and the preservation and wise use of natural resources;
- Carries on research projects on low-impact, environmentally-friendly technologies, appropriate technology and renewable energy.

RESEDA

onlus



RESEDA works in the renewable energy field, building hot water solar and photovoltaic installations, and small-scale biomass and wind generators.

Are you connected to the Transition movement?

I would say our connection with Transition initiatives is inborn. We share a "transition culture" of aiming for an oil-free society, with supportive relationships among fellow humans. Another thing we share is the practical, hands-on approach: we have always thought it best to try something first-hand and then share it with others. Furthermore, we are all looking at how to improve local resilience, for us particularly in terms of energy sources and food production.

Do you think your products and services can help the local community become more resilient? How?

Local energy and food improve community resilience. Also, a practical approach focussing on appropriate technology makes sense in this context. There is also a cultural aspect: we try to help communities to emerge from an information mono-culture, providing tools for technical and cultural self-reliance.

How many people does RESEDA employ?

We are 15 working members. Five work full time, and 40% are people with disabilities. The structure is non-hierarchical, with collective democratic management. If you work, you decide! We strive for equal rights and solidarity. A wider network of about 130 people help us and collaborate with RESEDA. We have three main areas of operation: renewable energy installations, appropriate technology research and development, training and capacity building.

Are you able to make a profit? And if not, when do you see this happening?

We have been paying salaries from the very beginning. Every year we try to improve the ratio between hours worked and actual pay. We look at economic but also at social indicators to analyse our business performance, such as a turnover/no. of employees index. The past few years have been difficult, because of the financial crisis. We responded by tapping into our collective intelligence and turning more and more to local activities, which are less vulnerable to financial shocks. By signing a "workers solidarity contract" we agreed to lower our salaries so that nobody had to be laid off. Members who wished to set up their own business received funding and support. Our average yearly turnover, in these 15 years, has been 400,000 Euro. Any extra proceeds are turned over to solidarity projects, including assistance to the population after the earthquake in L'Aquila, installations in sahrawi refugee camps, assistance to disabled people in finding work, our "Solar Solidarity" campaign.

What type of business structure did you choose?

Legally speaking we are a not-for-profit cooperative, but we call ourselves an eco-social co-op. Strategies and projects are defined collectively, using facilitation tools such as those we learnt in Transition courses.

Is your business sustainable, financially speaking?

At least up to now! We have never turned to the banks for credit, but rather asked for loans from our members and from supporters who share our ideals.



The ISSA solar cooling design created in collaboration with the Polytechnic Institute of Milan.

We began with 3,000 Euro invested by ten members, matched with a 3,000 Euro fund-raising. Currently we receive about 100,000 Euro/year in credit from members.

Can your work bring an economic benefit to the local community? What are your priorities (profit, social welfare, inclusion...)?

We benefit the local community firstly by creating jobs for people currently excluded from the workplace. We have also been supporting other similar business and cultural initiatives, particularly in difficult environments, such as depressed areas or towns controlled by the mafia. Any profits are reinvested in solidarity and in projects which help create an oil-free society. Our activities are designed to support the personal growth of all those involved: those who work with, and those who benefit from, our products and services.

We'd like to talk about re-localisation. Do you supply, distribute, network locally?

Through the years we have created a "positive economy" network by which we source materials, selecting suppliers and partners based on their ethics and practices. Sometimes we have to choose between ethical and local, e.g. we might find a component built locally, by a company which is not as ethically responsible as we would wish. If this happens, generally local collaboration prevails. Of course we also work with other, larger institutions, including outside Italy.

And what about your environmental impact? Negative, neutral or positive?

Certainly positive. We use indicators such as the ecological footprint to evaluate our work and also calculate how much greenhouse gases we are saving. We have solid, scientific data on how our actions have impacted the environment.

For 15 years now we have been working to reduce pollution and fossil fuel use. These are some of the results: 13,000 MWh less fossil fuel energy used, equivalent to 1,155 tons of oil equivalent (TOE) and 5,362 tons less CO₂ released in the atmosphere. That is about the consumption of 90 families for a year!

In the year 2013 we saved 1,800 MWh, equivalent to 715 tons less CO₂ (154 TOE).

Is there anything else you want to share?

We have decided to share our office and warehouse with other non-profits and local initiatives. A few years ago we came up with the idea of a "Positive Economy", an economy which can improve environmental and human conditions.

We develop solidarity projects wherever we can, such as the "Solar Solidarity" campaign in which disadvantaged populations are assisted in building and maintaining appropriate technology installations, including sharing technical know-how, through a network of non-profit and for-profit groups and businesses.



Wollyflower

woollyflower.blogspot.com

Mission

To use of locally raised sheep wool and add to its value by crocheting, weaving and knitting clothing items and other objects in felt and yarn. To promote a shift in how local wool is perceived: as an ideal manufacturing material which is local, renewable, easy to process in an environmental-friendly way, with the lowest of ecological footprints. To hold a vision which includes branching out into other heritage techniques using fibre crops and other materials, to create local, sustainable clothing for all seasons.

Are you connected to the Transition movement?

I met the local initiative about a year ago and immediately adhered to the Transition idea. The Transition movement provided a framework through which to interpret the changes I had already introduced in my personal and family life. I was "in transition" before I met the movement, but I was a bit confused and scattered about many things. Now I am certain that my small business can contribute to inspire others to be brave and re-think their own lives, including their professional lives. These new "transition" values may feel in contrast with the way we've been taught the world works, but they provide a much more solid, sustainable and balanced worldview which will help in the long run.

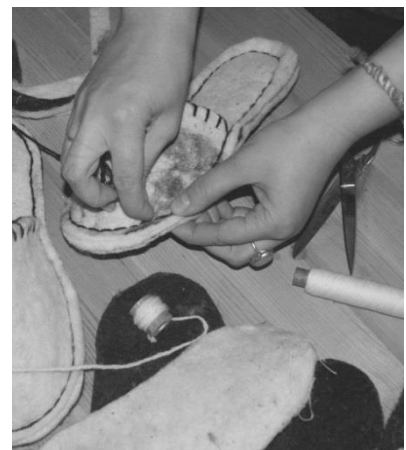
Do you think your products and services can help the local community become more resilient? How?

I use wool from our local sheep and recycled materials to make basic clothing items (and a few other things!). As for my tools, some are self-built and some were re-discovered gathering dust in people's attics. The methods I use are slow, traditional, and environmentally-friendly. This way of working is, at least in the clothing sector, about as resilient as it gets. My calling is to work with youth and teach them as much as I can, through workshops and training: I am moved by the importance of informing young people about local resources, to show them that everything we need is right here around us, if only we are willing to make an effort to see and understand, to open our eyes and, often, re-invent and re-interpret our heritage to fit modern times.

How many people does Woollyflower employ?

I work alone, but in a context which includes other people's professions, I am thinking of the local farmers and shepherds. If the project develops as I hope it will, I might ask other people to help me, and maybe even employ someone.

WOOLLYFLOWER



Woollyflower is a tale of personal Rieconomy, a change wrought by creating a new, sustainable and original way of working. But making ends meet is far from easy!

Are you able to make a profit? And if not, when do you see this happening?

Up to now, I have been working seasonally. This is in part due to the local climate, with cold winters and warm, wet summers. I work 3-4 months a year and make about 2,000 Euro. I hope to extend the project to include local fibre crops, for the warm seasons, and turn the project into a full-time job. I expect this could raise 10,000 Euro per year.

What type of business structure did you choose?

Mine is still an informal activity. I am researching options.

Is your business sustainable, financially speaking?

I insisted on having very low expenses. All my tools come from charity shops or second-hand stores. This took a lot of time and patience, but saved money! Any advertising and sales follow this low-cost approach. I built a workshop inside my own house, which makes things easier. I collect raw materials from local shepherds, who generally give it away for free. Anything I have to buy, or invest in better tools or training, I save for a bit at a time, without asking for loans or credit. Having said all this, I am not actually making much money yet... but I hope this will change within the year.

Can your work bring an economic benefit to the local community? What are your priorities (profit, social welfare, inclusion...)?

The first priority is personal: to ensure my work can support a pleasant, frugal lifestyle. At the same time, I am working to form a local network of business activities which are sustainable in terms of manufacturing methods, energy and material use, and local character. I come from an area which has always been rich in local crafts, human and natural resources.

We'd like to talk about re-localisation. Do you supply, distribute, network locally?

Absolutely! I work with local raw materials and my customers are locals. I think nobody better than my neighbours understands how special local wool is. I do have a website which allows me to attract clients from other parts of Italy.

And what about your environmental impact? Negative, neutral or positive?

I think this activity has a positive environmental impact. By promoting local textile manufacturing, I hope to inspire other people to rediscover a whole sector which, in the past, supported the population and connected people in a dense network of interdependent rural and urban professions and lifestyles. The mountain pastures were better cared for than they are now, there used to be a sustainable agricultural system based on fibre crops, local knowledge of natural dyes... Traditional manufacturing skills like those I practice and teach are low-cost, low-impact, and in balance with the environment.

Is there anything else you want to share?

I apply permacultural thinking to my business - trying to close circles, seeing every element of my work as part of an intricate web of connections and processes. Looking through the lens of Earth- and people-care I can see if my work is leading me closer or farther from an ethical ideal: if it were leading me astray I would certainly change what I do.



The project is based on community building.