



Mirto school presentation

“In the educative centre we want to develop reflection and action in the same way”

Daniilo Dolci



The history of Mirto school represents an important contribution in the international research on the educational field developed by Danilo Dolci.

Daniilo Dolci was a sociologist, educator, non-violent activist, poet, who arrived in Sicily in the early 1950s. During his life, Dolci closely worked with people, disadvantaged and oppressed groups of the western Sicily in order to study the possible ways of change and the potential for a democratic social transformation. He played a vital role in the struggle against the mafia-patronage system,

dedicating his life to the poor towns close to Palermo.

The Reciprocal Maieutic Approach (RMA) developed by Dolci constitutes an important characteristic of his social and educational work. This approach represents a popular dialectic methodology of research and self-analysis tested by Dolci starting from the 50s. This approach promotes a sense of responsibility among people and can be defined as a “collective exploration process that considers individuals’ experience and intuition as a reference point”.

Mirto Educative Centre project started in 1970 to try out the RMA in the educational field and to embrace mothers’ requests for a place where children could friendly go and receive education. So even the choice of the place is fundamental part of this history.

Dolci collaborated with the most influential educators in the world among which Paulo Freire and Johan Galtung. He also closely worked with students and parents to try out a new educational system using his approach focused on the needs and motivation of people. In order to better understand people’s needs and valorise the resources within each person, Danilo was a very questioning person. He used the same approach with children, so before starting to project the building of the school, he asked the children what they needed to feel comfortable in a place dedicated to them. They gave different answers like being close to the sea, to the mountain or to a river, and above all to set the place in the countryside.

In November 1970 there was the official acquisition of a 10 hectares field dipped into the Sicilian countryside. The architect Giorgio Stokel was asked to envision the project after Danilo Dolci highlighted some points. In Dolci’s educative concept, it was fundamental to receive appropriate inputs in order to activate different levels of discovery and skills to acquire a personal fulfilment and development. As the main aim of the school was to develop this educational concept, un-formal and unconventional, and furthermore to give children the possibility to have a continuous contact and interaction with nature, Mirto educative centre was specially designed. The child was considered to be the point of view of the world and the structure of the new educational centre is adapted to the children’s needs.

The centre was supposed to host all the educational cycle from pre primary to high school and it included areas dedicated to sports and training. The only building realized was the one dedicated to pre primary schools. Interiors are unconventionally shaped, windows are as high as children to give them the possibility to watch outside, corridors are like circular rooms with several accesses to the classrooms. These work as meeting points, inside the classrooms tables and chairs are settled to be moved according to the activities.

In this centre Danilo Dolci and his collaborators tried out the RMA in the educational field. He shared with the educators his experience as sociologist, educator, poet and musician. For a long period the school was an excellence for educators coming from all over the world, but in Sicily it had to face hard difficulties. In 1983 “Mirto” was recognized from the national authorities as Public Experimental School. Unfortunately after few years it went toward a fast decline, as funds were stopped. The building was sold to the public administration and the centre closed.

Nowadays the building is newly active. It became a public pre-primary and primary school following ministerial curriculum. It will get new funds from the European Community to restore the building and the close area. Recent times also marked a renewed interest for Danilo Dolci’s bottom up approach, some teachers try to implement their activities inspired by Dolci’s experience.

Mirto school for SUSTAIN project



Mirto school has been chosen to implement the activities of SUSTAIN project because of this history and its relevance in the field of education. Past events and future possibilities represent a contribution of great value for the project. The history of this school, its foundation and location are strictly connected with the Sustainable Development topics, World Citizenship and Democracy, Human Rights, Peace and Justice, Local and Global Responsibility.

On the occasion of the III project meeting in Palermo, the SUSTAIN team took part to the *Sagra dell’Olio (Oil Festival)*, which was held on Friday 9th November at Mirto school. The *Sagra* closes the cycle of the olives harvesting and the oil producing which has been renewed for more than 10 years in Mirto with the active cooperation of pupils, parents and school operators. The day started with the presentation of dance and theatrical representations of folkloristic inspiration. The students of the Palermitan high school which brings the name of Danilo Dolci performed some texts from his writings. Around the school, some exhibitions about the ancient works have been put on. The oil produced by the school and some typical products were offered to the large number of guests visiting the school. The organization of this event has an important educational value for Mirto school. The direct experience and the contact with the ground contribute, in fact, to increase a sense of belonging to the community in the children and they learn the popular traditions connected to the ground and the techniques of cultivation and harvest of olives. Therefore, the Oil Festival represents an important example of ESD that the SUSTAIN project aims at collecting as Good Practices and spreading at European level

In the afternoon, the **II Local Workshop** of the SUSTAIN project organized by the *Centro per lo Sviluppo Creativo “Danilo Dolci”* took place at Mirto School. Experts,



coordinators and teachers from the partner countries and teachers from some Partinico schools took part to the Workshop. where experiences and skills on ESD were shared. The faced issue and the used non-formal approach have stimulated the interest of teachers and encouraged their active participation to the Workshop. The 9th of November had a big value for the SUSTAIN project, allowing from one hand foreign partners to know closely the educational local

context activated in the Sustainable Development Education, and from the other local teachers to know practices and educational realities of the European educational context.