

Women Empowerment through Nonprofits: Internship with Reuse with Love

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Since the 20th century, Non-Profit organizations have become a well-organized source for aid in all aspects. The 2011 Census in Italy recorded that there are about 301,191 active nonprofit organizations and 347,602 local units on nonprofit institutions.¹ The internship that I worked with this past semester is for a Non-Profit organization called ReUse with Love and is an operation that was started and is run primarily by women. This distinct aspect of the organization has led my research into women-run operations and women in the workplace in Italy and what makes ReUse a special case for their contribution to the Italian workforce and their community. The workplace is universally dominated by men and Italy is no exception, however, by looking at operations such as ReUse with Love, one can acknowledge its influence on not only the professional world but as well as the culture in Italy and how it is a force for the modernization of Italy.

Reuse with Love was established in November 2014 and was created as a non profit organization in Bologna, Italy and is run mainly by women. The organization was founded by a group of female friends who decided to make their habit of exchanging unwanted clothes as something that could help those who are less fortunate. It was first organized with selling donated clothes but due to the large amount of donations that they were receiving, the organization started a project called “ReUse for Good.”² This project is a small clothing boutique off of Via Savenella in Bologna where ReUse gives away clothes for free for those in need; items range in clothing for babies, toddlers, young children, teens, and adults. They include whatever is in season; such as heavy coats, scarves and mittens during the winter season and dresses and shorts for the warmer weather, as well as shoes, books, and small household items. The boutique is open twice a month, with the exception of two months out of the year and those

¹ "Nonprofit Institution Profile Based on 2011 Census Results." Censimentoindustriaservizi.istat.it.

² REUSE WITH LOVE

who shop at the boutique must apply online at social services in order for the organization to ensure that those who are taking clothes for free are for those who are truly in need. The limit for each visit is 10 to 15 items but exceptions can be made for larger families. On the organization's website, they state that "the REUSE FOR GOOD project intends to promote and organize, uniting the forces of institutional and non-institutional stakeholders, events, meetings, campaigns and other initiatives on issues of sustainability, social solidarity and education for re-use and wants to become a reference and orientation for all energies, skills, proposals active in the area."³ From what I experienced, ReUse devotes a great deal of their energy to the operation and presentation of the boutique and they do their best to ensure that those who are visiting create a solid relationship with the organization.

The mission of Reuse includes two key concepts: recovery and conscious reuse. These two key elements allow for an education to those who volunteer with the organization on the theme of reuse as a means for creating social awareness and solidarity. Their core values are centered around six main aspects that include reuse, care, solidarity, social innovation, rapport and cooperation. Under the heading for Reuse, the organization views this aspect as what it is that organization is trying to achieve, that is the reuse of donated garments that channel through their markets and the Solidale Boutique. Under Social Innovation, ReUse with Love stimulate social innovation through the means of recovery in unwanted materials but also in social relationships that are both effective and economically sustainable. The Care that ReUse focuses on exhibiting is through their Solidale Boutique in which they make it essential to present the boutique in a pleasant and welcoming manner so as to be inviting for customers, donors, and volunteers. The Rapport is fundamental for ReUse because it provides a relationship between the

³ Ibid.

volunteers and their customers that can either be a source of advice on clothing or a source that reaches a deeper connection. Cooperation is another important aspect because it outlines the relationship between the organization and the community so that a collaboration between public administrations, associations, social cooperatives, schools, and universities etc. can come about. Lastly, Solidarity is both an ethical and social commitment for the organization because no one should be forgotten due to their circumstances, so it is ReUse's obligation to show support.⁴ ReUse provides a special experience for the community of Bologna that is displayed through the Solidale Boutique as well as through their markets that are thrown twice a year.

In the Spring and the Fall, ReUse with Love works with the community of Bologna to present a market of used clothing available for sale. The profit made from the sales are donated to a cause in the community that ranges every year from educational programs to health technology. From the ReUse with Love website, one can find a transparent transcript of profits made by each market and the organization that the money was donated to. I had the chance to work with ReUse during their Fall market that took place in October for four days in the third week of the month. What makes this market unique for the community is that ReUse associates a theme to their markets that are very important to the overall presentation of the market to the Bologna community. A theme provides a brilliant aesthetic that draws in customers to purchase the used clothing that goes towards a good cause, which ReUse was able to do so by raising \$75,000 for Sant'Orsola Hospital of Bologna. The way in which the markets are designed and conducted demonstrates to not only to the customers but to the community the importance of their work in Bologna and what it means for women to run a successful event. With a genuine

⁴ Ibid.

mission statement and practical core values instilled in the organization, it is no surprise that ReUse is as lucrative as they are.

Nonprofit organizations can be beneficial for many communities and according to Istat and the 2011 Italian census, women volunteers in nonprofit institutions account for 1.8 million people or 38% of the total number of volunteers in Italy, this number is only growing.⁵ Despite this number, from what I was told by my supervisor Simona, women dominate much of the logistics and volunteerism for nonprofits in Italy, more so than in the professional world albeit nonprofits or companies.⁶ Yet, studies have found that a women's participation in voluntary organizations are dependent on whether or not a woman is married or if they are a mother; these factors in turn, inhibit the number of women volunteers.⁷ The differences between women and men in the workplace is dependent on the social and cultural norms of a country. Italy is indeed an industrialized country but culture is an important facet that has created several barriers for the advancement of women. Although the history of feminism in Italy extends as far back as to writings written during the Renaissance period and the achievement of Elea Cornaro Piscopia, who was the first woman in the world to receive a doctorate, there are still differing thoughts on the roles for women in Italy.⁸ Researchers have found that Italian women tend to generate greater support for gender equality in household roles than equality within the workplace.⁹ Studies have also found that in Italy, in an average week, for the 47% of employed women and the 67% of employed men, women work 22 hours outside the house and 36 hours at home on household tasks while men work 33 hours outside the house and only 14 hours at home. Compared to world

⁵ Nonprofit Institution Profile Based on 2011 Census Results." Censimentoindustriaservizi.istat.it

⁶ "Interview for ReUse." Interview by author. December 05, 2017.

⁷ Quaranta, Mario, "Life Course, Gender, and Participation in Voluntary Organizations in Italy." VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations, 2015. P. 894-895.

⁸ Hunt, Christopher, Valentina Piccoli, Karen Gonsalkorale ,Andrea, "Feminine Role Norms Among Australian and Italian Women: a Cross-Cultural Comparison." Carnaghi, Sex Roles, 2015. P. 534.

⁹ Ibid.

studies, during an average week a woman will work 24.5 hours outside the house and 31.5 hours in the home while men work 33.7 hours outside the house and 21 hours in the home. In this case, Italy exceeds the world average.¹⁰ It was also found that in childless households, Italian women still complete much of the domestic work than Italian men.¹¹ In most areas of the professional world, Italian women struggle to make an impact.

In 2013, a profile of Italy's gender equality reported data from 2012 on different aspects of gender percentages in the workplace. The study found that women in Italy generally work in the fields of education, healthcare, and humanities; and although Italian women have a higher percentage than the EU average of women in Science and Engineering, there is still a significant low percentage of their involvement. However, the percentage of women on corporate boards did increase significantly from 2% in 2003 to 22% in 2012, although below the EU average of 16%. The gender pay gap reported that the average female employee earns 5.8% less than the average male employee and while this may be lower than the 16.2% average of the EU, many highly educated women are also highly paid and can skew the statistics more positively.¹² Regardless, the gender pay gap is still largely disproportionate and contradicts Article 37 of the Italian Constitution that states "Working women are entitled to equal rights and, for comparable jobs, equal pay as men. Working conditions must allow women to fulfill their essential family duties and ensure an adequate protection of mothers and children."¹³ Unfortunately, societal norms in the workplace for women can inhibit growth or progress.

¹⁰ Amato, Rosaria. "Italiane stakanoviste per forza ecco perché tra casa e ufficio nessuna al mondo lavora di più ." La Repubblica, November 07, 2013. P.2.

¹¹ Hunt, Christopher, Valentina Piccoli, Karen Gonsalkorale ,Andrea, "Feminine Role Norms Among Australian and Italian Women: a Cross-Cultural Comparison." Carnaghi, Sex Roles, 2015.

¹² Italy. European Commission. Directorate-General Justice, Unit D2 "Gender Equality". The current situation of gender equality in Italy. 2013.

¹³ Constitution of Italy, art. 37, sec. 1.

There is a phenomenon in the professional world for women who are experiencing the concept of either the “Glass Ceiling” or the “Sticky Floor.” These terms indicate a woman’s inability to mobilize in the workplace, especially in the corporate world. “Glass Ceiling” refers to the point in which a woman reaches the highest point possible of management and is unable to go any higher. The transparency of the metaphorical ceiling allows her to see what she is missing but she will not be able to achieve higher positions because she is a woman.¹⁴ On the other hand, the “Sticky Floor concept is aimed at women whose job position is at the bottom and has no possibility to move up in any way, they are in turn, stuck.¹⁵ For women in Italy and on an International scale, it is very difficult to find women in high positions of power. In my conversation with Simona she stated “Le donne in Italia che lavorano possono fare le aziende, abbiamo tante aziende guidate da donne, molto però sono family business, sono donne che hanno ereditato le aziende dal padre,” (Women in Italy who work can run businesses, we have many businesses run operated by women, a lot but they are family businesses, they are women who inherited the business from the father).¹⁶ While this was Simona’s perspective, I did find that since 2014 female run businesses accounted for only 21.6% in the country.¹⁷ Reporting conducted in 2012 found that in the European Union out of 37 countries, 29% of businesses were women owned and that they vary considerably between countries.¹⁸ Furthermore for Nonprofits, Simona stated that it is “un mondo molto femminile, il mondo del volontariato... il mondo dell’associazione ed un altro mondo,” (a very feminine world, the world of volunteer.. the world

¹⁴ Morgan, Mary S. "Glass Ceilings and Sticky Floors: Drawing New Ontologies." The London School of Economics and Political Science, no. 208 (December 2015). P. 3-4.

¹⁵ Morgan, Mary S. "Glass Ceilings and Sticky Floors: Drawing New Ontologies." The London School of Economics and Political Science, no. 208 (December 2015).p. 9.

¹⁶ "Interview for ReUse." Interview by author. December 05, 2017.

¹⁷ Unioncamere. Cammere Di Commercio D’Italia. “Impresa in Genere: 3 Rapporto nazionale sull’imprenditoria femminile.” P 14.

¹⁸ Italy, European Commission. Enterprise and Industry. “Statistical Data on Women Entrepreneurs in Europe.” 2014. P 23.

of associations is another world).¹⁹ From her statement, I found that in the European Union, women were more likely to hold leadership positions within a nonprofit organization and men are more who are more likely to hold leadership positions in a for-profit organization.²⁰

Considering this finding, it is also examined that “nonprofit organizations, which typically support a value-based mission and vision, are perceived as more likely to employ women in upper level leadership positions due to the soft nature skills that these organizations support and due to the fact that nonprofit organizations are predominantly female.”²¹ It is clear to see why ReUse with Love is as successful as it is.

Women in the workplace in Italy is complicated because of all the outside factors that influence a woman’s role in Italian culture. There are religious, economic, educational, and family pulls that direct a woman’s career path in Italy. In a survey study conducted in 2012 and 2013 in Italy found that in the North 43% of women and 49% of men agreed that it is better for a family when the man works and the woman takes care of the home; compared to 49% of women and 57% of men in central Italy, and 51% of women and 60% of men in the South.²² To Italian society, women are viewed first as mothers and wives, which according to Italian culture, should be their full-time priority.²³ This assumption leads many businesses to either be reluctant on employing women or are not concerned with discharging women once they decide to have children. Women’s organizations have become a useful tool for achieving leadership roles within

¹⁹ "Interview for ReUse." Interview by author. December 05, 2017.

²⁰ Claus Vanessa, Jamie Callahan, Judy Sandlin, “Culture and leadership: women in nonprofit and for-profit leadership positions within the European Union.” Human Resource Development International, 2013.p 342.

²¹ Ibid. P 339.

²² Opinion on gender roles in family life by in Italy 2012-2013 | Survey

²³Panetta, Daniela . The Role of Italian Women vs. The Role of Italian-American Women. Report. Indiana University. Vol. 15. 2014. P.70.

the workplace. They have also allowed for women to challenge societal norms while pushing for modernity.

My experience with an internship at ReUse was very valuable, it taught me practical skills for my future and provided me with an experience that very few people get to have when they study abroad. I was very pleased with the operation as whole, from the way in which it was run primarily by women to the way in which they operated and what their nonprofit stands for. The passion that these ladies exhibit is beyond anything I could have imagined. They truly take the time to ensure that whoever is around them and around ReUse are receiving the best quality experience they can; no one is made to feel left out. This organization is surely important for the dynamics constructed in Italy, it is rare when women are given the opportunity to succeed by her own means. Due to the sexism and rigid cultural norms, women in Italy as well as in the European Union are in between the “glass ceiling” and “sticky floor” within the corporate world. For many women in the European Union, nonprofit organizations are a practical outlet for them to gain leadership roles over men, but overall, there is a low percentage of women owned businesses. The work that ReUse has done with the community of Bologna has inspired me to reevaluate what makes a genuine organization. The partnership that ReUse has with their community does not exist often; there is a sense of community whether it is on a small-scale within the boutique or on a large-scale during their markets. Speaking with the women at ReUse has given me the confidence and communication skills I need to be an effective leader. My chances of being heard are slimmer than men since I am a woman, but ReUse has taught me that women are valuable to the workplace environment because of our organization, communication, and compassionate skills that get the job done. The world needs more people like the women at ReUse.

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