

## MEMORY : FEMININE NOUN

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### **Abstract:**

*The Women International House of Trieste , and its Library and Documentation Centre "Elca Ruzzier", is a place run by for women, regardless of age and social and ethnic origin. It is a point of reference and stimulus to the political and programming action of institutions, and it is a physical expression of the network among organizations, associations and women's movements. In this place women can express their creativeness and ideas by organizing many activities of cultural exchange, discussion, and meeting, thus improving women's access to information and promoting their empowerment.*

*Here we will present a few of the most successful projects carried out recently by the House and its Library: MIAF, COMCITA, WOMEN STUDIES CONFERENCES, PUBLISHING HOUSE "VITA ACTIVA".*

**Keywords** : access to information, empowerment, women entrepreneurs, international women houses

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### **The House and its Library and Documentation Centre (1)**

The Women International House of Trieste and its Library and Documentation Centre "Elca Ruzzier" have the mission to :

underline the gender difference in every social, cultural and political aspect;  
encourage participation and debate on current issues and of particular interest to women; collect the experiences and testimonies, the knowledge and the history of women at local level;

become a place where it is possible to cultivate cultural activities, research and social engagement;  
support gender studies, also through meetings with authors and through reading groups.

The Library, with its bibliographic and documentary heritage, with a multilingual and a children section, is available for free consultation; a librarian is ready to help in bibliographic and legislative searches, to search the major sites and portals of gender studies in Europe and in cross-border regions.

The first nucleus of texts was the result of donations. Particular attention is devoted to poetry, narrative, biographical and autobiographical works of women of all ages, to artistic, scientific, philosophical, feminine production, to women's history and the analysis of gender difference.

The Library strives to collect and preserve books, journals, documents, photographs and audio-visual material relating to historical memory, cultural, political and social development of women and feminist movements, with particular reference to local realities.

This campaign of "memory recovery" involves single women, but also the world of voluntary associations, cultural and scientific institutions, and our partner women houses in Italy and abroad.

The Library and Documentation Centre is dedicated to the memory of Elca Ruzzier, who died on May 10, 2009 and was one of the landmarks of the women's movement in Trieste.

She was founder and President of the Association Goap (Anti-violence Centre) (6), Vice-President of the Commission for equal opportunities in the Province and a member of the Committee for equal opportunities of Trieste Municipality.

This was a tribute to a woman who devoted so much competent and passionate work to women and to the International House, thanks to her ability to combine so well culture and creativity.

Since a few months, a writer and very active member of the House has created a blog where you can find the activities and material of the Library.

See <http://centrodocumentazioneelcaruzzier.blogspot.it/>

## **Project MIAF (Micro Impresa Al Femminile = Women Micro Enterprise) (2)**

Recently the Documentation Centre contributed to set up an incubator project for the creation of micro enterprises for women, aimed at women who want to start a business independently, by creating small groups of people interested in the same productive activity and/or provision of services.

The project has to the goal of fostering the entrance of women into the work market by combining aspirations, needs and mutual support, integrating skills and aptitudes in a team work that strengthens the possibility to create your own "company project". It offers the opportunity to be supported and assisted through a social network in the territory which includes associations and professionals with expertise in this area.

The project is in particular aimed at:

1. removing the critical aspects of access to information ;
2. promoting contacts and collaborative networks;
3. developing the technical expertise in doing business ;

4. increasing women self-esteem by reinforcing the awareness of their abilities ;
5. contributing to the growth of micro enterprises for women;
6. ensuring mentoring and support during business start up.

One of the result of the project was the opening of new companies run by women who attended the courses, such as Curry Mix, a multiethnic food shop run by a Bengali woman. She found the courage to fulfill her dream after learning how to have more self-confidence and was able to put into practice what she learnt during the Miaf courses.

The Miaf experience lies also behind another company called "Femmedile", namely six women who entered the construction sector with the slogan "Mani eleganti per lavori pesanti" (Elegant hands for heavy works, but we lost the rhyme!) offering their competence in home and garden restyling and restoring.

See <http://ilpiccolo.gelocal.it/cronaca/2013/03/15/news/nuove-ditte-in-rosa-con-il-miaf-il-fai-da-te-1.6706293>

DALL'ALIMENTARE MULTIETNICO DI UNA BENGALESE A UN'AZIENDA EDILE

## Nuove ditte in "rosa" Con il Miaf il fai da te

di Annalisa perini

Rilanciarsi in gioco nel mondo del lavoro, ricominciando da sé, senza lasciarsi abbattere dall'effetto paralizzante della crisi. Nato sotto l'egida della Casa Internazionale delle Donne il progetto Micro Imprenditorialità ai femminile (Miaf) è stato ideato da Gabriella Taddeo, consigliera provinciale alla Partita, e Tania Crimaldi del Gap, attivo anche sul fronte della violenza economica, per venire incontro alle tantissime donne escluse dal lavoro o con il fiato sospeso sulle montagne russe della precarietà. Hanno risposto in più di 80, lo scorso autunno, ai primi "brainstorming", e a un'occasione di formazione orientata al fare impresa, a uno spazio in cui far emergere talenti, creatività, confrontarsi per dare vita a progetti concreti di lavoro autonomo.

Iris Parvin Khan, 37 anni, tre figli, originaria dal Bangladesh, vive a Trieste da sei anni. Il Miaf le ha dato lo sprone per concretizzare un sogno. «Ho



Iris Parvin Khan, 37 anni, tre figli, del Bangladesh (foto di vano)

lavorato come aiutante - racconta - in una nota pasticceria triestina, fino a una riduzione del personale. Mi sarebbe piaciuto aprire un bistro, ma oltre all'impegno economico pesante mi frenava lo stare via da casa tutte le sere. Pensavo ad un negozio, ma ero sfiduciata. Già compilare un "business plan" era uno scoglio. Al Miaf mi sono resa conto di quante cose "tecniche" non sapevo.

Imparandole ho ritrovato entusiasmo e fiducia in me. Il mio "Curry Mix" a breve diventerà realtà, un negozio di alimentari multietnici, con prodotti africani e asiatici, collegato alla cooperativa "4 continenti in cucina", servizio catering. Maria Niot è sua co-stanea. Molto spesso sono le donne con un alto profilo professionale, uscite dal mercato del lavoro, a faticare per rientrarvi.

DA DOMANI

### Mercatino dell'arte

A partire da domani, in piazza Piccola (in caso di pioggia sotto la Loggia del Palazzo Municipale), prenderà il via l'edizione 2013 del Mercatino dell'arte e dell'ingegno con prodotti di artigianato e hobbyistica, rigorosamente lavorati a mano attenderà gli appassionati e turisti. Il mercatino, a cura dell'associazione Hobbyistica Trieste che quest'anno compie 15 anni, sarà presente ogni terzo sabato del mese e precisamente, in esposizione, piatti di ceramica decorati, ceramiche artistiche, quadri coperti da fiori secchi, pietre colorate a guisa di coloratissimi animali, articoli di pelletteria (dal portafogli alla borsa alle figure di animali).

«Soprattutto - sottolinea - se l'idea che si possa pensare alla maternità diventa un ulteriore fattore discriminante. Madre di una bimba è stata responsabile del personale di "Radio Triestina". A lei facevano capo oltre 100 persone: si è ritrovata in mobilità. Ora avvia uno studio di consulenza aziendale dedicato alle imprese: investendovi una specializ-

zazione in "Total Quality Management". Ma al Miaf è sbocciata anche un'impresa edile con lo slogan "Mani eleganti per lavori pesanti". "Femmedile", spiega l'architetto Inda Manola, 52 anni, è nato pensando alle donne ma anche alle difficoltà che tutti possono incontrare nel re-styling di case e giardini.

«Alle donne - dice - viene rimproverato di essere pigre. Precise e affidabili quindi? Anche nell'edilizia due belle qualità. Da libera professionista ha risentito della crisi, ma «il Miaf è stato un dono del cielo. L'unione fa la forza, con aggregazioni in gruppi omogenei e ricchi di energia. Nel nostro siamo in sei, dai 25 ai 59 anni, con me due imbianchine e decoratrici, una serramentista, una restauratrice di mobili e chi si dedicherà un particolare alla creazione di complementi d'arredo con materiali riciclati». Gli altri progetti sono "Cid Comunication", agenzia di comunicazione dedicata al mondo femminile e alle associazioni, "Gutenberg 2.0", impresa di servizi editoriali anche on line, l'associazione editoriale e culturale "Vivaiva" e "Magictavelinfratando", studio di progettazione e organizzazione di viaggi a tema, attrezzato a rispondere ad esigenze particolari come quelle dei genitori single.

## Project COMCITA (Competenze di cittadinanza attiva per le donne immigrate = Active citizenship skills for immigrant women) (3)

The main difficulty for immigrant women in their role of citizens and mothers is the poor knowledge of the Italian language, which is a fundamental tool to help themselves and their children growing well in their new country.

Many immigrant women have a poor knowledge of Italian poorly and have few opportunities to socialize with other people outside the family.

This not only has a major influence on their integration and autonomy but also leads to other difficulties :

- ◆ difficulty in following Italian language courses provided by the official authorities, in looking for a job, in carrying out the assigned tasks accurately, in understanding the rules on safety at work;
- ◆ difficulty in getting correct information regarding health, schooling , banking, insurance, public administration, and in getting advantage of the many services for the citizens
- ◆ difficulty in achieving enough familiarity with the social and cultural environment;
- ◆ difficulty in understanding the laws and rules, and therefore in abiding to the rules enforced in the host country.

The project, through learning better the language, through promoting a better knowledge of the Italian society in its cultural and legal aspects, wants to reduce the isolation and invisibility of immigrant women that lead to apartheid and social malaise.

It aims at shortening social distances among immigrant women who are the weaker segment in our territory, promoting their integration, exchange of ideas and peaceful living.

If the immigrant population is more informed and aware, the work of the government services is easier and also lighter on the regional budget in the health, social, economic and education sectors.

## **Goals**

Considering that the Trieste Province (4) was already active in the territory, this Project wanted to focus on four fundamental issues:

1. to teach basic Italian because its knowledge is fundamental to attend the official language courses for foreigners; to give basic computer training so that one can pass the online language tests thus reducing digital divide;
2. to promote the use of health facilities and services for women and children: namely to visit the physical places and to explain how to access the services provided by the local health system and the family counseling; to provide information in order to help women to take care of their children effectively; to discuss the problem of women genital mutilation; to provide cultural support in order to help the pediatrician to communicate with foreign mothers;
3. to develop citizenship skills, namely to help women in their relations with local institutions operating in the social, health, work and education areas; to inform about the rules and the laws according to which people can benefit from different local services;
4. to develop knowledge of the territory, namely getting to know the physical places of our local institutions: Province, Region (5) , Municipality, Prefecture, Law-Court, Police etc.; getting to know their functional structure; getting to know the territory of Trieste province, its cultural diversity, its different communities, promoting contacts among groups of people belonging to different cultures and origins and now living in the city and its surroundings.

## **Target and place of the activities**

COMCITA was devised for foreign women living in the Trieste province who have a low level literacy or a totally different literacy.

Women participating to this first courses were from Bangladesh, Senegal, Arab countries, China, Eritrea, Liberia, Sudan, Niger, Thailand, Tunisia, Kosovo, Japan, Somalia, Palestine, Egypt, Algeria.

It was decided the Women International House to be the perfect place to carry out the majority of these activities, since many of the participants had limited freedom of movement and very scarce opportunities to socialize with other people.

The House was suited for many reasons: a “feminine” space, with a computer room for lessons, a conference room for discussion, performance, showing; it is easily reached by bus; a play room for children and a kitchen allowed to have a babysitting service which was essential for the young women to participate.

The House wants to become a “landmark” of Trieste territory, a place where to meet, to experiment social and cultural inclusion and growth, where foreign women can feel protected, can express their skills and creativity, find services tailored on their needs.

## **Speakers, teachers, cultural mediators**

The Italian language and computer training courses were taught by teachers with experience of different cultural environments, but cultural mediators were always at disposal. These mediators gave support also during the meetings with institutional personnel, during the seminars held by hospital personnel about health problems, and during the guided tours over the territory.



## **Italian language and computer training courses**

Four classes of 40 hours each : 2 classes for illiterate women (1 class of Chinese women, 1 class of mixed nationalities); 2 classes for women with different alphabet languages (1 class of Arab and Bengali women, 1 class of mixed nationalities).

The lessons, held in the computer room, aimed at teaching the latin alphabet, basic knowledge of Italian and of the use of computer to ease their access to the institutional courses for foreigners.

### **Women and children health**

Ten seminars were held for a total of about 22 hours. A few doctors from Trieste Health Service talked about pregnancy, cancer prevention, abortion prevention, means of contraception, feminine genital mutilations, children's health, effective dialogue between pediatricians and immigrant mothers.

### **Citizenship skills**

Eight seminars were held for a total of about 16 hours, aiming at illustrating the local services of Public Administration, Education, Province Work office, Province Work Headquarters, Police and Prefecture offices for immigrants, in order to know the regulations and functions of these bodies. Meetings were organized with women associations of the city and a lecture on the multicultural history of Trieste, which was useful to take advantage of the city visits and tours which were going to be made.

All these meetings and seminars were open to the families of the women taking part in the project.



*foto marisa ulcigrai*

### **Knowledge of the territory**

Guided tours in the city and surroundings for about 28 hours; the tours were made by bus and tram.

In order to give a broad overview of the cultural, ethnical, linguistic and religious features of Trieste, several meetings were organized with the different communities such as the Jewish community and Association of Jewish Women; the Serbian community with a visit to the Serbian-Orthodox church; the Croatian community; the German community with a visit to the Evangelical church, and a visit to the Goethe Institute; the Greek community with a visit to the Greek-Orthodox church; the Slovenian women association with a visit to the Karst House.

## **“Vita Activa” Publishing House : an independent publishing project**

The project of setting up an independent publishing house is in progress : this project is more strictly related to the activities and interests of the Library.

This publishing house aims at giving visibility to women writers, starting from the writing workshops and from the literary contests held in the House; at filling the book market gaps about forgotten women authors, with particular attention to the local production; at finding novels and essay works by both national and international women authors, which have not yet been published in Italy and make them known.

### **A conferences' cycle called the Women Studies (6)**

The Documentation Centre is taking active part in a conferences' cycle aiming at giving visibility to doctoral dissertations which deal with gender topics. It is a very important initiative because these works would otherwise be known only within the university circle. These conferences draw the attention of local population on gender topics in the framework of activities supported by the Trieste Province.

So far there have been three conferences given by young women graduated at Trieste University in the Psychology and in the Law Departments.

on December 17th, 2013 – In a conference called “Little miss...used : girls' bodies in the media” Elena CUMANI and Anita Baicu presented their dissertations, respectively dealing with the sexualized images and contents found in girls' magazines, and with the influence on adults imagination produced by girls' pictures as sexual objects.

on February 4th, 2014 - Federica Bastiani presented her dissertation “I'm not a feminist, but...” : new generations and Feminism , where she explores the relation between Feminism and young women, the quality of man-woman relationship among young people, how far is gender equality accomplished, etc.

on May 6th, 2014 - Rachele Bonazzon presented her dissertation “When violence kills. Femicide : from the Istanbul Convention to a national law to prevent violence on women”, which deals with the terrible problem of more than 120 women killed in Italy each year by husbands, fiancés, men of the family, friends etc., and for which a new word has been created : Femminicidio – Femicide.

### **And Last but non Least : 05.05.2014 - Go on Italia - Go On Women FVG (7)**

The 5th of May 2014 was named D-Day, i.e. Digital Day, namely the starting day of the project "Go On Italia", aiming at increasing digital skills of citizens, enterprises, and Public Administration.

Friuli-Venezia Giulia is the first Italian region to go digital, with more than 100 seminars, workshops and meetings organized by Wikitalia and many other institutions.

At the Women International House a free lesson was given by one of her members on learning how to use institutional sites, how to download apps, how to enter safely the social media, under

the slogan : + time for yourself - bureaucracy = digital agenda

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