

From Italy to London – Diana Cetara’s non-profit business links up European students and new start-ups

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Suffer without complaining is the one lesson you have to learn in life. That maverick genius Van Gogh said it again and again. And yet, it seems that the new generations have inherited the pessimism of our ancestors, but not their humility. In fact, today’s young people looking ahead to an uncertain future tend to complain. And how! On the other hand, you can’t blame them.

Newly qualified young people in their twenties with degrees or A-level qualifications are increasingly aware of the difficulty of getting a foothold in the labour market. As well as looking for jobs as employees they now tend to

think of setting up their own businesses.

Great or small as the challenge may be, more and more tools are available to the budding entrepreneur. As well as the recent legislation on start-ups and the easily accessible competitions promoted by Chambers of Commerce, when it comes to finding staff there are now excellent channels for recruiting new graduates from all over Europe, who are keen to gain motivating work experience providing they are enabled to make a real contribution to the development of a business.

There was a time when this kind of thing only happened in other countries, examples to be copied and maybe imported; nowadays, thanks to the European Community, it is possible to communicate directly with work placement agencies.

These are the positive aspects of an increasingly international training market. Specific examples are the heroes who manage initiatives funded by the **Leonardo da Vinci Mobility project**. The purpose of the Leonardo project is to offer new graduates work and study experience in good quality companies. In most cases the funding is managed by universities, which often have agreements with medium to large-sized companies; the result is that the students end up with so-called “photocopier” work experience. However there are also organizations which work with small local enterprises in need of staff, energy and inventiveness, and which make a real contribution to making the world a better place.



In Great Britain the best organization (as recognized by awards and certificates) of this kind is **The United Euro Bridge**. It is a receptacle for energies and CVs, and at the same time a business – the only English non-profit company in this field – dealing with international recruiting. It links resources with projects and allocates qualified staff to salaried work placements in projects all over Europe.

The head of the business is an energetic Italian woman with a very feminine headquarters: an office-cum-home in South Kensington, in the centre of London.

Diana Cetara, who has three grown-up sons and five full-time employees, found her role in life in the homeland of Virginia Woolf. “I came here at the age of twenty-two – she told me in her office, surrounded by a myriad of ornaments, house plants and sweets – after taking a degree in Chinese language and culture at Ca’ Foscari University in Venice. It was in the Seventies, when the whole of Europe was in a ferment of change. As soon as I set foot in London I realized that here I would finally find my path in life”.

Diana has done various different kinds of job in her life, providing for her family and children. Her most recent post, before setting up this enterprise which is so closely involved with the European Community, was as manager of the IT Department of University.

“It was an important role, but over time it became purely bureaucratic” she explained. “I quite liked being a manager and organizing people and budgets. But not just doing that. At that point I could perhaps have done the same thing in Italy, in my family’s business. I had chosen to work in a University to be in contact with students, because I enjoy exchanging experiences with the people I work with. I wanted to regain a human dimension in my professional life”.

Thus in 2003 Diana decided to make a clean break and start all over again. After a pause for reflection and a few years off work for herself, at a certain point “I realized, thanks to a colleague who was working for the European Community, that I could do a lot more to develop new projects. Responding to specific public competitions, I could connect together people, businesses and professional skills. The Leonardo project, within which we operate, is a complex tool but it enables people to make their dreams come true; it pays for work and provides a salary for students, without employers having to deal with the organizational procedures”.



Over the last eight years Diana with the help of Ali Khan, the CFO of The United Euro Bridge, have developed about forty projects, including working with the Italian **Slow Food** organization and **Archipelagos**, a Greek initiative.

As well as working with existing businesses Diana helps organisations realise their full potential and advises how to share and expand their unique expertise. This is how the English project **Full of Life** is developing. It is a unique charity shaped and driven by parents of disabled children who wanted to make sure services were developed to meet their children’s needs and their needs as parent carers. Over the years Full of Life have proven that money in the right hands can make huge differences to families and save Local Authorities money. For example to support one of the young people Full of Life work with in a residential placement would cost 70% more than the current cost of their placement at Full of Life. It is because of the high quality local services Full of Life delivers that families choose this option. This is not only beneficial for families; it is beneficial for local communities.

Full of Life is first and foremost a magical place, a timber house in the middle of a wood, right in the centre of London. It is a centre for children, young people and parents to learn and has a wealth of expertise and information that can help parents to help each other in practical and emotional ways. One example of this is how to understand different methods of communication, to have everyone’s voice heard! This is done using touchscreens, iPad’s, communication boards the list goes on! Most importantly Full of Life helps families to feel valued, less isolated and vulnerable, because it is run by

parents of disabled children, who live the life! Diana recognised this uniqueness and has given this non-profit organisation advice on how to fund raise and how to share this expertise with other parents throughout Europe.

This is the kind of way in which The United Euro Bridge can open up new prospects and activities. It is also able to recruit qualified staff in areas where the classic recruiting tools are often imprecise, too impersonal and not suitable for the purpose, paying students and apprentices directly with European funding.

But this is not all they do. For already existing European businesses and organizations, **The United Euro Bridge** offers both a consultancy service and assistance with business recovery; that is to say, the possibility of broadening the areas of improvement in the organization's activity and of helping businesses in difficulty by supplying suitable staff free of charge.

It acts as a kind of business angel which, for a given period of time, works alongside a business as it goes through a difficult patch, or, more simply, provides staff for projects which would not have survived.



Archipelagos is a prime example. It is a full-blown organization for the protection of biodiversity. Headed by a very young and very courageous girl called Anastasia Milou, it was set up in 1998 and promotes the conservation of the marine environment in Greece. She was just twenty-three years old, and had recently completed her degree, when she left home and began to spend 6 entire years at sea. "With the support of Greek, UK, US and other international universities and the invaluable help of Diana, who each year picks out qualified young people who aspire to doing something a bit different and love the sea, our organization aims to preserve the rare wildlife of the Greek seas which is largely unknown to the public. We do this by tracking

the presence of illegal fishing vessels which frequently, especially during night-time and storms, infringe the Greek and EU laws and by evaluating the spread of various pollutants in marine ecosystems. We also work closely with the local fishing communities from which we learn a lot" says Anastasia. "It is important to avoid being seen as people who come along and want to give lessons. On the contrary, we want to collaborate in order to promote the birth and growth of a shared culture of respect for the sea".

Working to conserve the sea is not a simple matter. You don't earn much. You simply cover your costs. And you are always on the move. To begin with it feels like an adventure. After over a decade, well ... Anastasia is a kind of missionary for nature. As she says, "If I can cover my board and lodging and do a job I love, that is enough for me. For me this is what life is about. Seeing all of this hard work bringing results to protect this unique wildlife makes everything worth it"

You could say the same about Diana. Despite having lived a difficult life, with health problems and sentimental complications, her constant motto remains "never give up". An authentic European Business Angel, she has created a unique platform from which many fruits will germinate and grow.

Photos of Diana Cetara by Armando Rotoletti.