

*TERRITORIES FOR MENTAL HEALTH:  
AN EMPOWERMENT PROCESS THROUGH PEER-COLLABORATION  
AMONG COMMUNITY DISTRICT STAKE-HOLDERS*

---

**Fabio Lucchi**

Dipartimento Salute Mentale  
Azienda Ospedaliera Desenzano del Garda  
Unità Operativa di Psichiatria n°24  
tel. 0309037383 e-mail: fabio.lucchi@aod.it

**Adresse professionnelle**

Località Montecroce, Desenzano del Garda  
(Brescia, Italia)

**Résumé** : Le projet appelé Equal Territoirs pour la santé mentale naît de la collaboration parmi les départements de santé mentale, ceux de coopération sociale, les municipalités et les associations des usagers et des membres de leurs familles en neuf districts de la Santé Publique en Lombardie. Les théories que ce projet se propose de vérifier concernent le fait que l'inclusion sociale des gens avec des troubles mentaux graves n'est possible et efficace avec une responsabilisation des protagonistes principaux sur un territoire à l'égard des questions de santé mentale et d'une implication active des usagers mêmes.

Ce projet prévoit dans ses actions la réalisation d'un instrument pour le monitoring et l'amélioration des politiques locales pour favoriser la promotion de la santé mentale appelée Manual pour l'accréditation entre pair des territoires socialement responsables de santé mentale.

**Summary** : The Equal Project Territories for Mental Health is based on a collaboration among nine districts in Lombardia involving mental health departments, social cooperation, municipalities and users and their families associations. The project aims to put to the test that social inclusion of persons with psychiatric disorders is feasible and efficacious only when there is a strong responsibility of the most important actors of a definite territory about mental illness issues and when there is an active involvement of users themselves.

The project is composed by a set of various actions and one of the most important is the production of a tool for monitoring and improving local policies for mental health promotion that is called "Manual for the peer accreditation of social responsibility of territories for mental health".

**Mots clés** : Promotion de la santé mentale, inclusion sociale, accréditation entre pair, implication active des usagers

**Keywords** : Mental health promotion, social inclusion, empowerment, peer-accreditation, stake-holders involvement

## Territories for mental health: an empowerment process through peer-collaboration among community district stake-holders

The Equal project “Territories for Mental Health” involves nine districts in Lombardia (three in the Brescia area, four in the Milano area and two in the Varese area).

The steering group of the project is composed of Confcooperative, a trade union scheme for social cooperation, Departments of Mental Health, municipalities, regional associations of service users and their families and QUASM, a scientific society for Quality and Accreditation in Mental Health Services.

Shared visions of mental health, cross-agency working, are active ingredients of a local community that moves towards an integrated set of policies for social inclusion.

The achievement of these goals should be pursued with a partnership approach among mental health services, local authorities, social cooperation, third sector, users and their families.

If mental health is broader and more complex of the map of “regular” mental health services it deals necessarily with cross-boundaries local policies, community features and general attitudes referring to the concepts of social capital and community capacity.

There is a growing emphasis on different methodologies and frameworks aiming to assure quality in mental health delivery but these are often efforts within the institutional mental health service systems and they don’t focus their attention to the wider community context as an important factor in health promotion.

Aside of certification and quality awards implying a “third party” evaluators who set the standards for their systems of indicators, it seems that a bottom-up and peer-to-peer approach could facilitate a wider and deeper knowledge in communities about mental health issues as a common basis for more efficacious actions.

If communities and neighborhoods do impact processes and modulate psychosocial outcomes of interventions then there is a need for instruments to read, analyse and eventually promote a change in local policies affecting mental health.

“Territories for Mental Health” aims to bring together in each involved district significant stakeholders from public and private sector, professionals and users in scheduled meeting and ask them to define dimensions and indicators useful to measure and enhance the “social responsibility” of local communities for mental health.

Each group will choose tutors from a panel of mental health and health promotion experts who

The background of the project is the result of a previous Equal project (Equal Assist) that aimed to the application to psychosocial rehabilitation programs for persons with severe mental illness of a quality management tool called the Patient’s pathway.

One of the lessons learnt by Assist is that recovery processes towards social inclusion for persons with psychiatric disorders get positive outcomes if there is a strong support and shared responsibilities from local communities.

will facilitate and give advice along the empowerment process. The materials produced by each groups will be shared, discussed among all the partners in plenary sessions and the result of these “consensus operations” will be the Peer-review Accreditation Manual of the Social Responsibility of Local Communities for Mental Health.

In a second phase of the project each district will be visited by other partners in order to verifying indicators previously established and the compliance with the commonly agreed standards.

At the end of the visit, the visitor partners will provide a report to local administrators and mental health service system managers of the results of the inspection.

The regular use of the Manual procedures will provide a “big picture” of a district concerning mental health and particularly the cross-boundaries policies implied in mental health promotion at community level.

Starting from the analysis level, it will start an improvement process of those aspects and weaknesses pointed out.

The aim of the project is also the networking of different districts and the sharing of experiences on a peer consultation basis, with a multidisciplinary approach.

The project implies also a transnational section that will involves partners from France and Lettonia and a collaboration under the framework of International Initiative Mental Health Leadership (IIMHL). The IIMHL is infact promoting an international research on social inclusion, the Community Engagement and Social Inclusion Collaborative that is gathering partners from UK, USA, Australia, New Zealand and Italy: the main goal of this study is to strenghten the evidence base of effective interventions in social inclusion, empowerment and community engagement fields.