



Incubators for CO-productive Enterprises and Social Inclusion (IN-CUBA) Project

Intellectual Output 4

***Pilot Actions: testing the co-productive
methodology for incubating enterprises for people
with intellectual disability***



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1. Introduction

IN-CUBA is an ERASMUS+ funded project aimed at developing a methodology based on co-production addressed to people with intellectual disability to support the development of ideas and projects to transform them into enterprises (considered in its widest meaning).

The methodology is the result of several steps, a first analysis of users' needs and requirements (IO1), a research on levers and obstacles in the access to entrepreneurship for people with intellectual disability (IO2), and several co-productive focus-groups that helped shape the result (IO3). Once adopted the methodology, the partnership proceeded with its testing in dedicated pilot actions in each country involved. The testing of the IN-CUBA co-productive methodology, aimed at incubating entrepreneurial ideas and projects for people with intellectual disabilities, was a very important phase of the project, as it allowed to put into practice the elements elaborated by the partnership and get significant feedback from all the users involved. These feedbacks, together with the evaluation reports (IO5), helped updating and refining the methodology.

This methodology, based on the principles of co-production, places the person at the centre and focuses on his/her potential, providing important tools in order to develop an alternative and possible way to entering the labour market as entrepreneurs.

The Methodology is based on 5 phases that aim at supporting people with intellectual disability in identifying and developing an idea, transform it into a project, and eventually into an enterprise: 1) Enabling, empowering (triggering potential); 2) Idea generation; 3) planning & realization; 4) stabilization; 5) evaluation.

What makes this methodology unique is the co-productive approach used for its development and deployment, together with the importance given to knowledge and skills of all in order to achieve, each in its own field, a common goal. In other words, building the "business of individual dreams" in a collective mentality, bringing personal skills to common realization.



2. Organisation

The testing phase has been organized in four phases (corresponding to the first four steps of the methodology) and a final separate step, impact and evaluation that corresponds to a separate Output:

1. Analysis (enabling, empowering)
2. Objectives (Collecting, generating and developing ideas)
3. Opportunities (Idea Development - from idea to practice-
4. Feasibility (Stabilization)

The testing has been planned and organised (initially) via co-productive focus-groups according to the guidelines already followed during the first stage of the project implementation. However, the pandemic and the confinement measures that have been adopted in all the countries involved impacted on the project activities and in particular on the Focus groups planned for the testing phase (several organisations involved in the project were forced to close their front-line services leaving users at home for safety reason). Nevertheless, even in face of an uncertain situation, all partners manifested a strong commitment to move on with the project and agreed to work online when physical meetings were not possible. In this sense, thanks to the experience already developed by OpenGroup (partner of the project), who pre-tested this methodology during the first lockdown and shared its approach and tips with all the partnership in a dedicated webinar, all partners were able to organise effective online co-productive focus groups.



3. Execution

Each pilot has been carefully planned and each plan presented to the partnership. This has been useful so each partner has been able to confront the plan and eventually integrate it.

As anticipated, the testing phase has been organized in four phases (corresponding to the first four steps of the methodology) and a final separate step, impact and evaluation that corresponds to a separate Output:

1. Analysis (enabling, empowering)
2. Objectives (Collecting, generating and developing ideas)
3. Opportunities (Idea Development - from idea to practice-
4. Feasibility (Stabilization) For each phase, through experimentation of the methodology, a set of **recommendations have been identified**.

In particular, the testing phases have been structured as follows:

➤ Phase 1:

Starting from existing projects, partners have been involved in focus groups aimed at the recognition of existing projects / activities in their organization. The focus groups revolved around following questions:

- what we are able to do?
- what are our skills?
- resources involved
- strengths and weaknesses
- choice of possible activities to “incubate”.

➤ Phase 2:

Partners have been invited to compare and analyze identified projects and to build a map of ideas, inserting all the ideas, without limitations. Indeed, in this phase the leading questions were:

- what ideas could be developed?



- how could activities evolve?

➤ **Phase 3:**

Partners have been invited to discuss following questions related to the possibility/way to expand the map by entering resources:

- what other realities could be involved?
- who could help us?
- where can I find resources?
- what other skills do I need? How can I get them?

➤ **Phase 4:**

Participants have been reflecting on how to reduce the map to what is really possible and allocate the tasks. Leading questions were the following:

- difficulties encountered? What are the limits?
- obstacles to overcome
- what did I learn?

During the focus groups it was highly **recommended** to use all the tools available following the co-production methodology.

Moreover, for each phase a small report was required to emphasize:

- activity performance
- critical points
- suggestions.

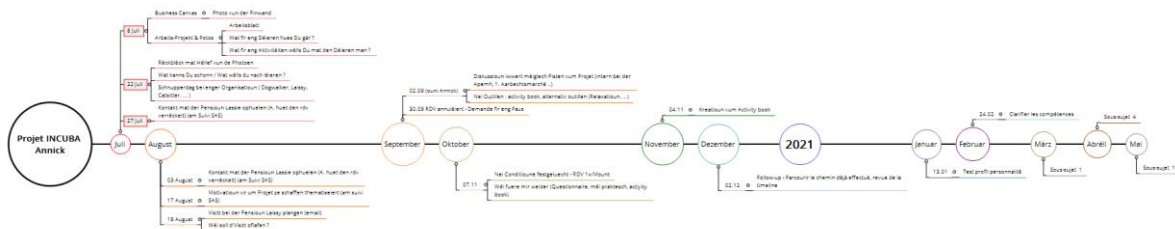
All partners were able to successfully participate and contribute to the piloting phase. Indeed, **participants were all involved in several sessions/meetings**, which have been performed **both face-to-face and online**, given the necessity to overcome the Covid-19 impasse.

Here we are happy to report a summary of the activities carried out by each partner involved in the pilots.



➤ APEMH

APEMH decided to organise the pilot with Annick, a 37 years old girl who has always dreamt of working with pets. The objective of this pilot has been to help Annick clarify her pet sitting project and support her in its development and implementation.



Several focus group sessions have been organised in order to present the project and discuss with her how to develop an entrepreneurial project starting from her dream. It wasn't always easy as Annick couldn't stay focus more than 30 minutes, and sometimes it was necessary to go back in order to move forward.

The first sessions helped Annick clarify the idea a shape the project, which developed into a pet sitter activity. In session three, APEMH organised a meeting with a pet pension, which provided Annick with elements to further shape her plan.

After this session however, Annick demanded a break because the activity was becoming somewhat stressful. The focus groups were resumed in November 2020 and the sessions have been integrated with use of images, whiteboard and more examples.

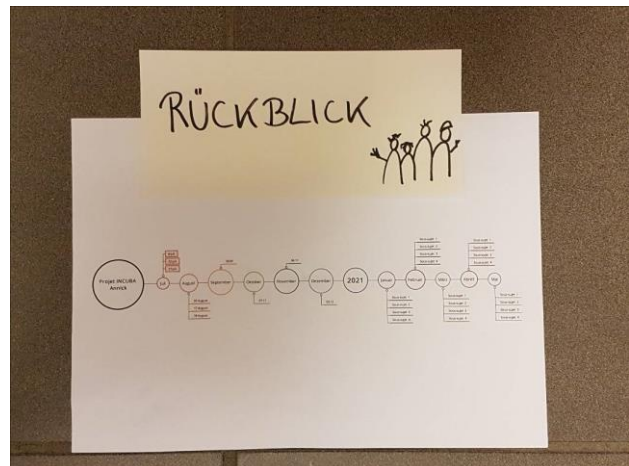
Here it was difficult to move from phase two to three, and it was impossible to reach stabilisation. However, this experience proved to be extremely useful and it provided educators with a set of feedbacks on how to work in the definition and development of a project.

In particular, lessons learned can be summarised as follow:

- Co-construct the necessary tools in according to user's needs;
- It is a work in progress, you need to be prepared to adapt when necessary.
- Activities with external experts should be carefully prepared and order to avoid over stressing sensitive users;



- A key tool for testing entrepreneurial motivation: the personality test.
- Framework conducive to action: music, free space to move, activities done while standing, it's the person who acts. Clarify that we are in an "experimental" setting
- Take photos to keep track of the way;
- Work on movement and the body, do not over-solicit the "thoughts" mode;
- end each session with a result and an Anchoring performed by the person with the formula of their choice: stapler, put the photos in the book
- Integration of the tools produced in the project in other work situations: timeline, activity book, test ...
- Interest in having an external perspective
- Opportunities: peer support, focus group with several people involved in such an approach.



➤ **Delork**

Delork professionals organised an information meeting to explain the concept of 'entrepreneurship' via video and to find out what talents are. In a second exercise they tried to develop business ideas with all the talents that they discovered during the first exercise (a total of 12 users participated).



Users then had a few weeks to think and come up with their own business idea. They communicated their ideas through an easy-to-read **form**. (a total of 6 users entered a business idea).

Professionals organised a **jury-moment** with a panel of 4 experts. 6 users presented their business idea. The jury used a number of criteria:

- a. Achievable;
- b. Innovative;
- c. Entrepreneurship;
- d. Enthusiasm;
- e. Possible partnerships;
- f. Local: in Brussels.

The jury deliberated right after the presentations. They then gathered every candidate around the table to go through every project individually and point out all the strengths per candidate. This was important for the self-esteem of the candidates. Finally, they announced the winning project and explained why this project was the best based on the criteria mentioned above.

At a second stage, Delork had 5 live focus group sessions and 1 learning expedition before COVID-19, while during the period May 2020 – February 2021 they organised 6 online focus group sessions, using MS Teams.

The most appreciated activity was a learning expedition to a 'repair café'. Users learned a lot about what is necessary during the start-up phase, about which steps to take first.



Occasionally, some experts were invited to the focus groups to help with a specific item, e.g., the logo, slogan, ... This outsider perspective always provided new oxygen to the focus group.

Professionals used an online game 'be your own boss' as an alternative for a business model canvas (<https://eigenbaas.hetklokhuis.nl/>).





➤ **FENACERCI**

At FENACERCI all the sessions were conducted online, scheduled once a week, during the months of December, January and February, although with some gaps in between due to the confinement measures.

The sessions were facilitated by 2 Fenacerci professionals, the ones that are currently responsible for the project. In some of the sessions some front-line staff also participated. Indeed, both Fenacerci professionals are certificated trainers used to developed similar activities (face to face and online) having as target group people with disabilities.

The persons with intellectual disabilities who attended these online pilot actions were from Fenacerci associated members.

During the online sessions trainers could identify how challenging this situation was. It required more preparation in order to maintain the level of participation and interest of all involved people. Therefore, the trainers have always tried to create dynamic and appealing visual support, as well as developing participation methodologies that promote group discussion and the involvement of all at the same level.

A work programme divided into 6 sessions was set up: Online meetings - Individual work programme worked on collectively:

- 1st Meeting - Sharing background information
- 2nd Meeting - Gathering and developing ideas I
 - Framework
 - Objectives
 - Steps
 - Deadlines
- 3rd Meeting - Gathering and Developing Ideas II
 - Individual and collective strengths and competences - identification
 - Resources to be used



- Barriers and obstacles
- 4th Meeting - Turning ideas into reality
 - What does it mean to be an entrepreneur then?
 - The role of the self in making my dream comes true
 - Dissemination strategies
- 5th Meeting - Stabilizing ideas
 - Sustainability strategies
- 6th Meeting - Evaluating the ideas
 - Evaluation
 - Impact on quality of life

The timetables and the contents were considered very useful and important to create the first steps for an entrepreneur mind set.

The homework was very successful to guide the work sessions contents and also the personal dream of each participant.

Nevertheless, the project teams feels that if the sessions were made face to face the benefit could be bigger due to the personal relationships developed and also the participations methodologies that could be done (role playing, visits to different working places, making interviews to entrepreneurs and so on). This was of course not possible due to the Covid-19 situation.





➤ **Opengroup**

Opengroup had three remote focus groups: one to review the Project from a general perspective and its objectives and two to focus on the selected projects and therefore the ideas to be developed.

Three subgroups were formed that worked with the same methodology: a total of 10 people with disabilities, 3 family members, 4 people belonging to public institutions, 2 people who carry out social activities in the area participated.

Six permanent educators and one manager supported and participated in the project focus groups.

The welcome activity to focus on points and objectives was the construction of tutorials on entrepreneurial activities and the use of quizzes as learning activities, elaborated with Google sheets by people with disabilities with the support of educators.

The experimentation and use of digital technology in all cooperative's activities has helped to welcome and quite easily develop this attitude. Within the quizzes, different colour palettes were used to express the various preferences (green - red) as a clear and visible tool for active participation.

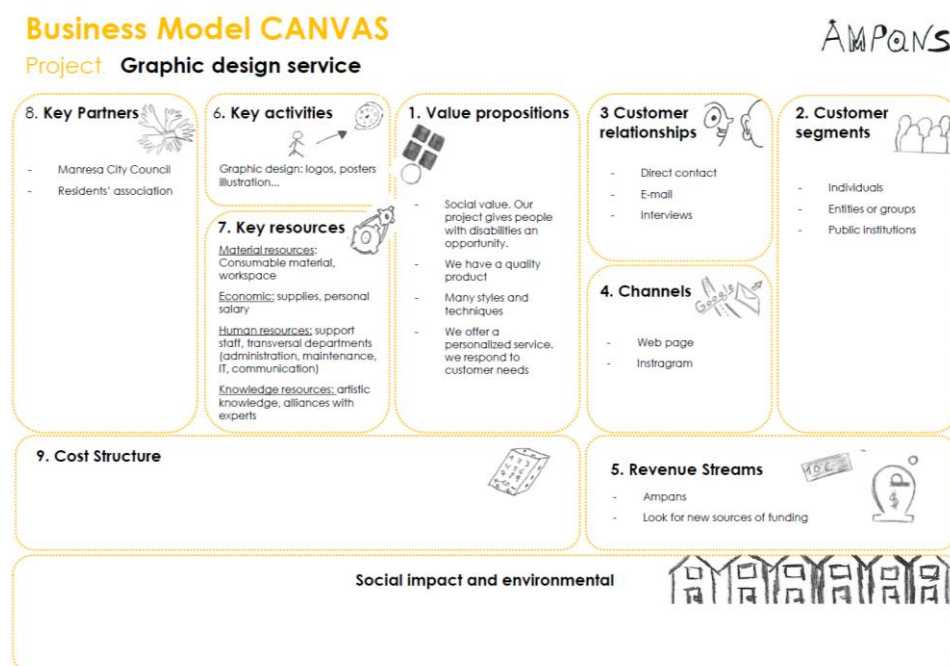
The methodology was clear and appropriate for the people who worked. They have also chosen to use other tools, being in line with the choices they made within their projects and services. The reference to the tools used in the co-production facilitated some steps and moments.





➤ Ampans

Ampans organised 4 meetings, one for each phase, both online and face to face. The meeting last one full day each and were further enriched by some integrative short meetings with the users involved. The focus groups were particularly fruitful and helped shaping some projects also with the help of social business model canvas.



A total of 12 users participated.

The activities/features that were particularly appreciated are the following:

- Entrepreneurship training for an external teacher
- Participation of users in meetings with potential clients for design projects
- Use of images, objects and power, visual support
- Adaptation of the Canvas Model
- To Summarize each session to recall topics and objectives
- Teamwork, brainstorming and business creation activities.

Thanks to the “Business Model Canvas” following actions have been performed:

1. Graphic design of the menus for Itaca Restaurant



2. Reading club poster for Municipal Library
3. Logo “La Font es mou” neighborhood sports activity
4. Logo for a radio program “la veu dels valentes”
5. Poster of literary festival “Tocats de Lletra”
6. Design of two wine label
7. Design of a beer label
8. Illustrated foil for the company “The Impact gift Co”
9. Logo design and signage for a market stall.

Participants had the opportunity to learn:

- New artistic techniques
- Knowledge of graphic design and art
- How to deal with a client
- The different parts of the creation process (from the idea to the final)
- To value the opinions of classmates
- To appreciate that peer ideas can be better than your own
- To work in a team.

Laura

I am 31 years old

I work as a gardener at the Garden of Ampans

I am funny and cheerful

I have the qualification in agricultural farms and
in comic illustration



The infographic features a black and white portrait of Laura on the left. To her right are four orange hexagonal callouts: 1. 'SKILL Draw' with an illustration of a person drawing. 2. 'EXPERIENCE' with text: 'She made illustrations for calendars and she collaborated drawing pictures for local newspapers' and a drawing of a character. 3. 'Her GOAL is to publish a children's book' with a drawing of a book cover. 4. A drawing of a character's head.



➤ **CADIAI**

Cadiai organised two focus groups in presence and 4 remote ones.

The focus groups involved users, educators and professionals (pedagogists and psychologists) who work with users on a daily basis.

In the first phase potentials were analysed, what each person was able to do and would like to enhance.

After a first moment of uncertainty, it was not easy to identify talents, the potential of the "group" was written down.

Then, with the help of posters, we put the talents together and tried to develop a business idea.

At a later stage we drew up a business plan with a special focus on all the collaborative realities that could help develop the idea.

For this phase it was fundamental to make available all the possible realities, the users then chose those they considered of greatest interest and possible success.

Three different projects were identified to work on:

- Soap bubbles" activity
- Cooking activities, with a particular focus on pizza
- Batick activity

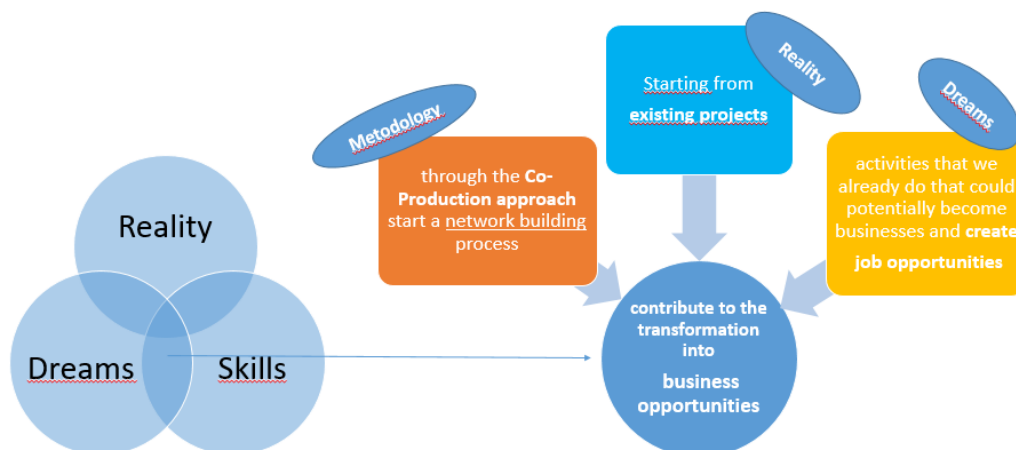




In a final session it was decided, in a shared way, which of the three activities was most appropriate to develop and the batik activity was chosen, on which a business plan was created. Cadiai has found this **methodology** to be a very **valid tool**; in particular, the path to enhancing the talents of each person is outlined, thus starting from an attitude of attribution of value to the person, rather than a deficit with regard to what he or she does not know how to do.

There is then an extremely important step, it is the one in which from the enhancement of talents and the "dream" of what could be, we move on to the analysis of reality and then to "model" the dream according to the real possibilities.

How to turn activities into businesses...





Comments & Recommendations

The pilot had a positive development, event in face of the difficulties caused by the confinement measures. Here some consideration regarding the different phases.

➤ **Phase 1 Analysis: enabling, empowering**

The main objective of this phase was to discuss and consider on what entrepreneurship means and the concept of enterprise in a co-productive environment. In particular, this first step was meant to provide people with intellectual disabilities with information and perspectives able to widen their perspective and increase their self-confidence, proposing a new angle for their self-development where they can see themselves as potential entrepreneurs. The discussion focused on fuelling ideas and give participants time to start imagining, allowing potential candidates to emerge. Another key aspect was to discover what you are passionate about and what you want to develop and achieve in your future. Identify your talents and how to empower them to successfully achieve your goals.

Comments to Phase 1

In this phase, a critical aspect to keep in mind is the active involvement of users, and when the activities involve more participants it is important to keep the whole group active.

A very high risk, in a teamwork context, it is that the people with a 'less leading' attitude remain 'in the shadows'. Some of the co-design techniques developed in the Enable project proved to be very useful in engaging all participants. A good trick is to make participants dream, the sky is the limit. Starting from their own interests and talents is a good idea.

It is important to trigger users to be part of the conversation, help even those who find it hardest to be protagonists.

3 points should be retained:

- Identify yourself (strengths, weaknesses)



- Identify your passions
- Identify your desires

Some users have little confidence in their abilities, it is important to show them the positive aspects, the potential they have.

In this phase, professionals must be particularly careful of possible frustrations that users might experience, it is also a matter here of doing all the steps with extreme care.

➤ **Phase 2: Collecting, generating and developing ideas**

The main focus of the second phase was to identify an idea or project to be further developed. This is a rather ambitious goal because it is not easy to translate a passion into a concrete idea, but the co-productive approach and some specific indications that the methodology provided to educators, have been very useful.

Comments to Phase 2

Since this is not an easy task, it is important to remain positive and concentrate on emphasizing the strengths of each project. Moreover, it is important that participants do not get discouraged; it is not easy to "turn dreams into concrete activities".

It is important that the people involved in the focus group work in a co-productive way from the beginning, using tools to stimulate a critical view.

One element to be considered very carefully is the frustration that may develop when an idea it is difficult to realize it concretely. It is therefore useful to define all the different steps and do not expect to get everything done quickly.

Users tend to "dream really big". The focus groups played an important role into providing a "border" to their aspirations and grow from a broad idea to a more specific and realistic business plan.

➤ **Phase 3: Idea Development - Planning & Realization**

Having identified ideas and potential projects, how to begin to develop a plan?



The objective of the third phase is to understand **how to develop the idea**, how to transform the dream into reality, checking its feasibility, its innovative characteristics, confronting it with experiences already developed by others. It is very important in this phase to identify a path that is really feasible, knowing how to identify all the obstacles that may be encountered and imagining how to overcome them.

- How do you analyse the feasibility of a project?
- What is the gap between reality and desire?
- It may be useful to start having some exchanges with experts.

Comments to Phase 3

The educator coach is an essential support for users, to help them explore their aspirations but also to keep them connected to reality, to see the different opportunities. **Reassurance** of the educator is an extremely important aspect (for the start-up phase support is essential, afterwards users can be more autonomous).

Inviting experts helps to have an outside perspective. This helped to make the users' expectations more realistic. Users have a high consideration for the expert and are therefore more inclined to follow his advice.

Activities and projects must be quality oriented, so if all the necessary skills are not already acquired it is necessary involve experts in the field who can teach specific techniques and bring relevant know-how.

With external experts, there may be difficulties in understanding with the participants (language, speed of speaking, lack of visual stimuli). To avoid difficulties in understanding and unhelpful assumptions, it would be useful for the educators and participants involved to carefully prepare the meeting for people with limited, or no experience of engaging with people with intellectual disability.

➤ Phase 4 Feasibility: Stabilization

This is the time to focus on "setting up" the idea, making "The Dream" real.

In a project, every single part depends on the others to achieve a good result.



Have good colleagues, identify and use the most convenient tools, identify of the resources needed and how to get them. Be aware of the environment.

Comments to Phase 4

This is a critical phase where other important aspects may emerge. An example is the economic aspect: often there is no correspondence between the entire incubation process and the respective economic part, which users would generally like to see realized in a short time and in a way that is not always possible. This situation may become extremely demotivating for entrepreneurship-initiatives. The point that should be stressed is that an activity does not automatically and necessarily generate an economic reward, but a whole series of opportunities that are considered to be of very important value in the social community.

At this stage it is essential to have the support of external experts that can support the development of the project.

However, some points work on at this stage are:

- Persistency
- Do not give up on the first difficulties encountered
- Creativity
- Loving what you do
- Planning ability
- Self-motivation ability



4. Conclusion

The methodology provided a good general guideline, it is useful to broaden the perspective of the people involved, identify a project or an idea, develop it, and eventually “start an enterprise” in the broadest sense of the word.

The 5 phases are easily adaptable for different countries, context, and situations.

While the first three phases are quite clear and specific, thanks also to the focus groups that focused a lot on them, the fourth phase ‘stabilization’ needs to be further practiced. It would be helpful to enrich it with some examples of tools on how to make the stabilization real, particularly because this is a difficult and long phase.

The use mind maps might be useful for a general visualization. It can be imagined also to break down the mind map in smaller parts per phase in the methodology could help.

This pilot phase has made it possible to test a methodology focused to the development of an integrated system of support for people with disabilities, aimed at professional development but also at the enhancement of people at risk of exclusion not only from the labour market but also from the community, especially in this difficult time of pandemic.

Testing the methodology developed by the IN-CUBA project proved that it is possible to make people belonging to disadvantaged groups the protagonists of change and innovation, bringing out their attitudes and potential through participation in a training program aimed at business creation but also at the recognized positioning within a community.

The social and work integration of disabled people can become a "collective project" in which to redefine the roles of all the actors, public and private, assigning to the social values the right relevance, focusing on the individual, his abilities and relationships generated by the quality of interpersonal relationships and psychophysical well-being.

The main objective can therefore be identified in the transformation of the limitations of people with disabilities into investments: investing in people, in their training and their potential. Through the skills acquired they can get access to the market and the society and feel supported and, at the same time, be active protagonists.