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A.W.A.R.D
Autistic World A Real Dimension

IO2

GUIDE FOR THE EMPLOYMENT OF PEOPLE WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

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1.
INTRODUCTION TO THE MANUAL

Employment is fundamental to the well-being of individuals including those with autism spectrum disorder.
Some studies report that in UK only 16% of people ASD are full-time employed, although the number of those that seek for job are 77%.
Challenging behaviors, difficulties in social communication, comorbidities, level of education, family support, access to vocational services, were identified as the main factors in predicting the possibility of having and maintaining a job. It was also found that experiences of positive placements were based on specific job preparation programs, ongoing support, technological support and multidisciplinary collaboration.
Although the guidelines and fundamental principles for the employment of ASD people have been clearly traced at an international level, the variety and different severity of the ASD, but, above all, the different national regulations do not allow to have an exhaustive and unambiguous picture of this problem.
The ERASMUS+ A.W.A.R.D. project proposes a work placement model for young people with autism. This model was tested in three European countries (Italy, Romania and Germany) between 2019 and 2020.
In this report we will describe the proposed A.W.A.R.D. model, the internship experiences for young ASD in the three partner countries, the difficulties encountered, the strengths and weaknesses, and what we learned from it.

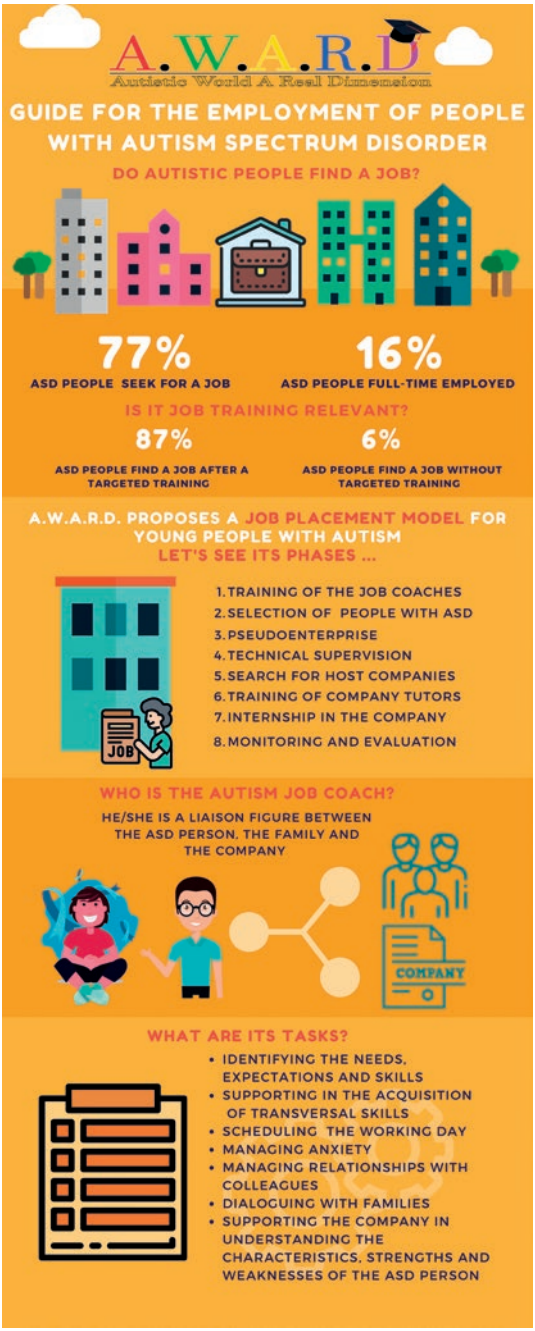
This report is organized as follows:

- **the *Manual* aims to describe in detail the A.W.A.R.D. model** (system for the work placement of young people with autism spectrum disorders) in all its steps. This model envisages actions addressed to at all the actors involved in the process: young people with autism and their families; the school (if involved) / job coaches; companies and company tutors.

- **Appendix 1:** describes how the pilot experiences in the project partner countries (Italy, Romania and Germany) went, the difficulties encountered, the strengths and weaknesses of the model and the opportunities for improvement.

- **Appendix 2**: it is a short handbook on the main regulations and laws in the partner countries relating to the job placement of people with autism.

The A.W.A.R.D. model is divided into the following phases which will be analyzed in the course of this manual:
1. training of the job coaches;
2. selection of people with autism spectrum disorder;
3. simulentreprise;
4. technical supervision;
5. search for host companies;
6. training of company tutors;
7. internship in the company;
8. monitoring and evaluation.


A.W.A.R.D
Autistic World A Real Dimension
GUIDE FOR THE EMPLOYMENT OF PEOPLE WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER
DO AUTISTIC PEOPLE FIND A JOB?
77%
ASD PEOPLE SEEK FOR A JOB
16%
ASD PEOPLE FULL-TIME EMPLOYED
IS IT JOB TRAINING RELEVANT?
87%
ASD PEOPLE FIND A JOB AFTER A TARGETED TRAINING
6%
ASD PEOPLE FIND A JOB WITHOUT TARGETED TRAINING
A.W.A.R.D. PROPOSES A JOB PLACEMENT MODEL FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH AUTISM
LET'S SEE ITS PHASES ...
JOB
1. TRAINING OF THE JOB COACHES
2. SELECTION OF PEOPLE WITH ASD
3. PSEUDOENTERPRISE
4. TECHNICAL SUPERVISION
5. SEARCH FOR HOST COMPANIES
6. TRAINING OF COMPANY TUTORS
7. INTERNSHIP IN THE COMPANY
8. MONITORING AND EVALUATION
WHO IS THE AUTISM JOB COACH?
HE/SHE IS A LIAISON FIGURE BETWEEN THE ASD PERSON, THE FAMILY AND THE COMPANY
COMPANY
WHAT ARE ITS TASKS?
• IDENTIFYING THE NEEDS, EXPECTATIONS AND SKILLS
• SUPPORTING IN THE ACQUISITION OF TRANSVERSAL SKILLS
• SCHEDULING THE WORKING DAY
• MANAGING ANXIETY
• MANAGING RELATIONSHIPS WITH COLLEAGUES
• DIALOGUING WITH FAMILIES
• SUPPORTING THE COMPANY IN UNDERSTANDING THE CHARACTERISTICS, STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE ASD PERSON

2.
TRAINING OF THE JOB COACHES - WHO IS THE JOB COACH

The A.W.A.R.D. model envisaged, as a first action, the training of a nucleus of job coaches, in charge of supporting students with autism spectrum disorder during the simulenterprise process and the internship in the company.

Who is the autism job coach?

The job coach is a liaison figure between the person ASD, the family and the company. A sort of interpreter / translator of the needs of the two worlds, that of the autistic person and that of the companies, each with its own characteristics. The role of the job coach is to facilitate the link between these two parties, acting both from the trainee's side and from the company side.

In more details, the job coach:

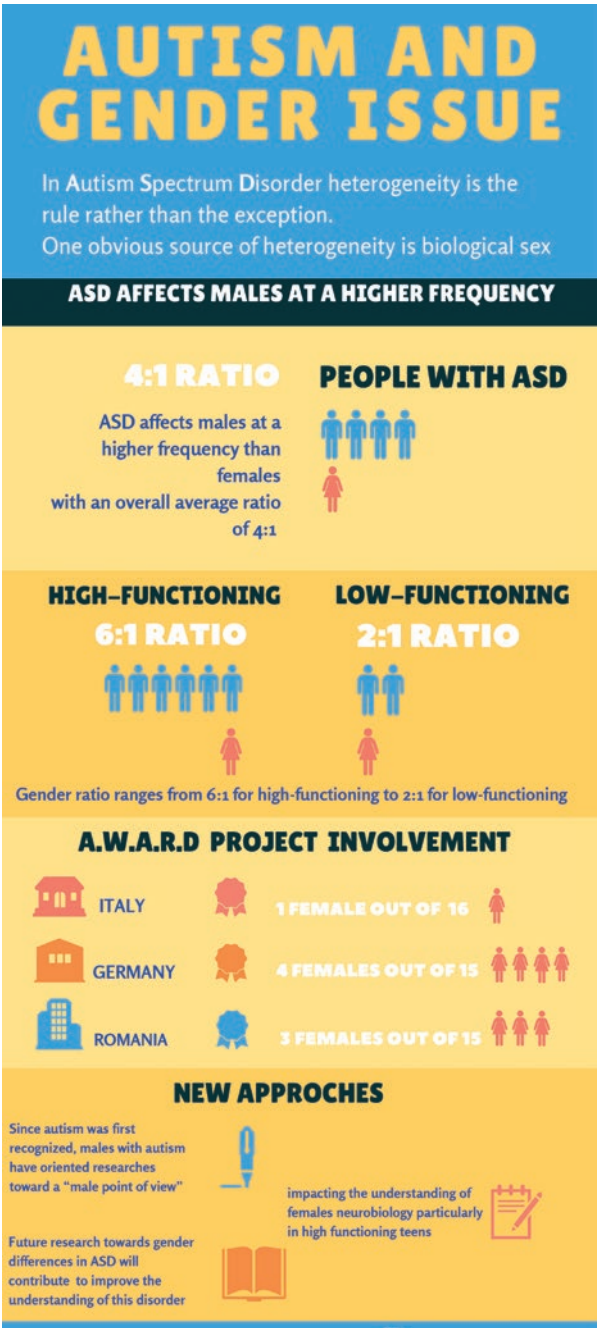
- identifies and assesses the needs, expectations and skills of the person with autism and helps them to have confidence in their abilities;
- supports the student in the acquisition and reinforcement of transversal skills;
- supports young people with autism with training and information, providing schedules for the working day, organize their work, help managing anxiety, positively deals with the challenges of social life and manage relationships with colleagues in a serene way;
- dialogues with families and supports them in the change caused by the job placement;
- supports the company and the company tutor in understanding the characteristics, strengths and weaknesses of the person with autism, in organizing their duties, the workplace and in managing any maladaptive behavior;

- is informed about the main protections provided for at the legislative level for disabled people for the purposes of job placement;
- discusses with the school (if involved in the project) and with the student's teachers to learn about his strengths and weaknesses during the school period.

Thanks to the job coach a link between employer and autistic employed can be positively establish.
One of the fundamental questions that the A.W.A.R.D. model tried to answer was whether it was possible for any teacher coming from vocational training to become a job coach for autism, of course on condition of being sufficiently motivated and adequately trained.

Within the A.W.A.R.D. project, the trainers/job coaches were first selected and then trained.
With regard to the specific contents of the training, please refer to the "*ASD teachers - tutors training scheme manual*", produced as part of the same project and focused on this topic.
Here we will limit ourselves to specifying that the trainers' training covered the following topics:

- basic knowledge of autism (neurobiology of autism spectrum disorder and associated behaviors);
- management of maladaptive behaviors;
- assessment of the skills of people with ASD;
- adaptation of the workplace, organization of time and space;
- specific educational strategies: use of videomodeling, task analysis, social stories, token economy.


AUTISM AND GENDER ISSUE
In Autism Spectrum Disorder heterogeneity is the rule rather than the exception.
One obvious source of heterogeneity is biological sex
ASD AFFECTS MALES AT A HIGHER FREQUENCY
4:1 RATIO
ASD affects males at a higher frequency than females with an overall average ratio of 4:1
PEOPLE WITH ASD
HIGH-FUNCTIONING
6:1 RATIO
LOW-FUNCTIONING
2:1 RATIO
Gender ratio ranges from 6:1 for high-functioning to 2:1 for low-functioning
A.W.A.R.D PROJECT INVOLVEMENT
ITALY
1 FEMALE OUT OF 16
GERMANY
4 FEMALES OUT OF 15
ROMANIA
3 FEMALES OUT OF 15
NEW APPROCHES
Since autism was first recognized, males with autism have oriented researches toward a "male point of view"
impacting the understanding of females neurobiology particularly in high functioning teens
Future research towards gender differences in ASD will contribute to improve the understanding of this disorder

3.
SELECTION OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

3.1 Requirements, modality and tools

Once the group of tutors was identified, the next step was that of selecting the students.
The project partners, after adequate consultation, have identified the following requirements for the selection of students:

- age between 17 and 29 years;
- diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder;
- good level of autonomy when traveling by public or private transport;
- level of functioning between medium and high (in no case were severe cases of autism selected);
- willingness to get involved in a personalized learning path.

The choice of the age range between 17 and 27 years was not accidental: indeed, this is the right age in which the foundations for the person's future working life should be built. Many young people with autism when school years finish do not have many other opportunities, and often they are abandoned inside the family, without any incentive for the future. Hence the need for personalized learning services connected to the support services offered by schools, in order to implement learning skills and direct them towards the work placement.
A.W.A.R.D. students were selected through a call which was published on the websites and social networks of the partners and also spread through other media such as newspapers and direct contact with associations for autism and cooperatives in the sector and VET agencies. Applications had to be sent accompanied by a short curriculum vitae or cover letter.

Subsequently, a first meeting was organized between the job coaches, the students (all candidates were admitted to the project) and the families. During this meeting the project was illustrate to families and students and we had the opportunity to answer the parents' and student's questions.
On that occasion the trainers gave the students the RAADS-R test - Italian version Ritvo Autism Asperger's Diagnostic Scale-Revised (RAADS-R) aimed at a first acquaintance of the ASD participants. The students were divided into small groups to facilitate the compilation of the questionnaire, under the supervision of the job coaches. Working in small groups is a fundamental requirement in working with autism.
The group immediately appeared very diverse: the presence of high-functioning and medium-functioning students emerged, for these reason teachers had to give assistance to students in filling out the questionnaire.

4.
PSEUDOENTERPRISE PROGRAM

4.1 Orienting

After the selection, the students were initiated to the first phase of the experimentation, that is, to the simulentreprise, lasting three months, aimed at the acquisition and strengthening of transversal skills in an environment that simulated that of the real workplace.
The preparation of the young autistic person in a simulated enterprise environment reduces the risk of potentially anxious situations for the boy as it allows him to arrive "already prepared" in the company.
The simulenterprise process started with an initial orientation phase which had the following objectives:
• investigate the personal characteristics of the students, their

skills, difficulties, expectations and areas of interest in order to define a personalized activity path;
- organize the simulentreprise classes in a homogeneous way, taking into account the level of the students.

The initial orientation was carried out through:
- interviews with students and families;
- specific worksheets;
- direct interface with the job coaches.

The initial interviews were conducted by the project technical supervisor and the most experienced teachers in autism - able to quickly frame the main characteristics of the students - and were used to investigate the cultural background of the students, their special needs, the social environment, educational and family origin.

Thanks to the information gathered through the interviews it was possible to divide the students into homogeneous class groups for IQ, language skills, level of autonomy and socialization skills.

This subdivision allowed teachers to use the most suitable working tools within each class group: in fact, the less high-functioning students worked better with images and needed very simple indications to proceed, while high-functioning students could also work on more complex texts and activities.

During the simulentreprise period, the class groups underwent some changes: some students did not feel comfortable with their classmates and threatened to leave the project, others needed to attend classes at a different time. In any case, all the issues that arose within the classes were promptly addressed thanks to the constant dialogue between the organization, teachers and technical supervisor.

The job coaches were the facilitators of the initial orientation process in the classroom: with the help of worksheets such as "*What upsets me and what makes me happy*", "*I'm good: workshop on skills, experiences and personal qualities*" opened the dialogue, framing their interests, skills and competences up to the point of

defining a personalized activity path to facilitate the best possible job placement.

From the initial orientation phase, dialogue with families, fundamental "translators" of the complexity of the boy's language, was an important key point. Parents were also invited to the first meeting in order to create a climate and a relationship of alliances and mutual support. No one more than parents, especially in situations like these, can validate or invalidate a process. In fact, the whole period of simulentreprise was the demonstration of the importance of the role the parents play on their son/daughter wellness.

This project has taught many things to the professionals involved, even to those who have already worked with disability and discomfort. Parents need to be strongly supported since they are the most important resource for students with ASD, that put a strain on all those with whom they relate.

On the basis of individual interviews, interviews with parents and from what emerged during class work, it was possible to define the personal profile of each participant, accompanied by job training proposals consistent with the information collected.

4.2 Program of pseudoenterpriese

In accordance with the A.W.A.R.D. model, the three months of simulentreprise are the first step of the job placement program of young students and are fundamental for the success of the entire process. Preparing the young ASD in a simulated work environment has the aim of reducing the risk of potentially anxious situations for the young person when facing the real work environment.

In this phase, the job coaches had the task of supporting the students in the acquisition of professional and relational skills and in achieving a level of autonomy and self-confidence such as to feel at ease in the work environment.

The table below summarizes the main phases of the pseudoenterprise process and the related macro-objectives:

Phase	Macro-objectives	Time
First orienting and confidence with individual personalities	Supervision of personal characteristics Analysis of individual skills Analysis of weaknesses and strengths Reinforcement of daily life skills, autonomy and self-confidence	1st month
Basic tools for a job placement	Know how to write a CV and to be ready for an interview Acquisition of social skills Safety at work Basic knowledge of the hierarchy in a company	2st month
Get ready for the internship	Get ready for the internship by acquiring a basic knowledge of the requested work tasks	3st month

Design of the pseudoenterprise

Initially it was decided to leave ample space to the trainers/tutors in the whole design of the didactic plan and in the preparation of all the materials necessary for the simulation (it had to be part of the experimentation) but from the first signs of discomfort and difficulties it was clear the inappropriateness of delegating to them the tasks. As a consequence, "*de facto*", the lessons were conceived and prepared by a group of people made up of trainers, supervisors with a long experience in autism, with the active collaboration of a limited group of teachers[1].

[1] In particular, two teachers from the group showed greater knowledge of autism and greater ability to analyze work processes (Maria Franca Frau and Chiara Canepa).

During the classroom lessons the following *topics* were developed:

- **Lesson 1**: presentation of everyone and sharing of the activities that would take place in the three months of simulentreprise; creation and explanation of a behavioral vademecum.
- **Lesson 2**: personal care to enter the job market and to be in a group with other people.
- **Lesson 3**: anxiety management: what anxiety is, the things that upset me, the things that make me happy, the perspective scale.
- **Lesson 4:** anxiety management, relaxation techniques.
- **Lesson 5**: I'm good: workshop on skills, experiences and personal qualities.
- **Lesson 6:** assessement of professional skills.
- **Lesson 7:** time management: my typical day; my typical week.
- **Lesson 8:** computer skills, practical tests.
- **Lesson 9:** computer skills, practical tests.
- **Lesson 10:** communication in the company; breaks at work and moments of relax. Verbal and non-verbal communication (physical posture, contact with others ...).
- **Lesson 11:** communication in the company; breaks at work and moments of relax Verbal and non-verbal communication (physical posture, contact with others...). Listening and interaction.
- **Lesson 12:** schedule management. Topics: my typical day; my typical week; program changes and unexpected events.
- **Lesson 13**: communication in the company; Simulations on communication in the company, with colleagues during breaks; appropriate arguments, not appropriate.
- **Lesson 14:** analysis and reflections on what has been done up to that point.
- **Lesson 15:** simulation of an interview in the company.

Lessons on company safety

As part of the simulentreprise, it was important to train students on how to operate safely within companies. Considering that safety training is a basic condition for being able to operate within companies.

The safety module was carried out on a self-training platform with the presence in the classroom of the teacher who intervened on particularly difficult and / or complicated aspects. This module held particular surprises as we were rather concerned that the boys would not be able to follow with interest and profit and in fact for some it was, while for others it was interesting and exciting[2].

The basis from which we started to set up the lessons and to achieve the set objectives is the observation that every human being is a person in his own right from whom one cannot and must not ignore. So the times for the acquisition of knowledge are relative and subjective, linked to the personal stories of each one. In the case of autism, this consideration is even more valid. In fact, therefore, beyond the topic of the lessons, some groups have carried out the same lesson in several days, others in fewer days. However, regarding some issues such as anxiety management, it has been realized that not everyone has the tools to carry it out. Modules of this nature are most effective when managed by psychologists. We therefore chose that this type of topic was carried out by the psychologist teachers.

Some days were also used to re-elaborate what had been done up to that moment to understand the level of understanding and acquisition of the individual topics.

After more than two months of activity of simulentreprise, we had the first meetings with the companies in which the students would have had to carry out the training. This meeting was intended to allow teachers to understand what activities the student could have

[2] This assessment reinforces the concept of the complexity of the "world" of autism.

carried out within the company and to allow students to begin to "familiarize themselves" with work colleagues.
This phase coincided with the onset of the COVID - 19 pandemic which caused a short period of business interruption. The lockdown has, however, pushed us to take advantage of the situation and to try to enhance the digital skills of students and teachers and the opportunities offered by virtual learning platforms. We therefore took the opportunity to focus on the development of transversal skills, important for any type of occupation and for the personal development of students:

- including communication and self-esteem;
- web browsing: searching and selecting relevant and reliable information;
- presentation skills - including presenting oneself through the media.

4.3 Worksheets and Tools

During the simulation, to develop each issue, worksheet or power point presentations were prepared aimed at "fixing" some fundamental points and / or guiding the ASD individuals in the acquisition of a specific concept or in the resolution of specific "cases". Where no worksheet or tracks were used or handed out, teachers used tools such as flipchart, PC to highlight concepts or keywords.
With the lower level of functioning subgroups, the worksheets and the material delivered had a more "visual" footprint (more images and colors, less text).

It should therefore be keep in mind that, although the themes and topics have been proposed were the same for all the sub-groups, the carry out of each of them has been adapted to the different needs and characteristics of the groups. This double work proved to be fundamental in order to work in the best way in class groups with different abilities.

Other tools that were functional and preparatory for the employment were *role-playing games* and *simulations of typical situations* (e.g. coffee break with colleagues, job interview ...), as well as practical computer exercises. During the months of lockdown, *videomodeling* was also widely used, a teaching method used with autism and based on learning by imitation of videos that illustrate step by step the correct way to carry out a task. The video modeling was foreseen by the project and is one of the pillars of the A.W.A.R.D. model. The Italian students produced some self videomodeling (playing the part of the protagonist of the videos) on anti-COVID behaviors (eg correct hand washing, use of the mask...).

The German and Romanian pupils have successfully produced videomodeling of domestic and daily activities. Videomodeling was also used during the internships, to facilitate the correct learning of the tasks in the company, as in a sort of tutorial.

4.4 Methodology

The idea that we wanted to develop right from the beginning of the project was making the students feeling like living in an environment as close as possible to the work setting. However, in setting up job simulation activities with ASD students it is important to provide for some precautions including:

- to meet the participants and their families in advance to present the project, illustrate the characteristics and aims of the training, specify the timing, highlight any possibility of renunciation;
- to provide for homogeneous classes according to the level of functioning of the students (high / low);
- to foresee groups not too numerous class (3/5 students) managed by one or two trainers;
- to use different worksheets according to the level of functioning of the students;

- to provide for a 10-minute break every 40 minutes of activity (or similar, depending on the needs of the students);
- to organize the classroom as a laboratory of practices in which students are an active part in the learning process and are involved in role plays, simulations of interviews to prepare them for typical situations that could occur in the world of work, including the use of videomodeling and self videomodeling;
- to identify the areas of professional training that are interesting for the participants and search for companies based on the inclinations, skills and characteristics of the individual students. The inability to manage a situation that does not conform to one's skills and expectations, in fact, can generate frustration, anxiety and discomfort in the autistic trainee, compromising their job placement.

4.5 Solaris Game

The German partner Solaris, manager of the largest game museum in Europe (German Games Museum in Chemnitz), was responsible (with the collaboration of the other partners) for the design of a board game on job placement aimed at young people with autism, to be used during simulentreprise training.
The strategy was to use A.W.A.R.D. GAME in the first phase of the job training, that is, in the orientation phase.
The goal was to offer our students pedagogical help and a realistic representation of professional life and teamwork.

In relation to its content - rules and practical situations of communication between people, personal and work-related rules and rituals - the game aims to provide a complete approach to different aspects:

- *Social interaction,* communication languages: students exercised patience, mutual respect, eye contact, regularization of speech / speech, understanding of commands.
- *Cognitive sphere:* students practiced using an argument for get into conversation with other players and understand different tasks.
- *Motor sphere:* avoid repetitive movements or sudden movements.

The game was well received by trainers and participants and was evaluated as a useful tool for dealing with some preparatory issues for job placement during the simulation.

4.6 Videomodeling

Fig. 1 Infographic about Videomodeling Tool

Video modeling is a self-learning tool by imitation used in autism: the videos represent, as a sort of tutorial, all the steps required to successfully complete a certain task / activity. The subject learns by observing the behavior of the protagonist of the video.
In video modeling the actions to be performed must be proposed:

- in a clear and detailed way;
- in increasing order of difficulty;
- frequently;
- without unnecessary information / details;
- if possible, in different contexts in order to allow generalization.

The advantages of using this technique are many:

- limits the field of action to the object of learning allowing the focus of attention;
- breaks down complex activities into single steps
- avoid face-to-face interaction, often a source of discomfort for people with autism;
- the video can be watched over and over again depending on the student's learning time (repetition) and exploits the ability of autistic people to process visual information more easily than verbal indications;
- through video modeling many behaviors are learned, strengthened, weakened or facilitated;
- today the video tool is increasingly accessible thanks to the widespread use of smartphones and tablets and is therefore easy to produce and use.

Despite the effectiveness of the methodology, in the European context the educational applications of video modeling are still rare. The A.W.A.R.D. model wanted to contribute to the transition to a systematic use of video modeling in training programs with students with autism, for this reason video modeling was foreseen and included from the beginning in the original project.

In the implementation of the A.W.A.R.D. model, two types of video modeling were used: video modeling and self video modeling.
In *video modeling,* the company tutor plays the role of "actor" by proposing to the student all the steps of the job to be performed (preparatory function for job placement).
In *self video modeling*, students test themselves by carrying out the task several times until it is correctly learned (learning control function).
The purpose of the self-video modeling was also to increase the perception of self-efficacy and motivation in learning new skills, thanks to the observation of one's own positive behaviors.
During the training of the A.W.A.R.D. job coaches in Germany, an entire morning was dedicated to learning the best techniques for creating video modeling and some practical exercises. Teachers from different countries appreciated this phase of practical work and even the German job coaches, already experts in the employment of people with autism, appreciated this new tool and implemented it in their work.
In experimenting with the A.W.A.R.D. model, this technique was used in the internships (both during the "smart working phase" - caused by COVID - and during the "face-to-face" phase). During smart working, it was decided to use video modeling to train students, before entering the company, on the procedures for containing the infection from Coronavirus, illustrating the correct methods of hand washing and use of the mask. During the on-site internship, on the other hand, video modeling was used for learning specific company tasks, together with task analysis.
Autistic people struggle to organize and execute complex actions in sequence with some consistency. That is why, when you want to teach them a complex skill, it is advisable to carry out a task analysis, or task analysis, that is, break down the activity into all its phases, thus determining more sub-objectives.
The "video" was also used as a tool for self-presentation: students

were encouraged to produce a sort of video-CV which was then, in some cases, sent to companies before the internship, in order to introduce the autistic trainee to colleagues.

Achieved results

The use of videos is a successful tool in working with autism and the spread of smartphones, tablets and even smart working due to COVID has made everyone more accustomed to using technology for learning.

A.W.A.R.D. students appreciated the use of video modeling and carried out self-video modeling successfully and without difficulty (sometimes with the support of families).

5.
THE ENTERPRISES

5.1 Identification of companies

Looking for the "perfect" student / company matching has circumscribed the field of action of the partners, since the beginning the approach of the A.W.A.R.D. model has been not to choose an activity for the students *a priori*, but rather to contact only the companies with the better matching with the expectations / skills / characteristics of the students.

It is never easy to find companies willing to welcome trainees, even more difficult if the trainee is autistic.

The difficulties, doubts and obstacles that most often made companies hesitate or give up were the following:

- no or little knowledge of the autism spectrum disorder (fear of the unknown, prejudices);
- limited internal human resources (lack of staff available to follow the trainee);

- fear that the experience could be too expensive in terms of time and money for the company;
- fear that the trainee could cause problems and hinder the normal activities of the company;
- fear of non-acceptance by colleagues or customers;

no or low corporate sensitivity "towards the social".

We had to dealt with

- highly structured companies that would have needed longer "negotiation" time to formalize the collaboration (eg IKEA);
- companies that were experiencing a difficult time and were not in a position to undertake the commitment of an intern;
- companies that had negative experiences in the past and did not want to repeate them.

Many companies asked us questions like: "Can these guys be trained?", "Can they become productive for a company?", "Can they take a job?", "Does the investment pay off the costs incurred?", "Can they adapt to social life?".

It was difficult for us to give these answers but we knew that by creating more suitable working conditions and developing tools to support the professional training of young people with autism, good results would be obtained.

COVID-19

COVID, of course, did not facilitate the search for companies but most of the companies that decided to participate in the A.W.A.R.D. project also resisted COVID, that is they confirmed their willingness to welcome one or more trainees even after the first lockdown. Some pulled back due to the uncertainty of the new ministerial provisions, while others waited only the time necessary to figure out how to move or requested additional support.

In Italy, the core of "motivated" companies has also resisted the pandemic, many of them explicitly expressed the desire to grow and

acquire new skills with this project and to get to know the world of autism more closely.

In any case, the work continued remotely: we took the opportunity to organize virtual sessions with our students, developing new skills related to the use of media, including video modeling.

Companies willing to welcome autistic trainees asked us:

- to be able to take advantage of training on autism to better accommodate the trainee and make the experience a growth opportunity for the company. They were unaware that it was already foreseen by the project and their request confirmed the seriousness and professionalism with which they wanted to face the internship;
- to be able to count on qualified support, that is, to have a point of reference in case of problems with the trainee.

How to search for companies

Some companies have joined the project because they are already known to the partners (deriving from personal contacts of the partners), others have been found through a long search that required a considerable investment of time, a good dose of patience and a good ability to promote the objectives of project.

ASD people find it extremely difficult to adapt to new situations and conditions.

This is why, in general, companies were sought that could guarantee at least the following requirements:

- availability of an internal tutor able to follow the trainee with autism (good level of supervision);
- possibility of entrusting the trainee with a simple and repetitive task to always carry out in the same way in a quiet and familiar environment, preferably not in contact with the public;
- possibility of providing an individual, tidy, clean, quiet, private workstation with well-defined working times and activities.

With regard to the areas of activity of the companies, the specific interests that emerged in the class groups have led the partners to move towards activities operating in the following sectors:

- animal care;
- warehouse work;
- paperwork;
- catering (including bar, diner ..);
- pastry;
- graphics;
- waste management;
- design;
- cataloging and reordering of archives / warehouses;
- cleaning;
- beauty and well-being;
- industrial laundry.

5.2 Relationship with the companies

As mentioned above, the identification of the companies took place in two different ways:

1. through personal contacts of partners;
2. through new contacts to companies not previously known, operating in sectors consistent with the characteristics, skills and aspirations of the students.

Some important aspects in the relationship with companies are highlighted, which correspond to some critical aspects of the model:

1. the training of personnel involved in the search of companies;
2. the role of job coaches;
3. the enhancement of the contribution of companies;
4. enhancement of the work of trainees.

Each aspect will be briefly analyzed below.

1. The search for companies is always a particularly delicate and not an easy one in projects involving job placements. The staff who deal with it must be adequately trained: they have to know the project very well and be somehow "capable of selling it", must be able to talk about the specific need and / or context within which the internship must take place, must know how to illustrate to companies the pros and cons of working with autism and be able to reassure about the presence of an organized structure that can give them support during the internship, in case of problems.
2. In relations with companies, the role of job coaches is certainly important since they act as a translator and interpreter of the world of autism for the company throughout the internship, they support the student and the company tutor in the job placement and they become the reference point in case of problems. It is not an easy role. It requires a lot of skills, a great sense of responsibility, a lot of passion and a lot of care, all aspects that in some cases have been partially ignored. Communication with companies must be carried out clearly and competently. Misunderstandings or incomplete communications can generate tensions, with strong repercussions on students and families.

   The job coach will have to inform the company about what autism is, what the strengths and weaknesses of autism are, entering into the specifics of the trainee who will join the company. It will also be important to identify the best strategies to be adopted with the trainee, both at an organizational and communicative level.

   A difficulty that we have often encountered in dialogue with companies was the identification of a task to be entrusted to the student.

   Many companies did not immediately understand (or perhaps they were not told clearly enough) that entrusting the student on the spectrum with a specific task is not an option but rather a necessary condition for the successful job placement since the ASD trainee needs to know in advance what he is going to do in

order to learn it little by little, calm his anxiety and reach independence as soon as possible.

3. The participation of companies in social projects is a rare and precious thing. This is why it is important to emphasize those who got involved, who believed in this project, who wanted to improve. A.W.A.R.D. has done his best to give visibility, when possible, to the involved companies through various media: interviews, articles in newspapers, videos and newsletters. These interventions were greatly appreciated by the companies and gave value to the project.
4. The remuneration of traineeships remains a sore point: would companies be willing to extend traineeships if financial support was found for them? Did the companies take in ASD trainees just to do a "good job", or did they receive a real benefit / help and could consider a real hiring of the boy?

   These questions still remain open.

   It should be noted that almost all of the host companies in Italy have declared themselves willing to repeat the experience with other similar projects meaning that A.W.A.R.D. left a positive mark and contributed to raising general awareness on autism.

5.3 The training of company tutors

The training of the company tutors took place directly "in the field", that is, in the company by the job coaches, before the start of the internships.
Once the companies were identified and the agreements with them were formalized, the students were entrusted to the various A.W.A.R.D. job coaches on the basis of some parameters including the level of support needed, the relationship with the job coach, the insertion company sector.

The A.W.A.R.D. job coaches had among their duties to accompany the student in the internship experience and to act as a link between the boy and the company, acting as "interpreter and translator" between the two parties, contributing to the training of company tutors on autism and identifying with them a specific job for the trainee.

The company tutors were trained by the job coaches on:

- main characteristics of autism, difficulty in using language, difficulties in social relationships, pros and cons of autism spectrum disorders;
- specific characteristics of the individual trainee (any fears, difficulties, idiosyncrasies, strengths and weaknesses ...);
- importance of identifying a suitable job for the insertion of the autistic trainee, also in order to achieve autonomy of the same (repetitiveness, work support tools such as task analysis and video modeling ...);
- preparation of the workstation and preparation of tools to support work;
- management of any maladaptive behaviors, anxiety management techniques ...

This training in the work real environment took place during the preliminary meetings when the young person entered the company

and during the first days of the internship during which the joint presence of the job coach and the company tutor was expected to support the student.

Strengths of the autistic person that can positively affect their work attitude

- care of detail;
- methodical approach and skill in identifying errors;
- good long-term memory;
- reliability, accuracy, perseverance;
- perfectionism;
- concentration;
- technical skills;
- few distractions due to emotional factors;
- clarity and transparency in relationships (the autistic person says what he thinks);
- sense of social justice;
- originality in solving problems.

Possible difficulties of the autistic person in the company

- difficulties in team work;
- difficulty coping with changes (stiffness, little flexibility);
- advice perceived as criticism, presumption ...;
- cleaning and personal hygiene;
- difficulties in social relationships (coffee break management or similar ..);
- stress and anxiety management ;
- need time to think and prepare;
- problems with command figures;
- vulnerability (the autistic person usually believes what they are told and can become a victim of teasing);
- unorthodox work routines;
- pedantry.

Good practices to be adopted in working with autism

- use precise and direct explanations;
- provide detailed instructions for each task;
- avoid figurative or idiomatic language;
- do not be authoritarian;
- show respect for differences;
- provide both written and oral instructions and individual training;
- check that what has been explained would have been understood;
- ensure that the person is integrated into the working staff;
- collect feedback and monitor activities, including with periodic individual meetings;
- make the staff aware of the strengths and possible difficulties of the colleague with autism.

A neurotypical person usually adapts himself to work, with autistic people it is the work that must adapt to the person: having identified the job for the boy, the trainers, in collaboration with the company tutors, took care of preparing the analysis of individual business processes (task analysis), to help young people to learn it and to support them during the first days of work in the company.

6.
RELATIONSHIP WITH STUDENT'S FAMILIES

The transition from youth to adulthood brings new challenges for people with autism and their families. The natural desire of every young adult and his family is the need for independence and self-determination. But what is the attitude of parents towards their children? How much independence are they willing to grant the disabled young person? In projects with disabilities, the relationship with families is often the critical element of interventions: it is not possible to act without the agreement and direct involvement of the families first of all because a lot of parents are the legal guardians

of the children, secondly because families can provide useful information about the personal inclinations and behaviors of the child, in order to identify the most suitable training and internship methods. Talking with families therefore helps to get to know the children better, to frame the context of origin more precisely and to understand whether or not we are going in the right direction.

In some cases, knowing the parents shed light on some characteristics of the student, highlighting the family origin of some of their beliefs / fixations.

After the first meeting, the families were asked to fill in an interview on the strengths and weaknesses of their children, on tastes / desires / inclinations and abilities, autonomy, communication methods (verbal, in images ...), ways of managing anxiety, the ability to act and behave in social contexts, the ability to ask for help, to be silent and to respect a task. Parents were also consulted before the beginning of the internships and when was necessary to decipher their son's behavior. Parents always play a crucial role as co-therapists and translators and have had several roles in the project:

Structural role: a) as valuable consultants thanks to the knowledge of the child and the practical and theoretical skills acquired over time b) as capable of giving continuity to the activities carried out also working at home c) as support in spatial orientation and 'personal orientation; d) in the organization of the daily routine.

Communicative role: a) to avoid misunderstandings; b) as mediators in the translation of conversations; c) for accompanying to meetings and meetings. During the project we received many thanks and, in general, we found a lot of understanding and patience in these people who are used to move through the difficulties of life.

7.
THE INTERNSHIP

7.1 Structure of internship

After the three months of pseudoenterprise, the A.W.A.R.D. project included an internship in the company.
Suddenly, however, we had to stop, even if only for a short time, because Covid 19, which stopped the whole world, started in Europe right from Italy. The project has slowed down and we have lived in general uncertainty for a while.
After the first signs of reopening, however, the necessary steps were taken to regain contact with teachers and students and start internships in smart working mode, thanks to the use of an online platform.
After a meeting with teachers and employers, it was decided to carry out the following program of preparatory activities for joining the company, without wasting further time:

- Video presentation of each one (creation of a video CV).
- Sharing and correcting your CV video.
- Self videomodeling on "Correct behavior in the company during the COVID period" (use of the mask, correct hand washing, social distancing).
- Monitoring of self videomodeling on COVID procedures.
- Flipped classroom on individual internship activities (e.g. the students had to do a research on the typical activities of a company similar to the one in which they would have carried out their internship).
- Monitoring of the researches of the student (results of the flipped classroom).
- Video modeling of the single job tasks.
- Self video modeling of the single business process.
- Creation of everyone's daily agenda.
- Creations of social stories, daily rules, more ...

The meetings in smart working mode were carried out by the teachers and involved the students divided into class groups. Then, the meetings with the students became individual and personalized as the discussion of specific topics became necessary and the transition to face-to-face internships was closer.
The online activity was generally well accepted by the students who were thus able to prepare for the internship in the company.
With the improvement of the data on the pandemic, many internships have finally moved to the phase face to face with different frequency and duration for each student. Each trainee was followed by a single teacher and an internal company tutor. In all cases, initial accompaniment was guaranteed in the co-presence of both tutors (A.W.A.R.D. tutor and company tutor) and then, subsequently, periodic monitoring every fifteen days by the A.W.A.R.D. tutor. In the start-up phase of the internship, each student was provided, where possible, with the task analysis of the individual business process and a daily agenda, with precise indication of the hour of beginning and end of duty, time for break, etc..
Autistic people struggle to organize and execute complex actions in sequence with some consistency. That is why, when you want to teach them a complex skill, it is advisable to carry out a task analysis, or the analysis of the tasks, that is, to break down the activity into all its phases, thus determining more sub-objectives. Task analysis is essential to make autistic people independent in carrying out daily or work activities.
The agenda, on the other hand, is a tool that helps autistic people to prepare for independent life and to manage anxiety by introducing rituals and procedures.
The tutors were given precise instructions to periodically report to the partnership on the progress of the internships and to always discuss with the organization before any intervention in the company.
No internship gave particular problems: in general the internships

went well and few interventions were needed to correct some critical situations. Based on our experience, joining the company will be successful only if it can be accompanied by some specific interventions including:

1. the preparation of an individual work station in a quiet and peaceful environment;
2. the preparation of a daily agenda that clearly determines work times and breaks (organization of daily routine and sequences of actions);
3. the preparation of tools to support the internship including task analysis or analysis of the task and video modeling.

Together with the task of learning a job, an important goal was to point out the social rules in the workplace including:

- the basic rules of communication;
- the shared rules of conduct;
- feelings and gestures and facial expressions;
- the ability to show empathy;
- conflict resolution;
- the ways of working in collaboration with others.

The range of tasks entrusted to the student during the internship was adapted according to the needs, interests and personal situation as well as the performance.

The preferred activities were: those that could be carried out without particular time pressure, those which were perceived as significant and those where a benefit for the student and/or for the company and its customers in general was recognizable.

7.2 Coaching methods by the teacher / coach

The coaching process was continuous, dynamic and oriented to the individual needs of the students.

Each trainee was followed by a single job coach in the job placement.

In all cases, initial accompaniment by both tutors (A.W.A.R.D. tutor and company tutor) was guaranteed, followed by periodic monitoring of the internship.
The A.W.A.R.D. tutors had the precise indication to periodically report to the partnership on the progress of the internships and to discuss with the organization before any intervention in the company.
The project partnership was, therefore, continuously informed on the progress of the internships.
The role of the teacher was to accompany the boy in the job placement and to support companies in the knowledge of autism and in the implementation of all measures that could facilitate the job placement of the young person with autism.
In no case the tutor was called upon to provide psychological support to the student: the job coach is neither a psychotherapist nor an educator but only a facilitator of the job placement process, a sort of translator / interpreter between autism and the company.
The job coach has the task of presenting the characteristics of autistic subjects to companies, connecting the interested parties and planning possible interventions to be carried out before and during a job placement, with targeted tools and actions.
The job coach has the role of informing companies that autism is not a disease but a different way of being and that autistic people:

- are very routine dependent;
- are very bewildered by unexpected events and changes in plans;
- have difficulty completing complex tasks;
- are anxious about meeting new people and new places;
- have great ability to concentrate and have a great predisposition for repetitive work;
- have difficulty understanding the point of view of others
- have a great memory for details and very specific centers of interest;
- have great ability to select and reorder objects;
- they tend to express anxiety and frustration about new situations

they don't know how to handle;
- have limited (or no) verbal skills or may have very high verbal skills very focused on specific interests;
- they express themselves without filters and without real awareness of social conventions;
- they need silence and longer times to interpret verbal communications;
- have difficulty interpreting double meanings, not understanding sarcasm;
- have low tolerance for noise;
- may be clumsy in their movements and have motor difficulties.

The job coach is also responsible for supporting the company in identifying the best space for the workstation of the autistic trainee, in a quiet and reserved, tidy and clean place, adequately organized, protected from light or sound disturbances. *In working with autism it is important to organize spaces precisely, plan activities, determine work and rest times. Only in this way the autistic person will have a clear idea of what he is going through and will calm his anxiety.*

The coaching process is a continuous, dynamic process and oriented to the individual needs of the students.

Our experience shows that, despite difficult social circumstances and personal restrictions, it is possible to prepare more and more autistic students for an internship and that the presence of one or more tutors has given the students self-confidence and facilitated their relationship with the company and workmates.

7.3 Relationship with the company tutor

The company tutor is essential in any internship and, even more, in the work placements of students with autism.

In fact, autism requires fixed reference points in the environments

that are as constant and as unchangeable as possible. Hence the importance of ensuring a safe reference for the young person in the company (the tutor) and establishing a schedule with him.

Before the beginning of each internship, a lot of work was done to make the company tutors aware that it is very important to define a specific task for the trainee, both for the intrinsic characteristics of autism (which requires repetitive patterns to appease the anxiety of the students and to allow them to learn a new job), and because of the need to make the trainee independent as soon as possible, so to avoid to be a burden for the company. In Italy, a company tutor has covertly "reported" to the organization a too expensive commitment in terms of time to follow the boy. It is clear that such a situation cannot be well viewed by companies. The trainee must be able to become a help for the company and not a hindrance (except for the initial training phase which naturally requires a certain investment of time), only in this way can a work placement have the hope of evolving into a real placement and not to remain a one shot experience.

We are also confident that the entry into the company of a young autistic person, as well as a help for the business, can above all be an opportunity to get to know each other better and become more aware of the beauty of diversity.

After all, autism is a world by itself and learning to know it is a bit like taking a soul journey to another planet. However, we have not to forget the autistic person's perspective well pictured in the statement: it is like being "an anthropologist on Mars" (Oliver Sacks).

8.
MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE ASSISTANCE MODEL FOR THE JOB PLACEMENT OF YOUNG AUTISTIC

Evaluation "is mainly (but not exclusively), as the reduction of decision-making complexity through the analysis of the direct and indirect effects, expected and not expected, wanted and unwanted, of the action, including those not attributable to material aspects…. . "(Bezzi, 2003: 60)

The monitoring and evaluation, the connected processes, the results in general, in each project to be able to have not only a photograph of what is underway or carried out but also a set of information such as quantitative that have verified the impact of the project and of the its results on systems and targets. Evaluate the effectiveness of the actions, the sustainability of the project.

Specifically, monitoring becomes a strategic tool for activating corrective or improvement actions and strategies in the face of evidence of anomalies.

The evaluation process investigates a set of indicators that make it possible to understand if the project is going "in the right direction" (ongoing evaluation) and if the project achieved those expected changes (final evaluation)[3].

The field of support for the job placement of young autistic adults, subject to experimentation with the A.W.A.R.D. project, is certainly delicate and complex, even more so in a scenario of a constantly changing "work system", a welfare system in difficulties and currently, in a pandemic context, which started in 2020 is still ongoing and has brought and still carries important repercussions.

[3] During the design and project start-up phase, the evaluation and monitoring manager defines a plan with a clear indication of all the indicators and the expected goals.

The complexity of monitoring and evaluation is equal to the complexity of the purposes and of the components themselves of the support model for job placement.

We are in fact in a particularly delicate field, in which different actors act in an integrated way, resources and variables that are often not controllable and which are closely connected with the very variability that is inherent in the person. Last but not least, the expectations of the trainee and those of the context in which they find themselves, and of the parent or care network of reference. An even more delicate field if we consider the complexity of the autistic person's problems in the system of relationships.

The complexity is also linked to the innovative and experimental character of the model, such that evaluation and monitoring become essential for the validation or not of the model.

The monitoring process aimed at providing objective data and information, in this specific case investigated a set of elements including:

- students' expectations;
- expectations of families;
- skills of the students;
- potential of the students;
- number of students in the project and number of students involved;
- number of students in the project start-up phase and at the end of the experimentation;
- number of internships / number of work experiences started
- right timing and type of actions;
- consistency in the use of resources.

Some areas of observation overlap with some evaluation indicators, for this reason, for some phases, the two processes are even more interconnected and functional for each other. The evaluation, as anticipated, however, assumes a greater value and complexity. This is also linked to the fact that the work placement and / or support for

the work placement of autistic people has within itself a density of meanings that touch a whole sphere of indicators that in fact determine the real success of the experience. That is, the real change and the positive impact of the model is not to be found in the simple evaluation of congruences in terms of numbers relating to young people involved at the beginning and at the end, nn results achieved in terms of work experience activated and companies involved etc.
The analysis of the impacts, in order to be able to verify the functionality of the model, its sustainability and transferability must necessarily include the analysis of different indicators that can be evaluated and observed in the different actors involved: young people, trainers, company tutors, parents and in the different systems including households, businesses, VET agencies.
Important to check:

- the real change on a series of initial behavioral aspects of the students (autonomy, respect for the rules, anxiety management, dysfunctional behavior management, adaptation ...);
- the change in the representation that each young autistic person had of their work and their role within the company before and after the project;
- level of support for autonomy and an adultization process by the same family and analysis of the differential before and after the experiment;
- change felt by families with respect to some aspects such as autonomy, anxiety management, adaptation, etc.
- level of effectiveness of the interventions by the job coaches / trainers (measurable through different indicators including functionality of the relationship, ability to guide the young person in experimentation ..);
- availability of job coaches and level of collaboration;
- Business approach to experience, level of involvement of internal resources, representation of companies with respect to autism;

The above control indicators presuppose the use of specific and differentiated tools and approaches:

- semi-structured questionnaires with value scales from 1 to 5;
- observation grids with defined analysis fields;
- silent observer, activated especially during the simulation in order to observe the dynamics and approaches implemented by the various actors;
- focus groups especially with job coaches to facilitate participatory self-analysis processes;
- open interviews with companies and families (based on a grid of questions);

"... Evaluation takes on the unique role of a participatory tool for judging socially relevant actions, necessarily accepting the operational consequences relating to the relationship between decision makers, operators and beneficiaries of the action" (Bezzi, 2003: 60)

8.1 Impacts

The project has allowed us to understand the importance of restoring an active role even to people with autism spectrum disorder and how much work commitment can change the perspective of the day of each of them. For some families, the award was a sort of lifesaver to face a difficult period, for others the rediscovery of skills in their children that no one imagined.

All companies involved showed an interest not only in the individual with autism but in autism in general, which they knew little or nothing. This, therefore, gives us hope for a future change of course on the part of the whole society that can really take charge of this part of the population who has the right to live a life with dignity.

9.
STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Strengths

- The A.W.A.R.D. model can be used for job placement in any type of company.
- The A.W.A.R.D. model is transferable and usable, with the necessary modifications, also with people with different types of disabilities and also with young people coming from situations of great discomfort (that often prevents job placement).
- The A.W.A.R.D. model is integrated, dynamic and expandable thanks to the possibility of inserting additional tools / models resulting from the progress of research.
- Some internships were successfull and the company declared to be available for other internships and to be available to maintain the relationship with the student and to insert him into the productive process if a financial support will be found.

Weaknesses

- The search for host companies was a delicate, long and cumbersome part of the process that required a considerable amount of time and human resources.
- We found that there is no knowledge of autism, there is no will, in some cases, to support the social. There is a lot to do and the government should act as it has already done in Italy with Law 68 but adapting the regulations to autism.
- In Romania, the government should act creating sector legislation and further promoting knowledge of autism to differentiate it from the generic label of "mental illness". The stigmatization of people with autism spectrum disorder in Romania was even more evident with the Award project as people assimilated the Award project to autism and this made recruiting young people difficult.
- In Germany, companies have recently recognized that people

with autism spectrum disorder have special abilities could be an asset. Several laws have also been passed to support inclusion and companies are open to welcome but it is not easy. The range of measures to integrate people with autism range from autism awareness events to communication training for friends and stable contacts. However, there is no one-size-fits-all recipe. It is important to adapt the measures to all stakeholders.

- Economic sustainability of the system: the implementation of the model requires huge costs in order to enhance economically each individual party involved (see, for example, the hypothesis of remunerating trainees and company tutors).

APPENDIX 1

Experiences and considerations in partner's countries

This appendix describes how the A.W.A.R.D. model has been implemented in the three partner countries (Italy, Romania and Germany), focusing in particular on any adaptations made, on the difficulties that have arisen along the way, on the mistakes not to be repeated, on the reflections and proposals for improvement resulting from experience.
Nno further study will be dedicated to what went exactly as it should be, that is, according to the model.

The three nations took part to the A.W.A.R.D. project for different reasons:

Italy - the challenge of the Italian VET agencies was double: first of all to understand if it was possible to qualify trainers who are not experts in autism for the profession of job coach, secondly to experiment with the A.W.A.R.D. work placement model.

Romania - the "Ioan Slavici" Liceul Tehnologic Institute is an inclusive private school that welcomes many children with special needs, bringing them up to graduation. Many pupils of this school come from the mainstream school that they left because of they couldn't find the right environment for their education. Many pupils of this school have learning and behavior problems. Some of them are students with autism spectrum disorder. First of all Liceul's challenge was to improve the skills of its teachers with autistic pupils and then, secondly, to experiment with the A.W.A.R.D. work placement model.

Germany - the job coach for autism already exists and works in companies. The challenge of the German partner Solaris was to improve its skills in working with autism and design a preparatory game for the job placement of young people with autism.

1.
Specialized trainers: role and skills of job coaches

1.1 *Italy*

Working with autism requires a lot of skills and a lot of experience that can be acquired with "field work". The A.W.A.R.D. model provides for the training of job coaches from professional training, not necessarily autism experts, on the basis of the idea that any interested and motivated person can be enabled to work with disabilities.

The application of the model in Italy has taught us that it is certainly possible to train motivated job coaches to work in this sector but that "good will" is not enough, we also need some important personal / character skills as well as availability and interest in self-training and some experience in autism.

1. 2 *Romania*

For the teachers of the Liceul Technologic "Ioan Slavici" of Timisoara A.W.A.R.D. was a very important opportunity to grow: the project allowed them to learn methodologies to work with autistic students and to involve other trainers and families of the autistic students in this process. Romania has chosen an inclusive approach: the school ensured that as many people as possible could benefit from the trainers' training, increasing the multiplier effects of the project and forging new ties and collaborations with organizations dealing with autism in the Timisoara region.

The implementation of the A.W.A.R.D. project has highlighted that there is still a lot to do to raise awareness among the Romanian population about autism, which many still consider taboo. This aspect will be examined in depth in the paragraph relating to the selection of students.

1.3 *Germany*

In Germany, we have found a more advanced situation: companies have been obliged for years to hire employees with disabilities (including autism spectrum disorders) and the figure of the Job coach for autism was already existing and well defined.

With regard to the A.W.A.R.D. model, the German trainers particularly appreciated the use of video modeling which helped to improve their skills and renew their daily work.

The A.W.A.R.D. THE GAME proved to be an additional tool to support the activities to enable entry into the world of work.

Fig. 1 Teacher training course in Chemnitz at The German Games Museum

Fig. 2 Italian teachers/job coaches.

Fig. 3 Teamwork with teachers from different countries in Chemnitz

Fig. 4 Romanian teachers in Chemnitz

2.
The selection of students

2.1 *Italy*

Between August and September 2019 a call was issued to identify young people with autism to be initiated into the work placement. Applications for participation had to be accompanied by a short curriculum vitae or cover letter. In some cases the cover letter was written by the students, other times was written by one of the parents. These elements have been taken into consideration as a further element to begin to "understand" the level and characteristics of the young person.

The announcement was published on the websites and social networks of the partners and sent, for information, to the Associations / cooperatives of the sector and to local VET agencies.

Fig. 5 Italian students

2.2 *Romania*

The partner of the project, Liceul Tehnologic Ioan Slavici is a private high school which offers its program to students who usually finish their studies at 18-19 years. According to the educational regulations, students with no more than 3 years above the enrollment limit can be included in traditional education, which means that the maximum age of the pupils could be 22 years. The older students are enrolled in evening courses, but during the months of the A.W.A.R.D. project there were no autistic students, or at least they were not declared or certified by their families.

In fact, Romania has also involved young people from the home-schooling system who benefit from specialized support from the "Podul Lung" Association. The Romanian partner carried out the activities in collaboration with the staff of this association, also involving parents interested in the Award project.

In Romania, the main tool used to identify families was direct contact with them, through educators, therapists, support people and resources. It is important to point out that many of the cases identified refused to be included in the project, because, based on the collective mentality, they prefer to avoid the "stigmatization" resulting from participation in a project dedicated only to autistic people. We found[1] that a lot of families with an above-average socio-financial background were unwilling to accept their children's participation in the project as it was explicitly aimed at autistic people. This is more evident in cases of highly functioning autistic people: in these situations, families, together with support people, try to hide the specific difficulties of their children, considering these children only as "special" and try to compensate by helping them to develop easier skills relying on support figures.

[1] Evaluation based on the staff experience and not on statistical data.

In the case of students with an average functioning, we found a real openness towards the project by the parents, particular the mothers, who take care of the students that lack personal autonomy. We have included all of these students in our groups, along with their parents and educators.

The public promotion of the objectives and opportunities of the project have been useful for a specific category of people in the education sector and NGOs who already work on this topic who have greatly appreciated the discussions and sharing possibilities offered by the project. to. Nonetheless, we were unable to involve some young people who preferred to stay hidden rather than "risk" public stigmatization.

By carrying out the selection of participants we have clearly identified one of the main problems of our community. There is a great lack of knowledge of the autistic syndrome, even on the part of the educational staff: usually the autistic boy is considered in the ranks of people with different abilities and, later, the inclusion of the autistic adult in the category of people with mental disabilities completely annihilates the possibility of these people gaining autonomy and work skills. The problem in Romania is also that of the complete lack of differentiation between the various disorders and between the various levels of impairment with consequent absence of analysis of the different behaviors related to different disorders.

Families who have an autistic child usually try to avoid public recognition of the diagnosis, are unwilling to join support groups due to fear of stigmatization.

Interventions towards a more inclusive society are directed towards families that need support together with the communities in which we try to integrate them.

In some ways it is a paradox that these families reject these types of supports, but it is very important to realize that this is the expression of the social pressure of stigmatization, which is great and negates the benefits offered by the actions of support through various projects.

We have to be aware that a single project will not achieve the expected results and will not be successful until the entire community / society is called to an urgent change of mentality, thanks to adequate awareness.

2.3 *Germany*

The German partner Solaris has been working for many years in the field of job inclusion of people with special needs and disabilities, supporting the participation of autistic people in integrative measures.
In this context Solaris provides assistance in all matters relating to career choice and promotes professional integration by focusing on the individual and personal counseling of young people, in close collaboration with parents (family work), with social workers in schools and outside, and thanks to close collaboration with the Job Center and the Youth Welfare Office.
Selecting autistic young people was a rather challenging process that required patience, discussion and networking. Solaris used various resources for this operation including its staff (social workers, educators, pedagogues) and the assistance of the Chemnitz Autism Center and the Chemnitz Job Center. Germany has very strict privacy laws and for this reason Solaris was able to provide project partners with little information about students. In most cases they were already in the Chemnitz Autism Center.

3.
The pseudoenterprise program

3.1 *Italy*

The management of the pseudoenterprise needed a huge commitment at an organizational and coordination level. An initial orien-

tation phase aimed to investigate the main characteristics, skills and expectations of the students and was followed by a phase of professional advice and a phase of individual training on specific business processes.

The students were divided into four homogeneous groups to allow teachers to use the most suitable working tools within each class: in fact, the low - functioning students often work better with images and need very simple indications to proceed, while with high-functioning students can also work on more complex texts and activities. High-functioning students were entrusted to trainers already experienced in autism (psychologists), those with lower functioning to less experienced job coaches, in training. In order to allow a more rapid knowledge of the students, in the initial orientation phase, dialogue with families was also important, although we found that, sometimes, the involvement of parents is a double-edged sword, since they attribute their personal expectations to their children, partially distorting reality.

Fig. 6 One of the groups of Italian students

3.2 *Romania*

In order to avoid overexposure of families with autistic children and to promote social inclusion, Romania has chosen to involve a mixed group of autistic and neurotypical students in the simulation process. The entire simulation process was carried out in a group, giving rise to a learning context in which several students collaborated and learned together, as happens in the workplace.

Cooperation, attention to each person's specific needs and willingness to offer and receive support was encouraged throughout the process.

This approach was not intended to hide the limits, in terms of specific skills, of autistic people but rather to standardize approaches. In fact, the strengths and weaknesses of each student were analyzed. This supportive context helped each of the participants to show their skills because the learners knew that the group would understand, support and adequately value everyone's achievements. The attitude and atmosphere that they managed to create in the group, according to them, should be recreated in the workplace, to offer students a context in which they are able to demonstrate their skills.

In Romania, during the pseudoenterprise, orientation meetings were organized to present the characteristics of some professions and motivate students in the choice of work.

Fig. 7 Pseudoenterprise activities in Romania

Various professions were presented using descriptions, videos and a large poster, with a "visual prompt" for each proposal. The participants expressed their opinion and subsequently a voting session was organized to identify the works considered most interesting by the group, from a statistical point of view. During the voting process the choices of autistic students were carefully recorded, because, because of their situation, the Romanian teachers were particularly interested in their choice which could be different from the average. Romania has opted for this - apparently group - orientation choice to limit the exposure of autistic students to peers. At the same time, he assessed that the presence of the group could have a motivational influence for everyone. Once the preferred jobs were chosen, the following aspects were studied in depth for each job, in some "test sessions":

- the description of the workplace, the presentation of the main activities and the results;
- practical demo of the specific task related to the planned job;
- use of a video tutorial prepared by the tutor and teacher, as a guide for the development of the proposed skills;
- context and logistics prepared with visual prompts.

They have been guaranteed:

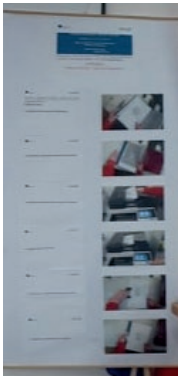
- materials necessary for the execution of the proposed tasks;
- individual support for each student, during the practical exercise;
- feedback on the results for improvement;
- final practical demonstration session.

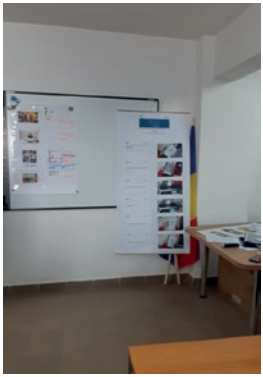
Example of a training session during the simulation: office work

Fig. 8 Visual prompt: office assistant

Stage / moments of the event

The agenda for the office assistant, the basis for carrying out the task analysis





The poster created for the event organized for the office assistant

The job coach supports the student during the internship, following the agenda

From March to June 2020, the activities in the schools were suspended and most companies were forced to close. Romania has decided to exploit the advantages of this situation and try to enhance the digital skills of students and teachers through the opportunities offered by virtual learning platforms by directing training activities towards:

- the development of transversal skills, important for any occupation and for the personal development of students including communication, self-esteem;
- search for relevant, correct and reliable information online;
- presentation skills - including verbal and media presentation.

3.3 Germany

The pseudoenterprise phase was useful to know the abilities and weaknesses, the inclinations and preferences of each participant to start a personalized activity path.

For greater effectiveness, the students were divided into 2 groups, homogeneous for IQ, language skills, level of autonomy and ability to socialize.

In Germany, the program of the orientation phase of job training has been divided as follows:

A. Professional advice.

B. Professional spectrum.

C. Professional preparation.

A. Professional advice

To provide individual assistance in choosing a career according to individual needs, Solaris focused on understanding what the background of the participants was and what their social, educational and family background was. This approach made it possible to identify special needs in close collaboration with families and staff in order to adapt counseling methods.

Caregivers and parents of the participants were involved, using them also as "translators".
Each participant received a checklist with the most important aspects to be taken into consideration in career guidance and the transition to the labor market.

Activities preliminary to career guidance:

- Completion of the career choice pass.
- Participation in career workshops.
- Try to understand which professions were of interest to the person.
- Look for open positions and internships for autistic people on the job center lists.

Self-sufficiency: communication exercises with people, information on normal domestic problems, care of the external appearance.

Self-assessment: learning to travel alone from home to the place of internship, seeking employment independently, learning and practicing on interviews.
On the basis of the interview and individual meetings, we were able to establish a personal profile of each participant accompanied by job training proposals consistent with the information collected.

B. Professional spectrum
In this phase, activities aimed at specific training courses for some professions were proposed and presented.
Activities requiring group or team work, involving relations with the public or frequent changes of duties were clearly excluded as unsuitable.
On the contrary, the participants' special interests and skills, already being studied, were used to find the occupation that could best suit the individual:

Methods:

- Individual interviews.
- Presentation of professions through conversations, video material, flyers.
- "Test days" in the company.
- In individual cases, training in professions such as gardener, carpenter or packager specialized in trade[2] was successfully completed.

C. Professional advice

Solaris FZU supported autistic young people in the job choice process with some job preparation sessions.

After completing school, many young people do not have a professional maturity that makes direct vocational training possible. This is why Solaris has chosen to include a longer phase of professional preparation in the pseudoenterprise to prevent young people from changing their mind or abandoning or refusing training and subsequent placement in the company.

Solaris acted:

- clarifying the conditions of the training course from the beginning: preparation of the individual professional training plan, meeting with the participants to present the plan and to get feedback on it, precise description of the required result and the time frame available, clear regulation of learning / work times and breaks; possibility of waiver; constant contact to clarify difficulties.ricercando le aziende ospitanti: meetings for the planning of professional training and final admission of the participants.
- identifying the vocational training areas of interest to the participants including laboratory assistant, planning assistant, tour-

[2] Only about ten percent of young people with autism are able to cope with the needs of vocational training because, in addition to the cognitive level reached, psychopathological anomalies are decisive for the ability to train.

ism and leisure assistant (museum), building cleaner, recycling / waste management adapting training conditions to take into account the particular difficulties of autistic students. Solaris worked with the smallest possible working groups, managed by a single trainer, with individual internships, single workstations and away from contact with the public, adapting the duration of the tasks and the program according to the characteristics of each student.

Video modeling

Italy

During smart working, it was decided to use video modeling to train students, before entering the company, on the procedures for containing the infection from Coronavirus, illustrating the correct methods of hand washing and use of the face mask. During the on-site internship, on the other hand, video modeling was used to learn specific company tasks, together with task analysis.

The "video" was also used as a working tool for self-presentation: students were encouraged to produce a sort of video CV which was then, in some cases, sent to companies before the internship began, to in order to anticipate the entry of the autistic trainee into the company to colleagues.

Achieved results

The use of videos is a tool of sure success in working with autism and the spread of smartphones, tablets and even smart working due to COVID has made everyone more accustomed to using technology for learning.

A.W.A.R.D. students appreciated the use of video modeling and made the self video-modeling with pleasure and without difficulty, sometimes with the support of families.

Romania

The video modeling tool was appreciated from the outset by the Liceul teachers during the first demonstration sessions and during the trainer's training in Chemnitz.

Already within the training dissemination and multiplication sessions, we organized interactive demo sessions, which were warmly welcomed by the participants who considered them very useful and already imagined being able to use them successfully with the students.

Video modeling was used both in the demo presentation phase of the various work activities during the simulation, and during the lockdown. The whole process of designing and building the video modeling tool was highly appreciated by the students and provided an excellent context for enhance collaboration with students.

The internship sessions and, subsequently, the internship meetings organized for the selected professions, showed that the expectations were correct: students were involved in learning and exercising different skills relevant to an occupation. It was noticed that the guys were very excited about creating their own video modeling recordings.

During the restrictions due to the COVID 19 situation, we realized the enormous advantage of the video modeling tool; In fact, at the beginning of March, schools were closed and companies forced to reduce their activity.

In this context, characterized by various elements of uncertainty, we have tried to exploit the advantages offered by virtual classrooms, by virtual communication platforms, with the intention of maintaining contact and communication between students, teachers and tutors.

Later we realized that the students were involved in active participation during the sessions and, based on these strengths, we decided to adapt our initial program to this new context.

While each student was obliged to stay at home, we proposed to

create a short video, in which the student could demonstrate a special skill, with the support of colleagues. Each student was asked to identify specific skills that might be related to specific professions or hobbies. As a result, we received several videos from the students, covering a broad spectrum of skills, from everyday skills such as making coffee or making a sandwich to dance lessons, make-up or use of the virtual platform for communication.
The videos were presented and the developers received feedback from colleagues, a very important motivational recognition for the demonstrated skill. Feedback from teachers and company tutors was a very important contribution to improve students' self-esteem. The interesting thing that emerged is that the autistic students were very happy to use this type of communication: they had the advantages of their home which offered a high level of security[3] and when they came in person (very often accompanied by their mother) they were very satisfied with submit the videos[4] and be able to discuss them.

Germany
The video modeling technique was used to show participants the job requirements and assumptions of the various jobs.
Each participant was asked to get involved in the video production with the support of teachers, families and VET trainers. The video presented the participants as they interacted in a role-playing set. One person played the part of a worker, while the second person played the part of a colleague while acting appropriately, showing the correct work behaviors. Participants were then asked to complete a social task and their performance was compared against baseline scores.

[3] Even in Romania the fear of COVID had a great impact on young people with Autism.

[4] Some of these videos can be watch on YouTube.

The result of this approach indicated that video modeling can be an effective method for teaching complex work skills or social skills to autistic people. Much also depends on the level of autism and the goals you want to achieve with the individual.
Some students didn't want to participate or create a sequence for a first-person video modeling. A successful video was made in the "Laboratory Assistant" category.
The "lip balm" project aimed to create a product in the chemistry laboratory and, at the same time, to take care of secondary tasks such as the preparation of materials or the cleaning of the work-place.

Fig. 9 Lip balm project

Videomodeling was mainly used during the lockdown individually by the participants.
The step-by-step advice and assistance mainteined a continuous contact with the participants.

4.
The companies

4.1 *Italy*

The specific interests that emerged in the class groups led the Italian partners to look for companies in the following sectors:

- animal care: dog kennel
- warehouse work
- paperwork / data entry
- catering: pastry and diner
- graphics
- cataloging and reordering: library
- industrial laundry
- radio broadcasting

In Sardinia, looking for host companies was a long and cumbersome process: more than 50 companies were contacted starting from December 2019 and up to March 2020.
Some companies joined the project because they already known the partners (personal contacts), others have been found through a long search that required a considerable investment of time, a good dose of patience and a good ability to promote the project objectives.

Specific skills required in the different occupations

Field of activity	Description of task	Specific skills
Tourist accomodation Partner: *Best Western Hotel Italia Quartu*	• reception • check in control	Soft skills: • taking care of the details • precision and order • ability to carry out repetitive actions without frustration Job related skills: • use of specific tools (ex. software ...)
Doghouse Partner: *Bau club canile*	• preparing meals for animals • taking care of animals	Soft skills: • order and care • ability to carry out repetitive actions without frustration • relationship with colleagues Job related skills: • use of specific tools in the kitchen
Industrial Laundry Partner: *Coop sociale Elan*	• Laundry clerk • cleaning of washing machine • use of bagging machine • clothes folding	Soft skills: • attention to details • care and patience • relationship with colleagues Job related skills: • use of specific tools • manual skills
VET Agency/Archive Partner: *Fondazione Leonardo* * ** *Ex.For* *** *Pro.Service SPA*	• paperwork • data entry • documents management	Soft skills: • attention to details • care and patience • ability to work alone • ability to carry out repetitive • actions without frustration Job related skills: • digital skills

Field of activity	Description of task	Specific skills
Gardener Partner: *Pro.service Spa*	• cleaning of paths • pruning of plants	Soft skills: • attention to details • care • sense of responsibility Job related skills: • care and prudence • manual and technical skills
Warehouse and product packaging Partner: *Pro.service Spa* *** *La Tazza d'oro*	• warehouse assistant • reordering materials • product labeling • product packaging	Soft skills: • attention to details • precision and order • sense of responsibility Job related skills: • care and prudence • manual and technical skills (use of specific tools)
Planning and consulting Project management Partner: *Associazione Studio L&P*	• grafhics: logo production for a new project	Soft skills: • creativity • drawing skills • perseverance • flexibility Job related skills: • technical skills
Web Radio Partner: *Radio Onde corte*	• production of a broadcast for the web radio	Soft skills: • creativity • perseverance Job related skills: • technical skills, use of software

Field of activity	Description of task	Specific skills
Catering e pastry Partner: *Tavola Calda da Matteo* *** *Pasticceria Incantadora*	• pastry assistant • assistant in basic food preparations	Soft skills: • attention to details • care and patience • ability to work alone • ability to carry out repetitive actions without frustration Job related skills: • manual and technical skills (use of specific tools)
Environmental education and Sustainable tourism Partner: *Gea Ambiente e turismo scarl*	• data entry • translation	Soft skills: • attention to details • care and patience • concentration • ability to carry out repetitive • actions without frustration Job related skills: • digital skills

COVID- 19. Most of the companies that decided to participate in the A.W.A.R.D. project also resisted COVID, in the sense that they confirmed their willingness to welcome one or more trainees even after the first lockdown. Only a few companies pulled back due to the uncertainty of the new ministerial provisions while the others only waited the time necessary to understand how to move.
Therefore, the core of "motivated" companies decided to continue with the A.W.A.R.D. project also after the pandemic, not only because they promised that to their "friends or colleagues" but because many of them desire to grow with this project, to acquire new skills and to learn more about autism.

4.2 *Romania*

Timisoara is a large city, with a very dynamic economic environment, with multinational companies, small businesses and a well-developed tertiary sector. Having this variety of companies, it was thought that it would be easy to find different places for a suitable internship, but the reality didn't meet our expectations. Very soon, the Romanian partner realized that he needed to activate personal contacts because companies showed little interest and a lack of willingness to work with people with special needs.
The "voting session" organized within the pseudoenterprise showed that the Romanian students were interested in the following jobs / areas of activity, towards which the research of companies was directed. In fact, Romania has also chosen to search for companies based on the interests expressed by students:

- office assistant;
- event organizer;
- bartender;
- assistant in the kitchen preparing snacks and small sandwiches;
- housework / cleaning;
- beauty and wellness;
- kitchen assistant - fruit juices, biscuits etc;
- assistant in the kitchen in tidying up the equipment.

The following table presents the list of companies that decided to join the experiment by employing young autistic people, in the tasks identified during the simulation sessions.

Specific skills required in the different occupations

Field of activity	Description of task	Specific skills
Handmade and recycling Partner: *Ozz Vintage House*	• production of small decorative items, gifts and souvenirs • tailoring, sewing ...	Soft skills: • attention to details • care and patience • social skills, relationship with colleagues • concentration Job related skills: • manual skills • use of specific tools for the creation, painting and packaging of products • elements of e-marketing, e-sale skills
Brasserie Partner: social enter-prise "Eco-sens" *** Reciproc Caffee	• assistant in the preparation of snacks and sandwiches for coffee-break, breakfast • assistant in the preparation of fruit, vegetables, juice, healthy drinks • BARISTA – assistant in preparation of coffee	Soft skills: • attention to details • care and patience • social skills, relationship with colleagues • concentration • be autonomous in food preparation Job related skills: • manual skills (ex. selection, washing and squeezing of fruits and vegetables) • use of specific tools
Software house Partner: *Cobalt Sign*	• Coding and IT programming	Soft skills: • attention to details • concentration • be autonomous • ability to carry out repetitive actions without frustration Job related skills: • specifis skills in coding

Field of activity	Description of task	Specific skills
Project management Partner: CR for Education and Occupation	• assistant in management of documents • use of copy machine and scanner • file storage	Soft skills: • attention to details • order • concentration • patience • ability to carry out repetitive actions without frustration Job related skills: • use of specific tools (copy machine, scanner)
Event management Partner: *Partner: Asociatia CRIES* *** *Fundatia pentru Cultura si Educatie IS*	• event manager assistant • badge preparation and kit for participants	Soft skills: • attention to details • order • concentration • ability to carry out repetitive actions without frustration Job related skills: • use of specific tools
Tourist Accomodation Partner: *Hotel Mara Timisoara*	• housekeeping • cleaning	Soft skills: • attention of details and order • concentration and speed • ability to carry out repetitive • actions without frustration Job related skills: • use of specific tools/ detergents
Typography Partner: *Grafoprint*	• printing and labeling assi-stant	Soft skills: • attention to details and order • concentration and speed • ability to carry out repetitive actions without frustration Job related skills: • use of specific tools

Field of activity	Description of task	Specific skills
Bakery	• • bakery assistant	Soft skills: • attention to details and order • concentration and speed • ability to carry out repetitive actions without frustration Job related skills: • use of specific tools
Partner: *Prospero*		
Other possible jobs: agriculture and bio agriculture	Relevant partner companies: Association for traditional agricultural support: - ASAT	
Carpentry	Small companies with small production	

Unfortunately, some of the companies identified were closed during the COVID19 restrictions and after 3 months of lack of production, the economic and financial situation of the companies has radically changed; they are more vulnerable in these uncertain conditions, they need further support to reschedule their activities and some of them are still closed, in whole or in part, with less willingness to cooperate. Some companies, on the other hand, have kept open the dialogue and the possibility of welcoming them for internships and have requested additional support actions.

In any case, our work continued remotely: we took the opportunity to organize virtual sessions with our students, developing new skills related to the use of virtual media and communications, including video-modeling.

4.3 *Germany*

According to the Bremen Institute for Autism Research, only 10% - about 15% of adult drivers - are able to take on a job but that doesn't mean they don't fail, due to their poor social skills.
It is estimated that only one in three people with autism spectrum disorder and normal or average intelligence have a full-time job subject to social security contributions.
With the right conditions, however, young people with autism can find their place in the job market, strengthening their self-esteem.
For the research of companies Solaris appealed to its internal resources and its network of contacts, finding a good cooperation and a good opening of institutions and companies.
The following job positions have been identified, in accordance with the wishes and interests of the participants in the A.W.A.R.D. project:
Internal companies: *Multigenerational House Association*, *Solaris Building Administration, Solaris Jugend- und Umweltwerkstätten*

External companies: *Deutsches SPILEmuseum e.V.*, *Chemnitzer Verkehrs-AG, Stadt Chemnitz-Tierpark, Abfall- und Stadtreinigungsbetrieb der Stadt Chemnitz*

All the companies gave the students the opportunity to take a trial day to learn about the environment of the training site and some characteristics of the selected occupation.
In those days, it was possible to observe how long it took for the students to grasp the new situation, whether they were interested or bored.

Specific skills required in the different occupations

Field of activity	Description of task	Specific skills
Education Partner: *Solaris Jugend- und Umweltwerkstätten*	• lab assistant • prepare experiments and tests used in different projects and activities with children • documents the results • laboratory cleaning activities	Soft skills: • organization • patience • precision Job related skills: • basic knowledge of technology and Chemistry • interesting in Science • basic competence in MS Office
Design Partner: *Multigenerational House Association*	• Design and development of products • Preparation of presentations • Orders of materials and organization of deliveries • Assistant in design development	Soft skills: • creativity • organization of activities Job related skills: • creatività • skills in drawing
Museum Partner: *Deutsches SPILEmuseum*	• tourism and leasure assistant • reception work • storage work • general support (gathering toys, ...)	Soft skills: • attention and care • precision • organizational and • administrative skills Job related skills: • basic knowledge of MS - Office
Cleaning Services Partner: *Solaris Building Administration*	• urban and building cleaning • cleaning rooms and windows according to a plan	Soft skills: • precision and care Job related skills: • care and prudence • skillful craftsmanship • basic knowledge of chemistry

Field of activity	Description of task	Specific skills
Waste management and recycling Partner: *Chemnitzer Verkehrs AG* * *Abfall- und Stadtreinigungsbetrieb der Stadt Chemnitz* * *Stadt Chemnitz-Tierpark*	• street cleaning • collect, divide and dispose of waste • cleaning of the external ground of the building	Soft skills: • attention to details • care • responsibility Job related skills: • care and prudence • manual skills and technical comprehension

5.
The internship

The last phase of the business simulation was marked by preparatory activities for entering the company, which took place in smart working mode due to the COVID 19 pandemic and then subsequently most of it passed in presence.
The online meetings were carried out by the teachers, who proposed to the students, divided into class groups, preparatory activities for entering the company, including:

- Video presentation of each one (creation of a video CV).
- Sharing and correcting your CV video.
- Self videomodeling on "Correct behavior in the company during the COVID period" (use of the mask, correct hand washing, social distancing).
- Monitoring of self videomodeling on COVID procedures.
- Flipped Classroom (Bergmann & Sams) on individual internship activities (Eg. The students had to do a research on the typical activities of a company similar to the one in which they would have carried out their internship).
- Monitoring of the researches of the children (results of the Flipped Classroom).
- Video modeling of the single business process.
- Self video modeling of the single business process.
- work on everyone's daily agenda.
- work on everyone's social stories, daily rules, more ...

As the moment of joining the company approached, the appointments with the students became individual and personalized.
The online activity was generally well accepted by the students who were finally able to prepare for the internship in the company.
Each trainee was followed by a single teacher and an internal company tutor.

An initial accompaniment of both tutors (A.W.A.R.D. tutor and company tutor) was guaranteed and then, subsequently, periodic monitoring every fortnight by the A.W.A.R.D. tutor.
In general, the internships had good results and few interventions were needed to correct some critical situations.
Vocational training will only be successful if it can be modified and adapted to take into account the particular difficulties of the young person with autism.
Young people with autism always need special care because they have difficulty in social adaptation or in the management of unpredictable and unexpected events.
Internship activities were carried out in both Germany and Romania according to the model to facilitate the entry into the company of young people with autism, supporting them with training activities on specific job skills, social skills, training company tutors and organizing workstations in a suitable way. The activities were carried out compatibly with the advent of COVID - 19 which forced partners to move some activities online.

Fig 10: Internships in Italy

6.
RELATIONSHIP WITH FAMILIES

In projects with disabilities, the relationship with families is fundamental first of all because many parents are the legal guardians of their children, and secondly because families can provide information about the personal inclinations and behaviors of the child useful in order to identify the training methods and internship more suited to the characteristics of the young ASD.
Families were very grateful to the staff of A.W.A.R.D. and we found a lot of understanding and patience when we communicated the encountered difficulties due to the COVID-19 emergency.

6.1 *Germany*

The transition from youth to adulthood brings new challenges for people with autism and their families. The natural desire of every young adult and his family is the need for independence and self-determination. Several factors play an important role in how well a young person with autism will be able to live independently.
A decisive factor is the parents' attitude towards their children, that is, how much independence they are willing to give / grant step by step. Parents always play a crucial role as co-therapists, due to the particular language used by young people with autism (complicated, symbolic expressions) there may be misunderstandings.
This is why in Germany too it was important to involve family members - such as parents and tutors - as translators in the meetings.

6.2 *Romania*

Families are the critical element of interventions; it is not possible to act without the agreement and direct involvement of the families. In our experience, the main role is played by the mothers who are

usually always present in the life of the children and in most cases have the role of caregivers for the autistic child. This does not mean that fathers are not involved, but they are generally dedicated to their work and spend less time with the autistic child. However, there is a strong influence on the development and socio-psychological balance of the child and in most families we have noticed that there is a clear distribution of roles between the two parents.

The role of mothers is evident from the child's point of view, but we would like to value the contribution of mothers also for the active involvement and commitment they have placed in learning and in the development of skills they have acquired hand in hand with the personnel involved in the various phases of the project. Mothers have acquired, in most cases, an excellent knowledge of the specific case of their child, but also a general view of the whole problem. Furthermore, all this knowledge is strengthened by their daily practical experience. These skills were very important during the learning and experimentation process of the work model. They made their children's knowledge available to us motivated by the strong desire to spread an inclusive approach towards the autistic boy.

We would also like to express our gratitude from the point of view of employers who have greatly appreciated the details provided by mothers regarding the specific behaviors of the children. During the preparatory meetings and the internships, the mothers offered fundamental support, always giving their availability to answer questions, resolve any misunderstandings or intervene immediately in certain situations.
This availability is considered by employers to be a very important prerequisite as well as the most relevant security element for accepting the challenges related to internships and, subsequently, the temporary and / or permanent work of autistic young people.

During this experience we learned that we must prepare the logistical conditions, including the presence of parents, in various learning and employment situations.

Thank you to the companies that have welcomed the trainees of the project with enthusiasm and professionalism.

LIST OF COMPANIES INVOLVED IN THE AWARD PROJECT IN ITALY

N.	Companies	Field of activity
1	**La Tazza d'Oro** Zona Industriale Strada 8 località, Macchiareddu	Coffee factory
2	**Bau Club** Cooperativa Sociale Onlus Località Cannamenda	Doghouse
4	**Exfor** Via Vincenzo Bellini, 4 Cagliari	VET agency
5	**Pro.Service** di Simone Rivano Via Monte Sabotino 9 a Cagliari Parco di Monte Claro	Garden maintenance
6	**Pasticceria Incantadora** Via Piemonte 80, Nuoro	Bar, pastry
7	**Tavola Calda da Matteo** Via Giovanni XXIII 8, Nuoro	Catering and diner
8	**Coop Agora** – Biblioteca Comunale di Guspini, Via San Nicolò 9, Guspini	Library
9	**Elan Coop Sociale -Carcere minorile di Quartucciu** Localita' Su Pezzu Mannu - Quartucciu	Industrial laundry
10	**Gea Ambiente e Turismo** Presso Casa Spadaccino, Località Su Loi Capoterra	Environmental education and sustainable tourism

11	**Fondazione Ente Leonardo** Via San Giovanni, Cagliari	VET agency
12	**Best Western Hotel Italia** Via Panzini 67, Quartu	Hotel
13	**Associazione Studio L&P** Via San Giacomo 24, Cagliari	Associazione senza scopo di lucro (progettazione/valutazione e monitoraggio)
14	**Radio Onde corte** Piazza San Giacomo 7, Cagliari	Web Radio

LIST OF COMPANIES INVOLVED IN THE AWARD PROJECT IN GERMANY

No.	Companies	Field of activity
1.	Multigenerational House Association Chemnitz	Project management assistant
2.	Solaris Building Administration	Cleaning
3.	Solaris Jugend- und Umweltwerkstätten	Lab assistant
4.	Deutsches SPILEmuseum	Assistent in agency for turism and free time
5.	Chemnitzer Verkehrs AG	Recycling waste
6.	Abfall- und Stadtreinigungsbetrieb der Stadt Chemnitz	Recycling waste
7.	Stadt Chemnitz-Tierpark	Recycling waste

APPENDIX 2

Vademecum on the main regulations in partner countries Relating to the work placement of people with autism

Fig 11: Internships in Italy

THE REGULATION FOR THE TRAINING OF AUTISTIC PEOPLE AND THE SUPPORT TO JOB PLACEMENT

1.1 Italy

In Italy, internships of autistic people who need support and fall into the category of frailty are subject to the general regulations for people with disabilities. The law of 12 March 1999 n ° 68 constitutes the current reference legislation for the job placement of people with disabilities. It is a set of rules that ensure a targeted placement of people with disabilities, thanks to support services and cooperation between all those involved. Furthermore, Legislative Decree 151/2015, which amends Law 68/99, introduces the concept of "Reasonable Adaptations" (in accordance with Article 2, fourth paragraph, of the UN Convention) and set up a new professional role: "the disability manager". The reasonable adaptations (therefore not disproportionately onerous) are useful to allow not only the job placement but also the permanence in the workplace. These are not only the removal of architectural barriers, but, more generally, to create in the workplace - including the organization of tasks and working hours - adaptations compatible with the functioning of the disabled person. Training and mentoring of the other employees are also precious tools for the integration of the disable. Indeed, the worker with disabilities can be supported by a specially trained colleague to allow him a more effective and inclusive integration.

1.2 Romania

The existing general legal framework is built around the Law nr. 151/2010, with the norms for practical use approved in 16.09.2016, by Ministry Order nr. 5.194, and are approved by the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, National Health Assurance Agency, Ministry of Labor, family and social protection, but the law does not include any standard of quality concerning the integrated services designed to the autistic people.

The legal framework developed in Romania concerning the professional insertion of people with autism, includes the following main regulations:

The law nr. 221/2010, concerning the The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities adopted on 13 December 2006 by the United Nations in New York, establish the right to work for the disabled persons, respecting the principles of equal opportunities, non-discrimination, and ensuring this right through national legislation. The convention invite to avoid any form of discrimination in employment, and stipulate the need to ensure the free acces of the persons to specific professional training and counseling services by supporting the employment of the disabled people both in the public and private sector.

The law nr. 448/2006 concerning the protection and right promotion of the disabled persons, has a dedicated chapter including the benefits offered to this group; The Government Order -H.G. 268/2007 includes the Norms for the implementation of the Law nr. 448/2006, thus supporting the process to put in place the legal recommendations;

The law nr. 76/2002 refers to the system of social assurance and stimulation of the occupation of the labour force, include chapters with the subsidies offered to the employers while employing disabled peoples of young graduates; The Government Order nr. H.G. 174/2002, includes the Norms for the implementation of the Law nr. 76/2002

It is very important to mention, that young autistic people, older than 18 years, are not registered independently as autistic people, they are included in the larger category of people with mental disabilities. This is one of the reasons for meeting several refusals from the employers, in accepting autistic people, because they are simply stigmatised by persons with mental disabilities, without any differentiation concerning their abilities and capacities.

In this context the valuable experiences of various projects, are

models for developing dedicated support for employers supporting the insertion of autistic young people. We mention the project Start in life for young autistic people - Start în viață pentru tineriù cu autism" initiated by the Association AUTISM ROMANIA, which includes case studies, with extremely relevant conclusions: autistic adults experiencing failure in employment, have been supported by a dedicated internship program developed for the autistic adult together with the employers, and even after the first failures and trauma suffered by the autistic people, they were successful in preparing both the employee and the context of the employer for a successful employment.

There is no specific compulsory regulation for a dedicated internship developed for autistic people, but the examples, and models created and promoted within various projects, are an excellent resource for the design and implementation of the internships.

1.3 Germany

Overview of key legal principles:

1.The Social Security Code (SGB) IX came into force on July 1st, 2001. It contains general regulations for the rehabilitation and participation of disabled peopleIndividual case assistance according to §35a SGB XIII

2. The Disability Equality Law (BGG) became effective on May 1st 2002 and it includes equality principles for people with disabilities in the public domain ("accessibility").

3. The General Equal Treatment Law (AGG) came into force on August 18, 2006. Among other things, it regulates the equality of disabled people in the area of civil law.

4. The UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was ratified in Germany on March 26s 2009. The sixth chapter of social assistance (SGB XII) contains legal entitlements to integration assistance for people with disabilities.

5. The new Federal Participation Law is one of the major social policy projects of this decades. The Federal Participation Law (BTHG) is a comprehensive legislative package that provides many improvements for people with disabilities, including autistic people. The BTHG creates more opportunities for participation and more self-determination for people with disabilities. Therefore, the professional services of integration assistance will be in future clearly separated from the services for subsistence and financed. This is a complete system change. In future, the focus will be on people.
An extremely important area is therefore in Germany the education for children and youngsters with autism.
After completing school at a regular school, to those students with autism who do not undergo general dual vocational education (in-company) must be guaranteed the access to the vocational training centers. People with autism without access to the general job market are generally entitled to be admitted to a workshop for disabled people.
In the discussion of the legislative process of the Federal Participation Law, the Federal Association of Autism Germany, along with other associations of disabled people, raised the requirement that all people with physical, physiological, mental, or sensory impairments – including people with all autism spectrum - have unrestricted access to all previous services for people with disabilities. This was basically implemented by the legislator. The intellectual and mental functions were expressly included in the planned version of the legal text from 01.01.2023 and are not only included in the reasoning.

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