

The **Oficina di Buenaventura** Cultural Centre is located in north Italy, 40 km far from Venice. Our town is called Castelfranco Veneto, and it's a small prosperous town with 30.000 residents grown around a mediaeval castle. It's part of the province of Treviso. A rich and high density province (with a company every 10 inhabitants) and its export amount is the same as Greece. Then residents are, on a per-capita basis, among the richest in Italy.

This wealth is a recent phenomenon, as a result of industrialisation after the 60's. This development has, without doubt, improved the economical conditions but at the same time serious social problems have emerged. It's evident, in particular, a strong tendency of closure towards "the other".

In Castelfranco Veneto there were no free places for meeting and exchanging ideas, so in 1999 we decided to found a cultural centre ourselves, without waiting in vain for institutions' initiatives (just think that our town library was practically closed for 12 years).

Our legal status is a non-profit association. **The Buenaventura is completely self- financed and managed by volunteers**. To create it we used our own savings and a bank loan. Nowadays we pay each month 2000 euros for house-rent, and about 1000 euros more for other expenses. We obtain all this money, plus 300 euros more, from membership-fees and from our activities. We receive no money from institutions neither from our town hall.

We have almost 40 volunteers from the surroundings (three of them are living in the Buenaventura) and one volunteer from European Voluntary Service, besides 10 part-time workers serving in the bar (which are also involved in the management and are volunteers in other activities).

Quite often musicians from abroad come to the Buenaventura, so we started a basic Music/Art exchange program for musicians willing to exchange one or two nights of performances for some days of free boarding.

We have a four floor, 600 square meter building with:

Concert venue for 100 people used also as a rehearsal room;

Bar;

apartment with rooms for five volunteers;

Internet room with 12 pc's with very fast adsl internet connection;

conference venue used also for courses (tango, theatre, photography, video, etc...)

kitchen for 40 people that we use for ethnic dinners

darkroom

Besides concerts we often organize conferences with journalists, politicians and writers. Activities mainly take place in the evenings. The bar is open from 7 p.m. till 2 a.m.

The administrative/management board meets once a week and it's open to all members. We want to **encourage members to take decisions and to feel responsible for the Buenaventura**

Today we understood that having an apartment for hosting volunteers for free in exchange for their work has been fundamental. This was not planned at the beginning. Over 50 young people, mostly foreigners have lived there for 2 weeks up to 2 years (from Mexico, France, Benin, Marocco, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Poland, Puerto Rico, Spain, Sweden, India, Iran, Montenegro, Usa, Czech Republic, etc.. ).

We have a great web application (adapted from [phprojekt](#) ) for the coordination of group activities and to share information and documents via internet. All of us can check through internet: daily expenses, public and private agenda, bank account, see faxes sent, etc. one can fix a date of a concert for a band and write some description about it from anywhere in the world. This data goes *automatically:* in this web site, in the next

[Newsletter](#)

, in the press release and can be viewed check and modified by all the others.

Our weekly newsletter is sent to over 4000 emails (summer 2003). With a smart and cheap system that we've created, we are able to send almost 3000 sms' to our members anytime we want (normally each week).

Even this web site is designed to be very easy and pleasant to be modified (we use only free software: no microsoft at all). To work on this site it is really easy: you don't have to be a webmaster.

Our relation to the city council is not good at all. At the beginning they didn't let us open for a year, formally because of bureaucracy. Finally they stopped when they read the document we had prepared to take them to court. At that time politicians didn't understand what we were trying to do. Now they do know our aims, but they are still afraid that we'll run for elections in future.

Relation with our community is much better. Of course at the beginning they claimed we were: drug addicts, communists, homosexuals,... that Buenaventura was a way to perdition, then the new catholic centre, part of the racist party Lega Nord, and even a temple for Jehovah's witnesses. Now (summer 2003) it's much better, and what have helped us a lot was the organisation of conferences with famous journalists and also computer courses for old people.

Now: two words about our future dreams. We would like to move to a bigger place capable of containing 400/500 people. We wish we could occupy an old factory, but we know it will be hard for our community to accept this. Then we wish we could buy some big industrial place borrowing money from our community, from a bank and maybe with the help of a EU project. We are convinced that having a community as a part of this project is fundamental.

Two more dreams are to create a newspaper and also a cooperative with which we'll be able to live, situated in a beautiful Croatian island with headquarters in a sailing boat and in the Buenaventura.