



NEW HUMANITY

Building Trust through Public-Private Partnership: the Economy of Communion Project

New Humanity is a Non Governmental Organization with General Consultative Status at the Economic and Social Council of United Nations, representing the activities inspired by the spirituality of the Focolare Movement, in various fields: politics, businesses, economics, family, youth, education, health care, environment, sport, arts and communication.

The Focolare Movement was born in 1943, under the air raids of the Second World War, in Trent, in Northern Italy, when Chiara Lubich, the founder, had understood, with particular clarity, some words of the Gospel, which she and her young companions always carried with them.

These were the words of the prayer that Jesus said at the Last Supper, before being crucified: "Father, that all will be one, as You and I". This was his spiritual testament: an expression of reciprocal love, the new commandment that brings Unity, and that brings back the divine between people through human activities.

This Ideal became the reason for existence for Chiara and her first companions, while air raid destruction demonstrated the precariousness of human objectives. Today, this Ideal has spread, and involves about four million people throughout the world.

These include people of all ages, social condition, ethnic origin, religion or belief. Trusting in the Ideal of a United World, they embarked on several hundreds social projects, including schools, hospitals, social centers, activities for economic development, and thirty international towns complete with schools, houses, families and small economic enterprises.

The Economy of Communion project started in 1991 when Chiara Lubich, crossing the immense Brazilian town of San Paulo to reach one its Movement Citadels, witnessed the violent contrast between the multitude of modern skyscrapers and the large number of slums that surrounded the city.

She was shocked by the misery of the slums, in particular being aware that were living in the slums also people sharing her Ideal.

Chiara felt pressing to find a way to insure a dignified way of living at least to the Brazilians that joined her Ideal that were presently oppressed by the distress how to provide tomorrow the basic needs of their family, food, education, health, housing. The practice followed in the Focolari Movement of sharing the superfluous, was no longer sufficient.

Chiara, urged by their need, launched the proposal of "The Economy of Communion" to the 250.000 members of the Movement in Brazil. She proposed that they freely pool together their resources – "We are poor but we are many people."

Her proposal to the people was to become shareholders in Economy of Communion companies, to create jobs and to distribute the profits in three directions. One part would be allocated for company development, a second part would be shared with people in need, and the third portion would be allocated for education to forward the ideals of the Economy of Communion, the universal brotherhood and sisterhood.

Chiara's plan was to develop economic activities near the "pilot towns" of the Movement, that would promote the "culture of communion" as expressed in the Gospel.

She suggested that similar companies in different areas, would contribute in a similar manner, thus creating jobs and generating profits to be distributed according to this new concept.

Between the 750 companies worldwide that are presently following the "Economy of Communion" project, providing help to come out of poverty to 5000 families in various countries of Latin America, Africa, Asia, South East Europe and Middle East, there is the Tassano Consortium of Casarza Ligure, Italy.

This Consortium was born in 1989 from two friends that were running a small business for household appliances. They had offered jobs to some of the needy people around them, but facing their impotence in front of many other situations, they decided to transform their business into a co-operative, partnering with 26 people who shared the same need to build solidarity made of 'facts'.

The initial capital was only 2.000 Euros, but the real capital of this new business was the way it was born: a gift from two persons who decided to renounce to the security of their small but sound company to start with others a work opportunity for many.

This gesture started a chain of solidarity and when the project of Economy of Communion was launched, the Tassano partners immediately felt that this initiative was perfectly expressing their objectives, extending solidarity at a world level; as a consequence they adhered immediately to it.

Today the Consortium is made by 62 co-operatives with almost 1.300 workers. All co-operatives have adhered to the "Guidelines to manage a venture of Economy of Communion", set out in 1997 during an international meeting in Rome of Entrepreneurs, Scholars and Students adhering to the Economy of Communion Project.

The present Consortium turnover is almost 50 million Euros, and various economists have agreed to state that there must be an extra element, which justifies a growth of almost 70% per each year. Somebody calls it 'providence', others use different names; what is certain is that the strong feeling, the trust which exists among those who work in the different initiatives of the group, stands at the root of it.

The Consortium activities are various: 13 structures with a total of more than 700 beds, welcome aged people or people coming from psychiatric hospitals: there are co-operatives engaged in education, in a printing house, in civil works.

And finally there are three co-operatives of workers, the majority of which with social problems, engaged in industrial activities but maintaining at the first place the importance of the human element. They are the social core of the system, and the reason why we are presenting this experience today.

Packing and assembling products for third parties (electrical and nautical material...), this people, with their disabilities, compete with the prices of world market economy: this would not be possible without the solidarity of the other cooperatives.

The main intent of this cooperatives that we call a "school of work" is to give through a job the opportunity to people who, because of their inconvenient situation, could not have any other possibilities of integration in the community.

Twenty five between managers, psychologists, doctors and professional teachers are involved in the hard job of managing a complex social medley of ex prisoners, drug-addicted, physical and mental disabled, ordinary unemployed people one close to the other.

While these cooperatives currently give work to 200 employees, of which 140 with social problems, in ten years they have performed 350 recruitment, because their managers feel as a true success, when one of their best workers finds a job outside.

The annual economic deficit which derives from this activity is of about 300.000 Euros, which is presently mainly recovered by other co-operatives profits and in part thanks to the help of public Institutions, and 300.000 Euros have been recently invested in high technology machinery (digital cut work bench) to match the market competition.

Year after year the Tassano activities, demonstrating the validity of the subsidiarity to able to bring people out of a condition of poverty of money, of relationship and of sense of life, experienced an improving appreciation of workers trade unions and private businesses organization of the territory, that invited local private companies to offer to these cooperatives work orders.

A very fruitful partnerships started also with the governments of the Liguria Region, Genoa Province and the local towns administration, that became aware of the social importance of the Tassano activities when the need of a new working centre made uncertain the prosecution of this "school of work".

So all together, notwithstanding their different political side, they agree to build a Foundation to recover Four Million Euros to build the new work centre; lately the Liguria Region, realizing the public importance of the "work school", promised to subsidize its deficit every year, for the next ten years, if the Tassano Consortium will start similar activities in the other three Provinces of the Region.

Indeed the annual public saving in social cost for disabled people made possible by the Tassano activity has been calculated equal to ten times the "work school" deficit.

This experience makes possible to *foresee a less expensive and more effective welfare state*: the economist James Buchanan, analyzing the Samaritan Dilemma, that is if it is fruitful to help people in need, concluded that the public aid in two cases over three encourages an opportunistic behavior, increasing instead of reducing the numbers of persons in need.

Without arguing with Buchanan conclusions, Tassano Consortium and similar experiences in Economy of Communion businesses, offers a different solution to the Samaritan Dilemma: the proximity.

When the help means to offer the dignity of a productive work, in which everyone is giving his, different for each one 100 % effort, and this work is done together, in an environment in which the help requires reciprocity, has been experienced that not one, but two persons over three will cooperate and only one will remain opportunistic.

In defining the welfare state strategy, this result in our opinion is of fundamental importance: it explains that it will be a lot more fruitful for the Public Administration to support financially the activities in the territory of people willing to help professionally their neighbor, than to build expensive structures to solve alone all the social problems.

The adoption of a *subsidiarity approach* in welfare state, the choice of public administration to subsidize, when they are available, the civil society efforts to help people in the territory, will make the welfare state *less expensive and more affordable*: not only, it will be also *more effective*, because it will face the most forgotten and cruel poverty: the poverty of relationship, of membership, of trust, of sense of life.