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SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, INNOVATION, AND GOVERNANCE: THE CASE OF THE ECONOMY OF COMMUNION IN ITALY²

Abstract

The Economy of Communion (EoC) movement is one of the most interesting phenomena both in today's Catholicism and in the global field of spiritually oriented entrepreneurship. This model – first elaborated by the founder of the Focolare movement, Chiara Lubich – is focused on a 'culture of giving'; on the development of a relation of 'communion' with employees, customers and even competitors; on transparency and fairness; and on environmental sustainability. Although grounded in the Gospel and the Catholic Church's social doctrine, it is meant as a business model which can be adopted also by people belonging to other religious traditions, and even by non-believers. This paper, based on interviews to people involved in the EoC movement and on other primary and secondary sources, will analyse the movement in Italy, focusing on a side understudied by the literature: the complex web of organizations which provide it with a structure and a governance. Particularly, the paper will show how such organizations try to strike a balance between preserving the movement's identity and Chiara Lubich's message, and spreading the EoC model by trying to make it popular, also outside the Focolare movement.

Keywords: Economy of Communion, Focolare movement, Catholicism, religion and economy, spiritually oriented entrepreneurship, Italy

Introduction and Methodology

This paper deals with the Economy of Communion (EoC), an economic movement created in the early 1990s by the Focolare, one of the best known and

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- 2 This research has been carried out thanks to funds provided by the Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Torino to the project "Searching Alternative Communitarianism, Religion and Economic Development" (SACRED) [S1315_RIC14_L2_OZL_01], carried out at the University of Turin between July 2015 and December 2017 and coordinated by the author of this paper. The author would like to thank Chiara Maritato, Nicola Pannofino, and Matteo Tubiana, who have carried out some of the interviews on which the paper is based; and Paolo Frizzi, whose help to access the field of research was invaluable. The author also thanks Monica Gilli, Xabier Itcaina, and Stefania Palmisano for their precious suggestions after reading earlier versions of this paper, and all the members of the CRAFT (Contemporary Religions and Faiths in Transition) workshop at the Department of Cultures, Politics and Society of the University of Turin for the exchanges of ideas during the whole research project.

fastest growing Catholic movements developed in the 20th century.³ The study at the basis of this paper is part of a wider interdisciplinary research project, named 'Searching Alternative Communitarianism, Religion and Economic Development' (SACRED), funded by the Compagnia di Sanpaolo Foundation at the University of Turin between 2015 and 2017, and coordinated by the author. This project was focused on the comparison of the economic values and practices of three religious or spiritual movements: the Catholic Focolare movement, the Sunni Muslim Hizmet movement, and the Damanhur community (created in north-west Italy on the basis of a new age/alternative spirituality outlook). The point of the research was to single out the values and the best practices embedded in the economic activities of these movements, and to understand whether and how much they can propose alternatives to and/or provide improvements to the current capitalist neoliberal economic system in the direction of a more humane and sustainable social and economic system.

The part of the research specifically focused on the Focolare movement and the EoC has been carried out through 20 in depth interviews to EoC entrepreneurs (see list of interviewees in Appendix 1) and other informed people (such as for example the coordinators of the EoC microcredit programme and the enterprises incubators programme); and through an analysis of the EoC and Focolare publications (particularly, the yearly EoC bulletin, and other publications of the 'New City' publishing house, belonging to the Focolare), and of the main academic works on the movement and its economic vision and activities (these latter mostly written by members of the Focolare movement, and not rarely published by Focolare institutions, with a scarcity of independent scholarship).

The first section of the paper will sketch a brief history of the Focolare and the EoC, to be followed by analyses of the values embedded in the EoC and its main principles, focusing particularly on the behaviour of the EoC entrepreneurs and their motivations to be involved in the movement. The second section will then focus on an understudied side of the EoC: its governance, with a particular focus on Italy (which is the centre of the international Focolare movement). The final paragraph will provide a discussion on how much the EoC can be regarded as an exportable model of business, also outside the Focolare movement and the Catholic world, and what a popularization of the EoC would mean for the Focolare movement and its message.

The Focolare Movement and the EoC: A Brief Historical Sketch

The EoC movement is today a global network involving thousands of people who are not necessarily part of the Focolare movement, and is based on principles which can theoretically be compatible with other religious and

3 Massimo Faggioli, *The Rising Laity: Ecclesial Movements since Vatican II*, Paulist Press, New York, 2016.

spiritual traditions and secular worldviews alike. However it cannot be adequately understood if it is not considered in relation to the Focolare, not only because the two movements are structurally very strongly integrated, but more precisely because, as shown below, the EoC is based on a specific theological vision and is regarded by the Focolare people as a realization of the prophetic message of the movement's founder, Chiara Lubich (an idea which emerges very clearly for example from interviews #5, #12, #15, and #20).

This latter was an Italian woman born in Trent in 1920 in a Catholic family with a left-wing orientation (her father was a socialist and an opponent to the Fascist regime).⁴ A fervent believer, in 1939 she visited the Loreto shrine and developed the desire to live her life according to the Gospel's message. However, rather than becoming a nun, she chose to do so as a layperson, and gathered around herself other young women willing to live the Gospel and help the poor. In May 1944, after her home had been destroyed by an airstrike, she decided not to leave Trent with her family and went to live with her comrades in a small apartment owned by the Church, in order to, she recounts, make God the ideal of our life.⁵

In a few months, the small community became a point of reference for many people, who gave them food and other goods to be redistributed to the poor and the homeless. Their home became known as *focolare* (after the Italian name for 'hearth') and Chiara and her followers as *focolarini/focolarine*. Their group, however, was officially named Movimento per l'unità (movement for unity), and as such it was officially recognized by the dioceses of Trent in 1947. In the meantime, more Focolare centres had been opened, at first including only female youth; since 1948 male *focolari* were also created, but women always remained the heart of the movement (as shown by the rule which still today prescribes a female leader for it).

In the following years, the Focolare movement rapidly grew, and structured in three concentric circles: a hardcore of consecrated people, living a common life in frugality and chastity in gender-segregated common houses; an intermediate circle of married people combining family life with the Gospel (who, unlike the former, who give to the movement all their goods and revenues, are only supposed to give what exceeds the needs of their families); and the 'volunteers', both married and unmarried, who are marked by a lower degree of involvement although maintaining some forms of communalism, in terms of goods and common life.⁶ The movement spread throughout Italy, also thanks to the help of Igino Giordani, a Christian Democracy MP who had enthusiastically joined the Focolare,⁷ and in 1962, after a long enquiry, was officially recognized

4 Jim Gallagher, *A Woman's Work: Chiara Lubich*, Harper Collins, London, 1997.

5 Chiara Lubich, *La dottrina spirituale*, Arnoldo Mondadori, Milano, 2001, p. 45.

6 Gallagher, *A Woman's Work*.

7 Edwin Robertson, *The Fire Of Love: A Life Of Igino Giordani "Foco"*, New City, London, 1989.

by the Vatican. In the meantime, since the 1950s, the movement had started to spread also in neighbouring European countries, and to develop its structures and institutions, such as the publishing house Città Nuova (New City), and its summer meetings called Mariapoli (city of Mary). This name was later also used for the citadels of the movement, the 'permanent' Mariapolis whose first example was the citadel of Loppiano, in the Florence countryside, founded in 1964. This latter is today still the international centre of the movement, together with the Castel Gandolfo facilities in Rome, granted to the movement by Pope John Paul II in 1982.⁸ Already in the 1960s, the movement also started its interreligious dialogue activities, which today represent one of its main focuses, and created 'ecumenical citadels' such as the Ottmaring one, in Germany, which also welcome non-Catholics.⁹

The movement, that was rapidly becoming global, also started its expansion outside Europe, and flourished in South America, especially Brazil, which gradually became the second Focolare homeland after Italy. It is not by chance, therefore, that Lubich first conceived the EoC project during a travel in that country, after witnessing from the plane the contrast between the Sao Paulo skyscrapers and the surrounding *favelas*. The founder of the Focolare invited thus the members of the movement to create enterprises 'in order to engage everybody's skills and resources to produce together wealth in favour of the destitute'. About the profits, they had to be used 'for the same purposes as in the early Christian community: one part to help the poor [...], one part to develop education institutions to create "new men" [...]; and a last part [...] to enhance the enterprise'.¹⁰

The members of the movement answered Lubich's call enthusiastically, and very quickly dozens of EoC enterprises were created, with such a rate of growth that in 2000 an independent study already listed 750 EoC enterprises spanning with their activities over 100 countries.¹¹ It is remarkable however that, after the early 2000s, these figures haven't substantially been updated, after the official ones provided by Gold, according to whom 'there are 246 businesses in Italy, 233 are in the rest of Europe (of which 60 are in Eastern Europe), 176 are in Latin America, 48 in North America, 40 in Asia, 15 in Australia, and 9 in Africa'. As for the characteristics of these businesses, 'the majority are small- and medium-size companies [...] 194 engaged in productive activities, 156 in commerce, and 343 in the services sector'.¹² These data are confirmed by the observations and the interviews gathered by the author of this paper, which also highlight a trend

8 Gallagher, *A Woman's Work*.

9 Roberto Catalano, *Spiritualità di comunione e dialogo interreligioso. L'esperienza di Chiara Lubich e del movimento dei Focolari*, Città Nuova, Roma, 2010; Gallagher, *A Woman's Work*.

10 Chiara Lubich, *L'economia di Comunione. Storia e profezia*, Città Nuova, Roma, 2001, pp. 23–24.

11 Keith T. Linard, Economy of Communion: Systemic Factors in the Rise of a New Entrepreneurship, *Systems Research and Behavioral Science* Vol. 20, no. 2, 2003, pp. 163–175.

12 Lorna Gold, The Roots of the Focolare Movement's Economic Ethic, *Journal of Markets & Morality*, Vol. 6, no. 1, 2003, p. 149.

of transformation of the movement from productive activities (for example, many of the historical Italian EoC enterprises were engaged in the mechanical sector and in agriculture) to services (such as insurances, consulting, medical services).¹³ Although my interviewees involved in the EoC commissions have declared that both a new census and an attempt at better defining the features of an EoC enterprise are underway, no new data seem to be available at the time of writing this paper (May 2018).

Almost since its very beginning, the EoC has been the subject of extensive scholarship (mainly by economists and theologians who were part of the movement) and a countless number of dissertations (almost 400 of which are available online on an EoC website).¹⁴ Moreover, new institutions were created to support the EoC enterprises, such as the Associazione Mondo Unito (united world association) an NGO established in 1986 with the task to manage most of the money given by EoC enterprises and other subjects to help the poor. This organization today carries out projects in all continents 'with cooperation initiatives involving, depending on the context, support for basic needs (housing, food and health), development of agriculture and handicrafts, micro-enterprises, basic education, vocational training, post-emergency interventions and social development'.¹⁵ According to the latest EoC report available, in 2016 the EoC entrepreneurs had shared a total of 1,774,591 euros, 781,167 of which had been spent for the poor (food, housing, schools, social projects and development of new enterprises) and 738,247 for education and training (mainly for the EoC events and schools, and the entrepreneurial poles).¹⁶

Principles of the EoC

The main aim of the research project which includes this analysis of the EoC network was to try to give an answer to some basic questions:

- a) Are religiously/spiritually oriented economic receipts an alternative or just an improvement to the capitalistic neoliberal system?
- b) What are the values of the entrepreneurs and the other people involved? What drives them to adopt modes of economic behaviour which might be prejudicial for their profit?
- c) Are there specific best practices that can be singled out in the movements analysed? Can they be transplanted in other – religious or secular – contexts?

13 It is also interesting to note that nearly all of the 'historical' EoC entrepreneurs we have been in contact with are male; while the younger ones are apparently evenly split between male and female.

14 <http://www.ecodicom.net/tesi.php>, (accessed on 17 July 2017).

15 <http://www.amu-it.eu/chi-siamo/?lang=en>, (accessed on 17 July 2017).

16 Rapporto EdC 2016, <http://www.edc-online.org/es/publicaciones/documentos-pdf-es/rapporto-edc/rapporto-edc-2016/3205-edc44/file.html>, (accessed on 17 July 2017).

In relation to the first question, it is not immediately clear whether the EoC intends to represent an alternative to the capitalistic system and to traditional enterprises: even the main EoC economists declare that the movement is hard to categorize as for profit rather than non profit¹⁷ and define it as ‘a challenge for standard economic theory’.¹⁸ The fact that the EoC is difficult to categorize is also shown by a broader study on Catholic entrepreneurship in Europe carried out by Xabier Itcaina, who creates a category of its own for the EoC, which ‘cannot be reduced to any of these ideal-types [liberal/conservative, communitarian and liberationist] because of its specific connection to a religious movement (the Focolare) and its communitarian and globalized perspective’.¹⁹

On the one hand, if we look at the ideas inspiring the EoC – from the speeches and works of the movement’s founder Chiara Lubich, to the articles and books of the movement’s main thinkers, such as Luigino Bruni – it is evident a very strong criticism towards the capitalistic mode of production, the dehumanization it often involves, and the spreading of consumerism: Lubich indeed explains that the ‘culture of giving’ inspiring the EoC is opposed to the “‘culture of having’ of consumerism.”²⁰ On the other hand, if we look at the EoC enterprises, we see that they operate within the capitalistic system, although not adopting some of its values and practices. This is also shown by our interviewees, who never propose the idea to overthrow the capitalist system based on enterprises, but just seem to be focused on reorienting its values. By the way, it is worthwhile to note that Chiara Lubich herself, in her speech which gave rise to the EoC, was very clear in inviting her followers to create enterprises, and later affirmed that the EoC enterprises ‘produce thus goods and services efficiently, economically, with responsibility, and respecting the rules of competition’.²¹ This emphasis on creating entrepreneurship has been connected by Lorna Gold to Novak’s thesis on the Catholic ethic and the spirit of capitalism,²² because ‘the teaching of Catholicism on “creation” makes it highly compatible with an economic system that emphasizes free enterprise’.²³

It is also necessary to point out that, however, not all the enterprises involved in the project work the same way. Particularly, looking at Lubich’s works and speeches, it is clear that the EoC concept was originally crafted in relation

17 Benedetto Gui, *Le imprese di Economia di Comunione tra non-profit e for profit*, in *Per una Economia di Comunione. Un approccio multidisciplinare*, ed. Luigino Bruni and Luca Crivelli, Città Nuova, Roma, 2004, pp. 179–196.

18 Stefano Zamagni, *The Economy of Communion Project as a Challenge to Standard Economic Theory*, *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* Vol. 70, no. 1, 2014, pp. 44–60.

19 Xabier Itcaina, *Les politiques territoriales du religieux. Médiations Catholiques en Europe du sud* (Dossier soumis en vue de l’obtention de l’Habilitation à diriger des recherches, Sciences Po Bordeaux, 2015), 72; Xabier Itcaina, *Catholic Mediations in Southern Europe: The Invisible Politics of Religion*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2018.

20 Lubich, *La Dottrina spirituale*, p. 331.

21 Lubich, *Leconomia di Comunione. Storia e profezia*, p. 26.

22 Michael Novak, *The Catholic Ethic And The Spirit Of Capitalism*, Free Press, New York, 1993.

23 Gold, *The Roots of the Focolare Movement’s Economic Ethic*, p. 155.

to enterprises – already existing or to be created *ex novo* – explicitly designed to help people in need, and involving people who were part of the hard core membership of the movement – ‘especially married *focolarini* and volunteers’²⁴ – who already lived in a regime of shared goods and revenues in or around the movement’s citadels. This also helps to explain the tripartition of the profits (one third for the poor, one third for the educational activities of the Focolare, and one third to be reinvested in the enterprise), which apparently left no room for the profit of the people involved in the enterprise. When applied to enterprises created by people belonging to the movement, but not necessarily in a community mode – not to mention the cases of EoC entrepreneurs who are simple sympathizers of the movement: a growing category, especially after the creation of the AIPEC (see below) – this concept needed an adaptation, to include a share of the revenues for the entrepreneurs and the workers, and their families.²⁵ Our interviews to the EoC entrepreneurs clearly show this adaptation process, since the interviewees give very different answers to the question about the repartition and the destination of their revenues, and virtually no one of them declares to mechanically apply the tripartition envisaged by Lubich. In relation to this, a standard answer from EoC entrepreneurs is that every year they give as much as possible, and in any case they help people in need in other ways: by supporting workers in dire straits, by setting up social programs in partnership with other institutions, by helping people to attend EoC events, etc. Of course, these differences can also be the consequence of the uneven structures of competition in the different economic sectors where the EoC companies are engaged, as well as of company size issues.

As for the second question, the values which emerge from our interviews, consistent with the literature, are the following:

- a) Respect and consideration for all the people involved in the EoC economic activities – first and foremost workers and customers, but also all other people involved, including competitors – as human beings and not simply as economic actors, according to ‘a spirit of service and cooperation’.²⁶ For example, our interviews (for example #1, #5, #7 and #9) confirm the large corpus of anecdotes already circulating about EoC entrepreneurs helping competitors in need.
- b) Transparency in all domains of the entrepreneurial activity, in relation to workers (who often have access to all acts of the enterprise administration and sometimes also to the decision-making processes), customers, and the public administration.
- c) A style of management inspired to respect for legality in all its forms.

24 Lubich, *La dottrina spirituale*, p. 325; Lubich, *L'economia di Comunione. Storia e Profezia*, p. 12.

25 Benedetto Rocchi, Un sovrappiù di Comunione: Formazione e distribuzione del reddito nelle aziende EdC, in *Per una Economia di Comunione. Un approccio multidisciplinare*, ed. Luigino Bruni and Luca Crivelli, Città Nuova, Roma, 2004, pp. 211–15.

26 Lubich, *La dottrina spirituale*, p. 326.

- d) Respect for the working environment and nature, even when using better materials and lowering pollution mean higher costs and lower revenues (see for example interviews #1 and #6).
- e) Cooperation with other entrepreneurial and social actors inspired by ideals of solidarity, both in the surrounding areas and at the international level.²⁷

As a whole, however, our interviews convey the idea that people involved in the EoC are first and foremost focused on other people and human relations. In fact, although they mention respect for the rules (also in terms of fiscal fairness) and the natural environment, most of their words are spent to talk about their attempts to create good relations with workers and all other people involved in their businesses, including not only customers but also competitors. This philosophy is very clear in the 'Company Cube', recently created by the US EoC entrepreneur John Mundell (interview #6). This is a dice, each face of which represents a tenet of the EoC attitude toward entrepreneurial life:

Build relationships every day
Support with actions, not just words
Share expertise, time, yourself
Value every person, every idea
Be the first to help others
Competitors can be friends too.²⁸

In relation to the second part of the second question (why they adopt business models which might be prejudicial for their revenues), our expectations were instead completely overturned by the answers of our interviewees. First of all, they seem to be not very concerned about a loss or revenues brought about by the adoption of the EoC values and practices; or, if they are, they don't seem anyway to take into account other kinds of economic behaviour as viable in relation to their values as Christians and members of the Focolare. This is the case for example of interviewee #19, a business consultant, who says that she has been left by some clients – or that, in some cases, she has deliberately decided to let them go – because they were willing to find ways to pay fewer taxes that might not be legal. However, more interestingly, in many cases the EoC entrepreneurs declare that their way to do business is not detrimental at all in terms of revenues and business success: on the contrary, they regard it as beneficial for business. This is partly a consequence of the trust in Providence as 'a central element of the corporate culture' already highlighted by Gold, whose main tenet is the belief in 'an "invisible Shareholder" who has "a bank in heaven",

²⁷ Lubich, *La dottrina spirituale*.

²⁸ <http://thecompanycube.org/>, (accessed on 17 July 2017).

and supports the businesses through difficult times.²⁹ This idea, also clearly expressed by several of our interviewees (#1, #3, #7, #12 and #15), is indeed crucial in Lubich's works themselves, where she states: 'in the EoC enterprises, we leave room to the intervention of God', because the EoC is 'an expression of the Focolare movement, which is the Work of God'; accordingly, God is expected to provide the 'hundredfold' promised in the Gospel to those who make unpopular choices for His sake.³⁰ Economic activities become thus a manifestation of God on Earth, since 'economic facts are interpreted as substantive proof for God's intervention in human life.'³¹

This spiritual drive is indeed very evident in the words of most of our interviewees, who seem to be convinced that their economic activity in the EoC movement is the realization of Chiara Lubich's prophetic vision, and the way to apply to the economic domain the broader values inspiring their belonging to the Focolare movement. Several entrepreneurs, however, also explain the success of their model of business in more earthly terms, as a consequence of the relations of trust established with the other subjects involved. For example, they explain that workers treated as human beings and involved in the decision-making are more productive and correct in their work; and that competitors helped in times of need sometimes become precious allies (interviews #1, #5 and #10). The benefits of belonging to the EoC and the Focolare in terms of networks are also sometimes mentioned. In some cases, this happens when the entrepreneur is active in an area with a significant EoC presence (interviews #1, #2, #3, #15 and #19), and can engage in precious exchanges and reciprocal support with other EoC enterprises belonging to the same productive sector. However, the usefulness of the networks is also pointed out by more 'isolated' entrepreneurs, in terms of new ideas which can improve the business models of their enterprises (interview #4). Finally, even when their area is not marked by a significant EoC presence, the entrepreneurs often manage to create networks with other socially-oriented economic actors and public administrations which share some of their values (interview #5) or contribute in other ways to the global network: this is the case, for example of the US entrepreneur John Mundell (interview #6), one of the most cherished EoC representatives, who for many years has been providing opportunities for stages in his enterprise to dozens of young members of the movement from all over the world. Mundell himself describes the above mentioned Company Cube not just as a Christian philosophy of enterprise, but also as 'a new cooperative strategy for small business success.'³²

29 Gold, *The Roots of the Focolare Movement's Economic Ethic*, p. 150.

30 Lubich, *La dottrina spirituale*, p. 328.

31 Gold, *The Roots of the Focolare Movement's Economic Ethic*, p. 146.

32 <http://thecompanycube.org/>, (accessed on 17 July 2017).

EoC Governance in Italy

The organization of the EoC in Italy (which mirrors the organization of other countries where both an entrepreneurial pole and a national organization exist, such as Brazil) is quite complex, considering the fact that three different kinds of organizations, all with a national, when not international scope, coexist: the commissions, the entrepreneurial poles, and the national EoC entrepreneurial organizations.

a) The Commissions

They are the original connection between the Focolare movement and the EoC enterprises envisaged by Lubich after the creation of the EoC in the early 1990s, and they were also the first EoC institutions to be created, immediately after the start of the project in 1991. In the words of one of my interviewees (#20), who is a member of the Italian commission and has participated in the EoC project since its very beginning, the commissions can be defined as 'groups of people belonging to the Focolare movement with a specific expertise in the economic field and the desire to live the spirit of the movement through this economic modality; who become a point of reference in the territory for all the people willing to know and to participate in the EoC project'. Indeed, the commissions have the specific task to meet entrepreneurs willing to join the EoC movement, to follow their path toward the application of the EoC 'rules' (which, as often highlighted by my interviewees, are not meant to be rigid and fixed, since everybody have their own way to live their faith), 'with the look of a brother willing to share your burden', in the words of my interviewee (#20), and to 'certificate' their conformity. Moreover, they are also involved in the organization of events to publicize the EoC among the wider public and in helping the youth willing to study the EoC network.³³ This process of accompanying can involve just a generic help through the transmission of know how and suggestions on how to implement the EoC principles, or be more structured, with the provision of consultancy services: it is not a case that consultancy firms are on the rise within the movement.³⁴ The commissions can include different kinds of members, but more frequently they are entrepreneurs, scholars, and other members of the movement with specific expertises useful for the Commissions aims (among which many of my interviewees specifically mention the youth: a category that was singled out as one of the crucial targets of the project by Chiara Lubich herself). This is also meant to make the commissions apt to interrelate with the broader society while

33 The movement maintains a database of all the theses (MA, BA, and post-doctoral) on the EoC, at the address <http://www.ecodicom.net/tesi.php> (accessed on 17 July 2017).

34 Paolo Frizzi, From Spirituality to Business. The Case of the Innovation Consultancy 'Consulus', paper presented at the Conference on Transnational Religious Movements, Dialogue and Development, University of Turin, 10 December 2015.

the national organizations are primarily focused on the entrepreneurial world.

The fact that the commissions, among the EoC organizations, are the most closely connected to the movement and its spiritual message (in a role of 'keeper' of the EoC principles and their history, according to my interviewees), is also shown by the correspondence of the movement zones with the EoC zones. Unlike other countries, the movement's organization in Italy used to be divided in several geographic zones (each including several Italian regions but in some cases also neighbouring countries such as Albania and Malta), each one with its own EoC commission. However, when the Focolare movement in recent years underwent a reorganization, with the creation of a single Italian zone, the EoC also created a national commission (which, indeed, seems to have created a fourth organizational layer, since the sub-national commissions still exist with their function of liaison with the territory, while the national commission is responsible for the Italian zone and coordinates with the international commission overseeing the whole EoC network).

*b) The entrepreneurial pole Lionello Bonfanti*³⁵

The Pole Bonfanti, inaugurated in 2006 in Incisa Valdarno (near Florence), was the first entrepreneurial pole created in Europe, following the Pole Spartaco in Brazil and the Pole Solidaridad in Argentina, created already in the 1990s. However, its history starts already at the beginning of 2001, with the creation of the E. di C. S.p.A., a widespread ownership association which in 2017 counted 5704 associates: individuals, enterprises and banks, mostly, but not only, belonging to the Focolare. This association was originally created to supervise the planning and the construction of the pole, whose project was officially presented in Loppiano in February 2002. The choice of the location, very close to the Focolare citadel of Loppiano, was not a case, since EoC poles are usually built in locations very close to a permanent Mariapoli. The facility was meant to host some enterprises already active in the Loppiano area, as well as some new enterprises to be created, and others already located in other regions of Italy.

In the 11 years since the inauguration of the pole, however, these plans have partly changed, and a considerable turnover of the enterprises hosted by the Pole is detectable. This was first of all a consequence of the start of a phase of economic crisis in 2007-8.³⁶ This unfavorable economic situation first and foremost meant a downsizing of the whole project: for example, some entrepreneurs who had planned to move their whole activity to the pole were not able to do it, and others utterly renounced to the spaces they had already booked within the structure. Moreover, in the following years many enterprises

35 The information included in this paragraph is mainly based on interview #15.

36 During one of our visits to the pole in March 2017 we gathered some brochures, printed in 2010, listing the enterprises active in the Polo at the time: a majority of them is no longer there at the time of writing this article (May 2018).

had to leave the pole, sometimes to be replaced by others, sometimes to leave empty spaces: which also prompted a research for new partners. In some cases, the new members were not necessarily already part of the EoC movement, but had to be overseen in their path of adoption of the EoC values (with the creation of an ethical code for enterprises becoming part of the pole, and a trial contract of 1 year, which can be renewed if both parts are satisfied). Another consequence of these changes was the partial change in the specialization of the pole: while at first it was thought as mainly including factories and workshops, later it came to host many service providers and professionals, in fields such as consulting, medicine, and insurances (as already mentioned, this fact seems to mirror a broader evolution happened in the last decades within the Italian EoC field, with a partial shift from industry to services). The structure also developed stronger ties with the surrounding territory (rather than only with the Focolare community based in Loppiano) than it was originally thought. These ties are also shown by the large community of shareholders supporting the pole, which – as already mentioned – includes today 5704 associates, which may or may not belong to the Focolare movement.

The pole today also hosts the EoC-Inn incubator, a very recent international Focolare project aiming at fostering the creation and the growth of new EoC enterprises: particularly, during the meeting in Castel Gandolfo celebrating the 25th anniversary of the EoC – during which the EoC-Inn project was officially launched – it was very clear the concern of the movement about the creation and the sustainment of a new batch of EoC enterprises (for example through microcredit and mentoring programs), and in new programs aiming at supporting the existing EoC enterprises in all the phases of their development.

Despite these difficulties, the pole is still cherished by the movement as ‘a prototype of what we would like to give to Italy and to the broader world’ (according to interviewee #20, who is part of the Italian EoC Commission), and this is evident also by the fact that in recent years it hosted the national EoC meetings. According to Luigino Bruni, the poles are, at the same time, ‘a city on the hill’, ‘a sketch of a new and Christian economy’ to be looked at as a model by all others; and also a kind of ‘salt and yeast’ to contaminate the other EoC enterprises which are not part of a pole and be contaminated by them.³⁷

In organizational terms and geographic scope, the pole appears as a two-faced reality. On the one hand, it is undeniable that most enterprises based in it are mostly focused on the surrounding area in terms of economic activity. On the other hand, however, it is very clear that the role of the pole as a symbol of the EoC and the Focolare movement and its cultural project is meant as national if not international (also as a consequence of the role of the Loppiano citadel as the main centre of the Focolare movement at the international level). This point

37 Luigino Bruni, *Il Polo Industriale: Città sul monte e sale della Terra*, in *Economia di Comunione. Una cultura nuova*, ed. Vittorio Pelligra and Antonella Ferrucci (Associazione Internazionale per una Economia di Comunione – AIEC, n.p., n.d., 168–72).

is clearly shown by the membership of the council of administration of the E. di C. S.p.A., currently still owning and managing the structure, which includes entrepreneurs and professionals (three of whom have been interviewed during our research) from different parts of Italy (two from Apulia, one from Sicily, one from Piedmont, and only one, the president, living in the pole area) and one from Belgium. By the way, many of them also have an active role in the national and international EoC commissions, which shows the closeness between these latter and the pole.

*c) The Associazione Italiana per un'Economia di Comunione (AIPEC)*³⁸

In the 2000s, the EoC movement started to create national associations of entrepreneurs, whose prototype was the Associação Nacional por uma Economia de Comunhão (Anpecom), created in Brazil in the mid-2000s. In the 2010s, this example was followed by several countries where a bulk of EoC entrepreneurs exist, such as Argentina, Portugal and Spain. Italy made no exception, with the creation in 2012 of the Associazione Italiana per un'Economia di Comunione (AIPEC). The path toward the creation of the organization started in March 2012, with a meeting of EoC entrepreneurs at the Polo Bonfanti, which ushered in the creation of a workgroup of eight people, who in the following month elaborated the charter and the ethical code of the association (with the involvement of other experts belonging to the Focolare movement, particularly from Sophia University in Loppiano) which was formally created in September 2012.³⁹ The AIPEC is described by its website as 'an association of entrepreneurs, professionals and enterprises which aim at setting the culture of giving as an added value to their work in the domestic and international markets', in order to 'concretely support enterprises, help them to grow and develop in the culture of giving, and favour the creation of new enterprises, ideas and opportunities.'⁴⁰ The three main points highlighted for this are the knowledge of enterprises which are part of the association, in order to create new connections; the training of people and enterprises in the spirit of the culture of giving; and the creation of enterprises aiming at eradicating poverty and injustice, and at creating a new social and economic system based on communion. Although its primary focus are entrepreneurs and professionals, the association is also open to the membership of associations and common citizens who share the principles of the economy of communion (a choice which, according to the AIPEC president, has been suggested by Prof. Luigino Bruni – a very close collaborator of Chiara Lubich since the very beginning of the EoC and today probably the main EoC ideologue – in order not to create 'a caste of entrepreneurs'). At the time of

38 Most of the information included in this paragraph is based on interview #1.

39 <http://www.aipec.it/storia-dell'associazione/> (accessed on 18 July 2017)

40 <http://www.aipec.it/associazione-e-obiettivi/> (accessed on 18 July 2017)

writing this paper (May 2018), the association has about 300 members (more than 1/10 only in the Piedmont region, where the AIPEC president lives and works), although about half of them are individuals who are not part of an economic enterprise. On the other hand, according to the AIPEC president, most of the 'historical' EoC enterprises have not yet entered the association, since they are allegedly afraid of the openness of the AIPEC ('we accept everybody', in the words of its President), and concerned about preserving their purity. This might imply some kind of tension between the historical EoC network and the new AIPEC project, which has however been denied by all interviewees, who highlight the freedom of choice implied in the EoC project (whose complete name originally was, indeed, 'Economy of Communion in Freedom').

Five years after its creation, the AIPEC looks like a fully-fledged and lively national organization, with a working website (which is not true for national EoC organizations in other countries), local representatives in most Italian regions, and a thick agenda which includes the organization of national and local meetings and other events, the sponsorship of courses of civil economy (in partnership with the School of Civil Economy based in the Polo Bonfanti – interview #18), and a frequent presence in national and local media of its most prominent members. In 2018 it celebrated its first national congress in Turin, in a 1000-seats room, with the introduction of a well known tv presenter and the participation not only of EoC entrepreneurs, but also famous non-EoC socially oriented entrepreneurs, journalists, athletes, etc. The author of this article has also participated in several meetings of the Piedmont section (which is particularly lively, since the AIPEC president and some historical EoC entrepreneurs live in the region), which usually include a moment of shared food and free socialization, followed by the presentation of two enterprises (which may already belong to the association, but also be non-EoC socially-oriented enterprises) and their practices in the framework of the EoC. This model seems to be quite fruitful in terms of both socialization among members (which might also imply new economic opportunities) and reaching out efforts to new potential members.

In any case, the AIPEC project seems to be the signal of an attempt to widen the EoC network in order to get a 'critical mass' (in the words of some of my interviewees), which is also the purpose of two other very recent project of the global EoC network: the EoC-Inn incubators, and the Mecc microcredit project.

Concluding remarks: can the EoC be exported outside the Focolare?

To sum up, the EoC looks like a very interesting and very productive experiment in times of economic crisis and attempts at rethinking the capitalist economic system. In these terms, its added value seems to be the capability to show that a more human and sustainable way to do business is not incompatible with effectiveness and economic results. In other words, the EoC shows 'that it

is possible to structure relationships based on the gratuitous and free gift of self – the opposite of rational egoism – and still survive on the market.⁴¹ However, it also ‘indicates the possibility that the market can become a space characterized not only by efficiency, but also by room to live out spirituality and a culture of giving, love and fraternity, on the condition that cultural foundations are laid,⁴² thus raising business ‘to a high dignity.’⁴³

Indeed, the EoC seems to be a movement aiming at infusing values into capitalism rather than building some kind of alternative economic system. On the one hand, the fact that it is based on enterprises rather than other kinds of economic agents makes it easier for it to go mainstream, even with the paradoxical consequence that EoC enterprises are sometimes difficult to single out at first sight from the outside. On the other hand, however, its dependence on Christian values and the Focolare movement can be a problem for the exportability of the model, which would require a theorization in secular (or, at least, non Christian) terms which has, so far, not taken place. Most of all, what is needed is an operational definition of what an EoC enterprise is, which can be adopted to put in place some kind of certification. This latter, and possibly some kind of EoC label or logo would perform two essential functions: it would provide more visibility to the movement, its enterprises and its message to the outside public; and it would provide a litmus test to decide what is within the movement and what is outside it.

Without this, the current attempts at widening the movement and popularizing the EoC philosophy outside the Focolare movement (which in Italy is carried out mainly by the AIPEC) is bound to make the boundaries between the EoC movement and the broader non profit sector very fuzzy. This could ultimately have a negative effect on the identity of the movement itself, by undermining its cohesion and stability. This danger seems to be perceived both by some EoC entrepreneurs, who seem to have a rather cautious approach towards the recent developments; and by the EoC commissions themselves, which are currently carrying up an effort to take a census of the EoC world and to provide more precise criteria to define an EoC enterprise and singling it out from other kinds of humanitarian economic agents.

41 Amelia J. Uelmen and Luigino Bruni, *Religious Values and Corporate Decision Making: The Economy of Communion Project*, *Fordham Journal of Corporate and Financial Law* Vol. 11, 2006, p. 662.

42 Uelmen and Bruni, p. 670.

43 Gregorio Guitian, *Integral Subsidiarity and Economy of Communion: Two Challenges from Caritas in Veritate*, *Journal of Markets & Morality* Vol. 13, No. 2, 2012, p. 292.

Appendix 1 – List of Interviewees

- 1) Male, mechanical industry CEO (Marene (CN) – Italy) – AIPEC President, Marene, March 31, 2016
- 2) Male, mechanical industry CEO (Grugliasco (TO) – Italy), Grugliasco, July 15, 2016
- 3) Male, Construction firm CEO (La Loggia (TO) – Italy), La Loggia, July 19, 2016
- 4) Male, small retail shop owner (Montecosaro (MC) – Italy), Castel Gandolfo, February 2, 2017
- 5) Male, mechanical industry CEO (Bari – Italy), Castel Gandolfo, February 3, 2017
- 6) Male, environmental consultant (Indianapolis – USA), Castel Gandolfo, February 3, 2017
- 7) Male, pharmaceutical industry CEO (Curitiba – Brazil), Castel Gandolfo, February 3, 2017
- 8) Male, consultancy firm CEO (Singapore), Castel Gandolfo, February 3, 2017
- 9) Male, pharmaceutical industry CEO (Córdoba, Argentina), Castel Gandolfo, February 4, 2017
- 10) Male, engineer (Barcelona, Spain), Castel Gandolfo, February 4, 2017
- 11) Male, banker – Microcredit operator (MECC) (Palermo – Italy), Turin, February 16, 2017
- 12) Female, president of medical clinic (Figline e Incisa Valdarno (FI) – Italy), Figline e Incisa Valdarno, March 16, 2017
- 13) Male, agricultural firm CEO, (Figline e Incisa Valdarno (FI) – Italy), Figline e Incisa Valdarno, March 16, 2017
- 14) Female, door and window manufacturer, (Figline e Incisa Valdarno (FI) – Italy), Figline e Incisa Valdarno, March 16, 2017
- 15) Female, consultancy firm CEO – E. di C. SpA President (Figline e Incisa Valdarno (FI) – Italy), Figline e Incisa Valdarno, March 16, 2017 – Skype, March 24, 2017
- 16) Male, President of Fondazione per Sophia (Figline e Incisa Valdarno (FI) – Italy), Figline e Incisa Valdarno, March 17, 2017
- 17) Female, EoC-Inn (incubator programme) coordinator (Figline e Incisa Valdarno (FI) – Italy), Figline e Incisa Valdarno, March 17, 2017
- 18) Male, Director of educational institution (Figline e Incisa Valdarno (FI) – Italy), Figline e Incisa Valdarno, March 17, 2017
- 19) Female, business consultant (Figline e Incisa Valdarno (FI) – Italy), Figline e Incisa Valdarno, March 17, 2017
- 20) Female, member of the Italian EoC Commission (Palermo – Italy), Skype, April 11, 2017

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Лука Оцано
ДРУШТВЕНИ ПОКРЕТИ, ИНОВАЦИЈЕ И УПРАВЉАЊЕ: СЛУЧАЈ
ЕКОНОМСКЕ ЗАЈЕДНИЦЕ У ИТАЛИЈИ

Сажетак

Покрет Економске заједнице (ЕЗ) јесте један од најинтересантнијих покрета у данашњем католицизму, али и у области спиритуално оријентисаног глобалног предузетништва. Овај покрет, који је први пут елабориран од стране Киаре Лубиц, оснивачице Фоколаро покрета, се фокусира на 'културу давања'; развоју односа између заједнице и запослених; госта и чак конкурента; транспарентност и правду, и на еколошку одрживост. Иако заснована у Јеванђељу и католичкој социјалној доктрини, ова заједница је замишљена као бизнис модел који може бити прихваћен и од других верских традиција, чак и атеиста. Овај рад, који се заснива на интервјуима са особама које су укључене у рад ЕЗ-а и на другим примарним и секундарним изворима, анализира овај покрет у Италији и фокусира се на питање које је запостављено у литератури: комплексну организациону мрежу која нуди структуру и управљање. Посебно, овај чланак показује како таква организација покушава да утиче на равнотежу између одржавања идентитета покрета и поруке Киаре Лубиц, али и ширење модела који покушава да буде популаран и ван Фоколаро покрета.

Кључне речи: Економска заједница, Фоколаре покрет, католицизам, религија и економија, верских усмерено предузетништво, Италија

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