

Education as a strategy to combat poverty. The microcredit, the accompanying and the family budget, the most suitable instruments to deal with the new poverties

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Abstract: The aim of the article is to highlight the educational role of money in the intervention against poverty. Many times, in fact, poverty arises from people's incapacity to choose and make decisions, to set up priorities and manage their income and savings. The article takes inspiration from the reflection that the Caritas of FVG and the Regional Observatory on poverty of FVG have made on this issue and in particular on the experimentations of the microcredit and the economic accompanying set up by the Caritas. These experimentations recover the original relational dimension of the money and use it as an instrument for introducing the individual in need to a network of personal relationships in order to give him/her confidence again and to embark upon and proceed in an educational process to develop the individual in need abilities in making decisions and in choosing.

Key words: Poverty, money, economic accompanying, microcredit

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Introduction

In the current historical period in which the economic crisis increases the number of people whose income is heavily diminished by the reduction or loss of their job and which causes impoverishment or poverty, it is of great interest and utility to reflect upon the kind of interventions implemented to help them. As the present economic crisis confirms, in situations like these, the first and the foremost widespread intervention adopted comprises benefits and contribution to support income. In fact, economic interventions are among the most common measures to counteract poverty. But they are also the most debated and contrasted for their doubtful, or rather weak efficacy and for the risks of opportunism that accompanies them. A lot of the stereotypes and the prejudices about poverty and the poor, in fact, are nurtured by the political discussion regarding economic measures. Hence, politicians and public and non profit administrators make great efforts to succeed in finding, through reforms and experimentations, the most equitable, efficacious and efficient modalities to implement this kind of intervention.

This article takes inspiration from the reflection that the Caritas of FVG and the Regional Observatory on poverty of FVG have made on this issue. Their analysis has focused in particular on the experimentations of the microcredit and the economic accompanying set up by the Caritas and has also highlighted two objectives. On the one hand, it emphasized that among the causes of poverty there is often the incapacity to use the money and, on the other hand, that the efficacy of the economic interventions established to combat poverty and to help the poor depends on the educational process which, through the economical aid, is carried out with the poor.

The experimentations set up by the Caritas, in fact, recover the original relational dimension of the money and use it as an instrument for introducing the individual in need to a network of personal relationships in order to give him/her confidence again and to embark upon and proceed in an educational process to develop the individual in need abilities in making decisions and in choosing.

Reconsidering the economic measures against poverty

Among the measures against poverty, the economic interventions are the most contrasted. A lot of the stereotypes and prejudices about poverty and the poor, in fact, are nurtured by the political discussion about these kinds of interventions (Bosco and Negri, 1997; Bosco, 2003). Nevertheless, they are still the most common interventions against poverty and the ones set up first in periods of economic crisis such as the one that currently involves Italy as well as the rest of Europe. In FVG, for example, in this situation of crisis, the effort made by the Region, the Province, the Municipalities and the Caritas has been immediate and substantial in establishing economic intervention to support the income of individuals and families hit by the economic crisis. This kind of interventions, in view of its particular consistency, has given rise to many questions about its efficacy with regard to the severity of the crisis but also with regard to the situations of poverty in general and of impoverishment. Hence, the economic interventions established to contrast the crisis have again drawn attention to the opportunity and efficacy of their application, an issue that has been object of reflection at regional, national and international level over a long period of time.

The debate held at national level about the introduction of a universal measure (i. e. the citizen income, the minimum income of guarantee, the minimum income of employment) seems to have been neglected, now more than in the past, an instrument, such as the microcredit, considered worth while and useful. In the reflection about the reform of the economic interventions to support people's income, the microcredit does not seem to receive the attention it merits to fit in very well in situations of poverty caused by the ongoing economic crisis.

Nowadays, in fact, talking about poverty means referring a series of very different situations, which concern: people who are living a limited period of poverty which has no consequence on their life opportunities or on their self esteem; people for whom the periods of poverty are recurrent because they are in a persistent situation of economic precariousness that does not allow them to face the crisis; people for whom poverty is a constant situation that is handed down from generation to generation, without offering them any opportunity to change.

Bearing this in mind, it is fundamental to distinguish people who are always poor and people who are poor only for a limited period of their life (Siza, 2009). This distinction, in particular, is essential to operate with efficacy in order to avoid that a temporary situation of poverty becomes a recurrent one and, progressively, a persistent or a chronic situation of poverty. For this reason it is very important to recognize the particular characteristics of the new types of poverty in order to discover the best ways to deal with them efficaciously.

The first feature of the new types of poverty is the great diffusion thereof. This type of poverty, in fact, regards a wider sphere of people today, than it did in the past, and needs to be faced with strategies and instruments that allow all these people to be reached. In view of the large number of the people who need help, the equality and the supportability of the economic interventions become still more important and make it necessary to combine both these aspects in order to ensure social cohesion.

The number of the so called the new poor has enlarged because the situations in which the risk of impoverishment and of poverty is very high has increased. The expression indicative of this enlargement is vulnerability, an expression introduced to denote those situations of weakness, insecurity and exposure to risk regarding permanent workers and employees or people with low qualifications but also relative to a wide sector of the middle class, for whom impoverishment is more probable due to the changes of the labour market and of the society on the whole (Guidicini, 2000).

In the area of the vulnerability we can find, first of all, the *outnumbered* (Castel, 1993), that is people who are in excess in the labour market or who are not necessary, non-useful, like the homeless in the society and without any chance to find a place therein (Bauman, 2004). They are not necessarily poor but are at risk of impoverishment more than others because their life is threatened by problems that are related to many spheres of life and can cause situations of impoverishment and insecurity. Although their problems are not necessarily negative or unsatisfactory at the present, they can easily become so in the future.

In general, these situations are characterized by the uncertainty of the income and of the job, and regard people with a permanent job but an

uncertain income, people with an uncertain job and a satisfactory income, people with an uncertain income and job. The vulnerability shows itself, in particular, through three trends: the destabilization of those who are stable, that is people with permanent jobs such as the working class; the establishment of precariousness, that is the change in the work states from temporary jobs to odd jobs, to receiving social benefits especially common among women and young people; the increase of the number of people that the labour market cannot absorb and who become “*outnumbered*” (Castel, 1997). These trends depend on the simultaneous crisis of the three great institutions that are the foundation of the security of the industrial society in the Fordism era namely, the job market dominated by the large industry; the family characterized by the traditional distinction of roles based on gender; the welfare system established on the obligatory social assistance (Meo and Negri, 2002; Negri, 2006).

The vulnerability, in fact, is not limited only to the precariousness of employment, but also concerns the precariousness or the stability of people in the main systems of social integration: these are the job, the welfare and the family (Ranci, 2002).

This counts in particular in Italy where the family has a relevant role inside the welfare system and is used as an important buffer against social vulnerability. Poverty and impoverishment, in fact, are not only caused by the lack or by the inadequacy of the work, but also by the lack or by the scarcity of family and social relationships. “Poorly payed work or the lack of work has worse effects when people have weak social relationships, when their relationships are poor or without significant human contacts and when they do not have a social network that could give them support. Poor work and poor relationships connected in different ways and cause a lot of different types of poverty-stricken situations and of poor life styles: people without income but supported by the relationships existing among themselves and their family of origin which makes economic difficulties more bearable or, alternatively, people whose work and social relationships are both poor. The emphasis on the precariousness of the work, or the dynamics of the work, can hide a more complex reality in which the spheres of life naturally compensate each other only in part, or they

accentuate the discomfort of a condition of life and can even make it worse” (Siza, 2009, p. 12).

Referred to the family, the trends of instability by which vulnerability shows itself, as aforesaid, bring us to consider vulnerable the families where young people are unemployed, those where there are young children and the mother’s job is temporary, as well as families where the breadwinner has a temporary job and, in particular, where he/she is also without a husband/wife (Migliavacca, 2002).

A second feature of the new types of poverty is that they concern a number of people who were up to the present considered immune from the risk of poverty and who suddenly find themselves having to face it. The new types of poverty, in fact, regard people who would never have imagined becoming poor and who are totally unable to face it because they haven’t at their disposal “the narrative abilities to explain this new situation to themselves” and “the cognitive instruments to move in an area of discomforts and poverty that they had not known before” (Revelli, 2010, p. 89).

These people need to be accompanied in a process of orientation and re-orientation of their life, because they need to understand which personal and community resources they can count on, and how they can use these resources to get out of the difficult situation in which they find themselves. Often, in fact, the loss or reduction of work compromises life situations whose balance was very weak or at a high risk of breaking. Living above one’s possibilities, long-term investments made without calculating the risk factor, the incapacity to save money or to organize expenditures on the basis of priorities are some of the situations that give rise to impoverishment and to poverty triggered off a sudden loss of work. These situations highlight the fact that the people who find themselves in situations like these are lacking in the ability of managing their income and of choosing and making decisions; they need to be educated in the use of money as such, in order to realize the projects of their life in particular.

The third feature of the new types of poverty is their fluctuating course (Alcock and Siza, 2003). These are the situations that come and go, so there is an increasing number of people who live short periods of impoverishment from which they can get out of if they are helped in a right

way. The term vulnerability aims at highlighting the dynamic and progressive nature of poverty. This term, in fact, has been introduced by Castel (1991) to emphasize how poverty is a path that a person can cover during his/her life time, on the basis of the professional and relational situations in which he/she may find himself/herself. From this perspective, everyone can go along this path, in an ascending or descending way, through a condition of social integration, characterized by a permanent job and firm relational supports, in particular family support, to a situation of vulnerability characterized by precariousness and weakness in the job and personal relationships, to a situation of disaffiliation characterized by the breaking of every social tie, unemployment and social exclusion.

With respect to the past, nowadays there is an increasing number of people involved in the fluctuations between periods of poverty and periods when their income is barely sufficient, people who often go in and out of poverty, in concomitance with events that in the short or middle term could change (Siza, 2009).

Remaining in a situation of poverty has become more unstable, with longer or shorter periods, and with consequences which are more or less long-lasting. Entering or leaving the state of poverty, however, does not highlight a situation of real social mobility, but rather highlight very weak life conditions in many dimensions that can be improved only in part by a contingent improvement of the income available. Hence, as we shall later see, it is very important to accompany the economic interventions with other types of interventions and to assign them in a way that could have positive effects not only from the economic point of view but also regarding the global dimension of the person. Recent longitudinal and dynamic studies have “pointed out the complexity of being exposed to risks due to the lack of the availability of an adequate income. In particular, they have shown that people and families who become poor at least ones during their life time are more numerous than it appears in cross studies. They have also highlighted that the number of people and families constantly in poverty are less than people and families that suffer poverty in a specific period of their life. So, in modern societies, it is possible to distinguish three groups of poor people: those who are in a state of poverty occasionally (only ones in their life time); viceversa, people who are

always in poverty (for much longer periods; people who are in a state of poverty on a recurring basis (that is, those who go in and out of poverty again and again)” (Saraceno and Schizzerotto, 2009, p. 22).

These studies² have also shown that on the one hand, poverty and social exclusion are dynamic processes that last for a long time, and, on the other hand, that there are relevant effects of spillovers, “therefore to be in poverty (or social exclusion) in a particular moment, make it more probable to become poor (or to be excluded) in the future as well” (Devicienti and Poggi, 2009, p. 88).

In situations of new poverty which do not last for a long time and which have a great possibility of rebuilding satisfactory economic conditions, the rapidity of the intervention is fundamental, because people who are in this kind of situation are less ready psychologically to face the consequences of impoverishment (Revelli, 2010) and because “the longer one person remains in a condition of poverty, the less possibilities there will be for him/her to overcome this situation, to avoid losing any professional competences, relational abilities, and a life style that can allow him/her to return to a normal social life” (Siza, 2009, p. 8).

The economic interventions can be set up quickly, but, the mere granting of the funds cannot easily fulfil all the situations of new poverty and resolve the problems from which they arose. For this reason, it is necessary to find other instruments and different ways to help the people so called new poor economically. An alternative instrument is the microcredit which, instead of simply giving money lends it, and in so doing promotes a completely different consideration of both the money and of the person who lends or borrows it.

Recover the relational dimension of money: the microcredit

The microcredito, in fact, recovers the social relationship nature intrinsic of money and its original capability of representing the

² Devicienti and Poggi, 2007; 2009.

relationships at the basis of society. As Simmel (1900, p. 232) emphasized at the beginning of the Nineteenth century, the money “is the expression and the means of the relationship, of the mutual dependence of men and of their relativity that makes the fulfilment of one’s wishes depend on the interaction with others; so money does not find a place where there is no relationship between people, both because people do not expect anything from others and because we elevate above the level of other men – so without any relationship with them – and it is possible to satisfy every desire without having to give something in return”. Hence money arises from a structure of social relationships and contributes to improve and regenerate it. Weber as well had recognised that tied to the instrumental dimension of money related to payment, was the symbolic and relational dimension too, that is essential for the development of the spirit of modern capitalism. Since the beginning of the *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*, in fact, money is shown by Weber as the instrument which highlights the quality of honesty, diligence, moderation, punctuality and precision in the personal business of people who embody the spirit of modern capitalism and who have success in business. In particular, the bond between the debit and credit, peculiar to the nature of money, allows it to appear as a symbol of the trust which circulates in the social relationships that form the basis of the relations between debtor and creditor. The relationship that through money passes from the creditor who offers his trust, to the debtor who shows his reliability, becomes the symbol and the presupposition for other similar relationships that could be established later on. Simmel theorized in the most complete way the symbolic nature of money. In his *Philosophie des Geldes*, in fact, he shows money as the preferential code to express the impersonal and generalized trust. Through its features of extreme versatility, ease of measurement and ability to defer payments, it allows to enlarge on the one hand, the relationships, and on the other the individual freedom. For Simmel, money has a relational origin, not only because basically there is an interaction between two subjects but also because this interaction is extended to a third entity represented by the society which answers for the exchange of money itself. This trust in the society functioning as warrantee does not only constitute the foundation of the economy but also that of the social order. “As the society would disintegrated itself in the absence of trust between

men – [...] – so too would the circulation of currency be lacking in the absence of trust [...]. The feeling of personal security given by the ownership of money is perhaps the deepest and strongest form and expression of trust in the State organization and in the order of the society” (Simmel, 1900, p. 263-264).

Parsons also moves along this perspective; he considers the money to be one of the universal elements responsible for the overcoming of the primitive stadium of the social evolution. In his theory, in fact, money represents the generalized symbolic means of economic exchange in the subsystem of the market and becomes the medium of instrumental use of goods and services, shifting the attention from the significance of the immediate consumption of goods to their becoming instruments aimed at other goals. As a means of generalized exchange, money represents the passage from the inter-personal to the systemic trust, that is based on more standardized rules and on instruments more abstract and recognizable everywhere for every kind of economic action in the social system.

According to Luhmann (2000), the institution of the money allows the passage from the interpersonal trust to the systemic one. “Anyone who has trust in the stability of the value of money and in the continuity of a plurality of opportunities to spend it, sets off from the presupposition that a system functions, and put his trust in the functioning instead of in someone known to him” (Luhmann, 2000, p. 77). In this way, there occurs the passage from the interpersonal trust based on familiarity to the systemic trust free from any bond with each single person and obtained through a process of learning based on repeated and positive experiences.

The microcredit recovers this original relational dimension of money, using it as a means of communication with which to express trust and reliability that enable relevant relationships between persons to originate and develop. The microcredit, as also the microfinance in which it is placed, draws its inspiration from the ancient idea of the loan which can be found in the communities and villages of the rural areas. It was from this idea that originated the first rotative funds, the first credit associations and later the Monti di Pietà. The latter are special banks that in the XIII century, issued loans of small entity and for a short period of time, generally from six to twelve months, to people not those with special needs but also by

small craftsmen and farmers who, with a small loan, could overcome a period of crisis or develop their own business.

The microcredit is particularly known today for the way it was experimented and promoted by the bengalish Muhammad Yunus with the Grameen Bank, “the bank of the poor”, set up to lend to the “poorest among the poor” (Yunus, 1998). The microcredit is based on some fundamental principles which rotate around the issue of trust and relationships and which have a strong educational function towards those who receive the loan. Loans, in fact, are based on personal warrants, in general warrants of a group instead of a single person; at first the amount of the loan is small and is given in periodic instalments only if it is regularly paid within the established time limit; the loan is expected to be refunded by frequent instalments during public meetings; if one of the debtors cannot repay the loan, the entire group is responsible. As we can see, the issue and the refund of the loan are carried out in such a way as to make both the person who borrows the loan as well as the one who grants it responsible. All the system, in fact, is based on relationships of trust, “on the possibility that between the bank and the creditor and between the creditors themselves established a cooperative relationship aimed at the attainment of a common good and not only of a reciprocal advantage, a relationship between partners and not between contracting parties, a subtraction of selfishness instead of an addition of utilities. A relationship where the fundamental resources of the microcredit originate and take place: the recognition of the person, the trust, and the dignity that this trust gives to the person who receives the loan, thereby leading to trustworthiness” (Andreoni and Pelligra, 2009, p. 20).

The simplicity and efficacy of this model of microcredit, which proves that the *poor are solvent*, fostered its diffusion in many developing countries and promoted the experimentation of different kinds of microcredit which maintain some original features and modify others in order to adapt it to the specificity of the industrial contexts, among which Europe as well and, in particular, Italy. Furthermore, during the last years, the European Commission, The European Bank for Investments (BEI) and the European Fund for Investment (FEI) have launched a set of programmes to promote the spreading of microfinance and microcredit in

Europe. A goal that, after the huge financial and economic crisis that involved the member countries, became more and more current and relevant. “The recent social transformations, and in particular the precariousness of work, the impoverishment of the middle class and the working poor, that is those workers whose wages do not allow them to lead standard life like the middle-low class, are further situations of vulnerability in which the microcredit can represent a useful support. [...] Contrary to the credit granted for consumption purposes, the microcredit can represent a means to discretely bring unbanked people to the traditional banking sector, giving them training and consulting and contributing, in this way, to introduce them into the financial sector in order to prevent them from running into debts [...]” (Niccoli and Presbitero, 2009, pp. 103-104).

In general, there are two main types of microcredit: one to finance investments and one to finance consumption. The first type tries to overcome one of the main obstacles to the economic growth, that is the lack of capital necessary to produce, to support development and improve business, whereas the second type allows the payment in advance for the purchase of durable and perishable goods.

The projects of microcredit and the economic accompanying set up by the Caritas of FVG come into this framework. These projects have been established since 2004 by the Caritas of FVG in reply to the needs of families and individuals who cannot face relevant expenditures, although having a sufficient income or after the suddenly reduction of it, or families and individuals who cannot pay daily expenditures (such as rental, mortgage loans, instalments of other loans, domestic expenditures) because they have lost their jobs and cannot benefit from social economic supports (unemployment fund or an unemployment subsidy) and/or from other grants of public social protection because the income they had when they were at work exceeded the fixed limit to have access to the welfare. To reply to this kind of needs the Caritas of FVG have promoted the establishment of an extraordinary fund – the so called extraordinary fund for solidarity – by the local and ecclesial communities to finance experimental projects of microcredit which provide the issue of small loans to individuals and families struck by the crisis.

The projects establish that the loan can be granted to people who have a sufficient income, to those who cannot accede to ordinary bank credit and that the amount of the loans must be small. In fact, these amounts range from € 1.500,00 to € 2.000,00 or to a maximum of € 3.000,00; they have a very low repayment rate and are contracted with banks which have signed a convention with the Caritas of FVG. Sometimes the loans are issued on the basis of a trust fund that covers the risk of default in repayment for the 50% or the 100%. Other times, instead, the bank takes all the defaults upon itself. These projects distinguish themselves for the rapidity in accomplishing every fulfilment necessary to receive the loan. Generally the procedure takes a month from the application for the loan to the issue thereof; it takes two weeks for the assessment by the Caritas and then it takes a further two weeks for the bank operations.

Money, but not only: the educational perspective of the accompanying and of the family budget

The most innovative and original feature of the projects of the microcredit set up by the Caritas of FVG is represented by the educational dimension, which is realized using two instruments: the accompanying and the family budget. These projects take inspiration from the acknowledgment that isolation or social exclusion and the inability in managing one's own income are two kinds of poverty that can cause further kinds of poverty. For this reason, the interventions of microcredit and economic support established by the Caritas are never limited to issuing a loan or to giving an economic benefits but always try to accompany the person, to teach him/her to manage his/her own income and to introduce him/her to a network of relationships.

When facing economic poverty, it is easy to forget that among its numerous causes there is also the lack, scarcity or inadequacy of personal and parental relationships and it is easy to think that, on the one hand the lack of income alone can cause impoverishment and on the other, the benefits or the loans themselves can overcome it. Instead, the economic poverty as well is frequently caused by personal and social uneasiness and

therefore it can also be overcome by the relationships that the person actually has or by the relationships that can be developed around him/her. The person and his/her community – that is, all his/her relevant relationships – always represent the hinge around which every instrument and intervention against poverty must rotate. The latter, in fact, must always be aimed at promoting and developing a positive and promotional relationship with the person and between the person himself/herself and the other people significant for him/her. For this reason, every instrument and intervention in favour of or to help the poor must also involve the persons who are relevant and close to him/her or those who can become relevant or close to him/her.

The accompanying, an extremely topical instrument used in many different sectors, such as education, teaching, social and sanitary contexts as the preferred strategy to developing positive relationships of aid, support and care, can be applied in a wide range of practices – for example coaching, counselling, mentoring, orienteering – that share the particular relationship which exists between the person who accompanies and the one who is accompanied³. The accompanying, in fact, focuses its attention and action on the person who needs to be accompanied and not on the person who accompanies whose action could assume different types. There are three main types of action that can be indicated with three synonymous of the verb “to accompany”. They are: to conduct, when the intervention emphasizes «the aspects of motivating someone, following exact rules and checking the various steps, insisting on the control by a responsible authority and aimed at achieving a specific goal and at maintaining a proper behaviour»; to escort, when it assumes a therapeutic and repairing significance or when it implies taking care of the person and assumes the meaning «of the shelter to bring to someone, to prevent and to watch over possible deficiencies, but also to defend and remedy possible weaknesses»; to guide when the intervention emphasizes the experience and the competences to orient the person «in making a decision and to foster any

³ To go in depth in this issue you can see Biasin [2010], who highlights the etymologic significance of the accompanying and describes its applications in different contexts.

development arising therefrom as though it were an advice aimed at supporting a choice» [ivi, 23].

In the context of social work, the idea of the accompanying goes back to the first modalities of intervention that, from the beginning, did not limit themselves to offering a material aid or a simple economic benefit, but also provided a “relationship with the person in need to help him/her find his/her dignity again and to activate all his/her energies in order to get out of the situation of poverty” (Landuzzi and Pieretti, 2003, p. 14). Already at the beginning of the 1800s, it was clear that “good advice together with an exhortation, aimed at modifying the various aspects of the stylelife, could be more efficacious than money or the exclusively delivery of material goods” (*ibidem*). As a specific methodology of intervention rooted in the history of social work, the accompanying has, in the long run, assumed different kinds of applications which have confirmed its efficacy, in particular in the situations of extreme poverty. The recent national and regional laws that reform the assistance system propose, once again, the accompanying as a means to overcome the charitable and repairing logic of many interventions - based on an administrative management and a predefined approach to needs - and to proceed to take care of the person in need with an overall and personalized approach, functional in enabling him/her to trust once more in his/her abilities and to make him/her responsible of his/her own life’s project.

For the Caritas of FVG the accompanying is above all the way to highlight the centrality of the relationship in the intervention to help a person. The person and the community are the focus of the accompanying and they nurture each other: in fact, if the poor find support in the community, the latter may also find in the poor an opportunity to recognize some of its own aspects that need to be modified and improved. For the Caritas the accompanying is at the same time both an instrument as well as a working style which can be applied in different ways on the basis of the specific characteristics of each single situation. Hence, it can be realized co-operating with the person in need in:

- drawing up his/her family budget and making him/her aware of his/her income and expenditures;

- managing his/her budget through advice and suggestions about the family consumptions and expenditures;
- managing his/her indebtedness and making him/her aware about the possible solutions to overcome it;
- making him/her aware of his/her economic situation and in finding the most adequate support.

The accompanying is a kind of intervention that includes activities aimed at the emotional, practical and operative support as well. In fact, it “cannot be limited to a psychological support”, aimed “at trying to modify the behaviour of people in difficulty forcing them to change their way of thinking and to strengthen their motivations ‘to get out’, as if they were the only ones responsible for the situation in which they find themselves” (Castel, 2003, p. 80).

In the projects of economic support of the Caritas the function of accompanying can be entrusted to expert operators or to volunteers or to both of them. The availability of volunteers, without which huge economic resources would be necessary and probably unavailable, does not only warrant the supportability of the accompanying but also gives the person who is accompanied a strong sign of proximity. The volunteers, in fact, demonstrate that a part of the community puts itself beside the person in need to share his/her hardships. At the same time, the volunteers represent without whom the intervention would not be possible, represent the fundamental value of the accompanying as well as the added value, because if the intervention were realized by operators it would be worthless. Hence the volunteers are not considered as simple executives of decisions making elsewhere. In this approach, in fact, the volunteers bridge the gap between the community and the poor. Through them, in fact, the Caritas helps the community to take care of poverty, to take an interest in the poor who live in it, to collaborate with other public organizations in helping the poor. For this reason in the projects of microcredit and in the economic interventions set up by the Caritas, money becomes the instrument to realize an educative intervention in favour of the community. This means:

- to accompany the poor towards the community that is, to build a community around the poor and warrant them relationships. This is the best way to help the poor. The experience of the Caritas in these

years has highlighted that every kind of help is more efficacious when it is possible to build a network of relationships around the person who does not only feels helped but also shares equal dignity on a par with the community;

- to accompany the community towards the poor that is, to reveal the poor and the causes of impoverishment to the community, putting these questions at the centre of the debate and involving public and private organizations in becoming responsible for them. In fact, in the projects of microcredit of the Caritas of FVG, the involvement of the banks and other private institutions is not only aimed at finding more funds, as necessary as they may be, or at using their specific competences, but also to get them to participate in the efforts to overcome poverty and its related problems.

The extraordinary fund of solidarity raised by the Caritas of FVG on the occasion of the economic crisis of 2008, for example, is specifically aimed at giving an economic support through the constitution of a local network made up of the parish churches, that filter the requests, and of the volunteers who accompany the poor in the realization of a project of life which aims at inserting him/her in the labour market and making him/her economically autonomous. Through this fund the Caritas takes care of the poor in a special way, called “adoption by proximity” which foresees that some volunteers adopt or take care of individuals or families which have become poor as a result of the economic crisis, sharing with them their difficulties and strengthening a bond of trust with them.

In this approach, it is possible to recognize the ethical dimension of the accompanying which refers to the logic of gift, of gratuitousness, of exchange at the human level (Biasin, 2010), through which the projects of microcredit set up by the Caritas can develop not only economic capital but also social capital. Social capital, in fact, is unanimously considered (Bourdieu, 1980, 1986; Coleman, 1988, 1990; Putnam *et al.*, 1993; Fukuyama, 1996; Bagnasco *et al.*, 2001; Dasgupta, 2002; Cartocci, 2007) as the particular capital which lies in the relationships that develop among people and grows by the interaction which occurs among them. Social relations constitute the structural component of social capital because they arise from reciprocal rules and practices of trust which are considered

fundamental elements of social capital (Dasgupta, 2002). Social capital is at the same time an individual and a collective resource, because its value goes beyond the individuals, developing solidarity and reciprocity. For this reason, it is “a collective resource, indivisible and inseparable; everyone can make use of it without diminishing its availability for the future. The stock of social capital produces the level of social cohesion, the width and the depth of the horizontal relationships (the relationships of solidarity among unknown people) and the nature of the relation with the institutions. [...] This kind of collective endowment also reflects itself on the quality of the political institutions and on the development of market relations, producing the ethic texture where transactions and relations take place between citizens and institutions: reliability of actors, respect of rules, low opportunistic behaviours, loyalty to institutions” (Cartocci, 2007, pp. 52-53).

The family budget is the second instrument used by the Caritas of FVG in the projects of economic accompanying. It is produced by the operator or the volunteer together with the person who asks for a microcredit when he/she presents the application to get a loan, an economic accompanying, or a benefit from the extraordinary fund and aims to register all the economic resources of the family: the job income, either from subordinate or autonomous sources, the pension income, as well as public or non-profit benefits. The analysis of the items of the budget illustrates whether the family needs an economic accompanying, whether it manages to redeem the loans or whether it needs an economic integration to its income. Unlike other instruments to analyze the economic situation of a person (for example the ISEE, Indicator of the economic situation or equivalent economic situation), the family budget highlights the current economic situation of the person and not the situation of the previous year⁴. It also offers the basis for assessing the expenditures of the person through which the family style of consumption is known. It is an instrument of assessment and of education: of assessment, because it offers the basis for the decision of the commission instituted to deliberate on the economic support; of education, because it is produced by the operator or the volunteer of the

⁴ According to Mesini (2006, 2011) e Motta (2011), this is one of the main rigidity of ISEE.

Caritas together with the person who asks for the economic benefit, and in so doing, the operator or the volunteer with discretion and tact can express opinions about the lifestyle of the person and give suggestions and indications in order to modify it. For example, he can suggest that the person goes to a social estate agency to find a house with a lower rent, or to renegotiate the loan. Then he can also point out that the domestic expenditure are too high compared to the income, or he can suggest that the situation of indebtedness be reviewed because the rates of the loans are too relevant compared to the person's income. In fact, the aid that the volunteers can give is really important with regard to the access and the utilization of the financial services promoted by banks. The procedures and the documentation required to have access not only to the credit, but also to other financial opportunities, even though as ordinary as a current account, are often complex and difficult to understand. Hence they often represent an obstacle to accede to the financial instruments that could help people to manage small savings as well. "It is quite common not only among the economists but also among the many people who debate about poverty and development, to think that the poor have no interest and no ability in using financial instruments to manage their family budget in an ordinary way. Nothing is more incorrect: [...] the poor run into debt and borrow significant amounts, compared to their income, not *in spite of* being poor but *because* they are poor" (Niccoli and Presbitero, 2009, p. 31). The analysis of the life of the poor highlights, in fact, that the poor have an inclination to save that does not find adequate space in the specific financial services. "The common opinion by which the poor spend all their income is totally far from reality. [...] even for those families with a low income there is a real possibility to save money. If it does not happen, most of the time it is because people often have no efficacious instruments available to manage their savings" (Niccoli and Presbitero, 2009, p. 182). Consequently it is urgent to support people with limited economic resources and to educate them on how to use their resources, in particular when they have no possibility to accede to adequate financial services.

Conclusion

The aim of the article was to highlight the educational role of money in the intervention against poverty. Many times, in fact, poverty arises from people's incapacity to choose and make decisions, to set up priorities and manage their income and savings. Often people lead a life that is far above their economic possibilities, make decisions without thinking about their future and without precautions. A suddenly loss of the job or a reduction in working hours, very frequent in periods of economic crisis or in situations of vulnerability or of precariousness, together with these kind of incapacities can impoverish people. The so called new poverties are frequently characterized by the loss or the reduction of the income and by the incapacity to manage it. For this reason, these situations must be dealt with not only through an economic intervention but also through an educational one, aimed at helping the person to use better his/her money and savings, and to organize the latter with reference to his/her life's projects. Furthermore, on numerous occasions, the new poor are people who had never thought of becoming poor so they have no cognitive and practical instrument to deal with the situation of impoverishment in which they suddenly find themselves. Hence, these people need to be helped to recognize the situation and identify the personal and the institutional resources at their disposal. In this case, as well, it is fundamental to set up not only an economic intervention but also an educational one in order to give the person useful cognitive instruments. But, the educational intervention is also necessary to enable the person to acquire new trust in himself/herself and in the people that mean something to him/her. In fact, the economic dimension of poverty usually arises from isolation and loneliness and can be dealt with by placing the person within a network of personal relationships. This is the aim of the microcredit and of the economic accompanying, which are the instruments used by the Caritas of FVG to deal with the new kinds of poverty. Through them, in fact, the Caritas intends strengthening the trust of the poor in themselves, in the society and in the future, by bearing in mind that this kind of trust is the main resource against poverty. But, through the microcredit and the economic accompanying, the Caritas of FVG also aims at drawing the attention of the local communities to the poverty issue and at increasing

their commitment and responsibility in taking care of the poor. In this way, money used to deal with poverty becomes an important instrument to educate the poor and the communities, to enforce social cohesion and social responsibility, and to produce social capital.

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