

## Responsibility, people rather than procedure

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*A guide to rereading the key words of economic behavior, after breaking down the myths and bursting a few bubbles. Luigino Bruni's "Dictionary" has arrived at it's sixth entry. The words already analyzed over the last few weeks are: Happiness, Profit, Market, Bank and Investment.*

Responsibility derives from respond. To be responsible, in fact, means responding, offering reasoning, when one is consulted by someone else. A person or a business is irresponsible when he does not offer reasoning, good reasoning, for his actions. By tradition, the dominating business and economic culture is irresponsible, since the predominantly Anglo-Saxon logic on which the market logic and that of competition has been built in the last century is based on what A. Hirshman called "exit" (results).

In the political sphere, people protest and want answers (because the result is difficult and very costly), but in the economic sphere where instead one can change companies, it doesn't make sense to protest. In other words, if I don't like a product or service on the market, I only have one way of protesting: changing to a different company.

In reality, we know that in recent years, the boundary between politics and economy is always more blurred. Citizens also protest in the market, asking businesses for "good reasons" for their actions. We could define the responsible citizen as he who, before leaving (or changing companies) protests by trying to obtain a change from the business, voting, as you say, "with his buying power". The need to ask and to protest also in the market represents an anomaly, or a truly new fact, in our development model.

In fact, in the past decades, even the growth of large distribution was the result of this same culture of anonymity. The consumerism dogma of the 20th century, or second-generation capitalism, was the following: the less personal the relationships, the less proximity in the consumption, the more efficient the economic system, the more satisfied the citizens. The crisis we're living is also the crisis of this market culture.

If we look well in the folds of our society, we realize that a general phenomenon is developing which goes in the opposite direction. I'm referring to the tendency to "shorten the distribution chain", reducing the distance between producer and consumer, personalizing economic encounters. In other words, there is a request for increased responsibility along with a reaction against the irresponsible practice in our countries of passing the buck when questioned about a problem - referring the questioner to someone else who is absent, far away, anonymous and therefore unreachable. What's happening today, especially in the food industry, is that the "big, anonymous and far-away" doesn't work anymore.

My guess is that the tendency to "shorten the distances" will spread from foodstuffs to many other sectors. It's already evident in tourism, art, restoration, and care services. New alliances between businesses and banks, economy and society must also keep this need to "reduce distance" in mind. In these months, we're realizing that a good life doesn't depend only on the

quality of food, but also that of retirement funds, savings, and mortgages for a healthy individual and societal life. They poison us with polluted food, but also with toxic mortgages. When anonymity becomes systematic, one sets foot outside of human territory. Social responsibility of businesses isn't gambled upon "instruments" (social balance, ethic codes...) but above all and mainly on people. To get out of this crisis, a new alliance based on responsibility is needed.

Only an alliance of people, amidst people, for people will be able to create the foundation for a new economy.

Next week, Luigino Bruni will analyze "Rules"