

Relational goods as common goods: between Gresham's law, free riding and reciprocity

keywords: civil economy, relational goods, commons, consumerism, reciprocity, free riding, crowding-out effect

Abstract

This paper aims to apply economic laws to the dynamics of relational goods studied in civil and non-civil economics (Bruni, Scitovsky, Donati) whether the nature of reciprocity (the golden rule of relational goods) conflicts with Gresham's ancient economic law, assessing whether it can be applied to non-economic goods. In turn, it will assess whether the crowding-out effect of intrinsic motivation (Titmuss, Frey) also applies to relational goods, also observing, where appropriate, dynamics from cooperative game theory (Nash) against the use of free riding strategies and suboptimal equilibria caused by the failure to overcome the ideology of *homo oeconomicus*. The paper will also examine the psychological repercussions of adherence to the neoclassical paradigm of rationality, combining classic sources of criticism (Sen, Nussbaum) with additional contributions, such as the infantilising ethos of late consumer capitalism (Barber) and the ideology of neoliberal privatisation (Zizek, Lacan, Lippmann, Latouche, Sandel). The research will be interdisciplinary in terms of the authors cited and will seek to overcome the separation of knowledge (Morin). In addition to being usefully framed within the new paradigm of civil economy, overcoming anthropological pessimism through the so-called *homo reciprocans* (Becchetti, Bruni, Zamagni), a case study will be used, reporting empirical evidence of what has been claimed following observation of the post-pandemic effects on the community of a common for urban civic use, the ex Asilo Filangieri, and the impact it has had on a community that claimed to be open, inclusive and porous (Benjamin), and therefore dedicated to hospitality and an ideal habitat for relational goods and non-instrumental relationships.

The thesis is that the failure to sanction non-inclusive practices, free riders, purely instrumental relational goods and behaviours that derogate from reciprocity (Genovesi) have a disincentive effect on the relational goods of a community (even if horizontal) similar to monetary incentives on intrinsic motivations, causing displacement and a counterproductive effect when the norm is not matched by a sanction, leading to an exit strategy (Hirschmann) and adverse selection (Akerlof) that follow Gresham's law, which would also apply to relational goods when they reach the dimension of common goods. In doing so, we would see the tragedy of the commons (Hardin) and the resilience of the model opposed to it (Ostrom), bringing the resulting dynamics back to participation.

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