

TAKING CARE OF WORK FOR A NEW ECONOMY: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE ECONOMY OF FRANCESCO

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a summary of the experience of the “Work and Care” thematic village of The Economy of Francesco, which reflected on a wide range of topics related to the future of work, both as a means for sustainment and as personal and professional fulfilment, in close relationship with care for others and creation. In the first part, we outline a conceptual framework based on the social teachings of the Church; we highlight insights from economics and personal experiences, according to which work has an essentially relational nature and requires care itself in the face of current global and moral threats. Then we explore three possible applications (care for the disregarded, a “part-time for all” proposal, and a “flexicurity” approach to the labour market), highlighting potential economic and social benefits as well as discussing their limitations, mostly due to limited immediate feasibility.

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With our gaze fixed on Jesus, we will find the
inspiration to design a new world and the courage
to walk together towards a better future.
Pope Francis (October 2, 2021)

1. INTRODUCTION

On May 1, 2019, addressing young economists and entrepreneurs worldwide, Pope Francis wrote:

Dear Friends,

I am writing to invite you to take part in an initiative very close to my heart. An event that will allow me to encounter young men and women studying economics and interested in a different kind of economy: one that brings life not death, one that is inclusive and not exclusive, humane and not dehumanizing, one that cares for the environment and does not despoil it. An event that will help bring us together and allow us to meet one another and eventually enter into a “covenant” to change today’s economy and to give a soul to the economy of tomorrow¹.

Since this call by Pope Francis, summoning together young economists, entrepreneurs and changemakers interested in the common good, thousands of young people (and even more senior ones) have given life to the process we know by the name of The Economy of Francesco (Eof for brevity). In less than two years of activity, an amazing number of large and small events have taken place, mostly online (due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic), but also in person, especially at the local and regional level, in which young people from all over the world confronted each other on many issues related to how economic relations can be marked – as the Pope asks – by respect for human dignity in all its forms. The work was carried out in 12 “thematic villages”². These villages represent the actual spaces for dialogue and reflection into which the community members’ working sessions on the major economic issues of today and tomorrow are divided. These villages are often cross-roads – places where different people and cultures meet – and of course, spaces for dialogue and confrontation, questions and perspectives, reflections and proposals.

The authors’ personal experiences in the EoF mostly (although not exclusively) relates to the “Work and Care” village, which we have the honour of coordinating, initially jointly with Sr. Alessandra Smerilli. Together with many young participants, we have engaged in a wide-ranging reflection on issues related to the future of work, understood both as a means of sustenance and as personal and professional fulfilment, in close relation to the care of affections, relationships and creation.

¹ Francis, *Letter sent by the Holy Father for the event “Economy of Francesco”*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, May 1, 2019. The full text is available here: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2019/documents/papa-francesco_20190501_giovani-imprenditori.html.

² Management and Gift; Finance and Humanity; Work and Care; Agriculture and Justice; Energy and Poverty; Business and Peace; Women for Economy; CO₂ for Inequalities; Vocation and Profit; Business in Transition; Life and Lifestyles; Policies for Happiness.

The pandemic, which initially constituted an obstacle, preventing the organization of the original event (initially scheduled for March 2020) and forcing us to hold an online event in November 2020, then imposed a new rhythm, sometimes even pressing, on the work of the villages, which were able to take advantage of the propitious moment and cancelling distances with the help of remote communication tools. Innumerable WhatsApp groups, discussions, and webinars have taken place over the past two years, in addition, of course, to the more structured proposals put forward by the EoF promoter committee.

The importance of work as an essential feature of human life has now been acknowledged. In 2015, in his encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis highlighted how we need to care for our common home, including our human family. The present crisis cannot be addressed through incremental adjustments to the way the economy works but, rather, requires a radical transformation. Bringing this about requires alternative approaches, including building transformative global communities to implement them. It is through care – the adoption of social discernment as to the appropriate decision-making process for transformation – that we can open the newly needed horizons. We at the EoF took very seriously Pope Francis's warning that we are “the last generation that can save us”³. The effort we made in our village has been aimed at giving voice to this aspiration, of course humbly acknowledging that our task may be, at best, to throw a seed without necessarily expecting to be able to see a grown plant.

In this paper, we provide a brief description of the work we conducted in the village. Section 2 outlines the conceptual framework that empowered our work, grounded on the social teachings of the Church, the experience of our participants and contributions from the established economic literature. Section 3 highlights the main projects that we developed, involving contributions from academia and the public and private sectors. Section 4 discusses the main insights and offers some concluding remarks.

2. TO WORK AND TO CARE: TWO INTIMATELY INTERTWINED DIMENSIONS OF HUMAN LIFE

2.1. *Work IS care*

The activities of men and women are pivotal in nearly every field in economics. Through their actions and lives, humans contribute to shaping nature, transforming it, and enabling the sustenance and development of a community. Therefore, work is not only relevant as a “production factor” within a production process but also because no production process can be obtained without man's action. Joseph Schumpeter highlighted one of the most famous and emphatic features of such activity by

³ Francis, *Video message to the participants to the second global event “The Economy of Francesco”*, October 2, 2021; source: www.vatican.va. Our translation from the original Italian version.

describing the “creative destruction” process as the fulcrum of economic development in the capitalist system (Schumpeter, 1942) that prevails today in most of the world. Through human creativity, expressed here in the entrepreneur’s actions, new and more efficient production processes supplant the old ones, generating new and greater opportunities for wealth and well-being, but at the same time “destroying” old models and with them the companies that embodied them. The results of such a process have been impressive: since the end of the 19th century, most European countries have experienced exponential growth in per capita income, unknown in previous centuries (Bolt and Van Zenden, 2013), and the progress experienced in the last two centuries, especially in the period following the Second World War, has led millions of people throughout the world to “escape” the trap of material deprivation by improving their standards of living and income (Deaton, 2013). According to the most recent estimates by the World Bank, at the beginning of the 1980s more than 40% of the world’s population lived on less than US\$ 1.90, i.e. below the absolute poverty line, while in 2015, the percentage had fallen to around 10%⁴.

Within this framework, standard economics textbooks conceive labour as one of the factors of production whose employment is needed in a production function to generate an economic output, in addition to capital and land. However, labour carries the distinctive feature of being embodied in human beings: unlike capital and land, labour cannot be separated from the human who embodies it, and once sold and bought, it directly affects the individual well-being of the worker.

The emphasis on the need for a new perspective on work has gained increasing interest in recent decades, both in international organizations historically devoted to the promotion of better working conditions and working rights, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), and in academia. It is well known, for instance, that improving labour standards worldwide is within the ambitious program of the UN Agenda 2030, through the resolution adopted by the General Assembly on the 25th of September 2015. In particular, Sustainable Development Goal 8, dealing with “decent work and economic growth”, sets a specific target on labour, namely to “Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all” (UN, 2015, p. 19). At the same time, a few comprehensive summaries of the state-of-the-art of ethical reflections on work (de La Rochefoucauld et al., 2018; Alasino et al., 2020) document the depth and breadth of the current debate⁵.

Firstly, work deserves this renewed attention due to its impact on both economic and social life. As work is embodied by humans, improving working conditions is a prerequisite for achieving better living conditions, which directly impacts society.

⁴ See the indicator: Poverty headcount ratio at \$1.90 a day (2011 PPP) (% of population), World Development Indicators, <https://data.worldbank.org/topic/poverty>. [Accessed: 24/10/2020]

⁵ See two comprehensive works: one is published by the Caritas in Veritate Foundation (de La Rochefoucauld et al., 2018); another one collects the final works of the “The Future of Work – Labor after *Laudato si*” project (Alasino et al., 2020).

Therefore, it is widely acknowledged that in order to rethink work in a fast-changing global environment, it is crucial to understand not only its economic component but also its social component. Therefore, work can serve the scope of translating value for both personal and social fulfilment (Biondi Bird, 2018).

Secondly, throughout history all philosophical schools and cultural and religious traditions have offered a vision of the meaning of work (Arendt, 1958), examining if and how work should be an expression of the dignity of the human person and to what extent it contributes to human flourishing (Mele, 2014; Laszlo, 2019). The social teaching of the Church teaches that every man and woman on Earth is called on to take care of creation. Through their creative activities, humans have the power to interact with nature in all its forms. People provide necessary care for each other, they care for (and harm) the earth, and they can “take care” through their work. Thus, work needs to be taken care of through an integral human ecology perspective, as Pope Francis recently postulated in his encyclical *Laudato Si’*.

This leads to the core of our village’s perspective on work, namely that work *is* care. The integral human ecology perspective is deeply rooted in Christian thought. In the book of Genesis, man is called on to take “care” of creation through the work of his hands and his ingenuity: work assumes a fundamental role of cooperation in the creation, custody and safeguarding of creation. Indeed, as Pope Francis recalls in *Laudato Si’* (124) “God placed man and woman in the garden he had created not only to preserve it (“keep”) but also to make it fruitful (“till”). Laborers and craftsmen thus “maintain the fabric of the world” (Sir 38:34)”⁶.

As *Laudato Si’* (124) forcefully affirms, taking up *Gaudium et Spes* (63): “man is the source, the center, and the purpose of all economic and social life”⁷. This founding trait of Christian anthropology requires an ongoing reminder of the capacity to contemplate creation, its characteristics and its fragilities.

This perspective was very well understood within the monastic tradition, as recalled in *Laudato Si’* (127). Starting with St Benedict of Norcia, life in community combined manual labour with spiritual activity in such a way that “Personal growth and sanctification came to be sought in the interplay of recollection and work”. Such a harmonic conception of life and work had “social” and “economic” benefits as well: Benedictine monks established good governance on their lands (Inauen et al., 2010) that generated positive economic returns, as recently documented for the case of Middle-Age England (Rossignoli and Trombetta, 2020).

Therefore, through his creative activity – whether it be the work of his hands or his ingenuity – man has the power to act on nature in all its forms. The call to contemplation opens the way to recognizing in the fragility of creation and of man the areas in which to concentrate efforts for the safeguarding of what God has placed in the world, “the capacity to improve their lot, to further their moral growth and to

⁶ Francis, *Laudato Si’*, Encyclical letter, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, May 24, 2015.

⁷ Vatican Ecumenical Council II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, December 7, 1965, Acta Apostolicae Sedis 58 (1966), 1025-1120.

develop their spiritual endowments”⁸ (*Populorum Progressio*, 34). This awareness is reinforced by *Caritas in Veritate* (50), which affirms that “On this Earth, there is room for everyone: here the entire human family must find the resources to live with dignity, through the help of nature itself – God’s gift to his children – and through hard work and creativity. At the same time, we must recognize our grave duty to hand the Earth on to future generations in such a condition that they too can worthily inhabit it and continue to cultivate it”⁹.

Finally, it is worth recalling what, already at the very beginning of contemporary social teachings of the Church, *Rerum Novarum* (7) summarized with lapidary simplicity, namely that “all human subsistence is derived from labor”¹⁰. This last aspect, which stems from the very nature of man, from the earliest times, and which in a certain sense is reinvigorated by the famous Pauline warning (2 Th 3:10), cannot be overlooked if we address the relationship between man and work in its entirety.

2.2. *Work NEEDS care*

Every man and woman on Earth is called on to take care of creation through work. By using their creativity, humans have the power to interact with nature in all its forms: through work, people interact with fellow human beings and with the environment, clearly with different intensities depending on the specific tasks required by one’s own job.

Therefore, working always also implies “taking care”. At the same time, however, people earn their living through work as well. Thus, work needs to be taken care of through an integral human ecology perspective, as Pope Francis entreats us in *Laudato Si’* and *Fratelli Tutti*. Through work, people take care of creation, and therefore work *is* care. Through work, people earn their living as well. Therefore, work *needs* care. In the Work and Care village, we tried to explore both dimensions and the possibility that they can evolve together in the context of the profound technological, social and regulatory transformations we are experiencing.

The current pandemic has led to an immediate and sudden increase in global unemployment rates. This spike also impacted some key advanced economies, with unemployment hitting 13 percent in the United States in the third quarter of 2020, reaching an at least 50-year high.¹¹ Furthermore, according to ILO and World Bank estimates (ILO, 2021), in the third quarter of 2020, 7.2 percent of working hours were lost worldwide. In the fourth quarter, global working hours declined by 4.6 percent, a figure that is equivalent to 130 million full-time jobs. The same report also estimates

⁸ Paul VI, Encyclical Letter, *Populorum Progressio*, March 26, 1967, Acta Apostolicae Sedis, 59 (1967).

⁹ Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter, *Caritas in Veritate*, June 29, 2009, Acta Apostolicae Sedis, 101 (2009).

¹⁰ Leo XII, Encyclical Letter, *Rerum Novarum*, May 15, 1891, P.M. Acta, XI, Romae. 1892

¹¹ Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2021/article/unemployment-rises-in-2020-as-the-country-battles-the-covid-19-pandemic.htm>.

that the shift to inactivity has been even stronger than the shift to unemployment. These concerns about the impact of job loss have spread across public debates and academia, especially since the second half of 2020. However, the most important threats (as well as potential benefits) to job creation precede the outbreak of COVID-19, being due to underlying structural trends mostly (although not exclusively) related to the combined forces of technology and globalization (Baldwin, 2019).

Since the so-called “Fourth Industrial Revolution” (Schwab, 2016), signalled by the advent of a set of ground-breaking new technologies, an increasing number of tasks have been transferred from human workers to machines, robots and artificial intelligence. As detailed in *The Future of Jobs Report 2020* (WEF, 2020) issued by the World Economic Forum in October 2020, the risk of labour displacement in the short and medium term is high, especially in some industries, due to the combined effects of post-COVID adjustments and long-term underlying technological substitution. On average, this report suggests that 15% of a company’s workforce is at risk of being disrupted. The IMF has also estimated that in the context of the current pandemic, 97.3 million individuals – corresponding to roughly 15% of the workforce in the 35 countries included in their sample – are at high risk of being furloughed or made redundant and are thus likely to shift to unemployment or inactivity (OECD, 2020). Clearly, new technologies may also generate new opportunities across the private sectors that embarked on a reorientation of their organizational strategies, especially in advanced economies. However, this rapidly mutating scenario is worrying workers worldwide. As the report mentioned above claims, “by 2025, the capabilities of machines and algorithms will be more broadly employed than in previous years, and the work hours performed by machines will match the time spent working by human beings” (WEF, 2020, p. 8).

This brief outlook on the future of work, although clearly not comprehensive, highlights the need for caring about work in terms both of preserving and promoting job creation and in terms of work quality. An inclusive and “well-functioning” labour market needs to take care of workers as the ultimate purpose of job creation, not simply as a “tool”—a production factor—with which to obtain an economic output. The promotion of decent work is indeed also a “prelude” for social justice (ILO, 2019) and, ultimately, for a more inclusive society (Sen, 1999) and a more harmonious concept of development, as implied in the integral human ecology approach.

2.3. *A “Catholic” (aka “universal”) idea of work*

Catholic Social Thought provides the starting point for developing a comprehensive approach towards work and care, stating that “Work, because of its subjective or personal character, is superior to every other factor connected with productivity” and, therefore, that “Labor has an intrinsic priority over capital”¹². This view originates from recognizing two intertwined dimensions of labour, one objective and one

¹² Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Part II, Chapter VI, §276 and 277.

subjective, as outlined in John Paul II's encyclical, *Laborem exercens* (1981). Through the objective nature of work, which entails all the technical aspects of human labour, man can transform the environment, as we have seen in Section 2.1. In contrast, the subjective dimension refers to man as the only subject of work. This means that he is the one who carries out all the activities required in the work process and that his actions "[...] must all serve to realize his humanity, to fulfill the calling to be a person that is his by reason of his very humanity"¹³.

The subjective interpretation of work and the emphasis on the centrality of work and its dignity in the broader plan of God's Providence leads us to draw attention to the need for access to work to be promoted and protected: this objective is of primary importance and is of great political and social relevance, as was already stressed by Benedict XVI in *Caritas in Veritate* (32). Access to work, however, requires further necessary attention: "caring" for work means not only ensuring that work is present (more jobs), but also that its conditions are respectful of human dignity and the protection of creation.

The focus on the subjective dimension of work also highlights the intimate relational nature of the economy itself¹⁴. The relational nature of economic interactions has been explored especially by behavioural and experimental economists. Brown et al. (2004), for example, have shown that in most working interactions (for instance, between employers and employees), with a third party being absent to enforce contracts, relationships emerge endogenously, providing a long-term horizon with mutually beneficial outcomes (Fehr and Falk, 1999). This outcome, apparently at odds with the common assumption of purely self-interested individuals, is supported by empirical evidence showing that people may incorporate "other-regarding preferences" and respond to fairness and reciprocity in social interactions (Rabin, 1993; Fehr and Schmidt, 1999). Experimental evidence has shown that this pattern occurs specifically in the labour market, where the preference for reciprocal fairness leads workers to put in greater effort when they feel they are being treated fairly by their employers.

Awareness of the interconnectedness that binds men and women to the environment in which they live leads us to carefully consider and place great importance on the system of human relationships in which work develops: the relationships within a company, factory or office and the relationships that bind the individual worker with his family, friends and living environment. The reference, strong and unequivocal, is to the integral human ecology outlined by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*. To

¹³ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter, *Laborem Exercens*, September 14, 1981, Acta Apostolicae Sedis, 73 (1981) 577-647.

¹⁴ On the relational nature of the economy see, for instance, Sacco et al. (2006), Donati (2011) and Bruni and Zamagni (2015). More specifically, interpersonal relationships, which may be generated in an encounter but do not represent the encounter, can instead generate many other different outputs. The kinds of relationships that are generally experienced within a corporate context could be seen as social interactions (Bruni, 2013).

“take care” of work means to take into due consideration the complexity of relationships that make up the person of the worker (whether employee, entrepreneur, freelancer...) and, in this way, to bring also the work itself into a correct “ecological” and “anthropological” perspective based on the centrality of the person and not of other, albeit important, competing factors.

Finally, this perspective places a strong emphasis on the need for policies aimed at encouraging access to work to be placed in this multidimensional and integral perspective of the person, recognizing this characteristic as a value to human nature and not as a burden. For example, favouring women’s work implies paying close attention to the theme of motherhood and the necessary attention to the harmonious growth of children; extending working hours throughout the week implies asking the worker to make a sacrifice in terms of affections and relationships in exchange for a job. Through its social teachings, the Church has been working on these aspects since the first radical economic and social transformations carried forward by the First Industrial Revolution, and more specifically with the encyclical letter *Rerum Novarum*.

In conclusion, the relationship between work and care is intrinsically linked to the idea of man as the heart and ultimate goal of economic and social relations. For this reason, a renewal of the relationship between work and care within the system of economic relations implies a renewal of the economic system itself, in the light of a new humanism, as Benedict XVI often hoped for in *Caritas in Veritate*.

This ambitious project cannot be achieved solely through top-down statements or organizations imposed, but only starting from a renewed educational impetus. Leveraging the best energies of people – starting with the youngest – can give rise to free and conscious life choices based on the centrality of man – the whole man in his entirety, from the profession he performs to the relationships he knows how to take care of.

3. THE WORK AND CARE VILLAGE IN ACTION: OUR MILESTONES

In Section 2, we outlined the conceptual and inspirational framework that guided the work of the Work and Care (W&C) village. When we approached this thematic village, the first challenge was narrowing its scope and defining its mission. With over 200 young participants applying to W&C when registration opened in late 2019, we realized that our reconception of work should incorporate a “care” soul, characterised by the ideas put forward in two main sources. First is the Magisterium of the Church, and especially its social teachings. Since 1891, with *Rerum Novarum*, the Church has engaged with the most dividing, cutting-edge social issues of its time. St Francis himself, as the primary inspiration for The Economic of Francesco, provided us with some inspirational teachings about the profound meaning and dignity of work.

Second, we draw from our personal research activities and experiences to contribute to developing the discussion and the core beliefs of the village participants. Areas of relevance to our view on work and care were identified through a participant poll, which was worked into a proposal structure by a core project team and finally

substantiated into a draft proposal in a collaborative process between an extended project team composed of professionally and academically experienced participants. Working to develop feasible proposals, we ended up also producing a large number of side outputs, including projects, papers, videos and a young-voices document about the Franciscan view of labour. In this section, we present just some of the outcomes of our village's collaborative process, which we believe may help elucidate the spirit and core values of the whole underlying process. More specifically, we first present our projects relating to marginalized people, in a context where work and care are neatly intertwined and indistinguishable. Second, we analyse the "Part-Time for All" proposal by Jennifer Nedelsky, focusing on a renewed balance between work and care at both the individual and societal levels. We then study the necessary interactions with business persons and companies, with whom we addressed the issue of flexicurity (flexibility plus security)¹⁵, a necessary requirement in today's ever-changing world. Finally, we placed our entire reflection in the inspiring light of St Francis, who defined work as "a grace". "The grace of work" has become a manifesto that sums up the yearning and aspirations of our village to ensure that work is truly recognized as a gift from God, a gift to be protected and cultivated.

3.1. *The Disregarded*

Since work is care, we first looked at care workers and social workers in general. In the Basilica of San Francesco in Assisi, you can admire the twenty-eight scenes¹⁶ that narrate the life of the saint frescoed by Giotto. Originally, there should have been twenty-nine scenes. At the time of its creation, the noble families of the city who financed the work did not want to pay for the scene that depicted the embrace of St Francis with the lepers in Rivotorto (Bruni, 2021)¹⁷ since the lords of the city did not want to showcase the presence of lepers in Assisi. They thought the city would have seemed less appealing, so the painting was excluded from the narration,

¹⁵ This refers to avoiding precariousness – a risk to be avoided at all costs to give work its full dignity – as the Church calls for in its social teachings.

¹⁶ 1. St Francis of Assisi honoured by a simple man; 2. St Francis of Assisi gives the cloak to the poor knight; 3. Dream of St Francis of Assisi; 4. St Francis of Assisi prays before the crucifix of San Damiano; 5. St Francis of Assisi renounces paternal goods; 6. Dream of Pope Innocent III; 7. Innocent III confirms the Franciscan Rule; 8. Appearance of St Francis on a chariot of fire; 9. Vision of the thrones; 10. Expulsion of the devils from Arezzo; 11. St Francis before the sultan; 12. The ecstasy of St Francis; 13. Greccio's nativity scene; 14. The miracle of spring; 15. Preaching to the birds; 16. Death of the knight of Celano; 17. Preaching before Honorius III; 18. St Francis appears at the Arles Chapter; 19. St Francis receives the stigmata; 20. Death of St Francis; 21. Visions of Brother Augustine and the Bishop of Assisi; 22. Jerome examines the stigmata; 23. Greetings from St Clare and her sisters to St Francis; 24. Canonization of St Francis; 25. St Francis appears to Gregory IX; 26. Healing of Ilerda; 27. Confession of the resurrected woman; 28. St Francis frees the heretic Pietro di Alife.

¹⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EXkwLaMfDZI>.

thus excluding the presence of the poor, those who may question us, from history (Smerilli, 2008)¹⁸ and its narratives. On the other hand, the idea underlying The Economy of Francesco is that no one is left behind.¹⁹ Therefore, The Economy of Francesco, including our village, aims to redesign the twenty-ninth scene, making room for those whom society tends to exclude.

For this reason, we created the opportunity for villagers to engage in (virtual) discussions with Jacques Verduin, the founder of Insight-Out, a US-based NGO providing healing courses for prisoners in California serving life or long sentences. Furthermore, we hosted a webinar with Marco Trivelli, at the time head of the Health Department of Regione Lombardia (Italy), who shared his in-field experience of the first wave of COVID-19 in Italy. Even when speed and efficiency were not an option, he witnessed how true care towards patients could make a difference, sometimes between life and death.

As economists, we have often come across the study of caring relationships that can have a transformative impact on people's existence, especially in behavioural economics. This field of research is particularly relevant at a time in which care workers may suffer a perceived low social status (Nedelsky and Malleon, 2021), their jobs are often affected by high turnover rates and low wages, and they may even face substitution by anthropomorphic machines in advanced economies (Hsu et al., 2020). The expertise of one of the authors, Domenico, has been particularly key to this project. With other colleagues at the Department of International Economics, Institutions and Development at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore (Mario Maggioni, Simona Beretta and Sara Balestri) he studied, for example, how a rehabilitation program in maximum security prisons in the US can increase trust (Maggioni et al., 2018) or how taking care of orphaned children in schools in Goma can improve their academic performance, as well as allow them to go to school (Rossignoli et al., 2017; Rossignoli et al., 2021). Furthermore, in their most recent project, Maggioni and Rossignoli even show that people may perceive humanoid robots as reliable as human beings in interactions involving trust and cooperation if the robots are able to communicate verbally in a way that is consistent with the context and implicitly evokes a commonly accepted moral norm: in other words, people trust partners if they look and talk like humans (Maggioni and Rossignoli, 2021).

¹⁸ <https://www.cittanuova.it/agenda/fratelli-tutti-baggio-smerilli-bruni-commentano-la-nuova-enciclica-del-papa/>.

¹⁹ This idea is perfectly captured by the EoF logo. If the circular shape recalls integral ecology and sustainability, the fact that the circle remains open is representative of the hope of being able to create an inclusive economy. A tri-colored Franciscan rope composes the circle: yellow, which evokes the Pope, who made the call; brown to indicate poverty and man; and green, to symbolize the environment (Amoroso and Bruno, 2020). The choice of the *corda* (rope) as a symbol of the event also recalls the economic tradition of the Neapolitan school, which with Antonio Genovesi had emphasized the role of public faith as a determinant of the civil and economic development that EoF intends to nurture. In fact, for Genovesi, “the word *fides* means rope that binds and unites. Public faith is therefore the bond of families united” (Genovesi, 1973).

3.2. *Part-Time for All*

As implied by the conceptual framework presented in Section 2, the tight relationship between work and care urges a renewed debate on the deeper meaning of “work” and its direct relationship with “care”, reimagining an economy in which paid work meets both material needs and the need to build a meaningful life. The term work-life balance, so widely used nowadays, refers to harmony and balance between the time spent doing work and the time dedicated to oneself and one’s family.

Within this framework, paid work is only one part of a meaningful life. A truly sustainable economy needs to be built not only based on just and satisfying “decent” work but also on the centrality of care for a thriving society. According to Eurostat²⁰, 106 million European citizens aged between 18-64 carry out caregiver activities for children and disabled relatives, and a significant share (53%) is made up of working, highly educated women aged 35-44 who live with a partner/husband and children in urban areas of their native countries.

In most contemporary societies, care is poorly paid, if at all, and suffers from a low societal status (Nedelsky and Malleon, 2021). Eurostat figures help shed light on the state of care in Europe. Marginalized groups of people who are perceived as low status – women, racialized people, immigrants – usually provide care services, irrespective of the fundamental role that care plays in society. Most “family caregivers” do not use social welfare services, either deciding to use family help only (47%), combining their own resources with informal help from relatives (15%) or letting the children or elderly take care of themselves (18%).

This misperceived relationship between work and care is so embedded in our society that it also affects labour market relationships. Often, employers prefer workers who put work ahead of care, assuming that someone else can provide care for their employees’ family needs. According to Eurostat data, in Europe many citizens aged 18-64 have to make changes and adjustments to their work schedule to manage caring activities (27%), and this tends to involve people with higher education (34%) as opposed to lower education (17%). Equal access to jobs also requires new thinking about how the burden of care is shared. Analysing the data on gender equality, a significant gap can be observed: only 17% of men introduce changes in the hours they work, compared to 39% of women, and only 3% reduced their working hours, compared to 18% of women. Finally, 33% of women have interrupted work (meaning a period of remaining employed but without pay) for childcare reasons for a period of more than six months, whereas this figure is only at about 1.3% for men.

Consequently, the rate of women changing jobs is about 4%, compared with about 2% for men. Moreover, taking care is not only about burdens but also about improving

²⁰ Data updated in January 2021 and referring to 2018, source: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Reconciliation_of_work_and_family_life_-_statistics. All figures mentioned in this section are retrieved from this source.

life satisfaction and happiness. In this context, 63% of workers do not have a problem with shortening their working hours, while 37% complain about long shifts and the unpredictability of work. Better norms would solve this misalignment and bring more sustainable solutions. By giving people time to shop, cook and commute to work, unsustainable shortcuts would be greatly reduced.

Jennifer Nedelsky, the keynote speaker for our village, and Tom Malleson, who participated in and supported our workshops, designed the “Part-Time for All” proposal, which offers a model for how wealthy societies can achieve a greater balance between work and care through the introduction of new norms (not laws) and adequate financing through a universal basic income (UBI)²¹ scheme. As a village, we have analysed and worked to understand the feasibility and application of this proposal. The norm would be that everyone who is able contributes 22 hours per week of unpaid care and does not do more than 30 hours of paid work. When children are young or parents are elderly, most of the care goes to the immediate family. But the care responsibilities are constant, so at other stages of life, people contribute their care to communities of their choosing. This would solve several pressing problems: everyone would learn about the importance of care for sustaining relationships because everyone would do it, and the care/policy divide would also fade since policymakers in government and corporations, who are often ignorant about care, would themselves acquire caring skills that round out their full competence for their own jobs.

The experience of COVID-19 has alerted everyone to the fact that paid work cannot get done unless someone can provide the necessary care. However, the prevailing view still does not accept the idea that working hours can radically change to grant everyone an equal chance at good work and necessary care. All countries need radically new norms around work and care, even if their paths to transition will vary significantly. The laws that might support those norm changes will also vary, changing the structure of work.

Our village found the overall proposal compelling, although we found only scattered examples of tentative applications in large firms²², and we strived to come to a common view about its concrete feasibility. In some developing economies, care workers constitute an important part of the economy and companies may not have the resources to split tasks to allow for a decrease in working hours. In addition, governments may find it very difficult to earmark resources for subsidizing the necessary complementary measures to sustain incomes while maintaining a reduction in working hours. Conversely, advanced economies may find it easier to experiment with these provisions, although perhaps only in larger companies (indeed, multinational corporations can already grant their employees far higher working standards

²¹ We had a dedicated workshop on UBI and other financing opportunities for Part-Time for All and are still studying possible outputs. It is worth noting here that the discussion on this specific issue was open and debated. UBI is a controversial measure that has been mostly criticized in the economics literature (see, for instance, Banerjee et al., 2019; Hoynes, Hilary and Jesse Rothstein, 2019).

²² For instance, we had the opportunity to interact with Luxottica, which experimented with a “part-time for all” proposal in one of its factories, but only for seasonal workers.

than small enterprises). Finally, our exchanges with top managers in some firms partnering with our village showed a certain extent of resistance to applying the reduction of hours scheme to top management positions, where managers view tasks as mostly indivisible. Overall, we engaged in a very fruitful analysis of the Part-Time for All proposal. While we could not reach a definite conclusion, we found it worthy of further investigation within academia, business corporations and policymakers.

3.3. *Flexicurity*

At the time of writing, the COVID-19 pandemic is still ongoing. The world of labour is at the forefront of this new crisis, the consequences of which are likely to cause unevenly distributed social and economic shocks (ILO, 2021). Technological development and the transformation of our way of living and working can, in some cases, facilitate the combination of working and private responsibilities, but also contributes to the melting of “borders” between the spheres. Since workers are always reachable, working hours are sometimes extended to much more than agreed to.

Responses from public authorities and civil societies need to be designed and implemented in the broadest and most inclusive way possible to avoid some of the poorest and most vulnerable people being left behind. However, not all communities are equally well equipped to face the incoming crisis and some are incapable of providing effective support in terms of health, quality of life, well-being and economic survival (de La Rochefoucauld and Marengi, 2018; Alasino et al., 2020).

In fact, the ongoing health crisis has already turned into an economic and social crisis. In some cases, businesses have reorganized job contents and dynamics, while in others, companies have reduced their workforce. In some environments, working conditions are still far from meeting the standard of decent work advocated by the International Labour Organization (Arnold and Bowie, 2007) and included in goal 8 of the SDGs (UN, 2015). Conversely, some professions have proved indispensable to meeting basic needs during the crisis, highlighting the importance of the social dimensions of work, which affects the well-being of all humankind as well as our relationship with the natural environment.

In our work with GiGroup, one of our village’s corporate partners, we analysed these issues. The enhancement of human capital requires the development of organizational solutions capable of ensuring the regularity of contracts, salaries, bonuses and the psycho-physical health and well-being of employees, while guaranteeing safety in the workplace and monitoring and reducing work-related levels of work-related stress. Investments must be made into corporate welfare, providing flexible working solutions (hour banks, well-paid part-time, “smart” working) so that both private and professional life can achieve greater value.

A significant contribution to creating the right operational structure can come from using protected flexibility solutions that, while guaranteeing companies’ adaptability to market fluctuations, favour all workers, including temporary and external consultants, thus supporting work continuity overall. This can also be achieved through

technology. The introduction of new digital and computer technologies can change working-time arrangements and, at the same time, can guarantee more flexibility. If well implemented, this phenomenon can lead to better management of working time.

Technology offers the possibility of “anytime-anyplace” jobs, but this should not result in a need to work “always-everywhere”. Workers should have the “right to disconnect” to avoid such situations²³. Technologies change our ways of working, and this should imply a new conception of labour laws, changing their scope and the extent of their protections. Innovation should be intended as the ability to respond to the market’s new needs with valuable solutions. The digitization of processes must not be seen in terms of productivity but as a way to enable new forms of collaboration and accessibility to corporate know-how.

In addition, it is increasingly crucial to create a labour market where supply meets demand. The phenomenon of skill mismatch drains energy and resources from the world of work and must be addressed in a structural and systemic way. This can be achieved by introducing uniform and shared standards that are continuously updated and accessible and using contractual forms that allow a rapid and flexible adaptation of the workforce to the characteristics of the market, simultaneously guaranteeing full protection of workers’ rights and effectively supporting people in work transitions, such as from training to work and in between jobs. This requires new curricula, more effective opportunities (internships, apprenticeships), training and continuous learning. All of these activities need to be consistent with effective employment opportunities, facilitating the possibility of changing jobs and moving between different sectors.

The need for flexibility may drift towards precariousness. In many countries, those with non-standard employment contracts cannot apply to a bank for a mortgage, thus making it impossible for those with flexible contracts to gain independence by buying a house. Since 2017, in the Netherlands the private employment agency (PEA) sector, in cooperation with certain banks, designed an innovative solution called a “prospect statement”, a document containing an objective analysis of a worker’s future employment possibilities and remuneration prospects through which a private employment agency worker can apply to a bank for a home loan²⁴. This example provides

²³ For example, in France the right to disconnect has been provided by a labor law reform and through provisions in many collective agreements. Companies with more than 50 workers will be obliged to draw up a charter of good conduct, setting out the hours during which staff are not supposed to send or answer emails. In 2016, for example, Orange signed an agreement stipulating that workers cannot check their private email during working hours and during meetings. In this way, there is an alternation between work connection and disconnection.

²⁴ This document is generated by the joint actions of the PEA, the company temporarily employing the worker, labor consultants and a certification body. The agency worker obtains the document through a two-step process. In the first step, a check of the worker’s skills and degree of employability is carried out, based on a positive written assessment from the agency for which he has worked for at least one year. In addition, the agency worker must successfully pass an aptitude and employability skills test. The second step consists of an analysis of the skills and potential employment prospects of the worker. If, and only if, both steps result in positive assessments, the document is prepared and given to the worker.

an interesting policy innovation worth more investigation, since it could help find a feasible solution involving all stakeholders, to match the need for flexibility of firms in a rapidly changing economy and the need of the employee for a secure time horizon in which to plan his/her own future.

At the same time, it is also essential to create a sense of belonging and trust in company choices through systems, processes and tools for listening to collaborators and sharing transparent information, enhancing everyone's skills and responsibilities. To generate true inclusivity and the recognition of merit regardless of gender, disability, age, culture, religion and sexual orientation, equal opportunities in both monetary and non-monetary terms and linear career development should be in place in order to lead to open, nontoxic work environments.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Our experience at The Economy of Francesco represents an attempt to abide by Pope Francis' remark that "giving priority to time means being concerned about initiating processes rather than possessing spaces"²⁵. Drawing from the teachings of the Church, insights from economics and the expertise, skills and intuitions of participants, we set up a process whose purpose is to contribute to the vivid debate about the future of work in a world of rapid transformations.

Within a framework in which work can serve as a means for realizing personal and social aspirations, being able to provide care for the economy, society and, ultimately, individual people, we analysed the threats to work stemming both from globalization and technological change, but also from a wrong and potentially toxic idea of work as unable to sustain a comprehensive flourishing of humanity. Thus, focusing on the link between work and care, based on the pivotal role of each person's dignity, we explored several potential practical applications.

First, we let young participants consider real experiences in which work and care are intertwined at the highest level, i.e. when work is targeted at disregarded people such as prisoners or people in desperate need of care, such as patients in COVID hospitals during the pandemic. The anecdotal evidence from recent behavioural and experimental economics shows that caring for people, beyond being morally desirable, may be effective in increasing the impact of healing treatments.

Second, we addressed the possibility of imagining work as capable of reconciling time for care, reflecting on the Part-Time for All proposal of Jennifer Nedelsky and Tom Malleson. Through an in-depth analysis, we found that the proposal puts forward appealing and intuitive ideas that could promote a fairer labour market, improving the quality of jobs and quality of life, generating an overall positive social impact. However, we noted that the actual implementation of the proposal still

²⁵ Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, November 24, 2013, Acta Apostolicae Sedis, 105 (12): 1019-1137 (2013)

requires further investigation in terms of financial coverage, application in developing contexts and compatibility with top-management positions and tasks.

Third, all of the above led us to interact with businesspeople and companies, with whom we addressed the issue of flexibility, a necessary requirement in today's ever-changing world but which comes with the risk of degenerating into precariousness, a risk to be avoided at all costs in order to endow work with its full dignity. We explored the concept of "flexicurity", namely the possibility of extending a secure horizon to workers independent of their job contract types, shifting the prevailing paradigm from protecting jobs to protecting workers. We saw this project as promising since it appears favourable for both firms and workers, although at the moment it appears to be feasible only for very large business groups. Furthermore, developing the most innovative and promising projects, such as the prospect statements that we briefly described, requires coordination by firms, banks and financial institutions, as well as public agencies.

To sum it all up, we (re)discovered that work is a fertile ground upon which to develop a more humane economy, as entreated by the pope. Indeed, the Church has focused on the need to achieve the full dignity of labour since the very beginning of its social teachings. Working closely with Franciscan monks in our village, and particularly with Friar Andrea Ricatti, we set the overarching theme of our village as tied to Franciscan teachings, thus placing all our reflection in the inspiring light of St Francis, who defined work as "a grace". "The grace of work"²⁶ has become a sort of manifesto that sums up the yearning and aspirations of our village to ensure that work is truly recognized as a gift of God – a gift to be protected and cultivated.

In the writings of St Francis, each man is meant to share his gifts with others and put them at the service of the community for the good of all. It is gratuitousness that drives towards a new model based on service, fraternity and reciprocity. In the Franciscan perspective, four principles are at the basis of man's relationship with work: freedom, gratuitousness, fraternity and the principle of the common good. Work has a social dimension because it enters into a relationship with the family and the common good, with others and with the environment. The individual succeeds in realizing his own worth only when he is an integral part of the community he belongs to and when all of its members can access work to ensure a dignified lifestyle with a fair wage capable of maintaining oneself and one's family.

The example of St Francis of Assisi can be a significant stimulus for integrative personal and collective transformation. The principle of spiritual poverty – treating every person equally – and the ideal of the community are the cornerstones of Franciscan leadership and organizational culture. It involves an attitude of considering a

²⁶ Fr. Andrea, in cooperation with other participants in our village, developed a brief document called "The grace of work" that we distributed freely through the EoF platforms and has been translated into several languages. Through this work, we put all our discussions about work and care on the path of the long-standing fruitful tradition of Franciscan thought.

person, utilizing their hidden potential and devoting oneself to the service of the community (Dienberg and Warode, 2018), exemplifying the wholeness and oneness of personal integrity (Miller and Miller, 2018).

In sum, within our village we started a process and tried to light a fire without the presumption of coming to definite conclusions. The renewal of the concept of work and the possibility to further develop the projects we discussed would require a collective leap (Neal, 2018) at an institutional, business and personal level. Institutions, in particular, are called upon to intervene to favour a greater balance between life and working hours by investing in infrastructure and cost-controlled service solutions, intervening with fiscal and organizational incentives and norms that support people in their care activities, as well as implementing actions aimed at encouraging a more equitable redistribution of the care burden within families.

All of this requires a change in the mindset of civil society, as well as new practices by corporations and a change in rules and the general narrative. This process can only be advanced through genuine, time-consuming, personal engagement by all stakeholders.

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