

## ABCDEconomy "G" as in "Gift" – Part 2

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Gift. It doesn't exist if there isn't reciprocity .

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*With the word "Gift", which our readers will find this week, we conclude the series ABCDEconomy by Luigino Bruni. We proposed this series as a guide to the key words within economic behavior, after breaking down the myths and bursting a few bubbles. Here's an index of the analyzed words: Happiness, Profit, Market, Bank, Investment, Responsibility, Rules, Interests, Organization, Reciprocity, Capital. This week, the second part regarding the concluding word, "Gift".*

The idea of a gift consists of a way of acting inspired by gratuitousness, and so moved by the search for the good of the other, of the common good. A related experience: a few years ago in Montevideo, a few women made a living by begging outside of supermarkets. At a certain point, an NGO arrives that begins a development project with these women, giving birth to some cooperatives which produce artisan goods, embroidered handkerchiefs.

The day arrived when these women returned, after years, to sell the handkerchiefs, fruit of their work, in front of the same supermarkets where they once begged people for alms and gifts. During the first few days, people still handed them money, but they didn't want the handkerchiefs, until one of those women said, "If you don't want the handkerchief, we don't want the money".

This is also "gift". It's gratuitousness. It's giving recognition to the other. Its reciprocity. Today, microcredit projects in the world are authentic experiences of gift and of gratuitousness, not through gift-giving but through contracts. We need to get used to seeing gifts in our complex society not as a "thing" but as a "means to", not relationships limited to philanthropy or alms-giving but based on reciprocity and happiness.

This complex grammatical use of *munus*, of gift-that-obligates, of which important authors and philosophers like Derrida and Marion, sociologists like Caillé and Goodbout, have written, would even be at the base of the ambivalent "*communitas*", as Roberto Esposito has shown. The base category within the circuit of giving is not gratuitousness but reciprocity, as we've been shown especially by Karl Polanyi, a 19th century author who was a point of reference for the anthropology of giving.

The reciprocal aspect of giving is not, in its basic relational structure, substantially different from the phenomenon of economical exchange, appearing in cultures much later in respect to ritual giving. In the history of cultures, between giving and the market there was a difference of degrees (of measuring equivalents, of the timing of giving and receiving, of the allowed sanctions) and not of nature. With giving, we close our ABCDEconomy series. Thank you to all who have followed me through this small handbook of civil economy.