Making space for sharing in the global market

The Focolare Movement's Economy of Sharing

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Abstract

The distinction between the 'cultural' and the 'economic' has become increasingly blurred in recent years within human geography. The re-emergence of the 'cultural' in the 'economic', which is highlighted by the search for so called 'alternative economic geographies', discloses underlying normative concerns for a more socially and environmentally sustainable economy. Within such considerations, the question of geographical scale is of crucial importance, since many such geographies are often bound up in localised understandings of culture and of economic action. The thesis argues that insights into *global* economic alternatives can be gained from examining existing *global* cultures which are in contrast to the market. Religious movements form one of the most ancient, but also one of the most enduring and controversial examples of such global cultures. Such movements, it is argued, could be one possible source, not only of localised alternatives to the dominant capitalist regime, but of emerging global alternative economic geographies. Through ethnographic research, the various geographies of one such emerging global socio-religious movement, the Focolare, are examined in depth. It is argued that this movement offers a social vision, rooted in the idea of a Trinitarian perspective, which therein contains concepts of economic life and its relationship to other dimensions of human existence not present within contemporary economic discourses.

The thesis considers, in particular, the emergence of a global 'economic' project, the Economy of Sharing, which grew from within the Focolare Movement in 1991. It first explores the evolution of the Economy of Sharing, providing a statistical overview of the main contours of the project. It also examines the various local, regional and global organisational structures which form the institutional dimension of the project. The implementation of the Economy of Sharing is then examined at a local level in the social, cultural and economic geographies of two contrasting regions: Sao Paulo in Brazil and Milan in Italy. The different spaces in which the Economy of Sharing is applied are then examined in turn. In successive chapters, the spaces of sharing of the Economy of Sharing are opened out, from the local to the global, examining the new possibilities and conflicts which arise through the application of the Focolare's ethos at these different scales. The thesis concludes by asking what could be the wider implications of this economic and social experiment. In a series of more theoretical

reflections, three inter-linking themes with particular geographical pertinence are re-examined in the light of the empirical research: the relationships between the cultural and the economic, the economic as networks, and the question of care for distant strangers. The possible futures of the Economy of Sharing are explored and the potential of the concept to solve the pressing global problem of the distribution of wealth are considered.

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tragically in a plane crash in July 1999, aged 22, whilst working for an Economy of Sharing business in the Philippines quoted in this thesis. For several years we shared, discussed and often argued about the ideas which are now presented in this thesis. As a management graduate, her expertise helped me to keep my feet firmly on the ground and never to lose sight of the 'real' problems which affect businesses when attempting to apply high ideals in everyday life. Her words said whilst alive now take on a whole new significance in light of her death.

In loving memory of Siobhan Coyle

"I realised that this type of culture, that of sharing spontaneously of all resources, is the root of the Economy of Sharing...

I have observed that companies throughout the world are trying to create cultures ... to keep employees motivated and to assure a common vision. Much energy and time is spent in ensuring the global culture is adopted at the local level ...

That global culture is already in place throughout Economy of Sharing organisations, which is evident in the immediate willingness and generosity of Ancilla to share even my concerns and fears, since I am viewed as both a worker and a human being.

This culture, I believe, will be a competitive edge in today's global market since it not only transcends languages and cultures but industries too. And the sharing of time, knowledge and expertise across these organisations will prove a powerful resource" [CEOS90].

Siobhan Coyle, 25.7.99.

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Introduction

It could almost be regarded as a cliché to compare an intellectual enterprise to a 'journey'. Human geography, in recent years, has been awash with spatial references to intellectual enterprises. Journeys, it seems, are now almost exclusively 'internal', involving the use of conceptual maps rather than topographic ones. Despite this overuse of spatial vocabulary, I still feel that 'journey' is a compelling metaphor for this piece of work. From my perspective, as the author, it has been an intellectual, emotional and even spiritual journey which has involved wrestling with, and mastering a diverse range of ideas and concepts. These ideas, at first glance, are primarily concerned with the relationship between the 'cultural' and the 'economic', and normative concerns for social justice. Developing these ideas, however, has taken me far from my geographical home (in terms of ideas) into the lesser known worlds of theological anthropology and spiritual theology. The convergence and contradictions of different perspectives on reality which are represented within such diverse materials have challenged my deepest perceptions of how these worlds relate to each other and interact. As a consequence, it has altered my own understanding of where I fit into the picture of the Focolare and the Economy of Sharing presented in this thesis. It has also led me to question deeply my own 'morality' as a geographer, and the values and beliefs that I wish to bring to my work.

On another level the thesis is presented as a kind of geographical journey which starts and ends in Glasgow. In the course of the thesis, the settings shift from Glasgow to Rome and from Sao Paulo to Milan. Throughout the thesis the horizons of the Economy of Sharing, as an alternative economic geography, are continually shifting, creating and juxtaposing 'views' from various perspectives and on various scales. In a similar way that the lens of a camera changes its view, the local geographies of the Economy of Sharing are seen alongside the global ones; the spiritual geographies with the more 'mundane' conventional economic ones; and the academic ones with the non-academic. The lens, however, through which all this is seen is not presented here as a sub-conscious 'God's eye view', at least in the conventional understanding of the term. Rather, through making use of a wide range of sources, it seeks to give voice to a Focolare view, which is crystallised in the idea of the Trinitarian perspective. Such a view is certainly 'God's eye' (since the Trinity is a specifically Christian image of God), but itself challenges on an ontological level what is meant by 'God's eye'. It is presented here not as an all-seeing, all-knowing eye, but in its grounded form as interpretations, discourses, beliefs and practices at both the Focolare Centre in Rome and in the regions of Sao Paulo and Milan. In many respects, therefore, this thesis can be regarded as a journey.

Overview of thesis

Chapter 1, *In search of alternative economic geographies*, consists of three main sections. The first section considers the relationship between the 'cultural' and the 'economic', with particular reference to the 'cultural turn' within economic geography. Reference here is made to literature within human geography, but also to related work being done in disciplines such as economic sociology and social economics. In particular, it examines the normative concerns (for a more socially and environmentally sustainable economy) underpinning the search for so called 'alternative economic geographies'. It poses the crucial question of scale in such concerns, asking how such geographies, which are often bound up in localised understandings of culture and of economic action, could possibly provide alternatives within the context of an increasingly global economy in which the pursuit of profit is universalised.

The second section proposes a possible new avenue to examining this question. It proposes that insights into *global* economic alternatives can be gained from examining existing *global* cultures which are in contrast to the market. Religious movements form one of the most ancient, but also one of the most enduring examples of such global cultures. Such movements, it is argued, could be one possible source, not only of localised alternatives to the dominant capitalist regime, but of emerging global alternative economic geographies. The relationship between religion and the economy, therefore, needs to be taken seriously within the context of the formation of alternative global cultures. The third section moves on to the substantive topic of the thesis: the economic geographies of a global socio-religious movement, the Focolare Movement. The limited academic literature on this topic is reviewed. The main aims and objectives of the thesis are then set out on page 47.

In Chapter 2, *Methodology and research techniques*, I reflect on how I went about examining the economic geographies of the Focolare Movement's Economy of Sharing, outlining the various fieldwork locations involved in the study. I consider the 'multi-method ethnographic' approach which I used throughout the thesis, and the way quantitative and qualitative methods, such as textual analysis, can complement each other.

Quantitative methods, such as the calculation of the growth rates and geographical distribution of businesses, are regarded as indispensable in this thesis as they offer the reader objective criteria against which to examine the overall scale and scope of the Economy of Sharing. The use of qualitative methods, on the other hand, gives texture and meaning to these geographies through examining in-depth the ideals, motivations and beliefs underpinning the Focolare Movement and the Economy of Sharing. I also explore the question of positionality, asking how my own personal involvement in the Focolare Movement and my faith as a committed Catholic have influenced this research. Finally, I reflect on the issue of translation and interpretation, which has been very important within this research given that the primary sources, both written and verbal, were almost exclusively in Italian and Portuguese.

In Chapter 3, *The Focolare Movement: an emerging global culture*, I move on to the substantive topic of the thesis. I begin to build up a picture of the underlying aims and objectives of the movement, through reference to a wide range of documentary sources, interviews with key Focolare leaders and participant observation. I look at the diffusion of the Focolare throughout the world, its various activities and the idea of a 'Trinitarian perspective' which underpins the Focolare's spirituality. I then consider how the organisational structures of the Focolare can be seen as distinctive Focolare spaces in which the ideals of the movement are lived out. Finally, I critically examine the way that the Focolare could be regarded as a colonial power within the context of the various post-colonial debates.

In Chapter 4, *The Focolare's economic vision: 'a culture of giving'*, I begin to explore how the ideals of the Focolare, underpinned by a distinctive Trinitarian anthropology, give rise to a distinctive way of 're-imagining' the economic dimension of life and its relationship to other dimensions of life. I return to the historical origins of the Focolare, as disclosed in the Focolare's archives, and consider in greater detail the relationship between the spiritual and the economic at the beginning of the movement in Trent, Italy, in the 1940s. I then examine how these ideas and practices have taken root within the Focolare throughout the world, giving rise to an understanding of economic life which is in many ways in contradiction with dominant economic discourses.

In Chapter 5, *The evolution of the Economy of Sharing*, I make the transition from this general vision of economic life to one particular manifestation of it which has emerged within the Focolare in recent years, namely the Economy of Sharing project. I explore the historical origins of the Economy of Sharing in Brazil in 1991, and construct a picture of the development of the project over the past nine years. I provide a statistical overview of the main contours of the project since 1991, including the number and nature of participating businesses and the profits shared. I also examine the various local, regional and global organisational structures which form the institutional dimension of the project and analyse the decision-making procedures within these structures.

In Chapters 6 to 9, the exploration of economic geographies of the Focolare moves from the global view of the Focolare Centre in Rome (where the bulk of the above research was carried out), to two contrasting regions in which the idea has been grounded: Sao Paulo in Brazil and Milan in Italy. In successive chapters, I open out the geographical spaces in which the Economy of Sharing is lived. Chapter 6, *Locating the case study regions*, acts as an introduction to the empirical research carried out in Milan and Sao Paulo. In this chapter, I locate the regions in terms of their overall economic geographies. I also locate them in the social, cultural and political geographies of Italy and Brazil, which contributed to the development of the Economy of Sharing in these two regions.

In Chapter 7, *The Focolare's spirituality and Economy of Sharing businesses*, I begin to examine the Economy of Sharing within the economic 'space' which is arguably the 'home' of the market ethos - commercial business - and consider the relevance of the Focolare ethos, as understood by the directors of the companies, within their businesses. In Chapter 8, *Entanglements: 'social' networks – 'economic' relationships*, I widen out this discussion to the various social/economic relationships (with clients, suppliers, employer/employee, legal authorities, professional institutions and local community) in which business is engaged. I look at how these relationships are re-made through the Economy of Sharing and the resulting changes which occur. In Chapter 9, *Making space for sharing: local-global networks*, this widening frame of reference is extended to the various networks which constitute the Economy of Sharing throughout the world. In particular, I explore the various networks of social contacts within the Economy of Sharing on a local, regional and international scale, and trace how these give rise to spaces within the market economy wherein in sharing is a dominant economic and religious motivation. I also consider the difficult challenges faced by those trying to develop the Economy of Sharing within the context of the current globalised market economy.

In the final chapter, *The geographies of the Economy of Sharing*, I step back from the empirical data and return to the initial questions raised at the beginning of the thesis, asking what could be the wider implications of this economic and social experiment. In a series of more theoretical reflections, I examine three inter-linking themes with particular geographical pertinence, which surface throughout the thesis: the relationships between the cultural and the economic, the economic as networks, and the question of care for distant strangers. The chapter is made up of three main sections, each of which revisits the key theoretical debates and then considers how such debates could be re-interpreted in the light of what is presented in this thesis. By means of conclusion, I speculate on possible futures of the Economy of Sharing and the prospects it could offer to solving the pressing global problem of the distribution of wealth.

1. In search of alternative economic geographies

> *"Economic ethnocide flows from the belief that pre-modern forms of economic organisation must give way for either private or multinational capitalism or state-planned socialism or mixes of these"* (UNESCO, 1995: 69).

> *"How disinterested goodwill can be fostered in modern, pluralistic, 'Western' societies is a question raised sharply by several sociologists and social philosophers, who realise that they cannot be presumed, but have to be consciously pursued, because industrialisation and urbanisation have weakened the traditional social and religious bonds which did foster them"* (Preston, 1991: 26).

The beginning of the third millennium has been marked by a new global consciousness of the economic and social inequalities which affect the population of the world. The century that has just come to a close seemed to end with as many unanswered questions as with which it began. The last decade of the twentieth century started with the so called 'triumph of capitalism' and the failure of the socialism regimes in Eastern Europe. This was accompanied by a wave of optimism that the 'evils' of communism could be overcome by the emancipating forces of the free market. The result was the expansion of the global economy, based on the ideals of the free market, on an unprecedented scale. Globalisation became the buzzword of the 1990s. The turnover of international monetary transactions burgeoned, reaching heights only dreamt of in previous generations. There was a wave of optimism that the end of communism would herald a new age of international co-operation and solidarity.

At the end of the decade, however, the UNICEF statistics on Human Development showed that the contrasts in terms of economic and social development between the Westernised nations and the rest of the world remain stark (see Table 1.1). Although globalisation has led to an unprecedented boom in the world economy, the same phenomenon has generated even greater inequalities. Key indicators of human well-being - life expectancy, access to nutritional requirements, health-care, education, employment, shelter - are gradually becoming polarised with the high values being concentrated increasingly in a smaller proportion of the global population. The problem is one of distribution. The world had 157 billionaires and about 2 million millionaires in 1989, but 1.2 billion of its inhabitants were living in absolute poverty, including 100 million living without shelter (Brown, 1993). A

1993 UNDP report noted that the wealthiest 20% of humanity received 82.7% of the world's income. Moreover, access to technology is polarising, and, as economic institutions become increasingly global, terms of trade have been consistently deteriorating, effectively excluding those who cannot afford the technology or expertise to participate in the global markets.[1] It was estimated that in the decade up to 1992, average per capita incomes fell by about 3% per year in Sub-Saharan Africa and by about 1.3% in the highly indebted countries (UNDP, 1992).

Table 1.1: Indicators of Human Development Regional Summaries

	Infant Mortality Rate (per 1000)		*GNP per capita (US $) 1995*	*Total adult literacy (per 100) 1995*	*% Share of household income (US $) 1995*	
	1960	*1996*			*lowest 40%*	*highest 20%*
Sub-Saharan Africa	154	105	501	57	11	58
Middle East and North Africa	154	50	1710	59	-	-
East Asia and Pacific	146	80	345	49	21	42
South Asia	133	41	1043	84	17	46
Latin America and the Caribbean	105	35	3271	87	9	61
CEE/CIS and the Baltic States	76	29	2086	97	18	44
Industrialised Nations	31	6	25926	98	18	40
Developing countries	137	66	1101	71	15	51
Least developed Countries	171	109	220	48	20	43
World	123	60	4812	75	18	42

Source: UNICEF (1998)

Aggregate figures such as these, however, fail to convey the disparate regional and intra-societal impacts of reduced incomes (Nef, 1999). If other indicators such as the Gini coefficient are used to measure income disparities in a range between 0 and 1, they reveal that these rose from 0.69 to 0.87 between 1960 and 1989, "an intolerable level that far exceeds anything seen in individual countries" (UNDP, 1992).

One of the main contributory factors to this growing inequality on a macro-economics level is the 'expanding and insurmountable indebtedness' (Nef, 1999). The problem of indebtedness is increasingly seen not only as an issue for developing countries, but for the industrialised nations too. In 1970, according to World Bank figures, the total external debt

[1] Analysts point to the interconnectedness and mutual causality of the long term deterioration in terms of trade and the debt situation in LDCs. Poor trade dampens the growth of purchasing power of exports. At the same time it increases the need to borrow for necessary imports, which in turn puts downward pressures on export price. This then has leads to a worsening of the terms of trade through devaluation and other measures of forced exports. The effects of this account for $500 billion of debt. More than 70% of this increase can be explained by a deterioration of the terms of trade of LDCs (Singer & Sakar, 1992).

of all debtor nations was equivalent to 14% of their GNP and 142% of their export earnings. In 1987, these figures had climbed to 51.7% and 27.9%, respectively (UNDP, 1992). For most countries, debt ratios of nearly 50% of GNP or service rates of more than 20% of export earnings are unmanageable. According to Nef (1999), such figures do not adequately portray the tragedy of the situation which is faced in highly indebted countries, nor the differential impact on the poor, who are most 'grievously hurt' by the crisis, through the knock-on effects on employment, consumption and credit. In industrialised states, on the other hand, the persistence of the debt crisis has left financial institutions exposed to uncertainty. Such institutions in turn normally transfer the debt burden to the public sector through government-sponsored insurance schemes or simply pass on losses to their customers at home.

According to the UNDP (1999) the underlying reason for this persistent poverty and widening of social and economic inequalities at a regional and global scale is a widespread belief, above all within influential economic and political policy institutions, that the market alone can solve the problems of inequality. The 1980s and 1990s saw a profound change in the attitudes of the most industrialised countries with respect to the developing ones. Whereas in the 1960s and 1970s there had been a concerted effort to promote development in less developed countries (LDCs), by the 1990s aid budgets were cut dramatically as free trade and minimal government intervention became the new political and economic orthodoxy (Ayres, 1998; Amin, 1996). The continuation of such a global system which perpetuates inequalities, many have argued is continuously under threat since it lacks the values, on a global scale, to sustain its growth (Samuelson, 1998a).

The collapse of the centrally controlled socialist regimes created a vacuum which has substantially been filled by the conflicting and often contradictory ideals of 'globalisation'. So all-encompassing is this term and so overused that some have questioned whether it is a useful term at all (Allen, 1995: 58). The term was initially conceived as an 'economic' phenomenon, describing the spatial stretching of economic ties across the globe, in particular through the development of Transnational Corporations (Dicken, 1986), but has now grown into a multifaceted concept (Leyshon, 1997: 133). Despite these differences, globalisation is now generally accepted as series of inter-linking discourses, with one shared point of contact: they are principally driven by the philosophy of the market (Amin, 1996). Such discourses are dominant within the 'new institutional forms of globalisation' such as the World Trade Organisation and other multilateral trade agreements such as NAFTA (Watts & McCarthy, 1997). In the words of Nef (1999) "A crucial ideological trait ... underpins the present regime. This is the persuasiveness of neo-liberalism as a hegemonic and homogenising discourse". In many ways it can be interpreted as a form of neo-colonialism or 'economic imperialism' (Daly, 1996: 12).

It is this domination of the market philosophy, underpinning the discourses[2] of globalisation, which, according to the UNDP, is leading to ethics being put into second place and the sacrificing of justice and human rights. In the absence of a global ethic of responsibility towards those who are excluded from the market, as well as care for the environment, the market has itself 'grown into' the governing principle of social justice (Amin, 1996: 5). The paradigm of development may have changed its focus in the 1990s - emphasising community participation and empowerment - rather than government intervention on a local scale, but such changes have to be seen within the wider political economy of globalisation (Craig & Mayo, 1995). There is scepticism over the value of 'community participation' if it is not accompanied by changes in the global economy, which must include some form of wealth redistribution (Nelson & Wright, 1995: 41). As the 1999 UNDP report states: "The market alone will make global citizens only of those who can afford it" (UNDP, 1999: 63).

In search of alternatives

The UNDP *Human Development Report 1999* recognised the need for a global alternative which responds not only to the market: "The world is rushing headlong into greater integration, driven mostly by economic forces and guided mostly by a philosophy of market profitability and economic efficiency... It is time to change" (UNDP, 1999: 114). The words 'time to change' are significant since they are an explicit acknowledgement of the failures of globalisation conceived as the expansion of the market economy. Such admittance marks a dramatic shift in principle from the *Bruntland Report* (1987), which advocated increased economic growth as the solution to poverty rather than redistribution.

The problem, however, is in interpreting what this 'change' actually means. The UNDP

[2] Here I am referring to a broadly Foucauldian perspective in which 'discourses' are organised bodies of written statements, models and agendas relating to a particular issue (Foucault, 1980; Barrett, 1998). These reflect a specific worldview and a power relationship in which there is a dialectical relationship between economic practice (the 'economic'), embedded within social and cultural values, and the theory (Economics), couched in scientific reasoning (see Escobar, 1995).

does not specify what such a change could entail, except that it would involve a shift away from the domination of the market philosophy as the governing principle of globalisation. In a world in which there are no universally accepted values, globalisation is rapidly becoming the 'new universal', at least in terms of public policy, which takes precedence over other considerations. The UNDP highlighted the need for a different vision: one perhaps heralding a need to work in partnership with civil society organisations in the promotion of alternative forms of economic action which are more sustainable, respecting the environment and human rights, a theme which will be examined throughout this thesis.

On a theoretical level, the 1990s saw the emergence of a plethora of 'alternatives' within various schools of development thinking linked to economic geography (Escobar, 1995; Esteva, 1987; Latouche, 1993; Sachs, 1992; Watts, 1993). Many of these emerged as a reaction against the waning Marxist critique and the over-emphasis that globalisation placed on the 'market' (Booth, 1994; Rahnema & Bawtree, 1997). Others were influenced principally by the post-colonial critique of development theory (Crush, 1995; Roe, 1991). Such accounts of 'alternatives to development' highlighted, in particular, the various modes of economic interaction taking place amongst communities at the margins of the formal market. Such communities, they argued, have seen the emergence of a new kind of economics, often promoted or instigated by new social movements[3] and other civil society organisations. Such economics are based on solidarity, collaboration and a sense of belonging, underlining the social, ethical and cultural dimensions of economic life. They highlight the existence of different perspectives on economic life within the global market, rooted in particular social and cultural understandings, reflecting specific values and behaviours.

Like the UNDP, scholars here also come to the conclusion that the alternatives to the free market do not necessarily need to be invented on a grand scale. There is scepticism about grand ideas, reflecting a preference for alternatives rooted in local knowledges and geographies (Routledge, 1992). They emphasise the need to make visible the alternatives that already exist, standing as working examples of different perspectives rather than as

[3] This term is contested amongst theorists (Scott, 1990; Laclau, 1985) but is generally used to describe the emergence of various groups on a local and international scale working outwith formal political structures to obtain political goals, especially in developing countries. This thesis originated from an undergraduate dissertation on new social movements in Latin America (Gold, 1996). New social movement literatures are not discussed extensively here, though it is acknowledged that there is an overlap with many of the ideas in this thesis.

'purely' theoretical constructs. Such an approach would emphasise the places where 'people are getting it right' rather than a pathology of development failures (Ekins, 1992). The alternatives that are envisaged reflect different 'economic geographies' at the intersection of community, culture and economy, rather than a new universalised economic theory detached from the context in which it came to be.

Different perspectives on the economy, giving rise to proposed alternative practices, therefore have to be studied at the theoretical intersection between the economy and culture and, in particular, at the point economies exist in partnership with civil society. The focus of this thesis is one such emerging alternative economic geography: the Focolare Movement's Economy of Sharing. The idea of the Economy of Sharing emerged in 1991 in Sao Paulo, Brazil as an attempt to address inequalities in wealth, first of all within the Focolare Movement, initially within Brazil and subsequently on a global scale. Small commercial businesses were set up or transformed so that their profits could be redistributed to the poor. By 1999, 761 small and medium-sized businesses in 45 countries were participating in the project, redistributing a proportion of their profits to promote welfare in the poorest countries and the spread of a 'culture of giving' (Bruni, 1999). The success of this new form of economic activity, and the 'culture of giving' which underpins it, has generated interest both from within the academic community and from governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in different countries.

Yet this interest in the Economy of Sharing could seem disproportional to the size of the project. As an actual existing reality it is still very small. Nevertheless, its very existence and survival within the global market raises interesting and probing questions about the interrelationship between the cultural, the spiritual and the economic dimensions of life, arguably calling into question the assertion that the 'market' is the only viable economic doctrine underpinning globalisation. In the Economy of Sharing, the economy itself takes on the meaning of a privileged place, a social space in which all the instrumental aspects that are normally associated with 'economy' only acquire a pertinence (on an existential level) if they are carried out in such a way as to promote greater communion within the workplace and between the business and the wider community (Bruni, 1999; Ressl, 1999). In other words, it would appear that the utilitarian logic of profitability, on which the market rests, can here be framed by a greater logic which accords value to every member of the working community as a human person who finds fulfilment, above all, in communion with others (Delia, 2000; Gold, 2000).

Such a proposal raises many important questions in view of the possibility of reaching alternatives to the market on a local and a global scale, which this research will seek to examine in depth. Firstly, it questions the place of the business in the free market economy as a public or private space and the discourses which commonly circulate within the context of the business sphere. Is there a place for a different ethic, perhaps 'of caring', perhaps one which is based on religious roots, within the sphere of international business? Secondly, it raises questions regarding the ownership of profit and social justice: if profits are to be shared, who has the right to them? Do 'distant strangers'[4], above all those in dire need, have a claim to the profits of businesses? Above all, it raises an urgent question with regard to sustainability: to what extent is it possible to transcend the logic of market profitability as the ethic of globalisation with one that is more environmentally and socially sustainable?

In this thesis, therefore, the aim is to uncover the economic geographies, but also the social, cultural and even political geographies, of the Economy of Sharing. This means studying institutions which exist within the sphere of business, the Economy of Sharing businesses and networks, and examining their relationship with socio-cultural practices that underpin them. It therefore involves studying socio-religious institutions, such as the Focolare Movement, to understand the economic vision that is derived from the spirituality that the movement promotes. It also means studying commercial establishments, the Economy of Sharing businesses, to understand the extent to which they can apply such high ideals in the everyday conduct of economic action. Such research, by its nature, cuts across well-established academic boundaries, forging new links between literatures which have apparently little in common and enabling them to enter into some kind of dialogue with each other.[5] This movement towards greater interdisciplinary work, however, is not out of context within human geography. Within economic geography, there has been just such a shift in recent years, drawing on work from cultural and social geography and beyond. It is in this context, at the boundary between economic and cultural geography,

[4] The term 'distant strangers' has been used in geographical texts by Smith (1998) in relation to the claims that unknown others can make in relation to the distribution of goods. The idea that people have rights and responsibilities to distant strangers is one that emerges primarily within the debates concerning the failures of market globalisation to distribute benefits fairly.
[5] The literature which forms the basis of the thesis has been taken mainly from the disciplines of social theology, economic sociology, economic anthropology as well and cultural and economic geography.

that the economic geographies of the 'Economy of Sharing' have to be placed.

The 'cultural turn' and economic geography

This crossover between economic and non-economic sub-disciplines is increasingly apparent within human geography. The boundaries between the 'economic' and social and cultural geography have become increasingly blurred in the 1990s. Within economic geography, this shift has been reflected in a renewed interest in the social and cultural dimensions of economic life (Lee & Wills, 1997). It has led to a refiguring of the traditional debates within the sub-discipline, opening up a 'whole new world' which lies outside the 'territories' of conventional economic enquiry (Thrift & Olds, 1996). There is a renewed emphasis on the intersections between the economy and cultural meaning, discourse and identity (Crang, 1997), bringing a whole new language into the conventional debates about geographies of production, consumption and distribution.

This shift in emphasis within economic geography (although still partial) has to be seen within the context of wider debates within human geography and social science in general. Some regard the move to question the cultural and social discourses through which the economic is both delineated and operated as the natural extension of the 'cultural turn' which has dominated human geography in recent years (Crang, 1994). Although there may still be some disagreement on what the cultural turn actually is and what it represents, a general statement of the phrase is contained in the description given by Cosgrove. He says that it is an attempt to give greater attention to: "a sense of history and of human agency as the collective expressions of real people with imagination, ideas, desire, beliefs and values - all those characteristics that are captured in that powerful but thankfully elusive term, culture" (Cosgrove, 1988, in Philo, 1991: 1).

This 'cultural turn' within human geography, although sharing many of the same objectives as humanistic geography, differs in many ways from the other schools of humanistic geography.[6] Both the cultural turn and humanistic geography reflect a common concern to study what is distinctively human - 'meaning, values, goals and purpose' (Ley & Samuels, 1978) - about humanity, and are in some ways reactions to the rational economic models that dominated geography as spatial science in the 1950s and 1960s and the structural Marxism of the 1970s. But, whereas the humanistic geographers sought out

[6] By 'humanistic geography' I am referring to primarily to the themes laid out in Ley and Samuels (1978).

some kind of universal vision of what is human lurking beneath the surface of apparent differences and contradictions through the use of phenomenological and existential philosophies, the 'cultural turn' has been distinguished by its attention to difference and the desire to study others as different, without seeking to make them appear like one's self. It is an aim that takes the 'new' cultural geography some distance from the realms commonly identified with humanistic geography. In this way, the epistemological certainties of existentialism and phenomenology are challenged and any attempt to define what is fundamentally and universally 'human' about humanity is treated with scepticism.

'Culture' within the new cultural geographies is not necessarily seen as something that unites humanity, creating an underlying similarity between people. Rather, it is stressed that culture differentiates groups of people and individuals. The notion of culture adopted within the new cultural geography is a broadly anthropological one (Philo, 1991: 9), where culture is regarded as a system of shared meaning, and where local culture is a local version of such a system. The notion of culture in practice thus shares some elements of a traditional cultural anthropological approach.[7] Cultures are seen as systems of shared meaning in a similar way to Geertz (1973), who refers to the 'imaginative universe' which is present within specific 'local knowledges'. Within this imaginative universe, the different elements of culture are related in some way. It is assumed that the different dimensions of life within such an imaginative universe are linked together on a semantic or in a logical way, and that they imply one another, as in a text or narrative.

The notion of culture in practice within cultural geography, however, is also a response to the numerous critiques of the uncritical social anthropological approach. Primarily, the critique is a methodological issue, regarding the extent to which it is possible to draw general conclusions about the 'whole' from the experiences that isolated individuals have of their particular culture at one particular time and in one particular place. A more detailed analysis shows that the interrelations among cultural elements are much more contradictory than Geertz perhaps thought, and that there is always an element of dissent (Clifford, 1988). The notion that cultures are self-contained, clearly bounded, internally consistent entities has thus been challenged (Featherstone, 1995; Thompson, 1990b). Some have

[7] Discussion here is restricted to culture in the anthropological sense within the English language. There is no discussion of the origins of the term 'culture' and its relation to 'High Culture' or 'cultured society', although these concepts are clearly related, but arguably encompassed, within the anthropological term. Full discussion of the history of the term can be found in texts such as Tanner (1997).

argued that social anthropology reveals more about the position of the researcher rather than the researched - searching for coherence in terms of an inner logic, smoothing over the 'messy bits' - in the bid to produce an intellectually acceptable account (within their own culture). This arguably says more about the academic framework in which the researcher works (and the use to which the knowledge is put) than any identification with the culture under study *per se* (Tanner, 1997: 39).

This dehistoricised 'snap shot' approach to culture in operation within much anthropological work has been severely criticised in recent years. In particular, the post-colonial question has raised the issue of representations of cultures as social facts (Rabinow, 1985), problematising the way that the discipline of anthropology in particular, but also other disciplines such as geography, have mediated the interpretation of other cultures, placing them on a trajectory of Western development: "The culture from which the anthropologist speaks is in historical process; it has a past. But non-western cultures do not have a past in the same way: they are the past - relics of a vanished age, ruins, petrified fossils, the living dead" (Tanner, 1997: 41).

The result of this critique has been the call for cultural studies to engage with wider political, social and economic discourses (Thompson, 1990b: 134). Such discourses do not stand outside culture, but in themselves are social and cultural constructs. Neo-Marxist theorists, influenced by the work of Foucault and Gramsci, have shifted their understanding of ideology and power to accommodate the anthropological understanding of culture as the experiential meaning of everyday life (Marcus & Fischer, 1986). Discussion of ideology in this way has duly moved from the analysis of religious and political discourse in isolation, to considering how these are translated into meanings and practices in everyday life. In particular, questions of power, as struggles of identity or cultural meaning, have taken precedence over questions of exploitation and domination, since power requires consent. Power, as a struggle over cultural identity, and how this is related to wider, more impersonal political and economic struggles, has become a key concern within social theory (Barnes, 1995). Culture here can no longer be likened to pictures hanging in an exhibition, with the underlying emphasis on aesthetics. It is about practices, meaning and signification which "have the potential for involving moral-ethical attribution of significance" (Crang, 1997).

The traditional anthropological idea that cultures are sharply bounded entities which are 'contained' within a localised geographic space has thus become increasingly implausible. Cultural identity is increasingly seen as a relational process, in which there are many contributory factors including the interactions with wider social and political discourses on both a local and global scale. Culture is still taken to be the 'meaning dimension of life', but a meaning in which there is now more space for incoherence, contradiction and juxtaposition, and where inherent power relations are reflected in the social construction and deployment of knowledge. It is no longer a static entity, but a 'web of meanings' which are continually created and spun out over space. In this way, it is about how one defines one position in the world in terms of meanings, beliefs, myths and values, reflecting diverse 'mental maps' and 'geographic imaginaries' (Gregory, 1994). It comprises a local dimension, in as much as different cultures are situated and understood within local contexts. It also comprises a global dimension, since each culture is a vision of the way the world is and everything in it. This of course makes it increasingly difficult to draw boundaries around specific cultures: cultural identity becomes a hybrid, relational affair - something which exists as much between cultures as within them.

It is a position which requires a greater critical self-awareness on the part of the researcher, who has to be conscious of their own positionality in relation to the researched. It demands a greater honesty about what is actually being represented by ethnographic studies: not the 'truth' about another culture, but an interpretation mediated through one's own culture. It is a representation which is inevitably bound up in power relations (Clifford & Marcus, 1986). The implications of such issues in relation to this thesis will be considered at length in the next chapter.

This shift in what is meant by 'cultural' has far-reaching implications for economic geography. Culture, until recently, has been conspicuous by its absence from economic geography texts. Economic geographers have traditionally been concerned with describing and explaining the spatial patterns of economic differentiation at various scales of analysis. As Knox and Agnew (1989: 4) put it: "The job of the student of economic geography is to make sense of the world - the real world - and the ways in which its economic landscapes are changing." Central to this analysis of patterns of economic differentiation has been the use of deductive models, which have been adapted from neo-classical economics such as Myrdal's Process of Cumulative Growth, Rostow's Model of Economic Growth, and Perroux's 'growth poles' (Chorley & Haggett, 1967: 258). Since cultures are also considered as part of the 'real world' and since they vary too in space, they are sometimes considered as factors in the explanation of economic differentiation, along with other factors such as resource base, capital flow and the like. Cultural differences are here usually regarded as residual factors which deter or slow down the full implementation of economic growth: "Cultural and racial factors may also act as barriers to growth transmission" (Chorley & Haggett, 1967: 285). In the same vein, certain cultural values are seen to speed up this process, as could be the case of the Japanese work ethic or the Protestant ethic.

The new cultural turn, however, means recognising that economies are, above all, *value systems,* and at the centre of questions of value are people who shape and are shaped by social relations of meaning, and therefore by culture (Storper, 1992; Sayer & Walker, 1992). It creates a new intersection between economic theory, seen as an abstract universalising discourse, and the economic practices prevalent and possible in particular places. These 'grounded' economies or economic geographies reflect the collusion and contradictions between the expansive logic of capital, which Harvey (1989: 296) called the 'highly unified space economy' operating at a global scale, and numerous localised knowledges and values. They manifest how various logics are in operation in the micro-, meso-, and macro-economies, giving rise to varied spaces of production and consumption.

The literature on the social and cultural dimensions of the 'economic' has taken on many forms and covers a range of substantive topics. One of the features of this new economic geography is the plurality of discourses which co-exist within it (Thrift & Olds, 1996). One of the fields which has received most interest is work on the *social nature of markets.* This work has drawn substantially on concepts which have emerged within other disciplines such as economic sociology and social economics. The revival of the work of Karl Polanyi (1957) has led to renewed interest in the ways that particular markets are 'embedded'[8] within social and cultural relations which are the result of particular historical and geographical circumstances (Granovetter, 1985; Swedberg, 1998; Platteau, 1994). Once societies accept the market as the main form of social organisation, as Polanyi stressed, human relationships within these societies are transformed into the 'epiphenomenon of the market'. Polanyi formulated a perspective on the forms of economic integration,

[8] Embeddedness is defined as "the fact that economic action and outcomes, like all social action and outcomes, are affected by actors' dyadic relations and by the structure of the overall network of relations" (Grabher, 1993: 4).

underlining the co-existence of various modes of integration at different scales of economic action. He stressed the importance of 'reciprocity', alongside other modes of interaction such as 'market exchange' and 'redistribution'.[9] Polanyi agreed with the Marxist critique of the market, as Harvey (1973: 206) highlighted, but he was also critical of the 'economistic fallacy' which he saw as underpinning historical materialism (Block & Somers, 1984).

The work on the social and cultural embeddedness of markets has focused on deconstructing the idea of the 'market' which is prevalent within neo-classical economic theory.[10] Within economic theory, the market is taken as the governing principle of economic behaviour, following in the tradition of Adam Smith (1981), who is said to be the 'father' of classical economics. The theoretical principle of the market is underpinned by several assumptions, such as the theoretical construct of 'rational economic man', which have been contested by social economists, economic sociologists and others. The assumption of a rational actor, who constantly seeks to maximise his personal or corporate utility, and who in so doing contributes to the wider economy and therefore benefits society as a whole, has been severely criticised (Daly & Cobb, 1990: 25-43).

Some have argued that the impossibility of perfect knowledge makes the idea of a rational actor implausible. Others have criticised the over-emphasis on 'self-interest' implicit within 'utility maximisation', stressing that different forms of utility can be conflicting (Etzioni, 1989: 31) and that the interests of the individual may not necessarily contribute to the common good (Daly & Cobb, 1990). Others have critiqued the assumption that human activity is always motivated by a desire to maximise and by the pursuit of a single goal (Barnes, 1995).[11] Some geographers, such as Wallace (1978: 101-2), have gone as far as saying that the concept of economic man prevalent within classical economics is inherently flawed since it is based on an anthropology which limits the possibilities of change itself,

[9] There is some contention over the validity of the approach that Polanyi took in his research. Some anthropologists and historians (e.g. Latham, 2000) disagree with Polanyi's interpretation of primitive economies as being 'free' from market economies. In their view, such societies were just as dominated by markets as in the present day.
[10] By 'nęo-classical economic theory' I am referring here to the varied body of literature which draws on the theoretical frameworks of Adam Smith, David Ricardo, John Stuart Mill and Karl Marx, all classical economists. Neo-classical economics, such as Samuelson (1998b) outlines, is broadly characterised by the theoretical assumptions of 'rational economic man' and methodological individualism. It has been very influential since the 1980s and 1990s, placing emphasis on the role of *laissez faire* and the market highlighting the ability of a large number of small producers or consumers to influence prices.
[11] These criticisms gave rise to various 'off-shoots' of economic theory such as behavioural approaches in economic geography (Cox & Golledge, 1981), which stressed the various different motivations in economic action, attempting to determine the optimising or 'satisficer' option (Pred, 1967).

as by excluding the collaborative side of economic action. His proposal is a radical shift in the underlying 'worldview' which underpins economic thinking.

Despite these critiques, the 'economic' has come to be understood as synonymous with 'the market': a space in which one can assume the outworking of an underlying instrumental, utilitarian logic in social relations. Such a logic, by its nature is antithetical to ethical judgements on the part of its participants (Wuthnow, 1994: 626): indeed, it is antithetical to anything forming an alternative basis for decision-making. In this way, ethical considerations, such as social justice, are reduced to the interplay of 'market forces', through which the system rather than the individual decides on the most efficient allocation of resources.

The complexity of economic life in the late-twentieth century has meant that the same concept of the market is being applied to the most astonishing range of social relationships on a variety of scales. There are the financial markets which deal in moneys or derivatives of money of various kinds. There are the stock markets which are engaged in evaluating and distributing the ownership of companies. These markets span the globe through the various institutions of the international financial system and increasingly through cyberspace. Then there are the markets for various products and services, functioning according to demand and supply, there are housing and labour markets, and finally there are some 'market markets' - as events or occasions where people still physically come together to sell and buy things. It is also still the name of the place where this event is held. The same word is also used as a verb to mean the attributes of something (real or imagined) which make it sellable. There is a growing acknowledgement that the concept of the market is now unable to comprehend this vast range of relationships, suggesting that other concepts are needed to represent the changes in the economic system which are taking place.

Globalisation

One such concept, which has become intertwined with the market, as mentioned in the introduction, is globalisation. Greater attention within economic geography has been given to the social and cultural nature of globalisation (Leyshon, 1997). The initial wave of writings on the globalisation of the world economy stressed how globalisation seemed to lead to the 'end of geography', to 'time-space compression' (Harvey, 1989), creating a spaceless place of flows in which capital was thought to circulate. Dicken (1992) deemed the change as 'global shift' as early as 1986, highlighting the way that economic activity was increasingly global in scope. Economic geographers were quick to underline the material outcomes of globalisation. There was a renewed interest in the roles of transnational corporations and international financial centres, and also in global trade patterns. There was increasing interest in the interconnectedness of national economies increasingly viewed as being at the mercy of international flows and inward investment. This increasing hypermobility of capital created the idea that globalisation is somehow illegible and too complex to comprehend. The creation of the hyperspace of global capital flows (Swyngedouw, 1992) has in effect spun abstract stories of a global space in which there are no people - just electrons whizzing around the globe in search of profit. But this story, as Thrift pointed out, is simultaneously another story of re-engagement:

> *"The result is that the hypermobile world of international money is actually a hypersocial world, a world of constant interchange between people, whether over electronic networks, or in face-to face meetings, or at the end of lengthy journeys. In this sense this world of flows is not abstract at all - it is the product of and is produced by people communicating about what is going on"* (Thrift, 1995: 27).

Economic geographers were less quick to examine critically the socio-spatial practices and discourses which underpin the concept of globalisation itself. This, however, has now come about in the late-1990s with interest in the work of Foucault and Latour. Through their work, which highlights the power of discourse and the way that discourses and practices are intertwined, there is now a critical awareness that globalisation is not an unproblematic phenomenon. It is a multifaceted accomplishment in which there are fragile networks of vested interests, universalised value systems and socially produced discourses which result in practices.

The arena where this idea has been most influential is in the debate over 'development' and alternatives to it. There have been a range of post-development and anti-development theories which stress the links between globalisation and discourses of economic development (Sachs, 1992; Latouche, 1993). Barnes (1995) has termed this body of literature 'post-pre-fixed theory', stating that it is broadly Marxist in its emphasis on the need for 'alternatives' but essentially conservative since it offers no account of how the alternatives can be universally applied. One of the most prominent examples is that of Escobar (1995), who examines the way that specific economic discourses (emanating from specific world contexts) have been translated into universalised practices, rules and regulations in institutions. Since the collapse of the Bretton Woods agreement, he argues that the economic discourse of development and the related discourses of Westernisation have systematically precluded the possibility of other alternatives. He highlights how "forms of production are not independent from the representations (the 'models') of social life in which they exist" (Escobar, 1995: 98). Such models, he argues are specific to different cultural groups, but the Western model of social life has been imposed on developing countries through the medium of transported economic discourses. Alternatives, therefore, cannot emerge from the top down and attempts to formulate alternatives at an abstract level should be resisted. Research should hence focus on the more local formulations and expressions of such alternatives: "The nature of alternatives as a research question and a social practice can be most fruitfully gleaned for the specific manifestations of such alternatives in concrete local settings" (Escobar, 1995: 223).

Networks

The debate over both economic discourse and the existence of alternatives has often failed to recognise the interrelationship that already exists between 'alternative economic geographies' and the global economic sphere, preferring to concentrate on the local rather than the global. Such alternatives do not sit outside of the global market economy, but are often entangled in it, in many cases so as to gain a greater share in the material benefits of the market. In this sense the alternatives are also modernist in their nature. One of the ways that this new engagement has been understood is as a series of overlapping, intersecting networks which span the globe: "The late twentieth century is covered by a lattice of networks. Public and private, civil and military, open and closed, the networks carry an unimaginable volume of messages, conversations, images and commands" (Mulgan, 1991: 6). Rather than a smooth place of flows, these networks consist in various types of social interactions which stretch social relations across time and space: "The space of flows is revealed as a practical and contingent affair, just like all human enterprises, which is not abstract or abstracted but consists of social networks, often of quite a limited size, even thought they might span the globe" (Thrift, 1995: 34-5). Within these networks the whole issue of scale is turned upside down, since networks are "neither local nor global but are more or less long and more or less connected" (Latour, 1993: 122). Networks interact with each other and are constantly changing.

One particular set of networks that has come to the fore in view of globalisation is the increasing internationalisation and prominence of business networks. As the international business sphere has become increasingly powerful in recent years, the governance of this international sphere of economic action has moved from the nation-states to a range of non-state and supra-state bodies. These bodies (such as credit-rating agencies, investment banks, business reporters, media industry, IMF) govern through intermediaries such as technology, text, visual media other humans and money itself, forming *actor-networks* (Law, 1994; Leyshon & Thrift, 1997).[12] Market theories assumed that transactions take place on a 'one off' basis, but work on the nature of competition has stressed the importance of long-term relationships in business. Far from being an impersonal mechanism in which transactions take place anonymously, within the business world there are well-developed networks of contacts and often unspoken loyalties which influence and direct economic action (Grabhner, 1993). In actor-networks, the activation of power has more to do with the possibility of 'enlisting' other actors, material objects, procedures and frameworks within and, in effect to constitute, the network. This involves binding other actors and intermediaries together into 'knowledge-producing networks' (Bridge, 1997: 611). Since networks often involve 'acting at a distance' (Whatmore & Thornes, 1997), the maintenance of the network is heavily reliant on the existence and control of a common 'mental part' (Olds & Yeung, 1999) - vocabulary, shared knowledge, technology, rules - through which economic action is co-ordinated, made possible and reviewed.

The socio-cultural embeddedness of business relations and networks has been studied in different geographical contexts with references to globalisation, highlighting the interrelationship between regional cultures and global economic space. Olds and Yeung (1999) consider the role of traditional Chinese business networks, which relied heavily on the *guanxi* relationships and family ties.[13] The traditions of guanxi remain very important and can have an influence on the employment market (Bian, 1998), as well as on the choices of suppliers and clients (Yeung, 1997). Whereas in the past these networks were geographically bounded by ethnic and institutional constraints, their scope has widened, creating overlapping global networks of Chinese and non-Chinese business networks.

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[12] Actor-Network Theory came to prominence within social theory in the 1990s (Latour, 1993; Law, 1994). It has recently been more prominent within geographical texts (e.g. Amin & Thrift, 1995; Murdoch & Marden, 1995; Whatmore & Thornes, 1997). ANT covers a range of theoretical discussions, stressing the heterogeneous nature of networks, arguing that it is the relations in the networks, the 'passing', that constitutes knowledge rather than the nodes. For an overview of ANT and geography, see Murdoch (1997).
[13] The word 'guanxi' literally means 'relationships' and can have both positive and negative connotations in the business world. It refers to the tendency within Chinese capitalism to place a strong emphasis on doing business with people who are known and trusted.

Other research on business networks and regional development has highlighted the process of building associations and networks as a critical factor in the economic development of a region (Amin & Thrift, 1994). Amin and Thrift, in their analysis, distinguish between three types of 'contact network' operating within a group of businesses. The first kind of network refers to the relationships between firms and their competitors and their clients. Such networks, although relying on long term relationships, do not require a strong shared commitment to common values. The second kind of networks which they cite are those networks which form linkages between the business and professional-social institutions. These are often made up of business leaders who share the same interests and have shared specialist knowledge. The third kind of network is what they call "epistemic communities" (Amin & Thrift, 1994: 14). These networks are made up of "tightly drawn interest groups which not only have shared specialist knowledge, shared interests and shared attitudes, but also share a normative commitment to act in particular ways and to follow quite particular policy agendas" (Amin & Thrift, 1994: 14). The existence of these three kinds of networks generates what they call 'institutional thickness',[14] which cannot be explained by economic factors alone. In the establishment of this institutional thickness, cultural norms and values play a critical role.

The implication of this work on both globalisation and the social nature of business markets is that there is no such thing as 'pure' markets or 'pure' economic transactions. Money and resources do not just 'flow'. All economic transactions, however much they depend on profitability, are simultaneously an expression of social and cultural relations. Markets are not 'aspatial', therefore, but the result of multifaceted interactions between geographical location, connectivity in networks, social discourses and institutional thickness:

> *"The markets ... are indeed regulated and global, even though none of the causes of that regulation and that aggregation is itself either global or total. The aggregates are not made from some substance different from what they are aggregating. No visible or invisible hand suddenly descends to bring order to*

[14] Institutional thickness is a multifaceted concept used by Amin and Thrift to claim that "social and cultural factors also live at the heart of economic success" (Amin & Thrift, 1994: 14). There are four factors which constitute 'thickness' (Powell & Dimaggio, 1991): strong institutional presence, high levels of interaction between institutions, sharply defined structures of domination and/or patterns of coalition and a mutual awareness of belonging to a common enterprise. Such thickness "establishes legitimacy and nourishes relations of trust" (Amin & Thrift, 1994: 15). Keeble (1999) demonstrated the strong relationship that exists between institutional thickness and the learning capabilities of small enterprises (Keeble et al, 1999), whilst other authors have developed methodological approaches to studying institutional thickness itself (Raco, 1998).

dispersed and chaotic individual atoms" (Latour, 1993: 122).

Underpinning much of this work is the idea that there is something redeeming, or reforming, about highlighting the more social and cultural prerequisites of economic action. Implicit within the literature is the idea that such an emphasis amounts to rediscovering the 'human face' of capitalism (Brittan, 1995).[15] In essence, what is being said is that in order to function as economic actors, one has to recognise that people are simultaneously cultural and social actors. The economic cannot be separated from these other dimensions as economic spaces are hence also cultural and social spaces.

Another place where this shift in emphasis can be seen clearly is in management texts, which now highlight ways of increasing the social capital which is seen as the foundation of the most successful companies (Collins, 1996). Many management texts point to the necessity of a shared corporate vision or 'corporate culture' which underpins action. Such corporate culture is what binds the corporation together, increasing the commitment of individuals to the group and ensuring their loyalty in the long-term. The social/cultural is here often simultaneously linked to the ethical/moral dimension of economic action. It is not uncommon for texts to relate to basic ethical principles such as 'love thy neighbour as thyself' as the foundation of a good corporate strategy![16]

Stating this interconnectedness between the cultural, the social and the economic, however, is clearly not the same as advocating the turn (in 'real' life) to a more social and cultural economic system, as is sometimes assumed. In certain contexts, the emphasis on the social and cultural is simply about finding more expedient ways of increasing profitability.[17] If it is more profitable to be more sociable, then being sociable is seen to be a good thing. If it is more profitable to treat workers well, to love thy neighbour, to invest ethically, and so on, then so be it. In this way, the ethical dimension is itself brought within the logic of

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[15] This shift is in some ways contradictory to the Latourian roots from which much of it emerged. The emphasis of ANT on the 'heterogeneous' nature of networks (Murdoch, 1997) places humans as only one among any number of 'actants' combining in networks to achieve outcomes. It thus highlights the role of non-human agents (Latour, 1993). In many respects, therefore, ANT has been seen as 'anti-humanist' (Whatmore, 1999). In effect, however, it has actually helped to break down the monopoly of a narrowly economistic understanding of economic action, making space for new understandings of economic action.

[16] Against the background of business literature and practice which prevailed in the 1980s and early-1990s, this renewed emphasis on 'soft' approaches to management (with its vocabulary of trust, care and kindness) appears new, even revolutionary. Nevertheless, such changes ideas, though not dominant, have existed throughout the history of industrialisation in the form of economic reformers such as the Quakers and entrepreneurs like Robert Owen (see Gatrell, 1970; Nevaskar, 1971).

[17] This can be said in particular with reference to the changes in management strategies discussed above, which are at the end of the day primarily concerned with increasing profits.

profitability. One could argue that this step is in fact the ultimate 'colonisation of the life world' (Habermas, 1988). As Sayer (1997: 20) put it: "It does not amount to a remoralisation of the economy, just a more sophisticated and effective way of meeting the eternal goals of business." He then goes on to say that "when practices influenced by moral and aesthetic values become means to ends which have nothing to do with the moral, the good or the beautiful, those qualities are arguably degraded or tainted to some degree" (Sayer, 1997: 21). Culture, in this way becomes 'performance' or 'acting out', and has little to do with the 'meaning dimension of life'.[18] As a consequence, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between intrinsic motivations behind genuine attempts to put people first and instrumental logics which put profit first, but does so in apparently people friendly ways. There is a big difference between the customer or employee loyalty which is now central to the functioning of corporations within the capitalistic economic system and the 'human' foundations envisaged by some 'alternative' economic systems. So long as profit remains the ultimate and sole goal of economic action, any talk of 'people' being put back at the centre of economic action is rhetorical.

Cultural definition of the 'economic'

The object of economic geography - the economy, whether regional, national or global - has seldom come into question. After all, what distinguishes economic geography from other geographies is its principal concern with the economic. Economic things which make up economies are supposedly self-evident (industry, employment, labour, welfare, markets, production, profits), and can be measured in various ways and mapped out to show similarities and differences. But clearly, if the 'cultural' dimension is taken seriously as the 'meaning dimension of life', then one has to consider how the distinction between the economic and the non-economic is culturally constructed and maintained. It requires a critical reconstruction of what the 'economic' may mean. As Block (1990: 27) said, it needs to go beyond "the economistic fallacy which imagines that capitalist societies do not have cultures in the way that primitive or pre-modern societies do." The 'economic' has to be regarded as an analytical dimension of every sphere of human life and social relationships.

[18] The idea of culture as 'performance' is increasingly present within human geography. It is seen as a way of theorising how the present is produced, through 'day-to-day improvisations', in a way that is anti-essentialist and open to the possibility of alternative perspectives of space and time. It is often linked to the rise of non-representational theory (Thrift, 1996). Here, there is a clear tension between culture as 'performance', with its emphasis on the mobile and transient, and culture, in the anthropological sense as world view underpinned by an unchanging epistemological framework.

In other words, the challenge for understanding the interrelationship between culture and the economy is more than simply understanding them as discrete entities. It means 'exoticising' Western cultures (Clifford & Marcus, 1986) through problematising the common sense economic/non-economic distinction. This means striking at the very heart of the social science distinction which sets the economic apart as a special domain which functions according to its own scientific laws. It means rediscovering the human agent in a doctrine that has long been represented as operating according to its own laws which are as immutable as the physical sciences. In other words, it means recognising that economic discourse is itself a cultural construct. It does not stand outside culture, and the task of rebuilding the relationship between culture and the economy at a theoretical level is very complex. As Peet (1997: 38) says: "Economic forms are culturally created, economically maintained, interact with subjective processes of agents' identity formation, and to a degree are self-generating or at least self-maintaining. No wonder theorists have avoided the topic!" The relationship between culture and the economy within modern societies is so complex that it is difficult to imagine how to separate the two in practice. The definition of a cultural sphere and an economic sphere is itself a cultural question. The phase of capitalism that we are living in is characterised by the increasing interrelationship between culture and production, but at the same time by the apparent autonomy of the two. It is on this boundary between the cultural and the economic that the most interesting work is to be found.

The economic in the cultural

Crang (1997) suggests that the relationship between the economic and cultural is understood in several ways within social theory. Firstly, there are social theorists, such as Harvey (1989), Bourdieu (1984) and Habermas (1988), who regard the increasing influence of the market rationale within the cultural as the "economicisation of culture" (Crang, 1997: 7). In other words, their main concern is the influence of the *economic in the cultural.* Harvey (1989) argues that the 'cultural' is determined by the superstructure of capitalism and cannot exist independently of it. In his view culture is regarded as the epiphenomenon of the market, both legitimising and responding to the economic laws of supply and demand. Secondly, a related concept emerges from the work of Bourdieu (1984), who stresses the 'economic operation' of cultural practices and the evolution of an autonomous cultural sphere within late-capitalist society. The 'culture industry' has resulted in cultures themselves, and not just the artefacts which form part of them, becoming marketable products which can be 'bought and sold', either implicitly (through marketing strategies focusing on lifestyle) or through the growth of industries such as cultural tourism. The growth of such industries has led to the development of mass culture, reinforcing the idea that culture is somehow 'separate' from the meaning of life itself. As culture becomes more prominent, therefore, what is regarded as culture shifts away from the taken-for-granted everyday stock of memories, traditions and myths into the aesthetic and popular culture determined by market forces.

Finally, there is the idea of 'economic colonialism' which is present in the work of Habermas (1988) in particular. Habermas is referring to the way that within capitalist society, all human-human relationships and human-thing relationships are eventually subsumed within the instrumental logic of profitability. Dimensions of human life which were previously free from this logic have, in late capitalism, been gradually taken over by the expansion of the market into every sphere of life. Every such sphere has been commodified and no space is lift untouched - family, health, education, leisure time: all of these aspects of the life world are colonised by economic action. This has led to a legitimisation crisis in which there is an in-built tension between "political and economic systems on the one hand, and the socio-cultural systems as a supplier of motivations on the other" (Scott, 1990: 72).

The cultural in the economic

The view that the cultural is becoming increasingly dominated by the economic, however, is counterbalanced and even contradicted by examining the 'economic' dimension of those spaces in which the logic of the market is subsumed within other 'social' relationships such as family ties, friends, neighbours and community. Within such 'non-market spaces'[19] the instrumental economic logic of profitability does not dominate social transactions and the logic of the market cannot easily be applied.[20] Such values and behaviours, which are often taken for granted, but indispensable to the functioning of the money economy, have been

[19] I am aware that such a distinction between the economic and the non-market is itself problematic as there is a continuous interplay between various economic rationales. Boyle uses the term 'third economy' to distinguish this 'economy' from the standard money economy: "The third economy isn't really an economy at all: it makes up the crucial human transactions that build families and neighbourhoods ... without which nothing we do can be successful" (Boyle, 2000: 4). The distinction here is made primarily as a way of illustrating the different dominant 'economic' rationales applied in different social settings.

[20] People do not (generally) bid for food at the dinner table, nor do parents in later life present their children with a bill for potty training services.

termed 'social capital' (Coleman, 1988).[21] Social capital has come to mean the whole range of cultural and social values such as trustworthiness, honesty, reliability, and neighbourliness on which the capitalist system arguably rests. Within this non-market space, there is a different vocabulary for exchange: rather than buying, selling or bidding, exchange is often expressed as sharing, caring, gift-giving, or even 'doing one's duty' (Putnam, 1993). A different set of assumptions underpins such forms of exchange, since giving and receiving is often based on the subjective relationship with the people with whom the exchange is made. Such people are not seen as anonymous players in one big market, but rather, as ethical beings with whom there is an assumed relationship - as family, as community member, as a neighbour or as a friend. This special status entitles the person to membership of that space in which the non-market rationale is applied. Dore (1983) calls such values 'goodwill', and Sen (1993) has emphasised the role of such economies in generating 'trust', which is the cornerstone of the economy (Sen, 1993).

Despite the essential nature of such economies to the working of the monetary economy, they are often 'hidden', since they do not appear in GDP or in other economic indicators of wealth.[22] If, however, the exchanges of things, time, services and so on, which takes place within such economies, were *valued* in conventional currency, they would far outstrip the exchange within the money economy (Zadek & Mayo, 1997: 4-7; NEF, 1998).[23] They are hidden, it could be argued, because the 'goods' which are actually circulating - kindness, generosity, solidarity, care and even love - are assumed to be inexhaustible. Market exchange, on the other hand, is designed to share out scarce resources but depends on the existence of this plentiful supply of goodwill. This increased dominance of market exchange within capitalist societies has shown that such social capital (although still plentiful) can be 'eroded'. The increasing penetration of utilitarian thinking into non-market relationships can lead to the trust at the foundation of economic structures being undermined: "It is the trust that underpins all the rest, but the international economy tends to drive it out by converting social transactions done by people for each other into cash transactions" (Boyle, 2000: 4).

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[21] To highlight the indispensable nature of this economy, the futurist Alvin Toffler, for example, asked executives what it would cost big business in hard cash if their new recruits had not been toilet-trained (Boyle, 2000: 4).

[22] Such 'non-market' economies have been theorised in different ways by social economists and economic sociologists. Thompson, (1966) makes reference to the 'moral economy' whereas Putnam (1993) refers to the 'civil economy'.

[23] Work done by NEF has highlighted the close links between social capital and local economic development. Putnam (1993), in his book on associative democracy in Italian regions cites membership of choral societies as one of the three best predictors of a robust and effective local democracy and economy.

Between the market and non-market economies, there has been a dramatic rise in pseudo-monetary forms of exchange (NEF, 1994). Through such 'community economies' (Pearce, 1993) local groups can create wealth through investing time and energy recovering the non-market values of co-operation and participation within the realm of economic exchange.[24] Such pseudo-monetary forms of exchange, such as Local Exchange Trading Schemes (LETS) and Time Dollars initiatives (Boyle, 1998) have been shown to have a profound impact in regenerating areas which have experienced social exclusion through the dominance of the market. The role of LETS has become of increasing interest to geographers such as Bowring (1998) and Lee (1996), who have examined, amongst other things, the ability of such schemes to form an intersection between the capitalist system and 'moral' economies incorporating alternative values. There is still a market of sorts, but it is framed within certain accepted values and there is always room for 'give and take' (Boyle, 1998). Such schemes, therefore, open up the possibility of new practical possibilities of alternative economic geographies underpinned by different values (North, 1999). Gibson-Graham (1997) calls such hidden economies, lying at the boundaries of conventional economic geographies, 'thinly disguised socialisms'. Within such community economies, emphasis is placed on the existence of a shared community spirit, inclusion and co-operation, emphasising the relational dimension of life rather than the individualist construct of 'economic man' (Lee, 1996). The boundaries between schemes such as Local Exchange Trading (LETs) and the formal market are often contested, though, demonstrating how close the monetary and non-monetary economies really are.[25]

Further insights into the existence of community economies, and the rationale underpinning them, come from studies of shanty town communities and social movements in Latin America. Within such communities, the struggle for survival can be viewed not only as an economic struggle, but as a cultural one - about defining the meaning of life (Routledge, 1990) within a given territory. Esteva's (1987) account of life in the 'hammock', a community of peasants in Mexico, highlights the way that the relationships within the community overcome the economic rationality of the market: "*Homo sapiens* and *homo ludens* are celebrating their awareness of having awakened from the nightmare

[24] NEF (1996) lists 33 forms of community economics initiatives which can create 'real wealth' within communities from community loans funds and community enterprise to organic food box schemes and permaculture. It estimates that if a community were to put into practice three of the initiatives it would be able to revitalise the local community.
[25] One such debate, for example, has ensued around whether the monetary equivalent of the 'currency' which is exchanged through LETS should be deducted from any social security benefits.

created by the impossible attempt to establish *homo economicus* on earth" (Esteva, 1987: 140). In this way Esteva is advocating a break away from the cultural construct which underpins the Western concept of economic development - *homo economicus*. His alternative is an economic logic based on sharing, friendship and good neighbours through which people in the hammock are "rediscovering their space and their present " (Esteva, 1987: 142). Friedman (1989) similarly considers the different economic expressions of the Barrio Movement in Brazil, arising in those areas where there is greatest poverty. The economy within these areas is based on the reciprocity of relations among members of a community who have learned to trust one another. Within the 'barrio' economy, co-operatives have come about which do not have profit as their aim: "Their objective might be said to be the development of a moral economy in which the worker is not merely the embodiment of an abstract category called labour power, but someone standing in relations to others, and thus an ethical being, a person" (Friedman, 1989: 226). He asks, like many others in the alternative development school (e.g. Latouche, 1993), whether the moral economies of the poor, which demonstrate the existence of other economic rationalities, could point the way out of the current domination of the market in Western society. Through understanding the non-market logics of the moral economies of the poor, the West could perhaps relearn some of the lessons which have been forgotten since the Enlightenment, and redirect the economy towards a more equitable distribution of wealth.

Could such moral economies point the way to the possibility, in the current globalised market economy, of 'uncovering' new economic geographies – of production and consumption - which are arguably far removed from the dominant vision of capitalism? Such economic geographies involve different ways of thinking, feeling and living the economy. They involve different understanding of how the economy relates to other dimensions of life – the social, the cultural, the ethical and even the spiritual – disrupting and undoing the sharp boundaries which apparently separate these spheres of life. Such economic geographies operate side by side and are often entangled with capitalist structures, showing that the latter are not always oppressive, but sometimes a means through which new forms of economic interaction and structures can come into being and thrive.

One of the critical issues, therefore, is whether such moral economies can withstand the social relations which are implicated in the global market economy. Much has been written on the destructive nature of the market with regard to social capital and the civil economy, especially in the writings of Harvey (1989) and Habermas (1988). Many would argue that the expansion of market logics into more and more spheres of human life 'eats up' social capital, destroying the foundations of the market and also the possibility of alternatives (Platteau, 1994). The evidence regarding the revitalisation of community economies, on the other hand, would suggest that it is precisely in those places where the market has led to exclusion that the seeds of new moral economies emerge. The most interesting research question is therefore, to ask about the boundary between the moral economy and the market economy, and to examine the interactions between the two, especially where alternatives are being advocated.

The spatial scope of 'moral economies'

A crucial consideration here is the spatial scope of such moral economies. What are their limitations in the face of a globalised market economy? Is it possible to imagine that moral economies, which are predominantly present within the 'non-market' spaces of the family and local community, could create the possibility of a 'non-market' rationale within the context of global economic spaces? Harvey (1989: 46) argues that the penetration of such a 'non-market' rationale is 'place bound' since the communities in which it can take place are limited. It is impossible, in his opinion, to imagine that there could be a way of incorporating such a rationale into the global economic system. The existence of moral economies depends on the subjective relationship between the persons involved in the transaction, and in that respect presupposes a face-to-face level of interaction. Within the moral economy, there is always space for partiality based on the relationship between the people involved in the transactions. One could say that the whole rationale behind such schemes is partiality, and therefore favours the local.

Human geographers, such as Smith (1998), have recently examined the possible spatial scope of such moral economies. Smith (1998) specifically raises the question of the global scope of benevolence and related questions about the interrelationship of the market and non-market economies. His view is that this would require the emergence of an 'ethic of care' which would take into consideration not only the needs of those close at hand, such as family and close friends, but also the needs of people with whom there is no direct relationship. Similarly, Corbridge (1993) and Sterba (1981) raise the question of responsibility to 'distant strangers'. Conventional partiality, they argue, relies very heavily on spatiality. Until relatively recently people were excluded from such 'special' relationships on the basis of being geographically distant. Caring and sharing for those who were 'outside' of a given community was restricted to codes of hospitality which were clearly defined. This raises the question of how this scope of benevolence can be extended beyond the confines of a local community in the context of an increasingly globalised and interconnected world. According to Tronto, this question is one of the critical conundrums facing modern society: "Whether we can conceive of a way to think of morality that extends some form of sympathy further than our own group remains the fundamental question for contemporary life" (Tronto, 1987: 59; in Smith, 1998: 212). She goes on to argue that it is only when we "expand our moral boundaries to include a concept of care" that we will be able to deal with the moral implications of tribalism and racism, which undermine moral responsibility. In her eyes, the principle of 'care' is at the heart of this renewed morality.

Incorporating such an idea into globalising discourses - whether political, social or economic - leads to fundamental questions about the perceived relationship that exists between 'us' and distant people and the potential to overcome vested interests within dominant economic structures. As Smith (1998: 35) says, "the problem is one of meta-ethics: of self-identity and moral motivation." Caring and sharing with distant others implies that there is something similar about them and ourselves, despite our differences, no matter how deep-seated. To reach the kind of care required may be "no less a task than the complete transformation of human identity initiated when people were first inclined to look beyond their own highly localised experience, to see others with self-recognition and a trace of sympathy" (Smith, 1998: 35). He argues that what is required is an "overarching conception of the good incorporating care for others", drawing not only on reason, but on emotion as well. This is a radical view which is shared by non-geographers examining the changes in attitudes and motivations which would be required to reach 'sustainable development' (Cobb, 1995; Milbrath, 1995). The key finding of their research is that the transition to a more sustainable economic and social system would require a fundamental change at the 'social vision' level. Some go as far as saying that it would amount to a spiritual transformation (Daly & Cobb, 1989), a claim of clear significance for what follows in my thesis.

In this debate over the spatial scope of caring, one of the key research questions must be the spatial origins and extent of the networks comprising the emerging 'alternative' moral economies already operating within the structures of the global market economy. These moral economies are arguably the already existing expressions of a 'global ethic of care' which is being advocated here, being present not only within the private sphere of the family and local community but also in the institutions of the market. Such globalised *structures of giving* can arguably be seen in the development of global charitable and non-profit organisations. In recent years the distinction between such organisations and conventional capitalist businesses has become increasingly blurred (*The Economist*, 1999: 25). The linkages between corporations and charitable giving, moreover, already exists in the form of global philanthropic organisations such the Rotarians and the Lions Clubs, which work to foster stronger ties between commerce and humanitarian causes.[26] *The Economist* (1998: 23) recently reported that philanthropy is "alive and well" within America, and not "a tradition in jeopardy" as some have argued. Through these networks of giving, vast amounts of money are already shared out on a local and global scale. *Giving USA* reported in 1998 that Americans donated $143 billion dollars to non-profit organisations. Of this money, three quarters came from living individuals ($109 billion); the rest from Foundations ($13 billion), bequests ($13 billion) and companies ($8 billion).

One has to ask, therefore, whether such distribution also leads to care being stretched out beyond the local, reaching into global economic space? Such philanthropic giving is often accused of being paternalistic and is being increasingly dominated by public donations of very few wealthy people. Others, however, have argued that some kinds of paternalism are not necessarily a bad thing. Boston (2000) argues that the kind of paternalism which was practised by such Quaker inspired businesses as Rowntree, Cadbury and Fry was a sort that 'gives fathers a good name'. Such paternalism was based on a work ethos that regarded the business as an extension of the family. Those who worked in such businesses could expect a job for life and were privileged with gardens and orchards, playing fields and open-air swimming pool, education and healthcare. In the case of Cadbury's, in particular, such benefits were gradually withdrawn in the mid-twentieth century, as the company adopted a more overtly profit-oriented restructuring in the 1960s.

[26] The Rotarians have existed since 1917 and consist of over 26,000 local clubs in 186 countries linked together through a global network of business people. The primary objectives of the organisation are to promote greater fellowship amongst people in the business world through shared participation in philanthropic giving (Rotary International, 2000).

There is some evidence within the global market economy that the trend which arguably led to the demise of the 'Cadbury ethos' is beginning to shift and that the values of the moral economy are being taken seriously in the philosophies of corporations.[27] Ethical trading and ethical investment funds have become an increasingly vibrant sector of the market economy.[28] Work has been done on the emergence and growth in ethical trading initiatives, what Thornes (1997) has termed 'ethical trading space'. In this work Thornes uses an ANT perspective to 're-imagine' international trade in a way which emphasises the role of small businesses in transforming the trading space into one which is constituted by ethical values. In this piece of work she highlights how fair trade businesses have formed networks which are concerned with engaging in the market, and therefore have to form conjunctions with legal, monetary and 'talking-up' networks in order to perform within the market economy (Thornes, 1997: 111). Her work underlines the existence of alternative perspectives on trade and commerce within the market, which are working with the networks of the current capitalist system, transforming them from within.

Yet the emergence of such 'ethical' forms of market economy ultimately begs the question of the cultural foundations for such a global 'moral' economy? At a local level, within the 'non-market' dominated spaces of both the family and the local community, such moral economies are founded on the personal, face-to-face relationship with the persons involved in the transactions. The moral justification for such transactions is the special relationship between the persons involved. Once such transactions are entangled with the networks of the market and are elongated across space such that the transactions are much less personally mediated, the moral justification for any kind of 'ethical' stance is more complex to define.

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[27] Even large MNCs such as Shell have begun to take such issues seriously (Shell, 1998). In their annual report of 1998, they recognised the need to size up 'profits and principles', taking into account the social and environmental responsibilities of the corporation. This led to a lengthy period of consultation with shareholders and other stakeholders as to which principles should govern the corporation. The result was a massive investment in research into renewable energy. Although such initiatives are easily dismissed as 'sound bites', there is increasing evidence that large corporations are beginning to take the questions of responsibility seriously if for no other reason, for potential future 'ethical' market share.

[28] The rise in ethical investment and trade has also led to institutions geared at monitoring and assessing the 'ethical' and 'social' status of organisations. One such initiative is the AA1000 standards set up by the Institute of Social and Ethical Accountability (NEF, 1999).

Culture and the economy: the 'religious' dimension

One possible way of re-engaging economic geography and ethical debates is through reconsidering the relationship between economy and religion. Although there has been a shift to recognise the importance of the culture/economy relationship within economic geography, the religion/economy relationship has not yet been studied in great depth. The work on the 'ethical trading space' (Thomes, 1997) cited above does not go into depth regarding the cultural assumptions which underpin the formulation of ethical judgements within the economy. Through the use of ANT, Thomes examines the evolution of 'ethical' economic networks not so much in terms of ideological or cultural assumptions but in terms of performance. In a similar way, the recent literature concerning the normative question of the spatial scope of beneficence (Smith, 1998) has rarely considered the relationship between religion, economy and ethical norms and motivations, although there is an awareness of the way that religious perspectives can influence questions of social justice.

One possible reason for this lack of interest in, or of attention to, the relationship between the religious and the economic is due to the widespread belief that such issues are irrelevant in a secularised society. Modern pluralistic society is characterised by a high degree of differentiation between economic action and religious beliefs, and religious institutions do not arguably hold the same weight as they did in the past. Religion has been 'privatised' to a great extent, meaning that it is not regarded as important within the public sphere (Trigg, 1998: 8). There is recognition that a multiplicity of factors are influencing the economic dimension at any one time, and it is therefore impossible to say that religious beliefs are the only factor. Re-engaging religion and economic geography, therefore, would have to avoid an approach which said that the economy is determined by religion.

Moreover, the lack of attention to the religion/economy debate could be in part due to a more general post-modern scepticism about 'universalising meta-narratives', of which religions are most definitely examples. Religions can be termed 'universalising meta-narratives' on the grounds that they assume to possess the ultimate truth about reality on an ontological and epistemological level. As Haught says: "believers take their religious symbols and ideas to be disclosive of the truth of reality that they are aroused to moral passion ... If devotees thought that their religions were *not* representative of the way things *really* are, then religions would be ethically impotent" (In Daly, 1996: 19). Such truth claims have historically been accompanied by a zealous universalising spirit which has emphasised the opposition between different religious cosmologies, resulting in violent conflict, rather than the overlapping discourses of different religions (UNESCO, 1995: 71).

Various strands of ethical and cultural relativism, prominent within cultural geography in recent years, have tended to 'celebrate difference' and are suspicious of such deepseated truth claims. This celebration of difference, with its emphasis on localised cultural differences, however, can loose sight of the underlying similarity in human cultures on a global scale. Without some underlying humanistic concern for the alleviation of human suffering, which is bound up in an understanding of the nature of the human person, the celebration of difference results in ethical relativism. Such relativism could itself be regarded as 'culture bound', since it is a phenomenon itself found primarily in Westernised countries. It can itself be regarded as a 'universalising meta-narrative' which has profound social and political consequences, especially in debates regarding human rights (Lund, 1998: 4). Moreover, as Fay (1996: 81) argues: "relativism's biggest mistake is failing to see that difference requires a background of deep similarity; as a result it overemphasises the differences while failing to appreciate what is shared."

Such fear of religious epistemologies, however, cannot be overlooked as is often bound up in 'post-colonial' reactions against the hegemonic power of Christianity within Western Europe and the way that Christianity has been implicated in the colonial era. The Christian church often occupied an ambiguous role in colonialism, which resulted in it being linked to a Eurocentric, imperialist, masculinist past (Sanneh, 1993). The Church's role is often interpreted as one which bolstered the colonial ambitions of countries through justifying their political mission, whilst the Church 'profited' from colonialism through gaining converts and wealth. The over-zealous universalising spirit of colonial attempts to impose modernity onto other cultures is bound up, therefore, with the attempt to 'Christianise' them, with the consequence that their own belief systems were either destroyed or denied (Câmara, 1969). The work of missionaries, in particular, was criticised as being entirely complicit with the imperialist powers. More recent work, though, has questioned this wholesale hostility to the role of the Church and emphasised the humanitarian role that many religious missionaries played in providing education and health-care and in defending the rights of the 'natives' against the colonial powers (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991, 1997).

Over the past thirty years, therefore, with the shift of power away from the West, such notions of universality on thought and the world have waned (Featherstone, 1995: 10). The clarity of a universal perspective is distorted by the voices of those who are asserting their right to express the world differently (Childs & Williams, 1997). Such a right to difference which underpins post-colonialism is primarily interested in allowing the voices of those who were 'half inside and half outside' of modernity (Bhaba, 1994: 6) to be heard. Such voices, however, are almost exclusively non-Christian. Casoli (1996: 167) points out that within post-modernist thinking there is an implicit rejection of Christianity. The same could be said of post-colonialism, in which there is a tendency to characterise the post-colonial era as a post-Christian one. Yet despite its entanglements with colonialism, as Comaroff and Comaroff (1997) argue, the influence of Christianity cannot be reduced to a form of Eurocentric imperialism. There are forms of Christianity (both European and non-European), such as the Focolare Movement, which could arguably be termed 'post-colonial'. Although globalised, they mark a shift in thought away from hegemonic Westernising discourse, in favour of forms of thought which respect religious and cultural differences. Such issues are highly relevant to possible futures of the Economy of Sharing and, hence, to the content of this thesis.

Moreover, the relationship between religion and the economy is heightened by the revival of interest in 'spirituality' of different kinds at the turn of the millennium (Glock & Bella, 1976; Wuthnow, 1976). This has led to an array of new beliefs and practices which also have an economic dimension and profound economic implications. The rise of 'alternative' lifestyles drawing inspiration from different spiritual writings is even regarded as a 'growth industry' (Niebuhr, 1999). Some of these are Christian in origin, while others draw on 'New Ageism' or other transcendental teachings such as Buddhism. Within this resurgence there is often a distinction between the 'spiritual' and the 'religious', the former indicating an awareness or 'openness' to a metaphysical or mystical dimension of life (Melton, 1999). This resurgence in spirituality has also given rise to new forms of community, offering alternative social and community visions which are often born from a rejection of the dominance of economic and materialist logics within modern culture (Usher, 1997).

Many of these 'new religious movements' have been the subject of controversy and even alarm, with accusations of brainwashing and mass suicides. Nevertheless, the question remains whether religious groups present the seeds of new forms of economic action which are not only local, but through communications such as the Internet are able to stretch out across space, generating new forms of global community with their own characteristic economic practices.[29]

The view that religion is less influential now than it has been in the past is hence strongly contested by economic sociologists such as Wuthnow, who argue that the influence of religious beliefs is underestimated in modern society: "Despite the fact that the economic organisations have extricated themselves from the direct control of religious functions, traditional teachings continue to exert normative pressure on the way in which economic affairs are conducted" (Wuthnow, 1994: 621). A study of the relationship between culture and the economic, therefore, cannot omit the religious dimension: "The market system is embedded within a cultural sphere of which religion is a significant part. Indeed, few other aspects of culture could be said to have such far-reaching implications as religion, the reason being that religion purports to add and alter the meaning of all realms of human activity including work and money" (Wuthnow, 1994: 640). Religion remains a highly influential source of ethical and moral values. In this sense, religious meaning still often shapes the 'imaginary universe' of individuals and groups at a existential level. In Wuthnow's opinion, understanding the influence of religion on economic meaning and action is one of the most important questions today: "Whether there may be residues of ethical or value oriented reasoning in religious traditions capable of suggesting ways of restricting economic commitments is thus an additional cause for rethinking the relationship between religion and economic life" (Wuthnow, 1994: 623).

There are several recent papers which point to renewed interest in this field within cultural/economic geography. One such notable piece of work is Massey's (1997) examination of the construction of 'economic' space within Western economies. Massey makes the connection between the 'economic' as 'places of science' (Massey, 1997: 27), and hence 'Reason, not emotion' and the clericalism of Christianity, which has itself supposedly led to the creation of 'masculinist' spaces. Her main concern is to trace the

[29] The term 'new religious movement' is used in different contexts to describe the vast array of movements, sects and cults which have emerged within the past hundred years. Some new religious movements, such as Focolare, Opus Dei and Communion and Liberation have marked a spiritual revival within established churches. Others, such as 'New Age', have emerged precisely from a rejection of established religion and the syncretism of various beliefs and traditions. Yet others are based on new fundamentalist doctrines and the emergence of self-styled messiahs such as David Koresh and Marshall Applewhite, teaching about the impending doom of Christianity. Comparisons between such groups using terms such as 'sect' and 'cult' is difficult as such inflammatory language inevitably discloses a hidden positionality (Usher, 1997).

deep roots of Western scientific reasoning back to the supposedly masculinist nature of the early Christian Church.[30] She examines how the beliefs and attitudes which developed from the 11th Century onwards led to male domination in the production of authorised knowledge and, hence, the domination of the 'economic'. Such domination did not go unchallenged: throughout the history of Christianity dissension led to many radical and commitment groups being punished and banished from the production of knowledge. Massey is highly critical of the attitudes and practices which led to this domination, conceding that "had such challenges succeeded, today's high-tech workplaces might not have the characteristics they do: as the elite spaces of a masculine caste of the producers of authorised knowledge" (Massey, 1997: 30). Arguably, in her view, such workplaces would embody a different set of values which were not based on the exclusion of supposedly feminine qualities such as 'emotion', and perhaps care. Massey's account of the historical relationship between the rise of Christianity and the construction of masculinist 'economic' spaces is rather selective.[31] It does, however, highlight the critical importance of bringing the religious dimension, and in particular the role of Christianity, back into the debate over the formulation and distinction between the economic and the cultural.

Peet (1997: 37-46) considers the role of the 'Protestant ethic' in the economic development of New England. He examines how the settlers in New England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries 'constructed' an 'imagined economy' (Peet, 1997: 44) which was based on their worldview and was imbued with both economic and religious motivations. Through examining various original documents, Peet reconstructs a picture of the various interconnected discourses which formed the belief system in operation amongst the settlers as they began to build their economy. He stresses the importance of a hermeneutics which is 'sympathetic' to the discourses, stressing that the beliefs of the settlers were not merely "formed by economic practices" but "informed the economic and political practices of powerful agents" (Peet, 1997: 43). His research uncovers a range of dominant values, such as the importance of private property, which were derived from religious beliefs but which played a critical economic role in the new colony, but do not fit neatly into the narrow

[30] Massey concedes that in the first millennium of Christianity women played a prominent role. The time she is referring to is from the 11th century onwards.
[31] I disagree, for example, with her reading of the 'multiplicity of dissentions' as primarily a reaction to the gender divisions within the dominant church. Massey makes no mention of the progressive social and economic role of numerous female religious orders (which developed in parallel to the male ones). Religious orders, such as the 'Little Sisters of the Poor', founded by Jeanne Jugan in the 18th century, were both 'radical and passionate' and arguably instrumental in the origins of the welfare state.

Weberian formulation of economic rationalism. One key concept in the lives of the New England settlers which Peet highlights, and which is critically important in what will follow in this thesis, is that of Divine Providence. In his sympathetic reading of the imagined economy of the settlers, Peet cautions against dismissing such ideas as 'after-dinner exaggerations'. Rather, he says:

> *"we might sometimes (but not always!) remember that members of elites are human beings too. So their discourse may be read as an ideological justification for power, but also as an existential quest for meaning, the two as interacting moments. Power, in this case takes the particular form of control, over fierce nature, over other people, over the course and causes of life, while the search for meaning eventually is about significance, here an intense desire to place one's life within some broader scheme, which they call Divine Providence or Destiny, depending on their specific mysticism; a synthesis of power and meaning is made possible by the similarities (in existential terms) between control and significance."* (Peet, 1997: 45).

Both Massey (1997) and Peet (1997) regard the role of religion as complicit with capitalist forms of production, seeing it through a Marxist 'lens' (albeit sympathetic in Peet's case), as a means through which capitalist structures are legitimised. Yet to limit the role of religion to a bourgeois occupation does not do justice to the numerous individuals and groups who have offered alternatives to the capitalist system based on religious principles. In particular, the role of liberation theology in Latin America[32] has come to the fore since the 1960s. The importance of the role of new Christian movements in the political and economic development of Latin America has been the intensely debated in the 1990s (Lehmann, 1999).

Since the industrial revolution there have been numerous attempts to redirect economic action according to the precepts of certain religious groups. One prominent example is the role of Quaker inspired businesses and trust funds in the social and economic history of Britain, and this is a clear example of how religious principles can have a reforming role in the economy as well as a complicit one. Little has been written within economic geography on the way that contemporary socio-religious groups and movements potentially re-shape

[32] The place of liberation theology in the formulation of alternatives to neo-liberalism in Latin America is peculiar in that it draws from Marxist sources and from Catholicism in order to advocate a radical, revolutionary interpretation of the Gospel (Guttierez, 1984). The emergence of some 100,000 'Christian base communities' throughout Brazil alone has resulted in a phenomenal religious revival which is often highly political (Daudelin & Hewitt, 1995), to the extent that 'religion' is often played as the voting card by 'political para-theologians' (Miles, 1996: 525). Although the hierarchical establishment has been critical of the overtly political and violent tendencies of some strands of liberation theology (Kirk, 1995), its role in championing the plight of the poor and 'empowering' them in the fight for justice is clear (Lehmann, 1999).

the economic.[33]

The idea that religious beliefs and practices could present alternative perspectives on/blueprint for economic life has nonetheless been present, although never mainstream, within economic geography. Wallace (1978), for example, advocates a 'humanised conception of economic geography' rooted in what he termed a 'Christian world vision'. He argues that changing the concept of 'man' present within economic theories is central to the development of a more humanised concept of economic geography. From his perspective, the best way to reach this new concept, which has to be 'transideological', is to appeal to a 'biblical view of man'. Although he is aware that such an idea may seem quaint to some, he is also aware that it is a radical proposal that offers the chance to recover a revolutionary paradigm, but he does not go on to develop the radical implications of this different cultural perspective that he is proposing. As he says: "There is more than one revolutionary paradigm" (Wallace, 1978: 106). One could argue that there would be a place for such a perspective within the current hints in economic and cultural geography at examining moral geographies (Philo, 1991: 26).

There could also be a place for such work in what Sopher (1981) termed 'confessional' geographies, in that they are geographical interpretations based on the tradition of a religious worldview. In a more recent paper on Christianity and the global economy (Wallace, 1998: 37-48), Wallace sees a place for the development of such a geography which interprets the world *through* a cultural perspective. In this case, he considers how a specifically Christian perspective could offer insights into the global economy, in a similar way to the theoretical interpretation that could be given through a secular worldview such as Marxism. This approach could be taken one step further, by suggesting that such confessional geographies, formed along the lines of religious perspectives, are not only 'religious' geographies. They could also be viewed as interpretative frameworks which can be used to examine the peculiar 'economic' geographies of religions, forming a bridge between the geography of religion and economic geography. Such a perspective could open up a space for theorising about a range of cultural/economic geographies which draw on traditions, concepts and principles of different religious traditions. It would involve a work

[33] Here I am thinking in particular of the Yorkshire based confectionery businesses of Rowntree and Cadburys, which, during their early years were governed on Quaker principles (Nevaskar, 1971). This Quaker influence has continued to the present day through various Trust funds (such as the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust) which funds causes which are in-keeping with Quaker beliefs (JRCT, 1997: 4).

of 'reconnaissance' which has already begun in the more recent work of Aay and Griffioen (1998).

Interpreting the 'economic' - 'religious' relationship

Many of the ideas and concepts which have been used within cultural/economic geography can also be used to examine the interrelationship between religion and the economic. The concepts of networks, discourses and practices, socio-cultural embeddedness and the like can be equally applied to the religious dimension. Nevertheless, such a re-engagement would also have to draw on the long tradition of thinking on the interrelationship between religion and the economy outwith economic geography, especially the literature on the relationship between capitalism and Christianity.[34] This topic was traditionally at the heart of many social science disciplines, such as sociology and social anthropology.

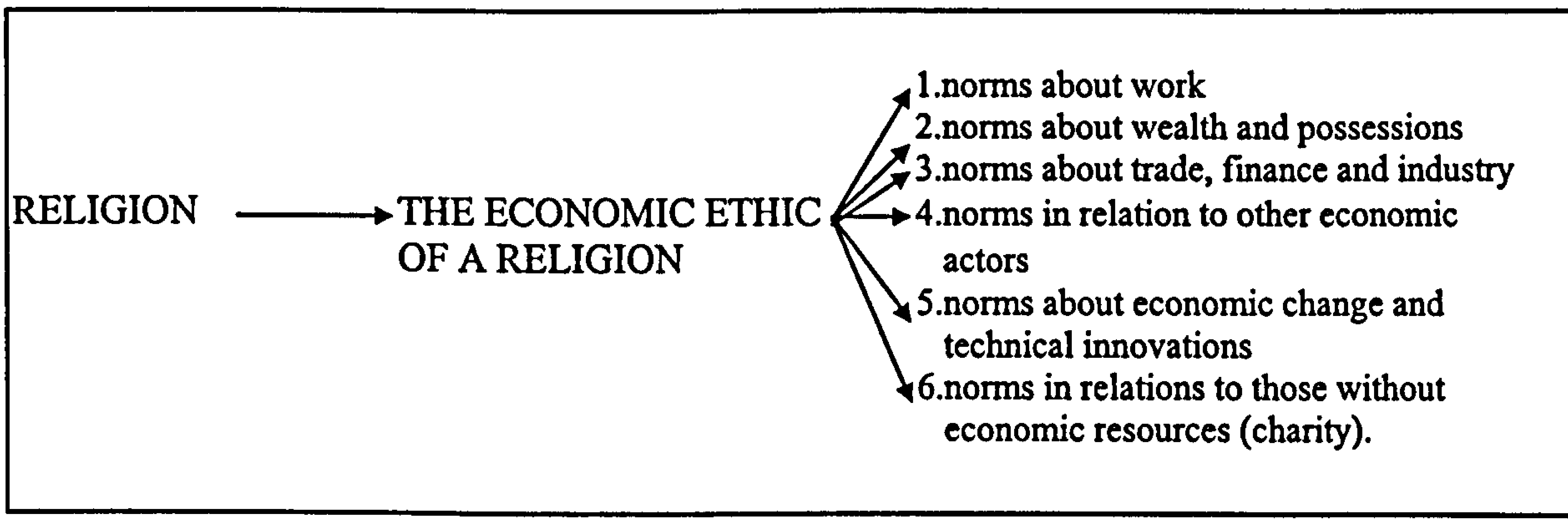
The literature on the relationship between Christianity and capitalism is vast. Much of it draws on the traditions of Weber and Durkheim, underlining the ways that Christianity has overcome the apparent tensions between religion and economic action in order to sustain the capitalist economic system. Weber (1958) was fascinated by the fact that the Protestant reformation had given rise to a series of motivations which he saw as catalysts in the rise of capitalism.[35] Through the emphasis on the 'calling' to work as a way of serving God, as well as through warning against the pursuit of frivolous leisure activities and through destroying the laws against usury, the Calvinist work ethic enabled the accumulation of wealth. What Weber emphasised, however, was not the compatibility of religion and capitalism, but rather the tension that exists between the two due to the fact that they rely on different kinds of rationality (Wuthnow, 1994: 628). Religion relies on value-oriented rationality, whereas economic action depends on modern means-end instrumental rationality. The two, in his analysis, ought to be incompatible, and yet they became compatible. Through breaking down the ethical disapproval of traditional capitalism, and through actively encouraging a methodical approach to economic affairs, Weber argued that the 'Protestant ethic' had played a critical role in shaping the economic and social

[34] Most of the work in this thesis is given over to the relationship between Christianity and the economy as opposed to other world religions. The reason behind this is that the substantive topic of the thesis originated within the Catholic tradition. The wider question of the relationship between the 'economic' and other religions is considered in the concluding chapter.
[35] A comprehensive overview of the various debates surrounding the thesis of Weber can be found in Swedberg (1998). In this book Swedberg discusses the various critiques to which the Weberian thesis has been subjected. He concludes, however, that the central ideas of the thesis can still be used in the analysis of religion and capitalism.

history of Western Europe (Swedberg, 1998: 126).

According to Weber, religion shaped the economic ethic of individuals (see Figure 1.1). Through carrying out their economic action in a particular way, people who belonged to specific religions gained a 'premium' on what they were doing.[36] Thus, Weber derived his understanding of the *Protestant Ethic* (1958), yet he recognised that the economic ethic of such a religion was not the only factor influencing the general economic ethic of a society. Other factors such as economic geography[37] and historical factors also had a bearing on the economic ethic of a given society (Swedberg, 1998: 152-3).

Figure 1.1 Weber's view of the economic ethic of a religion



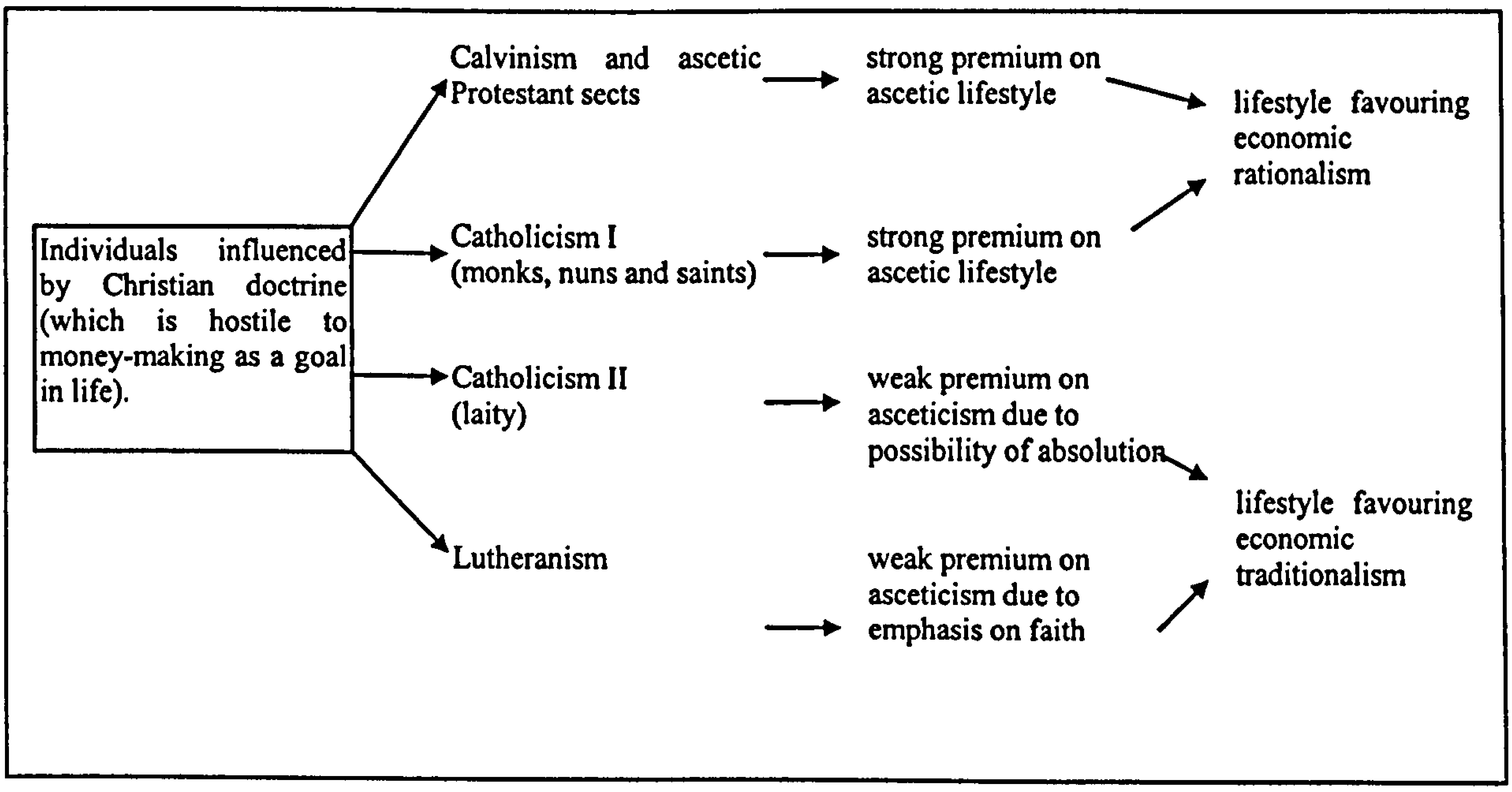
Source: Swedberg (1998: 138).

Through this series of norms identified here, according to Weber, individuals attach meanings to economic action which are bound up with their religious beliefs. It is possible, therefore, to discern different economic rationalities which derive from religious belief systems. Weber makes the distinction between such rationalities in operation within Catholicism and Protestantism based on the premium each placed on ascetic lifestyle, as can be seen in Figure 1.2 below. His distinctions are based primarily on the practices and doctrines within these two traditions prevalent at the time. What is interesting is that in attempting to discern a Protestant ethic, Weber is actually outlining his own understanding of a Catholic ethic. In his view, since Catholicism placed emphasis on 'absolution', this was a deterrent to engaging in economic activities.

[36] Weber (1978: 54-56) termed this premium 'Heilgsüter', which has been translated into English as 'religious benefits' or 'religious goods'. Weber uses the term to cover a range of 'religious desirables' (Swedberg, 1998: 109) in a similar way that the term 'goods' is used in economic theory to mean anything that is required or wanted. Such benefits can be this-worldly or other-worldly, material or spiritual.
[37] In this respect Weber was clearly influenced by his brother Alfred, who is the 'father' of industrial location theory (Weber, 1971), and hence of spatial-scientific economic geography.

According to Weber, the 'philosophy of avarice' which underpins capitalism is legitimised through the premium that Calvinism placed on asceticism. It has been argued, however, that there are many flaws in Weber's approach to the question of religion and the rise of capitalism (Marshall, 1982; Preston, 1991). Firstly, his explanation of how religious beliefs influence economic action - the actual ways in which the doctrine can become action - is disputable. Weber offers little explanation as to how doctrines which are applied in practice by individuals are then adopted as an 'ethic' by a group. As a consequence, many have argued that there is little power in the Protestant ethic thesis as a explanation of the rise of capitalism (Coleman, 1987).

Figure 1.2 The influence of different types of Christianity on the economy according to the *Protestant Ethic*



Source: Swedberg (1998: 125).

Then there is the question of empirical evidence. Marshall (1982) has asked what constitutes evidence that the Protestant ethic was influential in the rise of capitalism. He concludes that, based on the evidence that Weber offered, the case is not proven. Weber used this distinction between Calvinism and Catholicism to explain the spread of capitalism in certain geographical regions, but failed to recognise that some of the earliest centres of capitalism were not dominantly Calvinist but Catholic cities such as Liege, Lille and Turin (Trevor-Roper, 1969: 1-45). Moreover, many of the first capitalist families in Europe were not Calvinist at all, but Catholics, Jewish and freethinkers (Little, 1969: 226).

Another criticism is that the distinction made by Weber between Protestantism and

Catholicism (see Figure 1.2) is itself flawed and not based on any substantial evidence. In his attempt to understand the ethic which underpins the capitalist system, Novak (1993) argues that Weber himself invented an ethic which has little to do with a Christian spirit, nor Protestantism in any shape or form:

> *"The complex of attitudes that Weber identified as Protestant actually was shared by many others besides Calvinists. Its tonalities and lineaments were rather more various, subtle, and diverse than he suggests. Furthermore, Calvinists today do not usually recognise themselves in this portrait"* (Novak, 1993: 6).

Such a critique is highly relevant in view of this thesis, in which I will examine the relationship between religious beliefs, culture and the economy within the context of a new religious movement. One of the distinctive characteristics of the Focolare is the fact that it tends to cross over the conventional distinctions between different Christian traditions and the lines between different religions. This critique highlights the importance of examining not only the similarities which could constitute a distinctive economic ethic, but the anomalies which may distort this picture.

Another important concept which can be derived from the literature relating to the Weberian thesis is the distinction between economic form and economic spirit (Swedberg, 1998: 132). Weber was inconsistent in his use of these two ideas, but others such as Coleman (1982) have highlighted the importance of making such a distinction. Does the spirit (or ethic) of a religion lead to specific economic forms, such as a particular kind of enterprise or sets of institutions, or does it underpin the existing economic forms?

The concept of economic rationality

Despite these criticisms of Weber's thesis, there is still much scope for development of his ideas, especially in the way that he relates economic rationalities to specific religious beliefs. In some ways, the strength of Weber's thesis lies not so much in his attempt to attribute the rise of capitalism to one particular religion as his development of intermediate concepts which link culture and economic action. The Weberian idea of 'economic rationalities' which can be found in different kinds of social action is similar to Peet's (1997).concerns about developing intermediate concepts in order to understand the cultural meanings which are attached to economic action. In his opinion, such middle range concepts are necessary in order to bridge the gap between the emotional subjectivity of agency/identity and the objectivity of economically derived logics:

> *"This needs bridging by intermediate concepts which, at the present time, in*

> *the pre-history of a new cultural-economic geography, can only be guessed at. So let us therefore speculate. A link between culture and economy through the mediation of subjectivity might be specified by the concept of* economic rationality. *By this is meant the 'logic of economic action', understood as the reasons people have for behaving in certain ways as economic agents ... More generally, rationality implies the motives which drive economic actors, even the ethical justification is an integral part of rational explanation in the post-Enlightenment world ... Economic rationalities are culturally created, take on diverse forms and have distinct geographies. A geography of economic rationalities awaits our exploration!"* (Peet, 1997: 37-38)

In other words, Peet is arguing for a conceptual framework which is capable of embracing the various levels of socio-cultural and ethically oriented 'rationalities' which come together within economic spaces. In order to reach this kind of 'cultural-economic geography', it is not enough to appeal to religious doctrines and then deduce how they might apply in action in an uncritical fashion. Much of the theological work in this field has focused on the role of doctrine and interpretations of the Bible with regards to economic action (Preston, 1991), as opposed to how it is applied in particular places and situations. It is not enough to state that the Bible or Koran says such and such, and that therefore economic action for Christians or Muslims is such and such. The multiplicity of interpretations of religious teachings makes this impossible, a fact compounded because the application of such principles in economic practice is mediated by different agencies and varies from place to place.

The difficulties of this kind of approach are illustrated in the work of Daly and Cobb (1989) and Daly (1996), who adopt a Biblical perspective in order to examine the way that Christian teachings could offer insights into a more sustainable future. They base their insights on Scripture, deriving economic concepts from those presented in the Bible. In particular, Daly focuses on the cluster of values expressed by "sustainability-sufficiency-equity-efficiency" (Daly, 1996: 220) and the way that these can be derived from Scripture. Although highlighting a number of important principles and traditions which underpin a Christian worldview, which can have an impact on modern economic life,[38] their approach actually highlights the enormous difficulties in deriving modern economic practices from those preached and practised in Palestine two thousand years ago. Daly is aware of this difficulty: "Everyone claims biblical support for his own pet economic ideas. Like the devil, the economist can quote scripture to prove what he wants to prove" (Daly, 1996:

[38] For example, their books highlighted the idea of the 'Jubilee' as a year of deliverance from debts - a concept which has been central to the Jubilee 2000 campaign for the cancellation of unpayable debt.

205).

It is necessary, therefore, to understand how Christian (or other religious) experience actually interprets religious discourses and relates them to specific economic actions, both in the private and in the public sphere, rather than to engage in a moral debate over how doctrines ought to shape it. Religious ideas and ideals originate from doctrine, but what is most interesting is how they shape actions, attitudes and things 'on the ground', taking on grounded significance. Religious ideas, and how they are experienced, can give rise to different concepts which can be related to economic action. These could range from different concepts regarding the meaning of money and work, to the place of sharing of resources within the market economic system. In this way it is possible that there could be a space within in the modern globalised economy for the emergence of new systems to emerge which are deeply mystical and which form alternative bases for ethical decisions to be made. This is a view which is shared by Wuthnow, who recognises the need for research into the way that the two 'realms' of spirituality and economics interrelate: "Such an analysis would emphasise the symbolic distinction between the two realms, the ritual activities that dramatise this distinction, and the symbiotic relationship that binds the two together" (Wuthnow: 1994: 636-7).

Adopting a perspectivist approach

Another very strong point of contact between geography and the different approaches to the religion/economy debate within economic sociology can be found in the latter's attempts to advocate a 'perspectivist approach' to the relationship between religion and the economy (Fay, 1996: 76-82; Bloch and Parry, 1989). What is being argued is that religion is best studied as an 'alternative perspective' rather than as a series of related behavioural or psycho-social traits. It is possible to study the quantifiable indicators of religious activity (attendance at religious services, belief in God) and attempt to relate these to economic indicators such as charitable donations, but the potential for such research is limited.[39] Above all, such work further entrenches the sharp boundary between what is regarded as 'religious behaviour' through compartmentalising it. "Explained variance alone is not likely to persuade many of the relevance of these factors. It is rather through an alternative perspective approach, one in which entire systems of social and cultural relations are to be

[39] Such work has been carried out within economic sociology in relation to the relationship between religious beliefs and commitment to the poor. Pseudo-indicators of religiosity were used to attempt to determine whether or not religious people are more generous in giving (see Hart, 1992).

understood, that religion becomes most interesting" (Wuthnow, 1994: 640).

This is an approach which was adopted by Schumacher (1973) in his much acclaimed and criticised study of Buddhist economics. In this book, drawing on his experience of economic life in Burma, he examines the way that different religions offer alternative view points of economic life: "No one seems to think that a Buddhist way of life would call for Buddhist economics, just as the modern materialist way of life has brought forth modern economics" (Schumacher, 1973: 44). He then goes on to examine the various Buddhist teachings and the implications that they could have for economic theory and practice. In particular, he examines the question of the size of enterprises and the relationship between the local and the global: "From the viewpoint of Buddhist economics, therefore, production from local resources for local needs is the most rational way of economic life" (Schumacher, 1973: 49). Schumacher calls his economics 'Buddhist', but he is conscious that similar 'meta-economics' could be derived from other traditions such as Christianity or Judaism.

Such ideas are also found within economic anthropology. In the view of Bloch and Parry (1989), in order to understand how money is viewed, it is important to understand the 'cultural matrix' within which it is incorporated. Through an ethnographic approach, which would locate economic action within the wider spectrum of cultural values in a particular cultural group, it would be possible to understand the symbolic meanings attached to a range of economic actions and the place of the economy itself. There are strong parallels between the 'perspectivist' approach that is being advocated here and the approach that Wallace (1978; 1998) advocates within economic geography. For Wallace, as discussed earlier, there could be many economic geographies which are formed along the lines of the different worldview within different religions. Such an approach would have to draw on more ethnographic approaches within cultural geography, placing greater emphasis on the symbolic meanings attached to economic action.

Economic geographies of the Focolare Movement

A key field of research, therefore, is that of examining the alternative perspectives on the economic which are present within diverse cultural groups, and in particular those which highlight a more 'spiritual' dimension of life. As outlined in the introduction, the aim of this research is to take one socio-religious movement, namely the Focolare Movement, which is proposing a different form of economic spirit and action, the Economy of Sharing, and to examine the emerging geographies within it. Some literature is available on the economic vision of the Focolare, but the majority of this work is non-academic literature from within the Focolare itself (Movimento Umanita Nuova, 1992). This will be discussed more fully in Chapters 3 and 4.

There has been growing academic interest in the Economy of Sharing in recent years and several research projects about it are currently underway in Brazil[40] and Italy.[41] Several conferences have been held on the topic within academic institutions (for example Piacenza, 1996; Palermo, 1997; Milan, 1998; Piacenza, 1999) and for academics within Focolare centres (New York, 1998; Sao Paulo, 1999) at which the possible theoretical implications of 'sharing'[42] as an economic form and spirit has been discussed. The proceedings of these conferences are currently the main source of published academic material on the Economy of Sharing.[43] This work examines the current dominant theoretical positions within economics and the response that the Economy of Sharing could present to this orthodox vision. Some have examined the possible relationship between the concept of 'relational goods' present within social economics and the emphasis on relationships present within the Focolare's Economy of Sharing (Gui, 1996). Bruni (1999) examines the history of economic theory, stressing how the 'economic' needs to recover the 'we' dimension in order to understand what is happening within the Economy of Sharing. Such a concept, he argues, was present in certain economic thinkers in the eighteenth century, but has subsequently been sidelined. In other research papers, salient points which form part of the social vision of the Focolare, such as the idea of the communitarian dimension of the human person and the importance of self-giving, are examined in relation to the Economy of Sharing businesses [CEOS68; CEOS73].

Gold (2000) examines the possible role that the Economy of Sharing could play in reaching

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[40] Here I am referring to the work of Professor P Vaz et al. at the UniSantos Catholic University in Recife entitled "Economy of Sharing, a new ethics for human emancipation".

[41] For example, the Istituto Veritatis Splendor, a Catholic institute in Bologna has started a two year research project on the Economy of Sharing co-ordinated by Prof. S. Zamagni and Prof. P. Donati. The Bocconi University of Milan has started a "permanent observatory" on the Economy of Sharing co-ordinated by Prof. V. Coda and Prof. M. Molteni. The first stage of the project, commencing in 2000, will be a systematic study of the business profile of all the Economy of Sharing businesses in Italy.

[42] The translation here is 'sharing' though the Italian/Portuguese term used at such conferences is '*Comunione*' or 'comunhão'. The reason for and implications of this translation will be discussed in the methodology chapter.

[43] Unpublished academic material is available through an Internet archive of around 50 unpublished dissertations and Masters theses which have been written on the subject over the past seven years (Quasar BBS Associazione Culturale, 2000). This work crosses over many academic boundaries and includes theses within social theology, social economics and behavioural science as well as economics itself.

a more equitable distribution of wealth. She concludes that the Economy of Sharing originated from a shift in culture within the Focolare Movement, and that any development in the Economy of Sharing would result from such a similar change on a societal level. Likewise, Delia (2000) examines the contribution which the Economy of Sharing could make in relation to the debate on sustainable development, arguing that the Economy of Sharing could provide a possible bridge to overcome the gap between the 'production-income distribution-expenditure process'. The Economy of Sharing does this through bypassing the governmental redistribution stage in this process. He argues that such a model is not in conflict with liberal traditions, but can co-exist with capitalism as it opens a "space for other motives to induce enterprising behaviour" within the conventional economic space. He concludes that "this space is seen by the Communion model as a sound base from which to disseminate the Communion ideal." Delia, however, does not examine in detail what constitutes the 'Communion model' which underpins the Economy of Sharing in depth, nor its relationship to the 'Communion ideal'. In his comparative study of Protestant and Catholic work ethics, Arslan, 1999: 207) makes a passing reference to the emergence of the Economy of Sharing in relation to the 'communitarian' dimension of the human person present within Catholic social teaching. He comments that, "although its influence on national economies is restricted by the number of its members and sympathisers, it applies a communitarian ethic to economics and tries to provide an alternative way of life to individualism."

There is currently one completed PhD thesis tackling the Economy of Sharing businesses and how the vision of the Focolare is actually worked out within them and put in to practice in various ways (Ressl, 1999). In his research, Ressl argues that the Economy of Sharing businesses are based on a radical departure from the current anthropological vision which underpins economic thinking. The *homo economicus* of the Economy of Sharing, he argues, is 'communitarian' rather than 'individualistic', since it is derived from the communitarian spirituality of the Focolare Movement. He then goes on to illustrate, by means of extensive case study evidence, the way that the Economy of Sharing businesses function and what could be the future of the Economy of Sharing. His conclusion, based on the evidence presented, is that the prospective future of the Economy of Sharing will be comprised of a 'group of companies' on an international level sharing the Economy of Sharing vision.

Within this research, though, Ressl does not consider several important factors regarding the way that the cultural and economic dimensions interact which I would regard as fundamental to the Economy of Sharing. In his view, the application of the Focolare vision within the realm of business is unproblematic - there are no compromises, no failures, no misunderstandings. Just as the model of the egoistic *homo economicus* was applied in an unproblematic fashion, so too Ressl risks applying the communitarian *homo economicus* in the same way. I would argue, on the other hand, that presuming such a direct application of the Focolare vision within the businesses and other economic institutions is highly problematic. Firstly, it does not take into account the possibility that the Focolare vision could be interpreted in different ways by different people, at different times and in geographical locations. Secondly, it does not consider the possibility that the Economy of Sharing is part of a historical process in which there are a high number of contributory factors benefiting and deterring its development. Thirdly, Ressl does not offer the possibility that the Focolare spirituality and the Economy of Sharing could be incompatible. For Ressl, it would seem enough for everyone to 'switch' to non-egoistic practices for the Economy of Sharing to come into existence. There is therefore an urgent need to carry out empirical research into the ways that the vision of the Focolare is applied (or not applied) within the context of the Economy of Sharing, taking the above criticisms into account.

Research aims and objectives

In this chapter, I have tried to locate the economic geographies of the Focolare Movement within the wider context of the current debates affecting economic geography and beyond, notably on the social and cultural 'nature' of the economic. I have gradually brought together the various axes of religion-spirituality-economy into the equation, considering the possibility of a 'non-market' ethic of caring which could possibly transcend local spaces to acquire a global reach. I have finally discussed the current academic literature on the Focolare's Economy of Sharing. At this point it is now possible to define the precise aims and objectives of this thesis, and to clarify the contribution that it will hopefully bring to these discussions.

Aims

It is possible to distinguish three main aims of this thesis:

1. To examine critically the interrelationship between the 'cultural' and the 'economic' within the context of a socio-religious movement.
2. To highlight the possibilities, problems and challenges that emerge when consciously 're-imagining' the global economy.
3. To consider the spatial scope of moral economies, in particular the prospect of a global Economy of Sharing.

Objectives

At the same time, this thesis will address the following themes, relating specifically to the economic geographies of the Focolare Movement's Economy of Sharing:

1. To outline the basic aims and objectives of the Focolare Movement and its historical geographies.
2. To present a detailed account of the economic geographies of the Focolare Movement, with special reference to the Economy of Sharing. This account will provide the following information:
   - Outline of global/local structures (Focolare centres, businesses, community groups) regulating the Economy of Sharing;
   - Quantitative details about the growth and development of the Economy of Sharing since 1991 (turnover, number of businesses participating, profits shared).
3. To provide an analysis and comparison of the Economy of Sharing regional networks in two geographical areas which will be used as case study regions:
   - Sao Paulo, Brazil;
   - Milan, Italy.
4. To examine critically the cultural roots of the Economy of Sharing in the 'culture of giving', with reference to historical documentation on the Focolare Movement.
5. To examine the tensions encountered by those trying to apply the 'culture of giving' within the context of commercial business.
6. To suggest possible ways in which such tensions could be overcome in view of the wider application of the Economy of Sharing.

2. Methodology and research techniques

The aim of this research is to 'map out',[44] both literally and conceptually, the economic geographies of the Focolare Movement and, in particular, of the Economy of Sharing project. It will also examine the extent to which this alternative perspective on economic life could offer an alternative for thinking about economic and social inequalities on a global scale. Research into 'alternative economic geographies' presents interesting and challenging methodological questions. These questions highlight the wider structures of power and knowledge underpinning social and economic research.[45] These underlying structures of power and knowledge are brought even more to the fore when the question of the relationship between religion and the economy is in question, as is the case in this research.[46] In this Chapter, therefore, I will outline the methodology which forms the basis of the thesis and highlight several important issues which emerge from the research. In particular, I wish to consider the questions of access, positionality and linguistics.

Overview of methodology

In order to build up a picture of the economic geographies of the Focolare Movement, several methodological issues had to be tackled. Firstly, there was the question of what constituted the 'economic geographies' of the Focolare. On the one hand these geographies are bound up with certain 'economic' facts such as the size, sector and location of the Economy of Sharing businesses. They are also related to certain flows of capital, in the form of the profits from the Economy of Sharing businesses moving to the 'centre' of the Focolare for redistribution. Such geographies have local, regional and international dimensions which can be mapped in a quantitative fashion, providing an overview of the geographical scale and distribution of the various institutions and flows which form the

[44] I use this metaphor with a degree of caution. By using 'mapping out' as a metaphor, I am not implying that my research shall uncover the overall, unequivocal perspective of the Economy of Sharing. In doing so, I would, in Jackson's (1993: 211) words be assuming a "position outside of, or suspended above, the field that is being surveyed." The challenge which I am addressing here is that of 'mapping out' economic geographies 'from inside that world'.

[45] Within human geography, for example, such struggles can be seen in the resistance, on the part of some economic geographers, to importing concepts and methods normally used within cultural geography. Such struggles are partly about "defending the strengths of political-economic analysis" (Crang, 1997: 5) against a cultural descent into discourse, but also reflect the concerns of 'economic' disciplines with substantive issues, such as poverty, rather than culture.

[46] Such concerns were dealt with in Chapter 1 in relation to the relevance of religion in discussions concerning economic matters.

Economy of Sharing. Gaining access to this kind of quantitative data is clearly central to the thesis.

This quantitative data could only act as surface indicator of the economic geographies involved, however, and not provide access to the underlying perspectives, discourses and structures which had given rise to them. As outlined in Chapter 1, it is precisely this kind of qualitative data, relating to the 'cultural matrix' in which the Economy of Sharing is taking place, which is of most interest to my research. It is only through understanding the meaning attached to economic life within the Focolare that the Economy of Sharing can really be understood. Gaining accessing to this kind of data is much more complex and less quantifiable.

In order to examine the cultural matrix in which the Economy of Sharing is taking place, I had first of all to access data relating to the relationship between the spirituality of the Focolare and the Economy of Sharing. I had to be aware from the outset of the many pitfalls which could beset the research. The main pitfall, mentioned in Chapter 1, involved taking the link between the Focolare's spirituality and the Economy of Sharing at 'face value' in a deterministic fashion as Ressl (1999) tends to do in his research. This approach would not take into account the various degrees of freedom possessed by individuals and groups interpreting spiritual life and prescriptions, nor the possibility that there could be different interpretations of the Economy of Sharing over space and time.

I also realised that it would be critical in my research to take the historical geographies of the Focolare into account when considering the various economic geographies of the movement. The Economy of Sharing did not emerge from a vacuum, but from a 50 year tradition within the Focolare, and it thus needs to be seen within this context. It would therefore be necessary to examine in some detail the roots of the Focolare Movement during the Second World War and to trace the subsequent development of its economic perspective. Moreover, I had to be open to the possibility that the ideas relating to economic life may have changed since the beginnings of the Focolare.

I also had to build into my research some assessment of how the Economy of Sharing varies over space, on a global scale, as well as on regional and local scales. The Focolare is a global movement and the Economy of Sharing is a global economic project. This is arguably one of the most interesting characteristics of the project. I recognised, therefore, that my research would have to provide some kind of overview of the global nature of the Economy of Sharing, but limitations in finance and time have made in-depth qualitative analysis on a global scale beyond the scope of the thesis. I have instead sought to isolate several key geographical areas dispersed across the globe which could be researched in-depth as case studies. Since the Focolare started in Northern Italy but the Economy of Sharing project emerged within Sao Paulo, Brazil, I decided to take these two regions as those where my in-depth case studies would be situated. These two areas provided an interesting dynamic relationship since the Focolare spirituality originated in Italy, reached Brazil, and from there gave rise to the Economy of Sharing which has since been taken on by the Focolare in different countries, including back in Italy. It provided the possibility not only of examining the two regions in isolation, but also in relationship with each other and with the wider structures within the Focolare Movement.

In order to research the varied economic geographies of the Focolare, though, there were other questions that had to be considered apart from the relationship between spirituality and the Economy of Sharing. Those participating in the project are in constant interaction with other agencies and individuals that do not share the same perspective and ideas relating to economic life, itself another crucial aspect of what I wish to explore. The Economy of Sharing businesses are hence subject to the standard 'market' economic discourses and legal stipulations of the various countries and regions in which they are situated. Moreover, the relationship between the Economy of Sharing and other discourses cannot be assumed to be passive. I had to recognise the possibility that there might be a struggle which could result in failure. One of the critical issues was thus to find a way of 'dramatising' the boundary between the various market discourses and the perspective presented by the Focolare's spirituality.

Several inter-linking concepts provided analytical tools which can be used to dramatise the way that this relationship is played out in particular places. In Chapter 1 I discussed the concepts of networks and 'economic rationalities', as particularly important within the context of this research. I will be examining in which ways the Economy of Sharing can be likened (in theory and practice) to the idea of networks, which has emerged through the engagement of economic geography with Actor Network Theory (Murdoch, 1997; Hetherington and Law, 1999) and other 'associationist' schools of economic thinking. I will use the concept of 'economic rationality', exploring how the idea can be broadened out.[47] The concept of economic rationality has many nuances that have to be explored. Weber (1958), for example, differentiated between two kinds of rationality: 'formal rationality', which applies to conditions of absolute scarcity and the efficient use of resources under such conditions; and 'substantive rationality', relating to the allocation of resources within the guidelines of other principles such as communal loyalties or sacred values. Such a distinction is somewhat artificial and it is difficult to draw a sharp boundary around absolute and relative scarcity. Nevertheless, Weber attached great importance to the meaning of economic action: economic actions, in his view, are characterised by the meaning that they have for human action. Such meanings are historically constructed and must be empirically investigated. They cannot be derived from outside assumptions and external circumstances. Polanyi (1957) also distinguished between the formal and the substantive meanings of the economy, the former defining the economy in terms of rational action. For Polanyi this way of understanding the economy was erroneous. Instead, his notion of the economy was as something that is institutionally visible and connected with generating a livelihood. He came up with a classification of various types of economic action - including reciprocity, exchange and redistribution – thus highlighting the futility of reducing the economy to the "market" (Harvey, 1973: 209).

The idea of economic rationality is indeed one that has to be empirically investigated. As an idea, however, it cannot be divorced from the concepts of power and control. Any discussion of alternative perspectives on economic life has to be seen in relation to the wider political economy in which it is happening. The role of institutional constraints, the role of long-standing friendship, and the capacity for collaborative action all have to be considered. In particular, as mentioned in Chapter 1, the relationship between discourse and practice has to be examined. Research into alternative economic geographies must also examine the global political economy in which the alternatives are emerging, and critically appraise the way in which this context both enables and constrains, or even 'colonises', the emergence of alternatives.

Research into the economic geographies of the Focolare Movement cannot simply examine the 'vital statistics' of the businesses engaged in the Economy of Sharing project. It will have to examine the relationship between these statistics and the meanings which are

[47] According to mainstream economists, rationality (understood as the maximisation of utility) is an assumption but for economic sociologists, on the other hand, regard it as a variable. Rationality, therefore, has to be explained, not assumed.

attached to them by both the people who are involved in the Focolare and those on the 'outside' examining the development and significance of the project. It will have to map out the various structures involved in the generation and deployment of knowledge throughout the Focolare, and reveal how this knowledge is translated into practices within the Economy of Sharing.

A mixed-method ethnographic approach

The kinds of information which I required for my research, therefore, were both quantitative and qualitative in nature. The approach that seemed most appropriate in fulfilling the latter mentioned objectives of this research is an 'multi-method' one,[48] involving extended periods of fieldwork in different locations.[49] This involved using ethnographic techniques such as participant observation, interviewing and archival searches at the Focolare centre in Rome, complemented by other research tools such as a quantitative analysis of the various Economy of Sharing databases. In the two case study regions of Milan and Sao Paulo, this approach meant carrying out interviews with key participants in the Economy of Sharing and gathering background information on the development of the Economy of Sharing in these regions.

The reason for adopting this mixed method approach, as opposed to a more systematic deductive approach which relied principally on quantitative analysis, was derived from my desire to carry out 'theory informed' rather than 'theory driven' research. If a formal deductive methodology had been adopted (based on the creation of hypotheses), I would have run a high risk of eliminating key elements of my research by default. A deductive approach, even if carried out through the triangulation of various research methods,[50] would assume that there was one objective answer to be gained from the research.

In the case of this research, I recognised that quantitative methods did have an important

[48] The various benefits to be gained from and the difficulties encountered when trying to combine quantitative and qualitative methods within human geography have been discussed by Philip (1998). She underlines the link that has often been made within human geography between particular methodologies and epistemqlogical positions. She argues that much could be gained from 'freeing up epistemological space' in order to make room for 'combined-methods' research (Philip, 1998: 263).
[49] The fieldwork for this research was carried out in three locations: the Focolare Centre in Rome (Sept 1997 - Jan 1998), in Milan (Jan - Feb 1998) and finally, in Sao Paulo (Aug - Oct 1998).
[50] Triangulation is a methodology used most commonly in sociology, involving a range of research techniques which, taken together, are assumed to rid the research of bias (Fay, 1996). The various methods are assumed to make up a unified whole through which an objective account can be obtained. It can also be used to mean using the same methods to gain information from a range of informants who may have different perspectives on the same situation.

role to play, especially in view of the 'economic' visibility of the geographies I was uncovering.[51] Through an ethnographic approach, on the other hand, which is by its nature more inductive and requires a degree of researcher openness, I was able to employ a range of qualitative research techniques which helped me to discern the ways that meaning is constructed in everyday life. Through the interpretation of the various documents at the Focolare Centre I could interpret the way that the various discourses emerged and were disseminated throughout the Focolare. This could then be related back to the everyday practices and the meanings attached to them. Eventually, these two complementary strategies could be brought into dialogue with the broader theoretical framework in an interpretative mode.

The shift towards the use of ethnography within cultural geography (Philo, 1991), and more recently within economic geography (Lee and Wills, 1997), has been phenomenal. In the past, such approaches were mainly the preserve of social and cultural anthropologists,[52] but through the use of the associated methods, geographers have used the same methodology to understand the inner life and consciousness of particular groups or communities (Jackson, 1985). Geographers, in recent years, have used ethnography to understand the various ways in which space is socially constructed and becomes meaningful (as place) within different cultural groups. The focus of such work has shifted from what were considered as 'exotic' cultures, in far off places, to cultures within modern urban settings (Crang, 1994) and particularly in relation to capitalism (Miller, 1997).

This shift, however, has also been subject to many criticisms. [53] Cook and Crang (1995) point out four main criticisms that have emerged in recent years. Firstly, there is the problem of the notion of "culture" which has been employed within much ethnographic work. This notion has, in their opinion "invariably characterised its subjects as having a

[51] One criticism that has been launched against the cultural turn in economic geography is its apparent lack of concern for financial (or conventionally economic) matters and the subsequent risk that it could become purely discursive (Crang, 1997: 6). In this respect, I regard it as fundamental to 'ground' any cultural interpretations of economic action within conventional economic parameters such as budgets, statements, balance sheets, and turnover.

[52] The use of such approaches has been deeply implicated in the rise of colonialism (Marcus & Fischer, 1986) due to the power of representation which the academic establishment held over colonised peoples. The debate over whether ethnographic approaches can really 'give voice' to those who had been silenced within the colonial era is still the topic of intense debate (Spivak, 1988).

[53] Here I am referring to the various post-modern critiques put forward by theorists such as Clifford (1988) and Thompson (1990b), in which they argue against the plausibility of regarding cultures as self-contained, clearly bounded entities which are internally consistent wholes. Their critique is made in view of the role of anthropology in writing traditional cultures into the past along the time line of Western development.

'culture' which can be unproblematically 'read' by an apparently detached researcher" (Cook & Crang, 1995: 6). Culture they propose is a more problematic term that often reveals inconsistencies and contradictions, as discussed at length in Chapter 1. Secondly, the subjects are seen as transparent and knowledgeable carriers of a pure cultural code. There is thus a degree of determinism in the understanding of the way that culture relates to practices. Thirdly, they criticise how cultures have been viewed as pure, isolatable homogeneous entities. And finally, there is the criticism that the work of ethnography can never be objective and does not stand up to the rigours of scientific method. This is a view echoed by those who are concerned with the 'non-representational' nature of such studies (Mitchell, 1983), criticising the emphasis on 'depth' rather than 'coverage'.

Such criticisms have to be taken into consideration, especially the recognition of the limitations of an ethnographic approach in terms of representativeness. In my own research I have tried to approach this difficulty through seeking out a range of different sources and informants in several geographical locations. Through addressing the question of the discourses underpinning the Economy of Sharing at the Focolare Centre in Rome, I was able to build up a picture of the Focolare's economic vision as it is seen from the Centre, thereby focusing on 'depth' rather than 'coverage'. By then choosing two disparate geographical regions as case studies of the Economy of Sharing in practice, and interviewing a number of informants within these regions, I was able to gain a degree of 'coverage' in terms of the global geographies of the Economy of Sharing.

As will be discussed later with reference to my own 'positionality', however, the main underlying criticism refers to the validity of ethnography as a scientific method. On the one hand, this could be taken as a specific criticism of the relationship between the researcher and the subject. Since a degree of empathy is necessary in order to access the kinds of information which form ethnographic work, it is questionable whether or not such 'closeness' (whether disclosed or assumed) creates 'bias' within the findings of research. On the other hand, the questioning of the 'scientific' status of ethnographic work could say something more fundamental about the wider politics of knowledge within geography and social research in general (Spivak, 1987). It touches on the very question of what constitutes scientific knowledge, and/or the privileged status of science over other forms of more subjective knowledge. Such 'other' knowledge may be accepted as valid, but is not granted the same authority in terms of funding or policy.

Table 2.1 below provides an outline of the various sources and research techniques used in the research. It illustrates the wide range of sources used to access the quantitative and qualitative data. Most of the original sources - archives and interviews - used in the thesis were in Italian and Portuguese. In order to access them I had to become proficient in both languages. With regard to Italian, this was straightforward, as I have spoken it for ten years and studied it to degree level. I learnt Portuguese from basics in order to carry out this research and have since given a paper at an Economy of Sharing conference in Brazil which has been published in Portuguese.

Table 2.1 Research sources

Data Required	Sources	Research techniques
Quantitative information on the Economy of Sharing businesses: size, distribution, sectors	• Databases, accounts information from Economy of Sharing Centre, Rome • Economy of Sharing businesses in the case study regions	• Accessing databases on computer and compiling summary data • Interviews with business leaders
Information relating to the historical geographies of the Focolare Movement	• Archives at the Focolare Centre in Rome • Focolare leaders in Rome and in various regions	• Accessing historical archives • Interviews with Focolare leaders
Information relating to the Focolare's economic vision and the way it is applied	• Archives at the Focolare Centre in Rome • Focolare leaders in Rome and in various regions	• Archival searches based on term 'economy' • Interviews with leading members • Participant observation
Data relating to the way that the Economy of Sharing is understood in different regions	• Business leaders in the two case study regions • Visits to businesses over a prolonged period • Company literature businesses	• Interviews with business leaders • Participant observation of businesses in operation • Documentary research on company literatures (promotions, memos, policies, statutes)

Fieldwork at the Focolare Centre, Rome

The starting point for my fieldwork was the Focolare Centre in Rome. I arranged to go there to spend an extended period working in the head office of the Economy of Sharing and consulting the archives of the Focolare Movement which are located in the Centre. The Focolare archives, which provide a detailed social and cultural history of the movement dating back to 1943, have rarely been used in academic studies so gaining access to them was a privilege. I was able to do this mainly due to the fact that I (and my work) was already known to the people working at the Focolare Centre, since my previous study on the Economy of Sharing (Gold, 1996) had been widely circulated within the Focolare. This time at the Centre enabled me to gain a detailed understanding of the inner workings and overall structure of the Economy of Sharing at a global level. It also provided an insight into the various dynamics in place between the 'centre' and the different areas throughout the world where there are Economy of Sharing businesses. Through working in the head office I was able to have informal access to the leading members of the movement, and chat to them during coffee breaks and over dinner, as well as carrying out formal interviews. It also gave me the chance to gather background information on the origins and development of the socio-economic aspects of the Focolare throughout its fifty year history.

In-depth interviews

The first of these aims involved carrying out interviews with 'key informants'[54] who could provide information and insight regarding Focolare's economic ideas and the development of the Economy of Sharing in different regions. I was able to arrange interviews with several leading members of the Focolare, some of whom are also prominent academics and church leaders.[55] The interviews were loosely structured (see Table 2.2), covering three main areas of enquiry, enabling the interviewees to express their understanding of the spiritual and philosophical foundations of the Focolare's thought. They also gave me the chance to gain detailed accounts of the processes by which the Economy of Sharing works. Some of the people I interviewed were delegates of the Focolare in different regions who

[54] Burgess (1984: 48-54) highlights the fact that in certain research projects there is greater value in selecting informants on the basis of their 'specialise interests and concerns' in particular social settings rather than a predetermined sampling strategy. In the case of this research, the various informants were selected on the basis of my own knowledge of the Focolare centre and the various responsibilities people within it held. Like Burgess, I was very aware of the role of personal contacts in gaining access to the various 'gatekeepers' within the Economy of Sharing.

[55] A full list of the interviews is provided in Appendix 3.

were in Rome for an annual meeting. Through interviewing them I was able to discuss the various issues that they regarded as important within the Economy of Sharing in their region. These views could then be compared with those from the various business leaders in those regions.

My experience of interviewing could be compared to the experience that Rowles (1978) describes in relation to the effects of turning the tape recorder off/on. Rowles experienced a change in the attitudes of the interviewees when he was not formally interviewing them. In my own research, much of the interesting data relating to the Economy of Sharing emerged when the tape recorder had been turned off during informal discussions with Focolare leaders over coffee or in the course of conferences and workshops. This degree of informality presented ethical questions for myself as a researcher and also raised the question of my positionality, an issue which will be discussed further ahead.

Table 2.2 Outline of interview questions (Focolare Centre in Rome)

Regarding the Economy of Sharing in different regions: • What importance is given to the Economy of Sharing within --- region? • Have special meetings, conferences been organised for the Economy of Sharing? • What was their specific aim? • Have any theses been written on the topic? • Are the Economy of Sharing businesses linked in some way to the model town in --- region?
Regarding the redistribution of profits: • How are the Economy of Sharing profits 'shared'? • Who is responsible for their administration? • Are the businesses regularly informed of how profits are used? • Do they receive a balance sheet?
Regarding those who are helped: • Who are 'the poor' for the Economy of Sharing? • How do needs come to the attention of the Focolare? • Is there a general rule for defining who is poor? • Are there any 'poor' in --- region? • Are their other non-EoS social welfare projects in --- region run by the Focolare? • Do they receive Economy of Sharing funding? If not, how are they funded? • Within the Economy of Sharing, is it the businesses as a whole what give profits or individuals within the companies?

The idea of 'elites' is one which is not easily applied to the Focolare, in view of the spirituality which underpins it. Nevertheless, given that some of the people interviewed in the course of this researcher were 'corporate managers' and others held considerable responsibility within the Focolare itself, it is important to consider the issues surrounding research with such groups. Much has been written about the politics of ethnographic research when interviewing elites (Hughes & Cormode, 1999; Hertz & Imber 1993; McDowell, 1998), underlining the different methodological approaches that are needed when carrying out research in elite settings as opposed to researching those who are 'down'. Within emerging economic/cultural geography research, there are a whole different set of underlying issues, such as access to elite networks (and their 'gatekeepers') and the reliability of disclosed information, which highlight the different power relations involved (Ward & Jones, 1999: 303). Oinas (1999: 356), for example, points out that within corporate interviews 'silence' often speaks louder than what is actually uttered. Hughes (1999) examines the difficulties encountered in accessing different kinds of information within corporate interviews, underlining the fact that such interviews can only form one particular viewpoint on any new economic geography. Within my own research, I tried to construct the economic geographies from a range of viewpoints, including those of corporate managers, but also those of Focolare leaders and, to a lesser extent, those on the receiving end of Economy of Sharing profits.

The role of texts

Much of the information on the historical geographies of the Focolare and the relationship between the Focolare spirituality and the economic sphere was gained from the interpretation of various texts dating back to 1943, which could be found in the Focolare archives at the Centre in Rome. This archival material, which consisted mainly of reports, letters, memos, public talks and transcripts of internal meetings, was arranged both chronologically and geographically and provided an insight into the nature of the early Focolare communities in the 1940s and 1950s. From there, it was possible to build up a picture of their understanding of economic and social concerns. Two examples of the kind of documentation in the archives are found in Figures 2.1 and 2.2. One difficulty in using this source, however, was the fact that the relevant material was spread across several different archives, which themselves were located in different places. Moreover, the methods of collecting and storing the information have themselves changed over the years. In recent years, the Focolare has itself developed an archival system (currently only used to document the public talks of the Focolare leaders).

The archives of the Focolare are held separately from the Economy of Sharing archives, which are located at the Economy of Sharing Commission. As well as consulting the

Focolare archives, I carried out an exhaustive search of all the materials (in published and unpublished form) relating to the development of the Economy of Sharing, from 1991 to 1997. The published documentation on the Economy of Sharing consisted mainly in newspaper and journal articles sent to the Focolare Centre through the ANSA news agency.[56] The unpublished information consists of minutes of meetings (both in Rome and abroad), annual reports, letters, memos, brochures, and photo albums/scrap books. Again, accessing the materials required a lot of time and patience as the archives were not ordered in a way conducive to this research. There was no comprehensive index of the materials available, as I was the first person to consult these archives for academic research. One of my first tasks, therefore, was to compile an index of all the materials relating to the Economy of Sharing (see Appendix 2).

In the course of this archival search the texts were not simply regarded a vehicle to obtain information about a reality beyond them. In the context of this research, the texts themselves, as well as how they were arranged, were taken to be significant. The idea of an 'active text' is one that has been used within social research (Silverman, 1997). The texts in question are not 'dead', but they have (and have had) an influence on the structuring of social and economic action. As Silverman said: "Smith attempts to replace this notion of the text as a transparent channel with a conception of an active text, a text that has a structuring effect, that actively organises a course of social action and that it is consequential for that action, directing its course" (Silverman, 1997: 85). Likewise, in his discussion on Foucault's notion of discourse, Philo (1989) argues that such texts are 'serious statements' which form an active level of social reality engaged in changing the world. In this respect, annotations written onto texts and subsequent changes to transcripts were just as important, if not more, in providing an insight into the evolution of the ideas relating to the Economy of Sharing and the relationship between the Focolare Centre and the various regions. This, of course, calls into question the readership of the text and the way that the text is read/delivered.

In accessing the various texts, therefore, I was constantly aware that the various texts - reports, letters, articles, newsletters, brochures and transcripts - were more than mere 'words on paper'. They were active parts of an overall body of texts that had to been seen

[56] The Focolare receives notification from ANSA any time that the name Focolare or other connected titles are used in published works. This information has been compiled into an archive.

in relationship with one another, and above all in the context of their intended readership. Some of the texts were recommendations and instructions, designed to change what their readers were doing, whereas others were designed to inform the readership of relevant issues concerning developments of the Economy of Sharing or of the Focolare in general. I had to understand, therefore, which documents people within the Economy of Sharing regarded as the 'key texts'.

Figure 2.1 Example of material from the Focolare archives

Letter from Chiara Lubich to the Bishop of Trent, containing the first statistics on the new movement (dated 21.10.49)

al vescovo di Trento, ~~Mons. De Ferrari~~ 21-X-49
Trento

Altezza Reverendissima,

Padre nostro,

21-X-1949

Ecco la statistica:

Trento 597
Trentino (paesi) 1575
Rovereto 289
Italia (città e paesi) 611
Sardegna 110
Fuori Italia 30
Roma 308

Complessive 3520 anime.

Parto per Roma. Se fosse necessaria qui verrò, Altezza, specie per la presentazione di nostro nuovo Assistente.
Quel documento noi non l'abbiamo. Ci benedica
sua figlia Chiara

Figure 2.2 Example of material from the Focolare archives

Letter from Igino Giordani (Foco), Co-founder of the Focolare Movement, to a Focolare group who had set up a farming co-operative (dated Christmas, 1979)

Cittanuova
RIVISTA DI ATTUALITA'

Il direttore

Roma,

Carissimo Augusto e carissimi soci della Cooperativa Loppiano Prima,

il vostro ricordo, l'unità e i preziosi doni "frutto dell'amore nel vostro lavoro", mi riempiono l'animo di gioia e di gratitudine e insieme d'ammirazione: grazie cari volontari ! Voi testimoniate e gridate il Vangelo semplicemente col lavoro e la comunione dei beni sostanziati di carità e siete le primizie di una società da molti concepibile solo a parole eppure da tutti sognata. Per voi e grazie a voi, il mondo di domani è già incominciato! Contraccambio gli auguri più belli con tutto il cuore e insieme desidero assicurarvi che sono con voi ogni momento in questa gioia di vivere al solo scopo di "incarnare" l'Ideale di Chiara nel mondo.

Foco

CITTÀ NUOVA - Roma Viale Carso, 71. Tel 36 03 520 - 35 96 324 - c.c. post 34458003 - C.C.I.A.A. 336200

Given that the Focolare Movement is founded on spiritual ideals, I had also to try to recognise what spiritual meaning was attached to the various texts, not just in terms of content but also in their form. Some texts could hold importance in terms of 'sacred meaning', depending on who wrote them. This status could arguably give them greater authority as directives for social action. Recognising this 'sacred' dimension also provided me with an insight into whether or not the Economy of Sharing businesses were regarded as 'sacred' or 'spiritual spaces' as well as economic ones, and whether they were being encouraged to 'make themselves over' as spiritual spaces by the 'centre'.

The texts thus provided an essential insight into the way that the relationship between the spirituality of the Focolare and economic life has developed since the beginning of the movement. They offered a well of authoritative knowledge and interpretation on the Economy of Sharing, and on the broader cultural matrix in which it was situated. The key elements of these texts relating to the various assumptions, categories, logics and claims can be seen in relation to various practices which are (and have been) happening 'on the ground' within the Economy of Sharing, and my work on them thereby complemented my ethnographic research in the businesses themselves. Given that the majority of the authors of the various texts are still alive, the interpretation of the texts could be carried out in relation to the interviews with some of these authors in order to clarify and to spot certain aspects and possible inconsistencies in what had been written.

Participant observation

As well as gaining information from the archival sources cited above, I made use of the time in the various field locations to carry out participant observation. According to Burgess, the rationale behind participant observation, as a research method, is derived from the interpretative role of social science:

> *"The social world is not objective but involves subjective meanings and experiences that are constructed by participants in social situations. Accordingly, it is the task of the social scientist to interpret the meanings and experiences of social actors, as task that can only be achieved through participation with the individuals involved"* (Burgess, 1984: 78).

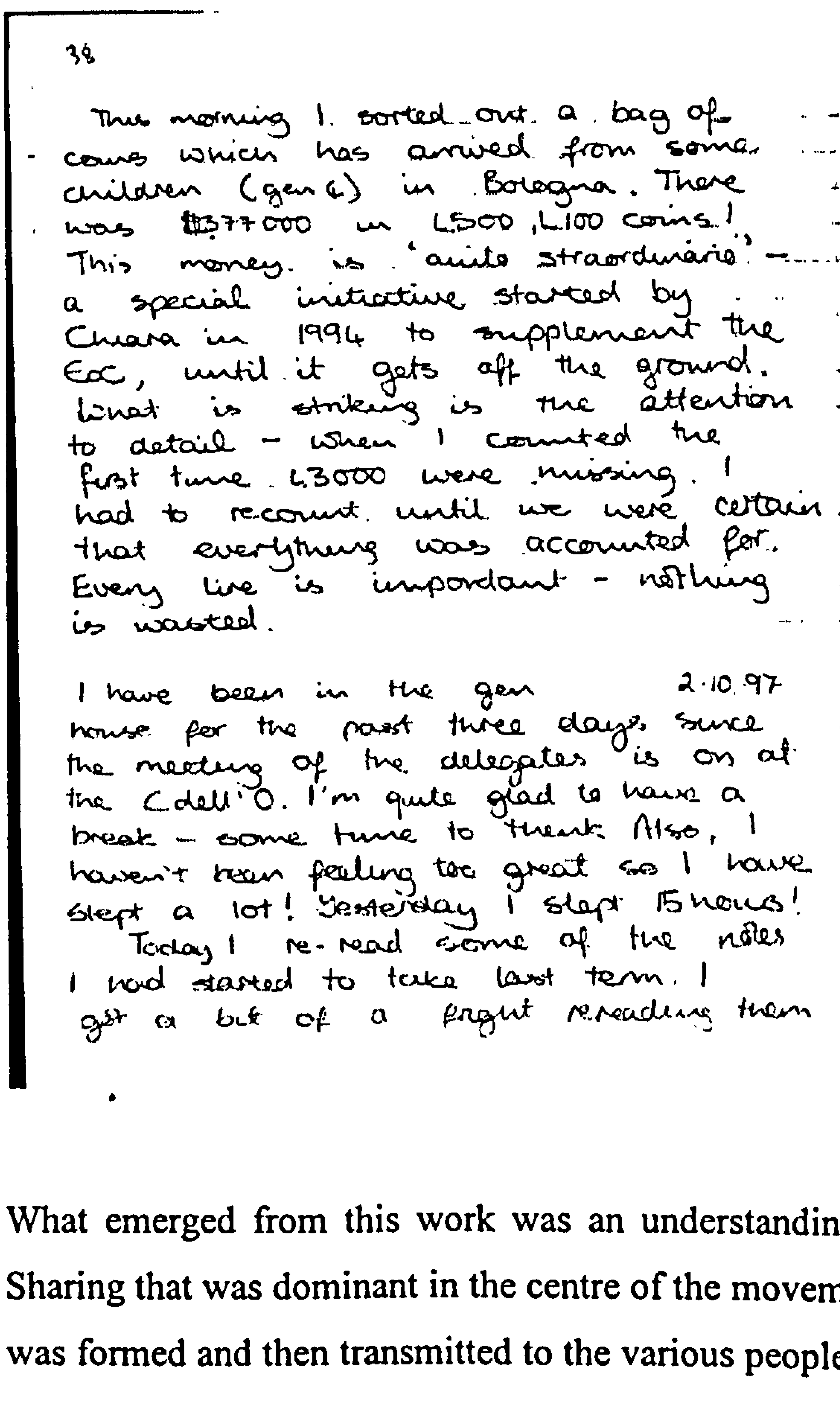
Thus, through participating in the daily life of a group or organisation, and observing the various situations in which they normally meet, the social researcher is able to understand their interpretations of the events which are taking place. Through obtaining the accounts of a number of different participants, the researcher is able to build up a picture of the meanings attached to various dimensions of everyday life. Such an approach involves taking on a role within a group or organisation, and the kinds of information which can be gained depends to a great extent of the nature of this role.[57]

There has been much discussion in recent years over the applicability of participant observation in fieldwork, and whether or not it can be called a 'technique'. Most of the criticism has centred around the politics of representation which are implicit within any form of observation (Cook, 1997). Above all, there is the recognition that the act of 'writing culture' is not so much a quest to uncover an objective reality as a function of the relationship between the researcher, with his or her perspectives and prejudices, and the researched (Baszanger & Dodier, 1997). Participant observation relies heavily on the acceptance of the researcher within the research context and assumes a degree of empathy with the people who are being 'observed'. The process is relational, and once again relates very much to the issue of positionality. Such issues regarding how the 'field' is constituted and, in particular, how gender issues can add a whole series of dynamics to fieldwork, have been examined by feminist geographers such as Katz (1994).

[57] Burgess (1984: 80-85) discusses the benefits and difficulties posed by different roles in field work. He draws on the work of Gold (1958), who highlighted 'ideal type' roles which are adopted during fieldwork: complete participant, participant-as-observer, the observer-as-participant and the complete observer.

My main means of observing was through actually working alongside those who worked within the Economy of Sharing office, seeking to understand the various practices which were going on and things that were being said. I also took advantage of the possibility of going to various meetings about the Economy of Sharing as an observer, such as the annual meeting of the Focolare delegates in October 1997. During this meeting, where the four hundred Focolare delegates from all over the world were present, I was able to observe the way that the profits from the Economy of Sharing were distributed to the various beneficiaries. I was thus able also understand more about the way that the 'centre-periphery' relationship was outworked on a face-to-face basis. These observations were noted down in a daily research diary, which I will quote from throughout the thesis. An example of the kind of entries in this diary is provided in Figure 2.3.

Figure 2.3 Example of research diary entry



38

This morning I sorted out a bag of coins which has arrived from some children (gen 4) in Bologna. There was L377 000 in L500, L100 coins! This money is 'aiuto straordinario' — a special initiative started by Chiara in 1994 to supplement the EoC, until it gets off the ground. What is striking is the attention to detail — when I counted the first time L3000 were missing. I had to recount until we were certain that everything was accounted for. Every lire is important — nothing is wasted.

I have been in the gen house for the past three days, since the meeting of the delegates is on at the C dell'O. I'm quite glad to have a break — some time to think. Also, I haven't been feeling too great so I have slept a lot! Yesterday I slept 15 hours! 2.10.97

Today I re-read some of the notes I had started to take last term. I got a bit of a fright reading them

This extract from my research diary whilst at the Centre in Rome, describes how money arriving from children in Italy was administered by those in the Economy of Sharing office.

What emerged from this work was an understanding of the vision of the Economy of Sharing that was dominant in the centre of the movement. I began to sense how this vision was formed and then transmitted to the various people engaged directly in the Economy of

Sharing. This vision from the centre could then be compared to the way that the ideas were translated into practices 'on the ground' in the businesses.

Economy of Sharing database

During the time at the centre in Rome, I also had access to a statistical database containing information on the Economy of Sharing businesses all over the world, including a breakdown of the profits redistributed and how they were allocated. This database provides the statistical background for the qualitative research that is the thrust of my thesis. I regard this data as indispensable to the thesis as it provides the framework on which the rest of the qualitative research rests. Through the statistical profile, it is possible to gain a clear idea of the dimensions and scope of the Economy of Sharing and to weigh these against the perceptions and the visions of the people directly involved in the project.

As with the other archives, this database had not been used for academic purposes prior to myself. This presented similar difficulties to those cited above. One of the biggest difficulties was establishing the validity of comparisons over time, given that the ways of calculating the number of businesses and their profits changed at least three times after 1991. Since the database was compiled on the basis of the information that the Centre required each year, this meant that not all the information was available for each year. This restricted the overall picture of the Economy of Sharing that I can present in this thesis. Another restriction is the fact that I have had to respect the right of the Focolare to restrict the level of data that I can present, since I do not have permission from the various businesses to disclose their details.

Case study regions

As outlined in the introduction above, one of the key issues in the research is the question of scale and whether or not the Economy of Sharing can be seen as a global 'alternative' to economic and social inequalities. It therefore seemed of prime importance to maintain a global dimension to the fieldwork. Given the limited resources available, above all in time, it seemed logical to limit the case studies to two disparate geographical locations in which the Ecónomy of Sharing had developed. The two locations that were chosen, as mentioned above, were Milan, Italy and Sao Paulo, Brazil. Within these regions my main aim was to carry out participant observation, as well as interviews with leading members of the Focolare engaged in the development of the Economy of Sharing both within and outwith the businesses participating in the Economy of Sharing.

There are 40 Economy of Sharing businesses in the Milan region and 42 in Sao Paulo. [58] From these wider groups, I chose to interview twelve in each region. Through reading the profiles of the businesses in Rome, I managed to gain an idea of their nature and size, and made my choice on the basis of gaining a representative cross-section of the size and sectors of businesses involved in the project. Several external factors influenced this choice. The first was the limited availability of the business owners in the time available. During the fieldwork in Milan, this was a key factor. In Brazil, the main factor in the choice of businesses was their geographic location, it being easiest to choose those businesses close to the town of Araceli. Moreover, since I had already carried out research in Brazil in 1995, it was much easier to arrange interviews with those businesses which had formed part of my dissertation in that year.

In the businesses, interviews were held with one or more of the main directors/shareholders of the businesses. An outline of the interview questions is provided in Table 2.3 on the next page. The main emphasis of the interview was on the business itself and on how, in their mind, the business related to other aspects of social, cultural and religious dimensions of life, and on how this translated into particular associations and relationships on the ground. In particular, my aim was to concentrate on what it actually means in everyday practice to translate the principles of the Economy of Sharing into business: to consider whether these constitute cultural practices or not. In my questions I was careful not to assume a position relating to 'what it means to be an Economy of Sharing business' but tried to get the business people themselves to answer that question. In this way the relationship between the market philosophy of profitability and the 'opposing' forces of spirituality and benevolence could be explored in depth, highlighting the cultural meanings attached to the various communities, associations and institutions which act as intermediaries in this relationship.

The businesses involved in the Economy of Sharing were chosen as the 'point of entry' in this research as they arguably provide a privileged point of access into the Economy of Sharing networks. It is within such businesses, above all, that the 'battle lines' are drawn between the world of free market competition and the altruistic philosophy on which the Focolare is based.

[58] The geographical boundaries of the case study regions do not exactly coincide with political boundaries such as regions. The exact boundaries of the regions are shown in Figures 6.2 and 6.8.

Table 2.3 Interview outline (Case study businesses)

General situation • How has your business been going over the last few years? Is it still growing? • What structural changes have taken place within the business? • What have been the main difficulties within the business? How have these been faced?
Business and the Economy of Sharing • What does it mean to you to be an Economy of Sharing business? • In what ways do you think this makes you different to other businesses in your sector? • Has your involvement in the Economy of Sharing changed over the years? • Have you ever doubted the point of the project? • Would you say you still have the same enthusiasm as you had at the beginning? • In the everyday running of the company, how does the Economy of Sharing influence how work is organised in relation to your workers/unions, suppliers, clients and professional associations? • What proportion of your employees share the spirit of the Economy of Sharing? • Has this number been increasing in recent years?
Distribution of profits • Has the business shared its profits for the aims of the Economy of Sharing? • How do you decide how much to give to the Economy of Sharing? • What form do these profits take (money, services, machinery)? • Do you take a personal interest in the destination of the profits? • What relationship is there between the businesses and those who are helped by the Economy of Sharing? • Do you receive any information regarding how the profits are spent?
Relationship with competitors • What is the competition like in your sector? • How do you manage to be faithful to the Economy of Sharing when where there is tight competition? • Have there ever been situations like this where you have compromised for the survival of the business?
Relationship with the local community • What relationship is there between the business and the local community? • Does the business feel it is part of the local community? • Has this relationship changed as a result of the Economy of Sharing? If so, how?
Relationship with the state • What is the relationship between the business and the legal authorities? • Has the Economy of Sharing brought about a change in attitude in this relationship?
Relationship with the Focolare Movement • What relationship is there between the Focolare Movement and the business? • What contacts do you have with other businesses which are part of the Economy of Sharing? • Are these with other local businesses or ones abroad? • Are these contacts on a personal or business level? • What occasions are there to meet other business people interested in the Economy of Sharing? • Have you taken part in Economy of Sharing meetings on an international level? • What are the benefits of these meetings?
Work motivation • What is the deep motivation behind your work? • What do you gain from this (apart from money)?
Vision of the future • What vision of the Economy of Sharing do you have for the future?

It is only through understanding the 'place' of the businesses which are participating in this project that it is possible to analyse the complex ethical, cultural and philosophical dilemmas which emerge. Business is usually regarded as the homeland of neo-liberalism, the place in which the discourse of the market is most readily applied. It is within the businesses, therefore, that the most interesting challenges to the dominant discourses of the market can be examined.

Positionality

One important issue which emerges from my research is the recurrent theme of the positionality of the researcher and the researched. The question of positionality is one that is extremely topical within human geography, partly as a response to the 'crisis of representation' which has dominated much of social science in recent years (Jackson, 1993). This shift has underlined the impossibility of carrying out and writing social research which is in some way 'value free', questioning the authority and validity of ethnographic research (Clifford, 1988). Many challenges have come from feminist theorists such as Haraway (1991) and Harding (1991), who argue that all knowledge is 'situated' knowledge since it is marked by its origins and therefore has to be accompanied by a statement on the position of the researcher. They are critical of the 'view from no-where' which tends to dominate academic literature, a trick that Haraway (1991) calls the 'God trick'. This is a view that is echoed by McDowell (1992: 409), who argues that "we must recognise and take account of our own position, as well as that of our research participants, and write this into our research practice."

Others, however, such as Rose (1997), drawing on psychoanalytical claims about the inaccessible 'unconscious' aspects of position, have questioned the extent to which it is possible for the researcher to be fully aware of their own position, thus limiting the possibility of research being fully reflexive. Positionality is not always consistent, but could create conflicts depending on the various roles being played out by the researcher, the researched and the research itself. It is something dynamic, since the 'we' and 'they' are not fixed, as Katz (1994) explains when writing about the demarcation of the 'field'. This is particularly true in questions to do with 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. Being outside or inside is not a static position, but one that is dynamic and could change over time and in relation to circumstances. I would argue that *any* position is a position of power relations and that there could be valid viewpoints from many positions. What matters is not so much an inside or outside position, but an honest and self-reflective awareness of the dynamics involved in any position, to the extent that such self-awareness is possible.

These are questions which I had to face from the beginning of my own research. I believe that a degree of reflexivity is possible, if not total, and the case of this researcher has to be brought out into the open. At the outset I would have considered myself an active promoter of the Economy of Sharing, who shared fully in the values and beliefs which underpin the idea. It is as a result of this strong commitment to the ideals of social justice that I considered this research a valid course of action. [59] There is nothing impartial, therefore, about my choice of research topic. It is as a direct result of my involvement in the Focolare, in particular through my undergraduate research on the Economy of Sharing in Brazil in 1995 (Gold, 1996), that I became interested in the Economy of Sharing.

This 'insider' position presented considerable advantages as well as risks in the research. Being considered as an insider meant that I had no problems pertaining to access to people and texts. It is as a result of the generous hospitality of many of the members of the Focolare, and their willingness actively to participate in my work, that this research has been possible. Moreover, it is only through the extensive contacts that I already had within the Focolare, and by nature of the fact that I am known within the context of the Economy of Sharing, that the research itself became a feasible prospect. Through these contacts I was able to gain unlimited, unsupervised access to all of the documentation relating to the Focolare and the Economy of Sharing at the Focolare Centre in Rome. I also had the opportunity to interview many of the leading figures within the Focolare. It would have been very difficult for someone without a prior involvement in the Focolare to gain the

[59] Without wishing to engage in a lengthy auto-narrative, it is worth pointing out several important influences which I would say have predisposed me to ideals of the Economy of Sharing. The first major influence in my life has been my upbringing in a Catholic family. Despite (or perhaps because of) the difficult situation which my family faced when I was young, I grew up with a strong faith as a Catholic and a deep conviction of God's loving presence, even in the tragic circumstances of life. My mother, in particular, taught me always to trust in God's providence – advice which has never failed in my own experience. The second influence was my education in a Jesuit College, which confirmed my Catholic faith, but also instilled in me a strong sense of social justice and a commitment to do what I can to help the 'poorest of the poor'. Finally, the influence of the Focolare 'socialised' me into this particular form of spirituality and way of life from a young age, but also gave me the opportunity to see how this ideal can be applied in many different geographical settings. One event which made a profound mark on my life was attending the World Conference for Religions and Peace in Kyoto, Japan to read the declaration for peace when I was 15 years old. This event gave me a deep sense of the universality of shared human values such as peace, altruism and love – and an enduring commitment to work for the promotion of those values. My work, therefore, reflects my own religious convictions, as one who believes in the profound social and economic relevance of Christianity. It also reflects my underlying desire to bring Christian, and in particular, certain versions of Catholic, ideas and practices into academic research.

confidences that I have gained in such a short time. This existing trust enabled me to access the various databases and archives, and, from a logistical point of view, to organise the fieldwork in Brazil and Milan within the given time scale and financial resources.

At the same time, through the course of my research, I became aware that this 'special' position presented me with particular problems. These difficulties came to the fore as my understanding of the Economy of Sharing changed through my research. It became clear to me from the outset that this was no 'ordinary' researcher/researched relationship (as read in research manuals) in which the researcher is depicted as a knowledgeable (or even ignorant) outsider with little or no prior knowledge of the research subjects. The first question that this raised was that of objectivity. I realised that it would be impossible for me to present an outsider account of the Focolare or the Economy of Sharing (without verging on schizophrenia) but also that an uncritical, hagiographic account of the Economy of Sharing was neither feasible nor desirable. As my research progressed, therefore, I developed a more critical stance on certain practices and ideas relating to the Economy of Sharing.

The issue of positionality, therefore, has not been an easy one for me to come to terms with in my research, especially in its early stages, as it is one that entails bringing together two very different facets of my personal and academic life. It has meant confronting the different intellectual, emotional and ethical demands and expectations that are placed on these facets and attempting to reconcile them. These issues have been in some ways heightened in the course of my research due to the increasingly prominent role that I have taken on as an academic researcher within the Focolare.[60] I have been invited on numerous occasions to speak at Focolare conferences,[61] and to write articles about my research within Focolare magazines with the consequence that my work has become widely known within the Focolare. Whilst the aims and objectives of these conferences were to promote the Economy of Sharing, as my understanding matured I became more aware of the potential difficulties and pitfalls in the idea and the way it was being practised. I recognised that I was becoming more critical as a researcher, but felt that my criticism may not be accepted within the Focolare.

[60] A role which led eventually to me being asked to be sit on the directorate of the consultative NGO (IBEW) which represents the Focolare at the UN Economic and Social Council.
[61] In April 1998, for example, I was part of a delegation which presented the key principles of the Economy of Sharing to the UN Commission on Sustainable Development in New York.

On several occasions the tension between this inside/outside position nearly led to my abandoning the research altogether. This was not due to the fact that I had actually uncovered some unethical, corrupt practices but more a question of what I *would* do if I uncovered something unpalatable. Would I be prepared to be intellectually honest if I did uncover a 'can of worms'? My own closeness to the people involved in the Economy of Sharing and personal feelings about the implications of such a scenario made me think hard about whether to proceed. This issue was compounded by the simple fact that I knew from the outset that the readership of this research would not be restricted to academia, but, simply due to the novelty of the topic covered, would be widely read within the Focolare as well.[62]

At the same time I recognised that this point of crisis could also be a creative point of departure. What I was experiencing was the convergence and conflict of different (religious, political, economic, academic) discourses which resulted in reconciling different and overlapping identities that I had assumed both within academia and within the Focolare Movement. I realised that one of the key difficulties with regard to my positionality was not so much a fear of retribution as an inner conflict regarding the underlying epistemologies of academic research and that of the Focolare as a distinctive worldview. The two perspectives seemed initially to be incompatible. Whereas current social research demands (or assumes) a critical (and often sceptical) attitude as a means of generating new knowledge, the Focolare spirituality (as will be discussed in subsequent chapters) also contains a specific theory of knowledge and methodology. In short, this demands mutual respect and reciprocity as the foundation of all knowledge. I became increasingly aware that this crisis of positionality was in fact central to my thesis.

I would therefore like to think of my positionality as an ongoing journey. Throughout the course of my research I have had to develop my own understanding of my position and to 'create' a particular position for myself within the Economy of Sharing. On the one hand I fully share in the aims and objectives of the Economy of Sharing - to contribute towards a fairer distribution of wealth and the promotion of a culture of giving. At the same time, however, I hold a critical perspective on the way that these spiritual ideals are applied within the realm of economic and social action. I recognise that this critical approach is not

[62] Around 300 copies of my undergraduate dissertation on the Economy of Sharing in Brazil (1996) were requested by people involved in the Focolare. Copies were also translated into Spanish and Portuguese.

incompatible to some degree with the underlying epistemology of the Focolare. It could provide a way of highlighting the similarities and differences between the two perspectives. Of course, within this critical interpretation there is still an underlying normative objective, which cannot and ought not to be avoided: that of hopefully rectifying any perceived problems so that the aims of the Economy of Sharing can be advanced.

Multiple language research

Another issue that I have had to face in the course of this research is that of carrying out research in several languages. In this case, the primary sources and many of the secondary sources are in Italian and Portuguese. This is an issue which has also been raised by geographers questioning the limitations, but also the creative possibilities, of translation in representing the intentions of the researched (Smith, 1996). This has presented problems at the fieldwork stage and the transcription and translation stages. As mentioned earlier, prior to my research I was already fluent in Italian, and through my research I became proficient in Portuguese. I was able to arrange and carry out the fieldwork in Italy and Brazil without the use of an interpreter.

At the fieldwork stage, the main problems resulted from the misinterpretation of questions, although the effect of this on the overall research is minimal. The main problems have resulted from the pressures of time and finances on the transcription and translation stages. Ideally, it would have been possible to transcribe all of the interviews in the original languages and then to translate them several times before reaching the final version that approximates the original meaning. In effect, most of the translations have been carried out directly from the original tape of the interview and not from the transcribed text. There are advantages in working in this manner: it is arguably easier to gauge subtle meanings from the tone of voice than from the printed text. So too is it easier to enter into the flow of the discussion from audio material than from text. Nevertheless, the question of time/efficiency was a key factor in this decision and not quality of research alone.

The question of linguistics, however, extends far beyond the simple issues of efficiency. Throughout my research I have become increasingly aware of the cultural constructs that are reflected in figures of speech - language is embedded in a way of thinking that is not directly translatable. There are distinctive languages and vocabularies in use within Catholic spirituality, for example, which do not always easily translate into or sit alongside academic vocabularies. In this respect, throughout the thesis as a researcher, I have also been engaged in interpreting materials from religious discourses to social scientific assessment. I have been constantly aware of this interpretive role and the need to be attentive to the danger that I could transfer my own understanding of the spirituality of the Focolare into the materials I was translating.

Interpretation

Given the range of research methods and the various sources of primary materials (see Table 2.1), it was crucial to find adequate ways of interpreting the data. Throughout the field work, one of my main concerns was that of giving voice to those who were participating in the Economy of Sharing, without simultaneously trying to impose a fixed academic viewpoint onto their understandings. The advantage of this was to open up interesting areas of discussion which I had not anticipated. On the other hand, it presented potential problems when it came to organising and interpreting the information received. The main difficulty was that the topics of discussion ranged widely, with some business directors, for example, focusing on more spiritual dimensions of the Economy of Sharing and others emphasising the more pragmatic aspects. I had to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of using formal analysis tools like computer packages such as *Ethnograph* against the task of manually trying to assimilate all of the information and interpret it. I decided that the benefits of using a computer package to analyse the information were outweighed by the technical difficulties. Much of the historical data was not available on computer and would have to have been typed up before analysis could take place. Given the work involved in transcription and translation, this task seemed outwith the scope of this research.

The alternative was to invent some kind of coding for the various sources, especially the transcripts of the interviews with the business leaders and the research diaries. An example of this coding technique is shown in Table 2.4. Once coded, according to key words, this information could then be sorted into substantive topics based on recurring themes and ideas. This approach seemed to work relatively well. I sorted out the various sections of interview transcripts according to key words. The coding revealed interesting patterns in the answers given by the business leaders. The answers could then be used to carry out comparisons between different businesses and different regions. Throughout the text of the thesis, these interviews and other original sources are referred to by their code name (e.g. CEOS01, 01SP). The code names refer to the different kinds of sources and/or location of the source. The codes are explained in Appendices 2 and 3.

Table 2.4. Example of coding technique in interview texts

CODE: RELIGION **keywords**: providence, religion, ideals, motivation, Jesus Christ, Gospel, mystical, spirituality, Eternal Father, God, Soul, Ideal of Unity

01M	*BERTAGNA FILATI*	p.2	**Providence:** "La provvidenza ci ha fatto incontrare una forza vendita che distribuiamo in Italia. Il mercato ee molto difficile percio i margini di guadagno sono molto ristretti e dobbiamo ancora a ritoccare qualcosa e vedere delle alternative."
02M	CUCCI	p.2 p.6	**They have not gone bust despite their attempts to operate honestly:** "It is also a sign to us that the **Eternal Father** is never outdone in generosity." **Motivation:** "There are many motivations. We have to work – in one way or another. We have chosen to work in a certain way... Then I understood that I have talents and that I have to use them well. If the **Eternal Father** has made me do a certain kind of job."
03M	FALEGNM	p.1	**Living the ideals in work:** "E allora il fatto di vivere il discorso **dell'Ideale** come individui nel senso di famiglia ma anche come singoli, ci ha chiamato anche a una maggiore responsabilita anche nel livello del lavoro. E per questo ci sembrava che **l'Ideale** non si puo vivere solo come persona e tralasciare il lavoro perche il lavoro e un momento essenziale della vita e **l'Ideale** va vissuto attraverso il lavoro."
04M	STELLA	p.3	**Motivation:** As I said before, it is not simply a **religious** question. It is not simply a case of because I believe in **Christ**, I do the Economy of Sharing. I believe that it is a need deep within man, whether he knows **Christ** or not. Man is made to be part of humanity and cannot exist as 'homo economicus' who works only for himself. The beauty of the Economy of Sharing – it is a sharing out which is participative. It is not that we are doing the Economy of Sharing only in the moment when we share out the profits- we are doing the Economy of Sharing also in our formation. This is the moment to spread a new way of looking at the economy. This can also have a religious dimension, but above all it is about human relationships. It is about human relationships in the sense that I believe that if I do not carry ahead a discourse that is collective, which takes the other into consideration.
05M	STILNOVO	p.1 p.2 p.5	**Motivation:** In practice, for us, because we do not have profits yet, perhaps we will begin this year, it means putting into practice the **Ideal of unity** and to bring this into the world of work. It means beginning to work with a new **spirit**, which is more than simply earning a living or gaining experience. We want to witness to the **gospel** in the work that we do. **Seeing Jesus:** It means that when they come in, or when we go to them, to love them right from the first instance. Above all, to see **Jesus**, a brother, in them, rather than a client who is going to buy something. **Irrational motivation:** When I heard the Economy of Sharing talked about I felt that this is the right way. I thought that I would like to work in that way, for that reason. Then you said that why this as opposed to the other charities. I would say that the structures, in the technical sense, of the movement guarantee that the money gets to the right places. It is a way which seems right to me. It is something of **God**.

Table 2.5 Special typeface settings used

Original source text (for indented quotes)	*"With the money received, the Committee would help, month by month and in secret, those families in the community in need, carrying this out this delicate task with the greatest charity and discretion"* [CEOS04].
Transcripts (of interviews)	"The biggest problem is the rate of taxes in place in the country. We still suffer a lot due to this because in order to keep the country stabilised and its economic plan working, one of the weapons that the government has used is that of raising taxes in order to attract external capital." [01SP: 1]
Research diary	`21.11.97 Today I have interviewed Tom from Luminosa. Tomorrow I will hopefully manage to get some more interviews. Mind you, the translating has exhausted me... I have to think of some questions for Vera.`

In the 'results' Chapters (3-9), I have tried as far as possible to allow the various people who were being interviewed to 'speak', rather than dominate with my own voice as a researcher (to the extent that this is possible). This text is interspersed with parts of my research diary relating to various practices and observations. An explanation of the various typeface settings used in these chapters is provided in Table 2.5. In these chapters, therefore, I stick very closely to the archival materials, transcripts and my diary in order to build up a detailed picture of the economic geographies of the Economy of Sharing. In the final two chapters this picture is then interpreted, in relation to the various theoretical and normative themes laid out in Chapter 1.

3. The Focolare Movement: an emerging 'global culture'

Once upon a time, there was no home, no matter how poor, without a hearth.
I would even say that the hearth was the symbol of home.
There, meals were prepared, you were warmed.
Seated at the fireside you rested your weary bones, chatted, told stories, dozed off.
You met with each other, with family and friends.
Those times have gone. It would be hard to bring them back completely.
But something can be done.[63]

Focolare, the Italian word for 'hearth'[64] is more than just the description of a physical space within a house. *Focolare* is the symbol of 'hearth and home', the most intimate image of family, love, security, warmth. Within Italian culture, it brings to mind the romantic image of a by-gone age, when poverty was widespread and life was harsh, but nothing could take away from the closeness of family and friends huddled together around an open fire, telling tales and sharing food in an atmosphere of serenity and peace. The *focolare* was a way of life, especially in northern Italy, where bitterly cold winters meant that the fireside was a welcome sight at the end of a hard day's work. At the *focolare*, all cares would disappear, and the darkness of the night would be dispelled by the caress of a mother, and the intense heat of the fire. It is by no coincidence that the spatially intimate *focolare* first became the nickname, and eventually the formal title, of the Focolare Movement, a global movement for the promotion of peace and unity in the world.[65]

The economic, cultural and historical geographies of the Focolare Movement are bound up in this image of the *focolare*. The Focolare Movement is a global movement, with universalising tendencies, as this chapter will demonstrate, but its ideals, aims and overall organisational structure all recall the ideal of the *focolare*, as the intimate place of sharing, and its dream is one of rekindling that intimacy of human friendship and family on a global

[63] *[Non c'era casa - una volta - per povera che fosse, che non avesse il focolare.*
Dirò di più: il focolare era il simbolo della casa.
Vi si preparava il cibo, ci si scaldava.
Seduti davanti al focolare ci si riposava dalla fatica, si chiacchierava, si raccontava, ci si appisolava.
Ci si incontrava, con famigliari e amici.Altri tempi. Difficile riproporli. Ma qualcosa del genere si può fare].
Taken from the poem 'Il Camino' by F. Braga (Braga, 2000). Printed with the author's permission.

[64] The Harrap's Shorter Italian Dictionary (1989) offers four meanings to the word *focolare:* 'hearth', 'fireside', 'furnace', and 'home'.

[65] General references to the Focolare's aims and objectives are taken from the Focolare Movement's website (Focolare, 2000a).

scale. The Focolare Movement was founded by Chiara Lubich[66] and her friends in the 1940s. The aim of the Movement right from the start was to bring about universal brother and sisterhood based on solidarity and mutual respect. This was underlined by Lubich in a recent address to the Council of Europe: "We would have to live for a very high ideal: to bring about unity among all people, considered as brothers and sisters."[67] It does not propose a new religion, as the way to bring this about, but the renewal of the basic principle of the 'golden rule' 'Do to others what you would like them to do to you', underpinning many world religions (UNESCO, 1995: 36). The Focolare initially started in Italy within the Catholic Church, but has spread into all of the main Christian denominations and to other religions, uniting people in a common commitment to promoting peace and justice in the world [FOC19:1]. It has developed an increasingly public profile, particularly in Italy and Brazil, where Chiara Lubich has received many awards for her work for human rights.

The various initiatives and projects of the Focolare Movement all share one principal aim and objective: promoting greater unity within the human family at all levels, calling for social integration between races, between rich and poor, between different sexes, different age groups, different political groups and so on. The Focolare spirit and message rests on the belief that greater social integration will not come about through the action of governments alone – from the top down. It will come about, above all, through the transformation of interpersonal relationships between individuals and groups, from the revival of those kinds of caring relationships found within the *focolare*. To this end, over the years, the Focolare has developed initiatives and projects geared at the promotion of a humanistic cultural vision rooted in human values such as peace, solidarity, respect and sharing, which it sees as necessary to build a more caring and united world [FOC23; FOC24].

The Focolare, however, like other socio-religious movements, has not been without its critics. Within the 1990s, controversy was sparked over certain aspects of the Focolare and other movements originating within the Catholic Church, through the publication of an apostate, based on a testimony of life within the Focolare (Urquhart, 1995). In his book,

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[66] A profile of Chiara Lubich for her work is provided in Appendix 1. For an overview of the life and work of Chiara Lubich see, for example, Gallagher (1997).
[67] Chiara Lubich to the Council of Europe on the occasion of the European Human Rights Prize, Strasbourg, 22nd September 1998.

Urquhart offers a personal view of life in the Focolare in the 1970s, and the circumstances leading up to his subsequent choice to leave the movement.[68] On a wider scale, Urquhart uses this book to make the claim that the current Pope has backed the emergence of such movements within the Catholic Church as a way of promoting his own 'ultra-traditionalist' agenda within the Vatican. Urquart's claim, however, has been disputed due to the fact that he groups together the most varied group of movements under this term without specifying what he intends by 'ultra-traditionalist'.[69] Whereas some of these movements are arguably very traditionalist in nature, others, such as the Focolare have been termed as "protagonists" (Secondin, 1991) in the creation of a forward thinking Church which is actively engaged in social and political action. In subsequent broadsheet articles, Urquhart has reflected on the role of women, claiming that Chiara Lubich is the most powerful woman in the Catholic Church today (1999a) and on the political consequences (on issues such as abortion and birth control) that have resulted from greater collaboration between different religious traditions, such as the kind promoted by the Focolare (Urquhart, 1999b). Urquhart's views have to be given critical consideration, especially his comments regarding the underlying Catholic perspective within the Focolare's development work.

Historical geographies of the Focolare

The origins of the Focolare can be traced back to the city of Trent, Italy, during the Second World War (Gallagher, 1997). The birthplace of the Focolare in the city of Trent is highly symbolic. Trent sits at the north eastern extremity of the Italian peninsula, in the region of Trentino-Alto Adige, in the shadow of the Dolomite mountains. In the course of its history, Trent has experienced many invasions from the Slavic nations and also from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Its position makes it a natural meeting point for the peoples of east and western Europe, and between the southern Mediterranean peoples as well as the Germanic

[68] Urquhart lived in a Focolare house in Britain for nine years and left the movement as the result of personal difficulties with life as a celibate member of the Focolare community. His reasons for rejecting the movement were interpreted by Moynihan, editor of 'Inside the Vatican' as follows: "It is traditional Christian spirituality that seems to be under attack here... silence, fasting, cutting oneself off from one's former friends and associates to devote oneself to God, labouring to bring the Gospel to the ends of the earth, all of these behaviours are seen as fanatical, irrational, cult-like. But these are behaviours that Catholics honour and praise in St. Benedict, St. Francis of Assisi and St Thomas More" (In Usher, 1997).

[69] Within this book he cites three movements as ultra-traditionalist: Focolare, Neo-Catecumenate and Opus Dei. These three groups, though sharing a common perspective rooted in orthodox Catholic teachings (presumably this is what Urquart terms as ultra-traditional), have very different specific aims and means of carrying these out. Some of these are very traditional, in the case of Opus Dei, for example, based on a very rigorous individual spirituality and open exclusively to Catholics. The Neo-Catecumenate movements, on the other hand, have their roots in charismatic traditions, in many ways similar to Pentecostal traditions. Neither does the Focolare, as will be seen from this thesis, fit neatly into the 'traditionalist' category, especially on account of its openness to people of other religions.

north. It also makes it a region of potential conflict over disputed territory.

The symbolism of the birth of the Focolare in the city, however, reaches far beyond its function as a melting pot in the heart of Europe. Within Christianity, Trent is historically one of the most contentious geographical symbols, as the place where the divisions of the Reformation were set in stone during the sixteenth century. At the time when the Reformation was happening in the northern European nations, the nineteenth ecumenical council opened at Trent on 13th December, 1545, and lasted for eighteen years. Its main object was the definitive determination of the doctrines of the Church in answer to the heresies of the Protestants (Knight, 2000).[70] Trent, therefore, became the symbol of the failures of Christianity to overcome the divisions which had arisen within it.

The political, economic and human cost of such divisions were once more played out in the city of Trent during the Second World War. Historians point to the perpetuation of the 'brutal friendship' between Mussolini and Hitler which proved fatal to Italian fascism. As Italian troops were humiliated in Greece and Africa and the fortunes of the War swung in favour of the Allies (Ginsborg, 1990: 10). Within Italy this change of fortunes led to the aerial bombardment of the country by the allies, and the allied invasion of Sicily in the summer of 1943. The allies made their way north, but it was to be several months before the most northern extremities of the country were to be freed. In the north, Nazi rule prevailed,[71] and the underground resistance movement[72] came into being, especially in the mountains surrounding the city of Trent. Yet the partisans, consisting of many independent bands, were unable to put up any real resistance to the Nazis and the casualty rate was extremely high. The consequences of the resistance movement on the north were horrific, leading to brutal reprisals: "partisans and their sympathisers were treated with the utmost savagery by the Nazis and the blackshirt troops of the Republic of Saló. In September 1943, the Germans committed their first atrocity against the civilian population, reducing

[70] The choice of Trent as a location for this meeting was itself highly contentious: "On 28 November, 1518, Luther had appealed from the pope to a general council because he was convinced that he would be condemned at Rome for his heretical doctrines ... Owing to the feeling prevalent in Germany the demand was very dangerous. Rome positively rejected the German national council, but did not absolutely object to holding a general council. Emperor Charles V forbade the national council, but notified Clement VII through his ambassadors that he considered the calling of a general council expedient and proposed the city of Trent as the place of assembly" *The Catholic Encyclopaedia, Volume XV* (Online Edition Knight, 2000).
[71] This came into effect through Mussolini's puppet government at Saló on the shores of Lake Garda. From there, he acted as a figurehead for the Germans, who gave him orders to round up as many Italian Jews as possible for deportation to extermination camps.
[72] The resistance movement consisted of an 'unholy' alliance of anti-fascists made up of communists, socialists and Catholic opposition to Mussolini and Hitler (Grassi, 1993).

the village of Boves in Piedmont to ashes, burning alive many of its inhabitants" (Ginsborg, 1990: 17). The prolonged warfare, moreover, had devastating consequences on the industrial and agricultural infrastructure of the country, leading to widespread poverty and near starvation, especially in the north of the country. Life in the north of Italy in the 1940s, therefore, was characterised by dire poverty and brutality, and the shadow of suspicion of neighbours and friends, leading to the destruction of many communities.

It was against this backdrop that the Focolare emerged in the city of Trent, which was bombed continuously throughout the summer of 1943. Chiara Lubich and her companions were caught up in the tragic circumstances of war on a personal level, through the destruction of their homes and the death of friends and family.[73] Witnessing the futility of the war, they decided together to combat the hatred and division through beginning to live out the Christian message of concern for others in a radical way, starting among themselves. They had no intentions of starting a movement, but through their actions a small community came into being (Robertson, 1978). This community was dedicated, above all, to relieving the sufferings of those who were hit by the war.

Table 3.1 Geographical distribution of the Focolare Movement, 1949

Place	Participants
Trent	597
Trentine valley	1575
Roveretto	289
Rome	308
Rest of Italy	611
Outside Italy	30
Total	**3520**

Source:[FOC04]

The first data relating to the geographical spread of the Focolare dates from 1949 (see Table 3.1) when Chiara Lubich was asked to provide the local bishop, Monsignor Ferrari, with an account of the Movement [FOC04]. It shows that even in 1949 there were members of the Focolare outside Italy, although the vast majority of members were within the north of Italy. Since then, the Focolare has expanded both geographically (Table 3.2, Figure 3.1) and in terms of the kinds of involvement. Until recently, the Focolare has spread almost exclusively through personal contacts rather than by public communications.

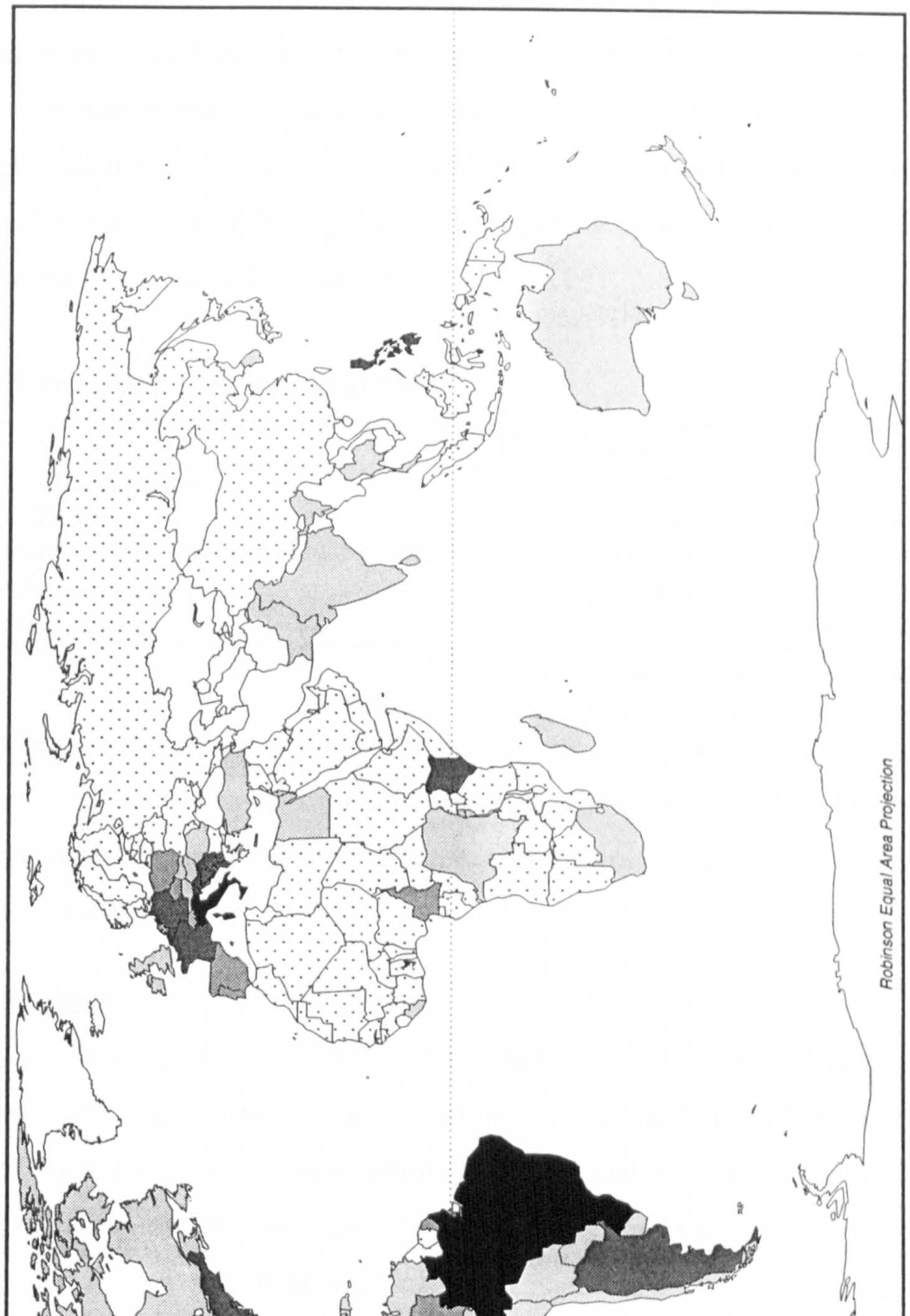
[73] On 13th May, 1943, the home of the Lubich family was destroyed and the family had to take refuge in the mountains (Lubich, 1987).

Since the 1940s, the Focolare has become increasingly international. The statistics for 1999 (Table 3.2) show this clearly. Figure 3.1 also shows that even although the Movement is now 'global', there are nonetheless several very strong concentrations of development for the Focolare: Italy, Brazil, Argentina, and the Philippines. These areas stand out as countries in which the Focolare is numerically most developed. It is interesting to note at this stage that these are also countries in which there is a very high proportion of Catholics in the population. In Italy this figure is around 98%, in Brazil around 70% and in the Philippines around 95% (CIA, 1999). At the same time, there are also relatively high numbers of people in Eastern European countries participating in the Focolare. It is interesting to note that the number of members in the Focolare is now almost exactly the same in Latin America as in Western Europe.

Table 3.2 Geographical distribution of the Focolare Movement, 1999

Region	Participants
Western Europe	1,063,417
Eastern Europe, Central Asia	369,792
Middle East and North Africa	190,449
Sub-Saharan Africa	337,625
Central/South America	1,067,421
North America	172,297
South Asia	412,742
Australia	19,234
Total	**3,632,977**

Source: Focolare Centre, Rome, 1999



Source: Focolare Centre, Rome, 2000.

Figure 3.1 Geographical Distribution of the Focolare Movement 1999

The distribution of the people involved in the Focolare according to age groups and sectors is provided in Table 3.3 below. This table shows that the 'core members' are a small proportion of the actual number of people participating in the Focolare in some manner. The core members of the various movements listed below refer to all those who to some extent have taken on a regular commitment to participate and to co-ordinate activities. 'Adherents' refers to all of those people who regularly participate in Focolare events and apparently share its aims and objectives.

Table 3.3 Focolare membership 1999

Branch	Core members	Adherents
Members in Focolare houses	6,240	--
Youth (under 30)	60,500	1,192,077
New Humanity, New Families, New Parishes	41,294	2,254,966
Priests/bishops/religious	3,000	77,000
Focolare (as a whole)	**108,034**	**3,524,043**

Source: Focolare Centre, Rome, 1999

Although the purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the Focolare rather than an exhaustive account of its diffusion, the selection of several examples of the spread of the Movement in Brazil and in Eastern Europe exemplifies some aspects of its globalising historical geography.[74]

Arrival in Brazil

The Focolare Movement arrived in Brazil almost by chance in 1959. A monk from Recife had met some members of the Movement whilst on a trip to Italy in 1957. On his return to Brazil he wished to spread this new vitality, showing that the Gospel could bring about an effective social revolution: one based on dialogue and understanding rather than conflict and hatred. Within a few months, this new vitality became collective action among the rich and poor. The Movement set up its roots in *Ilhâ do Inferno* [Island of the Inferno] (Calliari, 1991), a notorious shantytown in Recife. Several people gave up their modest standard of living to live in the shantytown. Their motive was simple: to offer to the people there an example of Christian love that was credible and real. In order to do this they realised that they had to take on the conditions of the others fully, without holding back anything for themselves. So they too set up their own shack similar to that of the other residents and set about integrating themselves into the community. It was not an easy task: "There was

[74] More detailed accounts of the spread of the Focolare can be found in biographies of Chiara Lubich and other publications by Cittá Nuova.

suspicion on the part of the locals: they could not understand why these people had come to live with them. They were defiant of any attempts to help them better their situation. Yet the local community did gradually begin to accept them because of the practical help that they offered and their shack became a centre where everyone was welcome, regardless of who they were" [01RE]. People began to talk to one another and began to share ideas, talents and material goods.

The atmosphere of solidarity brought by the Focolare people was accepted by the local community, and situations began to change throughout the shantytown. Those who lived there began to bring about small changes in a spirit of co-operation: removing garbage heaps and digging trenches [01RE]. They formed a credit union and through the proceeds set up a brick factory, AMT. One resident, who is eighty years old, and completely paralysed, said: "I have lived here for a long time ... Before the Movement came my situation was dire. With the help of the community I have been able to rebuild my house" [05RE]. Eventually, they formed an association of shantytown dwellers and over time were able to make demands to the authorities for the basic infrastructure to serve the area [02RE; 03RE]. The spirit of co-operation became the distinguishing feature of the shantytown, so much so that they changed its name to *Ilhâ Santa Teresinha* [Island of St. Teresa]. Forty years on, Santa Teresinha now has a school, health centre, crèche, sewing workshop, and brick factory, amongst other amenities. The Focolare community is still present in the shantytown, but no longer as an 'outside' presence. Most of those who co-ordinate the various community projects, as in many of the Focolare's initiatives of this kind, are members of the Focolare who come from the shantytown itself.

Since the 1950s, the Focolare has spread all over Brazil, almost entirely through chance meetings and personal contacts. Wherever it arrived, the same pattern of change has generally occurred; the number of social welfare projects run by members of the Movement has now reached over one hundred (Focolare, 1994). The Focolare did not restrict itself to changing the situation of the poor. Its message of solidarity was just as relevant (if not more so) to other social classes. Consequently, people from the most diverse backgrounds and from the most different of places began to become part of the same 'family', united by a common desire to bring about a social revolution based on solidarity, dialogue and love. Those who have money and resources put them freely at the service of the poor, bringing about a 'gift relationship' in which those who give and those who receive are respected on equal terms.

Beyond the Iron Curtain

It was only in 1989 when the Berlin Wall came down that the extent of the Focolare Movement in Eastern Europe became widely known. The Focolare had been present in Poland and other Eastern European countries since the 1950s working alongside Church organisations undercover – or so they thought. In 1991, when many of the Stazi documents were released in Ex-DDR, it became apparent that the police had detailed information about the activities of the Focolare dating back to the arrival of the first members in 1958 at the Leipzig fair (Gallagher, 1997: 120). Two of the founding members of the Focolare went to the fair as tourists and met with some friends of the Movement there, amongst whom, was Fr. Hans Lubsczyk, a priest whom some Focolare members had met in Munster the previous year. In the two years that followed they made several trips to Berlin with Chiara Lubich, always under the auspices of tourism. Then, on 13th May 1961, two of them, Enzo Fondi and Giuseppe Santanche, took up positions in St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Leipzig. In the first few months they lay low, trying not to attract attention to themselves nor to the numerous friends they already had through the movement.

In August that year, as East Germany faced a mass exodus, the Berlin Wall was constructed to prevent others leaving. More Focolare people decided to try to enter the country in order to provide humanitarian assistance. Suspicious of their motives, they were held in a detention centre at the border by the police and interrogated for a week. Eventually they were allowed in but were kept under surveillance by secret police. Over the years that followed the Movement spread into all of the Eastern European countries almost entirely by example and by word of mouth. The Movement could not hold any large scale meetings, but the people in the communities met in each other's houses and occasionally arranged holidays together in the mountains.

Despite this intense surveillance, the extent of which only became apparent in 1989 after the fall of the Berlin Wall when Stazi documents were released, the Focolare managed to get off the ground in Eastern Europe. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the number of people participating in the Focolare grew, and communications between the Focolare in the East and West were kept open throughout. The 'underground' nature of the Focolare's activities in Eastern Europe, in many ways reflects the hidden, underground geographies of social movements, which has been written about within human geography (Routledge, 1992). Within the context of the communist regimes, the Focolare was resisting the domination of the state in the everyday life of people and articulating an 'alternative'.

Current Focolare activities

The activities of the Focolare, although sharing a common aim, are very diverse. The promotion of greater social integration can take place at various levels and in innumerable ways. The range of activities which have emerged within the Focolare reflects this variety. A summary of the main activities of the Focolare in the 1990s is provided in Table 3.4 on the next page. On the one hand, there are social and economic development initiatives, which promote the integration of people at a grassroots level. Such projects are regarded primarily as a way of overcoming the barriers between rich and poor. The Focolare, however, also works increasingly on a political level, through the *Movimento per l'Unità* [Movement for Unity]. Through this initiative, which has taken off in Italy, Brazil and Hungary in particular, politicians of different political traditions aim to work for the promotion of greater unity within their own party and between parties, based on the promotion of human rights. The Focolare has resisted the temptation to form its own political party (or influencing the way people vote), through stressing that the values of greater social justice and human rights ought to be stressed within different parties.[75]

The Focolare, however, also increaslingly works on a cultural level to promote the values for which it stands. This is carried out at the level of dissemination of ideas through the network of 'New City' publishers throughout the world, as well as two media centres in Italy and Brazil. It is also carried out, on a more subtle level, through the development of music, dance and artists groups through which the Focolare's message of unity can reach new audiences.

[75] The Italian politician, Igino Giordani, had a great influence in the development of the political dimension of the Focolare Movement (Robertson, 1989). Prior to meeting the Focolare Movement in 1948, Giordani was a prolific writer on such topics as the social message of the Gospel and the relationship between Church and State. Giordani was actively involved in the creation of the *Democrazia Cristiana*, was a close friend and colleague of De Gasperi: "Giordani gave the Party its basic principles and De Gasperi gave it its policy" Robertson (1989: 114). This combination of principles and policy, however, did not always work and on many occasions De Gasperi and Giordani differed. Whereas De Gasperi was regarded as a man of action, ready to adapt his ideology to fit the situation, Giordani came to be regarded as a somewhat 'ingenuous' person within the Party as a result of his insistence on definite moral values (Robertson, 1989: 115). Although Giordani died in 1980, the strain between ideal and practice in public life, which he experienced first hand, of the way values can be subsumed within 'Party' structures and ideologies has had a strong influence on the way the Focolare regards political life.

Table 3.4 Main sectors of Focolare activities in the 1990s

Sector	*Nature of Activity*
Social and Economic development	• 1000 development projects run by Azione per un Mondo Unito (AMU), New Humanity (NH), and the United World Fund (UWF). • Adoptions at a Distance (AD), sponsoring around 15,000 children • Economy of Sharing project (761 businesses) • School of Social and Political Formation, Araceli Brazil
Publishing and Communications	• 27 publishing houses in 4 continents publishing around 300 titles p.a. • 37 editions of Cittá Nuova magazine in 23 languages with subscriptions of around 200,000 • 2 multi-media communications centres (Italy and Brazil) • Regular world-wide TV coverage of large scale events (e.g. Genfest)
Cultural Activities	• International Groups (theatre, music, dance)- *Gen Rosso* and *Gen Verde* • Centres for artistic excellence e.g. *Centro Ave*, Loppiano; Casa Clara, Buenos Aires • Conferences for artists • Film industry study group in Hollywood • Incontri Romani Tourism Group in Rome
Political activities	• Cross party group called *Movimento per l'Unitá* working in 7 countries to promote greater co-operation in favour of human rights • Represented at UN ECO/SOC by New Humanity, which has Category 2 consultative status
Religious formation	• Publication of 'Word of Life' commentary each month. Estimated distribution: 3,000 000 copies. • Courses (from 1 day – 1 year) in various aspects of spiritual formation in various Focolare Centres and Mariapolis Centre, Rome • Dialogue with around 300 Christian churches Centro Uno centre for Ecumenical dialogue • Inter-religious dialogue including the Centre for Buddhist Dialogue in the Philippines • Istituto Mistici Corporis College, Loppiano

Source: Focolare Information Service, Rome, 1997

New Humanity

Ever since the start of the Focolare, there has been a great emphasis on translating the spiritual vision of the Movement into practical action in favour of those in need, as will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 4. Initially, the focus of the Focolare was to help those in need within the immediate community and to the poor in the local area of Trent during.the Second World War. Through doing this, they expanded out their ideal of hearth to an ever greater number of people. As the Focolare has spread, the main challenge it has faced is that of attending to the needs of a vast and constantly changing international community, whilst retaining that intimacy of the hearth. The concerns of the Movement have led to the multiplication of local initiatives in favour of social integration and the eradication of poverty. As well as these micro-projects, there has been the development of internationally recognised NGOs.[76] These help to secure the long-term funding of the various projects, forming an institutional framework that is transparent and accountable, through which the projects can receive private and government finance. A summary of some of the main projects run by these NGOs and funds is provided in Table 3.5 below. Several examples of the most prominent social projects are highlighted in the vignettes.

Table 3.5 Projects promoted and sponsored by Focolare NGOs

Project Name	Nature of Project	Location	Main Sponsors
Bairro do Carmo	Multi-sectoral: health centre, primary school, co-operative, church, bakery, sewing workshop	Sao Roque BRAZIL	AMU NH AD
Bukas Palad	Multi-sectoral: health centre, social services, carpentry workshop	Manila, Cebu PHILIPPINES	NH AD
Fontem	Multi-sectoral: hospital, primary school, college, social services	Fontem CAMEROON	AMU NH
Las Aguilas	Social Centre and sports facilities for young people	Mexico City MEXICO	AMU
Magnificat	Multi-sectoral: agricultural, artisan and social services (school, doctor) project	Pernambuco BRAZIL	AMU NH
Santa Maria di Catamarca	artisan workshop (indigenous textiles workshop)	Santa Maria di Catamarca ARGENTINA	AMU UWF
Santa Teresinha	Multi-sectoral: health centre, primary school, nutrition centre, day care centre, building project, social work	Recife BRAZIL	AMU AD
Adoptions at a Distance	Monthly donation of money to support a named child in a developing country with basic needs	various	AD
Bobo Dioulasso	Multi-sectoral: literacy project, health education, centre for disabled people, Centre for the promotion of women, mill,	Bobo Dioulasso BURKINO FASO	AMU NH
Professional skills project	Agricultural and mechanical formation	Guatemala City GUATEMALA	AMU
Scholarships	Provision of scholarships for secondary education and university for disadvantaged young people	POLAND, CROATIA, SERBIA, RUSSIA, BULGARIA, ALBANIA, PHILIPPINES MADAGASCAR	AMU UWF
Tailor workshop	Provision of machinery for sewing workshop	Chiguayante CHILE	AMU
Thika	Agricultural co-operative	Thika KENYA	AMU
Youth.Centre	Social centre for young people	Urpay PERU	AMU

[76]The Focolare runs around 1000 social projects mainly under the auspices of the NGOs New Humanity (Category 2 consultative status in the UN Economic and Social Council since 1985) and Azione per un Mondo Unito (AMU - recognised by the Italian Government in 1987).

The projects run by the Focolare are all multi-faceted and based on the same holistic vision. Responsibility for these projects is increasingly in the hands of local people with minimum support from others outside. Those who are from outside normally act as facilitators rather than directors of the projects. One example of this is the social development project *Bukas Palad* which is described in Figure 3.2 below. This vision seeks to put the needs of the individual person at the centre, balancing this need for a personal approach with the needs of the wider community and limited resources. It is a vision which is incorporated into the statutes of AMU: "The inspiration for AMU comes from the spirituality of the Focolare Movement and proposes to co-operate in the development of countries and peoples, with special reference to developing countries and to spread a culture of dialogue between peoples" (Art. 2, AMU Statute). The basis of all of the development projects which AMU undertakes is "dialogue and reciprocal listening in order to establish the needs of the local communities with which it is in contact so as to define objectives and methods of the programmes together." In this process, the most important factor is respect for the specific cultural and social circumstances in which the communities exist. Through respect, the members of the local communities are encouraged to participate in the decision making process and become protagonists in their development.

Figure 3.2 Bukas Palad, Manila

Against a backdrop of widespread poverty and an immense gap between the few rich people and the great number of poor people, during the particularly difficult period of 1983 in the Philippines, Bukas Palad came into being in Pasay City, Metro Manila. Faced with the very serious problems, the founding members of Bukas Palad looked at the model of the first Christian community, of whom it was written: 'Look how they love one another' and because of this love there was no-one in need. The project started through their wish to make the problems of the other their own: "This child is malnourished. He is my own." As a result, a number of projects were started which responded to the needs of the local community. Among these were a Nutrition Programme, Job Placement Bureau, Loans Programme, Drop-in Resource Centres as well as a well developed medical clinic offering specialist care in many areas. There are also two pre-schools for 2-6 year olds enrolling 400 children. There are currently 61 full-time staff members, 81% of whom are from the local community. The local community are taking more and more of the responsibility for Bukas Palad into their own hands. 3500 people are currently in regular contact with the project in Manila. Nine subsidiary projects have been started in other regions of the Philippines mainly by former workers.

Funding for Bukas Palad was originally based on donations from members of the Focolare in Europe. The project receives very limited government support and still relies heavily on outside private donations for the majority of its work.

Source: Bukas Palad Promotional Leaflet, 1993

The Focolare carries out work specifically concerned with the situation of families in the world and working together with families in order to build unity within families. It mainly works in small local groups in different countries, but periodically large-scale events are organised in order to highlight different aspects of the work being done. In 1992, for example, the *Family Fest* took place in Rome with 16,000 people participating from eighty countries. At this event an initiative known as 'Adoptions at a Distance' was launched in order to enable individuals to sponsor children in developing countries. An example of one of the projects set up and administered through the scheme is provided in Figure 3.3 below.

Figure 3.3 AACA Recife, Adoptions at a Distance

The AACA Recife Project is located in one of the most deprived areas of the city of Recife. The shanty town with an estimated population of around 500,000 was formerly known as the 'Island of Hell' as a result of the high levels of violence and misery. It is an area which, until recently, had no running water, no sanitation or basic facilities for the education of children.

The Focolare Movement started work in the shanty town in 1964 at a time when no-one would venture near the area as a result of the hostility to outsiders. Through involving the local community in programmes of house building and through generating outside support, the Focolare has managed to drastically improve the living conditions of the shanty town dwellers in recent years.

Funding for the various projects has mainly come from the 'Adoptions at a Distance' campaign which was launched by the New Families Movement all over the world. One of the most critical projects funded by this scheme is AACA, a centre for children who come from very unstable family backgrounds. The centre provides a source of regular meals and basic education for the children as well as social activities essential for integration into society. Without this vital service, many of these children would be forced into a vicious spiral of poverty, drugs, and prostitution. Many of them would join the thousands of Brazilian children living on the streets of the large cities.

Source: Interview with AACA project co-ordinator, Recife, 1995

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the role of the Focolare within the context of such issues as family planning has been criticised as displaying 'ultra-conservative' tendencies (Urquhart, 1999b). Urquhart makes these claims based on emergence of a religious front against contraception and other forms of birth control at events such as the World Congress of Families.[77] The emergence of such a 'united' front, he argues, is partly a result of the Focolare's work over the years. The link between the Focolare's work and the conference, however, is a tenuous one since the vast majority of the Focolare's work is in micro-projects, such as the kind cited above, and not at a political level. Nevertheless, since the Focolare's roots are Catholic and its work 'on the ground' is within prominently Catholic countries, it has tended to adopt a perspective on such matters which is in keeping

[77] This UN conference was held in Geneva on the 11-12 November 1999.

with such traditions.

Youth for a United World

The young people who are involved in the Focolare set up several youth movements in the 1960s ('Gen') and subsequently in the 1980s ('Youth for a United World' and 'Teens for Unity') which involve children and young people from 2-30 years. Initially, the Gen Movement was a reaction to the student revolutions in 1967 in Italy and France [FOC34]. The young people who were part of the Focolare wanted to propose a different kind of revolution which was not based on protest alone, but on putting into practice the principle of 'love thy neighbour' in a radical way.

The initial group of young people who participated in this Movement were Christians, but in the 1980s this message was widened out to any young people who wished to collaborate in building a united world, regardless of religious convictions [FOC32]. They became involved in numerous initiatives and short-term projects that are designed to help break down barriers of wealth and poverty, race, religious prejudice, sex or age. Youth for a United World promotes initiatives on a local level, but also co-ordinates global action, such as a petition for a moratorium on the death penalty and 'Time Out', a daily minute's silence to reflect and/or pray for peace. One of the most significant developments in the 1990s has been the start of the *United World Fund* [FOC33]. Through this fund, young people create the possibility for disadvantaged young people to go through university and to start other micro-projects in their local areas which help to promote peace and unity.

Ecumenical dialogue

From the start of the Focolare, Chiara Lubich was convinced of the universal relevance of the message which herself and her friends had adopted [FOC16]. The question of ecumenism, however, only arose within the Movement in the 1950s, as a result some Lutheran sisters visited one of the summer gatherings of the Focolare in the Dolomites. Despite the difficult ecumenical situation of the time, they invited Chiara Lubich to Darmstadt in Germany to speak to a group of their sisters about her spiritual experience. As a result of this first meeting, the Focolare began to enter into the Lutheran Church (Reindl, 1992). With regards to the Anglican Church, Chiara Lubich became a close friend of the Anglican Observer at the Second Vatican Council, Archdeacon Bernard Pawley. She met him for the first time on 19 May 1961. From that meeting, the Archdeacon arranged for a group of Anglican clergy to visit the Focolare centre in Rome in 1964 (Back, 1988). This meeting was to become an annual event and has since expanded to involve members of over 300 Churches who wish to witness their unity in love and their Christian faith. Chiara Lubich also played an instrumental role in fostering closer relations between Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenonagoras of Constantinople in the 1960s and 1970s (Gallagher, 1997: 133). The Focolare has also established a centre for Christian unity in Rome, *Centro Uno,* which organises meetings and carries out research on various issues regarding the unity of the Churches.

Whilst Chiara Lubich, as a charismatic leader has played an important personal role in fostering greater understanding between Church leaders from different traditions, the emphasis of the Focolare's work remains amongst the ordinary lay members of different Churches. Through fostering a greater communion amongst people of different Christian traditions, the Focolare has given rise to a new form of dialogue known as the 'dialogue of the people' [FOC37]. Such dialogue, which is borne out in carrying out shared activities rather than discussions, emphasises what is shared by the various traditions and arguably forms an indispensable foundation for theological dialogue (Back, 1988).

Likewise, the question of the involvement of other religions within the Focolare became relevant when the Movement began to spread into countries such as Japan and the Middle East, where Christianity is a minority religion. In such countries, religious prejudice and intolerance can be the cause of much unrest and hatred. Much of this intolerance is based on the fear that others (of a different religion) wish to impose their vision of the world and their truths onto ideas and practices that are regarded as sacred. Authentic dialogue, on the other hand, has to be free from this fear of an ulterior motive and rooted in a belief that, no matter what the differences separating the various religious traditions, there is always common ground. For this reason, the Focolare has been working since the 1980s to create dialogue between people of different religious traditions. In 1997, Chiara Lubich was appointed an Honorary President of the World Council for Religions and Peace. At the 1999 conference in Amman, she was invited to give the closing address of the meeting, in which she underlined the shared values which underpin all of the world religions and the need to stress these in a common commitment to work for peace.

The basis of this dialogue is a shared commitment to put into practice the 'golden rule' which is at the heart of many of the great traditions – 'do to others what you would like them to do to you; do not do to others what you would not like them to do to you'

[FOC21]. The dialogue which the Focolare brings about, as with the other forms of social action, emerges from the local circumstances in which the people of the Focolare find themselves. Thus, whereas dialogue between Jewish and Christian communities may be prominent in some areas, such as in Israel and Argentina, in other areas, such as in Thailand and Japan, there is a strong relationship between Buddhist and Christian communities. For several years the Focolare has been working in collaboration with other groups within different religious traditions in order to foster greater understanding and co-operation in favour of the poor. One of the earliest contacts that the Focolare had with other religious groups was with the Buddhist *Risse Koshe Kai* Movement in Japan. In 1980 the then leader of the Movement, Nikkio Niwano, invited Chiara Lubich to address 10,000 Buddhist followers in the Golden Temple. This initial step has led to years of mutual collaboration between the two Movements, both of which are global. Collaboration with Buddhism in Thailand has led to the development of a model town of the Movement in Chang Mai, in which there will be both a Buddhist temple and a Christian church.

One particularly significant event in the history of the Focolare's inter-religious dialogue took place on 18th May 1997 Chiara Lubich was invited by Warith Deen Mohammed, the Imam of the Malcom X mosque in Harlem, New York, to address his congregation. In her address to over 3000 Muslims and Christians she stressed the need to work together to promote the human values which are shared by Christianity and Islam and to combat any form of fundamentalism [FOC18]. This meeting, which was reported in the Muslim press as 'historic' (Lateef & Lateef, 1997), has led to on going collaboration within the Focolare between people of Christian and Muslim traditions which has been mutually enriching. Within the Focolare there are now regular meetings for Muslims who wish to deepen the Focolare's spirituality within the Islamic tradition and from an Islamic perspective. Such open statements of unity between leaders of different religions has also been fiercely opposed by those who take a more fundamentalist stance on both sides.[78] Despite this opposition, Chiara Lubich is convinced that *this* kind of dialogue is the only way to reach a deeper awareness and understanding of the values that can lead to a more peaceful society.

[78] Warith Deen Mohammed has had several attempts made on his life and any public appearances, such as his presence at the Focolare town of Luminosa in 1998, always require heavy security.

Organisational structures

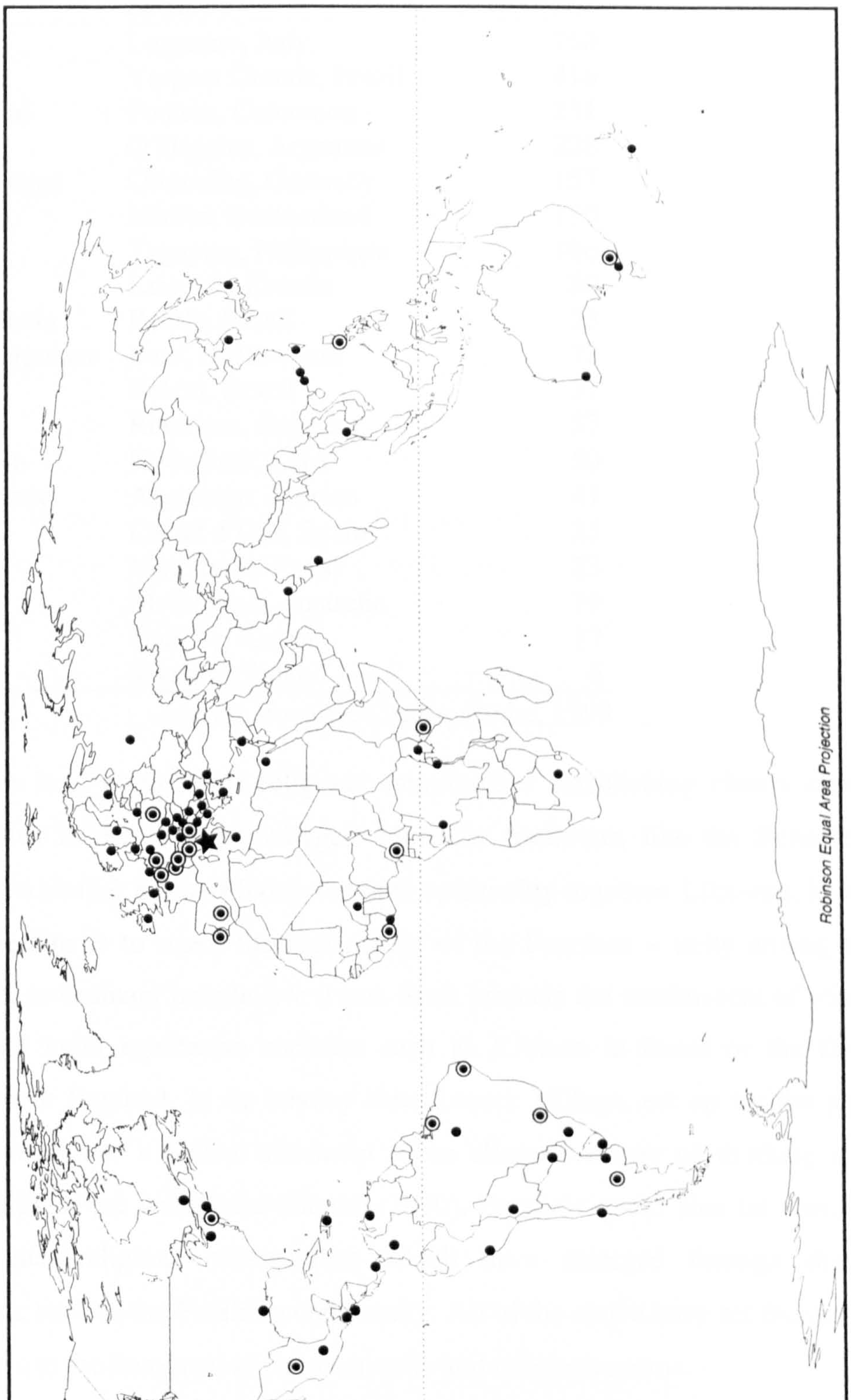
There are three main structures shared by all of the various branches and groups of the Focolare: the local Focolare centres, the model towns and the global Focolare Centre in Rome. The geographical distribution of the various Focolare organisational structures is shown in Figure 3.4. Rather than being regarded as mere organisational structures, however, these places on the Focolare world map are seen above all as spaces in which the Focolare spirit is put into practice, they are 'hearths' in action. The places may differ in size and shape, but their main function is always that of generating a welcoming atmosphere and environment.

Local Focolare centres

In the network of Focolare spaces, the local 'focolares', which take the form of houses or conference centres, are the focal points for the Focolare throughout the world. These consist of small communities of 5-8 people who make a life-long commitment to work for the Focolare. Most of the 'focolarini' have jobs out with the Focolare and share all of their possessions in common (this will be discussed further in the next chapter). The focolarini facilitate meetings and activities for the various community members, usually based on age or personal circumstances. Above all, however, the role of the Focolare houses is to maintain the warmth of a family atmosphere within the community. The Focolare houses are generally located within the major cities of the world, where there are concentrations of people who are involved in the Focolare. Their location in such cities makes them easily accessible to those wishing to visit from dispersed regions. Some are located within the 'model towns'.

Model towns

The second main Focolare space are the model towns, which were set up in the late 1960s. Given the depersonalised urban setting in which many people now live, the ideal of a close-knit community can seem remote or even impossible. It is reminiscent of another era when people knew each other and had many opportunities to talk to one another. As a counter to this situation, over the years, the Focolare has developed around twenty permanent communities throughout the world (see Table 3.6 below) which could be regarded as small villages. The communities are self-contained to some extent and to a greater or lesser extent take on the functions of small towns.



Source: Focolare Centre, Rome, 2000.

Figure 3.4 Focolare Organisational Structures and their Spaces

Table 3.6 Model towns of the Focolare Movement 1997

Name	*Location*	*Inhabitants*
Renata	Loppiano, Italy	750
Araceli	Vargem Grande, Brazil	416
Maria mai	Fontem, Cameroon	231
Andrea	O'Higgins, Argentina	228
Nuova Legge	Ottmaring, Germany	157
Foco	Montet, Switzerland	150
Pace	Tagaytay, Philippines	106
Faro	Krizevci, Croatia	80
Santa Maria	Recife, Brazil	73
Pietra Angolare	Baar, Switzerland	72
Gloria	Belem, Brazil	57
Vita	Rotselaar, Belguim	57
Luminosa	Hyde Park, USA	50
Il Diamante	Acatzingo, Mexico	41
Loreto	Castel d'Oro, Spain	25
Vittoria	Man, Ivory Coast	23
Marilen	Melbourne, Australia	19
Piero	Nairobi, Kenya	17
Fiore	Warsaw, Poland	6

Source: Focolare Centre, Rome, 1999

There is a long tradition of religious communities establishing clearly distinguishable communities in the form of villages. Monastic traditions, like the Benedictines, were formed on a similar basis of living out their spirituality together. Likewise, in the Focolare towns, the aim is to make the high ideals of the Focolare – unity among all people - accessible, as ordinary people live it out. Such projects are reminiscent of other historical attempts to build egalitarian societies such as Kibbutz in Israel or the Distributionist Movement in England. In its heyday New Lanark Village, set up by the philanthropist Robert Owen, was a radical statement of an alternative way of thinking about human relationships in the workplace (Gatrell, 1970). Parallels could also be drawn with more modern quasi-religious communities which have emerged through the New Age Movement, such as the Findhorn community. All of the above have set themselves apart as alternatives to the dominant social, economic and religious norms.

It is important, though, to highlight the differences between the model towns of the Focolare and these other examples of utopian societies. First, they are not imagined as places closed-off from the rest of society. They are open and have a high number of visitors who come for a time to meet the inhabitants and to experience the atmosphere of sharing and trust that exists there. The town of Loppiano in Italy has around 750 inhabitants and receives on average 40,000 visitors each year - a trend which could possibly indicate the emergence of a new kind of 'spiritual' tourism,[79] following on from the 'eco-' tourism of the 1990s. Secondly, there is a regular turnover even in the majority of the inhabitants of the towns, which act as focal points for the global Focolare Movement at large. Thirdly, the economies of these towns are modern, are inserted in local economies, and compete in global markets, as will be discussed in Chapter 5. There is a complex division of labour ranging from agriculture and services, to industrial activities. Many other utopian societies have relied on a high degree of economic and social closure to allow the communities to grow and develop. The Focolare businesses compete freely with those outside the towns on equal terms and so have to be as profitable as any other business.

These 'model towns' are founded on the principle of mutual love and respect which everyone strives to live out each day.[80] Despite the many difficulties which are encountered in relationships, they persevere in an effort to make the ideal of mutual love and respect the Law or the norm of the town. As a result of many years of commitment to this genuine ideal, the values of trust, honesty, generosity and sincerity come to dominate in the social interactions within the community as a whole. This gives rise to new cultural practices called the 'culture of giving', the spiritual and cultural soil out of which the Economy of Sharing grows. The differences between peoples are not annulled in a forced attempt to create equality, but these differences are cherished and become mutual enrichment between people in a culture. There is the realisation that the cultural differences have to be seen against the backdrop of a common humanity that is universal. Certain shared values such as honesty, truth, and trust cut across all barriers and are brought into relief. In Brazil there are three of these towns: Santa Maria lies about 20 miles from Recife, Gloria lies just outside Belem in Para and Araceli is the largest and acts as a focus for the whole of the Focolare in Brazil. In 1995 it received 29,000 visitors. The ideal of the Focolare, through these towns becomes one which is accessible and credible. Such towns, as will be seen in later chapters, now form a natural focus for the development of the Economy of Sharing businesses.

[79] Incidentally, such tourism used to be called a "pilgrimage".
[80] References here have been taken from the webpage of one such town (Focolare, 2000b).

Global Focolare Centre

The central international offices for the Focolare Movement are at the Centre near Rome. The Centre acts as a central co-ordination point for all of the Movement's activities around the world: gathering and circulating news and information about the Focolare in different countries, planning major initiatives for the Movement on a global scale, making major decisions especially regarding structural growth and organising large scale events in Rome that involve the whole of the Movement. Less important decisions which relate to the everyday running of the Movement in individual countries are taken by the people in the countries themselves, often in consultation with the Movement's delegates. The delegates of the Focolare and the positions of responsibility at the head of the various Movements are elected during the General Assembly of the Focolare every four years. The General Assembly consists of locally elected representatives from each Focolare region plus the members of the Central Co-ordinating Council of the Focolare in Rome. Details of the various procedures and eligibility to vote can be found in the General Statutes of the Focolare Movement [FOC10].

The Focolare, therefore, is a Movement which has an institutional dimension reflected in well-defined organisational structures at local, regional and global scales. The structures of the Focolare, however, as discussed above, are not an end in themselves. Their existence only has meaning if they are able to reflect a global 'hearth' in which the principles of caring and sharing are lived out in a radical way. In other words, the purpose of the structures is to facilitate the growth and development of a global community that has its own cultural vision. For this reason, the growth of the structures of the Focolare has been 'organic' to some extent – adapting and growing to fit the needs and circumstances of the Movement at each stage of its growth and in each particular location. No-one sat down and wrote a master plan for the development of the Focolare: it has emerged over the years through the commitment of many individuals, and in particular through the work of Chiara Lubich. In this way it is highly flexible and adaptable to the changing regional conditions over time.

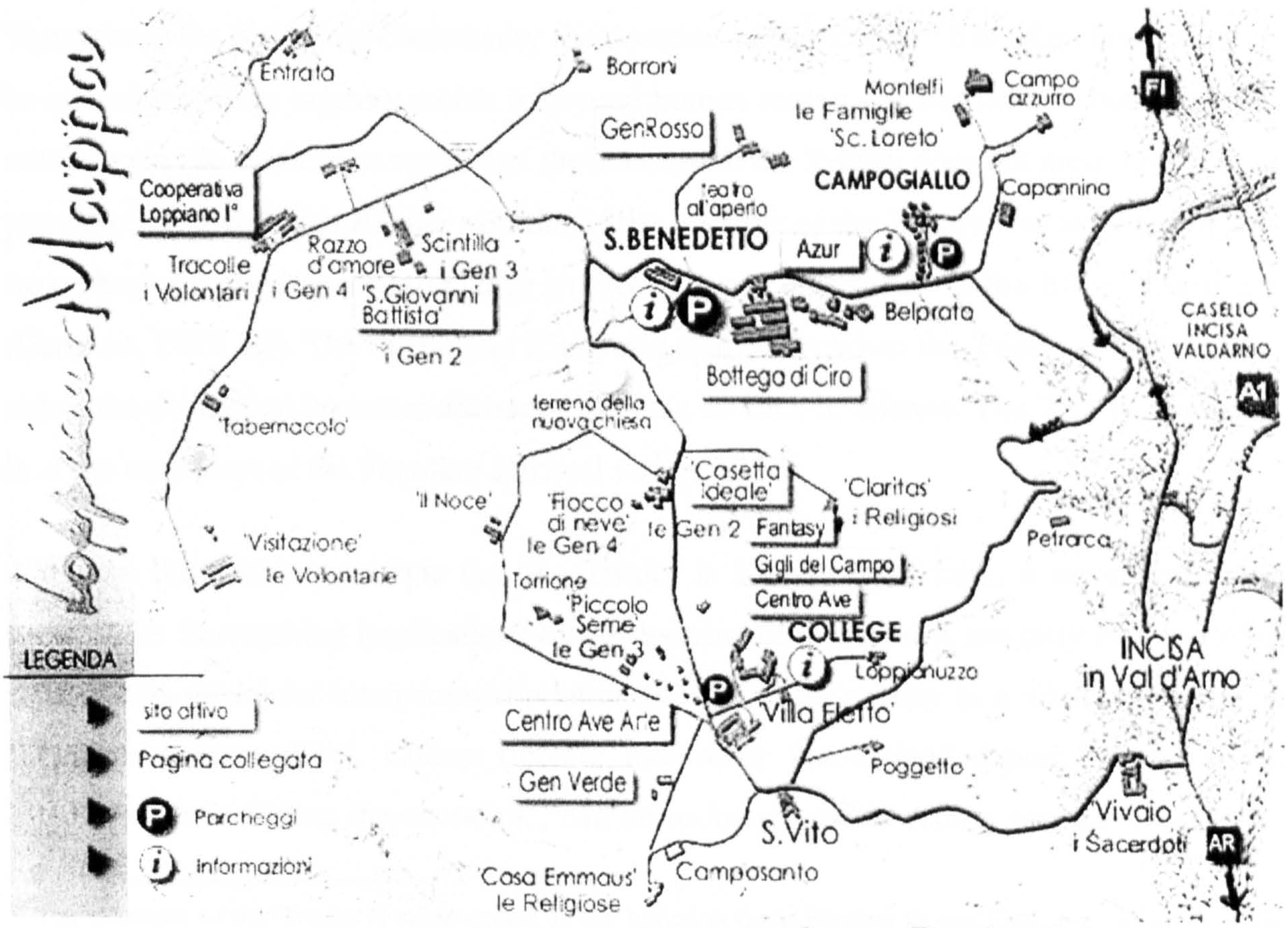
In the first part of this chapter, I have tried to examine the various projects and initiatives that have emerged as a result of the sense of belonging to one global community within the Focolare. Such an overview is inevitably incomplete since the work of the Focolare spans many areas and is in continual evolution. In the second part of this chapter, I want to examine in greater detail the different ways in which the Focolare could be seen to present a shared social vision and lifestyle which is cross-cultural. Chiara Lubich has repeatedly defined the Focolare as a 'people' which possesses its own culture, but in what ways and to what extent is this self-definition of the Focolare reflected in reality? Given the scope, diversity and global diffusion of the Focolare, such a task could be ambitious. Nevertheless, it is possible to discern socio-cultural values, beliefs which could be said to constitute a specific Focolare ethos.

The 'ideal' world

The physical and organisational structures of the Focolare are regarded as places in which the spirituality of the movement is lived among two or more people with the greatest intensity. Within the movement it is possible to see specific Focolare terminology relating to its local and global geographies. The Focolare houses and the model towns, for example, are key nodes in what is referred to within the Focolare as the 'ideal world'. In many ways, they represent a world-wide spiritual homeland for those who participate in the Movement. When this is referenced, the reference is therefore not to some imaginary place as in general speech (e.g. 'in the ideal world no-one would have to work') but refers to actual physical places in which the Focolare spirit is lived out by communities of different sizes. The Focolare's 'ideal world' is not simply 'utopian' in the conventional sense but is worked out on a day-to-day basis within real spaces and by real people. This is reflected in the way that some spaces are made over in order to reflect the Focolare ideals: the towns, the houses, streets and other shared spaces are often named after either important aspects of the spirituality or people who were part of the Focolare and who have died. One example of this is Araceli, who was one of the first people to bring the Focolare to Brazil and who died at a young age. The town of the Movement near Sao Paulo is now named after her. A Focolare map of Loppiano, the first Focolare town near Florence, is provided in Figure 3.5 on the next page.

The style of architecture and town planning within the Focolare towns and centres also reflects the spirituality of the Movement. In these places, such as the town of Nuova Legge in Germany, there is a synthesis of old and new elements. This synthesis is not based on a random eclecticism, however, but on the desire to create a unique style that is simple, elegant and in keeping with the local traditions as much as possible. Such places are designed not make the rich feel out of place, nor the poor feel overawed. Such a task is by no means easy, especially in countries where there are high levels of poverty. In Brazil, for example, the central square in Araceli and the large surrounding communal houses, although very simple and by no means ostentatious, gives the impression of wealth – since wealth is often associated with harmonious surroundings. This map shows in a graphic way how the town of Loppiano has been superimposed onto the existing map of Incisa Valdarno. The buildings owned by the Focolare are dispersed across an area of open fields stretching around 10 km^2, but form a single community and Focolare space within the global Focolare networks.

Figure 3.5 Map of Loppiano



Source: Focolare Centre, Loppiano

Spirituality of unity - a Trinitarian perspective

The starting point for defining a possible 'Focolare ethos' is the common spirituality that underpins the Movement. It is this shared understanding of the nature of the world on an ontological level which binds the Focolare together in different parts of the world, enabling it to develop into a global *community of meaning and action* in which there is a common lifestyle. The spirituality of unity is centred on the belief that the essence of every human being lies not in any ultimate material reality, nor in their holding an overly spiritualistic understanding of the world, but on their *being love.* Such an all-embracing vision could arguably be interpreted in an infinite number of ways, many of which do not correspond with what the Focolare understands to be *love* (Cambón, 1999: 35). Before considering the wider implications of this vision within social and economic fields, it is first necessary to clarify the epistemological roots of the Focolare spirituality in the Christian tradition and the ontology that emerges. Although the Focolare is now beginning to emerge within various religious traditions, the essential principles of the spirituality remain rooted in a Christian worldview, and this study draws on this perspective. Studies on other religious traditions, examining the way that various aspects of the Focolare's perspective have been integrated within other religions and the implications for dialogue, are essential. Throughout the history of Christianity the doctrine of the Trinity[81] has often been taken to be an unfathomable mystery which is beyond human reason and has little or nothing to do with human life. Kant once wrote that the doctrine of the Trinity does not mean anything in practice. The theologian Rahner said that if the doctrine of the Trinity was to be eliminated from theology nothing would change in theory – nor in practice in the life of Christians (Cambón, 1999: 16). The theologian Küng said that, sadly,when the Trinity is talked about either the discussion becomes abstract discourse or ends in silence. The Trinity, however, is at the very heart of the Focolare spiritual vision.

Although the Focolare accepts that the Trinity is a mystery of faith, it nevertheless has grasped the far-reaching implications of the doctrine of the Trinity, not only as a matter of faith, but as model for interpersonal relationships[82] and for society as a whole.[83] Through a 'Trinitarian perspective', Chiara Lubich, like other theologians argues that all social relationships, including the economic, can be re-interpreted is such a way as to cast light

[81] The Doctrine of the Trinity is summarised as the belief in three Persons in one God: the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Forte, 1986). It is central to the Christian faith since it rests on the belief that humans are "Made in the image and likeness of God" (John 1: 26).

[82] Some theologians have been reluctant to adopt such a perspective as there are many dangers which it could bring. St. Thomas Aquinas stressed the fundamental difference that exists between human relationships and God, which consists in the fact that people have relationships - in God, the relationship is the Person (Di Meana, 1992: 30). St. Augustine refused to accept the analogy of the Trinity for interpersonal love to explain the life of the Trinity since, in opposition to what happens in the Trinity, in human relationships the person does not proceed from the other who loves but already exists as a subject. (Mura, 1995: 204). It is therefore, essential when talking about the 'Trinitarian perspective', to first accept that "no analogy can 'explain' the Trinity" (Cambón, 1999: 53) and that concepts can only allude to what is a mystery which is inexpressible.

[83] Cambón (1999: 195-198) underlines that the persuasiveness of this idea could also lead to serious errors in thinking. The idea of the 'Trinity' as a social model can be regarded as a style of relationships, a provider of ideal motivations and priorities but not a provider of technical 'guidelines' which can replace specialist knowledge. At the same time, the idea could be used to promote "an absolutist style of authority which is dictatorial or the most absolute anarchy, justifying every kind of oppression". Here, too, therefore, the need to guard against fundamentalist ideas - whether based on naiveté or control.

onto the interpersonal dimension of human existence (Hemmerle, 1995). The Trinity is regarded as the perfect model of a united community (Boff, 1990) in which there is both perfect freedom and respect for the identity of the other. Three key concepts are used within theology to describe the nature of the Trinity. The first is *pericoresis* - which describes the way in which there is 'mutual in-dwelling' of the three Persons of the Trinity. Whilst there is in-dwelling, however, the Persons remain distinct and are not mixed up with each other: "they are united but they are not confused, they are in one another, and this inter-penetration (*pericoresis*) comes about without fusion or mixing" (Damasceno, 1998 in Cambón, 1999: 31). The second term is *kénosis*, which is the 'total emptying of self', exemplified in the Person of Christ who died on the Cross. The third term is *agàpe*, which is the reciprocal Love which binds the Trinity together, in which people also participate and that comprises their ultimate vocation. To say that human relationships are 'Trinitarian', therefore, is to specify that they have these three dimensions: *pericoresis-kénosis-agàpe*. The life of God is thus a perennial and total gift of self to the other. As St. Augustine said: "They are three: the lover, the loved, and love" (in Cerini, 1992: 45). This Trinitarian perspective, which is at the foundation of the Focolare spirituality, is one that reflects a move within academic theology in the past thirty years and in the teachings of the Catholic Church.[84]

From an existential point of view, therefore, within the Focolare vision there is an implicit rejection of materialism and the anthropology of the 'individual' as a being in isolation from others. Rather, within the *Trinitarian anthropology*, existence is defined by the free choice of an individual to recognise their personhood through offering themselves to others in loving service: "The more you give, the more you are fulfilled, the more you are you; since you have what you give, what you give makes you be" [FOC33]. It is this dynamic of 'being love', the central motivating force, which translates into a desire to bring about unity through dialogue. As a consequence, social behaviours and attitudes take on a new meaning within the context of a Trinitarian anthropology: solidarity, participation,

[84] The idea of a 'Trinitarian Perspective' is one that permeates all levels of the spirituality of the Focolare Movement centred on Christ's prayer for unity (John 17:21). This shift towards a 'Trinitarian anthropology' reflects a trend within the Catholic Church since Vatican II and in the wider ecumenical Movement . The idea that the Trinity could be considered as a model of social and economic action is found in many Church documents in Vatican II (*Gaudium et spes* nos.21, 24, 40; *Unitatis redintegratio*, no.2; *Lumen gentium* nos.4,47; *Perfectae caritatis*, no.1). Pope John Paul II has spoken and written many times about the Trinity as a model of communitarian and social life, in particular, the social encyclicals *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, no.40 and *Ut unum sint*, nos. 8,18,19,19,31,52). The Spirituality of the Focolare Movement is cited as an example of this perspective in action in several texts including Cambón (1999) and Cerini (1992).

freedom, pluralism can all be redefined as central concepts within this Trinitarian anthropology.[85]

The idea that the essence of the person lies in 'being love' is further bound up in Chiara Lubich's personal experience and understanding of the mystery of the abandonment, death and resurrection of Christ. In Chiara Lubich's understanding, the cry of abandonment from Jesus on the Cross "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt 27: 46), in which God (in Jesus) experienced the terrifying sensation of being abandoned by God (the father), marks the culminating point in the suffering of Christ (Lubich, 1985: 50). In this way, at that point when he cried out, he experienced the greatest negation of his humanity (physical and mental torture) and his divinity. At the same time, however, in that negation he reached the greatest expression of love in giving his life for others. Through this mysterious co-existence of the greatest suffering and the greatest love, he assumed all human failings within himself and thus took on himself the mysterious paradox of human suffering. He did not annul all that is negative or non-existence, but through his actions showed that 'existence' is not necessarily determined by the absence of all that is negative – suffering, pain, hurt. Existence is rather determined by the ability to 'be love'. Being love, as demonstrated in the death of Christ, is *kénosis*, the complete giving of self. This involves suffering and sacrifice to the point of being ready to die for others, but being love also brings the greatest fulfilment.

'Non-existence' in the Focolare spirituality could be said to have two meanings. On the one hand, there is a kind of non-existence in which the person accepts[86] to 'not exist' for themselves out of love so as to live for others. Such a non-existence is actually the fullness of existence in the Christian mystery (Coda, 1984). Through accepting suffering, humanity participates in the mystery of the redemption within the Trinity and is in communion with that life. On the other hand, there is a kind of non-existence that is derived from the refusal or denial of the freedom of others in order to assert the self. This kind of non-existence is seen as a nothingness in which there is an illusion of freedom. As will be seen from subsequent chapters, such an understanding of the human person also forms a powerful

[85] Cambón (1999: 75-100) provides an overview of the various possible implications that the Trinitarian perspective could have for these concepts. Those aspects most related to the Economy of Sharing will be explained further ahead.
[86] The word 'accept' here has to be read with caution. It is not to say that the Focolare 'accepts' suffering in the sense of resignation or indifference to it. Rather, it 'accepts' that suffering is an inevitable part of the human condition and experience and works to alleviate it in whatever way possible.

basis for a theological critique of 'free' market individualism.

The spirituality of the Focolare, although highlighting the need to accept suffering as a pre-condition to love, sees this as the starting point rather than the end in itself. Such an ascetic practice of self-denial, isolation and penance is highlighted in other more individual spiritualities. Here, though, the individual person is not seen in isolation from the community, which is viewed as both the means and the end of life. This emphasis on 'togetherness', on sharing, mitigates against isolationist social and spatial practices. Where there are two or more people who try to live in this way, both accepting the suffering that is implicit in loving one another, it is possible to create the conditions where Jesus himself is mystically present in the community. It is through the presence of Jesus in this love that unity can be achieved between human beings.

In the Gospel it is reported that Jesus said that he would be present where two or more are united in his name (Matt 18:20). Throughout the history of the Church this has been taken somewhat literally to mean that people had to recognise the name of Christ. Through the Focolare, the phrase 'united in my name' is understood to mean 'being united in my love'. Rather than being a question of semantics (understanding and accepting Jesus), it becomes an existential question (does love exist or not?). For those who share the Focolare spirituality, the main concern in life is not that of converting others to a particular belief pattern or symbolic universe. It lies, above all, in being love for other people, and where possible, creating the conditions where reciprocal love can generate the presence of God, regardless of creed or race.

The main principles of the Focolare spirituality, hence, can be interpreted as an explanation of the nature of this *agàpe* and how this translates into different aspects of human life, forming a lifestyle of love. Trinitarian love has particular characteristics which Chiara Lubich sums up in the book *Charity* (Lubich, 1981). This kind of love is universal, in as much as it is *open to everyone*, does not exclude anyone, and is capable of loving those who do not love in return, even enemies. It is willing to *take the initiative* and does not wait to be loved. It *listens to others* and puts them first, trying to do to others what you would like them to do to you. It is rooted in the *present moment* and not in the past or future. In this way, it is a love that can be experienced here and now, regardless of the conditions. In order to do this, it is a love which knows how to accept failure, to forgive and to *start again.*[87]

Likewise, the whole of creation is viewed in the Focolare as a reflection and outpouring of this love that exists in the heart of the Trinity. The world, and everything in it, is viewed as the work of a creator who has not abandoned creation, but is mysteriously present in it.[88] The creation, therefore, bears the imprint of the creator since everything is seen as being in a relationship of love. There is therefore a great sensitivity within the Focolare towards caring for the environment and promoting environmentally sustainable practices. Such practices are not seen as ends in themselves but as an expression of love for God and for others. The earth, moreover, is not seen only as a temporary abode for people, (like a hotel), but as a home – even a hearth - in an intimate relationship with heaven. It is regarded as a home which, although inhabited by individual people for a short time, is also transcendent through Christ.[89]

This underlying humanistic vision of the Focolare, although founded on a renewal of principles which are at the centre of Christian thinking, are not the exclusive domain of Christians. Through the practice of the spirituality of the Focolare, as outlined in the first part of this chapter, greater collaboration and understanding between peoples of different religious traditions has come about, highlighting many aspects of this Trinitarian perspective which can be shared by people of other faiths. Many of the aspects of the Focolare spirituality are equally accepted by Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Jewish people, who translate the basic principles of love into their own theological traditions, developing their roots therein. Common to all is the aim to increase love and understanding in the world. Likewise, there are people who are part of the Focolare who do not share the religious perspective which underpins the Christian vision, but who accept the practical application of that vision in practice and identify fully with the aims of the Movement.

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[87] There are parallels here between the principles which Chiara Lubich terms the 'art of loving' and the 'art of loving' outlined by the psychoanalyst Erich Fromm (1957). Breaking from the Freudian psychoanalytic tradition which focused largely on unconscious motivations, Fromm held that humans are products of the cultures in which they are bred. In modern, industrial societies, he maintained, they have become estranged from themselves. These feelings of isolation resulted in an unconscious desire for unity with others. The differençe, however, is that whereas in psychoanalysis, the pursuit of loving relationships is ultimately personal happiness, within Chiara Lubich's perspective, seeking unity is answering God's will.

[88] Chiara Lubich calls this presence of God within the whole of creation, the "silence that speaks" (Lubich, 1995: 8). Cambón (1999: 69) says that this silence of God can be understood by starting from the perspective of the Trinity: "If Trinitarian relationships mean complete reciprocal giving so that the other can be itself, it is logical to think that God, having given himself totally in creation 'withdraws' in order to make space for it, he 'disappears' from creation so that it can fully be itself.

[89] The book of Revelation refers to the "new heavens and new earth" (Rev 21: 1), in which the whole of the cosmos and creation will be recapitulated into the Trinity.

Post-colonial fears

From what has been said above, one can see that within the Focolare there are strong undertones of civilisation as an ideal, which was at the heart of the 'modernist' project (Escobar, 1995; Latouche, 1993). Although this ideal may have been criticised in certain circles of post-colonial and post-modern thought as an ethnocentric construct bound up in Westernisation discourse (Bhaba, 1994; Childs & Williams, 1997; Sanneh, 1993), within the Focolare it remains a powerful vision of the future. The unifying vision of humanity, and of the world which is prevalent in the Focolare, is the same one that underpins other global institutions like the United Nations. In an address at the UN, Chiara Lubich stressed the parallels that she saw between the two institutions. Both institutions share the aim of promoting the development of a global society which is founded on peace and security. In comparing the Focolare to the UN, she said: "It [the Focolare] proposes and promotes peace, not from the top down, as in the UN, but in humanity, amongst the people, between peoples who are different in terms of language, race, nationality, faith" [FOC19].

There are parallels, therefore, between the notion of universal culture which the UN has been promoting and the vision of the unity of peoples which is part of the Focolare vision. Within the Focolare there is a heightened sense of being *world citizens* with duties and responsibilities within an international community [FOC21]. This corresponds in many ways to the *global civic culture* which the UN sees as one of the signs of hope for the future (UNESCO, 1995). Whereas the UN seeks to achieve this from the perspective of inter-governmental co-operation, the Focolare seeks to bring this about from the 'bottom up', through a grassroots transformation of cultural consciousness, which can also have an influence on economic and political structures.

In certain respects, the sense of global mission within the Focolare also reveals strong parallels with colonialism, a fact which makes the development of such a movement highly contentious, as discussed in Chapter 1. The Focolare has one global centre in Rome which disseminates and collects information about the Movement in the whole world. Throughout the world, the Focolare has 'outposts' in different countries that form the local basis for its activities. There is a tendency within the Focolare to talk of 'conquering' the world, and the achievements of the Movement, such as the arrival of the Focolare in Brazil, are often told like the voyages of great explorers to distant lands. On arrival in these distant lands, the Focolare often establishes a base and raises its blue and gold flag, in a similar way to former powers in colonial times.

The Focolare, as a global organisation, thus, shares many traits which are reminiscent of modernism – in the ideal of civilisation and equality of all peoples, and in the desire to universalise its message of peace and unity. The movement also shares the Christian roots of colonialism in the parallels with missionary movements that have arguably had detrimental effects on the development of non-Christian ethnic groups and religious traditions, what Spivak (1987) has called 'epistemic violence'. Such missionary Movements are deeply implicated in political and economic power structures, and often facilitate the dependency of developing countries (Câmara, 1969). Likewise, wherever the Focolare arrives, it advocates a Christian ethos. In as much as it advocates unity and universality, the underlying morality advocated is clearly in line with Christian thinking. There could be a case, therefore, to be suspicious of the Focolare because of its global missionary tendencies.

The idea that the Focolare should be rejected due the fact that it is global and has Christian roots, however, has to be seriously questioned. Whilst there are obvious parallels with colonialism, they should not be overstated. There are profound differences between the two. Colonialism was founded on the doctrine of racial superiority, rooted also in the Christian belief in salvation. Salvation was assumed to be bound up in Westernisation discourse. It was imposed on peoples, often through the use of force, at a time when communications and information about alternative ways of thinking were arguably restricted. This doctrine is very far from the vision that underpins the Focolare. The Focolare does not impose a vision from above, but proposes certain human values that are rooted in a spiritual vision of the world. These values are rooted in a particular understanding of Christianity – as a radical cultural and social revolution – but at the same time are values that are widely held by people who are not Christian. There are many aspects of the cultural vision of the Movement, therefore, which do not fit neatly into a modernist vision.

Moreover, the idea of global culture which underpins the Focolare does not deny or annihilate diversity. Rather, it views the existence of a global culture as the foundation of global civilisation in which there are shared values against which diversity can flourish. Its very spiritual basis lies in diversity based on oneness through openness to difference. Cultural pluralism can only exist against a backdrop of shared values. In the absence of shared universal values such as mutual respect and tolerance, diversity will inevitably give rise to hatred based on prejudice and fear of the unknown. In this way, the Focolare demonstrates that cultural differences can be positive and enriching if they are welcomed in the context of universal human values. In many places where the Focolare has developed, the existence of the movement has led to often forgotten or neglected cultural traditions, such as those of the Bangwa tribe in Fontem, Cameroons being revived (Focolare, 2000c)[90]. Within Focolare gatherings, the celebration of diversity is regarded as an integral expression of unity. It is precisely this dialectic of diversity and unity, which can be only maintained through love, which is at the heart of the Focolare vision.

The Focolare itself contains a characteristic understanding of culture rooted in its specific vision of the world. Such a vision stresses the historical process of dialogue. In this process, the choice is not one of a clear-cut choice between difference and similarity, but that of recognising and highlighting the common values that underpin humanity through which differences and similarities can be expressed. The Focolare, however, also stresses the transcendent nature of difference and similarity, which is a human reflection of the mystery of the Trinity. According to the Focolare, it is through the mystery of the Trinity that unity and diversity can be understood in its most authentic form. As the theologian Salvati said: "The life of the Trinitarian God, in other words, appears to be a perennial 'making space' for the other" (Salvati, 1990: 156).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to present an overview of the Focolare as a global religious and social movement, outlining its historical geographies and aims. I showed how the ideal of the *focolare* rooted in an image of intimate family harmony, is at the heart of the Focolare's message and also its cultural geographies, which now span the globe, creating

[90] In 1964 Bishop Peeters, the bishop of a neighbouring town to Fontem in the Cameroons, received a delegation sent by the Fon of Fontem, bearing gifts. They came with a supplication: could the bishop ask Christians to pray to God to help them since there was a 90% infant mortality rate in their tribe. The bishop turned to the Focolare Movement which sent an initial group of doctors and nurses from the movement to the town in 1966 They opened the first dispensary in a local hut. Since then, Fontem has grown into a thriving community which now has a senior college from which many social an political leaders have emerged and a hospital. From that time this 'model town' has been the destination of many from all over Africa. In a recent visit, Chiara Lubich said that "Fontem has become a beacon which radiates the light of mutual love throughout Africa and indeed the whole world." The two local tribes, the Bangwa and Nweh-Mundani peoples, made a solemn pact to witness to unity amongst their tribes. Both tribes are animist, and through the Focolare, many have come to know Christianity and others have remained animists. This encounter, however, has not been forced, and where Christianity has been adopted, the traditions of the two tribes have been incorporated into the religious practices (Focolare 2000c).

distinctive Focolare spaces. I have also tried to underline some of the critical questions that arise when attempting to define the Movement as a 'global culture' which is the portent of universal human values. Although it may be true to argue that, on the surface, the Focolare demonstrates certain colonial tendencies, one has to question whether such parallels are well founded. On a planet in which the global population is facing up to the ecological limits of the biosphere, one has to consider the human values that the Focolare advocates. The critical question is whether such values, translated into action, can create the social conditions to enable the human race to co-exist on a small planet. In a world in which there is a neo-colonialism of international financial structures and capital, is it not perhaps necessary to make space for a different kind of 'colonialism' based on solidarity and sharing, 'alternative' human geographies with economic, political, social and cultural implications stretching globally?

4. The Focolare's economic vision: 'a culture of giving'

> *"Human beings, made in the image of God, who is Love, find their fulfilment in loving, in giving. This is a need which is at the centre of their being, whether believer or not"* [CEOS89].

In the previous chapter, I showed how the Focolare Movement can be viewed as an emerging global community that exhibits various cultural practices and beliefs. Although varying over space, for these practices and beliefs do not suppress regional differences, they nonetheless form a common ethic and lifestyle that is arguably transnational. The main principle behind this common ethic is that of creating principles for reaching agreement, sharing and social integration, based on the idea of a Trinitarian perspective emerging from within the Christian tradition [CEOS58]. Novak (1993: 203) has underlined the fact that the choices made in the economic spheres of production and consumption reveal much about a given culture's understanding of life, and this is particularly true in the case of the Focolare Movement. In this chapter, I will therefore examine in detail the historical and philosophical roots underpinning the specific vision of economic life that emerges from the spirituality informing the Focolare. These will then be related to the consequent economic practices within the Focolare.

Origins of the economic vision

From its origins in Trent during the Second World War, the Focolare has exhibited a distinctive understanding of the relationship that could exist between the 'economic' and other dimensions of life. This underlying vision has arguably remained unchanged until the present day, although how it is applied has altered substantially. Whenever the economic vision of the Focolare is being discussed in a public context [e.g. FOC19; FOC25], the first few years of the movement in Trent are stressed as the model for all economic activities within and outwith the Focolare. The reason for this constant return to the 'origins' is not primarily due to a nostalgic wish to return to the past, but rooted in a belief that the beginnings of the Focolare were marked by a particular insight wherein it was possible to see the 'intervention of God' [FOC22: 1]. Moreover, having started within the Catholic Church, this return to the origins of the Focolare is very much in keeping with the tradition of religious orders. Many such orders return to their origins in the belief that the founders (like St. Francis of Assisi, St. Ignatius) were blessed with a special gift or 'charism' for the whole of humanity.[91] Recalling the inspiration or events that led to the start of the movement is a source of renewal that leads to greater zeal in putting the Focolare spirituality into future practice. For this reason, it would seem necessary to revisit the remaining sources[92] from the early days of the Focolare and to examine the texts that refer in particular to economic matters.

The 'inspiring spark' which Pope John Paul II cited as the starting point for the Focolare Movement [FOC35], was the experience that Chiara Lubich and her companions had during the Second World War in Trent. It was an experience that altered their deepest perceptions of who they were in relation to God, to other people, and to their place in the cosmos (Zambonini, 1991: 45). Chiara Lubich had been brought up as a Roman Catholic and previous to the war had believed in God (Gallagher, 1997: 8). Yet the God that she had believed in was one that she assumed to be far away. In a certain sense, she inherited the image of God that had prevailed from the Enlightenment: the Kantian image of God as a judge who was distant from his creatures and often depicted as beyond human reason (Trigg, 1998: 4). In a sense, it was the image of a God who was beyond the grasp of human experience - up above, in the clouds. What happened from the rooftops downwards was not influenced by God but by people alone. One of the great feats of the Enlightenment was the emancipation of mankind from the superstitions of believing that human life was governed by providence. It was an image that in some ways mirrored the technical, materialistic vision of the world based on scientific positivism, in which metaphysical realities were viewed as fantasy or imagination, or, as Marx put it, 'the opium of the people': something which dimmed consciousness of the reality of a material world. In a sense, God was viewed as existing outside the spatial dimensions in which human beings live.

During the war, Chiara Lubich understood in a new way, through a series of personal experiences, which have since been confirmed by several prominent theologians as 'mystical insights' (Cerini, 1992; Hemmerle, 1998), that God did not only exist outside the

[91] In many theological circles Christian experience is now regarded as essential 'theological ground', a proposition which was also underlined by the Second Vatican Council (*Dei verbum*, No. 8). The study of an authentic Christian experience enables divine realities to be "perceived as concrete realities" (Cerini, 1992: 9).

[92] Many of the original sources such as personal letters have since been lost or destroyed. Edited versions of the remaining original sources from 1943 – 1954 have been published in Italian in three volumes of *Scritti Spirituali*. Additional unpublished texts can be found at the Focolare Centre in Rome. The original manuscripts of the texts quoted are retained by the author, Chiara Lubich.

spatial dimensions of normal human existence. Whilst being infinite, she began to perceive him as being within the realm of human experience. This new understanding, however, was not so much a sudden conversion as a gradual understanding. In a letter, which dates back to 1943, Chiara Lubich recalls the events that led up to this understanding:

> *"At a time when the way we Christians were living deeply distressed me, he [God] manifested himself. Exactly when, I do not know. His subtle light entered in and enlightened me. It enwrapped my soul, it did not suppress my former ideas, but slowly replaced them with new ones.*
>
> *One fact I recall. I was still in school. A priest ... wanted to have a word with me. He asked me to offer up an hour of my day for his intentions. I answered: "Why not the entire day?" Struck by such youthful generosity... he told me: "Remember that God loves you immensely." ... Since that moment I see God present everywhere with his love: in daytime, during the night, in my enthusiasm, in my resolutions, in events that are joyful and comforting, in situations that prove to be sad, awkward or difficult. He is always there, he is present everywhere, and he explains things to me. What does he explain? That everything is love: all that I am and all that regards me; all that we are and all that regards us. That nothing escapes his love, not even the mistakes that I make, because he permits them; that his love envelops Christians like myself, that it embraces the Church, the world and the entire universe. And he sustains me and opens my eyes to see everything and everyone, equally so, as expressions of his love"* [FOC01].[93]

The most striking thing about the conversion experience that Chiara Lubich had, which is revealed in this letter, is that it resulted in a new understanding of the personal love that God had for her, and for other people. She began to see God 'present everywhere with his love', and she repeats this phrase several times. Above all, she understood that the core of the message of the Gospel did not relate primarily to a series of moral directives that have to be followed. The core of the message lay, above all, in the revelation of the Love of God as a father who is very near to his children.[94] In the midst of the war, in which God was being blamed for the atrocities that were being committed, or for not stopping them, she seemed to discover a different God who was present in every circumstance, even in the suffering of the war [FOC31: 5]. It was this profound experience/belief in the love of God, which she called the 'inspiring spark' (Cerini, 1992: 11). It was so real to her that challenged the perspective she had on every aspect of human life, including economic and

[93] Unless otherwise stated, all original texts quoted here have been translated by myself from Italian.
[94] There are strong parallels here between the writings of Chiara Lubich and the emphasis placed on Divine Love within the Gospels and letters of John. John stresses the fact that Christian faith is not so much about love for God, but a new understanding of God's love for his children: "My dear people, let us love one another since love comes from God and everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. Anyone who fails to love can never have known God, because God is love. God's love was revealed when God sent into the world his only Son so that we could have life through him; this is the love I mean: not our love for God, but God's love for us" (1 John 4: 7-10).

social realities. Every circumstance, every meeting which took place, every happy and painful event, was willed or permitted by God. She communicated this new understanding to other people who were so convinced by her personal experience that they too began to change how they viewed reality, and to follow her (Zambonini, 1991: 161-2).

The basis of their new understanding came from reading the Gospels and deriving a more literal interpretation of what was written. In a similar way to various radical Christian groups throughout the centuries[95], they felt a calling to return to the original spirit of the Gospels, mirroring their existence on the life of the first Christian community in Jerusalem. On reading the familiar words of the Gospels, which they had heard in church so many times, they were profoundly struck by the relevance and depth of the message contained within them, especially in the context of the war. It seemed to Chiara Lubich that the words of the Gospel could be summed up in one word that had the power to transform everything: love. In the words of the evangelist John: "Not our love for God, but God's Love for us" (1 John, 4: 10). Every action, therefore, could be a response to that infinite Love: "We would not have had any meaning in the world if we were not a little flame of this infinite fire: love that responds to Love" (Lubich, in Cerini, 1992: 12). Filled with this new belief in God's Love, Chiara and her companions set about putting into practice what they had understood from the Gospel, trying to care for each person that they met with the same love they would have given, had Jesus himself been in front of them. In June 1944 she wrote to a group of girls who wished to follow her:

> *"You have been blinded with me by the fiery brilliance of an Ideal that exceeds all things and contains all:* by the infinite love of God! *It is he, he, my God and your God, who has established a bond between us that is stronger than death... It is Love who has called us to love! It is Love who has spoken to us in the depth of our hearts and has told us: 'Look around you. Everything in the world passes away. Everyday sees its evening, and how quickly each evening comes... Love that which does not die! Love the one who is love!'* [FOC02].

In this letter, what is apparent is the single-minded way in which the new understanding of God's love had enveloped Chiara Lubich's mind. Responding to this Love had become the sole purpose of her existence, and she encouraged others to feel the same. When they began to do this they realised that the love that they had to give could not be only kind words or feelings, but it had to be expressed in concrete actions. It had to change their relationships amongst themselves and with other people in radical ways.

[95]Here I am thinking of the Protestant movements of the Reformation and the Religious Society of Friends.

The deep impact that the circumstances of the war had made on Chiara Lubich and her companions, leading to their profound search for the meaning of existence, could be paralleled with the experiences of countless poets, mystics and philosophers who had similar experiences during the First and Second World Wars. There are striking parallels, for example, between the writings of Chiara Lubich and what Simone Weil contemporaneously wrote. Both Simone Weil and Chiara Lubich develop a social and political philosophy which is centred around what Simone Weil calls the idea of 'paying attention' (Weil, 1951). Chiara Lubich calls this 'living in the present moment' [FOC31]. Through living in the present or paying attention, they see the possibility of seeing through the ideological abstractions that dominated (and continue to dominate) the political and social dogmas of their day. Such dogmas, according to Simone Weil, form a 'metaphysical cloud' through which it is difficult to see the all pervasive injustice of the human condition (Weil, 1968). Both stress the need to start from the experience of people, the 'tissue of life' as Simone Weil calls it, in order to understand the human condition. Both advocate an 'ethic of care' as the only way to overcome injustice - not only at a personal level, but at a political level, through recognising human responsibilities as well as human rights. Both see *the way* as one that involves the awakening of the human spirit through a spirituality which goes beyond religious dogma and has the capacity to 'draw God down' into the realm of human experience. Both recognised the need for 'roots', and find these in the incarnational religion of Christianity, but are open to the wisdom of other cultures, especially Oriental religions.

According to Richard Bell, Simone Weil's philosophy embodies a position which is both *pragmatic* - in the sense that it is concerned primarily with action - and *idealistic* - recognising that it is only through imbuing human action with idealism that injustice can be overcome (Bell, 1998: 16). This could also be said about the thought and life of Chiara Lubich. Her thinking is both highly idealistic, urging people to belief in the good of the human spirit, but also profoundly pragmatic. Chiara Lubich sees the greatest challenge of human life as that of "rising to the highest contemplation whilst remaining in the midst of the world" (Lubich, 1981: 56). It is only through re-uniting the 'spiritual' with the other dimensions of life that social change can come about. Finally, it has to be noted that both Chiara Lubich and Simone Weil were women living and writing at a time when the male-dominated philosophical systems of Marxism and Fascism were at their peak in terms of political influence. Moreover, neither would label themselves as 'feminist', seeing such labels of gender, race and religion as clouding the relevance of their message to humankind in general. Nevertheless, their writing and action is clearly that of a woman's perspective, and this has to be borne in mind.

Although the parallels between the two are striking, this parallel is also in some ways uneven. Simone Weil died in 1943, at the peak of her philosophical thinking aged only 34. Chiara Lubich was a student of philosophy at that point and may well have read some of her writings. Whether or not she did, her story could be read as a continuation of Simone Weil's thought and action throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Chiara Lubich developed further many of the key issues that Simone Weil addressed, especially those relating to the need for a shared spirituality for public and private life. For Chiara Lubich, in particular, the method of 'drawing God down' into human affairs is through generating his presence in the community [FOC16]. For her, God is drawn down by the charity that exists between people, as outlined in Chapter 3. His presence was not limited to acceptance of a religious dogma but would be present, above all, in the very love that united people. The conditions for generating the presence of God in the midst of the community, therefore, were not be based merely on external agreements (e.g. keeping religious obligations) or structures (e.g. membership of a certain group). They were rather created by the love each person has in their heart and how it is translated into actions [FOC18]. This was reflected in their availability to give themselves unconditionally to others and to recognise the others as a gift, to the point of reaching unity of heart and soul [FOC16].

Such mutual self-giving, which created the conditions for God to be present in the community, was not restricted to Catholics or even Christians (Jesus did not say 'Where two or more Catholics, Christians...'). Anyone who wished to do so, could participate in living out the basic principles of love. This understanding of where God is present resulted in a radical openness to people of other cultures and religions, as described in the previous chapter. What mattered was not 'converting' the other to their personal religious beliefs - such an idea could disguise a hidden ulterior interest and prothlestysing tendencies - but reaching a shared understanding, based on practical action and dialogue, that selfless giving is the most powerful transformative power in the world. Reaching this 'unity in diversity' soon became the main focus of the Focolare Movement which was emerging. The page of John's Gospel in which he recounts the last supper when Jesus prayed for unity (John, 17:21) became the 'magna carta' for the group.

Through living out this love in a group of two or more, the first group of the Focolare understood that God becomes present within the community; or rather, through this love, persons begin to participate in a mystical way in the very life of the Trinity in which there is full communion amongst all three divine persons. The 'focolare', therefore, was not only a hearth in which there was human love, but the dwelling place of a 'divine fire of love' in the Trinity [FOC22]. They understood that the presence of God in the community had particular effects. In particular, it generated a profound trust in Providence,[96] it led to the sharing of material and spiritual goods, and it spread rapidly to other people, all of which have strong geographical and economic consequences [FOC08].

Trust in Providence

This trust that the initial group had in God's providence is underlined in many texts from the early days of the Focolare. Through such documents, it is possible to grasp the extraordinary experiences that they had of the intervention of God in the everyday circumstances of life [FOC05; FOC06]. During the war, the group of people who had begun to associate themselves with Chiara Lubich had been forced to give up their ordinary occupations due to the war and had to earn their living in temporary jobs. After they had begun to live out the new spirituality that was emerging from reading the Gospel together in the air raid shelters, a small group decided to rent an apartment together and to start to help those people most affected and displaced by the war [FOC25]. They understood that the message of the Gospel had to be lived out, above all, in service of the poorest people in the community, as Jesus identified with them in a special way. They decided to give away all of their possessions to the poor, keeping only the bear essentials for survival [FOC05].

When they did this, however, they started to receive items of all sorts from other people who had heard about how they were trying to help the poor in the city. People arrived at their flat with bags of food, clothing, firewood and other items so that they could use it or distribute it to the poor [CEOS57]. This pattern of distribution and receiving help from

[96] The term 'Providence' is one which appears throughout the Bible, and in particular, within the Old Testament (Daniel 4: 32, 35; Psalm 139: 7-18; Isaiah 41: 21-31). It is used to mean that God, the Creator, did not merely decree what should be, and then 'retire to heaven' to watch what inevitably must come to pass in the universe created by him. Rather, in infinite wisdom and power, God mysteriously governs all circumstances, making all things work together for the accomplishing of his own will. Whereas in the Old Testament the emphasis of Providence is on how God blesses the good and punishes the wicked, within the New Testament, the emphasis is on the mercy of God who makes the sun rise and set on everyone.

people continued throughout the war as the Focolare became a community that was spread out across the villages in the Dolomite valleys. Several stories about Providence form the oral history of the early days of the Focolare. The first story is known as the 'size 42 shoes' and was told by Chiara Lubich in an address in the Department of Economics of the *Universitá Cattolica di Milano* on the occasion of an honorary degree in Economics and Commerce:

> *"Jesus assured us: 'Ask and you will receive' (Math 7:7; Luke 11:9). We asked for the poor and we were filled with every good from God: bread, powdered milk, jam, firewood, clothing... which we took to those who were in need. One day - and this is a fact that is always told - a poor man asked me for a pair of shoes size 42. Knowing that Jesus identified himself with the poor, I asked the Lord this prayer in church: 'Give me a pair of size 42 shoes for you in that poor person'. I came out and a lady gave me a packet. I opened it: there was a pair of shoes, size 42. Millions of similar episodes have occurred like this through the years"* [CEOS57].

This episode demonstrates how the spiritual and economic dimensions of life are intrinsically bound together in Chiara Lubich's understanding, and how economic facts are used as substantive proof for the existence of God. The action that they had undertaken to help the poor, as a result of their new found spirituality, was not viewed as an optional appendage to the 'religious' act of praying, but as an extension of spiritual life into other dimensions of social and economic life. This is seen in the fact that they regarded what they did to the poor as done to Jesus, and in the fact that they did not feel that they were carrying out the action by themselves or on the strength of their own resources. They believed that if they did their part through living evangelical poverty and giving themselves to their neighbours, God would provide the necessary means for helping the poor since he had said so in the Gospel and he himself would be present through the love they had for each other [FOC11]. Their part was to trust in his providence and to create the underlying conditions of mutual love in such a way that the promises in the Gospel could be fulfilled. In this way, through the various experiences in the war, they began to understand that within the Gospel there is a kind of economic logic that is unique. This is illustrated in another episode that recalls the story of some apples:

> *"'Give and there will be gifts for you' (Luke, 6:38), we read in the Gospel one day. We gave what we had and it returned to us multiplied. On one occasion we had some apples at home. We gave them to the poor and lo and behold, the next morning we received a bag of apples. We gave them to the poor and a suitcase of apples arrived... And so on with other things: we gave and we received. The Gospel, therefore, was true! Jesus was keeping his promises even today"* [CEOS57].

They realised that there seemed to be a relationship between the amount that they gave away to the poor, and the amount they received 'in providence'. In their understanding, this was as a result of the promises that Jesus had made in the Gospels and not simply a coincidence:

> *"There were eight of us focolarine and every afternoon we went with lots of suitcases to take things to the poor. Someone could wonder: but where did so many things come from? I had nothing and my companions, the first focolarine, were more or less like me. But providence kept arriving and in such quantities! The corridor of my house was always full of sacks of flour and potatoes. And there we were, distributing the goods to one or other of the poor people, according to their needs"* [FOC08].

This tradition of believing in God's providence has continued throughout the Focolare down the years and still remains a key point in the understanding of the interrelationship of economic affairs and spirituality. Within the movement as a whole and in the individual focolare houses, 'providence' (in the form of unexpected gifts and donations) is even calculated formally as a part of the overall budget. Calculations and decisions regarding future developments of the movement are made on the basis of such providence arriving [FOC09]. This point will be further developed within the context of the Economy of Sharing businesses.

The 'communion of goods'

The other principal effect which is noted as a result of the Gospel law of love is the fact that, from a disparate group of persons, a community was formed in which everything was shared out according to the needs of each one. As Chiara Lubich recalls: "The first conclusion that we can draw from this is that unity of heart and soul, the result of reciprocal love, has a direct consequence on the communion of material goods" (FOC08: 14). The ideal which they were putting into practice was a spiritual one, but it was having direct consequences in how they understood and administered their personal possessions and other economic goods. In letters that she wrote to the communities in the surrounding villages in the first few years of the Focolare, Chiara Lubich stressed the link between the spirituality and material sharing: "Help each other in every way: above all with material help. The needs of one have to become the needs of all ... Put joys and sufferings in common. Facts and not chatter" [FOC08]. This strong link between the spiritual and material dimensions of the Focolare vision was underlined by Araujo, referring to the early experience of the Focolare: "Unity not only has a spiritual dimension, but since the beginning it had a big impact on society, in social realities. Straight away they understood that mutual love called for the communion of spiritual and material goods" [CEOS74].

The first Focolare community was fascinated by the first Christian community in Jerusalem after the death and resurrection of Christ, and started to mirror their life on the passage from the Acts of the Apostles which describes the nature of the first Christian community:

> *"The whole group of believers was united, heart and soul; no-one claimed for his own use anything that he had, as everything they owned was held in common. None of their members was ever in want, as all those who owned land or houses would sell them and bring the money from them, to present it to the apostles; it was then distributed to any members who might be in need"* (Acts 4:32; 34-35).

In a commentary on this passage, Chiara Lubich highlighted the strong link that she makes between material giving and living the Gospel. She also outlines many of the key ideas on which the movement is based. For this reason, it would seem appropriate to quote the text before further comment:

> *"While reading these words, we might begin to think that everything worked perfectly in the community. In fact, it is Luke himself who points out that there are incidents in which members of the Church of Jerusalem failed to live up to this standard (see Luke, 6). However, despite these failures which are understandable, the tone of the community was set by this effort, which animated everyone, to achieve the Christian community. It is this effort which Luke wants to emphasise. The examples of those who sold their property show the revolutionary power of the Gospel, i.e. its capacity for creating totally new social relationships with concrete effects on an economic level.*
>
> *Nobody was forced to dispose of his or her goods. Luke wanted to show how the Gospel, while respecting each person's individual freedom, is able to make us overcome all the barriers that divide us, and of these barriers, the selfish use of private property is one of the most serious causes of division. Naturally, the social revolution starts from an inner power, from faith in and love for Jesus. For Luke, this practical sharing is the unit of measurement for meaningful authentic Christian love. No matter what economic system the Christian finds himself in, with the power of this love he will be called first and foremost to overcome every form of attachment to earthly goods, in which fear, greed and selfishness continually tend to imprison him.*
>
> *The examination of conscience, which these words invite us to, covers a very wide field of values. We need to review our relations with the political community as a sign of solidarity by paying taxes. We need to review our relations with the social community by committing ourselves in a responsible way to building a more just society. We need to review our relationship with our church community, by giving our spare time, energy and material goods in order to help our brothers and sisters who are in need. We need to review our relations with our neighbours whose difficulties are perhaps known to us alone.*
>
> *In the first Christian community in Jerusalem, no one said that any of the things that he possessed was his own. This is the heart of the problem. What we*

> *must ascertain is whether we feel we are absolute owners or we feel we are children of God and brothers and sisters in Christ who act as administrators of the goods they receive and keep others always in mind. In the first centuries love for Jesus, by inspiring consciences, transformed pagan society, opening up the progressive liberation of long-standing situations of institutional injustice (slavery, the exclusion of women from society, poverty, the position of the defenceless and children in society, etc.). Why should our love for Jesus not do as much again today in the face of serious situations of injustice in the world?"* (In Robertson, 1993: 57).

What emerges from this commentary is how Chiara Lubich regarded the practice of the Gospel, not only as a form of spiritual edification for the people who put it into practice, but as a means of emancipation for the poor. Living the words of the Gospel had far-reaching social and political implications that led individuals to 'review' their relationship that they have with the various institutions and to make concrete changes to how they live. The 'heart of the problem', as she said, was the desire to claim possessions for one's self as opposed to feeling connected to others as a family. Whereas the distribution of wealth is perceived as an economic matter, the question of being brothers and sisters is regarded as a spiritual one. The Gospel offered a means of bridging this divide and bringing about a peaceful social revolution in which greater equality would be achieved, through the charity that imbued people's hearts. In this way 'evangelical poverty', which had been seen as a form of asceticism in traditional spiritualities, took on a new function within the Focolare. It was not an end in itself but a means of serving other people and creating greater equality. Reaching this equality became the main aim of the first Focolare community in Trent.

In an article written in the Vatican based journal *Amico Serafico* in 1948, commissioned by the parliamentarian Igino Giordani,[97] Chiara[98] Lubich explained in detail how this redistribution took place in the community of Trent:

> *"The spirit of unity in charity was the ever living flame which kept this fraternity alive... In some ways it was similar, in others dissimilar, to that first Christian community. In fact, whilst having the same aim, it did not require everyone to sell all that they had and to bring it to unity, but rather, that everyone gave what they possessed, depriving themselves of what they could without causing themselves harm ... This was possible amongst us who are already trained at living out in a radical way the first great principle 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart' (Luke, 10,27).*

[97] Giordani met Chiara Lubich in the autumn of 1948 and was profoundly moved by the social and political relevance of the spirituality which she was living. He dedicated most of the remainder of his life to the Focolare, becoming the first married 'focolarino' and had a profound impact on the social and economic dimension of the Movement. For more information consult Centro Igino Giordani (2000).
[98] Then known as 'Silvia Lubich', her baptismal name.

Everyone brought the extra that they had, above all in money, and committed themselves to giving a monthly sum. The donor and the amount promised remained secret. With the money received, the Committee would help, month by month and in secret, those families in the community in need, carrying out this delicate task with the greatest charity and discretion. This was our aim: to reach the point where there would be no more people in need, and that everyone would have enough to live on" [FOC03: 236-237].

From this article, what emerges is how the community of the Focolare was structured so as to enable people in need to be helped, whilst protecting the identities of those who were helped and those who gave. People were primarily helped via the Focolare house itself, through a central fund, since those who had dedicated their entire lives to the community were arguably in the best position to know the needs of people in the community as a whole. Even at this very early stage of the Focolare, the key to this was trust in the people who were carrying out the redistribution based on their total commitment to the community and their understanding of the needs of the various members. This is a characteristic which is very relevant to the Economy of Sharing today and is one which will be discussed in full in subsequent chapters.

This 'communion of goods', as it was called, which became a prominent feature of the life of the early Focolare community was not limited to the people who were part of the Focolare community itself. Right from the start, the first group of focolarini were aware that the problems of inequality could not be solved unless the rich could be made to realise in some way the injustice of the situation. In the Focolare's guidelines on economy and work, Giosi Guella recalls the first ideas of a social revolution which they had at the beginnings of the movement:

"We wanted to solve the social problem of Trent... our reasoning was simple: we have more and they have less; we will raise their standard of living so as to reach a certain equality. We even thought of ousting the rich, not through violence, but through our ideal that would burn the hearts of those who have more and the communion of goods would be spontaneous" [FOC08].

What is striking about this passage is how the group of the Focolare recognised right from the start, that the process of creating greater equality in society required the active participation of all people - not just the poor. It was not enough for they themselves to give away all that they had to the poor: they had to 'oust' the rich through winning them over to the ideals of the Movement. There are strong parallels between this way of thinking and the communist doctrine that was so prevalent in the city of Trent at that time, a fact that led to several brushes with the Fascist regime, which was suspicious of their activities. Chiara Lubich's brother was an active member of the Communist Party on the editorial team of *Il Popolo*, and a partisan (Gallagher, 1997). Both were advocating a radical redistribution of wealth. Yet, although it is right to say that the ultimate aim of greater equality was the same, the means suggested and employed in order to carry out this goal could not be more different. In the case of the communists, the end of equality justified the means - and those means could involve the violent repression of those in control of the means of production, resulting in revolution.

For Chiara Lubich and her companions, the main way of ousting the rich was through 'burning their hearts' with the ideal that they themselves had discovered and begun to put into practice through giving away all of their possessions (Lubich, 1984). It was through seeing and learning from their example that the rich would themselves be moved and become personally involved in the process of redistribution of wealth, since they too would feel that the poor were their brothers and sisters and that they had a duty to share their possessions with them. Rather than alienating the rich, their way would create greater participation of all, fostering greater social integration and the narrowing of the gap between rich and poor. On several occasions, however, the Focolare group was mistaken for communists, as recalled in a biography of Chiara Lubich:

> *"Word went around that they [the Focolare] were communists ... In those days, remembers Chiara, only the communists spoke about 'unity'. It was not something that you heard preached about in Sunday sermons. So they were communists, then? Either that or Protestants! All this reading of Scripture and living of Gospel phrases!"* (Gallagher, 1997: 42).

This strategy of overcoming the rich through engaging them is arguably more effective in the long term than the use of other means such as force, since it is a practice which is very personal and touches individual in a real way. It does not replace the law or the role of the state, but provides "a more solid foundation of all other good and lawful means of guaranteeing an honest and dignified livelihood for all" (Movimento Umanitá Nuova, 1984: 31). It is perhaps for this reason that on another occasion, on seeing the effectiveness of what the group was doing in the city of Trent, two communist activists approached them:

> *"'One day in May 1945, two communists came into our little focolare and said to me 'Look, we've been watching you. We've seen the way you girls share everything and how you give it away to those in need.'*

> *Chiara remembers the meeting very clearly because the two communists asked her, 'What's going on? Why on earth are you doing this? Tell us the secret of your success.'*
> *She says, 'I pointed to the crucifix on the wall, because he is the one who is love and who taught us to love. They lowered their eyes.'*
> *One of them said to her, 'What you're doing on a small scale, we will do all over the world.'*
> *Chiara challenged them: 'we are few, we're young, we're poor. But God is with us. Let's see who gets there first, shall we?'"* (Gallagher, 1997: 43-44)

The fall of communist regimes in the early-1990s and the start of the Economy of Sharing within the Focolare seemed to be a response to this question. In the 1950s and 1960s, however, the radical approach to wealth redistribution which they were advocating and the parallels which could be seen between their message and that of the communists (and Protestants) led to lengthy investigations by the Holy See about the Focolare (Zambonini, 1991: 63; Gallagher, 1997: 78-89). The Vatican could not find any evidence of infiltration of ideas that were not in keeping with the message of the Gospel, though, and approved the Focolare in 1963 for the first time. When the final approval of the Focolare came in 1990 [FOC10], it provided an opportunity for the Focolare to expand further in the 1990s.

The place of work

As a result of the emphasis of the Focolare's spirituality on forming a unity between the religious and socio-economic dimensions of life, work has always been given great importance within the Movement. During the war, little was written on the relevance of work since the time of the focolarini was taken up with the tasks of helping the poor and attending to the growing community. In the years that followed the war, and in particular in the past twenty years, the importance of work has been stressed within the Focolare as it is also through work that people derive meaning in their lives. There are several key ideas that have emerged, based on the theological anthropology of the human person, which is at the heart of the Focolare vision.

Co-creators

The first point regards the creativity of the human person. Within the context of Christian anthropology, the human person is viewed not as an isolated individual, but as a person who is called to be in a relationship with God and with other people (Burns, 1981). Work plays an important part in the development of these relationships, as it is through work that the process of creation is continued (Sachs, 1991). Within the Focolare, the idea of work is related back to the Biblical vision present in the book of Genesis:

> *"If Jesus asks that we seek first the kingdom of God, this does not mean that he exempts us from work. On the contrary ... we should have a very elevated concept of work...*
>
> *While it is a fact that man, because made in the image of God, finds his fulfilment in communion with God, it is also true that this is not his only constitutive element. The Bible points out that it is also characteristic of man to provide for sustenance and to work"* (Movimento Umanità Nuova, 1984: 29).

The human person, therefore, is viewed as continuing and completing the work that God started through creation - they are co-creators with God. This role as co-creator gives work a profound intrinsic value [FOC15]. Moreover, for Christians within the Focolare, the effort of work is viewed as the continuation of the redemption, which was paid for through the death and resurrection of Christ. Work, therefore, is viewed as constitutive of the human person as it is principally through work that the person can use his or her creativity and initiative. Combating unemployment and increasing the possibilities for every person to work is therefore an important underlying principle.

Work as a 'social' place

Work, however, is not only viewed as an action that can strengthen the relationship of the human person with God. It is also a means of maintaining and developing meaningful relationships with other people [FOC13]. Through work, people have an opportunity to collaborate in building up a community based on service. It is a process in which all members of the working community are required to participate - from the workers to management - since the spirituality requires that all people have to be loved equally and without exception. In the same way, economic problems cannot be solved only by uniting the workers, but only through greater collaboration between all people, since everyone has a stake in the economy. This principle is at the very heart of the Economy of Sharing, as will be seen from the case studies that follow.

The leaders of the Focolare have spoken on many occasions about how work ought to be carried out if this vision is to be applied in practice. What emerges is a vision of work in which the human person is regarded as at the centre of the working practices and not the mere fact of production. This was outlined by Chiara Lubich in 1984:

> *"We know the economic life of present day society is characterised by industrial production in which man is often subordinate to efficiency and the production of the machine. The centre of the entire productive system is no longer the person, but production itself. What counts are the goods and not the person and*

> *his or her work. Today the labourer's work has become meaningless for him, for it does not ... contribute towards fulfilling his potential of creativity and intelligence. Work has taken on an alienating character. At times it is also physically and psychologically destructive, tolerated as a means of survival, since there is no alternative. Thus, frequently, it possesses a sense of emptiness"* (Movimento Umanità Nuova, 1984: 36).

Chiara Lubich's analysis of the alienation of work bears a striking resemblance to Marx's account of the wage labourer. In Chiara Lubich's understanding, however, the first step towards changing this situation is "reaffirming that the person takes precedence over capital, over ownership and over structures, creating an ethic of work which bears in mind that through work, man achieves fulfilment as a human being, and in a sense becomes more human" (Movimento Umanità Nuova, 1984: 37). Rather than engaging in a process through which the means of production are overthrown, she emphasises the need to 'affirm' the centrality of the person as what gives meaning to capital. There is also a recognition that in many parts of society today, work itself has become the ultimate aim. Work though very important, thus has to be balanced with other dimensions of life and cannot be allowed to take over the whole of life:

> *"In our times, in some parts of humanity, life has become - in an exaggerated way - nothing but a frenzy of work, seeking a super perfection which leaves no room for anything else in life. In other parts of humanity, because work is considered an absolute value - the motto is 'omnia vincit labor' – 'work is supreme', 'work conquers all'. Thus, we can understand how, by stressing work, our Movement meets the needs of out times, but does not make work the 'only thing necessary' in life, not the only goal. What is supreme, what conquers all - we know - is love: 'omnia vincit amor'."* (Movimento Umanità Nuova, 1984: 31).

Work, although an extremely important component of life, should have its place and not be allowed to take over the whole of life. It should be balanced against other elements of life which have to be in harmony with each other.

A 'culture of giving'

As a result of this vision of economic matters and how these relate to other dimensions of life, and in particular to the spiritual vision, many specific practices have emerged within the Focolare, some of which have already been mentioned (communion of goods, trust in providence). The ideal of giving everything away to the poor, which had been practised during the war, can no longer be literally applied to the range of circumstances in which people within the movement find themselves. Several thousand people still feel called to take on the commitment of the focolarini through selling all that they have. Others want to remain in close contact with the movement but are unable actually to leave everything behind, either as a result of their commitments as married people or their responsibilities in society. Instead, such people, who now make up the vast majority of the Focolare Movement, are encouraged to make changes to their lifestyle that reflect their commitment to put the above principles into practice.

The first practice, which was present right from the start of the Focolare, is that of sharing material goods. As the movement has developed, this practice has evolved, enabling people from different social categories to participate in some form in the practice of sharing. Some of these people give all their possessions to the poor via the Focolare and adopt the community lifestyle that is based on the first Focolare community in Trent (the focolarini). Each month their salaries are deposited in a central account[99] from which the individual community houses receive an allowance, while what is left over is used to fund Focolare communities in developing countries and to help fund the international centre of the Focolare in Rocca di Papa near Rome. The focolarini bequeath all of their present and future possessions to the Focolare. Over the years, this has enabled the Focolare to grow and to develop at a substantial rate. Many of the pieces of land that it owns were bequeathed to it by focolarini or well-wishers. One example is the land in the Chianti hills near Florence on which the town of 'Loppiano' has been built. This piece of land was inherited by the children of the Folonari family (a famous Milanese family of wine makers), three of whom joined the Focolare.

Other people who are connected with the movement in one form or another commit themselves to sharing what is superfluous to their immediate needs, basing their 'need' on the measure of their brothers and sisters who do not have enough to survive. In an address in 1992 to a group of teenagers, Chiara Lubich highlighted this choice of sharing as a lifestyle that could overcome the tendency in Western society to focus on consumption and 'having' rather than 'being' or 'giving':

> *"You should keep for yourselves ... only what you need, as the plants do. They absorb from the earth only the water, salts and other things that they need, and not more. Likewise, each one of us must have what he or she needs. All the rest should be given away and put into common with the others"* [CEOS12].

This comparison with the natural world, although rather prosaic, illustrates how the

[99] In Britain the account is under the name of Focolare Trust, which is a registered charity.

children who participate in the Focolare are educated in a lifestyle in which emphasis is put on sharing. In the Focolare communities, things are shared in several ways. Firstly, on a local scale, the individual communities try to be constantly aware of the needs of other people within the community. People who have specific needs are also encouraged to communicate needs to others in the community in the small groups in which the Focolare members meet, through the Focolare houses or through contact with other people within the Focolare.

One practice, which dates back to the origins of the Focolare in Trent and which is still carried out in all of the Focolare groups is what is known as the 'bundle', recalling how the first group of focolarini piled up all of their possessions in a room so as to give them to the poor (Zambonini, 1991: 43). At least once a year, the members of the movement from the oldest to the youngest re-assess their personal possessions and then make a 'bundle' of everything that they no longer consider necessary [FOC03]. This bundle is then shared out with the local community. If all of the needs in community are met, the remaining articles are sorted out - some are sent to charity shops, others are given to the Focolare house in case they need them or know of others who do. Occasionally, items are sent abroad to the centre of the Focolare in Rome, to disasters or war-torn areas. Money is also shared within the Focolare communities on a local scale. This takes place through donations to the Focolare Trust through individuals who wish to contribute to the Focolare's activities. Within the smaller groups, the common practice is to keep a common fund that is administered by one of the group and then used for any immediate needs or future needs. A portion of this money is also given to the international centre of the Focolare in order to fund the international infrastructure of the movement and to help support other members of the community in other countries.

Sharing, however, has increasingly acquired a global dimension within the Focolare. Over and above helping people in the local communities, for several years the members of the Focolare have been involved in a direct action to help the members of the community who are lacking basic needs in other countries. It is an interesting example of how the Focolare community has tried to overcome the geographical distances that separate the community in order to achieve a global communion of goods. The Action was launched by Chiara Lubich herself in 1994 as a result of her observation that despite the work of the movement, including the launch of the Economy of Sharing in 1991, there were still people within the Focolare who lacked basic provisions for survival. As a result, in a letter to all the members of the movement [CEOS13a] she made an appeal for help on behalf of those who were in need. This Action has become known as 'Action 5000' as a result of the number of people who were in extreme poverty during the first year of the project. Since then, Action 5000 has become an annual occurrence within the Focolare, with members from the richer countries donating on average $40 per year to cover the costs of providing for the basic needs of people in developing countries. On average 80% of requests for assistance have been met. This Action has now been integrated with the Economy of Sharing and will be discussed more fully in subsequent chapters.

Sharing within the Focolare is not seen as being limited to material possessions. The line between material, social and spiritual sharing is very hard to draw. In many cases the practice of sharing may be in the form of an offer of help, which involves time, skills and energy. In other cases sharing may involve the offer of advice or a listening ear. Material sharing is viewed as a reflection of the spiritual communion that exists between people - their awareness of being brothers and sisters - and not simple a charitable action. The kind of giving advocated by the Focolare cannot easily be reduced to philanthropy, although there are elements of philanthropic giving in it. In an article on the different kinds of giving, Araujo highlights the kind of giving which is called 'evangelical' giving, and which the Focolare aims to promote:

> *"The 'culture of giving' qualifies the human person as a being that is open to communion, to a relationship with the Absolute – God, with others, and with creation. Individuality and sociality converge in the gift of self, the gift of one's being and in the circulation of material goods, which are needed for the development, and growth of everyone.*
>
> *Not every kind of giving therefore results in the culture of giving. There is a kind of giving which is contaminated by a desire for power over the other, a search for dominion and even the oppression of other peoples. It only has the appearance of giving. There is a kind of giving which seeks satisfaction and pleasure in the act of giving itself. Deep down, it is an egoistic expression of the self and, in general, this is perceived by the person who is on the receiving end as a humiliation or offence. There is also a kind of utilitarian giving which has an ulterior interest. This is present in the current forms of neo-liberalism, in which there is a search for a payoff in terms of profit. This kind of giving does not create a new mentality.*
>
> *Last of all there is the giving which we Christians call 'evangelical' because it is an integral part of the personal attitudes of those that welcome and commit themselves in the construction of the kingdom that Jesus brings ... This giving is open to the other – individual or people – and seeks out the other in respect for their dignity, which includes traditions, customs, culture, etc. It is an expression of our deepest being. The word 'to give' is synonymous with loving in a practical*

way" (Araujo, 1994a).

Within the Focolare, the role of the person who is in need is accorded a very high position. Since possessions are given secondary importance, the value of the person is judged not on their capacity to have or give materially but on their capacity to give of themselves to others [FOC12]. In this respect, even someone with no possessions has something to give to the others. Need is not regarded as something inherently negative, as something of which to be ashamed, but rather a situation which can enable sharing to be put into practice amongst the community. Offering a need to the community is therefore viewed as a positive action as people are encouraged to 'offer' their need in order to give others the opportunity to help. This in turn empowers the community, creating greater solidarity amongst the members. The act of receiving is therefore transformed into an act of giving.

Theoretical reflections

From the above outline of the historical development of the Focolare economic vision and associated practices, it is possible to distinguish certain key ideas that prevail within the Focolare. This vision of the economic dimension of life, and of how it relates to the spirituality, is radically different to the prevalent mechanistic vision of the market economy, which tends to isolate the economy as separate from the rest of human action. This contrast was outlined explicitly by Foresi, one of the founding members of the movement. He wrote:

> *"In general, when it comes to economic realities, one thinks of the 'cold law' of competition. The economy is like physics or mathematics: it goes through predetermined cycles that can be predicted and unavoidable peaks and troughs. Many economic books teach that little can be changed. Never, in any book, would you find the true law that regulates economic events on earth. It is that law that Jesus proclaimed: 'Seek first the kingdom of God and its justice and all the rest will be given to you'. It is in this law that we discover the point of contact between what is human and what is divine. Economic laws have their place, but if the existence of the divine is not taken into account, which also regulates economic activities, then you will never understand many great events. Beyond earth there is heaven, and heaven has promised to intervene to help mere people on earth if they try to look for it. This is not a fairy tale, it is the experience of many Christian families, it is the experience of the Church"* (Foresi, 1953: 53).

In this extract, Foresi transcends the classical distinction which has prevailed between the 'economic' and the 'social/ethical' since the Enlightenment, and in particular since the much quoted work of Adam Smith on the *Wealth of Nations* ([1784] 1981). According to Smith, the principal motor of economic action is that of self-interest. Through the reciprocal pursuit of self-interest, a greater good of wealth generation can be reached, guided by the so-called 'invisible hand'. By stating that the 'true law' that governs economic matters is not merely an external mechanism, but that there is a truth that is external to the market, Foresi is re-establishing the link that existed between moral philosophy and economics prior to the establishment of modern economics as a discipline in its own right. The question of the existence of 'Providence' becomes an economic question, as well as a spiritual one. Faith - and the experience that this entails for the Focolare - is put at the foundation of the economy.

One result of this is that the 'economic' is viewed as a 'social place' that cannot stand outside the realm of ethics. The term 'social', however, requires further elucidation. In relation to this, Sorgi outlines how the Focolare spirituality leads to a rediscovery of the 'sociological place' of the economy:

> *"Observing what is happening [within the Focolare], one can make two sociological and anthropological considerations, both of which has a specifically spiritual nature. The first consideration that emerges from what can be verified is that the economy re-finds its natural essence as a 'sociological place'. It is rediscovered as a net of specific relationships between social actors, who communicate their material and liquid goods with each other as person to person (both near and far). They come together to co-operate. They review their personal and family budgets in the light of an acute sensitivity to the needs of others. They invest their savings in order to participate in businesses that have declared from the outset their intention of giving any eventual profits to certain goals of solidarity and the formation of young people"* (Sorgi, 1991a: 56).

'Social' in the Focolare's economic vision is therefore regarded firstly as the recognition that economic institutions, structures, and transactions always reflect a subjective relationship with others, whether that relationship be one of exploitation, co-operation or indifference. Economic relationships cannot stand outside the social, since 'behind' the discourses of the market, people are ethical beings who makes moral choices, which take precedence over every other results-oriented, instrumental consideration (Platteau, 1994). It is interesting to note the emphasis that Sorgi places on the geographical distance - 'both near and far' - between social actors. All economic transactions, therefore, are viewed as spaces that are inherently relational (Gui, 1996: 260). This is a view which is echoed in many different strands of social economics and economic sociology (Granovetter, 1985; Swedberg, 1998), as outlined in Chapter 1. The 'social' is therefore an interpretative key through which the Focolare's 'economic' vision can be understood.

The term 'social', however, is also used to describe the specific nature of the Focolare vision and a normative vision of how people are and how the economy should be: the economy ought to be *more* social, *more* relational (Bruni, 1999). In this respect, the term is used to mean that economic choices, institutions and structures ought to reflect the social nature of the economy through being more sensitive to the needs of the person and entertaining respect for human rights at every level. In this way, the term 'social' actually means a range of interpersonal attributes that denote availability to help others and which relate to the spirituality of the movement. Understanding the relationship between the positive and normative dimensions of the Focolare economic vision is central to the subsequent development of the Economy of Sharing.

The understanding of economic and social issues that underpins the Focolare in many respects is consistent with the theological anthropology presented in Catholic Social Teaching (CST).[100] It is therefore possible to draw on several principles from that literature in order to understand the possible extensions of the Focolare vision in the realm of the 'economic'. CST is founded on two main principles: the idea of basic human rights and the promotion of peace. The body of literature which makes up CST argues, that the diversity of the human race has to be seen against the universal rights of every human being as members of one family (Herr, 1991: 50). Likewise, the Focolare stresses the need to adopt a perspective based on 'unity and diversity' in which every person has equal dignity, regardless of race, religion, age or sex [FOC25]. Within CST there is a growing positive attitude towards the role of business and the right of people to use their economic initiative (John Paul II, 1991: 8/42). There is a general agreement that the market economy is the best form of economic organisation, but there is also a view that it is in need of radical correction in order to bring about a more just distribution of wealth (Novak, 1995). In this context, there is agreement that business has somehow to be orientated towards the common good (John Paul II, 1991: 43). It recognises the power of business, and many theorists would argue that the ethical theory of human rights, which lies at the heart of CST, should also be applied to business (Mahoney, 1999).

[100] Catholic Social Teaching has practically disappeared from social science in recent years, to the point that the documents on which the main concepts are based are virtually unquoted and unknown. Many of these date back to Vatican II and consist in Papal Encyclicals such as *Centesimus annus* (1991) which is a stimulating and insightful critique of the demise of socialism and capitalism from a Christian viewpoint. Despite this, there is evidence that there is renewed interest in this literature (such as a recent interdisciplinary conference in Cambridge). Several concepts are of particular relevance in this context. A review of the main concepts and their relation to the market economy can be found in Novak (1993) and Herr (1991).

Another principle of CST which can be applied to the Focolare is that of *subsidiarity* – the idea that social justice should be achieved through sharing of resources at as small a geographical scale as possible (Herr, 1991). Within the Focolare, wherever possible, needs are covered within the community in the context of caring relationships. The intervention of more distant structures, such as the role of the state, are kept to a minimum through the voluntary participation of people in the local community, which involves enlarging civil society through the right of association with others. Within this context, the role of enterprise and private initiative is essential, and the Focolare vision places the freedom and responsibility of persons in a very prominent place, through promoting the virtues necessary for exercising personal responsibility. The ramifications of the parallels between the Focolare and CST will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined the main ideas which underpin the Focolare's vision of economic life. From considering the ideas which emerged at the historical origins of the Focolare and tracing their development, it has been possible to understand the interrelationship that exists between the 'spiritual' and the 'economic' within the context of the Focolare and the practices which have derived from it. Such practices and ideas represent a radical departure from orthodox economic thinking about the mechanisms that operate within the market economy, and to some extent mirror the more recent literature emphasising the socio-cultural dimensions of economic action. The Focolare, however, introduces to this literature the spiritual dimension of human life, raising new questions as to the place of religious concepts such as 'communion' within the context of economic life. There are strands of thinking which can be drawn on when talking about the economic vision of the Focolare, such as the literature of Catholic Social Teaching, based on the theory of human rights and the promotion of peace. These will be explored in depth in subsequent chapters.

5. The evolution of the 'Economy of Sharing'[101]

Over the years, the Focolare Movement has developed a distinctive vision of economic matters and their interrelationship with other aspects of human life. This distinctive vision, which can be traced back to the experience of Chiara Lubich and her companions during the Second World War, demonstrates a heightened awareness of the strong relationship between economic life and spirituality. It has led to the development of many 'economic-spiritual' practices, such as the 'communion of goods', in which there is an intimate relationship between the symbolic language of spirituality and economic affairs. As outlined in previous chapters, this emphasis on the practical application of their shared spirituality has given rise to local and global networks consisting of 1,000 well-established initiatives and projects to alleviate poverty both within and outwith the Focolare community.

In general, however, this distinctive vision of economic affairs has been applied in practice to the *personal economy* of individual people, families and local communities who participate in the Focolare. It has largely been applied to those 'non-market' spaces discussed in Chapter 1, in which it is often possible to assume the existence of a moral economy. In the early days of the Focolare, the circulation of personal possessions among the various members of the community was based on the common bond of the shared Focolare spirituality [FOC08]. In some ways this could be seen as the first stage of widening out from the 'hearth' of the Focolare by extending it into the family and then the local community. Over time, it began to be supposed that these larger 'spaces' could also become 'hearths' of sharing where the 'culture of giving' might be lived out amongst small groups of people who share everything that they own. One of the critical questions raised in Chapter 1, in relation to the recent work of a number of human geographers (Smith, 1998), is whether or not such moral economies can be extended into the still more extensive *public economy*. Such economies emphasise the values of co-operation, caring and sharing, which are normally assumed to reside within a more personal sphere, based principally on face-to-face communication. Moreover, could the 'hearth' of the Focolare be

[101] The term 'Economy of Sharing' is the translation of the Italian phrase *Economia di Comunione* which, literally translated, means 'Economy of Communion'. The translation used here is the one currently in use within the Economy of Sharing businesses in the USA, Canada and the Philippines.

effectively operationalised at the scale of the institutions of the *global economy*? In a certain sense, this is precisely what the Economy of Sharing does indeed seek to do, through the logical extension of the Focolare's spirituality into the realm of business. In this Chapter, I will consider the context in which the Economy of Sharing first emerged and provide an overview of the global dimensions of the project.

Globalisation and the 'communion of goods'

From the very beginning of the Focolare, as outlined in Chapters 3 and 4, the economic vision of the Focolare revealed a strong emphasis on equality. The foundation of this equality, however, is radically different from dominant forms of egalitarianism which have emerged in the last 40 years, based on the idea of 'rights'.[102] To talk of 'rights' in relation to the first Focolare community during the war clouds the central point of what was happening within that community. The absurd violations of war, in which there was an endemic climate of violence, stripped everyone of what could be called their basic rights. At the same time, this absence made the restoration of those rights an urgent necessity. One could say that in certain ways, the emergence of the Focolare in Trent led to the restoration of rights for some people, but that the way in which this happened had nothing to do with the discourse of rights itself.

Rather, the equality of the Focolare derived substantially from the understanding that human dignity derives first and foremost from the belief that all people are children of the one God, who loves each one with infinite love [FOC16]. This renewed awareness of the oneness of the human family was the fundamental point which transformed their particular 'communitarian' spirituality into economic and social action. This intimate relationship between the spiritual and the economic, epitomised in the model of the first Christian community in Jerusalem, was the powerful force activating a sense of family within the emerging movement. Within this 'family', equality was based on an 'ethic of care' in which each one recognised their responsibility to care for the others. In a similar way to Simone Weil's (1951) emphasis on attending to the needs of others, the Focolare's spirituality opened people's hearts to recognise and to attend to the needs of others,

[102] By 'egalitarianism' I am referring to the liberal theories of social justice put forward by thinkers such as Rawls (1971), Nozick (1974) and Rorty (1989), which can be traced back to the Hobbes and Locke. Within such theories the dominant civil concept to preserve security and prosperity is that of 'rights' (Bell, 1998). Society is viewed as instrumental to the attainment of these rights, which are increasingly viewed in terms of economic goods (Taylor, 1995). These rights are attributed to individuals (although there is an increasing move towards theorising the 'rights' of minority groups), and are not related to society as a whole.

regardless of who these others may be. Reaching greater equality was bound up in the ability to hear the cry of those who were hurting and to ask 'Why are you hurting?' not 'That's terrible – your rights have been violated'. Through attending to the needs of those who were hurting, they could offer care in a very personal and direct way.

This mutual attending also gave rise to the acceptance of a degree of inequality within the Focolare. Since equality within the community was not so much based on the possession of rights, but on the growth of ever greater mutual attending and therefore of spiritual communion, there was also the recognition that different people have different material needs [FOC15]. What mattered was not so much inequalities on some arithmetic scale by which individuals were measured against each other, but the extent to which the communion amongst the members of the community was able to fulfil specific needs as they arose. Things were privately owned by individuals or families, but there was a strong sense that private ownership did not exclude the possibility of others having access to goods, whenever necessary [FOC03]. Ownership, therefore, was regarded as 'stewardship' rather than as an end in itself. At the same time, the sense of responsibility towards those who were in material need - lacking food, clothing, work, and shelter - remained the strongest sign of the active life of the community and the greatest witness of Christian love (Johnston, 1981).

The Economy of Sharing emerged in 1991, as a consequence of the desire to make this ideal of communion within the Focolare work on an increasingly global scale. As the Focolare grew and developed over the years, as can be seen in Chapter 3, it became an international movement. Since the late-1970s, the number of members of the Focolare grew disproportionately within the poorest communities of Latin America, Asia and Africa, as did many other radical religious groups (Gutierrez, 1984; Slater, 1985). For many of these groups, such as the Christian Base Communities of Brazil, religious affiliation was also seen as a means of emancipation from poverty (Wirth, 1987). Whilst this internationalisation gave rise to many initiatives to attend to the needs of people linked to the Focolare throughout the world, by the early-1990s there were increasing strains on the capacity of the Movement to create equality on a global scale [CEOS01]. In particular, the fall of the communist block in 1989 revealed entire Focolare communities numbering several thousand behind the Iron Curtain who were in desperate need of basic food and shelter.

Araceli, Brazil, May 1991

This situation came to a head in May 1991, when Chiara Lubich visited the Focolare communities in Brazil. Whilst she was there, she saw for herself the extent of the inequality which is so apparent in the city of Sao Paulo and its surrounding areas. The scale of the poverty caused her to reflect on what action the Focolare was taking in order to alleviate the problem. In a sense, her visit was an opportunity for everyone in the Focolare community in Brazil to reflect on how they were attending to the needs of the poor. She was moved by the commitment that the Focolare people had in starting and running a range of projects to improve the living conditions of people in the poorest areas. She visited some of the projects to see for herself the work being done [CEOS03]. She became all too aware that the efforts of the Focolare were one drop in the ocean faced with the scale of the poverty in a city like Sao Paulo. She asked herself whether the Focolare, as a group, could make a greater contribution to resolving this entrenched social and economic inequality.

The launch of the Economy of Sharing can also be interpreted as a recognition of the failure of the 'communion of goods', as a strategy to overcome the inequalities on a global scale. Through launching the Economy of Sharing, Chiara Lubich also recognised that the communion of goods had many shortcomings and that something more would be needed if the 'hearth' of the Focolare was to be extended across the globe. Thus, although the communion of goods works as a powerful strategy of wealth redistribution at a local scale, it had obvious limitations in the context of the inequalities seemingly endemic within a globalised economy. The communion of goods said nothing about the nature of work and how value is created and distributed within an industrial (or post-industrial) society. In a sense, the practice of communion of goods is a kind of *post hoc* redistribution that may have a profound spiritual meaning, but does not have a direct impact on the public economy. It emerged during the War, at a time when there was no alternative to sharing since the normal patterns of work had been suspended. In the context of the economic imbalances within countries such as Brazil, the communion of goods did little to address the root causes of inequality: economic rationalisation, low wages, and unemployment. In a sense, the Focolare, like other civil society organisations in Latin America, was picking up the pieces left by both an economic system which thrived on inequality and a government which was unable to cope with the rising social 'fall out' from economic crisis (Green, 1996).

The solution to this situation, in Chiara Lubich's view, was simple. It involved extending the principles of the Focolare spirituality into the realm of business and industry. The communion of goods, which the Brazilian members of the Focolare practised with great generosity, was certainly one part of the solution – this had to continue. But the scope of this communion had to be recognised and the root causes of the inequality on a structural level had to be addressed. Chiara Lubich suggested that the Focolare in Brazil was perhaps being called to start to live the communion of goods in a 'superior way', what would later be called the Economy of Sharing. The thinking behind the Economy of Sharing is clear in a speech that she gave to the leaders of the Focolare in Araceli on 30th May 1991:

> *"This is the novelty: in the Movement we have always practised the communion of goods; the focolarini do it in a complete way, because they give everything; volunteers give what is superfluous, families also share out their surplus amongst themselves. Now we would like to propose a communion of goods which is at a superior level, that is, to give rise to businesses and industries here around the Mariapolis, which would be run by our people, who would put all the profits in common for the poor, having kept what is necessary to keep the business running. With these profits we will live the reality of the first Christians in the twentieth century: they brought all that they had to the feet of the apostles and distributed it to the poor, so that there was no one in need, there were no poor."* [CEOS03: 13].

What was new about this communion of goods, therefore, was that it would involve the participation of commercial enterprises and not just individual people, who would choose to share what they regarded as superfluous or to proceed with social projects which aimed at providing welfare for the poor. People were encouraged to start enterprises which would generate profits to be shared for predetermined aims. The Economy of Sharing hence aimed to make the communion of goods productive, generating new wealth from the existing communion between the people of the Movement. At the same time, the businesses themselves would create a new space in which the 'hearth' of the Focolare could be extended out into the realm of the public economy. Through businesses that were run by people who lived out the Focolare ideals of caring and sharing, the actual causes of inequality would be addressed in a radical way. It was a simple but challenging proposal. The principles of caring and sharing can arguably be easily applied to the realm of the *personal economy*, where there is a high degree of clarity and choice on how goods can be distributed due to the rights of ownership of private property. Within the sphere of the more *public economy*, however, the application of such ideas is not so straightforward, as will be seen from the case studies on the emergence of the Economy of Sharing.

Reading through the texts relating to the launch of the Economy of Sharing, another strand of reasoning it also apparent. In 1991, the aftermath of the fall of the communist regimes was reaching a critical point. There was euphoria over the triumph of capitalism, but also a profound sense of disillusionment over the collapse of the communist states and socialist ideals. Many social critics were beginning to discuss the possibility of a 'third way' and some even pointed to the new social and religious movements, including the Focolare, as the protagonists of economic alternatives (Secondin, 1991). In the spring of 1991, moreover, Pope John Paul II had published an encyclical called *Centesimus Annus*, celebrating a century of Catholic Social Teaching. The focus of this letter, in the aftermath of the fall of the Iron Curtain, was an in-depth critique of communism and also of the free market. Whilst restating the Catholic principle of the right to own private property and individual freedom, in this letter he stressed the need to highlight the universal ownership of all goods and social responsibility. Although not explicitly advocating a 'third way', the letter threw down the challenge to all people (and Catholics in particular) to come up with new ways of resolving social and economic inequalities.

Within the Focolare, the proposal of a radical alternative to the capitalist and communist models had never been far away. As discussed in the previous chapter, right from the beginnings of the movement Focolare leaders had advocated the Christian principles on which the movement rests as an alternative that had far reaching implications in the social and economic field. Yet this alternative had always been seen as a matter of personal choice, and had seldom been advocated as an institutional alternative set apart from either capitalism or communism. But in 1991, Chiara Lubich seemed to recognise that the Focolare could perhaps point to a 'third way', also in the public sphere, which would address the inequalities that she herself had seen.

The first business ideas

The idea was extremely simple and the immediate response to it was one of excitement (Gallagher, 1997: 160). News of it spread through the existing local Brazilian and global networks of the Focolare very rapidly [CEOS02]. Within hours of the launch of the idea, there were offers of participation pouring into Araceli from Focolare communities all over Brazil. Within a matter of days, the idea had spread to people all over the world and there were numerous offers of participation. From reading the documentation on the launch of the project and from watching footage of the meetings, the feeling one gets is that the

Economy of Sharing was viewed as a response, perhaps *the* response, to the urgent need for greater equality in Brazil and beyond. The following are extracts from letters from communities in different parts of Brazil that arrived at the Focolare Centres in Rome and Araceli, following the launch of the Economy of Sharing. The first extract comes from a family who lived in the city of Sao Paulo, offering their participation in the project:

> *"1st June, 1991, Sao Paulo ... We have a small business which makes office furniture and we would like to offer to equip the office which will be used for the secretariat that will administer this new reality [the Economy of Sharing]. This is what we have available: an Olivetti typewriter, Olympia calculator, 2 desks, 3 seats, 1 computer table, 1 stamping machine, 1 cupboard. We are also able to buy in objects from the factories that work with us at factory prices"* [CEOS 02: 1].

The most striking thing in this letter is the practical nature of the help offered. There was nothing abstract about the idea of the Economy of Sharing, and the response to it reflected this clarity through concrete offers of help. At the same time many people readily grasped the potential of the idea to transform the economy. In another letter, from the Focolare community in Manaus, the writers reflected on the spiritual significance of the idea and how it had changed their own attitudes towards the economy:

> *"Manaus, 2nd June, 1991. We have contemplated the project [Economy of Sharing] for building of a new society based on Trinitarian relationships! ... In their desire to give life to the Economy of Sharing, simple and poor people have offered the little money they had saved for their vital needs with extraordinary generosity, in order to participate in this great project in an unconditional way. Several communal and personal enterprises have already come about. These include: the opening of a bank account where the money for the capital will be deposited, jewellery, objects, availability of people to move house, offers of sales points for the produce of Araceli here in Manaus"* [CEOS02: 1].

The first reaction of those who heard about it, therefore, was to intensify the communion of goods that they were already putting into practice in their communities. People offered whatever they could - even wedding rings - so as to make a contribution towards building up the Economy of Sharing. People talked of a 'third way' between capitalism and communism (Sorgi, 1991b), and many people who had little or no experience of business felt 'called' to leave everything and to dedicate their lives to building up the project [CEOS05]. People began to offer their services to assist the project in Sao Paulo and declared their availability to move to Araceli to start up businesses. The following is an extract from Chiara Lubich's journal, shortly after the launch of the Economy of Sharing. It highlights the practical nature of the offers of participation:

> *"31.5.91 A volunteer who owns a clothes factory is prepared to move to the*

> *Mariapolis from her town (which is around 5 hours away) and to start a business here which will produce pyjamas. She has already found a suitable place where she can do this. Another volunteer is able to join her and to look after the commercial side of things. Together with a group of other volunteers, this enterprise could be up and running already. Providence has already arrived to buy an industrial over-locking machine and industrial cutters"* [CEOS05].

In this extract the way that the development of the Economy of Sharing is put down to the intervention of 'Providence' in 'providing an industrial over-locking machine and industrial cutters' - is striking. Those terms which were so often used to refer to the Focolare communion of goods on a personal level, within the confines of the community, were now quite spontaneously being used to describe the emergence of enterprises within the realm of the public economy. The news of the Economy of Sharing was not confined to Brazil. Responses to the idea soon began to arrive from around the world. In particular, a group of business people belonging to the Focolare were participating in a meeting on the social and economic implications of the Focolare vision in Rome when news of the developments in Brazil reached them. They were so enthusiastic about the proposal, that several of them decided immediately to start businesses or to convert the businesses that they had for the Economy of Sharing. Within a matter of weeks, the Economy of Sharing had emerged all over the world through the Focolare networks [CEOS04].

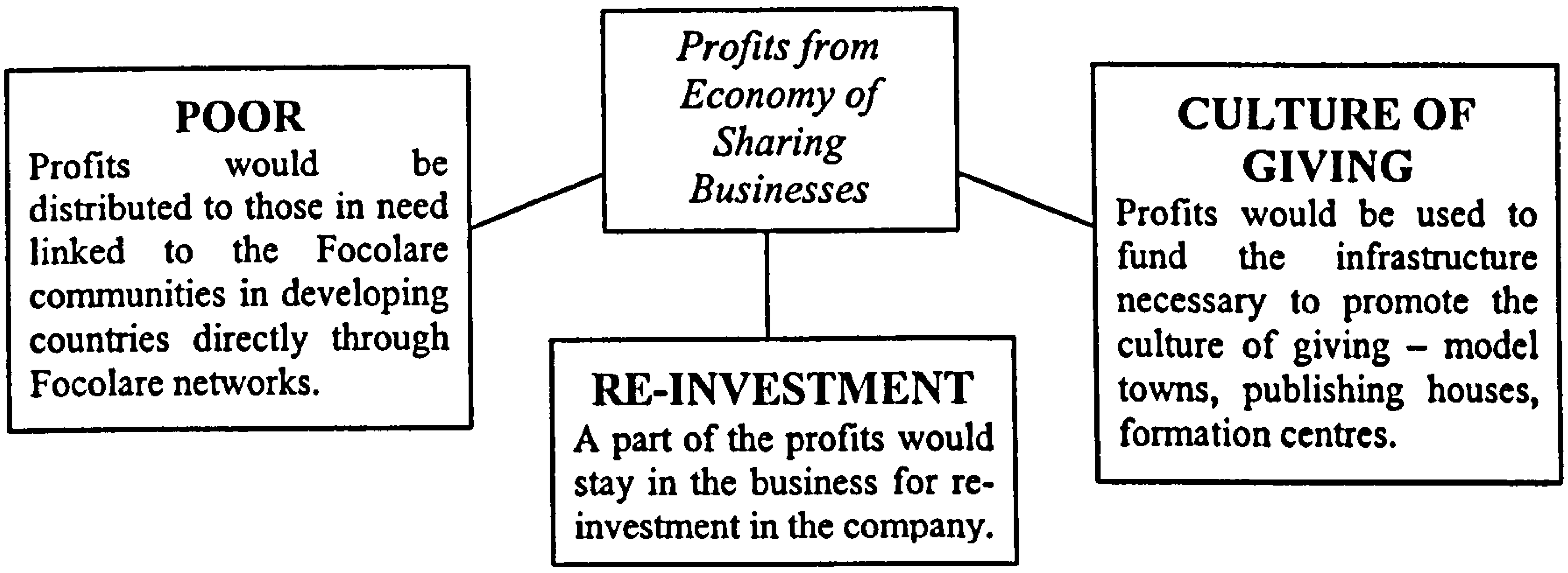
'Creating' a new economy

The idea of the Economy of Sharing was laid out in a series of talks that Chiara Lubich gave during her trip to Brazil in 1991, reflecting her personal concerns for social justice, above all within the Focolare on a global scale. Subsequently, these principles have been deepened, elaborated and discussed by other leading members of the Focolare, as well as by economists and other professionals working within or alongside the Focolare Movement. This body of documentation forms the guidelines which the businesses and other parties involved in the Economy of Sharing follow. Several key ideas relating to the nature of the Economy of Sharing emerge.

Profit sharing in three parts

The main principle that underpins the Economy of Sharing is that of increasing equality through making the communion of goods productive [CEOS08]. People linked to the Focolare are encouraged to set up businesses as a means of increasing the amount of resources available to help those linked to the movement who were in desperate need of food, clothing and shelter. The novelty of the project was initially seen as the division of the profits of the businesses into three parts [CEOS01]. One part was to be given to the poor, one kept for re-investment in the firm and the third part for creation of educational structures to promote the 'culture of giving', as shown in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1 Sub-division of Economy of Sharing business profits



Source: Adapted from Gold (1996)

The Economy of Sharing was not only advocating the revival of the tradition of 'tithing' within modern businesses, but insisting that it should become one of the chief motivations behind starting up new businesses. Within the Economy of Sharing, donations of profits should not be seen as a benevolent afterthought - what to do when excess wealth has been accumulated - but as an integral part of the business mission. There was initially talk of dividing the profits into 'thirds' [CEOS03], but in later documentation [CEOS18] this notion was changed to 'three parts', since the ideal of sharing three equal parts was regarded as damaging to the dynamic nature of business.[103] Nevertheless, there still remains some confusion regarding this matter, with different people still using both expressions. During the initial launch of the Economy of Sharing, little was said about how the project would actually be run or administered in any detail. It was assumed that the administration of the project would take place through the Focolare centres, which were the focus of the communion of goods, and that the same structures in place for the communion of goods would be able to fulfil the functions of the Economy of Sharing. The idea seemed to be so simple, yet it had the potential to redirect wealth in a way that was much more productive than the communion of goods alone.

[103] This subtle change is significant, as it can be interpreted as feedback from those who have businesses on the ground to the Focolare Centre in Rome. It is indicative of the difficulties faced in incorporating such a simple idea into the practices of business and will be returned to in subsequent chapters.

At a different level, however, what was actually being advocated was a redefinition of the place of business within the market economy. This debate has been highlighted in recent years by those writing about the need to recognise 'corporate responsibility' which goes beyond financial profitability.[104] The Economy of Sharing called on those wishing to take part to reflect on the distributive aspect of their existing or potential businesses, and the role it could play in creating greater equality and not only wealth generation. Redistribution already takes place within business through the various taxation regimes and through wages, much of which businesses have little control over owing to tax regimes and the laws governing pay, but the generation of profit is generally accepted as the principal function of business (Korten, 1995). In Korten's view, such a separation of this primary function of business (the generation of profits) from other, more distributive, social aspects, such as donations to charitable causes, is essential in order to prevent large corporations from taking on a 'pseudo-governmental role' through the sponsorship of welfare projects. Such a view, however, is based primarily on a particular understanding of the nature of profit within the American economic and financial system, and does not take into account the role that small and medium businesses have played for years in the redistribution of wealth through groups like the Rotarians.[105] What the Economy of Sharing is suggesting builds on this tradition, but goes further, through advocating that profit generation and redistribution should become parallel considerations within the very core of business. In order to be an authentic expression of the Economy of Sharing, this 'sharing' had to have certain characteristics.

Voluntary sharing

Since the Economy of Sharing has to be seen within the wider concept of equality valued by the Focolare, the sharing had to be entirely *voluntary*. If the sharing was not voluntary, but the result of coercion, it would result in the person who was giving being denied the possibility of granting consent. Without consent, the possibility of reaching 'communion' between people is taken away, given that the freedom to say 'no' is what makes authentic communion possible (Catapan, 1994). The act of giving within the Economy of Sharing

[104] The work of the New Economics Foundation (NEF, 2000) has researched the possibility of creating a set of 'social' principles through which corporations can monitor their social impact on the workers and on the local community. Other organisations, such as Action Towards Local sustainability (2000) have developed management strategies based on calculating the 'triple bottom line'.
[105] In this respect, parallels could be drawn between the Economy of Sharing and the Rotarians, which were set up in order to foster links between business and charitable giving formation (Rotary International, 2000).

has to be the result of recognising the needs of others and freely choosing to attend to those needs through practical assistance (Araujo, 1994a).

The logical extension of this freedom is the fact that the businesses wishing to participate in the Economy of Sharing remained in the direct management of the people who owned them. The Focolare did not create some kind of overarching communal ownership: the statutes of the Focolare state that, as an organisation with charitable status, it cannot own or directly manage commercial activities except for where they directly relate to the more spiritual and educational functions of the movement [FOC10].[106] Such centralised ownership of the businesses, apart from not being in keeping with the statutes of the movement, could arguably lead to the development of a communistic mentality of central planning and could be highly bureaucratic. According to the Economy of Sharing principles, the businesses should be managed and owned by private individuals who participate in the Focolare and live the culture of giving, not by the Focolare as an institution [CEOS29]. Private ownership of the businesses, therefore, and all of the legal responsibilities that ownership brings, was seen as a prerequisite to the donation of profits.

The business owners/shareholders have no legal obligation to give profits to the Economy of Sharing (Delia, 2000). The choice to share profits (and the proportion) comes primarily from the people within the business itself, based on their professional assessment of the needs of the business [CEOS39]. Nevertheless, the business people are encouraged to bear in mind their responsibility to others in the context of living out the 'culture of giving' [CEOS21]. On the one hand, this affords the businesses the freedom to participate in the Economy of Sharing to whatever degree they feel they can without having to fit into some rigid scheme. It also makes it possible for the range of businesses wishing to participate to be as wide as possible. On the other hand, as will be seen further ahead, this freedom has led to difficulties that were perhaps unforeseen at the beginnings of the Economy of Sharing. For example, if the businesses are granted the freedom to give as they please, how can one set criteria for those wishing to participate which are broad enough to include many kinds of businesses, yet tight enough to avoid possible misuses of the name 'Economy of Sharing'?

[106] Focolare, in a juridical sense, applies only to full-time members (focolarini) living in Focolare houses.

Widespread ownership: 'many shareholders'

Another key principle which emerged at the beginning of the Economy of Sharing is the idea that ownership of the businesses should be widespread, giving as many people as possible the chance to participate in the project in some form [CEOS01]. This idea of diffused ownership raises the question of the responsibility and rights of shareholders, and places it at the heart of the Economy of Sharing. If the business involved aims to redistribute its profits outwith the company, the inevitable consequence is that the shareholders will receive less. Such a decision cannot be forced on shareholders, but has to be based on a conscious choice (Delia, 2000). As a result, one of the initial objectives of the Economy of Sharing had to be that of making sure that the majority of the shareholders in any company shared in the ideals of the Focolare and were prepared to forego their dividends in order to help build up the Economy of Sharing. This is an issue which will be returned to through the case studies, as it is one where the Economy of Sharing finds itself most in conflict with dominant global economic structures and the concepts which underpin it.

Spaces of sharing

The Focolare spaces which were examined in Chapter 3 became the natural focus for the Economy of Sharing. The original idea behind these spaces was to offer a physical space in which people could experience a 'sample' of life in which people cared for each other in the way advocated by the Focolare. This experience would be the most powerful way to spread the message of peace and unity, and at the same time a way of convincing the sceptics of its practical application.

The vision of 'modern' model towns

One of the key points that emerged right from the beginning of the Economy of Sharing was the importance that special industrial estates linked to the Focolare little towns would have in the promotion of the project (Boselli, 1991a). The idea of the creation of 'model towns' in which everyone tried to live according to the Focolare principles was outlined in Chapter 3. It is interesting to note that this idea was at the forefront of Chiara Lubich's mind when she launched the Economy of Sharing in Brazil. Whilst she was in Brazil in 1991, she recalled how she had always imagined these places as industrial places in which there was full integration with the local economy. In Araceli she recalled an event that had taken place in the 1960s, in which she had impression that the Focolare was being called not only to put into practice a spirituality of unity, but to create social structures and institutions which reflected this vision of the world. While she was on holiday in Switzerland, she came across the Benedictine Abbey of Einsiedeln and was struck by how the spiritual vision of St. Benedict *'Ora et Laborem'* (prayer and work) was reflected in the buildings of the abbey and the surrounding village which had grown up around it. She had the impression that the vision of the Benedictines 'lived on' in that place and was inspired to think that, in a similar way, the characteristic spatial structures of the Focolare would entail model towns wherein the ethos of the movement could be developed and put into practice. These towns would also act as models of how society would be if all people were to live out the ideal of mutual love:

> *"At one point, it was as if that very beautiful sight of the church and fields in the dazzling sun was dissolved, and I felt that I understood that God wanted something similar from us. Einsiedeln appeared almost like a little city, because of its vastness, and it seemed that God also wanted a little city from us, but not like that one. He wanted a real and true little city, with houses, especially little houses, but also larger ones, with pavilions, with factories, with businesses and industries. This image has remained so deeply impressed that it is as if I can still see it, even now"* [CEOS01: 1].

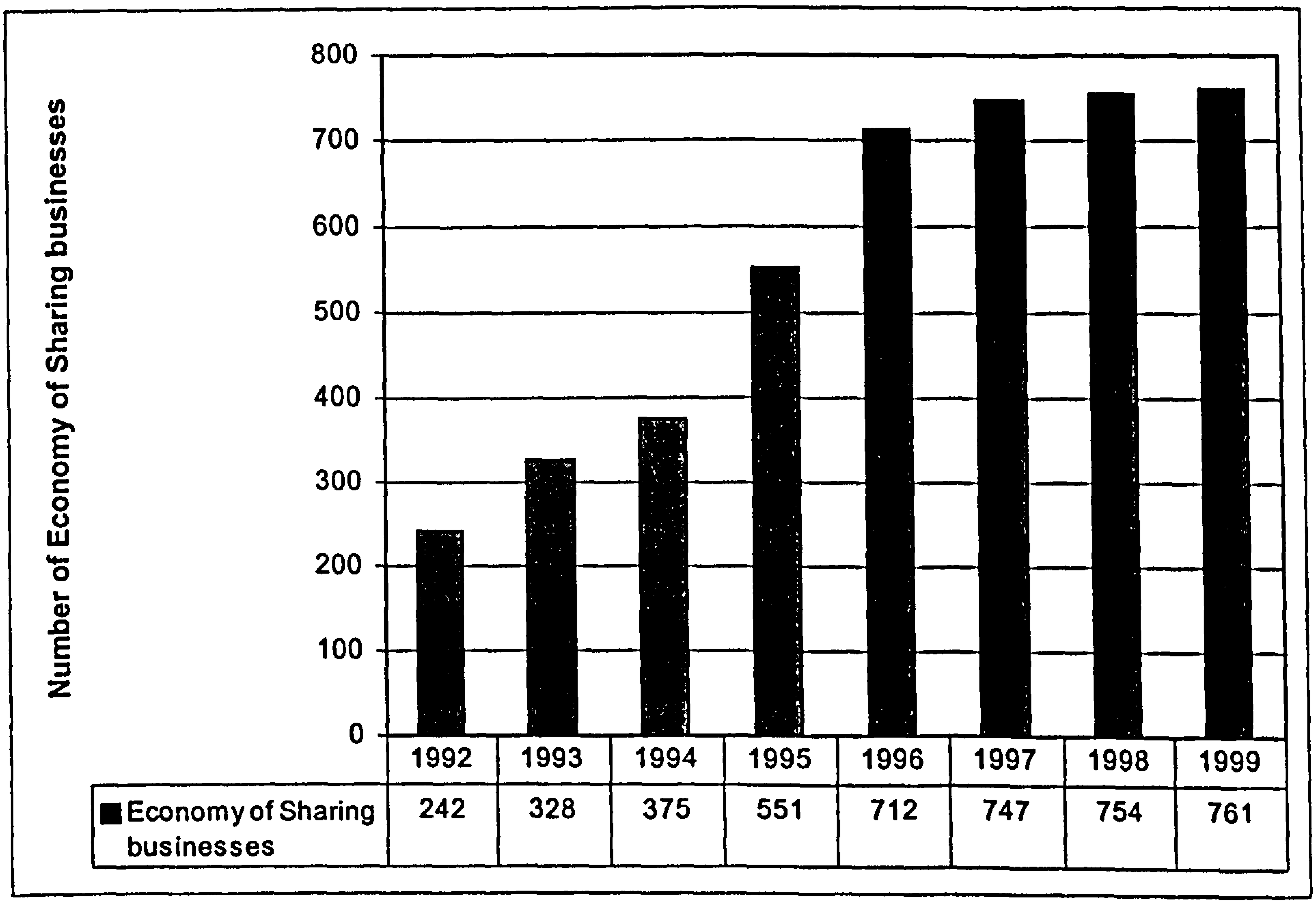
Part of the vision of the towns, therefore, would be an economic dimension that would also reflect the Focolare spirituality and culture. This idea was very much in her mind when she launched the Economy of Sharing: the towns of the movement could not remain spiritual enclaves, but had to exhibit the features of a modern town. As a result, the business people in Araceli, in response to this vision, decided to start up an industrial estate near the model town of Araceli, in which all the businesses would share the vision of the Economy of Sharing. The estate could not be right next to the town of Araceli due to the planning restrictions placed on the area, though, it being in the 'green belt' of Sao Paulo.

The creation of industrial estates or business parks, as will be seen in the following chapters, would serve several purposes. Firstly, since the businesses would be located within the same area, this would facilitate the growth of linkages between the businesses. Secondly, the creation of an actual physical space in which the idea was being applied, not only by an isolated business but also by a group of diverse businesses, would offer a credible example to others who were more sceptical about the viability of the project. It would therefore have a demonstration effect that could be imitated by others, as an economic parallel to the social exemplar set by the model towns.

Global Economy of Sharing networks

Although the Economy of Sharing began in Sao Paulo, Brazil in 1991, the project has spread rapidly throughout the world and has permeated a wide range of sectors of the economy. In the first four years following the launch of the project, there was a rapid increase in the number of businesses participating, as can be seen from Figure 5.2. This early exponential growth rate of the numbers of businesses across the world participating in the Economy of Sharing reflected an initial phase of enthusiasm within the Focolare and amongst others who heard about the Economy of Sharing and wished to participate in it.

Figure 5.2 Economy of Sharing businesses 1992-99[107]



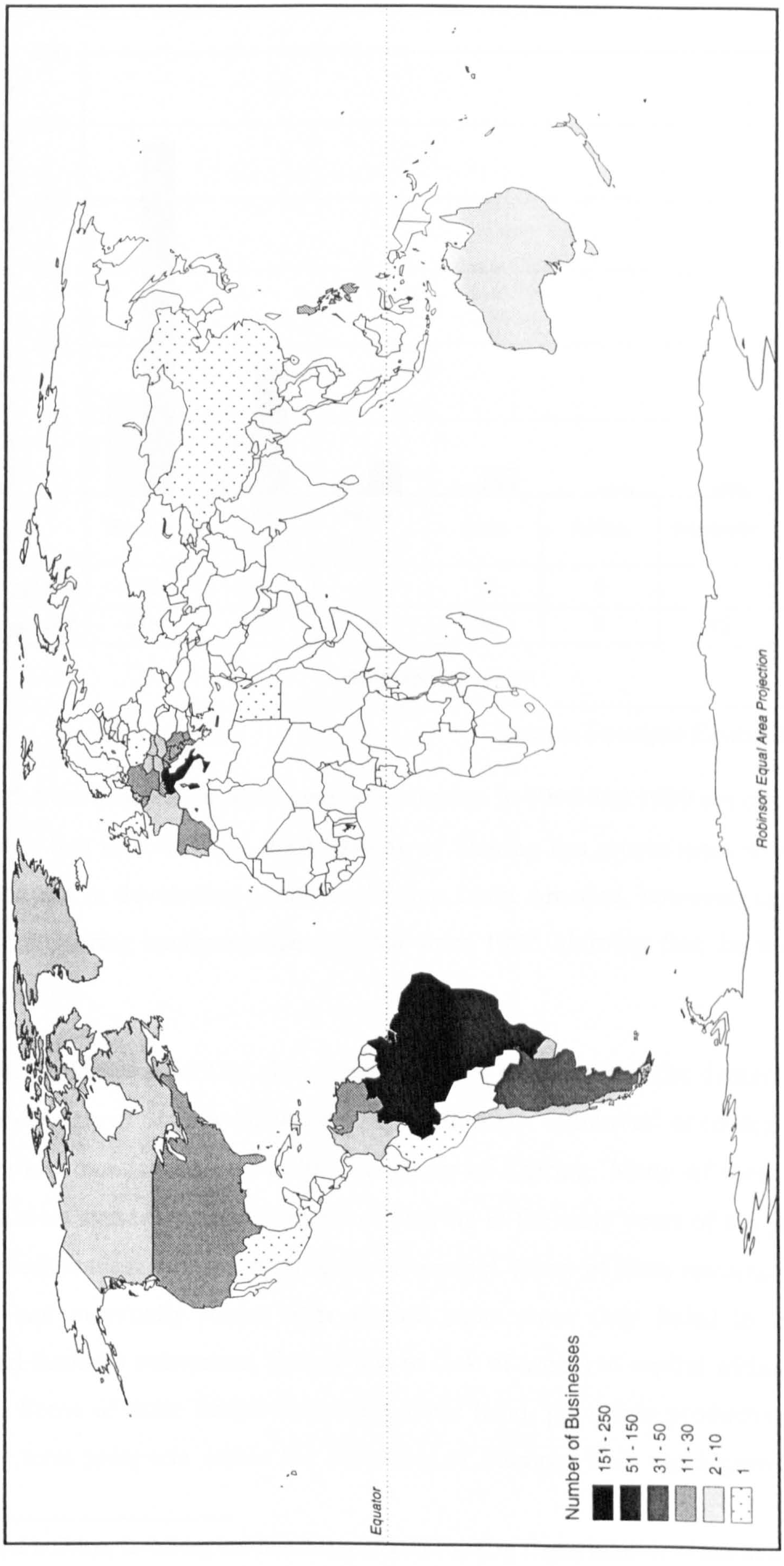
Source: Focolare Centre, Rome, 1999

The second phase of development of the Economy of Sharing could be termed one of consolidation. The growth rate began to slow down in 1996 and since then the number of businesses participating in the project seems to have levelled off around the 760 mark. The rate of growth thus appears to have slowed down, suggesting that the Economy of Sharing is entering a new phase of development.

[107] This graph relates to the total number of operational Economy of Sharing businesses in the year indicated. This overall total includes any new businesses and mortalities within the year.

The geographical distribution of the businesses in 1999 is show in Figure 5.3 on the next page. It shows that in 1999 there were several concentrations of businesses which correlate closely with the diffusion of the Focolare Movement throughout the world. The Focolare has become more widely diffused in countries where there is a high Catholic population, such as Brazil and the Philippines. The first concentration is in Brazil, with 84 businesses (11% of the total). The second such concentration is in Western Europe, and in particular Italy, with 248 businesses (33% of the total) and Germany, with 53 businesses (7% of the total). There are also relatively high concentrations of Economy of Sharing businesses in Argentina (4%), Ex-Yugoslavia (4%) and in the USA (5%). This global pattern of distribution reveals some interesting characteristics of the Economy of Sharing. The Economy of Sharing does not reflect the overall global distribution of wealth, as reflected in statistics such as GNP. Although the Economy of Sharing distribution is also highly uneven globally, there are also concentrations of businesses in the Philippines and Latin America. There are several regions in which there were very few or no Economy of Sharing businesses.

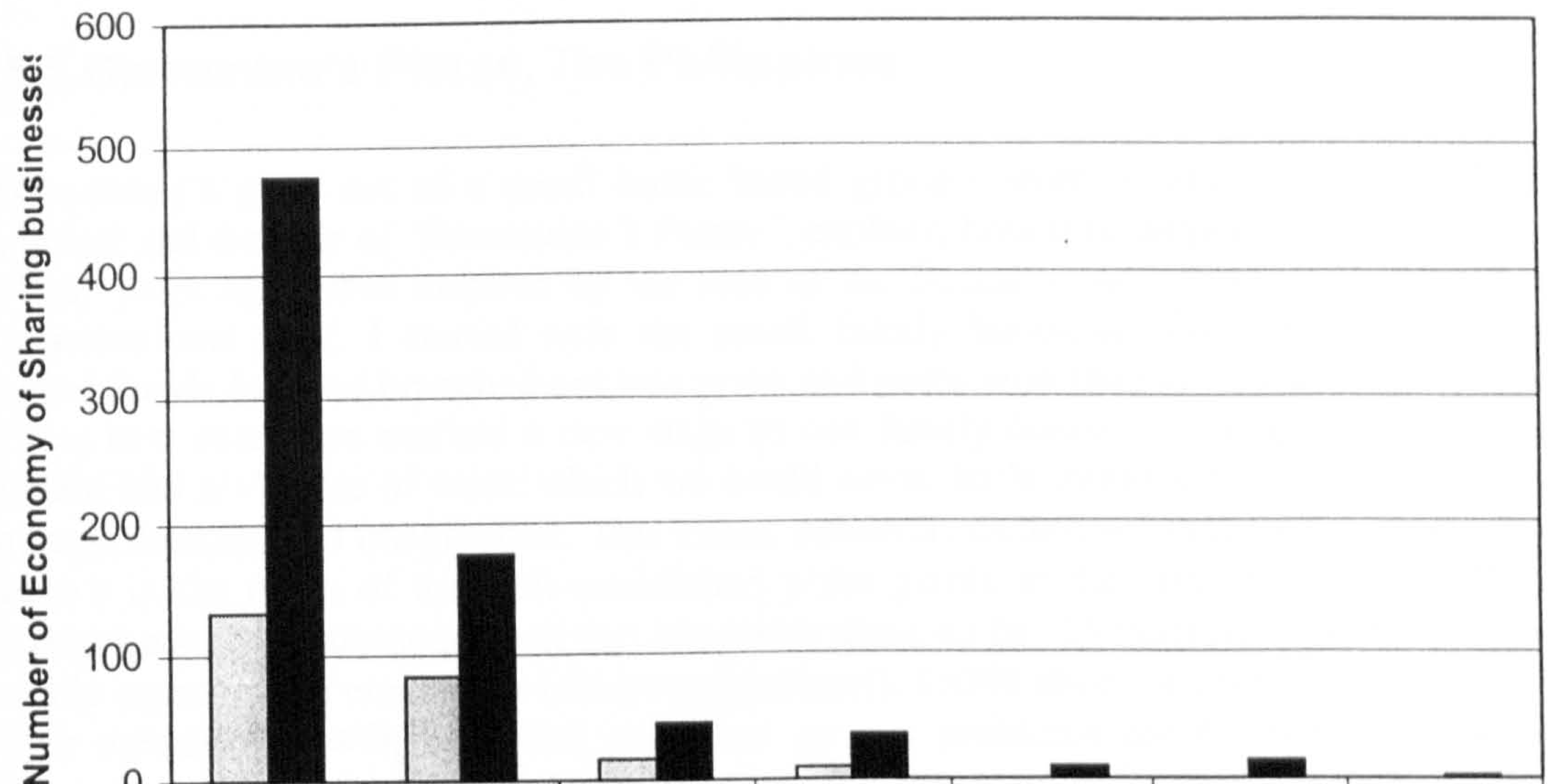
The most noticeable absence is Africa, north and south of the Sahara. In North Africa there is only one Economy of Sharing business in Egypt. In the whole of Africa south of the Sahara there are 11 businesses in total. In part, this absence could be the result of lack of communication between the Focolare communities in African countries and the Focolare Centre which collated the statistics. The more likely explanation, however, relates to the inability of those who would like to participate in the Economy of Sharing to generate adequate funds to start businesses. According to the geographical distribution, therefore, the Economy of Sharing reflects the tendency within the global economy to foster growth in emerging markets such as Brazil, Argentina and South Asia, whilst excluding many African nations from these developments. Likewise, there are very few Economy of Sharing businesses in former Soviet countries. In this case, the main reason is the very limited presence of the Focolare Movement within the former Soviet countries.



Source: Focolare Centre, Rome, 2000.

Figure 5.3 Geographical Distribution of Economy of Sharing Businesses 1999

Figure 5.4 Geographical distribution of Economy of Sharing businesses in 1992 and 1999



	Europe	Latin America	North America	Asia	Africa	Australia	Middle East
1992	132	83	16	10	0	1	0
1999	478	176	45	36	9	15	2

Geographical region

Source: Focolare Centre, Rome, 1999

In Figure 5.4 the numbers of participating businesses in 1992 and 1999 are compared. This graph shows that in real terms, the Economy of Sharing has grown most within Western Europe and not in developing countries. Within Latin America, however, the number of Economy of Sharing businesses has doubled since 1992, showing that the project is still developing there.

A possible explanation for this slow down becomes clearer when the distinction is made between Economy of Sharing businesses and small scale 'initiatives' or cottage industries[108] which are also considered part of the Economy of Sharing. Many of these small-scale initiatives were started for the Economy of Sharing in the early years of the project as the result of fresh enthusiasm to participate in the project. Many of them remained small-scale activities and eventually folded after several years since they failed to develop into established business enterprises, mainly due to lack of access to capital within developing countries. Some of these initiatives, on the other hand, grew into productive companies with long term prospects within the Economy of Sharing. This rapid growth, however,

[108] Productive activities involving less that five people and with an annual turnover of less than $1,000.

presented other problems, as can be seen from the case of *Giacomino's Pizzas* in the Philippines, which is outlined in Figure 5.5.

Figure 5.5 Giacomino's Pizzas, The Philippines

Giacomino's grew out of a small home based grocery store in Manila in 1991. Noel Castro, owner and director of *'Giacomino's Pizzas'*, explains how this happened:

"Four years ago I was inspired by the idea of the Economy of Sharing and wanted to play an active part in it. I started with the small family business which we already had (*Diversified Foods Inc*) and branched out into pizza and pasta with the name *Giacomino's*. The start of this new enterprise marked a new stage in our family business, giving a new serious commitment and a volume of work which we could never have imagined. We had to face it with courage, tenacity and imagination. This alone, however, cannot account for the survival of *Giacomino's* in the midst of the well-established pizza giants in the fast food market (*Pizza Hut, Shakeys*) nor the meteoric growth that has taken place so far: 15 restaurants and 40 kiosks in the whole country, 400 employees (direct and indirect), 15000 slices of pizza sold each day."

This meteoric growth, however, presented serious problems for the business: "What started out as a 'home-made' brand has reached the stage of industrial production. This requires high levels of capital investment and the improvement of our organisational structures in order to sustain our growth. It requires a leap of quality of our management and we have had serious doubts whether we are capable of doing it on our own. But faced with growing competition we have realised one thing: either we keep growing or we will die."

They were faced with the difficult decision of selling the company to their competitors, and thus protecting the interests of the employees who they had taken on. In this way they could make a massive profit and invest the sum in the start of a new venture with similar objectives, perhaps in the area of rice (*'Rice Time'*) or Chinese fast food (*'Ho Lee Chow'*), two areas of the fast food market which were underdeveloped. This however, would mean selling out the ethos of the Economy of Sharing to another company that would not, perhaps, share the same objectives. In order to survive, they would have to find capital.

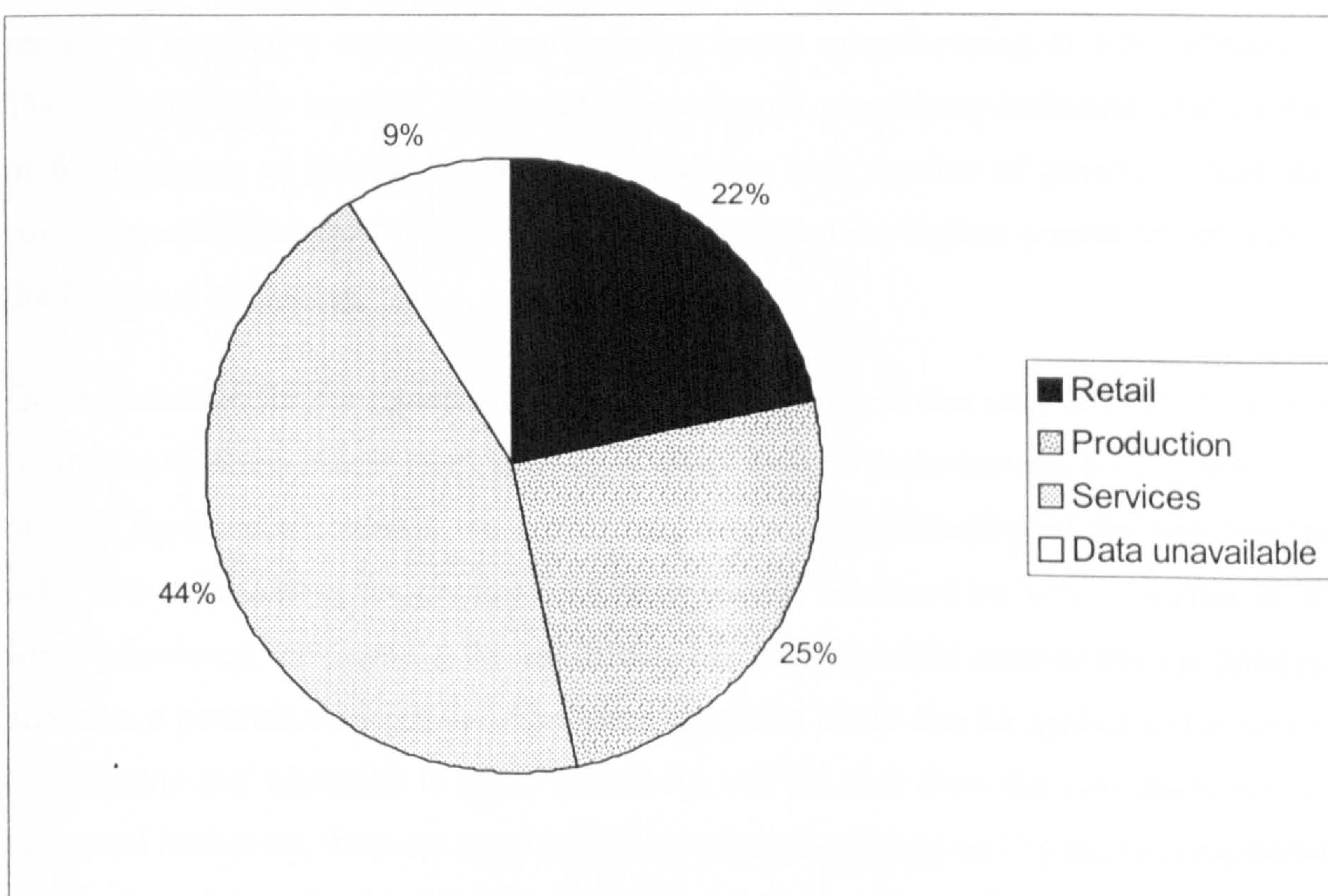
Source: Interview with Mr.N.Castro [05R]

The recognition that lack of capital within the poorest communities of the Focolare was becoming a barrier to Economy of Sharing businesses in developing countries, led to the creation of a business in Germany which was specifically aimed at increasing the levels of capital available to such businesses [CEOS37]. Many of the people within the Focolare in Germany, as in other European countries, did not feel it was right to leave their secure jobs in large corporations to start new companies. Rather, they thought that they could invest in the Economy of Sharing businesses in developing countries in such a way as to help their development, thus indirectly helping the poor. As a consequence, a group of German business people chose to start an investment trust, *Solidar Capital* (SC), which would gather the savings of anyone wishing to invest in the Economy of Sharing and invest the money in emerging Economy of Sharing businesses. The aim of SC is to aid the set up and development of companies which adhere to the spirit of the Economy of Sharing through giving them low interest loans, grants and know-how. The project was set up in 1994 by 17 people in the Focolare from Solingen, Germany with an initial capital of 191,000 DM. The directors are now looking into the possibility of incorporating international capital from people in Eastern Europe and Latin America into the project. The process, however, has been very difficult to put into practice. The business is faced with a complex legal context in which there are very stringent rules governing foreign investment, but despite these difficulties, several investment projects are already under way: three in Argentina, one in Brazil and one in Poland.

Sectoral distribution of Economy of Sharing businesses

What is perhaps surprising about the Economy of Sharing is the range of sectors within which the businesses take part. Figure 5.6 shows a summary of the cross-section of businesses which were participating in 1998. There are businesses in the production, supply, distribution and retail sectors of the economy. This broad range of businesses in the different sectors is a feature which could arguably be a great asset to the Economy of Sharing as a whole in the future and is one of aspects of the Economy of Sharing which will be studied in detail in relation to the case study regions.

Figure 5.6 Sectoral distribution of Economy of Sharing businesses 1998



Source: Focolare Centre, Rome, 1998

A further breakdown of these sectors is shown in Table 5.1. This breakdown shows that within the Economy of Sharing businesses in the commercial/retail sector, which accounts for 22% of overall businesses, there is a varied cross-section of retail outlets.

Table 5.1 Economy of Sharing businesses according to sub-sectors 1998[109]

Retail/commerical	No	Production/manufacturing	No	Services	No
unspecified	59	pharmaceutical	1	education	32
groceries	32	agriculture	31	photography	2
textiles/fashion	31	clothing	25	business services	71
home goods	16	food processing	33	information	25
medical supplies	12	engineering	17	restoration	5
books	7	various articles	27	maintenance	22
computers	4	graphic design	17	planning	13
vehicles	2	appliances	18	legal	10
photography	1	furniture	16	medical	46
Total	**164**	fine art	4	transport	2
		Total	**189**	tourism	14
				unspecified	59
				Total	**301**

Source: Focolare Centre, Rome 1998

The production sector, which accounts for 25% overall, displays an extremely varied cross-section of productive activities from including heavy manufacturing to food processing. The sector of 'other services' reveals a high number of consultancy businesses that are part of the Economy of Sharing, as well as a relatively high number of private medical and education establishments. These sectors have constituted the highest growth sectors within the Economy of Sharing.

One explanation for the growth of these particular sectors, is that they offer the Economy of Sharing business people an obvious chance to influence economic and social institutions outwith the Focolare. Within the consultancy sector, the spirituality of the Focolare can offer new solutions to the problems of interpersonal relationships within businesses. In some businesses, for example, the spirituality becomes an added asset within the business and even a possible selling point. The same reasoning could also be applied to the sectors of medicine and education to some extent. As will be seen from the case study regions discussed further on, there are considerable advantages to be gained by the communitarian ethos which is practised within the Economy of Sharing businesses. The breakdown of

[109] Details relating to the various sectors were not available for all Economy of Sharing businesses.

sectors of the Economy of Sharing duly reveals an eclectic mix of businesses. Further sub-divisions reveal that within the various sub-sections the businesses are still varied, comprising large and small-scale businesses even within the same sub-sector. This variety of businesses - both in terms of size, sector, and sub-sector - could offer the Economy of Sharing considerable opportunities for development in the future, as will be seen from the case study regions of Milan and Sao Paulo.

Defining Economy of Sharing business membership

So far I have presented a global distribution of the Economy of Sharing businesses, citing them as evidence of the development of the Economy of Sharing project. A logical question to ask at this point is how such businesses come to participate in the Economy of Sharing and gain 'membership' to these global networks. In business associations, such as the Rotarians, membership is based on adherence to a well-defined set of criteria and guidelines set out in the 'Declarations of Rotarians in Business and Professions'.[110] Such guidelines set out an underlying morality for the movement, summarised in the '4-Way Test', confirming a commitment to truth, fairness, friendship and the common good. Within the Economy of Sharing, however, there are no such global criteria for participation in the project. From the viewpoint of the Centre, the criteria for participation in the project is "a relationship of communion" [02R]. Participation in the Economy of Sharing is defined by adhering to the culture of giving within the movement, and this cannot be defined simply by nominal acceptance of a set of standards. Rather, those wishing to start Economy of Sharing businesses or convert their existing ones into Economy of Sharing businesses have to participate on a personal level in the Focolare movement. On this level, Economy of Sharing businesses are defined by cultural changes within the business. At a regional level, more recently, various groups of business people involved in the Focolare have created their own sets of general guidelines (presented in Chapter 9) to gauge this level of change and to enable business people interested in participating to know what it entails. This dual definition of participation has been underlined by what Chiara Lubich calls the "rule" of the Economy of Sharing:

- *"The Economy of Sharing without a doubt is open to everyone if they adhere to its 'rule' of dividing profits into three parts: one part for the poor, one for the business and a third for the structures for the formation of 'new people'. Whoever wants to carry out the Economy of Sharing has to throw themselves into these structures since they have to become 'new people'. The 'rule' of the Economy of*

[110] Text available from Rotary International (2000).

> *Sharing requires the ideal of unity, and the culture of giving to be lived deeply..."* [COES90: 5].[111]

According to Chiara Lubich, therefore, participation is defined by membership of the Focolare and sharing of profits *within* and *by* the Focolare. Ever since its launch, the Economy of Sharing has had an appeal outwith the Focolare Movement, as well as within it. Many business people outwith the structures of the Focolare have been keen to become part of the project and participate in it in some way. The Focolare has sought to foster links with such business people, leading to the Economy of Sharing becoming a high profile initiative within Italy and Brazil in particular (La Nazione, 1999; Calvi, 1999a). Moreover, the Economy of Sharing is now being presented and taught in academic institutions, beyond the control of the Focolare. This high profile, however, has led to questions over whether the Economy of Sharing can continue to be defined in terms of membership of the Focolare. If a business person, for example, who shared the underlying values of the Economy of Sharing, but belonged to a community other than the Focolare (for example a New Age community), would she/he be able to participate? Under what conditions could they call their businesses 'Economy of Sharing'? Finding solutions to this kind of dilemma between the Economy of Sharing as a Focolare project and the underlying principles is a matter of concern which I will address in this thesis.

Key 'nodes' in networks

One of the fascinating things about the Focolare Movement is the way that certain administrative structures emerge in order to facilitate growth and change. The underlying philosophy of 'attending' to needs, implicit within the Focolare's spirituality, has led to local and global networks which could seem chaotic. On the other hand, the gradual growth of new structures based on need facilitates a high degree of flexibility in the networks. It also involves a high degree of trial and error since spontaneous responses may not always be the most efficient or effective in the long term. Since the development of the Economy of Sharing in 1991, several different organisational structures have emerged in order to facilitate both the growth of the project and the distribution of the profits (see Table 5.2).

•

[111] Chiara Lubich often refers to the 'strutture per la formazione di uomini nuovi', a phrase which is very difficult to translate into English. It literally means 'structures for the formation of new people'. What she is refering to is the sharing of profits for the development of physical infrastructure of the Focolare, such as the model towns and centres, through which people can come to know and experience the 'culture of giving'. The reference to 'new people' alludes to St Paul's reference to those who are made 'new' through Christ.

Three different sets of structures can be distinguished: those that deal with *business development*, those that deal with the *administration of profits*, and those that deal with *profit redistribution* to the various beneficiaries.

Table 5.2 Functions and structures within the Economy of Sharing

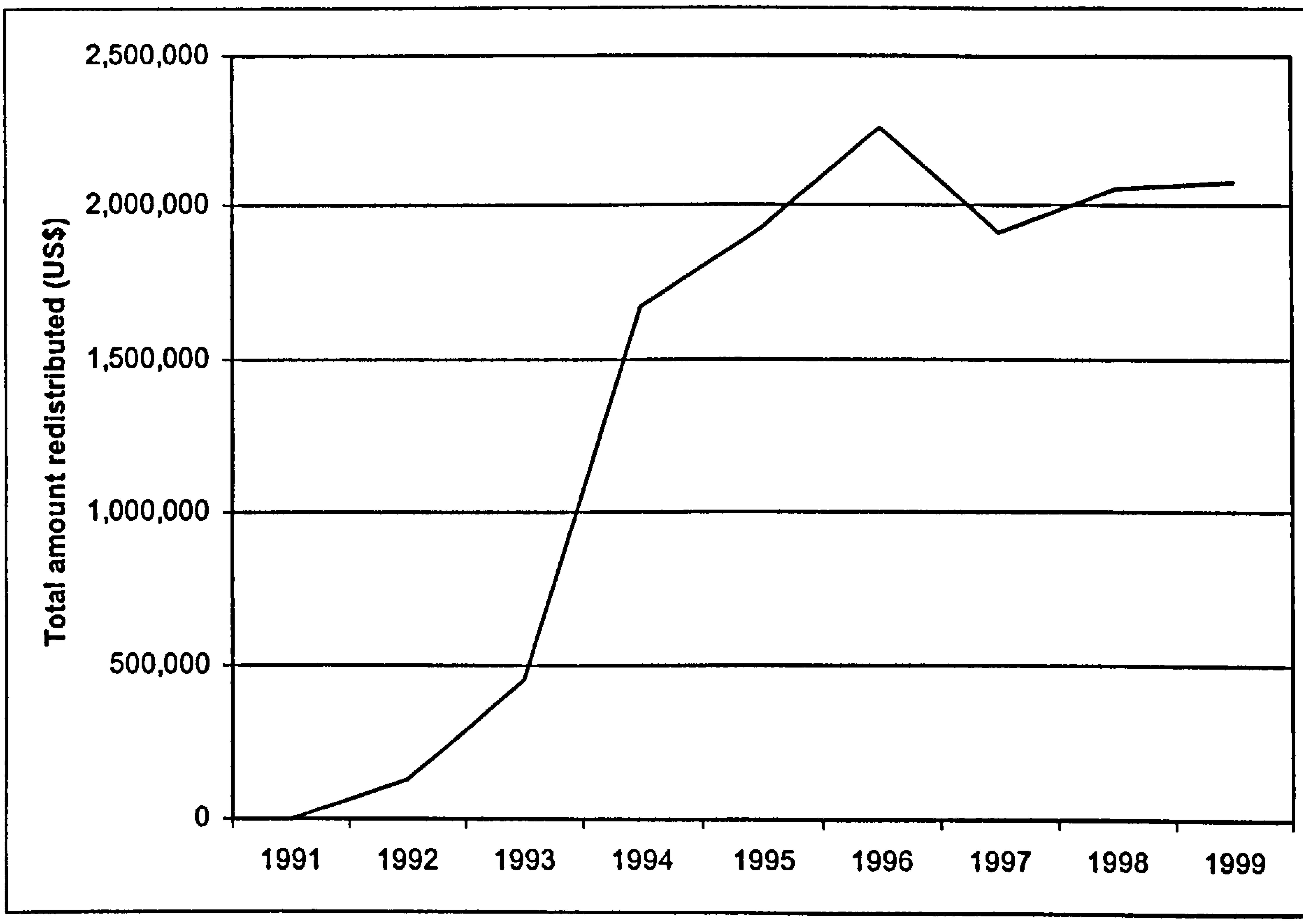
Function	Structure	Scale
Business development Promoting the growth of the Economy of Sharing businesses, ensuring that they are functioning well.	• *Business Associations for the Economy of Sharing* • *Regional Economy of Sharing Commissions*	local regional
Administration of profits The collection of the profits from the businesses and depositing profits in the Focolare accounts.	• *Businesses* • *Regional Commission for the Economy of Sharing* • *International Commission for the Economy of Sharing*	local regional global
redistribution of profits Ensuring that the profits are fairly redistributed and the help goes to the people who need it most.	• *Focolare Houses:* Defining and verifying the needs of people in the local communities; Communicating needs to the regional commission; Ensuring that help reaches the people in the community who need it; • *Regional Commission for the Economy of Sharing*: Collating the overall picture of the needs of the Communities within the region; Communicating the overall situation to the International Commission; • *International Commission for the Economy of Sharing*: Calculating the overall amount of profits from the businesses; Calculating the requests for help from the various regions; Depositing the redistributed profits.	local regional global

Source: Field work, Focolare Centre, Rome 1997

Profit-sharing 1991-1999

As outlined above, one of the main aims of the Economy of Sharing businesses is to help create greater equality amongst all those linked to the Focolare across the world. An important element of this is the redistribution of profits. It is therefore necessary to examine the extent to which profits have actually been redistributed since the beginning of the project. It is also important to examine the geographical distribution of donations and beneficiaries of the Economy of Sharing. In Figure 5.7 the overall funds shared within the context of the Economy of Sharing during the period 1992–1999 is shown. What is immediately apparent is the similarity of this graph and the graph relating to the overall number of businesses involved in the Economy of Sharing. As the numbers of new businesses participating in the project slowed down, so too did the levels of donations being redistributed. The level of donations levelled off in 1997/8 at around $2 million.

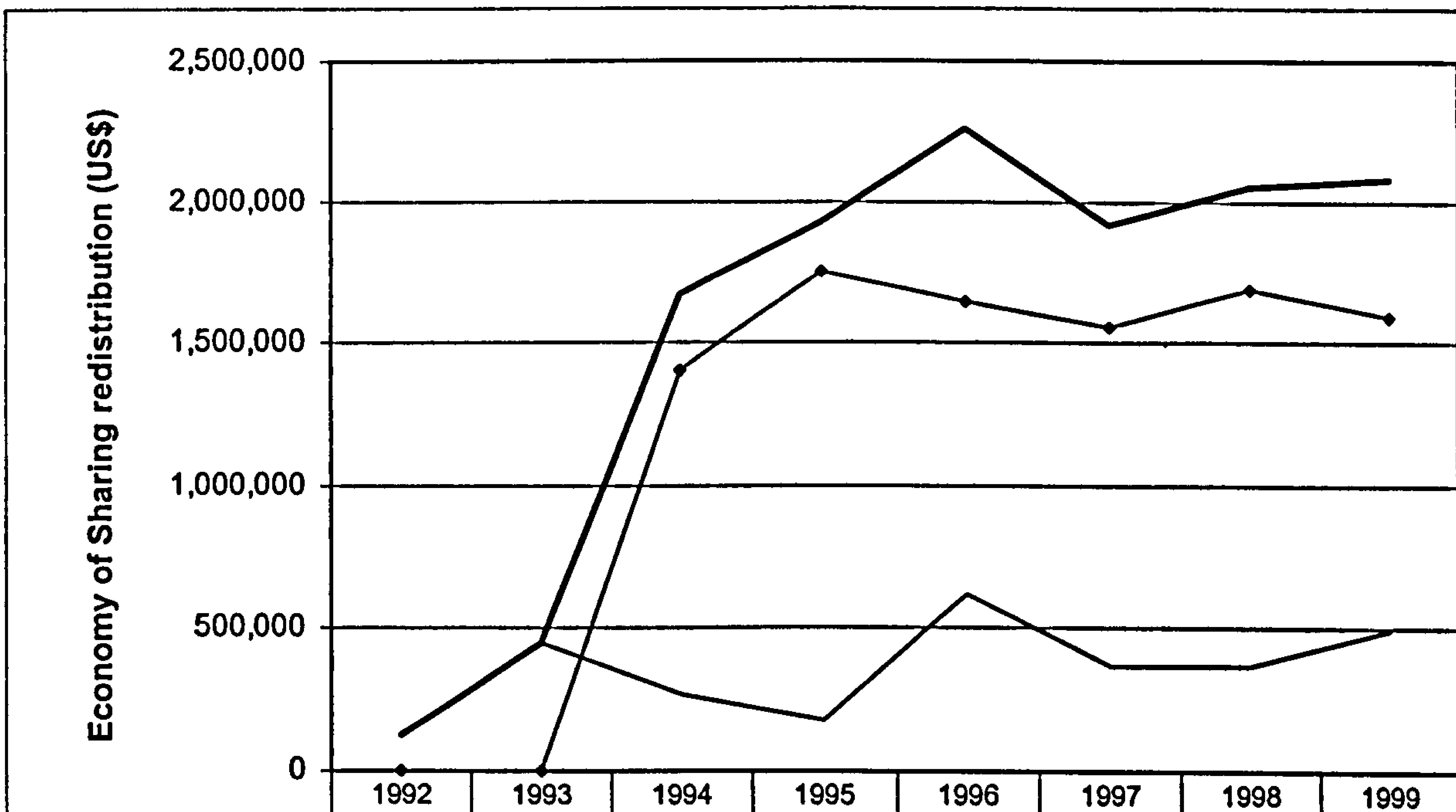
Figure 5.7 Total Economy of Sharing donations 1992-1999



Source: Focolare Centre, Rome, 1999

This profit sharing pattern, however, has to be seen in the context of what was going on within the Focolare Movement as a whole during the same period in relation to the 'communion of goods'. In 1994, as mentioned In Chapter 3, Chiara Lubich launched a special appeal within the movement for those people who were still in desperate need of material help. The Focolare had not envisaged that the Economy of Sharing businesses would take several years to develop into profitable enterprises so the idea of the 'Action 5000' was launched as a stopgap [CEOS13b]. This initiative was very successful, raising around $1.4 million in the first year. Figure 5.8 reveals that this initiative, whilst initially only intended as a short-term contribution, has now become the most important part of the Economy of Sharing. What is immediately noticeable from this graph is that the proportion of donations to the poor from the Economy of Sharing businesses in relation to the other contributions towards the alleviation of poverty has remained constant, but in the range of 15-18% of the total.

Figure 5.8 Economy of Sharing profits/donations 1992-1999[112]



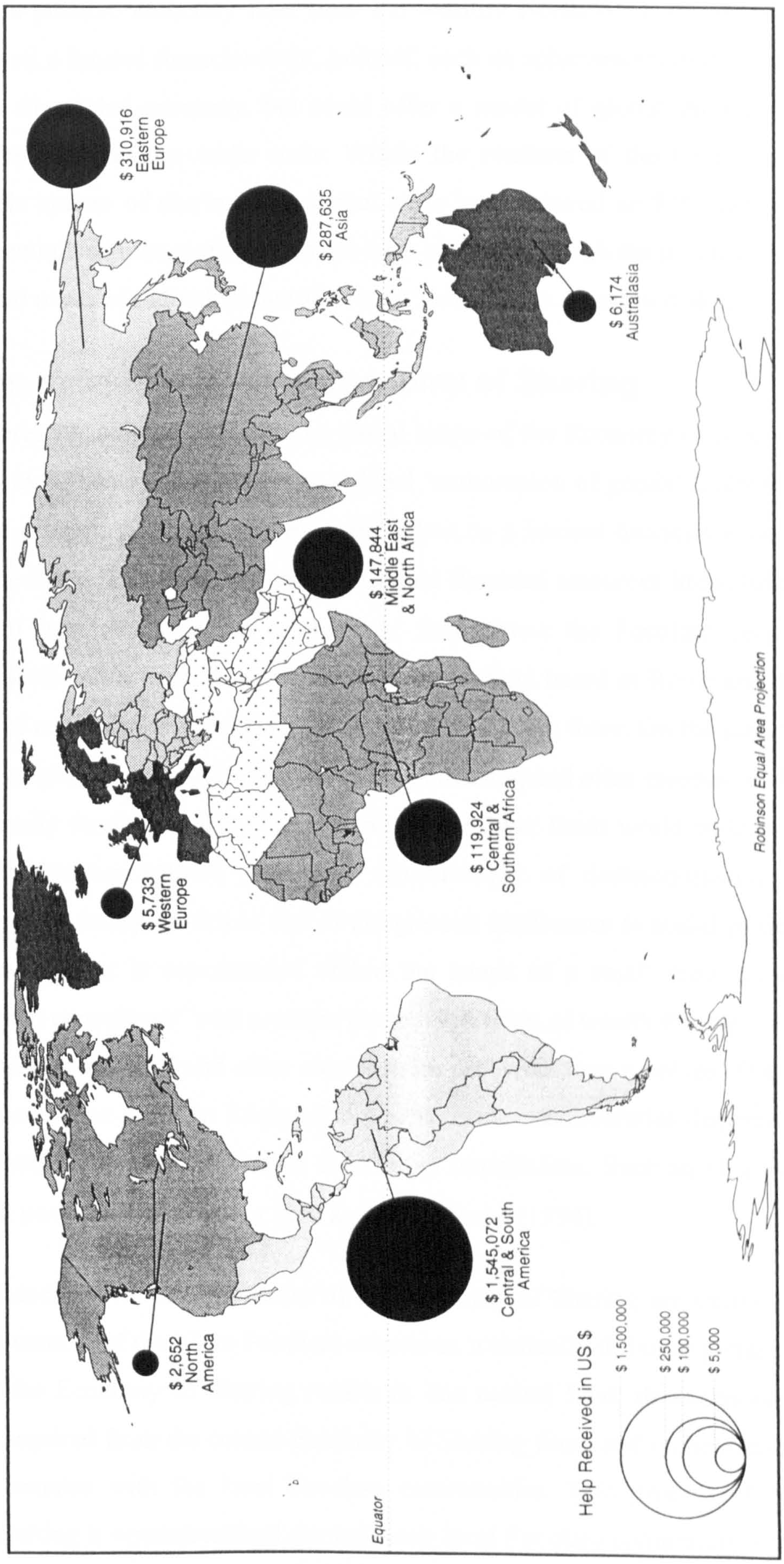
	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Action 5000	0	0	1400000	1,746,930	1,645,714	1,550,110	1,686,380	1,589,237
Total profits	126,511	449,736	268,000	179,281	612,797	365,865	369,091	487,335
Total redistributed	126,511	449,736	1,668,000	1,926,211	2,258,511	1,915,975	2,055,471	2,076,572

Source: Focolare Centre, Rome, 1999

Geographical redistribution

The map on the next page shows the geographic distribution of the Economy of Sharing profits at a global scale in 1998. The donations of profits into the Economy of Sharing came mainly from countries in Europe and North America. There were also substantial profits donated from businesses in Latin America, especially from Brazil and Argentina, as well as from the businesses in the Philippines. Figure 5.9 shows the global distribution of the regions helped by the profits from the Economy of Sharing businesses. The vast majority of the funds went to developing countries or the former Eastern European countries. The greatest amount went to Latin America, where there is also a high proportion of the Focolare community. Again, here, the low levels of help received by African countries is noticable within the global distribution of the Economy of Sharing profits.

[112] This graph shows the part of the Economy of Sharing donations allocated specifically for the provision of basic needs.



Source: Focolare Centre, Rome, 2000.

Figure 5.9 Geographical Distribution of Economy of Sharing Recipients 1999 (US $)

The above table shows through the Economy of Sharing, the Focolare Movement has generated a positive monetary flow from the wealthy North/West to the poorer nations, albeit still on a limited financial scale. In itself, such an achievement only scratches on the surface of the global economy, but could offer a model of global sharing which could arguably be applied on a wider scale. Within the confines of the Economy of Sharing project, this system of sharing on a global scale has achieved an 81% success rate with minimal centralised intervention. This has been possible through the procedure of attending to the actual needs of individual families rather than remote decision-making.

Decision-making within the Economy of Sharing

The data presented above highlight the global scope of the Economy of Sharing. Through the Economy of Sharing it is clear that a global 'communion of goods' is already occurring within and through the Focolare Movement, albeit on a limited financial scale. The global scale of the Economy of Sharing and the limited financial resources immediately begs the question of how decisions are reached. At first glance the Focolare decision-making processes seem rather centralised: there is one main fund based in Rome and decisions on the needs of remote communities across the world are taken there. On the surface, there are very strong similarities between the Economy of Sharing and other international NGOs that are continually faced with the problem how to distribute funds world-wide. According to critics like Escobar (1995), it is this centralisation of decision-making within the 'development industry' which is one of the greatest hindrances to social justice. Through this process, power is concentrated within the hands of a small group of highly paid 'development consultants' who promote the redistribution of wealth through a bureaucratic system which is wasteful and often creates more problems than it solves. The idea of one central organisation based in Rome taking decisions for communities dispersed across the world, moreover, arouses suspicions of Western imperialism. Such an idea would not sit easily with post-colonial thinking such as that of Bhaba (1994).

When the decision-making processes of the Economy of Sharing are examined in detail, within the context of the wider Focolare structures, a radically different picture is revealed. Although the Economy of Sharing results in one central fund, decisions on how much money is required from the central Economy of Sharing fund, and on how the money will be used, remains with the local Focolare communities. This process of decentralised decision-making is operationalised through each local Focolare community working out in real terms what its particular needs are on a regular basis. Each year in June a 'census' (commissioned by the Global Centre) is carried out in order to establish the needs of all those linked to the local Focolare communities. The emphasis that the Focolare's spirituality places on attending to the needs of others makes this task relatively straightforward. This usually takes place through the small groups in which the members of the Focolare meet on a regular basis. There may be circumstances, however, where particular people have specific needs which have to remain private. In order to avoid such needs being overlooked, everyone is invited to present their needs directly to the Focolare houses, which act as central co-ordination points in the process. Thus, this primary stage of decision-making in the Economy of Sharing is at the most decentralised, local level and is based on a kind of community self-assessment. Although this system is based almost entirely on trust, since those who are being helped actively participate in the life of the community, verification of circumstances would be relatively straightforward due to the high level of face-to-face relationships.

Once the needs of the community have been established, every attempt is made to cover these needs, first of all through making use of the resources available on a local level through living the 'culture of giving' which is the basis of the Focolare spirituality. In many cases, especially in Western nations, this communion of goods is enough to cover all of the needs of the immediate community and to generate an additional surplus which can be shared for other communities. If the needs of the local community cannot be met through this local communion of goods, these needs are put forward to the regional Focolare and the same process occurs. If the regional Focolare centres are still unable to cover the requests, the needs are then communicated to the International Economy of Sharing Commission. In this way, the requests that reach the International Economy of Sharing Commission have already been verified by means of the communion of goods.

The responsibility for verifying the needs of the community on a regional level lies with the regional delegates of Focolare communities.[113] In a sense, the task of discerning on who needs what lies with them more than with the International Commission. During the time I spent in Rome, I had the chance to discuss this decision-making process with several delegates from Latin America, Italy and the Philippines. I asked them how they reached

[113] Each regional community is represented within the Focolare at an international level by two regional delegates (one man and one woman) who are both single focolarini.

decisions regarding who to help, and whether there were general guidelines on what help could be given. The discussions with them revealed a range of interpretations of 'basic needs' and diverse ways of attending to those needs in different countries. One delegate described how the Focolare in his region reached decisions on who to help and how:

> *"We don't define it* [help] *by the amount he or she receives. It could be, for example, that you receive 100 and I receive 100 ... but you have five children and I only have one, your father is sick and you have to care for him, or you have to pay for your house ... So we define this in a personal relationship, so that the person can reach the end of the month ... we define it personally, in a personal relationship"* [01RO: 5].

The decision on how to help, therefore, is based on a personal relationship between the person in need and a responsible member of the Focolare community. It is not based on some predetermined criteria of need on a global scale, but on the actual needs that are brought to the community and in particular to the attention of the delegates. The help, when it arrives, goes through the same channels of personal relationships. It is a result of attending to the particular needs of the individual or family. The census means that decisions on how much each one will receive is decided prior to receipt of the money: "This is all carried out before hand. First we find out what the needs are in a very personalised way, with great discretion and charity. Then, after we have this list, we give it to the Centre" [01RO: 4]. This takes away any possibility of disagreement within the community when the help arrives. The task of the International Economy of Sharing Commission is hence more an administrative task of distributing funds that have been already allocated, as opposed to being a decision-making process regarding how money should be spent.

Constituting basic needs

Given the highly personalised nature of these Economy of Sharing networks, it is clear that there could be discrepancies in what constitutes a 'basic need' within the project as a whole. The global scope of the Economy of Sharing could give rise to many questions regarding the nature of poverty in different parts of the world. This is an issue which has been raised in recent years within academic texts in relation to 'relative' and 'absolute' poverty (Foster, 1998; Yapa, 1996). Such work has highlighted the way that poverty is socially constructed, and differs greatly within different cultural settings and in different places. The Focolare Centre was reluctant to set any standard at the start of the Economy of Sharing as it was thought that establishing needs was best left to those who were closest to the individuals who required help [03R]. As the Economy of Sharing has developed, however, they recognised that discrepancies did exist in what different countries defined as poverty [02R]. In order to avoid disagreements and misunderstandings, the International Economy of Sharing Commission arrived at a general agreement on what constitutes a 'basic need' within the context of the Economy of Sharing. The basic needs which are covered by the Economy of Sharing fund are listed in Table 5.4 below. The main needs are basic shelter, food, clothing, assistance with finding work and payment for education, and health expenses in those countries where this is not freely available. These guidelines on 'basic needs' are intended to help the delegates who request help from the international Economy of Sharing fund.

Table 5.4 Basic needs and the Economy of Sharing

Type of assistance	Nature of EoS assistance
Shelter *Help with rebuilding a house* *Help with accommodation expenses*	• Direct financial contribution; • Participation in existing house building projects;
Education *Help with the cost of school fees* *Help with the cost of school equipment*	• Direct financial contribution; • Placement in Focolare school; • Payment of fees to a non-focolare school;
Household expenses *Help with the cost of groceries* *Help with the cost of school meals*	• Direct financial contribution; • Provision of groceries from the Focolare house; • Payment to school;
Employment *Assistance in finding employment*	• Help with cost of preparing letters, applications, attending interviews; • Placement in an Economy of Sharing firm; • Financial contribution towards training courses;
Healthcare *Help with the cost of urgent medical expenses*	• Financial support for families if breadwinner is ill; • Direct financial contribution for medical expenses.

Source: [02R].

When the needs have been established, the total amount of money required to satisfy the needs of the local communities is then added to the totals from the other regions each year in October, when the 300 regional Focolare delegates meet in Rome for their annual meeting. In the course of the month, each pair of regional delegates has a meeting with the International Economy of Sharing Commission, so that any discrepancies arising from the information that they had provided can be sorted out and the progress of the Economy of Sharing in their region can be discussed.

Parallel to this process of decision-making related to the needs of local communities, the financial contributions to the Economy of Sharing fund are also being calculated. The profits from the businesses and the contributions for 'Action 5000' are added to the global Economy of Sharing fund. Some of these contributions (especially from the businesses) take the form of bank deposits in the Economy of Sharing fund. Other contributions, especially small ones, are brought in the form of cash by the delegates when they arrive at the meeting in October. During the time I was in Rome, I helped to count some of the contributions which had arrived from children who had contributed their pocket money to the 'Action 5000' appeal. This money is then banked with the other contributions in the global Economy of Sharing fund. Once all this information is collated and finalised, the amount of available Economy of Sharing funds (for the year) is ascertained. The decision about how to share out the money is then calculated by means of a simple calculation based on the total funds received in the year. If the sum received for the year is the same or exceeds the amount requested by the various communities, then everyone receives exactly the amount requested. If the amount received is less than the amount requested (as has been the case since the start of the Economy of Sharing), then each zone receives a proportional amount based on this overall sum. For example, in 1997 the amount of Economy of Sharing funds available was around 80% of the total requests. In that year, each zone received 80% of what they had requested. This process, however, leaves the Economy of Sharing open to the effects of international currency devaluation, as I outlined in my research diary:

> " Rome, 30.10.97. In the afternoon there was discussion about the distribution of profits for this year. I was surprised at the simplicity and the openness with which it was carried out. Oreste, the vice-president of the Focolare, outlined how this year, as a result of the devaluation of the European currencies compared with the dollar, there has been a reduction in the profits and the help available. The lire has decreased by 16% in this year and as a result, the help has to be reduced. It was very interesting to find out how this division takes place. Since all of the requests for help have been received in advance, each zone would receive a proportion of what they had asked for. In order to spread out the help as much as possible, the average was worked out on a per capita basis. In effect, this meant capping the zones that had asked for the highest amounts p/c...." (Research Diary 1: 21)

This way of calculating how much each zone receives has only been in effect since 1995, though, and prior to 1994 the Economy of Sharing contributions from businesses were allocated on a regional basis without passing through the Focolare Centre. Those countries which had the highest level of Economy of Sharing profits distributed them within that particular country. In 1994, however the system was globalised. The decision to bring this about came partly from the realisation that the businesses were still not managing to produce enough profits to cover the needs of the Focolare communities throughout the world [CEOS13b]. A global structure, it was thought, would enable a more comprehensive distribution of the profits, and therefore a more widespread communion of goods, between countries and not just within the countries themselves.

In order to do this, in 1994 the Focolare adopted a calculation based on the cost of living in different parts of the world in order to bring about a fair distribution of the profits. In a sense, this can be seen as an attempt to take seriously the pattern of global inequalities in an objective fashion. The different regions received help proportional to the cost of living in that particular region, based on the number of people within the Focolare in need [02 RO: 2]. This calculation, however, was deemed rather laborious as it did not directly relate to the needs of the individual communities in the countries which had requested help. As a result, the above calculation was adopted, which proved much quicker and more effective in achieving the aims of the Economy of Sharing.

The greatest benefit of this procedure of profit distribution is the clarity of the system on a global scale. As a result of globalising the Economy of Sharing, the Focolare Centre has achieved a system through which it can oversee the global distribution of the Economy of Sharing profits, but does not take responsibility for deciding precisely how the funds are spent in the different regions. The regional delegates and local communities decide on such matters according to the needs within their communities. This takes away much time-consuming bureaucracy from the Economy of Sharing since no-one at the Centre tries to work out how to distribute the profits in every corner of the globe. At the same time, the fact that the Economy of Sharing makes use of pre-existing networks within the Focolare, and also pre-existing meetings, means that the Economy of Sharing *per se* has almost zero administration costs. The profits that are collected specifically for the Economy of Sharing can be given directly without a large percentage being siphoned off to pay those working for the Economy of Sharing.

This system of profit sharing on a global scale is heavily reliant on high levels of trust within the Focolare at every level. Such trust is normally assumed to only exists within face-to-face everyday, community relationships at a local level. Few receipts are issued or received for the profits. There is limited internal scrutiny of documents from the delegates on the part of the Centre and profits are shared in the total trust that all the money will be well spent. In this way, the process is very quick and efficient with paperwork kept to an absolute minimum. Such a system could seem complete madness within the dominant market economy in which everything that is spent or requested has to be justified through a laborious system of accountability. The Economy of Sharing appears to be open to corruption, fraud, and the misuse of funds. The nature of the Focolare spirituality which underpins the system means that it is difficult to misuse the trust on which it is founded. At the same time, it makes it difficult to question the trustworthiness of the others. Those who are in roles of responsibility, for example, have given up all their possessions to live in the Focolare houses and do not have access to personal bank accounts. Nevertheless, given that the Economy of Sharing is working very much at the intersection between the normal public economy and the distinctive economic vision within the Focolare, this reliance on trust could present difficulties. The nature of such difficulties will be considered in relation to the case studies.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of the evolution of the Economy of Sharing and its development on a global scale between 1991-1998, highlighting the various local-global networks that have evolved. Several important points have emerged from this analysis which could indicate that the Economy of Sharing is facing difficulties or even a possible crisis. Firstly, although steady, the amount of profits redistributed by the businesses participating in the Economy of Sharing project is not growing at the rate which was initially expected. As a proportion of the overall money distributed within the context of 'help to the poor' within the Focolare, the contribution of the businesses only comes to around 15% of the total. Secondly, the number of new businesses joining the project has slowed in recent years, especially in European countries. The initial burst of enthusiasm in the early years of the project seems to have given way to a slower rate of growth, but one which is arguably more solid as it is based on well thought decisions rather than euphoria. Nevertheless, this slowdown of the number of businesses casts a doubt over the universal applicability of the Economy of Sharing on a wider scale.

In order to look more closely at the possible reasons for this pattern of development within the Economy of Sharing, and the wider prospects for its future growth, it is also necessary to analyse how the Economy of Sharing is being translated into practice at the grassroots level. In other words, it is necessary to examine in detail how the businesses that are participating in the project are attempting to 'enculture' this vision of the economy into their everyday practices of doing business, and into the networks that are evolving around these practices.

6. Locating the case study regions

The Economy of Sharing is a network of businesses, NGOs and individuals working together to address the question of wealth redistribution on a global scale through seeking to open up 'spaces of sharing' within the realm of the public economy. This global network, which is most visible from the Focolare centre in Rome, displays particular global economic geographies of business distribution and profit sharing. This global overview of the Economy of Sharing provided the general parameters of the project at its current stage of development. It could not, however, in itself provide an account of the local economic geographies of the Economy of Sharing. The global network only exists by virtue of various intertwining regional and local networks made up of businesses, Focolare communities and other institutions working in association with each other, negotiating various 'spaces of sharing' at a local level. It is at this scale of enquiry – juxtaposing it with the global - that the most interesting insights into the relationship here between the cultural and the economic can be generated. In this chapter, therefore, I will locate my two case study regions - Milan and Sao Paulo - both geographically and in terms of the wider economic and political context, at the time when the Economy of Sharing was first emerging in the early 1990s. I will then go on to introduce the character of the enterprises which form the Economy of Sharing in the two regions.

Brazil and Italy in the early 1990s

The global economic geographies explored in the previous chapter illustrate the way the Economy of Sharing was launched in Brazil and, almost immediately, was adopted throughout the world. The project made use of the existing Focolare networks, and extending these 'spaces of sharing' into the wider market economy. These global geographies reveal that the Economy of Sharing formed several concentrations throughout the world - principally in Italy and Brazil - crossing over the divisions between 'developing' and 'developed' nations. This phenomenon of the development of the Economy of Sharing within both mature industrialised European countries, such as Italy, and Latin American nations, such as Brazil, raises interesting questions as to the nature of the political, cultural and economic geographies in which the idea was emerging.

Italy and Brazil are worlds apart in terms of their respective levels of social and economic standings on a global scale (Table 6.1). This table shows that the Italian and Brazilian economic situation differed dramatically in the 1990s. Since World War II, the Italian economy had changed from one based on agriculture into a ranking industrial economy, with approximately the same total and per capita output as France and the UK. 3.3% of GDP came from agricultural production, with 33% coming from industry and 63.7% coming from the service sector. This basically capitalistic economy was still divided into a developed industrial north, dominated by private companies, and a less developed agricultural south, with large public enterprises and more than 20% unemployment (Sassoon, 1997: 17).[114] In the 1980s much attention was paid to the development of a third regional concentration of growth which had emerged within the economy, known as the 'Third Italy', located around Bologna in central-northern Italy (Trigilia, 1990: 160).[115] The Brazilian economy, on the other hand, although highly developed in some industrial sectors, still gained 14% of GDP from agriculture and 31% of the population were still employed in this sector. Nevertheless, industrial production in Brazil was estimated to growing by 4.5% in 1997, as compared to the estimated Italian growth rate of 0.5%.

In terms of indicators of social and economic well-being (see Table 6.2), the Italian population enjoys standards of living which, at least in financial terms, far surpass the Brazilian equivalent. In 1998, per capita purchasing of a Brazilian was less than one third of that of an Italian. Moreover, Italian society is more egalitarian and is not marked by the extreme levels of social and economic inequalities which have come to be a fundamental characteristic of Brazilian society, with almost half of the country's income going to the richest 10% of the population and an estimated 17.4% living below the poverty line. In Italy, by contrast, a quarter of the country's wealth is consumed by the top 10%.

[114] The underlying reasons for the regional polarisation of the Italian economy have been extensively studied (Lumley & Morris, 1997). Since the post-war, the Italian government (with the help of the EU) had ploughed millions. into the development of the South, which was predominantly agricultural, but the underlying problems remained. Since 1990 the so-called 'Southern Question' has led to widespread political corruption being revealed and increasingly vocal demands for separation from the northern regions (Sassoon, 1997: 10).
[115] The idea of the 'Third Italy' emerged principally as a result of the perceived dualism within the Italian economy - the 'Industrial Triangle' of the north-west (Milan, Turin and Genova) and the 'Mezzogiorno' region in the south (Bianchini, 1991). This industrial region is characterised by small and medium sized firms operating principally in the hi-tech sector. The validity of the concept, however, has been disputed (Bianchi, 1998; Silvani et al, 1993) due to the integration of the region in the economy of Lombardy, which in effect makes it an extension of the northern industrial triangle.

Table 6.1 Economic indicators for Italy and Brazil

	ITALY	BRAZIL
GDP: purchasing power parity	$1,181 trillion (1998 est.)	$1,352 trillion (1998 est.)
GDP—real growth rate	1.5% (1998 est.)	0.5% (1998)
GDP—composition by sector:	agriculture: 3.3% industry: 33% services: 63.7% (1994)	agriculture: 14% industry: 36% services: 50% (1997)
Inflation rate (consumer prices):	1.8% (1998 est.)	2% (1998)
Labor force	23.193 million	57 million (1989 est.)
Labor force—by occupation	services 61% industry 32% agriculture 7% (1996)	services 42% industry 27% agriculture 31% (1998)
Unemployment rate	12.5% (1998 est.)	8.5% (1998 est.)
Budget:	revenues: $559 billion expenditures: $589 billion (1998)	revenues: $151 billion expenditures: $149 billion (1998)
Industries:	tourism, machinery, iron and steel, chemicals, food processing, textiles, motor vehicles, clothing, footwear, ceramics	textiles, shoes, chemicals, cement, lumber, iron ore, tin, steel, aircraft, motor vehicles and parts, other machinery and equipment
Industrial production growth rate	0.5% (1996 est.)	4.5% (1997 est.)
Exports by value	$243 billion (f.o.b. 1998)	$51 billion (f.o.b. 1998)

Source: CIA World Factbook, 1999

Table 6.2 Economic indicators of inequality

		ITALY	BRAZIL
GDP—per capita purchasing power parity		$20,800 (1998 est.)	$6,100 (1998 est.)
Population below poverty line		NA%	17.4% (1990 est.)
Household income or consumption by percentage share	lowest 10% highest10%	2.9% 23.7% (1991)	0.8% 47.9% (1995)

Source: CIA World Factbook, 1999

Such indicators of inequality are borne out in the statistics regarding social indicators of well-being in Table 6.3. At the end of the 1990s, Brazil had an infant mortality rate almost six times that of Italy, and life expectancy at birth was more than fifteen years less than in Italy.

Table 6.3 Social indicators of well-being

		ITALY	BRAZIL
Infant mortality rate (1999) *(deaths per 1000 live births)*:		6.3	35.37
Life expectancy at birth (1999)	total population: male: female:	78.51 yrs 75.40 yrs 81.82 yrs	64.06 yrs 59.35 yrs 69.01 yrs
Literacy *(definition: age 15 and over can read and write)*	total population: male: female:	97% 98% 96% (1990 est.)	83.3% 83.3% 83.2% (1995 est.)

Source: CIA World Factbook, 1999

The visibility of such inequalities was the underlying rationale behind the start of the Economy of Sharing in Brazil but cannot provide an adequate answer as to why the idea took off in certain areas of Italy. For some insight into why the Economy of Sharing developed in Italy, it is necessary to examine the parallels within the wider political and economic context into which the Economy of Sharing was launched in both these countries.

The Brazilian context

In 1991, the Economy of Sharing was launched in Sao Paulo, Brazil into an economic and political system that was in turmoil, but also one that presented many opportunities. Brazil was facing profound challenges in terms of its future development, having the eighth largest economy in the world, but increasingly crippled by external debt and the domestic burden of widespread inequality.[116] The international scenario was one of increasing capital flows and rapid technological transformation, but, due to its external debt, Brazil was unable to participate fully in these developments (Becker & Elger, 1992).[117] Domestically, Brazil was faced with mounting inflation after a number of failed stabilisation plans and the prospect of a new constitution, which brought new social and economic features into an already complicated economic situation.

[116] The historical roots of this crisis, which came to a head in the early 1990s, date back to the Portuguese colonisation of Brazil, which ended in the mid-19th century. This extended period of colonisation gave rise to a very powerful rural oligarchy composed of owners of coffee plantations, originating an economic situation which was ruled by a very few people linked to the international economy. The historical roots are not discussed in detail here, but reference can be made to Font (1990), who writes extensively on the roots of the Brazilian crisis.

[117] A number of theoretical perspectives concerning the 'dependency' of Brazil have emerged since the 1930s. Some authors, such as Furtado (1963) pointed to the internal mechanisms which were rooted in colonial institutions and gave rise to dependency. Others, such as Cardoso and Faletto (1979) and pointed to the external mechanisms, such as poor conditions of trade, which prevented the development of the industrial potential of the country.

Import Substitution Industrialisation (ISI),[118] the country's main strategy of economic development, had been showing signs of failure since the mid-1980s. This had led to rapid industrialisation predominantly in the south-east of the country, leading to a highly dynamic economy within the southern states, but had done little to improve the concentration of wealth distribution within the country, or to make it competitive within an increasingly globalised world economy (Auty, 1995). The 1980s was dubbed the "lost decade" which was dogged by hyperinflation, low economic growth and the inability of the successive military governments to bring about meaningful economic and social reforms (Weyland, 1996). The end of the Cold War in 1989 and the changing global political climate in favour of market liberalisation meant that the sources of finance and political will which had made ISI a viable strategy for such a long time had dried up. The Brazilian government was faced with a "socio-political impasse" in which there was a profound need for alternative ideas (Becker & Elger, 1992).

At an international level, at the beginning of the 1990s, there was a growing consensus over the way ahead, based on the successful experiences of the emerging economies in Southeast Asia. The Brazilian economy was in need of reform in the shape of structural adjustment. The Brazilian government, like that of many other developing countries, had increasingly to bend to the will of the World Bank and IMF, implementing a programme of macro-economic reforms based on "market-oriented policy reforms".[119] In return, Brazil would continue to receive financial assistance from the World Bank in order to minimise the effects of the reforms at a micro level. As a result, it adopted radical liberal monetary and trade policies, and its overriding concern became the balance of payments in the public accounts. This strategy meant that the government had to adopt a stringent set of fiscal stabilisation measures, as well as a radical reform of the social security system, the main aim of which was to increase revenue which could be directed towards servicing its external debt. This process of economic modernisation was started in 1990 with the

[118] By ISI I am referring to a series of economic policies which can be traced back to the 1930s. Through these policies, protective tariffs were raised and the development of internal industrial capacity was encouraged, through the production of manufactured goods which were previously imported. The principal rationale behind this thinking was the idea that 'infant' industries require the help of the state in order to reach a stage whereby they can compete in open markets. These policies were encouraged by ECLA in the post-World War II period in Brazil, an implemented through a series of 'economic plans' put in place by Getulio Vargas, and Kubitschek (see Gwynne, 1990).

[119] These policies became known as the Washington Consensus. They had several common features: fiscal discipline; redirection of public expenditure priorities towards health, education and infrastructure; tax reform; providing competitive exchange rates; securing property rights; deregulation; trade liberalisation; privatisation; elimination of barriers to foreign investment and financial liberalisation (Baumann, 1999: 2).

election of Collor and his drastic measures which, it was hoped, would quell the inflationary cycle into which the country had plunged. In October of 1991, part of this plan consisted of freezing 80% of financial assets, but this plan failed to bring about the desired reforms and inflation continued to spiral in the early-1990s. In 1994 it was replaced with the 'Real Plan' under President Cardoso; this introduced a new currency, which was initially pegged to the US$ (Kinzo & Bulmer-Thomas, 1995). This monetary plan had drastic effects in terms of stabilising the national currency and further entrenched the structural adjustment policy, setting even more stringent spending limits on the government and imposing a privatisation programme which was by all accounts extremely ambitious and controversial.

On the one hand, the monetary policy that Brazil instituted is a success. It has succeeded in reducing inflationary levels from 2489% p.a. in 1993 to 2.6% in 1998. It has increased the level of direct foreign investment in the country and the demand for consumer goods has soared. At the same time, however, the result of these monetary plans has been a sharp reduction in public spending, leading to extensive cut backs in essential social services and the widening of the income gap between the rich and poor in the country. It led to a massive growth in unemployment in the urban conurbation and a widespread breakdown in social cohesion. In 1992, Brazil was described as "a rich country of poor people" (Becker & Elger, 1992: 50), in which the richest 10% of the population control half the country's income. The National Brazilian Bishops Conference (CNBB) has always been an outspoken critic of the government's economic and social strategy. In 1995 it published a report that analysed the impact of the fiscal reforms on social exclusion within Brazil, and it outlined how, through focusing on monetary reforms, the government had effectively washed its hands of the social consequences of these reforms. It was left to the NGOs, churches and social movements to pick up the pieces that the economic reforms created (Macdonald, 1995). The government's contribution was reduced to one programme, *Programa Comunidade Solidaria*, which the CNBB deemed as an inadequate response to the social crisis.

Moreover, despite rapid development and inward investment, the wealth generated was very unevenly distributed, the place of wealth becomes literally a place of poverty. The rapid development of the industrial sector led to a severe lack of housing for millions of migrants who came from the countryside (especially from the North East) in search of employment. Migration to Sao Paulo led to the city growing from around 4 million in 1970 to over 12 million in 1985 (IBGE, 1995). Makeshift shantytowns or *favelas* appeared on the most dangerous and degraded land in the city such as along the banks of the Tiête river, which had become highly polluted due to effluent from heavy industry. They also began to be constructed along the main arterial roads out of the city and on the grass verges of the ring road. Some *favelas*, such as Pedreira, were constructed on the emergency access land above the main gas pipeline into the city. Most of these areas, since they are technically illegal, still lack even the most basic infrastructure such as water and electricity [SP13]. The desparate plight of the poor in Brazilian cities, therefore, has become ever more visible in recent decades, especially in the central regions which have seen the most rapid economic transformation.

The Italian context

Likewise, the Italian political economy, into which the Economy of Sharing was launched in 1991, was also one in disarray, albeit for very different reasons to the situation in Brazil. Since 1945 Italy had been the European frontier between the East and the West. On the one hand it was the great bastion of the Catholic Church, and thus a symbolic heart of Christianity in Western Europe. On the other, it was the country with the largest communist party in Europe. This frontier status on the international stage in the Cold War enabled the emergence of a unique combination of political, social and economic factors resulting in the largest public sector (industrial and services) in Western Europe and the most extensive bureaucracy governing all areas of market regulation (Baldassarri & Modigliani, 1995: 18). It gave rise to and sustained a unique kind of economic protectionism which was justified principally on the grounds that compromise with communism was far better than allowing the communist party to take control.

In the early-1990s, the dramatic change in international political geography precipitated the unravelling of the political process in Italy, revealing a system that was riddled with corruption at every level. The *Democrazia Christiana* (DC), which had been in power since 1945, disintegrated in 1992 in a flurry of corruption scandals. Italy, in the meantime, lost what might have been termed its "special status" virtually overnight, and had to accept the emergence of a global market based on competitiveness, a value which had been undermined from within the Italian economy through reliance on political favours. Italy was faced with an economic situation wherein there were grave problems. The political situation, which was riddled with institutionalised corruption also affected the business world. Baldassarri & Modigliani (1995) cite three key problems, each touching on the relationship between the economy and the state, which emerged as a result of this scandal. Firstly, at a macro-economic level, massive public spending over several decades within the productive and service sectors of the economy had led to a 'protectionist attitude' and had put an enormous strain on the national finances. Secondly, the distributionist function of the state, which had been massively expanded over the course of forty years, had led to critical services such as education, justice and law and order being suffocated. Thirdly, there was the perception of a widespread 'culture of welfare' which resulted in high unemployment and lack of investment in business.

Amato's new Italian government in 1992 slowly began to contemplate ways in which this protectionist attitude could be overcome and competition could be increased. Among the solutions put forward was privatisation, in a similar vein to what had taken place in the 1980s in the rest of Western Europe. The pace of such reforms, however, was painfully slow and there was considerable resistance. The problem was that the rationalisation accompanying such a reform would inevitably lead to a massive increase in unemployment levels and perpetuate the overspending on welfare. There was a sense that a new form of economy had to emerge, one that would somehow bridge the gap between the 'market' demands for profitability and efficiency and the need to create new jobs and help in the provision of welfare.

In search of 'new solutions'

Both Brazil and Italy, therefore, at the beginning of the 1990s though differing greatly in terms of socio-economic development, were faced with similar difficulties. In Italy, the result of the political scandals (and their entanglements with economic life) was a vacuum in which there was a profound thirst for new ideas to help to revive and to renew the economic system (Baldassarri & Modigliani, 1995). With the political system in disarray, people looked elsewhere for solutions. Similarly in Brazil, the failures of the market to bring about greater social and economic equality and the external pressures on the state to decrease spending on essential welfare requirements, gave prominence to the role of 'other players', such as social movements and NGOs, in the provision of welfare: "Brazil in the early-1990s thus found itself at a cross-roads. It was groping for a new development model that would provide both the opportunity for renewed economic growth and the prospect of a greater degree of equity" (Baer & Tulchin, 1993: 4).

In other words, the emergence of a so called 'third sector'[120] came into relief, through which increasing demands for welfare provision and job creation could be transferred outside of the state's control. In Passuello's view, such a third sector in Italy had to open up a space where there would be a "radical change in the strategies of citizenship, founded on a different relationship between the public and the private" (Passuello, 1997: 8).[121] It would see the growth of the "intermediate bodies" of civil society which would bridge the gap between the state and the market. Such bodies could not be merely charitable or voluntary associations, which are often viewed as picking up the pieces of industrial society. It would rather, see the emergence of a new kind of economic venture within the market economy, in which "the figure of the professional operator tends to coincide with that of the citizen who is actively engaged in responsibly creating solidarity" (Passuello, 1997: 18). Passuello conceded, however, that talk of such a third sector tended to generate confusion when one attempts to define it: "a confusion which increases as soon as you try to 'name' this physical, mental, political, social and economic space - between the market and the state" (Passuello, 1997: 9). This is a view which was echoed by other social commentators:

> *"We are a country 'poised' between the old which we know and wish to discard and the new, which we do not know and of which we are unsure... There is a growing sensation that moving towards the future means profoundly changing our daily way of life and this generates fears and resistance vis-à-vis the increased responsibilities of a civil society to deal with the new"* (Delai, in Baldassarri & Modigliani 1995: 45).

Similarly in Brazil, according to Green, the critical question was precisely how to bring about greater citizen responsilitiy without creating a highly volatile economic situation within the country. He too located the solution in a new concept of the role of business in the wider function of bringing about solidarity at a societal level: "How can the region's business elite be persuaded to accept radical wealth distribution without provoking massive capital flight and an immediate economic crisis?" (Green, 1996: 160) The root problem in both cases was understood to be the dominance of neo-liberal thinking, especially within the realm of commercial institutions. Both countries were in search of solutions which

[120] There are strong parallels here between the Italian and Brazilian debates over the 'third sector' and the debates over the 'third way' which emerged within British political thinking in the 1990s (Giddens, 1998; Novak, 1998; Powell, 1999).
[121] Author's translation - original in Italian.

could bridge the gap between the productive sector of the economy and the fair distribution of wealth.

The revival of Catholic thinking/action

Despite their differences, both Italy and Brazil faced social, political and economic challenges which raised the question of giving rise to economic/social spaces within the public sphere, in which there was a shared sense of social responsibility and a commitment to solidarity. It could be thus argued that the long standing dominance of Catholicism within Italy and Brazil[122] made it possible to at least imagine solutions to these pressing issues based substantially on Catholic principles. This widespread concern in the early 1990s coincided with the publication of the most extensive social teaching ever within the Catholic Church, sparking a revival of Catholic thinking on such matters. As mentioned in the previous chapter, in 1991 Pope John Paul II published *Centesimus Annus*. This letter marked the first hundred years of Catholic social teaching, and is cited as a major step forward in the level and quality of analysis of economic and social matters on the part of the Catholic Church (Novak, 1993).

Moreover, both Italy and Brazil have diverse traditions of social and economic thinking which have drawn on such principles. In Brazil, for example, the CNBB had long been an outspoken and radical voice in favour of social justice. They argued that the problem of inequality within Brazilian society could only be solved through a radical shift in the dominant understanding of the relationship between economy and politics within Brazil, but also within the international political economy. The totalisation of economic growth as an end in itself and the belief that the market could solve all problems, including social ones, lay at the heart of this problem. The CNBB rejected the single-minded scope of the government's approach to economic and social development, which did not seem to have any medium or long-term strategy except keeping the economy stable. In the view of the Bishops, what was at stake was the entire model of economic liberalisation and how economic growth *per se* had become the overriding goal. Any reform would thereby have to include a return to the relationship between ethics and the economy:

[122] Although the role of religion is often said to be in decline, in Italy, 98% of the population are nominally Catholic and in Brazil the figure is 70% (CIA, 1999). The Catholic Church has played a critical role in the social political and economic development of both Italy and Brazil. In Brazil, this role dates back to the Jesuit missions of the 16th century. In more recent times, the separation of Church and state has led to the Catholic Church adopting a more reforming voice on social and economic issues. In Italy, the presence of the 'Vatican State' within Italian territory makes it a dominant political, as well as social and economic force.

> *"Only in the light of ethics is it possible to clearly see and reject outright, the injustice of a system which continues to exclude millions of Brazilians, depriving them of the basic conditions of human survival. It is only in the light of ethics that we can overcome the limitations of an economic rationale which continues to guarantee the success of 'plans' without considering those who are excluded from those plans"* (CNBB, 1995: 4).

Only in this way, through an economic system which prioritises social concerns and subordinates economic reasoning within social objectives, could greater equality be coupled with economic prosperity.

In Italy, on the other hand, the desire to find solutions to the political and economic crisis led to a renewed interest in the relationship between 'ethics and economics'. Some of this work paralleled similar debates going on within the British economic journals, examining the contribution that orthodox economic theory could bring to questions of social justice (Gandolfo & Marzano, 1999). Another strand of this work, which has not been explored to the same extent in the English language literature, but is highly relevant within the context of the Economy of Sharing, drew on the ideas of Catholic thinkers such as Don Luigi Sturzo.[123]. Sturzo's political thinking assumed the existence of a 'Christian anthropology'. The central nucleus of his reflections on the liberty of economic initiative are derived from the concept of the creative subjectivity of the person. There is a strong resonance between these ideas and those which underpin the Focolare's economic vision. Sturzo's thought had profoundly influenced the development of Catholic political and economic action in the immediate post-war years (in particular the creation of the DC), but had been undermined by the political scandals which called into question the whole question of Catholic action in the public sphere (Spampinato, 1993: 2). In the early 1990s, the revival of these strands of Catholic thinking within Italy provided a 'cultural humus' in which the Economy of Sharing could develop both on a practical and theoretical level.

The Economy of Sharing, thus, emerged at a time of profound change at a economic and political level within both Italy and Brazil. It was a time of profound questioning, but also a time of change. In a paradoxical way, despite the extremely difficult economic and social situation, the timing of the launch of the Economy of Sharing was extremely opportune.

[123] Sturzo (1871-1959) was a Sicilian priest and founder of the Italian Popular Party. He was a sociologist and philosopher who inaugurated a new stage of Catholic political action at the end of the 19th century. In 1926, on account of his anti-fascism, he was forced to leave Italy and to begin a twenty year exile, first in France, then in England, and finally in the USA (Felice, 1999). Amongst other things, he was a colleague of Igino Giordani, one of the founders of the Focolare (De Rosa & Piccoli, 1986).

On the one hand, it presented a vision of economic growth which appealed to those who recognised the need for greater imagination within the Brazilian economy, and in particular within the realm of business. In Italy, it offered the possibility of a new engagement between Catholic thinking and economic action. It emphasised social concerns, and not on profit *per se*, appealing to those who were seeking 'a third sector'. The Economy of Sharing seemed to the "imperatives" of both economic growth and income distribution.

Local Economy of Sharing networks

Sao Paulo

In many ways, the general situation in Brazil in the early-1990s was epitomised by the State of Sao Paulo where my Brazilian case studies are located. Sao Paulo forms the industrial heartland of the country and is by far the most industrialised and urbanised State in Brazil (Becker & Elger, 1992). It produced 51.4% of total industrial output of the country in 1991 and was home to 23% of the population, despite occupying only 0.5% of the territory. The roots of this industrial concentration arose from the geographical position of Sao Paulo in the nineteenth century during the coffee boom. The city of Sao Paulo is located in the plane above the Serra do Mar and the port of Santo, the latter beingon of the main ports of the country in the nineteenth century. As a result, the infra-structure of the city of Sao Paulo became highly developed in terms of railways, roads and electricity, as it was an obligatory stopping point on the way to Santos.

The policy of ISI in the 1960s and 1970s led to the rapid development of the conurbation of Sao Paulo, leading to high levels of capital investment, particularly in the car industry, nuclear industry, chemical engineering and consumer durables, all within a very small geographical area. The industrial belt stretched from along the alto plane from Sao Paulo in the south to Rio de Janeiro. It also stretched inland as far as Belo Horizonte. Around the city of Sao Paulo industrial regions emerged, such as the clustering of several chemical engineering plants in the Sant André district. Outside the metropolitan region, the hinterland of Sao Paulo is also highly developed with a highly industrialised sugar belt stretching inland to Piracicaba and Sao Jose dos Campos (Becker & Elger, 1992: 123).

The Economy of Sharing businesses within the Sao Paulo are dispersed over a wide region (see Figure 6.1). There are clusters of businesses in several major cities such as Piracicaba, Sao José dos Campos and metropolitan Sao Paulo, as well as in the smaller towns within the region. The other major cluster is around the town of Araceli, near Vargem Grande, where the Economy of Sharing project started in 1991. It is this town which forms the focal point for all of the Economy of Sharing businesses within the region, and for Brazil as a whole. Several miles to the west of Araceli there is a small industrial estate which is home to seven Economy of Sharing businesses. The town of Araceli also acts as a meeting point and conference centre for events related to the Economy of Sharing. Basic information concerning the Economy of Sharing businesses within this region is contained in Table 6.4 below.[124]

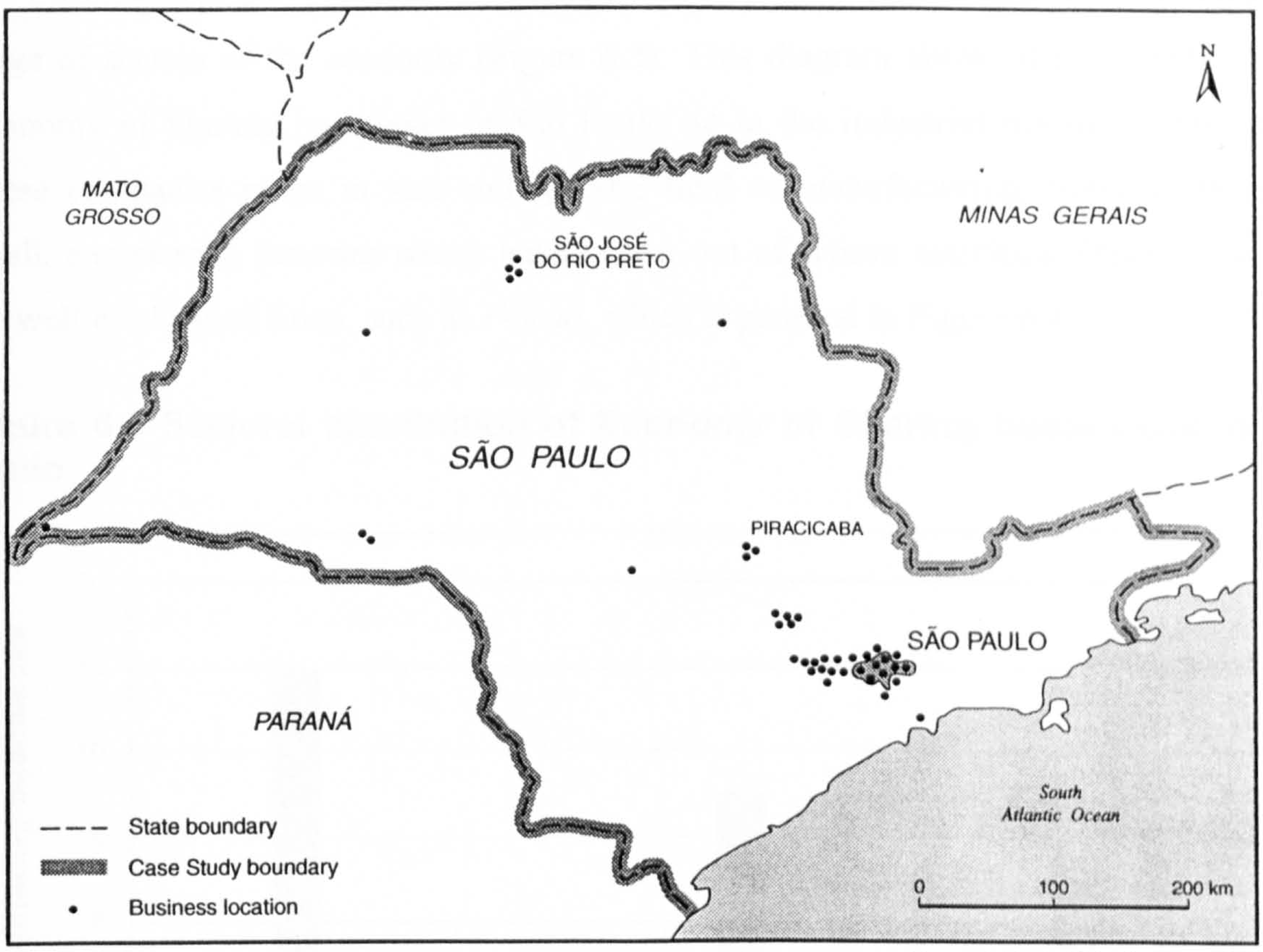
Table 6.4 The Economy of Sharing in Sao Paulo: basic statistics (1998)

Total number of Economy of Sharing businesses in case study region		42
Average turnover	$280,000	40
Lowest/highest turnover	$6000 - $2 million	40
Standard deviation	$428,990	40
Average capital value	$100,000	40
Lowest/highest capital	$2,000 - $2 million	40
Total number of employees	536	40

Source: Fieldwork, Sao Paulo 1998

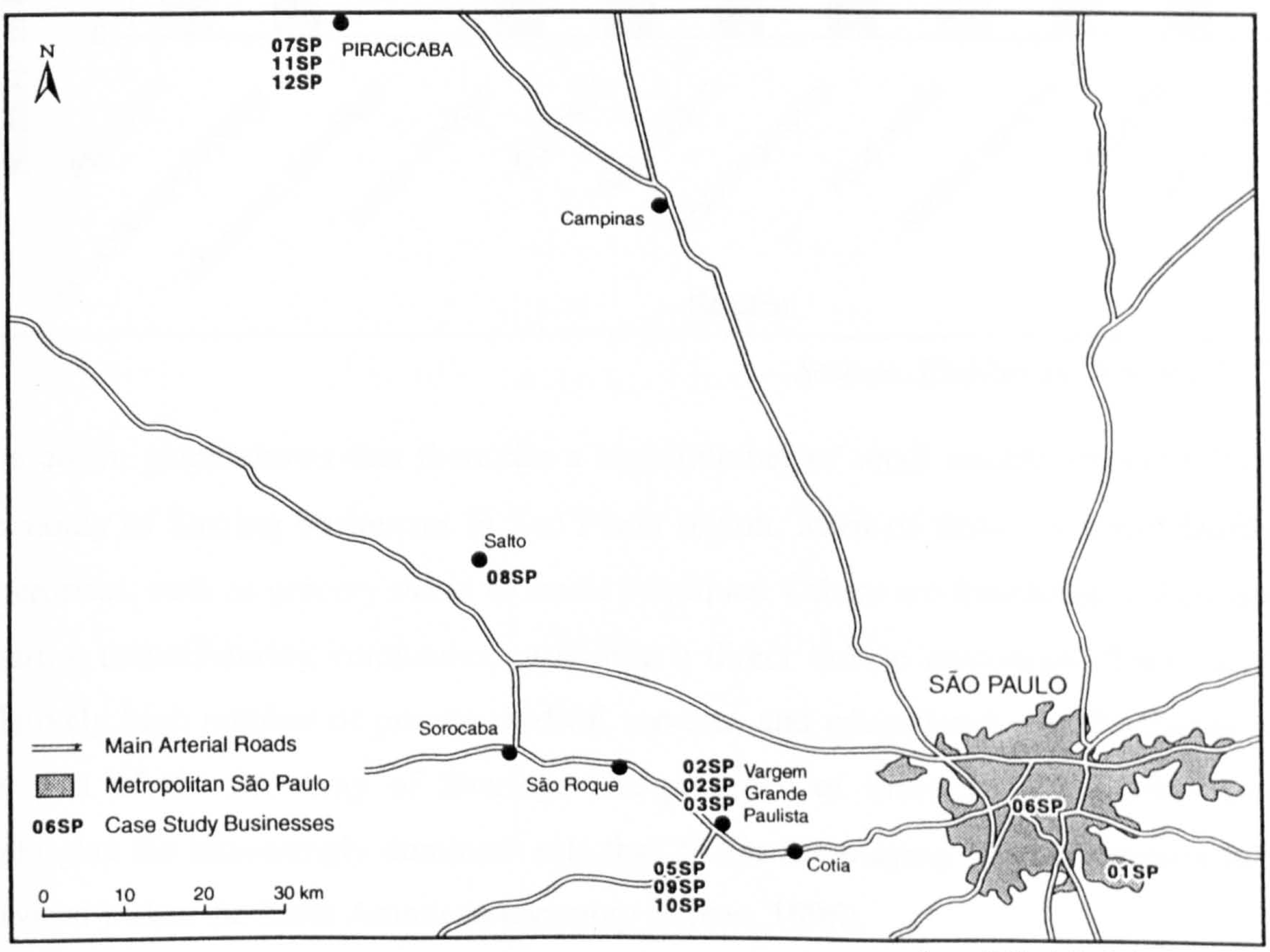
The range of capital value and annual turnover within the businesses is very great. The mean capital value in 1998 was $100,000 but the standard deviation from the mean was $159,409. This pattern could have been predicted given that the majority of the Economy of Sharing businesses started from nothing as a result of the launch in 1991. The kinds of businesses which were chosen, therefore, were ones which did not require vast amounts of capital. The mean turnover is $280,000 and the standard deviation is $428,990. This, again, tends to suggest that there are small number of businesses with a high turnover and a large number which are very small part-time ventures. This pattern seems to mirror the distinction made at the Focolare Centre (see previous chapter) regarding small scale initiatives and legally established commercial entities. Of these firms, 12 were chosen to represent this range for closer investigation. The distribution of these businesses is shown in Figure 6.2.

[124] As discussed in the methodology, the reliability of these statistics is hampered by the fact that some of the businesses (particularly the larger ones) reserved the right not to disclose details of their finances due to trade secrets. The number of cases relates to the actual number of businesses which provided the information from which the statistics are complied.



Source: Fieldwork, São Paulo, August 1998.

Figure 6.1 Geographical Distribution of Economy of Sharing Businesses in São Paulo

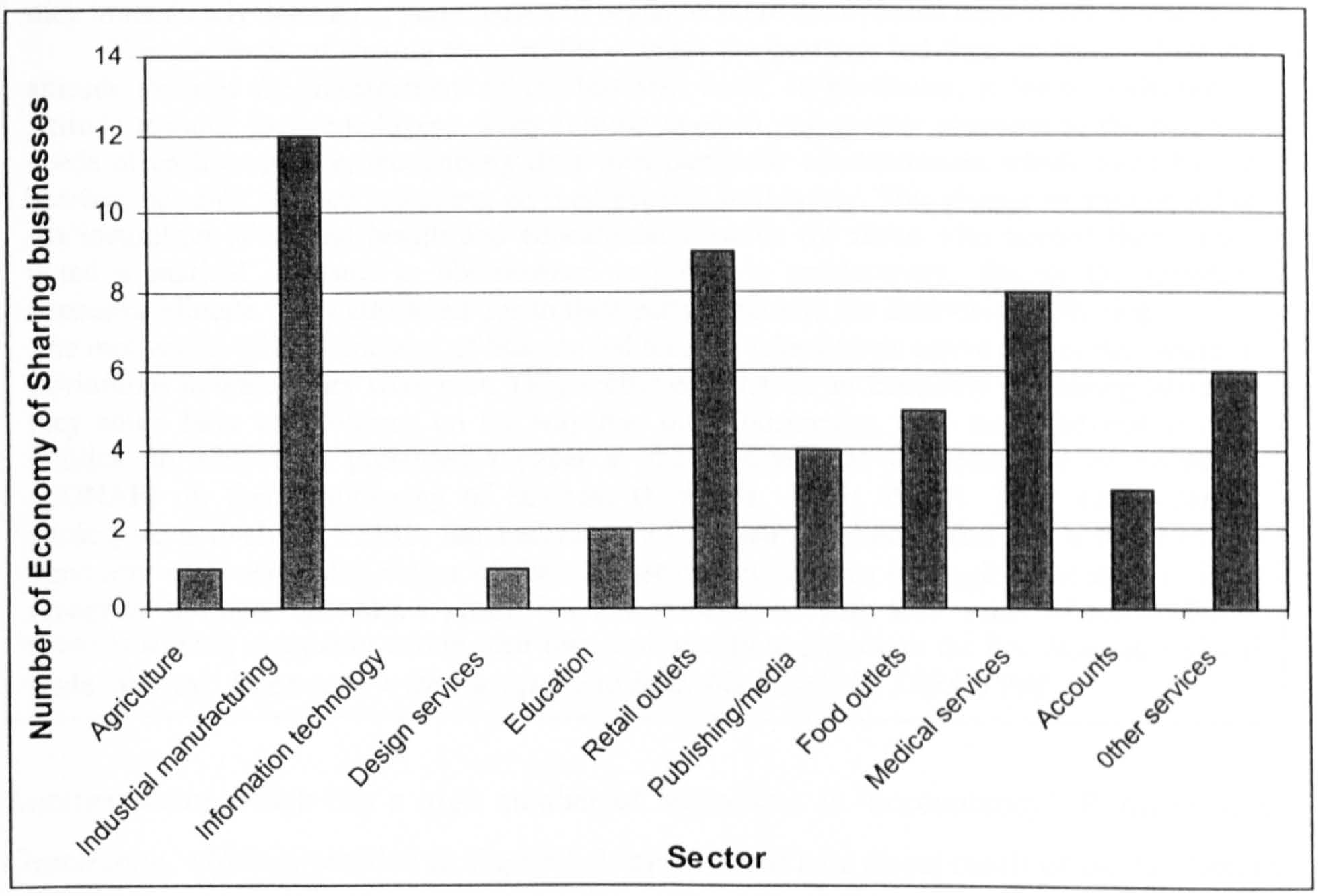


Source: Fieldwork, São Paulo, August 1998.

Figure 6.2 Location of Case Study Businesses in São Paulo

The businesses in Sao Paulo cover a wide cross section of small businesses operating in a range of sectors of the economy (Figure 6.3). This diagram shows that a quarter of the Economy of Sharing businesses in Sao Paulo lie in the industrial manufacturing sector. These companies range in size and specific field of manufacturing. Some of them are small, engineering factories which have grown out of artisan activities. Others, however, are well-established firms, such as *Femaq*, which is profiled in Figure 6.4.

Figure 6.3 Sectoral distribution of Economy of Sharing businesses in Sao Paulo



Source: Fieldwork, Sao Paulo, 1998

The above graph shows that there are a high number of retail establishments within the Economy of Sharing businesses in Sao Paulo region. Most of these are small family run enterprises, such as grocery stores or small boutiques. Others are franchises of Economy of Sharing manufacturing companies, providing a direct link to customers. There is also a relatively high number of private medical services and educational establishments which are part of the Economy of Sharing. The presence of these private welfare services highlights the increasingly dominant role that NGOs are playing in the provision of basic services within the Latin American economy (Green, 1996).

Figure 6.4 *Femaq* S.A.

Femaq S.A. was founded in Piracicaba in 1963 by Rudolfo and Enrique Leibholz, two brothers of German descent. The business consists of 60 full-time employees who work on site at the plant in Piracicaba, producing specialised parts for the car and paper industry. Over the years, they have gradually built up the company into one of the leading firms in its sector, not only in Brazil, but in Latin America. In 1994, the firm had an annual turnover of $US 8,200,000. The majority shareholding of the company is still in the hands of Enrique and Rudolfo, who are also the managing directors of the company.

Enrique and Rudolfo participated in the Focolare for many years and had applied the principles of sharing amongst employees in the business ever since they founded it. In 1991, when the Economy of Sharing was launched in Brazil, they immediately felt that this was a response to their deepest desire to help create a fairer distribution of wealth. As a consequence, they immediately decided to participate and began to share their profits outwith the business.

The challenge of sharing their profits outwith the business led them to have a different attitude towards the management of the business itself. In particular, it led to a change of attitude towards their employees. They felt the need to pay greater attention to the personal needs of each employee, recognising their own particular circumstances which could have a bearing, not only on their work, but on their general well-being. This change of attitude led to the institution of special health and educational benefits for those who needed them. They noted a marked decrease in absenteeism and rise in productivity, despite the turbulent economic climate. They attributed this to their participation in the Economy of Sharing.

The motivation of the Economy of Sharing led them to take a more active role in the industrial institutions in which they were part. They recognised that as an Economy of Sharing business, they could have an influence on the way that other businesses were managed and in local politics. In 1995 they presented a paper at the International Confederation of Foundries (CONAF) on their philosophy of business (Leibholz, 1995: 49-61). They also began to participate actively in FEISP, the Federation of Industry in Sao Paulo. As a result of the Economy of Sharing, the vision of their industrial activity has changed substantially. They recognise the need to make a profit, but this is balanced with their sense of responsibility towards solving inequality within their own community and through the Focolare, on a global scale. *Source: Interviews with Enrique and Rudolfo Liebholz, 1995, 1998*

Another sector which has a high number of businesses is 'accountancy'. Firms such as *Comunione*, which is profiled in Figure 6.5, came about as a direct result of the location of many Economy of Sharing businesses in the vicinity of Araceli. This is perhaps surprising given both the extremely difficult tax situation within Brazil and the underlying culture of tax evasion. The emergence of *Comunione* is typical of the way that such ethical dilemmas as institutionalied corruption have been overcome in the Economy of Sharing through the setting up of parallel Economy of Sharing economic structures to those which already existed.

Figure 6.5 *Comunione* Accounting Services

Comunione Auditoria e Assessorial Contabil Ltd is a small company which started in 1993 as a direct consequence of the Economy of Sharing launch. Three members of the Focolare who have experience in the area of accounting could see that there was a need for a reliable accountancy business which could serve the Economy of Sharing businesses. They noted that many of the new businesses were starting up around the town of Araceli, near Vargem Grande Paulista, and were struggling to find the business services which they required in the vicinity. As a consequence the three decided to invest a small amount of their own capital to start an Economy of Sharing company which would both share its own profits for the Economy of Sharing and at the same time provide a service for the other businesses.

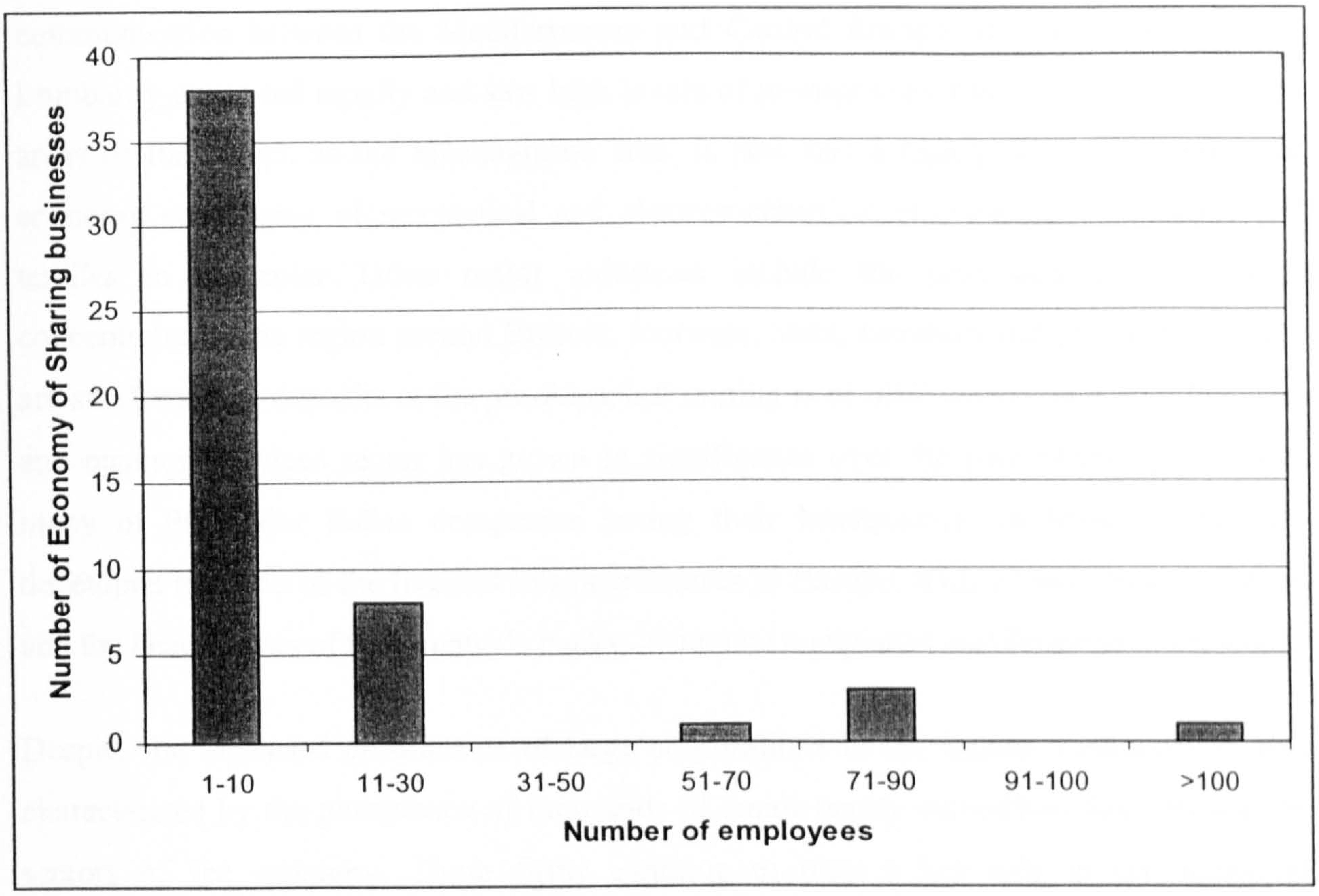
They rented a small office on the main street of Vargem Grande and initially began to work for the other Economy of Sharing businesses. As time went on, however, they began to gain clients from other local businesses and their network of customers expanded outwith the Economy of Sharing.

This expansion presented them with several problems. Firstly, they were faced with a business culture in which tax evasion is the norm and payoffs for creative accounting are widely accepted. *Comunione*, however, felt that in the light of being an Economy of Sharing business, they were unable to take part in such activities. This put them in the awkward position of having to turn down custom at a time when there was economic stagnation. Nevertheless, they persisted in pursuing this stance and eventually gained credibility from businesses outwith the Economy of Sharing and have had an influence on their practices too.
Source: Interview with the managing director of Comunione, 1998.

From these two examples of Economy of Sharing businesses in Sao Paulo, it is already possible to see how the Focolare's ethos is translated into business practices, directly influencing such matters as choice of suppliers, location of the business, and even the type of businesses which are started up. They also highlight some of the critical ethical questions, such as attitudes to workers and to corrupt practises, which affect the emergence of the Economy of Sharing in this region.

Figure 6.6 on the next page showes clearly that all of the businesses within the Economy of Sharing in Sao Paulo are small and medium sized businesses. Nevertheless, the size of the businesses varies greatly both in terms of employees, turnover, and the capital investment in the business. The average number of employees is thirteen but there is a high deviation from the mean. The largest Economy of Sharing business in the region of Sao Paulo is *Alman*, a mechanical engineering firm with 120 employees. Then there are a large number of businesses with around 20-30 employees, and a very large number with under five employees.

Figure 6.6 Number of employees in Economy of Sharing businesses in Sao Paulo



Source: Fieldwork in Sao Paulo, 1998

Milan

The region of Milan is made up of Lombardy, the northern most Italian region, Reggio Emilia and the Eastern part of Piemonte. This region sits at the centre of the Po Valley, and extends over the middle of the Italian Alps, bordering Switzerland to the north. The region of Lombardy is only the forth largest in Italy (23,856 sq. km) but is the most densely populated (c. 8,879 000), with a density of 372 inhabitants per square kilometre. There are three distinct natural zones within the region: the mountainous regions of the Alps to the north, the pre-Alps in the centre of the region, and the plains to the south.

Although Lombardy is a highly industrialised region, it also has a strong agricultural sector. Over 1,645,000 people are still employed in agriculture, a higher figure than for any other Italian region. The varied topography of the region makes it ideal for various agricultural activities from vine production to the rearing of livestock. Lombardy has the highest number of cattle and pigs in Italy, and this sector is highly mechanised and technologically advanced. The industrial development of the region has hence always been linked to the success of the agricultural sector. Even prior to the unification of Italy, however, Lombardy had emerged as an industrial zone, aided by the ready availability of water supplies and its geographical position at the junction of the main lines of communication between the Mediterranean and Central Europe. In the post-war years, Lombardy expanded rapidly and saw high levels of in-migration from the poorer southern areas of Italy, such as the Mezzogiorno area. It now has a highly diversified industrial economy comprising of mechanical and electromechanical engineering, chemicals, and textiles in particular. Other major industries include the processed food industry, concentrated in the region around Brescia, footwear, steel, furniture and publishing. There are small mineral deposits in the pre-Alps, but mining is of little importance. The financial and business services sector has grown in significance over the past twenty years, with many of the major Italian companies basing their headquarters in Milan. Milan has developed into one of the liveliest business centres in Europe, with a busy stock exchange and the head offices of the country's banks, insurance companies and financial institutions.

Despite the increased prominence of large corporations in the region, Lombardy is also characterised by the persistence of thousands of small family owned/run firms in various sectors of the economy. These firms continue to play a key role in the industrial development of the region. Bull and Corner (1993), in their study of the survival of the family economy in Northern Italy, demonstrate how the Alto Milan region does not fit into the traditional schema of industrial modernisation, wherein rural is equated with agriculture/backwardness and urban with industrial/modern. Rather, throughout the region, there has been an emergence of rural industries based on the evolution of pre-existing pluri-activities practised by peasant-workers. Such activities originated from the silk industry in the 1800s, but has continued as a form of social relations even to the present day. Rather than accept the break up of the family and migration to the industrial conurbation, the family economy has survived through continually re-inventing itself and transforming into entrepreneurs. This has given rise to a form of 'urbanised countryside' (Bull & Corner, 1993: 160) in which there is a combination of industrial and agricultural activities operating side-by-side, often managed by the same family. These individual businesses operate in close contact with other small firms, forming spontaneous networks.

The small family firms which make up this critical sector of the economy defy the assumption that small scale industry means technological backwardness. Many of the firms are highly competitive. In 1993 the Italian textile industry, for example, had a trade surplus of $18 billion. Within this sector there are only two large scale, publicly traded manufacturers, Benetton and Simint; 86% of the workers are employed in companies with fewer than ten employees (Fukuyama, 1995: 102). According to Piore and Sabel (1984), the persistence of this kind of industrialisation is not some kind of 'quirk' in the Italian economy. They used the example of such businesses to support their idea of "flexible specialisation", through which small businesses can thrive alongside very large ones in a consumer market characterised by segmentation, sophistication and rapid change. In this kind of market, there may be a premium which only small flexible businesses can provide. Piore and Sabel see this model as offering a possible pattern which other countries could follow in order to promote growth without the alienating features of mass production (Piore & Sabel, 1984).

The businesses in Milan region are spread across the localities of Lombardy and Piedmont, from Brescia in the east to Novara in the north west. Figure 6.7, on the next page, shows that there are several clusters of Economy of Sharing businesses in the region, notably in the cities of Milan and Brescia. The majority of the businesses, however, are to be found in small towns in the hinterland of Milan. Of these businesses, 12 were chosen for closer investigation. The location of these businesses is shown in Figure 6.8.

Table 6.5 The Economy of Sharing in Milan region: basic statistics

Number of Economy of Sharing businesses		40
Average turnover	$1,400,000	32
Lowest/highest turnover	$4000 - $8,400,000	32
Standard deviation	$2,295,110	32
Average capital value	$750,000	30
Lowest/highest capital	$5000 - $4 million	30
Total number of employees	206	32

Source: Fieldwork in Milan, 1998

Table 6.5 shows the general statistics relating to the Economy of Sharing in the region of Milan in 1998. As with the Sao Paulo businesses, here too there are a large number of micro-enterprises and a small number of well established firms. The turnover of the businesses and the capital value also reflect the broad range of size of businesses in the Economy of Sharing in Milan region. The average turnover of the businesses in 1998 was US$1,400,000 and the standard deviation was $2,295,110.

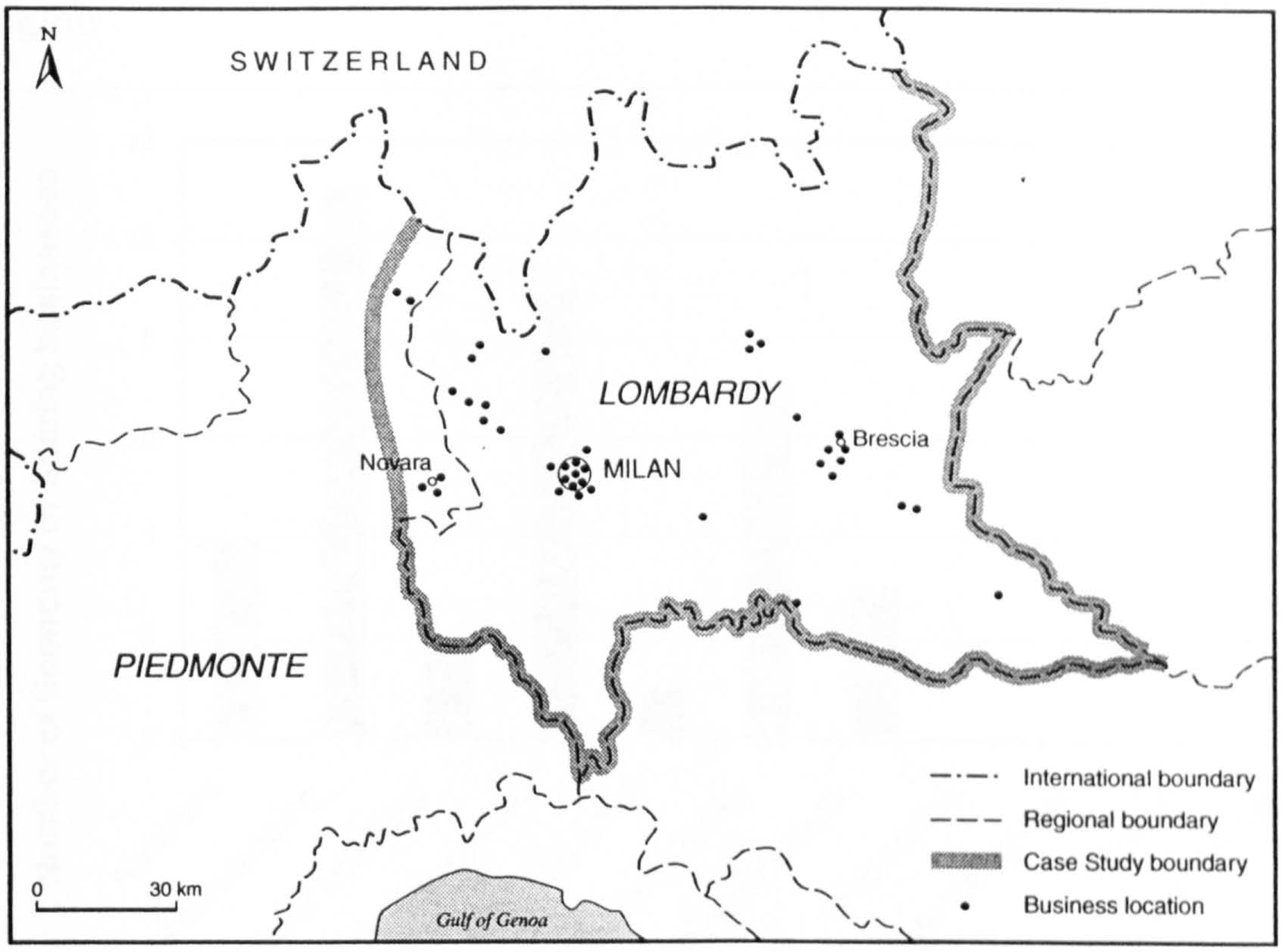


Figure 6.7 Distribution of Economy of Sharing Businesses in Milan Region

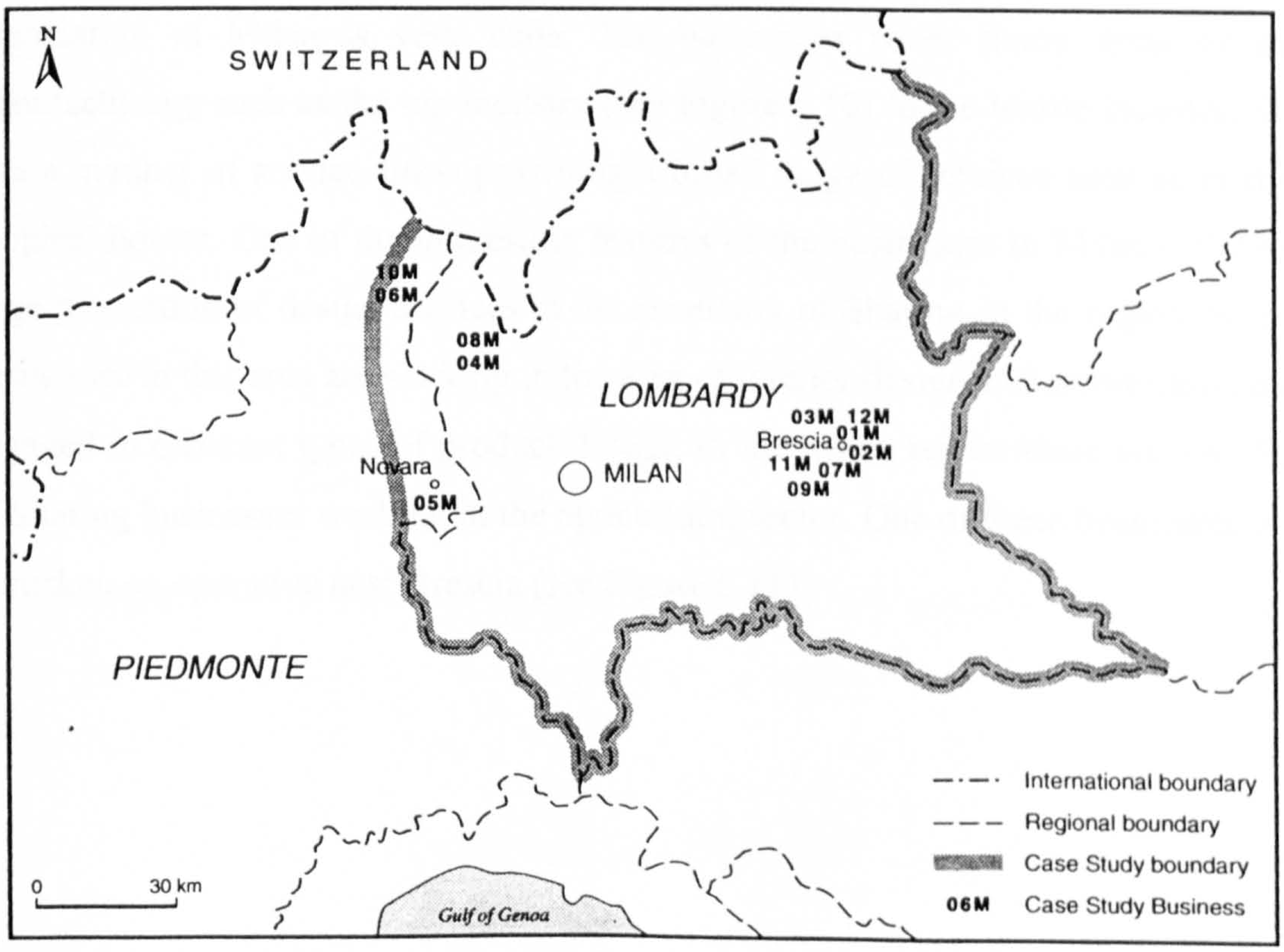
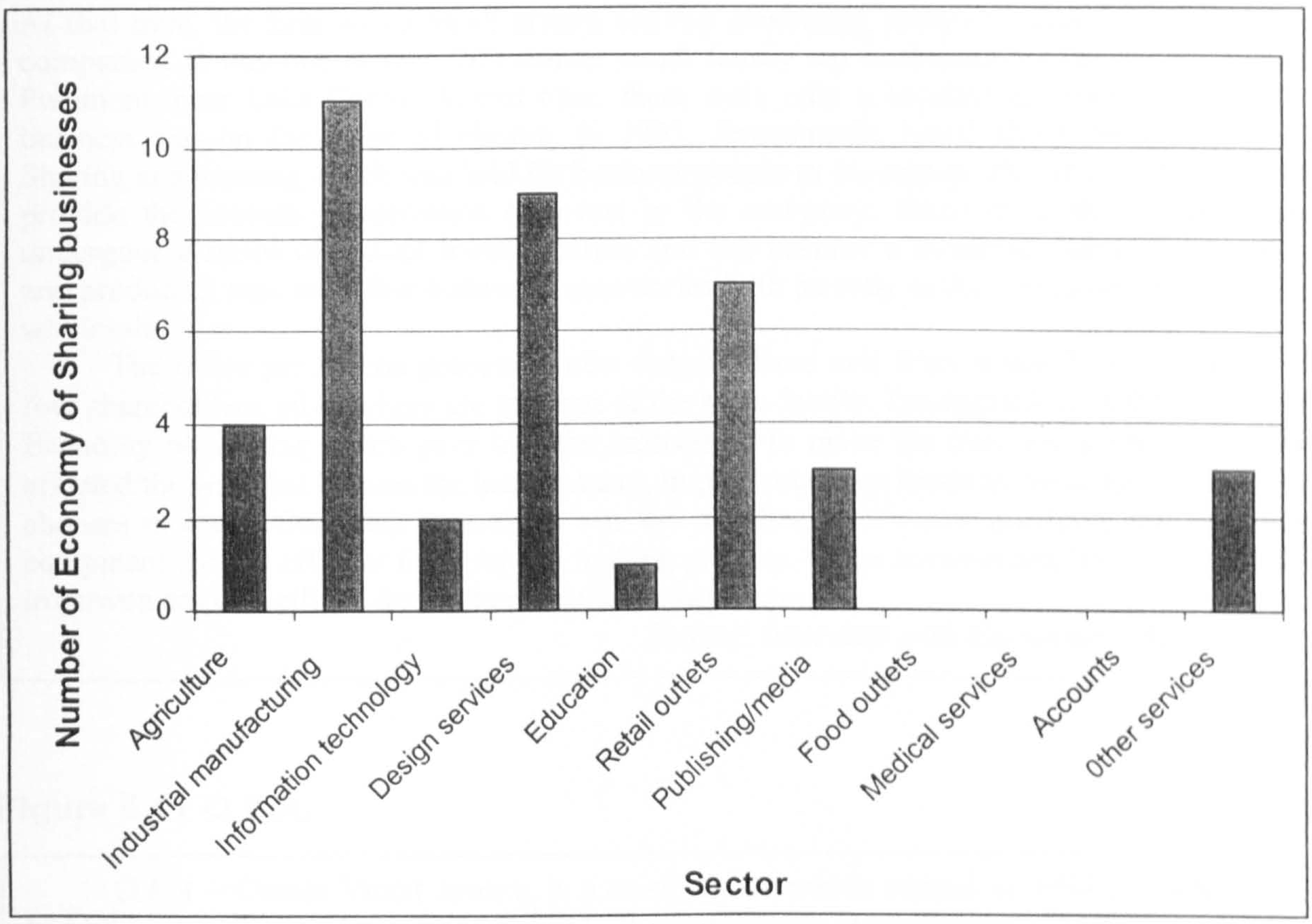


Figure 6.8 Location of Case Study Businesses in Milan Region

Figure 6.9 Sectoral distribution of Economy of Sharing businesses in Milan Region



Source: Fieldwork, Milan, 1998

Figure 6.9 shows that the range of economic sectors in the Economy of Sharing Association in Milan is very wide. The businesses cover many areas of industrial manufacturing, such as the tap industry (see Figure 6.10) to the textile industry. There are also a number of service firms providing a broad range of services such as media to old peoples' homes. One of the interesting features of the businesses in Milan is the relatively large proportion of design services in the Economy of Sharing in the region. Some of the businesses in this area are working in the area of interior design and architecture, others are engaged in different types of product design. In the Milan region there are four Economy of Sharing businesses working in the agricultural sector. One of these businesses is *O.V.A.*, a chicken co-operative near Brescia (see Figure 6.11).

Figure 6.10 *Webert* Ltd.

Emmanuele Webert took over the direction of the family firm in 1998 at the age of 19. At that time, the firm was a small artisan activity producing bathroom accessories for large companies. It was one of over 200 similar small family tap businesses in the eastern part of Piedmont, near Lake Como. At that time, there were only a handful of employees and the business was on the verge of closure. In 1991, Emmanuelle heard about the Economy of Sharing at a meeting which was held for business people in his region. He decided that it could provide the necessary motivation to invest in the company. Since then, the company has undergone a series of radical transformation and has become a dynamic company designing and producing taps and other bathroom accessories both directly to the consumer and to major wholesalers.

The entire production process is now industrialised and *Webert* has 74 employees and four shareholders, all of whom are still part of the same family. Emmanuele says that it was the Economy of Sharing which gave him the motivation to make the business grow. It has also affected the way that he runs the business and, in particular, the kinds of investments which he chooses to make. One such investment was the installation of water purifying and recycling equipment for the effluent from the tap making process. Other investments have included the improvement of facilities for workers on the factory floor.

Source: Interview with Emmanuele Webert 1998.

Figure 6.11 *O.V.A.*

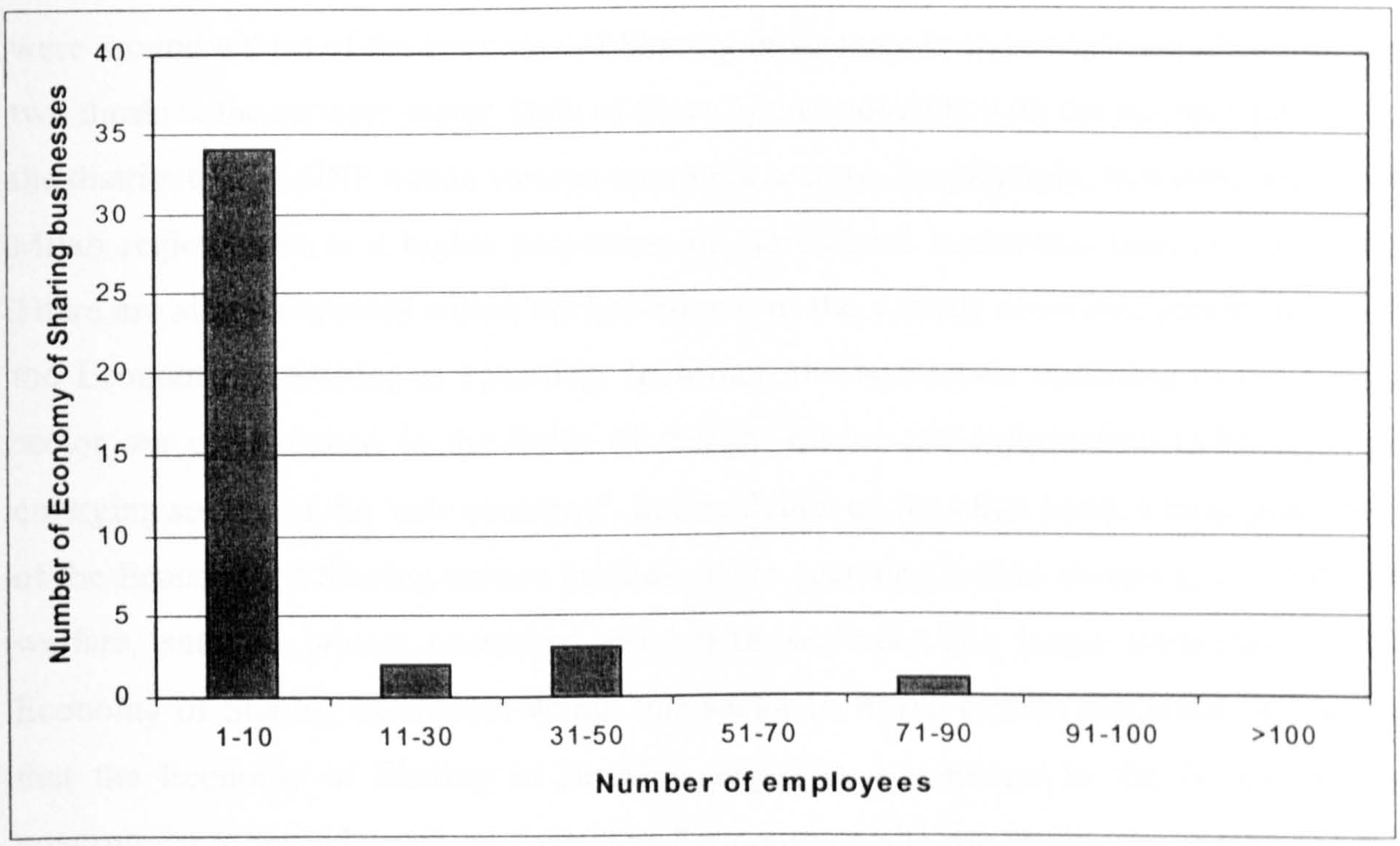
O.V.A – Omnia Vincit Amore, is a co-operative which started in 1984 and since 1991 has been part of the Economy of Sharing. It is situated in the village of Frontignano, around five miles from Brescia. The hinterland of Brescia is a region of intensive agricultural activity and hence, of high competition. The business now has around 10,000 chickens, which is still small by the region's standard, but has overcome the competition by selling directly to around 150 clients. In this way it is able to avoid paying middlemen. Many of the clients are people who are part of the Focolare Movement in the surrounding area. As well as the farm, the co-operative now has a farm shop which acts as a retail point for many Economy of Sharing businesses in Italy and beyond. They sell Economy of Sharing produce ranging from organic olive oil to wool from the near by yarn businesses. People come from all over the region to buy from the shop.

As an Economy of Sharing business, the co-operative is a special case. As a co-operative it is non-profit making, but the family still wished to participate in the Economy of Sharing in some way. As a result, they see the main way of participating as seeking to put the principles of the Focolare spirituality into practice within the business.

Source: Interview with Andrea, Director of OVA, Brescia, 1998.

In a similar way to the businesses in Sao Paulo, the businesses in Milan also exhibit a very great variation in the number of employees and size. Figure 6.12 shows that the number of employees ranged from zero to 72 in 1998.

Figure 6.12 Number of employees in Economy of Sharing businesses in Milan region



Source: Fieldwork in Milan, 1998

From the above overview of the two regional Economy of Sharing networks, it is clear that there are strong similarities between the Economy of Sharing development in the two regions. Firstly, the vast majority of the companies which form the Economy of Sharing in both regions are very small 'micro' enterprises consisting of under ten employees. In Sao Paulo, however, there were a small number of medium sized companies which had over 50 employees. None of the Economy of Sharing companies are listed, and all of the firms in these two regions are privately owned companies, mainly within the control of a owner-director or small family firms. This structure of the Economy of Sharing in both countries tends to suggest that the idea has been most readily taken up within very small enterprises in which overall control is not separated between management and shareholders, as with listed companies. Even although the majority of the businesses in the two regions are small, the levels of capitalisation within the businesses in Milan is greater than those in Sao Paulo. The summary tables of the two regions (Tables 6.1 and 6.2) show that the average turnover in the Milan businesses is five times greater than that in Sao Paulo and the average capital value of the businesses in Milan is over seven times greater than in Sao Paulo.

The second striking similarity is the fact that in both regions, the Economy of Sharing businesses are spread across a wide range of economic activities. In both regions, there were around a third of the Economy of Sharing businesses in industrial manufacturing and two thirds in the services sector. Both of these figures coincide with the national figures for the distribution of GNP within various economic sectors. Surprisingly, however, within the Milan region there is a higher proportion of agricultural businesses than in Sao Paulo. There are also differences within the breakdown of the various economic sectors in which the Economy of Sharing is operating. In Milan, the businesses operating in the service sector are concentrated in the fields of design, media and information technology, all emerging sectors of the 'new economy'. In Sao Paulo, on the other hand, a large proportion of the Economy of Sharing service businesses are operating within sectors associated with welfare, such as private education and health services. The larger proportion of the Economy of Sharing businesses within this sector in Brazil can be explained by the fact that the Economy of Sharing in Brazil emerged as a response to the failures of the government to provide such services. The Economy of Sharing businesses recognised this gap and took on these welfare functions directly. Such businesses were not operated as charitable enterprises, but as profit making businesses in their own right [02SP; 03SP]. In this way, through developing a pricing structure which enabled people to pay according to their means, they were providing immediate help to those without access to education and health services, but also generating profits to share with the overall Economy of Sharing projects.

In both regions, the Economy of Sharing businesses have formed 'clusters' in certain cities. In Milan, the main clusters are in the city of Milan and in Brescia. In Sao Paulo, there are two main clusters in Piracicaba and in the vicinity of the Focolare's model town of Araceli. The businesses in Milan region, however, are more dispersed across the region, with many businesses being isolated in towns and cities. One possible reason for this is that a larger number of the businesses in Milan pre-existed the Economy of Sharing and so were already established when they decided to participate in the project. In Sao Paulo, on the other hand, the location of Spartaco industrial estate near Araceli brought new businesses into the region and acted as a focal point for the businesses, not only in Sao Paulo, but also for the whole of Brazil and internationally. The consequences of the geographical location of the businesses will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided a description of the overall economic geographies associated with the two regional case studies of Sao Paulo and Milan. I have also outlined the main characteristics of the Economy of Sharing as it has developed in the two regions. From this information, it is possible to see strong similarities between the regions of Milan and Sao Paulo in terms of the Economy of Sharing. In both cases, the Economy of Sharing started at a time when there was great uncertainty regarding the economic and political models that had previously been applied. This arguably led to the Economy of Sharing being enthusiastically adopted by business people in the regions as an answer to this vacuum of ideas. If the data regarding the businesses is examined, however, it shows that in both Milan and Sao Paulo the majority of the businesses participating in the Economy of Sharing are still very small. In this respect they could be dubbed 'financially insignificant' to the economies of the respective regions. One has to consider that many of the companies are still very young, having started in the mid-1990s as a result of the Economy of Sharing. Moreover, by virtue of the fact that they exist as part of the Economy of Sharing, as will be seen in subsequent chapters, they acquire a significance that arguably goes beyond indicators of financial success.

7. The Focolare spirituality and Economy of Sharing businesses

The Economy of Sharing was launched in Brazil in 1991 with one principal aim: that of creating businesses which would produce profits to share in common. The documentation relating to the launch of the project comes back to this point – the Economy of Sharing is about making money to distribute to the poor and for the promotion of the culture of giving [CEOS01]. In this way, according to Chiara Lubich in an interview with Polish TV in August 1991, the ideal of communion, which was already in practice among the Focolare members, could become productive and could offer a solution to the difficult economic situations in the world [CEOS06]. One thing that is striking about the launch of the Economy of Sharing is the apparent simplicity of the idea Chiara Lubich launched and how readily it was taken up by the people within the Focolare all over the world in the initial months after the launch. At the time when the Economy of Sharing was launched, there was little discussion over the way that the Economy of Sharing businesses ought to conduct their affairs, except that they should be "*run by competent people who know how to make a profit*" [CEOS04]. The central point was distribution.

The idea of businesses making profits and sharing them in three parts, however, though it sounded straightforward, was laden with assumptions about the nature of profits and as a consequence, the way that profits ought to be made. Within the context of the Focolare spirituality, it is inconceivable to think that the Economy of Sharing businesses could have applied a conventional means-end relationship with regards to profit. Since the heart of the Focolare revolves around the creation of spaces in which there are relationships founded on love - 'Trinitarian relationships' - the businesses had to reflect this spirit in everything that they did. Profits, therefore, could not be the result of efficiency savings borne out of exploitation, coercion or corruption – they had to be the result of a new relationship above all between the people within the businesses. The start of the Economy of Sharing, therefore, also regarded the nature of the individual businesses themselves and the way that their profits were made. In this chapter, I will begin to consider the way that the aims and objectives of the Economy of Sharing have been interpreted and applied on the ground. I will look, above all, at how the relationship between the Focolare spirituality and business has been interpreted in the Economy of Sharing businesses in Sao Paulo and Milan.

The initial lack of direction in the way that the profits ought to be made within the Economy of Sharing businesses (on the part of the Focolare leaders) could have been an oversight. A more likely explanation, however, is that it resulted from a lack of awareness regarding the difficult compromises that often exist within the sphere of business. The launch of the Economy of Sharing was underpinned by the assumption that pre-existing businesses had *already* achieved a certain level of ethical practice which would be acceptable on a global scale, and that those setting up would adopt these same practices. In many of the regions where the Economy of Sharing took off, such as Sao Paulo, such assumptions were far from the reality of commercial activity on the ground. Within such regions, many of the underlying assumptions of the Focolare spirituality with regard to business practice were not common practice within business in general and could be regarded as unrealistic. One major difficulty within the Brazilian economy highlighted by the business directors, for example, was the high degree of informality in certain commercial sectors due to the impossible tax burden which small businesses face [01SP]. Norms and conventions regarding quality assurance and effects of businesses on the environment exist, but such legislation is rarely enforced (Suzigan, 1995: 134). The businesses in Milan, perhaps surprisingly, faced very similar problems to those in the Sao Paulo with regards to the way that profits could be made for the Economy of Sharing. They were embedded within a business culture in which non-compliance and tax evasion were widespread [01M; 07M]. The Economy of Sharing businesses had to discern to what extent their businesses ought to comply with legislation and risk being uncompetitive.

The Economy of Sharing generated a desire to produce higher profits to share in common on the business directors who were beginning to commit themselves to it, but this had to be balanced against the means that they could use in order to produce those profits. The outcome of this tension, in many cases, was the internal transformation of the businesses, as a precondition to giving profits for the Economy of Sharing. The profits that were to be shared had to be 'clean', as one business director put it. This desire to produce clean profits led to a 'cleaning up' process within the businesses wanting to participate in the project to bring their practices into line with the spiritual ideal against which they measured success.

The relevance of spirituality in business

As discussed in Chapter 1, the relevance of spirituality in business is an idea which has become more fashionable in management theory in recent years. The various schools of management theory have shifted from the 'big is beautiful' doctrine of the 1980s, the 'downsizing' of the 1990s, to the various schools of 'corporate responsibility' in the new millennium, which stress the links between business culture, ethics and religion.[125] Yet there is much confusion over what this new awareness actually means. On the one hand, there is a growing awareness that the profits have to be made in ways that harness the inner motivations of people to that end. Increasing numbers of highly qualified people are leaving commercial business in pursuit of more fulfilling jobs, often in the voluntary sector, due to high stress levels and poor quality of life. Spirituality is regarded as a kind of 'softener' in the hard-nosed world of cut throat competition: *feng shui* office designs are said to enable 'energy flows' to be released and crystals on desks (pointing in the right direction) have been said to calm stress and enable better working relationships. In this respect, the link with spirituality is viewed more as a means to making profit a feasible long term objective against the backdrop of increasing competitiveness in which employee and management stress is a major block.[126] Such approaches, whilst taken seriously by some, are often ridiculed within other sectors of business due to the lack of substantive evidence of their 'performance'. These attempts to incorporate spirituality into management theory are designed to maximise profit. In many ways this kind of exportation of spirituality into the economic is a good example of the way that aspects of human life, which are normally unrelated to the utilitarian logic of profitability, can be 'colonised' by this logic. In this instance, even the 'spiritual' is subverted to become marketable.

At the same time, however, the awareness that 'corporate responsibility' requires a 'necessary altruism' (Wuthnow, 1994), which inevitably puts limits on profitability, has caused theorists to rethink the various ethical frameworks relating to business. Spirituality, in this debate, is not regarded as a means to making more profits, but as a particular vision of the world, often (but not necessarily) linked to a particular religion, which engenders

[125] Evidence of this shift in thinking is well documented in the numerous reviews and websites relating to business ethics. Texts such as Davies (1997) trace the development of the relationship between business, ethics and management theory in the later part of the twentieth century, highlighting the return to greater emphasis on 'soft' subjects rather than economic theory, in the search for greater corporate responsibility.
[126] There is a new breed of business consultancies, such as The Domino Consultancy (2000), offering advice on 'spirituality and work' helping with the "alignment between the spirit of the individual and the soul of the organisation." 'Spirituality', therefore, is fast becoming a marketable product.

certain ethical practices. It is about the beliefs and values which frame economic action in a broader perspective. It is important, therefore, to examine how the Economy of Sharing business directors see the relationship between spirituality and business.

Through the launch of the Economy of Sharing, the business directors wishing to participate recognised that the spirituality of the Focolare could have an impact in the practical running and organisation of their businesses. In a geographical sense, they recognised that their businesses no longer stood outside the realm of the spiritual, but through the Economy of Sharing became part of the 'ideal world' as part of the Focolare geographies. Of the twenty-four business directors interviewed, twenty-one responded that the main motivation for their participation in the Economy of Sharing was a 'religious' one. When asked to elaborate on what they meant by 'religious', they explained that their decision (to link their business to the Economy of Sharing project or to start a new business) was a consequence of the realisation that the Focolare spirituality could, and ought to be, lived out within business. One business director said that her main motivation in the Economy of Sharing was the fact that it granted her: "The possibility to give a new soul to the economy" [05SP]. Another business director said: "We have seen that being an Economy of Sharing business means giving a soul" [01SP].

Prior to the launch of the Economy of Sharing, many of the respondents considered business as a sphere of action separate from the more personal, spiritual sphere: an independent sphere operating according to 'cold' laws of supply and demand. Through the Economy of Sharing, they came to regard the business as a sphere of action which was intrinsically connected to their religion, as it was founded on moral choices which they derived from religious principles. As such, they came to view it as a sphere that could be transformed by the actions of individuals and groups, who chose to manage their businesses on principles that were in accordance with their own beliefs. Their beliefs, on the one hand gave their actions a new meaning, and on the other hand, gave them a moral impetus to change those actions. Through doing this they felt that they were giving the economy this 'new soul', widening the horizons of the business to the possibility of contributing to a transcendent ideal.

This realisation of the relevance of the spirituality in business was a gradual transformation for 36% of the respondents, reflecting many years of experience within their particular field. Some of the businesses, such as *Femaq*, *Sucral* and *Zac* in Piracicaba, Brazil, started in the 1960s and ever since then had been attempting to apply the social teaching of the Church in the way they ran their enterprises. They prided themselves on this fact and felt that the Economy of Sharing was more of a way of consolidating the way they had always acted, giving new impetus to those choices, rather than something which required a dramatic transformation of what they were doing. They viewed those years of trying to apply the social teaching of the Church as a foundation for the insertion of the businesses within the Economy of Sharing after 1991 [07SP; 11SP; 12SP]. Since the Economy of Sharing emphasised the commitment that economic institutions have towards the poor, it was a renewed source of motivation for these businesses to continue what they were already doing.

The relevance of the launch of the Economy of Sharing in 1991 was not very clear for a small number of respondents. It was initially a bit puzzling, as they felt that they were already trying to apply the Focolare spirituality in their businesses. In Milan, the managing director of one business which began to participate in 1993, said:

> "since both my parents are ... part of the Focolare Movement, at the beginning it was not clear to us why we had to participate in the Economy of Sharing. Since they ... live the spirituality of the Movement, it was normal for them to apply certain values, also in their work. So at the beginning, we did not understand what we had to do. Then things became clearer" [10M].

For 60% of those interviewed, however, the launch of the Economy of Sharing in May 1991 was a date of crucial importance. It marked a dramatic transformation in the way that they viewed the relationship between economic life, (including work, money and the role of the business) and their spiritual life. They repeatedly referred to this date as a fundamental turning point in their life. Previous to 1991, they regarded their economic activities as primarily a means to an end – that of making a living – controlled by external market forces over which they had little influence. For some, this sense of working simply to serve another purpose rendered their work meaningless [01M; 08M; 05SP]. Their spiritual life and membership of the Focolare were considered personal matters that had no obvious bearing on the way that they managed their economic affairs within the context of the business. They always tried to maintain good relations with their employees and occasionally offered free services to the Focolare, but structurally there were no linkages between their spiritual lives and the businesses in which they worked.

When the Economy of Sharing started in 1991, they recognised the immense importance that their business activities could have, through offering the practical possibility to actively participate in the transformation of market structures through sharing profits and changing business practices. The transformation of existing businesses and the creation of new business enterprises became the central focus, not only of their economic life, but of their spiritual life too. It was to become the main motivating force behind their business. This is reflected in many of the responses of the business directors regarding what the Economy of Sharing means to them. Many of them responded that the Economy of Sharing "is their reason for existing" [03SP]. Not participating in the Economy of Sharing to them would be like returning to being 'Sunday Christians' [11SP]. Through the Economy of Sharing their businesses could become places in which the 'kingdom of God' could be spread, based on relationships built on mutual love and respect [04SP].

A spiritual calling

This growing awareness within the Focolare in 1991, that business was of relevance to spiritual life and vice versa, is reflected in the quasi-spiritual 'callings' that many of the people interviewed said they experienced when they heard of the Economy of Sharing project for the first time. Several directors from Milan were in Rome in May 1991 at a Focolare conference when they heard about the launch of the Economy of Sharing. One was so taken by enthusiasm that on his return to Milan after the conference, he decided, together with his wife, to split from the parent company in which he had a large share, and to form his own small company for the Economy of Sharing. If it had not been for the Economy of Sharing, he would not have started a new company: "It would not have come about otherwise" [01M]. It was an extremely risky decision, given that the company he was leaving belonged to his brother and was one of the most established yarn companies in the district. Leaving the company and starting another company in this sector put him in competition with his brother. He recalls the story as follows:

> "It started, therefore, at the end of 91 and it came about through splitting from our parent company in which the family had shares. We are four brothers and this business still operates within the ambit of textiles. Because of different opinions on the way that my brothers were running the business, I wanted to break away. But I would never have had the courage to do this, above all because I have reached a certain age, 50 years, and I would have had to have left the security of the parent company which is well established. It started in the post-war era with a large sum of family capital ... so I was prepared to sit around and do nothing rather than taking on the risk of starting over. Then it came to the end of 1991. In May of 1991 Chiara had launched these ideas in Brazil and at that time I was in

> Rome at a convention for Economy and Work, with all the business people there. We were taken by the enthusiasm and when I returned home I said to G [his wife] that perhaps the time had come to overcome our insecurity, our fears of leaving the company, to put them aside and to do something. I wrote a letter to my brothers who were the other shareholders in the business and I outlined my motives for wanting to start another business. I didn't go into the deep reasons, but highlighted the human motivations why I wanted to start something new but to continue collaborating with them. Things were a bit difficult and they did not understand my choice. The legal process took a long time but in the end I left and they paid me off with a large sum of money which we used to plan the factory we are in now" [01M].

Despite the difficulties that this choice presented, he was convinced that the decision was the right one, since what mattered most was the possibility of contributing to the Economy of Sharing through starting his own business. The launch of the Economy of Sharing marked the moment which enabled him to overcome his fears and insecurities and to risk starting a new company.

Another Milanese lady, who was also at that conference in Rome, returned home and invested all her savings in starting a new metal engineering business. She had previously had shares in a similar family business, but the same year as the Economy of Sharing started together with her husband, she had decided to sell their shares in the company. On hearing about the Economy of Sharing, she felt that the money she was accumulating in the bank could no longer stay there since it was 'God's capital'. Rather, she felt she had to invest the money in a small business:

> "It started in the beginning of 1991 because we started when Chiara launched the idea of the Economy of Sharing. It was in May. We started in September, because we were there when it was launched in Castelgandolfo,[127] when the beautiful experience started. Straight away we felt that the capital that we had put aside from a business which we had with my brother ... we had this capital in the bank and we didn't know what to do with it. We thought that we could have invested it in houses and lived comfortably, but we felt that this is not what God was asking us. We understood that we had to reinvest the money for God. Straightaway, when we came home, we found a building and we started this activity. So in September, *TREUNO* was already up and running" [06M].

It was not an easy decision, as many people regarded it as imprudent – there were much easier ways to make money. Given that they were nearing retirement age, it would have

[127] Focolare international centre is in Castelgandolfo, south of Rome.

been more comfortable to invest the money in a safe fund and live off the interest. Yet the Economy of Sharing led them to change their plans and this met with much disapproval on the part of their family and friends: "They said that we were mad. But what is madness for the world is wisdom for God" [06M]. Their faith in the Economy of Sharing, however, was even stronger than what their friends and family thought. The name of the company '*Treuno*' was also highly significant - the unity of the Trinity which is both three and one.

In Brazil, leaders of the Focolare from all over Brazil attended the meeting at Araceli in which the idea of the Economy of Sharing was launched (as discussed in Chapter 5). This meeting was the focus for the start of several businesses in the vicinity of Araceli. On hearing about the project, some people left everything that they were doing and pledged to start businesses. One example of this is the firm *Comunione,* situated near Araceli. In 1991 the various shareholders in the company were working independently in Fortaleza, over 3000km from Sao Paulo, but the start of the Economy of Sharing changed their plans: "I had already thought of starting a business in my town, in Fortaleza. When we realised the need for a business here in Vargem Grande we decided to move here. Three of us moved here from Fortaleza" [04SP/95]. They had nothing, but saw the Economy of Sharing as a challenge that had to be taken up. They also recognised that there had to be a focal point for the Economy of Sharing around the town of Araceli, an issue which will be taken up in subsequent chapters.

Several local women who were also present at the meeting in which Chiara Lubich proposed her idea, decided immediately to start a small clothing company, locating it at Araceli. They started from very modest means: a few sewing machines in the back room of one of the lady's houses. With great enthusiasm, however, they were able to acquire premises of their own and within two years they had their own purpose-built unit in the new industrial estate. In its first year it had a turnover of US$6,000 and provided employment for two people. Since then it has grown and in 1994 had a turnover of US$115,000 and employed 22 people. When asked what it was that made them get so involved without so much as a thought for the consequences, Maria do Carmo, the managing director answered: "Through this project we believe that we are creating an alternative economy"[09SP/95].

Whether the process was a gradual one, as in the case of *Femaq*, as outlined in the last chapter, or a sudden one, as in the case of *La Tunica*, all of the business directors have undergone a major transformation in the way they view the relationship between religious and business ideals. They regard the business not only as a means of making a profit to serve other purposes, however noble, but a place in which their spirituality can be applied, expanding the horizons of the business as a social and economic institution. All of the Economy of Sharing business directors shared the belief that there is a specific 'divine plan' on the Economy of Sharing project itself. They viewed their action not only as a personal witness to the truth of the Gospel, but an 'appointment with history' which could provide a solution to the dramatic inequalities of today.

Trust in providence

Since this project was viewed as a 'divine' one, there was a strong belief amongst the business directors that God would intervene with his providence to help those who risk resources in this project. The idea of providence is one that goes back to the very beginning of the Focolare, as discussed in Chapters 4 in relation to the size 42 shoes and the suitcases of apples during the war. Trusting in providence and relating stories about how providence has arrived was regarded as a way of responding to God's love and is a central element of the Focolare spirituality. Through trusting in God and interpreting events as 'providential', God's presence is 'drawn down' into human affairs and becomes more visible and tangible to those who believe.

This faith in God's providence gave many people the impetus to risk all their resources for the Economy of Sharing but this belief is, perhaps, the most sensitive and difficult aspect of the Economy of Sharing project to examine since it challenges the materialist explanation of economic and social action. Those who participate in the Economy of Sharing are acutely aware of this challenge [12SP] and speak about 'providence' with reluctance, for fear it could appear that they naively think that divine intervention will save their business from mismanagement or inevitable financial difficulties. One business director was very aware of the difficulties that trust in providence could present to those who are studying the Economy of Sharing:

> "You have to also believe in providence in this line of work. In effect, one thing that I have never thought about regarding the Economy of Sharing is this belief in providence. ... One can say that it is a coincidence. Sure, but I always feel that it depends on what you yourself have inside. One time you could say that it is a coincidence, but the second time? It could be providence, depending on how you see it. We have never been without work. Whenever there is a hole and I start to think what will I get

> that man to do? Someone always arrives to give you enough work to cover that week there. This could be a coincidence or it could be providence. I have learnt to see it as providence. It is difficult to say this in the world of business when we are talking about contracts with clients" [08M].

He recognised that the belief in providence all came down to the way that certain events were interpreted - to 'what you have inside you' that makes you interpret events in different ways. The Economy of Sharing business directors all expressed a strong belief that God has helped many of the businesses to survive despite the turbulent markets and based this on their experience since starting Economy of Sharing businesses. They related providence to many practical circumstances and could tell many stories of how it had helped their business to flourish, for example, "providence helped us to find a marketing outlet which sells all over Italy" [01M]. Some stories the business directors told in relation to providence can easily be explained in terms of straightforward changes to the businesses that took place as a result of the Economy of Sharing. Others, however, are more difficult to explain, except by saying that they had extremely good luck following a high number of coincidences which could have resulted in bankruptcy.

One such story is that of *Ecoar*, a Brazilian company which started up through the Economy of Sharing and is located in the industrial estate near Araceli. It has grown at phenomenal rates following an unexpected break into the market, which the director explained to me as follows:

> "We are aware of this presence of God within the project. We see this in how the business is run: we run it on the one hand, but on the other hand, it is God who is running the business. We have received immense providence. For example, there was a national fair in which all the big networks of supermarkets were represented with displays. We knew a person... who now works in the area of publicity, who works for a Spanish company which sells gondolas for the supermarkets. Space is very expensive in this fair. This company was preparing its exhibition and selling the spaces within the gondolas for the big companies like Lever, Parmalat at $30 000 per space. This person is highly motivated, she is very young but she knows about the spirit of the Economy of Sharing, so she said to the director that she knew a business which would like to exhibit in the fair... but that this business did not have $30,000 to buy the space. So the director asked how much we had and she said we had nothing. It seemed like madness to ask. He said 'They have nothing at all, each space costs $30,000. Get them to bring their products and display them.' There are many things like this that give us the certainty that this project is much bigger than we imagine today" [05SP].

Those who are participating in the Economy of Sharing regard this kind of phenomenon as 'divine intervention' - God's blessing on the work that they are doing. They do not regard such intervention as a random occurrence, but one that follows a precise pattern. Whenever they take an ethical stance in their business affairs – e.g. against corruption, in favour of employees – which results in the loss of orders, they feel that they are given a hand in the form of new unexpected orders or information. One example of this is the story that the director of *La Tunica* told:

> "A contact in the Town Council phoned us asking for uniforms. He asked us to send a rep so we sent one. They asked us for a quotation for shirts so we prepared it. They liked it and said that they would like to go ahead. They knew that they could find other places that were cheaper, but our quality was better. They wanted something good so they wanted to buy from us. They said: 'The only thing is, we have to enter into competition so we require three quotations. But we would really like to buy from you so do this – make up three quotations for us with three different names and then we will buy from you.' This is something that they do at times to make their work easier. Sometimes it is not out of wickedness but simply to make work easier. For me, however, it would not be honest to do this. I can send a quotation from my own business and not from any other. I said this to the rep and he said 'But you need this work so much'. I said that I couldn't. I could do it if I thought in a different way, but this is the way I think – the way of the Economy of Sharing. So couldn't do this. He said 'But then I will have to get these two quotations and you will risk not getting the job.' I said 'Patience, we may lose out, but this is all that I can do. Don't you agree?' He said he agreed, he is someone who really understands. In the end they did not give the order to us. But the same rep went to a school to whom we had already sold to and there was a proposal for more uniforms. We presented our proposals and the rep went to show them our projects. Our proposal was accepted and they placed an order that was five times greater than the Town Council's one. These two things happened one month apart" [09SP]

It is this trust that God will look after them if they act in accordance with what they see as his will, that enables them to make difficult ethical choices. Some even go as far as saying that God is like a 'shareholder' in the business who, like the other shareholders, does not want to see the business fail: "Providence is never missing. Work always arrives, so we can see that we have ... an 'invisible shareholder'. This is palpable" [11SP]. They said that the attempt to live the spirituality of the Focolare among the business directors provided them with insight and intuition regarding decisions to be taken. They explained this insight in terms of the 'Holy Spirit' who was able to guide them through difficult moments if they remained united.

Through deciding to participate in the Economy of Sharing, the business directors, in the most profound sense, were consciously 're-imagining' their own geographies, challenging many of the common sense distinctions between private and public space. Through the Economy of Sharing, their businesses became part of a global network of businesses linked to the Focolare. Discourses that were normally only applied to their private, personal life, as a result, now began to be applied to the business sphere. On the one hand, this led to a renewed consciousness of the synergy between personal and business attitudes. On the other hand, the business directors recognised that their own perspective was radically different from the dominant view that religious beliefs are primarily a matter for personal concern. In the Economy of Sharing, far from being viewed as a simple means to an end, the business itself became the central focus for living out the spirituality. The directors interviewed now regarded their businesses as playing a critical role in the transformation of modern society into a more equitable and just society.

For the majority of the business directors interviewed, this idealistic belief and aspiration to change economic structures, which was the prime motivating force behind their action, was based on a sound understanding of economic action and/or previous experience of business. Eighty-three percent of those who started businesses as a result of the Economy of Sharing had previous experience of business. Some of the directors had left senior positions in finance and banking in order to start their own business for the Economy of Sharing. This previous experience was given an extra impetus by the spiritual motivation that underpinned it. This meant that the risks which the directors were taking, in the belief that God would grant them good fortune, were not 'blind faith'. They were generally well calculated risks based on the experience and spiritual motivation of the business owners. As a result, this faith in Providence did not result in risks which, in terms of financial security, could be termed imprudent.

In some cases, however, an over spiritualistic understanding of what the Economy of Sharing is and lack of business acumen did lead to serious loss of capital.[128] Although such circumstances had not directly affected the businesses participating in this research, many of those interviewed could readily recall stories of businesses that had failed following the launch of the Economy of Sharing. They highlighted the fact that such failures were

[128] In other words, businesses started as a result of the Economy of Sharing had been liquidated. It is difficult to quantify such failures since the overall number of Economy of Sharing businesses has continued to grow despite this mortality rate.

generally not discussed and several voiced concerns over the way that those who had risked everything for the Economy of Sharing had subsequently distanced themselves from the Focolare. The loss of capital incurred through the loss of the business was thus compounded by the disillusionment of feeling that God had not sent help when needed. Such failures illustrate the difficulties faced when an over simplistic interpretation of the Economy of Sharing as a 'divine plan' is adopted. Such cases highlight the risks of interpreting the Trinitarian perspective of the Focolare in a way that is too literal and simplistic.[129] Such cases were more common in the first few years of the Economy of Sharing, since over the past few years there has been a growing awareness of the need for proper business training and expertise. Such expertise is now regarded as a necessary condition for God's providence to work.

The business as a 'hearth'

As outlined in previous chapters, the spirituality of the Focolare stems from the principle that all people are equal members of the one human family – being sons and daughters of the one Creator - and therefore have to be treated as brothers and sisters. This belief in 'being brothers and sisters', creates a strong relationship between 'being' and 'becoming' within the Focolare. Although people *are* brothers and sisters, the renewed awareness of this fact leads to a greater commitment to *become* brothers and sisters. It engenders a sense of responsibility towards others – both distant others, since those others are seen as part of the one family, and others nearby. Rebuilding that sense of belonging to one human family requires the active participation and conscious effort of people. It is regarded not simply as a natural process, but one that can be learnt. It is a process that is in continual evolution and is rooted in the ability of individuals to establish and re-establish relationships based on solidarity and communion in everyday life. The achievement of such relationships, in view of establishing one human family, becomes the main motivating force behind every action.

The spirituality of the Focolare, therefore, has a distinctive 'community-building' dimension and emphasis is placed on the creation of spaces in which this 'hearth' can be lived out amongst people. As a consequence, the realisation that the spirituality was relevant within the world of business led to transformations within the businesses, above all, on the level of human relationships. The first change that occurred within the businesses is that the business directors' perceptions of the people within their businesses

[129] The possible dangers of such an interpretation have been discussed by Cambón (1999: 196-7).

changed. The realisation that all those connected with the business were part of one human family, and not simply 'factors of production' or 'human resources', led to a series of changes in business management (as will be discussed in the next chapter). According to those who responded to the interviews, the essence of the Economy of Sharing lay in 'treating people as people' [01M] or 'creating new relationships' in which the economic dimension would be secondary [04M]. The Economy of Sharing was not simply about making profits to share with the poor, but applying the Focolare spirituality in the business, which meant 'humanising' economic structures, starting with the business as the basic unit of economic activity. This is a point which I stressed in my research diary during my time in Sao Paulo:

> " Sao Paulo 11.9.98. Reflecting on what the business people have told me over the past few weeks, I can see much more clearly what the Economy of Sharing is about. It is a cultural transformation which emanates from the spirituality of the Focolare. The nature of this change is to transform the various relationships within and outwith the business. Whereas, before, the business may have been seen as a means to an end - a way to create profits, within the Economy of Sharing, the business becomes a cornerstone of modern society. It is the meeting point for a whole series of relationships. With the Economy of Sharing, the creation and maintenance of these relationships becomes the most important aspect of the business... Of course money is still an important factor in all this, but it is secondary to the maintenance of these relationships. What is the nature of these relationships? In the Focolare they would say simply 'to see Jesus in the other' - but this is a phrase which is full of meanings..."

This transition from the 'spiritual' directly to the 'social' within the realm of business, is itself a reflection of the strong link that exists within the Focolare as a whole between the idealism of spirituality and the realism of social action. As discussed in Chapter 4, for the Focolare, a spiritual relationship with God is always reflected in the way that others are treated. By humanising the economy, the businesses recognised that the key to transforming the economic structures was changing the relationships between the people within them. It meant putting into practice, above all, the principles of the 'art of loving' within the business. Those connected with the business, thus, had to be treated as brothers and sisters with equal dignity. The task they were required to do within the business, whether blue collar or white collar, became secondary to this underlying equality. This meant reviewing the distribution of tasks within the business. It also led to the awareness that the relationship with those who are on the outside of the firm, such as the suppliers and the clients, also had to be reviewed. The creation and maintenance of relationships that transcend the economic function, became one of the main objectives of the businesses. One business director in Sao Paulo said:

> "What motivates me in the Economy of Sharing is the possibility of giving a new soul to the economy, a new vision. Not just in the distribution of profits, which is one of the important points, especially at a Brazilian level, but above all, this motivation for a new society, for these new relationships that are built. I feel that this is the most revolutionary aspect of the Economy of Sharing. These new relationships mean that man is not only 'economic man', but he is a being which exists. My enthusiasm comes when I see this coming about. It is gratifying when you live this on a daily basis, on a practical level" [05SP].

For some it is directly linked to the words of Jesus in the account of the last judgement in Matthew's gospel: "In so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me" (Matt 25: 40). One owner in Novara, Milan Zone, said: "It means that when they [customers] come in, or when we go to them, to love them right from the first instance. Above all, to see Jesus, a brother, in them, rather than a client who is going to buy something" [05M]. Being a client, therefore, in the economic sense, is seen as secondary to being a brother or sister. Likewise, within the business, the relationship between the employer and the employees was interpreted in the same way:

> "What we have seen is that this communion is not only a result of the Economy of Sharing but it is part of the life of the employees and me too. ... It is about looking out for the personal needs if we realise that someone needs something. For example, one of the ladies had a wedding and another brought in a dress for her to try on. There are many opportunities ... Or through making things circulate between us all - food as well. During the lunch hour we do things together. I feel that the relationship of communion between everyone has grown and I would say that this is a result of this harmony and of this search for communion that is put inside us by this project. You don't see 'employees' anymore, you see Jesus. You see people who have needs, problems, and you try - without harming the business because you can't just do this and let go of the business - to find a balance between the human needs and the business needs. The business needs to go ahead and stand on its own two feet" [12SP].

> "I would say that there is a brotherly relationship with people. We see our employees, our clients, and suppliers, as people who have to be treated fairly without judging them. It requires a lot of effort since they are business people, clients and so on" [11SP].

Others did not explicitly make this link to the religious root of the Economy of Sharing. Rather, they saw the link and recognised the importance of the Economy of Sharing in revealing a dimension of the economy in which other economic actors could be viewed in a way other than *homo economicus*. They framed it in terms of humanising the economy rather than a question of religion. One business director in Milan said:

> "Man is made to be part of humanity and cannot exist as 'homo economicus', working only for himself. The beauty of the Economy of Sharing is that it is a sharing out that is participative. It is not that we are participating in the Economy of Sharing only in the moment when we share out the profits: we are part of the Economy of Sharing also in our formation [of profits]. It is then that a new way of looking at the economy is spread. This can also have a religious dimension, but above all it is about human relationships" [04M].

This idea that the Economy of Sharing is 'participative' is one which also emerged in the various interviews with business directors in Brazil. In my research diary in 1998, I commented:

> " Piracicaba 23.9.98. In the interviews what seems to be coming out is the way that the spirituality of unity can be translated into a business culture which responds to the needs of society today. As Prof Geremias[130] said - it is a culture which is distributive and participative... For the employers it is certainly participative in the sense that they feel deeply involved in what they are doing. They feel part of a global community which is transforming social structures and not slaves to an ideology which puts profit before people."

The business directors did not regard the Economy of Sharing as an isolated act of 'distribution', such as giving philanthropic donations, but a way of actually doing business. Participation was about applying the Economy of Sharing to every action within the business - no matter how menial or trivial. It was about finding an intrinsic value - and not just instrumental value - in the various actions and relationships which formed the everyday life of the business. This emphasis on participation begs the question of the extent to which employees were aware of the business' involvement in the Economy of Sharing. The research on the businesses revealed that a very low percentage of employees in the Economy of Sharing businesses were actually aware of their employers involvement in the 'Economy of Sharing. This is an issue which represents a critical point for the Economy of Sharing and will be dealt with further ahead.

The business directors, however, also recognised the emphasis of the Economy of Sharing on 'becoming brothers and sisters' meant making distinctions between people, based on their geographical proximity. Although the ultimate aim of the Economy of Sharing was about generating profits to share with the poor and for the promotion of the culture of giving, this also placed a question over the relationship with those who were in need nearby:

> "For us, above all, being an Economy of Sharing company is about having a new relationship with people. Above all, there is this fraternal love with the employees, the clients, with everyone. This is what I can see. Then there is also this help for the poor, which will come. It is pointless me loving the poor in Brazil if I do not love the person beside me. They also have needs" [06M].

This relationship between the needs of the 'poor in Brazil' and the 'person beside me' is one which underpins the Economy of Sharing. The business directors wanted to attend to the needs of both through their businesses, but were faced with the reality that the needs of those in the business could potentially be limitless, leading to mounting costs within the business. Giving all their profits away, on the other hand could jeopardise the well-being of their employees and the future of the business. Moreover, within Brazilian business, the *compadrazco* patronage system still remains strong. Through this system of fictive godships, employees are helped out with a range of welfare benefits such as housing and education for their children. The Economy of Sharing is superimposed on this existing network and as a result, attending to those needs limits the possibilities of actually attending to the needs of those far away. In many cases, the directors explained their failure to share profits for the Economy of Sharing in these terms.

Balancing spirituality and professionalism

This synergy between professional skills and resources on the one hand, and the strong motivations of religion on the other, has given rise to what has been called a 'new emerging business culture' within the Economy of Sharing (Burkhart, 1999). In most cases the development of this new culture in business has developed in ways that are both beneficial to the business itself and to wider society, through the positive contribution that the businesses are making or hope to make in the future. Nevertheless, there is also some evidence that possible problems could be emerging due to misunderstandings about the different roles that professional expertise and spiritual support ought to play in business

[130] Prof Geremias Oliveira Filho, Professor of Sociology at the University of Sao Paulo.

management.

Moreover, other problems arose from the misunderstandings of how to reach decisions within the business. In some instances, the directors of the businesses felt constrained by their participation, or mistakenly thought that participation in the Economy of Sharing meant that decisions regarding the business had to be taken with the Focolare Movement. This desire to build unity created a situation in which the Economy of Sharing directors preferred to consult the Focolare when making business decisions rather than independent experts. In a small number of cases, this has led to confusion over responsibility, especially when things start to go wrong.

On the other hand, however, the growing professionalism of the business owners in the Economy of Sharing has also led to the opposite scenario in which the actual day to day running of business has led to the spirituality becoming secondary, if not forgotten. In the interviews, some of the directors expressed their concern that they were consistently forgetting the ultimate aim of why they were in business. On one occasion, one director was moved to tears when I asked him to consider what it meant to be an Economy of Sharing business. He had embarked on the Economy of Sharing with much enthusiasm in 1991 and had formed a new company specifically for the Project, investing his life's savings. Nevertheless, seven years down the line, he admitted that the Economy of Sharing was not always foremost in his mind: "It ought to be a choice that you make each day, when in fact, as far as I'm concerned, I forget. I am so taken up by managing the firm." The pressures of keeping the business running had become the main concern and as a result he seldom took time to reflect on the ultimate reason why he had started in the first place. This example, though extreme, was not the only one of this kind. Some of the directors interviewed even said that they had difficulty in remembering that their businesses were part of the Economy of Sharing.

Conclusion

Participation in the Economy of Sharing, therefore, altered the perceptions of the business directors. Firstly, it altered their understanding of the respective roles of religion and business. As a consequence, it shifted their relationship between their 'personal', more spiritual understanding of the world, and their more 'public' rationale within the realm of business. Above all, this led to changes in the way they saw the relationship between themselves and those who were connected with their business. Through the Economy of

Sharing they came to recognise that spirituality is something which could have profound implications on economic and social structures, providing a strong motivation for positive action in favour of social justice. Through applying the Focolare spirituality in the work place, they began to feel empowered to change the structures of the economy from the inside, transforming their businesses into 'hearths' in the public arena. The application of this spirituality in the business, however, also highlighted the relationship between social justice and geography, since the business directors were faced with new choices based on their desire to care for those nearby, including their employees who had benefited from *compadrazco*, and those faraway.

8. Entanglements: 'Social' networks - 'economic' relationships

In the previous chapter, I considered how the Economy of Sharing businesses have recognised the relevance of the Focolare spirituality within the business, and have attempted to apply that vision. The interviews with the businesses directors demonstrated, above all, that the Focolare's spirituality, rooted in the idea of the 'Trinitarian perspective', offers a different perspective on the place of business in society. It is a vision of business in which the 'spiritual' is seen not as an appendage or afterthought to the 'economic', but as the main motivating force behind every action. The firm is regarded as a social institution, not just an economic one, in which people can create and maintain relationships which are based on mutual respect, commitment and understanding. The economic function of producing products, services and, therefore, profits, is regarded as the means by which solidarity can strengthen relationships. It is through applying this vision that profits can be generated and put to social uses for the common good.

The application of the Focolare spirituality within the Economy of Sharing businesses dramatises the intersection of many different social networks wrapped up in the realm of economic action. The Economy of Sharing businesses exist within commercial, legal, political and cultural contexts in which there are established practices and norms. The Economy of Sharing nonetheless offers a new interpretation of the various networks in which business takes place, changing how the business directors themselves look at these networks and interact with them. In many cases, the business directors are faced with decisions and dilemmas regarding the relationship between the Focolare's ideals and their business. In this chapter, I will examine the different networks of relationships in which the Economy of Sharing businesses find themselves, and consider how the Economy of Sharing has influenced these different relationships.

Legal obligations as a 'foundation' for transformation

In Chapter 6, in the introduction to the case study regions, I mentioned the difficult relationship that exists between the tax authorities and business in both Italy and Brazil.[131] Both countries have seen the level of taxation on small and medium sized businesses increasing in recent years, and various attempts at reform of the tax system. The business directors interviewed also regarded this as a difficulty which could be impeding the development of the Economy of Sharing: "In general in Italy, pressure from taxation is very high and this puts our business and many other businesses at risk. Bear this in mind..." [01M: 5]. Likewise, in Brazil, the directors regarded taxation as a major problem:

> "The biggest problem is the rate of taxes in place in the country. We still suffer a lot due to this because in order to keep the country stabilised and its economic plan working, one of the weapons that the government has used is that of raising taxes... As a result, all of the businesses that require capital investment have suffered as a result. From an economic point of view this has been the biggest problem" [01SP: 1].

Given that the Economy of Sharing businesses are donating a percentage of their own profits to social causes, one would imagine that they place less importance on taxation. The percentage of the profits they give to the Focolare already operates as a kind of 'Focolare' tax on their profits. It would also be rational to assume that, given the strength of the Focolare's message and its all-embracing nature, the legitimacy of legal authorities to constrain business practices would be called into question. One has to consider whether or not the Economy of Sharing businesses see themselves as above or beyond the law.[132]

It is significant, therefore, that 59% of those interviewed reported a change in their attitude towards legal authorities, and in particular towards taxation, through their participation in the Economy of Sharing. One of the biggest changes was in relation to the difficult issue of tax evasion which the directors perceived as prevalent in Milan and Sao Paulo. According to the business directors, it is common practice for businesses to avoid payment of taxes in various ways, such as by not providing receipts for purchases or by marking down the

[131] Further information from Brazilian Business Council (2000). Kinzo and Bulmer-Thomas (1995) examine the various attempts of the Brazilian government to reform the fiscal system in the country since the introduction of the Real Plan in 1991. For up-to-date information relating to the Italian fiscal situation refer to 'Italy' at Price Waterhouse Coopers (2000).

[132] It is not within the remit of this thesis to consider the legal ramifications of the Economy of Sharing, though there would be ample scope for research into this field, in particular looking at the possible implications for international law. What is important, in view of this study, is the business directors' attitudes towards taxation as a form of distributive justice and other legal matters which relate to the business as a commercial entity.

receipts: "Normally it is like this: when they come to pay, they have to be given a receipt. In order to survive under the current taxation regime, they give receipts for a lesser amount, or they do not give them at all" [02SP: 2]. In deciding to participate in the Economy of Sharing, the businesses felt obliged to put their finances in order and to pay the taxes for which they were eligible.

For some, the motivation behind this sense of duty towards the state was directly derived from the Bible - 'Render unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar' (Mark 12:17): "Our objective is clear: we try to obey the Gospel. It says - give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar" [01SP]. They regarded this citation in the gospel of Mark as moral authority for paying taxes and legitimising the role of the state as an agent of distributive justice. Other business directors, however, did not express this sense of obligation to pay taxes in such a biblical sense. They saw the motivation behind the payment of taxes more as a question of social justice between the people, near and far, who had a claim to the profits of the business - workers, shareholders, local community, those in need. They felt that it was not fair to give profits to the poor of another country at the expense of other factors, including duties to the state and their own population. Both of these groups of directors, nonetheless, regarded the Economy of Sharing as something extra, on top of the normal taxation which all of the businesses are legally bound to pay. As a result, 59% of the businesses said that they were paying more formal taxes now as a direct result of the Economy of Sharing.

Some of the businesses that cited taxation as a major issue also said that they had pursued a variety of legal measures in order to minimise the level of taxation which they had to pay. They regarded their donations directly to the Economy of Sharing as a particular form of taxation and preferred to maximise these, rather than taxes to the state since they had more say over how their money was used. There were a variety of measures taken in the businesses in order to find ways out of paying taxes. Some of the businesses, for example, had managed to lessen the tax burden through declaring their contribution to the Economy of Sharing as a charitable donation.[133] However, they gave 'profits' to the Economy of Sharing as a portion of their personal income so as to avoid paying taxes on the contributions. Others found ways of lessening the rates for which they were eligible by moving their head office address to a region where the rates level was less:

[133] Through declaring their contribution to the Economy of Sharing, which through the Focolare is a charitable institution in both Italy and in Brazil, the businesses were able to achieve certain tax breaks.

> "There are inhumane taxes, they are oppressive. We are trying to look for legal ways of avoiding having to pay. We are trying to discover what legal moves we can make to avoid having to pay. I'll give you an example. We have opened a subsidiary company of this business in Vargem Grande Paulista since there the taxes are cheaper. This is a legal way of getting out of this situation. It is an alternative because this situation is very oppressive. There is pressure from the taxes and sometimes we do not manage to pay our taxes. There are times when I just can't manage it- but we declare that we cannot pay" [##SP].[134]

The directors in Italy and Brazil both saw levels of taxation as an injustice against small businesses faced with competition from large multinational corporations who have the ability to avoid taxation through manipulation of their financial assets between different countries' tax regimes. The fact that small businesses are generally situated in one country by virtue of their size, inevitably limits their possibilities for transferring funds to avoid taxation. Small businesses, in the opinion of one director in Milan, have to learn to use the same legal loopholes as do the multinationals, since otherwise they will not survive:

> "Our business has developed from the moment that it decided to make out receipts for everything and to pay taxes, within legal limits, not paying what I do not have to. I don't say that I want to pay everything. I use the means that are available to reduce taxes. Above all, here in Italy, we are great at creating laws for the big groups so that they do not have to ever pay taxes. Now I try to use the laws that are made for the big groups also for me ... Everyone should have the same conditions" [##M].

Although this director did not specifically state the 'loopholes' to which he was referring, the international scope of the Economy of Sharing and the closer business contacts it could engender may offer some means of overcoming this injustice. All of the business directors despite the difficulties that this approach brought, still underlined 'transparency' as the key word for all transactions with the legal authorities. Moreover, many of them said that the decision to tackle this question had positive medium term benefits for the business, especially in times of crisis. The fact that the business knew exactly where it was in terms of cash flow meant that it was possible to survive very difficult times: "We can see that when we do things well in this sense, we have an advantage, if only because things are under control. We knew exactly how much we were spending and how much we were earning. It was a guarantee" [M05].

[134] Businesses in this section asked to remain anonymous.

Some of the businesses, however, were experiencing severe difficulties in this respect. One of the businesses in Milan said that this aspect was the main transformation that had occurred within his business practice as a consequence of the Economy of Sharing. The director said that he came from a large family in which all of the siblings were involved in some kind of commercial enterprise. Amongst them it was normal not to give receipts, and to engage in practices which were 'not above board'. Before participating in the Economy of Sharing, he had been part of this scene. When he decided to participate in the Economy of Sharing, he realised that these practices would have to change. The choice was not easy and did not occur overnight. The main difficulty was the fact that the other people in his business circle - namely, his family - could not understand the stance that he was taking, especially due to the fact that the chances of getting caught were virtually zero. It provoked an angry response from his family since his attempts to do things differently not only meant that he lost many orders, but that their actions would also be exposed. Nevertheless, he affirmed that the choice he made was the right one, without wishing to cast judgement on his brothers, as it has given him a clear conscience:

> "There are 11 of us but commerce was always carried out in a certain way ... many of them still carry it out in this way because that is the way it is. It is not all above board, with receipts. This was the change in mentality that took place with the ideal: we try to make the business conform to the law. This business pre-existed the Economy of Sharing in 1991. When Chiara launched the Economy of Sharing, we tried to make everything above board. It was difficult and we are still living with the consequences. In these moments of crisis we feel it because we could do a lot more work but it does not respect the taxes which exist which are high, it is true, but... Others said that when we made this choice we would have to close, but on the contrary, it has increased.
>
> We have tried to do everything possible to make up for the orders that we have lost as a result of this. If someone comes to buy something, it costs 1000 plus 200. If you buy it without a receipt it costs only 1000. So you can see that it is 200 out of 1000 lire but 20,000 out of 200,000 and so on. If you do not make receipts for things then you do not have the proof and that item is not taxed. If it is not written down it is not taxed. So we could say that we have suffered a lot about this choice that we have made. But now that I have made it I am not going back. Apart from the difficulties that it brings, inside it gives you peace. I don't know if you understand. It is a big effort, but inside you feel you are doing right. It is not that you feel you are better than the others but let's say that I am doing my part... Beforehand I was living a different kind of life and trying to evade the tax man was normal for me. There was this change in mentality" [##M].

In this case, the problem had arisen from the fact that the business had existed previously to the Economy of Sharing and this meant changing practices. The director was caught up in a business culture which saw evasion as a normal factor of business practice. It highlights the ethical dilemmas which can arise when trying to foster relationships based on solidarity. In this case, the principles of honesty and legality conflicted with the desire to remain united with the family. The decision to endorse these principles, whilst strengthening the Economy of Sharing, paradoxically created conflict within the family itself.

Businesses which started out as a result of the Economy of Sharing have had the opportunity to start out with a clean slate and to set up businesses which are governed by certain principles. These new businesses, however, have faced similar problems to those described above:

> "It seems like we are always being taken advantage of. Nevertheless, we are very calm. We started out with the idea that we wanted to respect the fiscal laws ... There have been opportunities and people advise you to evade taxes, but our experience so far has shown us that this is not productive ... We have never ... how do I put it... done other things which are done in protest, like not giving receipts or giving incomplete ones" [05M].

The new businesses, thus, come up against advice, often in the form of consultancy, which runs contrary to their mentality. The fact that they can see other businesses following this advice has led some of them to question the ability of the Economy of Sharing businesses to survive in the long term. One business director, whilst feeling obliged to pay his taxes as an Economy of Sharing business, had doubts whether this was the best way ahead:

> "In some ways the Economy of Sharing gave us the impetus to do things according to the law, and we did it this way and still do, but these enormous taxes are penalising us today – in fact today we are trying to put off paying them till later on because we lack liquidity. So, unfortunately, this principle of honesty regarding taxation, which is one of the principles of the Economy of Sharing, and it is right, but in the actual reality of our country, it may be better perhaps to rebel against the taxes rather than give money which is pointless. Or perhaps the money could be given in other ways. But this is the historic moment we are living in and we have to respect it" [10M].

His desire to 'rebel against the taxes rather than give money which is pointless' in many ways is symptomatic of the institutionalised corruption which was endemic within political system in Italy in the 1990s. The uncovering of 'tangentopoli',[135] which exposed a web of corruption from the highest levels of politicians right down to every level of the civil service, led to a profound crisis in the political system and disillusionment on the part of the people (Baldassarri & Modigliani, 1995). Given this lack of trust in the state and the pressure to comply with tax evasion, some of the business directors did admit that they had resorted to doing things which were not above board so as to save the business. This left them with a deep sense of regret:

> "Our intentions have changed a lot in this respect. Now that we have our own business, we can decide what happens ... This 'bad habit' [tax evasion] still persists and since I am in control I find myself doing things that go against this total transparency ... We find ourselves reaching compromises with clients and suppliers in order to win a particular order" [##M].

In these cases, where there is a constant temptation to give in to evasion, it is often the fact that the business is recognised as part of the Economy of Sharing, and therefore, has the reputation of other businesses in the movement to think about, which stops them from giving in. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the Economy of Sharing offers the business directors the support of a like-minded community, but it could also be said that it also puts pressure on them to abide by certain rules even if they feel they could find more expedient ways of achieving their own aims.

The relationship between the legal authorities and the Economy of Sharing businesses, from these interviews, can be seen as a combination of moral duty, ideological commitment and commitment to the reputation of the other Economy of Sharing businesses. The business directors expressed a firm commitment to pay taxes where they were due, but did not regard this as the main distributive function of the business. They recognised that the function of the state in redistribution was limited (and often flawed) and, in a certain sense, this meant that they felt unable to abdicate responsibility for

[135] 'Tangentpoli' literally means 'bribesville' and was the name given to the scandal and the subsequent investigations which followed the collapse of Andreotti's Christian Democratic government in 1991. The old political order, which was shown to have links with the Sicilian Mafia, was discredited and a new breed, based in Northern Italy, took power. Within months, however, they too were under investigation and the Milan-based industrialist Silvio Berlusconi, who assumed the premiership April 1994, held office for less than nine months before he resigned. Former prime ministers Bettino Craxi and Arnaldo Forlani were convicted in October 1995, and more than half the members of the Italia faced charges for accepting bribes worth more than 620 billion lire. Two leading anti-corruption judges, Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, were assassinated. Their chief surviving colleague, Antonio Di Pietro, eventually resigned, claiming undue government interference in his work. Di Pietro himself was accused of corruption but was subsequently cleared (Helicon Publishers, 2000).

'caring' to the state. Although the state had a part to play, they felt that they had a right and a responsibility to engage directly in the distributive process themselves through the various changes within the business and through sharing their profits.

This question of the spatial relationship between taxation and other forms of 'giving' which bypasses the state[136] is highlighted through the international nature of the Focolare. The Economy of Sharing directors regarded taxation as 'limited', placing them with a sense of responsibility for distribution as well as production. 'Welfare', in the Focolare perspective is about 'attending to the needs of others' and is bound up in the subjective relationship of 'caring' which is implicit in the Trinitarian perspective. In this respect, the state cannot (and in their view should not) be regarded as the sole or main provider of care. Attending to the needs of others is regarded as a responsibility for all and the state has a subsidiary role to play in distributing this care.[137] Even where the state is responsible for distributing care, the Economy of Sharing ethos underlines the fact that care is always administered by people in relationship with others - and not by the state. The desire to attend to the needs of the Focolare community in particular through the Economy of Sharing, highlights the limitations of taxation since it is administered through the national government, above all through the welfare system. A small percentage of the budget is given over to international concerns, but the vast majority of the revenue is spent within the national space since it is this national community which is paying taxes. The Focolare, however, is an international organisation and one of the main aims behind the Economy of Sharing is that of sharing wealth on an international scale. There is a heightened sense of belonging to a 'global community' - not just a local one - and the businesses have a responsibility to care for this global community through sharing their profits.

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[136] By this I am referring to the structures of giving in place within corporate philanthropy in the conventional sense (White, 1995) and other forms of NGO activities.

[137] This position *vis-à-vis* the state would apparently line up the Focolare/EoS with more libertarian, right-wing views on the state (as a final safety net, with most social roles being performed by responsible citizens) and against more traditional, left-wing views on the state (as the organ for collective redistribution under the executive of the masses). In effect, the Focolare position is neither libertarian nor socialist (though interestingly the Focolare is sometimes placed into *both* these categories), but rather draws on the ideas of a 'tripartite' system and 'subsidiarity' within Catholic Social Teaching (John Paul II, 1991). These ideas emphasise the balance of responsibilities of both the state and the individual in caring for others, but favour the role of the individual in best attending to the needs of others since ideally "needs are best understood and satisfied by people who are closest to them and who act as neighbours to them" (*Ibid* 33). Such a position is only tenable within an open market economic system since it is dependent on the existence of private ownership (you can only share something if it was yours to give in the first place) and free enterprise. This ideal, however, has to be seen within the underlying concepts of freedom within Christian thinking (freedom to do what one ought, freedom of self-control) as opposed to the libertarian notion of freedom as licence (letting go, doing whatever one wants). Within the Catholic tradition, freedom is regarded as the first step in creating relationships built on solidarity (Novak, 1993).

The issue of legality, however, extends beyond taxation. The Economy of Sharing businesses are bound by the company laws of their respective countries which covers the various dimensions of employment law, including health and safety and environmental protection. None of the businesses saw their decision to become Economy of Sharing businesses as somehow raising them 'above' the law, since they had the greater aim of being part of this project. On the contrary, it gave them a heightened sense of responsibility towards fulfilling their legal obligations as a first step towards other aims. Nevertheless, many of the businesses stressed that a legalistic mentality is not enough in order to change business. What is needed is a 'moral conscience' in which legality is a foundation for other changes in the various relationships that make up the business. One director concisely summed up her opinion on this issue:

> "The relationship is one of doing things according to the law – paying our taxes... Nowadays, great importance is given to the legal situation since there is a crisis of values and identity in the world. I can see that what really matters is that you have a moral conscience. You need a Christian conscience, besides having a legal one. Many things that are legal today, are not moral – like abortion and a whole series of things. But we cannot be extremists on certain issues. We need to use our common sense to see what is best in order to carry ahead the project because there are many laws that harm business. So we have to work within the law and pay all the taxes, but we should not become preoccupied with the legal dimension. We have to look at the ethical, moral, Christian dimension. I think that this is what the Economy of Sharing is doing in some respects but acting in accordance with the taxes" [05SP].

'Charity begins as home': remaking the business from within

One the most contentious arenas in business has always been the relationship between employers and employees. The central tenet of Marx's critique of capitalism is founded on the distinction between employers and employees and the implications that has for social class, resulting in a conflictual relationship whereby those who possess the means of production seek to appropriate returns from the labour of the workers, those who do not possess these means (Marx, 1967). Any attempt to address inequalities within the capitalist system would, therefore, have to address the question of unequal power relations within business. In the case of the Economy of Sharing, there are interesting points to be made in this respect which would not sit easily with a Marxist interpretation of social justice.

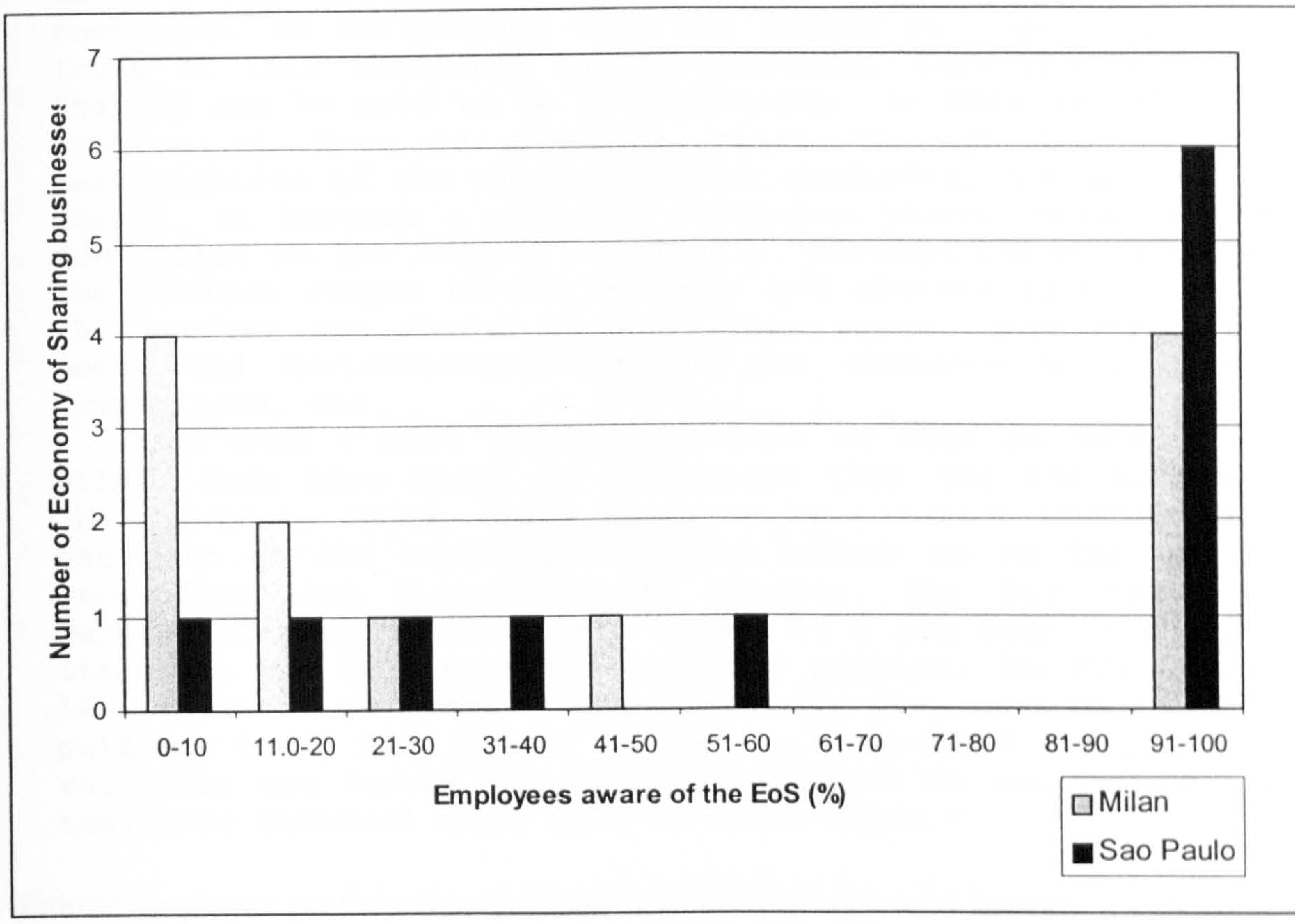
The decision to participate in the Economy of Sharing comes almost unanimously from the directorships of the businesses, and not from the workers themselves. The decision to participate in general does not involve consultation with employees and many of them are probably unaware that their company is part of the project. An exception to this is the case of *Zac*, a bookshop in Piracicaba, Brazil. They have a history of participative management and the decision to participate in the Economy of Sharing also came about through this process. It was suggested by one of the directors, but only implemented after consultation with employees. This resulted in a greater sense of shared participation within the business and a greater awareness of the needs of the employees:

> "Before sending off the documents saying that we agreed to becoming an Economy of Sharing business we held a meeting with all out employees to tell them about the idea. One of the workers said that she agreed with our idea since it was to help the poor - but she too was in need. We divided our profits with her too - saying that she could have that part of the profits as long as she needed" [02SP].

This kind of employee involvement in the decision to become an Economy of Sharing firm is seemingly the exception. Only 26% of those who work in the Economy of Sharing companies studied here are aware that their company participates in this project. This figure varied, however, between regions. In Milan, 35.5% of the employees in the businesses knew about the Economy of Sharing project, while in Sao Paulo this figure was 61.5%. The biggest difference in the number of employees aware of the project occurred in those businesses with more than 10 employees (50%) in both cases. In Milan, only 12.7% of employees in those businesses were aware of the project, whereas in Sao Paulo this figure was 54.8%. The distribution of employees' involvement can be seen in the graph below.

This graph shows that the distribution of levels of involvement varied significantly between Sao Paulo and Milan. In the case of Sao Paulo, 50% of the businesses had 91-100% of the employees involved in the project. In Milan, on the other hand, this figure was 33%. At the other end of the scale, only one business in Sao Paulo reported under 10% of the work-force involvement, but in Milan four businesses reported this. All four of these businesses had more than ten employees.

Figure 8.1 Employee knowledge of the Economy of Sharing



Source: Fieldwork in Italy and Brazil, 1997-98

The involvement of the workers in the businesses is important for several reasons. Firstly, it is very difficult to speak about a renewal of the economy unless those directly involved in production are conscious of the process. During my stay in Rome in 1997, I reflected on this point after speaking to one of the delegates about the Economy of Sharing. I wrote in my research diary:

> " **20.10.97** This interview (with Claudia Masera, delegate for Milan) caused me to reflect on the difference that exists between the Economy of Sharing businesses in which only the owner shares this spirit and those where the whole community of workers together are striving to be an expression of communion. In the first case, in my opinion, there are still overtones of philanthropy, even if there is a big difference: the philanthropists tended to be known and their 'works' bear their name or the name of their organisation e.g. The Carnegie Trusts.
>
> The fact remains, however, that when the employees are not conscious of the involvement of the business in the Economy of Sharing, and therefore the choice of destination of the profits, there is a strong resemblance. In fact, one could argue that the class problem of Marx still remains: the 'proletariat' are alienated from the destination of their work - their profits... I think that the great chance lies not simply in the involvement of the business owner and his or her

generosity towards the Focolare. It lies in the ability to involve the business as a community and transform it into communion. If the profits that are shared in 'communion' are a fruit of this communion in the business, then the Economy of Sharing can be said to be revolutionary. In this way the class problem of Marx is overcome since through the voluntary participation of the whole business community, the profits are shared. It becomes a chain of communion which irradiates this new spirit in the economy vertically, through the contacts with the various stages of the economy and society from the point the profits are shared to when they reach those who are in need, and horizontally, through the contacts with clients, competitors, etc.

From what I have understood, this is what is happening in Milan. They have begun to understand that for the Economy of Sharing to go ahead, there needs to be a fuller involvement on the part of the employees and the owners as to the means of production that distribute the profits. The fact that these owners put their profits into common is a big step in the right direction but it does not solve this problem. According to the law, there is no problem whatsoever. By law, once an owner has paid any taxes due, he/she is free to dispose of the profits in whichever way he/she chooses: the workers do not figure since they have received their dues in their wages."

Without employee participation the Economy of Sharing could become a new form of philanthropy in which the owners of the business share their profits with the Focolare, but the workers remain unaware of this and therefore do not actively participate in it. Such participation of the work-force will become increasingly important as the project becomes more well-known, as is the case in Italy and Brazil. From the point of view of the spirituality which underpins the project, moreover, the active participation of the employees would also seem to be a logical part of the Economy of Sharing. Within the Trinitarian perspective, active participation is seen as an integral part of the ideal of giving, as is reciprocity (Cambón, 1999). Increasing the levels of participation of the work-force, therefore, is not only a practical necessity but has its root in the spirituality of the Focolare.

The difficulties in involving the work-force in the Economy of Sharing are numerous and vary between the businesses. Firstly, there is the fact that involvement in the Economy of Sharing has often been understood as a personal matter which only involves the business owner/director. Since the project originates from the spiritual experience of the business director in the Focolare Movement there is, in general, some reluctance on the part of the directors to divulge unsolicited information about the nature of the project to their employees. This debate would open up a variety of questions that relate to the personal life and beliefs of the director and how these relate to his or her professional life. Bridging the gap between these two dimensions of life can often take years. Transmitting this high ideal to workers is a commitment on the part of the employer, which has to be taken very seriously. As one director said:

> "Employees are very demanding so if you say something, then you have to do it. They are much more demanding than my wife or children. It is true because it works the other way around too – when I see that something is not going well then I tell them" [08M].

In other words, telling the workers about the choice they have made to participate in the Economy of Sharing is a commitment to the workers. It can raise expectations and set a standard that the management then has to live up to in terms of the relationship that they maintain with the workers. For this reason, many of the business directors expressed a cautious attitude when telling their employees about the Economy of Sharing:

> "I am very cautious about this. There have been two meetings already for the employees of the businesses, so they are informed about it. Not all of them are in agreement, but we have presented the project. I don't feel that they participate in it today. It is too premature" [10M].

The current working culture makes it very difficult in many cases to broach a subject such as the Economy of Sharing without creating divisions within the workplace. The idea that the profits of the business should go to help other people outside the business may appeal to some who are more generous or on higher pay packets, but for others who are 'in the job' principally for the money it may seem against their personal interests. The workers are entitled to ask what benefit they will gain in return for this gesture of solidarity. This highlights the potential conflict between 'structures of giving' and the 'culture of giving'. The change of culture that the Economy of Sharing presupposes is not something that the management can impose on the workers - it has to emerge from a free choice on their part. This would require a change of management style. Rather than an imposing management style, the development of the culture of giving within the workplace would arguably have to start from a change of relationship between management and workers. It would involve the management putting the culture of giving into practice first themselves, perhaps through giving on a personal level. Once this is already being done they could then proposing it to the workers at the risk of them not accepting it. Broaching the subject within the business could result in a paternalistic attitude. This was a fear that was expressed by one of the business directors in Milan:

> "I do not speak to my employees about the Economy of Sharing because we have to be careful not to fall into a paternalistic attitude. If I

> give money to charity, rather than spend it here, my employees would say 'do what you like'. But they too have a great capacity to give. In that case it becomes a shared experience, otherwise, if the suggestion to give has to come from me, it could be misunderstood as a paternalistic attitude if there is not a personal relationship" [07M].

This problem is made worse in cases where there are members of the management who do not share the same values as the Economy of Sharing. Very little can be done at a structural level to involve the workers in the project unless all of the management are in agreement. Several positive experiences have been attempted by directors in order to increase the participation of the workers. In the Milan region, the Economy of Sharing Association organised the first joint meeting in January 1997 for the employers and employees of the Economy of Sharing businesses. On this occasion, the project was presented by the association and the employees had an opportunity to ask questions and meet other people who are working in businesses that are part of the project. The business directors said that this meeting was a success. It gave those employees who were interested the chance to find out more about the Economy of Sharing from a source outwith the context of the firm. Reaching the point where the employees wish to participate in such a meeting, out of work hours and unpaid, does nonetheless require a lot of preparation.

The long-term implications that this could have on the Economy of Sharing will be discussed in later chapters. In this section, however, I will examine the various ways in which participation in the Economy of Sharing has changed the relationship between management and workers within the businesses concerned. All of the business directors interviewed emphasised how the Economy of Sharing had changed how they regarded their employees. The heart of the Focolare spirituality is that of creating relationships based on mutual love and understanding. The business directors felt that this 'fraternal' relationship had to be expressed in a particular way in relation to their employees. In the course of the interviews, they highlighted specific changes which they put down to the Economy of Sharing. In the case of directors who had started businesses as a result of the Economy of Sharing, they were asked to compare their current practices with their previous experience of business. If they had no experience of business, they were asked to explain the nature of the relationship with their employees. Although the directors did not go into details regarding exact amounts of benefits given to employees as a result of the Economy of Sharing, what was most interesting was the scope issues that they now regarded as important in their relationship with employees.[138] The main changes reported by the business directors are shown in the table below, and it is clear that the directors attribute a wide variety of changes and practices within their businesses to the Economy of Sharing. Some of these will now be discussed in turn.

Table 8.1 Interview responses[139]

Change	Milan	Sao Paulo
Increased wages (at least to minimum wage) or bonuses	3	0
Take on new staff/apprentices	6	6
Change to participative management style	1	3
Introduced sick pay/holiday pay	0	5
Training courses to improve skills	0	3
Alter working structure – team work	4	5
Direct management action to promote community spirit	6	8
Improved working environment (health and safety)	2	0
No change reported	2	4

Source: Fieldwork, Milan and Sao Paulo, 1997-98

Changes to pay structure

A small number of the firms in Milan attributed changes in the structure of pay to the Economy of Sharing. Twenty-five percent of the Italian companies granted wage increases for employees as a result of the Economy of Sharing. The most common change was that of giving bonuses at the end of the season. This was preferred over other forms of benefit such as making the employees shareholders in the company or alterations to basic pay: "Over and above the pay set down by the unions, we give our employees a bonus which they really appreciate. We give it to them especially for the extra effort they put in to the business" [01M]. Wage increases within the business were viewed as a way of fulfilling obligations to the 'poor' within the business before attempting to help people outwith. One director said: "when I hear that the Economy of Sharing is about having greater care for the poor, I pay my employees better, since they are my nearest neighbours" [07M]. In this quotation, the distinction between 'near' and 'far' neighbours is highlighted. The director in this particular business felt that he was justified in not giving profits to the Economy of Sharing since his responsibility was first and foremost to those who were nearest him. It

[138] An interesting and important counterbalance to this study could result from interviewing employees of the various businesses and examining the extent to which the priorities of the directors matched their own priorities. Information regarding the implementation of the various programmes discussed here was based on participant observation and the collection of documentary evidence from the companies.
[139] This table has been constructed from the responses of the directors in semi-structured interviews. There was no limit, therefore, to the number of changes which an individual business could report. The number of respondents was twelve in both Milan and Sao Paulo.

highlights the way that the desire to care for those far away also engendered a stronger sense of justice within the business itself.

In the businesses in Sao Paulo, on the other hand, the main change to wages structure was that of introducing sick pay and holiday pay for employees. The introduction of such practices was a break with common practices in small businesses in Brazil. According to the business directors, it is normal practice for people to be 'hired and fired' according to need in order to maximise the efficiency of the company and to avoid the high costs of welfare contributions which have to be paid for permanent employees. The decision in 42% of the businesses to change this practice represented a real strain on the profitability of the company. Nevertheless, they regarded it as a first step towards making the business part of the Economy of Sharing. In the companies where such changes did not take place, the wages paid to employees were already above the minimum entitlement and holiday and sick pay were already established.

Despite these changes to the pay structure in some companies, the majority of the businesses made no such changes as a result of the Economy of Sharing. The directors regarded the poor, who were to be helped as a justification for not increasing wages within the firm itself. It was a case of striking a balance between those outside the company who were destitute and those within the company itself who could be regarded as fortunate to be in employment.

Recruitment policies

The Economy of Sharing had resulted in half of the businesses deciding to employ more people. In Italy, 40% of the businesses which had taken on new staff as a result of the Economy of Sharing were those which had started since 1991, since one new business had no employees. A tenth of the businesses that pre-existed the Economy of Sharing had taken on new staff. In Brazil, over and above the new businesses, 16.6% of the businesses had reported an intake of staff as a direct result of the Economy of Sharing.

Even if they had not yet taken on new staff, all of the business directors regarded the creation of new jobs as an important function of the Economy of Sharing. In particular, they regarded the creation of apprenticeships as an important function for the future of the business. These were offered to a range of people, but in particular young people who had difficulties of one kind or another. One director told me about why he had taken on a young boy who had had drug problems:

> "This year we have taken on two young people aged 15-17 ... We try not to transmit stress to our employees, but to create a friendly relationship and good collaboration. Of course the productivity of the business is important and our employees have to work, but we have to be sensitive, above all with one boy who has problems... sometimes he doesn't understand what is being said and we have to repeat things... even if he does not contribute in terms of productivity. Being part of the Economy of Sharing opens up our horizons – it is not that he has to produce a certain amount otherwise he will be fired. Given that we are a small business, we could just as well leave him at home. But we try to see him new each day and to give him a chance, even if intellectually he does not seem to have much to offer. For us, however, he is a brother" [03M].

They regarded this function of the Economy of Sharing business as a place where those with difficulties could be accepted and reintegrated into the work environment as a service to the poor. Many of the business directors expressed an interest in promoting this kind of initiative in the future.

The issue of recruitment, however, also presented difficulties for some of the businesses. For one business in Sao Paulo, the question of when to take on new workers and when to fire them was one that had become more vexed after the Economy of Sharing started:

> "There are many things which are difficult to do in a turbulent market. What is it that normally happens? People are employed when there is work and then fired when there is not. If I have work I will take you on and when there is no more work you are fired. This has always been our big dilemma: how to have as big a work-force as possible... Today we are trying as best we can, but there are times when it is necessary to take difficult decisions because the market is not absorbing. But we try our best so that this decision is as little as possible, so that it has as little impact on the group as possible. Otherwise it would not be possible to have the chance to train people.
>
> In other businesses in our sector it is not like this – people are hired and fired. I think that the big difference with us lies in this. We only do this as a last resort. This brings many problems in the economic sense, in keeping the business alive. I think that sometimes we can exaggerate in this respect, in our involvement with the people. But we are trying to find a balance – in a way that we will not harm the business and at the same time not harm this long-term plan of work that we have" [01SP].

In this example, what is clear is that the prospect of laying off employees, perhaps because of a down turn in the market, created difficulties for the company. The sense of closeness to the workers and the strong interpersonal relationships which had been established meant that it was extremely difficult to make decisions based on financial reasoning alone. The result was that the company often stretched itself to the limits, trying to find work for the employees when there was none, so as to avoid the prospect of laying off staff. In some cases, the directors went without their own salaries so as to enable liquidity to pay wages for several months. This gave them time to find creative and imaginative solutions within the business environment so as to keep people in work. This kind of dilemma, however, also points to something very profound about the extension of the Focolare spirituality into the realm of business. Whereas relationships within the family or community can have a degree of resilience based on blood relations or on a common link to a particular group, the relationships between employees and managers are subject to the pressures of the economic indices which legitimise the existence of the business as a productive enterprise. In many cases, such economic indices are governed by factors over which the company itself has little or no control. In some cases, there is no option but to reduce the numbers in the work-force, despite the desire to always find a way out which does not hurt anyone. This has been one of the most difficult lessons of the Economy of Sharing in the early years.

Participative management

Many of the companies in this study had under 20 employees, a factor which made participation in decision making relatively straightforward. Some of the larger businesses in Milan and Sao Paulo reported that they had introduced formal schemes aimed at involving workers in decision making within the business. The schemes included workers' councils and formal structures within the business to facilitate greater communication between different levels of responsibility. The main purpose of these changes was to foster a widespread sense of participation within the company.[140]

The main aspects which were included in this different approach to management were access to training, organisation of working hours, and general conditions of work on a daily basis. As a result of this approach, several Brazilian businesses initiated training courses over and above professional training that was in place already within the businesses. One idea was that of *Ecoar*, which introduced a 'personal career plan' for each employee. Each employee was encouraged to come up with a personal development plan which he/she

[140] These changes in management style and structure which occur within the Economy of Sharing have been termed by Burkhard (1999) as a form of 'sustainable management' and is the subject of an annual interdisciplinary conference at the University of Antioquia, Medellin.

would then discuss with the managing director and together they would work out the best way to achieve it:

> "This year we began to work out a career plan, investment in training ... but this is still in the early stages. We want to make them employable in the market. We do not want to make them people who can only work within this business, *Ecoar*, but to make them ready so that if there were no more work here for them or they felt they should go for a new job, he would be able to go onto the market. We want to prepare him for the market. One of the greatest objectives of *Ecoar*" [05SP].

An interesting feature of this plan is the awareness that it is unlikely that an employee will stay with the company for life within the current market. As a result, *Ecoar* regarded it as important for the employee to gain as wide a skill base as possible so that he would be competitive in the market. This could be seen as *Ecoar* offering a fully trained employee to the sector.

Another change which came about through the co-operation between employers and employees was the possibility of introducing a rotation within the company so that no-one ended up with the 'worst' job for any length of time [03SP; 05SP]. Employees retained their own specialisation in a particular field, but everyone had responsibility for a menial task for part of the time for which they were employed. These tasks included administration, answering phones, welcoming guests to the firm, preparing the refreshments and cleaning the office. Within the context of Latin America, where the divide between white and blue collared workers is still generally high, creating the opportunity for employees to carry out a range of blue and white collared tasks could be seen as perks of the job. The directors of the company also participated in these tasks. The outcome of this rotation of 'menial' tasks was an increase in the morale amongst the employees.

Action to promote community spirit

In a high proportion of the businesses in Italy and Brazil (50% and 67% respectively) the management within the businesses had made other changes in order to improve the community spirit within the business. These initiatives included giving grants to the employees which could be used for social purposes such as organising a party for their children, or the promotion of shared meals among the employees [04M; 08SP]. Other initiatives included creating an open atmosphere in which employees could feel free to share their personal needs and the needs of their families with the management [07SP]. In

Brazil, in particular, this new openness resulted in extra grants over and above their wages being given to employees for food and improvements to their homes [01SP]. In other cases it resulted in employees being able to gain very low cost loans in order to carry out plans which they had.

Remaking the relationship with clients/suppliers

These changes within the business were also mirrored in the changing relationship between the business and the clients that it served. Many of these changes also took place as a direct result of the Economy of Sharing. Participation in the Economy of Sharing gave the businesses an added sense of responsibility towards those they were trying to serve: Forty-two percent of the businesses in Brazil and 30% in Italy reported significant changes in the relationship with their clients and/or suppliers as a direct result. They no longer regarded the business as an isolated entity which had the sole concern of profit. Although business survival was still vital, the nature of the relationship with those whom the business served went beyond the economic function being fulfilled. The network of Trinitarian relationships also had to extend outwith the business into the wider economy with which it was engaged. This extension took place through the clients and the suppliers with whom the business was working.

Quality service

In practical terms, the new concern for the clients and suppliers meant seeking to fulfil their needs and requests through offering them the best possible service or product. Such a proposal not only fulfilled the Economy of Sharing ideal of serving the other, it was also competitive in economic terms. It was reflected in attempts to improve the quality of service and value for money. This change was more prevalent amongst the Brazilian businesses, although one Milanese business reported a change:

> "This means taking care of the product that is produced, making sure that the detail in it is to a high standard... It is not something that can be churned out because it will make us money, but it is something that is going to another person. It is also important for it to be a source of earnings for the person who makes it, but it has to be made with this care because what matters are people. It is a different concept" [03M].

This emphasis on service to the person and not the 'client' or 'consumer' highlights how the Economy of Sharing companies regarded those outwith the company itself as being part, in some way, of the overall objectives of the Economy of Sharing. They regarded them as people with whom they had a relationship. It is this sense of relationship and not the desire to make a profit which motivates the Economy of Sharing businesses. In this sense, in the eyes of the Economy of Sharing businesses, those who are doing business within them are effectively enlisted in the Economy of Sharing networks, though this participation is not in force to expressly become some kind of 'covenant'. As one of the other directors said:

> "This idea of giving the best quality service to everyone is not something which is a formality on paper - it is in our mission statement. We wrote that we want to involve everyone – the suppliers and the clients. It is not just that they supply.... they provide the raw materials which are part of a process. So every time that I manage to involve them in this, they too are part of it. We try to do this through the way we act, the way we are.
>
> Behind the functioning of that machine there is something very special which is not just the price or the quality or service – but that there is something behind it which for us is the Economy of Sharing. He does not know this but one day he will know" [01SP].

The Economy of Sharing networks, therefore, are founded on this common agreement that economic commitments and relationships are secondary to subjectivity of the human being who is in a relationship with another human being. This relationship, if based on the Trinitarian perspective, imbues the relationship with love for the other, and therefore, the desire to serve him/her in the best possible way. Even if there is no direct contact with the consumer, due to geographical distance or the involvement of complex chains of manufacture, this relationship can be expressed through the quality of the product produced or the perfection of the service offered. In the case of the firm *Ecoar*, which produced cleaning products, this relationship was expressed in their desire to produce high quality products which would not harm the people who used them or the environment:

> "The difference lies first of all in the quality of the products. You could say that there are two kinds of clients: there are the final consumers, the ones that consume. We do not have a direct relationship with them – the relationship is through the product, the quality of the product, which we try to... The only relationship that we have with the client is through the quality of the product and it is through it that they will feel all our love. The other clients are the networks of supermarkets that buy the products from us ... Each day is a challenge with the clients when you decide to put the human person at the centre. Before being clients, they are human beings" [05SP].

Such an approach, however, often means that the Economy of Sharing businesses have to specialise in sectors in which there is a premium on quality products or services. Giving their 'all' to every customer is often time consuming and costly as it requires attention to detail. In the case of *La Tunica*, this meant opting out of the general clothing market and finding a niche in the market for quality clothing:

> "Here we try to show our clients the value of the work that we are doing. So in the first place, our clothes have to be of high quality and at the right price. So the price of our clothes is not the 'popular' price like the clothes that arrive in containers from Asia and flood the market with very cheap clothes... We could not compete with this. So we need to find the right clients, who wants the kinds of clothes that we present and to show them that the price is such because we work in a certain way – look at the quality of our materials, sewing, - we have to show them" [09SP].

The attention to quality meant that the business was able to resist the sudden opening of the Brazilian market to cheap imports from Asia in the mid-1990s. The business, however, had other supports, such as dependence on the 'internal' Focolare markets, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

For other businesses, the Economy of Sharing meant altering how clients were treated when they came into contact with the business. The desire to build relationships with those who came into contact with the business meant that virtues like politeness, for example, became more important:

> "With the clients there is always this relationship based on being brothers. I always say to my children that on the phone, what is needed is politeness. You can't do things just because you're asked to do this or that. You always have to be polite because on the other end of the phone there is a neighbour who has to be loved" [06M].

The Economy of Sharing also led some companies to undertake market research to see exactly what their customers wanted from the business – a decision which made good business sense. This was the case with a bookshop in Piracicaba, which saw a large increase in its turnover through changes brought about by the Economy of Sharing:

> "Due to the Economy of Sharing and the situation in the country we are publicising our shop much more. Our shop is always busy now. We started marketing research in the bookshop - people were invited to leave their impressions about the shop and we responded to their suggestions: put in new lighting, armchairs, water, electric fans, name tags for the employees - to facilitate a relationship with the customers. We also reached an agreement with the restaurant across the road so that our customers can leave their cars there. There is another bookshop in the town which launched an advert saying that it is easier to park your car there. So instead of launching publicity against them, we reached an agreement with the restaurant. We also asked customers to comment on the shop: they all commented that the employees had an 'interior peace', they were always

> happy and ready to help. People come here because they feel good - they feel that the place is different" [02SP].

The emphasis which the Economy of Sharing placed on offering quality services to their clients also had repercussions on the expectations which it placed on suppliers.

Environmental sustainability

In particular, in industries where there was a risk of pollution from the extraction of raw materials or toxic waste, the Economy of Sharing businesses put pressure on existing suppliers or switched to suppliers who were known to use technology which minimised environmental impact:

> "Our suppliers have changed substantially over the past few years. In the past we had to seek out suppliers. Now the market has changed and they need to sell. They know that these days, many businesses have financial problems... People are scared to buy. So the relationship with them is good. On the other hand, this relationship has become more demanding. If I am more demanding on myself, because of all the aims that are behind my work, I transmit this to everyone and they too become more demanding. For example, I had to buy raw materials and I knew that this process created environmental problems. For me, personally, it is not a problem. But since I have a different mentality, I think about how this problem will affect someone else. So I understand that I cannot do this. So we have to seek out other suppliers who are developing technologies which we not create environmental problems in the future" [07SP].

Amongst the Business directors in Brazil there was a heightened sense of responsibility towards environmental concerns. In the industrial estate near Araceli, where seven businesses were installed, one of the prime concerns was that of creating an *ecologically sustainable* industrial estate [CEOS84]. Thus, much effort was made to construct buildings which economised on energy usage, to plant trees, and above all, to recycle waste from the various factories. *Ecoar*, for example, invested in water recycling and purification technology which minimised the impact of the plant on the environment. One reason for the emphasis on environmental concerns in the region of Sao Paulo is that the consequences of years of lack of concern are strikingly clear. The Tiete river, which runs through Sao Paulo state, is so polluted from industrial effluent that it resembles tar rather than water and has a layer of foam up to a meter thick. Atmospheric pollution casts a thick yellow smog over the city, leading to extremely poor air quality.

The question of environmental concerns did not feature as highly in the discussions with the business directors in the Milan region. In the case of the tap making factory [10M], a similar water purification installation to that of *Ecoar* had recently been installed as a result of the Economy of Sharing, reducing the level of heavy metals leaving the factory. One reason for this was the fact that environmental monitoring is much more widely enforced in the Milan region, since it is governed by European legislation regarding levels of effluent. Since such measures were taken for granted as normal, they were not directly attributed to the Economy of Sharing.

Another aspect of environmental concern is the relationship with animals, and therefore, animal welfare. It is possible to derive a particular attitude towards animals from the spirituality of the Focolare. Since work is regarded as the continuation of the work of creation, one would assume that within the Economy of Sharing businesses animals would be given instrumental value, but also respect as God's creatures. A small minority of the businesses participating in this research were involved in the welfare of animals, one of which was in Milan and the other in Sao Paulo. There was a strong contrast between the attitudes of the two businesses with regard to this aspect of environmental concern. In the Brazilian business, the scale of operations was very large, but there was a high degree of care for the welfare of the animals, although the level of infrastructure in the business was badly in need of investment. The chickens were kept in large barns, but were able to roam and had access to direct sunlight. The other animals (pigs and cattle) were well cared for and emphasis was put on minimising the use of anti-biotics and other ways of artificially increasing the meat quantity. The business in Milan which agreed to be part of this study, on the other hand, did not reflect the above values in any way. The chickens were kept in battery cages with electronic feeders and no access to direct sunlight. The machinery used to handle the eggs was dirty and in extreme need of investment. This form of production was regarded as completely normal by the business directors, who seemed to see little value in the chickens themselves, except as egg machines.

It is difficult to deduce general attitudes among the Economy of Sharing businesses from these two isolated examples. The Economy of Sharing regional spokesperson in Milan, on reflection, cited the above example as a matter of concern. Due to the locality of the business near the Focolare in the region and other particular circumstances, it had been impossible to ban the business from being part of the Economy of Sharing. It was almost considered an Economy of Sharing business by default. Its participation, however, highlights the difficulties that arise from the various interpretations of the Focolare spirituality in business in different parts of the world.

The role of trust

The role of 'trust' in the functioning of markets has re-emerged within economic discourses in recent years as one of the most pressing conundrums of modern economic life (Sen, 1993; Fukuyama, 1995). In particular, authors such as Grabher (1993) and Platteau (1994) have emphasised the role of long-term friendships and acquaintances in the shaping of business networks. Within the Economy of Sharing businesses too, the creation of relationships with suppliers and clients based on trust and honesty was regarded as being of paramount importance. The underlying motivation for this was the belief that only within such relationships, would it be possible to work well and develop the businesses:

> "It is interesting with our suppliers because in the beginning we needed to make ourselves known. From the time that they got to know us and have given us a credit margin, things are easier. But there are times when it is not so easy. Sometimes it is as a result of changes in the market, etc. So you have to always try to seek out a new relationship. It is interesting, in this respect, with the suppliers, how you gain a lot of respect. I remember one instance with one of our main suppliers of winter clothes. He is a very good supplier, his business is very widely respected, but he works within very rigid time scales. You are not allowed to deviate from what he has planned. But we, at a certain point needed a greater credit margin. We already had won a certain credit margin, but we needed a greater one in order to work better. It was difficult with the representative who came here. We talked it over, we gave him our documentation, we showed him how we were working... but we were not managing.
>
> In the end we had to go to the head of the financial sector of the business at a fair here in Sao Paulo. There was this big fair in Sao Paulo and we went there to find him. But you know how it is – we are small, they are big... but it went very well. We were received with a lot of respect and consideration, we talked with him and explained how we were trying to work, and he said: 'We have seen that in effect, *La Tunica* has gone through difficult times, but it has come out well, and *La Tunica* merits our confidence, since it is a business which is growing and is going well. So we are going to give you this credit.' He doubled our credit margin" [09SP].

The question of honesty is also a matter for the reputation of the Economy of Sharing as a whole, and derives from the sense of being part of a bigger picture in which the actions of one business could have repercussions on the others:

> "In negotiations, we feel we have to be honest because if we are not honest, we cannot be part of the Economy of Sharing. If it wasn't for the Economy of Sharing we could be tempted to do something wrong, but

being of the Economy of Sharing, we can't do this because the ideals do not go together. I would say that being part of the Economy of Sharing means having a different business culture. It changes everything - every aspect" [07SP].

In some cases, however, this relationship with clients and suppliers has led to misunderstandings about the nature of the Economy of Sharing. This is often the case when the businesses are engaging in contracts with other businesses which are part of the Economy of Sharing or with people who are part of the Focolare in the different countries. In this case, one of the dangers is that the degree of informality in the relationships - based on trust and a mutual sense of purpose - can sometimes lead to lax service, confused expectations and, at worst, a break in relationships between people if contracts are not respected. In other words, the desire to create greater solidarity within economic networks can actually lead to exactly the kinds of behaviour which the Economy of Sharing was aiming to avoid.

Remaking the relationship with competitors

One of the most interesting areas of the Economy of Sharing is the relationship that the businesses aim to establish with their competitors. Building 'Trinitarian relationships' between employees within the business is one thing, but it is difficult to see how such relationships based on sharing can be applied to competitors. In business literature, the relationship with competitors is either regarded as a matter of mutual warfare or in the case of 'win-win' theories, it is a case of mutual advantage from co-operation. Adam Smith, however, would have argued that such co-operation has to be treated with the utmost suspicion, since a high level of co-operation between businesses would inevitably lead to the development of monopolies and oligarchies and result in a worse deal for the consumer. This negative attitude towards business collaboration has resulted in the widespread implementation of 'anti-trust' laws at a national and international level to protect consumer rights.[141] Such legislation governs the kinds of agreements and relationships in which companies can engage, ranging from price fixing to codes of ethical practice. Any change in relationships with competitors and potential inter-firm collaboration between Economy of Sharing companies, therefore, has to be regarded in

[141] Anti-trust legislation has been in place since the Serman Act in 1890 in the USA and the Clayton Act in 1914 (BOLA Project, 2000). In the case of Italy, the Law no. 287 of October 10th, 1990 (Autoritá garante della concorrenza e del mercato, 2000) brought Italy into line with European anti-trust legislation governed by the EU Commission competition directorate (EC Drectorate-General for Competition, 2000). In Brazil, competition law is governed by the Ministry of Justice CADE (Ministério da Justiça do Brasil, 2000).

view of this legal framework.

Over 50% of the businesses said that the Economy of Sharing had resulted in a change in the relationship with their competitors. In most cases, the aim was to create an open relationship in which competition did not degenerate into bad feelings between people. As in other aspects of the Economy of Sharing, the 'social' dimension of the relationship was stressed over and above the economic function. In some instances establishing such relationships was very difficult, especially in economic sectors where there is cut-throat competition and high levels of mistrust. One example of this is a business in Brazil which distributes medical supplies. The director illustrated how friendly relations with competitors can easily be misunderstood:

> "When a business starts out in the market, it can be treated aggressively by other businesses. They try to destroy the reputation of the business – we have experienced this first hand. But these problems are overcome quickly, because if you have accomplished a job well and work legally, these things crumble and what is true remains. Many other businesses have tried to copy our way of working. Our competitors are shocked by the fact that we are happy to show them how we work – and they try to do the same. They don't manage to copy our way of working, however, because it is not a formula that says 'do this' 'do that'... it is a way of being, a way of acting.
>
> Last year there was a competitor who tried to attack us on every corner... creating a very difficult situation for our business. At a certain point, the law in Brazil changed and it was a very important change. In order to help this other business, we faxed this news to them. The business owner was so struck by our gesture that he not only wanted to re-establish his friendship with us, but he offered to help us in areas that we find difficult. It was through him that we had the idea of getting in a consultancy – the best decision that we ever made. The consultant was so impressed by how we run our business that he goes out of his way to help us in whatever way he can. This all started through responding to the aggression of our competitors with a different attitude" [10SP].

In some instances, the decision to approach competitors has led to improved relations which benefit both sides and even collaboration on certain projects. This is the case with one of the businesses in Milan. It works in the field of metal engineering, in which there is a rapid rate of technological change and the capital investment costs are very high, leading to them adopting a flexible specialisation approach within their business. Through the open attitude with their competitors, they decided on a consortium of local businesses in which technology could be shared and larger projects could be taken on as a group:

> "With our competitors we are more and more in touch, in fact we

> formed a consortium of mould builders in our sector. There was a time when the companies would not even let the others in their premises. Now we receive orders together and two or three companies may be working on the same product. This has made us see that collaboration is the most intelligent solution. We get on very well. There are 15 businesses and we have held fairs together and studied the products together. We build the same product in two or three businesses then we put it together but the aim is always that of pleasing the client because they are the ones who set the deadlines. They ask us to do something and the part has to be ready straightaway. Also in the investments that we make - we are constantly specialising in our sector so it would be intelligent to use the other's machinery which are more adapted to the work in hand" [10M].

Such agreements are based on building on practice within the same spheres of industry but, as outlined above, are subject to the anti-trust laws of the EC. In this case, the nature of the collaboration did not contravene this legislation since there was no evidence that the formation of such an agreement was creating a monopoly which was to the detriment of the consumer. Rather, it enabled the individual firms to specialise in specific areas in such a way as to complement the work of the other businesses.

The open attitude of the Economy of Sharing, however, is not always an answer to the kind of cut-throat competition in certain areas of the market, especially the international markets. In this sphere, too, the Economy of Sharing has provoked a response. When it is impossible to avoid competition which is unethical – using such methods as bribery, tax evasion, malicious slander – the best decision is to get out of that sector all together. There is no point in attempting to take on Goliath head-on. This is the case of one company in Brazil which operates in the field of metal engineering. In recent years, the competition in certain sectors of their field had become so dominated by certain unethical practices that they were faced with the decision to either be complicit, by indirect association, to what was going on or find other ways of entering the market. They decided that the only prudent decision would be to gradually transfer production to the development of another sector which had been emerging slowly.

> "I would say this: in the long term, you have the certainty that the Economy of Sharing is the best way to act. In the short term, you have to try to create a dialogue. If there is no dialogue, you have to see if you can enter into other markets. Entering into this kind of competition in desperation and trying to change it according to how the Economy of Sharing is, is not a good idea in my opinion. I would prefer to change market or to diminish my production. This is the experience that we have had. When the car industry began to become very competitive, we were

> already seeking out alternative markets which are less competitive but require more technology. So this is what we are developing since it is not worth entering this kind of competition. You will not change it at all so it is not worth it. So far this has worked for us" [07SP].

After starting a firm for the Economy of Sharing, one firm in Milan faced the difficult decision of either having to change the direction of his firm or enter into direct competition with his brother, the owner of the company he had left:

> "At the end of '95 we were faced with a difficult choice: either we closed, or we entered into direct competition with them. There were no other alternatives... we had left their business and we had a perfect knowledge of all their products. It meant entering into direct confrontation. Instead, we have tried to offer alternatives to them and not competition – it is something completely different – I am proposing something completely different. Clients can chose one or other freely. Nevertheless, we still are in direct competition on some fronts and this has created problems ... Our ex-business had not understood why we are in competition with them" [01M].

The decision to start an Economy of Sharing business, therefore, had resulted in difficult relationships with their family due to the nature of the insider knowledge that the business directors had. The situation was clearly having a detrimental effect on the relationship between the business and the family, as well as creating stress within the business itself. It called into question the possibility of the Economy of Sharing engaging in competitive relationships which are also 'Trinitarian'. Although this is possible to some extent in certain circumstances, in this case, the decision to participate in the Economy of Sharing resulted in a conflict of interests which was detrimental to the business and to the families involved.

The structure of corporate ownership

The past fifty years has seen a dramatic shift in the structure of ownership of companies. This shift is most readily seen in the separation of ownership and direct management control. The constant need to raise new funds has resulted in questions of ownership and control becoming increasingly blurred with the consequence that profitability and efficiency are the main governing principles of corporate strategy. Within the Economy of Sharing, the vast majority of businesses are privately owned by individuals, families or groups of less than ten people (Delia, 2000). None of them have as yet considered flotation on the stock market. Out of the 22 businesses in this study, only one, *Espri*, is a company with widespread shareholders. Ownership of this company will be discussed in the next chapter as it raises interesting questions regarding the local-global networks of the Focolare and the Economy of Sharing businesses. The rest of the Economy of Sharing businesses in this study were all either completely owned by the managing directors of the companies, or partly owned by the directors or owned by close colleagues of the directors who shared the desire to participate in the Economy of Sharing.

Such a trend of owner-directorship within the Economy of Sharing is significant as it marks a reversal of the current well-documented trend towards the disembedding of corporate ownership in which there is a constant split between management and ownership. Within the Economy of Sharing, this re-embedding of 'ownership' within the location of the firm itself means that there is a trend towards localisation of decision making, since the business directors do not have to answer to remote shareholders who expect dividends. To some extent, the pressure for greater efficiency that anonymous shareholders would exert on the business is replaced by the desire to produce more for the Economy of Sharing.

Remaking the role of shareholders

The interests of the shareholders within the Economy of Sharing businesses, therefore, closely coincide with those of the company directors, giving them the ability to make executive decisions on the distribution of company profits. In effect, the profits which are distributed mean that the directors themselves forego the dividends that they could receive and invest these in the Economy of Sharing. There is no conflict of interests in this respect. The prevalence of the owner-director relationship also enables the directors to keep control of the internal workings of the business, meaning that the quality of the Economy of Sharing ethos can be upheld at all levels. This desire to retain control of the internal workings and the profits of the company could explain the reason why the Economy of Sharing has not resulted in more people, such as employees, becoming shareholders. Giving over ownership to a 'remote' party, such as through flotation on the stock market, would undermine the security of the Economy of Sharing, above all in terms of its underlying values.

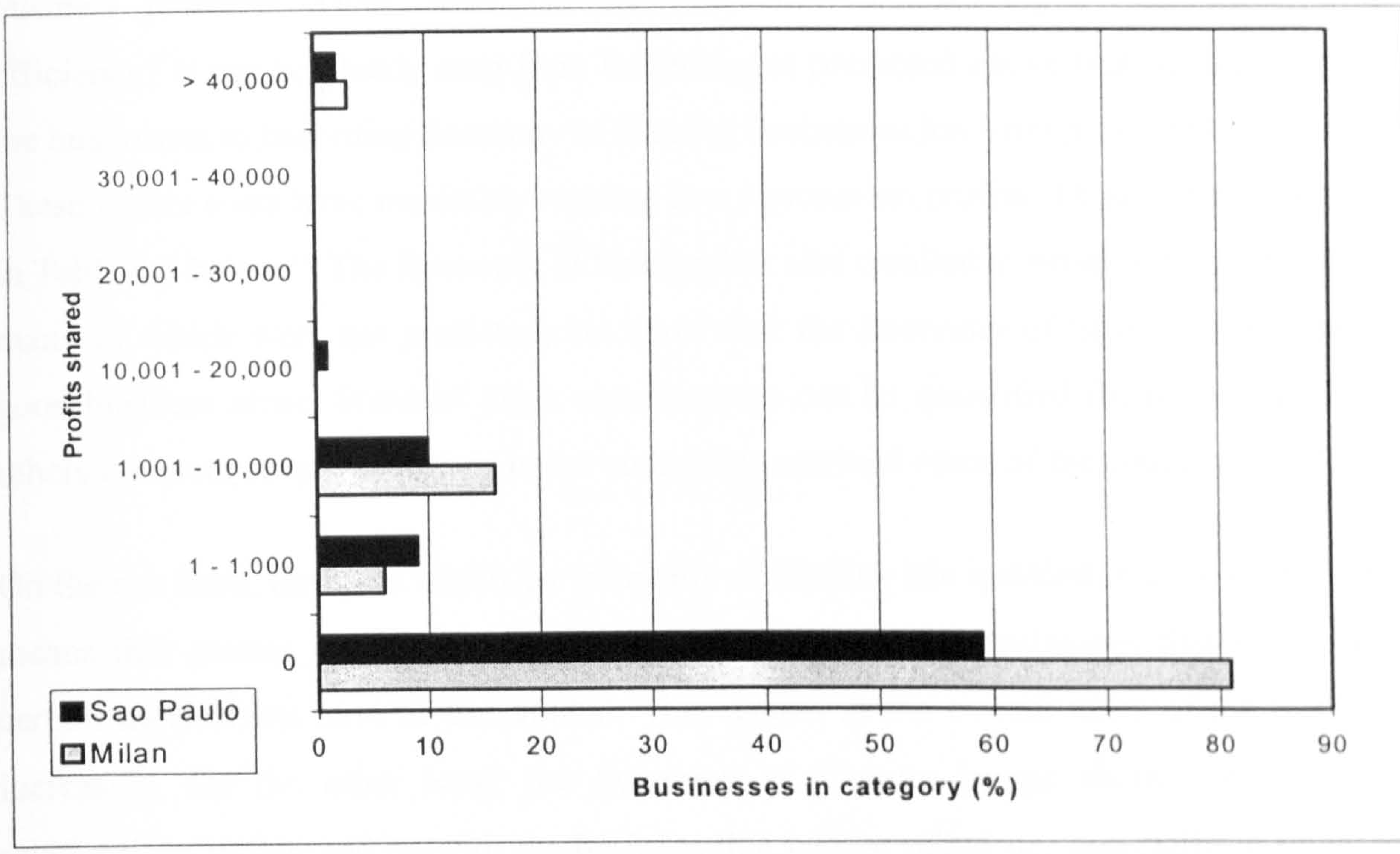
The question which arises, though, is the extent to which this limited number of shareholders limits the development of the Economy of Sharing businesses. Two further questions derive from this: how can the Economy of Sharing businesses generate adequate financial resources without the kind of investment raised by flotation on the stock market? Could the Economy of Sharing be applied in situations in which there is separation between management and ownership? These are questions which will have to be considered as the Economy of Sharing develops. The growth of ethical investment funds within the stock market could provide one avenue of investment capital for the businesses in the future.[142] Future listed Economy of Sharing companies would take this trend one step further by advocating that shareholders should forego dividends altogether and donate them to the Economy of Sharing. Another possible solution to these problems could come from the growing networks of Economy of Sharing businesses and groups across the world. These groups could arguably provide opportunities for 'internal' collaboration and partnerships in which there could be separation between investment and management, but still set within a global community of like-minded individuals who share the Economy of Sharing objectives. The prospect for such a future pattern for development is already visible on a national level in Brazil within *Espri*. Through the Focolare, the Economy of Sharing could offer the possibility of shareholder ownership to a vast network of people who share the principal aim of developing the Economy of Sharing. However it is difficult to see how companies could be restricted to working within these networks, which moreover could jeopardise their stability and put strain on the relationships.

Does 'love' limit efficiency?

The analysis of the various relationships and networks in which the Economy of Sharing businesses find themselves, underlines the fact that the Economy of Sharing businesses have at least two 'co-essential' goals against which to measure success. The first of these is that of running the business efficiently in current market conditions so as produce profits to be shared in common. As with other businesses, the underlying rationale behind this process is instrumental. The business, as a 'place', exists to produce surplus value which can be shared out for other purposes. In the case of the Economy of Sharing, this surplus value is divided into the three parts according to the aims of the Economy of Sharing (one for those in need, one for the spread of the culture of giving and a third for re-investment). The second aim, however, is that of transforming the production process to bring it into line with the spiritual and social ideals of the Focolare. This is about the creation and maintenance of 'Trinitarian relationships' within the business at all levels and in the networks through which the business is operating.

[142] Through such funds, it could be argued, that individuals with specific ethical beliefs or concerns forego a percentage of possible income from their investment in return for 'social' benefits. Within the Economy of Sharing, the dividends which are foregone by investors could be returned in the form of the 'social' benefits of the Economy of Sharing.

Figure 8.2 Profits shared for the Economy of Sharing 1998 (US$)



Source: Fieldwork in Sao Paulo and Milan, 1997-98

The examples above show that, whereas the former is regarded as the principal aim of the Economy of Sharing by the Focolare Centre, in reality, in the businesses on the ground, the quality of internal and external relationships is what seems to be the main concern. The level of profit-sharing remains very low. Figure 8.2 shows that in 1998, over 80% of the business directors interviewed in Milan, and around 60% in Sao Paulo, had not yet contributed any profits to the Economy of Sharing. Of those that had already shared a proportion of their profits, most had given small donations (arguably in proportion to the size of the business). Only a very small number, around 10%, had shared above $40,000 in that year.

The internal space of the business, and attending to the needs of those who form the immediate business community, is hence continuously balanced against the need to make profits and provide for the wider needs of the Economy of Sharing. This desire to attend to the needs of and within the business, prompts questions about the efficiency of the businesses in generating profits to share in common. The primary objective of the Economy of Sharing businesses has to be that of surviving within the market economy, otherwise there will be no profits to share in common. One of the main issues that has had to be faced by the Economy of Sharing businesses is the extent to which a business philosophy which draws so much on altruistic principles is compatible with profitable business practices. Does 'love', in the Focolare understanding of the word, limit efficiency? It can be clearly seen from the evidence presented above that the transition of the businesses to becoming Economy of Sharing businesses has brought a number of costs. These higher costs have inevitably resulted in a squeeze on profits. These are summarised in Table 8.2 below.[143] The Economy of Sharing has also resulted in benefits to the business, many of which were not predicted, but show that the Economy of Sharing often makes good business sense. Some of these consequences can be quantified financially, whereas others are more social, and relate to the underlying spiritual ethos of the company.

On the one hand, the ethos which the Economy of Sharing has instilled into the businesses, means that greater investment needs to be made within the businesses themselves and certain transactions have to be avoided. This results in the overall costs of the business increasing. On the other hand, the Economy of Sharing brings about a network of relationships within and outwith the business that can be relied on, especially in times of crisis, providing a mechanism for coping in crises which is largely absent in conventional capitalist businesses. The quality of the various relationships within the companies and between the businesses can be likened to increasing 'social capital' (Coleman, 1988) in which the high levels of trust and co-operation in the businesses also have a financial benefit. This social capital, however, cannot simply be reduced to 'good will' in the case of the Economy of Sharing. The social capital can also be seen as a network of contacts, of tacit knowledge and moral courage to endure difficulties for the greater good of the Economy of Sharing.

[143] The table shows a summary of all the reported changes and benefits brought about by the Economy of Sharing. It is not intended as an account of the changes in one particular business - since the simultaneous application of all of these changes would be unsustainable.

Table 8.2 The costs and benefits of the Economy of Sharing

Costs incurred from the application of the Economy of Sharing	Benefits from the application of the Economy of Sharing:
Investment in the work-force – training courses, higher wages/bonuses, taking on new recruits	Increased productivity through greater team spirit
Investment in the environment – technology; pressures on suppliers and clients	Increased levels of innovation through active participation of all in the business through shared sense of ownership
Investment in occupational health – work safety	Dedication of workers to work extra time to get through difficult times
Investment in the local community – voluntary services to local organisations, Focolare community	Loyalty of customers – value the production process and the product
Investment in 'global society' through the distribution of profits to the Economy of Sharing.	International network of support and contacts through the Focolare – autarkic tendencies, sharing technology
Payment of Taxes	Fiscal transparency enables careful planning during crises
Loss of orders due to stance against corruption	Spiritual motivation to endure extreme hardships rather than see the project fail - belief in providence

Source: Fieldwork in Sao Paulo and Milan, 1997-98

Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined the various ways in which the Focolare spirituality has been translated into particular attitudes and practices within the Economy of Sharing businesses. Within the businesses in Italy and Brazil, there are strong similarities in the attitudes of the business directors on aspects of business such as legality, relationship with employees and those with competitors. The overall objective of the businesses is that of improving the quality of the relationships within the business itself as a precondition to sharing profits with the Economy of Sharing. In a sense, the business directors come to regard the business as a 'social' place and not simply an 'economic' one.[144] This has led to a range of transformations in how the relationships within the business and the variety of relationships with surround the institution of the firm are viewed within capitalist economies.

[144] Such a conclusion prompts further questions about the quality of everyday work/social relations as played out 'on the ground' in actual places of work. Such micro-geographies of the workplace have been considered in the work of Crang (1994).

The picture which emerges, therefore, highlights on the one hand the tensions that exist between the ideals of the Focolare and the perspective of the economy therein, with the existing conditions 'on the ground' in Italy and Brazil. In particular, it highlights the way in which the legal system in each of the countries can operate in ways which penalise exactly the kinds of 'social' changes which the businesses are seeking to implement. The legal system is geared towards enforcing transparent competition and non-discrimination, and does not encourage reciprocal relationships as they are understood within the Economy of Sharing. This situation is heightened by a context in which there is institutionalised corruption and unethical practices which are often too entrenched to challenge. Within such a context, many Economy of Sharing businesses have had to make a stance against such practices.

On the other hand, the view from within the businesses highlighted the overlap between the ethical practices of the Economy of Sharing and 'sound' economic practices. The advantages which the business directors put down to participation in the Economy of Sharing such as legal tax avoidance, good training, bonuses, staffing policies and loyalty, quality services and reputation, and inter-firm collaboration, are all practices which are recognised as good business acumen. Moreover, the decision to give a percentage of ones profits to 'good causes' is an idea which is already practised by millions of businesses both individually, or through organisations such as the Rotarians. As an ideal, the Economy of Sharing is based on the distinctive Focolare economic vision - in practice it shares much in common with other forms of giving already in place within the economy. This overlap could provide possible avenues for the future development of the Economy of Sharing on a wider scale.

9. Making space for sharing: local – global networks

The Economy of Sharing businesses are attempting to renew the network of relationships within and surrounding the business. Through the application of the Focolare spirituality, the business directors are able to re-imagine the place of business, redefining it as a 'social' space, as well as an economic one, in the utilitarian sense. The dominance of the economic rationale of profitability, however, does not exist only within individual firms. It is in the 'in-between' space that defines the relationship between firms that the market logic of competition is arguably most prevalent. The market economy is perceived as a battle for superiority above all between corporate bodies. The previous chapter showed that the Economy of Sharing has begun to involve the network of relationship between firms, at a local level, and also at a global scale. It is this relationship between companies and with other economic institutions that creates space within the economy for the development of a new business mentality in which alternative values to the dominant ones are practised and pursued. In this chapter, I will examine the networks which have grown up through the Economy of Sharing at a local and global level, using the businesses in Milan and Brazil as examples of regional groups within the context of the globalised Economy of Sharing networks.

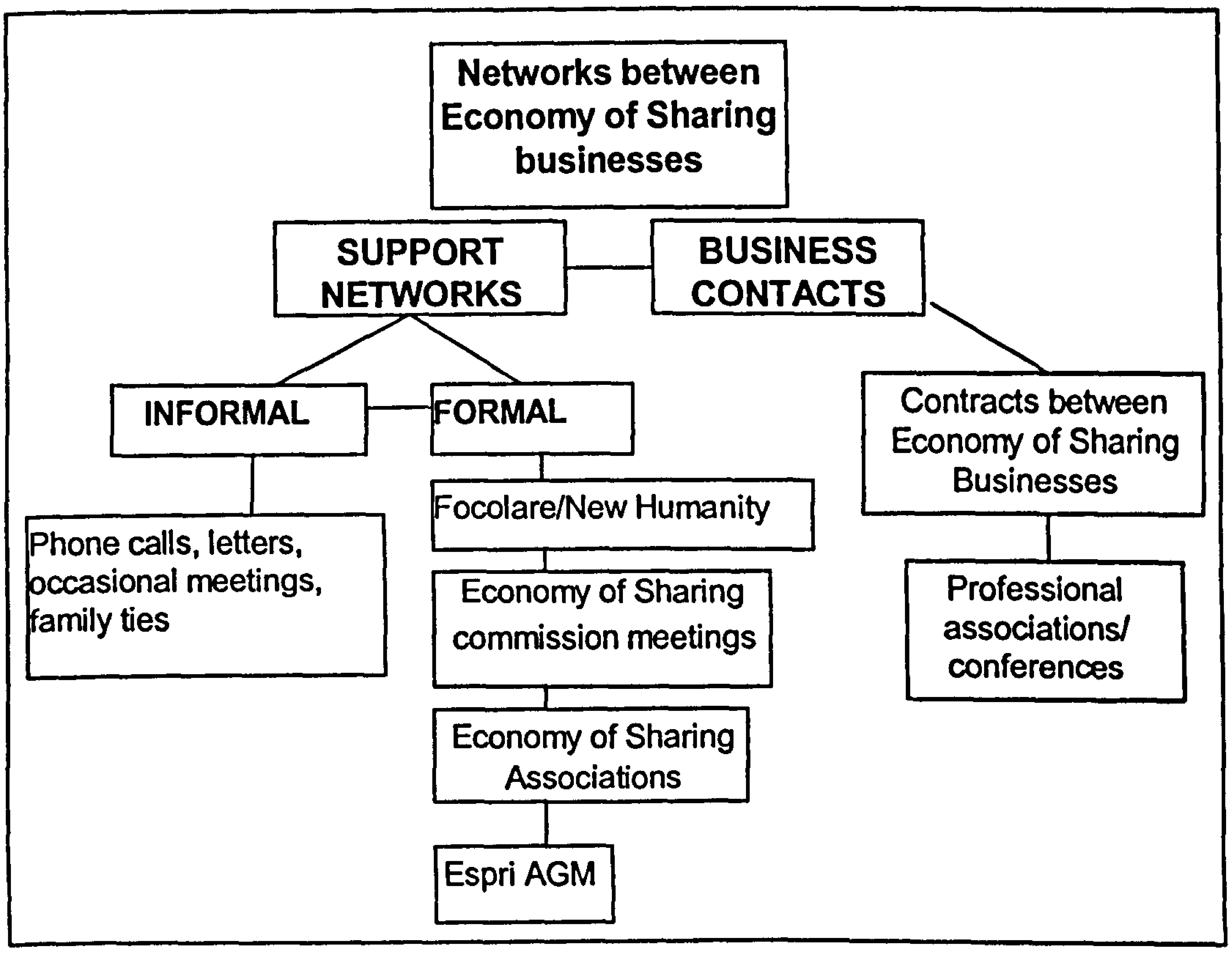
Emerging 'Economy of Sharing' spaces

One of the main features of the Economy of Sharing, which in some ways distinguishes it from other attempts to reform the economy is that the local businesses are linked to other businesses all over the world that are attempting to put into practice the same principles.[145] This global consciousness within the Economy of Sharing, on the one hand gave the directors a profound sense of contributing to a project which extends far beyond their own business, which is some way was universal: "Our experience is not a local one, it is a global one" [01SP]. At the same time, the global nature of the Economy of Sharing made them realise that they were one node in a global network of small, but significant businesses, giving them many practical opportunities to expand their own enterprises.

[145] Economic reformers, such as the Quakers in Britain in the 19th century, also displayed the tendency to collaborate, though this was primarily at a local scale and not internationally. The tendency towards insider dealings within the Quaker networks often led to them being branded as 'dishonest', illustrating how inter-firm collaboration in view of a greater good can be interpreted as anti-competitive (see Nevaskar, 1971).

Based on the research done in the two case study regions, it is possible to distinguish between two types of relationship between the directors of the Economy of Sharing businesses. The first kind of relationship can be called *'support networks'* specifically linked to the creation of spaces in which the difficulties and needs of Economy of Sharing businesses can be openly discussed. The second kind of network is what I have called a *'networks of business contacts'*. This network, which is entangled with the first, provides the business directors and other entrepreneurs, with the possibility of meeting other business directors with whom they can form business ties.[146] A diagram of the various networks is provided in Figure 9.1 below.

Figure 9.1 Regional Economy of Sharing networks



Source: Fieldwork in Italy and Brazil, 1997-98

Although both of the case study regions shared many aspects of these networks, there are a significant differences in the Economy of Sharing networks in Milan and Sao Paulo. The support which Economy of Sharing businesses provide for each other is essential to the

[146] There are similarities here with the networks of businesses formed by other humanitarian associations such as the Rotarians or the Lions Clubs. Such organisations were formed principally with the aim of humanising the market economy through applying humanistic principals both within the business and in the way that the profits from the businesses were spent. Over the years, however, they have also formed a natural way for likeminded business people to meet and form contacts (Rotary International, 2000).

survival of the Economy of Sharing as a whole, given the difficulties which the businesses face in attempting to put such high principles into practice within the market economy. Two related networks can be distinguished; the informal and the formal. The informal networks consist of voluntary personal contacts - phone calls, visits, letters, - between two or more business directors on a regular basis. The more formal network of contacts consists of a range of meetings organised by the commissions for the Economy of Sharing on a regional, national and international basis, or by Economy of Sharing Associations which the directors had established themselves. In these meetings, personal and commercial contacts are strengthened and various dimensions of the Economy of Sharing can be examined in greater detail.

Support networks in Sao Paulo

In Sao Paulo, the Economy of Sharing businesses met as a regional group once a year at the annual convention for Economy of Sharing businesses in Araceli, which was arranged to coincide with the *Espri* Annual General Meeting. All of the business directors interviewed participated in these meetings each year. Through the national meeting, the business directors were able to grasp the breadth of the developments of the Economy of Sharing in the whole of the country, giving them a shared vision and sense of participation in the project. The directors stressed how the emphasis of these meetings had altered in recent years. In the first few national meetings, the emphasis was on the more technical aspects of business –financial difficulties, technological development, marketing – but given the diverse range of businesses within the remit of the project and the various sectors in which they were operating, this approach became very difficult. Meetings of this sort would have had to be organised according to sector groups and not as a national meeting. This made the organisers – a group of business people with Economy of Sharing businesses - reflect on the main purpose of the national meetings and come up with a revised programme. The revised meeting focused much more on the spiritual dimension of the Economy of Sharing and the various ways that businesses were trying to apply this vision. Significant examples of successful businesses were highlighted and much time was left for quiet reflection, as well as time for dialogue with more experienced business people. This change in the focus of national meetings appears to have had an important impact on the Economy of Sharing in the country. One of the directors of *Espri* explained how the change took place:

"We meet up once a year. There is a national meeting for the

> Economy of Sharing, for the business owners of the Economy of Sharing and this meeting in very important. What we have seen over the years, through the experience that we have gained, is that in the beginning, the business people wanted these meetings to look at technical things - how to manage a business, productivity, or professional skills. We could see that this is something that all business people can find in their own work. There are organisations set up by the government which do this. They provide a professional analysis of the business. What we felt that was missing was the foundation of the Economy of Sharing, the exchange of experiences, and witnesses about how to live out these things. It took us a few years to realise this because we thought that we had to be more practical and we could see that this is not the way it is. The people who are involved in the Economy of Sharing - the owners, managers, administration etc - need this foundation which is based on lived experience. This is something that you can find in these meetings of the Economy of Sharing which are made up of people from all sectors, experts etc. There is the need for this basis. This is the only place where you will find this. You can't find this outside" [11SP].

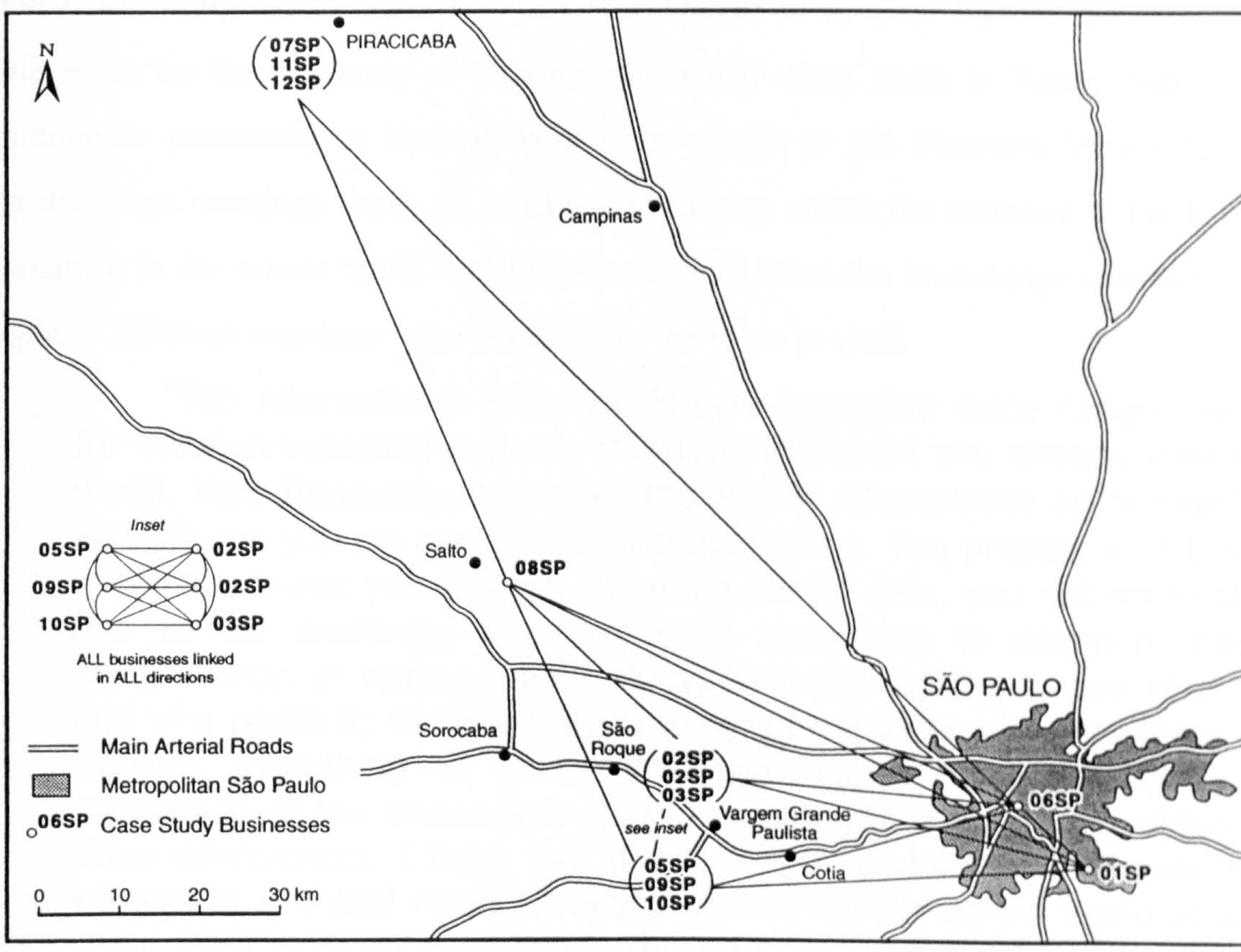
What is interesting is the way that the business directors themselves recognised the particular 'gap' which the Economy of Sharing could fill. It could not offer expertise in a new form of technology or financial management - but it could offer the 'foundation' for the Economy of Sharing based on the 'exchange of experiences and witnesses'. In other words, these meetings acted as a focal point for learning from other experiences, reinforcing the underlying ethos among all the businesses in Brazil. This need for the opportunity to exchange experiences on how the Economy of Sharing could be applied was echoed by other business directors in relation to the importance of these meetings:

> "I would say that first of all there is the joy of knowing that this project is leading the way, that there is global interest in the project and that all over the world there are people who are fighting for this. Then you can see the evolution of the businesses - all of them are growing and the number of workers involved is growing. There are weaknesses here and there, but the great majority are in evolution and growth. Then there is the experience that this gives us because I have the feeling that here in Brazil, because of the government, because of inflation... When you hear the experiences from other regions you get the feeling that we are much better off and this comforts us and encourages us to go ahead" [01SP].

The business directors in Brazil, moreover, stressed the importance of keeping the 'world vision" alive amongst the directors through these meetings: "it gives you a world vision of the Economy of Sharing, and it can even open up new horizons" [05SP]. Although the local vision was important to them, the opportunity to meet was about opening up their vision to the global - since without this local sense of the global, there would be little prospect for sharing out profits beyond their particular local community. The meetings gave them a profound sense of belonging to a global community, even though their own businesses were firmly situated in a local context. This sense of the 'global' was offering them a sense of vast opportunity - 'leading the way', 'new horizons'. It gave them courage and enthusiasm to put the spirit of the Economy of Sharing into practice in their businesses, despite the inevitable difficulties and possible opposition to the idea at a local level.

Despite the fact that the national meetings only took place on an annual basis amongst the business directors in Sao Paulo, there was a strong sense of a close knit local community. All the directors knew the directors of the other businesses personally, were aware of the situations that existed within the other Economy of Sharing businesses (exact function of other businesses, commercial difficulties, personal problems etc.) and felt supported by the others. There was a very high level of personal ties between the business directors and their families based on informal exchanges of phone calls, letters and private visits. This exchange was facilitated by the fact that many of the business directors are also on the directorate of *Espri*, the company which manages the industrial estate near Araceli. They made use of the monthly *Espri* meetings to keep up with the other people involved in the Economy of Sharing near Araceli. The map of the personal contacts between the Economy of Sharing businesses, Figure 9.2, interviewed illustrates this point. From this diagram, it is clear that there is a high level of regular personal contacts between the business directors of the Economy of Sharing in the zone of Sao Paulo. The network focuses geographically on the industrial estate near Araceli.

As can be seen from Figure 9.2, the businesses in Sao Paulo region are spread over a wide geographical area. There are clusters of businesses within the various cities in the state of Sao Paulo and in particular, a concentration of businesses in the area that surrounds the model town of Araceli. The level of personal contacts between the businesses, however, does not appear to be affected by the variation in distances between the businesses. All of the businesses interviewed had close ties with the other businesses, despite the distances involved. One reason for this could be the strong desire of the businesses to succeed in the Economy of Sharing and their awareness that this is only possible through helping one another to overcome the tendency of the market to undermine co-operative relationships.



Source: Fieldwork, São Paulo, August 1998.

Figure 9.2 Map of Support Networks in São Paulo

The personal contacts, however, also extended beyond the local area, with many of the business directors having close links with business people in other countries including other Latin American nations and Europe: "Our experience is not a local one, it is a global experience" [07SP]. Many of these contacts were with people whom they had known through the Focolare Movement but had only become aware of their business ties through the Economy of Sharing. This sense of personal ties throughout the world meant that whilst the directors had a 'world vision', it was not synonymous with something abstract or detached from their personal experience. The sense of the global which the Brazilian directors experienced was about participating in a global community with people who were identifiable. Many of the directors had participated in at least one of the international conferences on the Economy of Sharing which had taken place in Rome, funding their participation personally or through help from people in the Focolare Movement. They regarded these meetings above all as an opportunity to assess the situation of the Economy of Sharing in the whole world and to gain strength from the knowledge that many other people in different countries were working for the same project:

> "This international exchange is very important since congresses held for different industrial sectors - chemical, industrial, etc. already exist in the world. Very frequently, however, these only concentrate on the technical aspects and you are not able to give everything. You present your business in terms of what you do, you share superficial data, you sell some alcohol etc. In our meetings, since we have something in common, there is transparency: in terms of technology, they are looking to see who has it and who needs it; there is transparency on the level of relationships - you transmit everything to the person who needs that information. The experience of the business is shared completely. This is very different to other conferences. I think that this is very important also because it is a witness to a united world. It bears witness to this united world at a time when here in Brazil everyone is talking about globalisation. Globalisation, globalisation... there is no way back... and we can see that as Economy of Sharing business people we are working for another aspect: the globalisation of love. I feel that this aspect - there is already the globalisation of technology, finance - but we contribute in this respect through working for the globalisation of love. This means disinterested giving, being prepared to also transfer technology, solidarity. The globalisation of love - which is translated into solidarity. This is disinterested giving - sharing" [10SP].

In this answer, the director in some ways focuses in on the specific aim of the Economy of Sharing in view of the globalisation of the free market - 'working for the globalisation of love'. Although such an idea jars with current theories of globalisation (and sounds rather quaint), he was very specific in what he meant by 'love'. He was not referring to a sentimental feeling of 'one world' but a practical commitment to care for those far away - 'love - which is translated into solidarity' - through the Economy of Sharing.

These informal support networks, however, also translated into practical help for other businesses within the Economy of Sharing at a local scale. For example, more experienced businesses offered advice to newer businesses on various aspects of technology, expertise and administration. Wherever possible, they would be happy to give occasional free services to the others in order to enable them to grow and develop, seeing this as a service of 'sharing' within the Economy of Sharing. This was particularly the case, but not exclusively, where the businesses were within easy geographical reach of each other:

> "There are some business which are here near by, and we work together, sharing the responsibility and our talents. We are in contact with other businesses which are further away in order to help them through sharing our experience, since our business is a bit bigger and has a little more experience. We offer our administrative experience with the other businesses which need it" [01SP].

This support network proved to be critical when difficult situations arose within the businesses, putting at risk the values of the Economy of Sharing or the future of the business itself. Several business directors said that they would not have had the will or the strength to continue if it had not been for the friendship and support of the other businesses. In particular, one business director in Sao Paulo[147] had experienced a very tough situation in the past year. One of the partners in the business, who was not of the Economy of Sharing, had been found to be embezzling the funds of the company. This betrayal of trust created a very painful situation that could easily have led to the closure of the company and the loss of many jobs. The director said that without the Economy of Sharing it would have most definitely led to this. When talking to other business directors, many of them cited this particular situation as if it were happening in their own business.

The personal relationships between the directors in Brazil was facilitated by the existence and development of the industrial estate at Araceli. As well as providing a commercial focus for the Economy of Sharing in Brazil, the industrial estate also offered the possibility to get to know others who are participating in the project. Participating in the development of the estate also offered encouragement to those who were experiencing difficulties within

[147] Who asked to remain anonymous

their own businesses.

Support networks in Milan

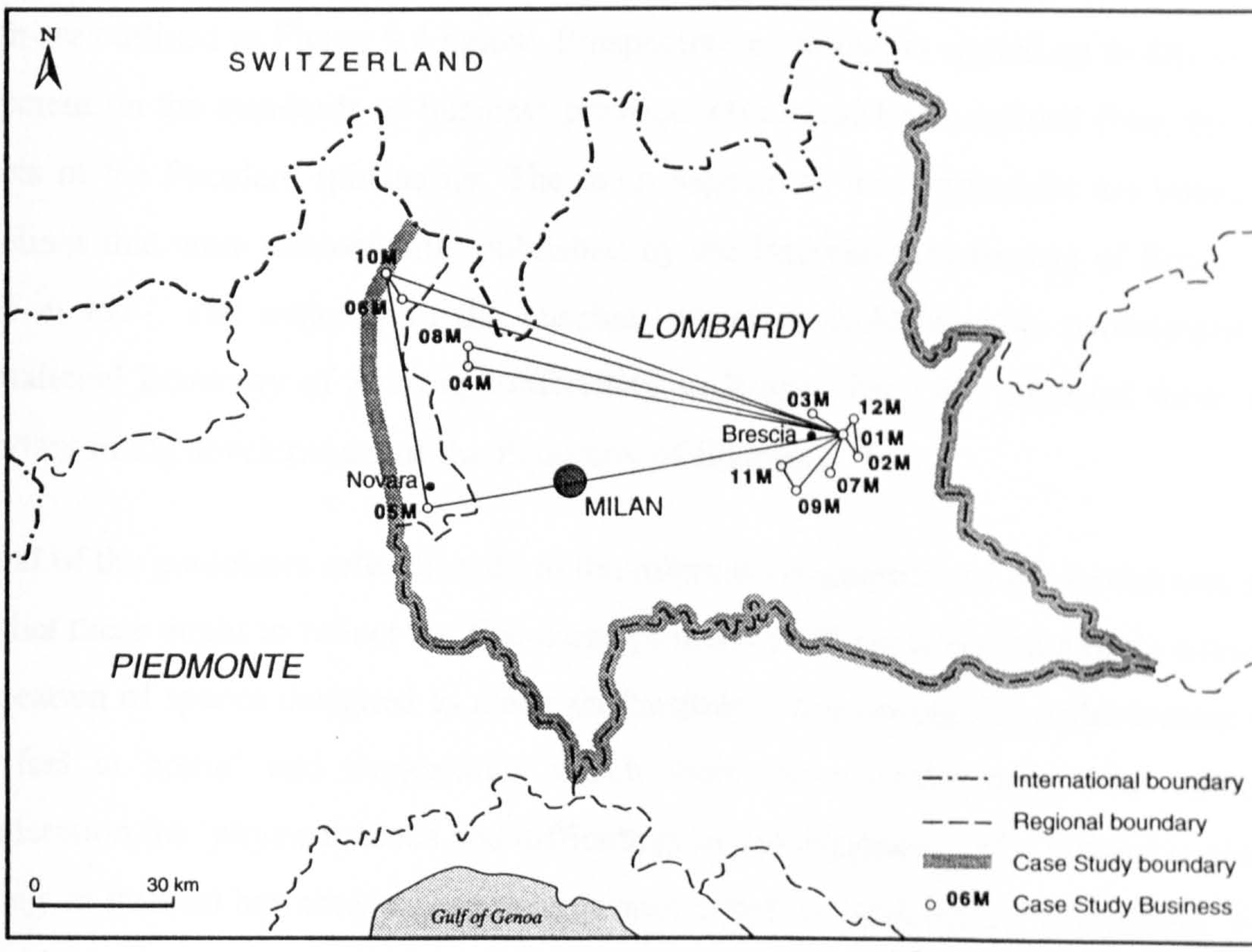
The support networks in Brazil differed in many respects to those in the Milan region, although the businesses also participated in informal and formal support networks to some degree. The Milan support networks are illustrated in Figure 9.3 on the next page. As in Brazil, the main function of these was to provide moral support and encouragement in putting the principles of the Economy of Sharing into practice, especially in difficult times:

> "We hold meetings now and again. There have been a few and they help us an awful lot to go ahead when we share our difficulties. We do not feel that we are on our own. I remember that there was a time last year when we were embarking on a project, and therefore had a lot of apprehension, but when we heard that P was going through a difficult time, we felt that we were in it together - one heart and one soul. This still keeps me going" [06M].

They used these meetings to share the practical difficulties they face in trying to apply the Economy of Sharing ethos in their businesses, such as improving the relationship with employees and clarifying the legal status of the business. Likewise, participation in the Economy of Sharing gave the business directors a sense of participating in a common project in which the relationships were founded on 'communion'. Within these relationships there was a mutual sense of openness and an ability to tell each other truths and even to correct each other:

> "The other kind of relationships that have come about and are still emerging, are relationships of communion, you could say, where we are talk about common problems which we face. What I have noticed is that it is not that anyone has the solution to all the problems. There will always be problems, but if you sit round a table and are able to talk about your problem and feel that the other understands you, it is very important. Especially if you understand that the other person understands you not just because he is a business person like you, but because we have a common goal – the desire to share our profits with the poor, the preferential option for the poor. So I can speak to you or another Economy of Sharing business person and even though we may not actually say it, the aim is the same. So it is important to understand that sometimes there are things that you are doing that are not going well. If you speak to someone about it, they can analyse your business in truth and in freedom, if you share the same feeling" [08M].

The relationships between the businesses in Milan had been formalised in a business association for the Economy of Sharing that was formed in 1995. One of the founding



Source: Fieldwork, Milan, January 1998.

Figure 9.3 Map of Support Networks in Milan Region

members explains how this association came about.

> "It came about because we wanted all the money that arrived to be managed transparently and at the same time not to fall into the hands of just one person. Beforehand, there was one person who did everything, but now we have formed this Association for the Economy of Sharing... All the money that is given, is gathered by the Association" [04M].

The main function of the Association, therefore, was to provide an intermediary for the collection of profits which were then passed on to the Focolare Movement. The Association, however, also serves other purposes in organising meetings in conjunction with the commission for the Economy of Sharing in the region. In 1995, for example, it issued a series of guidelines for the businesses that wished to participate in the Association which are outlined in Figure 9.4 below. Prospective participants signed up to this voluntary agreement on the standards of business practice which had been derived from the various aspects of the Focolare spirituality. The main aspects of this agreement are based on the guidelines that were subsequently published by the International Bureau of Economy and Work in 1997. The majority of the business directors in Milan also participated in the international Economy of Sharing conferences in Rome. They too regarded them as very important in the development of the Economy of Sharing.

Several of the guidelines refer directly to the internal geographies of the businesses and the way that these ought to reflect the Focolare spirituality. These involved simple advice, like the creation of spaces designed to make the business 'welcoming for collaborators so that they feel at home' and suggestions which were more challenging, like taking into consideration the 'physical needs and difficulties of collaborators'. The emphasis placed on creating an internal harmony within the business which is 'welcoming and serene' in some ways mirrors the tendency in business to emphasise a spiritual dimension (as mentioned in Chapter 7). The underlying rationale behind this in the Economy of Sharing businesses, however, is not so much that of promoting productivity, but as an expression of the caring relationships that ought to exist between everyone in the business and with the environment. Thus, the guidelines referring to the internal geographies of the businesses relate mostly to aspects of the physical environment which would improve the relationships between various collaborators.

Figure 9.4 Guidelines for business practice within Economy of Sharing businesses

Economy and Work

- Solidarity. Promote various initiatives in favour of those in need (e.g. loans or direct help to employees in need, donations or contributions for social needs
- Create new jobs
- Reconcile the various needs of the business, and make provision to donate part of the profits for the Economy of Sharing project

Relationships

Starting from the assumption that the 'person' is at the centre and not work, try, amongst other things to check:

- That the structure of the business favours the human relationships within it
- That meaningful relationships are established with clients, suppliers, or other people connected with the business
- whether the way of running the business, inspired by this new culture, leads to questions over the motivation behind the business

Ethics and Economy

It would be good to look at the effort made in the running of the business to maintain a correct relationship:

- with institutions (taxation, inspectors, unions)
- with competitors
- with employees (fair and adequate pay, etc.)

Health

The physical well-being of collaborators has to be given particular care and attention, not only because it increases production. It would be good to check:

- in cases where there is a hazardous activity, whether all the norms of occupational health are being respected
- if the physical needs and difficulties of collaborators are being considered (for example: Good ventilation, lighting, clean work space, comfortable working position without compromising standards, good seating, etc.)
- whether shifts are arranged in such a way as to allow adequate periods of rest

Harmony and Environment

A welcoming and serene atmosphere requires an appropriate environment. Check carefully whether:

- there is space within the business which responds to the practical needs of welcoming people, meeting, and eating
- the environment can be adapted in simple ways to make it more welcoming for collaborators so that they feel at home

Studies and Professional Training

- initiatives undertaken to improve and increase the professional skills within the business as a whole and within the individual sectors (production, administration, commerce etc.)
- Participation in training courses and time set aside for refresher courses and study

Communications

- Employee participation in the decision making of the firm, through seeking and listening to their needs and proposals
- Analyse the initiatives taken within the business so that the sense of collaboration amongst everyone can grow and people do not feel isolated in their corner of work.

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Translation by Lorna Gold

It would appear, however, that the businesses in Milan are experiencing greater difficulties than their Brazilian counterparts in establishing support networks with other businesses in the region. Although the businesses in Milan met together quarterly to discuss how to progress as Economy of Sharing businesses [10M] and had formalised their businesses in an association, several expressed a desire to have more time to get to know other business owners:

> "Here in Piemonte, in Lombardy ... we meet regularly, about three or four times a year, so there is a relationship. I see the relationship as very limited so far - it is difficult for us to get to know each other. We see each other, certainly, but I do not know what the other is going through. In my opinion, we need friendship – not friendship in the sense of wanting the other to be my friend, but knowing the other. Just as I cannot get to know the business of my competitors or acquaintances, I find that I do not know the businesses of the Economy of Sharing, even though I may know the person who owns it for years. For me this is something which needs to be developed more" [10M].

In this quote, the director is expressing exactly the opposite of what the business directors in Sao Paulo were experiencing. The Brazilian directors stressed that what mattered most to them was creating a relationship of communion with the other business directors involved in the Economy of Sharing - one based on 'knowing the other'. The interviews illustrated the way that the directors did know each other - not in a superficial way, but they did indeed 'know what the other is going through' and continuously related their experiences to the other businesses. Their relationships were founded on a sincere friendship and not a formality.

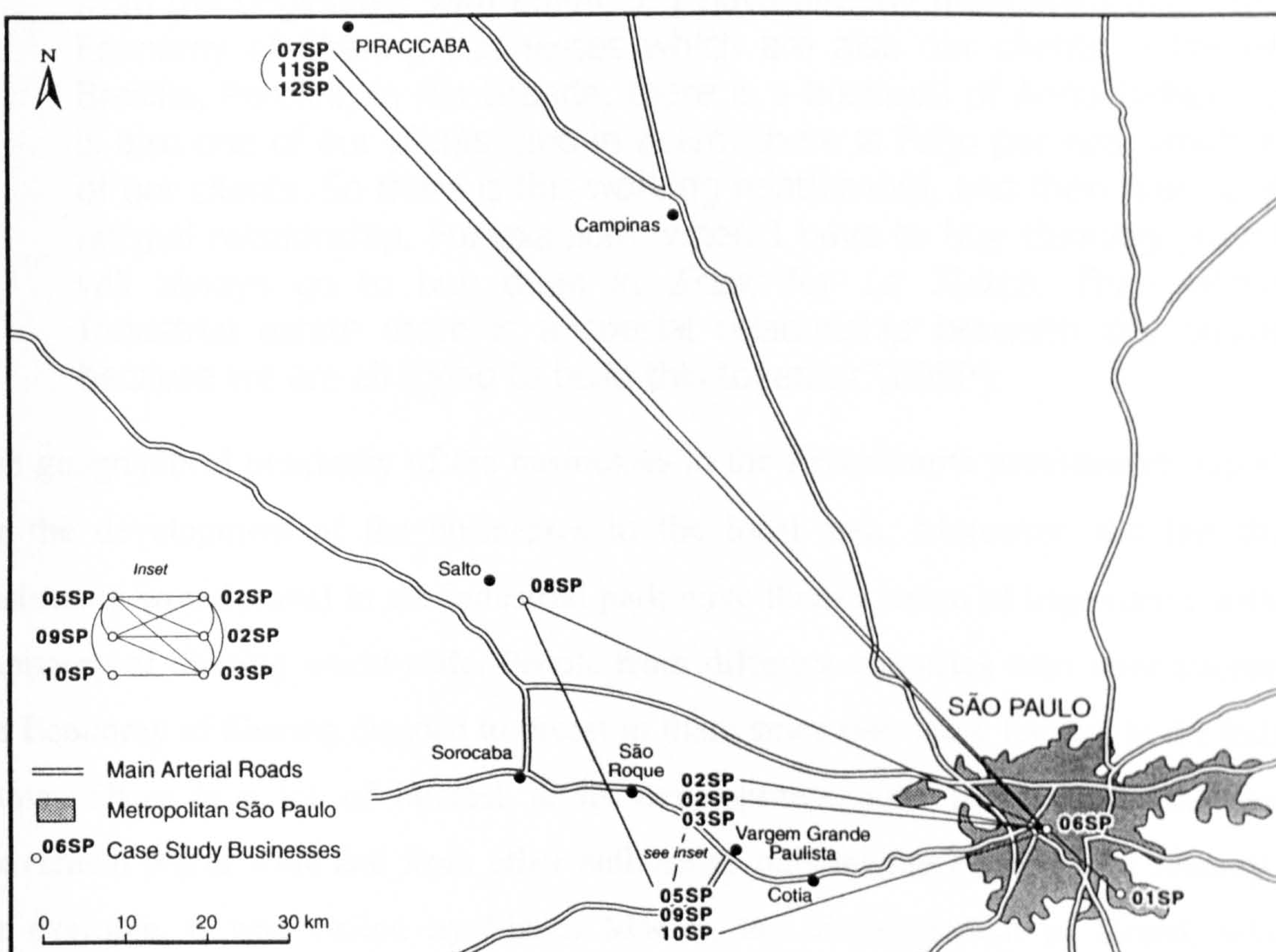
In Milan, however, they recognised that this communion was the basis of the Economy of Sharing, but found this 'knowing the other' much more difficult. The business directors in this region were much less aware of the other Economy of Sharing businesses than the Brazilians – where they were, what they produce, who owned them - and tended to feel more isolated. They saw a greater need to meet more often (despite the fact they met on average 3-4 times per year) and to find time to get to know the other business directors. The formal association of the Economy of Sharing did not appear to be providing an adequate basis for the establishment of a more informal support network.

Some of the directors put this lack of contact between the businesses down to the simple geography of the region and the location of the businesses in relation to each other. "There are contacts with other businesses. Not with a lot of them because they are very spread out over the territory so it becomes a bit difficult" [05M]. In the region of Milan itself there is no common focus for the development of the Economy of Sharing, such as the industrial estate in Brazil, which acts as a cluster. This focus on a shared project gave the business directors in Brazil a common focus for their enthusiasm for the Economy of Sharing outside their own business. In Milan, on the other hand, when the business directors meet together, it was to discuss the developments of the Economy of Sharing within their own businesses and not the development of a shared project. In some ways this led to them becoming focused on themselves and their particular difficulties as a region, rather than looking outwards to the Economy of Sharing as a shared space in the wider economy.

Commercial contacts in Sao Paulo

The other level of networks that have begun to emerge through the Economy of Sharing is that of formal business links between the businesses in the form of business contracts and transactions. Although the businesses participating in the Economy of Sharing cross over a wide range of commercial sectors, there is some scope for the businesses to form alliances amongst themselves. Again, in this respect, there is a marked difference between Italy and Brazil, demonstrating a close link between the levels of personal contacts and commercial contacts. This aspect is much more highly developed in Sao Paulo, despite the fact that the businesses there have the same degree of sectoral variation as in Milan.

The links between the businesses in Sao Paulo are shown in Figures 9.5 on the next page. This map shows current patterns of commerical transactions between the businesses participating in this study. It shows clearly that that in Sao Paulo the level of commercial contacts between the businesses is already fairly highly developed. All of the businesses have some commercial contact with other Economy of Sharing businesses in the region. In particular, the cluster of businesses which are in the vicinity of Araceli have strong commercial links amongst themselves and with other Economy of Sharing businesses in Brazil (see Figure 9.6).



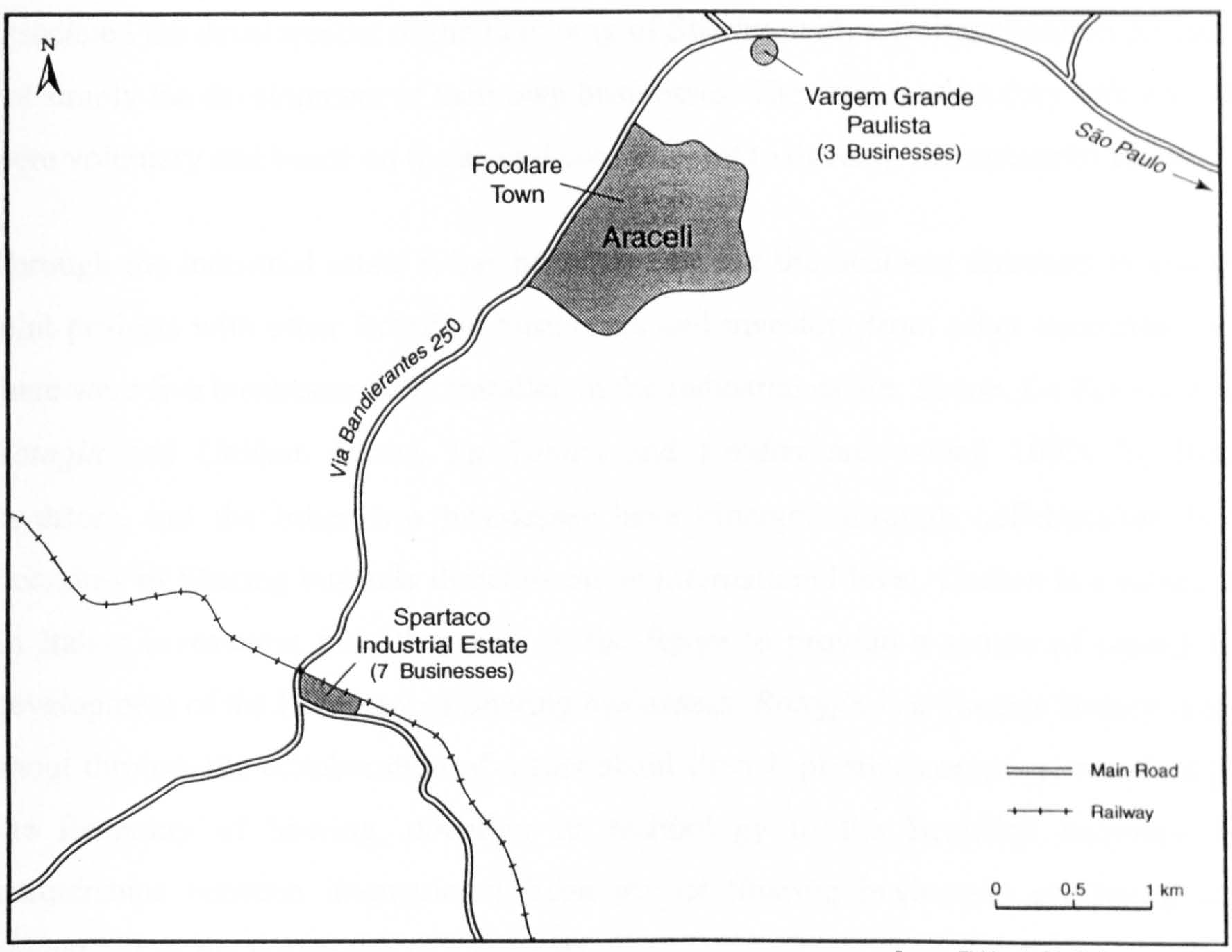
Source: Fieldwork, São Paulo, August 1998.

Figure 9.5 Map of Commercial Contacts in São Paulo

The *Aurora* school has arranged special health care arrangements with the health clinic Agape. *Comunione*, the accounts office, provides an accounting service for *La Tunica*, Agape and *Ecoar* [04SP]. *La Tunica* provides the uniforms for *Aurora* and Agape. *Ecoar* provided cleaning products for all of the businesses on the industrial estate, as well as *Comunione*, *Aurora* and Agape. The management consultancy Espaco provides services for all of the above companies. The director of *La Tunica* describes the emerging network:

> "We have commercial contacts with various businesses which are near by. For example, *Comunione* looks after our accounts; we have a contract with Agape for the health care of our employees, there is a reciprocal relationship; The same applies to *Aurora* – we supplied the uniforms right from the beginning; with ESPACO, I have already mentioned this. We have Economy of Sharing businesses which are also our clients - the one in Brasilia, Perolini; in Rio Grande, there is a business of Anna Diolello, which is also one of our clients; and in Belem there is Feito por nos, which is one of our clients. So there is this working relationship, and then there is also a normal relationship. For example, when I have to buy cleaning products, I will always go to buy them in *Ecoar* for *La Tunica*. Then within the Industrial estate there is a special relationship between the businesses because we are all trying to build this together"[09SP].

The geographical proximity of the businesses in the Araceli area provided an opportunity for the development of the businesses in the local area. Moreover, the fact that the businesses were located in the industrial park gave them a sense of importance within the Economy of Sharing world-wide. People from different countries who were interested in the Economy of Sharing decided to invest in them since they were located in the industrial estate. There is a lot of interest in its development both from within the Focolare Movement world wide and from other authorities outwith the Focolare. In January 1998, for example, it was visited by Marco Maciel, the vice-president of Brazil, who then participated in a conference on the subject in Brasilia in May 1998. This continuous interest in the development of the industrial estate has provided a strong motivation to succeed and to enable the project to grow.



Source: Fieldwork, São Paulo, August 1998.

Figure 9.6 Economy of Sharing Businesses in the Vicinity of Araceli

The idea behind the industrial estate was that it could provide a prototype of the Economy of Sharing for the rest of Brazil and for the world, as part of the model towns of the Focolare [CEOS04]. Chiara Lubich envisaged that the towns would have an industrial area, demonstrating that the Focolare spirituality was not primarily a means of retreating from the world, but a way of transforming it. As a result, the shareholding company *Espri* was established to administer the purchase of the land and the installation of the necessary infrastructure [CEOS65]. The role that *Espri* plays in this respect is central. Eight of the business directors who had their own Economy of Sharing companies were also on the managing committee of *Espri*. In this respect, the business directors in Brazil immediately associated the development of the Economy of Sharing with creating common projects and not simply the development of their own businesses. The services that they offered to *Espri* were voluntary and based on the shared commitment to develop the industrial estate.

Through the industrial estate it has been possible for the business directors to embark on joint projects with other Brazilian businesses and investors from other countries. In 1998 there were five businesses fully installed in the industrial estate: *Ecoar*, *La Tunica*, *Prodiet*, *Rotogin* and *Uniben*. *Ecoar*, *La Tunica* and *Prodiet* are owned 100% by Brazilian investors, but the other two businesses have emerged through collaboration between Economy of Sharing business directors on an international level. *Uniben* is a subsidiary of an Italian investment fund that aims in the future to provide a source of capital for the development of the Economy of Sharing businesses. *Rotogin* is a plastics factory that came about through the collaboration of a successful French plastics company, which is part of the Economy of Sharing, donating its technology to the Brazilian business. Future partnerships between international Economy of Sharing businesses are being actively sought out by the businesses in Sao Paulo.

In Piracicaba, where there is another cluster of Economy of Sharing businesses, there is a similar pattern of interaction, despite the fact that the businesses are very diverse. The directors of two of the businesses are also on the board for a third business and are working together for the development of this third business. Here the businesses have begun to develop ties with Economy of Sharing businesses in other parts of Brazil and in other countries:

> "Today a volunteer from Belo Horizonte called me. He wants to expand his business and he wanted to know how *Femaq* could co-operate with him. It is a contact I have made through the movement, but it is a

> professional contact. He wanted to know what he could do - how we could help one another. Since he phoned today, we want to make an appointment next month to talk about this proposal. In that meeting when Chiara came in April, the German business people came to visit our business. And probably, the one who is responsible for *Solidar Capital*, he also visited *Zac* Livros, and we thought that next year, we could go to visit the Economy of Sharing businesses there. Just to see whether anything comes of it - not just for *Femaq*, but for the Industrial Estate, for the other businesses in Brazil. So this relationship is already at a business level, it is a professional relationship. But it has grown out of these personal contacts. We are also trying to see whether in would be possible for them to lend us some money to expand *Zac*" [07SP].

Despite the fact that the businesses were spread out in the city of Sao Paulo, there was also evidence that the Economy of Sharing businesses were forming closer business contacts across the various sectors in which they operated:

> "We have commercial contacts with a few businesses here in our zone. For example, there is a business that is linked to ours here which promotes parties and events. So every time that we need to organise a party or a get together with our employees, a lunch, we get this business to come in. There is another business that has a vehicle, so every time we have to transport a piece or offer this kind of service, I get in touch with this business. So there is already this kind of relationship. There is another which is a consultancy business in Sao Paulo so when we need something in this area, we work together with them" [01SP].

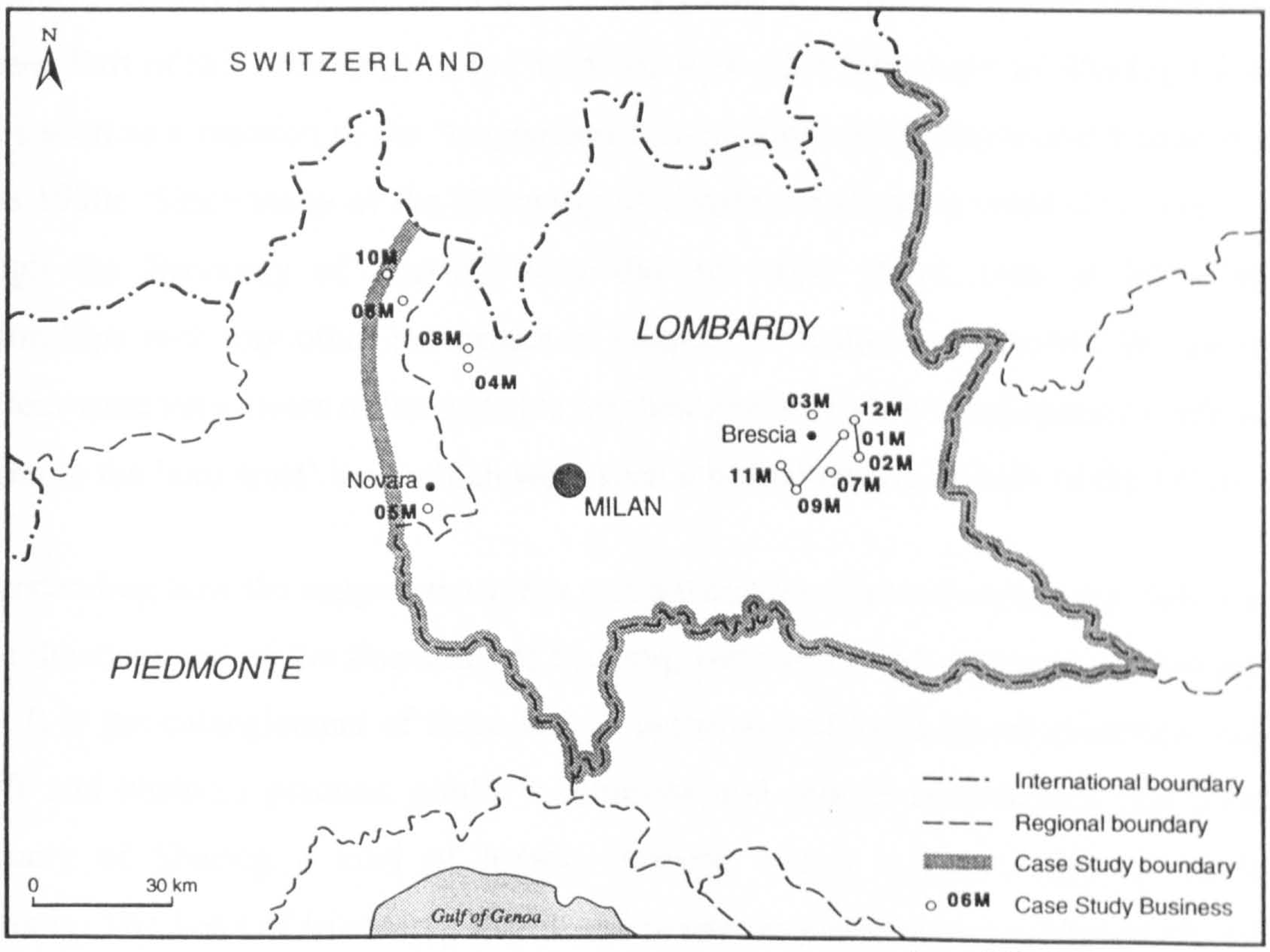
In the above examples in the Sao Paulo region, the localised clusters of businesses are demonstrating a kind of reciprocal relationship towards the other Economy of Sharing businesses, similar to the relationship which exists in the LETS schemes. In the case of these businesses there is a monetary transaction involved, but there are unwritten agreements on which businesses will be granted contracts and preferred suppliers based on their participation in the Economy of Sharing rather than the market price per se. In this case, however, the reciprocity between the different people involved is not restricted to the informal economy, but the business directors are using their personal contacts to create a degree of leverage which benefits the Economy of Sharing as a whole. The business directors, moreover, regarded development of these kinds of relationships as critical to the development of the Economy of Sharing as a whole. There was substantial evidence that the business directors were committing time and resources to developing common projects as a group.

Commercial contacts in Milan

In the Milan region, on the other hand, the level of commercial contacts amongst the Economy of Sharing businesses is very low. Figure 9.7, on the next page, illustrates that the level of integration of services is almost zero. Most of the contacts were with businesses that were not part of the case study group. In most cases, however, the commercial contacts were sporadic in nature. The focus of the business directors was still by and large on the development of their own business, in the hope that through this development it would be possible to contribute to the Economy of Sharing through sharing profits. Integrating their businesses with other businesses in the Economy of Sharing was not seen as a priority.

One explanation which could be given for the lack of integration in Milan could be the fact that the businesses were in very different sectors. It is difficult to imagine what commercial relationship a tap factory could have with a nursery school. The same thing, however, could be said about many of the businesses in Brazil, which are in very different sectors but still find some point of commercial contact. Another explanation could be the geographical distance between the different businesses. In Brazil, there were three clusters of businesses and the industrial estate in Araceli acted as a catalyst to the development of the Economy of Sharing. In the case of Milan, there is not the same degree of clustering, and there is no central focus for the businesses. Geographical distance alone, however, cannot explain the lack of exchange between the businesses. In the city of Brescia, for example, there are Economy of Sharing businesses within several miles of each other in relatively compatible sectors - a textile factory, a retail outlet (selling clothes), a joinery workshop and a bread sticks' factory. Despite their proximity and the fact that the directors of the companies knew each other (at least by name), there was little business between them.

Another explanation that could be put forward for this reluctance to integrate with other businesses is perhaps the dominance of a more capitalistic, individualistic culture within the business world in Italy as opposed to Brazil. In saying this, I am not saying that there was a lack of will or enthusiasm towards the Economy of Sharing in Milan - both the business directors in Brazil and Italy were very enthusiastic. Instead, there was a difference in the way that the business directors believed that they could achieve this goal. In Brazil there was more of a sense of getting on together, helping one another's businesses out.



Source: Fieldwork, Milan, January 1998.

Figure 9.7 Map of Commercial Contacts in Milan Region

In Milan the dominant idea was that the individual businesses should compete as best they can in the market without getting too involved in the affairs of other Economy of Sharing businesses. The underlying mentality of the business directors in Milan was that their businesses could contribute more by being more competitive rather than reaching agreements with other businesses.

This kind of 'corporate individualism' could also be seen in the reluctance to share the trade secrets with other Economy of Sharing businesses (and with myself as a researcher). Many of the directors expressed a desire to have more open, transparent relationships with the other Economy of Sharing businesses but regarded this as an extremely difficult task to achieve. Part of this reluctance to get involved with other Economy of Sharing businesses can be seen as a reaction to the 'tangentopoli' mentality which dominated Italian business in the 1990s. Since many of the Economy of Sharing businesses wanted to 'come clean' through the Economy of Sharing, they did not wish to be seen to have 'special' relationships with any other businesses or people, no matter how worthy the cause. The directors were very aware of the possible implications that such relationships could have in relation to the 'anti-trust' laws which were such a heated debate in Italy in the 1990s.

Understanding how the support networks and the commercial networks inter-link is critical to the development of the Economy of Sharing, both at a local, regional and international level. It is the entanglement of these sets of personal and business relationships, religious beliefs and business practice, public institutions and private associations that makes the Economy of Sharing a kind of hybrid network which is both religious, social and economic. The links of friendship that the business directors have established (to differing degrees in Brazil and Italy), have enabled networks of trust to consolidate at a local and regional level. The exchange of experience and advice on a personal level almost imperceptibly translated into commercial opportunities:

> "We share our difficulties and commercial ideas. Perhaps there is one that has a material that could be interesting for another, so they sent a fax to say 'Perhaps this could interest you'. Or another may know about a fair that one of the others may be interested in so... there is all this exchange, 'all this help" [05SP].

This trust is not simply a belief that the others share in the spiritual vision of the Focolare or that they have good intentions. It is a trust based on a sound knowledge of how the others are working in their enterprises as a professional. It requires a working knowledge of the professional capabilities of the others as well as their commitment to the spiritual vision. Through the development of these links of trust there has been a gradual transition to developing business contacts which can benefit both parties. In some ways, the links that are emerging between the businesses, especially in Brazil, are similar to traditional guilds, which emerged primarily to create greater collaboration within certain commercial and industrial sectors of the economy. In the case of the Economy of Sharing the linkages of solidarity between the businesses, which are spread over a broad range of sectors, are interpreted as 'communion'.

Relationship between the businesses and Focolare

One of most sensitive areas of the networks that the Economy of Sharing has created, is based on the relationship that exists between the businesses and the Focolare Movement. This relationship is interesting, above all, because it is an area where the borderline between the 'spiritual authority', which the Focolare represents, and the authority that comes from business expertise is found. It is a sensitive area because it is the area where there is the greatest scope for misunderstandings of a serious nature involving peoples' 'spiritual salvation' and 'material wealth'. In both of these respects, the novelty of the Economy of Sharing has led to a situation in which there is a creative tension which, in many cases, is yet to be resolved. Without the spiritual vision of the Focolare Movement and the spiritual community which has come about through the Focolare, the Economy of Sharing would not exist. It was the desire to apply this spiritual vision in the economy so as to resolve the problem of inequality that led to the Economy of Sharing being formed in the first place. The application of this vision, however, cannot be static: it is a constant process of verification and renewed commitment based on the individuals' free choice to put the Economy of Sharing principles into practice.[148] Maintaining strong links between the businesses and spiritual vision of the Focolare is therefore a critical element for the future growth of the project.

As well as providing the spiritual vision behind the Economy of Sharing, the Focolare Movement also acts as a network of contacts which has the potential to offer sales and publicity for Economy of Sharing businesses. Since its beginning in 1991, the Economy of Sharing has had a high profile within the Focolare and the members of the movement have been encouraged to actively participate in it. Since many people within the Focolare are

[148] As discussed at length in Chapter 7

unable to contribute towards the Economy of Sharing directly through investing in businesses or through starting businesses of their own, the next best thing is to support the businesses through buying from them or assisting them in the promotion of their products. The businesses advertise in the various Focolare publications such as the *Cittá Nuova* magazine in different languages and the *Economia di Comunione* newsletter [CEOS50]. Through these magazines, and presentations of the businesses at meetings organised by New Humanity, the Economy of Sharing businesses become 'household names' for the Focolare: "when there is a big meeting, for example, ... of 12,000 people, all the directors of our business went to share our experience. Personally speaking, it is great, there are no problems" [07SP]. In their 'experience' the directors highlight the ways that they are applying the Economy of Sharing principles in their business. As a result, their business becomes a natural choice for anyone wishing to support the Economy of Sharing.

This has certainly been the case for many of the Economy of Sharing businesses in Brazil. There is strong evidence in Brazil that the success of several of the new businesses is due primarily to the help that they have gained from people within the Focolare and from the Focolare as a whole. One example of this trend is *La Tunica*, the clothes factory in the Araceli industrial estate, which could not have developed as rapidly were it not for an extensive network of people within the Focolare who provided a sales network across Brazil. This network of contacts, who had heard about the start of *La Tunica* through the Focolare internal press, provided a ready made market. In the first three years, *La Tunica* was able to set up 15 franchises in all of the Brazilian states:

> "The relationship is very simple since all the people who work here or in the sales, are people of the Focolare Movement. A large part of our sales reps are members of the movement. There is this natural relationship. But as a business, with the movement, we have a relationship with *ESPRI* here – we try to have a very open relationship, very professional, so we try to do all our part and also to suggest steps which could be taken in order to improve the running of the industrial estate" [09SP].

Nevertheless, the reliance on the internal market of the Focolare for both sales network through franchises and a large proportion of actual sales, could not be sustained. It highlights the difficulties which have to be faced when the Economy of Sharing businesses are competing in a closed market. Firstly, because the people who had provided the sales network either lost enthusiasm, or were taken up by other concerns which they regarded as more important. This gave *La Tunica* a false sense of security as to the extent that its products were being distributed. Secondly, the sales market within the Focolare soon became saturated with *La Tunica* produce. Over the past two years, the number of sales from this sector has begun to decrease and alternative outlets have had to be found. In some ways, the internal sales network that the Focolare provided was a 'buffer' with the forces of the market in the early years of the business. Now the business has to adapt to market conditions without that extra support to the same extent.

Despite the close relationship which existed between the businesses and the Focolare in Brazil, the business directors interviewed had clear ideas about the nature and limitations of the relationship. They highlighted the distinction between the spiritual relationship that they had with other people in the Focolare on a personal level, and the institutional relationship that they have as a business with the movement through the distribution of profits. In their opinion, the maintenance of this distinction was very important as it enabled the businesses to grow without interference or pressure from the movement:

> "The life of the business, is the life of the business. There is no interference on the part of the Focolare in the life of the business. It has its own management which decides on the goals, but what makes it different isn't whether the Focolare is involved or not, but the fact that in general the people who are directing the business are involved in the Focolare Movement. The business, in a juridical sense, is completely separate from the Focolare Movement. The people who are managing the business are involved in the Focolare Movement" [05SP].
>
> "There is alway a good relationship. It works like this - at the end of the month, we work out the profits, and the finance sector automatically separates that proportion of the profits which goes to the Focolare Movement. So the relationship with the movement as a business is more or less a technical one. We also try to remember to send a report about how things are going each month. On the other hand, there is a personal relationship with the movement - this report that we send. But there is a good relationship" [12SP].

The movement, however, did not have any say over how much money the businesses donated. Decisions regarding the amount of profits to be shared were at the discretion of the individual business directors.

> "The movement does not interfere in the decision of how much profit is distributed. It is something which is very discreet and this is a characteristic of the movement - not to make a show of peoples suffering, their situation" [11SP].

None of the Brazilian business directors interviewed suggested that there were any difficulties in the relationship with the Focolare. On the contrary, they stressed that the open relationship with the Focolare was very positive for their business. The main help from the Focolare was in the form of moral support, which gave many of the business owners a shared sense of ownership and responsibility with the other people in the Focolare. Whilst retaining the full responsibility for the running of the business, the directors felt that the continuous interest in their businesses from other people within the Focolare was a strong incentive to develop in accordance with the Economy of Sharing. Many of the business directors had been invited by the Focolare to present the experience of their business in national and international conferences, which enabled other people within the Focolare to be kept informed in the developments within the Economy of Sharing.

This close relationship was facilitated by the fact that industrial estate of the Economy of Sharing was located very close to the main Focolare centre in Brazil. This meant that decisions relating to the location of businesses in the industrial estate were taken in conjunction with the leaders of the Focolare in Araceli. It also meant that the Focolare's conference facilities in Araceli became the 'natural' venue for any meetings relating to the Economy of Sharing, from the local ones to major international conferences. No difficulties were expressed by any of the business people in relation to this close relationship with the Focolare. Both the Focolare leaders and the business people interviewed expressed mutual trust and admiration in each other, regarding the relationship as a partnership which was extremely beneficial to both the businesses and the Focolare.

Nevertheless, the directors of some of the businesses did express the desire for the Economy of Sharing businesses to form some kind of professional association, along the lines of a guild, which would be separate from the Focolare. They regarded this as a priority for the future growth and development of the project:

> "This is a dream that we have... to form an association of businesses that can offer this help and can be a bit more close at hand and a bit more secure. It could offer administrative help, financial help, it could help the business to discover its mission, help with the quality control programs... there are a series of things which could be done together but we are not managing to do them today since we are all spread out. Our dream would be to study this idea more and to transform it into something more" [01SP].

Through the development of an association, they could see that the businesses would have greater scope to exchange ideas and technology on a regular basis, fostering the development of shared projects. This could take place within the security of a formal association in which there would be clear guidelines on the Economy of Sharing.

In Milan region, on the other hand, the reliance on the Focolare as a potential market for products was less apparent. Most of the businesses advertised in the Focolare press, but did not regard this as the main source of clients. Only one business, *O.V.A.*, was making use of its particular relationship with the Focolare and its location next to the Focolare Centre to promote the business. The shop sold products from Economy of Sharing businesses all over Italy and abroad. The main clients were people who came to Focolare meetings in the nearby centre. Only a quarter of the directors in Milan regions had a clear idea of the relationship that existed between the businesses and the Focolare. For them, as with the Brazilian business directors, the distinction between the role of the business and the movement was clear cut and they had no difficulty in explaining the relationship: "With the Focolare, each of us has a personal relationship. There is not a relationship with the business as an entity" [04M].

For the rest of the directors in Milan the relationship between the businesses and the Focolare was more complicated. Many of them were puzzled at the question of the relationship between the business and the movement, as they had never thought about it before: "I think that this is a new question... With the Focolare there is not a relationship. At least that is what I think... Perhaps we occasionally offer services for the community. If they ask me to lend them the lorry, I do it..." [03M].In some cases the spiritual role that the Focolare plays in sustaining the vision beneath the businesses was becoming confused with the strategic planning of the business itself. In a minority of cases, business directors expressed confusion over who was providing them with the decision-making advice in their business context. For most of the business people the decisions on the future of the business were still taken in the boardroom with the advice of the other partners. For others, advice was sought with other people who were living out the spirituality of the Focolare. In some instances, as might have been expected, this had led to bad decisions in terms of the financial success of the business or had led to difficulties in the relationships with other people on the board of managers.

Many of the business directors in Milan region voiced concerns over how the relationship with the Focolare was developing and could see that there is a need for reflection on the nature of the relationship that should exist between the businesses and the movement. Nevertheless, amongst themselves they had very different ideas as to the future development. For some of them, the way ahead was greater help from other people within the Focolare.

> "I would say that much could be done here ... In my opinion, the Economy of Sharing has to become part of everything ... Everything should co-operate to use this resource ... The source is the same, but we have to clarify a bit, how we should behave. Things ought to be clearer" [10M].

Others were aware that although there was a relationship between the two, the Economy of Sharing had to be separate in some way from the more spiritual dimension of the Focolare:

> "Here I would make a distinction. I feel that the Economy of Sharing... It is not that the Economy of Sharing is one thing and the Focolare is something else... but the Economy of Sharing is something that has come out of the maturity of the spirituality" [08M].

One of the business directors recognised, however, that the maintenance of a good relationship with the Focolare was a two way process and that in his opinion he was as much at fault as anyone else for a lack of communication: "This is a personal omission on my part because I can see that this relationship with the businesses emerges when there is a personal relationship – it is not a problem with the business per se but with people" [01M].

Availability of profit information

As well as providing the spiritual vision for the Economy of Sharing and a potential market for produce/services, the Focolare also acts as the channel for the redistribution of the profits from the businesses on a global scale. There was a marked difference in the attitudes of the business directors in relation to this aspect in Italy and Brazil. In Brazil, none of the business directors had any problem with the levels of information that they received regarding the way profits were spent. In Milan, on the other hand, half of the business directors said that lack of feed back from the Focolare regarding the way profits of the Economy of Sharing were distributed was a problem. Both of the sets of business directors received the same levels of information from the Focolare centre in Rome.

One possible explanation for the lack of need for information for the Brazilian businesses, comes from the fact that there is a long history of initiatives to help the poor communities in Brazil. The widening of the gap between the wealthy classes and the poor in Brazilian society is a daily reality which faces every person as they go about their business. As a result, the business directors were aware of the need to change things, but could also see for themselves the difference that the profit distribution was making. Sharing the profits from the businesses was about helping people who were nearby. The fact that the business directors in Milan were experiencing this difficulty regarding the amount of information required might be put down to the distance between the business and the people who were eventually receiving the help that was given. Although they had trust in the Focolare distribution, they could not see where the money was going and this made it hard to sustain the donations over a long period of time. Some of the directors had decided not to continue with donations to the Economy of Sharing until they had a clearer idea of how the money was being spent. Finding ways of improving the global communications between the Focolare and the businesses is an important area which has to be examined.

Conclusions

In this chapter, the various networks between the Economy of Sharing businesses and with the Focolare on a local and global scale have been examined in depth. What emerges from this is the variety of experiences that exist both between the regions of Milan and Sao Paulo and within the regional groups. In Sao Paulo, the formal and informal support networks between the businesses are strong, and this has had important implications for the rapid development of commercial contacts between the businesses. The development of the industrial estate near Araceli, as a physical space in which these ideas can be applied, plays an important role in building up the networks between the businesses and with the Focolare. It also has a 'demonstration effect' in encouraging people that it is possible to apply the Economy of Sharing in the present. In the Milan region, although there is a formal association for the Economy of Sharing providing clear guidelines on the implementation of the project, the support networks between the businesses are weaker. As a result, the commercial contacts between the businesses are still very limited. In both regions, the relationship with the Focolare plays a central role in the development of the Economy of Sharing both on a spiritual level, as the source of inspiration and motivation, and on practical level through adapting 'ready-made' networks to serve the Economy of Sharing. For the business directors in Sao Paulo, the nature of this relationship was clear-cut. In Milan, however, there are queries about how this relationship ought to develop, especially with regards to the sharing of profits and transparency.

This raises the contentious issue of the way such special relationships between businesses can be interpreted. The Economy of Sharing is based on the assumption of the altruistic spirituality of the Focolare Movement, and the relationships between the businesses are interpreted as 'communion' by those who are taking part. The purpose of the collaboration is to improve the prospects of the businesses so as to have more profits, in a similar way too the creation of guilds and other business associations. The difference which the Economy of Sharing businesses cite, however, is that their collaboration is based on the choice to share the eventual gains with the poor. In this way a certain amount of 'closure' between the Economy of Sharing businesses is acceptable in view of the greater good which they are seeking. Such relationships, nevertheless, would be interpreted by sceptics, such as Adam Smith, as an emerging cartel which would only be to the detriment of the consumer through tacit agreements between the businesses involved making prices higher. Within the local areas, moreover, such unwritten agreements based on personal relationships could be regarded as unfair, as they prevent the workings of the 'free' market, based on the assumption of anonymous actors working independently and making choices on price rather than personal preference. Such relationships are subject to the 'anti-trust' laws of the countries in which they are operating, which, in effect, enforce the perception of the market as an arena which is (and ought to be) governed by individualistic anonymous economic actors.

Such questions, as discussed in Chapter 1, have been the topic of sustained debate between orthodox economics and socio-economics in recent years. Whereas the former argue that businesses ought to operate independently in view of respecting the freedom and openness of the market, the latter argued precisely the opposite: that those freedoms are based on the creation of associations and special relationships (Granovetter, 1985; Amin & Thrift, 1995). They argue that markets in which there is perfect anonymity do not exist in practice, but rather institutions make their choices on a number of criteria which include profitability, but also other, more culturally defined criteria. The Economy of Sharing companies substantiate this idea and could be interpreted as expressions of institutional thickness at a regional level, but also at a global scale. As such, it builds on existing local networks of relationships and practices, such as compradesco, remaking these and developing them within the Economy of Sharing perspective. They do not operate according to the rigidity of market anonymity within orthodox economics, but make decisions which take profitability into consideration, but are based on a broader range of values, including the shared sense of belonging to the Economy of Sharing.

10. The geographies of the Economy of Sharing

> *"If my son is in need, it doesn't matter to me whether he is here or on the other side of the planet – I want to help him"* [01R].

Throughout this thesis, I have presented the findings of detailed ethnographic research within the Economy of Sharing networks. This research has involved examining the cultural roots of the Focolare's economic vision, through reference to the archives at the Focolare Centre in Rome. It has also involved carrying out participant observation at the Focolare Centre in Rome and in the businesses that are attempting to apply the Focolare principles. Throughout the presentation of these findings, one of my main concerns has been to stick closely to the original texts and transcripts (in as much as this is possible), without simultaneously interpreting them in a critical fashion. In this way, it has been possible to build up a detailed picture of the various ideas that underpin the Economy of Sharing - in particular, the Focolare spirituality, the culture of giving, market norms and global economic discourses, and local cultural practices. I have shown the various ways in which these interplay, giving rise to various practices within and between the Economy of Sharing businesses that aim to create spaces of 'sharing' within the market economy on a local and global scale. I will now return to the more theoretical questions which frame the question of the economic geographies of the Economy of Sharing. In particular, I will examine three related themes which underlie this thesis. Firstly, I will examine the question of the relationship between the cultural and the economic. I will then examine the question of the economic as networks, and how this relates to the Economy of Sharing. Finally, I will consider the question of social justice and the needs of so-called 'distant strangers'. In each section, I will recall the main points raised in relation to these themes in Chapter 1 and examine the theoretical reflections that this research on the Economy of Sharing raises.

The 'cultural' and the 'economic'

Before moving on to the specific relationship between culture and the economy within the Focolare, it is necessary to recall briefly the principal ideas which formed the theoretical framework for the research. The starting point for this thesis was the increasingly blurred line emerging between the 'cultural' and the 'economic' within current human geography, and within social science more generally. In Chapter 1, I examined the various theoretical stances that have been taken in attempting to explain the nature of the relationship between the cultural and the economic both outwith and within human geography. In particular, I looked at the way that the renewed interest in the social and cultural dimensions of economic life could be considered as an extension of the 'cultural turn' into economic geography (Thrift & Olds, 1996: 311). Although there is still a large body of mainstream literature within economic geography upholding the theoretical opposition of cultural and economic perspectives, there has been a growth of literature deconstructing the boundary between them (Lee & Wills, 1997).

In Chapter 1, I argued that much of this literature has been dominated by a broadly Marxist perspective in which the economic is viewed as the 'core' and culture is seen as a kind of 'periphery', a veneer which surrounds it. Within this broad Marxist perspective, according to Crang (1997), there are at least three different related ideas: economic determinism (Harvey, 1989), economic operation (Bourdieu, 1984) and economic colonialism (Habermas, 1988). These three interpretations of the interrelationship between culture and the economy emphasise the way that post-modern culture can be viewed as the 'cultural clothing' of late capitalism, reflecting the market laws of supply and demand. Western society, they argue, has become increasingly dominated by economic forces and the cultural sphere is increasingly seen as an autonomous arena, separate from the meaning of life itself (Featherstone, 1995: 15-33). It has been integrated or entangled within the economy, creating a kind of mass culture which at the same time erodes the memories, customs and myths which constituted traditional cultures (Tanner, 1997). There is increasingly talk of a 'consumer culture' making it very difficult to separate the cultural and the economic. People are seen as cultural consumers who pick and choose their culture, just as they would vegetables or a new car. Particular cultures, moreover, become marketable products based on their aesthetic value (e.g. Scottish men in kilts, whisky drinkers) or even on their underlying ethical principles (e.g. locate in Germany – hard workers; Irish – welcoming, happy people), reinforcing, by default, certain stereotypes about other cultures which are non-compatible with capitalist working structures. At the extreme, the economic rationale of profit is seen to 'colonise the life world' (Habermas, 1987),. taking over all other dimensions of human life. All spheres of life, including personal relationships, according to this view, are subject to the instrumental logic of the market that dominates the capitalist economy: it is in the 'nature' of capitalism to turn everything and everybody into a commodity, reducing culture to a means-end relationship.

This 'economic core – cultural periphery' view has to some extent been counterbalanced within economic geography by renewed interest in the various schools of 'social and cultural embeddedness' (Granovetter, 1985; Smelser & Swedberg, 1994) which draw on the work of Polanyi (1957) and Weberian traditions within economic sociology. From this perspective it could be argued that economic action can never be separated from the cultural and social practices in which it is taking place. Economic actors are simultaneously part of a network of social relationships which give meaning to their economic action and shape the way that they act within the market (Grabher, 1993; Wuthnow, 1995). Such cultural factors such as regional tastes, religious practices, traditional ways of relating to each other, the status of commerce in a society or even attitudes towards debt all have profound influences on the nature of the 'market'. Polanyi (1957), in particular, cited three modes of economic integration – reciprocity, market relations and redistribution - which are dependent on different kinds of relationship. Harvey (1973) used these modes of integration in his analysis of socialist formulations for social justice. He stressed that all three modes of integration can simultaneously be found within different modes of production and are not mutually exclusive (Harvey, 1973: 205-6). The dependence of the economic sphere on reciprocal relationships has led to increased interest on the relationship between economic success and 'social' factors such as the ability to build associations and to network (Platteau, 1994, Amin & Thrift, 1994).

Although stressing the inseparability of the social, cultural and the economic, I argued that none of these conceptualisations of the relationship actually challenged the commonsense distinction between the economic and the non-economic, since the 'economic' is still equated with the 'market' and the 'non-economic'; by default is seen as 'non-market'. Yet it is arguably in examining this commonsense distinction between market/non-market or economic/non-economic that the greatest insight into the relationship between the cultural and the economic can be gained. One way of doing this is through examining those spaces which do not fit easily into being 'market' or 'non-market', since such spaces may be engaged in some kind of socio-economic life which is founded on reciprocity and which thereby challenge such commonsense distinctions.[149] The examples I gave were co-

[149] Sayer and Ray (1999: 6) disagree with this 'blurring' of the distinction between the economic and the non-economic, stating that some activities are economic in 'nature' (e.g. doing paid employment) whilst others, though having economic dimensions, are non-economic (e.g. watching television). I would argue, however, that the distinction that they are making is actually between the formal, money economy and other non-monetary forms of economic life. Both have an 'economic' dimension, in as much as they involve the production, exchange, and distribution of goods (material or otherwise) and services.

operative activities of LETS schemes (Bowring, 1998; Lee, 1996) and the emergence of Time Dollars initiatives (Boyle, 1998), in which there is no financial reward for what is being done. Such initiatives can be explained with conventional economic discourse, but the explanatory power of such discourses is limited in relation to how those engaging in these activities actually view what they are doing (North, 1999). What is interesting is hence to examine the explanation that they themselves give for their actions. I argued, like Peet (1997), that such explanations could uncover different economic rationalities that go beyond the conventional understanding of rational economic action. They would have to make reference to those cultural factors which helped to frame the wider worldview and sense of purpose, taking into account the way such factors as religious beliefs and localised knowledges shape economic thinking and action.

The idea that there could be different, 'alternative perspectives' which cast light onto different economic rationalities is one which Wallace (1978) put forward in his discussion of a humanised conception of economic geography. Although some would regard his 'project' as fatally flawed due to his assertion that a 'Christian perspective' is a 'non-ideological paradigm in which to ground an authentically human economic geography', I argued in Chapter 1 that his conception of alternative perspectives is still valid. His difficulty was in not recognising that there could be a plurality of perspectives within economic geography. More recent work on the relationship between the range of Christian worldviews and geography (Aay & Griffioen, 1998) has demonstrated the potential for different worldviews to co-exist and to be mutually enriching. They also highlight the difficulties that emerge when attempting to rewrite geographies along 'confessional' lines, since although these different perspectives may represent a non-ideological view of the world for those who share them, for those who do not share the same beliefs they are entirely ideological.

The economic and the cultural within the Focolare

It is from this wider perspective on economic rationality that I sought to examine how the interrelationship between the economic and the cultural is understood within the Focolare, and particularly within the Economy of Sharing businesses and other institutions involved in the Economy of Sharing. From the documentation examined in Chapters 3 and 4 on the Focolare Movement, it emerged that within the Focolare spirituality, from the beginnings of the movement, there has been a very strong relationship between the economic and the cultural [FOC03]. The geographies of the beginning of the movement in Trent in the 1940s showed that one of the main concerns of the group was to solve the social problems of the city through creating a greater equality amongst those who were part of the emerging community and with those who had been most affected by the war [CEOS74]. They emphasised strongly that the new understanding of God's Love which characterised the start of the Focolare led to changes in the way that they perceived and lived out economic and social relationships. Their aim was not simply a renewal of religion, but a 'social revolution' [FOC08].

This relationship has remained strong throughout the history of the Focolare up to the present day and is crystallised in the idea of the Trinitarian perspective (Coda, 1998), through which all human relationships and the cosmos can be regarded as the reflection of the image of the God, who is one and three: "The life of the Trinitarian God, in other words, appears to be a perennial 'making space' for the other" (Salvati, 1990: 156). This image of the Trinity, as the perfect community in which there is unity and diversity, is regarded as the model which can both explain and influence all aspects of human existence (Cambón, 1999). It is this shared belief in the presence of God in human relationships that reflects the communion of the Trinity, which is at the heart of the Focolare's economic vision [Bruni in CEOS46]. The aim of the Focolare, therefore, is not so much about carrying out particular initiatives or promoting particular causes, but about 'Trinitising' relationships on every scale, and raising the awareness of the Trinitarian nature of human relationships:

> *"In the Trinity everything is in common. Therefore, when Christians live out the communion of goods, they are not carrying out 'good works' nor is it an 'optional extra' onto their life, but they are simply fulfilling what they were made for: living in harmony with the Trinitarian roots of human existence"* (Cambón, 1999: 62).

It is these relationships which give meaning to the networks of 'focolares' or 'hearths' which have expanded across the globe, giving rise to distinctive 'Focolare spaces' in which the ethos of the Focolare is applied, in much a similar way to Duncan's (1990) interpretation of the Kandyan kingdom in Sri Lanka. Duncan demonstrated how the landscape could be interpreted through the culture of the Kandyan people, showing how buildings and towns were laid out in accordance with sacred texts. In a similar way, it could be said that the Focolare's spaces also represent the 'incarnation' of the Focolare ideal. This can be said about the individual spaces, such as the model towns and Focolare centres, which form tangible landscapes which have been 'made over' according to the Focolare spirituality. These spaces can act as privileged places in which the ideas of the Focolare are lived out amongst communities of differing sizes. In the Focolare perspective, these are places where the Trinitarian relationships are already lived out, and therefore sacred spaces. The Focolare, however, is not limited to these tangible landscapes. The same idea could be applied to the various intangible, more elusive networks of the Focolare, and in particular the Economy of Sharing, which span space and time, forming inter-linking groups of people who seek to live out Trinitarian relationships within the social, political and economic structures in which they live and work.

The Economy of Sharing, therefore, can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Ley (1974), in his examination of urban conceptions of good and evil, considered the different interpretations that Marxist and Christian geographers could bring to the same subject. The interpretative key arguably says more about the theoretical suppositions of the author than the subject of the research. In the case of the Economy of Sharing, the Trinitarian perspective is one possible interpretation amongst many. It is arguably a privileged perspective as it is the one to which the majority of the subjects of the research adhered. Within this perspective, the value of economic action is the extent to which it can be said to reflect Trinitarian relationships. This clearly begs the complex theological question of how to explain the nature of economic action within the Trinity. The Trinity, God, as a transcendent being has no need for economic action, which is a temporal condition of existence on earth. The Trinitarian perspective, therefore, cannot offer direct answers to questions that relate to economic action, as stressed by Cambón (1999: 196). At most it can offer values, priorities and ideal motivations which can underpin economic action.

Within Focolare spirituality, however, there is a very close link between theory and practice, since the Trinitarian perspective also proposes an epistemological framework which has far reaching implications regarding the possibility of mystical insight into the nature of God and human existence. The central precept of this epistemology is that human beings not only reflect the life of the Trinity from the exterior, but can participate, in a mystical way, in the Love that is the intimate life of the Trinity.[150] The creation of such Trinitarian relationships is both the end point and the point of departure for the Focolare

[150] To this effect, the work of Coda (1998) points to the way that living out Trinitarian relationships also leads to a renewal of ontology.

spirituality. This love, however, also has the capacity to generate new insights since participation in the life of God is the spirit of understanding. Trinitarian relationships, therefore, can result in a new way of thinking: "thinking *in* the Trinity, living in the relationships, living in communion" (Tomatis, in Cambón, 1999: 202).[151] The experiences of those who seek to live this way do not simply replicate a static dogma, but participate in the life of the Trinity and in doing so generate further insights into the way that this perspective can be applied to different fields of human life.

The Focolare spirituality, therefore, engenders a strong sense of moral responsibility to transform relationships in order to make them more Trinitarian, generating greater communion between all. It is this communion which the Economy of Sharing seeks to generate within the sphere of the economy:

> *"When ... someone re-finds their faith in the capabilities of the human person for altruism, disinterested giving and sharing, and promotes a 'culture of giving' and an 'economy of communion', they know that they are proposing a type of society which is arduous to achieve, but not an utopia ... they are betting on the best part, on the objective capacity to love and on the 'trinitarian nostalgia' which exists, also subconsciously, deep within every human being"* (Cambón, 1999: 63).

In economic terms, the Trinitarian perspective translates into a *culture of giving* in which there is a constant intertwining of material and non-material giving. The term 'giving' in relation to the Focolare spirituality, as discussed in Chapter 4, has to be understood as 'gift of self' on an existential level. It is not possible to reduce giving to an external act, but has to be seen in view of the relationship that exists between the giver and the receiver. 'Giving', therefore, in this respect is intrinsically relational since it is always about establishing a relationship with the other.

When the Economy of Sharing was launched in 1991, it was viewed by the Focolare Centre and the business leaders as an opportunity to live this culture of giving within the sphere of the wider monetary economy so as to redistribute wealth. It was a chance to enculture the monetary economy within the particular vision of the world of the Focolare. Through recognising that the economic is bound by a cultural vision, and subject to the

[151] Cambón (1999: 56) says that the Trinitarian unity can add a "supplement of knowledge" onto the competence of those working in different fields of human endevour, so as to generate new creative solutions which are appropriate to the circumstances. It therefore, can have an impact at a theoretical level through generating a new way of thinking which is *pericoretic*. In order for this to come about, it is not sufficient for there to be a profound silence which welcomes the words of the other, seeking to understand what they are saying but, in the words of Zanghì, a relationship is Trinitarian on the level of thought when: "I am myself in you and you are yourself in me" [Io sono io in te e tu sei tu in me] (Zanghi, 1998: 83).

ethical ideals contained therein, the Focolare was attempting to create a space within the market economy in which its ideals would be dominant. It was not trying to create an alternative to the market economy (although there appeared to be some confusion over this within the Focolare), but to transform the relationships within the sphere of the more extensive public economy into ones that could be called Trinitarian. Part of this involved sharing a proportion of the profits of the businesses to fund assistance to the poor and to promote education for a culture of giving [CEOS04].

Although an alien concept within Western industrialised economic thinking, the Focolare movement supports the Weberian view (Swedberg, 1998) that religions contain their own economic ethic and that this shapes their understanding of how economic relationships and institutions ought to be regulated. Within the Economy of Sharing businesses this sense of God's presence within the businesses is also reflected in the sense of calling which the business directors felt in responding to the Economy of Sharing. The businesses themselves, and in particular the industrial estates within the Focolare model towns, became in effect 'sacred spaces' and even places of pilgrimage for those in search of a 'new way'. Participation in the Economy of Sharing affected the choices that they made in how they regulated every aspect of their economic action from the relationship with employees to taxation and environmental concerns. For the majority of the business leaders, their actions were part of their religious calling.

For Weber (1958), however, capitalism and Christianity ought to be fundamentally opposed due to the fact that the former relies on a means-end instrumental rationality and the latter relies on value-oriented rationality. His main concern was in understanding how these incompatible rationalities actually became compatible. Weber started from the premise that Christianity and capitalism are incompatible, since Christianity is hostile to money making as a goal in life: "You cannot serve God and Mammon" (Lk 16:13). In particular, he highlighted the way that the Catholic laity tended to favour an economically traditional life due to the "weak premium on asceticism due to the possibility of absolution" (Swedberg, 1998: 125). Weber's descriptions of Calvinism and Catholicism have since been disputed (Marshall, 1982) due to his oversimplifications and definitions of religious beliefs which were not acceptable even amongst the leaders of the religions.

The perspective on the relationship between economic action and Catholicism offered by my research on the businesses in Milan and Sao Paulo demonstrates certain aspects of

Weber's thesis, but also differs from it in some important aspects. It is clear that the launch of the Economy of Sharing marked a decisive point in the lives of those who decided to take part and that they experienced a sense of 'calling'. This turning point lay, above all, in a transformation in the way that they themselves regarded the relationship between their economic action and the spirituality of the Focolare. In Chapter 7, I considered how the business directors interpreted the spirituality and applied it within commercial businesses for which the discourse of the market is usually dominant. The salient point which underpins all the responses is what could be termed the 'depth of epistemic commitment' to the Focolare vision possessed by the business directors. They explained their actions not so much in terms of financial profitability but in terms of *"giving a soul to the economy"* [05SP]. This epistemic commitment was reflected above all in the substantial risks that they took in order to follow what they believed was a 'divine' project. In Brazil, for example, several of the businesses had been set up through the owners selling all that they had in order to invest in the idea [03SP; 04SP; 06SP]. They were prepared to transfer location to Araceli, choosing the location of their business on the basis of a divine plan rather than predetermined financial criteria (such as economic rent). Given the level of financial insecurity at the time within Brazil, this was an extremely high risk, even a gamble. In some ways, their actions reflected a blatant disregard for tried and tested 'scientific' theories of business practice and management in favour of belief in a spiritual ideal.

Yet, in the mind of those who were taking the risks, this was not blind faith or irrational behaviour. Within the context of the Economy of Sharing, this kind of action was entirely rational and discloses an economic rationality outwith the confines of conventional economic discourse. Their actions were founded on the belief in God's providence, which would come to the aid of those who participated in this project: *"Providence helped us to find a marketing outlet that sells all over Italy"* [01SP]. Their profound belief in the Trinitarian relationships meant that God's action was not perceived as a kind of magic formula or good luck, but a reality which was borne out in their personal experience and that of others. In practical terms, it was a trust that was reflected, in a sense of material security in participating in the Focolare community. Those in the Focolare would be sure to come to the aid of those who risked everything for the Economy of Sharing. If their businesses failed, then those who had risked would be sure to be the top of the list of those to be helped.

As discussed in Chapter 9, the experience of those who had lost businesses as a result of the Economy of Sharing was not examined in a direct way within this research and is rarely discussed amongst people within the Focolare. When asked about this, however, the Focolare delegates and business directors could cite several examples of Economy of Sharing businesses which had folded. When asked how the people concerned interpreted this failure, the response was mixed. Some interpreted their failure as business incompetence or the result of an external shock. These people were generally able to continue their participation in the Focolare and were being helped through these difficult circumstances by other people in the community. Some had gone on to start other Economy of Sharing businesses.

On the other hand, one person[152] explained how her father had invested his life savings in an Economy of Sharing business. The investment was based on good faith that the money would be well spent. The business started to go wrong, however, since its location was based on proximity to a 'model town' rather than economic criteria based on access to suppliers, markets and so forth. Around the model town there was limited access to the specific market it was supposed to be serving. Instead of recognising the failure and liquidating the project or changing strategy, the project was prolonged and more money was poured into it. In the end it had to close and those who had invested lost everything. In this case, the failure resulted in a profound sense of disillusionment in the Economy of Sharing and isolation from the Focolare. The sheds which housed the business now lie empty and the machinery is rusting. Such stories highlight the dangers of an interpretation of the Economy of Sharing which is verging on what could be termed 'Trinitarian fundamentalism'. Such cases are extreme and rare (based on the evidence within this thesis), but illustrate precisely the kind of situation which Cambón (1999: 196) cites as one of the very real dangers of a 'naive' interpretation of the Trinitarian perspective. The Economy of Sharing requires technical expertise, also within the sphere of market analysis. Attempts to disregard such expertise in the belief that God will run the business will inevitably result in serious loss of capital and profound disillusionment.

Although this thesis supports the view that religious beliefs influence economic action, the Trinitarian perspective sits uneasily with the interpretation of Catholicism offered by Weber. Within the Focolare spirituality, as discussed above, God is found and served

[152] The person concerned asked to remain anonymous.

through service to one's neighbour and through mirroring these relationships by the relationships within the Trinity. This emphasis on finding God through others makes it extremely difficult to equate economic action and an instrumental rationality with religion and a value-oriented rationality. Money making in itself is neither good nor bad. What matters is the motivation behind the money making, which will influence how the money is made and what is done with the money. If making money is the only goal in economic action, and everything else is a means to that end, then such an action could not reflect the Trinitarian relationships since it is focused entirely on self. If making money is motivated by an attitude of creating wealth to share with others, so as to build up the community, and if those who are involved in that process are treated in such a way as to build up Trinitarian relationships, then it is not only acceptable but could even be regarded as a moral duty. Sharing becomes the principal rationale behind the economic action. The business is regarded not simply as a means to an end, but as an end in itself, as a 'social space' (Sorgi, 1991a). Within this social space, the goal of making a profit is paralleled with that of creating an atmosphere of caring amongst all those who participate and through promoting a more socially and environmentally sustainable world.

The sense of engagement with the free market economy, which underpins this spirituality, is strikingly in tune with Novak's (1993) understanding of the 'Catholic ethic'. As mentioned already in Chapter 3, Novak highlights the fact that the teaching of Catholicism on 'creation' makes it highly compatible with an economic system that emphasises free enterprise. He argues that, although Weber was right in his understanding that religions can give rise to a particular economic ethic, his understanding of 'rationality' and how it gave rise to capitalism is inherently flawed. Weber's understanding of rationality sidelined the value of creativity. Economic thinkers throughout the twentieth century such as Schumpeter, Hayek and Kirzner have repeatedly stressed creativity as central to the continuation of the market. Novak's understanding of the Catholic ethic draws on the rich theological anthropology of 'creativity' within the Catholic tradition. He says that the moral strength of capitalism (and democracy) lies not so much in its ability to distribute wealth fairly, but in its ability to promote human creativity. It is also interesting to note that Novak also predicted that such an ethic would be most likely to appear in Latin America since it has traditionally been the source of progressive Catholic thinking.

The attitudes and actions of the Economy of Sharing business leaders display many of the central elements of Novak's Catholic ethic, especially in Brazil. Through the promotion of Economy of Sharing businesses, initiative and enterprise have become qualities which are promoted throughout the Focolare Movement in general, harnessing the creative potential which Novak sees as central to the development of the market economy. Through the Economy of Sharing, the art of association is promoted, especially at local levels, through encouraging local communities to take stock of their needs and to begin to work to fulfill these needs. The Economy of Sharing also engenders a sense of public spiritedness and civic responsibility within individuals and in corporate groups which decide to participate in the Economy of Sharing. This could be seen above all in the attitudes of the business leaders towards the various communities of which they were a part. The Economy of Sharing provoked a sense of looking outwards from the business itself as a source of profit to the place of the business in the wider local community and beyond.

The Economy of Sharing business leaders, moreover, demonstrated what Novak calls the 'virtues of civility', which he puts at the foundation of the free market. These are "the art of compromise on practicalities", "the habit of showing respect to other persons", and, finally, "the art of speaking kindly" (Novak, 1993: 234). In some ways these virtues are very similar to the 'goodwill' which Dore (1983) says is an essential foundation of the economy, since they foster trust amongst people. The business leaders in the case studies emphasised strongly the value of 'new relationships' within the economy, with some even going so far as calling them Trinitarian relationships. The foundation of these new relationships was the recognition of the dignity of every person as an equal member of the human family, created in the image of God. In practice, it translated into the desire to promote a 'family' relationship with those who collaborated in the business and to attend to the needs of those who were part of the business.

Tensions between business and the culture of giving

Despite the transformative power which the Economy of Sharing businesses and the Focolare demonstrate, as mentioned above, this thesis also presents evidence which tends to suggest that there are aspects of Focolare economic action which are creating conflict. Other studies into the Economy of Sharing (Ressl, 1999) have not examined such potential tensions. As a result it is essential to offer a critique of the relationship between the Economy of Sharing as an idea and as a practice. The business leaders' responses and the data relating to the Economy of Sharing tend to suggest that there are difficulties in putting the Focolare spirituality into practice within the sphere of business.

In Chapter 5, the global overview of the Economy of Sharing showed that the levels of profits shared in common have not been rising as quickly as expected, and that over the past few years the number of businesses joining has been falling. Of the businesses surveyed, 70% had not shared any profits since they started to participate in the Economy of Sharing. On the one hand, this high percentage is partly due to the fact that the businesses are young and still have several years of investment before breaking even. On the other hand, it is also a reflection of the fact that many business people felt that they had to invest within the business itself in order to participate in the Economy of Sharing. As outlined in Chapter 8, participation in the Economy of Sharing meant that many of the businesses incurred extra costs. It is necessary to examine the possible reasons for these failures, and whether they seriously limit the prospect of the future growth of the Economy of Sharing.

One of the tensions observed was a general lack of clarity regarding what it means to be an Economy of Sharing business. This has resulted from confusion over what it means to live the culture of giving within the business and, consequently, the nature of the relationship between the business and the Focolare. In Chapter 8, I looked at the different ways in which the Economy of Sharing business people applied the culture of giving in the business. For some, the ideal of 'giving' posed them with moral conundrums since it is impossible to interpret business life *only* as an act of giving. If this were the case then the owners of the businesses would have to 'give' to their employees without expecting them to fulfil their obligations as workers; they would have to 'give' to their clients without expecting them to pay for services; they would have to 'give' to their suppliers without expecting them to provide a reliable service. Suggestions of such a literal interpretation of the culture of giving could be seen in the examples of business directors who did not want to discipline employees who were not pulling their weight, or who failed to reinvest an adequate amount in the business in order to ensure its long term survival. This literal interpretation in some ways demonstrated that the business people themselves had not understood how the Focolare spirituality could be related to business. The interpretation of the Focolare spirituality, on the other hand, had to be balanced against the needs of the business, recognising that the culture of giving cannot be taken at face value.

The lack of profit donations, however, also resulted from the concerns of some of the business people regarding the lack of information that they received about how the profits would be spent. This too has to be seen in the light of the meaning attached to giving within the Focolare. Normal practice within the Focolare regarding the communion of goods on a personal level reflects the principle in the Gospel regarding alms giving - 'your right hand should not know what the left hand is doing'. In other words, when one 'gives', one gives in trust and has no need to know how or where the gift is used. The responsibility of the giver rests in the act of giving itself. In a certain sense, the desire to know is seen as a form of inappropriate gratification. This practice has remained strong throughout the Focolare over the years and is one of the factors which has made the communion of goods so successful, since people are helped out according to their needs in a discrete manner in the same way that people may be helped in a family. There is a profound sense of trust in the focolarini, who are the ones often entrusted with establishing the needs of people and administering the goods to be shared out.

One of the difficulties with the Economy of Sharing has been the applicability of this 'family' mentality, deeply bound up in the idea of the culture of giving, within the public sphere and on a global scale. It is possible to be accepting and trusting when what is being given is a personal gift, but what happens when the gift is no longer personal, but the result of the work of a group of people, many of whom do not share the same beliefs and trust? Within the world of commerce, it is common practice to receive detailed accounts of donations given to charities and receipts for donations. Within the Economy of Sharing, since the structures emerged directly from those in place within the Focolare for the communion of goods, the need to communicate how the profits were being spent was not regarded as a high priority. The business people would receive the same notification as everyone else who read the Economy of Sharing newsletter.[153] Yet the research carried out in the businesses showed that this lack of information was beginning to stall the development of the Economy of Sharing. A desire for information in this respect comes, above all, from a sense of corporate responsibility based on the legal requirement to justify the use of profits to other directors and to employees.

This dilemma dramatises the critical question of the projection of the private within the Focolare into spheres normally associated with a more public sphere. The sense of intimate

[153] As a result of this research the situation has changed. From January 1999, all the Economy of Sharing businesses which give profits for the Economy of Sharing receive an annual balance of how the money has been spent from the Focolare centre.

'hearth' or family, at the heart of the Focolare spirituality, is one that is normally associated with the private sphere and relies on forms of interaction that could be associated with a high degree of informality and spontaneity. Such informalities have existed since the beginning of the Focolare and are based on the desire to respond to needs with immediacy, and without the need for bureaucratic interference. At a local level, this intimacy is enabled by face-to-face interactions, and transparency is ensured by the limited scale. At a global level, however, there are profound challenges to such a system if it is to retain this specific characteristic of intimacy and to operate within the legal, institutional and political framework of the market economy.

There are striking parallels between this kind of interaction which is taking place on a global scale within the Focolare and the so-called 'moral economies' which were discussed in Chapter 1. Such moral economies, which are traditionally linked to pre-industrialised 'close-knit' communities, are characterised by very high levels of trust (Platteau, 1994) and characterised by a high degree of reciprocity. The social structures of such communities would mean that decisions on allocation of resources and wealth distribution are often taken by a leader on behalf of the community. Few questions are asked, since there is certainty that the leader will only act in the best interests of the community. At the same time, transactions between members of the community are often unrecorded and non-monetary. Most transactions are based on mutual help or neighbourliness. Yet the main characteristics of these moral economies is that they are restricted to small geographical areas, and within such communities there is also a limited division of labour. Through the Economy of Sharing, the Focolare is attempting thus to project a similar vision into the global market economy through the involvement of commercial enterprises. Within the Economy of Sharing there is a global network of businesses, interacting with the rest of the global economy with its highly sophisticated division of labour. Whereas the survival of moral economies relies on the trust generated by knowing the other through living in close proximity, within the Economy of Sharing this trust is generated through sharing the same Focolare spirituality on a global scale. This trust is stretched out through the intertwining of multiple and overlapping networks of the Focolare binding together and could even be stretched to breaking point.

The justification for sharing profits for the Economy of Sharing was based above all on their personal participation in the Focolare community, and their understanding that the profits of their business were going to be used to help people whom they regarded as part of the same 'global family'. In this way, it was irrelevant whether these people were in the business, in the same street, town, or even the same country. They felt the responsibility to help them on the basis that they were part of the same global community in which distance did not matter. In some cases, however, the employees, who were generating the profits, were either unaware of this choice or not in favour of it leading to a tension between the desire to share globally, and to attend to the needs of those closest within the business. In most cases, the business directors felt it was their responsibility to attend directly to the needs of those who were geographically closest, whilst also helping those who were far away.

The involvement of employees in the sharing of profits, therefore, is an important aspect of the Economy of Sharing. The data relating to the number of employees who are aware of participating in the Economy of Sharing demonstrate that this is another source of potential tension, as discussed in Chapter 8. Some businesses initially skirted around this issue by only employing people who were involved in the Focolare and who therefore were assumed to be in agreement with the aims of the business, to share its profits with the Economy of Sharing, and were prepared to share the same work ethic. For many businesses, this form of closure could have been an easy road to follow, since it would have overcome the difficulty of explaining the Economy of Sharing to outsiders and avoided employee opposition to the idea. It also meant that these Economy of Sharing businesses could openly use a common language other than the one dominant in public discourses. It is normal to talk about sharing, loving, caring in the context of the family or even at a community level – but not in a workplace. Yet in the Economy of Sharing businesses, where all of the partners shared in the spirituality of the Focolare, it was possible to use this new business language and to establish these criteria as norms. There is evidence that this kind of practice was happening, especially in Brazil in the initial stages of the Economy of Sharing. It was carried out not on the basis of discrimination, but rather based on a shared commitment to set up new businesses on the basis of the Economy of Sharing. As the project has developed, however, this kind of practice (which in the long term could be viewed as positive discrimination) has been actively avoided. People are employed on the basis of their ability to do the job. That ability, however, also depends on at least their tacit agreement with the philosophy of the business which is made clear in the interview. In Italy, on the other hand, there was little evidence of this form of closure.

In other businesses, on the other hand, where there were already employees who did not belong to the Focolare or even know of its existence, this was not an option. They were completely oblivious to the fact that their boss participated in the Focolare. The main reason for this is the fact that there had never been any reason to discuss such matters: business is not a place to discuss participation in religious groups, since these are normally taken as wholly personal matters. The owners of the businesses thus had to accept the fact that they had to work within the cultural frame of reference of these employees without imposing different sets of standards which derived from their own personal visions. At the same time, though, the fact that the profits of the business were being used to help people led business people to question to what extent non-Focolare employees should be aware of the new philosophy and objectives of the business and, if so, how this should be communicated. The Economy of Sharing created a paradoxical situation within the businesses in which there were insiders (Focolare people both within the business and outwith) and outsiders (non-Focolare employees), although there is no evidence to suggest that there was favouritism on the basis of such distinctions.

From a legal perspective, the choice of the business owner to share profits is completely acceptable. Yet at the global scale, the tendency to do things informally, when transferred into the realm of business in relation to substantial financial resources, could give rise to 'grey areas' in which the legality of some of the transactions becomes questionable.[154] Given the emphasis within the businesses on carrying out their work legally, and the fact that the Economy of Sharing relies heavily on trust, these practices need to be clarified if the Economy of Sharing is to grow and develop.[155] Within the Economy of Sharing, however, the question of legal responsibility is secondary to the nature of the relationships with the people who are engaged in the working process. From an existential point of view, these relationships have to tend more and more towards communion in order to be authentic. Although it is legally acceptable for the decisions on profit sharing to remain a private matter at the discretion of the owner of a private business, from the point of view of how the Economy of Sharing businesses relate to the Focolare spirituality, it seems to be a contradiction. If the choice to share profits is simply a private matter for the business owner, then there is little difference between the Economy of Sharing and the paternalistic benevolence of many wealthy individuals who make sizeable charitable donations.

[154] Again, as a result of this research, the legal implications of the Economy of Sharing are being studied as a matter of concern.

The Economy of Sharing businesses can arguably say that they reflect the Focolare spirituality when the profits are the result of the consent and full participation of the workers within the businesses. From the point of view of the Focolare, the Economy of Sharing is already partially achieved when the business owner shares his orher profits, even without the conscious participation of the workers. In this respect, the workers are bound up in a 'divine project' due to the fact that they work for the Economy of Sharing. The Economy of Sharing, though, can arguably only be fully achieved at the point when the ideal of sharing is not only an end-product, based on the decision of one person (or a group of people), but the result of a working process in which these values permeate every level. In other words, businesses are only truly Economy of Sharing businesses when all of the relationships within the business can be said to be Trinitarian. Clearly there will always be the need for one person to take the decision to share, if the ownership legally rests in that person's hands, but that decision should be the result of consensus rather than personal conviction alone.

The final source of potential conflict between the culture of giving and the Economy of Sharing relates to the nature of the services and products which the Economy of Sharing businesses provide. As a alternative to the dominant view of global capitalism, the Economy of Sharing is very different to the other radical 'alternatives' put forward in the 1990s. The views of authors such as Latouche (1993) and Sachs (1992) point the way to a 'scaling down' of Western high consumption lifestyles in order to make space for those who have not had the opportunity to experience the benefits of economic development: consuming less so that they can consume more. It is a view that regards the globe as a closed ecosystem with finite resources that need to be sensibly, even equitably, divided up amongst a growing population (Daly, 1996). Enabling the poorest to gain a more equal share of wealth means lessening the 'environmental footprint' of Western societies.

The 'culture of giving', which was outlined in Chapter 4, embodies the values which are cited as critical for the kind of transformations needed in order to reach environmental and social sustainability (Oslon, 1995). Oslon stresses that the revitalisation of meaningful community life is critical in the search for a renewed social vision (Oslon, 1995: 30). In this respect, the Focolare demonstrates an extraordinary potential to revitalise the 'social imagination'. Nevertheless, one has to examine the role that the businesses of the Economy

[155] Such a study is outwith the remit of this thesis but could form a very interesting area of future research.

of Sharing play in changing attitudes towards consumption and whether they are complicit in fostering high consumption lifestlyes through the chain of industrial production. Do the businesses, for example, produce goods or services (the name of sharing profits for good causes) which contradict the values of giving underpinning the Focolare spirituality?

In the research into the businesses in Italy and Brazil, those in Sao Paulo demonstrated a greater awareness of the interrelationship between these two levels of economic action and social vision. There was a stronger influence on producing goods which were environmentally friendly and services which they regarded as compatible with the culture of giving within the businesses in Brazil. In Milan, on the other hand, there was less awareness of how these different levels related to each other. More businesses were engaged in producing products and services which could be regarded as symbolic of consumer culture. These included luxury items, such as designer sunglasses, and financial services for some of the big fashion houses in Milan. Although it is not possible directly to equate products with cultural attitudes, clearly the Economy of Sharing businesses which were providing such goods (so as to share their profits) had an interest in retaining an ethos of consumption which identified with consumerism, otherwise they would inevitably lose business. The involvement of the businesses in such relationships with other non-Economy of Sharing businesses demonstrates the complexity of 'claiming the moral high ground' for the Economy of Sharing. It is something that requires further thought and reflection.

The economic as 'networks'

The second theme which underpins this thesis is the idea of the economic as networks. In Chapter 1, I examined the various ideas that have emerged to theorise and to spatialise the emergence of multiple and intertwining global networks. Some of these ideas have made use of the idea of business embeddedness to understand the way that social and economic networks intertwine (Granovetter, 1985; Grabher, 1993), illustrating the importance of personal contacts and relationships within the world of business. Such ideas challenge the orthodox perceptions of the 'market'. More recently, Actor Network Theory (ANT) has taken on a more prominent role within economic geography (Thrift, 1995; Law, 1994; Leyshon & Thrift, 1997), demonstrating how, within heterogeneous networks using 'intelligent' technology, it is increasingly difficult to establish the cause and effect or subject and object of economic action, and stressing that what matters more are the 'flows' rather than the nodes in the network (Murdoch, 1997).

Networks and the Economy of Sharing

The Economy of Sharing is played out in the overlapping and intersecting local and global networks, which I examined in Chapters 8 and 9. These networks are important in sustaining the business directors who are participating in the Economy of Sharing, giving them the moral courage to persevere in their choice, and also offering them practical opportunities to develop commercial contacts with like-minded business people. Within these networks, resources are shared to some extent and profits are re-distributed to the poor within the Focolare communities on a global scale. Some of the networks are local, with interactions between business people and the members of the Focolare community taking place on a regular basis. These networks provide moral support and are sources of innovation for the businesses participating in the Economy of Sharing.

The evidence presented in Chapters 8 and 9 tends to support Thrift's (1995: 34-5) view that, although the economy is commonly perceived as a 'space of flows', it is in fact made up of a series of social networks which are "often of quite limited size, even though they might span the globe". The Economy of Sharing businesses form networks which are global, in that they span the globe, but are also limited in that they involve at most several thousand people. Within these networks the local-global distinction is turned upside down to some extent. What matters within the Economy of Sharing is 'connectedness' within the network, since being connected is what enables the businesses to gain access to the support and commercial opportunities which the Economy of Sharing could bring.

The connectedness of the businesses, as the field work showed, also reveals a strong relationship between the local and global scales. The businesses in Sao Paulo, for example, were working closely as a local group of Economy of Sharing businesses, and were also visible in the global Economy of Sharing networks. The Milan businesses, on the other hand, aspired more to the global network but did not work as closely with the other Economy of Sharing businesses at a local level. As a consequence, they were not as visible *either* at a local level *or* on an international scale. The key factor in consolidating the Economy of Sharing networks in Sao Paulo was the institution of the industrial estate near Araceli. The creation of a shared project which everyone involved in the Economy of Sharing could work on together was a catalyst for the Economy of Sharing in the region. The existence of a 'micro-economy' in which all of the businesses shared the same ideal of the Economy of Sharing offered a visible, spatialised, example to outside parties of the validity of the project. It also created an example that could be cited at an international level. Latour's assertion that what matters in networks is connectedness rather than geographical scale, therefore, is only partially true for the Economy of Sharing: connectedness is also a function of geographical scale.

The question of connectedness, moreover, to some extent goes beyond the issue of scale. It is also a question of membership and what governs who can and who cannot become part of the Economy of Sharing. All the Economy of Sharing networks share the feature that they rely on a high degree of mutual trust in order to function. The need for extremely high levels of trust within the networks leads, paradoxically, to a high degree of closure in networks which, according to the Focolare's spirituality, one might assume to be open. The closure of these business networks is highlighted by the fact that the only people who know 'who's who' in the Economy of Sharing are the other Economy of Sharing business people and a limited number of people within the Focolare. The reason for this need for closure extends from the assumption (which is often backed by negative experience) that business relationships are generally founded on competition. Such competition requires businesses to keep closely guarded secrets so that others cannot profit from them. As discussed in Chapter 1, within the realm of the economy, there is the underlying assumption that the social and cultural niceties of business are about meeting the eternal goal of profit more effectively. The so-called 'people-centred' approach to economic action remains rhetoric so long as profit is the sole goal, since the human relationships involved become instrumental and not an end in themselves.

The Economy of Sharing networks rely on the trust that the participating businesses are not involved in the project for personal gain. This high degree of closure of the Economy of Sharing networks enables the businesses to create a space within the commercial economy, in which they can be certain that whatever is shared will not be manipulated to the ends of others or used against them. This trust comes directly from the fact that the business people involved in the Economy of Sharing all share the same spirituality, and hence share the same lifestyle based on living out Trinitarian relationships. This deep commitment of the business leaders to the spirituality thus minimises the possibility of 'free riders' taking advantage of the other businesses. The prospects for free riders, should they succeed in penetrating the Economy of Sharing networks, could be very great indeed since they would be met with a trusting attitude and a willingness to share everything with them. Although such a prospect would be slim, given that it would require a high degree of manipulation not only of business practices but also lifestyle changes and commitment to the Focolare, it is not entirely implausible. A more likely scenario is that someone already on the inside of the Economy of Sharing might use their knowledge to the detriment of the others, if for some reason they could no longer participate in the Economy of Sharing. So far, there is no evidence that this has happened.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, there are parallels between the Economy of Sharing networks, which one could call 'Trinitarian relationships' and the '*guanxi*' which Olds and Yeung (1999) discuss in relation to traditional Chinese business networks. Guanxi relationships have been fundamental to the development of the Chinese commercial economy. Both are dependent on cultural factors that go beyond the conventional understanding of business practice. Guanxi relationships, however, relate much more to convention and social structure than do Trinitarian relationships. The underlying concept of social esteem and respect in Guanxi is based on social position as a means of obtaining favours (Bian, 1998), whereas the concept of Trinitarian relationships is principally about giving with the same care and respect without expecting any return. Nevertheless, there are strong parallels in the way that guanxi relationships are regarded as a form of 'social capital', and in how relationships between people within the Economy of Sharing enable the exchange of information and other resources based on trust.

Olds and Yeung argue that these traditional business relationships are now giving way to conventional understandings of business in the process of modernisation within China. They are regarded as a tradition which is now incompatible with the global market and are being progressively eroded. Nevertheless, businesses hoping to enter the Chinese market still invest a large amount of capital in fostering guanxi relationships, showing how difficult it is to separate business relationships from traditional forms of social network. The Trinitarian relationships which form the basis of the Economy of Sharing, on the other hand, are not traditional in the sense of emerging from localised practices over a long period of time. To some extent they draw on traditional elements of religious beliefs, but transform these beliefs in a radical way. The fact that the Economy of Sharing relationships draw closely on a Catholic theology means that they will be more likely to develop in countries where there is a strong Catholic culture, as shown in Chapters 5 and 6. This can be seen in the current pattern of development of the Economy of Sharing (Figure 5.3). It does not mean, however, that such relationships will be confined to certain places, but can be extended across the globe wherever there are people who share the Economy of Sharing perspective.

The Economy of Sharing, moreover, forms a potentially powerful series of 'contact networks' in the sense that Thrift and Amin (1994) mean. Thrift and Amin discuss three kinds of contact networks which ordinary firms exhibit and which contribute towards the 'institutional thickness'[156] of a region: relationships with other firms and competitors, links with professional bodies and social institutions, and what they call 'epistemic communities'. The Economy of Sharing businesses, like other businesses, have access to all three of these networks. Participation in the Economy of Sharing, as shown in Chapter 8, led a number of the businesses to become more actively involved in the local and regional professional bodies and social institutions. Likewise, participation often leads to the creation of new partnerships with other businesses in the same sector with whom they may have previously had antagonistic relationships. All of these networks are strengthened through participation in the Economy of Sharing.

The Economy of Sharing, however, offers a very special kind of 'epistemic community',[157] which Thrift and Amin (1994) cite as the third kind of contact network. By 'epistemic', Amin and Thrift are alluding to the possibility that different ways of knowing the world, underpinning cultural and religious beliefs, can have a profound influence on economic networks, and therefore institutional thickness, although it is unlikely that they had 'mystical participation in the life of the Trinity' in mind as the epistemology underpinning one such community! Often such epistemic communities, according to Thrift and Amin, revolve around a particular interest and therefore limit the kinds of businesses and people who can actively participate in them. What is particularly interesting about the Economy of Sharing, however, is the fact that it is made up of a broad range of businesses representing different sectors, different sizes of firms and different geographical regions throughout the world. Moreover, the group is not only made up of business leaders but also employees and policy makers who share the same normative vision and are prepared to work together to promote the Economy of Sharing in different ways.

[156] Refer to Chapter 1, pp.17-20 for a definition.
[157] Amin and Thrift use this term to describe tightly drawn interest groups which not only share specialist knowledge, interests and attitudes but also a normative commitment to act in certain ways and follow specific policy agendas (Amin & Thrift, 1994: 14).

The 'thickness' of the Economy of Sharing networks varies considerably in different places, as could be seen from the case study regions of Milan and Sao Paulo. The research showed that where the businesses are more closely connected on a local level, as in Sao Paulo, they are more likely to be visible within the global Economy of Sharing networks. One of the important challenges which the Economy of Sharing faces is strengthening these networks both at a local level and at an international level. It is only through having the opportunity to meet others in this epistemic community, who share the common ideals of the Economy of Sharing, that common projects can emerge and the space for sharing in the market economy can be widened out.

Levels of Focolare - Economy of Sharing interaction

One of the critical issues which needs to be clarified in this respect is the relationship between the Focolare and the Economy of Sharing businesses. The Economy of Sharing has evolved from the spirituality which is at the heart of the Focolare Movement and it could not exist in its present form without this vision. Nevertheless, the different levels of interaction between the Focolare and the businesses need to be examined in closer detail. In Chapter 5, I examined the various institutions which have been formed since the start of the Economy of Sharing in 1991 and the way that these were developed from the existing Focolare structures (see Table 5.2).

On one level, the ideas which are at the heart of the Focolare inform the motivation for the functioning of the businesses. It is through sharing the global culture of the Focolare that the Economy of Sharing came about in the first place. On another level, the Focolare community provides a source of guidance and support in the practical application of these ideas. The business leaders look to the Focolare for inspiration, but also for help when things go wrong. At the same time, the Focolare community acts as a potential market for products, and creates new possibilities for the emergence of common projects. Finally, the Focolare provides the organisational structure for the redistribution of the profits from the businesses.

Based on the results of the research at the Focolare Centre and in the businesses, there is evidence that these different functions and levels of interaction between the Economy of Sharing and the Focolare have, at times, become confused. This is illustrated in the degree of confusion regarding responsibilities and misplaced expectations amongst the business people, as was discussed in Chapter 8. The consequences of this confusion have been the failure of some Economy of Sharing businesses and the development of others in ways which cannot be sustained long-term. On the other hand, there is evidence that the lack of understanding on the part of the business people regarding how the Economy of Sharing functions on a global scale is preventing the growth of the project both in terms of businesses *and* profit distribution.

One way to avoid such confusion, and to promote the future growth of the Economy of Sharing, is to advocate the separation of certain aspects of the Economy of Sharing from the Focolare Movement. From the point of view of operational support, the separation of the Focolare and the Economy of Sharing is necessary in order to secure good business practice. At present, the Economy of Sharing commissions attempt to fulfill this role, but such commissions are often unable to meet the demand for help since they operate on a voluntary basis. The businesses, on the other hand often require not only specialised advice, but practical help to integrate the Economy of Sharing and business practice in the form of on-site workshops and the analysis of business practices. The Economy of Sharing commissions are not in a position to undertake such legal or moral responsibility.

The separation of the technical aspects would have to give rise to new structures capable of integrating the Focolare vision and current management thinking. One way of bringing this about could be through the creation of new consultancy businesses offering a range of support services specifically (but not exclusively) to Economy of Sharing businesses. Such consultancy businesses, which would have to be run by people who share the Economy of Sharing vision, could operate according to the market. Such consultancy businesses would not replace the existing commissions, but enable them to point businesses in the direction of specialised support where necessary. In that way the commissions could continue their role as facilitators of the Economy of Sharing, as a local reference point for all the businesses and a means of spreading the idea of the Economy of Sharing to a greater number of people.

Interaction at a market level between the Economy of Sharing and the Focolare, moreover, also has to be clarified. It seems normal and acceptable for people within the Focolare to want to support businesses that both reflect their ideals and share their profits with the Focolare community. As outlined in Chapter 9, this interaction has created the possibility of new enterprises and enabled them to prosper in otherwise hostile conditions. Nevertheless, this interaction has to be monitored closely in order to avoid confused expectations. The businesses cannot be allowed to fall into a kind of 'autarkic growth', using the people within the Focolare as their main or principal market. In the long term, this kind of practice could have serious consequences for the Economy of Sharing and for the Focolare, and even lead to bankrupcy.

At the moment, most of the business projects which have started through the Economy of Sharing operate at a local level. International joint projects, such as *Solidar Capital* and the exchange of technology through businesses like Rotogine in Brazil, are the exception rather than the rule. The network of business contacts between people engaged in the Economy of Sharing, however, is increasingly international. There is great potential for collaborative ventures, therefore, such as the free transfer of technology and know-how and joint business projects. This kind of co-operation could eventually lead to the expansion of the Economy of Sharing through the creation of many new businesses in developing countries. In his research, Ressl (1999) concludes that the future development of the Economy of Sharing would see a greater integration of international ventures in the shape of a 'group of companies' in which there is shared ownership. In effect, he argues that the Economy of Sharing could give rise to a new model of MNC. Such international ventures in the current context of the Economy of Sharing at the present time have to be regarded with caution. As shown in previous chapters, the networks of the Economy of Sharing currently rely heavily on the Focolare at an international scale. The business leaders from different countries have come to know each other through the Focolare. This kind of relationship generates a high level of trust, but not necessarily the technical expertise nor the experience to operate within the context of joint business ventures, although such a possibility cannot be ruled out. Making the successful transition from a relationship based on shared participation in the Focolare to becoming international business partners requires careful thought.

The Economy of Sharing and the needs of distant strangers

So far, I have considered the way that the Economy of Sharing relates to the various theories regarding the relationship between the cultural, the social, the religious and the economic and how these are played out in inter-linking and overlapping networks. What emerges from this discussion is the fact that within the various Economy of Sharing networks both at a local and global scale there is a shared understanding of the relationship between the economic and the other aspects of life. There is an underlying assumption that the cultural embraces the economic, *transforming economic spaces into social* and even 'sacred' ones through the Trinitarian relationships. It reveals an economic landscape which is enriched with new concepts of rational action, underpinned by 'other' rationalities, which are arguably inseparable from the cultural context in which they were formed.

At this point it is possible to examine the implications that this distinctive understanding of the relationship between the economic and the cultural could have in relation to what might be termed the 'morality' of the economy. The Economy of Sharing raises important questions with regards to social justice and the market, both as a theoretical idea and as a normative vision. Is it possible to call the spaces of the Economy of Sharing 'moral', as opposed to the 'amoral' spaces of conventional economic discourse? At this point I will draw out some of the principal ideas about social justice as they emerge from the research in this thesis. In particular, I will examine the possible insights that this thesis brings to the geographical question of the 'spatial scope of beneficence' raised by Smith (1998).

The question of the relationship between geography and moral philosophy has been cited as an important area for future geographical study (Philo, 1991: 15). In this keynote paper, Philo calls for geographers to open up a new engagement with moral philosophy, so as to "yield fresh insights into geographical issues where the economic 'logic' is already understood but where the moral components are as yet 'invisible'" (Philo, 1991: 18). Since this paper, there has been a resurgence in 'moral' debates in many geographical texts (e.g. Harvey, 1996; Hay, 1995; Smith, 1994), highlighting how considerations of space, place and environment are potentially at the heart of moral thinking. Smith (1997) provides an overview of the various re-engagements between the disciplines of human geography and ethical issues. He cites the different levels of engagement between geography and moral philosophy as three: with meta-ethics (regarding the 'big' questions relating to the world view from which ethical/moral standpoints emerge), with descriptive ethics (examining the actual moral beliefs and practices in particular places and circumstances) and with normative ethics (prescribing moral solutions based on the above). The majority of the work so far has focused on the particular 'moral geographies' of everyday life, describing the 'moral landscapes' (Driver, 1988; Ley, 1993), 'moral locations' or 'moral terrains' (Proctor, 1998) which shape and influence choices and actions, primarily in the urban environment. The role of the geographer has been that of understanding what Walzer (1994: xi) terms 'thick' local moralities which are "richly referential, culturally resonant, locked into a locally established symbolic system or network of meanings."

Given the complexity of the debates surrounding the interface between moral philosophy and geography, Smith cautions against geographers engaging with meta-ethics, but cites two areas in which he regards the contribution of geographers as highly relevant: the debate over universalism and relativism and the question of the geographical distribution of goods (with the related question of responsibility to 'distant others'). Both of these related debates are highly relevant to the Economy of Sharing. The question of redistribution is at the heart of the Economy of Sharing and raises probing questions regarding the nature of distribution. Secondly, the Focolare ethos challenges the prevalent dualistic tendency to describe the morality of the local/particular as 'thick' and that of the global/universal as 'thin'. The Focolare/Economy of Sharing ethos is arguably an example of a 'thick' global morality which is particular, but has universalising tendencies. The ethos of the Focolare is a global projection of a 'morality' rooted in the idea of the local 'hearth', the most intimate image of caring and sharing within a family.

Theories of social justice

Smith (1994) provides an overview of the various theories of social justice which have been influential on the discourses which still dominate both the market economy and other theories which have emerged as reactions. He cites the following quote on economic justice, which highlights the problem:

> *"The problem of economic justice can be expressed with remarkable simplicity: On what basis should goods and services be distributed? Answers to this question, however, are as numerous as those to any important philosophical issue. Some (libertarians) believe that the operation of the free market guarantees justice. Others (utilitarian) hold that the needs or interests of people should be of primary concern. Still others look to how much is deserved, as measured by labour time, or contribution, as the basis for distribution. Equal distribution, since it seems to reflect the common humanity shared by all, is also viewed by many as the core of economic justice. The philosophical problem is to decide which among these and other positions is in fact superior, and to give reasons for one's conclusions that will convince others"* (Arthur and Shaw, 1991: 1, cited in Smith, 1994).

As discussed in Chapter 1, of these different theories, the one that is most deeply implicated in economic affairs in the present day is utilitarianism (Smith, 1997: 59). The overriding concern within utilitarianism is the pursuit of human welfare as the only sound normative basis for making decisions. It places the maximisation of well-being (or welfare, utility, happiness, pleasure) as the overriding objective towards which all other objectives should be directed. It reflects the moral principle of equal concern in requiring 'impartiality', giving the same weight to each individual's welfare and asking each individual to give the same concern to all others equally. Classical utilitarianism stressed the pursuit of pleasure or the absence of pain as the universal value which had to be maximised. Such concepts, however, have been criticised strongly since the pursuit of pleasure is loaded with hedonistic connotations (Nozick, 1974: 42-5). In more recent theoretical elaborations of utilitarianism, the theory has been linked closely to classical economics and welfare theory. In this concept, the idea of happiness is replaced by 'utility', meaning that each individual seeks to maximise their own personal preferences within the general structure of the market. It is normally restricted to monetary transactions, but can be extended and applied to all kinds of things from which people gain satisfaction. The aggregate pursuit of utility is called 'welfare'. This principle was reworked by Pareto and became the foundation of economic science: it is in the best interests of everyone if each person pursues their own self-interest. Egalitarianism can be seen as the flip side to utilitarianism. Goods have to be shared out somehow and the responsibility for distributing the goods (in some versions of the theory) lies with the state, legitimising the separation between production and distribution. Social justice is seen as a big cake with slices that have to be distributed out fairly: either people keep their slices and the cake keeps growing, or the slices are shared out differently.

This concept of social justice has been severely criticised on many grounds, but despite this, it has remained the cornerstone of economic thinking and practice. Criticisms range from the impossibility of assuming that human beings perform calculations to maximise their satisfaction to the gross difficulties in measuring utility itself. Etzioni (1989), for example, highlights the point that there are at least two different 'utilities' relating to morality, duty and pleasure, which are in conflict with each other. Such utilities cannot be reduced to a single concept of preferences. The concept of preferences itself, moreover, is very difficult to accept in view of the numerous special relationships which people have with those closest to them. Within this concept of social justice, there is no conception of 'relationships', either special ones (family, friends, community) or general ones with unknown strangers. People are viewed as isolated individuals who exist to gain their personal maximisation of utility. At most, personal utility is substituted with corporate utility, which reflects a kind of collective utility maximisation. Finally, such a universalised concept of social justice is 'aspatial', since it starts from an original position of equality which does not take into account the actual existing claims to space (territorial, parochial, local) which perpetuate situations of injustice. As a consequence, such concepts are 'thin' in terms of vocabulary and in their ability to offer normative answers to the questions of injustice.

Despite these shortcomings, there are certain aspects of this universalised vision of social justice which can be readily applied to what is happening within the Economy of Sharing, although they can by no means offer an explanation of the Economy of Sharing. Within the Focolare, there is a strong sense that the equalisation of the distribution of wealth is related to social justice. In Chapter 4, when I considered the economic vision of the Focolare, I looked at the way that the focolarini were at times mistaken for communists due to their strong emphasis on social revolution and the emancipation of the poor. They regarded creating a fair distribution as a key to achieving a more just society. The underlying principle of social justice, therefore, stressed the inequality of access to resources, particularly money, as a source of injustice. This emphasis on equalisation can also be seen very clearly within the Economy of Sharing: through sharing their profits the business directors see themselves as helping to create a more just society. Legitimate self-interest is accepted as a positive force for good - in the sense that free initiative is essential in order to facilitate the pursuit of profit - but it is not regarded as the goal of economic action. It has to be constantly moderated through responsibility towards persons and the environment.

The main difference between the Focolare perspective and the egalitarian/distributionist theories of social justice would appear to reside in who should do the distributing and how. The Economy of Sharing emerged as the result of the failure of the modern economic system to deliver welfare to the people within the community. This can be seen in particular in Latin America, where the Economy of Sharing has taken off most vigorously. Whereas traditional theories would place the role of redistribution in the hands of the state through taxation, within the Economy of Sharing the redistribution of resources is regarded as an integral part of the production process. The business owners are given the responsibility to distribute their profits to the poor through the Focolare, putting into practice the CST principle of 'subsidiarity', as discussed in Chapter 4. They do not take on the personal task of sharing out resources, but delegate responsibility for this to those whom they regard as part of their wider community. Through creating a system by which care is administered through community structures both on a local level and global scale, the role of the state in the lives of those who are helped by the Economy of Sharing is kept to a minimum. In this way the business is not just the means of 'increasing the size of the cake' (in the egalitarian sense) whereas the state is the means of 'sharing out the cake'. Through the Economy of Sharing, the productive process/business also has the function of redistributing profits in proportion to the increasing size of the cake. This in turn limits the extent to which the corporations can grow since they balance their potential to invest in future growth with the need to distribute in the present.

On another level, however, there are aspects of these theories of social justice which sit uneasily with the vision of the Economy of Sharing presented in this thesis. In particular, the ontological vision of Trinitarian relationships raises questions regarding the possibility of impartiality within the market. Within the Economy of Sharing one has to ask *to what extent is it possible to create Trinitarian relationships whilst at the same time being impartial?* As discussed above in relation to networks, the Economy of Sharing businesses seem to have great problems in 'respecting' the norms of impartiality within the market, a phenomenon which is not unique to the Economy of Sharing. This is occurring on all levels within the Economy of Sharing – from the creation of Economy of Sharing associations to the decision to share profits with a specific (albeit globally dispersed) group of people. In a sense, the underlying principle of creating Trinitarian relationships leads the business owners to view the market not as a series of colliding atoms, but as a space which is inherently relational. Their aim becomes that of making the economy *more* relational through increasing the number of these special relationships within the market through living out the Focolare spirituality in the workplace. Thus, within the network of Economy of Sharing businesses it is possible to share technology – but not with those outside. Within the Economy of Sharing there may be concessions on prices to other Economy of Sharing businesses or to members of the Focolare – but not to those outside. This poses questions as to the legality of some of the unwritten deals or contracts between a number of the businesses.

The creation of these kinds of special relationships within the market could be interpreted by the above universalised theories of social justice as 'unjust'. Whilst improving the well-being of a number of people and increasing their chances of escaping poverty, the processes by which they are helped and the nature of the help received could be deemed as 'unfair' by those who are in favour of an openly accountable and democratic system of decision making in which there is a formal application procedure for help. Yet such processes are at odds with the existing process within the Economy of Sharing, which is inherently relational. Nevertheless, such is the complexity of theoretical considerations of social justice, what is injustice to one theory is perfectly just to another. In this case, the Economy of Sharing is very much in tune with a number of contemporary theories of social justice, such as communitarianism which Smith (1994) terms as 'reactionary', since they have emerged in response to the universalised theories discussed above. In particular, they stress the relational dimension of ethics.

Among such relational ethical theories is the idea of a 'politics of difference', which is advocated by Young (1990b). In Young's view, an adequate concept of social justice must emphasise the relations which lead to domination and oppression rather than focusing just on the distribution of goods. In her work there is a rejection of the universalised theories of social justice which tend to mask the real situations of oppression which are expressed in institutions and groups. Her work in this respect parallels the work of Simone Weil, cited earlier in this thesis, as the emphasis is put on "heeding a call" (Young, 1990b: 5) rather than on "mastering a state of affairs". Although she rejects the kind of communitarianism which is put forward by Walzer (1983), on the grounds that is an unobtainable ideal in contemporary life as it emphasises face-to-face relations (Young, 1990a: 314), her own work resonates with the need to build meaningful 'groups' (rather than communities) which can overcome forms of domination and oppression. Perhaps the main difference with communitarianism, apart from vocabulary, is that Young has a vision which sees questions of justice/injustice in how various groups relate to others, and therefore is alert to how they regard the boundaries between themselves and others. Justice is about expanding out the network of relationships which can be found within particular groups to include others rather than involving the inward-looking promotion of parochial self-interest at the expense of those who are different.

In this respect, there are strong parallels between the work of Young and the Focolare ethos, both in the writings of Chiara Lubich and in the practices of the Economy of Sharing. The question of social justice in relation to the Economy of Sharing moves away from one based on the market – with the undertones of impartiality and universality which are implicit within it. It rests rather on involvement or participation in a community wherein there is a mutual recognition of the duties to and responsibilities of each other. The question is therefore one of belonging rather than one preoccupied by some predetermined rationale of justice. As one Focolare delegate told me in an interview: *"If my son is in need, it doesn't matter to me whether he is here or on the other side of the planet – I want to help him"*. What matters is the fraternal relationship which exists with the person no matter how physically near or far they might be. This has strong parallels with Young's idea of the increasing importance of groups and movements in which welfare is taken out of the hands of the state and administered through intermediaries. Within the Focolare this shift in the meaning of community, as imagined by Young, can be seen in action. The Focolare is a global community in which participation is not based on any particular criteria except identification with the ideals and objectives of the group.

The Focolare, though, does not only form a practical example of one of the groups that Young was talking about. It can also cast light, in a more theoretical vein, on the kind of values which are essential to the 'politics of difference' which Young is advocating. One of the remarkable features of this pluralistic ethos is the co-existence of different epistemologies within the one group, without the dilution of one into the other in a form of either religious syncretism or the impoverishment of different traditions in an attempt not to offend others.[158] Although based on a profoundly Christian spirituality, which forms the main motivating force behind the actions of the vast majority of people within the Focolare, great emphasis is placed on the need to foster relationships with each person, especially with those who are 'different' in terms of race, gender and religious beliefs. Pluralism, therefore, is not regarded as a necessary evil (as it would be possible to assume) but an essential feature of human society which finds its counterpart in the Trinity.[159] The spirituality which underpins the Focolare homes in precisely on the place of disunity as the place where Christians are called to be, through the underlying vocation to create

[158] Here it has to be added that, as in all institutions, mistakes will have been made and will inevitably be made in the future, especially in countries where there are very strong cultural differences or tensions. Evidence of such shortcomings has not been systematically presented in this thesis as it would entail further investigation. Anecdotal evidence about situations where the integration of the Focolare ethos has met with resistance was gained from several ex-members in various African and Latin American countries. In both of these cases they stressed that the problems arose not from the ethos itself, but from the inability of particular Focolare leaders in the respective countries to accept certain cultural traditions. The difficulties expressed in most cases led to the leaders being moved to different places.

[159] This is underpinned by a profound commitment to pluralism, which is expressed succinctly in the words of the theologian Vives: "The revelation of the Trinity shows clearly that the affirmation of being, at its deepest level, is not closure within the self, which excludes plurality, but communication in the plurality" (cited in Cambón, 1999: 91).

Trinitarian relationships.[160] It is this preferential choice to 'fill the gaps' of disunity between individuals and groups that has enabled the emergence of a fruitful dialogue within the Focolare which encompasses people of different Christian traditions, people of different religions, and even people who have no specific religious tradition but who still share a commitment to the promotion of a common culture based on mutual love and respect.

Another theory of social justice which is particularly in tune with the Focolare ethos is what Gilligan (1982) called an 'ethic of care'. Recognising that the theories of social justice have been predominantly formulated from a masculine perspective, studies in behavioural psychology have showed that women related justice to an ethic of care rather than to one of impartiality and fairness. Her view hence stresses the relational dimension of ethics which has as much to do with feeling a sense of responsibility, involvement and duty towards others as it has to do with constructs of impartiality and rational observation. In much the same way, the Focolare ethos is about engaging with others so as to reach a mutual understanding and relationship. In a sense, through the perspective of Trinitarian relationships which underpins the Focolare spirituality, the Focolare is putting into practice an 'ethic of care' which is often associated with feminist thinking (Smith, 1994: 112) in order to bring about Young's (1990b) 'politics of difference'. The association between these two concepts of social justice is rarely made, but it seems that within the Focolare the two are intimately connected and mutually enriching. The idea that 'care' is a distinctively female attribute has been contested (Tronto, 1993) as it could lead to the perpetuation of unwanted stereotypes. Whilst bearing this in mind, and without wishing to make 'typecast' judgments on the nature of gender differences, the experience of the Economy of Sharing could cast some light on the nature of a 'feminised economic geography', if 'feminine' is equated with an 'ethic of care'.

The Economy of Sharing emerged from a movement which was initially dominated by women who, during the war, adopted an 'ethic of care' as their sole aim and objective in life. In this respect, it evolved from a perspective in which there was a close relationship between the giver and the receiver, emphasising the relational dimension of care in the construction of a meaningful community. Although the Focolare now involves men and

[160] The idea of *pericoresis*, as a dimension of Trinitarian relationships, is precisely this dimension of 'in-dwelling' in the other without dilution or mixing. The theology underpinning the Focolare was discussed in detail in Chapter 3. In particular, I examined the centrality of the abandonment of Jesus and the role of Christian life in the continuation of redemption. spirituality.

women (although the women almost always outnumber the men, sometimes up to 2:1), the Focolare and the Economy of Sharing still bear the hallmarks of Chiara Lubich's charismatic leadership. The 'ethic of care' within the Economy of Sharing could be translated into an 'ethic of caring and sharing' and is seen, above all, in the desire and commitment to care for those both near and far as the main concern of the businesses. This imbues the world of commerce with values traditionally associated with the home or the family - traditionally female 'spaces'. Such a vision of a 'feminisation' is far removed from the current literature on the feminisation of the economy which emphasises the way that capital has become more 'flexible' in order to facilitate the entry of more and more part-time predominantly female workers in the paid economy (Walters & Dex, 1992). Unfortunately, feminisation is almost always associated with low-paid, low-skilled, insecure, part-time jobs (Agee & Walker, 1990; Allen, 1992). In this regard, feminisation has come to mean the predominance of the rational pursuit of profit over every other consideration. In the Economy of Sharing, on the other hand, 'feminisation' of the economy means imbuing the structures of the market with values normally associated with the spatially intimate family.

Towards a global ethic of care

The Economy of Sharing demonstrates the possibility of the emergence of new global economic geographies which are underpinned by alternative perspectives on the dominant discourses of globalisation. It offers a radical reworking of the ideal of social justice within the market economy which has the potential for fostering 'sharing' not only at a local scale but also on a global scale. It offers the possibility of the extension of an 'ethic of care' not only at a local scale, but also through its incorporation within the institutions of the market economy, possibly within global networks. Despite the difficulties encountered by those attempting to apply the Focolare's vision, the potential for advocating a different, alternative perspective on economic and social life remains strong. Such a need is profoundly relevant and is echoed by those seeking solutions to the multiple environmental, social and economic crises which the world is facing. The need for 'alternative visions' has been advocated on numerous occasions by the United Nations in relation to the implementation of Agenda 21 (Brown & Quiblier, 1994), as well as numerous NGOs and academics seeking ways to envisage a more sustainable world (Cobb, 1995; Daly, 1996; Ekins, 1992; Milbrath, 1995). Within the Economy of Sharing there is a intertwining of spirituality, economic theory, idealism and realism capable of bringing about a particular blend of social justice, making the economy move in directions which are arguably more sustainable.

A central question which has to be asked, therefore, is the extent to which such an alternative can be universalised, as well as globalised, given that the epistemological framework from which it emerged is a religious one and the roots of the underlying idea of the 'hearth' is spatialised at a local level? Within the Focolare, there are very powerful truth claims which, although pluralistic to some extent, are rooted in a Christian religious epistemology. It is the belief in that particular vision of the world, moreover, that forms the rationale behind the Economy of Sharing. At the same time, as mentioned above, the Trinitarian perspective offers an interpretative key not only for the Economy of Sharing, but maybe for all social relationships. The urgent questions being raised through the existence of the Economy of Sharing hence go to the heart of many debates within contemporary geographical and moral thinking: to what extent is it possible to envisage a 'global ethic' which is external to the market and capable of embracing difference? In view of post-modern skepticism of 'grand meta-narratives', is it possible for such an ethic to make reference to epistemological certainties based on religious beliefs? To what extent can modern institutions, such as businesses, reflect these beliefs whilst remaining pluralistic?

The question of a global ethic which transcends the market is, perhaps, one of the most pertinent questions at the turn of the millennium (Küng, 1997a; McNeill, 1999; O'Connor, 1994). Work on this need for a 'global ethic' cites the world's religions as a primary potential source for such a global ethos (Küng, 2000; Küng & *Schmitt, 1998*). Writers stress that within many of the world religions there is already the basis of an global ethic capable of reaching a more environmentally and socially sustainable world. The central tenet of this ethic is a renewed emphasis on the 'golden rule' to do to others what you would like them to do to you (UNESCO, 1995: 36). They stress that the way forward will be found in the capacity of the different world religions to engage with other religions in the promotion of human rights and responsibilities. In this respect, the Focolare experience can offer some insight into the future prospects for inter-religious dialogue. The emphasis that the Focolare spirituality places on listening, on 'making space for the other,' has enabled a creative dialogue to evolve within the movement, between people belonging to different religious traditions, as outlined in Chapter 3.

One may question, however, the extent to which dialogue is possible within a predominantly Catholic organisation such as the Focolare, which has such close connections with the Catholic Church in Rome. The Focolare's actions and Christian ethos could be interpreted by some as a form of neo-colonialism which is irrelevant or inappropriate in a post-colonial era. As suggested in Chapter 3, such interpretations ought to be taken seriously, given that the Focolare does express a form of 'missionary activity' which pre-existed the demise of colonialism. In particular, the existence of the model towns of the Focolare in the various continents could be interpreted as an attempt to colonise distant lands with Focolare spaces. Yet the idea that the ethos of the Focolare ought to be thrown out due to connections with Catholicism is tantamount to throwing the baby out with the bathwater. I would argue that the basis for the post-colonial critique of Christianity relies not so much on the religion itself, but on the Eurocentric interpretation of Christianity and how it has often been enforced under colonial rule or used to justify certain actions. It is therefore not necessarily a critique of religious behaviour or beliefs, but of how dogmatic political and religious ideologies can inflict epistemic violence on local cultures and belief systems (Childs & Williams, 1997).

The Focolare goes some way to rectifying the often narrow-minded interpretation of 'salvation' which has dominated Catholic theology and practice. The emphasis placed on enabling the other to 'be' through engaging in dialogue, without wishing to convert them to a particular belief system, is a long way from the traditional (and often stereotypical) Catholic perspective. The theology which underpins the Focolare is far removed from the doctrines used to assert racial superiority or imperialism. In practical terms, the expansion of the Focolare network across the world has led to an interest in (even a fascination with) different cultural and religious groups, exploring different ways of seeing the world. This is seen in the many attempts to 'dig out' local cultural traditions which may have been abandoned or neglected in order to celebrate the differences within the Focolare community, as was shown in Chapter 3. Such differences are regarded as a mutual enrichment against the background of a shared ethos of caring and sharing.

Despite these universalising tendencies (or indeed, because of them) post-modern thinking would tend to be deeply suspicious of the Focolare. Its existence touches on the contentious issue of the relationship between the 'universal' and the 'particular', challenging the relativistic tendencies which have come to dominate some areas of human geography. Within such strands of thinking, as discussed in Chapter 1, the rejection of meta-narratives is often regarded as a 'celebration of difference', but seems to forget that difference only exists against a background of profound similarity, illustrated in what Davidson called the 'argument from translation' (in Fay, 1996: 90). Davidson argued that to say that others are different is actually an admittance of similarity.[161] Moreover, difference cannot be seen as a value in itself, detached from other values such as freedom:

> *"The universal right to difference has no moral value unless it is a product of freedom; that is, unless humans are truly free in both the negative and positive sense of freedom, and so they have the resources enabling them to choose what they genuinely wish to choose and to sustain their choices"* (Bauman, 1998: 17).

The Focolare approach to this tension between relativism and universalism is rooted in the ideal of the Trinitarian perspective. Such an ideal, is itself a culturally bound, specific concept, but it has far-reaching implications for the ensuing debates over ethical and cultural relativism. Within the idea of the Trinitarian perspective, there is an implicit rejection of ethical relativism, since there is a shared understanding of the 'nature' of the human person, as a being who is in relationship with God and with others. Within such a claim, however, there is also a place for difference, on a cultural level, since there is admittance that such a belief is not universally accepted. Different cultural groups possess distinctive understandings of the nature of the human person. Nevertheless, the Focolare proposes a kind of universalism which it regards as transcending cultural differences: the belief that human beings exist to love, to give. It is only within such love that cultural differences can find space for expression. It is this love, conceptualised in different ways by different cultures - compassion, goodwill, philanthropy, caring, sharing - which the Focolare seeks to universalise rather than a specific belief system. For Christians, the fact that such this concept of unity in diversity can be regarded as participation in the life of the Trinity is a powerful motivation to apply it in practice. For those who do not share such a cosmology, the Trinity can also be regarded as an icon of unity in diversity. This distinction between the different levels of 'universalising' is also expressed in the work of Young:

[161] The argument from translation is as follows: To claim that the others live in a different conceptual world from us is to claim that they speak and think. To claim that the others speak and think we need to know that they are saying something and therefore to say we know at least some of what they mean. To know what the others mean, we need to be able to translate their utterances into our language. But to be able to translate their utterances we need to ascribe to them various beliefs, desires, attitudes, and ways of connecting these mental elements. But to ascribe such mental elements to them we must assume that they share with us a background of common beliefs, and principles of thought. But to say that we have a shared background of beliefs, desires, and principles of reasoning is to live in the same world as they do (Fay, 1996: 88).

> *"Universality in the sense of participation and inclusion of everyone in moral and social life does not imply universality in the sense of the adoption of a general point of view which leaves behind particular affiliations, feelings, commitments and desires"* (Young, 1990b: 105).

The Focolare ethos neither fits neatly into the "dogmatic rationalism" associated with modernity nor the "ambiguous interregnum" of post-modern perspectives on reality (Friedman, 1989: 217). It embraces some elements of modernity, such as a commitment to justice and freedom, whilst others could be termed more 'post-modern', such as attention to difference and relationships. Universality – 'building unity' - within the Focolare is seen as an ongoing relational process of inclusion, a 'becoming' and a 'striving', therefore, rather than a fixity. Such a process involves the recognition and acceptance of differences within the context of dialogue. Reaching unity for the Focolare is hence not regarded as a question of eliminating differences in favour of uniformity, but about learning to care for and to love the other in both their differences and their similarities and *vice versa*.

So far, in this chapter I have sought to examine the various theoretical, moral and practical implications of the research findings in this thesis and to interpret them. In doing so, I have uncovered some of the overlaps and contrasts that exist between current strands of geographical and economic theory and the Focolare's perspective. In particular, I highlighted the contribution that the Focolare ethos, as expressed in the Economy of Sharing, could make to various discussions on social justice and geography, and in particular the emergence of a global ethic of care. The Focolare offers a different perspective on social justice to the one which dominates current economic thinking, proposing the relational dimension of ethics as the key to understanding the various injustices that exist. Such ideas are rooted in the belief in a Trinitarian perspective, which is at the heart of the Focolare's spirituality. The truth claims, which underpin such principles, give rise to underlying concerns about the potential universalisability of the Focolare's ethos in relation to post-modern fears of grand 'meta-narratives'. Such issues hightlight the positionality, throwing into relied, above all, the relationship between the beliefs and ethical commitments of the geographer and the geographies that they write. Such issues have been widely discussed in recent years in geographical texts (Aay & Griffoen, 1998; Clark & Sleeman, 1991). In my own case, as a 'believer' in the Focolare ethos, and as a Catholic, it is possible to imagine a future in which the Economy of Sharing will play a more prominent role. This optimism rests, ultimately, in the belief that the human person has the capacity to overcome selfish tendencies and to build relationships with others, even economic ones, which are based on the 'culture of giving'.

Re-imagining the global economy

In this thesis, I started out by examining the various theoretical ideas surrounding the relationship between the economic and the cultural and how these have been applied within human geography. I then explored the way that such ideas are played out within the Focolare Movement at both local and global scales, giving rise to the Economy of Sharing networks. In this way I have been able to 'uncover' and 'map out', both geographically and conceptually, alternative economic geographies operating within the global market. Such economic geographies draw on the spatially intimate image of the 'hearth', projecting the underlying values of face-to-face relationships in which *sharing* is the dominant form of economic exchange onto a global scale within the institutions of the market economy. This spatially intimate image finds a transcendent counterpart in the ideal of Trinitarian relationships, which is seen as the portent of humanising values such as solidarity, dialogue, participation and even love, transforming 'economic space' into 'social spaces' wherein the relational human dimension of economic action is emphasised. In particular, this Trinitarian perspective translates into sharing, as the practical expression of love in action. At this point, one has to ask, by way of conclusion, what are the prospects for the future growth of the Economy of Sharing in a commercial world which, although relational, is increasingly dominated by the globalised logic of profitability?

This thesis has shown that there are clear limitations in what the Economy of Sharing, as practised by the Focolare Movement, could hope to achieve in terms of redistribution of wealth on a global scale. Even if the Economy of Sharing develops dramatically in the future, taking into account the possible stumbling blocks highlighted in this thesis and learning from mistakes, its prospects for directly controlling the massive turnover of the global economy are extremely limited. The Economy of Sharing rests on a spiritual vision which, if considered through the lenses of conventional utilitarian economic discourses, seems unrealistic and even irrational. For those immersed in the Trinitiarian perspective underpinning the Focolare's spirituality, however, such 'otherworldly' ideas such as the mysterious workings of Providence and a radical openness to 'the other' make perfect sense. Within the Economy of Sharing networks the overlaps and conflicts between these appartently opposing visions are played out on a local scale and on a global scale. In some cases, this juncture has led to highly creative environments in which the culture of giving is harnessed to the advantage of companies, who then pass on this advantage to the Economy of Sharing through sharing their profits. In a few cases, however, the tendency to interpret the idea of Trinitarian relationships too literally has resulted in confusion over the respective place of business decisions and spirituality. The ultimate risks of such confusion are clearly bankrupcy. It would be totally unreasonable, therefore, to imagine (or even to wish) that one day a large proportion of the world's financial resources would pass through the Focolare Centre in Rome for redistribution to the world's poor! Even if many legal and financial safeguards were to be put into place, as suggested in this thesis, the risks of attempting such an undertaking would outweight the benefits. The maximum conceivable growth of the Focolare Movement's Economy of Sharing, I would suggest, would be that of meeting the needs of the poor linked to the Focolare community across the world.

Accepting these limitations of the Economy of Sharing, however, is not to say that the *idea* behind its rise need be limited to the Focolare Movement. Whilst the Focolare will continue to develop and grow its own distinctive Economy of Sharing, the future of the Economy of Sharing arguably could go beyond these limited structures. It is hence possible to speculate about the universalisability of the Focolare's ethos, as distinct from that of the organisational structures comprising the Focolare Movement, and about its persuasive power as a working example of a new economic geography, both at a local and a global scale, which could be applied elsewhere. Certain dimensions of the idea - above all at the level of values and motivations - could be emphasised by other communities and organisations, starting perhaps with other global communities such as religious movements.[162] This would give rise to a variety of diverse '*economies of sharing*', each with their distinctive co-ordination points operating at different scales from the local to the global. Such economies of sharing would revitalise the existing structures of giving[163] present within the market economy and maybe encourage the rise of new ones. One could even foresee partnerships and common projects between such movements and groups, leading to new opportunities for the local and global redistribution of wealth within and across the various communities.

Such economies of sharing would be based, above all, on establishing the centrality of two

[162] For example, within the Catholic Church, as in other churches, there are hundreds of new movements such as Communion and Liberation, L'Arche, Sant Egidio as well as older ones such as the Catenians.
[163] By 'structures of giving' I am referring both to numerous charitable organisations and NGOs, as well as the state structures designed to promote the redistribution of wealth.

principles underpinning the Focolare Movement's Economy of Sharing within the wider structures of society: the promotion of a culture of giving[164] and the subdivision of profits in favour of humanitarian causes. In the first case, the promotion of a culture of giving would entail fostering, promoting or initiating activities at all levels which would forward the development of cultural attitudes and social behaviours which emphasise the value of giving as a lifestyle choice. Such educational activities would have to focus on the idea of 'giving', not simply as the *act* of donating money or things[165] but as *self-giving* in the sense of an underlying value within all relationships with others both near and far. In the words of one of the Economy of Sharing directors, the culture of giving is "a way of being, a way of acting" [10SP] and not simply the act of giving itself. Within the Focolare, such activities are carried out chiefly through the development of both the little towns and the Focolare centres. Outwith the Focolare, such an idea could be co-opted by numerous NGOs already working in the fields of development education and sustainability.[166]

The second principle would emphasise the value of giving specifically within the realm of the commercial economy, advocating the basic idea that *all* companies should share their profits in 'three parts' (one part for the poor, one for the culture of giving and retaining one part for the business). Within such a perspective, such corporate giving should not simply be carried out to gain tax breaks or to gain publicity (although these may be regarded as mutually beneficial consequences), but as a visible commitment to the creation of a more equitable social and economic order. Such giving already exists through the substantial charitable donations of some companies, and is provided for in legislation in many countries, but through the development of diverse and ideally numerous economies of sharing such structures could be revitalised and new ones created. Moreover, such economies of sharing would build on the activities and ideas of those already seeking to

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[164] The idea of a culture of giving has increasingly come to be understood in terms of financial structures of corporate giving as can be seen from such as White (1995) and Burlingame (1998). Within the Focolare, giving has a much holistic meaning, as an underlying relationship between individual persons based on a culture which emphasises self-giving. Within this logic, if the structures of giving, understood in the above sense are to be revitalised, this would mean not simply giving more money but above all rediscovering the subjective relationships between individuals within these structures.

[165] Giving understood in this way does not necessarily lead to a 'culture of giving' in the Focolare sense. Such giving could also be motivated by a utilitarian ethos - as in the case of marketing strategies in which freebies are offered or in development strategies where giving resulted in dependence. Within this kind of giving what comes into relief are the power relations through which giving becomes a manipulative force. Such giving often leads to resentment or fear of the giver rather than mutual respect and understanding.

[166] For example, NGOs like Oxfam, Friends of the Earth, Cafod and Christian Aid all increasingly allocate parts of their budgets to the promotion of values on a cultural level. Within the UN, the Commission on Sustainable Development works in partnership with global NGOs for the promotion of a 'culture of peace'. Such structures could easily be adapted to promote a 'culture of giving'.

promote giving, such as the 'new economics' movement, cooperatives, LETS and social entrepreneurs.

It could therefore see the proliferation of economies of sharing at a local and global scale, providing new possibilities for economic and social justice. Such economies would not destroy cultural differences, communities and the environment, but thrive on co-operation and solidarity. In the words of the ex-Secretary General of the UN, Perez de Cuellar: "*Trust, loyalty, solidarity*, altruism and even love, though readily dismissed by currently fashionable economists, no doubt do play a part *in human relationships. Unlike material* goods, they grow on what they feed on. No society is capable of surviving without them" (UNESCO, 1995: 50). Through the Economy of Sharing, new geographies of sharing are being opened up within the market economy in which the 'fashionable' economic theories have given way to a different perspective on economic relationships. One can at least hope that these networks, based on 'solidarity, altruism and even love', will continue to 'grow on what they feed on' and play a more prominent role in shaping the global economic geographies of the third millennium.

Appendix 1

Profile of Chiara Lubich, founder and president of the Focolare Movement

The following is a summary of awards *granted to* Chiara Lubich:

- Council of Europe 1998 Human Rights Prize awarded to Chiara *Lubich for* her work in defence of individual and social rights (Strasbourg, September 1998).
- The Brazilian Government's Southern Cross awared to Chiara Lubich by the President of the Republic of Brazil, for her work in Brazil, especially for having promoted the Economy of Sharing (Rome, October 1998).
- 1996 UNESCO Prize for Peace Education awarded to Chiara Lubich for the following reasons: "In an age when ethnic and religious differences too often lead to violent conflict, the spread of the Focolare Movement has also contributed to a constructive dialogue between persons, generations, social classes and peoples". (Paris, December 1996). In this capacity, she addressed a Symposium in May 1997 on the Unity of Peoples at the UN headquarters in New York.
- Civilisation of Love Prize 1996 awarded to Chiara Lubich by the Forum Internazionale Civiltà dell'Amore for her "prophetic commitment in the field of interreligious dialogue." (Riete, Italy, 1996).
- Honorary president of the World Conference for Religions and Peace In this capacity, Chiara Lubich gave the closing address at the WCRP conference in Aman, Jordan (Ocober 1999).
- Tempelton Prize for Progress in Religions 1977 awarded to Chiara Lubich for interreligious dialogue (London, 1977).
- Freedom of the cities of Buenos Aires, Rome, Palermo, Bologna and Trent have been awarded Chiara, as wellas other local acknowledgements.
- Golden Cross of St Augustine of Canterbury awarded to Chiara Lubich by Dr Geogge Carey for recognition of her work "for the Anglican Communion throughout the world" (London, 1997).
- Byzantine Cross awarded by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I (Constantenople, 1995).
- Augburg Peace Prize awarded to Chiara Lubich for ther work in promoting Catholic - Lutheran relations (Augsburg, 1988).

Honorary degrees granted to Chiara Lubich:

- Social Sciences: Catholic University of Lublin, Poland.
- Theology: Pontifical University of San Thomaso, Manila, Philippines; Fu Jen University of Taipei.
- Social Communications: St. John University of Bangkok, Thailand.
- Humanitarian Sciences Sacred Heath University of Fairfield, Conneticut,USA.
- Philosophy S. Juan Bautista de la Salle University, Mexico City.
- A joint award by 13 faculties of the University of Buenos Aires, Argentina.
- Humanities and Science of Religion: Catholic University of Sao Paulo, Brazil.
- Economics: Unisantos University of Recife, Brazil and the Catholic University of Milan, Italy.
- Literature and Psychology: University of Malta.

Appendix 2

Archival materials consulted/cited

The following materials have been consulted in the course of this research and are referred to in the text. They were consulted in the Focolare Centre archives in Rome (FCR), Sao Paulo (FCSP), New York (FCNY) and London (FCL). Documents from Azone per un Mondo Unito offices in Rome (AMU), Espri Offices in Sao Paulo (ESPRI), and The Associazione Economia di comunione in Milan (EOSM) were also consulted. They are listed in the order in which they were consulted, giving the type of document and date.

a) Archives of the Focolare Movement

Code	Document	Details	Location
FOC01	Letter	CL to one of her friends, 1943	FCR
FOC02	Letter	CL to the Focolare communities in Italy, 1944 (Published in Gen 6 1968: 1)	FCR
FOC03	Article	Silvia Lubich (Published in Amico Serafico 1948: 236-7)	FCR
FOC04	Letter	CL to Bishop Ferrari, 1949	FCR
FOC05	Notes	Guidelines for the Focolarine, CL 1953	FCR
FOC06	Transcript	'Il Focolare' CL to the Focolarini, 1959	FCR
FOC07	Letter	I Giordani to Co-operative Loppiano Prima, 1979	FCR
FOC08	Internal document	Guidelines for Economy and Work, 1983	FCR
FOC09	Internal document	Guidelines for Economy and Work 2, 1984	FCR
FOC10	General Statutes	Opera di Maria approved by the Catholic Church 1990	FCR
FOC11	Transcript	'Chiara's thoughts on economy and work' T Sorgi to Focolare leaders, 1991	FCR
FOC12	Article	Gen's magazine special issue on the 'culture of giving' 1992	FCR
FOC13	Transcript	'The sociality of work' T Sorgi to New Humanity leaders, 1994	FCR,
FOC14	Letter	To the global Focolare community regarding the financial situation of those in need signed by CL June 1994	AMU
FOC15	Transcript	'Extracts from Foco's writings on Economy and Work'. P Quartana to New Humanity leaders, 1994	FCR
FOC16	Transcript	'Unity, a way for everyone' CL at the 23rd Eucharistic Congress, Bologna, September 26th 1997	FCR

Code	Document	Details	Location
FOC17	Profile	of CL given by Fr.R M Cervantes, vice-rector of Universidad La Salle, Mexico City, on occasion of honorary Doctorate in Philosophy 1997	FCR
FOC18	Transcript	CL at Malcom X Mosque, Harlem, May 18th 1997.	FCR
FOC19	Press release	issued by the Focolare Information Service regarding CL's trip to the UN, May 29th 1997	FCR
FOC21	Transcript	'Towards the unity of nations and the unity of peoples' CL to a Symposium of the WCRP at the UN, New York. May 28th 1997	FCR
FOC22	Transcript	CL at Universidad La Salle, Mexico City, June 6th 1997	FCR
FOC23	Newsletter	Notizie AMU 1998/4	AMU
FOC24	Newsletter	Notizie AMU 1998/3	AMU
FOC25	Transcript	CL to the Council of Europe for the European Human Rights Prize, September 22nd 1998	FCR
FOC26	Brochure	Focolare New York 1998	FCNY
FOC27	Brochure	Focolare Sao Paulo, Brazil 1998	FCSP
FOC28	Brochure	AMU 1998	AMU
FOC29	Newsletter	Notizie AMU 1999/1	AMU
FOC30	Brochure	'Unity - our adventure' Focolare London	FCL
FOC31	Transcript	'A silent anthropological revolution' CL University of Malta, February 26th 1999	FCR
FOC32	Transcript	CL to 'Genfest 1990' Rome, March 31st 1990	FCR
FOC33	Transcript	CL to 'Genfest 1995' Rome, May 31st 1995	FCR
FOC34	Transcript	CL to Focolare youth movement, Rocca di Papa, June 1969	FCR
FOC35	Transcript	Pope John Paul II to the Focolare Movement, August 19th 1984.	FCR
FOC36	Transcript	Ginetta Calliari (delegate of the Focolare in Brazil) on the story of the Focolare in Brazil 1991	FCSP
FOC37	Tanscript	CL to the Focolare community of Great Britain, Logan Hall, London, November 16th 1996	FCL

b) Unpublished Economy of Sharing materials

Code	Document	Details	Location
CEOS01	Transcript	CL launches the Economy of Sharing, Araceli, May 29th 1991	FCSP
CEOS02	Internal report	Reactions to the launch of the Economy of Sharing: collection of letters, ideas, impressions June 1991	FCSP
CEOS03	Transcript	CL meetings in Brazil 1991	FCSP
CEOS04	Transcript	Meeting of the Focolare delegates in Brazil including guidelines on the development of the Economy of Sharing. June 1st 1991.	FCR
CEOS05	Diaries	CL in Araceli, Brazil May 1991. These were circulated among the global Focolare communities during her visit to Brazil.	FCR
CEOS06	Transcript	Interview with CL on Polish national television, August 14th 1991	FCR
CEOS07	Transcript	Interview with CL on Vatican Radio, August 18th 1991	FCR
CEOS08	Minutes of meeting	Focolare delegates, Rome, September 30th 1991	FCR
CEOS09	Annotated transcript	Focolare delegates meeting regarding "guidelines for the Economy of Sharing" Rome, October 1st 1991	FCR
CEOS10	Transcript	Interview with CL on the Economy of Sharing October 19th 1991	FCR
CEOS11	Minutes of meeting	International secretariat of New Humanity, Rome, December 2nd 1991	FCR
CEOS12	Transcript	CL to a group of 6000 teenagers Marino Ice Stadium, Rome, June 12th 1992.	FCR
CEOS13a	Minutes of meeting	Focolare delegates Rome, June 26th 1994.	FCR
CEOS13b	Letter	CL to the members of the Focolare "To fulfil our dream - no-one in need" 1994	FCR
CEOS14	Transcript	Press conference held by Chiara Lubich, Trent, January 2nd 1995	FCR
CEOS15	Transcript	CL to the Focolare members in Triveneto, January 3rd 1995.	FCR
CEOS16	Transcript	CL to the members of the Focolare in Rome, January 25th 1995.	FCR
CEOS17	Transcript	Press conference held in Milan, March 3rd 1995.	FCR
CEOS18	Minutes of meeting	Focolare delegates meeting, October 1995.	FCR
CEOS19	Transcript	CL to the inhabitants of Loppiano, May 26th	FCR

Code	Document	Details	Location
CEOS21	Transcript	CL to Buddhist monks at Chang Mai, January 6th 1997.	FCR
CEOS22	Transcript	CL and the Focolare members in Manila, January 20th 1997.	FCR
CEOS23	Minutes of meeting	Focolare delegates in Buenos Aires, Argentina.	FCR
CEOS24	Transcript	CL and the Focolare members in Palermo, January 8th 1998.	FCR
CEOS25	Transcript	CL to New Humanity leaders in Castelgandolfo, February 8th 1998.	FCR
CEOS26	Minutes of meeting	Focolare delegates. Rome, June 4th 1998.	FCR
CEOS27	Minutes of meeting	Focolare delegates. Rome, June 5th 1998	FCR
CEOS28	Transcript	CL to Ecumenical Bishops' meeting, Anzere, Switzerland, August 3rd 1998	FCR
CEOS29	Minutes of meeting	Pasquale Foresi to the Focolare delegates. Montet, Switzerland, August 14th. 1998	FCR
CEOS30	Transcript	Pasquale Foresi to the Focolarini. Montet, Switzerland, august 15th 1998	FCR
CEOS31	Transcript	CL to the European Popular Party, Strasbourgh, September 15th 1998.	FCR
CEOS32	Internal report	The development of the enterprises in the Philippines, 1997	FCR
CEOS33	Internal report	The development of Language and Leisure, Ireland, October 1997.	FCR
CEOS34	Letter	To CL regarding the meeting for sustainable management in Medillin, October 1st 1997.	FCR
CEOS35	Internal report	The development of the Economy of Sharing in Tagaytay zone of the Philippines 1997.	FCR
CEOS36	Internal report	The development of the Ancilla, Manila, the Philippines 1997.	FCR
CEOS37	Internal report	The development of *Solidar Capital*, Germany 1997.	FCR
CEOS38	Internal report	The development of Giacomino's Pizza and Pasta, Manila, the Philippines 1997.	FCR
CEOS39	Internal memo	Guidelines for Economy of Sharing businesses 1997.	FCR
CEOS40	webpage	Economy of Communion webpage 1998 www.focolare.org/it/peco.html	www
CEOS41	Newsletter	Economia di *Comunione* 1, 1994	FCR

Code	Document	Details	Location
CEOS42	Newsletter	Economia di *Comunione* 2 1995	FCR
CEOS44	Newsletter	Economia di *Comunione* 4 1996	FCR
CEOS 45	Newsletter	Economia di *Comunione* 5 1996	FCR
CEOS46	Newsletter	Economia di *Comunione* 6 1997	FCR
CEOS47	Newsletter	Economia di *Comunione* 7 1997	FCR
CEOS48	Newsletter	Economia di *Comunione* 8 1998	FCR
CEOS49	Newsletter	Economia di *Comunione* 9 1998	FCR
CEOS50	Newsletter	Economia di *Comunione* 10 1999	FCR
CEOS51	Newsletter	Economia di *Comunione* 11 1999	FCR
CEOS52	Newsletter	Economia di *Comunione* 12 2000	FCR
CEOS53	Quarterly newsletter	New Society Inc (USA): Economy of Sharing 1996 1 (1-4).	FCNY
CEOS54	Quarterly newsletter	New Society Inc (USA): Economy of Sharing 1997 2 (1-4).	FCNY
CEOS55	Quarterly newsletter	New Society Inc (USA): Economy of Sharing 1998 Vol. 3 (1-4).	FCNY
CEOS56	Quarterly newsletter	New Society Inc (USA): Economy of Sharing 1999 4 (1-4).	FCNY
CEOS57	Transcript	CL to the Catholic University of Milan, Piacenza, January 29th 1999.	FCR
CEOS58	Article	Interview with Professor A Biela, Department of Sociology, University of Lublin, Poland *Gen*, October 1996.	FCR
CEOS59	Transcript	CL to the University of Lublin on the occasion of an honorary doctorate in Social Science, June 19th 1996.	FCR
CEOS60	Transcript	V Araujo 'Economy of Sharing' 3rd Conference on Mental Changes and Social Integration Perspectives in Europe, University of Lublin, November 16th 1995.	FCR
CEOS61	Transcript	T Sorgi 'The Gen and the Economy of Sharing' Rome, November 29th 1991.	FCR
CEOS62	Transcript	V Araujò 'Economy of Sharing, Logan Hall, University of London, November 16th 1996.	FCR
CEOS63	Minutes of meeting	Dialogue on the development of the Economy of Sharing Centre- Economy of Sharing commissions Rome, March 1997.	FCR
CEOS64	Transcript	M Quartana 'Reflections on the development of New Humanity' Rome, October 1997.	FCR
CEOS65	Corporate Statutes	*ESPRI*	FCSP

Code	Document	Details	Location
CEOS66	Transcript	V Araujo 'The culture of giving and its relationship with the Economy of Sharing'. Meeting of the Focolare delegates, Rome, October 30th 1993.	FCR
CEOS67	Transcript	V Araujo 'The Economy of Sharing'. Meeting of Bishops, Rome, February 1996.	FCR,
CEOS68	Transcript	V Araujo 'The characteristics of entrepreneurs and workers in the Economy of Sharing businesses' Meeting of Focolare business people, Rome, March 18th 1997	FCR
CEOS69	Transcript	Interview with T Sorgi on the Economy of Sharing, Rome, October 1991	FCR
CEOS70	Transcript	A Ferrucci 'The Economy of Sharing in freedom' 23rd National Eucharistic Conference, Bologna, September 26th 1997.	FCR
CEOS71	Transcript	T Sorgi 'The nature of work in the Economy of Sharing' Meeting of Focolare business people, Rome, March 22nd 1997.	FCR
CEOS72	Transcript	C Bozzani 'Help for the poor and for the formation of new people in these first years'. Meeting of Focolare business people, Rome, March 21st 1997.	FCR
CEOS73	Transcript	T Sorgi 'The charism of unity and the Economy of Sharing' International Bureau of Economy and Work, Rome, March 18th 1997.	FCR
CEOS74	Transcript	V Araujo 'The spirituality of Unity and the Economy of Sharing' Bishop's meeting, Rome. 1995.	FCR
CEOS75	Internal memo	List of participating businesses in the region of Milan, Associazione per una Economia di *Comunione*, Milan 1996.	EOSM
CEOS76	Brochure	Associazione per una Economia di *Comunione*, Milan.	EOSM
CEOS77	Guidelines	New Humanity Secretariat, Milan. Social balance sheet for Economy of Sharing businesses in Milan	EOSM
CEOS78	Internal report	To the Focolare Centre in Rome from the Associazione per una Economia di *Comunione*, Milan 1997.	EOSM
CEOS79	Internal report	To the Focolare Centre in Rome from New Humanity Secretariat, Milan 1994.	FCR
CEOS80	Newsletter	*ESPRI* Noticias Year 1 November 1996.	*ESPRI*
CEOS81	Brochure	*ESPRI* publicity leaflet 1997.	*ESPRI*
CEOS82	Video	'Economy of Sharing' 1992	FCSP

Code	Document	Details	Location
CEOS83	Video	'Alberto Ferrucci answers questions' 1992	FCSP
CEOS84	Video	'The Economy of Sharing meeting I' 1993	FCSP
CEOS85	Video	'The Economy of Sharing meeting II' 1993	FCSP
CEOS86	Video	'Updating on the developments of the Economy of Sharing' 1993	FCSP
CEOS87	Video	'Economy of Sharing meeting' 1995	FCSP
CEOS88	Transcript	Prof S Zamagni interview Bologna, April 24th 1998.	FCR
CEOS89	Transcript	CL to the Focolarini, Rome, November 10th 1991	FCR
CEOS90	Transcript	'Global networking and the Economy of Sharing' Talk given by Siobhan Coyle, Tagaytay, Philippines, 25th July, 1999	FCL

Appendix 3
Interviews

a) Interviews in Milan businesses

CODE	NAME	POSITION	DATE/LOCATION OF INTERVIEW
01M	Mr. & Mrs. G Bertagna	Managing directors and owners of *Bertagna Filati* Srl, Brescia.	*Bertagna Filati*, Brescia. January 22nd 1998.
02M	Mr. G Cucchi	Manager and majority shareholder of *Gabrielle Cucchi* Srl	*Gabrielle Cucchi*, Brescia, January 22nd 1998.
03M	Mr. & Mrs. A Borghese	Managers and joint shareholders of Falegnameria *Angelo Borghese* & C. Snc	Falegnameria *Angelo Borghese* & C. Snc Provaglio d'Isco, January 22nd 1998.
04M	Mr. G Spreafico	Director of *Stella* Società Cooperativa Arl.	*Stella* Società Cooperativa Arl. Busti Arsuzio, January 26th 1998.
05M	Unavailable	Manager and owner of *Stilnovo* C.so	*Stilnovo* C.so Novara, January 29th.
06M	Mrs. Santini	Managing director and joint owner of *Treuno* di Antonio Santini	*Treuno* di Antonio Santini Borgo Ticino, January 27th.
07M	Unavailable	Managing director and majority shareholder of *Valledoro* Distribuzione Srl.	*Valledoro Distribuzione Srl Brescia, January 27th 1998.*
08M	G Bombelli	Managing director and majority shareholder of *BBL* Snc di G. Bombelli & C.	*BBL* Snc di G. Bombelli & C. Varese, January 26th 1998.
09M	Unavailable	Managing directors of Azienda agricola *OVA*	Azienda agricola *OVA*, Frontignano di Barbariga, January 23rd, 1998.
10M	E Webert	Managing director and joint shareholder of Rubinetteria *Webert* Srl.	Rubinetteria *Webert* Srl. Maggiora, January 27th 1998.
11M	Unavailable	Manager of *Primo Sole* società cooperativa Arl.	*Primo Sole* società cooperativa Arl Frontignano di Barbariga, January 23rd, 1998.
12M	Mr. G Cucchi	Managing director and principle shareholder of *Graziella* Srl.	Gabrielle Cucchi, Brescia, January 22nd 1998.

b) Interviews at Focolare Centre, Rome

CODE	NAME	POSITION	DATE/LOCATION OF INTERVIEW
01R	Mr. G Claria	Focolare Delegate for Buenos Airies	Focolare Centre, Rome, October 1998.
02R	Miss C Bozzani	Secretary of the International Economy of Sharing Commission	January 1998
03R	Oreste	Vice-president of the Focolare Movement (until 1998)	January 1998
04R	Miss C Masera	Focolare delegate for Milan region	Focolare Centre, Rome, October 20th 1997.
05R	Mr N Castro	Director of Giacomino's Pizzas, Manila, the Philippines	Rome, March 1997
06R	Miss V Araujo	Focolarina and sociologist	Focolare Centre, Rome, January 12th, 1998.

c) Interviews in Sao Paulo businesses

CODE	NAME	POSITION	DATE/LOCATION OF INTERVIEW
01SP	Mr. A Neto	Managing director and principle shareholder of *Alman* Ltda.	*Alman* Ltd Sao Andrea, September 10th, 1998.
02SP	Unavailable	Director and joint shareholder of Policlinica *Agape* s/c ltda	Policlinica *Agape* s/c ltda, Vargem Grande Paulista September 1995
03SP	Anna Maria	Headmistress and joint shareholder of *Aurora* s/c	*Aurora* s/c Vargem Grande Paulista August 31st 1998.
04SP	Teresinha	Administrator of *Comunione* Ltd.	Araceli, August 30th 1998.
05SP	Mrs E Texiera	Managing director and principle shareholder of *Ecoar* Ltd.	*Ecoar* Ltd.Spartaco Industrial Estate, Cotia, September 20th 1998.
06SP	Mr. R Caiuby Faria	President of *Espri* s.a	*Espri* s.a offices, Spartaco Industrial Estate, Cotia, September 20th 1998.
07SP	Mr. R Liebholz	Managing director and joint shareholder of *Femaq* s.a.	*Femaq* s.a. Piracicaba, September 2nd 1998.
07bSP	Mr. R Liebholz	Managing director and joint shareholder of *Femaq* s.a.	*Femaq* s.a. Piracicaba, September 22nd 1998.
08SP	Mr. L C Moraes Santos	Managing director and owner of *Granja Più Più*	*Granja Più Più* Salto, September 23rd 1998.

CODE	NAME	POSITION	DATE/LOCATION OF INTERVIEW
09SP	Mrs. M Gaspar	Director and shareholder of *La Tunica* confeções industria e comercio ltda	*La Tunica* confeções industria e comercio ltda Spartaco Industrial Estate, Cotia, September 11th 1998.
10SP	Armando	Director of *Prodiet*	*Prodiet*, Spartaco Industrial Estate, Cotia, September 11th 1998
11SP	Mr. & Mrs. R Caiuby Faria	Directors and joint shareholders of *Sucral*	*Sucral* offices Piracicaba, September 3rd 1998.
12SP	Marie Ines	Manager of *Zac* Livros ltda	*Zac* Livros ltda, Piracicaba, September 2nd 1998.
13SP	Social Worker	Pedreira community Centre, Sao Paulo	Pedreira community centre, Sao apulo, September 20th 1998.
04SP/95.	Unavailable	Principle shareholder of *Comunione* Ltd.	Araceli, August 13th 1995.
09SP/95	Mrs. M Gaspar	Director and shareholder of *La Tunica* confeções industria e comercio ltda.	*La Tunica* confeções industria e comercio ltda Spartaco Industrial Estate, Cotia, August 10th 1995.

d) Interviews with Focolare leaders in Brazil

CODE	NAME	POSITION	DATE/LOCATION OF INTERVIEW
01RE	Lucia	Social worker in Santa Teresinha project	Santa Teresinha, Recife, September 1st 1995
02RE	Teresa	Nurse in Santa Teresihna	Santa Teresinha, Recife, September 1st 1995
03RE	Unavailable	Director of brick factory near Santa Teresinha	Santa Teresinha, Recife, September 1st 1995
04RE	Fransisca	Resident of Santa Teresinha	Santa Teresinha, Recife, September 1st 1995

e) Contextual interviews with non-Focolare experts

CODE	NAME	POSITION	DATE/LOCATION OF INTERVIEW
01EXP	Professor Paul Singer	Professor of Economics, Sao Paulo University	Sao Paulo, August 1998
02EXP	Professor Geremias Oliveira Filho	Professor of Sociology at the University of Sao Paulo	Araceli, August 1998

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