

## **WORKSHOP NO. 9 - FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE: HOW TO MONITOR THE CHANGE IN LIFESTYLE**

### **METHODOLOGY: THE INSTRUMENT USED BY BILANCI DI GIUSTIZIA (BALANCES OF JUSTICE) TO MONITOR THEIR CONSUMPTION**

*A family network for consuming less and living better*

#### **1. The paradox of growth**

Heinrich Boell writes of a tourist who is telling a sailor what are the advantages of working more. If you go out in the sea twice or three times a day, the tourist says, you might get more fishes, and get an instoppable growth going. First a boat, then two boats, then several; a factory for frozing fishes, smoking them and perhaps an helicopter to find the fish schools. "And so what?", asks the sailor. "And so", the tourist remarks with a triumphant smile, "you could sit quietly on the beach, relax under the sun, and contemplate the ocean". The sailor looks at him and says: "That's precisely what I was doing before you arrived".<sup>1</sup>

This little story makes us smile and leaves us puzzled. This is because it points out in a simple way that economic growth is paradoxical. Today many people acknowledge this paradox: yet, it seems difficult to leave it behind. It seems necessary to work hard in order to get the goods and products we need for living. This is so even if working so hard might leave us no time for staying with friends, our husband or wife, our children, reading what we like and cultivate our passions. That is, this is so even if working hard prevents us from living.

The fact that about thousand families joined the proposal of "Bilanci di Giustizia" (Balances of Justice) shows that one can get out of this vicious circle, and be a romantic sailor on the beach. It shows that one can have a high quality life, not so far from the life the sailor hints to. A life which incorporates justice. A life which takes into account the well-being of humanity as a whole.

The balancers (in Italian, 'bilancisti'), as we call those who join the Balances of Justice campaign, really ask themselves the question faced by our sailor. They wonder what sense does it have to work, how they want to do it, for how long and what meaning they want it to have. These questions are connected to the collective research that they have been doing for years. This research is focused on how to change consumer choices.

The story of the ballancers contains personal changes and political choices. Every year we reflect on the data we collect in our monthly budgets. 'What would the balancers be able to say to the sailor?', as asked Wolfgang Sachs in his preface to the book "Bilanci di Giustizia: famiglie in rete per consumi leggeri" (2000) ("Balances of Justice: a family network for light consumption")

#### **2. The balancers tools for change**

The Balances of Justice campaign starts off in 1993. It is a free network of families (there is no membership) that carry on their research together and share their experiences of change. A crucial tool for the balancers' families is this: the local groups that meet periodically in different parts of Italy, compare each other, share information and possibly

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<sup>1</sup> Wolfgang Sachs, preface to *Bilanci di Giustizia*, EMI, Bologna (2000).

plan joint actions.

Once per year there is a meeting with all the families, to think through and celebrate. Also the representatives of each local group meet up periodically, and take decisions. Thus the campaign has an orizontal structure.

The pragmatic tool of the campaign is the monthly balance sheet. It records the goals, the changes and the expenses decrease of every family. By filling the monthly sheet and the annual one (that especially monitors life quality) our families find a work tool that speaks both for personal and political change. Every year the data are collected and stastically elaborated and commented in the annual report. Through these numbers, the campaign has a political weight and a concrete basis to start with. These data witness and tell us what are the actual choices of the balancers families.

### 3. Steady choices: television, merrymaking, self-production and financial investments

Does the sailor of Boell's story watch TV? Probably not. Here is what the balancers say:

“TV? I got rid of it in 2000. -- We actually have no TV – I have no TV – Never owned one – I spent 2006 almost without it – We haven't got if for years – I do not have it; it's a choice – Non-watching TV changes your life”.

So many radical comments about TV have been collected in our annual report. They are telling. The lack of TV is the first thing the balancers have in common with the sailor.

One might like to talk about the need to facilitate one's habit to think with one's own head. But this is an issue which concerns the whole structure of one's life. In the balancers experience, the absence of TV gives you more time, more energy, a freer thought and creativity, more fantasy and communication opportunities. The issue of television is linked with that of conviviality and social relationships.

“Instead of a garage, we built a big room for merrymaking”

The 70% of the balancers declares to have increased the occasions for merrymaking with friends. The data about their hospitality confirm this. Every month, on average, they receive 13 lunch invitations and offer 11,4 lunches. They have 2,4 guests and 2,6 of them are guest of somebody else. It seems that without TV their house opens up to other people.

**Table 1 – Received/offered hospitality (Average number of meals/nights per month)**

	received	offered
<b>To eat</b>	13,1	11,4
<b>To sleep</b>	2,4	2,4
<b>Family numbers</b>	87	87

One may imagine the balancers families to be like the sailor, who in the evening gathers around the fire with the other people of the village and tells stories...

Another choice of the balancers is self-production. This element, as Gerhard Scherhorn

points out<sup>2</sup>, improves life quality. This is because it is an act of free creativity. This choice is also the keystone of the issue of the distribution of work.

Among the balancers self-production is quite common. Of course, it dominates in the food sector:

“We started to increase our self-production. In particular, we self-make bread and sweets, both in order to improve our know-how, and in order to create things with our children. We are still not good enough, but this is a meaningful experience! At the christening of our daughter we organized a huge party, and everything was self-made or fairtrade and organic.

For food, self-production is achieved in the 80% of cases. It mostly concerns bread and pasta (66%), cakes (60%). It also concerns vegetables (33%), and drinks (13%). The 11% of our families even self-produced the meals they do not have at home.

**Table 2 – Food self-production – Percentage of the families that self-produced their food**

Item	2003	2004	2005	2006
Meat, salami, fish	7,8	6,4	6,8	4,7
Milk, diaries, eggs	21,6	20,0	22,2	24,3
Pasta, bread, cereals	59,3	57,6	67,5	66,4
Fruit, vegetables, beans	24,0	27,2	32,5	33,6
The, coffee, cocoa, spices	6,0	4,8	6,0	2,8
Cakes, sugars, honey, biscuits	63,5	60,8	61,5	59,8
Drinks (water, wine, etc)	16,8	10,4	20,5	13,1
Meals out of home – free time	8,4	6,4	10,3	9,3
Meals out of home - work/school	8,4	5,6	13,7	11,2
Oils and fats	6,0	3,2	5,1	6,5
Others	16,8	8,0	9,4	7,5
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>77,8</i>	<i>72,8</i>	<i>80,3</i>	<i>74,8</i>
Number of families that self-produced their food	130	91	94	80

As to other items, the 24% of people declares that they self-produce some clothes, the 32% self-produces things for the house (mostly detergents), or for hygiene purposes; the 23% self-produces toys for children; the 52% steadily self-produces presents. Needless to say that on this point, once again, the balancers would find good company in the sailor's village.

There is one more meaningful datum about the social sphere. A major part of the financial investments of the balancers (12.4% moved, and 6.6% in total) are devoted to loans to friends, relatives and others.

<sup>2</sup> Gerhard Scherhorn, “Perchè meno è di più (meglio)”, paper given at the national meeting of Bilanci di Giustizia, 13 settembre 1998

Table 3 – The financial investments of the balancers' families

Type of investment		2006		2005	
		Total	%	Total	%
Bank investments	Usual	1.033.024	69,9%	450.586	56,3%
	Moved	858.830	52,8%	1.080.724	59,4%
	Total	1.891.854	60,9%	1.531.310	58,5%
	% moved	45,4%		70,6%	
Loans to friends/relatives/others	Usual	4.200	0,3%	7.500	0,9%
	Moved	201.710	12,4%	182.477	10,0%
	Total	<b>205.910</b>	<b>6,6%</b>	189.977	7,3%
	% moved	98,0%		96,1%	
Life insurance	Usual	173.291	11,7%	216.190	27,0%
	Moved	40.000	2,5%	3.784	0,2%
	Total	<b>213.291</b>	<b>6,9%</b>	219.974	8,4%
	% moved	18,8%		1,7%	
Cooperatives capital	Usual	600	0,0%	500	0,1%
	Moved	112.302	6,9%	51.172	2,8%
	Total	112.902	3,6%	51.672	2,0%
	% moved	99,5%		99,0%	
Transfers and loans to and from cooperatives	Usual	263.500	17,8%	123.000	15,4%
	Moved	412.191	25,3%	499.938	27,5%
	Total	675.691	21,8%	622.938	23,8%
	% moved	61,0%		80,3%	
Total	Usual	1.478.230	100,0%	800.160	100,0%
	Moved	1.627.433	100,0%	1.818.954	100,0%
	Total	3.105.663	100,0%	2.619.114	100,0%
	% moved	52,4%		69,4%	

\*These data refers to the 81 families (73 for 2005 and 64 for 2004) which filled the report in 2006.

“I lent money to a friend who wants to by a house” - “I lent money to friends with financial difficulties” – “I lent money without interests to some friends who want to open a B&B” – “I lent money to a relative for solidarity, in order to avoid his going to a bank” – “We transferred 7000€ to our nephew for his farming business and considered this “moved”.”

The amount of these investments is equal to those invested in life insurance. It seems to hear the words of Bruno Volpi<sup>3</sup> the president of Associazione Mondo di Comunita' e Famiglia<sup>4</sup> (Association World of Community and Family): “my main insurance and pension

<sup>3</sup> Bruno Volpi – Elio Meloni, Vivere con la porta aperta. La pedagogia dell'accoglienza nella comunità di Villapizzone (Mi), EDB

<sup>4</sup> Mondo di Comunità e Famiglia, [www.mcf.org](http://www.mcf.org)

investment is my personal growth and my work on cultivating relationships with people. If I become a nice old man who has built many friendly relationships with people, there will always be somebody who, if needed, will let me stay at theirs". Do you think that Boell's sailor would choose to invest in Association World of Community and Family pension fund?

#### 4. HOW DO THE BALANCERS CONSUME? Justice, sustainability and sobriety.

The statistics drawn from the monthly balance sheets during 15 years tell us that the balancers choices are always directed towards justice, sustainability and sobriety. The balancers consume fair trade goods, organic and local food and, through their daily choices (self-production, collective buying directly from the producers, etc.) they reduce their consumption.

They pay particular attention to natural resources. They spend significantly more than average in culture, education and entertainment, and in that kind of consumption which can increase their awareness (life-style investments). They choose to share in a systematic way part of their income via donations, and all this seems to result in a better life quality.

First of all, the balancers have a remarkable ability to reduce their consumption in all sectors, and in some of them in particular:

Here are the data:

**Table 4: Individual monthly average consumptions of the balancers, compared with the official Italian data (ISTAT data)**

Expenses sectors	2001*	2002*	2003*	2004*	2005*	2006*	2007*	2008	ISTAT**	SCO ST.
Food#	139.85	144.67	153.71	155.37	147.87	157.20	157.12	162.76	268.54	-39%
Clothes	31.86	33.89	31.49	28.95	29.02	37.86	35.44	37.86	74.88	-49%
Health	37.70	36.93	52.86	43.43	38.92	52.29	55.72	57.26	56.68	1%
Amusement and culture	58.68	62.81	56.22	56.38	66.53	84.38	68.37	71.37	41.43	72%
House	152.13	137.33	160.26	178.98	197.26	187.17	192.17	181.77	276.72	-34%
Transports	101.69	106.59	103.63	101.45	104.86	95.83	101.94	101.25	32.39	213%
Long-lasting goods	220.05	156.25	176.72	118.68	93.30	128.84	150.61	130.16		
Different things	132.04	125.59	116.88	98.25	101.08	112.65	126.00	114.17		
Hygiene	16.15	14.75	15.77	14.30	15.44	16.41	18.73	17.06	38.96	-56%
Other##	352.09	281.84	293.60	216.94	194.38	241.49	276.61	244.33	252.95	-3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>890.14</b>	<b>818.80</b>	<b>867.54</b>	<b>795.79</b>	<b>794.28</b>	<b>872.63</b>	<b>906.10</b>	<b>873.67</b>	<b>1 042.56</b>	<b>-16%</b>

\* These data only take into account families with at least 3 full budgets. We compared them with those of an average Italian family via equivalence tables. These calculations refer to the prices of 2008 for the previous years.

\*\*ISTAT, "I consumi delle famiglie" - year 2006: average for family with 2 members, North-East Italy; calculated to the 2008 prices.

# ISTAT data include the entrance 'meals and consumption out of the house' (€ 88.35) which allows us to compare the data with the monthly report of the Operazione Bilanci di Giustizia.

## The entrance is not in the reports; it has been added in order to get a comparison with the ISTAT data; we added up the voices "Long-lasting goods" and "Different Things".

The reduction in the expenses, for the category "Food", is of the 40% (for "meat", it gets to 65%). As to "Clothes", we have a 50% reduction. In the house, a 34% reduction, with a 45% reduction for washing up liquids and a 52% reduction of the expenses for electric

energy. The balancers reduce their water consumption of the 75%, and their heating consumption of the 45%.

**Table 5 – Comparison with the national average for some specific categories**

EXPENSES CATEGORIES		2000*	2001*	2002*	2003*	2004*	2005*	2006*	2007*	2008	ISTAT* *	SCOS T.
FOOD	Meat, salami, fish				20.98	20.43	17.99	18.16	22.41	24.65	65.66	-62%
HOUSE	Detergents	5.79	4.56	5.03	4.48	4.19	4.12	4.52	5.67	5.06	9.25	-45%
	Electric energy	8.66	7.83	8.96	10.00	8.25	7.28	8.95	9.15	10.03	20.83	-52%
	Water^				3.87	4.85	4.25	4.86	3.97	4.44	18.05	-75%
	Gas and Heating				21.62	24.43	27.23	23.82	21.50	25.27	45.65	-45%
TRANSPORT	Fuels^^	40.23	40.15	38.36	37.84	35.84	36.67	34.64	32.04	36.29	67.15	-46%
	Public transports	10.76	12.07	11.46	11.16	13.28	12.24	13.03	13.81	12.47	14.24	-12%

\* Results obtained by considering families with at least 3 full budgets. We compared the data with those of an Italian family of 2 components, via equivalence scales. The prices are those of 2008 for the previous years.

\*\*ISTAT, "I consumi delle famiglie" - year 2006: average for families of North-East Italy, with 2 members; calculated with 2008 prices.

^ In the ISTAT sheet the category includes also building-block's costs.

^^In the Bilanci di Giustizia sheet, till 2002, this category includes motorways costs.

Also the quantitative data (in litres, cube metres and KW) in the annual balance sheets confirm these results. The balancers consume on average 109 litres of water per day, pro capite. The Italian average, on the other hand, consumes 190 litres per day, pro capite. Some of the balancers consume even less. The less consuming family is from Valle d'Aosta. They say:

"All our basins and sinks have a flux reducer and we pay close attention to our water usage. The flux reducers by themselves bring about a 30% decrease in our water consumption. Moreover we use the river in order to water the garden.

As to electric energy, the average consumption of the balancers is almost half of the average Italian consumption.

"I switched off the fridge when I went on holiday, and got a new washing machine that uses warm water (warmed with solar panels)"

The balancers' family that consumes the less, that is, 28 Kwh, is a case study. They installed solar panels, so they only consume the little amount of energy that their self-production fails to cover. Obviously they also have solar panels for the heating.

The data are meaningful when one considers heating consumption as well:

**Table 6 – Gas consumption pro capite per year, for the heating, cooking and water**

	Average
Balances of Justice 2007	401
ISTAT 2006*	584
DIFFERENCE	<b>-31%</b>

\*Climate survey on cities (2006), North Italy including Tuscany

\*\* the consumption of wood gpl has been transformed into the gas equivalent

One may also find the category “entertainment, education and culture” interesting enough. This is the only area in which the balancers spend more than the average of Italians. In 2008 they spent 71€ per month. The average Italian family spends 41€ per month in this area. So here the balancers spend 72% more than the average.

“It's nice to see that museums and libraries propose many things for children, and of good quality. We increased theater and concert attendance”

Thus one can say that the balancers choices are not directed to saving per se. Rather, they shift their consumption not to waste natural resources and to consume more immaterial goods that do not affect the environment. It follows that the environmental impact of the balancers is significantly inferior than that of the average Italian population. The balancers' choices are directed to spare our natural resources in a systematic way.

## 5. The ability to change

The ability to change gets measured by considering the percentage of “moved consumption”. This is the percentage of consumption in accordance with justice, against the total expenses of every category. The biggest opportunities for change concern food, long-lasting goods and personal care. One finds over 45% of moved consumption in the food category; over 40% in the category of long-lasting goods; almost 40% for personal care. The categories of health and culture are also meaningful enough (about 38%).

**Table 7- Percentage of “moved” consumption per category**

CATEGORIES	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	□ 07-08
FOOD	38.7	39.4	38.0	37.6	42.7	46.1	45.0	42.5	47.8	12.5%
CLOTHES	27.7	24.3	21.9	21.4	26.0	25.8	25.1	22.4	24.4	8.9%
HEALTH	37.9	37.5	32.5	37.0	33.4	30.9	29.3	31.2	38.4	23.1%
ENTERTAINMENT AND CULTURE	31.9	33.7	35.0	29.3	31.9	31.0	34.5	31.2	37.7	20.8%
HOUSE	11.3	10.2	9.4	9.8	11.6	12.9	14.0	14.7	18.7	27.2%
TRANSPORTS	20.7	20.9	22.5	24.4	24.1	27.9	28.1	23.8	27.7	16.4%
LONG-LASTING GOODS	35.7	32.0	27.0	32.8	41.0	42.7	46.6	35.6	48.1	35.1%



DIFFERENT THINGS	24.7	27.7	28.3	25.1	33.7	30.9	29.5	30.1	41.0	36.2%
PERSONAL CARE	30.6	28.6	32.2	34.1	39.3	36.6	34.4	39.7	39.1	-1.5%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>28.8</b>	<b>28.3</b>	<b>27.4</b>	<b>27.9</b>	<b>31.5</b>	<b>31.6</b>	<b>31.8</b>	<b>30.1</b>	<b>35.9</b>	<b>19.1%</b>

\*Calculated by considering the total expense of the category, and only the families that moved something in that category in the relevant year.

Mobility is a weak point for the balancers. Yet, also the category “transports” shows some interesting data. The moved choices are increasing, and the number of families without a car (5%) starts to become relevant.

“We haven’t owned a car for 5 years. Even with the children we can easily do without it. The small one learnt the numbers by getting in and off the bus. Holidays? Train and bike. When we really need a car (once a month), we asked some friends and relatives. By asking for lifts we intensify our social relations.”<sup>5</sup>

**Table 8 – Number of owned cars**

No. of cars	2008		2007	
no answer	0	0,0	1	1,0
0	5	5,0	5	5,0
1	43	43,0	46	46,0
2	48	48,0	39	39,0
3	4	4,0	1	1,0
Total	100	100	92	92

45% of the balancers' families only owns one car. This is so despite the fact that most families have many members (3.6 average, constantly increasing). Thus it is interesting to see that the balancers have less cars than the Italian average (the difference amounts to 37%). As to the usage of public means of transport, the balancers roughly spend as much as the Italian average. One can instead notice how much they like cycling: more than half of the days of each month both men and women use a bike.

“We got a trolley for the kids and it works really well for bringing the children to school, even when it rains”

**Table 9 – Means of transports usage (average of the number of days per month)**

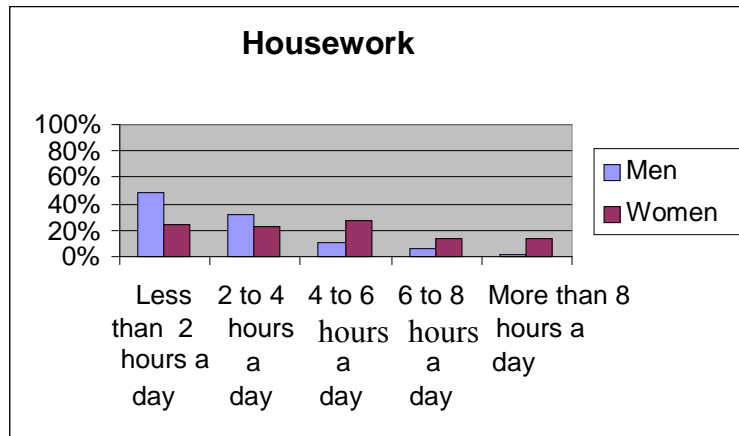
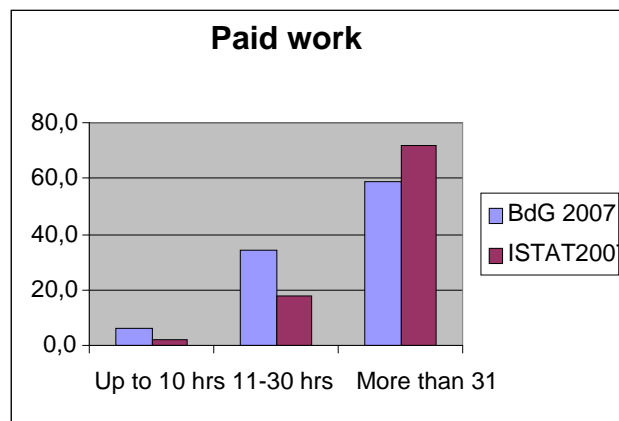
	2008				2007			
	M		F		M		F	
	N	D/Month	N	D/Month	N	D/Month	N	D/Month
car	89	16.30	78	16.64	64	17.10	71	18.08
bike	<b>65</b>	<b>13.53</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>12.86</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>16.49</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>14.14</b>
moto	14	8.93	4	7.79	7	13.57	3	16.00
bus	26	8.24	27	9.32	16	11.53	26	6.38
train	23	6.05	18	7.63	22	8.48	22	7.05
other	1	1.00	6	6.36	1	1.00	5	12.80

<sup>5</sup> Consider here Jungo, a modern and safe way of hitch-hyking ( [www.jungo.it](http://www.jungo.it))



## 6. Working less is possible and it makes you feel good

Critical reflection, once again, leads us to concrete life-choices. As to salaries, the balancers work less than the Italian average (33.5 hours per week for women, 41 for men). Even the data about the distribution of paid work and housework show that the balancers are making brave choices. In 2007, among 60 women, only one declared to be a housewife. The families seem to be directed to a more equal work distribution. 65% of the women works less than 30 hours per week. 23% of the men work less than 30 hours per week. The women with a full-time job amount to 35%. None of them works more than 40 hours per week. Moreover, even though women share a higher portion in the housework, 8% of the men does more than 6 hours per day of housework.



Let us look at the answers to the question at the end of the balance sheet: "when do you feel to have time for important things?". The genre difference, despite minimal, shows that men are less satisfied than women about the time they have. In short, working leaves no time for what is important. Or perhaps, what is important is not working.

## 7. A chance for everyone

Some critical observer tried to label the balancers as elitist, rich and spoilt. If so, they are not believable to the eyes of most Italians. Yet, the data show that the balancers' experience is open to everyone. The consumption choices can increase one's possibility to

choose as regards paid work and income.

But the balancers are rich or poor?

According to the poverty evaluation criteria (they are based on one's capacity to buy things, and therefore on what one actually buys), the balancers risk to locate themselves below the poverty threshold.

Yet, if we consider their income instead of their expenses – as it seems more sensible to do, given that the program of the balancers hinges open one's possibility to choose – we noticed that the balancers are within the average when this concerns the individual income. They are below average as soon as their families gets bigger.

**Table 10 – Family income per year (gross)**

Family members	BDG 2007	ISTAT 2003*	DIFF.
1	20.588	20.948	-2%
2	27.755	35.181	-21%
3	38.776	50.773	-24%
4	42.254	58.863	-28%
5 or more	39.862	60.340	-34%
Total	36.750	39.319	-7%

\*Istat 2003 North-East at 2007 prices

**NOTE:** The ISTAT data in 2003 are updated to 2007 in accordance to the 2003-2007 inflation, and changed in brute income by increasing the ISTAT value of a 25% VAT.

Thus our working hypothesis is that the balancers managed to decrease their consumption in such a way to be able to decrease their income. This would prove the thesis that it is possible to choose how and how much to consume. This widens one's freedom to choose how much to work.

## 8. The naked king: getting rid of the market myth

Achille Rossi, following the philosopher Maurice Bellet, claims that in our society the financial functioning occupies an illicit place. This is the place of the “fundamental function”<sup>6</sup>. Today, economy plays a mythic role. A myth is something we believe in without being aware of it: something which defines the limits of our reality. Within this horizon, we locate things and get to know them. Economy has been identified with reality. There is nothing else apart from it. Or so the myth says<sup>7</sup>.

The balancers got aware of this myth. They looked at it from the viewpoint of their concrete experience. They studied their needs and consumption. With this conscious look, they make choices of freedom. For instance, they choose to limit the role of the market and of our economical system in one's life. They self-produce, build up social relations, host people and support them, make room for “non-economic goods” that satisfy needs such as human relationships, spirituality, education and silence.

<sup>6</sup> The fundamental function makes the human being having a direction in life, knowing where to go, having a place to stay, a fundamental security in life [...], in Bellet M, *L'economia in un vicolo cieco*, Città di Castello 1995

<sup>7</sup> Achille Rossi, *Il mito del Mercato*, Edizioni L'altra pagina, Città di Castello

Along considering time, they also wonder “how much richer is our life now?”. Their answers are in the positive. They seem to trust the future, as the high number of children in their families suggests (an average of 3.5 members per family).

For 19 years the balancers have tried to tell their experiences. They have collected data, but also have created self-production workshops, and talked about their everyday life. To understand them, and see the potential for happiness of their lives, one has to experience things by oneself. One has to look closely at the myth of the market. Once aware of the myth, one can try and see that there is a different and satisfactory way of consuming, working and living.

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