

Special Issue Distances

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How to reflect on social distance to strengthen socio-territorial cohesion and equality

Mathematically speaking, the concept of distance has to do with a topological space that allows the definition of limits, continuity and connection through geometric typologies that include Euclidean, metric and manifold spaces.

This definition represents a fundamental starting point for analyzing the theme of "distance" from a spatial-social perspective. Sociologists define social distance as a subjective perception or experience of distance from another person or other persons.

Since Park and Burgess introduced the concept of social distance, drawing first from the work of Tarde and then from that of Simmel, its use in sociology has become quite widespread. It is not just a matter of thematizing a social dimension that insists on the degree of physical separation between actors and actants in a given space (a city, a sidewalk, a highway...), but distance (and proximity) play a role in human relationality, since the opportunity for interaction is clearly also related to physical distance. Speaking of an urban condominium, to give an applied example, the neighbors could have a more intense and lasting relationality than that which takes place within ties of ascribed origin, such as family ones.

Each of these social distances corresponds to a degree of intimacy/confidence that depends on culture, gender and personal preferences. For example, according to Islamic law, closeness (being in the same room or in a secluded place) between a man and a woman is permitted - at least in theory - only in the presence of their "mahram" (a spouse or a person from same sex or a pre-pubescent person of the opposite sex). This social distance can also be parameterized. For an average Westerner, for example, the "personal" space and therefore the distance from other people present in the same living space would be approximately 70 cm in front, 40 cm behind and 60 cm on each side. During the last pandemic, social distancing regulations included specific social distancing safety protocols across the globe. In that case the recommendations aimed to maintain a distance of at least one meter between people to avoid the spread of diseases transmissible through respiratory droplets.

In the phenomena of social life, the concept of distance also applies to social groups and determines their system of power hierarchies. In stratified social systems, such as those based on social class, social distance indicates a marked difference in power, access to resources, and social position between dominant and disadvantaged power groups. Consistently with this principle, Lammers and colleagues (2012) demonstrated that individuals in *high-power conditions* have a stronger preference for independent, solitary activities that create or maintain social distance than individuals in *low-power conditions*. These Scholars showed that power-holders' preference for social distance is partially explained by weaker motivation to interact with their low-power counterparts because they (theoretically) feel less dependent on others to satisfy their goals.

This social distance may also be linked to other factors such as education, occupation, social class or even race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. People from stigmatized or marginalized groups may experience greater social distance than privileged groups, which can manifest itself through discrimination, prejudice and unequal treatment.

In sociological terms, talking about social distance also evokes, among other things, both the dimension of socio-spatial homogeneity and heterogeneity.

Individuals often prefer to live in neighborhoods where their neighbors have similar characteristics. Hipp and Boessen (2012), for instance, discovered a negative correlation between housing demand and the social distance between neighboring households: a higher distance between households was associated with a lower demand. Hipp and Perrin (2009) had found in a previous study that there was a decline in the establishment of "weak ties" in the neighborhoods of those with higher incomes, as well as those who are older, married, and have children. This validates

findings from earlier studies. For example, Blokland (2003) notes that there is little interaction between the various population strata. A study in Bristol shows that middle- class parents tend to move for schools they believe are better for their children, even though they very much appreciate the heterogeneity of the neighborhood they left (Bridge, 2006).

Social distance can create a sense of separation and isolation, particularly in areas with limited transportation and communication infrastructure. Individuals living in remote or rural areas may perceive a greater geo-social distance from urban centers and experience a lack of access to resources and opportunities. Both social and geographical distance can impact these dynamics, as individuals who are geographically distant or socially different may experience social exclusion and isolation. Social distance is not fixed or static. It can change over time due to various factors such as advancements in technology, migration, urbanization, and social movements. These changes can lead to shifts in the perceived and actual distances between individuals and groups (migration flows, income polarisation, gender gap...) impacting social cohesion and social change.

As the result of social changes or the fall-out of ideological preferences (whether too much Keynesianism or too much neoliberalism), there is a need for new policy and political strategies. Indeed, some call for a new social architecture and forms of social protection in order to rebuild cohesion and to reduce critical consequences of social distance.

These actions should not be taken in siloes. An effective action agenda against unjust social distances requires an integrated approach, which looks to the interplay between policy areas, rather than merely measuring the distributive effects of separate interventions. Close collaboration across sectors, agencies, government and citizen groups will be indispensable to drive progress in fighting social distances in terms of inequality. Moreover, any adequate approach must address the structural barriers that drive gender, class, mobility and other forms of inequality. As well as action at the domestic level, there is also an urgent need for collective action at the international level to tackle the cross-border policy impacts and global governance deficits which are perpetuating inequality between as well as within countries.

This special issue of *Fuori Luogo* on the topic of social distancing tries to do its "job", promoting the debate on the issue through highly original research ideas. Hoping that the relationship between research and political application becomes increasingly closer.

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Distances Places, Practices, Knowledges

The Environmental and Territorial Sociologists' conference held in Naples on 8-9 July 2021 was among the first to break the lengthy lockdown imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Amidst persisting uncertainties about the advisability of re-establishing physical proximity without incurring significant risks of contagion, the conference was conducted in a hybrid manner (in-person and online), with many attendees participating physically.

In a pervasive climate of pandemic tension, which would require at least another year to subside, the topic of "Distances" emerged as an inevitable subject to address. While central to social sciences in general and territorial sociology in particular, during the pandemic the theme of distances also became paramount in public, political, and scientific discourse, often leading to rhetorical and semantic digressions. The preventive logic based on physical distancing indeed influenced governmental and health countermeasures against the pandemic for at least two years. Epidemiologists were the primary advocates for the concept of social distancing; and according to the more pessimistic among them, lifestyles characteristic of the pre-COVID-19 era would no longer be possible².

Amid the pandemic's ripple, the concept of distance has been progressively integrated into associative life' practices and discourses, defining new forms of cooperation but also igniting social and political conflicts. In media narratives, it has become the most recurrent term across languages. In essence, the concept of distance found itself at the heart of a stream of discourses and practices that adulterated its original significance conceptualized by social sciences: in part distorting it and in part, perhaps, modernizing it. Specifically, the term social distance improperly became synonymous with social distancing, understood as the set of actions aimed at containing the spread of infection. This inappropriate juxtaposition of two concepts from distinct fields (sociology and medicine) effectively diminished the spatial, cultural, and dynamic dimensions of the "distance" concept, altering its essence and meaning.

Generally, the pivotal issue remains the relationship between physical and social distance; the measures taken against the COVID-19 pandemic spurred sociological contemplation on this relationship, highlighting the lexical association's ambiguity. An initial observation worth noting is that social distance implies a deliberate choice, whereas physical distance is a rather tangible possibility. Social distancing, understood as the reduction of contacts, is a non-pharmacological epidemiological concept, aimed at limiting physical proximity to reduce infection probability and control the spread of contagious diseases (Bennato, 2020). The linguistic ambiguity in social distancing lies in its emphasis on the social aspect of the term. During various pandemic lockdown phases, physical distance was more enforced than the social. The latter, in some ways, was mitigated by resorting to digital and social media to maintain relationships, often even reviving weakened ones (Bennato, 2020).

In this context, the Naples conference aimed to refocus on the concept of Distances (intentionally using the plural) at various levels (spatial, practices, knowledge), necessitating contributions from various disciplines. It also underscores the need to develop new analytical methods and approaches while staying true to the traditional frameworks established in sociological knowledge. It is known that this line of study was initiated by George Simmel, one of the first to reference the concept of social distance (Historizes Wörterbuch der Philosophie, 1908) in his reflections on societal spatial arrangements. For Simmel (1989) space gains meaning and manifests as a

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2 Cfr. Corposanto, C. *Distanza sociale o distanza fisica? Un caso emblematico di uso non corretto delle parole #coronavirus #isolamento #prossimità #stateacasa*.

psychic content when individuals transition from alienation to interaction. In the early 1920s, amidst the burgeoning empirical approach to urban reality characterizing the Chicago School, Robert Park (1924) would then further this perspective, somewhat diverging from Simmel's view. The concept of social distance was translated into an attempt to quantify proximity or intimacy between individuals or groups, mutual trust, and perceived similarity in terms of culture, beliefs, and identity. Space was seen as an external category to society, an objective element posing constraints to social activities, overlooking the intrinsic cultural dimension that Simmel (1989) attributed to spatial processes.

In the subsequent developments of sociological reflection – backed by empirical evidence search – social distance was conceptually formalized in various ways: affective (Bogardus, 1933); normative (Durkheim, 1971); interactive (Fisher, 1982); (Boissevain and Mitchell, 1973); cultural (Bourdieu, 1994). In all these perspectives, the physical, symbolic, and spatial implications retain significant relevance. In different contexts, the use and organization of spaces, along with their symbolic and cultural meanings, can be indicators of social distance/proximity (Warner, 1949). Moreover, as noted by Simmel, spatial distance promotes the development of social distance between individuals as it intervenes in relational processes, thereby favoring intellectual ones. Simmel highlights that the difference between closeness and distance is notably relative: the sociological meaning of spatial conditions for each is not always consistent. This is even truer in modern times: physical and social spaces have lost their co-planarity to intersect and refract each other (Mandich, 1996).

The contributions gathered in this volume based on a selection of articles offer reflections on the concept of distance in light of the pandemic experience and its repercussions. On one hand, these repercussions impact the very articulation of the concept itself; on the other, they influence certain social processes which necessitate the invocation of the distance concept for comprehension.

Colloca, Lipari, and Lombardo delve into the topic of the territorialization of social inequalities through the lens of international migrations and settlement models in urban contexts. The focus is directed towards the extent to which these models delineate distances between the center and peripheries, both within cities and on a global scale. In terms of spatial organization, the concentration of immigrant/foreigner groups and communities can be highlighted not only as an indicator of segregation and social marginality but also as a representation of social distance structures and power dynamics.

Razzano and Bernardi investigate specific practices of mutual aid and grassroots solidarity that emerged during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. They present the case of *Brigate Volontarie per l'Emergenza* (Volunteer Emergency Brigades – hereinafter BVEs), born in Milan during the Covid-19 emergency to support people in need, discussing the hypothesis of their potential in reducing both urban and social distances. The resources anchoring these practices are both material and immaterial in nature, but are invariably spatially situated.

Sabatino, Madonia and Ragozini introduce the case of the “Scuola Viva” program, initiated by the Campania Region, which engages public, private, and citizen actors to bolster local learning communities. More specifically, the initiative aims to combat school dropout and educational poverty. Through the reconstruction of territorial disadvantage maps based on synthetic dropout risk indicators, the authors probe the implications of the project in terms of its effects on social distances predicated on socio-economic and demographic factors.

Marotta, Minervini, and Scotti broach the subject of the sustainability of the Energy Transition. They observe that, in combating the crisis induced by the Covid-19 pandemic, the European Union has allocated significant investments to promote actions in the ecological transition and digitalization sectors. The necessity – and opportunity – of involving diverse “new” actors in these processes complicates the decision-making landscape. The main impending is perceived as the “epistemic distance” among the actors involved in the transition process. This gap undermines the perspective of transdisciplinarity.

Two years after the conference held in Naples, the thought-provoking insights provided by these contributions remain highly topical. They suggest avenues of research and analysis on the concept of Distance, to which the end of the pandemic crisis is progressively restoring a meaning free from ambiguity, yet no less intricate and dynamic.

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Cities, Immigrants and Political Participation: The use of Constituencies in Milan²

1. Living in the suburbs (Centre-North) and old town centres (South)

The theme of the territorialisation of social inequalities first arose together with urban sociology, in that late 19th-century phase characterised by industrialisation, migration and urbanisation. International migrations on the one hand, and integration patterns in new urban contexts on the other, have always marked the increase of polarisation phenomena between the centres and outlying areas of the world and of polarisation between centres and suburban areas within the cities themselves. On various scales of observation, it is still possible to observe how migrations reflect the constitution and functioning of social orders that cast the figure of the foreigner as being out of place from a social, economic, legal and political viewpoint (Sayad, 1996). Thus, within cities, in terms of spatial organisation, the presence of the foreigner and the territorial concentration of immigrant groups and communities are not simply signs of segregation and social marginality, but are expressions of structures of social distance and power relations (Wacquant, 2018).

The ever more plural and differentiated characterisation of contemporary cities does require us to focus our attention on spatially circumscribed micro-areas of deprivation, no longer so easily ascribable to the centre/suburban model. However, the appeal to adopt a spatialist approach is also an invitation to adopt multiple scales of observation, small and minuscule units of observation, as broader geographical areas (Mela, 2006). The ecological approach remains an indispensable key for analysing how and to what extent socio-economic inequalities are reflected in the spatial structure of cities (Bergamaschi and Castrignanò 2006), even more so when analysed in their close interplay with the migrant's legal status and the ethnic question.

The distribution of housing of foreign citizens does actually differ from one city to another in Italy, in some places more centrally concentrated and in others with a greater density in the suburbs. Through a cartographic representation, we endeavoured to "frame from above" some Italian cities in order to distinguish areas, if any, that are more or less discernible due to the greater housing density of foreign citizens, and where they are located. Such an analysis could be useful in sketching out a comparative framework within which to place individual case studies, so as to then investigate the relationship between the formation of areas of concentration of immigrant populations and the characteristics of the local housing and labour markets, urban and social policies, and the role of attracting newcomers of pre-existing territorial concentrations of compatriots.

In the context of an almost unanimous consensus concerning the non-segregating character of the residential concentration of immigrant foreigners in Italy, unlike in other national contexts, a rift is now emerging, due to the recording of phenomena of widespread precariousness of housing and a simultaneous "invisibilisation" of the housing issue in Italy. The "legal irregularisation" of the presence of migrants, due to changes in the management of national borders, together with the economic stagnation characterising the current European historical context, have led

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Although the essay is the result of joint reflections by the authors, paragraphs 2 and 5 are attributable to Carlo Colloca; paragraphs 3 and 4 are attributable to Licia Lipari, paragraph 1 is attributable to Elisa Lombardo. In this paper, the authors present some results of the research project "GRIDAVI – *Gestione del Rischio, Incertezza Decisionale e Vulnerabilità Sociali*" (Risk management, decision uncertainty, social vulnerability) financed by University of Catania, research program "PIACERI – *Piano di inCentivi per la Ricerca di Ateneo 2020-22* (Plan to encourage research – Intervention line 2).

to discourses of an acceleration of the expulsion processes of lower-income populations and the emergence of new suburban areas, both in the outskirts and in city centres (Petrillo 2018). This would seem to be a kind of 'individualisation' of housing segregation, focused on single occupied buildings or shanty-town formations, and which seems to pursue and radicalise that progressive loss of the post-war reformist spirit already afoot from the 1980s onwards (Tosi 1980). Following Tosi's teaching, the concepts of spatial concentration, disorder and danger would appear to have become central in the public discourse on housing, giving rise to segregative or dispersive interventions. In the first case, containment policies were developed leading to the formation of ghetto-suburbs on the French model, to the construction of specially equipped camps for the Romani and Sinti populations, and to the establishment of first reception facilities for immigrants. In the second case, practices of residence dispersion were implemented, especially in France with the policies of *mixité* until the 1970s and, later, with the eviction of occupied buildings (Tosi 1980, 1993). In the American context, where segregation has traditionally been concentrated in the ghettos of the central areas of the city, profound and fast-changing processes of gentrification are now underway, driven by a plurality of factors of urban policy, real estate market investments, and the creation of attractive commercial areas for the upper-middle classes, which push working-class inhabitants elsewhere, into the abandoned recesses of the suburbs (Brown-Saracino, 2010).

Italy features high levels of internal territorial differentiation, as far as both cultural identity and economic development are concerned, as well as in terms of institutional performance and welfare responses. For a long time, Southern Italy - like Southern European countries in general - has been looked upon as a place of transit towards a North capable of offering greater opportunities for employment. In fact, there is a considerable difference in the number of foreign residents among the Italian regions, with higher percentages in the North, although in the South one must also consider the higher number of illegal presences, therefore invisible to official statistics. It is, however, a ratio that is probably destined to change, in view of the frontier nature of the southern regions, places of first arrival of migratory flows that have profoundly changed with respect to the past, which now see situations of extreme vulnerability prevailing and which will inevitably lead to different modes of settlement. These betoken far more worrying forecasts, considering the weak industrial development of the South and its dependence on the service sector, notoriously characterised by less protection and greater ease of sinking into the black economy (Consoli, 2009). These peculiarities of the Mediterranean urban economy would seem to have an impact on another characteristic common to Southern European cities, often overlooked, which is a stronger housing concentration of immigrant populations in historic centres (Gentileschi, 2004).

Starting from the hypothesis of co-existing centrifugal and centripetal trends in the housing placement of foreign citizens, we can identify three different patterns of residency of immigrant populations in Italy.

The first model features a centrifugal trend in the residency of foreign citizens and is represented by cities such as Milan or Turin. This would seem to be a settlement pattern indicating more 'mature' migratory flows and reproduces a housing model similar to that identified for migrant Italians in the 1950s-1970s coming from Southern Italy and heading to the former large industrial cities of the North (Martinotti, 1993; Mugnano, 2017).

As well illustrated by the city of Bologna, the second model does not show significant differences in the residential location of foreigners, but a substantial overlap with the areas of maximum concentration of the total population. This model positions itself somewhere between the other two, in which only some neighbourhoods, located in semi-central areas of the city, are characterised by greater multi-ethnicity (Bergamaschi, 2010).

Lastly, a third model is represented by the cities of Naples and Palermo, which feature a higher concentration of foreign residents in their respective old town centres. In contrast to the first model, a centripetal residential distribution pattern is evident in the third. In the southern cities,

in the extension of the inhabited urban area, the divide between the outskirts in which foreign citizens are practically non-existent and an old town centre in which almost all of them reside is more evident. Influenced also by the availability of housing in a poor state of preservation, but with affordable costs (Gentileschi, 2014), the greater attractiveness of the old town centres probably furthermore reveals the 'younger' character of the foreign presence in the cities of Southern Italy, as well as the existence of historic centres fortunately still untouched by gentrification processes, although affected by major demographic changes and transformations in usage that confirm their 'liveliness' (Mazzette, Sgroi, 2003).

If one were to attempt an operational definition to measure the Mediterranean-ness, the cities of Southern Italy could probably provide a favourable context for exploration (Amendola 2019). Inhabiting old town centres seems to bring with it, however, more opportunities to trace one's presence in the physical space of places, as in Naples, in those neighbourhoods and dwellings 'now out of the official market for the local population' (Amato, Coppola, 2009, p. 207), and also Palermo, whose ancient properly Mediterranean multiculturalism, already testified by architecture and toponymy, re-emerges in the re-functionalisation and re-styling of the spaces of the old parts of town by migrants (Tumminelli, 2010).

In all likelihood, what is actually of major interest from a sociological standpoint, and which would require a comparative and in-depth study in different 'concrete' contexts, is just to what extent these models have implications in terms of different relational potentialities and different ways of inhabiting urban space. Here, however, it is possible to point out some food for thought. First of all, despite the fact that settlement choice in favour of old town centres or suburbs is largely motivated by economic reasons, wherever the cost of living is presumed to be lower, also motivations linked to the desire to keep alive the relational fabric with the community of compatriots, for affective reasons (presence of ethnic organisations) or instrumental reasons (development of ethnic economies), are likely to be implicated.

In the old town centres, the heightened presence of activities of everyday life (of working, residing and consuming, to quote the categories proposed by Martinotti), should facilitate the unfolding of opportunities for social participation. Living in the compact city would appear to foster the formation of more disordered networks of relations, both in terms of strong ties due to the presence of ethnic, religious or other forms of associationism, and also weak ties due to the heterogeneous social fabric of which the compact city is composed. On the contrary, the widespread city would limit living only to sleeping, leaving less space for casual interaction and the establishment of meaningful social relations. In fact, the historic centres are widely seen as reservoirs of relationality and creative opportunities, pursued also in controversy with the processes of urban dispersion and undifferentiation that were taking place around the 1970s.

In opposition to such processes - as well as to the attempt to address them by adopting logics of mere utilitarianism rather than empty aestheticism - drawing from the Bolognese experience, Guidicini (1976) called for the endorsement of a social rationality based firstly on the elimination of those mechanisms restricting the accessibility and usage of old town centres and secondly, on participation in the formulation of the values and goals of the new urban reality that was approaching.

Better known is the position of Lefebvre (1968) who in contrast to the breaking down of the living space into differentiated areas and functions traced precisely in recreational centrality the possibility for the inhabitants to re-appropriate the time and space of the city, and to restore to the urban centres their role as spontaneous theatre and as an offer of «movement, the unexpected, possibilities and encounters» (Lefebvre, 1968, p. 128). Such characteristics of spaces and neighbourhoods would be able to ward off the risk of the formation of ghettos and hyper-ghettos in the urban city centres.

Far from seeking to contribute to the demonisation of the suburbs, this vision would rather be an attempt to urge a reconfiguring of the relationship between inhabitants and spaces, in reference to the concept of relationality, restoring to social ties their intrinsic political capacity.

All too often, in fact, there is a tendency to overemphasise the marginality and exclusion of certain neighbourhoods in the city, ignoring the 'demand for centrality' raised by these. The marginalisation of the margins appears even more evident when these are inhabited by foreign immigrant citizens whose perspective, precisely because electorally voiceless, goes all the more easily unheard (Ambrosini, 2012).

2. The *black swan*, or the political rights of immigrant foreigners

The "black swan" is actually part of a distinct branch of the swan family, but for the theory that evokes it (Taleb, 2007) it has become synonymous with an unlikely and unforeseeable event, the occurrence of which could have far-reaching consequences. In reference to the relationship between immigrants and politics, the 'black swan' represents the full recognition of rights, i.e. the exercise of the right to vote and stand for election; not least because where legally resident, immigrants can affect the definition of constituencies, as will be seen later in the case study.

Moreover, political institutions affect immigrants' political participation mainly through the citizenship regime of their country of residence, and the Italian institutions privilege an ethnic conception of citizenship. This conception, for natives and immigrants, defines rigid symbolic and material distinctions with regard to political rights (not only), and more generally, determines low levels of mobilisation and access to the public sphere on the part of immigrants compared to countries in which there is a territorial and civic conception of citizenship (Koopmans *et al.* 2005, pp.78-79). From a national standpoint, Italy harbours an ethnic cleavage that determines an asymmetric distribution of resources and as such the native organisations are in a dominant position with respect to the field of immigration, while the ethnic ones are mainly marginalised. Italy has been experiencing migratory dynamics for just over thirty years - at least since that Thursday 8 August 1991, when the arrival of the ship *Vlora* on its way from Durrës to Bari marked the beginning of the country's history not only as a land of emigration, but also of immigration. Nevertheless, a substantial part of society, and even more so of Italian politics, still seems reluctant to acknowledge the profound transformation in a multiethnic and multicultural sense that the country has experienced since then. Still more so if the issue of political rights is addressed.

It must be observed, however, that while in Europe, long before 1991, models of reception and inclusion of migrants based on assimilationism (in France), on the centrality of the community dimension (in Germany), on differentialism (in Great Britain) or on interculturalism (in Sweden) were being developed, more than five decades after the events in Bari Italy has still not elaborated its own model. Legislative production has certainly not been lacking, even though until the mid-1980s, in open contrast with the provisions dictated by Article 10.2 of the Constitution, the Italian Republic regulated the influx of foreign citizens into its territory through reference to the 1931 Consolidated Act of Public Security Laws, periodically supplementing it with ministerial circulars to compensate for the loopholes in the Fascist regulations.

It was Law 943/1986 (the so-called Foschi Law) that was the first regulatory intervention worthy of note on the subject of migratory flows, despite there being no provisions for programming, but above all it contained a simplistic vision of the immigrant labour market, accompanied by a series of complex mechanisms. In the years that followed, with Law 39/1990 (the so-called Martelli Law) there was a first attempt to deal with the issue in an organic manner, giving the impression that an Italian immigration policy could be envisaged. In reality it was created to respond to emergency situations and perhaps it is no coincidence that it still represents the basis of legislation on the subject today.

The introduction of the Consolidation Act on Immigration in 1998, following Law 40/1998 (the so-called Turco-Napolitano Law), was certainly a significant step, but not a decisive one in offering an Italian model of reception and inclusion, also because it was heavily reformed in a restrictive sense by Law 189/2002 (the so-called Bossi-Fini Law). There followed a twenty-

year period marked by a succession of security packages (the main protagonists being the Ministers of Home Affairs Maroni, Minniti, Salvini and Piantedosi), of discriminatory practices of human rights in the cumbersome system of reception among the various refugee facilities such as the CPT (*Centro di Permanenza Temporanea* – Reception Centre for Temporary Stays), the CARA (*Centro di Accoglienza per Richiedenti Asilo* – Reception Centre for Asylum Seekers), the CAS (*Centro di Accoglienza Straordinaria* – Special Reception Centre), the CIE (*Centro di Identificazione ed Espulsione* – Centre for Identification and Expulsion) and the CPR (*Centro di Permanenza per Rimpatri* – Reception Centre for Repatriation) and of agreements with countries, such as Libya, to curb arrivals. Exceptions are rare cases of international protection measures and choices that should be reinforced in order to realise sustainable reception projects, such as the former Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR), today the Reception and Integration System (SAI), set up by the network of local authorities.

Further exceptions include the outstanding work of certain secular and religious volunteers who pour so much time and effort into the issue. Perhaps, on closer inspection, Italy has developed a model of reception and inclusion inspired by the culture of *emergency* and *security*. Otherwise, it is difficult to explain the prolonged length of stay in the reception system and the unsustainability of the same in terms of respect for human rights. Likewise, there is the inexplicable question of those immigrants who, notwithstanding their legal residence in Italy (as of today there are 5,193,669 and they represent 8.8 % of the resident population, IDOS, 2022), cannot enjoy the right to vote and the right to stand for office, despite having an impact on the configuration of electoral constituencies, and who thus remain in the condition of 'half-citizens', as it were, or perhaps second-rate citizens.

In Italy, to date there is still no law regulating the political participation of immigrant foreigners. In this context, numerous local administrations have provided for the preparation of unprecedented forms of political integration, clashing, in the case of the most ambitious initiatives, with constitutional regulations. There is, increasingly, a proliferation of immigrant representative bodies within the local administrations, which include the Councils and Committees established at the regional, provincial and municipal levels. There are also cases in which local governments have appointed the figure of Deputy Foreign Councillor.

Although these instruments manifest the political will of local authorities to facilitate the political participation of foreigners and the forms of representation of interest, one cannot fail to point out the limitations of the scope of these new bodies. In particular, the powers provided under these institutions are of an advisory nature only, and the absence of adequate economic support has inevitable repercussions on the scope of action of the bodies themselves and the extent of the commitment required of those who participate in them.

In the context of collective bodies (councils and advisory boards), local governments can set up different criteria in relation to the mechanisms governing electoral consultations, providing, for example, ethnic-national constraints on candidacy and voting or introducing corrective mechanisms for gender representation. In most local contexts, however, given the multiplicity of backgrounds of the immigrant population, the issue of representativeness of these bodies often appears highly controversial. Ethnic, cultural and linguistic differences tend to overlap with those related to nationality of origin, making it difficult to identify representative entities with respect to the plurality of interests of immigrants in the area. Councils and advisory boards certainly have a strong symbolic value because they enshrine the recognition of the legitimacy of communities of permanently resident foreigners as citizens who can actively participate in public life. In the absence of incisive policy tools, however, there is the risk of adopting a paternalistic approach to immigrant subjects, starting from the consideration of the position of weakness and marginality they hold in the local socio-political context.

Within the framework of the scholarly debate, it has further been pointed out that «in a situation in which the possibilities of truly affecting the decisions of local institutions are almost nil, it is very likely that strategies of action will be redefined in an attempt to use the council as a

personalistic tool rather than an institutional space of representation» (Borghi, 2007, p. 99). The establishment of such bodies by local governments and the actual function they play probably need more empirical testing.

3. Morphology of urban immigration: the case of Milan

The approach to studying the housing distribution of foreign nationals through socio-territorial analysis reveals a rather multifaceted picture in Italy. In this scenario, characterized by differences between North and South, the city of Milan presents specific traits. It can increasingly be defined as a global city, a hub of material and immaterial capital flows, high-ranking activities and services (finance, communications, high-tech sector), and not least it has become an attractive destination for temporary populations but also for new residents (Rullani, 2012). On the other hand, Milan is representative of an urban model in transition, where some issues, including the housing of the regular immigrant population, still present atypical dynamics that differentiate it, as we shall see, from other major international capitals.

The city is located in a highly appealing territorial area for migratory flows (ISMU Foundation, 2018). Suffice it to say that in 2018 in the Lombardy region, foreign residents exceeded 1.1 million, making up 22.4 % of the total number of foreign residents in Italy (Istat). They represent 11.7 % of residents in the region, a figure that exceeds the national average value (8.7%). Another relevant aspect that characterizes the presence of foreigners in Lombardy is social stability. As reported by the Statistics Dossier on Immigration (IDOS, 2019), more than half of non-EU citizens hold a long-term residence permit (63 %), which indicates the entrenchment of foreign citizens in the Lombardy territory. Milan is the metropolitan area with the largest number of foreign residents (more than 470,000), who make up 40 % of the total presence in the region, marking a significant gap compared to other metropolitan cities where the maximum number recorded is 157,000 in Brescia (IDOS, 2019).

Like other large urban agglomerations in Southern Europe, the city of Milan became a key destination for foreign immigration between the 1980s and 1990s, thus relatively recently by comparison with Northern European capitals (Costarelli, Mugnano, 2017). As labour opportunities increased, the appeal of migratory flows heightened and this influenced changes in the urban structure. The increase in the foreign immigrant population can be observed through the establishment of cultural, religious and, no less importantly, economic activities that have contributed to forging the multi-ethnic character of some areas of the city (Riva, Lucchini, 2014). In order to understand the extent of the phenomenon and the repercussions on the changing urban profile of Milan, it is first of all necessary to analyse the spatial dimension of the housing of foreign immigrants.

The analysis was carried out with the support of GIS³ (Geographic Information System) tools and the open data available on the Municipality of Milan website. The updated dataset enabled us to carry out a detailed analysis on an urban scale with Local Identity Nuclei or units taken as territorial units for reference. These represent areas in which it is possible to discern the distinctive characteristics of historic neighbourhoods as well as those in embryo. Introduced by the Territorial Government Plan, these Local Identity Units (LIUs) are defined by the Municipality of Milan as «a set of areas connected by infrastructures and services for mobility. They are systems of urban vitality: concentrations of local businesses, gardens, meeting places, services; but they are also 88 nuclei of local identity in need of development and project planning».⁴

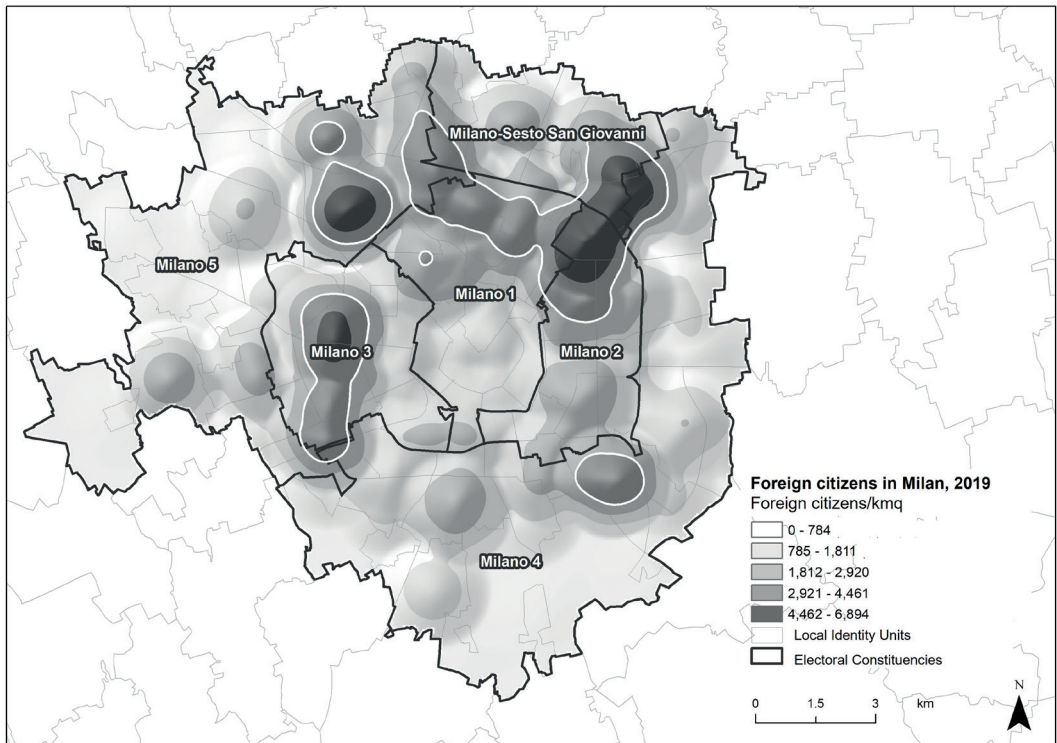
First, the density of foreign residents on an urban scale was analysed. The kernel statistical meth-

3 The maps for Milan were elaborated with the support of the ArcGis, ESRI software version 10.5.

4 The geographical database of the Local Identity Units is from the Municipality of Milan (<http://dati.comune.Milan.it/dataset/e8e765fc-d882-40b8-95d8-16ff3d39eb7c>, published on 4 December 2020).

od⁵ was used, which has the advantage of superimposing a bell-shaped distribution on each sample point in space «and the values of the different bell-shaped surfaces are summed at the points of overlap, so as to obtain a cumulative density surface» (Boffi, 2004, p. 106).

Fig 1. – Foreign resident population density in Milan, 2019.



Source: elaboration on data from Municipality of Milan (2019).

The socio-territorial analysis reveals the dynamics of residential concentration of foreign citizens in certain areas of the city. Four macro-areas can be identified that differ in intensity, breadth and form (areas delimited by the white border⁶ in figure 1, which correspond to the aggregation of the fourth and fifth classes of the distribution). In the first, larger macro-area located in the north-east of the Milan municipality, there is a hotspot (underlying the area with a high concentration of foreign residents, in dark grey in figure 1), that includes the Local Identity Units of Loreto and Padova, and encompasses part of Parco Lambro and Viale Monza. The significant presence of foreign citizens extends into the territories bordering the hotspot, including Maciachini-Greco and Affori-Comasina.

In the north-west a second macro-area emerges that includes Bovisa and whose hotspot falls in the LIU of Villapizzone. In the south-west there is a third macro-area extending to Bande Nere, Lorenteggio and Giambellino, in the south with hotspots in the LIUs of San Siro, Selinunte and De Angeli-Monterosa. The last macro-area is located in the south-east and includes Lodi-

5 The kernel method requires indicating the bandwidth, i.e. the width of the bell that will be superimposed on the sample points, which allows greater precision in the distribution of the density over the reference area. For Milan, a bandwidth of 500 metres was entered.

6 The white line that identifies the area with a significant concentration of foreign immigrant residents is referred to as isoline. Constructed through a function called contour, it is the line that delimits homogeneous bands of territory with respect to a variable (Boffi, 2004). In Figure 1, the isoline divides the territory into a portion with density values equal to or greater than 2,921 (the lower limit of the fourth class of the distribution) and another with lower values. This function allows the territory to be segmented into zones in relation to the phenomenon observed.

Corvetto and part of Rogoredo. Alongside the four aforementioned macro-areas, two poles emerge which, though small in size, present a significant density of foreign residents: Quarto Oggiaro located in the outer belt to the north, Sarpi and Ghisolfa adjacent to Corso Buenos Aires and north of the Duomo area.

In order to understand the distribution of resident foreign citizens in the Milanese territory, we need to elaborate some considerations on the peculiarities of the settlement neighbourhoods and, more generally, on the local housing context. A first aspect that emerges from the map is that the location of foreign immigration is not defined by administrative borders but rather is influenced by socio-territorial and economic factors. Many of the LIUs where hotspots are located (figure 1) include neighbourhoods where the foreign presence has taken root over time, where housing quality is low, thereby meaning more affordable costs.

Recent studies on the housing situation in the chief town of the region of Lombardy (Costarelli, Mugnano, 2017; Mugnano, Costarelli, 2018) highlight how a significant proportion of immigrant foreigners reside in housing where conditions are degraded and precarious, characterised by problems related to overcrowding as well as the inadequate quality of facilities (ANCI, 2010). Added to this is a poor quality of life that affects some of the areas with a high concentration of foreign residents. Among these, Padova, Rizzoli, Bovisa, Giambellino, Lorenteggio and Corvetto are indicated by the Suburban Plan as degraded areas of Milan where the need for redevelopment is a priority (Costarelli, Mugnano, 2017).

In the most deprived neighbourhoods it is not infrequent to see a process of succession involving low-income households in the most degraded housing left behind by family nuclei that in contrast have embarked on a path of upward social mobility. As already pointed out by the urban studies of the ecological branch of the Chicago School, this influences the preservation of social distances and fixes status (Park, Burgess, 1921). This phenomenon leads to the persistence of poor conditions in some neighbourhoods of Milan, with negative repercussions, especially on newcomers who usually represent the most fragile groups of foreign immigrants.

Compared to the previous decade (Boffi, 2007), there has been an increase in the immigrant presence in public housing districts where the most fragile segments of the native population live, such as the elderly or low-income families. These neighbourhoods include Giambellino, San Siro, Lorenteggio, Comasina, Corvetto and Quarto Oggiaro. This change is indicative of the extent to which foreign families have taken root in Milan (IDOS, 2018), as seniority of residence is one of the binding criteria for access to public housing. However, a negative filtering process persists which means that, compared to the applications submitted by immigrant families, only a limited number manage to access public housing (Mugnano, 2017).

Further reflections on the housing condition can be added when analysing the degree of potential accessibility to services that further differentiates the settlement districts of the foreign immigrant population. Accessibility is defined as the degree of potential accessibility of something or someone (Moseley, 1979, p. 56). From a spatial perspective, accessibility «indicates the ease of a place [...] to be reached by urban populations and the manner in which this occurs» (Daconto, Colleoni, Gwiazdzinski, 2017, p. 74). Elements that influence accessibility to urban opportunities include the transport system, planning and time scheduling of daily activities by individuals. Recent studies on the metropolitan area of Milan show that the immigrant population usually resides in areas with medium to high potential accessibility, often well connected so that they can reach their workplaces using public transport (ibid.).

These neighbourhoods are increasingly turning into multi-ethnic areas, where the rise in the immigrant presence is being matched by the creation and growth of new enterprises and businesses run by foreign citizens (Riva, Lucchini, 2014). Despite this, some areas with a high concentration of immigrant population feature problems of accessibility, mono-functionality and insufficient resources, including Ponte Lambro to the east, Quarto Oggiaro to the north, De Angeli and San Siro to the west, although the latter two have recently been connected by the new M5 metro line (Daconto, Colleoni, Gwiazdzinski 2017).

An overview of the distribution of the population of foreign residents related to the socio-demographic and economic peculiarities of Milan and its surrounding territory, and to the accessibility of urban opportunities accordingly yields a complex and varied picture. Similarly to other cities in Northern Italy, the presence of foreign residents tends to be greater in the semi-suburban and suburban areas of the city, confirming a tendency to spread outwards with respect to the central core, as highlighted above. Compared to other large European cities, in general, Milan is not characterised by strong segregation phenomena on the basis of ethnicity, but rather by a social mix and a patchy distribution of foreign residents (Zajczyk, 2003; Borlini, Memo 2009).

4. Political representation and presence of immigrants: the composition of constituencies

From the socio-territorial analysis, the Lombard capital emerges as an interesting case study for observing how the stable presence of foreign citizens contributes to the socio-cultural and demographic change of cities. We have seen how the concentration of foreign residents has influenced the processes of change in some neighbourhoods that are steadily shifting towards an increasingly multicultural and multiethnic profile (Barbagli, Pisati, 2012).

Cities like Milan that have a strong appeal for migratory flows cannot afford in their political agenda to pay no heed to the issues of reception and inclusion underpinning the complicated and delicate issue of participation. In contemporary cities, the challenge of combining the different needs and expectations of urban populations, including immigrants, becomes a priority issue in order to avoid conflicts and loss of consensus by local administrations. In city governance, a form of conflict emerges that is most often «difficult to mediate between an order that is the outcome of an explicitly rational action carried out by a scientifically neutral public subject and an order that is instead the result of a myriad of actors motivated by private interest» (Amendola, 2016, p. 55).

Some Italian municipalities have undertaken measures to involve regular foreign citizens in the decision-making process, including that of granting them the right to elect their own representative to take part in administrative consultations, which, however, reveal quite a few limitations and complexities (Ambrosini, 2016). Therefore, if in the governing of the city understood as the “projection of society onto the territory” (Lefebvre, 1968), the difficulty of managing and guaranteeing the inclusion and participation of the different populations that live there on a daily basis emerges with increasing incisiveness, the picture becomes even more complicated if we broaden the perspective of analysis.

Under Italian law, legally resident foreign citizens numerically weigh on the definition of electoral constituencies. As stated in Article 3 of the law of 3 November 2017, ‘the single-member constituencies are distributed proportionally to the respective population determined on the basis of the results of the last general population census, as reported by the most recent official publication of the National Institute of Statistics’⁷. Among resident foreigners, only those with the citizenship of a European Union country can claim their right to vote.⁸ In Italy in 2017, of the 5,144,440 foreign resident citizens, only 28% were from Member States of the EU, thus with the possibility to exercise their right to vote, while the remaining 72% are excluded (data source: IDOS 2018). From this it can be deduced how the presence of foreign citizens affects the definition of political representation, even if they are then excluded as subjects who do not enjoy the right to vote or stand for election. As happened to women in times of male suffrage, immigrants are asked to accept and obey laws that they are unable to contribute to defining.

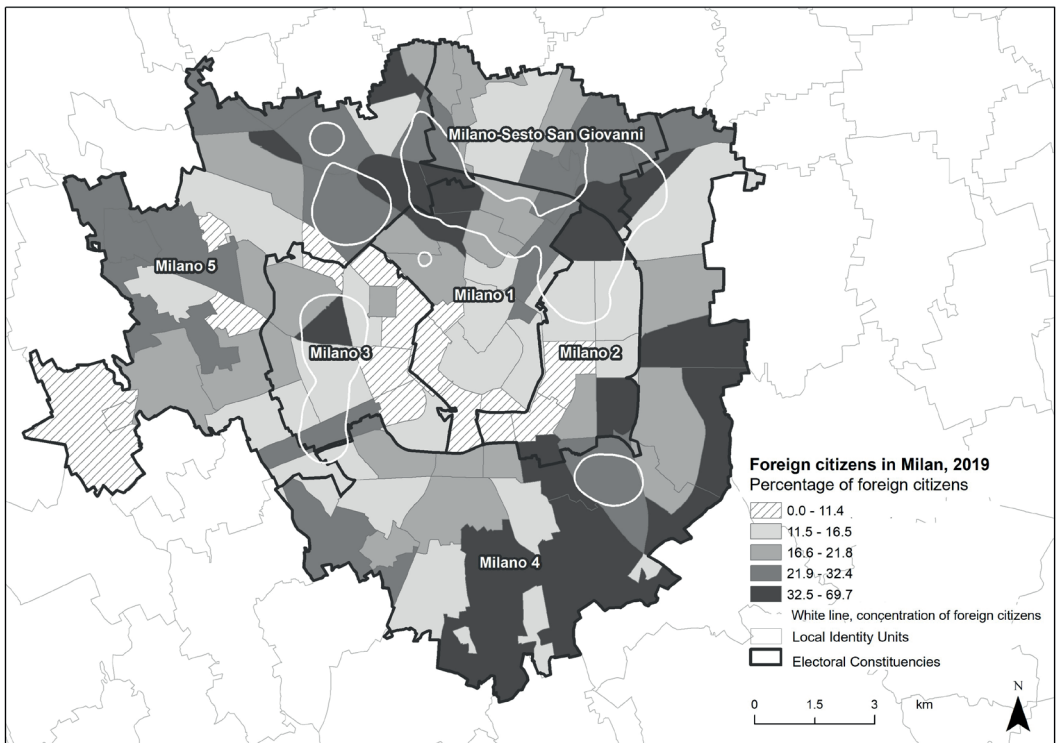
7 Legislative Decree No.189 of 12 December 2017. Decision of the electoral constituencies of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate of the Republic in implementation of Article 3 of Law No. 165 of 3 November 2017, containing amendments to the election system of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate of the Republic. Entry into force of the measure 20/12/2017.

8 The legislative references on this claim for the right to vote are: Legislative Decree No. 197 of 12 April 1996; Decree-Law No. 408 of 24 June 1994; Community Law 1999.

In this scenario, the case of Milan is emblematic. With reference to the foreign population, it suffices to recall that over the last decade there has been an increase to reach 19.3% of the total number of residents in 2017 and 20% in 2019 (data source: Municipality of Milano, 2017 and 2019). Of the approximately 281,000 regular foreigners, in 2019 only 11.6% are EU citizens, while the remaining 88.4% come from non-EU countries.

Therefore, compared to the Italian picture, the share of those excluded from political representation is higher. The municipality of Milan is divided into 6 single-member constituencies⁹ (indicated in Figure 2 by the black border in bold). By superimposing the ratio of resident foreigners to the total population per LIU it becomes clear how each constituency presents within it diversified situations. In particular, although less densely populated¹⁰ (in figure 2 outside the white boundary in bold), the constituencies in the outer belt of the municipality have districts within them that exceed the average values of foreign presence in the total number of residents. This result is confirmed if one aggregates the composition ratio by constituency (figure 3). It emerges, in fact, that the constituencies of Milano 4 (23.2%) are characterised by the highest proportion of foreign citizens, followed by Milano-Sesto San Giovanni (22.0%) and Milano 5 (21.6%).

Fig. 2. – Percentage of foreign resident population out of total population per Local Identity Unit (LIU) in Milan, 2019.



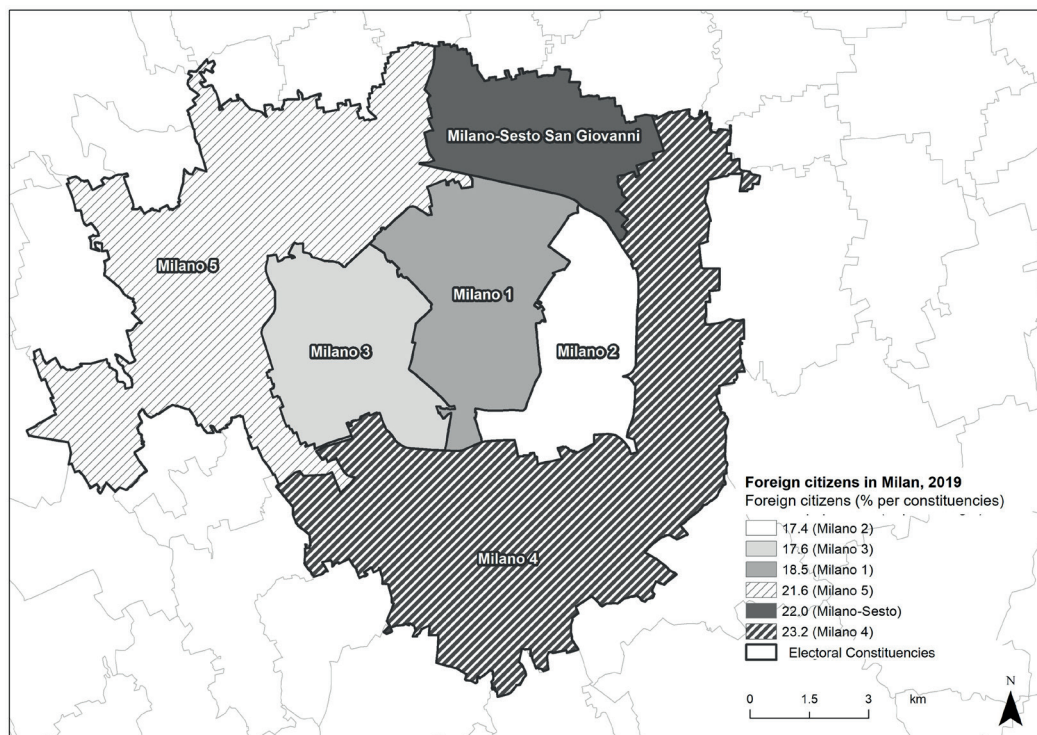
Source: our elaboration on data from the Municipality of Milan (2019).

Fig. 3 – Percentage of foreign resident population out of total population per constituency (single-member constituency)¹¹ in Milan, 2019.

9 The geographical database of the constituencies is from Istat, published on 15 May 2018 (see <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/208278>).

10 In particular, the Milano 4 and Milano 5 constituencies are characterised generally by low population density, and not only of the foreign population. Because of this connotation, the two aforementioned constituencies are also the most extensive on the Milanese territory, respectively 63 and 52 square kilometres (see table 1).

11 The constituency of Milan 1 includes the area of the old town centre (Duomo, Brera and Ticinese); Milano 2, the east-



Source: our elaboration on data from the Municipality of Milan (2019).

If we disaggregate the share of residents from non-EU countries, we can see that they are more present in the constituencies of the outlying areas than in those comprising the urban centre and neighbouring areas (see Table 1). The three constituencies that encompass the large Milanese suburbs (Milano 4, Milano-Sesto and Milano 5) exceed the average of 17.7 % of non-EU citizens out of the total resident population, while at the same time the share of EU citizens is lower than the urban average of 2.3 %.

Tab. 1 – Resident population in Milan per electoral constituency (single-member), 2019 (v. a. and ratios)

Electoral constituency	Tot. pop. (v.a.*1.000)	Foreign residents (v.a.*1.000)	UE citizens/ tot. pop. (%)	Non-UE citizens/ pop. tot. (%)	Kmsq
Milano 1	240,4	44,7	2,7	15,9	19
Milano 2	254,6	44,2	2,2	15,2	14
Milano 3	226,7	39,9	2,9	14,7	17
Milano 4	294,5	68,3	2,2	21,0	63
Milano 5	258,7	56,0	2,0	19,6	52
Milano-Sesto	129,6	28,5	1,9	20,1	16
Municipality of Milan	1.404,4	281,6	2,3	17,7	182

Source: our elaboration on data from Municipality of Milan (2019).

Some of the LIUs in Milan’s outer belts such as Barona, Stadera and Gratosoglio, Corvetto, Parco Lambro-Cimiano (in constituency Milano 4) and Affori, Quarto Oggiaro, Comasina and

ern areas bordering the centre (Porta Romana, Città Studi, Loreto); Milano 3, the western areas bordering the centre (from the Navigli to S. Siro); Milano 4, the eastern part of the city (Stadera, Rogoredo and Lambrate); Siro); Milano 5, the western part of the city (Lorenteggio, Baggio, Quinto Romano, Gallaratese, Bovisa and Quarto Oggiaro); Milano-Sesto, includes the northern part of Milan (Niguarda, Bicocca and Viale Monza) and the municipalities of Sesto S. Giovanni and Bresso (see http://www.cittametropolitana.mi.it/statistica/osservatorio_metropolitano/osservatorio_elettorale/).

Niguarda (in constituencies Milano 5 and Milano-Sesto) are characterised by a relevant degree of socio-economic vulnerability (Mugnano, Costarelli 2018). Immigrant citizens living there can often generally only afford low housing costs and therefore live in more precarious conditions than other groups of legal immigrant citizens. This suggests that the largest share of immigrants present in the three outer belt constituencies is not only excluded from political representation but is also, more often than not, in a situation of precariousness in social and economic terms, and with regard to housing and potential accessibility to urban resources (Daconto, Colleoni, Gwiazdzinski, 2017).

It can thus be inferred that the immigrant residents of outlying constituencies hold similar traits to those whom Gans (1962) referred to in his analysis as 'the entrapped', i.e. those disadvantaged social groups who remain stranded in deprived areas of the city from which it is increasingly difficult to get away. The high degree of criticality also leads to a higher risk of conflict in these neighbourhoods. The denied right to political participation, especially to those fragile immigrant population groups, therefore risks entrenching a condition of marginality and exclusion not only in the use and management of the city, but more generally on a broader scale of analysis and reflection on the issue.

5. Conclusion: towards an extension of civic solidarity

To conclude, it seems appropriate to emphasise that a sociologically oriented approach must address immigrant citizens' urban needs, and the development of urban lifestyles as a result of the relationship between natives and foreigners, as well as the sustainable socio-economic behaviours and values ensuing from this multicultural interaction. The paradigms and policies of territorial government play a large part in this reflection, without disregarding the "good practices" promoted by the voluntary world, but in order for an immigrant citizen not to perceive himself as a 'half-citizen', full appreciation of political participation is needed, and this depends on legislative choices being made in parliament.

Legal foreign citizens, whether they choose to live in the city or in rural communities, should also have the right to vote and stand for election because, being legal residents, they affect the definition of electoral constituencies. Taking into account the high density of immigrant-dominated populations that some Italian cities have (especially in central-northern Italy, as in the case of Milan analysed above), we arrive at the following contradiction: the immigrant is a subject in a country of citizens insofar as he or she does not enjoy the aforementioned right. He/she impinges on the definition of political representation, only to then be precluded from it. Therefore, as happened before to women in times of male suffrage, the immigrant is asked to obey laws that he cannot be involved in, or contribute to, defining.

Despite having been a destination for immigration for over twenty years, Italy has not yet developed a model of socio-cultural and political inclusion of foreign immigrant citizens, leaving it chiefly to the spontaneism and civic culture of the territories, individual cities, and local governments, in synergy with the sector of volunteering and trade associations, to offer themselves, 'from below', as actors willing to initiate practices of cultural acknowledgement and models of inclusion.

One need only think of the current procedure for granting citizenship, which could be defined as familistic, since in order to have the right to be Italian, one must be the child, descendant or spouse of Italians; therefore, foreigners who regularly reside, work and study, from South to North, can only hope to acquire it after a long time (from four to more than ten years depending on whether they are EU citizens or not) and after complex bureaucratic procedures. Even more disqualifying for a democratic society is the issue of citizenship with regard to the children of foreign citizens.

Also if born in Italy and therefore not migrants, due to the *jus sanguinis* in force (citizenship is therefore only transmitted by consanguinity) these people are discriminated against because

of their origins on biologically-based grounds and it matters little if, in addition to being born in Italy, they also pursue their individual life trajectories there on a daily basis¹². In Italy, even obtaining the right to citizenship would also appear to be a 'family affair'. It seems to be a rebuttal to the idea of fully assigning the 'right to have rights' to those who are not yet socialised or included, without realising that inclusion-integration derives from the *erga omnes* expansion of the spaces of citizenship; not doing so generates the risk of denying the fundamental right to self-determination, and «constructing non-persons [...] in the name of a presumed beneficial attitude towards them» (Rodotà, 2012, pp. 281-283).

As if this were not enough, for the recognition of qualifications, as a result of issues concerning bilateral and multilateral agreements stipulated by the Italian government, a Peruvian citizen collaborator of a Nobel Prize winner coming to Italy should accept a job as domestic collaborator, with a cultural impoverishment of the person in question, but also of the society hosting this person, which draws no benefit in terms of scientific development from the presence of these *new Italians* with high levels of education. The issue is even more poignant in times such as these, during which 'brains' regularly 'flee' from Italy, after incurring significant costs for the nation for their training, while at the same time there is no proper and fitting recognition of the 'brains' coming into the country.

Immigrants and their children should represent an opportunity for Italian society to think about its future not only from a securitising perspective. This is the conviction of Jürgen Habermas, who sees in the transnational presence of immigrant citizens an opportunity for an extension of European civic solidarity, since the challenge of multi-ethnicity can make national cultures «more porous, more receptive and more sensitive both internally and externally. [...] The opening up within them of cultures closed in on themselves also makes them open up to each other» (Habermas 2011, p. 18). The hope is that Italian society and institutions, pursuing universalist logics, will consolidate the citizenship rights of the *new Italians*, fully acknowledging their right to vote and stand for election, as well as addressing the demand for protection and recognition of the rights that the arrivals of thousands of non-EU citizens pose every day, rather than concentrating their energies on border control or launching reception policies based on the selection between 'economic migrants' and asylum seekers.

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¹² An exception to *jus soli*, also known as birth right citizenship, is granted only to the children of foreigners born in Italy and who have resided there without interruption. The right to become Italian is subject, however, to the submission of an application to the competent institutions between the age of eighteen and nineteen. The child of a foreigner, not born in Italy, but who arrives there after only a few months of life and perhaps completes his schooling in Italy, is not entitled to citizenship.

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Urban Distance, Civic Virtues, and Bottom-Up Solidarity in Milan: the Case of Brigade Volontarie per l'Emergenza²

1. Introduction

The measures and restrictions imposed to limit the spread of Coronavirus within urban areas (i.e. mobility limitations, travel restrictions, stay-at-home orders, the closure/limited access to public spaces and facilities) have created social and urban distancing with the outcome of disrupting social interactions, altering the use of public spaces, exacerbating existing social inequalities, and affecting individuals on a psychological and emotional levels (Martinze, Short, 2021). Covid-related outcomes added to the disruptions of proximity bonds and public welfare brought about by neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism can be defined as the extension of market mechanisms to all spheres of social activities, relying on State interventions, such as privatizations (Pinson, Journal, 2016: 371). From a more critical perspective, neoliberalization entails destruction of social relations (proximity bonds), and welfare provisions to pursue the maximization of entrepreneurial freedom, and individual liberty, which became the values of human wellbeing (Harvey, 2006).

In this fashion, urban life becomes dominated by market logic, whereby, market and entrepreneurial opportunities are enhanced but proximity relations are under threat, as well as the capacity of public services to cope with a moment of crises. The urban scale and neoliberalization process are highly interrelated, to the extent that cities "provide fundamental material bases for this process, but also for its contestation" (Pinson, Journal, 2016 p. 137).

Against this backdrop, this study is going to explore how practices of civic mobilization are able to counter the effects of the neoliberal city and reduce urban distances, while becoming practices of contestation (Raffini, Pirni 2019; Harvey, 2006; Brecher *et al.*, 2000). People at the grassroots mobilize and organize into networks "to impose their own needs and interests" (Brecher *et al.*, 2000:ix), practicing solidarity against the neoliberal city. Solidarity holds a transformative power to counter the disruptive effects globalized capitalism, as a form of "contestation from below" (Brecher *et al.*, 2000:ix).

Mutual aid and grassroots solidarity practices emerged during the Covid-19 pandemic in the city of Milan. The research identifies three dimensions through which practices of solidarity contributed to the reduction of urban distancing: the "re-politicization" of solidarity; the empowerment of citizens; and the reinterpretation of spaces.

The work is based on the third-mission initiative³ of the Milano-Bicocca University, specifically the "URBANA" initiative⁴ organized by the Department of Sociology and Social Research. The 2021 edition (May-September), examined the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic in Milan. Nine teams of scholars investigated various topics related to the pandemic's effects, including boundaries, mobility, housing, food, waiting time, and community building; see Xxxxx; xxxxx; xxxxx (2022) for the contribution to URBANA 2021 initiative about Milan food landscape and Covid-19. Each team produced a research video using smartphones and qualitative research methodologies. This study focuses on the food working group, which analyzed the Brigade Volontarie per l'Emergenza case (Volunteer Emergency Brigades – hereinafter BVEs)⁵

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3 Third Mission in universities refers to their societal or public engagement activities that go beyond traditional teaching (first mission) and research (second mission).

4 Info about URBANA is available online: <https://www.urbana.sociologia.unimib.it/>, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZFSL_KgljHQ, <https://www.urbana2021.sociologia.unimib.it/urbana-2021>.

5 The URBANA video from the *food* working group is available here: https://youtu.be/whY_tPyxNng.



The BVEs is an association of mutual aid, set up as a Volunteer Organization, born in Milan during the Covid-19 emergency. It addresses the well-known problems related to our unequal and individualistic society (Harvey, 2006; Pinson, Journal, 2016), but also new needs such as growing food insecurity. It was chosen because they contributed to the local food needs of families and fragile people in need, acting as a connecting and empowering actor able to reduce the urban distance imposed by the Covid-19 containment rules.

The article delves into their role in the city, discussing the spatial and social consequences of these practices. It provides a contextual background (section 2), methodology (section 3), case study (section 4), and analysis of the results (section 5).

2. Poverty and food insecurity: some figures

In Europe, one in five Europeans (21.9% of the European population) was at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2020 (Eurostat, 2021). The pandemic heightened existing inequalities, resulting in the emergence of “new poor” and the so-called “new working poor”: families not at risk until Covid-19 found themselves in an unprecedented condition of indigence, due to job losses or income reduction associated with the pandemic (Emergency, 2021; Han *et al.*, 2020). Italy as well has been harshly affected, with the year 2020 witnessing the highest rates of absolute poverty since 2005. Almost 6 million individuals (9.4% of population in 2020 against 7.7% in 2019) found themselves in conditions of poverty (Istat, 2021). According to civil society organizations, Italy is experiencing a real social emergency. In 2020, one-third of the population experienced an average income loss of 25%. Many workers faced prolonged unemployment, resulting in severe food insecurity for the first time (ActionAid, 2020; Demena *et al.*, 2022). Marchetti and Secondi (2022), developed an analytical tool to estimate the “at-risk-of-food-poverty” (ARoFP) rate and food insecurity index, founding that in Italy individuals at risk of food poverty or food insecurity amount to 22.3% of the entire population⁶.

Additionally, food prices reached new peaks in both 2020 and 2021 (FAO, 2021), and FAO (2022) indicates that the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has further worsened the situation. With global fluctuations in food prices, reduction of incomes, increasing inequalities, and widespread loss of jobs related to the pandemic, the scenario is alarming. The impacts affect not only vulnerable groups but also affluent urban areas, including Milan, which experienced a rise in poverty and a significant increase in support requests during the first lockdown. Milan is renowned as one of the wealthiest cities in the country based on consumption rates (Sole24Ore, 2022). However, during the first lockdown in March 2020, the city witnessed a worsening of poverty, with Caritas Ambrosiana, an Italian charity organization, reporting a staggering 121% increase in support requests (2020). Economic difficulties are affecting growing segments of the population, leading to a surge in poverty rates and the emergence of unexpected groups experiencing food insecurity. These groups, known as the “new poor”, consist of individuals who never sought assistance before the Covid-19 pandemic and were not detectable by regular social assistance and welfare services (Emergency, 2021).

Against this backdrop, during the first lockdown in Milan, as well as in many other European cities, autonomous and independent citizens, municipal institutions, and a range of civic actors mobilized to meet the emerging food security needs of the local community. Their action reduced not only the physical urban distance imposed by lockdown, connecting and supporting people in need, but also the social one, feeding (and being fed by) civic virtues while promoting bottom-up solidarity. Indeed, the research explores community responses that spontaneously emerged in the city of Milan to address food insecurity, and in particular the BVEs case, as a reaction and a form of contestation.

6 According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), a person is food insecure when regular access to enough nutritious (and safe) food for growth and development and active and healthy life is lacking (FAO, 1996). This condition can occur due to the unavailability of food and/or lack of resources to access food (Barrett, 2010).

3. The methodology

In line with the URBANA initiative's principles, the research team recognizes the importance of active involvement of Academia in shaping urban policies and informing citizenry. They also emphasize the significance of including engaged citizens and their grassroots organizations, in the knowledge production process about urban phenomena. The research team values the data and knowledge generated by the BVEs, considering it as a vital component of the analysis. To achieve this, a desk analysis was conducted, reviewing relevant academic literature as well as literature produced by the BVEs. Topics covered included mutual aid, grassroots solidarity, network and relational capital at the urban level, food security, and the repurposing of spaces. Additionally, the content of the BVEs' website and Instagram page was carefully examined and analysed.

Furthermore, a series of interviews were conducted in May and June 2021 with key informants of the BVEs' work: two in-depth interviews were carried out with the representatives of Coordination Brigade and Social Research Brigade (Gramsci Brigade); four semi-structured interviews were conducted with members of Baggio Neighbourhood Brigade (Emma Brigade) and Support Brigade (Longo Brigade). In addition, a semi-structure interview was also conducted with the President of Recup, a local organization that received a special mandate from the Milan Municipality to save food from waste in major Milan marketplaces, a key partner of BVEs. A second round of interviews was conducted in April 2022 as follow-up with the Recup President and representatives of the Support Brigade. Interviewees were selected as key informants on the food crisis scenario in Milan and on the functioning of the BVEs, according to their availability for interviews. They came both from associationism and informal groups. Interviews content analysis set out actors' concerns, discourse, and practices related to the pandemic food and poverty crisis (Grant, Iedema, 2005). The analysis helped to understand the BVEs' functioning and contribution to the fast-changing Covid-19 scenario.

In addition, the research team actively participated in the BVEs' voluntary work and initiatives, as volunteers, adopting the participant observation methodology. This approach facilitated a first-hand experience of the emotional and solidaristic motivations that drive civic participation in the BVEs' actions (Vinten, 1994). Active participation was also crucial in enabling a visual, impactful, and in-depth observation of the "food places" and their transformation. By actively engaging in the activities, the researchers were able to witness the interactions and exchanges between the volunteers and beneficiaries. Researchers participated in four moments to observe: 1. places of supply (Ortomercato, Milan wholesale fruits, and vegetable market); 2. places of sorting (two BVEs Hub places); 3. places of distribution (Baggio neighbourhood public park in Milan). These places are different in typology: third-sector organizations or civic associations closed during the Italian lockdown months made their spaces and headquarters available to the BVEs, to sort food to be distributed. Public spaces were also used to meet people and distribute food boxes. Interviews were video recorded, and during participant observations, pictures and footage were taken and impressions were noted. This allowed to testify the emotional scope of the solidaristic action, and to witness how the urban space is modified by solidarity activities.

A content analysis of the visual materials (Bell, 2001) was performed and paired with interviews and desk analysis for a comprehensive restitution of the impact of mutual help activities in Milan on the reduction of urban distancing.

4. The objective of the study: an introduction to Brigate Volontarie per l'Emergenza in Milan

The BVEs were spontaneously born in March 2020 as grass-root units of volunteers, to cope with lockdown times but also to cope with the structural poverty affecting the city. Their mis-

sion is based on three fundamental principles: care, solidarity, and community (BVE, 2021; BVE, 2022). They explicitly position themselves in opposition to the individualistic and poverty-driven dynamics of the neoliberal city (Harvey, 2006; Brecher *et al.*, 2000).

The volunteers of the BVEs come from diverse backgrounds, consisting of ordinary citizens who may not have had prior involvement in politics or volunteering. However, they felt compelled to participate for various reasons, such as responding to feelings of isolation, developing political awareness, upholding ethical and religious values, and seeking personal growth. Above all, their primary motivation is the desire to make a meaningful contribution by taking on responsibilities.

Mutual help and self-organization lay at the very core of the BVEs' action. The boundary between benefits and service is blurred, and many beneficiaries eventually became volunteers.

During the initial phase of the Italian lockdown, the BVEs emerged spontaneously and began assisting individuals in quarantine, providing grocery shopping and medicine. They soon joined forces with Emergency, an Italian NGO renowned for its work in war zones, to support the official city helpline initiative, called *MilanoAiuta*. This collaboration formalized the deliveries to people's doorsteps. After a few weeks of strict lockdown, it became evident that mere grocery deliveries were insufficient. The number of families unable to afford food was growing rapidly. To address this issue, in May 2020, the BVEs, in partnership with Emergency, launched the #NessunoEscluso project. This initiative involved collecting food donations and delivering them directly to food-insecure families. The project's name, "nobody is excluded", reflects its inclusive nature. The significance of #NessunoEscluso lies in its ability to reach marginalized groups, often unknown to the traditional assistance system that do not meet the formal requirements for accessing public aid measures (Emergency, 2021, p. 2).

The City of Milan approved and supported the project acknowledging a lack of an institutional response to the emergency. The BVEs were officially institutionalized as partners of the Municipality of Milan and Emergency in addressing the health and food crisis. Other initiatives for food supplies were realized by institutions like *Banco Alimentare* (a major Italian charity network), as well as private actors including supermarkets and other companies.

With Emergency's organizational and managerial expertise and the active involvement of BVE's volunteers, boxes of dry food and hygiene items were distributed to meet the increasing number of requests. By November 2020, fresh fruits and vegetables were added to the dry food boxes, addressing nutrition and food security concerns. To obtain fresh produce, the BVEs partnered with a local NGO called Recup, whose work is to reduce food waste. According to Recup's President and Support Brigade-Longo, the BVEs collect over 500 kgs of seasonal fresh products from Recup twice a week at the Ortomercato marketplace. This collaboration aims to add to each package approximately 2.5 kg of fresh fruit.⁷

Since the beginning of the #NessunoEscluso project, the BVEs have provided food boxes (both dry and fresh food) to almost 3,000 families (2,978 households) in the city's 9 zone. The project reached almost 12,000 individuals (11,912), of whom 87% never asked for food aid before the pandemic (BVEs, 2021b). Interestingly, the BVEs deliveries touched also *Municipio 1*, namely the most central and wealthy area of the city, corresponding to the historic center (Social Research-Gramsci Brigade, 2020).

The BVEs play several roles within the #NessunoEscluso project. They identify the needs of the beneficiaries through questionnaires, connecting with them and thus establishing a bond of trust; through the territorial Brigades they distribute food boxes at their collection points or, in case of need, at home; they coordinate the distribution, providing support where necessary and weekly appraisals for the inclusion of new beneficiaries (*Ibid*).

The BVEs network comprises over 1,300 volunteers (BVEs, 2021c), who operate at a hyper-local level and maintain close connections with the neighbourhoods they serve. Each brigade unit

7 Info taken from interviews with Recup President and Support Brigade-Longo.

is associated with a specific neighbourhood, enabling them to understand and address the unique needs of that community. Alongside these neighbourhood-specific brigades, there are also several brigades with broader roles: the Coordination Brigade oversees the other brigades, the Social Research-Gramsci Brigade collects data on box distribution, and the Psychological Support-Basaglia Brigade provides psychological assistance through a helpline. Additionally, there are two transversal brigades: the Brighella Brigade organizes entertainment activities, such as theatre initiatives, and the Kuliscioff Brigade offers health support, including Covid tests and personal protective equipment (such as face masks).

Furthermore, the BVEs have implemented internal governance mechanisms to ensure their efficient operation (BVEs, 2022). These mechanisms include Inter-Brigade assemblies, Working Tables, a National Committee, and Citizens Committees at the local level. These structures enable effective coordination and decision-making within the BVEs. In terms of organizational structure, the BVEs exhibit dynamism, with approximately 20 to 25 groups actively operating in Milan. However, the precise number of groups may vary as they may merge or divide based on the needs and circumstances. The local presence of the BVEs promotes participatory engagement and collaboration among different neighbourhoods.

The BVEs have a dual mission: to provide immediate assistance during emergencies, and to address long-term socioeconomic and environmental poverty. Their scope extends beyond the city of Milan, encompassing national and international efforts. They engage in diverse projects, including providing educational resources for distance learning, language schools for foreign residents, and solidarity actions in response to conflicts like the Russian-Ukraine conflict. Furthermore, the BVEs have established Casa Della Brigata, a dedicated facility in Milan that accommodates Ukrainian refugees. Their overarching objective is to foster a resilient community that tackles a wide range of societal challenges and creates positive change (BVEs, 2022, 2022c).

5. The dimensions of analysis: a discussion of results

The investigation of the BVEs allowed us to identify three analytical dimensions useful to understand and interpret the BVEs' contribution to a process of reduction of urban distances both in material and immaterial terms. These dimensions are discussed in this paragraph referring to the interviews, testimony, footage and the experiences collected and observed during data gathering. The dimensions of analysis identified are the following:

1. the process of "re-politicization" of solidarity;
2. the creation of new relationships and the empowerment of citizens;
3. the reinterpretation of spaces.

These dimensions are closely connected to the abilities and behaviours that typically promote the common good and the effective functioning of society. What sociologist Christopher Lasch (2001) called the "civic virtues", such as civic engagement, active participation in the community, social responsibility, mutual trust, and respect for others, which are closely related to these dimensions. In addressing the challenges of socio-economic poverty, the BVEs not only contribute to reducing urban distancing (material and immaterial) but also, through the three dimensions, promote these very civic virtues.

5.1 Re-politicisation of solidarity

The research shows that practices of mutual support and grassroots solidarity contribute to a re-politicization of solidarity and citizenship. The practices of participation activated by the BVEs

challenge neoliberal policies and financial capitalism (Pinson, Journal, 2016; Gallino, 2011; Harvey 2006) reversing some of the dynamics of neoliberalism (Brecher *et al.*, 2000; Harvey, 2006). In their action, the BVEs are closed to the so-called Alternative action organizations (AAOs) (among others: Forno, Graziano, 2014; Milbourne, 2013; Moulaert, Ailenei, 2005), described by Zamponi, Bosi (2018, p. 797) as «collective bodies engaged in carrying out alternatives to dominant socio-economic and cultural practices through actions that aim to provide people with alternative ways of enduring day-to-day difficulties and challenges in hard economic times».

As Raffini, Pini (2019) affirm, the expression of innovative practices of participation, promotes a process of re-politicization and empower individuals to make political choices and use solidarity as collective tools. Mutual help promoted by BVEs harnesses the powerful strength of human connection to drive impactful and long-term actions. As an interviewee declared:

«Milan is grappling with multiple challenges including economic hardship, food insecurity, distance learning limitations, lack of devices and internet access, domestic violence, and depression. We have taken a proactive stance to address these issues, recognizing the need for political intervention to drive transformative change in societal dynamics. Balancing political critique with mutual support is a challenging yet empowering endeavour that propels us towards progress.» (V., Coordination Brigade, 21 May 2021)

Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the shortcomings of the Lombardy regional health system, giving rise to criticisms of the privatization efforts that have taken place over the past 25 years (Brando, 2020). Despite having a high ratio of hospital beds to the population, this alone proved insufficient to handle the surge in cases. According to a recent report by GI-ESCR, Lombardy has one of the most privatized healthcare systems in Italy and Europe (De Falco, 2021), and it is well-established that privatized and commercialized healthcare systems are less effective in responding to crises such as a pandemic. The inadequate health policy response in Lombardy during the pandemic can be attributed, in part, to the high levels of healthcare privatization in the region (*Ibid.*). These findings have intensified the criticisms and, in turn, fuelled the process of re-politicizing solidarity. As a result, citizens have rallied behind the BVEs, actively engaging in civic participation and civil protection measures to provide support and solidarity to the vulnerable members of society.

It should also be remembered that at the very beginning of the lockdown, it was forbidden to leave one's dwelling due to the government-imposed restrictions. In this context, the BVEs challenged the authority and its impositions, fighting to be available to the community, in the streets. Practicing active contestation, the BVEs highlighted the inadequacy of public services, and volunteer associations; providing not only food, but also medical and social assistance (protection devices and assistance for applications for public housing) and encouraging regular people to mobilize. As in Pizzorno (1966), BVEs have encouraged the activation of people not previously involved in solidarity or politics, as a way of political fighting, against the conditions of inequality. This was the first and most influential action of re-politicisation of the BVEs:

«We mobilized individuals who don't typically engage in activism or volunteering, in their first volunteering and political experience. Our organization established a network of local merchants as a community-based supply network, activating social connections and community ties in neighbourhoods [...]. The BVEs bring people together through shared values, aiming for a politicized and united society, where the need for BVEs or solidarity professionals will diminish.» (I., Social Research Brigade, 21 May 2021)

Furthermore, the BVEs volunteers constitute a new political force, originated during very difficult time, that grew stronger and stronger:

«Our volunteers play a crucial role during times of crisis. The involvement of both beneficiaries and volunteers in solidarity has not ceased, even after the most intense months of the emergency. Engaging in beneficial actions fosters a greater willingness for solidarity among people. » (I., Social research Brigade, 21 May 2021)

Acknowledging poverty as a social issue, rather than an individual fault, is a core principle of mutualism (Peet, 1975). Interviews, direct observation, and footage of volunteers and beneficiaries during the distribution of Emergency food boxes showed that hardship and insecurity were intended as a common issue, and a social and political problem. The BVEs foster trust in grassroots politics, particularly in times when this is challenging.

The socialization and de-individualization of poverty are significant political actions that can transform both societal and individual realities, countering the dominance of neoliberalism and individualism. Additionally, food plays a crucial role in reconnecting people and overcoming distrust:

«Food fosters trust, bridges differences, and counters scepticism in society. It promotes understanding, mitigates hostility, and prevents animosity among diverse groups. It addresses identity crises and transforms frustration into connections. [...]. Food-based interactions create awareness of shared burdens and empower individuals to overcome defeat and weakness. » (V., Coordination Brigade, 21 May 2021)

Understanding the uncertainty and complexity of these times as a shared condition, can help to cope with such crises (Henderson, 1998). Conviviality and solidarity become political and social actions, finding in food an alternative answer to hate. At the same time, it helps to resolve individual and political identity crises through proximity, mutual support, and hope.

In addition, mutual help and solidarity contribute more to individual and collective, compared to institutional charity and welfare, thanks to first-hand activation and first-hand experience of hardship and support and the proximity that characterize mutualism (Bradley, Malki, 2022). Volunteers and beneficiaries expressed a deep sense of personal obligation as they witnessed first-hand the profound impact of BVEs'. In this sense, solidarity becomes a political tool that fosters consensus and exercises counter-power, contestation, resistance (Pinson, Journal, 2016; Harvey, 2006; Bracher *et al.*, 2000). Grass-root movements like BVEs, emerging informally, compel institutions to acknowledge their effectiveness and become partners for transformative change:

«We received right-wing criticism about "red mutualism" when we obtained special authorization to ride through the city during the lockdown. But by being proactive and close to the people, we outpaced institutional responses. This empowered us and made it challenging for institutions to deny our actions. We compelled them to recognize the importance of our work. As influential players, we had a seat at institutional tables and contributed valuable insights based on our ideas and experiences. » (I., Social research Brigade, 21 May 2021).

Re-politicization also involves self-reflection and introspective action. The BVEs not only provided essential services and fostered community strength and individual empowerment, but they adopted reflexivity:

«Internally, we address volunteer labor exploitation and strive to avoid exploitative dynamics. We prioritize mutualism while actively engaging in political battles and asserting our rights while delivering free services. » (V., Coordination Brigade, 21 May 2021).

Lastly, a notable instance of the re-politicization through the BVEs is the participation of one representative from the Longo Brigade and one from the Mario Vargas Brigade, in the 2022 Municipal Elections. These two members, along with former councillor for social and housing policies Mr. Gabriele Rabaiotti, joined mayoral candidate Giuseppe Sala. Their program aimed to

expand on the values and initiatives of the Brigades and Milan's solidarity capital.

5.2 Citizens' empowerment and creation of new relations

The second dimension that leads to a reduction of urban and social distancing is the creation of new and stronger relationships thanks to the mutual help and the networking created by the BVEs' action.

By fostering close relationships and connections within the community, the BVEs play a crucial role in creating a sense of togetherness and strengthening social ties at the local level. This nurturing of proximity relationships helps build communitarian bonds and enhances the social and relational capital within the community (Dubois, 2018). Through their actions, the BVEs empower citizens, particularly when public and third-sector institutions have fallen short. They provide the community with a 'platform' for civic engagement and participation, offering numerous associated benefits. The reduction of urban distancing is intended in terms of improved access to services, or alternative forms of services, to those who were most affected by the crisis, including the "new poor" and "new working poor" categories already mentioned. Secondly, the reduction of urban distancing passed through the dimension of territorial proximity, thanks to those connections and flows created by the brigades. In mutual help, the blurred distinction between volunteers and beneficiaries (more and more beneficiaries decide to become volunteers after a positive and touching experience) is another way to reduce distances.

The BVEs assert that nobody is alone in this crisis. They believe that through assistance and social cohesion, they can overcome the isolation caused by the financial-capitalist system. Through community engagement, they establish new bonds and revitalize solidarity. This urban transformation facilitates the empowerment of beneficiaries, who may eventually become volunteers themselves.

The proximity exercise undertaken by BVEs through food solidarity is well explained in this quote:

«It is outstanding how with the BVEs we were so inside society, so in touch with people in need... in that sense, we 'used' food as a tool to connect with people and convey an alternative view of the world. » (I., Social research Brigade, 21 May 2021).

Additionally, the BVEs' attentiveness to local needs bridges the gap between those who have access to institutional welfare, and the new poor (such as entertainment workers or the self-employed). Moreover, the BVEs overcome the barrier of shame associated with asking for help, recognizing that poverty is not an individual failing. The BVEs strive to make individuals realize that they are not alone and that communities can remain united.

«We provide assistance to those enduring extreme poverty and marginalized individuals. However, we are increasingly receiving requests from new groups: parcel-VAT workers, entertainment workers, restaurant workers, and those who suddenly lost their wages and official support. These individuals lack a sense of community and are unaccustomed to seeking help, often feeling ashamed to ask. Initially, they asked the packages somewhere, instead of their homes. However, when they saw their neighbors receiving food boxes, they approached in more relaxed way. When people feel alone in their struggles, they experience shame, but together, the dynamic changes. » (V., Coordination Brigade, 21 May 2021).

The BVEs leverage mutual-help principles, which are fundamental for empowerment and self-determination, expanding both individual and community agency (Dickerson, 1998). They enable people and communities to rely less on institutional assistance by creating a self-sustaining mechanism. This is particularly valuable during crises when shock-resisting mechanisms are compromised.

«[Through the experience of the BVEs, ed] It occurs that a nuclear mechanism of mutualism, that never

ends because it is self-feeding, shows how several problems can be solved without necessarily asking institutions. We solve our problems at the community level because we acknowledge our fate as shared. » (V., Coordination Brigade, 21 May 2021).

In their commitment to food, the BVEs started a partnership with the organization Recup. Recup's mission is to save food from being wasted at the local Wholesale (Ortomercato) Marketplace and other local markets, redistributing it to organizations.

In terms of strengthening networks inside the city, the direct observation of Recup's food distribution at the Ortomercato hotspot is interesting because all the organizations and quantities that Recup supplies are listed on a chalkboard on the wall: «On the chalkboard, you can see, the list of all the organizations that are coming to collect Recup food today, the amounts collected, and which crop is still available for collection. » (B., Longo Brigade, 27 May 2021)

The chalkboard gives the idea of the extensive solidarity network in the city of Milan. It serves as a representation of a larger network that revolves around the marketplace and extends across the city. Through interviews⁸, it became evident that an increasing number of businesses and traders in the Ortomercato actively participate in the Recup hotspot, reducing waste but also contributing to local solidarity. The BVEs are not alone, they are part of a well-coordinated solidarity mechanism. Thus, their actions contribute a network with businesses and other local actors engaged in solidarity efforts, reducing distances between them. Furthermore, they modified and enhanced the richness of Milan's third sector landscape, since BVEs members represent already existing third sector organizations (that could not perform due to lockdown restrictions), or they funded new associations, following the experience with the BVEs. An example is Milano Futuro, an organization funded by a representative of the Longo Brigade⁹.

5.3 Reinterpretation and re-purposing of spaces

The third dimension observed in the analysis is the reinterpretation of spaces, whereby the BVEs affect both urban space and urban relationships. With their expansion, the observers noticed an increase in the number of locations designated for collection, sorting, and distribution purposes. This proliferation was accompanied by a transformation and redefinition of spaces in terms of their functions and significance. For instance, a cultural association, closed due to Covid-19 restrictions, was repurposed as a sorting center. Likewise, a public park was converted into a meeting point where volunteers could interact with individuals in need, distributing food boxes, along with other essential materials, and providing information.

The BVEs collaborate closely with other third-sector organizations to access spaces and services. Two notable examples include the already mentioned Recup, and Nuova Armenia, a cultural association that emerged as a redevelopment initiative for a publicly owned space. Nuova Armenia typically hosts cultural events in the Bovisa neighbourhood but, during lockdowns, offered its premises as a collection and distribution hub. It became the headquarters for the Support Brigade Longo, which collected food from Ortomercato and transported it to Nuova Armenia¹⁰. Moreover, welfare and charity institutions, including ALER, the Lombard Agency for Social Housing, have collaborated with the BVEs, offering their spaces. Arci clubs¹¹, a well-established network of third-sector organizations, have also provided their venues for the BVEs to carry out

8 Interviews with Recup President and Support Brigade-Longo.

9 The information derives from the follow-up interviews with representatives of Longo Brigade (April 2022).

10 The Support Brigade Longo has been the subject of researchers' direct and participant observation; the researchers followed it for a whole day, from food collection at Ortomercato to Nuova Armenia food hub for sorting and packing.

11 Arci clubs were born in 1800–1900 as spaces dedicated to mutual-aid, sociality and bottom-up social participation, called "Società di Mutuo Soccorso" and "Case del Popolo". After WWII, they became institutionalized spaces for entertainment and cultural initiatives, and in the 50s they merged in the newly formed National Association "Associazione Ricreativa Culturale Italiana (ARCI)". Info available here: <https://www.arci.it/chi-siamo/storia/>. It is interesting that in an emergency situation they have returned to their original and historical use.

food sorting, storage, and distribution:

«We have been provided with spaces by Arci and the church; what we noticed is the dynamic nature and diverse backgrounds of the BVE volunteers, particularly the presence of young individuals. We engage with everyone involved because we value the tangible impact of our actions. ALER has offered spaces to the BVEs. Although in different circumstances we might have been critical of this collaboration, considering ALER's role in the city's housing crisis, we were willing to collaborate given the current situation. » (V., Coordination Brigade, 21 May 2021)

The pandemic, as appears in this testimony, provided an opportunity for the BVEs to overcome previous barriers. Despite the BVEs' critical stance towards actors like ALER, responsible for the mismanagement and disruption of social housing in Milan (Giannattasio, 2015), the crisis called for open dialogue and collaboration for the collective benefit.

Moreover, BVEs act as multiplier of spaces of solidarity. Meanwhile, the meaning and impact of food are transformed, no longer a basic necessity but a vehicle for connections. Food as the cohesive element that offers alternative perspectives to the prevailing mainstream narrative: «For the post-pandemic period we envision the multiplication of places where we can eat together, not just receive food aid. We wish to build from food a relationship of mutual trust. » (V., Coordination Brigade, 21 May 2021)

Robust and motivated collaborations, exemplified by the partnership between Emergency, BVEs, and the Baggio community, have facilitated the identification of an ideal location for fostering solidarity and multipurpose engagement. The Baggio municipality garden, previously primarily a garden, evolved into a multifaceted hub that extends beyond simple food distribution. In addition, BVEs also provides clothing and sandwiches to local homeless individuals, distributes fruits and vegetables to unregistered families, and offers support for social housing applications, ensuring a more comprehensive range of assistance and inclusion within their efforts.

«Emergency started and then we formed the brigade for the Baggio neighborhood, in June 2020. We used to sort food [dry food, provided by Emergency] in a hub and deliver it to people's homes. Now we have this public space, it has a canopy and we can stay in winter. More people transit here, more people see us, see what we do. There are public showers in front of us, many homeless people come here. We started clothing distribution; we make sandwiches for those in need. [...] This week people are coming here [to the Baggio community garden] to fill out the application form for social housing, supported by an accountant who is already a volunteer at a housing support desk. » (R., Emma Brigade, 22 May 2021).

Public spaces have been transformed by BVEs from mere transit places to places of solidarity to access multiple services:

«We noticed ladies repeatedly coming to pick up food boxes with their kids, and children were extremely bored. We built a safe space for them, offering activities to distract them. This initiative attracted additional individuals seeking assistance, such as help with enrolling their children in school (due to issues like lack of computers or language barriers). As a result, we began offering this support at the food box pickup locations. » (V., Coordination Brigade, 21 May 2021).

Recup and its collaborators facilitated access to spaces, as noted in an interview. The collection hub at Wholesale Marketplace, provided by a private trader, has greatly enhanced the efficiency and effectiveness of Recup's solidarity efforts.: «This year we carved out this space in Ortomercato marketplace that was let to us on loan from a trader. This makes everything easier for us, the management of logistics flows, that is, the collection and redistribution of surplus. » (R., Recup, 27 May 2021).

All of these locations, repurposed for emergency needs, serve as spaces for the development,

nurturing, and preservation of what Lasch (2001) referred to as “civic virtues” – qualities that facilitate communal living, expressions, and shared conditions within urban civilization. Urban civilization, in this context, refers to the coming together of numerous individuals who may not be connected through familial or clan ties, yet still forge relationships beyond these affiliations, as suggested by Jedlowsky (2011).

6. Conclusions

Building upon fieldwork conducted within the Milano-Bicocca University’s third-mission initiative, this research endeavours to examine the emergent practices of mutual aid and grassroots solidarity that have characterized the city of Milan during the pandemic. The focus is on the food sector, elucidating the escalating levels of food insecurity experienced by an increasingly sizable portion of the populace. Notably, even affluent cities and countries have been impacted by economic and food poverty due to the widespread transmission of Covid-19. Milan, as an example, has seen an increase in demand for food assistance, including even novel segments of the population known as the “new working poor”.

Delving into the local initiatives that arose in response to the crisis, encompassing initiatives driven by autonomous citizens, municipal institutions, local non-governmental organizations, and civic actors, this study focuses on the BVEs. Chosen for their support and resources for those in need and for the connections and empowerment they create, helping bridge social and urban distances resulted from Covid-19 restrictions.

The analysis has delineated three interconnected dimensions that elucidate how the bottom-up and community-based solidarity, as well as the mutual aid facilitated by the BVEs, have effectively mitigated urban distances and alleviated feelings of isolation during the challenging period of the Covid-19 pandemic. These dimensions, namely the re-politicization of solidarity, the reinforcement of proximate relationships and citizen empowerment, and the reinterpretation of spaces, converge synergistically within a comprehensive framework known as the “BVEs model”. This model has garnered national recognition as a commendable practice that can be replicated, and the BVEs themselves have extended their assistance beyond national borders to support individuals in need in Ukraine. Our analysis reveals that these three dimensions in BVE’s action have spawned a novel social force, enabling citizens to connect, support one another, and voice their concerns. This empowerment fosters collective action, facilitates community-institution relations, and transcends physical distances, demonstrating above all to be able to break or overcome immaterial, social, and human barriers that are posed by neoliberalism and worsened by the pandemic.

The first dimension relates to the process of re-politicization embedded within the mutual and solidaristic approach embraced by the BVEs. Their mission and goals firmly oppose capitalist and neoliberal policies. Guided by care, solidarity, and community, they fight inequalities and strive to empower citizens within a society that unjustly assigns blame for poverty to individuals rather than recognizing it as a collective issue. They are closed to Alternative Action Organizations even if they spontaneously emerged from the people’s desire to concretely act for helping those in need, intervening and taking responsibility during a crisis that institutions were not able to face. Their action leads to a re-elaboration of the political through participatory practices, strengthening human connections, and promoting long-term initiatives. In the Milanese context, predominantly privatized healthcare system has further bolstered the drive toward re-politicization among solidarity actors. The activation nudged by the BVEs involved a growing number of people, even those never engaged before in activism or associationism, or militancy and transforming beneficiaries into new volunteers. They engaged with local traders, as well as local public entities. Through these efforts, connections among individuals, private entities, civil

society actors, and public institutions are forged. This expands the local solidarity network that acts as collective contestation from below. As a result, BVEs have become key city players, where their solidarity approach serves as a political and counter-power exercise. Furthermore, the BVEs actively practiced reflexivity, questioning the potential exploitation of volunteer labour and continuously addressing social and labour-related concerns within their own ranks.

The second dimension focuses on citizens' empowerment and the establishment of new community ties. Nurturing proximity relations becomes a pivotal force in providing individuals with knowledge and fostering connections, not only bridging physical distances but also social gaps. The analysis reveals that by connecting people, raising awareness about shared conditions, equipping them with tools to comprehend contemporary challenges, new local bonds based on trust are formed. Isolation dissipates, shame diminishes, and collective trust emerges, shaping fresh community relations. Moreover, the empowerment process plays a significant role in transforming beneficiaries into active volunteers.

Additionally, the BVEs' partnerships with local organizations serve as a means to diminish distances and initiate mutually beneficial relationships. As observed, these partnerships contribute to nurturing and enlarging the local solidarity network.

The third dimension pertains to urban transformation and the re-purposing of spaces for collecting, sorting and distributing food. During the field research, these typologies of spaces have been observed and studied through participant observations. These spaces were made available to the BVEs through local organizations like Arci clubs, ALER spaces, municipal areas, and cultural association such as Nuova Armenia. In addition, the partnership with Recup, allowed the BVEs to use a location within the wholesale market with support from the traders operating in the market. These spaces served as hubs to gather, store food and materials, prepare packages, and distribute them. In addition to the transformation of existing spaces, new spaces also emerged for these activities. For instance, public gardens were made available for citizen gatherings and new uses. This redefinition of spaces facilitates the re-politicization and the empowerment of citizens, contributing to the reduction of urban, social, and interpersonal distances. They become places where "civic virtues" can be cultivated, promoting communal living among individuals who may not be otherwise connected, but who now share common challenges and can benefit from collective mutual support. Moreover, these spaces serve to access various services, i.e. children's entertainment, assistance with school enrolment or social housing applications, and the distribution of clothing.

The value that this research has provided is a deeper analysis of the BVEs model as a way to counter neoliberalism and isolation, through empirical evidence and theoretical insights into the potential of community-based initiatives like the BVEs model. There are fundamental dimensions of their actions that contribute to the reduction of both tangible and intangible distances, and this research offers a comprehensive understanding of their impacts on social, economic, and spatial dimensions; while fostering discussions on alternative approaches to social challenges, community empowerment, urban dynamics, and crisis response.

The emergence of the BVEs has revealed the shortcomings of the mainstream capitalist system in effectively responding to sudden and disruptive events such as a pandemic, without exacerbating inequalities, distances, and poverty. Their work has been transformative and invaluable in assisting the growing number of individuals in need within the city of Milan, fostering heightened political consciousness, nurturing stronger interpersonal connections, empowering citizens, and expanding the spaces dedicated to the collection, sorting, and distribution of essential resources. The BVEs have evolved into a resilient social force that has garnered recognition on a broader scale. Their efforts extend beyond the emergency phase and have transcended regional and national boundaries, reaching communities outside of Lombardy and even beyond Italy.

Despite its valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations that may influence the interpretation and generalization of the findings: a) the contextual specificity, as the focus is on Milan and the transferability of the findings to other contexts should be approached

with caution; b) the temporal scope, making interviews during the first lockdown would have been extremely useful to monitor from the beginning their birth and evolution; in addition, further follow-ups would make the research more complete. In addition, other questions to focus on to advance the research could include: how would the BVEs experience change, for the effect of institutionalization, especially given the tension between political and civil society activism in the backgrounds of his activists? How would the BVEs welcome the effects of a change of scale, especially when they will need to seat at the same table together with controversial institutional actors? The ongoing observation of their actions and impacts will provide the answers.

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The Spatial Dimension of Early School Leaving in Campania Region: The Case of Scuola Viva Program²

1. Scuola Viva Programme and the different causes of early school leaving

Scuola Viva, a four-year program launched by Campania Region, over the course of its duration (2015/2019) has supported the implementation of learning, training and cultural experiences built thanks to the collaboration of schools, enterprises, citizens, and other local actors (i.e., non-governmental organisations) in order to strengthen local learning communities. Only during the first year of activities, the program made it possible the afternoon opening of 451 schools in Campania and the involvement of about 3,000 public-private actors, working together with schools in contrasting early school leaving and dropping out.³ This led to the consolidation of practices (reflections, debates, and concrete actions) concerning the well-being of minors, young people and, more generally, the whole citizenry (Fortini, Madonia, Trezza, 2019). Campania region represents one of the worst regions in the Italian context regarding performance indicators relating to early school leaving/drop out (MIUR, 2019; D'Arcangelo, Giuliani, 2022), although with significant internal heterogeneity. In such a context, interventions to contain the consequences of training failures and policies aimed at reversing a negative trend that has characterised this region for too long, are both necessary and crucial. "Scuola Viva" program moves in this direction. Regional data (ISTAT, 2017) show that the causes of early school leaving and dropouts cannot be limited to critical issues within the education system. There is also a multiplicity of factors, among which both the educational function of families and the lack of stable connections between all territorial structures involved in the education and training system are relevant and significant (Madonia, 2013).

Over the years, in fact, the debate in literature has expanded and enriched with new semantic components, passing from the simple idea of premature dropout – at first attributed to a process of occult selection by teachers (Besozzi, 1993) and then to socio-demographic features of the students (Gattullo, 1989) – to all those circumstances that limit, slow down or waste the possibilities of enriching one's knowledge and skills during formal education (Morgagni, 1998). Discontinuous school attendance and poor effectiveness of the educational/training action, therefore, are two other aspects to take into consideration, together with the more classic school dropout. With respect to identify the causes of such a complex phenomenon, therefore, literature provides us with the possibility of choosing between several alternatives: internal (causes concerning educational system and the characteristics of specific schools), external (concerning the general socio-economic context and the characteristic of students and their families) and causes concerning the interaction between the student's world (biographical path, strategies, norms and values) and the world of the scholastic institution (Moscati, Nigris, Tramma, 2008).

This varied set of possible causes makes the phase of defining policies to contrast early school leaving very complex, since identifying concrete actions becomes a choice that is anything but taken for granted, and this for a number of reasons. First, because it depends on the different value orientations of the political decision maker. Second, because it can refer to a very broad set of contributing causes: institutional, social, relational, purely individual (such as psychological) or

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3 Due to the difficulty of translating the Italian term of "dispersione scolastica" we are going to use "early school leaving" and "school dropout" as synonyms, referring, in both cases to "all those circumstances that limit, slow down or waste the possibilities of enriching one's knowledge and skills during formal education" (Morgagni, 1998).

strictly socio-demographic and economic factors. Third, because this universe of possible contributing causes analytically described in literature in an abstract and generalized way, assumes concrete configurations in the various local contexts. Values, norms, cultural orientations and material conditions of existence, in fact, are the broader context in which early school leaving occurs and, for the remedies to be effective, they must differ based on different territorial specificities, calibrated on the possible causes, but also, above all, on the actual resources present in the area (Madonia, 2013).

The policy-design of Scuola Viva seems to have taken this complexity into consideration, to the extent that its implementation, potentially, has represented a container of ideas, concrete interventions and relationships of local partnership configured according to the needs analysis of each territory. In line with the provisions of the 2014-2020 European Social Fund Operational Programme, Campania Region decided to promote, starting from the 2016/17 school year, a process of expansion of the educational offer of schools, in terms of both hours actually provided, and contents, intended as an instrument to support families against early school leaving and, in perspective, juvenile crime.⁴

The program, lasting three years, but then renewed for a fourth year, provided for an initial funding of 25 million euros to be distributed among the 451 schools,⁵ carried out "interventions aimed at strengthening the local community through experiences and cultural paths of culture and learning based on the relationship between school, territory, businesses and citizens".⁶ The formula is very simple as well as general: each school, placing itself at the head of a local partnership network,⁷ had to guarantee a bare minimum of two weekly afternoon openings (at least, three hours each) during which carrying out planned activities. Each school could present only one project made up, however, of different thematic activities (modules) to be provided to a minimum of 10 participants: students enrolled in the 1st and 2nd grade state schools of Campania and/or young people up to 25 years of age.⁸ The total duration of all planned modules had to be at least 240 hours.

This lack of more detailed rules has made it possible to articulate tailor-based interventions for each local context. Each school, by involving other competent actors working both on the territory or elsewhere, had the opportunity to build their own project on the basis of the knowledge accumulated, by the school staff and the whole local learning community, about the strengths to be exploited, the weaknesses to be compensated, the criticalities to be solved. Of course, it is not possible to say that all participating schools have been able to design and implement all this successfully. The available data, in fact, do not allow an assessment of what has actually been implemented. What we want to highlight, however, was the ability of the program to be able to adapt to the different needs perceived in the territories and to provide schools with the necessary autonomy to plan an intervention deemed effective. Furthermore, an aspect that should

4 The descriptive information about the experience of Scuola Viva shown in this work was the result of an analysis of the documents (decrees, notices and communications) published by the Campania Region, over the course of the various years, in the section dedicated to the program, at the following web address: <http://www.fse.regione.campania.it/scuola-viva/>

5 It should be noted that only the 451 institutes recruited in the first year were able to benefit, if they had requested it, from the financing of the subsequent years.

6 Public notice "Scuola Viva program", Regional Council Resolution n. 204 of 10/05/2016 (B.U.R.C. n.31 of 16 May 2016).

7 In particular, it was necessary to involve at least one local actor among institutional bodies, cultural promotion associations, social promotion associations, cooperatives, laic and religious volunteering, other non-governmental organizations, companies, oratories, etc. The participation of other schools or non-local associations was also possible.

8 Even with respect to possible participants, the public notice shows a considerable degree of inclusiveness: "the activities of the proposing educational institution must be aimed at enrolled students, students of other I and II grade schools in the area and young people up to 25 years of age of age, Italians and foreigners, providing for the widest involvement of the different population groups. The activities will have no restrictions, will be free of charge and open to the territory, so they must provide for, and guarantee, the participation of adults in general, both Italian and foreign. In relation to the size and intensity of the phenomenon of early school leaving in the region, students who have dropped out of school are considered to be the privileged recipients of the project".

not be underestimated, the three-year duration (subsequently extended to four years) immediately declared enabled the participating institutions to plan wide-ranging interventions and, if necessary, tackling complex problems whose solution is difficult, if not unlikely, in the short term. Finally, during the four years it is possible that the partnership network formed during the program was consolidated, increasing the social capital of the territory on which the intervention took place. This led to the much-desired creation and development of a permanent learning community capable of taking care of the formative path of its young members. Even in this case, however, it is not possible to say that all this really happened. However, it must be noted that the conditions for this to happen were all there. Furthermore, as regards the content of the modules, the call-for-projects provided for the full autonomy of the proposing institutes with regard to both the topics and the teaching methodologies, offering the widest possible choice between strengthening, counselling, school-work alternation, individual psychological support and parenting support.

With reference to the reflections on school dropout already carried out, it is clear that the general setting of the program represents a toolbox capable of being used in many different ways. Possible activities were very heterogeneous: from the simple afternoon opening that allows many young people to meet in an institutional place of culture, rather than in the street, passing through the didactic enhancements (in the sense of both an enhancement of the excellences and the recovery of under achievements), to extracurricular activities designed to bring young people closer to practices that they probably would never have had the opportunity to carry out (violin, riding, advanced programming courses), up to psychological support, individual guidance and parenting support. These are initiatives that respond to many of the possible causes of school dropout mentioned in literature. Moreover, attending school to carry out an activity that fascinates allows children to re-evaluate their relationship with the educational institution no longer influenced by the traditional point of view based on the two phases of teaching and evaluation.

This could help solving some individual/institution interaction problems and placing the idea of school, and its mandatory attendance, within the students' biography in a more meaningful and concrete way. Finally, even if we consider the "type" of early school leaving it addresses, it is clear that Scuola Viva program could be useful to intervene, at least in principle, on dropouts, on intermittent frequencies, and on the more general question of the waste of the formative action. It remains to be considered whether this lucky, at least on paper, phase of conception was followed by adequate implementation. The absence of data on what is actually achieved by the schools (the information available refers to what is foreseen by the projects), does not allow an assessment at the micro level, that is, of how effective the individual interventions of each school have been. Nonetheless, here we intend to deepen the macro level, that is linked to the ability of the program to operate in the most vulnerable contexts, especially those most exposed to the risk of early school leaving. Campania school audience, in fact, seems more involved with the risk of non-completion and non-continuation of secondary schools. In 2019, for example, the percentage⁹ of early school leavers (ELET¹⁰) among young people between 18 and 24 in Campania (17.3%) is still higher than the national (13.5%), Central (10,9%) and Northern (10,5%) regions averages of the Country. A decrease of percentage of ELET over the last 15 years (2004-2019) has been recorded: the trend is very similar to what is happening in the rest of the country and in the South. This also means that there was not a reduction of the territorial gap, nor the beginning of new processes of divergence. Between 2004 (28.4%) and 2019, the ELET rate in Campania dropped by about 10 percentage points: the gap with the rest of the country remains

9 Data source for ELET at Italian regional level is ISTAT.

10 The acronym stands for Early Leaving from School and Training. For the Eurostat refers to a person aged 18 to 24 who has completed at most lower secondary education and is not involved in further education or training. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Early_leaver_from_education_and_training

significant and tends to be unchanged. Competence levels of Campania students, as measured in Invalsi tests¹¹, is another critical sign, as it sees the region far behind both the national and the central-northern averages. It is interesting to note how the small gap in skills in Reading and Mathematics (but the same could be applied to all of the other indicators of the test) in the lower school grades starts to increase as grades go up. So, the gap among Campania and other regions of Central and Northern Italy is not very significant in primary school but then it grows in lower and upper secondary schools.

As we have already seen, in Campania this waste of resources happens on a daily basis, in a territory marked by profound internal differences: more than elsewhere, the territory presents a wide range of contexts in which unproblematic realities coexist with those affected by incredible conditions of social exclusion and risk of school dropout. The severity of the context variables in certain areas is so high that it is compatible with models of urban segregation typical of the "hyperghetto" (Wacquant, Wilson, 1993) in which the absence of productive activities produces a collapse of the social structure and the concentration of poor and marginal classes unable to access even unskilled jobs due to the narrowness of their informal social networks and the decline of institutions, starting with school.

2. Objectives and methodology

With respect to these premises, the objective of the contribution is to classify, on a very detailed geographic scale, the territory of Campania region on the basis of a synthetic index of "dropout risk". In this aspect the paper follows similar attempts in Italy of mapping dropout risk (Regione Puglia, 2019), as well as educational poverty (Pratesi, Quattrociochi, Bertarelli, Gemignani, Caterina, 2021; Save The Children, 2018) and density of cultural and educational institutions (MIB-ACT, 2017). In all these cases, a detailed level of spatial analysis is essential to measure urban (and non-urban) segregation related to educational and cultural policies. Moreover, the choice of a synthetic index tries to be consistent with the multidimensional nature of school dropout causes.

Another objective of the paper is to verify how much Scuola Viva Program matched the young people most directly affected by early school leaving and educational poverty.

In other words, the study compares the territorial distribution of schools involved in the programme with a map of territorial disadvantage, as evidenced by the synthetic index of dropout risk. The lack of data available at school level (dropouts, absences, levels of learning) and the very nature of the indicators that are going to be used, shift the focus of the analysis to external causes of dropout, which refers to purely social, economic and demographic factors. Even if some internal causes can be, to a certain extent, connected to the external ones – the pedagogical action of the school is more difficult in problematic areas and with a high concentration of disadvantage (Madonia, 2013) – we are nonetheless aware of the strong weight attributed to exogenous variables. Furthermore, due to the nature of the study, nothing can be said with respect to the causes that refer to biographical or psychological factors of the young students. In any case, the tool proposed here will also try to identify the different connotations that this risk can assume in the various regional contexts, thus prefiguring itself as a real typological index.

In order to operate on a sufficiently detailed level of territorial aggregation, so as to safeguard the specificities of some territorial groups and reduce the distortion due to group heterogeneous areas in ecological analysis (Duncan, Cuzzort, Duncan, 1961), the data of the last population census (2011) relating to the census areas (*Aree di Censimento, from now on ACE*) were used. ACEs represent an intermediate aggregation (Bianchi et al., 2007; Crescenzi, Fortini, Gallo, Mancini, 2009) between the census sections (*Sezioni di Censimento*), often too small to calculate

11 "The INVALSI tests measure the quality of learning of skills – adapted of course to the age of the children examined [...] they measure some basics of critical thinking, which is inconceivable without the ability to understand texts, logical faculties, and the ability to solve new problems." (Invalsi, 2018, p.5).

some indicators, and those of the municipalities, in some cases too heterogeneous, especially when the number of residents and territorial dimension increase. It must also be noted that small municipalities correspond to a single ACE: In Campania region, this overlap between ACE and the municipal territory occurs in 483 cases out of 551. The unit of analysis selected is particularly useful in the city of Naples by operating an even more accurate disaggregation (73 ACE) compared to what would have been possible considering the neighbourhood (*Quartieri*) level (30) (De Falco, Sabatino, 2018). Although the use of data referring to 2011 may be anachronistic, it should be remembered that the policy design of Scuola Viva took place in 2015, a period of time not far from the last data available. Furthermore, the fact that only the schools involved in the first year of activities could participate in the following years, conferred a certain stability to schools' distribution. This means that there is no particular need to update the map of disadvantage as no really replanning of the program activities happened at macro level. The data were processed using SPSS, Excel and R software.

The entire set of indicators¹² initially taken into consideration, among the various options available for the construction of the typological index, refers to a series of phenomena that the literature often links to social exclusion or the risk of dropping out (Schizzerotto, Barone, 2006; Madonia, 2013; Moscati, Nigris, Tramma, 2008). In order to synthesize the information of the collected indicators, through a few composite indicators, we decide to carry out a principal components analysis (PCA). PCA is a statistical method that looks for few latent unobserved and uncorrelated variables (usually called factors) that are linear combination of the observed indicators, maximizing the explained variance. This method, followed by a Varimax rotation, is widely used to obtain data driven composite indicators (Saisana, Tarantola, 2002). In our case, looking at percentage of explained variance and following the Kaiser criterion, i.e. looking at the eigenvalues greater than one, we found two orthogonal factors (table 1), which explain approximately the 75,9% of the variance (39.7% for factor 1 and 36.1% for factor 2). The two factors refer respectively to purely socio-economic aspects, for which high scores indicate high levels of disadvantage (factor 1), and aspects concerning the human capital (factor 2), for which low scores indicate low levels of specialisation, education and skills. Table 1 reports the factor loadings, i.e. the correlation between the observed variables and the two latent factors.

Tab. 1 Factor loadings of the items on the first two factorial axis after a varimax rotation

	Factor 1	Factor 2
Incidence of families with potential economic hardship	,915	-,197
Incidence of large families	,822	-,162
Square meters per occupant	-,813	,176
Youth unemployment rate	,805	,227
Employment rate	-,674	,272
Incidence of high/medium specialization professions	-,015	,951
Incidence of adults with secondary or tertiary degrees	-,416	,866
Incidence of young people with tertiary education	-,347	,835
Incidence of low specialization professions	-,070	-,823

The different combinations of the factor loadings associated with each factor made it possible

12 The initial set of indicators included: Resident population, Demographic density, Old age index, Incidence of foreign residents, Incidence of houses owned, Incidence of buildings in a poor state of conservation, Square meters per occupant, Incidence of adults with high school or university degrees, Incidence of young people with university education, Youth unemployment rate, Employment rate, Incidence of high/medium specialization professions, Incidence of low specialization professions, Incidence of large families, Incidence of families with potential economic hardship, Incidence of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). Data source of indicators is 2011 National Census data, available on ISTAT website.

to outline the type of risk reported in Tab. 2. “Wilson areas” represent the territories in which a strong socio-economic distress is accompanied by a very low level of human capital. The next two types (“socio-economic risk” and “human capital risk”) are characterised by the strong disadvantage found on only one of the factors. “Dynamic areas with human capital risk” associate a very low human capital with a fairly favourable socio-economic situation, while “Core of local economy” refers to those areas where the most educated population of the region is concentrated (presence of management centres and specialised activities of the knowledge economy) but the socio-economic well-being levels are not particularly flourishing, neither particularly bad (high levels on the second factor, but intermediate on the first). All other ACEs showed intermediate scores on the two factors.

Tab. 2 Profile of dropout risk profile areas

Type label	Factorial scores features	Label name	% on total regional population (N=5.757.222)
High socio-eco risk / High human capital risk	Very high values on the first factor and very low on the second	Wilson areas	4,7
High socio-eco risk / Medium human capital risk	Very high values on the first factor but not particularly low on the second	Socio-Economic Risk	28,8
Medium socio-eco risk / High human capital risk	Values not particularly high on the first factor but very low on the second	Human Capital Risk	3,5
Low socio-eco risk / High human capital risk	Very low values on the first factor and very low on the second	Dynamic with Human Capital Risk	1,1
Intermediate ACEs ¹³	Intermediate values on both factors	Intermediate ACEs	53,6
Very Low Human Capital Risk	Intermediate values on the first factor and very high on the second factor	Core of local economy	8,3

Once the possible types of disadvantages (or non-disadvantage) that characterise the various regional territories have been identified, it is necessary to understand which of these are associated with a greater or lesser risk of dropping out. In this regard, a comparison among each type was made on the basis of the averages of the indicator “Incidence of young people (15-29) who do not study and do not work” (Table 3). With respect to this latter indicator, it is important to specify two important issues. The first is that although this label is very close to the definition of NEET, this indicator is based on census classification criteria giving us significantly lower values than the NEET¹⁴ data. The second question concerns the appropriateness of considering this indicator as indicative of the intensity of dropping out risk. In a recent document, the European Union highlighted how: «all countries (but Malta) where the proportion of early leavers is above 12% are characterised by high proportions of individuals who are simultaneously ‘NEET’ and ‘ELET’. [...] this result reflects the fact that people with low levels of education have weaker employment prospects and, therefore, face a higher risk of being unemployed or becoming inactive while not in education or training. Secondly, poor labour market conditions for young

13 Six ACEs with low level risk for the “human capital” factor and a high level of “socio-economic” factor were also included in this category. The choice to not constitute an additional category was due to the low number of territorial groups in question and by the total number of the population involved in it (83,435 units) which is of little significance.

14 In 2001, the incidence of NEETs (15-29 years) in Campania and in Italy was respectively 34.9% and 22.5%.

people may make it hard to find a job even for people with an upper-secondary or a tertiary degree, thereby increasing their risk of becoming NEET» (European Commission, 2019, p. 54). In other words, in countries with a share of early school leavers (ELET) above 12% and a weak productive system, the proportion of individuals who are both ELET and NEET at the same time is very high. As we have seen, due to its characteristics, Campania can legitimately be considered exemplary of this condition. Table 3, therefore, shows us the types identified, sorted by risk of dropout, in a ranking based on the incidence of young people (15-29 years old) who do not study and do not work, to which the average value for Campania and Italy have also been added. "Wilson areas" are those with the highest incidence of this category of young people (29.3%) and therefore at higher risk of early school leaving. These are followed by areas characterised by a "strong socio-economic risk" (24.7) and those with "low human capital" (22.0%), definitely above the regional average (18.4%). "Dynamic areas at risk of human capital" (18.0%) are in line with regional average, while it is interesting to note how the intermediate ACEs (16.7%), not particularly problematic compared to the regional average, are very disadvantaged if the data is compared to the national average (12.3). In all this, "Core of local economy" (11.0%) are an exception, characterised, as we have seen, by a strong presence of a population with a high level of education and highly specialised professional conditions.


Tab. 3 NEETs Index per dropout risk area

Tipo	Incidence of young people (15-29) who do not study and do not work
Wilson areas	29,3
Socio-economic risk	24,7
Human capital risk	22,0
Campania	18,4
Dynamic with human capital risk	18,0
Intermediate ACEs	16,7
Italy	12,3
Core of local economy	11,0

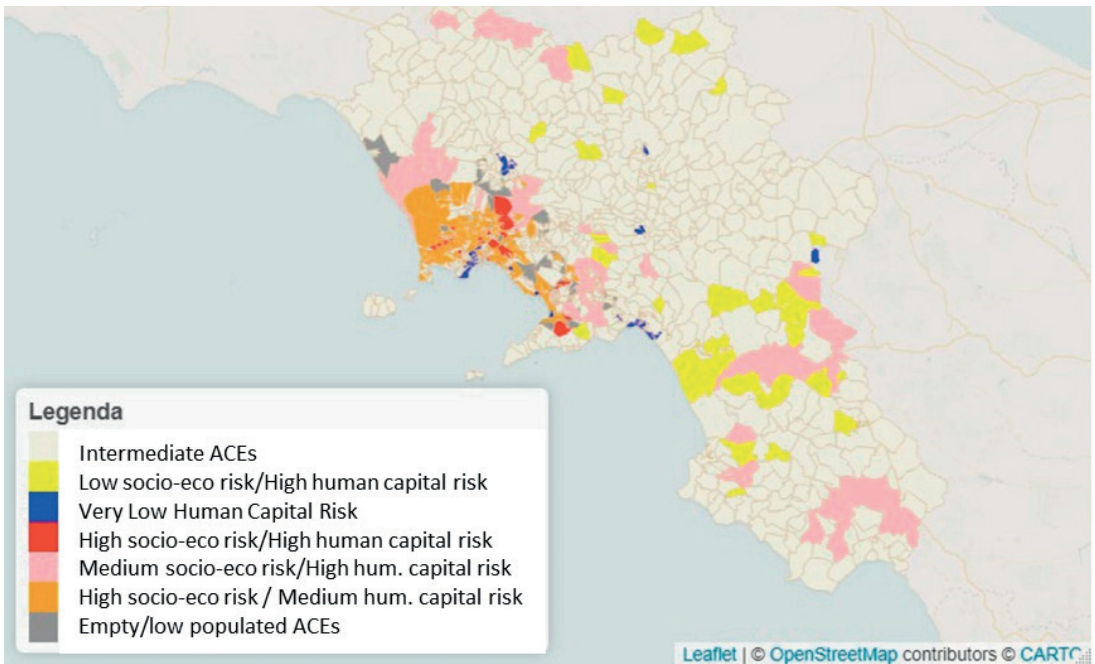
3. A geography of early school leaving risk in Campania

The types of areas identified have specific characteristics regarding both their size and their location within the region. Areas at risk in at least one of the two factors identified by the PCA include a population of over 2 million of inhabitants, representing the 38.0% of Campania residents in 2011¹⁵, as shown in Tab. 2.

This classification of micro-territories within Campania Region, based on the combination of two different risk factors, allows us to outline a geography of the contexts potentially linked to early-school-leaving phenomena (Fig.1).

Fig. 1: ACEs classified for dropout risk profile area 

15 This value is the sum of the percentage of population living in Wilson (4,7%), Socio-Economic Risk (28,8%), Human Capital Risk (3,5%), Dynamic with Human Capital Risk (1,1%) areas.



First of all, there are territories presenting a better situation than the regional average¹⁶ in terms of the socio-economic risk but at the same time a higher socio-cultural risk. This is an original combination in which a small part of the regional population - about 60,000 inhabitants, just over 1% of the total - is included. This area is made up of 29 ACEs spatially well defined: none of these are located in the biggest metropolitan area and none of them are in the province of Naples.

In these territories a relative economic well-being is associated with a low level of education, and there is a very weak demand of high-skilled workforce in the labour market. These 29 municipalities/census areas are not much populated (in average less than 3,000 inhabitants), they are distant from the administrative and directional centres of the region, but relatively dynamic in terms of added value and occupation. The geography of these areas is well spread among the province, except Naples, and the most notably examples are in Piana del Sele (municipalities of Eboli and Battipaglia) and in the northern part of Benevento province (Baselice, Ginestra degli Schiavoni, Castelpagano).

The other areas with a "risk profile" show more predictable characteristics.

This is the case of Wilson areas: here there are extremely low values on both the socio-economic and the socio-cultural factors. In this class 23 ACEs are included, all located in the province of Naples, with about 250,000 inhabitants. These territories cover significant parts of the northern and eastern neighbourhoods inside the municipality of Naples and in its province (some ACEs in Pozzuoli, Quarto, Qualiano, Afragola, Caivano, Boscoreale). All these highly-risk areas register a massive concentration of residents in social housing complexes and the pervasive presence of crime organisations. A chaotic urban development, an unequal income distribution and the growth of criminal organisations determined the so-called "concentration effects" as described by Wilson (Wilson, 1993). The characteristics of these peculiar contexts have an impressive impact on the number of young people at risk of early school leaving, as seen in, which is disturbingly evident.

¹⁶ The regional average in this context is the average value in both factors, either the one representing socio-economic risk, either in socio-cultural risk one.

The group that presents exclusively a high socio-economic risk profile (but lower socio-cultural risk values) includes a much larger area, spatially placed close to the “Wilson area” above mentioned. The geography of this type (Fig. 1) is quite clear: 113 ACEs with a population of over 1.5 million inhabitants, all located in the provinces of Naples (101) and Caserta (12), following a North-East/South-West direction. It is interesting to underline that over 40% of the inhabitants in Naples province live in these areas with significant levels of unemployment and poverty.

The group presenting a high-risk level only on the socio-cultural factor (Human capital risk) has a more complex geography (Fig. 1) than the last two groups. First of all, this class is considerably smaller both in terms of number of units (49 ACEs) and population (just under 200,000 inhabitants). It is possible to identify two large territorial concentrations for this category: on the one hand the ACEs situated at the extreme edge of the Caserta-Napoli-Salerno metropolitan area, on the other, the ACEs of the extreme periphery of the region, in rural contexts with negative demographic dynamics.

Finally, to help the interpretation of risk factors’ spatial dynamics, a group of ACEs without any particular risk profile was selected. These 35 ACEs have relatively average values on the socio-economic factor but are characterised by high levels on the human capital one. This territorial cluster is situated within the main towns of the region and, in the case of Naples, in its middle-upper class neighbourhoods (Vomero, Arenella, Chiaia, Posillipo, Fuorigrotta). An original geography that sees the places of residence of local elites just outside the historical centre of the city, but without settling in extra or peri-urban areas as in other western metropolises (Pfirsch, 2011). This cluster represents a social space attracting highly skilled and educated workers mostly thanks to its proximity to the most important public institutions (Universities, Research Centers, Healthcare Structures, Public bodies premises).

From the analysis some interesting points emerged. First of all, there is a crucial urban issue that involves the metropolitan area around the city of Naples where high levels of poverty and social segregation are concentrated. These are the areas where all the risk factors linked to school dropout unfold. Beyond this well-defined critical area, the geography of dropout risk involves a much wider territory where a relevant share of childhood and adolescence live.

Naples’ metropolitan area at the same time includes the ACEs where the degree of exclusion of young people and adolescents from work and training is well below the national average. The urban context between Naples, Caserta and Salerno can be depicted as the most unbalanced and unequal. This is clearly the space where policies like Scuola Viva are more needed. Outside this conurbation, social exclusion/expulsion dynamics, as described by Sassen (2015) are less evident: a large part of the province of Benevento, Avellino and Salerno falls within an intermediate area without any particular alarm from the point of view of the risk factors associated to early-school-leaving. It is true that even in non-urban contexts there is a presence of risk areas, specifically linked to a low presence of a high-skilled population and to a local labour market scarcely demanding for graduate workers. All these territories can also be considered as a priority.

4. Matching policy and dropout risk geography: the spatial distribution of Scuola Viva

Regarding this risk map linked to school dropout, in which way the main regional education policy has been designed? A first answer, opening up further analysis can be given by studying the geographical distribution of schools funded by the “Scuola Viva” program. The percentage of school’s beneficiaries of the program is by far higher in the Province of Naples: here 59% of the schools took part in the programme, compared to just over a third in the Province of Salerno (38%) and Caserta (35%). The percentages are even lower in the provinces of Avellino (24%) and Benevento (29%).

The map of the 451 schools participating in the first year of the Scuola Viva Program compared to the distribution of non-beneficiary ones (over 500) allows the match of each single institution in an ACE classified according to the typological risk index described above (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2: Localization of schools participating (yellow) and non-participating (blue) in “Scuola Viva” programme

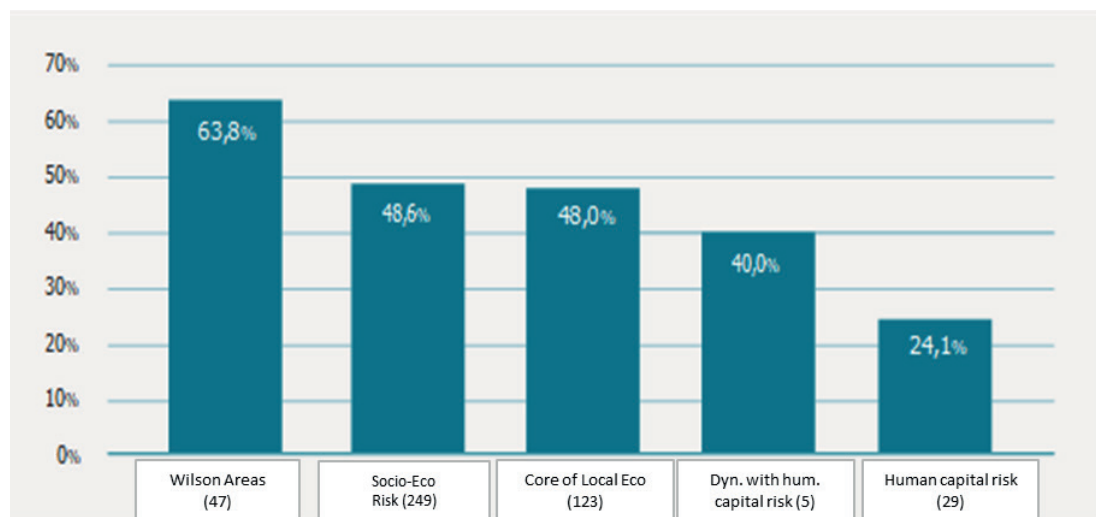


Some critical issues relating to this matching method should be highlighted here. First of all, It should be noted the presence of Institutes with multiple locations, which in some contexts - notably in scarcely populated areas - can be geographically distant from each other. It is likely, in this case, that those school complexes are located in different ACEs than the main one. Moreover, since the location of a school does not necessarily correspond to the area where enrolled students live, it could not be fully representative of school dropout risk at local level.

These methodological issues are difficult to overcome considering data availability already mentioned before. However, Scuola Viva granted the access potentially to all young people up to 25 years old even if not enrolled in any of participating schools. This characteristic in some way justifies the choice of a place-based analysis rather than a school based one for evaluating the programme.

The matching between schools and areas classified by risk profile (Fig. 3) confirms what has already emerged in provincial distribution: the percentage of beneficiary institutions is much higher in areas of extreme disadvantage (Wilson areas). Here about two thirds (64%) of the schools had access to the program, against a regional average of 45%. The incidence of beneficiary institutions in the socio-economic risk areas (48.6%) is also slightly higher than the average, while a lower participation is recorded for the two “human capital risk” classes, both the dynamic ones (40%) and those not dynamic (24.1%).

Fig. 3: Percentage of schools participating in “Scuola Viva” programme per risk-profile cluster



5. Conclusions

As far as Scuola Viva Program is concerned, the analysis shows that, in some way, it has fairly intercepted the “demand” for intervention coming from urban-risk areas which, as seen, represent the vast majority of critical areas. In this sense, it is undoubted that Scuola Viva selection procedures took into account the difficulties of territorial contexts in which these schools operate. On the other hand, the distribution of the programme appears less effective in rural and peri-urban critical clusters where the risk factors are still present although to a more limited degree. In these contexts, an additional reflection on the policy design is needed in order to identify more accessible channels of participation.

More generally, the question of how to distribute public funds for combating early school leaving is as topical as ever. In 2022, the issue was the subject of controversy between the Italian Ministry of Education and an expert working group that assessed the system of indicators for selecting schools for funding as insufficient and unstructured (Gruppo di lavoro contro la dispersione scolastica, 2022). The critique moves precisely on two motivations that also underlie this contribution: first, the need to increase the number of indicators to understand the different dimensions related to school dropout; and second, to start from a “place-centered” approach in assessing the performance of each individual school, and then in determining funding criteria. The goal here was to make a proposal for a method, potentially applicable to all educational policies, at least at the regional/local level. Future intentions therefore go in this direction: to apply the same mapping of “dropout risk areas” in other Italian (and European) regions; to update it with more recent data, such as those already released or about to be released from the 2021 Italian census; and to test other policies designed to combat early school leaving.

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The Epistemic Distances in the Sustainable Energy Transmission Process²

1. Introduction

To face the COVID-19 socio-economic crisis, the European Union defined the Next Generation EU plan, a relevant investment fund addressing clean and smart recovery actions for a more stable, wealthy and sustainable EU society. According to the plan, the ecological transition and digitalisation process will characterise the investments in the energy sector to redefine the provisioning system. The idea is to produce energy sustainably (through renewables) and efficiently (with storage and smart redistribution systems), engaging new actors in the energy field (citizens, companies, local institutions, and experts) for a just transition that will leave no one behind. In this prefigured future, big energy companies and energy prosumers (individual and collective) will work side by side, exchanging resources (energy, money, information, services) through smart grids with expected common benefits.

Many actors are involved in the transition process with different roles in promoting changes in the energy system, complicating the "big picture". Actors can express diverse interpretations and expectations of the "desirable future" based on different epistemic cultures and values. Transition is intended as a designed and contextualized framework, enacted consistently with the internal rules and epistemologies informing the different domains pertaining to experts, professionals and academics, that contribute to define the sociotechnical energy imaginary. Transdisciplinary is often recalled as the way to connect the distances of knowing (and managing) reality and to give a concrete shape to policy programs and discourses on environmental sustainability, as well as the general aim of improving socio-economic well-being through an inclusive participation in decision-making.

Distances among different prefigurations of the transition can be retraced not only between different field of experts but also along the divide between experts and lay people. Indeed, a consistent part of the actors that participate in developing the transition, generally acknowledged as stakeholders, can be unrelated to an institutionalized field of knowledge.

Through the main outcomes of the EU H2020 project ASSET, we propose to analyse the epistemic distances among actors involved in the transition process to understand how transdisciplinarity seems enacted. The research highlights the contradictions in the transition process in the case of the EU. Despite a widespread demand and initiatives for dialogue between STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and SSH (social sciences and humanities) disciplines, STEM retains a hegemonic position in the energy field with a traditional posture on the transition path. In this sense, the paper aims to promote consideration of the transdisciplinarity issues in the just transition. To do so, in the next paragraph, the concept of transdisciplinarity is questioned and connected with the energy issue. In the third section, we shortly report the research questions, the method and the consistency of our database. Research outcomes are detailed in paragraph four; in the conclusion section, we pose critical remarks on the epistemic distances in the sustainable energy transmission process.

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2. Transdisciplinarity Research and the Energy Transition

In the current socio-ecological crisis, complex and interrelated relations among human actors, objects, and natural entities appear evident; finding an effective solution for this issue is not possible without analysing separately the socio-material elements that act within it. To do so, we need to combine different disciplines, which clearly support the process toward the sustainable energy transition. The aim to develop a holistic understanding of this complexity has been pursued by important scholars such as Margaret Mead, Gregory Bateson, and Edgar Morin, to name a few. However, despite a broad debate, the framing of a connective epistemology still needs to be clearly established. Three different trajectories that compose the variety of disciplines can be mentioned.

First, "multidisciplinarity" recalls the cooperation between different scientific fields that still confirm their exclusive area of jurisdiction. In this case, the point is to differentiate among problematic claims about a specific issue. Second, "interdisciplinarity" is more about the linking and connection among different disciplines. Here the focus is to interplay different epistemic perspectives negotiating on a specific issue. The third case is the "transdisciplinarity", which represents an ambitious challenge consisting of a synchronic/coordinated understanding of the complex reality. It can be considered an ecological framing of the ontology, and, at the same time, a comprehensive epistemology based on the logic of inclusion, connection, reconstruction, and composition. Clearly, this posture distances itself from the modernist speculative/positivistic specialised and segmented division of scientific labour (Schroeder, 2022).

In the current socio-ecological crisis scenario, transdisciplinarity appears as a promising path forward. As Funtowicz and Ravetz (1993) showed, the separation and specialisation of scientific knowledge fail as "systems uncertainties" and "decision stakes" improve. Normal or applied science is the common way to address and fix problems; data are available, tools and techniques fit with the inquiries at stake, and decisions follow the ordinary "proof of evidence" approach, so science can "speak the truth to the power" (Collingridge, Reeve, 1986). However, when uncertainty increases, ordinary knowledge is not enough; something needs to be done in terms of problem framing before applying a specific protocol or claiming a state of facts. In this scenario, adaptation is the key, reshaping the old solutions, re-framing certainties while taking into account new risks, taking them into account. This is what Funtowicz and Ravetz call professional consultancy. Finally, the worst scenario (which is the current one) is characterised by high uncertainty, and the decision stakes are high, too. In this case, the urgency of the decision-making (policy) complicates the task of addressing, detecting, analysing, learning, and consolidating knowledge (science). The routinised science appears inadequate, and the adaptiveness of professionals is not enough. Here is where transdisciplinary research comes into action because what is needed to be managed is, first of all, the reconciliation of the facts and value nexus.

Where conclusive evidence-based demonstrations do not help manage and reduce the complexity, creative patterns for reconciling tensions and inconsistencies need to be explored. Transdisciplinary is not only a matter of deliberative scientific dialogue but also a remodulation of the relationship between experts, scientists and lay people. Transdisciplinarity recalls an extended idea of democracy, the method of knowing is political in itself, but this complicates the issue of the urgency of the decisions required. This short-circuit is quite straightforward and evident regarding the climate change "affair". Indeed, what is at stake is an "ecological subject" (Minervini, 2011), a heterogeneous aggregate of social and natural elements that needs to be unfolded, focusing on its relational and procedural dimensions that contribute to preserving or degrading the socio-natural balance. In a way, it challenged cognitive tools, producing an epistemological rift in the consolidated modern object-subject Cartesian dichotomy. For this, transdisciplinarity is close to the "ontology of becoming" promoted by Whitehead (1929), which postulates that knowledge experience involving object and subject precedes and affects the knowledge itself. Similarly, some perspectives reframe analytical categories and conceptual metaphors to over-

come Cartesian reductionism, like notions of “co-production” (Jasanoff, 2004), “assemblage” (De Landa, 2006) or “actant” (Latour, 2005). Those concepts try to break free from both materialist and constructivist radicalism. The current socio-ecological crisis also leads to reformulating the nature-society relationship in political terms, and the question of “care” emerges as a significant ethical issue. As ecofeminism highlighted, care involves humans and non-humans in space (intra-generational justice) and time (intergenerational justice). This perspective imposes a rethinking of life on earth due to “odd kin” (Haraway, 2016; Tsing, 2015). In this sense, the well-being policy must consider the interconnections between everyday life’s physical and social dimensions.

The “ecological subject” cannot be dispersed and fragmented into disciplinary fields. For example, to understand ecological innovations or the chance for alternative green life, some analyses (Shove *et al.*, 2013; Spaargaren *et al.*, 2011) propose to study how socio-materiality is embedded in everyday life, such as routines, consumption behaviour and lifestyles. Thus, disciplines (e.g. material sciences, sociology, urban planning) have to adapt to the study of the “new objects” and the researchers themselves, to some extent, have to cross knowledge fields accordingly to the post-normal approach mentioned before.

In energy research, transdisciplinarity is also a relevant topic (Grunwald, 2018; Heaslip, Fahy, 2018; Mallaband *et al.*, 2017; Sibilla, Kurul, 2020; Spreng, 2014). Energy across the natural science/social science interface and these two scientific cultures have to be intertwined to reach public purposes. For example, the sustainable energy transition process needs STEM to identify appropriate places to develop power facilities considering natural settings, technology efficiency, and plant affordability. SSH is useful in diverse ways because it can play a different role in studying the energy transition according to the analysis level: macro, meso or micro (Osti, 2019). SSH can recognise the socio-cultural values of local people affected by green projects and engage them in participatory development project steps. Some research report how green experts – who are strategic in promoting the green energy policy – seem to redefine their object of study, combining hard and soft skills (Minervini, Scotti, 2020) and practising transdisciplinarity in their work activities. Other research stresses how transdisciplinarity is useful for developing the energy community thanks to a constructive dialogue among “expert knowledge” (disciplines) and between ‘lay/local knowledge’ (local community) and researchers (Heaslip, Fahy, 2018; Thomas *et al.*, 2018).

Although the literature recognises the need to move toward a more collaborative approach in the energy field, studies highlight that fragmentation between disciplines remains a significant problem, and transdisciplinarity appears still as a goal than as practice (van Wees, 2022; Sibilla, Kurul, 2020). Moreover, scholars observe how exclusions of social sciences and humanities are reproduced in the energy research field (Baum, Bartkowski, 2020; Overland, Sovacool, 2020; Royston, Foulds, 2021). It also reduces the chance to consider how socio-technical imaginaries of the energy future emerge and are implemented as a result of conflict and mediation social process (Rudek, 2022; Sovacool, 2019). For this, the different positions, perspectives and epistemologies of the actors (individuals, civil society associations, companies, and institutions) involved in the transition need to be questioned. The inclusive, collaborative and deliberative approach featuring in the post-normal scenario overlaps with different epistemological distances enacting different ontologies (Carolan, 2004). People, observers, practitioners, scientists, and politicians can be more or less close to environmental facts. It depends on the complexity of the fact and the practical/direct experience of those involved in the facts. Carolan shows how the more complex and distant the environmental issues are, the more variable the ontological enactments of the same issues is (which are hybrid combinations of facts and values).

In short, the sustainable energy transition is a complex matter that affects (and is affected by) different experiences, practices and understandings. It implies conflicts and alliances, negations and confirmations of what is the energy transition itself. These ontologies are intrinsically political and real at the same time because they emerge from specific assemblages of heterogeneous institutions, discourses, knowledge, technologies, physical elements and so on (Law, Urry, 2004).

In this sense, the energy transition is not a linear process. Inquiring about the distance and proximity of the desirable energy future (policy/politic dimensions) for the main actors in the field and how they engage with transdisciplinarity to face the challenging complexity (knowledge/technical aspects) seems relevant to understand the possible green and just energy transition path.

3. Research Question and Methodology

EU policies aim to perform the energy transition as a participative, inclusive and sustainable process (Cameron *et al.*, 2020). To accomplish this goal, innovation processes must adopt the responsible research and innovation framework, including STEM and SSH disciplines (Wickson, Carew, 2014). In short, implementing the green energy transition has to consider socio-environmental effects and potential impacts, which implies a considerable complexity to manage. Despite indications, the way to implement the energy innovation is affected by actors' epistemic posture and what they intend for / enact transdisciplinarity.

Using some outcomes of project ASSET (funded by the EU Horizon program) carried out in 2020, we aim to retrace the actors' expectations on what kind of green energy innovation will be implemented and the combination of knowledge/competencies they consider relevant for the transition process³. Through a mixed-method approach, we collected information on the green professions and educational needs for the desirable transition by stakeholders at different stages of the energy project implementation. In this way, it was possible to detect how energy field actors consider transdisciplinarity and their epistemic distance from each other, affecting the implementation of the green energy transition process.

Specifically, we used a survey, in-deep interviews and two focus groups. We collected 140 questionnaires with a non-probabilistic sample that mainly reflects the relational circuits of the project partners. For this reason, the survey does not claim to apply our results on the whole sector. According to the multi-level perspective (Geels, 2002), we considered six stakeholder types to submit the questionnaire that represent the "energy regime" actors: market and costumers, industrial networks, policy and administration bodies, infrastructure managing authorities, cultural agencies, and science and technological actors. Those actors were detected in four European areas: continental, Mediterranean, Nordic, and West-European isles. According to the literature on the varieties of capitalism (Hall, 2008), those areas share similar institutional contexts. Even if this strategy guaranteed a sample heterogeneity (tab. 1), in the sample prevailed men (78), middle-aged people (42 years on average), subjects with a high level of education (85 with PhD, Master or similar), actors that work in private sector (36) or in public administration / authority (32), subjects involved in energy production (32) and manufacturing industry (27).

Tab. 1 - Sample of stakeholder for socio-economic and institutional contexts

	Continental	Mediterranean	Nordic	West-European isles	Total
Market and costumers	5	10	1	6	22
Industrial networks	7	9	2	2	20
Policy and administration bodies	6	10	1	4	21
Infrastructure managing authorities	7	11	7	7	32
Science and technological actors	10	19	8	1	38
Cultural agencies	1	6	-	-	7
Total	36	65	19	20	140

Source: research data.

3 ASSET (A holistic and Scalable Solution for research, innovation and Education in Energy Transition) was a research project funded by the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme of the European Union under Grant Agreement n. 837854. The consortium involved eleven partners from six European countries: Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy and Spain. The research was carried out between May 2019 and April 2021. The authors were part of the research team from the partner University of Naples Federico II (Italy).

The survey helped us to detect the features of the foreseeable energy future of our respondents and how competencies, knowledge, and social aspects they linked to the transition process. In this way, the actors' epistemologies emerged, along with the way with which transdisciplinary is defined.

In-deep open interviews were used to question 20 key informants (academics, market actors, policy and administrator subjects), energy field experts across some European countries: Italy, Greece, the UK, France, Belgium, and Sweden. First interviewees were identified by project partners, then informants were sampled with the snowball technique considering specific profiles to involve. This interview allowed us to reconstruct key features of the energy transition in terms of socio-technical practices and diachronic processes. A narrative / dialogical strategy was used for data production; it helped us to detect arguments emerging from the interviewed experts, not suppressing respondent arguments. The interview guideline included five main themes (energy transition and labour market; education, training, career; involvement in the energy transition field; energy transition and ethics; respondent data). Informants guided researchers in the cultural and semiotic space of the energy transition, in particular dimensions of knowledge and competencies needed in the innovation process. Finally, two focus groups involving 10 stakeholders were implemented using in-depth open interviews. The aim of focus-groups was primarily to retrace the epistemology behind policy decisions and the social legitimation of energy transition.

Using the triangulation of the research pieces of evidence (Jick, 1979), this study revealed the epistemic distance among energy stakeholders and the role of transdisciplinarity in the process as they emerge in the study.

4. Research Findings

By integrating data, perspectives and the arguments collected during the research, here we report the alignment/disagreement among heterogeneous stakeholders involved in the green transition process on energy innovation. In particular, we consider four aspects: 1) the prefigured energy future, 2) the challenge to involve ordinary people and communities in the transformation path, 3) the knowledge and competencies deemed relevant to perform the transition, and 4) the gender issues, a controversial topic in energy field linked to social aspects, competencies and complexity. Those aspects help to show the different epistemic positions in the energy field and stakeholders' consideration of the need to integrate diversified disciplines and knowledge in green energy innovation.

4.1 The Sustainable Energy Future

Our sample shares a common image of the sustainable energy future that appears very close to the current dominant European energy imaginary in which prevails a green-collaborative industrial scheme (Engels *et al.*, 2020). In 5-10 years, small-scale distributed systems, like roof-integrated photovoltaic, will increase relevance in their country scenario (64.3%) in lieu of large facilities (28.6%), such as wind farms. Consequently, developing technologies are related to the management of a complex system (smart grids, 51.4%) and to ensuring a steady energy supply (storage systems, 43.6%). The energy future will seemingly be shaped by small-medium facilities owned by cooperatives or citizens that will operate in decentralized smart grids for symmetrical exchanges of energy, money and services (48.6% highly agrees). This innovation should mainly contribute to CO₂ reduction and promote social share of "energy benefits", according to 57.9% and 55.0% of respondents.

To straighten out this green innovation, it seems crucial to engage University and public research

centres and citizens. Respondents consider economic agents or institutional and regulatory actors only in the second instance (tab. 2). These data seem to confirm the idea that the energy transition is an innovation process that needs not only novel technological solutions but an active role of citizens in implementing the new scenario.

Tab. 2 – The first sector entities involved in the transition considered relevant in next 5-10 years. Maximum 2 answers per each sector.

Economic agents: manufacturing sector (e.g., wind turbine, PV, etc.)	49,3%
Institutional/regulatory actors: local administrations	45.0%
Research and educational sector: Universities and public research centres	78,6%
Civil society: citizens (single energy consumers)	65.0%

Source: research data.

Despite those data, in the interviews, the opinion emerges that citizens' participation is weak, but it is increasing. Emphasis is placed on promoting local communities by providing them with knowledge and competence on green behaviour, regulation/incentives and technological options. In short, citizens, as local community members, are part of the picture. However, they need new knowledge dissemination and communication tools to circulate positive narratives and good practices in promoting the transition process.

«The issue of grassroots involvement is central because the only hope for the development of a democratic energy model is the involvement of the individuals [...]. All knowledge transfer is central to the choice of development model» (Managing director).

«The energy transition is a decentralised process, and as such it involves the local area, and without a push from the local area it cannot be done. On the one hand, there are policies [...] that can make action viable in the [energy field]. And, on the other hand, there must clearly be the local sensitivity and willingness to do all this, even the possibility» (Policy adviser)

According to our data, stakeholders describe a socio-technical energy imaginary that will be digital, green and delocalized; citizens and local communities need to be involved in decision-making and technology adoption to realise this innovation. The “smart-green energy community” appears in the forthcoming energy scenario. This last aspect opens up crucial questions: in which way (epistemic posture) do different stakeholders see the citizens/communities' involvement? Moreover, what kind of knowledge (transdisciplinarity issue) do they think is relevant for this purpose? Coherently with the literature, data seems to report how those topics are described fairly evenly among actors involved in the transition process because of the emerging socio-technical energy imaginary that frames them. However, essential differences reveal the current transition scenarios' underlying social conflicts or tensions (Rabiej-Sienick *et al.*, 2022; Smith, 2016).

4.2 People and Community Engagement

To build the “smart-green energy community” scenario, ordinary people need to establish their effective and direct role in framing the socio-technical transition consistent with the local context by acquiring several competencies. This point is linked to the democracy issue in the transition process and multilevel energy governance. Intuitively, institutions and public agencies are responsible for setting cooperative initiatives with local actors to enhance a just and effective green transition. However, research suggests that narratives about multilevel governance and democratic arrangements overlap but are not connected enough. Stakeholders maintain specific and distant epistemic positions from each other, which seem related to their particular interests and purposes.

In the sample (tab. 3), actors directly involved in economic or technical sectors (for example, assembling industries, Universities and regulatory authorities) consider it essential to involve a wide range of stakeholders in co-defining transition strategies. However, the local/territorial level seems less important. In this case, an image of “corporate democracy” prevails, where ordinary people are close to clients, customers or user figures. Contrarily, respondents in policy bodies, environmental and third sector seem to stress the relevance, or the equal importance, of the local level in the energy transition. Ordinary people appear linked to “active citizenship” here. In these opposing considerations, we have two perspectives on people engagement as the transition path appears necessarily different.

Tab. 3 - Question 1: “How policies can contribute to strengthening a democratic energy transition process?”; question 2: “Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?”.
Score 4 and 5 in percentage according to stakeholders’ categories.

	Answer question 1: involving a wider range of stakeholders in the co-construction of actions and strategies	Answer question 2: local level should be more relevant in decision making about the energy strategies
Civil society (e.g., grassroots movements)	66.7%	66.7%
Consumptions (e.g., consumers organisations)	100.0%	100.0%
Educational agencies (e.g., Universities)	80.0%	70.0%
Energy production (e.g., energy suppliers)	72.4%	65.5%
Environmental sector (e.g., envir. agencies or associations)	75.0%	91.7%
Manufacturing industry (e.g., assembling industries)	74.0%	66.7%
Policy body (e.g., local administrations, Ministries)	80.0%	80.0%
Regulatory energy authorities (e.g., transmission operators)	100,0%	70.0%
Total	77.7%	72.0%

Source: research data.

In both cases, ordinary people need an empowerment process, but interviewees rarely expand on this issue. When respondents focus on this aspect, they report the role of citizen associations in animating the green innovation process in local communities. However, more relevant stress is on political institutions in defining the transition path. In particular, institutions must push for change in ordinary people and help them to learn appropriate competencies. In this way, citizens’ involvement can increase energy and ecological awareness, promoting a stronger propensity to adopt new practices and participate in collective actions. The policy bodies (such as local administrations) require some new competencies and an innovation orientation to accomplish this task.

«On the political level, there is a philosophy that says: “people are incapable of adapting to change”, so we just must impose it. It would probably be right to impose it. Unfortunately, that’s how it works. But there is obviously a need for a strong political force that leads to dramatization» (Professor of sociology).

«Institutions must regain possession of the educational role, of informing people, first and foremost, because this illusion of “do-it-yourself” at the educational, informative level is an illusion. It is nice to think that you can have direct access to information, but you also need to have the culture, the training and the skills, the critical sense, the foresight, the awareness also to know how to filter from cyberspace» (Professor of chemical engineering).

The role of institutions appears pivotal because, in general, experts and market agents consider ordinary people’s involvement and community participation necessary in implementing new energy arrangements, but they have a substantially subordinate position in the process. Smart

solutions and experts have to support communities toward the best energy option that appears predetermined. In this case, competencies and knowledge emerging in the field (local technicians, local representatives) that could be relevant in a “participative green innovation” process seems not adequately recognised. For this, the integration of lay/local knowledge with the most legitimised and formalised skills profiles (academics, professionals) appears weak in the concrete undergoing the process.

As respondents report, institutions could connect different actors’ specificities (interests, vocabularies, knowledge) to fill voids of a complex, multilevel and contradictory process. It regards the articulated role of connecting governance levels and composing interests at stake to manage societal dynamics through a holistic approach. Nevertheless, such approach is not easy to adopt because, as one of the respondents pointed out, political institutions have their organisational structure and action principles:

«[...] the EU adopts the principle of competition, which means [...] the rules are applied uniformly as if all the players in the system had the same weight. This is an ideological distortion, if you like. [...] in practice the translation of European directives into national laws takes place through the national parliaments, and the ability of these parliaments to adequately represent minorities, even local instances, the instances of individual territories, and to represent them adequately and listen to them depends fundamentally on [...] the political architecture [...] of that country» (Advisory board).

4.3 Knowledge and Competencies

Consistent with the expected scenario, respondents report the knowledge and skills for professions needed to manage the energy transition. New skills are pivotal to governing the novel socio-technical complexity and the variety of actors involved in the “smart-green energy community” setting. The knowledge and skills necessary to facilitate a sustainable transition are transversal but slightly differ for specific actors (tab. 4). In general, on the one hand, hard skills related to digitalisation and data analysis seem necessary to integrate within the current energy field actors that can manage the technical side of smart-green innovation. On the other, soft skills, such as communication competencies, and adaptability/creativity, seem helpful in interfacing with communities and citizens to promote a collaborative and mindful transition. These skills appear essential to strengthen and support the cultural change we need for a sustainable transition. The requirement of an enhanced complex set of skills is also clarified by one of the stakeholders interviewed:

«Engineering, sociological, and economic skills are needed because the topic is very broad and has an impact on various social, technological and economic spheres. The energy transition has been with us for more than 20 years, since liberalization began, at this moment it’s involved a lot with new technologies. The skills needed are economic, technological and social as well as a well-developed knowledge of the regulation of this sector» (Researcher).

Nevertheless, some interesting nuances emerge on competencies if we consider specific respondents. For instance, market actors stress skills related to innovation in production processes or operational moments (software knowledge and big data analysis 72.4%, problem-solving 70.4% and decision-making 58.6%). At the same time, institutional subjects consider competencies helpful in governing the complexity (local context analysis 70.0%, adaptability 80%). Civil society, instead, emphasizes aspects that could contribute to participation and access to knowledge in co-defining the efforts required by the energy transition considering local contexts (local context analysis 66.7%, communication 70.0%, awareness of territorial context and intermediation 50.0%).

Tab. 4 - Considering the sector in which you are directly involved, which hard and soft skills should be trained in the near future to foster the energy transition? Maximum 4 answer for each.

<i>Hard skills</i>		<i>Soft skills</i>	
Software knowledge and Big Data analysis	62.1%	Communication skills	50.7%
Digital skills	54.3%	Adaptability/creativity	50.7%
Local context and paths analysis (Network Analysis)	52.1%	Decision-making	48.6%
Management	39.3%	Problem-solving	47.9%
Machine operation	28.6%	Team-working	43.6%
Logistics	21.4%	Networking/lobbying	32.1%
Languages knowledge	19.3%	Awareness of territorial contexts and intermediation	29.3%
Accounting	9.3%	Learn to learn	20.0%

Source: research data.

Data indicate that energy transition needs professional figures that integrate different disciplines and approaches to implement the green transition, able to connect STEM and SSH. In line with this, respondents think that these topics should be included in educational and training courses because the energy transition is a socio-technical innovation process. At the same time, respondents report that disciplines like “economic and management” and “engineering and technology” are those that need a priority reorganization to answer to the current energy challenges (respectively, 60.7% and 67.9% of the sample). It seems that energy managers and engineers are pivotal professional figures who embody the transition process. These traditional expert profiles need to enlarge and enrich their knowledge and skills because their ordinary disciplinary fields are insufficient.

In the focus-group sessions, a participant reported that these figures are relevant and need to be constantly updated because the energy field constantly changes, and new challenges emerge.

«The people I deal with daily are managers who generally do not have technical profiles, but they have been in the energy sector for a long time, so they gradually acquired technical skills. [...] I don't necessarily have to do engineering studies to enter the sector, but I have to do a training course. Training, so transversal. [...] We are constantly recruiting human resources and following the evolution of the sector [...] both technologically and in terms of services. [...] we create employment opportunities and new professionalism. These are people who have technical expertise in plant maintenance on the one hand, and managerial, economic, and managerial skills within the company on the other» (Employee of an energy company).

Data research suggests that new knowledge and skills are critical for engineers and economists concerning not only novel smart-green technologies but also territorial participation and local actors' involvement. However, other professional figures emerge as relevant in forging relationships with local authorities and links with territorial societies to promote green innovation and distribute energy benefits. These “new” (and renewed) profiles should acquire interpersonal skills to recognise social needs, rights, and communication competencies to establish a collaborative environment to balance local stakeholders' interests with market actors' purposes. In this sense, an interviewee reports the “community planner” in the energy transition.

«[...] the figure of the community planner, a syncretic figure that combines the urban planner, the territorialist, the sociologist, that combines all these skills put together can certainly make a difference, including the legal skills» (PhD researcher).

An uncritical general imaginary of the energy transition is therefore beginning to emerge, based on the same static conception of skills. This is mainly grounded in the dominant and positive image of this process and its subordination to the market.

Another case of new profiles is the “project developer”, which respondents qualified precisely.

This expert necessarily masters technical disciplines, but it should encompass both humanities and social science in their curriculum more than other figures. Accordingly, this expert's main competencies are related to communication, networking and decision-making (tab. 5). Our respondents and interviewees recall the necessity to combine scientific and social disciplines specifically for profiles directly in contact with local communities or citizens. Nevertheless, project developers can be qualified as market actors that work mainly for companies, and then intermediations with local actors/contexts are addressed by companies' purposes. On the contrary, experts like community planners seem close to institutional purposes to regulate competing interests to achieve the collective good. We can trace this difference in the role of educational agencies. The sample indicates Universities (43.6%) and energy companies (33.6%) – as on-the-job training or internal training – places where new skills have to be developed and spread. Social issues are pivotal for both, but the aspects on which Universities and companies should focus are diverse. For example, universities should consider environmental and ethical aspects in developing green novelties. It recalls the role of the public collective in preserving common goods. On the contrary, energy companies should focus on management and gender issues, which govern contingencies.

Data suggests that connecting disciplines in the energy transition takes work. In the survey, we decided to ask about a well-known "interdisciplinarity" concept as a proxy for transdisciplinarity one.

Tab. 5 - Disciplines and skills that characterize the "ideal job profile" for project developer in the renewables and energy efficiency sector.

<i>Disciplines</i>	Energy project developers	Average of other profiles
Arts and humanities	5.7%	2.6%
Engineering and technology	59.3%	87.2%
Social sciences and management	29.3%	6.2%
<i>Soft skills</i>		
Communication	20.7%	8.6%
Decision-making	26.4%	13.8%
Networking/lobbying	7.9%	3.3%
<i>Hard skills</i>		
Languages knowledge	9.3%	5.5%
Management	41.4%	15.4%
Network analysis	15.7%	7.1%

Source: research data.

On a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (definitively), we asked respondents if they thought interdisciplinarity was an important issue; around 81.5% said that it is relevant (4 and 5 scores). Nevertheless, they also indicate that acquiring and practising interdisciplinarity competencies is difficult, respectively 57.9% and 66.4%. According to some interviewees, these difficulties are related to the absence of figures able to define conditions in managing dialogue and coordination toward transition purposes. In this sense, stakeholders still maintain an epistemic distance, and transdisciplinarity is not easily reachable.

«I strongly think that we must not lose the depth of our own disciplinary knowledge, of the method, and we must instead work more on the connection between figures with different backgrounds, who must build up a capacity for scientific and project-related relations, etc» (Professor of chemical engineering). «There is a lack of transversal experience, where people from different fields can communicate with each other. Getting social scientists and engineers to communicate is not easy! It would be important to create people who facilitate these meetings, who can effectively organise a meeting between different groups of stakeholders, so that a constructive atmosphere can emerge. A major limitation is precisely that of creating opposition. A useful figure would therefore be represented by these facilitators, who

are not people that have to promote a project but are people who have to promote dialogue between different interests, therefore without espousing an a priori thesis» (Researcher).

What has been reconstructed so far leads us to believe that, as far as the distribution of expertise is concerned, the view of the respondents appears predominantly flat. It refers to an uncritical imaginary of the energy transition, entrenched mainly on the dominant and positive images of this process and its subordination to the market. This, according to writers, may depend on two factors: the first refers to the education of the respondents themselves, who are already involved in the transition scenario. The second issue, on the other hand, depends on the fact that the very vision of the energy future that is dominant among stakeholders is built on a common imaginary that bases its foundation on the status quo and current dominant interests. In this scenario, therefore, the (few) differences underscore an epistemic distance between SSH and STEM disciplines.

4.4 Gender and Energy Issues

Gender issues are another relevant topic in the energy transition that helps us observe the epistemic and transdisciplinary issues. In our sample, women involved in the energy sector have a higher educational level (77.0% have a PhD, Master or similar) compared to men (59.0%), but, at the same time, a lower job position; women that report being “top manager” or “manager with high responsibilities” are 25% versus 38.5% of men. This gender gap seems related to the different educational backgrounds: 57.5% of women indicated “engineering and technology”, while men were 62.8%. Women prevail in “social science and humanities” disciplines (30% versus 9%) while men in “economics and management” ones (15.4% versus 2.5%). Data also show how STEM is an increasingly dominant discipline in the energy (and the energy transition) sector, and SSH are growing (tab. 6), particularly for younger respondents. A specialization process in the field appears to reduce the relevance of “economic and management” competencies. At the same time, engineer profiles consolidate positions and gain new skills, as stressed in the last section. SSH significantly increased, but respondents with degrees in SSH, mainly women (54.5%), are not in high job positions, despite it being reported in the previous section that SSH disciplines offer knowledge and skills useful to promote processes of public involvement and persuasive actions for the green innovation process. It shows a peculiar epistemic dominance in the field.

Tab. 6 – Respondents for disciplines, gender and age.

	Women		Men		Total	
	≥ 40 yrs. old	< 40 yrs. old	≥ 40 yrs. old	< 40 yrs. old	≥ 40 yrs. old	< 40 yrs. old
Economics and management	5.6%	0.0%	23.7%	7.5%	15.2%	5.4%
Engineering and technology	55.6%	59.1%	60.5%	65.0%	56.1%	63.5%
Natural sciences	5.6%	4.5%	2.6%	10.0%	4.5%	6.8%
Social sciences and humanities	27.8%	31.8%	5.3%	12.5%	10.6%	20.3%
Other or not indicated	5.6%	4.5%	7.9%	5.0%	13.6%	4.1%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: research data.

Respondent women are around a third of the sample, but they propose a slightly diverse opinion on the sustainable energy transition process. Women think that green energy innovation should involve subjects linked with (or able to connect) local context, such as citizens (68%), end users (50%), plant developers (35%) and grassroots movements (18%). On this, men suggest an essential role for actors related to the industries and administrations, like university and research centres (86%), manufacturing sectors (51%) and local political bodies (51%). Moreover, even though

the most urgent priorities in the energy transition are slightly different for women and men, women prevail in aspects related to the environment and social dimensions (CO2 reduction, 63%; job opportunities, 43%; reduction of impact on the landscape, 43%), while men consider priority economic and regulatory ones (more socially share energy production, 58%; a simplified regulatory model, 49%; improving the security of energy supply, 35%). Differences insist even on the aspects that should be stressed in the educational path to support the green transition. For both women and men, “university and public research centres” and “energy companies” (in the on-job learning process) are the main places to develop competencies to achieve the transition. Nevertheless, women focus more on socio-environmental aspects, while men focus on technical and environmental ones (tab. 7).

Tab. 7 – Aspects that should be focused on University and energy companies to support the transition. Score 4 and 5 in percentage by gender.

	University		Energy companies	
	Women	Men	Woman	Men
Environmental aspects	87.5%	75.6%	85.0%	71.8%
Ethical issues	70.0%	60.2%	75.0%	66.7%
Gender aspects	47.5%	42.3%	55.0%	37.2%
Management issues	77.5%	74.40%	77.5%	70.5%
Social aspects	90.0%	65.4%	82.5%	69.2%
Technical/engineering issues	82.5%	84.6%	77.5%	83.3%

Source: research data.

For both, gender and ethical issues are minority elements to focus on, albeit women stress ethical and gender issues in the case of companies; supposedly, they report difficulties in the private sector to emerge as valuable skilled employees. Our respondents seem to record gender gaps that recall what is known in the literature as horizontal and vertical forms of occupational gender segregation (Valentini, 1997), as to say gender stereotypes influence the choice of educational/training paths and employment sectors to target (horizontal segregation); top positions are primarily a men prerogative (vertical segregation).

«Women always must show that we are intelligent, but not so much. [...] We have developed powerful chameleon skills [...], it is not enough for us women to know how to do things; we also need [...] to think when it is appropriate to propose something and when not, when to take a step forward or backwards. [...] Do you know how many times in the early days, about ten years ago or even more, that I was travelling around Europe, the energy tables were all male? 80% of the time, it was just me. In that context, they had a good-natured attitude toward me; I was «the only girl and young person» there. I did not have any influence role» (Director of Department of territorial government).

In sum, the presence of women in the energy field and the increasing relevance of SSH (evident in the case of younger respondents) appears to be an essential chance to determine a transdisciplinary dynamic in the sector promoting a more inclusive transition process. However, in the interviews and focus groups, subjects suggest that a slow change is taking place, particularly in the renewable sector. Nevertheless, the presence of women in the energy field continues to be minor, although their skills and attitudes are considered worthy of the transition process.

«As far as the presence of women is concerned, I would definitely say a minority, let's say 30%. I have a female boss, but at her level, she is one of the few, and I do not think there are any other women above her, so I would say there is still a strong gender gap (I.18, Nuclear Physicist).

«Energy is a very masculine field because it is always linked to technical education, and culturally technical education is something men have access to, all STEM subjects. That is still the situation today, but it is slowly evolving» (Member of renewables company).

«I see a prevalence of men, but with a gender disparity also linked to age. If I think of a group of people under 35/40, it is probably a draw. Men are more or less the same number as women. Perhaps because they are also new professional figures, women can enter more easily. However, if you go up in age, they are primarily men» (Project manager of an environmental association).

Gender issue, as a problematic analytical dimension, poses the question of how to promote transdisciplinarity and reduce epistemic distances among stakeholders in the energy field. Although interviewees mentioned a gradual increase in the presence of women in the innovative renewable sectors, many gaps persist in terms of employment, management and pay. In addition, research findings show that policy-makers consider women more as beneficiaries (passive role) than innovation agents (active role) and female employees are involved in administrative offices and mid-management positions. The public debate seems to converge on requesting a “gender-balanced” energy transition. However, our respondents are timid about this issue, and gender is not reported as relevant. The absence of emphasis specifically on this issue confirms the stereotyped polarisation between men and women on competencies that also seems to show the implicit division of epistemology postures that dialogue with difficulties.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we propose an analysis of how energy transition develops itself along different conceptions of reality, and how it creates reality itself, both in theory and in practice. Transdisciplinarity is considered a way to manage the epistemic distances among actors and, at the same time, to face high levels of complexity and uncertainty of eco-innovation. The “desirable” futures emerge as inherently political visions that embody social values enacted in situated energy practices. In other words, it represents a sociotechnical imaginary, a collectively held, institutionally stabilized, and publicly performed vision of a good energy future.

In this context, the participative and just transition, as principle, is insistently claimed as one of the pivotal points of the EU path to a decarbonized society, but significant insights seem to emerge from the analysis of ASSET research dataset.

The epistemic differences in the sustainable energy transition are commonly considered a barrier to green innovation and, at the same time, “lay knowledge” is claimed relevant as well as the involvement of citizens, local communities, and women. However, the fragmentation among specialized knowledges affects the concerns of the respondents, which seem to depict the disciplinary dialogue more as a vague wish than as an actual practice. Training and education institutions are introducing timid transdisciplinary working/learning method (Yeung *et al.*, 2021). Professionals who embody technical and engineering skills are aware that an efficient and sustainable energy transition needs to be consistent with an ecology of values, attitudes, and knowledge that may not fit with the “dominant” (neoliberal) culture of sustainability. So, mediation management and cooperative building are tasks that need to be organized with the professional profile also of those that are in charge to take care of the economic sustainability of green investments (Minervini, Scotti, 2020).

Data shows that professional re-skilling can be designed within a general scheme fostering not only a sort of disciplinary hybridization, but also the abilities to collect, interpret and be responsive to the requests from those local communities involved in experiences of energy transition. If the composition of STEM and SSH sensitivities seems to be a convergence point of discussion from the respondents, at the same time research results seem to denounce a lack of actual connections and practices. Actually, a STEM oriented approach prevails in the energy field, and despite the declared relevance of SSH, they are quite side-lined. Social scientists and experts from humanities participate with ambiguous roles, too often as facilitators for black-boxed innovations more than for a participatory and inclusive decision making process.

In short, energy still remains an engineering-lead field and the rhetoric about transdisciplinarity is characterised by a sort of depoliticization leading to an abstract/generic idea of connection of plural epistemologies, without a problematization of its actual translation in actual practices (with all the related contradictions, criticalities, challenges). The vague claim to transdisciplinary overlaps with a confirmation of a prescriptive image of the transition in financial and technological terms. The common awareness of epistemic distances doesn't lead to the reconfiguration of the big pictures but, paradoxically, seems to be confirmative of the status quo. In the same way, conflicts, power asymmetries and social exclusion could be reproduced in the new energy future despite the "smart-green energy community" recalling energy democracy concepts (Stephens, 2019).

Research findings reasonably lead to suggest that institutions can improve their commitment to develop non-rhetorical and practice-based transdisciplinary paths for the eco-transition. In the case of the EU, the Just Transition Mechanism (JTM) is devoted to reaching climate neutrality by 2050, ensuring that no one will be left behind in the green innovation process. The JTM offers funds to avoid that this transition could negatively affect industries, workers, and communities. In addition, territorial just transition plans finance social-territorial initiatives facilitating employment opportunities in new sectors, offering re-skilling opportunities, investing in fighting energy poverty and promoting access to energy. Nevertheless, European policies are not radical enough to put in question the "ontology" of energy transition itself, confirming an ecological modernization of the field and assembling more or less adaptive governance arrangements, the economization of ecology, and technological innovation.

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INCONTRO FUORI LUOGO

Struggles for the Right to Housing between Physical and Social Distances. Interview with Miguel A. Martínez

Miguel A. Martínez is Professor of Housing and Urban Sociology at the Institute for Housing and Urban Research (IBF), Uppsala University (Sweden) <https://www.miguelangelmartinez.net/>. During his academic career, he has held teaching positions at several universities in Spain, Portugal, and Hong Kong. In addition, Martínez has worked in the Housing Department of the Municipality of Vigo and as a consultant on various urban plans in Spain.

His research focuses on the analysis of urban movements and activism, with a special interest in participatory processes in urban planning. His study topics include housing policies, socio-spatial segregation, public space use, urban commons, sustainable mobility, labour and social structures, local governance, and gentrification. Being also interested in migration and globalization, since 2011 Miguel Martínez has broadened his critical gaze by going on to study anti-neoliberal, pro-democracy and pro-common goods movements as well, such as the Indignados in Spain or the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong. Methodologically, his approach is predominantly qualitative and developed from his early interest in Participatory-Action-Research methods and processes. His studies have been conducted in different urban settings, such as Porto, Vigo, Madrid and Hong Kong, where he spent long research periods. He also spent shorter periods of research in Medellín, Chicago, Beijing, Berlin, Amsterdam, Buenos Aires, Belo Horizonte, etc. Participating firsthand in various social movements that were developing in these cities, Martínez focused his studies on this issue.

As Martínez himself points out in one of his latest works, there are not many comprehensive critical analyses of the various research conducted on squatters' movements in Europe. The author proposes one in the volume *Squatters in the capitalist city. Housing, Justice and Urban Politics* (2020), highlighting the opportunity to study the historical trajectories of the various housing movements in order to guide progressive policy perspectives. In general, the theme of housing is necessarily linked to issues of justice and social inclusion, which Martínez refers to the sphere of urban politics. But his attention to the spatial dimensions of social movements is focal in all his work. In the volume just cited, he compares different movements in different cities and contexts, framing squatting not as an illegal and marginal practice, but as a long-lasting transnational urban movement with important political and social implications. In this way, he highlights the distance that often exists between urban policies and the right to housing.

In the volume *Resisting Citizenship. Migrant Housing Squats Against State Enclosures* (2021), Martínez addresses the study of migrant squats, noting how they are incorporated into the broader framework of movements engaged in anti-racist, anarchist and anti-authoritarian politics. These coalesce with migrants' squats to share spaces for claiming civil rights, thus narrowing the distance "between hosts and guests" and building networks of solidarity on which processes of social inclusion are structured.

The most usual form of protest for squatters is the unauthorised occupation of buildings and land, which according to Martínez represents a well-established repertoire of protest. It is the main socio-spatial practice (condensing means and ends of protest) used by European squatting movements over the last forty years.

The concept of the 'right to the city' generally underlies Martínez's analytical reflection (Lefebvre, 1968). However, it must be said that with respect to this concept, Martínez himself takes a critical position (*European squatters' movements and the right to the city, in Routledge Handbook of Contemporary European Social Movements*, 2020). Indeed, according to the author, the concept

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can help to understand squatting movements insofar as activists take over urban spaces; they are centrally located and connected to urban structures and networks; they practice self-management, direct democracy and the empowerment of the marginalised. However, it neglects other sources of oppression and social division such as gender, ethnicity, citizenship and housing status, which can generate other equally significant movements. As Martínez states, the right-to-city approach is valid, but fails to capture modern complexities; therefore, comparative case studies are needed to better understand urban activism. And this is the main avenue of research he follows.

QUESTION: *Distances have long been a focus of public, political, and scientific debate.*

During the long COVID period, physical distancing as a preventive measure inspired pandemic governance strategies. In the post-pandemic phase, the logic of distancing has been incorporated into the practices and discourses of associated life; it has helped define new forms of cooperation and labor organization. However, it has also activated social, political, and scientific contrasts. Increasingly, therefore, the concept of distance eludes an unambiguous definition; conversely, it lends itself to multiple declinations in the various scientific and political domains.

With respect to your research interests, what do you think is the source of this difficulty in converging on a shared definition?

ANSWER: In urban sociology we like to distinguish spatial and social distances, only to combine them afterwards. To complicate our analyses, we assume that distances across physical spaces are socially relative, depending on the available material means of transport and technologies of communications, their efficiency, affordability, regulation, etc. but also on more straightforward social constraints such as their individualised or collective character, the meaning we assign to them, the social forces that push or restrict us to move, etc. Distance, therefore, is just one of the multiple spatial features (as locations, volumes, geographical scales, etc.) that are socially produced, shaped, transformed, appropriated, communicated, represented, planned, regulated, contested, etc. Moreover, we should not investigate distance independently from other closely related socio-spatial phenomena such as physical mobility, commuting flows, migrations, and the transportation of goods, people, and information. And we should know the different spatial and social scales that are concerned with the specific phenomenon of distances under examination. For example, residential mobility within a city may substantially differ from residential mobility within a metropolitan area, a country, or across national borders. What do the authorities rule about all those different moves? What labour conditions and political regimes press people to move? How do different social groups and networks help each other to mobilise resources and information able to facilitate such moves? Who moves, why, and with what consequences at each pole of the move, or during their trajectory? These are some of the core questions that, in my view, should ground empirical inquiries about the notion of socio-spatial distance.

The most obvious illustration of this approach is offered by the deadly migrant moves across the Mediterranean sea. Most migrants and war refugees pay more for these trips with a high likelihood of dying, than the cost of a regular flight. They only do so because European authorities do not issue travel visas for non-wealthy citizens from the countries of origin of those migrants. In addition, the European Union invests large amounts of money to patrol the costs (e.g. Frontex) and pay third countries with no democratic rule of law (Libia, Tunis, Morocco, etc.) to prevent migrants from arriving European territory and return to conditions of slavery and torture. It is not the available technology and means of transport what is crucially at stake to understand these itineraries in order to bridge a certain physical distance, but the criminal European policies that foster human rights violations and the endless death of thousands of people every year in this and other routes of migration (see, for example, the reports and statements published by Alarm Phone: <https://alarmphone.org>).

The Covid-19 pandemic was an additional extraordinary period calling to explore socio-spatial issues. Since my current research is very much focused on grassroots housing and anti-home

evictions struggles (see, for example: <http://siba-ese.unisalento.it/index.php/paco/article/view/26872>), I observed many social problems and contradictions associated to the public policies dealing with the pandemic. These three ones were especially striking: 1) In many countries staying at home was compulsory, even for the homeless, despite the lack of available shelters; 2) Leaving home was only allowed, and even forcibly requested, to so-called essential workers, usually those with the lowest income; 3) Working from home became normalised in many professions, especially in service and managerial positions. The restrictions to physical mobility and face-to-face, real life social contacts were entirely new for millions of human beings who were not prior subject to this kind of infectious diseases (e.g. the SARS outbreak in Southern East Asia in 2003, the Ebola epidemic in West Africa in 2013-16, etc.). Policies changed very much from month to month, but also from country to country, mostly hinging on the scientific data and remedies suggested by experts.

However, many people lost their jobs and their income, which eroded their rights to secure and affordable housing, in case they already had a home to dwell in. Home evictions due to mortgage or rent arrears were still rolling out in countries such Spain, despite certain policies to mitigate or postpone the implementation of court ordeals. Internet and phone communications kept some social ties alive without the need of moves to meet up, at least at a superficial level, but mental disorders, isolation, pain, frustration, and health issues in general also increased dramatically all over. The elderly were especially hit, subject to poor—or the denial of—assistance, as extremely shown in the case of the Madrid region with more than 7,000 casualties in elderly homes, which represented a 20% higher figure than in the rest of Spain because the regional government refused to provide transportation to hospitals (<https://doi.org/10.3390/epidemiologia4020019>; see a similar approach to the elderly with a seemingly deadly outcome in Sweden: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-022-01097-5#change-history>). Working class and poor families had no resources (laptop, Internet connection, studying space, etc.) or cultural capacity to help their children with school work from home. Furthermore, the right to protest in public spaces often became prohibited, although grassroots organisations, for example, managed to set up free food deliveries and other forms of mutual aid in deprived neighbourhoods (<https://www.interfacejournal.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Martinez.pdf>).

These scattered phenomena may illuminate the interconnected configurations of socio-spatial distance. On the one hand, there is no absolute distance (or space, for the matter) because its definition depends, above all, on the unequal distribution of resources, information, and social capital among different social groups and classes. On the other hand, we can accept or question physical distance, stay put or move across spaces, but these hardly are individual choices without constraints. On the contrary, our belonging to specific social groups and classes; the material, cultural, and social support of others; and the state regulations at play, all set limits to our socio-spatial practices. Finally, most people in the world live under the rule of the capitalist global market and corporate powers, which also affects how distances are conceived and produced, how significant they are, and how are contested by a global and intersectional working class. Whether on daily commute, residential mobility, or transnational migration, all these moves imply different degrees of comfort and hazardous conditions which differ between the well-off and the worst-off, let alone its environmental impacts. As a consequence, far from essentialising any socio-spatial category like distance, I would suggest to investigate the specific ways that social distances (and its antagonist, proximity) between groups and classes, are translated into physical spatial distances, with more or less symmetric reflections according to significant historical, political, economic, and cultural contexts.

QUESTION: *From the postwar period until the early 1980s, Italy saw a strong push for public housing. Then there was a significant slowdown, partly due to the resulting conurbation. This emphasized the gap between housing policies and housing demand. What strategies could rebalance this gap? What is the role of social mobilization?*

ANSWER: It was not only Italy, but many other Western countries too experienced a similar rise and decline of public housing policies. Neoliberalism from the 1970-1980s onwards was especially damaging in this respect. The promotion of homeownership with many formulae (tax breaks for homeowners, privileged access of former residents to the privatisation of public housing, subsidies to mortgage loans, etc.), the promise of unearned returns by engaging in the speculative housing market with increasing financial deregulations, and the bad reputation of many public housing estates in terms of quality standards and the concentration of bureaucratically designated "social problems" (unemployment, isolated ethnic minorities, crime, etc.), all contributed to erode the popularity of public/social housing as social welfare. Cuts to state spending, large transfers of wealth and fiscal benefits to private corporations with the futile intention of attracting and fixing capital in every given territory (either cities, regions, or countries) came hand in hand with the same stream of neoliberal policies. The 2008 financial crisis and the austerity policies that followed suit did not help to recover a renewed imaginary of the great benefits that public housing policies carried on in the golden period after the WWII (1940s-1960s or until the 1970s in the case of Sweden, for example).

The bad news is that housing crises became more acute over the last decades for other reasons too, although the rise of urban neoliberalism certainly is at their roots. The main gap or contradiction at stake here is between housing policies, housing markets, and affordable, secure, decent, adequate, high quality, well-located, and low-environmental impact housing. In other words, the main conflict is between the right to housing for all, as a basic need to be guaranteed by society and state administrations, and the collusion of state and market actors who just approach housing as a for-profit commodity and investment asset. It is not merely the number of housing units produced or the available amount of land to be developed with residential purposes, what should lead housing policies, as is falsely highlighted in many public debates which are animated by pro-development (or YIMBY) lobbies, but the measures to protect the right to housing for everyone who experiences hardships in this respect. The latter have to necessarily start with a strong promotion of non-commodified housing, not only with a large and well-managed state-owned housing stock, but also with support to true cooperative housing (limited-equity coops instead of fake ones as market-oriented condominiums, for example), "housing first" programmes for the homeless, the regularisation and decriminalisation of squatters, the protection of tenants, and policies to improve under-standard and overcrowded housing. None of these measures can be implemented without restricting private property rights and the operations of real estate capital and global asset managers and investors. These restrictions are common in labour markets (e.g. by establishing a minimum wage and health regulations), in setting prices of strategic commodities such as energy, in setting the rules of road traffic, in military defence affairs, and in issues related to human rights such as trafficking, for example. Hence, there is no essential objection to not apply crucial regulations in the field of housing too. The history of past successful public housing policies should also be a mirror where to look at in order to learn lessons of what is possible and what is needed to be improved nowadays.

In terms of current struggles, my reflections above clearly echo the demands of many contemporary housing movements. There are tenants' unions and an international federation (IUT), especially fighting for the expansion of third-generation rent controls. There also is a network of organisations working on homelessness (FEANTSA). Squatting movements in relation to housing but also combined with demands of self-managed social centres, and in solidarity with migrants and refugees in urgent need of accommodation and support networks, are more alive than ever, especially across Europe and despite the latest legal changes that criminalise them. Campaigns opposing the privatisation and demolition of social housing are thriving too. Anti-home evictions struggles in Spain (with the PAH, Platform for People Affected by Mortgages), Italy, or Ireland, for example, have opened up new avenues of joint direct action and institutional litigation in housing activism. So did the campaigns to expropriate and socialise the real estate assets of large housing corporations (Deutsche Wohnen & Co in Berlin) and banks (Credit Suisse

in Switzerland, La SAREB es Nuestra in Spain), which aligned with protests against international vulture funds such as Blackstone (in Denmark and Spain, for example). The revival and rise of bottom-up housing cooperatives is another indicator of civic initiatives that revitalise and energise housing movements. Residents' struggles against the displacement effects of low-income households due to gentrification and the construction of infrastructures, mega projects, parks, and other public works add to the same tradition of urban and housing activism.

Many housing campaigns and struggles are local, but international networks such as the ECRHC (European Coalition for the Right to Housing and the City) provide an umbrella of expertise and mutual support that was unknown just a couple of decades ago. These are just a few illustrations of the crucial significance that struggles for social reproduction in the realm of housing, with a clear intersectional and multi-scalar character, are representing as grassroots responses to the increasing financialisation of the economy, the precarisation of working and living conditions especially for women, and the state-sponsored subjugation and repression of migrants.

QUESTION: *In one of your essays (Grassroots struggles challenging housing financialization in Spain, 2022) you state that "popular protests and campaigns are not powerless when they criticize, expose and fight the holders of financial power." In your opinion, how generalizable is this statement to other contexts?*

ANSWER: It is always difficult to imagine that lay citizens, workers, and even local governments can question and challenge the rule of powerful large corporations and institutional investors whose assets are even bigger than the GDP of some countries, let alone financial institutions such as the IMF and the European Central Bank where the US and the German governments, respectively, rule and veto their agendas. However, it is not impossible, in addition to represent a moral and political obligation if we are to save the most basic democratic rights, and guarantee a minimum well-being for everyone affected by the operations of all those powerholders.

In the past two decades there were anti-globalisation campaigns and boycotts to large corporations such as Nike, Nestlé, Apple, Coca-Cola, Inditex-Zara, Microsoft, Google, etc. which were only partially successful. The extraordinary referendums calling for the expropriation of DW in Berlin and the numerous protest actions against vulture funds and asset managers such as Blackstone, have proven that there are many more possibilities and cracks to expand than it was prior imagined. In Spain, a small group of activists (15mPaRato) launched a crowdfunding process and endured a long legal trial asking for accountability of the major savings bank in Spain, Bankia, that was bailed out by the government in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis. Ethical finances, participation in urban planning, legal litigation, and international networking and media strategies, thus, show activist routes that can be explored in order to empower grassroots activists when facing financial powers.

Struggles against banks involved in criminal money laundering and the hypocritical tolerance of tax havens, for example, also require deep legislative changes that need alliances between activists and members of parliaments. Similar joint efforts of direct action protests and institutional initiatives are needed to enact rent controls and increase affordable and high-quality public housing. As usual, the generalisation of one political campaign to other contexts is not as easy for activists as it is for global capital when moving across national boundaries. Grassroots activism, above all, is very much dependent on local political opportunity structures and their own legacies, background, and networks from previous movements, in addition to new allies and the involvement of third parties, as I have described in the article you mentioned and in my latest book on squatting movements (<https://www.routledge.com/Squatters-in-the-Capitalist-City-Housing-Justice-and-Urban-Politics/Martinez/p/book/9781138856950>). Capital investments, however, can easily flee to other localities where their return rate is more rapidly achieved, so more international cooperation is needed to interfere their operations and disclose their both illegal and anti-social activities.

QUESTION: *Currently in Italy, the demand for the “right to housing” has taken the form of university students’ protest against high rents. In some cities, many rentiers are also converting their properties into bed-and-breakfasts or vacation homes, greatly reducing the supply for off-campus students. The physical distance of university locations is another relevant structural factor in these dynamics. Compared to the contexts you studied, do similar problems emerge? Do you see trends in this direction at the transnational level?*

ANSWER: Yes, this phenomenon is on the rise, especially in large and touristified cities. University students are only one of the social groups experiencing rising rents and displacement far away off their educational centres. Migrants, single-parent households (often led by female parents), precarious workers, the elderly, and even substantial factions of the middle-class who are not homeowners, are subject to similar blows by largely deregulated housing markets. For example, a few years ago, I was shocked with the media coverage of a wave of rapes to female tenants in New York which were instigated by landlords who wanted to evict them in order to raise the rents. Landlords-led harassment, nuisances and criminal activities targeting tenants still are an under-researched field in housing studies, but also an urgent political and judicial matter that demands rapid and effective response. Another example is the combined effect of the global investors landing in the university students’ dorms sector and the higher international mobility of tertiary students, not only within Europe after the Erasmus Programme and the Bologna Process over the last two decades, but also due to the rising trends of international educational mobility from the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) countries. The industry of “studentification” also has impacts beyond speculative and inflationary moves in their accommodations, including their surrounding urban areas and many associated forms of consumption. Nevertheless, not all the above mentioned groups are equally organised when it comes to protest and rallying against this increasing housing exclusion and inequality. The lobbying power of companies such as Airbnb and global investors should not be dismissed either. These firms are extremely busy with their attempts to prevent rent control measures and regulations of short-term rentals from being approved or implemented, at all legislative and political levels, which keeps a large range of illegal practices active (documented, for example, here: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/09697764231155386>). Other entrepreneurial organisations and right-wing politicians are fully aligned with them, let alone the Court of Justice of the European Union that fiercely defends free market competition, regardless of its social benefits to increase equality.

QUESTION: *Staying on the university mobilization, it is expressing the needs of a particular social category (students, youth, out-of-towners, cross-gender, etc.). In your opinion, does the connotation of this protest risk marking distances on the broader level of housing demand? How far-reaching could the social effects of this struggle be?*

ANSWER: All struggles and campaigns are led by specific social categories and target the either same or other social categories as opponents, allies, and supporters. There is no magical recipe to decide which social selection will be more successful in these endeavours. Sometimes, activists can hide or downplay their own social background if they appeal to a wider potential social basis of mobilisation to join their claims. Labour struggles, more often than not, for example, use to have more symmetry: organised workers call for solidarity and unity with other workers. Residents, tenants, and students activism, on the contrary, tend to combine a diverse range of social categories and groups, so it is their specific demands which need to be framed in a convincing discourse to be appealing to sympathisers, and challenging for their opponents. Eventually, both the political discourse that activists manage to efficiently convey and spread, and the impact of the protest actions they choose to perform, are crucial to decide whether their social identity plays out a significant role in the movement’s achievements. The historical context of political configurations and capitalist development are crucial alike.

University students are a typical imprecise social category in which class, gender, and ethnicity—just to name the main categorical social features and cleavages—may be blurred or significantly diverse. Young age, high educational status, and their particular transitional life stage from depending on their parents' resources to initiate income-earning activities on their own, are often perceived by society as a very specific social condition, even a privileged one despite its internal and often hidden diversity, that is not shared by most. I will recall one clear illustration of this problem. In the decade of the economic boom in Spain before the financial crisis, 1997-2007, there was a social movement, V de Vivienda, that protested about the housing exclusion experienced by the youth given the disparity between precarious jobs and housing prices, plus the shortage of rental options and social housing. Some scholars argued that the movement failed because it was led by university students who were fully isolated from the concerns of the rest of society, who, in turn, were highly drawn into the mortgage and homeownership whirlpool. Activists were sharply correct in articulating their claims, but even the working class youth, let alone the migrant population, became easy targets for the tricks of banks and real estate developers trying to sell houses with loans and future expectations of rising prices and increasing private wealth. Housing became a massive investment for all social classes. Therefore, the housing movement declined quickly

(<https://revintsociologia.revistas.csic.es/index.php/revintsociologia/article/view/348/355>).

Housing was indeed a structural problem of the Spanish economy and homeownership was a highly risky decision for many households, but only V de Vivienda activists were prescient about all its implications. Looking back, however, we can assess that this students-led housing struggle paid off in the long-term. They raised awareness about housing issues, pioneered innovative ways of online and offline mobilisations, and trained activists who were crucial in the following housing mobilisation in the aftermath of the financial crisis: the anti-home evictions PAH (Platform of People Affected by Mortgages). We can thus argue that the PAH learned the lessons of the failed V de Vivienda, by continuing its political framing while also widening the social basis of such form of activism. In so doing, the PAH attracted impoverished working class (and even some low-middle class) people, and especially migrant households led by women. Hence, university students in a previous economic cycle, paved the way for the largest housing mobilisation in Spanish history ever, only in the next economic cycle.

As a conclusion, I do not see a problem with the fact that university students get concerned about housing issues if they articulate an efficient discourse and deploy protest campaigns able to build strong alliances with other affected and supportive social groups. It is also important that they speak up about their own housing problems because, first, they anchor the struggle in concrete and contradictory real conditions of living, and second, because they trigger critical analysis that help distinguish their experiences from the housing precarity and exclusion which is overwhelming other social groups. In fact, there are different types of landlords, rental situations, and housing regimes that may suggest specific strategies for advancing housing claims. Either students alone or in collaboration with other social groups, have to identify them and do some research that grounds their campaigns.

QUESTION: *In your opinion, is it possible to institutionalize housing movements? What could be the added value of this in terms of democratizing housing policies? How much could this reduce the distances that still exist today between housing policies and the right to housing?*

ANSWER: Many social movements in general, and housing movements in particular, have become institutionalised. In Sweden, for example, it is very well-known the case of the Tenants' Union (Hyresgästföreningen) established in 1941, one of the largest in the world with more than half a million members. It became a key player in the rise of the social welfare model in Sweden, tightly connected with the decades-ruling social democratic party, and even linked to cooperative housing construction. The Tenants' Union was also granted with the right to negotiate rents

with landlords on a general basis, which resulted in very limited rent rises over many decades. Researchers hold different interpretations about the development of this paradigmatic case of institutionalisation. Most agree that it played a very positive role to effectively apply rent control that made housing quite affordable in Sweden for a long period of time, until the 1990s at least. Critics argue that the organisation became too bureaucratic and was unable to efficiently respond to the market-oriented policies that changed housing since the 1990s, but especially during the last two decades with the privatisation of around 10% of public housing, the rise of corporate landlords, shortages of affordable housing, and a worrying wave of renoventions (see, for example, <https://radicalhousingjournal.org/2021/resisting-renovictions/>). Others argued that, once institutionalised, such housing organisations do not resort to direct and disruptive actions of protest, such as rent strikes, any longer, despite these being regularly employed at their very origins.

Another example is the legalization of squatter houses that has been possible in countries such as Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom since the Eighties. Legalisation is not the only form of institutionalisation, but is especially contested when it comes to radical housing movements such these. On the one hand, not all squatters are convinced that gaining social housing or housing subsidies for them is a fair outcome for everyone experiencing housing problems, and a consistent result with their intended anti-capitalist goals. On the other hand, when the legalisations of squatting becomes a large phenomenon, including many social groups who were active in the struggle and especially social categories more prone to be oppressed in the housing markets and welfare systems, it is usually seen as a victory. In my main book on squatting I first argue that repression against squatters force and constraint negotiations, and it is harshly applied, above all, to those who do not negotiate with the authorities. Second, there exist other forms of social and state institutionalisation that do not entail legalisations of occupied buildings or access to social housing elsewhere. Long-standing squatting movements, for example, have contributed with 'anomalous institutions' that combined housing and other social needs of social, cultural, political, and economic life in cities with certain stability in time, durable self-organised grassroots organisations, and true sharing de-commodified economies (or commons, in short). The dark side of the legalisation processes is not only the likely split between different factions of the movement, but also the unpredicted problems that arise later on (rent rises, end of leases, lack of social support, end of commoning, etc.) and the more repressive policies that authorities feel entitled to implement afterwards, as a way to compensate their concessions (for example, the full banning of squatting, making it a criminal offence).

As sociologists, we should not pre-empt judgements regarding the convenience or benefits coming out from the institutionalisation of social movements. Each movement organisation has the rights to identify their goals of more or less institutional achievements, and the more or less institutional ways of protest. Very often, legal litigations are necessary means of institutional defence for the movements, even if these are not specialised or limited to them. I also think that the history of the labour movement and class struggles always shows many different paths that emancipatory claims can take. Housing movements have strong links with workers' struggles but also present specific demands and features that, in direct or indirect ways, contest existing housing policies and the democratic process to address them. Therefore, researchers need to consider institutional forces and institutionalisation dynamics as part of the problem in which movements are always involved, but not as the only and circumscribed framework to analyse housing needs and possibilities to fight the economic and political elites responsible for the housing question.

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SEZIONI A 3 T



LETTURE A 3 T

Massimo Ilardi (2022), *Le due periferie. Il territorio e l'immaginario*.
Bologna: Derive Approdi, 2022

It is pessimistic perspective that given to us by sociologist Massimo Ilardi in his recent book on the contemporary metropolis *Le due periferie. Il territorio e l'immaginario* (Derive, Approdi 2022). Addressing concepts of territory, politics, and freedom, the author attempts to overcome romantic vision that had seen the city as a place to encourage feelings of social cohesion, community, solidarity, and common good in order to leave space for emergence of urban environment where individual interests, both private and economic, determine its fate. Result is construction of social spaces united by the same, identical dissolution of desires. With a constant reference to failure of large urban housing districts in the city of Rome in the 1970s and 1980s - conceived in their initial aspirations as places that were supposed to encourage solidarity, coexistence and new communities on social level - Ilardi offers a definition of the periphery. What do we mean, today, by periphery if it is no longer a physical distance from centre? If it is no longer place of degraded infrastructures and lack of meeting places? Or if it is no longer that place considered by some, especially by the inhabitants of the 'centre', as marginal and residual compared to places where life is "produced"? Periphery is to be framed today - he will say - as the space of consumption, of the impolitic, where there is no mediation and where domination of emotions prevails. At the same time, it remains, morphologically speaking, a desolate, harsh, arid, threatening territory. The supremacy of consumption, central in urban periphery where citizen' need overlap with those of the consumption, is «negation of property, of any property, and determines the decisive breaking between property and freedom; it is the destructive act as an end in itself [...]» (p. 9), in which individual dissolves not only objects but also relationships, emotions, everything that has duration in time. Inevitably, concept of consumption is linked to concept of freedom and to forms in which it is expressed. Picking up on Ballard, Ilardi argues that periphery is where, more than any other place, practices of freedom that cross metropolitan territories can be shaped. Nothing risky until the author clarifies that the freedom he is talking about does not coincide with concepts of democracy, justice, collectivity, as we have traditionally recognised it. Ilardi's is a freedom no longer mediated by politics and not linked to universal values. It is uncontrolled freedom, without any sense of responsibility, which crosses periphery and unleashes uncontrolled actions there.

And so one wonders when, where and how this transformation of concept of freedom, of politics and therefore of periphery took place. As to when, the author refers to the 1970s and 1980s and what he calls anthropological change. A change no longer driven by politics and with it ideology and idea of the market in which metropolis had been accustomed for decades, but by culture of consumption based on individual desire. Since the 1980s, mass political culture has disappeared, resulting in widespread micro-conflict. This has led, on the one hand, to lack of leadership and, on the other hand, to disappearance of collective action; social minorities have formed based on common interests, but not on community interests. It is no longer principles of social cohesion, community and collective that guide human actions, but rather centrality of emotional capital is recognised, which is the primacy of individual over person. And whereas in previous decades, emotional need found its most natural expression in belonging to political group, an association and/or in recognising oneself as part of a well-defined political and social identity, it is now expressed in possibility of possessing and accumulating non-durable goods that somehow make up for absence of collective places and occasions.

Here a good comparison, I think, would be made with the Tocqueville's work, especially in his reference to intense civic life that animates American society and it is expressed through participation in associations. What distinguishes the American citizen is an interest in wellbeing of community, in knowledge that individual wellbeing is closely linked to general wellbeing. Individual, completely immersed in his own particular interests - contrary to what Ilardi claims

- will not realise that he is gradually losing his freedom; occupied in maximisation of individual profit, he will not perceive that he is no longer self-master. We might ask if and how it is possible that collective need, not satisfied by territory of politics, cannot find any other channels than those that appeal to partisan interests. But is this really the case? Are not these extremes on a continuum that could, if correctly analysed, bring out less individualistic ways, times and forms of expressing this emotional capital? One of the antidotes to individualism, Tocqueville argues, is associationism. Could associationism, alive and vital in urban peripheries, limit tendency to isolation, by accustoming the individual to collaborate, to perform common actions, and to care about questions beyond their own particular interests?

But let us continue. On the where, Ilardi recalls centrality of periphery. There are essentially two peripheries: territory and imaginary. The former is, for the author, a merely political construction, which must necessarily be distinguished from the concept of landscape. Landscape is created by aesthetics, it is a physical and cultural heritage; territory is field of politics, where desires and ambitions of those who inhabit it are projected. «[...]Without conflict and without politics the territory would not exist, but we would remain within sphere of nature and landscape, these, yes, but only these, to be considered in some cases as common goods» (p. 24). The territory, he adds, «is instead the immediate projection of desires not of a generic humanity but of individuals, minorities, and groups that pass through it, break it up into places of belonging and transform it into a conflictual arena where different particularisms are in constant struggle with each other» (p. 25). Ilardi's hypothesis is that over time, despite processes of globalization and emergence of virtual squares, territory has regained centrality. This is because, in a consumption society that has no (political and ideological) mediations, territory is the only place where desires are satisfied.

At last, the how this individual need manifests itself. The author asks what happens when we move from institutional to individual level when everyone feels empowered to put their (consumption) desires into play. Reactions of an individual, who feels in a space felt to be totally manipulable and unregulated, are those of violence and deviance. Periphery, deprived of its political dimension and community values, becomes a cluster of conflict, of absurd follies, an uncontrollable explosion. Conflict, which has always been political by nature, is transformed into rebellion, which becomes the most tangible sign of this political and social transition. Rebellion is human action that has spread the most in peripheries, which has no political claim to bring about change, has nothing universal about it, nor is it linked to conscience. The purpose for which it takes place is never about work, equality, or protection of a good, but about individual control of space where one life and where one carries out one's individual instincts. Rebellion is not a politicized event, a communal action, but a self-referential act driven by power and control of one's own space. In this framework, therefore, territory is not considered a common good, but result of particularisms fighting each other and whose measure is made visible through actions and exclusions by minorities that inhabit it.

In a context such as the one described, man activates himself on the basis of mere satisfaction of his own needs and instincts that fall under desire, possession as well as consumption. I would ask, then, how to position that series of actions, built in neighborhoods and on urban streets, which aim to protect and safeguard common interest? Where to place experience of social movements or more generically of collective action aimed at production of a collective good, that is «good cannot be privatized and subtracted to any of members of collectivity on behalf of which collective action has taken place» (Della Porta, Diani, 2020, p. 19). We can imagine group of citizens who decide to take action to propose to superior authority renovation of a historical asset located in specific place in the city. Can we not consider these as forms of subjectivity that nourish the urban corpus of values linked to production of common goods, to relationships, cohesion as well as social support? As Beck (1999) states, since the 1990s, political participation has "shifted" into arenas and practices that from "non-political" become "sub-political" to the point that the "depoliticisation" of the political has found compensation in kind of "politicisation" of social and everyday life, which feeds off social reflexivity of individuals. Is this not politics or, again,

sub-politics? That is, a form of human action aimed not at individual good but, rather, at good of everyone.

The other periphery is imaginary, where man attempts to transform reality into dream he wants to live, satisfaction of his individual need. Where the imaginary has no space, however, it becomes a terrible thing. Concept of rebellion returns, because with disappearance of ideologies and politics, mediation between reality and imaginary no longer exists. And then there is imaginary of scholars who go looking for universal, that are values of solidarity and welcome in peripheries. Imaginary thus becomes a set of symbols and concepts present in memory that seeks, on the one hand, to structure social reality and, on the other, to conceal the world as it really is. For example, an attempt is made to discern existence of those universal values in urban peripheries, where they do not exist except in isolated cases because it is there that, in absence of politics, you try to make concrete other imaginaries, those of consumption.

The author's extreme and crude realism emerges, answering question of methodological nature: why study these suburban places? Because they, with fall of thought, have become territories of empty space, where individual expresses the freedom practices and desires of consumption society, consequently making territories theatres of struggle for their management. However, type of research referred to is anthropological research that aims to grasp relationship between forms of society and social subjectivity that makes it up: who are these subjects that live territory? What do they do? How do they aggregate? How do they constitute these subjectivities? Research that therefore needs new paradigms and new tools to grasp within urban context forms, cultures, behaviours, and places of a new "policy" with the evident consequence of bringing back into field a politics that gives form and meaning to the territory and establishes a comparison with these factions and their continuous demand for freedom.

Finally, radical nature of the author's thought finds its full expression in what he defines as "the impolitic lightness of universals", considering universalist culture to be that which would like to propose a return to preeminence of politics on the basis of values of solidarity, welcome and sharing, and placing mystifying rhetoric of other at the center. These values - he emphasizes - cannot be realized in field of politics, which is place of conflict, but can only be redemptive works of a few men or of associations born "for salvation of soul". How can one reconcile struggle for consumption and satisfaction of desires with instinct to welcome? One cannot, Ilardi replies. These values are to be considered "luxury goods" in hands of "saints" who have overcome problem of survival, while those who try to hoard resources to live are inclined to take contrary actions.

We ask ourselves, at this point, if and how the values of solidarity, welcome and integration cannot represent values of a new form of politics that starts from bottom, from territories and wealth of cultures, customs, ideologies that are constituted in them. The author seems to open up a glimmer here, a positive light: the question that we must actually ask ourselves - he argues - is how to transform these founding values for good of the city as a central requirement of a new policy and not consider them merely principles in hands of people with good feelings.

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Temi e metodi per la sociologia del territorio, a cura di Giampaolo Nuvolati e Marianna d'Ovidio, UTET università, 2022

Publicato nel 2022, il testo *Temi e metodi per la sociologia del territorio*, curato da Giampaolo Nuvolati e Marianna d'Ovidio, si inserisce all'interno di una tradizione di libri per la ricerca sociologica sul territorio che non è densamente popolata - a differenza dei manuali di metodologia della ricerca sociale che restano numerosi.

Benché di recente pubblicazione, il libro sembra destinato ad avere un'ampia diffusione, per la sua struttura e per la possibilità di essere utilizzato in maniera triplice: nelle aule di ateneo per la formazione universitaria, dagli addetti ai lavori (ricercatori, in primis) e da chi lavora in ambiti professionali (mediatori e facilitatori socio-culturali).

Dall'immersione nei suoi capitoli si deduce immediatamente l'impegnativa sfida degli autori ad avvicinare il testo ai non addetti ai lavori, nonché l'ambizione (peraltro riuscita) di trattare, in una modalità il più possibile applicativa, quei temi problematici e di difficile soluzione che caratterizzano i contesti urbani e rurali.

Sebbene sia rivolto anche ai non addetti ai lavori, dal manuale emerge un chiaro messaggio: la ricerca sociale sul territorio è un processo che, prima di essere effettuato, necessita di un'adeguata riflessione e di una accurata selezione di temi, di metodi e di dati.

In relazione a questa nota, ciascuna delle quindici tematiche esposte nel testo è caratterizzata dal passaggio dall'approfondimento teorico di argomenti emblematici socio-territoriali alla loro decodifica concreta in termini di ricerca applicata in aree e contesti specifici. Si tratta dunque di un transito articolato per tappe che migrano progressivamente da premesse teoriche generali su uno specifico tema di interesse territoriale sino al correlato elenco degli indicatori oggettivi e soggettivi, selezionati per fonti e livelli di aggregazione territoriale.

Due sono le prospettive che sembrano aprirsi attraverso questo passaggio. Una è la possibilità di soffermarsi sui contenuti teorici che precedono il disegno della ricerca sul territorio, tracciandone potenzialità e confini. La seconda consiste nel battere l'accento sui metodi, abituali e nuovi, inerenti alla rilevazione dei dati su un particolare argomento di interesse territoriale. In entrambe le prospettive, sia che il lettore si soffermi sulle componenti teoriche, sia che tenda alla sperimentazione ed operatività della ricerca, è raggiunto l'obiettivo di coniugarle in forma ben bilanciata.

L'unione di questi due sguardi - operazione non semplice - riesce comunque ad eludere il rischio che i quindici argomenti del testo restino mero appannaggio degli specialisti del settore. L'acquisizione di ciascuno dei quindici argomenti è difatti supportata da una precisa sistematizzazione di ogni capitolo, a sua volta suddiviso in sette momenti, che valorizza l'omogeneità esplicativa dell'impianto del testo.

I primi tre momenti di ogni capitolo sono di approfondimento teorico: i primi due riguardano l'inquadramento conoscitivo e le principali domande di ricerca sull'argomento, mentre il terzo illustra le ricerche più significative su di esso. Il quarto e il quinto sono di carattere più esplorativo: se nel quarto momento vengono illustrati gli indicatori oggettivi e soggettivi, nel quinto vengono aggiornate le eventuali innovazioni di metodo sul tema. Per finire, gli ultimi due sono di verifica su quanto percorso nei momenti precedenti: il sesto momento è di commento ai dati elencati nella fase antecedente mentre l'ultimo è dedicato a due esercizi, uno libero e uno guidato, ad ulteriore prova dell'utilità operativa di ciascun studio tematico. Gli esercizi di chiusura svelano il fine ultimo di ogni argomento trattato: ciò che si vuole raggiungere è l'acquisizione e l'approfondimento di competenze in termini di ricerca empirica.

E così, attraverso questa sistematizzazione, ogni capitolo riesce a tener fermo il proposito di dare un volto territoriale all'argomento teorico, presentando le tappe tipiche della ricerca sociale con i suoi metodi di indagine, nonché la capacità di unificare due principali approcci che fanno capo al lavoro sul campo - quello di tipo quantitativo e quello di tipo qualitativo. Benché ogni capitolo

del testo non affronti specificamente il momento esplorativo dei questionari e delle interviste, ciascuno di questi presenta il proprio elenco di indicatori oggettivi con quelli soggettivi sul tema, facilitando il futuro transito ad una ricerca di natura più qualitativa.

I temi selezionati nel volume sono tra i più emblematici, soprattutto se si guarda alla città. Ci sono i capitoli sulla Globalizzazione di Alessandra Terenzi e sulle Élite Locali di Simone Tosi, che inquadrano rispettivamente tematiche legate a scale territoriali diverse ma che si intrecciano fra loro. Altri capitoli sono più specifici e focalizzati sui quartieri, come quello sull'Abitare di Silvia Mugnano, che marca la questione abitativa come segno di una trasformazione sociale più ampia, e quello sulla Città Creativa di Marianna d'Ovidio con le reti sociali di lavoro culturale e creativo nei quartieri.

Vi sono le questioni irrisolte di sempre - non solo appannaggio delle comunità urbane, come i capitoli sulla Povertà di Marco Alberio e David Benassi, sulla Segregazione di Luca Daconto, sull'Immigrazione di Igor Costarelli, sulla Devianza di Valeria Verdolini e Enrico Petrilli. Altri capitoli ruotano sui temi classici della città, come la Qualità della Vita di Giampaolo Nuvolati, la Sicurezza di Sonia Stefanizzi, la Solitudine di Tom Brennecke, lo Spazio Pubblico di Luca Bottini. Ulteriori argomenti raccolgono le sfide e i nodi dei territori più urbanizzati, come il capitolo sulla Mobilità e Accessibilità di Matteo Colleoni e Simone Caiello, e il Turismo di Nunzia Borrelli. Infine, un argomento che abbraccia diversi aspetti del mutamento territoriale è espresso da Innovazione Sociale di Monica Bernardi.

Ciò che consegue dalla disanima di questi capitoli è che stato volutamente ridimensionato l'indugio sulla riflessione epistemologica, momento che abitualmente accompagna i testi di metodologia della ricerca sociale. Qui, la prolungata attesa a soffermarsi sui fondamenti e sui limiti della conoscenza scientifica, applicata allo studio dei processi sociali, è stata ridotta.

Questo non ha però comportato l'eliminazione di un approccio cognitivo di tipo scientifico alla ricerca sociale. Anzi, resta evidente la volontà di rendere questo sguardo il meno possibile connotato dal senso comune, inquadrando le crucialità teoriche e le novità metodologiche per ogni ambito di ricerca e preservando i quesiti di ricerca necessari a ciascuno. Questa sfida è stata superata dagli autori - pur restando ferma l'indicazione di dirigere i quindici argomenti presentati all'interno di un quadro progettuale di ricerca applicata.

L'impianto del testo riesce così a diluire il limite che spesso i manuali di ricerca sociale presentano, ovvero non riuscire ad avvicinarsi ad un disegno di ricerca empirica - e dunque non portando a compimento, o a neutralizzare, quanto teorizzato.

Molto tempo è passato dai testi classici che per primi hanno mostrato un bagaglio di diversità dei metodi sociologici: ad esempio, dai lavori di Murdock sulla struttura sociale o dagli strumenti metodologici raffinati sulla mobilità professionale di Blumen, Kogan e McCarthy, o ancora dal buon manuale universitario di Madge.

Ed è sulle spalle di questi giganti che poggia la ricerca attuale sul territorio, e in tale direzione vanno gli autori: una loro prerogativa è la presentazione di una varietà di approcci metodologici, indagabili secondo la veste più consona ad ogni argomento.

Insieme al richiamo ai metodi più frequentati, come la *social network analysis* di Igor Costarelli, le mappe sulla povertà di Marco Alberio e David Benassi o il *behavioural mapping* di Luca Bottini, vanno ricordate le attuali opportunità offerte dai big data, come sottolineato nel contributo di Marianna d'Ovidio sulle città creative, e dai dati della virtualità reale, come scrive Alessandra Terenzi, così come i *self-report*, le indagini di auto-confessione, citate da Valeria Verdolini e Enrico Petrilli, o ancora il metodo decisionale, col suo uso di resoconti ed atti amministrativi sulle scelte operative, come descrive Simone Tosi nel suo contributo sulle élite locali.

Non vanno pure dimenticate tecniche più specifiche, come quelle di *shadowing* del tracciamento degli spazi attraversati, che vengono menzionati da Luca Daconto e richiamati da Matteo Colleoni e Simone Caiello.

Il testo curato da Nuvolati e D'Ovidio ha pertanto il merito di cavalcare la contemporaneità con le sue urgenze sociali, e di saper selezionare gli argomenti cruciali per la ricerca sul territorio,

rendendoli comprensibili e accessibili anche al pubblico meno addentrato nei meandri della sociologia empirica. Accanto, vi è il pregio di aprire le porte a quegli approfondimenti e supporti di cui anche gli addetti ai lavori potrebbero aver bisogno.

Insieme a questi pregi di natura tecnica, vi è un messaggio più caldo, o si direbbe ontologico, che accompagna il testo: la trasmissione della passione per il lavoro di ricerca "sul campo".

Come scrive Marianna D'Ovidio: «Ci piace pensare alla ricerca come una pratica artigianale, nel senso più profondo di questo termine (Sennett, 2008), una pratica nella quale si mettono insieme mani e testa in un processo di continui rimandi. Non è possibile impostare una ricerca sui percorsi abitativi degli stranieri nelle città italiane, esplorare le pratiche di mobilità, individuare gli indicatori più appropriati a studiare la devianza [...] senza la consapevolezza di costruire un disegno della ricerca coerente con il tema oggetto di analisi» (Nuvolati e D'Ovidio, 2022, p. 307).

E aggiunge: «Di rimando, è solo attraverso la ricerca empirica, la discussione dei risultati e il confronto metodologico che il sapere progredisce all'interno delle scienze sociali» (ibidem, p. 307).

Questa citazione conduce il lettore verso il riconoscimento dell'importanza dell'esplorazione dei fatti sociali nello spazio in vista di una più matura e aggiornata riflessione dei diversi tasselli che compongono i nostri territori, urbani e rurali. Qui il rimando va all'altro curatore, Giampaolo Nuvolati, quando menziona le analisi socio-etnografiche della Scuola Ecologica di Chicago, con i suoi camminatori-ricercatori che percorrono la città raccogliendo i primi dati sulla composizione demografica ed etnica di quartiere in quartiere. Il richiamo a questi esploratori urbani nella versione aggiornata di "nuovi piedi polverosi" dentro la città di Chicago è il filo invisibile, ma robusto, che permea lo spirito di questo volume. Ed è attraverso il riconoscimento di questo filo che il manuale diventa lentamente un diario di lavoro da portare con sé, una guida che rammenta o suggerisce i passi del tracciato da seguire quando si fa ricerca sociologica sul campo.

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Lucatelli, S., Luisi, D., Tantillo, F. (a cura di), *L'Italia lontana. Una politica per le aree interne*, Donzelli Editore, 2022

Entrare nelle dinamiche della strategia che da vent'anni ha guidato lo sviluppo delle aree interne del nostro Paese è al tempo stesso semplice ed estremamente complesso. Semplice perché mirata a concretizzare, a cristallizzare alcuni obiettivi comuni a tutte le aree del Paese attraverso pratiche partecipative, a partire dall'approccio di tipo *place-based* da cui è animata fino alle pratiche di co-programmazione territoriali cui ha fatto ricorso. Complesso perché necessita di una metodologia rigorosa adatta ad un intervento di questo tipo su scala nazionale ed una *governance* multilivello di non facile gestione. Il libro ripercorre la storia, le intenzioni e i risultati della Strategia nazionale per le aree interne (Snai), nata su impulso di Fabrizio Barca quando, nel 2013, era Ministro per la Coesione territoriale. La Snai ha coinvolto nel tempo più di mille comuni e circa due milioni di abitanti. Gli autori dei diversi contributi sono anche i protagonisti di tale progettazione e fanno quindi trasmettere, tra richiami teorici ed esperienze vissute, tutti gli elementi che compongono il quadro multiforme e poliedrico dell'Italia dei borghi e dei piccoli comuni. Un'Italia abbandonata e lontana, appunto, ma che rappresenta ancora il 17% del territorio nazionale e che nasconde dei tesori, materiali e immateriali che devono solo essere scoperti o, spesso, ri-scoperti.

È questo il punto di partenza del gruppo di ricercatori che sono andati a "sentire" quell'Italia, con il primo intento di fare *public advocacy*, costituendo degli spazi fisici di dialogo con gli attori di tali politiche, individuati attraverso un'apposita fase di *scouting*. Il passaggio successivo è stato quello della "capacitazione" di tali attori, intesa nei termini di Amartya Sen: abilitando gli agenti del cambiamento attraverso un loro mutuo riconoscimento e fornendo gli strumenti necessari per attivare le trasformazioni. In tal modo è stato possibile trasformare istanze in progetti di sviluppo, attraverso momenti di co-programmazione con tutte le realtà locali. Processi che si sono poi concretizzati negli Accordi di programma quadro (Apq) tra Area interna, Regione, Comitato tecnico e Agenzia per la coesione che contengono le progettazioni finanziate con i Fondi comunitari dell'UE. Di tali progettazioni particolarmente interessanti sono le analisi condotte su tre studi di caso: Val Simeto (Sicilia), il Sud-ovest Orvietano (Umbria), l'Alta Marmilla (Sardegna), che fanno parte delle prime 23 aree interne sperimentali della prima fase (2014-2020). Tali pratiche sono testimonianze delle molteplici "domande di cambiamento" che hanno ricevuto delle risposte concrete e non sono quindi rimaste meri strumenti di propaganda politica. Per dare spazio a quella che viene definita "politica generativa" (Minervini, 2016) si devono creare delle condizioni che permettono l'abilitazione al cambiamento. Una delle quali è sicuramente un tipo di programmazione meno deterministico, aperto all'adattamento che i saperi e gli eventi possono richiedere durante la sua implementazione. Inoltre, serve una *governance* meno gerarchica e meno verticale, dove il multilivello si traduce in circolarità di comunicazione e progettazione, e si devono utilizzare strumenti di accesso alle risorse (bandi, avvisi) che non richiedono stringenti prerequisiti e burocrazia elevata.

Di notevole interesse anche l'analisi sulla Politica agricola comune, ripercorrendo velocemente le sue tappe dalla sua nascita con il Trattato di Roma, all'evoluzione come strumento di sviluppo rurale, poi convertito in sviluppo dei territori (c.d. secondo pilastro della Pac), da una parte consentendo la creazione e il rafforzamento di infrastrutture materiali e immateriali, dall'altra mantenendo aiuti diretti per lo più al settore agricolo industriale, che oggi stanno anche dirigendosi verso la sostenibilità ambientale grazie alle strategie comunitarie "From Farm to Fork" e "Biodiversity". In tale cornice anche la Snai ha abbracciato ulteriori obiettivi di sostenibilità nella sua nuova programmazione valorizzando la tipicità delle produzioni agricole; superando la logica del profitto e insistendo sul rapporto diretto produttore-consumatore (filiera corta); introducendo forme organizzative utili all'innovazione necessaria, soprattutto in termini di partenariati tra diversi operatori economici. Rimangono alcuni capisaldi della strategia quale il percorso asso-

ciativo che i Comuni limitrofi devono avviare al fine di firmare gli Accordi di programma quadro. Tra queste forme di aggregazione si sono sperimentati diversi livelli, a seconda del numero e del tipo di funzioni/servizi che i Comuni hanno scelto di associare. Certamente sono emerse diverse criticità ma la necessità di unirsi e di interagire rimane elemento imprescindibile anche per combattere quel deficit di rappresentanza, prima di tutto politica, che danneggia i piccoli Comuni. Deficit amplificato negli ultimi anni dalla soppressione delle comunità montane e dalla riduzione del numero dei parlamentari che allargano i collegi elettorali e favoriscono candidati delle città metropolitane.

Per immergersi nel tema dei risultati attesi ed inattesi di questa esperienza, unica nel suo genere, si rimanda alla lettura approfondita del testo che analizza bene i cambiamenti prodotti in termini di politiche pubbliche e in termini più sociologici e antropologici. Si ricorda, infine, che la Snai ha adottato un metodo sperimentale, attivando interazioni tra Stato e territori e mobilitando le risorse locali attraverso pratiche partecipative, facilitate dal lungo e instancabile lavoro del Comitato tecnico aree interne – Ctaì. Sarebbe quindi più corretto parlare allora di “lezioni apprese” e non di risultati attesi o di obiettivi raggiunti, che a volte sminuiscono il restante lavoro di cambiamento sociale e valore aggiunto che esperienze di questo tipo mirano a risvegliare.

Riferimenti

Minervini, G. (2016). *La politica generativa. Pratiche di comunità nel laboratorio Puglia*, Roma: Carocci.

Marco Marucci, CNR IRCRES



CONTRIBUTI FUORI LUOGO

Calculation, Life and Temporality: on Some Elements of Consonance Between Cryptoeconomy and Techno-Manipulation of Nature²

Introduction

The debate about the so-called cryptoeconomy develops on very different planes: from the inquiry on the strictly economic meaning of some controversial projects to the interpretation of the socio-political frameworks of the blockchain revolution. In particular, one layer of the debate touched upon the ecological implications of the innovation paths, examining the potential of new objects such as the environmental tokens, as well as the appalling environmental impacts of some of the darkest facets of the crypto universe, such as the extraordinarily energy-consuming functioning of Bitcoin.

This paper, though, reflects upon the relationship between cryptoeconomic innovation and environmental dynamics from a peculiar perspective. The work starts, in fact, from identifying, at the heart of some areas of cryptoeconomy, a cybernetic movement, which has some deep implications on the conceptions of economic life and its temporality. On one hand, cryptoeconomy characterizes itself as the locus of a relentless production of artificial certainties and of a cybernetic assurance of socio-economic processes. On the other hand, at the core of some ideological cryptoeconomic apparatuses we find a project aimed at transcending the reference to the human as the main agent of economic life, in a framework where agency is built around the unconditional and unlimited hybridization between the human and the machinic.

Now, these tendencies manifest some assonances with what is happening in the field of the techno-manipulation of nature. The intervention on nature proceeds under the insignia of constantly new enhancement and transformation forms, which are intrinsically connected to capitalist exploitation processes. The exploitation of nature cannot be understood, though, but in the framework of contemporary *ontological politics* (see the sociological reflection of Pellizzoni, 2016); in the framework, in other words, of the movement within which a number of ontological boundaries are called into question, including the ones between the natural and the technical, the living and the non-living, the human and the non-human.

Therefore, if the cybernetization of the economy and the techno-exploitation of nature represent two frontiers of contemporary capitalism, the task – as I claim in the paper, as a mere provisional contribution to preparing a space of theoretical debate – is to read, without stretching the analogies too far, the meaning of the assonances between the two macro-domains. One of the privileged fields for such a task concerns, in my opinion, the interrogation on what the techno-capitalist movement – in all its configurations, including the crypto-economic and environmental ones, and in its ever more intense “ontological” torsion – seems most intent on denying: the dimension of *limit*.

The paper begins with a general profile of the cybernetization of economic-monetary life that is occurring in some domains of cryptoeconomy, with a specific focus on Bitcoin. Afterward, the analysis highlights how the relationship between building artificial certainties and pulling the agency in the transhuman direction manifests itself in a set of monetary and non-monetary applications of the blockchain; such applications are aimed at turning an ever-expanding range of social phenomena into algorithmically treatable items. I will then retread some themes of the contemporary discourse about the manipulation of nature and its ontological dimension, in the perspective of interpreting the analogies that connect it to the cryptoeconomic sphere.

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Finally, in the last section of the paper, I will discuss on how certain strands of thought that look at perspectives that are other to the unconditional unfolding of techno-capitalist power can find, in the dimension of the economic and environmental limit, a common field of inquiry. This field could accommodate the reflection on certain alternative experimentation practices, both in the monetary and environmental fields.

1. Notes on the Cybernetic Stances and the Transhuman Imaginaries in some Domains of Cryptoeconomy

1.1 The Project of Cybernetic Assurance of Economic Life in Monetary and Non-Monetary Applications of Blockchain

As an intense media debate on Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies unfolds, considering them as scarily volatile assets, many lines of scholarly research inquire into the socio-political demands that characterize the blockchain revolution and into the strictly monetary meaning of this innovation (see Amato, Fantacci, 2020).

The sociopolitical side of Bitcoin has been examined in a wide range of interdisciplinary studies. The Bitcoin project has stemmed from a radical deconstruction of the institutional architecture of official money; an architecture which, with its hierarchies, its opacity and its power encrustations is seen as congenitally corruptible. The sociotechnical artefact of blockchain, which is the basis of Bitcoin, manifests itself, then, as the space where a revolutionary promise builds itself around an ideological arsenal. Blockchain is a distributed ledger that allows the registration and the storage of operations, processes and transactions: a ledger that is not governed by a central body and founded not upon "traditional" forms of management and control but on the incorruptible logic of the algorithm. Blockchain, in fact, is a specific form of *Distributed Ledger Technology*, which concerns ledgers distributed among networks of peer-to-peer nodes, where each node, independently, registers transactions, until a collective consensus is reached, which ultimately updates the ledger. This way of registering transactions became such a dominant technological innovation due to the fact that it allows to handle an incredibly wide variety of transactions, overcoming the traditional notions of trust. At the heart of the blockchain revolution, a movement (eminently controversial and problematic) can be pinpointed, that replaces trust with algorithmic logic; the latter would offer, regardless of the parties' reliability, secure, irreversible and inalterable transactions (see on these issues *ibidem*). Blockchain, as a system of decentered accounting entries, by eliminating the need for a third-party tasked with verifying transactions and keeping a record of them, gives voice to a general need for autonomy and, specifically in the monetary field, allows to fulfil – as Sartori (2020) highlights in a sociological perspective – the desire to be independent from the control of the state and of banks.

Now, the relevance of the blockchain revolution must be understood considering the wider framework of the growing utilization of algorithms in socio-economic life (under the insignia of the controversial algorithmic social and economic governance), which originated an extensive social science literature. According to its technical meaning, an algorithm is a codified procedure to transform a certain input into an output (Mazzotti, 2015). Algorithms, as codes, act as programs that regulate the functioning of a wide variety of social mechanisms and practices through action on data (Campo *et al.*, 2018); they select relevant information, discard what is considered irrelevant, structure priorities, help in search and decision-making processes through complex selection and recommendation systems (*ibidem*).

The themes of algorithmic opaqueness, inscrutability and "objectiveness" (Mazzotti, 2015, *op. cit.*) join the ones related to the treatment of algorithms within a social discourse which supports,

legitimizes or discredits them (see Campo *et al.*, 2018, *op. cit.* mentioning Beer, 2017 on the different dimensions of the social power of algorithms). These themes are central to the increasing sociological attention on the matter, which also concerns the specific field of algorithmic management (Stark, Pais, 2020). According to Mazzotti (2015, *op. cit.*), the nascent sociology of algorithms raises theoretical, methodological, and policy questions in many ways analogous to those already discussed in STS studies of other logical-formal knowledge, concerning their credibility, the attribution of agency and accountability, the materiality of abstraction processes, or the ambition to mechanize the rules. But, at the same time, in this field of research we encounter new structural conditions - the pervasiveness of numbers, for example - and new practical and conceptual problems - secrecy, the trade-off between interpretability and accuracy, the governability of algorithms - which will put to the test our sociological imagination (*ibidem*).

As for one of the most notable configurations of algorithmic processes - the one that concerns blockchain - around the idea of *distributed power* that blockchain materializes, a powerful debate has developed, that assumes the controversial notions of decentralization³ and disintermediation as cornerstones. What is at issue is the bypassing of a well-determined set of *middlemen* and *gatekeepers* that occupy the stage of the institutional governance of socio-economic life; but, on a wider perspective, the objective is to pursue a general disintermediation goal, within an ideological framework which assumes horizontality and automation as crucial elements.

On the monetary side, the power of blockchain manifested itself with the proliferation of cryptocurrencies⁴, i.e., monetary entities managed through cryptographic treatment of information, which represent one of the most noteworthy phenomena of the contemporary monetary innovation. If we focus, specifically, on the main cryptocurrency - Bitcoin⁵ - every centre, every mediation and every hierarchy is overcome through a sort of cybernetic-algorithmic purification of "old" institutional dynamics, with the aim of creating a "private" and "automatic" currency. It is a currency managed in a flat mode, in the horizon, i. e., of a *horizontal* distribution of power, capable of deconstructing the hierarchies based on the control which banks and states exert on the life of money; all this in the wake, as Sartori (2020) highlights, of the illusion of being able to draw a monetary architecture freed by social and political influences.

Bitcoins circulate indeed without bodies that regulate their course and their production, thanks to the *peer to peer* structure: there is no third party that issues money and warrants its validity. This comes at the price of what is interpreted as a de-socialization and de-institutionalization of money, or, in any case, as a profound reformulation of the sociality of money itself, which is based on a deep transformation of the grand issue of trust - on the fact that trust phenomena can be found in the Bitcoin universe, even though trust mainly becomes «trust in technology and in the automatic functioning of a shared system of rules and procedures», see Corradi & Höfner (2018, p. 203).

3 For a critical reading of the notion of de-centralization in the blockchain universe, which also considers the plurality of the meanings of the notion and its contested character, see Becker (2019).

4 The concept of cryptocurrency is at the center of a complex and incessant debate. The Cambridge Dictionary defines cryptocurrency as «a digital currency produced by a public network, rather than any government, that uses cryptography to make sure payments are sent and received safely».
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/cryptocurrency> (last accessed on 23 October 2023).

5 Bitcoin is the name of the cryptographic technology of payment and registration of information, and the currency itself, created and distributed by that technology. This currency is electronic money, whose maximum issued quantity is pre-determined. The mining activity is essential for the Bitcoin existence. In fact, as Marco Mancini (2015) underlines, the activity that leads to the generation and attribution of new currency units is defined as mining. The new currency units are generated as a reward granted by the network to users (miners) who contribute, in competition with each other, to its management and security, making the computation capabilities of their computers available, in order to verify, through the resolution of complex mathematical operations, the uniqueness and security of the transactions carried out. As underlined by Novella Mancini (2016), the progressive diffusion of bitcoins has required more and more computing power and has forced miners to form collaborative groups: through specific programs, the pools of miners combine the power of their computers to carry out as many verification operations as possible. For an analysis of the Bitcoin phenomenon, see also Amato and Fantacci (2020, *op. cit.*).

Now, the extensive debate that cryptocurrencies⁶ has sparked, sees the presence of an argumentative line that radically critiques some cruxes of the socio-political discourse of Bitcoin, unveiling their ideological trait, questioning representations of Bitcoin as a flat and de-socialized currency⁷ (when, instead, its life would show dynamics related to identitarian and communitarian phenomena; see, in a sociological perspective, Dodd, 2018) and highlighting the emergency, among other things, of power asymmetries in the processes concerning the functioning of the cryptocurrency (*ibidem*).

The arguments aimed at deconstructing the ideological apparatus of some cryptocurrency vanguards are undoubtedly appropriate (see for a discussion on related matters and for a critical reading of Bitcoin as a private and automatic currency, characterized by disintermediation Doria, 2020), but they are not specifically relevant for the theme I am presenting in this paper. What I'm going to discuss concerns the assonances that some of the dynamics in the environmental field share with a basic demand that can be seen in Bitcoin. Such a demand could be interpreted as techno-utopic, but it deserves consideration, also due to its capacity of performatively creating new economic realities; it blends the faith in the algorithmic certainty with a post/transhuman imaginary⁸ and points to (a movement which, in itself, is filled with problematic contents) a way of conceiving economic life and temporality. The reach of this project, of course, is not measured neither in relation to the possibility that Bitcoin might one day actually become the official currency at an international level, nor in relation to Bitcoin's actual capacity of producing a replacement of the human, in the context of a final dehumanizing automation of money; moreover, as it will be discussed afterwards, what is at issue is the constant hybridization between the human and the non-human, rather than substitution.

In order to fully understand the sense of the Bitcoin innovation one must naturally look at the strictly monetary meaning of the issue. The way with which Bitcoin answers to the many and severe inadequacies of the official currency is related to a sort of "calculative" stiffness of the institutional life of money, which, by algorithmically predetermining its issuing process and issued quantity, produces an artificial scarcity (see on these issues Amato, Fantacci, 2020, *op. cit.*). Bitcoin, therefore, proposes itself as an artificially scarce currency whose life is not in any way related to the dimension of debt, not even to the disfigured notion of credit and debt that is characteristic of capitalism (see on these issues Doria, 2020, *op. cit.* and on credit in capitalism Amato, Fantacci, 2012). Bitcoin is not the passivity of any issuer: it is simply a digital object whose issuing happens in relation to the certification of blockchain transactions, i.e., as proof of a computational process lacking any properly economic meaning.

Capitalism has to handle its relationship with debt by constantly postponing the moment of payment, in a context where debts are systematically translated, thanks to a powerful dogmatic-calculative apparatus, whose intrinsic fragility manifests itself in financial crises. In the face of such fragility, Bitcoin's answer takes the shape of a radical refusal; the new currency is a currency

6 On the phenomenon of cryptocurrencies see Vigna, Casey (2015).

7 For a critique of the idea that the Bitcoin and blockchain universes might contain a technical agency that is separated from socio-economic reality, see Zook, Blankenship (2018).

8 The posthuman tends to outline a complex and not always coherent set of processes and stances. The common thematic nexus of different conceptual positions concerns (Rugo, 2020) the blurring of boundaries between human, technology, and nature in favor of more hybrid and fluid configurations. In particular, the term is used both with reference to modes of being resulting from potential enhancements to human nature produced through applied science and technology, and with reference to the decentering of human exceptionalism and the overcoming of the principles of humanism (*ibidem*). Within the posthuman horizon, transhuman stances look toward the possibility of an evolution brought forth by human technology. One of the pillars of transhumanism refers, then, to an idea of human enhancement based on a set of techno-scientific pathways, such as those concerning biology, artificial intelligence, nanotechnologies, etc. According to Bostrom (2003, p. 493) «Transhumanism is a loosely defined movement that has developed gradually over the past two decades. It promotes an interdisciplinary approach to understanding and evaluating the opportunities for enhancing the human condition and the human organism opened up by the advancement of technology». See also Bostrom (2001) «For transhumanism is more than just an abstract belief that we are about to transcend our biological limitations by means of technology; it is also an attempt to re-evaluate the entire human predicament as traditionally conceived».

which, in a radical way, does not want to have anything to do with what official capitalism must constantly run away from, i.e. the dimension of the closure of economic relations. And it is a currency that sees itself as *safe* because artificial scarcity protects it from any inflation risk, erasing at its roots the risk of generating *too much money*. Within this horizon, Bitcoin (see Amato, Fantacci, 2020, *op. cit.*) is bound to amplify the most problematic traits of capitalist money - *in primis* the conception of money as an *appropriable thing*, ultimately leading to a monetary scenario that is socially and economically unbearable.

We might say that Bitcoin, therefore, is about building artificial certainties, with reference to both a general ideal of certification and assurance of socio-economic processes, and a specific project for assuring money, its life, and its temporality – a project which, paradoxically, saw the creation of a hyper-speculative cryptoasset as one of its most tangible achievements, and that seems to materialize an extreme form of financial speculation (see on these issues Doria, 2022). The demand for a “cybernetic” assurance of the economy, though, covers domains that go far beyond Bitcoin. There is little reason in identifying the whole of cryptoeconomy (an entity which has uncertain and unstable boundaries) as a univocal and recognizable project. In fact, blockchain has been the stage where currencies that are (as for conceptual apparatus, monetary meaning and operative architecture) radically distinct from Bitcoin have been and can be created. It is true, though, that a cybernetic stiffening of economic life can be easily pinpointed not only in the cryptocurrencies that share Bitcoin’s ideological and conceptual apparatus, but also in some configurations of the so-called non-monetary applications of blockchain and in related ideological constructs. The range of these applications is also rapidly expanding: one of the most glaring manifestations undoubtedly concerns the *smart contract* sphere, since blockchain promises to deeply reshape the semblance of one of the main institutional pillars of modern societies. According to Allen (2022, p. 27, italics in the original), a smart contract is a «(i) recording of a *legal agreement* between parties that is (ii) written in a *formal, ultimately machine-readable language* rather than a natural language such as English, and whose text incorporates (iii) an algorithm which *automates some or all performance* of the agreement». Within the smart contract horizon – dominated by the principle of *automatic* execution of contractual processes – a complex range of quite relevant “operations” are set to be replaced by algorithmic processes: interpretation, enforcement, jurisprudential evaluation are all destined to be radically remoulded. The traditional roles assigned to lawyers, notaries and judges are also risking to be bypassed by the power of the algorithmic protocol.

The debate on the definitions of *smart contracts* (see Allen, 2022, *op. cit.*) is quite lively; and so are the discussions on the extent to which the validation process is still, actually, embedded in social interactions. Herein, though, I aim at highlighting the extraordinary speed with which the range of institutional processes treatable through the *smart contract* logic has widened. This range, of course, comprehends property ownership (the so-called *smart property*) but tends to reach out to an unlimited number of fields of governance, while looking at redefining the very definition of governance itself, in light of a general demand for the *automation of the rules*.

The project of building an algorithmic governance of social and economic (as well as political, especially, but not exclusively, in relation to electoral dynamics) realities is going forward on the privileged pathway defined by the phenomenon of DAOs (Decentralized Autonomous Organizations). A DAO is «a blockchain-based system that enables people to coordinate and govern themselves mediated by a set of self-executing rules deployed on a public blockchain, and whose governance is decentralized (i.e., independent from central control)» (Hassan, De Filippi, 2021, p. 2). At the heart of some ideological apparatuses that are developing around DAOs we can find the trust in the safety and auditability of the code, which can guarantee the coordination of the action of people, machines or combinations of both (Wright, De Filippi, 2015).

In the most extreme visions of the algorithmic automation of governance, the latter could end up in touching upon every social domain, generating an indefinite range of social contracts, from nongeographic countries, to transnational lending programs, from universal plans of basic

income, to marriage contracts and so forth (Garrod, 2016). Even a DAS (*Decentralized Autonomous Society*) is envisaged, where the form and the role of the nation-state could be completely changed by technology – see Garrod (*ibidem*) for a critique of some of the scenarios circulating among the DAS discourse.

Generally speaking, one of the pathways that the blockchain-based technological management of social processes has taken is, as it is known, the one that concerns the production of tokens⁹, the so-called tokenization. «Tokenization refers to the process of transforming the rights to perform an action on an asset into a transferable data element (named *token*) on the blockchain» (Rozas *et al.*, 2021, p. 5, italics in the original). This is a process of digitalization of value, an «encapsulation of value in tradeable units of account» (Freni *et al.* 2022, p. 2). The very plasticity of tokenization has drawn a growing analytical interest:

«In simplistic terms, tokens can be seen as privately issued currencies used to exchange value within an ecosystem (e.g., Bitcoin). In reality, their usage has gone far beyond mere currency applications. The roles that a token may play are manifold and include, among others, giving access to a service, granting the right to contribute to a community, regulating the governance through voting rights» (*ibidem*).

Not every token, then, can be considered as a paramonetary item – i.e., as an entity which, like cryptocurrencies, performs, even if only partially, monetary functions. Actually, intense debates have been sparked around the difference and the relations among the different kinds of tokens, which include, for example, the ones similar to cryptocurrencies, the ones related to financial securities, to the *utility-tokens*, i.e. tokens that grant the right of utilizing or benefitting from a product or a service.

Tokenization¹⁰, then, manifests itself as a process, with remarkably fluid and open borders¹¹, which by incorporating value in units of digital accounts *creates* socio-economic entities; and it does so, naturally, in the register of decentralization and disintermediation that is typical of the blockchains, and thus without a center that can be deemed accountable for the meaning of the process. The finalization itself of the tokenization operation is also indetermined and open, in a manner of speaking. Of course, within a determined context of practices and meaning (which sometimes coincides with a space of digital commoning), a certain token and the rules that are behind its functioning can be fixed with a well-defined goal in mind. However, if we broaden our perspective to the extraordinary proliferation of tokens, the latter seems to take the shape of processes of digitalization of value that overlap each other, in search, to a certain extent, of a finalization.

It's worth mentioning, finally, that the space of urban studies and policies is also deeply affected by the proliferation of the power of distributed ledgers as a technology that can play an important role as «administrative layer and actuating agent in various assemblages of technologies and use practices» (Gloerich *et al.*, 2020, p. 12). Such systems (*ibidem*) «allow for new models to monitor, manage and actuate all kinds of urban processes. Examples vary from smart city services such as the management of parking spaces to the organization of local, commons-based peer-to-peer economies».

Some of the domains of local socio-economic action where the blockchain experiment is taking place concern, specifically, the lively space of sharing economy (see Fiorentino, Bartolucci, 2021) and the complex discourse that surrounds smart cities (on blockchain as «an indispensable layer of trust in a smart city» see Kundu, 2019, p. 42). The potential of distributed ledgers in an urban context are so relevant that some scholars proposed the image of the city *as a license* (Gloerich *et al.*, 2020, *op. cit.* p. 12):

9 The debate on the profile and types of tokens is very lively and complex. The Financial Stability Board (2019, p. 10) defines a digital token as «any digital representation of an interest, which may be of value, a right to receive a benefit or perform specified functions or may not have a specified purpose or use».

10 For some considerations on the phenomenon of tokens see Doria (2023).

11 The existence of tokens that grant the right of participating in the governance and planning of the activities of a specific organization is an element that contributes in making the sphere of tokenization wide and complex.

«We introduced “the city as a license” as a lens to explore these platforms or smart city services from a perspective of governance. As such we proposed to think of automated blockchain-based platforms as actors that give out licenses to temporary make use of resources, based on conditions encoded in smart-contracts through algorithmic governance. The city, seen through that lens, becomes a rights management system, or more likely a system of systems of rights management, and that perspective brings out questions in relation to power, agency, accountability and transparency».

This potential algorithm-based reshaping of the urban space opens up new perspectives, even diametrically opposed. In the horizon of the peculiar ambivalence that characterizes the critical perspectives of social sciences on the matter, democratic empowerment scenarios go with risks related to opaqueness or privacy threats.

«Whereas, blockchain-based ledgers are envisaged as empowering to citizens because of their decentralized character, and their architecture that can invoke “trustless trust,” there is also a risk that these networks will become dominated by a few central actors again, not unlike the internet itself. How these actors and their code could be held accountable by local legislators is not directly clear. Likewise, the trust that citizens may have in these systems could be undermined by their multiplicities and opaque form of algorithmic governance» (*ibidem*).

1.2. Between Artificial Certainties and Transhuman Indetermination

At the heart of the diversified scenario of cryptoeconomy we find, then, a movement that creates spaces of “algorithmic assurance” for an incredibly wide array of phenomena.

How can we understand the position of this movement of automatic assurance within the overall horizon of cryptoeconomy? Do we face a particularly potent version of the techno-prosthetic apparatus wielded by contemporary socio-economic actors – an apparatus which, though, would leave those actors basically unchanged, as human actors? This seems indeed the representation that we find (with particular regard to the gray area of media narrative) in the sphere of Bitcoin and similar cryptocurrencies, regarded as assets handled by a new species of capitalists, still possessing human attributes.

In reality, though, the situation is quite different than the one defined by technological artefacts wielded by human agents, proposing, instead, at its core, a condition of confusion and hybridization between the human and the machinic, in a context where the borders are increasingly blurry. A twofold movement can be found at the basis of an important part of cryptoeconomy: going beyond human weaknesses and corruptibility through building artificial certainties and freeing ourselves from human finitude with the project of an economy that features a hybridization between the human and the non-human (for considerations about related themes see Doria, 2020, *op. cit.*).

If the “official” finance is deeply influenced by the algorithms’ role, the Bitcoin experience takes a step forward in the direction of an increasingly complete interchangeability between human agents and technologically autonomous ones: the trend toward anonymity and protocol automation, featured in cryptocurrency dynamics, seems to preconize a completely legitimate and normal role for non-human or hybrid agents, such as a DAO. This theme, though, goes way beyond the boundaries of cryptocurrencies. The entire cryptoeconomy scene (from smart contracts to the mirage of DAS) has been explicitly and programmatically assuming as its own horizon of meaning the hybridization between the human and the non-human. The forms of organization of economic life based on the blockchain seem to be populated by humans, mechanical agents and endless combinations of the two.

At the heart of the debate, we find the idea of an agency that is more and more fully *distributed* between the human and the non-human, to the point where the two forms of agency are so strictly imbricated, overlapped, intertwined that they cannot be separated anymore. In the expectation of the complete fulfilment of the transhuman project, though, what is at issue in sev-

eral argumentative lines surrounding cryptoeconomy is the acknowledgment that certain tasks that the human can perform in the blockchain economy are still irreplaceable. This leads to an argumentative thread that considers the human element as a valuable asset, since it's not substitutable, for the functioning of a new kind of decentralized autonomous organization which «lives on the internet and exists autonomously, but also heavily relies on hiring individuals to perform certain tasks that the automaton itself cannot do» (Buterin, 2014).

Rather than in the register of the substitution of the human element with a machine, some lines of interpretation (see Nabben, 2021, referring to strands of thought in the field of cybernetics) thus develop with reference to the notion of autonomous human-machine systems, as entities in the context of which humans «are always in the loop of complex systems engineering, whether that is establishing initial settings, deciding what objectives to optimise for, or training algorithms» (*ibidem*, p. 10). What becomes at issue, therefore, (*ibidem*) is the emergence of a co-constitutive relationship between humans and algorithms and (see on this point *ibidem*, p. 9, with regard to a case study concerning a blockchain-based DAO) of a co-constitutive human-machine ensemble «in which humans determine algorithm rules, and human outcomes are thus determined by algorithms».

The whole picture could be observed, in my view, with regard to an unconditional and indetermined process by which the human makes itself into the algorithmic and vice versa, whereby algorithms, in some interpretations (see on these and related issues Amoore, Raley, 2017 and Raley, 2016) are meant as holders of *generative* and *world-making capacities*¹².

I believe that the movement, in its entirety, should be understood by focusing on its "vital" feature, in a context where the machinic lends itself to be assumed as a subject with vital capabilities; and this life, that pulsates to the beat of hybridization and fluidity, carries within itself a conception of temporality as an intrinsically *open* phenomenon. The never-ending making of the human in the non-human places at the core of the economic phenomena a demand of emancipation from the ideas of finitude and closure. If, on one hand, the algorithmic code seeks, in a way, to pre-determine the temporal evolution of socio-economic processes and to "immunize" future uncertainty, on the other hand, the temporal horizon is affected by a dilation (that is indeterminate and produces indetermination), in which the algorithmic life can simply live *forever* or at least until the energy that powers computer networks runs out.

Contemporary capitalism proceeds through the refusal of the element of closure¹³ and by an ever-increasing weakening of the dimension of limit. Within the dream (or, according to one's stances, the nightmare or the mirage) of the algorithmic economy, it seems that the issue of closure could be, instead, hollowed out at its very roots. The reverie of some cryptoeconomic projects, apparently, outlines an economic life shaped around the indefinite and immortal interchanges between the human and the algorithmic, while keeping the dimensions of the closure of relationships and of limit in the domain of artificial simulation games.

1.3 Between Capitalism and Post-Capitalism: the Transversal Fascination of the Algorithmic Transhuman

The multiform post/transhuman discourse is one of the frontiers of contemporary capitalism and develops on several sides, including the ones regarding biocapitalism (Cooper, 2008) and the ones concerning the paths of the algorithmic cybernetization of economic agency that I

12 On the process of *technogenesis* that concerns the co-evolution between humans and technical elements see the volume of Hayles (2012) mentioned in Amoore, Raley (2017).

13 On a strictly monetary-financial level, this refusal happens through a conception of money based on liquidity and through an understanding of finance that severs the etymologic bond with *ending* (see Amato, Fantacci, 2012, *op. cit.*). The reverie of some cryptoeconomic projects proceeds, in primis, by removing the link with debt-credit relations that call into action debtors and creditors as mortal beings. On the nexus between mortality and debt/credit relations, see *ibidem*.

mentioned in the previous paragraph. It is true, though, that the fascination of the transhuman pervades very wide domains of post-capitalist commoning (on the ambiguities surrounding the contemporary discourses on commoning, see Pellizzoni, 2018). The reference is about the discourses and practices that recognize in the distributed ledgers a formidable chance to outline new forms of governing digital commons (characterized by transparency, efficiency and flexibility) and that thus promote so-called crypto-commonist projects (Fritsch *et al.*, 2021), that are other to the capitalist horizon. In this framework, the demand of emancipation from the dominion of the institutional apparatus of capitalist markets tends to get together with the liberation from conceptions of agency shaped around the human actor and not around the hybridization between the human and non-the human. Many lines of research and experimentation connect the two sides of emancipation in a more or less explicit way (for example, on the topic of the relationship between blockchain and food commons, see Heitlinger *et al.*, 2021). The power of algorithms, then, breathes new life into the redefinition of commons as human/non-human assemblies, intrinsically open toward new enrollment possibilities – see on enrollment Gibson-Graham *et al.* (2016), with regard the notion of commoning-community: «As social scientists we have a role to play in helping to identify the human and more-than-human actants of the commoning-community. This may involve working with technologists, scientists, biota and so on to enrol members of the commoning-community» (*ibidem*, p. 207).

Besides, it's on the very field of some fundamental theoretical references that the transhuman twist of post-capitalist commons becomes tangible, with a specific focus on the machinic non-human. One example is the parable of post-workerist thought, especially the works of Hardt and Negri. If the fascination with the cyborg was already present in the elaboration on the biopolitical and the multitude in previous works (Hardt, Negri, 2000), the emphasis on the mutual interplay between the human and the machinic has become (on these topics see Pitts, 2020) peculiarly apparent in some of the most recent contributions and, specifically, in *Assembly* (Hardt, Negri, 2017). In this last work, in a horizon of ontological equivalence between humans and non-humans, the transformative potential of *machinic assemblages* (as ensembles of human and non-human singularities) is praised. When facing a capitalism that keeps on extracting value from the new configurations of commons, the role of the autonomous production of value and resistance against capitalist reappropriation is assigned to *human machines*. These theses are partly consonant with some post-capitalist lines of thought with post-humanistic implications (for example, consider the *accelerationist* thesis of Srnicek, Williams, 2015), which have been recently the topic of a heated-up debate, both in the scholarly and political field (for a critical analysis see Cruddas, Pitts, 2020). The risk, in my opinion, is that in this cultural climate, the only legitimate temporality could end up being the one that beats at the accelerated rhythm of the unlimited, *endless* vitality of human-machinic assemblies. Every reference to the experience of breath and rhythmicity in the economic (and so to the dimensions of waiting, of promise, of closure) risks to be regarded as something belonging to a sterile attitude, discordant with the only possible emancipatory perspective.

2. Techno-Manipulation of Nature and the Role of the Ontological Issue

2.1 *The Proliferation of Operations of Nature Manipulation and the Role of Environmental Tokenization*

Defining the profile of the processes of nature manipulation (Pellizzoni, 2016, *op. cit*) is a particularly complex task. A number of lines of action interlap, overlap and intertwine, in a framework where enhancing, transforming and “inventing” portions of nature goes along with a constant, ever-provisional redefinition of the ontological features of the natural. A first dimension con-

cerns the scenarios of the “tangible” manipulation of nature, that proceeds under the insignias of bio-genetic technoscience, nanotechnology and computer science. What is at issue is a number of processes that articulate themselves in multiple operative fields, such as the ever more intense genetic manipulation in agriculture. These interventions do not have to do with the mere register of natural enhancement, but with a movement that continuously recreates nature with new shapes and configurations. The ideological-argumentative framework of this process of technological recreation of reality is often placed around the impossibility of distinguishing between techno-genesis dynamics and the evolutionary work of nature. As Pellizzoni (2019) writes, for agribusiness companies, nature is ontologically and not only interpretatively “technical”, given that there is no substantial difference between the hybridizations that nature makes spontaneously, those of traditional farmers and those (more precise) that biotechnologies make.

There is a second dimension, which is related to the multiple forms with which nature is translated in a determined techno-scientific dimension, where it lives a parallel life, also by virtue of decomposition and reconstruction operations. A specific configuration of the phenomenon is found in the pathways of geo-engineering (*ibidem*), where the power of technology allows the transfer of environmentally crucial matters on new operational fields; an example is the attempt of answering to the climate crisis through solar irradiation with gigantic mirrors (*ibidem*). The scenario of the techno-capitalist treatment of the environmental issue is then certainly deeply marked by *compensatory* discourses and practices. The compensatory approach takes form as a bundle of practices and specific markets (*carbon markets* are at the helm, naturally) which, in their ever-constant transformation, outline the scenario of ecological modernization and of its numerous business frontiers. Furthermore, the bond between the calculative stance and commodification finds one of its most prominent manifestations in what is a crucial area for contemporary capitalism, the field of derivatives. While derivative markets have been one of the main frontiers of capitalism for many years, derivatives related to environmental dynamics (on this matter see Cooper, 2010) have been developing spectacularly, which is relevant both in terms of financial volumes, and in the ways with which it legitimates conceptions of the relation among environment, time and value.

In general terms, the pathways of commodification and financialization keep on multiplying, opening a number of critical perspectives. A particularly significant case, as highlighted by Pellizzoni (2021a), is the one concerning the so-called PES (payments for ecosystem services). They are based on processes that identify a set of environmental performances that nature might be able to provide (carbon sequestration, availability of habitats for protected species, landscape and water protection), isolating them from the relations that they have with other operations and other practices (*ibidem*). On these pathways, nature tends at configuring itself as a potential deposit (plastic, or even liquid) of an unlimited set of environmental performances/resources, just waiting to be acknowledged (*framed, enacted*) through a complex cognitive labour; the latter, in the very moment it defines them as specific items, also qualifies them as commodified entities.

Now, some of the issue I mentioned may take a particular shape in the domain of tokenization. The latter, as already highlighted, is a field (quite lively and, most of all, quite confusing) of processes which has extended its course of action toward environmental themes for quite a long time already. The proliferation of different kinds of ecological tokens¹⁴ is linked to the great flexibility of tokenization, both on the issuing and awarding criteria, and on the utilization of tokens. The latter can be granted as a “reward” for certain environment-friendly individual behaviors, in determined contexts¹⁵, or distributed within specific incentive strategies aimed at companies, in a horizon that is potentially more open to the financialization of environmental dynamics. Tokenization involves, then, a cognitive work aimed at outlining of the boundaries of services and behaviors to be incentivized and, on the other hand, a “computational work” that allows the awarding and utilization of the tokens on the blockchains.

14 For some examples of these tokens see Howson (2019).

15 See the reference to a project concerning the Milan context in Pettinaroli (2020).

The range of the possible configurations of environmental tokens¹⁶ is quite diversified, even if we focus on critical approaches toward the global commodification of nature. See Heitlinger *et al.* (2021, *op. cit.*), who read in tokenization the chance of reconfiguring the theme of relationship between value and food in a *more-than-human* key (attentive, then, also at recognizing human and non-human stakeholders), within a perspective which, in my opinion, configures an important relationship plane between two features of the non-human, the algorithmic non-human and the bio-physical one. The types of conceptual prototypes (see *ibidem* for details about them) which could substantiate the idea of *algorithmic food justice* are, indeed, quite different. They range, for example, from an initiative concerning a currency exchange for community currencies – in which the «exchange rate is set automatically according to the soil health data of each community, as measured by networked sensors and AI, and calibrated over time» (*ibidem*, p. 11) and the «better the quality of the soil, the higher the value of that local currency» (*ibidem*) –, to a project in which people are rewarded with tokens for spending time with plants, as well as for caring for them and non-exchangeable reputation tokens are used to make new proposals on the management of the commons (*ibidem*).

In general terms, it is the potential variety of the forms of environmental tokenization that makes reading them under the lens of *monetization* and *commodification* problematic; and it also makes the overall scenario of the critical interpretation of the phenomenon particularly difficult and thorny, also when considering the fact that, tokenization pathways that are in the beginning not market-oriented may be re-assimilated into financial logics.

One thing is sure: tokenization promises to deeply reshape the issue of the intervention on natural environment. The extraordinary potential variety of the rules concerning the issuing and circulation of environmental tokens (which, moreover, can connect different scales and different contexts of exploitation) introduces in the already intense sphere of nature manipulation an additional element for even more dynamism; the latter results in the generation of new fields of framing, assembling and connecting environmental resource and “performances”. In the movement of digital encapsulation of environmental value, what risks to be reinforced is the configuration of the natural as a source of an indefinite flow of exploitable forms of nature itself. And the fact that the process develops in a diffused, distributed and decentralized way makes the overlapping of exploitation processes particularly fluid, and makes it harder to focus the lenses of critique, compared to situations where exploitation itself is inscribed within traditional institutional frameworks.

2.2 The Ontological Dimension of Nature Manipulation

The background of old and new operations of manipulation and exploitation of nature is, as rightfully highlighted by Pellizzoni (2016, *op. cit.*), the one that is marked by the redetermination of a set of ontological boundaries; a movement that mostly proceeds riding the same wave of the new materialisms (see, for a critical read, Pellizzoni 2017) and of the ways with which, sometimes quite easily, they go beyond anthropocentric approaches and dualistic stances, considered as dominative. Thus, the processes of technical intervention on nature should be also read considering *ontological politics* and the theoretical-ideological frameworks that binds together anti/post naturalistic positions and post/trans-human stances.

On one hand, the natural world keeps on being perceived as constitutionally hybridized with the techno-artificial one; nature is defined by its relationship with a never-ending flow of socio-technical operations, including the very operation of abstaining from intervention. As Pellizzoni (2019, *op. cit.*) writes the “natural” appears as a sort of internal differentiation of the social, the technical, or of capital itself: almost like a moment of breathing or Hegelian contradiction necessary to make a further leap forward.

¹⁶ On some issues concerning these tokens see Doria (2023, *op. cit.*).

What is radically put into question is the distinction between the human and the non-human, between the human being and the non-human matter (animal, vegetal, mineral, etc.), which is also considered as holder of vital potential. In this framework, some crucial challenges, such as the climate one, are redefined in a perspective that aims at overcoming each and every form of *environmental anthropocentrism* and *human exceptionalism*. All this with one provision: the irrepressible "specificity" of the human as the entity capable of (since it possesses reason, with all that this entails) taking a peculiar role compared to other *vital matters* in environmental policies. Here we can find a truly questionable rhetoric thread that very closely recalls (and the consonance deserves a critical analysis) the arguments we saw in action concerning the specific human contribution to algorithmic economy. As written by Fox & Alldred (2020, p. 272) «Indeed, (post) humans have been demonstrated to acquire capacities that are unusual (though not necessarily unique) for planet Earth [...] Some of these unusual capacities (not least the capacity to generate "policy") will be of specific utility when addressing climate change».

The human element involved in non-hierarchical relationships with non-human matter risks, in my opinion, of being constituted as an indefinitely malleable object in a post-human scenario; it risks to fluctuate in a space where every possible declination of the post-human transition appear as obvious. It is by considering this that, in my view, we must read the following declaration, which is inserted in an approach in line with the theoretical arguments that recognize that (post) humans are fully part of the environment:

«This posthuman standpoint on environment and climate change, we have suggested, supplies the means to avoid human exceptionalism (Dunlap, Catton, 1994, p. 24) - a position in which the "environment" is treated merely as a resource to sustain human existence. Instead it acknowledges the diverse capacities of matter (non-human and (post)human) to affect and be affected, but that these capacities are not fixed attributes but relational and emergent» (*ibidem*, p. 280).

Within a perspective aimed toward the complete transcendence of every remnant of dominative approaches, the environment is conceptualized as the ensemble of the natural and social worlds (Fox, Alldred, 2017), and is seen as populated by (post)humans in a bijective relationship of influence with non-human matter.

I cannot properly discuss here the deep theoretical issues that are flourishing around the post-human and postnatural twist of ecological thought. Herein I just wish to draw attention to the fact that the project of rewriting the relationship between human life and nature clearly evokes – on various paths, that are consonant with what is happening in the cryptoeconomic world – the issue of temporality. Amid the proliferation of relations among the vitalisms of the different forms of matter, what stands out as a crucial trait is the deep transformation of the conceptions of temporality. What matters, indeed, is the constant, undefined, recurrent capacity that matter has *to affect and be affected* in relationships; but this matter – *in primis* the (post) human one – is already constitutively projected beyond itself, because it constitutively refutes any kind of boundaries. In this framework, the abyssal enigma of the relation between the finitude of human life and the finiteness of the natural world tends to play to a new tune, or even to ring empty. A number of dimensions of temporality¹⁷ (the ones that refer to cyclicity, but also to irreversibility, non-procrastination and even *urgency*) are at risk of being obscured. If we stretch the interpretation of a very deep issue, we might even say that, in the neo-materialist project of emancipation, it seems like there is no time to have an experience of limit, which is in tune with the relationship between time and finitude, and, according to that relationship, meets the challenges of ecological thought.

17 I have addressed some related issues, from the perspective of the debate on anticipatory governance, in Doria (2022, *op. cit.*).

3. Conclusion: the Meaning of a Joint Questioning

The algorithmic cybernetization of socio-economic life and the manipulation of the environment are two frontiers of high-tech capitalism.

The cryptoeconomic revolution is fueled by the power of algorithmic technology, which prefigures a cybernetic translation of ever-wider domains of socio-economic life. Within the mirage of "assuring" the economy – and overcoming the "too human" fundamental economic uncertainty – the technological investment ends up with continuously generating unprecedented and often controversial economic realities.

In the scene of techno-manipulation of nature, there are a series of different processes taking place (which are not always readable within a coherent perspective), which, on the one hand, are moving toward enhancing and transforming the bio-physical reality, and, on the other hand, are demanding an incessant, whirling redetermination of the very profile of nature.

These two macro-movements are both permeated by the ontological issue; and the posthuman and postnatural configurations of the latter tend to call into question the conceptions of temporality and economic life. This matter, moreover, in its profound ambiguity, has also an emancipatory colouring, under the heading, in one case, of the post-capitalist posthuman, and in the other, of an anti-dualistic postnaturalism.

Precisely on the ontological terrain, cryptoeconomy and environmental processes seem to echo each other, on the basis of a deep similarity. And this happens just when the two macrofields are connected – a connection that is strong, direct and rich of consequences – by the environmental tokenization process.

When facing this scenario, my opinion is that one of the tasks of the economic and ecological critique is to carry out a joint inquiry, searching for an ever more precise reading of the aforementioned consonances. The appropriateness of this effort is testified by the fact that some ecological and economic strands of thought, today, are already working on what *both* the post-human *and* the postnatural turn risk to drive to irrelevancy, i.e. the dimension of limit.

Let us think of some lines of sociological theory, in which the critique to new materialisms and their actual potential of emancipation from techno-capitalism (Pellizzoni, 2017, *op. cit.*) is joined by a reflection on limit (Pellizzoni, 2021c), which is a particularly challenging theoretical item. Limit, in fact, rather than being explicitly refuted, tends to be the object of a constant, and sometimes difficult to spot, remodulation. Within that movement, it risks to present itself (on these matters see Pellizzoni, *ibidem*) as an element compatible with the capitalist project and, particularly, to be re-purposed as a trampoline for new exploitation waves. Despite this, the issue keeps alive and finds a field of experimentation in a number of alternative practices (which often take *prefigurative* features, Yates, 2015) that aim to step outside of the grammar of capitalist goals, values and relations and of the way with which they inform social relations and the relation with the natural world. This is the take of Pellizzoni (2021b, p. 375-376) concerning phenomena such as farmers' markets, community-supported credit systems, participatory plant breeding, frugal innovation or permaculture: «Where is the difference with business-as-usual? Goods are sold and bought, money is lent, plants are grown, research and technology development proceeds. To get the difference one has to look at telling clues, especially those 'alternative value practices' (Centemeri, 2018) which run counter capitalist chains of equivalences and (self-) valorizing thrusts».

This project, if we read between the lines of Pellizzoni's contribution, is a frail and delicate one, since it has to work on some non-apparent differences, or, rather, on the ones that capitalist dominion seems to relegate to the rank of mere shades of the way of thinking and living the economy and which, instead, are nuances that hint at an abyss of difference.

It is around the theme of limit (and the hard task of rethinking economic limit at the core of the abyssal issue of the nature of money) that an interpretive pathway of monetary innovation practices is developing. These practices speak a *radically different* language (as for the concep-

tions of money and the economy) compared to some cryptocurrency experiences, Bitcoin in particular. One example are complementary currencies based on *clearing*¹⁸, which is an extraordinarily important “principle” for economic theory and practice and is at the core of proposals for reforming the international monetary system (the Clearing Union of Keynes), which keep on stimulating contemporary monetary thought (see Amato, Fantacci, 2012, *op. cit.*). Around local clearing a lively debate has developed, filled with sociological contents (see, for example, Sartori, Dini, 2016); it touches upon the interpretation of the economic meaning of projects and their implications in terms of social and institutional dynamics.

In some experiences based on clearing, money is created and “destroyed” in a dynamic that breathes at the pace of commercial transactions, under the command of the systematic closure of debt and credit positions. Incorporating the clearing system in a local currency experiment, therefore, generates a monetary form with a peculiar relation with the dimension of limit (see on related issues, Doria, Fantacci, 2018). This dimension manifests itself, first, as a functional limit; a clearing-based currency, unlike an official currency, doesn’t carry out all the functions that the manuals assign to money; in particular, it doesn’t carry out the reserve of value function¹⁹, which is one of the pillars of the power and controversiality of official money. Local clearing circuits, though (which are based on a determined and carefully-wrought network of participants), have to deal, naturally, with a territorial limit, which opens up the question on the economic sense of monetary *localness*. The possibility that is unfolding in the future of these monetary experiments – as well as some alternative practices of ecological nature – concerns a limit that is not experienced in the dimension of simulation (meaning in the context of artificial constraints that can be generated in the economic-algorithmic games) nor in that of a defensive closure.

The road toward a joint questioning on ecological and economic limit is not easy and its outcomes are not predetermined. The very threads – vivid, confused and surely not univocal in their meaning and breath – of contemporary economic and environmental innovation, though, make the inquiry urgent and potentially very fertile for sociology and other disciplines.

18 *Clearing* is a principle of functioning of economic relationships of extraordinary importance in the history of economic theory and practice. A clearing system «simply makes it possible to register (1) a debt owed by someone who is required to make a payment but cannot do so immediately; and (2) the corresponding credit in favour of the party to be paid. This is, however, from the very outset a trilateral rather than a bilateral relationship: both sums are registered as debit or credit *with respect to the system as a whole*. In virtue of its tripartite structure, the system permits the use of credits to make payments also towards third parties. In this way debit and credit are not individual and fungible positions, but acquire their meaning in relation to the entire set of relations constituting the system. Within a clearing system, credit takes the form, not of a bilateral relationship represented by a negotiable security, but that of the net position (positive or negative) of each member with respect to the set of all the others. What ensures the actual clearing, in other words the effective meeting of debtors and creditors, is therefore not a price (a rate of interest) such as to balance the supply and demand of money, but rather the multilateral compensation of profits and losses and the tendency to converge towards parity for all the participants» (Amato, Fantacci, 2012, *op. cit.* p. 34, italics in the original). For an analysis of how clearing works in experiences of monetary innovation, see the contribution of Fama, Musolino (2020), written in a perspective that is attentive to the social implications of the initiatives.

19 This function concerns the fact that money «allows us to preserve the share of income that is not used for the immediate consumption of goods and services for later use. In other words, it enables a share of current income to be kept (saved) for spending in the future» (Banca d’Italia, 2017).

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Residential Segregation: Concepts, Mechanisms and Effects of Spatial Inequalities²

1. Introduction

The study of the distribution and spatial division of social groups within the urban space gained increasing attention in the last years (Musterd, 2020; Tammaru *et al.*, 2016a), stimulated by growing social inequalities and levels of segregation in European countries and cities (Cassiers, Kesteloot, 2012; Moulaert *et al.*, 2003; van Ham *et al.*, 2021).

In Europe, segregation studies focused mainly on the separation of socio-economic groups. At the same time, the urban distribution of the foreign population became a research topic only when migrations assumed considerable dimensions in many large cities. In contrast, American researchers dealt with spatial inequalities related to the discrimination of ethnic groups and the concentration of disadvantaged families in neighbourhoods (Maloutas, 2012).

Although not problematic in an absolute sense, scholars have underscored that residential segregation can pose a significant threat to the social inclusion of disadvantaged groups (Hedman *et al.*, 2015; van Ham, Manley, 2010). It is assumed that the physical and social characteristics of the areas of residence, together with an unequal spatial distribution of services and resources, contribute to defining the opportunity/constraint structure of people, cultivating the reproduction and intergenerational transmission of social inequalities (Morlicchio, 2018; Nieuwenhuis *et al.*, 2020; van Ham *et al.*, 2018). It has also been argued that segregation can brew up vicious circles so that a condition of separateness experienced in the housing sphere tends to be reproduced and reinforced in other life spheres, such as school, workplace, and leisure time activities (Tammaru *et al.*, 2021).

Over the years, several authors dealt with this phenomenon focusing on aspects related to its causal processes – systematic and contextual factors that determine the degree and the intensity of residential segregation and its spatial configuration (Maloutas, 2012; Tammaru *et al.*, 2016a). On the other hand, many efforts have been made to give a good depiction of the phenomenon through the use of theoretical frameworks, statistical measures and cartographic tools (Reardon and O’Sullivan, 2004; Wong, 2016). As residential segregation can have profound effects on individual life courses, shaping inequalities in many spheres of life, endangering social cohesion, and raising questions of social justice (Cassiers and Kesteloot, 2012; Pratschke and Morlicchio, 2023), a public intervention through policies is required to address its main adverse effects. These programs include place-based policies aiming to diversify social mixing in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, by adopting specific housing policies to favor the replacement of buildings and household/individual-based policies, that act by reducing factors of social exclusion, such as education and employment, by creating opportunities for people, implying that the access to different networks could lead to the disruption of vicious circles that foster segregation. Finally, connectivity-based policies seek to support the physical connection between disadvantaged neighbourhoods with other urban places within a regional area (van Ham *et al.*, 2018). Despite the trust placed in such programs by policy makers, the real impact and usefulness of these strategies in addressing spatial inequalities in European countries have been questioned (Arbaci, 2019).

The work is organised as follows. Section 2 introduces the concept of residential segregation, its different declinations, and the spatial configurations through which it manifests in urban space. Section 3 illustrates the main theoretical frameworks that attempt to explain the mechanisms underlying the phenomenon’s production in contemporary cities, showing its complexity, and

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intertwining with economic, social, and institutional factors. Section 4 addresses issues related to the effects of residential segregation in terms of social inequalities and its potential impact on the life courses of individuals and families. Section 5 describes the impact of economic factors on the socio-spatial layout of European cities, with a particular focus on the city of Liverpool – one of the most important European industrial centers of the past. It provides an illustrative case to get insights about how much the changes induced by the transition from a Fordist to a post-Fordist socio-economic structure have shaped spatial segregation in European cities. The impact of these transformations on the current socio-spatial configuration of the city, resulting in residential segregation and spatial divisions among specific social groups, is explored. The analysis results are interpreted and linked back to the theoretical frameworks illustrated in Section 3. Finally, Section 6 summarises the evidence from the article and presents some concluding remarks.

2. Definition of the Concept of Residential Segregation and its Dimensions

Residential segregation is a concept used in the social sciences to refer to the physical separation between two or more groups based on specific social characteristics that lead to their unequal distribution in urban space (Barbagli and Pisati, 2012; Massey and Denton, 1988). The systematic study of socio-spatial divisions within population groups began with the Chicago school and the development of the Human Ecology Approach, which aimed to study and describe the structure and organisation of American cities. According to Park (1926), the spatial distance between social groups can be considered a good approximation of the social stratification system, where differences in status or occupation are fixed in space:

«It is because geography, occupation, and all the other factors which determine the distribution of population determine so irresistibly and fatally the place, the group, and the associates with whom each one of us is bound to live that spatial relations come to have, for the study of society and human nature, the importance which they do. It is because social relations are so frequently and so inevitably correlated with spatial relations; because physical distances so frequently are, or seem to be, the indexes of social distances, that statistics have any significance whatever for sociology. And this is true, finally, because it is only as social and psychical facts can be reduced to, or correlated with, spatial facts that they can be measured at all» (Park, 1926, p. 14).

Over time, the study of residential segregation has grown, particularly in the United States, where suburbanization and discriminatory housing practices have led to the creation of socially homogenous areas (Maloutas, 2012). American researchers have primarily focused on factors such as race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status as contributing dimensions to the formation of ghettos and disadvantaged areas (Massey, Denton, 1993). In contrast, studies on residential segregation in Europe have mainly concentrated on the socio-professional dimension and the distribution of foreigners within cities (Bergamaschi, Maggio, 2020; Oberti, Prêteceille, 2017). Historically, the study of segregation became an important research topic for urban sociologists, human geographers, and demographers starting from the 1950s onward. According to Hamnett (2001), the American urban riots of the 1960s, along with the changes in social compositions that American inner cities experienced in the post-war, stimulated a wave of research on residential segregation. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, these investigations were primarily centered around racial and ethnic dimensions. Additionally, the availability of census data and the use of quantitative analysis made it possible to analyse and compare the distributions of social groups by large urban areas. Nevertheless, the trajectory of research on residential segregation underwent a transformation with David Harvey's contributions (among them *Social Justice and the City*, 1973). This shift moved the focus from the study of residential patterns to a

deeper exploration of the foundational economic and social processes that, along with ethnic and social class factors, shaped urban divisions. Renewed interest in the topic came later with Wilson's seminal work *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass and Public Policy* (1987) which delved into American ghettos and the debate on the underclass. Subsequently, there was a further shift in focus toward topics like polarisation and duality, involving cities and their socio-spatial structure (Mollenkopf, Castells, 1991; Sassen, 1991).

On the other hand, while many researchers focused on methodological issues related to the quantitative measurement of the phenomenon and the criteria for classifying urban areas as segregated or not (Duncan, Duncan, 1955), fewer efforts were devoted to developing a theoretical framework on what segregation was and how to define it. In 1988, Massey and Denton published a seminal work that conceptualised residential segregation as a multidimensional phenomenon. They introduced a set of indices designed to capture each dimension, providing essential concepts and tools for scholars studying this phenomenon.

According to the authors, the classical definition of segregation, which is «the degree to which two or more groups live separately from one another, in different parts of the urban environment» (p. 282), may conceal a certain complexity related to the manifestation of the phenomenon in a variety of ways.

As stated by them, segregation is described through five conceptually distinct dimensions:

- 1) *evenness* (equal/unequal distribution of two or more groups across the areas of the urban space. The more unevenly a group is distributed within the urban area, the more segregated it is);
- 2) *exposure* (degree of potential contact/isolation between different groups within defined areas. The greater the interaction between members of the same group (isolation), the greater the segregation within that group);
- 3) *concentration* (share of physical space occupied by a group in the urban environment. The higher the concentration, the smaller the area occupied by a group);
- 4) *centralisation* (spatial distance/proximity of a group from the urban centre of the city. According to this dimension – which was designed for the declining central areas of American cities – a group that is more concentrated in the city centre is considered more segregated);
- 5) *clustering* (over-representation of a group between contiguous parts of the city. The more a group is clustered in contiguous areas of the city, the more segregated it is).

It is worth noting that according to the definition of Massey and Denton, evenness and exposure are aspatial dimensions as they are based solely on social group composition within urban zones. On the other hand, concentration, centralization, and clustering explicitly require spatial information such as the distribution of the population in urban space (Reardon, O'Sullivan, 2004).

Although Massey and Denton (1988) suggested paying attention to the multiple dimensions that characterise segregation, studies have mainly focused on evenness as the most critical dimension of segregation (Tammaru *et al.*, 2016a; van Ham *et al.* 2021). Over the years, the multidimensional definition proposed by Massey and Denton has been challenged by scholars who have suggested rethinking segregation and its dimensions through the adoption of different theoretical frameworks (Johnston *et al.*, 2007; Reardon, O'Sullivan, 2004; Wong, 2016).

According to Reardon and O'Sullivan (2004), segregation can be defined as «the extent to which individuals of different groups occupy or experience different social environments» (p. 122). This definition emphasises the spatial characterisation of the phenomenon, and its measurement – from a methodological point of view – must take this component into account, considering segregation as a complete spatial process. In light of this, the authors suggested that the five dimensions illustrated by Massey and Denton can be condensed into two primary ones: *spatial exposure/isolation* and *spatial evenness/clustering*.

The former refers to the extent to which members of one social group encounter members of another social group (or of the same social group, if we consider spatial isolation) in their local

environments; while the latter describes the extent to which social groups are similarly distributed across urban areas. When adopting this scheme, evenness and clustering dimensions are merged, while exposure is conceptualised as explicitly spatial.

The spatial dimension assumes a central role within the domain of social sciences in understanding social phenomena (Nuvolati, 2018). A recognition that stems from the awareness that human interactions and actions take place within a physical-spatial framework (Mela, 2006; Bottini, 2020). By adopting a spatial perspective, it becomes evident that, since all events occur within specific locations, comprehending the spatial arrangement of elements, especially in relation to each other, is relevant to shed light on social phenomena (Logan, 2012). This holds particularly true in urban segregation studies, where spatial concepts such as distance, proximity, and exposure encompass a relational component that can be used as tools for evaluating the extent of interactivity among social groups or their shared exposure. However, places are also a combination of cultural, social, and economic processes, thereby molding the constraint-opportunity structure of individuals and influencing their beliefs and behaviors as well (De Falco *et al.*, 2022). Consequently, the domain of spatial sociology has underscored the paramount importance of regarding space neither as an empty form nor merely as an endogenous variable, but as a potent shaping agent of human actions (Fuller, Löw, 2017). In connection to this aspect, which will be further explored later in this text within the context of urban segregation, it has been pointed out that places can also fuel social differences and hierarchies through intricate mechanisms that exclude and segregate categories of people. On the other hand, such hierarchies are reproduced and reinforced through places of residence that reflect and reinforce urban hierarchy and inequalities among social groups (Gieryn, 2000; Massey, Denton, 1993).

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that despite efforts to establish a shared theoretical and methodological framework for studying residential segregation in urban contexts, one that also adequately incorporates and conceptualizes the spatial component of the phenomenon, a consensus regarding its definition and primary dimensions remains yet to be reached. Consequently, research on segregation should not only focus on the development of measures but also on a shared understanding of the phenomenon itself (Wong, 2016).

Nevertheless, scholars generally agree that residential segregation is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that can take on various spatial configurations stemming from diverse economic, cultural, and social factors. According to Barbagli and Pisati (2012), three main ideal types of spatial segregation can be identified, namely: *ghetto*, *enclave*, and *citadel* (Marcuse, 1997; Wacquant, 2004).

The *ghetto* is defined as a place inhabited only by a social group affected by social stigma and negative connotations. This specific type of residential segregation implies that the excluded group lives in a condition of subordination to the other social groups; in this case, isolation and marginalisation from the rest of society can be imposed either *de facto* or *de jure*.

An *enclave* is a form of segregation different from the ghetto, as it is not the result of institutional racism or any other form of social discrimination. In this case, the spatial concentration of groups with similar characteristics, such as ethnicity and cultural identity, is in a sense voluntarily chosen in order to maintain and sustain social cohesion, mutual aid networks, and to achieve social, economic, and political improvements. Historically, this type of segregation is linked to immigration and is explained through the concept of homophily, which refers to the tendency of people to seek out other people similar to them.

The last type, the *citadel*, is considered a voluntary concentration in the urban space of people according to their position of privilege in terms of wealth, power, and status. Spatial separation, in this case, can also be understood as marking a physical distinction and protecting oneself from other social groups. An example is provided by the gated communities with access restricted to wealthy residents and their guests.

3. Mechanisms of Residential Segregation

Regardless of the different forms by which the spatial separation of social groups is shaped, a growing debate on the causes and effects of residential segregation has developed since the 1980s. Starting from the role of economic processes and institutional factors such as the state, the welfare regime, and the housing system, two main explanations of the phenomenon in contemporary cities can be distinguished in the literature. According to some American scholars (Mollenkopf, Castells, 1991; Sassen, 1991), the process of deindustrialization that began in the 1970s, followed by the globalisation and tertiarisation of economic activities, has led to a growing polarisation in the labour market between high-skilled and low-skilled workers; the changes that have taken place in the social structure of post-Fordist cities – with the contraction of the middle class and the expansion of higher and lower occupations – have manifested mainly in the urban space through a reorganisation of social geography that takes the form of a socio-spatial duality involving the two emerging occupational groups.

Despite the extensive use of the social polarisation thesis in segregation studies to describe new forms of urban inequalities in metropolitan cities, researchers have questioned its foundations (Hamnett, 1994; van Kempen, 1994) since the 1990s, emphasising that spatial divisions cannot be understood as a unidirectional and homogeneous process. Moreover, the relationship between social polarisation and spatial patterns has proven to be more complex and articulated than mainstream theories suggest (Arbaci, 2019, Pratschke, Morlicchio, 2012). It has also been argued that the adoption of the polarisation framework – developed mainly to account for changes in large American cities – can be problematic and less effective when translated into different urban contexts, where economic, social and cultural spheres can lead to different outcomes (Musterd, Ostendorf, 1998).

In particular, European researchers have specifically focused on the various types of residential segregation that result from a combination of economic and institutional factors, shifting the interest to the role of the state and redistributive policies. This approach has brought attention to the importance of contextual factors and variations between different urban areas, making it a central theme in international debates. Therefore, while global forces may help to explain inequality and segregation processes, monocausal explanations, such as the polarisation thesis, are insufficient to account for the diverse configurations of segregation observed in cities around the world. Instead, other contextual factors must be considered in order to understand the mechanisms and effects of residential segregation. As stated by Maloutas: «Urban segregation is context-dependent in the sense that its patterns and social impact are determined by the combined effect of mechanisms and institutions involving the market, the state, civil society and the specific and durable shape of local socio-spatial realities» (Maloutas, 2012, p. 3).

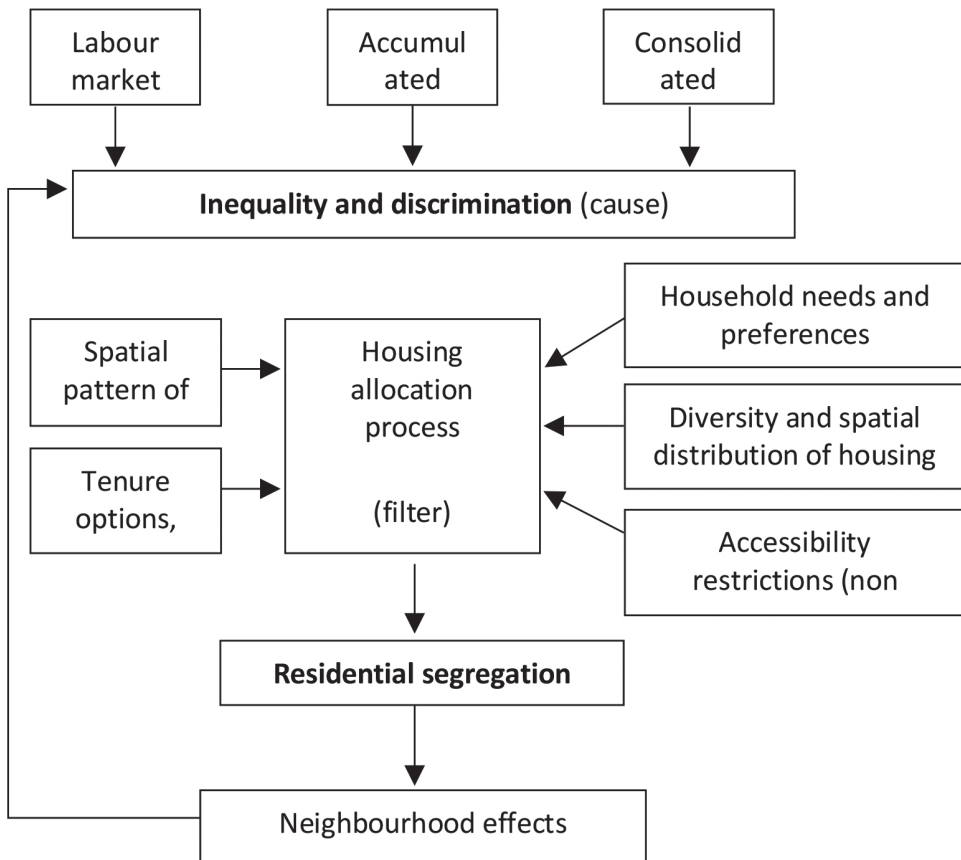
Hence, the spatial divisions can be understood as the result of various causal mechanisms – such as targeted national and local policies, welfare states, market forces, and private housing systems – which, combined with the local historical pathway, can lead to different outcomes. Maloutas (*op. cit.*) developed an explanatory scheme (Fig. 1) that defines the processes leading to residential segregation as a set of causal relationships mediated by local urban contexts.

The first part of the scheme considers the labour market, unequally accumulated wealth, and ethno-racial diversity as causes of social inequalities and discrimination. Here, different types of social regulation may act on the functioning of the labour market and accumulated wealth in other ways, producing different outcomes in terms of income inequality (considered the most critical contextual characteristic) and ethno-racial discrimination. Afterwards, these factors turn into segregation through several drivers that influence the housing allocation process: the role of the housing market and institutional intervention – ranging from minimal interference in market dynamics to the provision of social housing – greatly influence segregation patterns; the characteristics of housing stock, such as diversity, spatial distribution and quality; social networks and the presence of family ties can influence, along with property rights, neighbourhoods and

housing choices by producing low levels of residential mobility. Finally, as residential segregation may fuel inequalities and social exclusion through the action of neighbourhood effects, institutional intervention could promote mixed social policies and improve the distribution of services to address these adverse outcomes.

Regarding the last mechanism introduced in Maloutas’s model (the neighbourhood effects), other authors have underscored the pivotal role played by the place – and therefore by the spatial dimension – in conjunction with macrostructural factors, in generating inequalities and segregation. Wilson (1987) employed the expression “*concentration effects*” to explain how the concentration of disadvantaged social groups within highly impoverished areas can produce a range of different social outcomes that perpetuate inequalities.

Figure 1 Diagram of the causal mechanisms in the reproduction process of residential segregation (Maloutas, 2012, p. 12).



According to Sampson (2012), neighbourhoods play a crucial role in understanding spatial differentiation within urban areas. They act as intermediaries between macro-level factors (political, institutional, and economic spheres) and micro-level processes (such as individual preferences) contributing to shaping spatial inequality and segregation. The active role of places in producing spatial divisions is also highlighted by Oberti and Prêteceille (2017). Residential space constitutes a fundamental framework for comprehending social life, as social relationships and practices are deeply intertwined within local places. Moreover, according to the authors, the city goes beyond being a mere spatial reflection of social inequalities arising from economic

relationships. On the contrary, places actively generate distinct urban inequalities. Indeed, the city consists of a diverse range of resources that are unequally distributed in urban space. The convergence of urban segregation with urban inequalities gives rise to specific social disparities. These inequalities not only contribute to segregation, but conversely, segregation also gives rise to additional urban inequalities that mutually reinforce one another.

Musterd *et al.* (2017) proposed an analytical framework that seeks to account for the primary structural factors that shape socio-economic segregation. These factors include socio-economic inequalities, welfare and housing regimes, degrees of globalization, and changes in economic structures. Based on their analyses of European cities, the results reveal that while a relationship exists between segregation levels and these factors, they do not fully explain the phenomenon. This led the authors to argue that the unique combination of economic, social and physical factors, together with the local institutional contexts that characterise cities, play a crucial role in understanding socio-economic segregation.

The prominent role of national and local institutions in shaping segregation processes is also highlighted by Arbaci (2019), who defines residential segregation as a multi-scalar process embodied in the broader organisation of societies. It is driven by a variety of systemic mechanisms and contextual factors in which macro-structures such as welfare regimes and housing systems play a significant role in the social division of space, and the state-market(-family) nexus is a critical factor in the production and understanding of urban inequalities. According to this perspective, segregation cannot be conceptualised as the result of global forces or individual choices. Rather, it is linked to the functioning of society in terms of organisation, production and distribution of resources. This shift entails a radical change in how the issue of segregation is usually approached, as it places the phenomenon within the more complex debate on the production of urban inequalities.

The main differences in the conceptualisation of segregation, and its causes between North American and Western European schools, have historical and ideological reasons (Arbaci, 2019; Maloutas, 2012). These can be traced back to the different socio-spatial configurations of urban spaces and the distinct ways of defining and addressing segregation as a political and social problem. Regarding the first aspect, the process of suburbanisation in European cities has been less intense and widespread than in American cities. Additionally, the upper classes have not moved out of urban centres, while welfare policies have mitigated the effect of social and spatial inequalities. This has not been the case in American cities. Secondly, in the American context, dominated by the ideology of liberalism, segregation is perceived as a limitation to individual achievement – a situation that can be overcome through upward spatial mobility, as demonstrated by government programs that encourage residents to leave problematic areas instead of improving them – and as the product of individual choice. On the other hand, in Western European countries – traditionally characterised by principles of social equity – segregation is conceived as a social and structural problem.

Recognition of these differences has led European scholars to address segregation in a systematic and redistributive way, acting on the mechanisms that produce inequality in the housing and labour market. State regulation and the role of welfare policies may explain why Western European cities show a lower level of segregation than American cities, while the existence of different welfare regimes and housing systems in European countries helps to understand the variety of outcomes in terms of urban inequality between cities (Tammaru *et al.*, 2016b).

4. The Effects of Residential Segregation

Whatever the role and degree to which economic restructuring, institutional intervention, and the housing system shape the spatial division between social groups and the complex relation-

ship between social distance and spatial segregation, residential segregation as an outcome can produce negative effects in terms of social exclusion and transmission of social inequalities, undermining equal opportunities between individuals and families of different social groups. In the literature, many studies have focused on the relationship between place of residence and social mobility (Musterd *et al.*, 2003), employment, and educational attainment (van Ham *et al.*, 2012) underlining the undesirable consequences of the isolation and concentration of disadvantaged groups (by income, status, etc.) in terms of life opportunities. However, residential segregation is not negative per se and may also have positive effects on communities. Some studies suggest that the proximity of individuals who share the same socio-economic background or ethnicity can foster strong social ties and mutual support, allowing people to more easily access forms of instrumental and relational support (Peach, 1996, Piekut *et al.*, 2019). This can positively impact social cohesion and cultural values, especially among ethnic groups. The social composition of residential areas, therefore, does not necessarily lead to a cycle of inequality and social exclusion. In certain contexts, the concentration of social groups in urban spaces can produce positive effects in terms of access to resources (Daconto, 2014). However, it is widely recognised that segregation can also have a negative impact on individual life opportunities (Johnston *et al.*, 2014; Nieuwenhuis *et al.*, 2020; van Ham *et al.*, 2018).

The place where individuals and their families live is considered a key location for everyday activities such as school, the workplace, and leisure activities. Residential segregation can be therefore considered as a form of inequality interrelated with other life domains, leading some authors to define a conceptual framework of “the vicious circles of segregation” to explain how segregation and spatial inequalities systematically occur and reproduce in different spheres of life (Tammaru *et al.*, 2021). According to this perspective, segregation experienced in one sphere of life such as residential, school, or work, tends to reproduce itself in other spheres. Moreover, the disadvantage is often transferred from parents to children due to the close ties between family members. Thus, residential location and housing play a crucial role in shaping social and spatial inequalities in cities.

The urban areas in which people live influence their access to school, occupation, and leisure activities. The issue of school segregation provides a good example of how these spheres are interconnected. School choice is often influenced by the proximity of schools to the family residence; as consequence, schools reflect the social composition of the neighbourhood. This phenomenon is further compounded by differences in the quality and reputation of schools, leading to higher housing prices in areas with better schools, and the exclusion of low-income families. The spatial separation between rich and poor households in urban space implies that higher-income households may choose to live in neighbourhoods with high availability of services. This situation leads to the so-called Tiebout sorting effect, triggering competition between local areas to attract households by offering high-quality services, resulting in an uneven distribution of resources (van Ham *et al.*, 2018). The concentration of families according to their socio-economic characteristics and their exposure to poverty and social exclusion can influence the life opportunities of individuals through the action of negative contextual effects (Hedman *et al.*, 2015; Sampson *et al.*, 2002; van Ham, Manley, 2010) that act over time by fostering the intergenerational transmission of inequalities which, in turn, contribute to reinforcing the spatial separation of social groups in different places.

How segregation is perceived, whether it is considered problematic or not, can influence how institutions respond and their strategies for addressing the issue. According to Cassiers and Kesteloot (2012), it is possible to distinguish three levels of interventions: 1) strategies aiming to mitigate the negative outcome of segregation mainly through the adoption of programs in the disadvantaged areas; 2) strategies promoting the social mix between higher income households and lower-income households; 3) strategies targeting specific deprived areas seeking to upgrade and reconnecting them in the wider context of the city. These intervention approaches fall into the category of place-based policies and connectivity-based policies and are based on the

assumption that de-concentrating and mixing socio-economic or ethnic groups, or upgrading buildings and infrastructure may solve social problems related to segregation and inequalities. However, their effectiveness has been challenged and this is because they are mainly developed on the idea that it is places, and not disadvantaged groups, that need to be socially integrated (Kesteloot *et al.*, 2006). Other types of intervention target individuals and aim to improve their socio-economic conditions by creating educational and employment opportunities which in turn may facilitate mobility to better neighbourhoods. The validity of these policies is not easy to test as their effects may be visible in the long term. Additionally, families affected by upward socio-spatial mobility may be replaced by other low-income families, not changing the socio-spatial patterns in the urban area (van Ham *et al.*, 2018).

5. The Socio-spatial Structure in Post-industrial Cities: the Case of Liverpool

Historically, European cities have exhibited a range of socio-spatial configurations, in which economic and institutional factors have played a crucial role in shaping residential environments. Undoubtedly, the changes induced by the Industrial Revolution significantly impacted the social structure of cities, determining the expansion and the concentration of the working class in the inner areas – due to the presence of industrial plants – and the shift of the upper class in better and healthier residential areas placed in suburban zones. The shift from a traditional to a Fordist industrial society brought about changes in the social geography of urban areas. Production activities became more decentralized, and the expansion of the public tertiary sector led to the growth of the middle class. As a result, previously working-class neighbourhoods in central urban areas were gradually occupied by middle and upper-class families, while working-class families were displaced in peripheral areas or in smaller municipalities that surrounded the city core (Morlicchio, 2020). Starting from the 1970s, industrial cities in Western countries experienced a considerable decrease in manufacturing sector activities as the Fordist industry declined. As a result, there was a transition towards economic restructuring, leading to a substantial expansion of the tertiary sector and a corresponding reduction in industry sector employment, with a significant increase in service sector jobs (Kesteloot *et al.*, 2006). This shift towards a post-industrial economy created a growing polarisation between high-skilled and low-skilled occupations and a contraction of the middle class. As a consequence, there has been a notable increase in social and spatial inequalities within European cities, affecting their socio-spatial structure.

Given the significant changes that occurred during the transition from industrial to post-industrial economies, the city of Liverpool can offer an informative case study to examine how these processes affected the socio-spatial structure of urban areas. Once one of the world's major industrial centres and a strategic hub for international trade, Liverpool's socio-economic structure was characterised by high levels of employment in the industrial sector and the prevalence of manufacturing in the organization of economic activities. By the 1950s, its decline as a global economic centre began, accelerating dramatically in the 1980s, with the collapse of the Fordist industry and the subsequent deindustrialization of the city. This transformation, which occurred in many other European industrial cities, considerably altered Liverpool's social structure and urban morphology, leading to the decline of areas once cores of wealth production and increasing the spread of unemployment and urban poverty (Sykes *et al.*, 2013). According to Haase *et al.* (2021), the transition toward a new economic phase that reversed the economic decline of the city can be attributed to a few key factors. Among these, the national economic growth starting from the mid-1990s, driven by urban economies and the expansion of the tertiary sector; the end of the period of rapid industrial restructuring in the 1990s; and the long-term urban and economic regeneration strategies and programmes funded by the European Union and central government.

Like other English cities, Liverpool has undergone urban renewal, housing renewal projects, and regeneration programmes aimed primarily at central areas, with the goal of reversing the deterioration of industrial sectors and creating opportunities for a new economic development based on tertiary and tourism-related activities. In this new context, the city's identity has been deeply transformed by the growth of the advanced tertiary sector, as well as by the expansion of hotels, restaurants, and the entertainment industry, which mostly affected the city center. This transition has resulted in the city's shift from being a "centre of producers" to a "centre of consumers" (Belchem, 2006). However, these transformations have only affected specific areas of the city and certain social groups. Outside of the historic centre, which is mostly inhabited by the upper and middle classes, the trend of decline remains unchanged. Other areas continue to be affected by a weak economy and high unemployment rates. Given these processes, it is interesting to examine how the population is currently distributed within Liverpool and gain insights about the existence and extent of socio-spatial divisions. An operation also made possible by the recent release of the latest UK census data.

5.1 Methodology and Results

The analysis is based on data gathered from UK census data provided by the Office for National Statistics³ for the year 2021. Since the aim of this section is to get insights into the geographical distribution of socio-economic groups within the city of Liverpool, population groups are defined according to the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC)⁴. Socio-economic schemas have been extensively used by scholars to study social inequalities. These typologies commonly stem from data regarding individuals' occupations to explain differences in wealth and life chances. This is because work significantly influences socio-economic differences in market-driven economies (Ballarino and Cobalti, 2003). The NS-SEC classes are aggregated into four categories: 1) Higher managerial, administrative, and professional occupations (NS-SEC 1); 2) Intermediate occupations (NS-SEC 2); 3) Small employers and own account workers (NS-SEC 3); 4) Routine and manual occupations (NS-SEC 4).

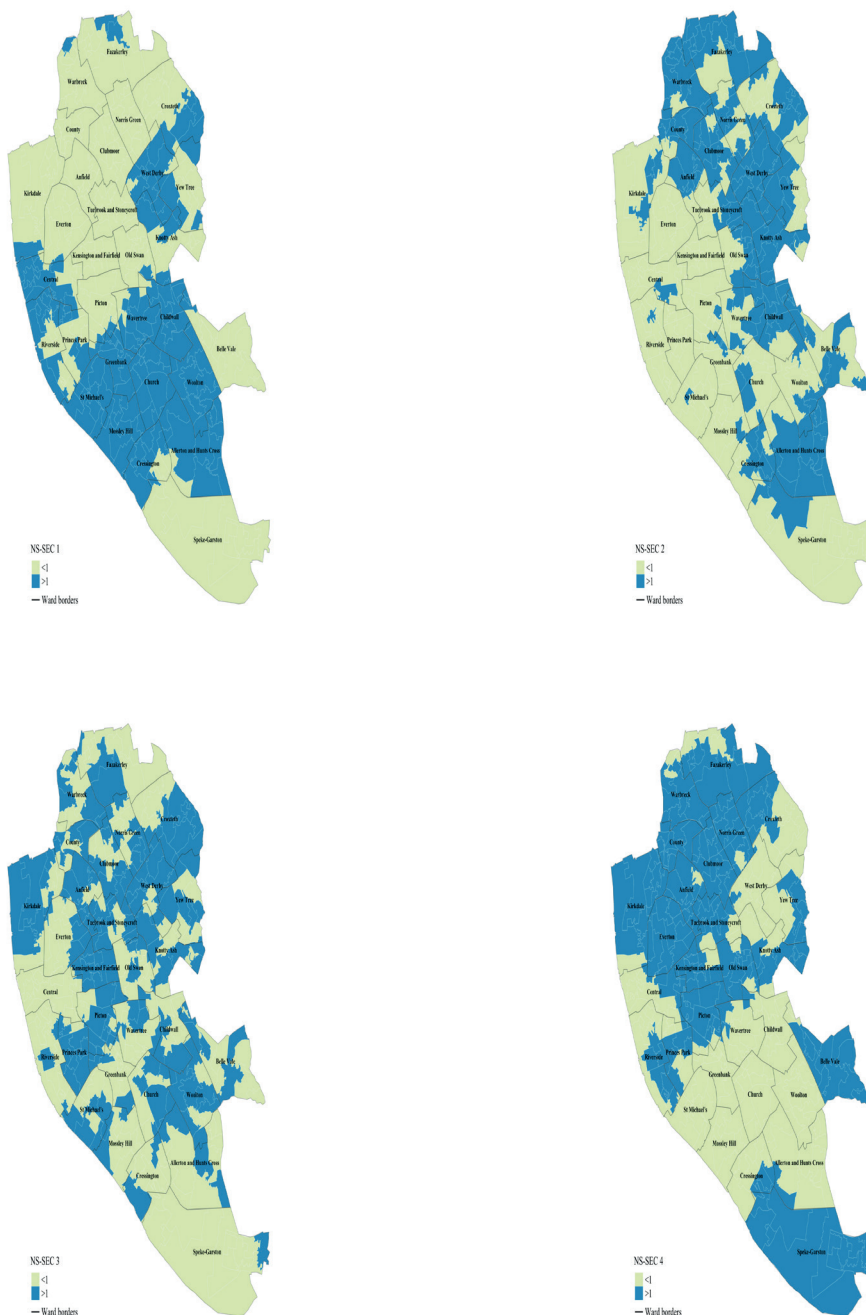
To unveil the geographical distribution of NS-SEC classes in the study area, the Location Quotient (LQ) (Brown, Chung, 2006), which is a common measure in residential segregation studies, was used. The LQ is a relative indicator of residential segregation, offering insights into the concentration of social groups in specific city areas. Furthermore, the results from the index can be visualised through mapping, providing a more accurate depiction of social group distribution across urban areas and thus enhancing the understanding of Liverpool's social geography.

Specifically, the LQ works by comparing the proportion of a specific group within a given area to the proportion of the same group at the municipality level, providing insights into the relative concentration or underrepresentation of socio-economic groups within particular city areas. Values greater or lower than 1 denote situations of concentration or underrepresentation respectively, while values equal to 1 indicate that there is no difference in the proportion of a socio-economic group in local areas compared to its proportion at the city level. Finally, Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) were used as ecological units for the analysis. These areas encompass between 400 and 1,200 households and have a resident population ranging from 1,000 to 3,000 individuals. Their size makes them suitable for approximating a neighborhood scale, facilitating detailed local-level analysis. The results of the LQ for each socio-economic group were mapped and reported in Figure 2.

3 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census>.

4 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/classificationsandstandards/otherclassifications/thenationalstatisticssocio-economicclassificationnssecrebasedonsoc2010>.

Figure 2 Location quotient maps of NS-SEC groups in Liverpool city at Lower Layer Super Output Area (LSOA) level – *Contains National Statistics data © Crown copyright and database right [2023].*



By looking at the cartograms, it is clear that the NS-SEC 1 class is mainly overrepresented in the central areas of the city, while middle occupational groups (NS-SEC 2 and NS-SEC 3) show a more scattered distribution across the urban area. Conversely, the NS-SEC 4 class is primarily concentrated in the peripheral zones of the city. It is interesting to note that areas of NS-SEC 1

concentration almost completely overlap with areas where NS-SEC 4 is underrepresented, and vice versa.

What emerges is that Liverpool exhibits a cleavage between socio-economic groups along the centre-periphery axis. The centre, defined not only in geographical terms but also by the concentration of commercial, cultural, and financial activities, is predominantly inhabited by the upper class (NS-SEC 1). On the opposite, the working class (NS-SEC 4) is concentrated in peripheral areas. Interestingly, the LQ map for the NS-SEC 1 class seems to show pockets of overrepresentation that could indicate a possible phenomenon of polycentrism taking place. It should be also highlighted that historically, the occupation of the city centers by the upper-middle classes is more distinctive in European continental cities than in Anglo-American ones, where elites favored suburban residences due to the rise of manufacturing and concentration of working-class populations in industrial city centers (Maloutas, 2012). It is remarkable but not surprising that these residential patterns coincide to a good extent with the geography of deprivation of the city. According to the index of household deprivation calculated by the Office for National Statistics for 2021, and based on employment, education, health and disability, and housing dimensions, the highest levels of deprivation can be found in the working-class areas, while at the opposite end of the spectrum, the central, predominantly upper-class areas experience the best socio-economic conditions. In conclusion, changes in recent decades that have altered the socio-occupational structure of the city of Liverpool seem to have produced a markedly polarised social geography. In my doctoral thesis (De Falco, 2023), I also conducted an extensive diachronic analysis of Liverpool at a metropolitan scale employing UK census data for the years 2001, 2011, and 2021. The results, as the ones outlined in this study, strongly supported the hypothesis of polarisation between NS-SEC 1 and NS-SEC 4 classes, demonstrating the persistence of this phenomenon over time and highlighting a distinct center-periphery demarcation as well.

6. Conclusions

Residential segregation refers to the spatial separation of population groups in urban areas. This definition incorporates both a socio-relational dimension – segregation involves at least two groups defined on the basis of some socially relevant characteristic (such as ethnicity or socio-economic class) – and a spatial dimension – segregation materialises in physical space through a condition of isolation (in most extreme cases) – or over-representation of homogeneous social groups in specific urban areas.

What makes the study of residential segregation interesting for scholars from different disciplines is not the spatial location of groups per se, but the underlying economic, institutional and social mechanisms that shape specific socio-spatial structures in cities and, above all, the social consequences in terms of life opportunities and inequalities it has on individuals and families. The mechanisms through which segregation shapes individual life courses are complex, intertwined and not always visible. As pointed out in the text, it is also crucial not to overlook the fundamental role that places play in generating urban inequalities and segregation. Operating as active agents, places exert their influence on behaviors, social interactions, and opportunities for individuals and families, through processes that emerge at the intersection of micro and macro factors.

When addressing the negative effects of segregation, it is mainly the disadvantaged and less affluent social groups that receive academic and institutional attention. The concentration of people with a low socio-economic profile in specific urban areas reduces their chances of upward social mobility and impacts the opportunities for intergroup interaction, raising issues in terms of social cohesion (see, for example, the riots in the suburbs of some major European cities such as London in 2011, Stockholm in 2013 and the recurring tensions that broke out in 2005 in the

banlieues of Paris). It can also define the extent and variety of social networks, which are essential in determining access to employment and educational opportunities, as well as in the capacity for social mobilisation and influencing political decisions.

Although not negative per se, residential segregation can have a negative impact on the inclusion of disadvantaged groups and can worsen social inequalities. This is because the social composition of the areas of residence, together with the unequal spatial distribution of services and resources, contribute to defining the spatial structure of constraints and opportunities of individuals.

This work aimed to present the concept of residential segregation by attempting to reconstruct the phases that led to its consolidation as an object of study in the social sciences from the early 1900s to the present. As illustrated, residential segregation is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that can be broken down into two main fields of research. As a process, segregation is conceived as the product of an intertwining of economic, social, cultural and institutional factors acting at the individual and contextual level, producing different socio-spatial configurations. In this case, the focus of scholars is, therefore, on the mechanisms underlying segregation. As a result, the interest of scholars is directed towards the effects of residential segregation on disadvantaged and less affluent social groups in terms of unequal life opportunities.

The in-depth study of the city of Liverpool showed how changes in the city's socio-economic structure with deindustrialization and tertiarisation of the economy have resulted in social and spatial polarisation. The findings indicate the existence of spatial divisions between the upper and working class, and the contrast of a regenerated city centre that is surrounded by disadvantaged and deprived residential areas.

As discussed, since the consequences of segregation raise social issues, public institutions have promoted policies to mitigate them over the years. Although a mix of strategies can effectively reduce segregation levels, it has been argued that addressing urban inequality is not just a matter of policy response through urban interventions. Still, it implies the need for a systemic rethinking of the key factors to be addressed – the production of urban inequality – and what principles and policies can lead to a less unequal society.

It is important to emphasise that this work was focused exclusively on the Western context. However, for a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, it could be valuable to broaden the lens to encompass non-Western urban contexts. In doing so, a global perspective that embraces contextual diversity and different theoretical approaches can be adopted. Regarding the examination of the Liverpool case, the use of the Local Quotient to depict the geographical distribution of socio-economic classes could benefit from the integration of qualitative elements. This integration would offer a more profound comprehension of the residential patterns in the city. Additionally, a further enhancement might involve considering other cities from different European countries as case studies. Through comparative analyses, it may become possible to investigate variations in social geography among urban areas, thereby further testing the polarisation thesis.

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Giuseppe Gaballo¹

Planning for Accessibility. Lecce: a Case-Study²

Introduction

Cities have always contributed to the coexistence of differences (Barbagli, Pisati, 2012). However, social disparities have gradually increased and become more visible, especially in large metropolitan areas, where urban planning has exacerbated both discrimination and exclusiveness (Harvey, 1973; Cesareo, 2007; Secchi, 2013, pp. 21-30; Sennett, 2018). The functional development of cities based on zoning has resulted in a patchwork of badly connected neighbourhoods and neglected peripheries (Gaballo, 2020; Alietti, 2021). Therefore, urban planners have been entrusted with the challenging task of efficiently connecting urban areas, by investing in infrastructure and logistics (La Cecla, 2018; Chan, 2019; Bernardini, Giolo, 2021).

Several new approaches have recently been adopted to enhance neighbourhoods by fostering their dynamism and giving value to bordering areas (Cremaschi, 2008; Fainstein, 2010). This has led to the introduction of the concept of “sustainable city”, which correlates the functional reorganization of spaces and services with the effect that an urban planning intervention may have on the city users’ lifestyle, habits, and prospects. The social dimension of urban sustainability includes two major ethical aspects: «on the one hand, the idea of the public space as a place where the encounter of diversity facilitates recognition and acceptance of difference; on the other hand, the idea of the public space as an inclusive place, accessible and usable by all people, builds on the concepts of the just city and of the right to the city» (Pinna *et al.*, 2021, p. 526). Such a new paradigm of urban planning includes the concepts of “accessibility” and “usability” (Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica, 2019). These are based on the principle of “universal design”³, by which urban transformation projects should have a positive impact on any category of city users (Pinna *et al.*, 2020), taking into account all the factors that may facilitate or prevent access to facilities, services, social opportunities and participatory initiatives (Geurs, van Wee, 2004; Garau *et al.*, 2020).

The idea of a more “welcoming” city is spreading also in Italy, with such a transformation being considered feasible through interdisciplinary measures (Rossi, 2021). Nevertheless, the current legislation is still based on old-fashioned notions, whereas the concepts of accessibility and usability have evolved over time (Lauria, 2012), going to include the improvement of the level of independent living of vulnerable categories. Italy introduced the Piano di Eliminazione delle Barriere Architettoniche (PEBA), a plan for the removal of architectural barriers, with Laws No. 41/1986 and 104/1992. The PEBA plan consists in the inventory and classification of all the architectural barriers that hinder access to buildings and public spaces in a specific area. Local governments are required to monitor, design, and schedule interventions aimed at achieving a satisfactory level of accessibility of spaces, facilities, goods and services.

An example of this innovative approach is provided by the strategy adopted by the Municipal Accessibility Lab (MAL) in the city of Lecce. Established in September 2020 by the Lecce City Council and coordinated by the Public Works Department, the MAL team was made up of three architect-researchers and a sociologist⁴, whose work was supervised by three professors of architecture, information technology and sociology at the Universities of Florence and Salento

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3 The phrase is used in Article 2 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which came into force on 3 May 2008 and was ratified by Italy with Law No. 18 of March 2009.

4 The MAL team included a sociologist only until 31 January 2022, while the three architect-researchers continued working on the project until 31 August 2023.

(Comune di Lecce, 2020; Raimondi *et al.*, 2022). The MAL team mainly aimed at developing an accessibility plan, which implied the revision of a political-administrative management system that used to attribute responsibility solely to the PEBA Department of the City Council and the disability manager. A permanent working group was set up that included municipal employees, researchers, and members of the main local associations of persons with disabilities (Comune di Lecce, 2019, p. 5).

In order to identify the basic principles for the development of an accessibility plan, a theoretical analysis was carried out.

1. Accessibility Plan. Theoretical Premises

1.1 Theoretical Background

Planning for accessibility has led to considering the urban space a social space. Therefore, reference should be made to the concepts of "just city" (Fainstein, 2010, *op. cit.*) and "right to the city" (Chan, 2019, *op. cit.*; Bernardini, Giolo, 2021, *op. cit.*). A review of the literature on the topic (Pinna *et al.*, 2021, *op. cit.*, p. 536) has shown that the inequalities in the distribution of economic and socio-cultural capital are particularly evident in some specific spatial morphology, which becomes both the cause and effect of exclusion and poverty. Such analyses focus on the concept of "spatial configuration" (Hillier, 2007), «the set of topological relations and interdependencies among components comprising a spatial system» (Pinna *et al.*, 2021, *op. cit.*, p. 536), which entails a social logic of space (Hillier, Hanson, 1984, pp. 82-142; Yamu *et al.*, 2021; Garau *et al.*, 2020).

Fainstein (1999) and Friedmann (2000, p. 463) have highlighted what has become a key concept in the work of the MAL team: «[...] justice claims are only made when people have a vision of what should be done» (Fainstein, 2014, *op. cit.*, p. 3). Going beyond Harvey's (1973) and Castells's (1972) merely critical approach, Fainstein has considered the right to the city an ideal of justice that transcends distribution issues and is connected with the right to build. According to Fainstein, the best strategy to practically apply such theoretical concepts is communicative rationality (Forester, 1993; Innes, 1995), also referred to as the collaborative approach (Healey, 2006; Mattila, 2016).

Rationality is not limited to a formal and scientific logic, but it is part of practical reasoning formed within intersubjective communication, thus encompassing all the ways in which individuals come to know and understand reality and use that knowledge in acting (Fainstein, 2014, *op. cit.*, p. 7). Only such a perspective may lead to embracing differences and counteracting the individualistic approach typical of economic liberalism that still prevails in urban planning.

This is the framework within which the MAL was created, with its permanent working group aiming at spreading knowledge of environmental issues, collaborating to find solutions to problems, and contributing to producing systemic patterns of behaviour so as to establish a dialogue between citizens, the local government, and economic stakeholders. While trying to achieve such objectives, the MAL team also attempted to address the miscommunication issues and conflict of values that may prevent a reinterpretation of the concept of just city. As Chan (2019) has pointed out, the concept of proximity becomes fundamental for the disadvantaged. The latter, however, are often invisible to their fellow citizens and are usually seen as unrelated to the urban fabric, with their level of vulnerability increasing. Furthermore, according to Chan, a productive resolution of conflicts, which might result in participatory processes of city development, may occur through two approaches – consensus building and the ethical compromise. Additionally, the concept of urban commons should be reconsidered, as it may lead to persons with disabilities being marginalized and missing opportunities.

In order to move from these theoretical premises to practical intervention, the MAL team focused on five fundamental concepts that became the basis for any action.

1.2 Conceptual Framework for an Operational Strategy

In Italy, PEBA plans mainly aim at dealing with specific issues. However, interventions to improve accessibility should be included in general urban planning and design (Bianchetti, 2008), with the whole local government being involved, rather than just its Public Works and Urban Planning Departments.

Such a cross-cutting approach reminds of the interdisciplinary nature of environmental planning studies (Salet, 2008). Adopting an interdisciplinary approach and encouraging stakeholders to contribute to identifying the possible solutions to problems and the citizens' needs may compensate for a lack of appropriate regulations and specific technical support, while helping to consider all the major aspects of the objectives of urban planning.

In that sense, a systemic approach revolves around the main focus of urban planning – equity. A number of experiments in accessibility (Church & Marston, 2003; Afacan, Afacan, 2011; Lid, Solvang, 2016; Velho, 2019) have been based on an idea of the built environment as a common good. Being instrumental in analysing various forms of discrimination, this approach entails a new concept of “inclusiveness”. Besides an object to access, the concept of accessibility includes an agent – the individual who needs to have access to something. An analysis of the process through which they can make use of such resources may ultimately reveal the level of accessibility of a place, a facility, a social opportunity (Borlini, Memo, 2009, p. 21). As Kwan (1998) has maintained, it would be advisable to assess “individual” accessibility. This would allow one to identify differences in terms of social stratification, geographical features, services provided, and even cognitive, sensory, and physical characteristics. This broader concept of inclusiveness fosters multifaceted knowledge and reduces mistakes, thus resulting in appropriate measures and the potential use of the space by any social category.

Furthermore, an adequate accessibility plan may be developed when all the social actors involved cooperate, and a dialogue is established between local government and stakeholders (Porrello, 1983; Wilson, 2009; Sintomer *et al.*, 2008; Warren, Pearse, 2008; Reuchamps, Suite, 2016).

Training is essential for the implementation of good practices. The training of architects, urban planners, engineers, municipal technicians and employees should include the cultural and relational matters linked to planning, designing, and implementing a project (Hansen, 2009). Training also implies the organizational and bureaucratic management of a project. The segmentation of institutional bodies and competences is one of the causes of the increasing mismatch between the levels of development of residential areas, businesses, infrastructures, and transport networks (Borlini, Memo, 2009, *op. cit.*, p. 47).

As architecture influences what people are and may become, neighbourhoods, buildings, monuments, squares, and streets end up playing a role in the formation of individual and collective memory. For this reason, it is essential to know a city before implementing any action that may transform it (Corbisiero, 2013). Based on such reflection, a multi-method approach does not just distinguish between qualitative and quantitative data collection, but it also differentiates between mere data collection and participatory research methods, where the investigation of phenomena depends on the active involvement of the target of the analysis (Lassiter, 2005; Biber, Leavy, 2006; Decataldo, Russo, 2022).

2. Sociological Intervention

In his experience in the MAL team, a sociologist worked to achieve three main objectives: getting to know the area and carrying out a needs analysis; encouraging stakeholders; spreading information and raising awareness. These tasks required a methodological approach that “harmo-

nized” (Matza, 1969, p. 5; Cardano, 2011, p. 17-19) with dynamic, multidimensional phenomena (Cardano, 2020, pp. 43-65).

The multi-method approach chosen focused on qualitative techniques, which were supplemented by quantitative research. Indeed, when carrying out research projects based on participation and interdisciplinary collaboration, the challenge does not lie in choosing the most appropriate methods, but in finding effective strategies to combine various approaches to research and pursue complex – and even partially conflicting – objectives (Decataldo, Russo, 2022, *op. cit.*, p. XI). The different actions carried out were ideally linked by the verb “to transfer”. A strategy was devised to transfer best practices in the acquisition of knowledge of the area to the three main target groups identified: the City Council; architects, surveyors, and engineers; citizens.

The second term that was central to such work is stigma (Goffman, 1986). In order to transfer knowledge, the subjectivity of the other should be protected, taking into account their past, habits, and needs, while fostering cooperative interaction with experts and insiders (Chan, 2019, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-91).

Based on these premises, a research design was chosen to build a complete picture of the city area.

2.1 Preliminary Analysis of the Area. Identifying the Area of Intervention

Having a general picture of the city is essential, as macro-factors influence the needs and everyday life of residents and city users. The urban structure and the geographical position of any individual may be seen as either fields of possibility or factors of segregation.

The statistics and maps available on the city official website (<http://dati.comune.lecce.it/>), a preliminary study aimed at designing a General Urban Plan⁵ (Indovina, 2006), and an analysis of the area carried out by the City Council to develop an Urban Plan for Sustainable Mobility⁶ enabled the MAL team to retrace the history of the city in terms of morphological and socio-economic change.

As the study of the administrative and political aspects of an area is influenced by ideas, perspectives, and needs that prevent a neutral analysis, the documents drafted by the City Council over the past few years were also analysed. In said documents, the word “marginalization” is just mentioned, whereas the problem of accessibility is not investigated in any way.

Mainly undertaken in the first nine months of the project, the collection of institutional/official data was complemented by meetings with a technical committee and municipal employees. This led to highlighting strengths and weaknesses in the competences of municipal employees, while helping to compare the past and present perspectives on, and doubts about, the social and urban situation in the city.

Finally, both a theoretical and methodological function was fulfilled by a series of interviews carried out with thirteen privileged interlocutors who experience the city on a daily basis: being representatives of vulnerable categories, the community, and the tourism sector, all of the interlocutors had a deep knowledge of the accessibility issue; the people involved were: a tour guide, two hotel managers, the owner of a popular bookshop in Lecce, the president of Federalberghi Italian hotel industry association, the president of a company owning three major hotels in Lecce, the front office manager of another important hotel in Lecce, a travel agent, two restaurant owners, the president of a cooperative that monitors and assesses the level of accessibility of events and leisure facilities, and two persons with disabilities, one of them being the president of an organization operating in the field of accessible tourism, and the other working as a regional employee and as a professor in the training programme for special needs teachers of the

5 See *Documento Programmatico Preliminare in Adeguamento al DRAG – 2015*, a preliminary document to comply with the requirements of the regional document for general planning.

6 See *Rapporto 1. Quadro conoscitivo. Inquadramento territoriale e socio-economico dell'area di piano – 2020*, report on the geographical and socio-economic characteristics of the area.

University of Salento, while being a member of a cooperative that produces Braille aids for the visually impaired.

On the one hand, said interviews allowed the MAL team to focus on aspects that are often neglected in the studies carried out by local councils. On the other hand, they provided the researchers with a clearer picture of the situation in the city, useful to conduct the subsequent phases of data collection and analysis.

The first phase of the project was aimed at identifying the pilot area where the intervention was going to be carried out. Theoretical-rational sampling, complemented by the area sampling technique (Corbetta, 1999, pp. 343-350) and quantitative data, was aimed at selecting an area that could best represent the urban, socio-economic and symbolic-cultural aspects of the city. The different types of quantitative data collected were related to public services (provided by the city, the province, the state), private services (in terms of religious facilities, shops, museums, and so on), monuments (seen as attractors), size of pedestrian zones and mainly vehicular areas, size of areas used by both pedestrians and vehicles, and accidents.

Therefore, the city centre was chosen, with its historic and more modern areas. It is the most popular part of the city, as a number of facilities providing public and private services are located there, as well as most of the cultural attractions and leisure facilities. Said pilot area consists of a surface of 55 hectares and 13 linear kilometres. With reference to public spaces, about 4,000 items were identified in terms of urban furniture, mobility infrastructure, and "obstacles".

The target consisted of residents who live in the pilot area, commuters, city users, and tourists. The different personal circumstances of the members of each group were also considered, taking into account cases of persons with mobility disabilities, blind and visually impaired persons, deaf and hard-of-hearing persons, persons with cognitive disabilities, and their caregivers. Some other categories that may experience particularly difficult situations were also identified, such as minors, elderly people, immigrants, and parents of young children.

2.2 Data Collection and Needs Analysis

The needs analysis (Frudà, 1989; Altieri, 2009) carried out included data gathering on competences, needs and wants, discussions on possible solutions to problems, inspections of the pilot area and municipal building sites, the assessment of the city official website, and awareness initiatives aimed at the business sector and public and private institutions.

Data collection was mainly carried out by adopting an ethnographic approach founded on different observational techniques (Becker, 2007). Participant observation was used when taking part in activities such as meetings, inspections, informal interviews, and office meetings (Blumer, 1966, p. 542). On the other hand, detached observation was used when the researcher did not participate actively in the initiatives and decisions taken by the municipal staff or the MAL team and in the data collection phases aimed at identifying how individuals and groups use spaces, goods and services in the pilot area.

Another observation technique that proved useful was shadowing (Sclavi, 1989; Paskiewicz, 2002; Czarniawska, 2007; Quinlan, 2008; McDonald, Simpson, 2014). The representatives of the different vulnerable categories were made aware of the use of such a technique whenever they actively participated in the activities, while its use remained unknown to the target whenever the social actors were observed during their daily routine in the city. Fourteen on-site observations were carried out in the pilot area in the months of June and July 2021. The individuals observed were visually impaired persons (2), persons with mobility disabilities (7), children younger than 14 years of age (2), teenagers between 14 and 17 years of age (1), teenagers with autism (1), and a group of young adults with cognitive disabilities (1).

Other qualitative methods were also used (Sachs, 1993, pp. 129-130, Barley, Kunda, 2001, pp. 84-86). Semi-structured interviews were useful when dealing with aspects that cannot be inves-

tigated through observation, such as the city users' and tourists' accounts of their experience, the know-how of the municipal employees working on the city transformation, and the conflict between users and local government. Eight more interviews were carried out. Among the people interviewed were an employee working in the management offices of the Lecce ASL local health authority, the mother of a young boy with autism, a person with a mobility disability, two members of a cooperative for the visually impaired, an Italian Sign Language teacher with a hard-of-hearing person, and three municipal technicians.

Focus groups (Barbour, Kitzinger, 1999; Cardano, 2011, *op. cit.*, pp. 199-239) were used to encourage discussions on the different representations of the city and find solutions to problems. Two types of focus groups were formed. The first type of focus group involved participants who shared similar social and health features, which was instrumental in revealing the different perspectives and life experiences within the same social category. A total of 15 focus groups of this type were held, with participants with mobility disabilities (2 focus groups), visually impaired people (1), hard-of-hearing persons (1), participants with cognitive disabilities (3), elderly people (3), parents and educators of young children and teenagers (4), and foreign immigrants (1). Conversely, a second type of focus group involved participants showing different forms of psychophysical, cognitive or cultural vulnerabilities, in order for mediated solutions to be found, especially when different social categories had conflicting needs. Three focus groups of this type were held with participants with different types of disabilities or their representatives.

The engagement activities carried out also involved 48 associations and 6 cooperatives dealing with disability⁷, 2 foundations doing social work, 3 employers' associations, 3 trade union federations, the Brindisi-Lecce branch of the Italian national association of service centres for volunteering⁸, 4 professional associations of architects, engineers, surveyors, and lawyers in Lecce, and 11 public bodies. In particular, the associations represented all the vulnerable categories facing physical, socio-cultural, and communication difficulties in the urban area. More specifically, the following vulnerable categories were involved: persons with mobility disabilities, visually impaired persons, deaf and hard-of-hearing persons, people with cognitive disabilities, minors, parents of young children, elderly people, and foreign immigrants. Also, the public bodies involved in data collection or the assessment of their PEBA plan were: the Art School, the Regional Agency for Tourism, the Arca Sud Salento regional housing agency, a branch of the Bank of Italy, the prefecture, the Provincial Council, the Archaeological Superintendence of Fine Arts and Landscape, and the Regional Administrative Court. Moreover, the Diocese of Lecce and the University of Salento were involved in the debate on accessibility and awareness initiatives. Finally, an agreement was signed between the local government and the local branch of the National Research Council, in order to deal with the renovation of buildings, squares, and monuments of great cultural, historical, and archaeological value.

More than 150 coordination and discussion meetings were held. The focus groups constituted 15 hours 50 minutes of audio recording, while the qualitative interviews totalled 14 hours 6 minutes. Seven hours of fieldwork were carried out through shadowing, which was documented with (309) photographs and (60) short videos (Stagi, Queirola Palmas, 2015). Seven inspections were conducted upon the citizens' request, in order to verify the presence of architectural barriers, with five administrative procedures being initiated and three municipal departments being involved – the Public Works, Urban Planning, and Mobility and Transport Departments. Further 10 inspections of municipal building sites were carried out so as to provide advice to improve accessibility, with the involvement of the members with disabilities of the permanent working group.

7 Thirty-seven associations were involved in the project between 1 September 2020 and 31 August 2021, when most activities were aimed at studying the area and identifying its problems.

8 Five-hundred associations were informed and involved in awareness initiatives as a result of the collaboration with the Brindisi-Lecce branch of the Italian national association of service centres for volunteering.

3. Main Findings of the Needs Analysis

3.1. *I Am Invisible, Therefore I Am. Reconsidering the Role of Physical Urban Space*

Simmel described space as a form of meaning. When it comes to architectural barriers, his reflection on boundaries should be mentioned, as he stated that «the boundary is not a spatial fact with sociological consequences but a sociological fact that is formed spatially» (1989, p. 531). For this reason, choosing the city centre as a pilot area was particularly helpful. On the one hand, the city centre includes the largest number and most diverse types of architectural barriers. On the other hand, it is the area that most embodies the spirit of the city, but also the one visitors and tourists most easily recognize. Such a situation emphasizes “the” social fact: the high density of users and attractors makes the city centre an indicator of marginalization. Physical, cultural, and administrative barriers either prevent some categories from experiencing the city centre or reduce their opportunities to do so. Therefore, the concept of accessibility cannot revolve around the structural aspects of a city if the culture of those who have contributed to building and transforming it is not understood first. (Sennett, 2018, *op. cit.*).

A blind or visually impaired person relies on sound and tactile elements to orient themselves to their surroundings, especially when in the proximity of obstacles and dangers. The experiences of shadowing carried out in Lecce, however, have shown that pedestrian lights are not associated with sound devices, while tactile paving is present on very few streets and fails to meet the essential requirements for usability. Furthermore, the pavement is damaged in several places, with people risking tripping. Crossing the road becomes dangerous due to noise pollution from traffic, which reduces the amount of auditory information blind and visually impaired people usually rely on when orienting themselves. Indeed, an “experienced” blind or visually impaired person – that is how blind and visually impaired people who walk around the city on a daily basis describe themselves – is able to distinguish an empty from a full space, understand they need to go up or down steps, or realize that they have reached a bus stop due to the area being specially built for pedestrians waiting to catch a bus. Finally, the buildings where public services are provided are not equipped with tactile signs and maps that could help users to get to the right office.

Even a small section of damaged pavement or a slightly taller step may become an insurmountable obstacle or a source of harm for wheelchair users, persons with mobility disabilities, and those pushing a pushchair. High pavements, dangerous crossroads in shared spaces, damaged cobbling, restaurant and pub tables placed on the pavement, signposts put on the pavement, cars, bicycles and electric scooters parked outside of designated areas paint a picture of a society that is unable even to imagine what it means to move differently. Another example of that is provided by public works aimed at street renewal, whose potentially negative impact is often underestimated. Shadowing showed that, following these kinds of works, wheelchair users often had to find another way to cross the road, due to pavement ramps, the verge of the street, and the asphalt creating depressions that prevented the wheelchair from moving forward, sometimes even causing the wheelchair user to fall into the road. Public and private service providers know so little about the world of persons with mobility disabilities that they believe that the accessibility of a building is determined by its being equipped with a lift. They fail to take into account the size of the area in front of the lift entrance, the width of the lift itself, the size and shape of corridors. The use of shadowing allowed the MAL team to inspect some municipal buildings in which there are steps before the lift entrance, lifts are too narrow, and the shape of the corridor leading to the lift does not allow wheelchair users to easily enter the lift.

Using the shadowing technique to observe the daily urban life of persons with cognitive disabilities gave the researcher the opportunity to experience what caregivers usually discussed during focus groups. As one of the associations involved is based in Monteroni, a town located

10 km from Lecce, the researcher reached the headquarters of the association in question to observe the organization of a trip to Lecce for a group of young adults. Interestingly, the first aspect their educators considered was the space-time relationship, as a stroll in the city centre may become a source of stress. Secondly, the educators had to decide what places the group was going to visit and choose where they were going to have a break. This step also involved solving the parking issue, described as one of the biggest problems in Lecce. The third was a motivational step, with the educators providing information about the trip and listening to the young adults' reaction. This was extremely necessary in order to prevent anyone from either getting scared and running away or suddenly leaving the group to explore the city. Once in the city centre, the group was arranged so that anybody could be supervised, especially in crowded places and busier traffic areas. While walking around, the educators paid attention to the young adults' emotional state, so as to understand when to stop to admire monuments, look at shop windows, have a snack, and find a restroom. The young people were calm and even enthusiastic, while their educators showed some signs of stress. Everybody's mood changed whenever they met some groups of tourists in the narrow streets of the city centre. On one particular occasion, the young adults stopped walking and gathered together near a building, an anxious reaction caused by encountering a noisy crowd. Identifying some alternative streets to the most crowded ones, with disabled parking spaces and wayfinding elements being available, may allow persons with disabilities to avoid the most challenging areas.

Not only did interviews and focus groups make physical barriers emerge, together with the absence of services and adequate urban furniture, but they also highlighted a lack of empathy among citizens, public and private workers. Spaces and services are still designed for adults with no disabilities, as the persons with disabilities and their caregivers involved in the project repeatedly pointed out. For instance, a person with a disability working in the tourism sector mentioned that in some cases services are not provided,

«in order not to cause trouble to the staff and not to annoy the other clients» (interview no. 1, February 26, 2021; our translation).

Furthermore, a visually impaired person complained that services may be inappropriately described as being accessible, especially when it comes to accommodation facilities, eating and drinking places,

«where the presence of areas accessible to persons with mobility disabilities and visually impaired persons is said to be guaranteed, although such areas fail to meet a number of essential requirements» (interview no. 2, April 20, 2021; our translation).

Moreover, the people interviewed highlighted how sometimes an attitude is adopted that may threaten one's dignity, with persons with disabilities being treated like objects:

«as it happened when I went to the orthopaedist, who kind of threw me onto the exam table» (interview no. 3, May 14, 2021; our translation).

During shadowing, the citizens' inappropriate behaviour also emerged. For instance, drivers seemed to be tense whenever a wheelchair user crossed the road, and some even repeatedly honked at them. On another occasion, some people seemed to be annoyed when having to move out of a visually impaired boy's way or when hit by his cane. It also happened that some customers were so displeased to see a group of teenagers with cognitive disabilities approaching the café they were in that the waiter had to serve the young customers in a different area. As the members of the various associations involved stated, most of these vulnerable people feel humiliated and frustrated when having to deal with the aforementioned issues. They believe they have to be invisible or marginalized in safe ghettos, so as not to bother anybody. Their place in society is not determined by their absolute invisibility, but rather by their absence in the

thoughts, circumstances, and situations characterizing the daily life of the rest of the population.

3.3 Communication as a Factor of Accessibility

Communication is one of the main problems to face when dealing with accessibility. Most categories of users need wayfinding elements that can make the environment “legible”, an issue that cannot be merely reduced to providing appropriate signage. The images of the city need to be clear enough to enable people to build their own mental map of the city (Lynch, 1960). In order for the map to be helpful in terms of orientation and use, spaces need to have intrinsic coherence that may help to understand how they are organized. «But an ordered environment can do more than this; it may serve as a broad frame of reference, an organizer of activity or belief or knowledge» (*ibidem*, p. 5).

Communication plays an important role in two main areas of urban life in Lecce. Firstly, in Lecce there is a significant shortage of signage guiding people to offices, public services, cultural and natural sites, and parking spaces reserved for vulnerable categories, including persons with disabilities and pregnant women. Such a shortage causes disorientation and stress, and hence a loss of independence, due to a temporary suspension of cognitive skills in the process of adjustment to the urban environment (Floridi, 2009; McGuire, 2018).

In this regard, the renovation of outdoor spaces such as squares and parks is particularly interesting. Visually impaired people and persons with cognitive disabilities in particular need to know their surroundings through a map. While visually impaired persons can rely on Braille maps, persons with cognitive disabilities need a different type of symbolic communication that is based on specific semantics and syntax (Beukelman, Mirenda, 2014). However, a map should not just be useful to orient oneself in a city, as it should also make the city become easily reachable by car and on foot. Therefore, the MAL team worked to provide the people frequenting the area with adequate and safe parking spaces, traffic circulation, and access to the area itself. As squares and parks are places connected with social interaction and relaxation, they cannot be built without taking into account the comfort and safety they should provide, since otherwise they would not effectively fulfil their function (Lynch, 1960, *op. cit.*, p. 6-7).

Another essential aspect of accessibility is related to the provision of services. On numerous occasions, the persons with disabilities involved in the project complained about the inappropriate behaviour of those working in public offices, whose lack of core professional and relational skills often results in discrimination.

Such cases lead to making reference to the concept of social gap. Spaces, goods and services can become actually available only when the cognitive skills of those living in the community and participating in the development of society are taken into account. The categories used to organize the world are characterized by multiple layers of meaning that, having strengthened over time, bear values, imaginaries, and representations containing evaluative aspects that may become crucial in the adoption of behaviours and attitudes aimed at creating distance (Cesareo, 2007, *op. cit.*, p. 63). Therefore, working together with municipal employees helps to become more aware of the structural and cultural factors causing a social gap that translates into both a certain approach to users and specific architectural and urban planning patterns.

The MAL team also advised the City Council on regeneration projects that were already being carried out, providing guidance on the most effective way to secure a construction site, the renovation of inaccessible pavement, the regeneration of an urban park, and the creation of a cycle lane. With the help of one of the architects on the team, inspections of such projects were carried out, with the representatives of the most vulnerable categories being involved. Fieldwork allowed the team to identify different types of gaps, in terms of legislation, difficulty in applying the regulations to specific and complex cases, and inability to understand the needs of potential users. As a result of this process, the municipal technicians involved became more aware of situations that may cause inaccessibility.

Furthermore, one of the main tasks of the MAL was to raise awareness among municipal employees working in different departments, encouraging them to develop a complex and multidisciplinary idea of accessibility. The observation of the bureaucratic machine revealed an organizational culture that fosters individual and intra-departmental work at most, rather than promote interdepartmental collaboration. Although such a gap results in a lack of perspectives and planning, dialogue is still seen as

«causing a loss in efficiency and leading to no predictable, effective results» (interview no. 4, July 8, 2021; our translation),

as the surveyor in the Planning Department of the City Council pointed out.

This lack of collaboration also causes a delay in interventions whenever citizens complain about any architectural barriers. A more efficient and effective response than the administrative one is sometimes provided by adopting a pre-modern approach. The residents who are lucky enough to have established a relationship with a politician or a municipal employee often manage to have their problems solved. However, these types of interventions focus on specific problems of single people, thus failing to contribute to solving more complex issues concerning the community as a whole. Conversely, this behaviour fosters an ineffective way of dealing with problems, making it become common practice. As the responsible for the project and surveyor in the Planning Department of the City Council stated:

«This is how we act. We do what we have always done. Then, if somebody complains and their voice reaches the right ears, we act to solve the problem. But this is to be considered a single event, as later we go back to making the same mistakes. [...] We often address a complaint after more than a year» (interview no. 6, July 15, 2021; our translation).

Therefore, it remains difficult to develop interdepartmental strategies of intervention, especially when dealing with matters connected with tourism and culture. There is no awareness of the importance of accessible leisure and cultural spaces and events, while the issue of accessibility to shops, accommodation facilities, eating and drinking places is often overlooked. This ends up influencing the quality of life of vulnerable categories, with persons with disabilities becoming invisible.

4. Concluding Remarks

When its multiple factors are not taken into account, accessibility becomes mere rhetoric. However, space has recently started to be interpreted differently, especially due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the invasion of digital technology.

While reconstructing the relationship between sociology and space, Urry (2004) has pointed out how the latter has been ignored for more than a century, with its importance being rarely emphasized in classical sociology. Among the few scholars who did deal with space were Lefebvre (1968), Bachelard (1969) and Benjamin (1979).

Lefebvre included space in the daily micro-, macro-, and meso-practices of social production, often interpreting it in terms of controversial material appropriation, but also as a symbol of individual and community revenge in the processes of identity development. In that sense, reference can be made to the concept of social gap, as it can be seen as both the cause and effect of the conflict over the management of space.

Bachelard focused on the relationship between the individual and the space of the house, giving a spatial dimension to the temporal nature of memory. According to Bachelard, individuals experience the house through their own body and memories, which makes it become an extension

of the individual's body and identity. This concept can also be applied to public buildings. Benjamin deemed it fundamental to understand how individuals "read the city". This does not just entail rational factors, but also emotions, desires, and dreams, with the aspects that any single individual focuses on usually differing from the way in which politicians and urban planners read the city.

Benjamin's reflection, which Urry has embraced (2004, *op. cit.*, p. 12), helps to realize that sociologists should play a crucial role in urban design and planning, especially when it comes to accessibility. The most difficult task carried out by the MAL team was to reduce the aforementioned social gap, which becomes evident in the urban invisibility of persons with disabilities, the suspension of their rights, and the unproductive conflict over the appropriation of space between categories with different psychophysical disabilities.

As vulnerable categories and municipal employees were involved in the project, accessibility transformed into an opportunity for the interaction of diverse individuals and mutual empowerment.

At the end of the work carried out in Lecce, some issues remained unresolved. These include the excessive sectoral approach to projects, the shortsightedness of interventions that deal with specific problems without taking into account the broader picture, the need to consider the involvement of at least the representatives of vulnerable categories in any intervention on the area, even when just planning a leisure or cultural event. As the collaboration between the Universities involved and the City Council ended once the project was over, some of the aspects of the complex method used, which resulted from the concept of universal and inclusive design, may remain unclear.

For this reason, the MAL should be replaced by a sort of advisory body made up of elected representatives of all the different vulnerable categories, who may collaborate to find solutions to current accessibility issues and monitor their implementation.

Finally, a fundamental importance should be placed on raising awareness among professionals and in schools. Listening to the experience of persons with disabilities is just one of the educational tools that may contribute to individuals becoming responsible citizens. The shadowing technique used has shown how observing and experiencing the daily routine of persons with disabilities first-hand may result in a more cognitively significant and lasting change in the perspective of those who contribute to building the city. An essential role should be played by the concept of "cognitive empathy" (Sclavi, 1989, *op. cit.*). Individuals should not just put themselves in someone else's shoes, but they should embrace and foster diversity in perspectives and ways of life.

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