

Culture4Governance

Governance of Culture and Culture of Governance



CRF RESEARCH NOTEBOOKS

4



CULTURE4GOVERNANCE

Governance of Culture and Culture of Governance

Curated by

Circular Research Foundation



CRF Research Notebooks No. 4 – Year 2024



*This research notebook was developed within the framework of Italy's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), thanks to a project funded by the **European Union – Next Generation EU**.*

*Special thanks to the **Italian Ministry of Culture** for the support provided to this publication, as part of the “Digital Transition of Cultural and Creative Organizations” (TOCC Digital) program.*

Preface

Culture is the silent and powerful engine of development, the invisible thread that connects individual and collective choices within complex systems. "Culture4Governance" explores this profound truth, placing culture at the center of a renewed vision of governance. In an increasingly interconnected world, mechanisms of guidance, adaptation, and cooperation become crucial within complex systems to address global challenges, from technological transition to social sustainability.

This project aims to overturn the perspective that attributes a leading role to technology. Here, digital tools are regarded merely as instruments, a support system in the service of culture — never the ultimate goal. The heart of change lies in the ability to rethink priorities, to place humans and culture at the core of governance choices, creating a virtuous dialogue between technical tools and cultural vision.

*"Culture4Governance" seeks to trace a path that, starting from the valorization of culture, leads to an integrated model of territorial development, where businesses, territories, and communities find new modes of collaboration and growth. It is a journey that connects past and future, inspired by extraordinary figures who made culture the heart of their vision, demonstrating how it can serve as the fulcrum of change both socially and territorially: **Adriano Olivetti** and **Enrico Mattei**.*

*To **Adriano Olivetti**, whose genius redefined the company not merely as an economic actor, but as a social and cultural pillar of the territory. His vision of a factory that dialogues with the community, that integrates into the cultural and human landscape, is more relevant today than ever. In an era where the boundaries between factory and territory are vanishing, Olivetti teaches us that the competitiveness of a place stems from the synergy among all its resources: human, social, and cultural. His idea of "culture within the factory" was not just an ideal, but a strategy to build a future where progress genuinely serves people.*

*To **Enrico Mattei**, whose innovative spirit outlined a model of cooperation beyond exploitation, imagining an Italy capable of competing without overpowering, and capable of engaging with Mediterranean peoples on an equal and respectful basis. His vision for Southern Italy, based on the cultural and strategic valorization of its territories, is not only a legacy to be remembered but a path still to be pursued. Mattei taught us that competition is measured not only economically but also through the ability to build bridges and forge relationships based on equity and mutual respect.*

*To **Olivetti and Mattei**, masters of culture and vision, we dedicate this social notebook. May their example continue to inspire us in building a world where culture is the beating heart of governance and development.*



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1. THE PROJECT: CULTURE AND GOVERNANCE

The **Culture4Governance** project was conceived as a tool to develop a series of reflections aimed at assessing the relationship between Culture and Society, in an attempt to answer the following questions:

- **What is Culture?**
- **Do Communities live off culture?**
- **What are the relationships between the "Governance of Culture" and the "Culture of Governance" in creating social well-being?**

Culture4Governance aims to trace a new path of contamination between different fields of knowledge to rebuild a unified vision of Culture as the driving force behind social dynamics and the development of Communities.

The project is expressly focused on raising awareness and enhancing the intangible heritage represented by **"Local Governance"** as a collective **"Symbolic Resource"** protected by a territory-community.

Culture4Governance has developed an analytical pathway aimed at recontextualizing the concept of culture within a scenario of transition towards new models of social organization and territorial governance.

The cultural reflection outlined revolves around the dialectical chiasm **"Culture of Governance and Governance of Culture,"** with the intent of investigating the configurations of social governance that may arise from changes induced by shifts in dominant technologies. From this perspective, the central question posed is whether technology lacking intrinsic meaning and whose significance emerges exclusively from its interaction with human beings can act as a catalyst or driver of a human-centered cultural transition.

The outlined scenarios show that technology does not represent a challenge in itself, but rather an enabler of a **transition that is profoundly cultural**. Paradoxically, the potential offered by digital technology does not solve problems but instead exposes the **symbolic resources** of a community: its ability to think of itself as a collective, to self-determine, and to build a shared vision of the future around which to orient operational choices. It is precisely this vision that should guide the local governance system, rewriting a new collective horizon of meaning. Technology thus proves to be a mirror reflecting the cultural maturity of a community and its ability to translate shared cultural values into collective action.

1.1 Culture and Governance

Culture, from the Latin *colere*, means "to cultivate" or "to care for." Originally referring to the cultivation of the land, the meaning of the term evolved to indicate the "cultivation of the soul" and spirit, eventually representing the set of practices, beliefs, and values that characterize a society.

From an anthropological point of view, Edward Tylor, in 1871, proposed one of the first systematic definitions, describing culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."

This conception emphasizes the social and acquired nature of culture, highlighting its vastness and inclusiveness. Tylor paved the way for a broader study of culture, considering it an organic whole that defines collective identity.

In the sociological field, Clifford Geertz, in 1973, introduced a symbolic interpretation of culture, defining it as "a system of shared symbols and meanings that guide human behavior."² This view shifts attention from the material aspects of culture to the practices and meanings that structure social life. For Geertz, culture is not a material entity but a set of practices that create symbolic coherence, making the understanding of value systems possible.

Karl Marx, from his historical-materialist perspective, instead framed culture as a superstructure derived from the economic base.³ According to Marx, culture reflected the relations of production and dominant economic structures, serving as a tool to consolidate power relationships. This view suggests that cultural changes are closely linked to economic and political transformations.

Another significant perspective is the psychosocial one of Carl Jung, who saw culture as a collective expression of the human unconscious.⁴ Jung argued that myths, symbols, and archetypes reflect the internal dynamics of individuals and collectively shape cultural identity. This perspective attributes a fundamental role to psychology in the understanding of culture.

Modern and interdisciplinary definitions further expand the interpretative horizon of culture. UNESCO, in 1982, provided an inclusive definition describing culture as "the complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group."⁵ This formulation integrates both material and immaterial elements, recognizing culture as a collective heritage that embraces diversity and specific identities.

On a cognitive level, culture is often described as the result of accumulated knowledge that enables a human group to adapt to and transform its environment. This perspective emphasizes the role of learning and the transmission of information in technological and cultural evolution.

Finally, Pierre Bourdieu emphasized the practical dimension of culture, defining it as "a set of practices that generate and reproduce social and symbolic capital."⁶ According to Bourdieu, culture is not merely a set of beliefs but an operational structure manifested through repeated habits and patterns of behavior.

¹ Edward Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1871.

² Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 1973.

³ Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, 1859.

⁴ Carl Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 1959.

⁵ UNESCO, *Mexico City Declaration on Cultural Policies*, 1982.

⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 1977.

Operational Definition

For application purposes, the usefulness of an operational definition of culture emerges. Such a definition can be formulated as **"a dynamic set of knowledge, beliefs, values, norms, symbols, and practices shared and transmitted by a social group through processes of learning and adaptation, influencing behaviors and relationships within the group and with the environment."**

This definition not only allows for the analysis of complex concepts but proves particularly useful for designing cultural interventions, studying social phenomena, and understanding changes in the interactions between technology and culture.

The operational definition of culture has emerged in response to the need to analyze and manage cultural phenomena in practical contexts. It integrates theoretical perspectives and methodological tools to make the concept of culture usable in the fields of sociology, organizational management, cultural policy, and social psychology. Malinowski, Schein, Hofstede, and UNESCO have contributed to the formalization of this approach, offering tools to understand cultural phenomena dynamically and contextually.

The operational definition of culture highlights its dynamic and contextual nature, emphasizing how it evolves over time through social interactions and is shaped by historical, geographical, and economic factors. It focuses on tangible and observable elements such as behaviors, symbols, norms, and shared values, and includes social transmission and adaptability to changes.

This conception allows for the design of cultural interventions, the analysis of social phenomena, and the understanding of change processes, symbolically linking culture and governance of socio-technical systems. In practical terms, it impacts areas such as policy-making—respectful of local specificities—organizational culture management, sociological research on cultural change and globalization, and technological adaptation, evaluating the impact of innovations such as artificial intelligence.

Culture as a dynamic system

Culture is a complex and dynamic system, constantly evolving, which includes both tangible aspects such as artifacts, tools, architecture, and technologies that represent the values and skills of a society and intangible aspects such as beliefs, values, moral norms, traditions, and shared symbolic meanings.

Culture and human behaviour

Culture operates as a “lens” through which individuals interpret the world, influencing perceptions, as people from different cultures may understand the same event in different ways. It conditions actions by establishing what is considered appropriate in a given context and contributes to creating collective identities, offering a sense of belonging to social, ethnic, religious, or national groups.

Adaptation and cultural change

Another key element of the operational definition of culture is its ability to adapt and transform. This can occur:

- **Through internal innovation:** the development of new ideas or practices within a group.
- **Through interaction with other cultures:** phenomena such as globalization, migration, and cultural exchanges profoundly influence local culture.
- **Through conflicts or crises:** sudden changes can redefine values and norms.

The operational definition of culture offers a perspective that distances itself from a partial vision, often imbued with nostalgia and a static humanism, which reduces culture to a collection of works of art, antiques, or historical testimonies to be admired. This new approach allows culture to be understood as a dynamic and complex system, living primarily in the minds and interactions of people rather than in places of conservation or aesthetic representation.

In this sense, culture is not confined to museums or historical artifacts, but is configured as a set of knowledge, values, symbols, and practices that emerge and evolve through the learning and adaptation processes of human communities. Culture, thus understood, is the connective tissue that guides collective actions, organizes social dynamics, and drives change in complex systems.

The operational definition also allows for the analysis of culture not as an elitist or affected attitude toward artistic heritage, but as a living and dynamic phenomenon that continuously develops, influencing and shaping governance systems and transitions between states of social systems. In this perspective, culture becomes both the result and the engine of complex interaction processes, capable of responding to emergencies and transformations, acting as a feedback system that shapes society and, at the same time, is shaped by it.

Therefore, speaking of culture does not simply mean celebrating the past through the contemplation of works of art, but recognizing a dynamic and adaptive mechanism that underlies human relationships and their ability to face present challenges. With this vision, culture becomes the beating heart of society, a driving force that transcends its material representation to embody collective thought, learning, and evolution.

This perspective clearly distances culture from a purely representative, elitist, and self-referential conception, embracing instead a vision in which it becomes a driver of innovation, cohesion, and transformation. Thus, culture does not belong to salons or museums, but to daily interactions, collective dynamics, and adaptation processes that allow communities to face the present and design the future. Culture as a living and shared heritage, whose value lies in its ability to generate meaning, build connections, and foster change and social well-being.

1.2 Culture, Symbolic Resources, and Collective Identity

Cultural assets (both tangible and intangible) have a close relationship with the concept of **symbolic resources** but operate on distinct and complementary levels. In fact, while intangible cultural assets represent specific and formalized elements of a community's heritage, symbolic resources constitute a broader, dynamic, and subjective dimension that refers to the shared meanings and mental representations connected to those same assets. Symbolic resources include meanings, representations, and narratives that emerge dynamically and subjectively from the interaction between individuals and communities. They are not necessarily formalized or recognized as part of cultural heritage, but they operate as tools for building identity, cohesion, and innovation.

Symbolic resources are intangible and subjective, as they exist in the form of mental representations or shared perceptions. They are dynamic and mutable, as they can rapidly transform to adapt to new contexts. Furthermore, they convey meanings, communicating values, norms, and identities, often in connection with elements of cultural heritage.

Cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, often serves as a primary source for symbolic resources, which do not merely represent cultural heritage as it is but reinterpret it, transforming it into a dynamic tool to address current challenges.

This process allows for the heritage to remain alive, enabling intangible traditions to be reinterpreted to fit new contexts, as in the case of ancient rituals transformed for educational or environmental purposes. At the same time, it fosters the creation of new meanings, transforming, for example, a historic site into a symbol of peace or resistance through the narratives that accompany it.

For instance, the Taranta is an intangible cultural asset reinterpreted as a "symbolic resource" of cultural rebirth and identity pride for the South.

Thus, cultural heritage, whether tangible or intangible, provides a stable and recognized substrate upon which **symbolic resources** are built and reinterpreted. However, these resources play a more **dynamic and adaptive role, allowing a community to transform elements of its heritage to respond to new needs, contexts, and meanings. In this way, symbolic resources not only keep heritage alive but project it into the future, ensuring its relevance and capacity to evolve.**

Symbolic resources are intangible elements that a community uses to build identity, social relations, and structures of meaning. They include ideas, beliefs, myths, languages, narratives, and shared symbols. They are not physical objects but intangible elements that reside in the minds, discourses, and collective behaviors shared within a community. They act as tools of cohesion and power, as they contribute to consolidating identities, organizing social relations, and legitimizing authority. At the same time, they are adaptable and flexible, transforming over time to meet the continuously evolving needs of the community.

Symbolic Resources as Engines of Meaning

Symbolic resources constitute the immaterial core that gives sense and cohesion to culture, also influencing the creation and recognition of cultural assets.

Symbolic resources are closely linked to an **internal and subjective dimension**, as they reside in the perception, meanings, and interpretations that people attribute to intangible elements such as symbols, myths, narratives, beliefs, and rituals. Unlike material goods or tangible structures, **symbolic resources exist in the mind and in social relations, operating as a shared language that shapes collective reality.**

Symbolic resources are heavily dependent on individual interpretation, as each person can attribute a unique meaning based on their experiences, beliefs, and the cultural context in which they live. They are not physical elements but mental representations that manifest as images, ideas, or meanings shared within a community. Moreover, these resources resonate emotionally, evoking deep feelings, collective memories, and emotional connections, making them powerful tools for building identity and fostering social cohesion.

Symbolic Resources and Personality Structure

At the individual level, symbolic resources influence **the construction of personal identity**. Through symbols, myths, and narratives, individuals organize their worldview, guide behaviors, and structure their sense of self. These symbolic resources provide an internal language through which individuals interpret experiences, desires, and relationships, **becoming a reference for the coherence of personality.**

Symbolic Resources and Collective Identity

Despite their subjective origin, symbolic resources act as a bridge between the individual world and the collective one. Through symbols and narratives, these resources allow individuals to connect their internal representations with those of others, thus creating a shared ground of meaning. When a symbolic resource becomes widely shared, it becomes an integral part of culture and social dynamics, influencing norms, behaviors, and social structures. In particular, when similar symbolic resources are shared within a group, they transform into social glues that build a collective identity and strengthen the sense of belonging. The sharing of symbols, myths, and narratives helps create a common imaginary, guiding social norms and collective behaviors.

Sharing Processes

The transition of symbolic resources from the individual level to the collective one occurs through communication and social interaction. Personal narratives, symbolic experiences, and beliefs intertwine during interactions among individuals, giving rise to a shared symbolic structure. When these symbolic resources gain social relevance, they can transform into institutionalized elements, such as rites, holidays, moral codes, or political ideologies.

Symbolic resources act as a bridge between personal and collective identity. They form the basis of the individual's personality, offering meaning and coherence to their worldview. When shared, they nourish the sense of belonging and the identity of a community, strengthening and sustaining it over time. In this way, symbolic resources become fundamental tools for stability and evolution, both at the individual and social levels.

1.3 Culture as an Entropy Reducer

Culture can be seen as a mechanism for reducing entropy in a complex social system. This reduction occurs through the creation of shared rules, meanings, values, and practices that stabilize collective behavior, reduce chaos, and improve system cohesion by fostering cooperation.

Entropy in a social system

Entropy represents the state of disorder or uncertainty within a system. In a society, entropy can manifest as disagreement over collective goals, conflicts between individuals or groups, or the inability to predict or control social behavior. Emergent culture reduces entropy by creating organizational structures such as shared norms and values that regulate behavior, common symbols and meanings that simplify communication, practices that stabilize interactions (e.g., rituals, customs, traditions).

Reduction of Chaos

When cultural practices emerge, are collectively accepted, and are translated into governance structures, the system becomes more predictable and coordinated.

Culture thus acts as an emergent phenomenon from which rules and governance structures are distilled. Emergent cultural expressions provide an informal basis for the system's rules. For example, cultural values of justice (e.g., not stealing) become formal laws within legal systems. The system's rules (laws, institutions)

can, in turn, influence emerging cultural practices. For example, educational policies promoting tolerance can generate a more inclusive culture.

There is, therefore, a mechanism of dynamic duality between system rules and culture, which, by mutually influencing each other, create a balance between stability and change.

Competitions among Cultural Emergents

Cultural emergents compete for a group's attention, time, and resources. For instance, local languages may compete with a dominant language as a vehicle of communication. Emergent cultural elements with opposing values may enter into conflict. Not all cultural emergents survive; those best suited to the social and economic context tend to prevail. Emergent cultural elements that better satisfy collective needs or solve critical problems are more likely to establish themselves. Emergents that do not adapt to the context or encounter resistance are forgotten or supplanted.

In conclusion, emerging culture not only organizes and stabilizes social systems but also acts as a driving force for the evolution of complex systems. Emergent cultural expressions undergo a process of selection, competition, and, in some cases, formalization, transforming into operative rules that shape the functioning of the system itself. This dynamic ensures a balance between order and innovation.

1.4 Culture of Governance and Global Challenges

The culture of governance stands at the center of an epochal transformation, not only driven by major global challenges such as climate change, digitalization, and social inequalities, but also by the increasing interconnection between states, businesses, and civil society. However, one of the most significant transitions is the shift from competition between companies to **competition between territories**, where it is no longer sufficient for individual enterprises to adapt to change, but entire territorial communities must be able to rethink themselves and structure local governance models capable of attracting resources, enhancing their peculiarities, and generating development.

In this context, digital technology is not just an enabler of new processes but an element that demands a profound cultural transition. The governance of the future will be called upon to reflect the symbolic resources of communities, namely those shared values, identities, and narratives that can guide local development and transform cultural diversity into strengths. Governance that fails to enhance these resources and trigger processes of collective participation risks relegating territories to economic and social stagnation, with phenomena such as depopulation and loss of competitiveness.

It is precisely in this cultural transition that the future of governance will be determined: the ability to conceive of themselves collectively and to build inclusive and sustainable development models will not only determine local well-being but also the capacity of territories to face global challenges and compete in an increasingly interconnected and complex world.

Governance as a Participatory and Inclusive System

The future of governance will be marked by a progressive abandonment of hierarchical models, replaced by decentralized and participatory approaches. Digital technology, through tools such as digital democracy and e-governance platforms, will enable citizens to actively participate in decision-making processes, while local communities will assume a central role in solving specific issues such as environmental sustainability. Collaboration among governments, businesses, non-governmental organizations, and scientific institutions will become essential to address the complexity of global challenges. In this new configuration, dialogue among the various actors will no longer be an option but a necessity for building resilient and shared governance.

Ethics and transparency as Fundamental Pillars

Transparency and ethics will be the cornerstones of governance capable of meeting future needs. At the same time, the growing demand for accountability will require leaders and institutions to account for their actions in an accessible and understandable manner. Governance decisions will no longer be dictated solely by immediate interests but will have to consider ethical implications and long-term impacts.

Technology and Governance: A New Era

Digitalization and artificial intelligence are radically transforming the way societies are governed. Big data analysis will enable more informed decisions based on concrete evidence, while advanced algorithms will support complex processes through predictive analysis and resource optimization. So-called smart cities represent a concrete model of how technology can serve as a tool to improve the efficiency of public services, but only if integrated into a framework of ethical and inclusive governance.

Sustainability and Resilience

Sustainability will be one of the cornerstones of future governance. The need to address climate change requires governance models that promote energy transition, environmental protection, and emissions reduction. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of resilient structures capable of responding rapidly to global crises. In this scenario, the circular economy model offers a concrete opportunity to integrate sustainability principles into industrial policies and to reduce waste and inefficiencies. Local governance systems will have to take responsibility for designing long-term solutions that combine resilience and innovation.

Global and multilateral Governance

The complexity of global challenges requires governance capable of operating on multiple levels, integrating local, national, and international dimensions. At the same time, collaboration between the public and private sectors will become a pillar of governance, with multinational companies called upon to contribute to infrastructural development and technological innovations. However, this drive toward global integration must be balanced with respect for local autonomy, avoiding tensions and conflicts.

The culture of governance of the future will be defined by the ability to integrate technology, ethics, and participation into a model that enhances cultural diversity and the symbolic resources of communities. Only territories capable of conceiving of themselves collectively and translating their identities into concrete actions will be able to face global competition and transform challenges into opportunities. This transition will not be merely administrative but profoundly cultural, since governance does not represent just a set of rules, but the reflection of the values and priorities of an evolving society.

1.5 Cultural Attractors in Complex Systems: The Case of Salento

In the context of complex systems theory, an **attractor** represents a state toward which a system tends to converge, a final configuration in which all its variables— economic, cultural, social, infrastructural — realign and transform to define a new dynamic equilibrium. Applied to the territorial system, a cultural attractor cannot be reduced to a single element, such as a tourist resource or a cultural asset, but is configured as an emergent state where every component of the system contributes to a shared and integrated narrative of development.

The case of Salento: "Lu sule, lu mare e lu ientu" and the failure of the monopoly

A significant example of a poorly conceived cultural attractor is represented by the case of Salento, where for decades territorial governance promoted a **monopoly** exclusively centered on the enhancement of environmental resources, summarized in the narrative "**lu sule, lu mare e lu ientu**" ("the sun, the sea, and the wind"). Although this approach was appealing, it proved limiting, establishing a **political monoculture** in which every potential for development was subordinated to tourism and the creation of an image of an uncontaminated natural oasis. The crucial question is: can a complex system such as an entire territory fully converge toward such a reductive attractor? And, above all, can tourism alone sustain the economy, culture, and future of a territory so rich in diversity and complexity?

The mistakes of the monopoly

The choice to establish governance entirely oriented toward tourism and romantic environmentalism reveals not only a simplistic vision but also strategic fragility. This approach is based on a dangerous illusion: that a single narrative, however strong, could carry the entire territorial system toward a stable state of development.

Reality, however, presents itself differently. The exclusive emphasis on tourism has led to a reduction of the territory's cultural complexity, neglecting the richness of local symbolic resources and relegating other productive sectors to a marginal and undervalued role. This has generated social and economic exclusion, particularly for those unable to integrate into the personal symbolic resources a vision linked to tourism, resulting in growing emigration and greater fragmentation of the community. Moreover, dependency on a tourism-centered economic model exposes the system to risks of stagnation, making it vulnerable to external crises such as climate change, seasonal fluctuations, and oscillations in international tourist flows. Finally, policies exclusively focused on tourism have not promoted integrated development, neglecting improvements in infrastructure, education, and the productive sector, leaving many parts of the territory isolated from the dominant narrative.

A Diseased Governance?

Behind this seemingly naive political choice, one could read a form of **pathological governance**, aiming to reduce the entire territory to an idyllic and immobilized vision of a "natural oasis," ignoring the real needs of the population and the possibilities of diversified development. Such an approach is not only shortsighted but also counterproductive, as it denies the system the possibility of evolving toward a richer and more sustainable equilibrium. In other words, it causes the emigration of entire social classes not aligned with the political monoculture.

Detachment and Risk of Collapse

In complex systems theory, the transition toward an attractor requires that all variables of the system transform coherently. In the case of Salento, this alignment did not occur. While part of the system (the tourism sector) moved toward the attractor, other components — such as education, agriculture, craftsmanship, and infrastructure — remained static or misaligned.

This process has led to evident internal detachment, manifesting in various critical issues. On one hand, there are resistances to change: sectors and communities excluded from the dominant narrative remain distant and disconnected from the transition process. On the other hand, systemic stagnation is observed, with the territory stuck in an intermediate state incapable of evolving toward a stable equilibrium or promoting structural innovations. Added to this is structural fragility, determined by the lack of economic and cultural diversification, making the system vulnerable to external shocks. This fragility contributes to demographic and social decline, while other, more dynamic territories attract human capital seeking alternative life prospects, exacerbating local depopulation.

The Role of Governance: Designing a Complex Attractor

To avoid collapse and guide a territorial system toward a stable state, governance must abandon the logic of the monopoly and adopt a systemic approach. A **sustainable cultural attractor** cannot be reduced to a single narrative but must be designed as a complex state in which all components of the system evolve in a coordinated manner.

This requires a paradigm shift, starting with the promotion of narrative plurality. It is essential to move beyond the monocentric vision synthesized in the rhetoric of "lu sule, lu mare e lu ientu" and embrace a narrative that includes culture, innovation, productive traditions, and sustainability. At the center of this approach is the integration of symbolic resources, enhancing the cultural and productive diversity of the territory, creating a dynamic balance between tourism, agriculture, industrial development, and the creative industry.

At the same time, it is essential to invest in infrastructural development, strengthening both material and immaterial infrastructures, so that all components of the territorial system can grow harmoniously. Supporting these transformations requires promoting inclusive governance, in which local communities are fully involved in the decision-making process, thus ensuring active participation and authentic rooting of territorial policies.

The case of Salento demonstrates that a **monopoly** based on a reductive narrative, however captivating, cannot sustain a complex system like a territory. For a territorial system to evolve toward a stable attractor, a systemic approach is necessary, in which all its variables are harmonized and integrated into a shared vision of development. Governance capable of designing a complex attractor, enhancing the plurality of symbolic

resources, and investing in an inclusive and diversified narrative represents the only way to guarantee Salento a sustainable, resilient future rich in opportunities for all its inhabitants.

1.6 Culture and Artificial Intelligence

The relationship between culture and artificial intelligence (AI) represents a profound and reciprocal dynamic, where both domains influence and transform each other. Culture, as the collective expression of human values, traditions, and knowledge, finds in AI a tool that not only supports but also modifies cultural practices and meanings. At the same time, AI derives meaning and purpose from culture, which defines its application contexts and ethical boundaries.

Cultura e AI as Symbiotic Systems

Culture evolves through dynamics of adaptation and transformation, shaping the behaviors and identities of a community. Similarly, AI is a system that continuously interacts with the human environment, adapting to the needs and data it receives. This reciprocal interaction creates a deep bond: AI amplifies human capabilities, while culture directs its development.

AI is not merely a passive technology but an active agent of cultural transformation. For example, AI systems used for language translation or artistic creation do not merely replicate existing models but reinterpret them, pushing cultures toward new expressive forms.

Symbiosis Between Culture and AI

The integration between culture and AI requires a bidirectional and collaborative relationship. On the one hand, culture provides AI with the context, values, and sensitivities necessary to operate responsibly. On the other hand, AI expands the possibilities of culture itself, democratizing access to knowledge and creating new modes of social and artistic interaction.

However, this relationship entails significant challenges. If not designed ethically, AI could accentuate cultural inequalities or standardize local diversities. Conversely, if used thoughtfully, it can become a means to strengthen cultural identities and respond to the needs of diverse communities.

Towards a Cultural Governance of AI

The integration between culture and artificial intelligence requires careful governance, capable of balancing technological innovation with social and cultural sustainability. For AI to truly meet the needs of communities, active involvement of these communities in the decision-making process is essential, ensuring that the systems developed reflect their values and objectives. This approach implies the design of technologies that respect and enhance cultural diversities, the creation of narratives capable of connecting new technologies with local traditions and aspirations, and the assurance that AI becomes a tool for empowerment and not a means to homogenize and flatten cultural differences.

Artificial Intelligence and the Transformation of Work: Towards New Cultural Frontiers

The advent of Artificial Intelligence represents an epochal transition, destined to redefine the very concept of work. It is now evident that AI will eliminate many current professions, especially those linked to repetitive tasks or technical specializations that can be automated. Paradoxically, one of the most affected sectors will be traditional IT skills, where AI's ability to program, debug, or develop new algorithms is already replacing numerous highly specialized functions. However, far from reducing the need for human skills, this change requires an elevation of human cultural and intellectual capacities, shifting the focus toward roles that machines, by their nature, cannot fulfill: creative, ethical, and meaning-oriented roles.

In this context, the worker of the future will need a combination of multidisciplinary knowledge, creativity, and collaborative working skills. Technical specialization will become a tool delegated to machines, while human competences will concentrate on higher levels, such as ethical understanding, strategic vision, and the ability to attribute meaning to innovations.

This transition imposes an unprecedented challenge for education systems and research, which must radically rethink themselves to prepare future generations for a society where cultural and relational competence will be central.

On a social level, AI does not eliminate work, but transforms it, shifting it toward higher tasks that require complex governance, strategic vision, and a much higher level of collective competence than at present. This phenomenon, similar to what characterized other historical technological transitions, requires a rethinking of human culture not as a mere reaction to technological tools but as an enhancement of collective capacities.

As with all technologies, AI is an inherently neutral tool. It is not AI, but humanity, that decides whether to use it for the common good or as an instrument of oppression and power. In this sense, AI is no different from past technologies: it can be an accelerator of progress or a tool of control, depending on human intentions and decisions. The risk of a distorted use of AI can only be mitigated through ethical governance and conscious culture, capable of guiding technological development toward collective well-being. This transition, which appears inevitable, therefore offers a unique opportunity: not only to elevate the technological level but, above all, to enhance human culture, competences, and consciousness.

1.7 Complexity and Climate Crisis

The relationship between the complexity of socio-technical systems and the climate crisis is the subject of growing interest among scholars, as both phenomena intertwine to outline scenarios of instability and vulnerability.

The current historical moment requires not only a radical change in production and consumption models to address climate challenges but also a transition toward governance models capable of managing increasing complexity.

However, the rise in complexity, although necessary to respond to increasingly intricate problems, can generate inefficiencies, vulnerabilities, and, in extreme cases, the collapse of the system itself.

Systemic Collapse and Complexity

In his book *The Collapse of Complex Societies* (1988), Joseph Tainter proposed a theory according to which societies tend to collapse when the level of complexity reaches a point where the costs of maintaining it outweigh the benefits. Every increase in complexity entails greater resources needed to sustain the system's organization and infrastructures. When these costs become unsustainable, the system can no longer bear its own weight, leading to collapse.

Recent studies, such as those by Ugo Bardi and colleagues, have expanded this theory through biophysical models that show how increasing complexity can initially enhance system resilience but, beyond a certain threshold, leads to diminishing returns. At that point, the system becomes increasingly vulnerable, favoring structural collapse. Similarly, Michele Bellingeri and colleagues have highlighted how the heterogeneity of interconnections in complex systems can reduce robustness, making the system susceptible to cascading failures.

The Climate Crisis as a Complexity Amplifier

The climate crisis represents an additional factor that increases the complexity of socio-technical systems. Extreme events, forced migrations, degradation of natural resources, and rising temperatures put pressure on infrastructures, institutions, and economic models, requiring rapid, coordinated, and multi-level responses. This growing pressure exacerbates system vulnerabilities, accelerating the risk of collapse.

Nevertheless, the relationship between complexity and the climate crisis is not linear. On the one hand, increasing complexity can slow the adoption of innovative solutions, as more intricate systems tend to be less flexible and slower to respond to change. On the other hand, complexity itself can act as an evolutionary brake, mitigating the destabilizing effects of climate change through self-regulation mechanisms. For example, highly interconnected complex systems can distribute energy and resources in ways that alleviate imbalances, reducing the risk of a rapid collapse.

Complexity as a Stabilizer

The increase in complexity in socio-technical systems could represent a stabilizing factor capable of mitigating the negative effects of disturbances such as the climate crisis. This occurs for three fundamental reasons. First, the structural inertia of such highly regulated and articulated systems slows their capacity to react to changes, thereby attenuating the impact of negative climate feedbacks. Second, the distribution of resources and energy within complex systems reduces the risk of destabilizing interactions, limiting the possibility of sudden and uncontrolled changes. Finally, these systems exhibit internal self-regulation mechanisms, based on feedback and redistribution, that tend to prevent sudden systemic crises, favoring the achievement of new equilibriums.

The relationship between complexity and the climate crisis highlights a delicate balance between stability and vulnerability. Assuming that the increase in complexity can temporarily slow climate change and mitigate collapse risks through self-regulation mechanisms, beyond a certain threshold, complexity itself becomes a destabilizing factor.

Global governance is called upon to face the dual task of managing growing complexity and mitigating the climate crisis, ensuring socially acceptable transitions toward new sustainable states of equilibrium.

However, the pursuit of such equilibriums cannot be the result of top-down decisions but must involve local communities, which must develop their own governance models compatible with the limits imposed by their culture. This requires initiating processes of self-determination for defining the development trajectories to be pursued, oriented toward collective well-being.

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1.8 Culture and the Delirium of the Babelics

The “**delirium of the Babelics**” is a concept rooted in the biblical myth of the **Tower of Babel**, narrated in the Book of Genesis. According to the story, humanity, then united by a single language, decided to build a tower that would reach the heavens, to celebrate its own strength and immortality. This titanic project represented an act of defiance toward God, a gesture of pride that did not respect the limits imposed by the human condition. To stop them, God confused their languages, making them unable to understand one another, and the project failed. The unfinished tower became a symbol of chaos, division, and the ruin resulting from human arrogance.

The Contemporary Babelic Delirium: The Challenge to Limits

In contemporary society, the "delirium of the Babelics" takes on a new, but equally dramatic form. It is no longer a physical tower being built, but an economic and productive system without boundaries, driven by the belief that growth, technological progress, and consumption can be limitless. Like the builders of the Tower, we too live a kind of **collective intoxication**: a vision in which we believe we can dominate nature, exploit the planet's resources infinitely, and overcome every limit imposed by physical, biological, and social reality.

This "modern Babelic delirium" manifests itself in the **primacy of the market** over every other aspect of life. The belief has spread that the value of things, people, and societies must be measured exclusively in economic terms: GDP, profits, and margins have become the new universal language. However, as in the Tower of Babel, this narrative hides a profound weakness: once limits are ignored, the foundations of the system begin to crack. Confusion and chaos become inevitable.

The Market God and the Merchants: Builders of an Unstable Tower

At the head of this new tower are the **accountants of the Market**, who for years have acted as if the planet's resources were infinite and human capital was a machine to be endlessly exploited. This logic is based on a

dangerous idea: that nature and people are tools to serve profit, means to be exploited rather than assets to be protected.

However, today even the merchants are beginning to glimpse the boundaries of their illusion. The environment, impoverished and devastated by climate change, demonstrates that natural resources are not inexhaustible. Social inequalities, the exhaustion of the workforce, and the loss of collective cohesion reveal that human capital cannot be treated as a mere cost. As happened to the Babelics, we are entering a phase of confusion: the global economic system is no longer able to guarantee stability and progress, and more and more people perceive the emptiness left by the abandonment of cultural and social values.

Culture as an Antidote

In this scenario, culture represents not only an alternative but a true salvation. If the Babelic delirium is the manifestation of human arrogance that ignores limits, culture is the **consciousness of the limit**. It reminds us that **not everything technically possible is also right**, that growth must be balanced by equity, and that the economy must not be an end in itself but a means.

Culture is the lens through which we can analyze reality, understand the consequences of our choices, and imagine alternatives. It is the fertile ground for wise and thoughtful decisions because it teaches us to respect natural, social, and moral constraints. Culture, with its wealth of knowledge, traditions, and values, allows us to see the interconnection between the environment, social justice, and collective well-being.

Just Transitions: Reconciling Economy and Culture

Today, there is increasing discussion about just transitions, both socially and environmentally. The shift toward a green economy, a sustainable production system, and an inclusive society cannot ignore the role of culture as an essential guide. Without this perspective, the risk is that such transitions will become massive but disorganized projects imposed from above, where technology and economic policies are deployed without considering overall balance.

For these transitions to be truly just, they must be based on the principle of the limit as a founding value. This implies respect for the environment, recognizing that natural resources are finite and that the Earth cannot be exploited beyond its capacity for regeneration. It also requires valuing human capital, treating people as bearers of dignity and rights, and not as mere economic instruments. Finally, it promotes social cohesion, building a system that meets collective needs, fosters inclusion, and helps reduce inequalities.

Awakening from the Delirium: A Return to Wisdom

The great lesson of the myth of Babel is that progress cannot be built on arrogance and ignorance. When limits are ignored, the system collapses. But the end of delirium can also represent a new beginning. Today, we have the opportunity to rebuild balance, not with towers challenging the sky, but with solid foundations based on culture and wisdom.

The merchants of the Market God are beginning to realize that without culture, without respect for the environment, and without social cohesion, there is no future. It is a late awakening, but it can be the first step toward abandoning the Babelic delirium and returning to build societies that respect human dignity and the planet's fragility.

The delirium of contemporary Babelics was believing that the economy could be the only universal language and that everything could be sacrificed on the altar of profit. But reality is imposing a harsh awakening: peoples do not live by numbers but by values, culture, and connection with the environment and with each other.

Recognizing limits is not a defeat but an act of wisdom. It is the first step toward leaving the tower and rediscovering contact with the earth, with people, and with the future we want to build together. Culture is not just a resource: it is the essential condition for progress that is authentic, just, and balanced.

1.9 Culture as a tool of manipulation

Historical and Cultural References: Gramsci and Cultural Hegemony

The reflection on the power of culture as a means of governance has deep roots, and one of the most significant contributions comes from **Antonio Gramsci**. In his *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci developed the concept of **cultural hegemony**, highlighting how the ruling class maintains power not only through political and economic coercion but also through the control of dominant ideas and values within society.

Gramsci saw culture as a positive means to create social cohesion and promote change. Cultural hegemony, in fact, could be used to generate consensus around a collective emancipation project, in which the oppressed would become aware of their transformative power. In this vision, culture was not merely a reflection of existing power relations but a tool for overcoming them.

Thinkers like **Paulo Freire**, in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, expanded on this perspective, emphasizing how education and culture can foster both individual and collective liberation, enabling people to think critically and act to change the system.

The Distorted Evolution of Cultural Hegemony

If Gramsci saw cultural hegemony as a possibility for social construction and cohesion around values of progress, today we often witness a distorted use of culture as a means to fragment and manipulate. Instead of uniting and promoting a deep understanding of structural problems, culture is employed to create divisions around marginal or artificial issues, producing **cultural entropy** — a symbolic disorder that disorients people and distances them from the central issues of their lives.

This distorted evolution translates into the creation of **false topics**, that is, issues that do not represent the most urgent or systemic problems but that capture the public's attention through polarization and emotional conflict. **Noam Chomsky**, in *Manufacturing Consent*, demonstrated how the media can construct narratives useful for maintaining power by distracting public opinion. Similarly, **Hannah Arendt**, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, highlighted how social fragmentation was a fundamental tool for controlling the masses.

The Creation of Conflicts on "Imaginary" Topics

Today, culture is often exploited to create divisions around imaginary or excessively simplified topics, diverting attention from fundamental structural problems such as sustainable economic development, the fight against job insecurity, social inequalities, and the climate crisis. This mechanism develops through various steps.

First, emotionally engaging topics are identified, choosing issues capable of eliciting strong and immediate reactions, such as generational, identity-based, or symbolic conflicts. An example is the supposed contrast between young and old, often summarized in the narrative of "gerontocracy," or the conflict between tradition and modernity. Next, opposing categories are created, reducing the complexity of reality to a binary

opposition: "us versus them," "young versus old," "progressives versus conservatives." This approach exploits the natural human tendency to identify with clear categories, catalyzing public attention.

The conflict is then amplified through the media, social networks, and cultural institutions, until it becomes a dominant theme. The polarizing narrative thus constructed makes rational confrontation difficult and shifts public attention onto symbolic battles, moving it away from structural problems. For example, instead of addressing job insecurity, the discussion focuses on whether young people are "lazy." Instead of analyzing the sustainability of pension systems, the generational conflict is fueled. Meanwhile, the climate crisis is sidelined by symbolic debates about traditions or cultural practices.

Finally, this dynamic produces cultural entropy: the excess of superficial and divisive debates generates collective confusion, obscuring true priorities. In this cultural chaos, people become more vulnerable to manipulation, unable to clearly identify the real problems that require complex and shared solutions.

Culture as a Tool of Control

This distorted use of culture produces two main effects that deeply impact society. The first is the distraction from real problems: divisive narratives act like a smokescreen, diverting public attention from structural issues such as the economy, the environment, and education. These symbolic and superficial conflicts maintain the status quo, preventing people from recognizing and addressing the true sources of inequality, making it harder to organize for change.

The second effect is social fragmentation, accompanied by the consolidation of power. The creation of opposing factions undermines people's ability to build cross-cutting alliances to solve common problems. In this context of division, those who control the narrative stand as the only legitimate mediators, further strengthening their position of power and perpetuating a system that privileges a few at the expense of the collective good.

A Conscious Use of Culture

To counter this manipulative drift, it is essential to return to a conscious and constructive use of culture, as advocated by Gramsci.

This first means promoting critical thinking, educating people to recognize manipulation and to distinguish between real problems and artificially created ones. It is also necessary to reject polarization, avoiding falling into the traps of simplistic oppositions and instead striving to understand the complexity of issues. Finally, we must focus on structural priorities, bringing public debate back to fundamental topics such as social equity, sustainability, and collective well-being, in order to build a fairer and more conscious society.

CASE STUDY: GERONTOCRACY

"Gerontocracy," a fictional example chosen for this case study, represents the construction of a divisive narrative that portrays a supposed generational conflict between the young and the elderly. It is useful to illustrate how cultural manipulation can be designed, disseminated, received, and ultimately unmasked. This study does not merely describe the manipulative process but also aims to provide tools to reframe the issue constructively.

Designing the Narrative: How a Division is Built

The construction of the gerontocracy narrative begins with identifying an emotionally engaging topic: the idea that the elderly, by virtue of their social position and control over resources, hinder progress and deprive the young of opportunities. The theme is designed and amplified by communication professionals and influential figures, with the aim of creating deep divisions.

The Actors Involved and Communication Strategies

The construction of the narrative involves several actors, each with a strategic role in shaping public opinion. Communication marketing experts create messages capable of exploiting strong emotions, such as the frustration of young people over job insecurity or the anxiety of the elderly about social change. Journalists and commentators amplify these stories through articles and debates that simplify the problem, reducing it to a binary opposition: young "innovators" versus old "conservatives." Influential cultural figures, such as writers, artists, and university professors, legitimize the conflict with arguments that appear rational and scientific, giving the narrative an air of unquestionable truth.

The communication relies on well-established techniques to manipulate public perception. *Emotional framing* plays a central role, portraying the young as heroic victims and the elderly as selfish oppressors, simplifying reality and preventing a deep understanding of the true causes of hardship. The *repetition and amplification* of the narrative through traditional media and social networks help root the polarized vision in collective perception, making it seem like an undeniable truth. Finally, the *appeal to moral conflict* charges the issue with ethical significance, turning the confrontation into a battle between "right" and "wrong," rather than between perspectives that could be complementary.

Reception of the Message: Individual and Collective Psychological Effects

Once the manipulative narrative spreads, it generates profound psychological effects at both individual and collective levels. The emotional and simplified nature of the message activates basic needs and psychological mechanisms, influencing people's behavior and perception.

At the individual level, one of the main effects is identification with the victim. The message allows individuals to side with the "right" side. For young people, for example, the gerontocracy narrative becomes a way to justify their frustration, providing an immediate explanation for their hardships. Similarly, for the elderly, the same narrative can generate guilt or provoke a defensive reaction. Another individual psychological effect concerns the need for belonging. The manipulative narrative creates a strong sense of group identity, where young people feel part of a community that shares the idea of being oppressed, thereby strengthening emotional bonds within the group and creating an increasing distance from the "other," namely the elderly. Moreover, the simplified message reduces analytical capacity. The emotional charge of such narratives makes it easier to accept the simplified version of facts without examining the complexity of the situation, providing a reassuring answer that requires no further reflection.

At the collective level, one of the main effects of manipulation is social fragmentation. Polarization leads to the division of society into opposing factions, making cooperation between groups with common interests increasingly difficult. This mutual isolation hampers collective progress and fuels conflict. Another collective effect is the mutual reinforcement of beliefs. Within groups, the manipulative narrative self-perpetuates: people seek confirmation of their beliefs and reject opposing views, creating an environment that continuously reinforces a partial view of reality. Finally, those who try to unmask the manipulation are often marginalized, accused of betraying the group. This mechanism prevents the emergence of constructive debate and reduces the chances of engaging with alternative perspectives, keeping the group closed and isolated.

Scenarios of Division Degeneration

When a manipulative narrative, like that of gerontocracy, becomes predominant, it can have serious and dangerous consequences for society. Generational polarization can escalate into increasingly intense social conflicts. Young people, feeling marginalized and voiceless in political decisions, may react with acts of rebellion or growing contempt toward institutions, perceived as dominated by an elderly ruling class detached from their needs. This resentment can escalate into verbal clashes, and in some cases, even physical conflicts, further exacerbating social division.

In parallel, the manipulative narrative can be used to justify shifts in power, fueling discriminatory policies that favor one part of society at the expense of another. For example, drastic interventions such as the forced retirement of the elderly or the exclusion of young people from crucial decision-making processes could be legitimized, attempting to "restore balance" according to a partial and unilateral vision. Such policies risk further weakening the social fabric and creating new inequalities between generations.

Finally, the social fragmentation resulting from a manipulative narrative can be exploited by power groups to justify the use of authoritarian measures, presented as necessary to "reunify" society. In this way, those who control the narrative can strengthen their power, consolidating their control over society and stifling any attempt at criticism or cross-generational alliance-building.

Recognizing that a narrative is manipulative is the first step toward reframing the problem in constructive terms. In this process, critical thinking and education play a fundamental role.

Reframing the Problem

To address the gerontocracy narrative, it is essential first to assess the real causes of the problems it masks. In reality, generational conflict is merely a distraction from more serious structural issues, such as job insecurity and economic inequalities. Focusing on the division between young and old prevents an understanding of the real causes of social and labor difficulties affecting broad sectors of the population.

Moreover, it is important to dismantle the complicities that fuel this manipulative narrative by identifying who actually benefits from it. Often, they are economic and political actors who, by exploiting social fragmentation, manage to consolidate their power or divert attention from their responsibilities. The goal is to expose those who gain from this type of division, to limit their influence on public perception.

Finally, it is necessary to escape the dialectical trap that fuels the conflict. A false problem, like that between young and old, has no concrete solution but rather perpetuates the paradox of division. Instead of taking opposing sides, the key is to reframe the issue in terms of collaboration. The central question should be: How can young and old work together to tackle common challenges, joining forces and resources from both generations? Only in this way can a more cohesive society oriented toward collective well-being be built.

The Role of Schools

Schools have a crucial role in forming aware citizens capable of facing the challenges of the contemporary world. First, it is essential that students learn to recognize manipulations present in media messages. This means developing the ability to deconstruct content, analyzing not only the language used but also the sources and interests behind it. Being able to identify the communication strategies used to influence opinions is a fundamental skill in an increasingly complex and polarized media context.

Secondly, schools should promote synthesis, teaching students to see conflicts not as deadlock situations but as opportunities to create solutions that can meet the needs of both sides involved. This approach fosters a constructive and cooperative attitude, rather than fueling division and exclusion.

Finally, it is essential for schools to build cognitive resilience, preparing students to handle the excess of informational stimuli that characterizes our digital era. It is important for students to learn to maintain a critical approach, able to discern what is truly useful and relevant, avoiding succumbing to emotional or social pressures that could lead them to hasty or superficially influenced judgments.

In conclusion, "gerontocracy," as an example of a divisive narrative, clearly shows how cultural manipulations can fragment society, turning an apparent generational conflict into a dialectical trap that diverts attention from real problems. However, reframing the problem by shifting it from the conflict between young and old to a deeper reflection on the value of **intergenerational transmission**, on the role of **mentorship**, and on the need to create new symbolic resources, offers a way out. It is possible to transform conflict into a dynamic of cultural evolution, where continuity and innovation work together to build a better society.

But to achieve this, it is not enough to merely unmask the manipulative narrative. A leap in the level of **schooling** is needed — for today, even schools risk becoming part of the problem.

2. TERRITORIES

2.1 Culture and Development of Southern Italy

Before the Unification of Italy, the South was among the most advanced areas of the peninsula. The Kingdom of the Two Sicilies boasted an advanced steel industry, with the Pietrarsa complex (Naples) hosting the largest industrial plant for locomotive production of its time. The shipyard of Castellammare di Stabia was one of the largest in Europe. The Naples–Portici railway, inaugurated in 1839, was the first in Italy. A network of efficient roads and ports facilitated internal and foreign trade. The South was a net exporter of wheat, oil, and wine, with innovative agricultural practices in certain regions. The lands were managed through centralized and sustainable administrative systems. The Bank of Naples and the Bank of Sicily were among the leading credit institutions in Europe, holding significant gold reserves. Before the Unification, the South was a land of immigration, attracting laborers and craftsmen from other regions: the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies was perceived as economically stable and safe. Many migrants arrived from Northern Italy to work in agriculture, industry, and commerce.

The Unification of Italy: The Shift of Wealth and the Creation of an Internal Colony

After the Unification of Italy (1861), the South underwent a drastic transfer of resources to the North. The reserves of the Bank of Naples and the Bank of Sicily were moved to Turin to cover the debts of the new unified State. Many businesses were closed or relocated to the North, contributing to the South's industrial decline. The unified tax system imposed heavy taxes on the South, penalizing local economies. An internal colony is a territory exploited for resources and labor to benefit another region. The South was transformed into an internal colony to supply raw materials and cheap labor for the North's industrialization. Southern populations were pushed to migrate northwards to work in factories.

But destroying a people's wealth is not sufficient for their assimilation!

The Cultural Erasure of the South

The Unification of Italy, completed in 1861 and consolidated through subsequent events, can be analyzed as a complex process involving various **phenomena of cultural substitution, erasure, and symbolic imposition**. These mechanisms had a profound impact on the cultural and identity realities of Italian regions, particularly in the South, which **experienced forms of forced assimilation and cultural marginalization**.

The Unification of Italy can be read as a process characterized by mechanisms aimed at cancelling and replacing local cultural identities. First, forced assimilation imposed a centralized cultural model, suffocating the richness and diversity of local traditions. In parallel, through denigration and the use of stereotypes, a cultural hierarchy was constructed that relegated the South and its expressions to a marginal and subordinate role.

In addition, the looting of local resources and institutions, accompanied by iconoclasm, led to the destruction of identity symbols. Linguicide then marginalized regional languages and dialects, depriving entire communities of an essential part of their cultural heritage.

Finally, the nostalgic and sanitized narrative of the Risorgimento often obscured the complexities and contradictions of the unification process, making it difficult to fully understand its consequences, especially on the cultural level. This set of dynamics did not so much unify as create cultural and identity fractures that continue to influence contemporary Italian society.

To integrate the South into the national project, it was necessary to weaken its cultural identity and sense of pride. This process was based on several mechanisms. Stereotypes and denigration played a central role: Southerners were portrayed as backward, lazy, and criminal, while the official narrative presented the South as a place lacking in civil culture and governed by disorder. An important element of this narrative was the association of the term "mafia" with Southern brigands in the 19th century, thus justifying repressive policies. The term "brigands" was also used strategically: those who tried to defend their lands and autonomy were portrayed as outlaws, reflecting a colonial logic.

Another tool used was the destruction of cultural pride through manipulation of education. School programs tended to ignore or downplay the South's contribution to Italian history and culture, while the history of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies was rewritten to legitimize conquest and annexation, erasing important aspects of historical memory.

Finally, emigration played a decisive role in the process of cultural dislocation. Millions of Southerners were forced to leave their lands due to economic hardships linked to the destruction of the South's industrial system and the imposition of an oppressive tax system. This mass exodus further weakened the bond with cultural roots: Southern emigrants, often forced into humble jobs, progressively saw their sense of belonging and identity eroded.

The South Today: Between Cultural Subjugation and the Development Trap

Despite some signs of change, the cultural effects of the unification choices and post-war policies continue to leave a significant mark. A first aspect concerns cultural subjugation: many southerners have internalized negative stereotypes, fueled by a persistent narrative depicting the North as superior. This perception affects not only policies but also social dynamics, reinforcing a sense of subordination that hinders the South's cultural emancipation.

Another critical issue is the lack of territorial cooperation. The absence of a strong shared cultural identity and the persistence of internal divisions create obstacles to development. Cultural fragmentation and widespread mistrust prevent the emergence of collective initiatives capable of enhancing local resources, which often remain unused or undervalued.

Finally, the economic effects of these dynamics are deeply felt. The South has not yet been able to equip itself with an autonomous development strategy, nor to recover the symbolic resources necessary to build a collective vision and project itself into the future. The lack of cooperation and territorial cohesion hinders innovation and discourages investments, leaving many potentials unexpressed and slowing the region's overall progress.

The cultural erasure of the South was a deliberate process to facilitate its integration into the national project and to promote the North's development. This caused a historic wound with the loss of collective symbolic resources that still today prevents the South from developing a capacity for self-conception and activating a participatory local governance. To overcome this state of subjugation, it is necessary to rediscover and enhance the Southern cultural identity, promoting sustainable development models rooted in local specificities.

2.2 Thinking Communities: culture That Creates Development

Thinking Communities are those capable of integrating the symbolic resources of the past, reinterpreting and adapting them to new contexts to bring forth shared perspectives and challenges that guide collective action. These are not communities that merely live off past glories or cling nostalgically to an idealized self-image, but social groups that maintain a strong rootedness in their traditions while projecting themselves into the future.

These communities know that collective well-being depends on themselves, on their ability to rethink their collective identity in light of present and future challenges. In this vision, culture becomes the beating heart of progress, while economy and labor are the consequences of a community that knows how to build and transfer symbolic resources to new generations.

It is culture that generates development!

Symbolic resources, whether individual or collective, represent a bridge between the past and the future, a dynamic balance between roots and innovation. They are not static or immutable elements, but living meanings that must be continually reinterpreted and adapted to meet present needs. This capacity for reinterpretation allows the cultural heritage to be transformed into an active asset, capable of supporting new visions and perspectives.

These resources also serve as tools for cohesion and collective action. They create a shared narrative, a common thread that unites people and directs them toward common goals. Through this narrative, symbolic resources motivate individuals to invest in their territory and community, strengthening their sense of responsibility toward the collective good.

Finally, symbolic resources are essential for fostering a sense of identity and belonging. They offer people a deep bond with their cultural context, enabling them to feel part of something greater. At the same time, they provide solid yet flexible roots capable of supporting individuals and communities as they face challenges of change and innovation.

Communities that succeed in developing new symbolic resources by adapting their cultural heritage can face modern challenges and generate a collective vision of progress. Conversely, those that retreat into an affected nostalgia, idealizing a past often stripped of its negative aspects, risk becoming stranded, abandoning the construction of a future.

Thinking Communities and the Youth Exodus

A clear indicator of a community's cultural failure is the emigration of young people. This phenomenon cannot be understood solely in economic terms: **a community from which young people emigrate is not simply poor, but culturally weak.**

When a community fails to create or transmit meaningful symbolic resources to new generations, the bond between young people and their roots breaks, and the motivation to invest in the territory's future fades. This phenomenon manifests itself in two main ways:

On one hand, the absence of relevant symbolic resources deprives young people of a cultural and identity reference that gives value to the place where they live. Without this connection, the territory appears meaningless, and staying or investing in its future seems senseless.

On the other hand, the failure to renew collective identity prevents the community from adapting to the needs and aspirations of new generations. If symbolic resources are not reinterpreted and updated to address contemporary challenges, they lose their appeal, pushing young people to seek elsewhere the opportunities and stimuli they cannot find in their home context.

Liquid Personalities and the Cultural Factor

Liquid personalities, a concept introduced by Zygmunt Bauman, represent individuals who are unstructured, lacking symbolic references and solid cultural roots. In a community, the absence of symbolic resources inevitably leads to the formation of this type of personality:

- **Without personal symbolic resources:** Individuals cannot build a coherent vision of themselves and their role in society.
- **Without collective symbolic resources:** The community loses its ability to offer a sense of belonging and direction, becoming fragmented and unable to progress.

Without culture and symbolic resources, both individual and collective, a community unravels, disintegrates, leaving space for exodus, apathy, and the loss of hope. **This phenomenon is not a direct consequence of the lack of jobs, but rather of the absence of a collective narrative that motivates individuals to build their future within their own territory.**

Progress as a Cultural Expression

The progress of a community is inextricably linked to its ability to value and renew its symbolic resources. A community that reinvents its cultural heritage generates a virtuous cycle of development and cohesion.

First, the presence of shared symbols and a collective vision drives the economy. It is not the economy that drives progress, but the opposite: when a community finds profound motivations that spur action, new opportunities for work and development emerge.

This dynamic also promotes the rooting of new generations. Young people choose to stay when they perceive that their contribution is not only material but also symbolic, and they feel part of a shared project for the future.

Finally, the ability to think and reinterpret symbolic resources stimulates innovation. A community that reflects on its identity and adapts to present challenges manages to transform difficulties into opportunities for growth, strengthening its resilience and vitality.

A community that values sustainability as a symbolic resource, for example, can transform agricultural traditions into new ecological and entrepreneurial practices, motivating young people to stay and build a meaningful future.

Thinking Communities are those that know how to cultivate their culture like a living garden, not like a museum. They integrate the symbolic resources of the past, reinterpreting them to meet modern challenges, and pass on to new generations a narrative of hope and action. **The failure of a community is never merely economic: it is cultural.** When a community fails to rethink itself, renew itself, and transfer relevant symbolic resources, it ceases to exist as a cohesive system, becoming a fragmented collection of

liquid personalities and sterile nostalgias. It is from culture, not from the economy, that work, progress, and well-being are born!

2.3 Territorial Systems, Entropy, and the Threshold of Chaos

The concept of **cultural entropy** was developed by Richard Barrett to describe the degree of dysfunction within an organization caused by limiting behaviors and negative values. In this context, cultural entropy measures the energy wasted in unproductive activities, such as internal conflicts, lack of trust, and ineffective communication. A high level of cultural entropy indicates a dysfunctional work environment, while a low level suggests a healthy and cohesive organization.

More generally, cultural entropy can refer to the loss of coherence and cultural identity in a society, often due to rapid or complex changes that exceed the culture's capacity for adaptation. This concept has been discussed in various contexts, such as in the article "Entropic Civilization: When Ideology Clashes with Nature", which explores how cultural entropy can manifest when human ideologies conflict with natural processes.

Cultural entropy may emerge when traditions and values fragment, leading to the loss of shared practices and values. An overload of information flows and new value proposals (e.g., a green transition too rapid, as correlated to the pace of implementation of the PNRR) increases entropy by generating confusion and disorientation. An increase in entropy can lead to intergenerational disconnection, where new generations embrace new value systems, creating a distance that weakens the social fabric. Operations of cultural colonization by imposing external or dominant culture values suppress or dilute local cultures and identity foundations. Technological innovations that progress too rapidly can outpace a culture's ability to adapt, creating a gap between advanced technologies and traditional values. An increase in entropy may also stem from the loss of a sense of limits, for example when pursuing innovation and progress at any cost, destabilizing cultures through a progressive loss of contact with fundamental values.

The effects of increasing cultural entropy include the loss of internal cultural coherence; people may feel confused or alienated, unable to identify with a stable community. Younger generations may feel detached from the traditions and values of previous generations. Social fragility phenomena emerge, related to a fragmented culture that is therefore vulnerable to internal conflicts, inequalities, and external manipulations. A lack of shared narratives impacts the value system, triggering phenomena of political polarization. The increase in entropy results in a loss of wealth stemming from the diversity of perspectives, values, and traditions that are no longer able to integrate into a homogeneous and functional cultural system.

To avoid the negative effects of increasing cultural entropy, territorial governance must aim for a balance between tradition and innovation. This requires particular attention to the valorization of local traditions through their documentation, teaching, and celebration, while simultaneously promoting respect for cultural specificities.

It is essential to educate new generations to recognize the value of their own history and roots while integrating an openness toward new ideas. At the same time, it is necessary to invest in innovative projects that combine technology and local culture, maintaining living shared narratives that can evolve while respecting traditions. This approach allows the construction of an inclusive, rooted, and dynamic future.

Cultural Entropy and the Threshold of Chaos in Complex Systems

Cultural entropy, as previously explored, describes the loss of coherence and identity within a cultural system, often caused by changes that are too rapid or too complex, destabilizing the system's equilibrium. This phenomenon finds a significant counterpart in the threshold of chaos, a concept originating from the theory of complex systems. The threshold of chaos refers to the critical point at which a system, while still structured, approaches the limit of disintegration, beyond which it risks falling into a state of irreversible disorder. In this condition, the system is no longer able to adapt or maintain its functionality.

The threshold of chaos represents the thin boundary between order and disorder. Complex systems—such as ecosystems, territorial systems, and local cultures—can thrive when they are able to operate optimally at the edge of the threshold of chaos without crossing it. In such a state, the balance between stability and change allows the system to maximize innovation and adaptability. However, exceeding this limit carries the risk of structural collapse, where the interactions between the system's components become so unpredictable and uncoordinated that they lead to its disintegration.

Unlike systems in equilibrium, which are reactive to transformations, systems operating near the threshold of chaos possess greater flexibility. They can reorganize and generate new forms of order through processes of self-organization. Nevertheless, this liminal state is fragile and requires optimal governance of internal dynamics.

In a cultural system, this translates into the ability to embrace change without compromising foundational values and the sense of collective belonging. Similarly, in an economic or technological system, staying at the edge of chaos means encouraging innovation without losing the ability to coordinate resources and relationships.

The threshold of chaos does not represent only a condition of risk but also an area of great creative potential. It is here that new ideas, innovative solutions, and adaptations emerge, enabling the system to evolve. However, the success of this evolution depends on balance: if the system becomes too rigid, it risks losing the ability to innovate; if it yields to disorder, it may collapse. For cultures, just like for complex systems, the future hinges on the ability to remain in this delicate zone of dynamic equilibrium. **It is in this intermediate space that rooted values encounter new challenges, giving rise to transformations that, instead of destroying identity, enrich and renew it.**

In summary, reflecting on cultural entropy helps us understand how to maintain coherence in social systems, while the threshold of chaos teaches us that a certain level of disorder can be essential for evolution and adaptation. Finding the right balance is the crucial challenge.

2.4 Thinking Territories: From Smart City to Smart Land

The concept of "Smart Land" is an evolution of the more well-known concept of "Smart City", applied to broader territorial contexts beyond a single city, such as rural areas, provinces, or regions. While "Smart Cities" focus on improving urban efficiency through the use of technology, "Smart Land" embraces a broader vision, including less urbanized areas.

Definition of Smart Land

A “Smart Land” is a territory that uses advanced technologies and intelligent strategies to improve the quality of life for its citizens, environmental sustainability, and the efficiency of public services, while simultaneously promoting economic and social development. The goal is to create a network of connections between cities, small towns, and rural areas, allowing everyone to benefit from the opportunities offered by digitization and innovation.

Political Principles of Smart Land

From a political perspective, the concept of Smart Land requires integrated and participatory governance, involving local institutions, businesses, civil society organizations, and citizens. This model is based on four fundamental pillars:

Digital Inclusion: Ensuring that even the least populated areas have access to advanced technological infrastructures such as broadband and digital services, promoting equal opportunities in technology usage.

Environmental Sustainability: Adopting smart solutions to reduce environmental impact, such as efficient management of water resources, waste reduction, and the spread of renewable energy sources.

Democratic Participation: Using digital tools to involve citizens in political life through online consultations, collaborative platforms, and applications that allow them to report issues or suggest proposals.

Local Economic Development: Supporting innovation and business competitiveness by encouraging interconnection between economic sectors and opening up to global markets. This approach helps build sustainable, inclusive, and dynamic territories.

Technologies for a Smart Land

Smart Land policies are based on the use of advanced technologies to improve the management and functioning of territorial areas. Among these, the **Internet of Things (IoT)** plays a key role in monitoring and managing vital resources such as water and energy, as well as optimizing transportation and logistics. **Big Data and Analytics** are essential for collecting and analyzing large amounts of information, useful for more precise territorial planning and for improving the efficiency of public services. Finally, **digital platforms** facilitate the connection between citizens, institutions, and businesses, simplifying communication and encouraging active community participation in local decision-making processes.

Examples of Political Application

- **Integrated Territorial Plans:** Policies that view the entire territory as an interconnected ecosystem, promoting collaboration between cities and rural areas for sustainable development.
- **Decentralized Public Services:** Using technology to bring public services even to remote areas, such as telemedicine, online education, and digital public administration.
- **Smart Agriculture:** Developing policies that support sustainable agriculture and the use of technologies to improve productivity and reduce environmental impact.

Political Critiques and Challenges

The concept of Smart Land also presents significant challenges. One such challenge is the **Digital Divide**, which risks excluding some areas from the benefits of digitization, exacerbating existing inequalities. Another difficulty lies in **complex governance**, as the realization of an integrated system requires close cooperation between different administrative levels, an objective that can be difficult to achieve. Finally, there is the issue of **economic sustainability**, since the initial investment needed to develop smart technological infrastructures can be too burdensome for some communities, especially the less developed ones.

In summary, the political concept of "Smart Land" aims to promote inclusive, sustainable, and innovative territorial development, using technology as a tool to improve quality of life and make local resource management more efficient.

Aldo Bonomi, an Italian sociologist, has developed a profound reflection on the evolution of the concepts of **smart city** and **smart land**, proposing an approach that focuses on social, economic, and territorial dynamics. Bonomi starts from the observation that the model for the development of cities and territories cannot be purely technological, but must also take into account the social and productive realities that characterize the fabric of a community.

Criticism of the Smart City Model

Bonomi criticizes the smart city model, considering it a paradigm too focused on technology and digitalization, often imposed from above without taking into account local specificities and social identities. According to Bonomi, the smart city, in its current conception, can encourage an urbanization that privileges urban centers, digital elites, and large investors, while excluding peripheral areas and less connected communities. In particular, the technocracy associated with this model risks creating a division between those who have access to the benefits of innovation and those who are left behind, thereby widening inequalities. Moreover, smart cities tend to concentrate resources and investments in large metropolises, neglecting rural areas and small communities, which are equally essential for territorial balance.

Towards a Smart Land

Bonomi proposes moving beyond the smart city model to embrace the concept of **smart land**, a notion that integrates the territorial dimension and acknowledges the social, productive, and cultural diversity of a broader area. The smart land is not just an intelligent urban area but a complex territorial system that includes cities, rural areas, industrial districts, and local communities.

Smart land considers the territory as an interconnected ecosystem, where cities and rural areas are complementary and interdependent. This approach aims to create a balance between urban development and the enhancement of local resources.

Bonomi emphasizes the importance of integrating technological innovation with local traditions and territorial economies, such as industrial districts and agriculture. Technology should be a tool to enhance the local productive fabric, not an end in itself.

Smart Land as a Community Future Project

The concept of smart land is based on an inclusive and participatory approach, where local communities play a central role in the development process. This implies the active involvement of citizens, businesses, institutions, and social organizations in the management of resources and territorial planning.

Bonomi highlights the importance of enhancing the local economy, emphasizing the economic and productive specificities of each territory, such as industrial districts, agricultural supply chains, or networks of local craftsmanship. Smart land should strengthen these realities, creating synergies between innovation and tradition. Furthermore, one of the main goals is to promote social and territorial cohesion, reducing inequalities and encouraging development that includes peripheral and rural areas, so that every part of the territory can benefit from the opportunities offered by technology.

The Role of Social Infrastructure

Bonomi stresses the importance of social infrastructures in building a smart land, a concept that goes beyond traditional technological infrastructures, such as broadband networks or IoT sensors. It is about creating networks of people, associations, and institutions working together for the common good. Social capital, that is, relationships of trust and cooperation among people, is essential for the development of a smart land. Communities must be actively involved in territorial regeneration projects, ensuring that innovation responds to the real needs of people. Moreover, the governance of the smart land must be participatory and inclusive, adopting models that actively involve citizens and local stakeholders. This approach fosters the creation of territorial policies more closely aligned with community needs, promoting a shared and sustainable management of the territory.

Productive Districts and Smart Land

A key aspect of Bonomi's vision concerns the role of productive districts and local economic chains. Italy is characterized by the presence of numerous industrial districts, representing a wealth of skills and knowledge that must be enhanced through innovation.

In a smart land, innovation should not be concentrated only in large urban centers but distributed across the entire territory. Local businesses, in fact, can collaborate with universities, research centers, and institutions to develop solutions that enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of productive districts. Agriculture also plays a crucial role in this context, especially regarding environmental sustainability and food security.

Bonomi emphasizes the importance of supporting quality agriculture and short supply chains, using technology to optimize production processes and reduce waste, thus promoting a more sustainable and integrated model of economic development.

2.5 Culture as Emerging Property in Complex Systems

In complex systems, an emergent property is a phenomenon that arises from the interaction between the parts of the system but cannot be reduced or attributed to any of them individually. **Culture**, in this context, represents a **collective emergent property** that arises from the interactions between individuals, their practices, shared values, and the surrounding environment.

Culture as an Emergent Property

Culture emerges from the daily interactions between individuals, such as verbal exchanges, imitation, and learning. Individual practices aggregate into recognizable collective patterns, as in the case of a local culinary custom, which arises from available resources and personal traditions. Culture is not the sum of individual behaviors, but an autonomous organizational structure that guides and influences collective behavior. For example, language is not the result of a single speaker, but a shared system regulated by the community.

Culture evolves in response to changes in the complex system, such as environmental, technological, and social changes. Digitalization, for example, has transformed values related to communication, creating new norms and practices, such as the use of social media. Furthermore, culture operates on different levels: at the micro level, influencing individual norms and values; at the meso level, influencing local traditions and institutions; and at the macro level, forming national or global identity. Culture facilitates cooperation among community members by providing a shared set of rules, meanings, and values that guide economic, social, and political behavior.

In complex systems, culture acts as a filter that reduces complexity by providing shared models that simplify decisions. Religious or moral traditions, for example, offer ethical guidelines that reduce conflicts. Culture stabilizes the system by introducing negative feedback mechanisms that regulate behaviors and prevent instability. Cultural taboos, such as those against excessive resource exploitation, can prevent ecological collapse in traditional communities. Finally, culture also stimulates innovation, as demonstrated by the competition among Renaissance city-states, which fostered the development of the arts and sciences. From the perspective of complex systems, culture can be defined as an emergent and adaptive system of norms, beliefs, practices, values, and knowledge that organizes the interactions of a population with its natural, social, and economic environment, influencing the flows of resources, information, and power in response to internal and external pressures.

The relationship between culture and the territorial system is characterized by several fundamental aspects. First, culture emerges rather than being designed. It is not the result of a deliberate act, but develops through the interaction between individuals and groups, originating local dynamics (micro) that over time create recognizable patterns at the global level (macro). An example of this process is represented by languages, rituals, and traditions that arise organically to respond to collective needs.

Culture is also highly adaptive, evolving in response to environmental, economic, and social changes. For example, a community living in a coastal area might develop cultural practices related to sustainable fishing to adapt to climate change. Furthermore, culture is not an isolated system, but constantly interacts with other systems, such as economic, ecological, and technological ones. The introduction of new technologies, such as irrigation systems, can alter traditional agricultural practices, also changing the values related to land.

Another crucial aspect concerns feedback and responses: cultural systems generate feedback mechanisms, both positive, which amplify certain behaviors, and negative, which regulate them. An example is cultural values, such as those related to environmental conservation, which lead to practices that limit the exploitation of natural resources.

The culture of a people interacts deeply with the territory. It develops as an adaptive system to the challenges posed by the natural environment, as happens in arid regions, where traditional cultures implement techniques for water conservation. Furthermore, culture acts as a regulator of natural resources, as in the case of the indigenous populations of the Amazon rainforest, for whom nature is considered sacred, with sustainable forest management practices that limit exploitation.

Culture can also be a vector of innovation or resistance. It can promote the acceptance of innovations that integrate with existing cultural values, as in the case of renewable energies, or reject those perceived as cultural threats, such as the opposition to GMOs in some communities. Furthermore, culture modulates information flows: in hierarchical societies, the dissemination of information is slow and filtered, while in more open contexts, the flows of ideas and innovations are rapid and dynamic.

Cultural values act as attractors in complex systems, influencing social dynamics. For example, in a culture that strongly values social justice, political systems tend to become more equitable. Complex systems can also reach critical points where small cultural changes provoke significant effects. An example of this is the introduction of social media, which has radically transformed modes of social interaction.

Finally, a resilient culture is able to adapt to disturbances without losing its fundamental identity. An example of cultural resilience is the rapid recovery of social structures by many local communities after traumatic natural events. Culture, therefore, viewed through the prism of complex systems, appears as an emerging and adaptive system that continuously evolves in response to internal and external pressures. Understanding these dynamics is essential for designing effective governance of the territorial system.

2.6 Nostalgic communities and symbolic resources

The relationship between the **symbolic resources inherited from the past** and a community's ability to develop new ones in times of change is central to understanding cultural dynamism and resilience. The symbolic resources of the past, rooted in traditions and collective memories, represent a fundamental identity heritage, but they can become an obstacle to innovation and progress when they turn into tools of **immobilizing nostalgia**, unable to respond to the challenges of the present and the future.

The symbolic resources of the past: heritage and limit

The symbolic resources that come from a community's traditions are often linked to values, myths, narratives, and practices that have consolidated social cohesion and guided collective identity over time. This connection to the past provides:

- **Identity roots:** Elements that provide stability and continuity, an anchor that strengthens the sense of belonging.
- **Collective memory:** The narration of the past helps the community build an image of itself, recalling shared experiences that give meaning to the present.

However, in times of great change, such as those characterizing the contemporary era, these symbolic resources risk becoming **static** or **nostalgic**, unable to provide answers to current challenges. Instead of representing a springboard to the future, they transform into a psychological refuge that blocks action.

Nostalgia for the past and collective removal

Nostalgia for an idealized past often stems from a psychological removal of its problematic aspects. For example, the memory of the peasant society is often actualized through an emotional filter that values harmony with nature and the simplicity of life, but ignores the harsh realities of that world: physical toil, economic precariousness, hunger, and vulnerability to natural events.

This type of nostalgia not only drains energy from progress but also induces a renunciation of hope. A community that takes refuge in an idealized past avoids the necessary commitment to face the uncertainties and complexities of the present, adopting a passive and defeatist attitude towards the future.

The importance of developing new symbolic resources

The development of new symbolic resources is essential to ensure collective progress. These resources emerge from a community's ability to rework the past, not denying it but critically reinterpreting it, accepting both positive and problematic aspects. Furthermore, the community must be able to imagine the future, creating symbols, narratives, and myths that guide the group towards shared goals and new hopes. Finally, experimentation plays a crucial role, promoting cultural innovations that respond to the challenges and opportunities of the present.

New symbolic resources do not eliminate traditional ones, but renew and integrate them, adapting them to contemporary needs. This process helps the community face change, providing meanings that help make sense of transformations and uncertainties. Moreover, these resources strengthen social cohesion, creating shared reference points that unite the group around a common project, and stimulate collective action, motivating commitment towards progress and the construction of new realities.

The ecological transition requires new symbolic resources that value sustainability and responsibility towards the planet. Symbols like "the circular economy" or narratives like the "green revolution" embody ideals that guide collective action. However, if this transition were based solely on a nostalgic return to an idealized harmony with nature from the past, it would risk failing, ignoring the technological and social advances necessary to address environmental challenges.

The risk of nostalgic and affected communities

A community that exclusively takes refuge in the symbolic resources of the past not only becomes immobilized but also loses the ability to imagine a different future. This attitude leads to a gradual inaction, where the community stops investing in collective projects and lives in a sort of symbolic paralysis. Moreover, the idealization of the past generates a loss of hope, as it implies a rejection of the possibility of improving the present and the future. The lack of new symbols that can unite the community ultimately fosters fragmentation, with the risk of creating divisions between those who nostalgically look to the past and those who try to move towards the future without common references.

The symbolic resources of the past are fundamental for rooting the identity of a community, but they must be critically reworked to avoid becoming a brake on change. Only an active community, capable of developing new symbolic resources in moments of transition, can progress and successfully face the challenges of the present. The construction of new narratives and symbols is an act of hope and collective investment towards a better future, overcoming the risk of affected nostalgia and immobility. In this process, the community regains not only the ability to act but also the ability to dream and build new possibilities.

2.7 Cultural and territorial capitalism: cooperation and competition

Current socio-economic and geopolitical scenarios highlight the **failure of the market** to ensure both social development and the sustainability of the global economic system. Not only has the market shown limits in addressing growing inequalities, but also in ensuring the survival of the businesses themselves, exposing them to the vulnerability of exogenous shocks such as the pandemic crisis, the fragilities of global supply chains, and geopolitical instability. In this context, the urgency to rethink the development model emerges,

moving towards a post-capitalist paradigm based on **Cultural Capitalism** that incorporates the concept of limit (**ecological, social, and productive**).

Lack of Productive Factors and Human Capital

Globalized economies are facing a severe shortage of human capital, caused by various factors, including demographic decline affecting many advanced economies, such as the Italian one, and the misalignment between the training offered and the actual needs of the labor market.

Moreover, the brain drain from marginal territories to large global centers further contributes to this shortage, while the fragmentation of the productive fabric makes it difficult to attract skills and innovation.

These issues highlight the unsustainability of the current economic model, suggesting the need for a reevaluation of the territory as a generative structure. A well-structured territory can offer rooted human capital, promoting skills that enhance local resources, ensuring social and economic protection, acting as a shield against external shocks through internal cooperation networks, and developing a territorial welfare that integrates businesses, communities, and institutions into systems of collective protection.

Cultural capitalism and the Post-Capitalist Model: Communities and Limits

A post-capitalist model is based on the incorporation of the concept of limit – ecological, social, and economic – and on the centrality of communities. In this context, the idea of unlimited growth as the dominant paradigm is surpassed, and the territorialization of development is promoted, where territories are not just places of production but integrated systems capable of generating well-being, sustainability, and protection.

Local communities, supported by strong governance, become the core of sustainable economic growth based on renewable resources and cultural assets. This approach also aims to protect local businesses, reducing dependence on unstable global markets, and to create an integrated welfare that combines social networks and territorial infrastructures.

Competition between Territories: Internal Cooperation and External Competition

With the decline of globalization, the competitive landscape shifts from competition between companies to competition between territories. Each territory becomes an integrated system that competes on a global scale, enhancing its own peculiarities.

This model is based on two fundamental dynamics. The first concerns internal cooperation, essential for transforming the territory into a systemic unit. Key elements of this cooperation include shared governance, where local institutions, businesses, and communities collaborate to define common goals, support networks that integrate local production chains, public services, and infrastructure, and resilience infrastructure, which involves investments in smart technologies, renewable energies, and sustainable mobility systems.

The second dynamic concerns external competition, which increasingly relies on symbolic resources, that is, intangible elements that create perceived value on a global scale. These resources include territorial identity, which strengthens the connection between products and their place of origin, cultural rooting that enhances traditions, historical heritage, and social practices as elements of uniqueness, and environmental and cultural assets, which protect and promote natural and landscape resources as economic assets.

Specializing and Territorializing Technological Innovation

Technological innovation, to be truly effective from a social and economic perspective, must be closely linked to the territory. Technologies must be adapted to local specificities, responding to the needs of communities and enhancing already available resources.

Moreover, it is essential that they are integrated with local production chains, as in the case of Artificial Intelligence or the Internet of Things (IoT), which can optimize agricultural, artisanal, and industrial productions typical of each territory. Another crucial aspect concerns accessibility and inclusivity: investments in digital infrastructure must ensure connectivity even in the most marginal areas, allowing all communities to benefit from the opportunities offered by technology.

Innovation as Global Competitiveness

Territorial-oriented innovation not only increases internal resilience but also becomes a crucial element of international competitiveness. Territories that stand out for technological advancement are more attractive for external investments, fostering the influx of capital. Moreover, local specializations can emerge as leaders in niche markets, such as food-tech or sustainable tourism, dominating specific sectors thanks to their peculiarities.

Towards a Post-Capitalist Scenario

In a post-capitalist context, competition between territories is oriented towards regenerative models, seeking to overcome the paradigm of resource extraction to promote economies that regenerate natural and social capital. In this scenario, the territory becomes the core of an integrated and territorial welfare system, acting as a driver of social and economic protection. Furthermore, global collaboration among resilient territories is growing, where community networks share knowledge and sustainable practices, contributing to the creation of a global system of solidarity and innovation.

The crisis of the global market and the post-industrial transition shift the axis of competition from companies to territories. In this scenario, **the territory becomes both the engine of development and the protective system** for communities and businesses, capable of generating well-being and resilience. Through internal cooperation and the enhancement of symbolic resources, territories can compete globally, building a sustainable future based on identity, innovation, and social cohesion.

2.8 Hegemony and geopolitical transition: America, the sea and the imperial challenge of Cina

The history of global hegemony is closely linked to the ability to project power without solely resorting to brute force. The United States of America have been masters of this strategy, building hegemony not through traditional territorial colonization, but through the strategic control of trade routes, seas, and military infrastructures. This strategy is now challenged by China, which, with its "New Silk Road," is trying to rewrite the rules of global power projection.

American Hegemony: Sea, Bases and Consensus

American power has never been based on direct and coercive imposition. On the contrary, the United States has built a system in which consent has often been induced through the perception of their role as "bearers of general interests." This consent has been reinforced by a network of land military bases and control of strategic maritime routes.

Land bases are the beating heart of American hegemony. Italy, with its bases in Sigonella, Aviano, and Naples, represents an emblematic example. These installations not only ensure a stable military presence in Europe and the Mediterranean but also serve as tools of political and economic influence. Their function goes far beyond the military aspect: the bases become coordination centers for global operations and symbols of American projection as a guarantor of international security.

Control of the sea, on the other hand, has been the true key to U.S. dominance. As emphasized by Alfred Thayer Mahan, a theorist of naval power, whoever controls the straits and major maritime routes controls global trade and, consequently, world power. The United States has applied this strategy with surgical precision: from managing the straits of Hormuz and Malacca to a massive presence in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific. Their navy is not just a military force, but a geopolitical architecture that regulates trade and ensures respect for their international order.

The Chinese Challenge: The Silk Road as a Trojan Horse

China, for its part, is positioning itself as an alternative to the American order, but with a strategy that combines the traditional imperial vision with technological and economic modernity. The "New Silk Road" (Belt and Road Initiative) represents the pivot of this strategy.

This initiative, presented as a commercial cooperation, has a dual objective: to strengthen Chinese control over global trade routes and to create an infrastructural and political network that connects Asia to Europe and Africa. Italy, with its strategic role in the Mediterranean, has been involved as a landing point for this grand project. Investments in the ports of Genoa and Trieste and promises of cooperation have made the Silk Road appear as a great economic opportunity. However, many analysts warn that it is a Trojan horse to extend Chinese influence on the European continent.

China is not limited to building physical infrastructures; it is also structuring its geopolitical presence in an imperial form. It perceives itself not as a nation among others, but as a "Middle Empire," destined to shape a new global order. This perception is visible in its foreign policy, which combines traditional tribute practices with modern economic tactics of indebtedness and dependency.

The Clash between Two Hegemonic Visions

The Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean have become the center of this hegemonic competition. The United States, which see the Belt and Road Initiative as a direct threat, have adopted a containment approach. Through military alliances (such as the Quad with Japan, Australia, and India) and investments in alternative infrastructures, they seek to prevent China from gaining strategic control over maritime routes and local economies.

This competition is not only economic or military; it is a battle for control of the narrative and perception. The United States continue to present themselves as guarantors of freedom of navigation and global security, while China positions itself as the ideal economic partner for emerging countries. However, behind both visions lies an intense struggle to redefine the parameters of the world order.

Italy between Two Giants

Italy finds itself in a strategic and vulnerable position in this competition. As a NATO member and historical ally of the United States, the country benefits from American protection, but at the same time must face Chinese pressures to fully engage in the Belt and Road Initiative.

This position requires a strategic vision that can balance the economic opportunities offered by China with the need to preserve Italy's political integrity and geopolitical role in the Mediterranean. In an era of hegemonic transition, Italy cannot afford to be a mere spectator: it must carefully choose its alliances and actively contribute to shaping the future world order.

2.9 The Mattei Plan: a vision of cultural redemption and external projection

Enrico Mattei, a visionary entrepreneur and founder of ENI, represents one of the most emblematic figures of Italy's ability to envision an autonomous and strategic role in the international chessboard. Mattei never accepted the idea of Italy relegated to the role of a subordinate pawn in global dynamics. His vision of cooperation with resource-producing countries, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa, was rooted in a culture aimed at building fair and respectful ties, based on mutual benefit rather than colonial imposition.

Today, the "Mattei Plan" proposed by the government led by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni seeks to recover and update this vision. It is not simply an economic or energy policy plan, but a cultural response to two crucial challenges: one internal, related to the cultural growth of Italians, and one external, concerning Italy's strategic projection in the Mediterranean and beyond.

An Internal Goal: The Cultural Growth of Italians

The Mattei Plan has the potential to reactivate a cultural dimension that has long been neglected in Italy. It is a project that can respond to the need to give back to Italians, and in particular to the peoples of the Mezzogiorno, a sense of rootedness and pride in its role in the history and geography of the Mediterranean.

After decades of narratives that have reduced the South to a land of marginality, crime, and forced emigration, the Mattei Plan can represent an opportunity to heal this historical wound. Restoring centrality to the Mezzogiorno means recognizing it as a strategic resource, not only for its geographical position but as a custodian of a millenary culture capable of dialoguing with the southern shores of the Mediterranean.

This project could trigger a path of cultural growth for the entire nation, recovering a shared strategic vision that surpasses the obsession with the economy as the only measure of development. The Mattei Plan is, in this regard, a response to the cultural erasure suffered by Italy over the centuries, particularly in the South, restoring to them an active role in the construction of the national future.

An External Objective: The Strategic Projection of Italy

On the international front, the Mattei Plan represents a vision of strategic projection based on cooperation and mutual respect. By adopting Mattei's approach, Italy can position itself as a mediator and trusted partner in the Mediterranean and Africa, areas of growing geopolitical interest.

This plan aims to transform Italy into a bridge between Europe and the Mediterranean, enhancing its ability to engage with diverse cultures and build relationships based on equity and sustainability. In a global context where competition among great powers tends to polarize choices, Italy can offer a third way: a foreign policy that is neither imperialist nor subordinate, but promotes cooperation as a tool for stability and development.

Investment in infrastructure, renewable energy, and industrial partnerships with African and Mediterranean countries, central to the Mattei Plan, goes beyond mere economics. It is an opportunity to reaffirm the centrality of the Mediterranean as a space for dialogue rather than conflict, and to relaunch Italy's role as a leading actor in this crucial region.

The Mattei Plan as Historical and Geostrategic Redemption

The Mattei Plan is not just a political project: it is an act of historical and cultural redemption. Internally, it represents the opportunity to heal the wound inflicted on the Mezzogiorno by the Unification of Italy and the post-war period, restoring to the South its natural role as a protagonist of the Mediterranean. Externally, it reaffirms Italy's ability to act as an autonomous and strategic nation, capable of building balanced and respectful international relations.

This plan, if fully realized, can bring back to the center of the Italian agenda not only economic growth but a cultural vision that values the symbolic and identity resources of the country. The Mediterranean, from a marginalized space, can return to being the focus of Italian foreign policy, and the Mezzogiorno can reclaim its role as a bridge between cultures, economies, and strategies.

The Mattei Plan, ultimately, is a call to reclaim Italy's cultural and strategic dignity, overcoming decades of subordination to return to being a central actor in the Mediterranean and the world.

2.10 Mattei Plan and the Southern locomotive: strategy and Mediterranean for the redemption of the South

During the speech on the occasion of the signing of the Agreement for development and cohesion with the Puglia Region on 29/11/2024, the Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni, offered a vision that transcends the boundaries of the agreement itself, touching on central themes for the future of the South and all of Italy. Her words recalled the fundamental themes of culture, strategy, and identity as key elements for the redemption of the South, outlining a path of growth that is rooted in the ability of the territories to enhance themselves.

Culture and Pride as Pillars of Redemption

"If we invest in pride, dynamism, flair, creativity, determination, and the desire to do, we can achieve great things," said the President, emphasizing that the redemption of the South cannot come from welfare, but from enhancing its human and cultural resources. The reference to the pride and creativity of the Southern

territories is central to a discourse that overturns the narrative of marginality and subordination that has too long characterized the history of the South.

"The South has been the locomotive of Italy," he continued, citing data that shows how the southern regions have led the growth of GDP and employment in 2023. This result, according to the President, is a demonstration that things can change, that investment in what makes the South unique and dynamic can produce tangible and lasting results.

Strategy and Vision to Compete on Equal Terms

A crucial point of the strategy outlined by the Prime Minister concerns overcoming the logic of allocating infrastructure funds in proportion to the resident population. "The absence of opportunities is often linked to the absence of infrastructure," he explained, highlighting how tying resources to the current population perpetuates a cycle of marginalization for the South.

The population of the South, now equal to 34% of the national total, has been decimated by decades of forced emigration, caused precisely by the lack of infrastructure and opportunities. Allocating funds in proportion to the existing population, therefore, only confirms this state of affairs, financing fewer infrastructures and triggering a cycle of decline rather than development. The logic is self-referential: fewer resources mean fewer infrastructures, which in turn lead to fewer opportunities and further depopulation.

If the funds are intended for equalization, their purpose must be to rebalance disparities, not to replicate inequalities. Equalization requires an approach that considers not only the data on the current population but also the strategic needs of a territory that needs to recover decades of structural disadvantages. "We cannot tie infrastructure spending to the existing population, because that means ignoring the damage already done by the lack of investments," Meloni emphasized.

For this reason, the Government has decided to allocate at least 40% of infrastructure funds to the South, a share that exceeds simple demographic calculations to address the root causes of the gap. It is a paradigm shift that recognizes the need to break the vicious cycle of marginalization and to transform the South into a protagonist of national development. This strategic choice aims to reverse the historical trend, creating infrastructures that not only retain the resident population but also attract new opportunities and investments, thus triggering a virtuous cycle of growth and development.

Mediterranean and South: At the Center of Italian Projection

Recognizing the strategic value of the Mediterranean and the South as a gateway to the world, the Prime Minister recalled: "The Mediterranean is a sea that is becoming central again... and Italy is central in the Mediterranean." The reference to Italy's position as a hub between the Indo-Pacific and the Atlantic Ocean highlighted how the South is not a periphery, but a hub of connections and geopolitical opportunities.

"The sea is one of our most extraordinary infrastructures and one of our most extraordinary opportunities," he stated, reiterating the importance of integrating this vision into the national development plan. Infrastructures, tourism, trade, and international cooperation must start from this centrality of the South and the Mediterranean to project Italy at the center of global dynamics.

A Cultural and Historical Redemption

The President clarified that the Government's strategy is not limited to economic measures but aims to rediscover and enhance the cultural and symbolic potential of the South. "I believe that the great challenge is to put these territories in a position to compete on equal terms," he said, emphasizing the importance of a vision that combines local pride and international projection.

This speech fits into a broader framework that sees the Mattei Plan not only as an economic measure but as an act of cultural and strategic redemption. Meloni's words, "betting on the value and pride of the people of the South," represent a statement of intent that seeks to heal the historical wounds of the South, restoring its centrality and dignity.

Ultimately, the redemption of the South is not just a local challenge but an opportunity for all of Italy to return to being a strategic actor, rooted in its culture and projected towards the future.

3. THE TRANSITION

3.1 Technological development and the myth of Prometheus

Culture, understood as a set of values, narratives, and shared practices, is not only the engine of a society's development but also its filter and stabilizer in relation to technological dynamics. In the transition process towards a digital society, local culture plays a crucial role in moderating the effects of a technological acceleration that, if uncontrolled, risks taking vital resources away from social and economic development, generating imbalances that directly affect communities.

Prometheus and the Fire

The Greek myth of Prometheus, who gave fire to mankind, symbolizes the transformative potential of technology but also the risks associated with its unlimited spread. Prometheus did not just bring a useful resource; he brought an immense power that humans had to learn to control. Fire, when used wisely, is life; but if left unchecked, it is destruction. This myth reminds us that every new technology, before being spread, must be filtered through a lens of collective wisdom: that of culture.

Accelerating technological development too quickly without assessing its social and ethical impact is like distributing fire without caring about its consequences. Technology, in itself, is senseless and limitless: it has no intrinsic direction or ethical purpose. It is up to culture, communities, and their symbolic resources to act as a filter, selecting what is useful and necessary compared to what is superfluous or harmful.

The Cultural Filter

Local culture acts as a stabilizer and moderator in relation to technology, serving as an essential filter that separates what is needed from what is the result of an unlimited capitalist race. Not everything that is known must necessarily be transformed into a technological product; not everything that is technically possible must be made socially mandatory. This principle becomes evident in sectors such as electric cars, an example of technology proposed and promoted before it was truly mature. The market, an expression of a collective cultural filter, has partially rejected this acceleration, indicating that the invested resources have not produced adequate solutions to real needs.

A rooted culture acts as a counterbalance to the pressures of capitalism that tends to favor innovation without considering its consequences. Unlimited technological acceleration risks absorbing natural, human, and economic resources, taking them away from society and generating forms of alienation that also express themselves on a symbolic level. The emergence of movements that reject the excesses of digitalization or the social implications of technology testifies to this dynamic: local culture responds to excesses, reclaiming space for human relationships, reflection, and balance.

Research and Cultural Progress

It is important to distinguish the role of research, oriented towards knowledge, from that of technological development. Speculative research has relatively low costs and directly contributes to cultural progress, broadening the horizons of human knowledge without immediately translating into market products.

On the contrary, technological development, driven by productive capitalism, often involves high costs and risks shifting crucial resources towards unnecessary or prematurely applied innovations.

The cultural filter helps to balance these forces, ensuring that technological innovation responds to real and shared needs. It is not a brake on progress, but a guide: a society that places culture at its center can steer technological development towards goals that improve the quality of life without sacrificing resources or fundamental balances.

Technology, Culture, and Symbolic Resources

The relationship between technology and culture goes beyond simple technical adaptation; it is a matter of symbolic resources. A technology that does not find roots in the symbolic resources of a community remains a foreign body, unable to generate lasting value. In contrast, a strong and cohesive culture can transform technology into a useful tool, contextualizing and adapting it to the real needs of people.

This dynamic clearly emerges in the resistance that some communities oppose to technologies perceived as invasive or superfluous. The use of digital technology, for example, cannot be reduced to an uncontrolled acceleration of life rhythms or to a compulsive consumption of content. It must be integrated into a cultural vision that recognizes its value without sacrificing the health, time, and balance of people.

Culture as the Rudder of Development

Local culture is the rudder that guides technological progress, filtering its excesses and enhancing its potential. It ensures that innovations are not only technically advanced but also socially, ethically, and culturally sustainable. In an era of epochal transition like the current one, where digital technology reshapes economic and social structures, it is essential to recover the role of culture as a stabilizing element.

Prometheus teaches us that technological progress must be accompanied by wisdom. Humanity cannot afford to rush into the future without stopping to reflect. Culture, in this sense, is not a brake, but an essential guide: a beacon that illuminates the path towards development that is not only innovative but also just and sustainable.

3.2 Trust in Culture and trust the market

In an era dominated by economic narrative, culture has lost its central role as a lens for analyzing reality and as a driver of social development and progress. Once a pillar of society, culture now appears relegated to the margins, crushed by the pressure of market logics that value only what produces immediate profit. This change has had profound consequences: the devaluation of cultural places, such as schools, and their guardians, the teachers, has created a void that not only impoverishes the social fabric but undermines the very foundations of civil coexistence.

Culture: From Beacon to Handmaiden of the market

Culture has historically been the means through which humanity has interpreted the world, asked questions, and imagined the future. From philosophy to literature, from art to science, it has provided the keys to understanding the complexity of reality. However, in recent decades, the dominant narrative has progressively shifted the focus from intellectual enrichment to economic profitability.

Reductionism, everything that is not immediately monetizable is considered superfluous. Culture has become a luxury, a decorative accessory devoid of real utility. This has led to a dramatic loss of confidence in its ability to impact reality: culture is no longer perceived as a tool for emancipation and social transformation, but as a mere distraction from "true" progress, measured only in terms of economic growth.

The School and the Teachers: from social pillars to servants of the market

The devaluation of culture has particularly severely affected its places of creation and dissemination: schools and teachers. Once considered beacons of knowledge and essential reference points, these pillars of society are now diminished, left to their own devices, trapped in an educational system subservient to the market of mind homogenization, functional to the creation of uncritical consumers, liquid personalities, deconstructed, manipulable, devoid of critical thinking.

The school, once a laboratory of ideas and a cradle of critical thinking, has become a mere training space for work, where the value of teachings is measured by their immediate economic utility. The role of the teacher, a central figure in the transmission of values and knowledge, has been degraded to the point of becoming a "social waste." Teachers, once recognized as spiritual and intellectual guides, are now treated as mere executors of mind homogenization programs, stripped of the autonomy and respect that their role deserves.

The Primacy of Economics: a Pervasive Narrative

At the root of this decline is the supremacy of an economic narrative that has colonized every aspect of life. Public discourse, policies, and even individual expectations are shaped by a logic that considers the market as the sole criterion of value. In this context, everything that does not produce tangible results in economic terms is marginalized.

However, this paradigm ignores a fundamental fact: culture is the humus in which not only critical thinking and creativity grow, but also the ability to imagine alternatives. Without culture, a society loses its ability to conceive of itself, remaining trapped in a perpetual present where the only goal is the maximization of profit.

3.3 Triple Transition: towards a new socio-economic

The "triple transition" is narrated as the shift towards a socio-economic model based on three interconnected pillars: environmental sustainability (green), digital transformation (digital), and social inclusion (inclusion).

For the green transition, terms like "Green economy" are used, implying an economic paradigm based on environmental sustainability, while "Circular Economy," as a production paradigm based on closed material cycles, also introduces the concept of "knowledge economy" as an economic paradigm induced by digital technology.

Finally, reluctantly, to respond to the growing social inequalities that have emerged from the unbalanced application of these recipes, the theme of "Just Transition" has been introduced, understood as an inclusive and fair social transition.

The narrative, through an innocent semantic operation, achieves a heterogenesis of ends, transforming a purpose into a poorly defined tool of action.

The adjectivation of the term "Economy" in expressions like "circular economy," "green economy," or "knowledge economy" is generally associated with the idea of an economic paradigm. However, a true economic paradigm requires the support of a solid cultural superstructure capable of justifying and sustaining it as the foundation of a systemic vision. Furthermore, an authentic economic paradigm must be sufficiently structured to guide a historical transition of the entire socio-economic system. This raises the question of whether such terms actually represent foundational and transformative economic paradigms of society, or if they are merely shared operational policies among actors, lacking a cultural and structural basis adequate to bring about deep and lasting change.

Alternatively, one could argue that such concepts do not represent true autonomous economic paradigms, but rather partial or fragmented visions of an underlying economic paradigm. This raises an interesting question: what would be the actual economic paradigm that these narratives underlie? Is it perhaps an emerging economic model capable of integrating the dimensions of environmental sustainability, technological innovation, and social justice, or are we facing a multiplicity of sectoral approaches lacking a unified and coherent vision?

Alternatively, it is possible that such narratives are rhetorical tools used to conceal, within a framework of seemingly shareable and shared goals, the maintenance of the existing economic paradigm. **Greenwashing**, **social washing**, and the strategic use of **digital control** could indeed serve to preserve established structures of power and profit, masking them behind the language of change and sustainability. This possibility poses an additional critical challenge: to distinguish between authentic innovation and narratives that function to perpetuate the status quo.

The goals appear to be shareable and shared:

Green (Sustainability and Circularity): Promote sustainable economic development that reduces environmental impact, ensures the satisfaction of present and future needs, and encourages the transition to a circular economy based on recycling and waste reduction.

Digital Transformation: Accelerate technological innovation to improve efficiency and create new economic opportunities.

Social Inclusion: Ensure that the transition to new economic models is fair and just, reducing inequalities, guaranteeing equal opportunities, and including the most vulnerable segments of the population.

The triple transition therefore emerges as a consequence of an environmental demand, a change in dominant technology, and the resulting social changes. The ultimate goal is therefore to identify an economic paradigm that can integrate the 3 dimensions of the transition and be inclusive of the productive and industrial system that constitutes the material infrastructure on which society stands.

It is evident that the uninvited guest of the reasoning that seems excluded from the public narrative is Capitalism and the forms in which it developed during the 20th century!

The triple transition is configured as a response to pressing environmental needs, the evolution of dominant technologies, and the resulting social changes. The final goal is to define a new economic paradigm that **integrates the three dimensions of the transition** – ecological, digital, and social – into a coherent and sustainable system, and that is **also inclusive of the productive and industrial system**, which constitutes the material infrastructure on which society is based.

However, it is evident that the "**uninvited guest**" in this reflection, and surprisingly absent from the public narrative, is **Capitalism** and its modes of development, especially those consolidated during the 20th century. This silence raises fundamental questions: is it really possible to build an economic paradigm capable of responding to the challenges of the triple transition without confronting the roots of the current economic system?

It is equally evident that the capitalist system is trying **to self-regenerate** to face the forced path imposed by the triple transition. It can be hypothesized that if the required transition is limited to transforming the **operational modes** of the system – such as internal production processes or external relations – then this regeneration could indeed occur, adapting to new needs without altering its essence.

However, if the transition touches on what the system is **ontologically**, that is, its fundamental structure and its "**symbolic resources**" (such as values, ideologies, and cultural assumptions on which it is based), then self-regeneration becomes impossible. In this case, the system could not survive the change without **destroying itself**, as it would be forced to give up the foundations on which it has historically grown and consolidated. This scenario therefore poses a crucial challenge for the sustainability and evolution of capitalism itself.

Economic Paradigms of the 20th Century

Classical political economy, which forms the theoretical basis of capitalism, is based on some fundamental assumptions:

1. **Infinite environmental resources:** the system implicitly assumes that natural resources are unlimited or easily replaceable, ignoring ecological limits and environmental impact.
2. **Available and inexhaustible labor:** human labor is seen as a production factor that is always accessible, often without considering its social and psychological implications.
3. **Esternalità ambientali:** i costi ambientali (inquinamento, degrado delle risorse naturali) sono esclusi dal calcolo economico, trasferiti al di fuori del sistema come "effetti collaterali".

In contrast to capitalism, **socialism** has promoted a model based on a principle of **equality**, where the economy is centralized and regulated by a single ordering entity – the State. This model aims for the fair redistribution of resources and the elimination of economic disparities. However, centralized planning has often clashed with **social complexity**: the diversity of needs, aspirations and local contexts have made a rigid organization difficult, leading to inefficiencies and a loss of flexibility in relation to the real dynamics of society.

Keynesianism, developed in the 20th century, represents a compromise between capitalism and socialism, proposing an active intervention of the State to mitigate market dysfunctions. Through fiscal and monetary policies, Keynesianism seeks to stabilize the economy, reduce unemployment, and promote economic growth, without questioning the foundations of capitalism. This model was successful in the context of the industrial economy, characterized by mass production, relatively predictable markets, and a hierarchical organization of labor.

However, all these economic paradigms – classical capitalism, planned socialism, and Keynesianism – are based on a model of **industrial economy** with specific forms of **labor organization**.

The economic paradigms of the 20th century were conceived to address the dichotomy between Capital and Labor, which represents the heart of the productive, social, and political dynamics of the time. This opposition, central to the economic and political thought of the last century, defined economic relations, class struggles, and models of social inclusion. Capital, representing the means of production and investments, has historically been associated with economic and industrial elites, while Labor, embodied by the workforce, has represented the productive and social base on which every economy is founded. The tension between these two poles has driven the evolution of economic and political institutions, fueling negotiations that defined rights, wages, and wealth redistribution.

The political and social system has been organized around this dichotomy, with trade unions and workers' associations on one side, and industrial and financial confederations on the other, representing the respective parties in social bargaining, trying to mediate between the divergent interests of capital and labor. The reduction of inequalities and the guarantee of fair participation in the economic system have been objectives pursued through redistributive and welfare policies, often inspired by the Keynesian compromise, which sought to balance power between capital and labor, promoting social cohesion and economic integration.

Political forces, trade union movements, and dominant ideologies such as socialism, communism, social democracy, and liberalism were structured to respond to and manage this dialectic between capital and labor, with conflicts and alliances that shaped the politics of the 20th century. The structure of modern institutions, from national governments to local administrations, has evolved to manage this dichotomy, ensuring fair rules for production and labor, redistributive taxation, and regulations that preserve social stability.

This dichotomy has represented both a moment of clash and an ordering principle of the socio-economic system, but the transition from industrial production to digitalization has radically changed the relationship between human beings and labor, and between labor and capital.

The paradigm of Civil Economy

As described above, the terms "**green economy**", "**circular economy**", and "**knowledge economy**" do not seem to possess the theoretical foundations necessary to constitute a **foundational economic paradigm** capable of supporting and guiding society as a whole. Although they represent useful tools and relevant concepts for addressing specific contemporary challenges – from environmental sustainability to digital transformation – they are more configured as **sectoral policies or operational** approaches than as organic systems capable of integrating the various economic, social, and cultural dimensions.

To become a true economic paradigm, each of these concepts should be supported by a coherent theoretical vision, capable of redefining the productive, distributive, and institutional structures on which society rests, something that currently appears still incomplete or fragmented.

In recent decades, various attempts have emerged to overcome the limitations of **Classical Political Economy**, which has traditionally supported **Capitalism**, especially in its consolidated forms of the 20th century. These approaches seek to address the critical issues related to environmental sustainability, social inequalities, and technological transformations that are rapidly reshaping the economic and productive foundations. Organizations such as the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** and the **World Bank** have initiated programs and policies to integrate aspects such as sustainability and social inclusion, recognizing the importance of addressing economic and environmental externalities.

However, many of the proposed interventions remain tied to an incremental logic, aiming more to mitigate the negative effects of capitalism rather than to rethink it in a systemic way. In this context, the need arises to develop a new economic paradigm that overcomes the limits of the traditional approach. Such a paradigm should first incorporate the concept of limits, recognizing the ecological boundaries of the planet and integrating environmental sustainability as a structural constraint, rather than as a mere externality to be managed.

Secondly, it should internalize the environment as a productive resource, treating natural capital not only as an asset to be preserved but as a central element in production cycles and overall economic value. Another fundamental aspect is the recognition of Human Capital as a value owned by the worker, overcoming the idea of a homogeneous and standardized "working class," and valuing human capital in its complexity, which includes not only skills and abilities but also creativity and personal aspirations.

Furthermore, it is necessary to integrate the digital transition not only as a driver of efficiency but as a true cultural and organizational transformation that reshapes the relationships between labor, capital, and society, with particular attention to social justice. Finally, the new paradigm should ensure social inclusion, shifting the focus from an individual profit logic to a collective vision capable of balancing economic growth and social well-being.

Within such a paradigm, a **rethinking of social forms and governance structures** can take place. If productive organizations transform into entities that **internalize the environment and human capital**, the traditional boundaries between business and community begin to dissolve, orienting towards a model inspired by the **olivetti** vision, in which the enterprise is conceived not only as an economic engine but also as a center for social and cultural development.

In this scenario, **the factory gates open to the territory and the social sphere**, giving rise to a process of positive contamination between production and community. This **broadening of perspectives** not only promotes greater integration between economic activities and social responsibility but also modifies the dynamics of competition.

Competition between businesses shifts towards **competition between territories**, where the attractiveness and quality of the local context – in terms of human capital, environmental sustainability, and social cohesion – become determining factors for economic success. This transformation could redefine the very concept of competitiveness, orienting it towards the enhancement of the **common good** and the sustainable development of territories.

The paradigm of Civil Economy

The concept of **Civil Economy** presents itself as a suitable paradigm to respond to contemporary challenges, emerging as a **rediscovery of ancient principles and values**, reinterpreted in light of current needs. Its roots lie in the pre-classical economic tradition, developed by thinkers such as Antonio Genovesi in the 18th century, who saw the economy not only as a science of production and exchange but as a means to promote **cooperation, reciprocity, and the common good**.

This **perspective, long overshadowed by the advent of classical political economy** and its utilitarian logics, is now being reclaimed as a model capable of addressing the **contradictions of traditional capitalism**. Civil Economy proposes a system in which economy, environment, and society are not separate dimensions but are deeply interconnected. It overcomes the extractive and competitive logics of the modern market, offering a vision based on social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and the enhancement of human relationships as economic and cultural resources.

In this sense, Civil Economy represents a **conscious return to a way of thinking and practicing economics** that recognizes the intrinsic value of people, communities, and the environment, integrating these aspects into a holistic paradigm suitable for the challenges of our time.

Civil Economy is based on distinctive principles that differentiate it from classical and modern economic approaches. It proposes an **integrated** model centered on values such as **reciprocity**, the **common good**, and **sustainability**. This approach aims to overcome purely extractive and competitive logics, offering a vision of the economy that places people, relationships, and respect for the environment at its center.

Civil Economy is sharply distinguished from Political Economy by its different conception of human relationships and the purposes of economic activity. While traditional Political Economy is based on the idea of "**homo homini lupus**", according to which humans act primarily in a selfish and competitive manner, Civil Economy is inspired by the opposite principle of "**homo homini natura amicus**", which sees reciprocity, cooperation, and the common good as the cornerstones of economic activity.

Among the fundamental concepts that characterize Civil Economy are: **productivity**, which emphasizes the multiplicative value of collaboration; **relational capital**, which values the role of human and economic connections; and the **social value of production**, which integrates economic, social, and environmental impacts.

Economic value as productivity

One of the central aspects of Civil Economy is the concept of **productivity**, which serves as a measure of the value generated by cooperation among economic actors. Unlike Political Economy, which tends to assess value through the **sum of individual contributions** (for example, the sum of incomes or individual productivity), productivity represents the **multiplicative** value of collaborative relationships.

Mathematically, productivity is expressed as:

$$P = \prod_{i=1}^n x_i$$

Dove:

- P è il valore complessivo generato;
- x_i è il contributo del singolo attore economico;
- n è il numero totale di attori coinvolti.

In this view, the value of the system is not simply the sum of contributions but a product that captures the **synergies** and added value of cooperative relationships. In a well- integrated system, the contribution of each actor amplifies the overall result, highlighting how collaboration can generate greater value than the simple sum of the parts.

Relational Capital: The Value of Connections

In Civil Economy, **relational capital** is considered a fundamental resource for the functioning of the economic system. The relationships between economic actors are not seen merely as utilitarian tools, but as **generators of trust, cooperation, and sustainability**. This contrasts with Political Economy, which tends to treat relationships as mere means to optimize individual transactions.

Relational capital can be mathematically expressed as:

$$C_R = \sum_{i=1}^n \sum_{j=i+1}^n r_{ij}$$

Dove:

- C_R è il capitale relazionale totale;
- r_{ij} è l'intensità della relazione tra i soggetti i e j ;
- n è il numero totale di soggetti.

In an economic system that values relationships, greater relational capital translates into greater efficiency, innovation, and resilience, as the connections between actors are not just transactional but oriented towards creating shared value.

Social Value of Production: The Integration of Economy, Society, and Environment

Civil Economy introduces a holistic view of the value of production, considering not only direct economic benefits but also social and environmental impact. In contrast to Political Economy, which reduces value to a quantitative measure of profit, Civil Economy proposes a more complex and balanced assessment.

The overall value can be expressed as:

$$V = \alpha V_e + \beta V_s + \gamma V_a$$

Dove:

- V è il valore complessivo;
- V_e , V_s , e V_a sono rispettivamente i contributi economico, sociale e ambientale;
- α , β , e γ sono i pesi assegnati a ciascuna componente.

This formula highlights how Civil Economy emphasizes a balanced value that integrates different dimensions of well-being, in contrast to the utilitarian and profit-oriented approach of Political Economy.

Civil Economy, with its fundamental concepts, proposes a systemic alternative to Political Economy. While the latter emphasizes competition and individual profit, Civil Economy values cooperation, relational capital, and the common good. The productive measure, as a measure of multiplicative value, and relational capital, as an essential resource, represent a profound innovation in the understanding of economic value, making Civil Economy a paradigm capable of addressing the challenges of the 21st century.

3.4 Civil Economy: territory and complex systems

Civil Economy, with its principles of reciprocity, cooperation, and orientation towards the common good, is configured as a paradigm particularly suited to address the challenges posed by contemporary economic and social systems, which are intrinsically **multi-level networks of complex systems**. Civil Economy not only responds to ethical and environmental demands but also offers analytical and quantitative tools to understand and manage emerging phenomena, such as the fragility of global supply chains and the multiplicative effect of collaboration.

Complex systems are distinguished by the interconnection between their elements, where the overall behavior of the system emerges from relationships that can generate **domino effects** or positive and negative **feedback**.

Civil Economy, with its focus on relationships and synergies, naturally aligns with a systemic and integrated view of the economy. It emphasizes interdependence and collaboration, recognizing that the value generated by an economic system depends on the cooperation among its actors. This principle is particularly relevant in complex systems, where each component influences the others. A clear example can be observed in global supply chains: a local crisis, such as a production disruption in a single plant, can cause chain effects, interrupting economic and production flows globally. Civil Economy recognizes this interconnection and promotes the building of resilient and sustainable relationships, capable of minimizing risks and fostering stability.

Moreover, Civil Economy does not limit itself to managing the risks arising from negative feedback, but also highlights the positive potential of collaboration. Cooperation among economic actors not only helps to prevent systemic fragility but amplifies the overall value generated, creating a virtuous dynamic. In this way, the success of a single part of the system reinforces the entire system itself. This the approach surpasses the traditional logic of the sum of individual parts and demonstrates how well-managed relationships can multiply value and benefits for all actors involved.

Ethical integration and sustainability through resilience

In addition to addressing the complexity of economic systems, Civil Economy stands out for its ability to integrate **ethics and sustainability**. This approach has been formally recognized and supported by the **social doctrine of the Catholic Church**, particularly in Pope Francis' encyclical "Laudato Si'." Here, the importance of an economy that promotes the common good, respects the environment, and builds solidarity among people is emphasized.

Civil economy, by integrating the concept of relationship, allows for the transformation of abstract principles into practical models that reflect resilience and interconnection within the socio-technical system. Valuing human and relational capital is essential to increase a system's ability to adapt to shocks and to reduce the impact of potential crises, mitigating the chain effects that could harm the entire system. In this context, cooperation not only generates economic value but also helps to reduce negative externalities, such as pollution and social inequalities, creating positive synergies that strengthen the community as a whole. The dynamic balance between economic, social, and environmental objectives thus becomes a fundamental lever to balance negative effects and ensure sustainable stability in the long term, where the collective interest prevails over individual benefit.

Feedback and Domino Effects

A concrete example of complexity in economic systems is represented by global supply chains. Events such as the COVID-19 pandemic have demonstrated how the disruption of a single node in a production network can generate widespread domino effects, paralyzing entire economic sectors. This fragility, typical of networks, is amplified by excessive dependence on key nodes and a lack of diversification.

Civil Economy offers responses to these challenges through the diversification of connections, which helps to reduce vulnerability to single critical points. It also promotes the enhancement of resilient local networks, capable of integrating global dynamics with greater territorial sustainability. Another fundamental aspect is the focus on relational capital, which builds trust and cooperation, improving crisis management and fostering a more stable and inclusive socio-economic system.

Civil Economy and Local Communities

Local communities, within the framework of Civil Economy, are not simply an element of the economic system, but its **vital core**. They represent the laboratories where models of cooperation, sustainability, and social innovation are tested and developed. In an increasingly interconnected and complex world, strengthening local networks offers a concrete and sustainable response to global challenges, demonstrating that Civil Economy is not only an ethical paradigm but also a practical strategy to promote resilience and collective well-being.

1. **Local communities as nodes of global networks:** Local communities serve as essential nodes in systems complex, providing resilience in the face of global shocks, such as disruptions in supply chains or economic crises. Thanks to their territorial dimension and the proximity between actors, local communities can respond quickly and adaptively to challenges, ensuring productive continuity and social cohesion. The Civil Economy values this role, proposing a model in which local networks integrate with global ones without losing their specificities.
2. **territorial sustainability:** The Civil Economy recognizes that local communities are crucial for promoting **environmental and social sustainability**. Local networks allow for the internalization of the impacts of

economic activities, favoring direct management of resources and a particular attention to the needs of people and the environment. This approach avoids the "cost transfer" typical of globalized models, where environmental or social damages are shifted elsewhere.

3. **Strengthening relational and social capital:** Local communities are the privileged place for the construction of **relational capital**. The relationships of trust and cooperation that develop at the territorial level strengthen resilience and innovative capacity, also facilitating the adoption of production models based on collaboration. The Civil Economy supports the creation of strong local networks, where economic value combines with collective well-being.
4. **Territories as competitive actors:** In a civil economy, competition shifts from businesses to territories. Local communities become protagonists, working to increase their attractiveness through the development of productive ecosystems that combine human capital, innovation, sustainability, and social inclusion. This shift not only reduces competitive pressure on businesses that operate in synergy with the local community but also promotes the harmonious and sustainable development of territories.

3.5 The new cultural capitalism

The radicality of the change underlying the triple transition is highlighted by an apparent disinterest **of young people in work**. This phenomenon represents a break from the 20th century, in which work was the focal point around which epochal battles were fought, often at the cost of life. Workers' and peasants' struggles, union victories, and fundamental rights have historically centered on the affirmation of the dignity of work. Emblematically, the **Italian Constitution** places work as the foundation of the Republic, reflecting the importance it held in the social structure and values of the time.

Today, however, **the disinterest of young people in work** cannot simply be labeled as indifference or superficiality, nor reduced to the idea of "living off dad's money." There are emblematic cases of young managers who, despite having well-established and lucrative careers, choose to **abandon traditional work** to pursue simpler lives, often in fields such as agriculture, volunteering, or sustainable projects. This phenomenon reflects the development of new "**symbolic resources**", which interpret work differently from previous generations.

This new vision seems to question work not as an activity in itself, but as a totalizing structure of life, where productivity and profit prevail over values such as quality of life, personal well-being, and the relationship with nature. Young people seem to seek a more **balanced relationship between human beings and work**, where the latter is not just a means of livelihood but also an expression of meaning and identity.

This cultural transformation requires urgent reflection to **institutionalize new economic paradigms and social forms** that can respond to this evolution. It is not a crisis of values, but rather a **change of priorities and perspectives** that institutions and traditional economic models must recognize and integrate. Work, as it was understood in the 20th century, may no longer be the center exclusive around which to organize society, and this requires a deep rethinking of the very foundations of economic and social paradigms.

It is becoming increasingly evident the emergence of new "**cultural resources**", profoundly different from those that have guided the choices and values of the generations of the 20th century. These new resources seem to shape the decisions of young people, directing them towards visions of life and work that do not align with traditional paradigms.

In this context, the **Capital-Labor dichotomy**, which dominated the last century as the backbone of economic, social, and political dynamics, seems to be progressively **dissolving**. We are entering a new scenario, characterized by a **renewed value relationship** between capital and labor, where work is no longer perceived solely as a means to ensure sustenance or social advancement, but as a choice linked to meaning, well-being, and sustainability. Capital is no longer just a productive factor to be accumulated and managed, but begins to be re-evaluated in terms of social, environmental, and cultural impact.

This change reflects a **cultural and value fracture** compared to the past. The new generations no longer seem willing to live according to the productivity and consumption models of traditional capitalism, nor to reduce work to a simple economic function. Therefore, new narratives are emerging that reinterpret the role of work, capital, and human time, challenging established models and calling for a radical rethinking of economic and social paradigms.

In this scenario, the urgency is not only to recognize this change but also to **redefine the theoretical and ethical foundations** on which to build an economy and a society that can respond to new priorities, without being trapped in outdated schemes.

The renewed relationship between young people and work seems not only to overcome the traditional **Labor-Capital dichotomy** but also to introduce a new "**symbolic resource**", summarizable in the idea that "**capital is work**". This vision redefines the very concept of capital, directing it towards a valuation of **human capital**, understood not only as skills and productivity but as an expression of the creative, relational, and cultural potential of people.

This change suggests the emergence of a new paradigm, which could be defined as "**Cultural Capitalism**", in which capital is no longer reduced to material goods or financial instruments, but is rooted in the immaterial dimension of culture, ideas, and relationships. In this model, work takes on a broader meaning, becoming a manifestation of identity, values, and personal projects, rather than a simple economic activity. Capital is enriched with new dimensions, such as creativity, well-being, and sustainability, which redefine its nature and use.

This evolution suggests a profound transformation in the cultural and economic foundations of society, paving the way for models that harmoniously integrate **people, environment, and innovation**. However, to ensure that "cultural capitalism" becomes an inclusive and sustainable reality, it will be essential to build institutions and paradigms capable of accompanying and valuing this transition.

Cultural Capital

In an economic and social context increasingly oriented towards knowledge and innovation, the strategic value of human capital emerges strongly, particularly in highly specialized professions. Work appears as the market manifestation of Cultural Capital and is characterized by:

Scarcity and Value: A first point of analogy is the shortage of qualified human capital in many key professions. For example, in the technology and IT sector, the demand for experts in artificial intelligence, software development, and data analysis far exceeds the available supply in the market. This scarcity generates a significant increase in salaries in such areas, making certain skills particularly valuable, on par with financial resources in a tight market. Salaries in the IT sector, for example, are constantly growing, reflecting the value attributed to those who possess highly specialized skills.

Investment and Accumulation: human capital requires targeted investments to grow and become productive. Training, education, and continuous updating represent the "liquidity injections" necessary to develop the skills required by the market. Companies, for their part, treat qualified employees as true strategic assets, investing in internal training programs or in partnerships with academic institutions to attract and develop talent. This process creates a parallel between the accumulation of financial capital and that of human capital.

Return and Added Value: Human capital generates a return on investment, just like financial capital. A highly qualified professional can create value in terms of innovation, operational efficiency, and business growth. For example, a software developer capable of designing innovative solutions can have a significant economic impact, not unlike a fruitful financial investment.

Mobility and Global Markets: Another significant analogy is represented by the mobility of human capital, which moves towards the most attractive economic and social contexts, following similar logics to those of financial capital. Highly qualified talents tend to migrate to regions or sectors that can offer better professional, remuneration, and personal growth opportunities. This creates a dynamic of global competition for human capital, making it a resource that is not only scarce but also extremely mobile.

Control and Hoarding of Cultural Capital: The growing value of cultural capital has triggered an increasingly intense competition for its **control and hoarding**. Companies seek to secure access and dominance over highly qualified human resources by adopting diversified strategies. On one hand, **control** manifests itself through digital tools such as social networking platforms and work management technologies. Professional social networks, like LinkedIn, have become true markets for human capital, monitoring skills, paths, and connections, and providing companies with a way to identify and attract talent. This control also extends within companies, where digital surveillance tools analyze the productivity and behavior of workers, consolidating the organization's dominance over its human assets. On the other hand, the **hoarding** of cultural capital manifests itself in the competition among companies to attract and retain talent. Through benefit offerings, stimulating work environments, and training programs, companies compete for the best professionals, seeking to secure a competitive advantage. This race for cultural capital involves not only individuals but also institutions such as universities or research centers, which are incorporated into networks of business innovation to maximize knowledge production.

The Ownership of Cultural Capital: A distinctive feature of cultural capital is that, unlike physical or financial capital, it is **held by the human** being and cannot be completely transferred or expropriated. The "symbolic resources" – knowledge, ideas, creativity – reside in the minds of people and remain an integral part of their being. Even if a company can purchase the time and skills of a worker, it can never fully own their cultural capital, as it is intrinsically linked to the individual. This fact creates a tension in the relationship between workers and companies: while employers seek to extract the maximum possible value from human capital, workers maintain a form of autonomy that escapes the total control of organizations.

The Nature of Cultural Capital Compared to Material Capitals: Another fundamental peculiarity of cultural capital is its replicability. Unlike material goods, which can only be used by one individual or organization at a time (for example, a machine or a ton of steel), knowledge and skills can be shared and used simultaneously by multiple parties without losing their original value. A technical solution, a process innovation, or a creative idea. can be transferred, copied, and applied in multiple contexts, amplifying their economic and social impact. The nature of cultural capital, therefore, makes it a factor of profound transformation compared to traditional economic paradigms, pushing towards new models of production and distribution of value.

3.6 Technological revolutions and culture: the vision of Carlota Perez

Technological transitions represent complex processes that intertwine innovation, economy, and culture. Carlota Perez, a prominent economist, analyzes these transitions as evolutionary cycles in which the development of an appropriate lifestyle and culture is an essential prerequisite for the diffusion and adoption of new technologies.

The Stages of Technological Transitions

Perez identifies two main phases in each cycle of technological innovation:

1. **Technology Production Phase:** In this phase, new technologies emerge, often driven by innovators and significant investments in the private sector. It is characterized by rapid and experimental innovation, with multiple competing technologies, and by high economic and social instability due to uncertainty about the actual utility of the technologies. For example, during the industrial revolution, the initial development of the steam engine and railways revolutionized the production landscape, but only some of these innovations established themselves in the long term.
2. **Penetration and Absorption Phase:** The most useful technologies that are compatible with cultural values are adopted and integrated into society. This phase involves the adaptation of infrastructures and social models to incorporate technologies, economic stabilization through the widespread diffusion of innovations, and changes in cultural values to align with new technologies. An emblematic example is the integration of the automobile and electricity in the 20th century, which transformed lifestyles and work models.

The Role of Culture in Technological Development

According to Perez, the effective diffusion of a new technology requires the development of a lifestyle and culture that facilitate its adoption. Society acts as a filter, selecting technologies that align with its cultural values or that solve concrete problems.

This selection process is accompanied by a co-evolution between technology and culture. Technologies that are compatible with the dominant principles of a society tend to find greater acceptance. For example, in Europe, the adoption of renewable energies reflects a strong commitment to sustainability. At the same time, technology not only adapts to existing values but often modifies them, introducing new paradigms. The advent of the Internet, for example, has redefined concepts such as privacy and sociality. In this process, technology and culture influence each other, creating new balances that reflect the needs and aspirations of each era.

Duration of Technological Transitions

Perez estimates that each cycle of technological revolution lasts between 40 and 70 years. This estimate is based on the historical analysis of previous technological revolutions, such as the industrial revolution, the age of steam and railways, the age of electricity and steel, the age of oil and the automobile, and the age of information and telecommunications. Each cycle includes an initial phase of incursion, followed by a frenzy phase, a synergy phase, and finally, a maturity phase.

The Case of the Green Transition

The current transition towards a green economy represents a concrete example of the model described by Perez. Initially characterized by intense technological experimentation (renewable energies, electric mobility, sustainable agriculture), this transition is now entering the absorption phase. Societies are adapting infrastructures and consumption models, consolidating values such as environmental responsibility and sustainable consumption.

Ultimately, Carlota Perez's vision offers an in-depth perspective on technological transitions, highlighting the importance of culture and lifestyle as preconditions for the diffusion of new technologies. Through the dynamic interaction between innovation, economy, and culture, societies filter, integrate, and ultimately stabilize new technologies, creating emerging values that will guide the future. In the context of the green transition, this vision offers an optimistic perspective on how innovation and sustainability can converge into a new model of inclusive and conscious growth.

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3.7 Artificial Intelligence: A transition tool hegemonic in the post-globalization era

In the era of post-globalization, global power dynamics are changing rapidly. Artificial intelligence (AI) emerges as a strategic lever in the competition among great powers, not only for economic or military control but as a central element of a new form of cultural hegemony. To understand this transformation, it is essential to examine the concept of hegemony, understood not merely as economic dominance, but as a collective structuring of values and cultural projection.

Hegemony and the Enlightenment Legacy: From Progress to Control

The concept of hegemony has been profoundly influenced by Enlightenment thought, which in the eighteenth century proposed a progressive vision based on rationality, trial and error, and a constant improvement of humanity through science and knowledge. This vision shaped the modern world, encouraging the development of technologies that promised to free man from his limitations.

However, the introduction of artificial intelligence represents a reversal of this perspective. It is no longer a linear progress based on a dialectic of errors and discoveries, but a predictive and prescriptive model in which data and algorithms shape decisions, often removing them from human control. This change reflects a crisis of the Enlightenment model: while accumulated knowledge continues to grow, the ability to exercise critical and independent judgment diminishes, leaving room for a reality constructed and often manipulated by centralized powers.

AI, therefore, becomes a tool not only to automate processes or increase efficiency but to redefine the very concept of truth and reality, threatening to transform Enlightenment values of freedom and self-determination into mechanisms of control and subordination.

Hegemony as Cultural Projection

Traditionally, global hegemony has been interpreted as a function of GDP, military strength, or technological control. However, true hegemony is rooted in culture. Antonio Gramsci defined hegemony as a process in which a class or group dominates society through cultural consent rather than through coercion. In this view, culture becomes the most important battleground: those who control the narrative and the very concept of reality exercise the most enduring power.

In the era of AI, this dynamic intensifies. AI is not just a technical tool, but a means to build and reinforce narratives that influence the perception of reality itself. Through data manipulation and decision automation, great powers are redefining what is true and what is false, shaping the worldview for billions of people.

The Competition between the United States and China: A New Battle for Hegemony

The competition between the United States and China is the most evident example of this dynamic. The United States, still a leader in technological innovation and AI development, uses these resources to maintain a dominant position. On the other hand, China, with its rapid rise, is challenging American hegemony through massive investments in artificial intelligence, aiming to create an alternative technological and cultural ecosystem.

This competition is not limited to economic or military dominance; it is a struggle for control of the global narrative. Through the use of AI, both countries seek to influence global public opinion, shape ideologies, and promote a self-image consistent with their strategic interests. In this context, the ability to make people believe that things "are one way and not another" becomes a more effective form of power than any army.

The European Decline and the Legacy of Enlightenment

In this competition, Europe appears weak and fragmented. This is particularly ironic, considering that Europe was the cradle of the Enlightenment, which laid the foundations of rational thought and the modern technological progress. The lack of a unified strategy and significant investments in AI relegates Europe to a marginal role, raising questions about the continent's ability to protect its cultural and intellectual heritage in a world dominated by external actors.

AI and Hegemonic Transition: From Progress to Manipulation

Artificial intelligence represents a breaking point from the Enlightenment model of progress. If the Enlightenment was based on criticism, doubt, and the search for truth through knowledge, AI introduces a paradigm in which data and algorithms establish what is real. Reality itself becomes a manipulable construct, where altered perceptions can consolidate power.

This is not a neutral process: AI often arises from military needs and reflects the strategic priorities of those who develop it. The risk is that, rather than emancipating humanity, AI becomes a tool to reinforce inequalities and consolidate the cultural and economic hegemony of dominant powers.

Ultimately, in the post-globalization era, artificial intelligence is not just a technology: it is a means to define and control the very concept of reality. For great powers, success depends not only on the ability to develop advanced technologies but also on their skill in integrating these technologies into a cultural strategy that reinforces their hegemony.

As heirs of the Enlightenment, we have a duty to maintain a critical spirit and resist monolithic narratives. No technology can establish an absolute truth, and no power can have a universal viewpoint. Hegemonic competition, with AI at its center, reminds us that power is always a matter of culture, narrative, and, above all, of who controls the definition of what is real.

4. THE SUPPLY CHAINS

4.1 Culture and Technological Development

Culture and Technological Development: The Digital Transition as a Cultural Revolution

Technological evolution has always represented a driving force for profound transformation in human societies, and never as in the contemporary era, marked by the dominance of the digital, does the indissoluble intertwining of technological innovation and culture become evident. The spread of digital technology, now in its phase of maturity and pervasiveness, marks the transition from a strictly productive phase – masterfully described by Carlotta Perez in her theories on the dynamics of technological waves – to a phase of dissemination and rooting in the social and cultural fabric. This process is not limited to the modernization of productive structures, but requires a deep adaptation of the symbolic resources of communities and the development of new cultural, economic, and social paradigms.

From the Industrial Model to the Knowledge Society

The transition from one dominant technology to another is never a simple technical process. The abandonment of the industrial era, characterized by mass production, in favor of the era of knowledge and information, entails radical changes in social structures and cultural models. Digital technology does not merely optimize processes or automate operations: it impacts personal habits, reshapes social relationships, revolutionizes forms of work, and challenges traditional governance structures.

A paradigmatic example is represented by artificial intelligence (AI). AI is not just a technical advancement, but a cultural challenge: it requires the development of new ethical norms, the protection of new generations from digital pathologies, and the adaptation of educational and research systems to skills that combine technology, creativity, and empathy. The relationship between man and machine, already the subject of profound philosophical reflections, is now a practical and daily reality that redefines the boundaries between human and artificial capabilities.

The Transformation of Work and Enterprises

Digitalization is "opening the factory like a can of tuna," extending its functions beyond physical boundaries, integrating into the territory, and creating new forms of interaction. This phenomenon not only dissolves the boundary between production and society but radically alters the very structures of work. Fordist assembly lines, symbols of the industrial society, give way to unstructured, collaborative, and multidisciplinary teams. The representation of workers, once based on hierarchical and uniform models, struggles to grasp the new demands of an increasingly fluid and fragmented workforce.

In this context, businesses are no longer simple productive units. They transform into complex systems that interact with local communities, adapting to new cultural and territorial paradigms. The Italian enterprise, characterized by a family dimension and a social vocation, represents a unique model that, while far from pure capitalism, offers significant insights for a more humane and sustainable economy

Governance in the Digital Society

The advent of digital technology has a profound impact not only on the economy but also on territorial and global governance. Cities and territories are called to rethink their development in terms of smart land, a concept that surpasses the technocratic vision of the smart city to integrate local communities into participatory and sustainable decision-making processes. Digital technology reshapes urban spaces, altering not only urban planning but also people's life choices, with an increasing balance between work, nature, and well-being.

This cultural transition requires new economic paradigms that surpass the limits of the political economy born in the industrial era. The linear approach based on consumption and mass production gives way to circular and sustainable models, capable of integrating the challenges of the green and digital transition. Culture, in this context, becomes the engine of the new governance, imposing a reflection on shared values and common perspectives.

A Historic Transition

Technological change is not limited to reshaping existing structures but reactivates history, breaking the illusion of the "end of history" evoked by Francis Fukuyama. Globalization, dominated by an elite that has attempted to standardize the economic system on a global scale, crashes against cultural diversities and local resistances. The percolation of technology into territories reignites cultural, social, and economic conflicts, reaffirming the role of culture as a central element in development.

The symbolic resources of communities, often forgotten or marginalized, return to the forefront. Civil economy, the Greek **tecknè**, and other historical paradigms reemerge as current tools to address contemporary challenges. At the same time, it is necessary to develop new symbolic resources to respond to emerging questions: what ethical rules for AI? How to protect new generations from an increasingly complex digital world? What forms of collaboration can overcome social and territorial divisions?

Technology and Culture, an Indissoluble Relationship

The ongoing technological transition is not a simple technical evolution but a cultural revolution that redraws the boundaries of our society. Digital technology, while being a neutral tool, is imbued with meanings and implications through interaction with communities. This bidirectional relationship, in which technology shapes and is shaped by local cultures, represents the true challenge of our time.

The future will not depend on technology itself but on the ability of communities to adapt and lead change, rooting themselves in their values and projecting towards new horizons. As history teaches us, great technological transformations are never just the result of technical innovations but of a profound cultural renewal that involves all dimensions of society.

4.2 Apulia: Development Trap Region

The "**development trap regions**" are territories that, despite having significant potential and resources, find themselves trapped in a condition of economic and social stagnation. According to the **European Commission**, these regions exhibit **slow or absent economic growth, a lack of convergence with the average European GDP, structural delays** in key sectors such as innovation, infrastructure, human capital, and governance.

These territories often face significant internal disparities that exacerbate development difficulties. Among the main problems is a poor capacity for innovation and limited participation in technological transformation

processes. Furthermore, human capital is often underutilized or tends to migrate elsewhere, a phenomenon known as brain drain. To these critical issues are added deep internal territorial disparities, which particularly penalize peripheral and rural areas. Finally, the economy of these territories is often characterized by a strong dependence on exogenous sectors, poorly integrated with the local context.

Issues of the Development Trap Regions

The regions defined as "development traps" face a series of structural problems that hinder their economic and social progress. One of the main critical issues is represented by development disparities and governance fragmentation. Often, these regions suffer from a weak institutional system, lacking a common strategic vision capable of coordinating effective interventions. This leads to territorial polarization, with development concentrated around central economic hubs, while rural and peripheral areas remain marginalized. Furthermore, the lack of connection between productive sectors and local systems reduces the possibilities of creating integrated and sustainable development dynamics.

Another recurring problem is related to exogenous investments, which rarely harmonize with local vocations and characteristics. Such investments often end up generating isolated production systems, lacking a significant connection to the territory. This creates a dangerous economic dependence on unsustainable sectors, such as heavy industry, and risks reintroducing failed models of the past. An emblematic example is the so-called "cathedrals in the desert," such as the petrochemical hubs built in Southern Italy after the war, which left a legacy of negative environmental impacts and limited economic benefits for local communities.

The Case of Puglia: Analysis and Issues

Puglia represents an emblematic case of a region that risks remaining trapped in a stagnant development dynamic, despite its numerous resources and potential. One of the main critical issues is related to the implementation of the Smart Specialization Strategy (S3), designed to promote innovation at the regional level. In Puglia, however, this strategy has highlighted several weaknesses. The supported technological sectors have not always integrated with the traditional productive vocations of the territory, while universities and research centers continue to operate in isolation from the entrepreneurial world, limiting the transfer of knowledge and innovations. Furthermore, investments have mainly concentrated in the areas of Bari and Taranto, neglecting rural and peripheral areas.

Another relevant problem is the strong polarization of economic development. The geographical conformation of Puglia, characterized by its longitudinal extension, accentuates territorial disparities. Bari and Taranto, the main central hubs, attract a large part of economic resources and opportunities, leaving areas such as Gargano, Murgia, and Salento in conditions of marginality. In particular, the lack of infrastructure and services in rural areas further amplifies these inequalities.

The region also has a long history of attracting exogenous investments, often disconnected from the local context. Large sectors such as the steel and petrochemical industries, concentrated in Taranto and Brindisi, have generated temporary but unsustainable economic benefits in the long term. Even innovative sectors, such as aerospace, while being of strategic importance, remain isolated from other local economic supply chains, thus reducing their potential positive impact on the territory.

Finally, regional governance suffers from some cultural and structural issues. Decision-making processes are often dominated by self-referential elites, reluctant to change and open to approaches

inclusive. Furthermore, the production supply chains do not effectively communicate with local communities, creating a disconnection between economic development and social involvement, thus limiting the inclusion and participation of the population in growth processes.

Strategies to Overcome the Development Trap

To address the critical issues characterizing Puglia, it is essential to develop an integrated strategy aimed at enhancing the specificities of the territory and overcoming existing disparities. A first step is the integration of local vocations, supporting traditionally rooted sectors such as agri-food, sustainable tourism, and the circular economy. The rich cultural and environmental heritage of the region must be transformed into a true economic asset capable of generating long-term value.

At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen the knowledge supply chains by creating stronger connections between universities, research centers, and local businesses to stimulate innovation and technology transfer. It is also essential to develop training programs that meet the specific needs of the territory, contributing to retaining and enhancing human capital.

Another crucial aspect is overcoming territorial polarization. To reduce disparities between central economic poles, such as Bari and Taranto, and peripheral and rural areas, it is necessary to invest in infrastructure that improves connectivity and access to services. At the same time, it is important to promote targeted initiatives for the development of internal areas, ensuring widespread economic opportunities throughout the regional territory.

The reform of governance represents a key element of this strategy. It is necessary to build inclusive and participatory models, involving local actors and communities in strategic decisions. Overcoming self-referential dynamics requires a commitment to greater transparency and shared planning, which fosters dialogue and cooperation.

Finally, it is essential to promote a cultural change that encourages an innovation-oriented and inclusive mindset. Reducing the closure of decision-making circles and fostering an open and collaborative approach are essential steps to create a more resilient, sustainable, and competitive Puglia.

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4.3 The School of Standardizers and Standardized

The school, once a bastion of critical thinking education and the promotion of aware citizens, has progressively transformed into a tool of standardization. What should be the privileged place for cultivating intellectual autonomy has often become a rigid environment, oriented more towards adaptation than growth.

School curricula, increasingly standardized, have reduced the role of the teacher from a **master**, capable of supporting the growth of solid personality structures, to that of a **technician in the transmission of skills**, focused on training for a predefined system. In doing so, the school no longer promotes the discovery and internalization of **symbolic resources** — values, ideas, and visions that shape and give substance to personality — but contributes to the deconstruction of the individual, transforming them into a liquid figure, without roots or critical capacity.

From the School of Masters to the School of Liquidity

In the past, the teacher was a central figure not only for the transmission of knowledge but also for their role as a cultural and moral guide. Through dialogue and example, the teacher helped students develop a critical view of the world, encouraging them to build a solid personality capable of integrating the knowledge of the past with the challenges of the present. The school did not just instruct: it **educated**, in the fullest sense of the term, guiding students towards intellectual and moral maturity.

Today, however, the figure of the teacher has been supplanted by that of a standardization operator, a functionary of an educational system that aims more to conform than to emancipate. The transmission of symbolic resources — such as the sense of responsibility, respect for knowledge, the ability to distinguish the true from the false — has been replaced by mechanical training: answering pre-packaged questions, following standardized paths, and conforming to predetermined schemes. In this model, the student is not encouraged to critically question the world but is shaped to passively adapt to the rules of an increasingly consumption- and efficiency-oriented society.

Liquid and Manipulable Personalities

This transformation has produced liquid personalities, unable to structure an autonomous identity and easily manipulable by external narratives. Students, deprived of critical tools, are trained to follow instructions without questioning them, becoming fragile in the face of the manipulative dynamics of contemporary culture. The school, from a potential tool of cultural resistance, risks becoming a factory of the standardized: adaptable individuals, but lacking solid symbolic roots.

The Leap in Level Required of the School

To restore to the school the role of a tool for emancipation and not mere standardization, a radical change is necessary that redefines its purposes and practices. A first step is to rethink the role of the teacher, who must return to being a master in the fullest sense. It is not just about transmitting technical knowledge, but about inspiring, stimulating critical thinking, and providing students with symbolic tools and values that accompany them in a deep understanding of the world. In this sense, education must concern the integral formation of the human being, going beyond mere preparation for the job market.

School programs also require transformation. The current trend towards curricular standardization must be overcome, favoring paths that promote reflection, critical analysis, and creativity. The school should become

a space for experimentation and confrontation, where students can explore real and complex problems, instead of limiting themselves to pre-packaged or simplified answers.

In an increasingly culturally dominated context by digital tools and media manipulation, it is essential to educate young people in cultural resistance. Schools must provide them with the skills to critically analyze media and information sources, recognize the hidden interests behind dominant narratives, and engage in respectful dialogue with differing opinions, avoiding polarization. This type of cultural literacy not only protects students from manipulation but also prepares them to be aware and responsible citizens.

Finally, the school must become the place where layered symbolic resources, such as the value of collective memory and traditions, dialogue with emerging ones, resulting from the new challenges and aspirations of younger generations. This meeting between tradition and innovation is essential to keep culture alive, promote change, and build a society capable of evolving in a balanced and conscious way.

A New Cultural Contract for the School

To overcome the school of conformity, it is necessary to establish a new cultural contract between generations, institutions, and the educational system. This contract must recognize the complexity of the contemporary world, preparing students to navigate different perspectives without losing the ability to critically discern.

Central to this vision is the enhancement of the figure of the authentic teacher, who does not merely transmit knowledge but contributes to the formation of critical and aware personalities. At the same time, it is essential to promote cultural innovation, integrating new ideas and challenges, while not neglecting respect for the symbolic foundations that provide coherence and stability to society.

Only in this way can we transform the school from a factory of conformity to a laboratory of emancipation, where students become citizens capable of thinking independently, resisting manipulation, and actively contributing to the common good. A school that creates teachers and not just technicians, citizens and not just consumers, thinkers and not just executors.

4.4 Critical issues of the Italian university system: towards a new pact between Universities and the territory

The relationship between universities and businesses is being redefined within a development framework that places the **territory** at the center of two epochal challenges: **endogenous local development** and **geopolitical technological oversight**. This tension, which intertwines local and global dimensions, requires a new culture of local governance and a deep reflection on the role of the university as a driver of development and as a strategic actor in areas ranging from technological innovation to building resilient communities.

The Territory as a Socio-Technical Ecosystem

Today, the territory is much more than a simple geographical entity; it is a living space where the **symbolic resources of a community** intersect, namely the knowledge, traditions, and local vocations that translate into shared projects, and **SMEs as an expression of local identity**: Small and medium-sized enterprises represent

the productive and innovative roots of a territory, catalyzing local knowledge and adapting it to contemporary challenges.

This "bottom-up" development is the result of an action aimed at building local networks, which sees SMEs as a natural expression of the cultural and productive specificities of the community.

The Territory as a Geopolitical Platform

At the same time, the territory plays a fundamental strategic role, serving as a physical platform to support overarching policies. In this context, sectors such as aerospace, digital, seas, and seabeds become new fields of international competition, where technological and geopolitical control is essential. Furthermore, territories host key infrastructures that are crucial for safeguarding technological frontiers, with the aim of supporting geopolitical purposes and ensuring strategic projection.

This dual role of the territory, as a place for bottom-up development and a strategic platform for global objectives, poses a complex challenge: reconciling the autonomy and identity of local communities with the geopolitical and technological needs of states and supranational organizations.

Universities at the Center of Tension: Two Strategic Objectives

In this context, the university is called to respond to two major challenges. The first concerns frontier research for geopolitical safeguarding, with the aim of contributing to the development of advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, aerospace control, and marine resources. Furthermore, it is essential to engage in international research networks to maintain competitiveness and progress in the global race for technological leadership. The second challenge concerns the third mission and local economic development. In this area, the university must support SMEs and local communities through technology transfer, digital innovation, and the enhancement of the symbolic resources of the territory. Additionally, it must promote a model of applied research that can generate concrete economic and social impacts.

Critical Issues of the Italian University System

The Italian university is facing several critical issues that risk compromising its ability to respond to global and local challenges. One of the main problems concerns the academic culture and distorted incentives. Italian research is often evaluated based on parameters such as the number of published articles and the Impact Factor (Z-index), rather than in terms of concrete impact on the territory or technological progress. This academic orientation, focused on paper production, limits the ability to translate research into applicable innovation, especially for the production system and geopolitical challenges.

Furthermore, there is a significant disconnection with SMEs, which are unable to fully benefit from academic innovations. The lack of effective intermediary structures, such as incubators, startups, and integrators, hinders technology transfer. Additionally, the collaboration models between universities and local businesses are often inadequate, preventing the creation of stable and bidirectional relationships that could foster endogenous development of the territory. Finally, there is a lack of strategy for frontier research. Advanced research requires substantial investments, but the Italian university system suffers from a chronic lack of funding. Despite some individual excellences, Italian universities struggle to integrate into international networks of technological and geopolitical research, remaining isolated and missing crucial opportunities for progress.

Knowledge Networks as a Solution

To address these challenges, it is essential to build a model of oriented knowledge networks, in which the university acts as a bridge between local development and geopolitical objectives. On one hand, the university must create synergies between symbolic resources, SMEs, and digital technologies, thus contributing to the growth of territory. On the other hand, it must collaborate with national and European institutions to develop strategic technologies in line with geopolitical needs.

Knowledge supply chains must be designed to support a dual mission: on one hand, connecting academic research to national and European technological infrastructures, and on the other, strengthening the local productive fabric, enhancing human and cultural capital, with the aim of stimulating concrete and lasting economic and social development.

Ultimately, the relationship between universities and territory requires a profound cultural change that goes beyond the limits of self-referential academic logic and recognizes the value of research as a tool for social, economic, and strategic progress. Only through a balance between local development and geopolitical oversight will it be possible to build a sustainable future for Italian communities and territories, making the university a key player in this process.

4.5 Universities: between self referentiality and the risk of double funding

The Italian university is currently at the center of a crucial debate, highlighting both its strategic role and the structural difficulties in responding to the needs of a rapidly transforming society. The main critical issues concern three fundamental areas: education, often perceived as inadequate to the demands of the contemporary labor market; technology transfer, unable to reach the frontiers of innovation; and the third mission, which should promote local development but often proves ineffective due to fragmented and distorted approaches.

This situation not only raises doubts about the overall effectiveness of the Italian university system but also undermines the trust between universities and businesses, two worlds that should collaborate synergistically to promote the economic and social growth of the country.

Cultural Crisis and distortion of the Third Mission

One of the main issues is represented by an attitude of cultural arrogance that permeates academia. Statements from certain academics such as: ***"I don't expect to find scientists in a company!"*** or ***"we do not go down to the territory!"*** reflect a view that reduces businesses to mere tools to support academic research, without any consideration for their operational needs or the technological challenges they face.

This vision has transformed the third mission, which should serve as a bridge between universities and society, into a missed opportunity. Rather than fostering cooperation, the university entrenches itself in dynamics that end up triggering unfair competition among the actors in the technology transfer chain. Funds intended to promote innovation are sometimes used to support basic research, distorting the objectives of public funding and penalizing the industrial fabric.

The Risk of Double Funding

A particularly delicate issue is that of double funding. Public funds intended for technology transfer and industrial innovation are often interpreted as funds supporting academia. In this context, companies are often seen as mere co-financers rather than as recipients of real processes of open collaboration.

Such an approach, in addition to creating a risk of double funding, undermines the effectiveness of the entire system, erodes trust between universities and businesses, and prevents the creation of a truly innovative, cooperative, and competitive ecosystem.

Facade Collaborations: A Reality to Change

Despite a narrative that describes companies as "strategic partners," in practice the relationship is often unbalanced. Companies are often used as a tool to fuel academic publications or research projects without any real involvement in decision-making processes or in defining objectives.

This dynamic aimed at perpetuating self-referential processes constitutes a barrier that hinders, rather than facilitates, technology transfer with negative effects on socio-economic development.

Towards Relationships Based on Respect, Loyalty, and Transparency

To overcome these critical issues, it is necessary to deeply rethink the relationship between universities and businesses, building a collaboration based on transparency, mutual respect, and effective cooperation. It is essential to value companies as places of applied innovation, actively involving them in defining research objectives, thus creating a more direct link between the academic world and the productive one. Furthermore, it is necessary to integrate all local actors, such as startups, professionals, technology centers, integrators, and consultants, into a collaborative supply chain, where each part contributes within a cooperative network. Finally, it is crucial to redefine the role of the university's **third mission**, transforming it into a driver of local development, **with concrete and measurable objectives that directly impact the territory**.

A Collaborative Ecosystem for the Future

The Italian university faces a crucial choice: to continue perpetuating a model based on cultural arrogance and the risk of double funding, or to embrace a renewal approach based on productive and equal collaboration with businesses and local actors.

This transformation is not only desirable but necessary. Only through a change in mindset and transparent management of funding will it be possible to create an innovative ecosystem capable of competing globally and responding to the needs of a constantly evolving society. In doing so, academic research can finally become a concrete engine for the economic and social development of the country.

5. THE CONNECTIONS

5.1 The narrated Italy and the real one: cui prodest?

The perception that a people has of itself is crucial for its cultural, economic, and social development. Whether it concerns individuals or nations, rooting oneself in one's roots, recognizing one's identity, and feeling at the center of one's world is what allows for the construction of mature relationships based on cooperation and independence. When a people allows itself to be defined by external narratives, the risk is to live in a state of cultural and psychological subalternity, with profound consequences on its capacity for development.

Examples like Ethiopia demonstrate how even peoples without great economic power can live centered on their identity. Italy, on the other hand, one of the nations richest in cultural, historical, and economic resources, often appears imprisoned by a narrative that depicts it as the periphery of MittelEuropa, in decline and subordinate. The question is: **cui prodest?**

Rooting in One's Roots: the example of Ethiopia

An emblematic example is Ethiopia, a country that, while not a global economic power, perceives itself as the center of its own world. Rooted in a millennia-old history, which includes figures like the Queen of Sheba and a victorious resistance against colonialism, Ethiopia never sees itself as a periphery, but as a central place in its own cultural and historical universe. This sense of identity has allowed Ethiopians to face deep crises while maintaining their pride and cohesion.

These peoples demonstrate that economic power is not the only resource that matters. The ability to keep one's symbolic resources alive — culture, history, values — allows for a centered and autonomous life, without feeling like a periphery of something.

The Narrated Italy

In contrast to reality, the dominant narrative about Italy tends to highlight weaknesses and shortcomings, obscuring its true potential. Italy is often portrayed as a country to flee from, with young people emigrating in search of opportunities elsewhere, suggesting that Italy is a land devoid of future. Furthermore, Italy is represented as a periphery of Europe, subordinate to central powers like Germany and France, ignoring its strategic role and centrality in the Mediterranean. Sometimes, even the immense Italian cultural heritage is seen as an obstacle, as a burden that hinders innovation and progress. This narrative has a corrosive effect, undermining Italians' trust in their country and fueling a vision of dependency and backwardness.

The Real Italy

The reality of Italy is quite different from what is often described. The country possesses extraordinary resources that many other states envy.

Firstly, Italy is the second largest manufacturer in Europe, with a network of extremely competitive small and medium enterprises, making it a pillar of the European economy and a globally relevant player in the manufacturing sector.

Moreover, its cultural heritage is the richest in the world: no other country can boast a concentration of art, history, and culture similar to it, recognized as a unique asset on a global level.

Italy is also one of the countries with the highest private wealth, with over 8,500 billion euros owned by its citizens, a figure that far exceeds the public debt that is often discussed in economic debates.

Finally, its strategic geographical position in the heart of the Mediterranean gives the country a crucial role as a natural bridge between Europe, Africa, and Asia, an opportunity that, if properly valued, could transform it into a nerve center for trade, culture, and geopolitics.

Some order of magnitude

Considering the Total Wealth/Public Debt ratio, Italy ranks around fifth in the world.

	Country To	Total wealth (billion €)	Public Debt (billion €)	Wealth/Debt Ratio
1	United States	120,000	33,420	3.59
2	China	85,000	14,770	5.76
3	Japan	35,000	10,630	3.29
4	Germany	20,000	2,870	6.97
5	France	18,000	3,350	5.37
6	United Kingdom	15,000	3,380	4.44
7	Italy	14,000	3,100	4.52
8	Canada	10,000	2,290	4.37
9	India	8,000	2,960	2.70
10	Brazil	7,000	1,840	3.80

Where intangible factors such as (geostrategic positioning, cultural assets, and natural capital) are to be considered, the values reported in the following table are obtained.

Position	Country To	Total Wealth (bn €)	Cultural Value (%)	Geostrategic Position (%)	Natural Capital (%)	Innovation/Creativity (%)	Final Total Wealth (€ billion)
1	Stati Uniti	120.000	+2%	+1.5%	+1%	+5%	129.500
2	Cina	85.000	+1.5%	+2%	+1%	+5%	93.000
3	Germania	20.000	+5%	+1%	+1.5%	+5%	22.500

Position	Country To	Total Wealth (bn €)	Cultural Value (%)	Geostrategic Position (%)	Natural Capital (%)	Innovation/Creativity (%)	Final Total Wealth (€ billion)
4	Francia	18.000	+15%	+2%	+3%	+10%	23.340
5	Italia	14.000	+25%	+5%	+3%	+10%	20.020
6	Regno Unito	15.000	+7%	+3%	+2.5%	+7%	17.900
7	Giappone	35.000	+1%	+0.5%	+0.5%	+7%	38.300
8	Canada	10.000	+3%	+1%	+8%	+10%	12.200
9	India	8.000	+2%	+7%	+5%	+10%	12.400
10	Brasile	7.000	+1%	+5%	+10%	+8%	9.600

Position	Country To	Value of Industrial Production (bn €)	Main Industrial Sectors
1	Germania	1.050	Automotive, machinery, chemicals, electronics
2	Francia	450	Aerospace, agri-food, pharmaceuticals
3	Italia	425	Manufacturing, fashion, design, mechanics, agri-food
4	Regno Unito	300	Aerospace, pharmaceuticals, energy, chemicals
5	Spagna	260	Automotive, agri-food, energy, tourism o industrial
6	Polonia	190	Automotive, electronics, metalworking
7	Paesi Bassi	180	chemicals, electronics, logistics
8	Svezia	140	Automotive, green technologies, machinery
9	Austria	120	Mechanics, automotive, energy
10	Belgio	110	Chemicals, pharmaceuticals, logistics

Italy is indeed the third largest industrial manufacturer in Europe, the 7th country in the world for the ratio of total wealth/debt, and where one wishes to correct this data to consider geostrategic, cultural, and natural factors, this position is destined to improve (estimates conducted without claims of scientific validity indicate a 5th place).

A toxic narrative: Cui Prodest?

The narrative that paints Italy as peripheral and weak is not accidental. It serves very specific interests:

1. **Consolidate the economic and political bond:** Presenting Italy as fragile justifies the imposition of external constraints, limiting its decision-making autonomy and keeping it in a state of subordination.
2. **Limit industrial competitiveness:** A narrative of decline reduces the perception of the strength of Italian industry, paving the way for competing economies that want to maintain their dominant position.
3. **Deplete human resources and talents:** The emigration of young people, driven by this vision, deprives the Country of human capital, enriching other nations instead.

Italy is not the periphery of anything. It is a country rich in unique resources, capable of facing global challenges from a position of strength. However, to do so, it must unmask the narratives that paint it as a weak and declining country, always asking itself: cui prodest?

The answer is clear: not to Italy. It is time for the country to regain control of its "symbolic resources" and of a governance oriented towards national interests, telling itself for what it really is: a central, strategic, creative, and extraordinarily resilient nation.

5.2 Italy and the sea

Italy, with its unique geographical configuration, represents one of the main gateways to the Mediterranean, a sea that is not just a division between continents, but a space of connections and opportunities. In this context, the South, with its strategic position at the center of these routes, should be the natural outpost of a development model that values the centrality of the Mediterranean. However, as Dario Fabbri emphasizes, this vocation remains largely unexpressed.

Southern Italy is often perceived as a marginal area, penalized by national policies that, historically, have preferred to look towards Central Europe. This choice has relegated the Mediterranean to a secondary function, ignoring the enormous potential offered by its southern shores.

By changing the cultural perspective, the South could miraculously rediscover itself as a "central and strategic area" and not already "marginal"!

Italy and the sea: An ambivalent relationship

Despite its maritime geographical nature, Italy has always had an ambivalent relationship with the sea. Its post-unification political and economic history has favored a closer bond with the mainland and Central Europe, rather than with the Mediterranean.

Yet, reconciling with the Mediterranean does not mean renouncing this tradition, but rather integrating it into a broader strategic vision. The Mediterranean should not be seen only as an economic resource or a commercial platform, but also as a cultural and political space. Italy has the potential to be a bridge between

North and South, between the powerful economy of Northern Europe and the cultural wealth of the Global South, overcoming the traditional dualism between sea and land.

The Mediterranean as a "Medicean" space and of horizontal exchanges

Fabbri proposes to consider the Mediterranean not only as a line of demarcation between North and South, but as a "Medicean" space, a system of horizontal exchanges that unites the eastern and western coasts. This historical vision of the Mediterranean, which in the past saw cities like Venice, Genoa, Tunis, and Alexandria collaborate and prosper, offers a model of cultural and economic integration capable of overcoming geopolitical barriers.

Italy and the Mezzogiorno, thanks to its central position, could once again become the hub of a Mediterranean system that promotes new forms of cooperation. However, this requires going beyond the Economy of the aperitif that characterizes the Italic system, creating a shared narrative and investing in infrastructure and diplomatic relations that favor a network of connections between the two shores of the sea.

Economy and power: Peoples who live by economy and peoples who live by strategic culture

Dario Fabbri introduces a crucial distinction between peoples who "live by economy" and peoples who "live by power". The former, like Italy, base their prosperity on trade, industry, and ingenuity, while the latter build their international role on strategies of military and geopolitical control. This dichotomy, according to Fabbri, explains many of Italy's structural weaknesses, historically more inclined to trade than to power.

This economic vocation has ensured well-being during periods of peace, but has exposed the country to vulnerabilities in times of global competition. Italy has been, for example, a weak colonial actor compared to powers like France and Great Britain, unable to reconcile its mercantile tradition with a strategic geopolitical approach. The current challenge is to evolve into a "strategic economic power," capable of integrating its commercial tradition with an ambitious vision of its international role.

Italy in the Mediterranean: A future to be rebuilt

The fundamental question for Italy is: can it evolve from a country that "lives by economy" to a nation that "lives by cultural and strategic power"? The paradigm shift is possible, but it requires leadership capable of envisioning the Mediterranean as a central space in national politics. This implies investing in maritime infrastructure, fostering cooperation with the countries of the Southern Mediterranean, and promoting a cultural vision that values Italy's role as a bridge between North and South.

Only through a strong strategic culture, capable of integrating economy, diplomacy, and national identity, can Italy assert its role in the Mediterranean and, consequently, in the world. The challenge is to abandon the "client" mentality, limited to the short term and economic dependence, to embrace a broader and more autonomous vision that makes the Mediterranean not only a resource but the beating heart of a new national identity.

Dario Fabbri Human Geopolitics. Understanding the world from ancient civilizations to today's powers. Mondadori, Milan, 2022.

5.3 Salento and the Buen ritiro: cases of toxic narratives

CultureCreates and Narrative destroys!

There is a toxic narrative that has hovered over Salento for years: that of the "Buen Ritiro". An idyllic and glossy vision that presents the territory as an oasis of relaxation, where one does nothing but bask in the sun, enjoy traditional foods, and surrender to the sweetness of a stress-free life. A representation, let's be clear, that clashes with the reality of those who work, produce, and fight daily to build something lasting here. It is a narrative that, far from exalting the potential of the territory, ends up belittling it, reducing it to a stage for sunset aperitifs and luxury vacations. And it is precisely this distorted image that contributes, in a sly and dangerous way, to hindering economic development and pushing young people to seek life and career prospects elsewhere.

The narrative of the "Buen Ritiro": a trap for the territory

Salento as a "Buen Ritiro" is the forbidden dream of a certain radical-chic elite, ready to come here to "disconnect" without ever questioning the economic and social fabric that supports the territory. For them, Salento is little more than a perfect Instagram backdrop: golden beaches, ancient olive trees, restored farmhouses, and a plate of orecchiette to immortalize before returning to their "serious" lives in the big cities. But what does this narrative leave for the territory? Nothing but an image of staticity and perpetual vacation, an image that betrays the dynamism and creativity of those who live and work here.

This stereotypical representation not only fails to value the work of local businesses, but literally erases the role of those who produce, innovate, and invest. Salento is not just made of beaches and festivals; it is a territory where companies, artisans, professionals, and start-ups operate. Yet, this reality is invisible in the dominant narrative. No one talks about those who struggle to find qualified personnel, those who seek to create employment and build opportunities for new generations. Why? Because talking about work and business breaks the spell of the "Buen Ritiro". And this, evidently, is not convenient for those who prefer a static and reassuring postcard.

Young people fleeing the buen ritiro!

The most devastating effect of this narrative is visible in young people. Growing up in a territory painted as a "holiday land" means internalizing the idea that there is no space for professional ambitions here. The perspective seems to narrow down to a few options: being waiters, lifeguards, or guesthouse owners. There is no narrative that speaks of opportunities in local businesses, of required skills, of innovation. It is not surprising that many young people do not even ask what productive sectors exist in Salento. Emigration thus becomes not a choice, but a necessary escape from a territory that seems to offer no future.

Yet, the reality is different. There are companies looking for qualified personnel and cannot find them, who would like to grow but cannot find the necessary skills. This is a defeat not only for the businesses but for the entire territory, which finds itself impoverished of valuable human resources. Who is responsible for this situation? A shortsighted policy that for years has built a monoculture of tourism and catering, ignoring economic diversification and the potential of the territory. The mantra of "lu sule, lu mare, lu ientu" has had its time: if we want to build a future for Salento, we must abandon this lazy narrative and embrace a cultural vision worthy of the name.

The urgency of a new narrative

Salento needs other narratives that give visibility to its businesses, its skills, and its potential. A narrative that values not only the beauty of the territory but also the creativity, ingenuity, and industriousness of its people. It is not about renouncing Salento's tourist vocation, but about integrating it into a broader project that gives space to all productive sectors.

Telling the story of Salento as a place of work, innovation, and opportunity is not just a moral duty but a strategic necessity. It is time to stop treating this territory as a postcard for tourists and start seeing it for what it is: a living land, capable of attracting not only tourists but also investments, talents, and ideas. Young people should no longer be forced to choose between staying and settling or leaving to seek a future. They should be able to stay and grow in a Salento that is not just a "Buen Ritiro" but a "Forge" of opportunities.

The challenge is open, and it is a cultural challenge before it is an economic one. If we want Salento to stop being seen as a place where "nothing is done," we must start telling everything that is done here, every day, with effort and passion. And we must tell it well, because the young people who leave today could be the ones who tomorrow will change the face of this territory, provided they stop seeing Salento as a place to come only to relax and start seeing it as a place to live and plan for the future.

5.4 Mediterranean and Southern Culture

"One must be slow like an old country train and of peasant women dressed in black, like those who walk and see the world magically opening up, because walking is leafing through the book, while running is just looking at the over. One must be slow, love the stops to look at the path taken, feel the fatigue conquering the limbs like a melancholy, envying the sweet anarchy of those who invent moment by moment the road"

Franco Cassano

Slowness as reflection and measured action: the thought of Franco Cassano

Franco Cassano, in his famous *The Southern Thought*, invites us to rediscover the value of slowness as a tool for connection with the world and for deep reflection. Cassano writes:

"One must be slow like an old country train and of peasant women dressed in black, like those who walk and see the world magically opening up, because walking is leafing through the book, while running is just looking at the cover."

With these words, Cassano contrasts the act of walking, a symbol of contemplation and rooting, with the frantic race that dominates Western society, where efficiency becomes the only measure of judgment. In his thought, slowness is not inertia, but a necessary space-time to understand the meaning of actions, to imagine a future in balance with nature and with the human being itself.

Cassano's far-sighted thought proposes a cultural overturning of the dominant paradigm, inviting us to consider the South, with its different rhythm, not as a backward place, but as a model of critical reflection on modernity. His "southern slowness" is an alternative to American speed, which often acts before thinking, allowing the consequences to emerge later.

Mediterranean and United States: two cultures in comparison

Cassano therefore offers us a key to understand the differences between Mediterranean and American culture. The United States, embodying a culture of impulsive action and immediate pragmatism, have built their identity on "doing". It is a culture that moves towards goals and measures success in terms of immediate results. Their history is emblematic, from the dropping of the atomic bomb to the release of technologies like artificial intelligence, without a preliminary debate on the ethical implications or the consequences of actions.

The Mediterranean, on the contrary, has rooted in its DNA a thought of limits and sustainability. Greek culture, the mother of Mediterranean civilization, considered *sophrosyne* – measure, moderation – as the essential virtue for a life in harmony. This thought has evolved in the culture of Southern Italy, which has transformed adversities into opportunities for resilience and fertility: the dry stone walls, the spring wells, the art of adapting to aridity and scarcity are all testimonies of a balance with nature and a practical wisdom that does not waste.

Otium and negotium in balance

Mediterranean slowness is not laziness, but is the Latin *otium*: the time dedicated to reflection and planning, away from the frenzy of work. Americans, on the other hand, seem to live in a culture of perpetual *negotium*, where a person's value is determined by their productivity. This frenzy is also reflected in the American consumption model, often based on disposable use, the superficiality of experiences, and the lack of rooting.

The Mediterranean model, on the other hand, is intrinsically circular. Nothing is thrown away, everything is saved, reused. It is a culture that thinks about the future, as demonstrated by the tradition of planting trees whose fruits will be harvested by future generations. This approach, which we could today define as "circular economy", is an antidote to the environmental and social crises generated by consumer culture.

Southern Italy as a model of resilience

The culture of Southern Italy represents a concrete alternative to the American consumerist and impulsive model. Salento, for example, embodies a lifestyle that, if adequately valued, could offer important lessons for facing the challenges of the green and digital transition. It is a place where slowness allows living in harmony with nature and with others, but risks being misrepresented by a stereotypical narrative of "Buen retiro".

This representation of Salento as a place where "nothing happens" is the result of shortsighted policies that have focused on a single narrative – "lu sule, lu mare e lu ientu" – without valuing the complexity and potential of the territory. The monoculture of tourism has fueled youth emigration, depriving the area of skills and vitality. The reality, however, is quite different: the Mezzogiorno is made up of industrious communities, small and medium enterprises that embody a model of social enterprise, where work is central and capital is merely a means, not an end.

Collective psychology and social resilience

Another fundamental difference between the Mediterranean and the United States is reflected in collective psychology. Americans, despite being a global power, live in a state of constant stress. Always at war, both militarily and economically, a significant percentage of the population suffers from clinical depression.

In contrast, Southern Italy has developed a culture of social resilience, capable of "making a virtue out of necessity." Even in difficulties, the Mezzogiorno manages to maintain social cohesion and a quality of life that Americans can only envy. Family networks, conviviality, and a sense of belonging to the territory are elements that provide a natural psychological support, essential for facing crises.

Southern Italy as a model of Lifestyle and sustainability

Cassano's thought invites us to reevaluate the Mediterranean model not as a relic of the past, but as a vision for the future. In an era of green and digital transition, where sustainability and balance have become essential goals, Southern Italy offers a valuable lesson: **think before acting, live slowly, respect limits.**

This approach, deeply rooted in Mediterranean culture, represents a concrete response to the crisis of modernity, which has lost the sense of human progress. The Mezzogiorno, with its resilience and its ability to transform aridity into fertility, can be the model of a new global lifestyle, capable of combining tradition and innovation, slowness and development, humanity and technology.

5.5 Culture, Peoples and Leadership: who commands?

The leadership of a nation, of a territory, is not simply a consequence of the personal abilities of a leader or the economic power of a state, but is rooted in the culture of the people it expresses. As noted by Dario Fabbri, a well-known geopolitical analyst, every form of government, even the most tyrannical, derives legitimacy from the culture and collective identity of the people it represents. Culture, understood as the set of values, traditions, narratives, and shared perspectives, is the true engine that defines not only the identity of a people but also the ways in which that people relates to the world and builds its own destiny.

Culture and forms of government

Forms of government are never imposed from above without the explicit or implicit consent of a significant part of the population. Even in tyrannical regimes, the support of social groups that see in the figure of the tyrant a reflection of their own aspirations or fears ensures the stability of the system. This implies that there is no "universal" or intrinsically superior form of government. Democracy, often considered the ideal model, is not necessarily the system desired by all peoples at every historical moment.

Fabbri challenges the Eurocentric idea of political progress, which interprets the history of nations as an inexorable march towards democracy. Leadership and institutions, on the other hand, reflect the values and cultural tensions of a community. When these values change, the system of government can evolve or collapse, but always as a result of internal dynamics related to collective identity.

Empires, clients, and strategic culture

Dario Fabbri introduces a fundamental distinction between empires and colonies, or rather between sovereign powers and "clients." Empires, like the United States or China, base their supremacy not on mere economic factors, but on a deep strategic culture, the ability to build long-term visions, and the attitude to shape the world according to their cultural priorities. Colonies or clients, like much of Europe and, according to Fabbri, also Italy, live instead off the economy. Their existence is tied to a short-term perspective, dominated by material interests and dependence on larger powers.

Empires are architects of the future, capable of defining the direction of the international system. Clients, on the other hand, merely follow the rules set by empires, accepting a subordinate position. This relationship is not imposed solely by force, but is the result of a cultural and strategic deficiency in societies that agree to live exclusively off the economy. The lack of a strong collective vision and a shared strategic projection deprives these nations of the ability to self-determine, relegating them to the role of extras in global history.

Culture as a driver of leadership

Culture, understood as a shared narrative and a set of identity values, allows peoples to exercise command and sovereignty. It is not economic or territorial resources that determine a people's ability to govern their own destiny, but the strength with which they can imagine and represent themselves as a historical subject. This principle is found in the history of peoples who, despite lacking significant material resources, have imposed their presence in the world thanks to a strong and cohesive culture.

An emblematic example is offered by the Arab peoples, who at moments of maximum cultural and religious expression were able to generate vast empires, founded on a common identity and the will to project themselves beyond their own borders. Similarly, the Roman Empire or the British Empire owe their strength to the ability to build a universal narrative and attract other communities into their system of values.

On the contrary, when the culture of a people flattens into a weak or fragmented identity, the economy ends up taking over as the sole engine of society. This phenomenon is evident in Western countries that, despite having immense wealth, seem unable to generate long-term strategic visions. These countries risk transforming into "joint-stock companies," where material well-being is the ultimate goal, but the lack of a strong cultural identity makes them vulnerable to internal and external crises.

Leadership and self-determination

Leadership does not arise from economic power, but from a people's ability to imagine and project themselves as a global actor. A community that lives for the "here and now," settling for superficial well-being and reducing one's culture to a sum of consumption, renounces the possibility of self-determination. Fabbri emphasizes how this trend is particularly evident in Europe, where many countries seem to have resigned themselves to a subordinate role, accepting external governance in exchange for ephemeral economic stability.

The fundamental question then becomes: who really commands? It is not the leaders, who represent the collective will, nor the economy, which is a tool and not an end. It is the peoples who command, to the extent that they can express a strong, directional, and projective culture. A culture that does not merely preserve the past, but continuously renews itself, responding to the challenges of the present with a clear vision of the future.

The relationship between culture, peoples, and leadership highlights a truth often overlooked: power does not reside in institutions or the economy, but in the ability of a people to envision themselves as protagonists of history. Empires are built on culture and strategy, while clients live on economy and dependence.

The choice between being subjects or objects of history depends on the willingness of a community to invest in its own culture as a tool of self-determination and sovereignty.

- Dario Fabbri Human *Geopolitics*. Understanding the world from ancient civilizations to current powers. Mondadori, Milan, 2022.

5.6 Cultural substitutions and assimilations

The destruction of a culture can occur through **drastic and violent means** (such as wars, colonizations) or through **soft forms** (cultural manipulation through communication, narratives, and economic influences), with the aim of erasing or assimilating Communities or peoples.

War and totalitarianism: Systematic destruction of the symbols and cultural institutions of a people. Inclusion of acts such as the destruction of places of worship, sacred texts, historical monuments. Sterilization or forced assimilation to eliminate future generations of culture. For example: The destruction of the libraries of Baghdad (1258) and Alexandria. Forced assimilation policies against Native Americans (boarding schools). The effects consist of an irreversible loss of cultural heritage, identity disorientation, and loss of social cohesion;

Colonization: imposition of cultural, religious, linguistic, and political values of the colonizing power. The plundering of local resources accompanied by the marginalization of indigenous populations. For example, European expansion in Africa and the Americas, with the imposition of Christianity and European languages. The effects are the uprooting of indigenous cultures and the imposition of foreign economic and social models, the marginalization of indigenous traditions, and loss of cultural autonomy.

Cultural globalization: spread of dominant cultural models (for example, Western) through media, fashion, technology, and consumerism. Gradual replacement of local traditions with globalized models. For example, the spread of fast food and globalized clothing that supplants local food and tailoring traditions. The forced adoption of English as a global language at the expense of local languages. The effects are cultural uniformity and loss of local identity. Loss of traditional skills related to the territory.

Narrative and cultural propaganda: use of media and narrative to ridicule, marginalize, or reinterpret a culture. Creation of negative stereotypes to justify the abandonment of certain values or traditions. For example, Hollywood and the stereotypical representation of non-Western cultures. Erasure of local historical figures in educational programs. The effects are that entire generations of young people drift away from their cultural roots. Local cultural models are perceived as backward.

Economic manipulation: Imposition of economic models that force communities to give up their traditions. Economic subordination that encourages the adoption of external values. For example, industrial agriculture that supplants traditional subsistence practices. Touristification that trivializes local traditions. The effects are the loss of cultural and economic autonomy, dependence on external models.

Consequences of cultural substitutions

When the new imposed cultural values do not align with the real needs of the social system, systemic dysfunctions can arise. For example, the imposition of exploitative economic models in sustainability-based societies leads to ecological and social collapses. Local cultures may resist, creating conflicts and alienation.

Another consequence is the loss of resilience as traditional local cultures have often adapted to territorial specificities. Their replacement can weaken a people's ability to face environmental or economic crises. For example, the abandonment of traditional agricultural techniques in favor of industrial crops has led to soil degradation and famines.

The effects of cultural replacement on a territory are the loss of identity and the connection of peoples to their historical and spiritual roots, social conflicts, homogenization with loss of cultural diversity and impoverishment of the collective heritage, economic vulnerability, and dependence on external cultural models can create economic instability.

In conclusion, the erasure of a culture, whether violent or soft, has profound and often irreversible impacts. **Cultural replacement** can lead to a loss of resilience and identity, and its success depends on the compatibility of new values with the needs of the system and the people. To preserve balance, it is crucial to respect local cultural specificities and promote models of cultural evolution that emerge organically from the communities themselves.

5.7 Culture and systems theory

Culture and the theory of complex systems

Culture, understood as the complex of symbols, values, norms, and narratives that guide the identity and actions of a community, can be analyzed through the fundamental principles of **complex systems theory**, which offer an interpretive key to understanding its dynamic, adaptive, and deeply interactive nature. Culture is not an immutable state, but a system that undergoes transitions, adapts to disturbances, and, in some cases, evolves towards new equilibria or risks collapsing into states of disorder.

State of the system

The culture of a community can be considered a state of the system, defined by the balance between its constituent elements: shared symbols, core values, traditions, social practices, and collective narratives. This state reflects the internal coherence of the cultural system and its ability to respond to challenges and opportunities. A well-functioning cultural system is able to maintain its identity and cohesion, even in the presence of external pressures.

Transitions to new states

When the cultural system undergoes significant changes — for example, a technological transformation, an environmental or social crisis — it can go through transitions to new states. These transitions are not linear and may involve a process of redefining the symbolic resources that allow the community to adapt. For example, a community experiencing a technological change must reinterpret its values to integrate technology into its cultural fabric without losing identity.

Multiplicity of possible states

A cultural system is not bound to a single future state, but has a **multiplicity of possible states**. These states depend on collective choices, external constraints, and the community's ability to manage change. Some states may lead to greater cohesion and innovation, while others may lead to stagnation or fragmentation. The direction of change depends on the governance's ability to guide the system towards **stable attractors**, that is, configurations that ensure a dynamic and sustainable balance.

The threshold of chaos

A central concept in the theory of complex systems is the **threshold of chaos**, the critical point beyond which the system enters a state of irreversible disorder. For a cultural system, this threshold represents the moment when symbolic resources fragment, shared values dissolve, and the coherence of the system falters. Once this threshold is crossed, culture risks collapsing, leaving room for internal conflicts, loss of identity, and inability to adapt to challenges.

The limit state as an enabler

Before reaching the threshold of chaos, a complex system may find itself in a **limit state**, a condition of high tension and instability, but still manageable. This limit state is paradoxically an **enabler**: the proximity to chaos stimulates the system to innovate, adapt, and find creative solutions. For culture, the limit state can be a phase of great ferment, in which communities reinterpret their symbolic resources and generate new meanings to face change.

The crossing of the threshold of chaos

When the cultural system surpasses the threshold of chaos, it enters a phase of total disorder, where the connections between its elements break down and culture loses its capacity to adapt. This can manifest through social fragmentation, political polarization, or cultural alienation. Rebuilding the system after a total breakdown is extremely difficult and requires significant efforts to re-establish shared values and narratives.

The role of governance in the transition

Governance plays a crucial role in guiding the cultural system through transitions, avoiding the threshold of chaos and steering it towards stable attractors. Governance, understood as the collective process of decision-making and management, must create conditions that favor the renewal of symbolic resources and cultural cohesion, while avoiding rigidities that could hinder adaptation. In this perspective, effective governance is based on collective participation, the enhancement of cultural diversity, and the integration of technological tools to support informed decisions.

Analyzing culture through the lens of complex systems theory allows for an understanding of its dynamic and interactive nature, highlighting the crucial role of symbolic resources as structuring and transformative elements. The ability of a community to reinterpret and renew its symbolic heritage depends on the presence of governance capable of steering the system towards stable attractors, avoiding chaos and fostering resilience. In a rapidly changing world, culture is not only an element of internal cohesion but a strategic factor for ensuring the survival and development of communities in the long term.

6. TOOLS

6.1 Territoriali business models

Territorial business models (BMT) represent a strategic response to the needs for sustainable development and the enhancement of local peculiarities. In the context of Smartland and community-based development (CBD), BMT are configured as tools for creating shared value through a synergy between technology, community participation, and optimization of territorial resources.

Territorial Business Models as a Tool for Community-Based Development

Territorial Business Models (BMT) represent a crucial tool for community-based development (CBD), which places people at the center of territorial strategies. In this context, BMT become essential for enhancing local resources, promoting the cultural, historical, and natural identity of the territory, and creating products and services that, while rooted in tradition, are competitive in global markets. Furthermore, these models promote social inclusion by involving vulnerable communities and strengthening local social capital.

Another important aspect concerns economic sustainability: BMT allow for the reduction of energy and environmental costs while simultaneously creating new production chains such as those related to bioeconomy or agro-industry. Finally, Territorial Business Models facilitate participatory governance by promoting the creation of collaborative platforms for territorial planning and the use of participatory mapping and data-sharing tools for a more inclusive and shared management of resources.

Integrated or aggregated design

A Territorial Business Model (BMT) is a strategic approach that considers the territory as a complex system, integrating natural, economic, social, and cultural resources to promote sustainable and coordinated development. Integrated development, in this context, refers to a process aimed at optimizing the overall potential of the territory through collaboration among local, regional, and national actors, creating synergies between different sectors and actions that should not be confused with the aggregated development of different projects.

Integrated territorial development is based on a model of **coordination and synergy among different sectors, resources, and actors**, with the aim of maximizing collective benefits and creating shared value. This type of development is characterized by:

1. **Multidimensionality:** involves economic, social, environmental, and cultural aspects.
2. **Coordination of actions:** promotes concerted action among public entities, private enterprises, and local communities.
3. **Sustainability:** aims to preserve resources for future generations.
4. **Centrality of strategic objectives:** actions are oriented towards achieving defined programmatic objectives defined through a participatory planning process and needs analysis.

In integrated development, territorial planning presents itself as a system of **coherent and coordinated** actions on a territorial scale, where each intervention contributes to achieving common objectives.

This approach assumes a **systemic view** and the overcoming of sectoral logics, promoting integration between policies, tools, and resources.

Integrated design should not be confused with the aggregation of uncoordinated public interventions. While integrated design aims to create a **cohesive and synergistic system of actions**, a different practice is often observed where under the term "integrated" plans are proposed that are merely a simple **summation of sectoral investments** resulting from political compromises rather than from a strategic analysis.

Integrated Design

Integrated design is characterized by a clear strategic orientation and well-defined programmatic objectives. Each intervention is conceived to contribute to the territorial system as a whole, seeking to maximize overall benefits. Investments are evaluated not only for their intrinsic value but for their synergistic impact, that is, how they interact with other elements of the system. Furthermore, integrated design involves active and dynamic management, allowing for adjustments and modifications based on performance indicators and results achieved, thus ensuring continuous optimization of resources and interventions.

Aggregation of Public Interventions

Public interventions are often the result of political compromises in the distribution of resources, without a unified strategic vision. This approach leads to a series of projects that, while legitimate and addressing specific needs, are disconnected from one another and do not contribute to a real overall development of the territory. In many cases, they translate into a schedule of public investments that simply represents a summation of projects, without addressing local development issues coherently and without considering the connections between interventions or their functionality concerning broader systemic objectives.

Limits of the Aggregation of Interventions

The aggregation of public interventions under the label "integrated" presents several limitations:

1. **Lack of coordination:** investments do not communicate with each other and do not contribute to a common goal.
2. **Reduced effectiveness:** the overall impact of the interventions is less than the sum of the individual contributions, because there is a lack of a multiplier effect.
3. **Spreco di risorse:** il disallineamento tra interventi può portare a sovrapposizioni, duplicazioni o inefficienze.
4. **Waste of sustainability:** by not considering the long-term vision, many interventions end up only addressing immediate needs, without contributing to the resilience of the territory.

Why the Territorial Business Model is Fundamental

The Territorial Business Model offers a solution to the critical issues of the traditional development approach, proposing an integrated framework based on a long-term strategic vision, built on an accurate analysis of the specific needs and potentials of the territory. A fundamental aspect of this model is the measurement of impact, which occurs through the use of advanced tools such as performance indicators, input-output models, and predictive algorithms, to ensure that each intervention contributes concretely to overall

development. Furthermore, the model promotes integration and synergy, coordinating resources and local actors to maximize the value created, while placing a strong emphasis on sustainability and inclusivity, seeking to maintain a balance between environmental, social, and economic aspects, without neglecting any component of the system.

Integrated development requires strategic planning that goes beyond the simple aggregation of public interventions, often the result of political compromises. The Territorial Business Model is a key tool to ensure that resources are used in a coordinated manner, generating shared and sustainable value. Only through a unified vision and a participatory approach will it be possible to translate the concept of integrated development into concrete reality.

Practical Applications of Territorial Business Models: Case Studies

Copenhagen (Denmark): Smart City Model Copenhagen has developed a territorial business model aimed at becoming the first carbon neutral capital by 2025. The strategy is based on investments in sustainable infrastructure, green transport systems, and advanced management of renewable energies. Through the implementation of digital platforms for monitoring emissions and energy consumption and the use of predictive models to simulate the impact of policies, the city has attracted significant international investments, also improving the well-being of its citizens. Key results include a 42% reduction in CO₂ emissions from 2005 to 2020 and growth in the technology sector and green businesses, consolidating Copenhagen as a global model of urban sustainability.

Basque Country (Spain): Innovation Clusters The Basque Country has adopted a territorial business model aimed at stimulating innovation through collaboration between universities, businesses, and public institutions. This model focuses on optimizing local resources and attracting talent to foster competitive development. Key tools include the use of performance indicators, such as cluster productivity and the number of patents registered, and matching models between supply and demand for innovation. Thanks to this strategy, the region has recorded a 20% GDP growth over ten years and a 35% increase in tech start-ups, demonstrating the effectiveness of the territorial model for enhancing innovation.

Freiburg (Germany): Sustainable City Freiburg is a European example of urban sustainability, having implemented a territorial business model focused on renewable energy, sustainable mobility, and intelligent land management. The model employs advanced tools such as input- output models to analyze energy consumption and renewable energy production, as well as participatory projects to involve citizens in strategic decisions. The results achieved include a 38% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from 1992 to 2020 and a 25% increase in sustainable tourism, making Freiburg a benchmark for sustainable development.

Textile District of Prato (Italy): Circular Economy The textile district of Prato has developed a territorial business model centered on the circular economy, focusing on the recycling of textile fibers and the sustainable management of industrial waste. The initiative is based on the use of circularity indicators, such as the recycling rate, and integrated supply chain models to optimize material flows. This approach has led to a 50% reduction in textile waste sent to landfills and a 15% growth in green businesses over five years, demonstrating how a territorial model can promote sustainability and economic competitiveness.

Ultimately, a **territorial business model** is not just an economic growth strategy, but an integrated approach to ensure the well-being and sustainability of the territory. Through quantitative tools, collaboration among local actors, and planning over clear time horizons, Territorial Business Models have become essential for addressing global and local challenges.

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6.2 Quantitative Approaches to territorial Business Models

A territorial business model (BMT) applied to a territory can be expressed as a quantitative function that integrates resources, investments, and impacts:

$$V_t = f(R_t, C_t, I_t, S_t, P_c)$$

Dove:

- V_t : Valore generato (economico, ambientale, sociale).
- R_t : Risorse locali (naturali, culturali, umane).
- C_t : Competitività del territorio (produttività, innovazione).
- I_t : Investimenti (pubblici e privati).
- S_t : Sostenibilità (ambientale, sociale).
- P_c : Partecipazione comunitaria (livello di engagement, contributo decisionale).

A **territorial business model (BMT)** is a strategic framework that guides sustainable development and competitiveness of a territory through the integrated management of its natural, economic, social, and cultural resources. Unlike traditional business models focused on individual companies or sectors, BMTs consider the territory as a complex system, characterized by interconnections among local actors, infrastructures, and resources, with the aim of generating shared and sustainable value.

Fundamental Elements of a BMT

A Territorial Business Model (BMT) is based on several key elements that determine its effectiveness and sustainability. First, there is the enhancement of local resources, which includes natural resources such as energy, water, biodiversity, and landscape, fundamental elements for an economic model that respects the environment. In addition, there are cultural resources, such as historical heritage, traditions, and local identity, which are valuable for preserving the memory and social cohesion of the territory. Finally, economic resources refer to local businesses, industrial districts, and production chains, which form the economic engine of the territory.

The strategic objectives of a BMT are articulated in three main directions: sustainability, understood as a balance between environment, society, and economy; attractiveness for investments and innovation, to stimulate growth and competitiveness; and the improvement of the quality of life for the people living in the territory.

To effectively measure and implement these objectives, various operational tools are used. Among these are quantitative indicators, such as territorial GDP, employment rate, and ecological footprint, which allow monitoring of economic and environmental results. Additionally, territorial input-output models are employed to trace economic and environmental flows, while simulations and predictive algorithms help explore future development scenarios, making the territorial model more dynamic and adaptable.

Time Horizon of a Territorial Business Model

BMTs develop over medium to long-term time horizons, often articulated in distinct phases:

Short Term (1-3 years):

- Initial analysis of the territory.
- Involvement of stakeholders and definition of objectives.
- Creation of operational tools (platforms, databases, algorithms).
- Implementation of pilot projects.

Medio Term (4-7 years):

- Extension of strategies on a broader territorial scale.
- Monitoring and optimization of performance indicators.
- Integration of new technologies and resources.
- Evaluation of economic, social, and environmental impact.

Long Term (8-15 years):

- Consolidation of the model as a self-sufficient and resilient system.
- Expansion of international collaborations.
- Review of strategic objectives based on global and local trends.

The Fundamental Principles of Quantitative Models

A quantitative model for a Territorial Business Model must be able to comprehensively and detailed represent the territorial system, taking into account the complex interactions between natural resources, infrastructure, businesses, and communities. This approach allows for understanding how the different components of the territory influence each other and how these dynamics can be optimized to promote sustainable development.

The model must also be able to measure performance, providing clear and reliable indicators to assess the effectiveness of the policies and investments undertaken. In this way, it is possible to monitor in real-time the results achieved and make adjustments if necessary.

Furthermore, a good quantitative model should allow for the simulation of future scenarios, anticipating the impacts of decisions made and strategies implemented. This predictive capability is essential to avoid mistakes and to make informed decisions.

Finally, it is essential that the model integrates multidimensional objectives, ensuring consistency between the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of development. The harmonization of these objectives allows for balancing the various interests at play, ensuring that all parts of the territory can benefit from development.

To achieve all this, quantitative models combine historical data with real-time information, using advanced analytical tools based on algorithms, mathematical equations, and simulations. This approach allows for building more accurate forecasts and supporting more strategic decisions.

Territorial Input-Output Models

Originally developed by Wassily Leontief, input-output models are adapted to territorial contexts to analyze economic and environmental flows.

Main features:

- They map interdependencies between production sectors and consumption.
- They integrate environmental variables such as resource use and waste production.
- They calculate the indirect and induced impacts of policies and investments.

Application: An example is the model adopted in the Tuscany Region to optimize production flows in industrial districts, reducing waste and promoting the circular economy.

Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA) Models

MCDA models are used to support complex decisions involving multiple objectives and different actors.

Operation:

- They identify evaluation criteria (economic, environmental, social).
- They weigh the criteria based on strategic priorities.
- They provide a hierarchy of options based on trade-off analysis.

Application: These models have been used in Barcelona to optimize sustainable mobility strategies, integrating criteria such as emission reduction, infrastructure costs, and citizen satisfaction.

Agent-Based Models (ABM)

ABM models simulate the behavior of individual agents (e.g., citizens, businesses, institutions) to observe emerging dynamics at the territorial scale.

Main features:

- Bottom-up models that capture interactions between agents.
- They incorporate variables such as individual preferences, economic constraints, and social dynamics.
- They use scenarios to test policies and strategies.

Application: Freiburg, Germany, has used ABM models to design territorial energy plans that combine renewable energy and consumption optimization.

Mathematical Optimization Models

These models define the best use of territorial resources to achieve specific objectives. **Common methods:**

- **Linear Programming:** Optimizes resource allocation to maximize economic return.
- **Non linear Programming :** Manages complex problems with environmental or social constraints.
- **Stochastic Optimization:** Considers uncertainties in data or forecasts.

Application Optimization models have been implemented in Northern Europe to improve water resource management and reduce infrastructure costs.

Computable General Equilibrium (CGE) Models

CGE models simulate interactions between markets and sectors at the territorial level.

Advantages:

- They analyze fiscal and environmental policies
- They measure the long-term impacts of strategic investments.
- They assess the distributive effects of policies among social groups or regions.

Application: The CGE model has been used in the Basque Region to analyze the economic and employment impact of innovation clusters.

Territorial Performance Indicators

Quantitative indicators are essential tools for monitoring and evaluating the progress of a BMT.

Common indicators:

- **Territorial GDP:** Measures economic growth.
- **Employment rate:** Assesses social impact.
- **Ecological footprint:** Analyzes environmental sustainability.
- **Innovation index:** Detects competitive capacity.

Application: The city of Malmö, Sweden, uses a dashboard of indicators to monitor the transition to a circular economy.

Integrating Models into Territorial Business Models

An effective BMT requires the integration of multiple quantitative methods into a single analytical platform. This approach allows:

- **Scenario simulations:** to assess alternative impacts of policies.
- **Dynamic monitoring:** to adapt strategies in real-time.
- **Inclusive participation:** to engage local actors in planning.

An example of integration is represented by the **URBAN-E** platform, adopted by several European cities, which combines input-output models, ABM simulations, and indicators to optimize urban resource management.

Challenges and Future Perspectives

Despite the potential, quantitative models face several challenges. The first concerns data availability, as many regions lack sufficiently detailed territorial information. Secondly, computational complexity poses an obstacle, as some models require advanced technological resources to be implemented and used correctly.

Finally, there is the issue of political and social acceptance: decisions based on these models must be communicated clearly and understandably to all stakeholders involved, to ensure consensus and cooperation.

In the future, integration with emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and machine learning promises to improve the accuracy and predictive capacity of BMTs.

Quantitative methods and models represent the core of modern Territorial Business Models, providing tools to analyze, simulate, and optimize territorial development. Through the adoption of scientific approaches, it is possible to overcome the limitations of traditional models and create truly integrated and sustainable strategies capable of responding to the global and local challenges of our time.

6.3 Community based development

Community-Based Development (CBD) is a development approach that places communities at the center of the decision-making, design, and implementation process. This paradigm is based on the empowerment of people at the local level, active participation, and the enhancement of available resources within the community. CBD aims to generate sustainable and meaningful changes by adapting solutions to the specific needs of the populations involved.

Active Participation: The community is involved in all phases of the project: from needs analysis to planning, implementation, and monitoring. This principle ensures that solutions are rooted in local contexts and respond to the real needs of people.

1. **Empowerment** CBD aims to strengthen the capacities of communities, enabling them to make autonomous decisions and manage resources effectively. Empowerment reduces dependence on external interventions and promotes resilience.
2. **Enhancement of Local Resources** Communities possess unique resources – cultural, natural, social, and economic – that CBD leverages to promote sustainable development. The focus is on what already exists rather than what is lacking.
3. **Sustainability** CBD interventions aim to produce long-term benefits, ensuring that the initiatives are ecologically, economically, and socially sustainable.
4. **Inclusion** All members of the community, including marginalized groups, are involved in the decision-making process, ensuring equity and representativeness.
5. **Adaptability** CBD takes into account local specificities and adapts to the cultural, economic, and social contexts of the communities.

Objectives of CBD

1. **Poverty Reduction:** Through the development of infrastructure, local economic activities, and essential services, CBD improves living conditions.

2. **Building Social Capital** Strengthening social networks and relationships within the community enhances cohesion and the ability to face collective challenges.
3. **Promotion of Social Justice** CBD addresses structural inequalities and promotes the inclusion of marginalized groups, such as women, youth, and ethnic minorities.
4. **Sustainable Economic Development** The approach promotes the creation of job opportunities and entrepreneurial activities at the local level, with particular attention to environmental sustainability.

Methodologies of Community-Based Development

1. **Participatory Mapping:** Through techniques such as resource mapping, community members identify the available assets and resources, as well as the main challenges.
2. **Needs Analysis:** The CBD uses participatory tools (focus groups, interviews, workshops) to understand the needs of the community from the perspective of its members.
3. **Collaborative Management:** Decisions are made collectively, often through committees or community councils that represent different parts of the population.
4. **Microfinance and Cooperatives:** To stimulate local entrepreneurship, the CBD promotes mechanisms of microcredit and the creation of cooperatives to manage common resources.
5. **Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation:** Communities are involved in monitoring and evaluating projects, ensuring transparency and accountability.

Advantages of CBD

1. **Contextually Rooted Approach:** Solutions are designed to fit the needs and local realities, making them more effective and acceptable.
2. **Empowerment and Autonomous Capacity** By strengthening the skills and capacities of communities, the CBD reduces dependence on external aid.
3. **Long-Term Sustainability:** By involving the community in managing resources and infrastructure, the CBD promotes long-term sustainability.
4. **Inclusive Growth:** The inclusion of marginalized groups helps reduce inequalities and improve social justice.

Critical Issues and Challenges of CBD

1. **Complexity of the Participatory Process:** Involving all community members can be difficult, especially in contexts with entrenched inequalities or internal conflicts.
2. **Slow Timelines:** Participatory processes take time to build trust and consensus, which can slow down implementation.
3. **Dependence on External Resources:** Despite the emphasis on autonomy, many communities require initial resources or technical skills from external actors.

4. **Risk of Cooptation:** Without clear governance mechanisms, decision-making power can be monopolized by local elites, excluding weaker groups.
5. **Difficulties in Monitoring:** Evaluating impacts can be complex, especially in the absence of clear and shared indicators.

Community-Based Development represents a transformative approach to development, based on the centrality of the community, the enhancement of local resources, and collective empowerment. Despite its challenges, CBD offers a sustainable development model that meets people's needs, promotes social justice, and builds resilience. To succeed, it requires targeted support from institutions and inclusive governance, but its potential to generate lasting and significant changes makes it an essential tool for contemporary development.

6.4 SmartLand: a model for the italian reality

Italy, with its reality of **villages, small municipalities, and small to medium-sized cities**, represents a unique territory characterized by cultural richness, landscape diversity, and a widespread historical heritage. However, this territorial fragmentation poses significant challenges to strategic planning and integrated development. Unlike large metropolitan cities, where the concentration of resources and population allows for the development of large-scale autonomous projects, smaller territories face structural limits, such as a lack of economic resources, skills, and the ability to relate to the global context.

In this context, the creation of **shared governance structures** becomes crucial to transform Italian territories into a **smartland**, that is, an integrated, resilient territorial system capable of competing at the national and international levels.

Territorial aggregation consists of bringing together different municipalities and villages into a supramunicipal structure, with the aim of overcoming administrative fragmentation and promoting the integration of resources and strategies. Furthermore, it aims to optimize internal functionalities, creating a coherent territorial system with shared services and integrated infrastructures. Finally, through this aggregation, the intention is to build a relational capacity towards the outside, facilitating the economic, cultural, and social promotion of the territory, both at the national and international levels.

This structure is inspired by **metropolitan cities** but with a model adapted to the reality of small centers. The result is a **territorial district** that functions as a systemic unit, capable of facing global challenges without losing local identity.

The Challenges of Italian Territories

Italian territories face various challenges related to their size and the distribution of resources. Most Italian municipalities have fewer than 5,000 inhabitants, which contributes to the fragmentation of the territory and makes it difficult to plan and implement integrated development projects. The limited resources and weak institutional capacity of these municipalities will exacerbate the situation. Furthermore, small centers often have limited access to the necessary resources, such as technical skills, economic resources, or technological tools, to participate in development programs at the national or European level. Another issue is the functional isolation of many villages, which are not well connected to nearby cities, reducing their

effectiveness and limiting their attractiveness to investors. Finally, in some cases, competition among municipalities for scarce resources hinders the creation of a shared vision for development and promotes ineffective territorial management.

Shared Governance Structures

To address the challenges of Italian territories, it is essential to create shared governance structures that act as territorial development agencies in support of local authorities.

These structures must be able to promote an integrated vision of development, overcoming the particular interests of individual municipalities to work towards a common strategy. They must also effectively coordinate the available resources, optimizing the use of financial, human, and technological resources.

Moreover, they must facilitate municipalities' access to available funds, supporting them in the design and management of projects funded by regional, national, and European programs.

Another important aspect is the creation of economies of scale through the sharing of services and infrastructures, which allow for cost reduction and increased efficiency. Finally, these structures must act as unique interlocutors to represent the territory to higher institutions, investors, and other external partners, ensuring coordinated and strategic management of the territory.

Characteristics of a Territorial District like Smartland

- **Systemic Unit:** Each Municipality participates as part of an integrated system, with a clear distribution of roles and responsibilities.
- **Ability to Generate Synergies:** Projects are developed to maximize collective benefits, avoiding duplications and overlaps.
- **External Attractiveness:** The district becomes an attractive hub for investments, tourism, and culture, thanks to joint promotion.
- **Innovation and Sustainability:** The adoption of smart technologies and the transition to sustainable economic models are central priorities.

Key Steps for Creating a Smartland

To create a "Smartland", it is necessary to follow some key steps.

The first step involves mapping the territory, a thorough analysis that allows for the identification of the involved Municipalities and available resources, while also identifying strengths and weaknesses.

Next, it is essential to define a shared governance, creating a territorial development agency with a clear mandate that ensures inclusive representation of all local entities. Once the governance structure is established, strategic planning follows, which involves developing an integrated plan based on shared objectives and measurable performance indicators.

Another crucial step is the integration of services, which involves the implementation of shared public services such as transportation, waste management, and digital infrastructure, in order to optimize costs and improve overall efficiency. It is also important to attract external resources, presenting the district as a unique interlocutor to access public funds and attract private investments.

Finally, constant monitoring is necessary, using appropriate tools to assess progress and adapt strategies based on the results achieved.

Territorial aggregation around a community-based integrated development project represents the only sustainable path for Italian villages and small municipalities that want to overcome fragmentation and face development challenges. Creating shared governance structures similar to those of metropolitan cities allows transforming a set of local entities into a systemic unit capable of acting as a smartland. Through resource optimization, collaboration among municipalities, and a shared strategic vision, Italy can enhance its territorial peculiarities and promote sustainable and inclusive development.

6.5 Community based development and complex systems

Community-Based Development (CBD) represents a fundamental strategy for addressing the challenges of a post-industrial scenario, characterized by increasing complexity, ecological transition, and recurring global crises. This approach is based on bottom-up participation and strengthening local governance, proposing itself as a means to promote **territorial resilience**, sustainable development, and adaptation to exogenous shocks.

In a post-globalization and post-capitalist context, CBD perfectly aligns with the strategies supported by the European Union (EU), which emphasizes the role of territories as pillars for building more resilient and sustainable systems.

The Complex Nature of Territorial Systems

Territories, understood as socio-ecological entities, are complex systems characterized by:

1. **Multiple interconnections** between economic sectors, environmental resources, and communities.
2. **Dynamic adaptation** to internal and external pressures.
3. **Dependence on local and global resources**, which exposes communities to the effects of exogenous events such as economic crises, pandemics, or climate change.

In CBD, the systemic approach allows for the identification of critical nodes in the territory, strengthening internal connections and developing strategies that promote autonomy and sustainability.

The post-industrial transition is characterized by the decline of traditional economies, especially those related to mass production, and the rise of new economic models, such as the knowledge economy, services, and green technologies. In this context, production chains are being reconfigured, adopting more local and resilient models. In this scenario, strengthening local governance plays a fundamental role. Local communities, through Community-Based Development (CBD), have the opportunity to promote social and economic innovation using the local resources available. They can also mitigate the effects of external shocks by creating support networks and short supply chains that increase the resilience of the territory. Finally, CBD ensures the adaptability of the system, preserving social cohesion and territorial capital, which are essential for facing unforeseen changes.

The European framework for smart cities and CBD

The European Union recognizes the importance of territories as key actors in addressing global challenges, supporting CBD through policies and programs aimed at strengthening **local governance** through integrated planning tools and community participation, and **promoting territorial resilience** through the development of sustainable local economies and the adoption of circular approaches.

Key EU Policies

1. **Cohesion Policy:** The EU's cohesion policy funds projects that promote the reduction of regional inequalities and integrated development, with an emphasis on local participation and sustainability.
2. **European Green Deal:** The Green Deal recognizes the role of territories in the ecological transition, encouraging the adoption of CBD models to implement sustainable and resilient practices.
3. **NextGenerationEU:** This tool aims to stimulate post-pandemic recovery, with funding that strengthen the capacity of local communities to respond to economic and health shocks.
4. **European Strategy for Rural Areas:** CBD is a pillar of this strategy, which supports projects of local development to combat the marginalization of rural territories and promote their integration into regional and European markets.

Lessons learned from Recent Crises

COVID-19 Crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the **fragility of global supply chains**, showing the risks of dependence on foreign suppliers for essential goods. At the same time, it has brought to light the importance of local networks to ensure essential services and support local economies. Resilience is built through strengthening local economies, diversifying productive activities, and enhancing local governance.

Fragility of Global Supply Chains

The crisis of global supplies, exacerbated by the pandemic and geopolitical events, has underscored the need to develop **short supply chains** and **local productions**, reducing dependence on distant markets. Community-Based Development (CBD), integrated with circular economy practices, can transform territories into more autonomous and sustainable systems.

Climate and Environmental Crises

Extreme weather events require territories capable of adapting quickly. CBD allows for planning local strategies for mitigation and adaptation, improving overall resilience. Local development must integrate ecological measures to ensure community safety.

Towards a Post-Globalization and Post-Capitalist Scenario

In a post-globalization context, which places greater emphasis on localization and sustainability, Community-Based Development (CBD) emerges as a crucial model for relocalizing economies, supporting production and consumption at the local level. Furthermore, CBD helps build community support networks, reducing dependence on global markets and promoting social cohesion. This model fosters a transformation of development paradigms, shifting from a linear and extractive capitalism to a regenerative and participatory approach. In the post-capitalist context, CBD serves as a platform to experiment with new forms of economy based on principles of equity, cooperation, and sustainability.

Resilience and Future of Territories

Community-Based Development, combined with a systemic approach, represents an adaptive response to exogenous shocks and global transitions. By strengthening local governance and promoting resilient territorial networks, CBD positions itself as an essential tool for local development in an era of post-industrial and post-globalization transformations. Supported by European policies, CBD can help create territories that not only withstand crises but thrive, building a sustainable and inclusive future based on participation, autonomy, and cohesion.