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The role of sociology in the promotion of actions aimed at social innovation in the Mediterranean area / *El papel de la sociología en la promoción de acciones dirigidas a la innovación social en el área del Mediterráneo*

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ABSTRACT

The change in contexts and their complexity, especially in the Mediterranean area, has raised the need to start reflecting on modernizing innovative actions able to provide social responses to the real needs of citizens and, moreover, able to combine resources and quality. This is necessary since the expansion of rights is associated with a decreasing public funding capacity. The future challenge will surely be a retrenchment in public spending, orienting it towards the threefold structure of choice (need, preferences, goods) and overcoming of rational choice model (preferences, goods). In a context characterized by these features, the sociological knowledge becomes paramount for reading social phenomena. The role of sociology is to produce "knowledge" through which society can observe the occurring phenomena recognizing their problems, thus allowing for a continuous, ongoing improvement.

Keywords: sociology; social innovation; Mediterranean; action; policies.

RESUMEN

El cambio en los contextos y sus complejidades, especialmente en el área del Mediterráneo, ha planteado la necesidad de comenzar a reflexionar sobre la modernización de acciones innovadoras capaces de proporcionar respuestas sociales a las necesidades reales de los ciudadanos para poder combinar recursos y calidad. Esto es necesario, ya que la expansión de los derechos está asociada con una capacidad de financiamiento público en disminución. El desafío futuro seguramente será una reducción del gasto público, orientado hacia la triple estructura de elección (necesidad, preferencias, bienes) y superando el modelo de elección racional (preferencias, bienes). En un marco general con estas características, el conocimiento sociológico se convierte en algo primordial para leer los fenómenos sociales. El papel de la sociología es producir "conocimiento", así la sociedad puede observar los fenómenos que ocurren, reconocer sus problemas, permitiendo una mejora permanente y continua.

Palabras clave: *sociología; innovación social; Mediterráneo; acción; políticas.*

WHY THE MEDITERRANEAN SHOULD BE BACK AT THE CORE OF POLITICAL AGENDAS

In the past decades, Mediterranean societies have undergone profound transformations due to both new socio-political conflicts and mobility processes linked to migrations. On the latter, data for 2017 (UNHCR, 2018) show that 171,332 migrants landed on the coasts of Italy, Spain and Greece, and in smaller amounts in Cyprus, while 3,081 died or were lost at sea. This sea (*Mare nostrum*, "our sea", as the Romans called it) is not a given fact, but an ongoing process (Ruel, 1991) and it has now become a "place of closure" rather than a "place of openness" to dialogue. Nevertheless, the Mediterranean can still provide a response to the identity crisis and the claims for autonomy affecting Europe in this historic juncture (like the United Kingdom with "Brexit" and Catalonia in Spain). These transformations pose a challenge to in order to renew the rules of common life. Migrations are a controversial issue and, although all the forecasts indicate that the Northern Mediterranean countries (Italy, Greece and Spain) will have to coexist with an ever-increasing share of foreign presence, a large part of the local population struggles to consider this possibility and adopt a positive attitude.

Beyond these negative social changes, the Mediterranean is still paramount for the promotion of pluralism, diversity and freedom, because, by becoming a place of dialogue and encounter, it could be the table of peace between the West and the Islamic world (Hadhri and Mangone, 2016). If Europe and Europeans want to build —or rather re-build— their future, they will have to review their relationship with the Mediterranean and do so together with the other political and cultural actors bordering its shores, starting with the Arab peoples. After September 11th attacks on the Twin Towers in New York Amartya Sen, Nobel Prize winner for Economics, wrote: "The championing of pluralism, diversity, and basic liberties can be found in the history of many societies. The long traditions of encouraging and protecting public debates on political, social, and cultural matters in, say, India, China, Japan, Korea, Iran, Turkey, the Arab world, and many parts of Africa, demand much fuller recognition in the history of democratic ideas" (Sen, 2003: 29-30).

In recent years, with the process of Europeanisation encompassing also the economy, many resentments have sprung and been expressed towards Southern Europe, often identified with the Mediterranean, overlooking the fact that it is a bridge to Africa. The weight of the Mediterranean component and its proximity to North African countries is multi-faceted and impressive throughout Southern Europe, causing many differences in comparison with the rest of Europe. European identity and European geography deal not only with the institutional divisions of the individual nations (and within the nations themselves), but also with these complex divergences that range from politics to economics, from religion to culture, as they represent true cleavages, often within the borders of the single nation state (Eder and Giesen, 2001). The Mediterranean does not represent a problem for cosmopolitanism and a cosmopolitan Europe (Beck and Grande, 2007), not least because it witnessed the birth of civilizations, religions and philosophies, legal codes and political systems, including democracy and even science. All these values and knowledges born in the Mediterranean basin (Southern Europe, North Africa and East) can be strategic elements in overcoming the European crisis that seems affect the EU since its inception, prompting the revision of policies and providing a solid basis for the emergence of a true common cultural heritage and Euro-Mediterranean knowledge.

The transformations in contexts (social, cultural, and economic) and their complexity, especially in the Mediterranean area, has raised the need to start reflecting on modernizing innovative actions that should be able to: *a)* strengthen the intercultural perspective in the comparative and general theory of the relations between the Mediterranean societies and their impact on the internal dynamics of their social life; *b)* provide social responses to the real needs of citizens and, moreover, combine resources and quality. This is necessary since the expansion of rights is associated with a decreasing public funding capacity, thus shifting the focus from the guarantee of citizens' well-being to the problem of cost containment.

CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

During the last two centuries, societies have become increasingly complex in both relationships and processes, with gradual unfolding according to the different geographical areas and, above all, to the socio-cultural contexts that are considered as a reference for analysis. Secularization (loss of relevance of religion in social life), rationalization (predominance of purposive rationality) and, finally, individualization (*Gemeinschaft* vs. *Gesellschaft*, with the relative replacement of Durkheim's mechanical solidarity with organic solidarity) have caused transformations in social representations and in the beliefs through which subjects interpret the society in which they live, as well as in the values by which they orientate themselves within it. All these processes have led to a redefinition of the relationship between individuals and their social environment, producing a sort of "break" (transformation)[1] in rhythms and lifestyles and affecting, in general, people's representation of life and their world.

In light of these transformations and given that national boundaries can easily be overcome —especially thanks to new computer technologies that enable us to create links and manage highly complex processes from afar— the development of mankind must be rethought by shifting the focus from the traditional elements of competitive advantage to the new ones based on knowledge (often unique and inimitable). The future challenge will surely be a retrenchment in public spending, orienting it towards the threefold structure of choice (need, preferences, goods) and overcoming of rational choice model (preferences, goods), but an even bigger challenge will be to combine the lack of resources with the concern of improving citizens' living conditions.

"For social sciences, this means focusing on the processes of structuring and de-structuring, integration and exchange, external conflict and internal reproduction of the economy, politics, culture, and the community system. These are seen and read as subsystems of a society that seems to have no physical boundaries anymore and recognizing oneself beyond boundaries involves dealing with a complex interaction process" (Mangone, 2018: 49). This logic of development, however, presents some paradoxical aspects that should not be overlooked. For example, although we are witnessing unprecedented technological progress and knowledge, there are many doubts on their development and diffusion, which could lead to an increase in inequalities and the consolidation of subordination of some peoples to others —as the management of migrants flows in the Mediterranean are a clear example of—. These doubts seem now certainty: the current political and market systems result from a series of changes and reforms imposed by the need to combine the growing expectations of the population (harbouring higher and higher quality standards that nevertheless not always corresponded to real needs) with decreasing financial resources. The economic systems, that can influence political systems, are the result of a progressive affirmation of the "economy market" (Lee and Dot, 1991), which heavily burdens political control. Although political systems result from promoting cooperation between the various levels of political responsibility, they are unable, particularly in recent years, to control monetary turbulence and to ensure a fair system of goods and services that meets the real needs of citizens. The reference to goods and services is no mere rhetoric: the presence of a fair and effective system of services is one of the determinants that can guarantee all citizens full participation in social life and the expression of their individual abilities. This is one of the three necessary —but not sufficient— conditions[2] identified by Sen (1995) so that financial, social or territorial barriers do not hinder the effective enjoyment of individual rights.

This consideration steers the reflection to another paradox of the global society: equality.

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1   Here the term "break" is to be understood as a synonym of the Greek one of "krisis" which etymologically means "separo". It is the moment that separates a way of being or a series of phenomena from different others.

2   The other two are financing through general taxation and gratuitousness at the moment of consumption. The financing system must ensure that the individual contribution is exclusively determined by their ability to contribute and not by their illness-related risks and/or services received.

Equality may appear easy to define, but there are several theoretical and linguistic difficulties to the achievement of a single meaning. To understand the socio-economic and political dynamics of contemporary society, however, it is sufficient adopt the generic content of "final distribution of resources more egalitarian than that originally resulting from the game of economic and financial markets". In light of the above, equality can be variously understood, as various are its methods of application[3]. This makes it a principle difficult to ensure: no current model of welfare system (Esping-Andersen *et al.,* 2002) has succeeded in combining its different forms. It is clear that this political project is far from being implemented, as demonstrated by the fact that the general trend is to retrench welfare assistance to minimum levels (expenditure cuts), rather than to identify rational, transparent and shared criteria that are, in addition and above all, fair in the distribution of taxes and resources. Defining equality principles recognised and shared by all decision-makers is by no means easy, since it involves various spheres of human life: from the ethics of human rights to health, population and social sciences, up to economics and politics.

Equality, therefore, is not "everything for everyone", but "what is necessary so that everyone can have equal opportunity to choose for their own life project". In other words, we return to Sen's concepts of "functioning" and "capabilities" (1982; 1987), where the former are "states of being and doing" (being in good health, being adequately fed, etc.) that allow the achievement of well-being, while the latter allow for the acquisition of "functionings" (welfare) that allow them to choose between several chances of life. Now, taking up Dahrendorf's arguments (1988), it can be affirmed that *life chances*, understood as the possibility of choosing between alternatives, are never distributed equally: there are no societies in which all men have the same *entitlements* (access to and legitimate control over things) and enjoy the same *provisions* (a set of material and immaterial choices).

The basic problem is therefore one of rationing and of evolution of choices, but choices can only be taken freely if opportunities are fairly distributed on the basis of individual needs rather than social privilege.

To date, in the global society, no government can apply equality in an Aristotelian sense. The future challenge lies in retrenchments, that must sort out needs, preferences and goods (tripolar structure of choice), overcoming the logic of rational choice (preferences, goods). And yet, it is necessary to combine the scarcity of resources with the interests of improving the living conditions of all individuals.

SOCIAL INNOVATION AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Sen claimed that "the merits of democracy and its claim as a universal value can be related to certain distinct virtues that go with its unfettered practice. Indeed, we can distinguish three different ways in which democracy enriches the lives of the citizens. First, political freedom is a part of human freedom in general, and exercising civil and political rights is a crucial part of good lives of individuals as social beings. Political and social participation has intrinsic value for human life and well-being. To be prevented from participation in the political life of the community is a major deprivation. Second, as I have just discussed (in disputing the claim that democracy is in tension with economic development), democracy has an important instrumental value in enhancing the hearing that people get in expressing and supporting their claims to political attention (including claims of economic needs). Third —and this is a point to be explored further— the practice of democracy gives citizens an opportunity to learn from one another, and helps society to form its values and priorities" (Sen 1999: 10). Societal citizenship is built precisely on these aspects, often translating into new configurations of civil society able to prompt actions not only for defining needs, but for

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3   Firstly, it can be understood as an equal distribution of resources among different groups (social, ethnic, etc.); secondly, it can be understood as the equal possibility of access to resources regardless of individual income; and finally, it can be understood as an equal opportunity of access for equal needs.

taking responsibility in innovative development processes.

For the implementation of a planning methodology and participatory choices it is useful to adopt a mode of governance that points to the continuous involvement of the social forces, even if the process can appear to be exhausting and inconclusive. This to guarantee effectiveness, not only when it comes to identifying problems and taking decisions, but also, and above all, when it comes to initiating processes and implementing measures that require strong collaboration between the various social and/or local actors.

This condition implies a strong cooperation among all the actors involved, which in turn oft-times involves a cultural "leap", that is, changes in the collective behaviour and the limitation of micro-conflictual initiatives. It follows that, first, sociology must be ready to face the challenges of future welfare, and secondly, that the stratification of legislative, regulatory, operational, and cultural innovations that has flooded society in recent years is such that the only feasible solution is to centre daily practices on the *innovation*, that precedes *experimentation* and contrasts with *conservation*. The latter, however, is not to be understood as a process of maintaining knowledge but as maintaining the *status quo*. It is understood that social innovation (Murray, Caulier-Grice, Mulgan, 2010), is not innovation *tout court*, but innovation processes whose initiation is favoured by the replacement of mechanisms or processes to achieve the same purpose —in this case, the purpose concerns the satisfaction of the needs of individuals who no longer find a response in either the market or public administrations—. In this situation, individuals are pressed to organize themselves to meet new and old needs and ensure not only the improvement of their quality of life, but also the protection of common goods. Social innovation not only provides an answer to citizens' needs, but also proposes new ways of taking decisions and implementing actions by connecting "formal" with "informal" (networking), supporting and promoting all those community solidarity and reciprocity networks (Zoll, 2000) that occur spontaneously.

The higher and more inclusive the process of involvement of all members of the community, the better the outcome of innovative practices on the social context: indeed, these are the more suitable actors and sectors for developing social innovation practices. Social innovation as such has a collective connotation, it is not the result of individual imagination or ingenuity, but of activities that are configured as cooperative learning or *communities of practic*e (Manville and Foote, 1996): groups of individuals characterized by spontaneous aggregation, which is both social and professional, inserted in learning processes and which deal with common issues and needs. Communities represent the active subject that promotes both actions and the exchange of experiences. Innovation starts from an intuition and develops to the point of turning into widespread practice. Innovation thus defined achieves social results in terms of output (for example, the provision of health and/or social services) that not only meet people's needs but also leads to an increase in collective well-being and quality of life (manifest function). At the same time, however, it also has a latent function linked to the creation of new relationships (social capital) and new governance structures. Both functions together produce what can then actually be considered as an improvement in well-being and quality of life (social improvement).

In light of the above dynamics, the ways and forms in which civil society expresses itself must aim at: i) transitioning from the "appropriation logic" to the "solidarity logic", generating new forms of cooperation and social solidarity in order to collectively compensate for social risks; ii) integrating the roles and responsibilities of civil society as a form of expression of collective needs that can affect, as a social force, the determination of both the political agenda and new alliances; iii) enhancing two key resources: knowledge and trust, which allow for a full and wide involvement with the context, where the latter prompts towards the growth of individual, organizational and collective knowledge, and the expansion of social relations, with the ensuing increase in "knowledge".

Recalling Esping-Andersen, the strategy to be implemented should be "to adapt and empower citizens so that they may be far better equipped to satisfy their welfare needs within the market. At its core it is a supply-driven policy attempting

to furnish citizens with the requisites needed for individual success" (Esping-Andersen, 2002: 5). However, this process can only be achieved when the role of civil society is recognised. The *empowerment* process of political, civil and economic participation capacities enables citizens and their organisations (civil society) to identify their interests and evaluate options, as well as to plan and implement innovative lines of action aimed at responding to collective needs. These processes are particularly important in the Mediterranean area, where relations between the north and south shores seem to envisage only a reduction of the number of migrants and not an attempt to overcome a Eurocentric vision of this area. Indeed, the southern shores of the Mediterranean basin, in recent years, have seen the birth of civil society movements and actions (Solera, 2017) to reaffirm a Mediterranean identity that allows the creation of true —and not merely symbolic— networking across borders.

This means that social actors (civil society) to face future challenges will design new organisational models focusing on two key factors: innovation and experimentation. The first, in turn, is based on three strategic factors: 1) *involvement,* that is, the ability to involve oneself in the surrounding environment; 2) the orientation towards internal and external interests; and, finally 3) the possibility of creating relationships for a strong and lasting collaboration. Experimentation is paramount to building new development processes, such as activities, projects and actions with highly flexible management systems.

Innovation and experimentation processes are based on by the constant "creation of knowledge" aimed at "continuous innovation" in the industrial, social, and cultural fields. The new challenge to keep up with the globalization processes is to be able to learn to read and/or prefigure changes, and to do so, it is necessary to implement mechanisms of acquisition, creation, dissemination, and incorporation of the "key" resource: knowledge. And if these are the effects of globalization in the industrial world on the circulation and dissemination of knowledge, which is increasingly regarded as a factor of competitiveness and strong differentiation, we cannot but propose a further reflection on its effects on the non-industrialized world. Since

ancient times, in fact the problem of knowledge has been a core issue for scholars of a number of disciplines. This is, firstly, because the primary function of knowledge is to allow the construction of meanings and thus of social reality; and, secondly, because the improvement in knowledge (especially of the objectified kind) has improved, in the absence of distortions or perverse effects (Boudon, 1977), the quality of life for individuals. Every interaction with objects or with human beings, every communicative act implies a transfer of knowledge and skills: an exchange that becomes a process of integrating differences without limitation in the individual learning paths or prejudice on "expert" *vs.* "amateurish" knowledge.

THE ROLE OF SOCIOLOGY IN PROMOTING INNOVATIVE ACTIONS

Even before the economic crisis, civil society has been called by international and supra-national organizations to actively play a more significant role, with a consequent effect on welfare systems. The World Economic Forum (WEF, 2013) has identified various practical roles for civil society. These include "capacity builder", providing the necessary training to enable the acquisition of skills and abilities; "service provider" to meet the societal needs; "incubator" of ideas and solutions that may also require a long gestation or payback period; and, finally, "citizenship champion", encouraging citizens engagement and supporting the rights of all citizens. The reorganisation of policies therefore requires civil society actors to play a reformist role by sharing responsibilities with public institutions. Civil society is not just a minor player but a powerful negotiator whose successes or failures are as influential as those of political leaders. It is no coincidence that in the preface to the Europe 2020 strategy Barroso states that "[o]ur new agenda requires a coordinated European response, including with social partners and civil society. If we act together, then we can fight back and come out of the crisis stronger" (European Commission, 2010: 3). It is no coincidence either that the World Economic Forum has launched a project to explore the rapidly changing space in which civil society

actors operate. On the one hand, we see a paradigm shift in the roles between businesses, governments and civil society: they no longer represent three distinct sectors each acting within their own sphere of interest and with independent, well-defined roles with little interaction. On the other hand, in contemporary society, these three components enjoy greater activity and integration in facing social challenges through a shared and shared space.

In a context characterized by these features, and from the standpoint that sociology was born and developed as a form of thought aimed at helping society reflect on itself (Donati, 2011a), sociological knowledge becomes paramount for reading social phenomena: the role of sociology is to produce "knowledge" through which society can observe the occurring phenomena recognizing their problems, thus allowing for a continuous, ongoing improvement. Indeed, its main task is "the critical unhinging of the manoeuvring and manipulation of citizens and of consumers that rely on perverse usages of science" (Bourdieu, 2013: 12), going beyond the misleading, fake needs generated and imposed by common sense or by the media.

In other words, sociology can be considered a tool for understanding the interconnections of society, as it does not analyze the specific aspects of society as such but rather the interactions, bonds and reciprocal conditioning. According to Berger and Luckmann "[t]the central question for sociological theory can then be put as follows: How is it possible that subjective meanings become objective facticities? Or, in terms appropriate to the aforementioned theoretical positions: How is it possible that human activity should produce a world of things? In other words, an adequate understanding of the 'reality *sui generis*' of society requires an enquiry into the manner in which this reality is constructed. This inquiry, we maintain, is the task of the sociology of knowledge" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966: 30). Sociological knowledge, or rather sociology itself, is suspected of "compromising with politics" (Bourdieu, 2013), since its results derive from the work of a subject (the researcher) who is himself part of society and hence runs the risk of adding assumptions and prejudices. However, the main defence against this danger is precisely the search for possible ways to improve daily life by building a relationship between the actors, making society more "tailored" for all citizens.

The work of the sociologist and the resulting knowledge are therefore twofold. On the one hand, they allow "institutional accompaniment" (public service), which does not mean responding to all the needs of society, but rather formulating scientific responses to real problems —not with the "solution", but by suggesting possible pathways to improve the issue in question—. On the other hand, they allow for the development of a "critical and active citizen" very close to Schütz's ideal type "well-informed citizen" (1946). The latter, reconsidered according to the present society, seems to wish for the affirmation of a modern citizenship that it is no longer just a right, but also a duty, and for which establishing a socially accepted knowledge based on forms of responsible freedom that emerge through social reflexivity (Donati, 2011b) becomes a priority. Social reflexivity is the dimension of the individual reflexivity which is neither subjective nor structural but related to the order of reality of the social relationship.

While all work activities have individual and economic effects, some of them may also have social and cultural implications. There are problems connected with the sociologist's role that cannot be separated from those related to her commitment and intervention in general. Embracing a logic in which the sociologist's activities are considered in a relational perspective (Donati, 2011a, 2011b; Donati and Archer, 2015; Emirbayer, 1997), we believe it impossible for a clear distinction of the sociopolitical and biographical implications of these activities to exist according to the specific social context in which they are expressed. The boundary between science, profession and social utility is soon crossed. We can no longer speak of a contrast between theory and operativity, but rather of a continuum of interdependencies that goes from theory to operativity, through research-action. Social research therefore is indispensable for acquiring knowledge. The latter, in turn, must "dirty its hands" to read individual and/or social phenomena in order to translate the theoretical premises into concrete actions. In this logic, humanities and social sciences, and particularly sociology, assume a fundamental role in creating (first) and maintain-

ing (then) the integration of these aspects, contributing to the construction of a responsible work environment, in which each professional, with his knowledge and experience, can be directly involved in the choices to be made in relation to the various problematic situations faced.

The crisis of welfare systems and the attempts to define and launch new policies has not prevented the fragmentation of legal labour protection, nor the deterioration of the social fabric that needs to be re-constructed through the implementation of new forms of solidarity to enable citizenship to achieve both well-being and "*savoir vivre*". Sociological knowledge lies precisely in this process of re-construction. It pays close attention to all aspects of the transformation of society, and not just to certain specific areas, since the action of the social researcher should not be exclusively technical, nor consider the understanding of reality as a given (thus exercising control over it). Rather, it should include a reflection on the researcher's own activities. Sociological knowledge breaches the wall represented by the complexity of the problems and situations experienced by subjects in everyday life, allowing for a better conjugation of the objective and subjective dimension. If order characterized traditional societies, disorder characterizes contemporary societies, and this forces scholars to redefine paradigms and methods so that sociological knowledge is configured as a networking experience resulting from comparisons and conflicts that materialize in a certain space and time.

Sociological knowledge and scientific reflection in this discipline necessarily leap towards operativity by providing not answers, but indications and tools that act as a guideline for policies (welfare, educational, economic, etc.) and innovative actions to be taken in order to achieve a society that is open to cultural differences and respects them. This applies especially to the societies bordering the Mediterranean Sea, which in recent decades have undergone the transformations described above.

The study of socio-cultural phenomena and the relative methodologies adopted aim at integrating the subjective (micro social) and the objective (macro social) dimension. The link is the interpretation and construction of reality through the relations between human beings, and between human beings, society and culture. As individuals act as agents of interaction (in the world of daily life and in institutions), all these aspects are seen as a *correlation of interpretations* and with a different methodology[4].

For the study of socio-cultural phenomena, it is necessary to consider an integrated interweaving of factors, disciplines and methods of investigation. Sociological knowledge and that of other social sciences merge into a single integrated knowledge system that pays attention to all aspects of the transformation of society (in a holistic sense: aspects of personality, society and culture) without neglecting to reflect on the researcher's activities. Knowledge associated with innovative action, makes it possible to find not the solution but the possible ways to improve the problems in question. The work of social scientists therefore has political weight because they are themselves actors in society, and as such they are bearers of values and meanings, as well as subjective and social rights. It is through their research activity that inequalities are recognised.

AN EXAMPLE OF INNOVATIVE PRACTICE: FROM SOCIAL HOUSING TO PARTICIPATORY LIVING

Sociological knowledge, as stated above, is steered towards operativity by providing indications and tools that act as a guideline for innovative policies and actions. These should be adopted with the aim of concretely creating a society that guarantees equal opportunities for various groups

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4   Hence the need for studies that take into account both qualitative and quantitative aspects. The analyses based exclusively on statistical data are limited by the very data used, due to three main factors: *a)* the data does not always meet the researcher's requirements, since the statistical indicators (especially those from official sources) may not be valid as they are collected for purposes other than those of the researcher; *b)* the data refer only to the objective dimension (macro) neglecting or overlooking the subjective dimension (micro); *c)* the data are not suitable for the analysis of individual behaviours, especially when they are acquired only in a given area, since they set boundaries to the conclusions that cannot thus be generalised.

of disadvantaged people (whether migrants or other categories of people). This guideline applies especially to Mediterranean societies, since in recent decades they have experienced the deepest transformations, particularly at the demographic level (ageing population, mass migration and low birth rates).

In support of the reflections above, we will advance the example of Social Housing, an innovative practice well known in North European countries (Krokfors, 2012) but almost completely unknown in the Mediterranean countries and in Italy (Gili and Pece, 2017), at least until a few years ago. This practice seems to embody the characteristics of classical concepts such as Durkheim's "mechanical solidarity" (1893) or Tönnies's "community" (1887). The innovative element underpinning Social Housing projects is a new idea of living, characterized mainly by a social dimension in which the home is no longer a simple space where individuals or families live their private sphere, but becomes an instrument by which they have the opportunity to redefine their daily life through ties with others (reciprocity, mutual aid, collaboration). "Living" takes on methods and procedures of action that vary according to the needs of the territorial context in which one wishes to intervene and the specific characteristics of the target groups. In this way, Social Housing represents an innovative "model" to implement new interventions aimed at creating new "living formulas" able to regenerate and reconstitute relationships between people. The small communities stemming from these new living formulas develop positive attitudes and openness towards others, in turn aimed at fostering a process of social integration. The latter not only favours those "directly affected" (elderly people, migrants, abused women and other categories of disadvantaged people) but can also have positive effects on the social cohesion of the entire territory. If we think of the three types of community outlined by Tönnies (1887) —*blood*, *place* and *spirit*— the community to which Social Housing refers is a combination of these three forms: community by blood based on parental ties, community by place based on neighbourhood, and community by spirit based on friendship. The objective of Social Housing is not only to find affordable homes for disadvantaged

people, but also to build quality relationships that last over time: the relationship "induced" by these new forms of living becomes a "by-product" of the intervention.

The development of relational networks (Donati and Archer, 2015) contributes to reduce the physical and cultural distances between individuals, creating a "dialogue" with the rest of the territory. The centrality of the housing dimension seems able to widen the meaning to an urbanism that becomes increasingly relational: living moves according to the interactions between physical space (for example, the home) understood as a primary relational good, and social space (for example, the neighbourhood), understood as a collective relational good. The relational dimension applied to the experience of living becomes, thus, an essential element for the construction of a path of integration. Social Housing seems, in this way, to "force" individuals to rethink society on the basis of relationships both in urban areas and the suburbs, with a housing experience that aims not only at functionality and efficiency, but also at security and social cohesion, at "taking root". The whole urban system seems to be changing under the force of these new needs that require strengthening group identities from within compared to a society that tends to liquefy these identities and relationships.

A Case Study: "Casa Scalabrini" of Rome

To support what we said so far, we will present a case study of Social Housing concerning a specific project implemented in Italy and aimed at the integration of migrants. It is the "Casa Scalabrini" project in Rome (Pece, 2017), part of the program of the Scalabrinian Agency for Development and Cooperation (*Agenzia Scalabriniana per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo*) and the operational centre of the program "Welcoming and Inclusive Community" (CAI, *Comunità Accogliente e Inclusiva*), belonging to the Congregation of the Scalabrinian Missionaries of St. Charles, a social reality that for over a century has been at the service of migrants and refugees in many countries of the world.

Among the various investigative tools to carry out this case study, the choice fell on the obser-

vation and analysis of second level data. This is because when you want to know a certain social phenomenon —be it individual or collective— you have two systems to gather information: observation (the most direct and immediate way to study manifest behaviors) and interrogation (the obligatory path) to explore motivations, attitudes, beliefs, feelings, perceptions, expectations). The observation was therefore chosen because it was decided to have a "direct way" to find information about the daily life of the guests of "Casa Scalabrini", and the second level analysis, that is, we used information taken from documents existing.

The project (second level analysis) states as its main objective the need to continue the social integration of those who leave the accommodation centres for asylum seekers and refugees (SPRAR and CARA centres), with the aim of helping them acquire substantial individual autonomy, starting from the housing dimension, which in turn becomes a first step towards a process of integration. The structure of the "House" that proposes a "mixed" lifestyle (autonomous and community) has a total of thirty places available: twenty-eight reserved for asylum seekers and refugees (single, mostly men) and two accommodations reserved for small families (with no more than two to three children).

Again, from the analysis of documents and the contents of the "Casa Scalabrini" website[5], we can identify the minimum requirements necessary to be included in the waiting lists and then access the interview to obtain the room. These requirements refer to the objective dimension (basic knowledge of the Italian language and economic entry), the priorities are also established on the basis of the urgent needs of the applicant (*i. e.,* precarious health conditions, presence of children, etc.). Only a monthly contribution of 50 euros to the structure is required. The stay in "Casa Scalabrini" can vary from 6 to 12 months, a period aimed at the construction of an autonomous life

project outside the "Casa" which includes both the inclusion in another house and the departure to other countries.

At the time of the visit of "Casa Scalabrini" (observation), this is developed on three levels, each of them with specific functions: on the ground floor the common areas (kitchen, dining room and a TV room) while on the other two floors find the lodgings (the so-called "casette") usually composed of three rooms with a shared bathroom and fridge, and the community meeting spaces (*i. e.,* the gym and a room used as a mosque).

All the residents of the house, predominantly young, live in "semi-autonomy" because the operators (sociologists, psychologists and social workers) and volunteers of the association "chaperone" them in their path to social and economic integration. "Chaperoning" actions consist of a series of activities aimed at personal development (first and foremost Italian language courses), professional training and the development of a civic awareness open to the host territory. The development of paths aimed at the formation of an active and civic citizenship is achieved through social commitment activities (for example, cleaning parks, protection and upgrading of public areas) in the perspective of an opening to the territory and a "return" to the local community.

The many actions implemented are useful for the "construction" of the integration process and they involve the educational, professional, civic and relational fields. The interesting aspect of this innovative action is the ability of all operators to act as "chaperones" to the acquisition of "practical" and "cultural" tools capable of bringing together, in a perspective of reciprocity, all the inhabitants of the community (migrants and natives). The relational dimension is a fundamental element for starting a process of integration and social cohesion. The peculiarities of the interaction/relationships established between the inhabitants of the house and the rest of the community, prefigure the perspective reversal of the migrant's role. The activation of path aimed at developing active citizenship allow to overcome the logic of welfare in which the migrant (the refugee or the asylum applicant) is a "passive" subject, to reach instead a support-oriented logic, where the migrant takes an

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5   For an overview of the activities and objectives of "Casa Scalabrini" see the website: http://scalabrini634.it/ while for the activities carried out by the Scalabrinian Agency for Development and Cooperation in Rome, see the website: http://www.scalabrini.net/it/roma.html.

"active" role and participates —together with the operators— in the construction of relational networks (social reflectiveness) with the rest of the community within a different context and far from their cultural model of origin. The process of "restitution" that permeates the activities of "Casa Scalabrini" is also manifested through the development of virtuous attitudes that have positive effects not only for the migrants who are about to undertake a path of integration, but also because these attitudes can be examples of good practices to be extended from micro-contexts to the rest of the surrounding area.

TO CONCLUDE

The rapid social transformations, particularly those happening in the Mediterranean that involve thousands of individuals in humanitarian emergency, lead us reconsider the role of sociology in reading social transformations and, more generally, global society. Today, while we witness the development of a new way of thinking that involves even the organizational structures of the major supranational institutions, sociology seems to have difficulties in reading these transformations, perhaps because it is still "perched" on excessive self-referentiality. It is precisely in this ever-changing context that sociology can take on a primary role as a science able to understand society as a whole. This leads researchers to redefine paradigms and methods so that knowledge is configured as a network experience resulting from confrontations and conflicts in a given space and time and in an integrated knowledge system. In this way, this system of knowledge is produced by the relationship/interaction between the researcher and the object of his investigation, between self and other, without any dependencies or hierarchical levels (as it happens for the operators of "Casa Scalabrini"). All this can be translated with a single term: the suffix "co-" (shared). In other words, to actualize this integrated system of knowledge we go beyond the various discipline-related viewpoints and combine our reflections through a disciplinary co-reflection in a perspective that not only consider *macro-social* phenom-

ena (related to social systems and their forms of organization), but include *micro-social* (relating to the individual/society relationship and social actions) and/or *meso-social* ones (relating to the relations between the social system and the world of life, the latter being understood as the set of meanings and representations of culture).

It is through systematic and methodologically well-founded observation —considered the main activity for overcoming Comte's "social physics"— that we can lay the foundations for an intervention that can involve changes/transformations both at individual and social level because it is oriented towards those innovative actions described above. It is therefore necessary to try and redefine the paradigms of sociology in a direction that takes due account of the various and different dimensions. It is unthinkable that sociological research does not integrate the contexts in which the interactions/actions of individuals take place. Furthermore, the research into why the manifestation of a phenomenon no longer refer only to the *cause(s)*, but to the *meaning(s)*.

In summary, if sociological knowledge accompanies forms of "relational reflexivity", it enables learning and activation processes (building of reference models and experimentation) that direct actions towards social innovation (Murray, Caulier-Grice, Mulgan, 2010), *i. e.* towards new ideas (products, services, and models) that meet social needs (more effectively than the alternatives) and at the same time create new social relationships: The above example of Social Housing is a concrete experience that follows these very guidelines.

It is, therefore, desirable that sociological knowledge —without denying the autonomy of sociology, and yet abandoning its excessive self-referentiality, or "sociologism", that limits all sociological knowledge within its reference frameworks and paradigms— becomes reflexive knowledge. In this way, it would promote both the construction of the mechanisms and processes to meet the needs of the subjects, and the initiatives that cannot spontaneously come into contact, to lay the (theoretical/empirical) foundations for interventions leading to positive transformations both at the individual and at the social level, that in turn can be translated into *savoir vivre.*

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