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Introduction

Enrica Chiappero

The global economic crisis has clearly shown the limits of capitalism model and of capitalist economies and the unsustainability of the current development system. It has also shown the failures of the economics discipline in understanding how modern economies really work. The aim of this book is to discuss if alternative economic models and systems are possible and how economic, environmental and welfare policies can be reshaped for addressing emerging needs and facing current challenges.

In the first part of the book, we will start by arguing against the *There Is No Alternative* (TINA) statement: using two examples we will testify the importance of politics and policy in shaping alternative patterns of development, sharing a common reading among them. The first example examines the “paradox of Europe”: the path of some relevant macroeconomic indicators suggests that even within the rather homogeneous European Union, different patterns are viable. Even when the institutional linkages become tighter and dominant theory would indicate spontaneous alignment. The second example refers to another regional integration mechanism, that of the ALBA-TCP (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America – People Trade Agreement), in order to raise some considerations on the structural features of the socio-economic system, which underlies political integration schemes. In our reading of these two case studies, we will try to shed a light on the multiple dimensions of reciprocal influence connecting the economic crisis and the legitimation crisis presently affecting democratic systems

in advanced economies. The current democratic downturn is a result of the increasing expansion of financial markets within monetary production economies, of the resulting disruptive impact on the real economy, and of the diminished role that democratic governments play within a globalized world, characterized by profound inequalities and radical technological changes.

We know institutional change is necessarily a societal change. While sometimes the formal change may come first – e.g. the banning of cigarettes in public places – and the practice comes second, in other cases new concepts, values and habits may be emerging among the people, which then claim for their formal regulation. In any case, real change will require the complex (re)alignment of cognitive frames (what people think), social networks (who thinks and does what, and with whom), and some specific rule that sets a boundary between the collective value that is to be protected (legitimate behaviour) and that excludes alternatives (illegitimate behaviour).

The second part of this book will address similar issues (i.e. how to rethink the development frame, how to reshape institutions, how to reconsidering the role of different actors, how to redesign policies) in the environmental and resource management.

Many companies and financial actors have managed to turn ‘green’ into a profitable business. However, the wide majority of the markets still struggles to understand whether and how to move in this direction, which is still perceived as unsure and risky. If the market doesn’t advance towards a sustainable re-thinking of its operations, is it possible for the public actor to move financial resources towards the desired sustainability goals? And if so, what should public institutions do, exactly?

Even though financial risks stemming from climate instability are quite clear, financial regulators have mainly operated on the micro-prudential side, without implementing bolder macro-prudential

measures, complementing voluntary market-led approaches with proactive low-carbon development strategies. This reluctance is mainly due to a strong reliance on risk evidence as a driver for action, and wide gaps in knowledge and methodologies.

An example of this sustainable approach to production sectors is the agro-ecology movement: starting from the French case, we will project its main characteristic on the Italian context, analysing the historical evolution of the concept and the many actors who contributed to its diffusion at Italian level. We will also try to understand why, no matter its potential, agro-ecology is still lacking in fulfilling the goal of reducing hunger at a global level: based on those issues, some gateways can be proposed to enable the transition towards “agro-ecology-based agri-food systems”, shedding light on the need to consider innovation in its broader meaning, including novel processes and methodologies, new products and tools, new educational degree programs characterized by a genuine interdisciplinary approach.

So, how could we summarize the main steps that led the profit sector embracing the sustainability issue integrating it into business practices? Along the path, three main areas are investigated to better understand the evolution of the business models at identity, function and relationship level. Criticalities are pointed out and contextualized at Italian level, looking at public institutions for building mutual trust amongst profit/non-profit/public actors populating the sustainability ecosystem of good-doers.

The wider frame suggested in these contributions must anyway consider the demand-supply imbalance generated by a growing population and an insufficient amount of for coping with the global needs: food supply is particularly exposed to such imbalances, due to conflicting land and crops multiple uses.

Corporate Social Responsibility can have a key role in managing this conflict, and commitments may be crucial for achieving a more

sustainable food production and consumption chain. The role of consumers is highlighted in such perspective, in particular within the circular economy model, considered as a viable approach to pursue a sustainable food supply chain meanwhile responding to the increasing needs of the growing world population. That will not work any obstacle out, unless communication will keep on increasing consumers' awareness on sustainability-related information about food production.

The third and last part of the volume is devoted to discuss how to redesign welfare policies in the light of the current demographic and social changes. Imbalances in welfare systems, and particularly health-related welfare, are strongly influenced by social determinants, whose roots are to be found outside welfare-related imbalances.

Solutions provided by policy interventions tend to be very specific, overlooking the many inter-linkages that underpin such needs: in order to adopt a more systemic view for targeting welfare issues, nexus thinking may provide a useful standpoint for applying holistic and participative policies. Lastly, a model for mainstreaming such a systemic approach is proposed, envisioning a methodological roadmap for the upcoming policy responses.

Scaling down to an example, one of the most urgent social phenomena in Europe, is the population ageing. Italy, heavily affected by this problem, appears to be at a crucial crossroad between relying on a welfare system that adapts to population changes or not, ultimately hindering the overall sustainability of welfare policies. By now, policies seem to be merely based on money transfer and social security schemes: such an approach, leaving to families the burden of caring, hits the so-called "sandwich generation", primarily made out of women aged 50-60. In this context, most families end up taking care of the elderly at home, either directly (through informal care) or indirectly (by hiring a caregiver or a helper) or both. Due to the interplay between high functional pressures and low public effort compared to other social policy sectors, a

Long Time Care policy approach could be a way of experimenting long-time perspective solutions, based on innovative instruments and introducing new actors (such as Third Sector) in the policy arena, building up multi-stakeholder networks between them and local public institutions. Social Innovation, brought at the light by this kind of approach, can be a viable and, in perspective, innovative new solution.