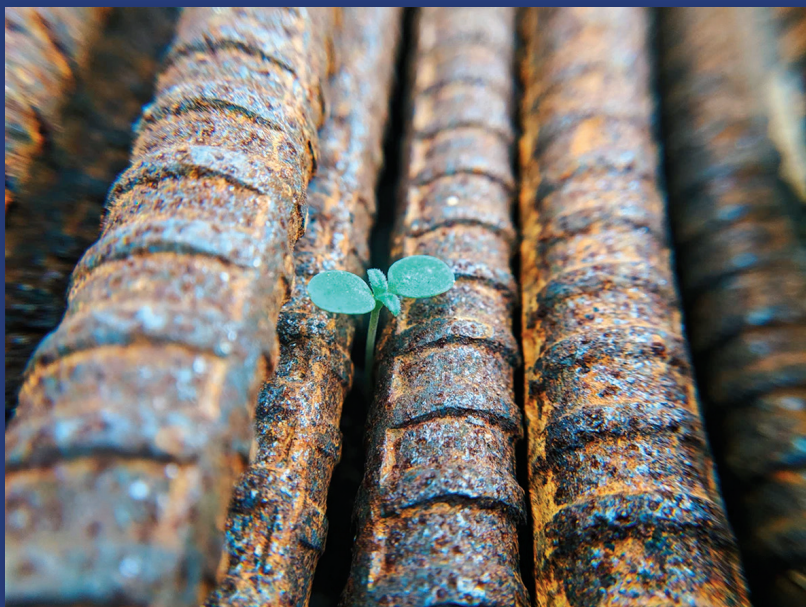


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THE FUTURE OF HOPE



Edited by Renata Salvarani

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Scientific Committee of the three years research project “The Future of Hope. An Interdisciplinary Dialogue” promoted by the CeFI, Center for Integral Formation of UER, Università Europea di Roma in cooperation with FUCE, European Federation of Catholic Universities (2023-2025):

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PREFACE

This volume collects the proceedings of the *Conference* entitled “*The Future of Hope: an Interdisciplinary Dialogue*”, promoted by the Centre for Integral Formation of the European University of Rome and held in Brussels in November 2024. This *Conference* represents the second stage of an interdisciplinary research project conceived by Prof. Guido Traversa, and inspired by the Papal Bull of Indiction of the Jubilee Year 2025, whose central theme is Hope.

This collection of essays reflects the methodological approach that characterizes the Integral Formation of the European University of Rome: the dialogue among disciplines as an essential tool for addressing the complexity of reality and offering humankind – defined as *homo viator* in the Jubilee’s papal Bull – new keys to interpret and engage with life. Multi-disciplinarity here is not understood as a mere juxtaposition of different competencies, but rather as an authentic conversation among disciplines that, while preserving their specific identities, mutually enrich one another in the pursuit of a deeper understanding of human and social phenomena.

Hope is presented as a privileged hermeneutical category for interpreting the challenges and opportunities of our time. This research project aims to explore crucial themes at the very foundations of the contemporary human condition, including: the dialogue between theology and philosophy in conceptualizing hope, the ethical implications of artificial intelligence, migration and social integration, prospects for global peace, university innovation, and inclusive education.

This second year of *The Future of Hope* project confirms the fruitfulness of an approach that combines scientific rigor with openness to dialogue, analytical depth with breadth of vision, and critical reflection on

the present with responsible planning for the future. An important goal has also been achieved: establishing a dialogue between the world of academia and the world of politics, bringing together university scholars and members of the European Parliament. The essays included in this volume provide readers with tools for understanding and reflection, to continue a research journey which, in its third and final year, aims to outline concrete perspectives for action and commitment.

In publishing the proceedings of this *Conference*, we wish to extend special thanks to Team Service, represented by its President Dr. Emilio Innocenzi, and to Envision, represented by its President Eng. Matteo Gattola, whose generous contributions made possible, respectively, the organization of the *Conference* and the publication of these proceedings. We also thank Dr. Marina Bresciani and the Italian School Committee in Brussels for their valuable and expert support in organizing the event.

In conclusion, Hope is not only a virtue or a complex and seemingly abstract concept that crosses various dimensions of human experience, but becomes a subject of study and a key to understand reality. Hope, as taught by the Christian tradition that inspires our University, is to *hope against all hope*: the ability to perceive possibilities for truth and goodness even in the most complex and contradictory situations.

FR. ENRICO TRONO, LC
Director of the Centre for Integral Formation
European University of Rome

INTRODUCING HOPE: WORDS, DEFINITIONS, ROOTS

RENATA SALVARANI

In common sense, Hope can be defined as a desire of some good, accompanied with at least a slight expectation of obtaining it, or a belief that it is obtainable.

A double dimension characterizes this concept: Hope always is oriented in a positive attitude, and gives pleasure or joy; whereas wish and desire may produce or be accompanied with pain and anxiety¹.

Hope – as well as the corresponding words in different modern European languages –, carries with it the meaning of Hebrew תִּקְוָה (tikva), expectation, and יָחַל (yachal), to wait.

It includes also the meanings of the greek ἐλπίς, expectation of good, anticipation of what of positive is forthcoming².

The term, therefore, broadens to include the concepts of future, attitude, propensity, scenario, horizon, perspective.

It generally coincides with a glimpse oriented towards the future.

This stratification of nuances and differences corresponds to the intertwining of contributions that have converged in the semantic structures of the continent: definitions of Hope, along the thousand-year pathway of European and Mediterranean cultures, imply a plurality of references, as well as an internal dialectic, some semantic oppositions, and sometimes a certain level of ambiguity.

A primary implication is the relationship with time, and secondly, by consequence, with memory.

¹ Treccani Enciclopedia Italiana.

² Encyclopedia of the Bible <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/encyclopedia-of-the-bible/Hope>.

Bridging past and future, the term refers to a dynamic dimension.

It is no coincidence that the most extensive and complex reflections on its implicit contradictions were developed during periods of crisis, conflict and irreversible change.

The twentieth century, with its two world wars and its troubled final years, saw a succession of lofty interpretations of this theme, which expanded to include a comprehensive meditation on the entire human destiny.

These readings give voice to a wide spectrum of differences and aporias, which derive from the different souls present in Western culture as a whole and from their historical and scriptural origins.

Among the analyses that remain most anchored to the biblical matrix, Max Scheler's theory of the time-consciousness of past, present and future anchors the idea of hope into the life of the communities, emphasizing both centrality of the communities and the foundational role of narratives of common events.

In the same circular perspective, Yosef Hayim Hierushalmi points out that "memory of the past is incomplete without its natural complement: hope for the future". In this sense, in the biblical story the Mount Sinai and Exodus become iconic paradigms of the double dimension of Hope.

David Hartman locates the sources of Hope in the memories of events, distinguishing two types of Hope: the courage to bear human responsibility even within contexts of uncertainty. This Hope stams from the revelation at Sinai, which enhance our capacity to act; secondly, radical hope, that is a mode of anticipation, a faith that ultimately redemption will come, based on the remembrance of Israel's exodic redemption. The exodus experience through pain and doubt becomes the perennial form of future liberation. Hartman adds that the wilderness of the desert, during the exodus march is a reminder of human vulnerability to idolatry, fearfulness, uncertainty.

A similar deep dialectic is evident also in the texts of pope John Paul 2nd, starting from the address speech to the Italian young people in 1978³. Also the complex dialogue of the interview "crossing the threshold of

³ Discorso di Giovanni Paolo II alla Gioventù italiana, mercoledì, 8 novembre 1978 https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1978/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19781108_giovani.html#:~:text=Il%20Papa%20vuole%20bene%20a%20tutti%2C%20ad%20ogni,l%E2%80%99Apostolo%20pi%C3%B9%20giovane%2C%20aveva%20fatto%20il%20suo%20prediletto.

Hope” is structured around the interactions between the Hope announced in the Gospels and the drama of History⁴.

Do the manifestations of evil, wars, exterminations and divisions that repeatedly mark humanity’s path through time, involving the Church itself, nullify the idea of a Hope that can guide human action? What is the basis for the “scandal and mystery” of a faith that nourishes awareness of the future that awaits humanity, within, through and beyond the upheavals and tribulations of the present?

We can assume that the whole European thought is marked by this double dimension.

This dialectic has given rise to various interpretations that have fragmented the picture and reduced the horizon of the future to subjective and relative dimensions.

Such complexity of stratifications requires an analytical reading, both historically and from a contemporary perspective, broadening the view to the various implications of Hope and the semantic richness that this word conveys. This need gave rise to a **three-year “journey”** of conferences and study days on the theme of Hope promoted and organized by UER, Università Europea di Roma from 2023 to the Catholic Jubilee Year.

Dozens of scholars and researchers from Italian, European and non-European universities were involved. Based on their disciplinary expertise, they worked and discussed to define the future our society is facing, to identify models of intervention, and to envisage scenarios in which universities – and Christian-inspired universities in particular – can make a significant contribution.

The conference activities highlighted the practical **implications of Hope in the economic and legal fields**, emphasizing the concrete and tangible social repercussions of a specific mode of “action” – *agere sequitur esse* – based on the perspectives that will emerge from this three-year path of studies and reflections.

The **scientific objective** is to define the **different ideas of Hope** that emerged in the path of European culture, including also the concepts of: future, progress, innovation, scenario, projection, models of future, expectation, desire, salvation.

On this basis, any declination within the different disciplinary areas has been outlined.

⁴ First edition Giovanni Paolo II - Vittorio Messori, *Varcare la soglia della speranza*, Milano (Oscar Bestsellers, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore) 1995, p. 247.

What needs for Hope and of future arise in the different scientific areas? What answers and what readings of the future are elaborated in the individual disciplines? What idea of the human being and society is emerging?

The research project has been **promoted in view of the Jubilee of 2025**, dedicated the theme of Hope, and is focused on the Homo Viator and on the contemporary walking society, assuming that the human condition is based on change and that the future is an open challenge.

The program have been inserted in the plan of initiatives of **CRUI** (Conference of Rectors of Italian Universities) for the Jubilee Year and is officially participated by **Fuce** (European Federation of Catholic Universities), **FIUC** (Fédération Internationale des Universités Catholiques), and **RIU** (Red Internacional de Universidades Regnum Christi).

Doctoral students and undergraduates actively participated; seminars and open meetings were organised, including a forum with legislators and policy makers at COMECE, the association of European Episcopal Conferences. A series of dialogues will be held between members of the European Parliament, leaders of EU institutions, and professors and researchers involved in the project's working groups.

Key topics included education, migration and European cultures, ethics and artificial intelligence, university and innovation, peacebuilding, and cultural processes.

This volume of studies stems from the need to record such a process of reflection, which took the form of discussions, debates and studies.

It serves as a tool for raising awareness of the importance of thinking of ourselves as a community looking to the future and provides a basis for further theoretical developments, the starting point for a broader debate.

It brings together a series of systematic contributions resulting from the project, most of which were presented during the symposium held in Brussels from 19 to 21 November 2024.

It is divided into thematic sections that reflect the structure of the working groups and the developments in the discussions, from the perspective of both academic research and public engagement:

Theoretical perspectives, che sviluppa il quadro filosofico e antropologico di riferimento, definisce la terminologia e delinea sfide ermeneutiche e critiche che si aprono intorno al tema della Speranza;

New instruments for a critical approach, mette a fuoco le potenzialità offerte dalle innovazioni tecnologiche e la complessità dei cambiamenti etici, sociali e culturali da esse indotti;

Hoping beyond divisions and clashes considera i motivi di tensione e di scontro all'interno e all'esterno della società europea evidenziando che, sia pure nella difficoltà delle situazioni, sono in atto azioni che favoriscono la coesione sociale, la cura dell'altro, la progettazione di un futuro condiviso;

Strategies towards resources and fairness affronta il tema della sostenibilità intesa come equità e gestione etica del creato;

Classical roots for new anthropological visions propone le Humanities come base per declinare nel futuro gli elementi di speranza già presenti nella cultura europea, fondata sui principi dell'Umanesimo;

Looking forward the new generations pone l'accento sulla prospettiva educativa considerata come asse portante per la creazione del futuro e per lo sviluppo di un'attitudine culturale aperta alla speranza;

Acting in a world in labour declina modalità di operare concretamente sul piano educativo descrivendo alcuni progetti emblematici.

The theme of Hope is thus embodied within European society, rooted in culture, alive and capable of emerging even in problematic situations. It takes shape on three different levels:

1 the methodological framework and critical logical tools for addressing and understanding the theme, both within contemporary interpretative categories and in the main historical phases of the development of Western culture; Concepts of human being and humankind; Christian anthropology and its elements across different cultures; Ideas of human destiny and happiness; Humanism and post-Humanism;

2 identification of the main contemporary challenges that universities and European thought are called upon to address; these require specific skills and contributions and only if addressed in their complexity can they become positive ground for openness to the future and opportunities to develop reasons for hope; Knowledge, science and building the future – The role of sciences in contemporary society; Visions of the future inspiring scientific research; Elements of Hope in the knowledge and research professions; Hope and Education visions;

3 discovery and codification of practical interventions that demonstrate how the future can be planned in a positive way, even within the difficulties of a complex world undergoing epochal change; projects and experiences carried out in different countries, in urban societies, in research, in schools and in healthcare institutions are proposed as examples that can become models of intervention to be applied in situations to promote the emergence of a more equitable and integrated society.

The summaries of such complexity, albeit partial, highlight a picture of knowledge that is open to the future and oriented towards highlighting positive aspects of a society in the making, laying the foundations for further developments, both in terms of research and in terms of the public social commitment of universities.

SECTION I

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

PHILOSOPHY: BETWEEN MEMORY AND VISION OF FUTURE

GUIDO TRAVERSA

Abstract

This philosophical contribute explores the dynamic relationship between potentiality and actuality, proposing finality as a key to understanding reality across time. Hope expresses ontological correlation of past, present, and future, basing on analogical unity. Human identity and freedom are rooted in the interplay of necessity and responsibility. Action, as both individual and collective, requires an epistemology tied to ethics and history. Memory can be interpreted as exercise of Hope itself. Also technological innovation and spiritual continuity are unified through a critique of understanding. Ultimately, by consequence, the common good emerges as a cosmopolitan goal rooted in responsible historical action.

Keywords: Hope, Memory, Work of memory, Historical responsibility, Ethic of memory

1. Metaphysics: power and act

Let's start with a metaphysical consideration: once power is translated into act, can it maintain itself as power? Maintain itself as power not only in relation to the new acts that can derive from it, but also in that very act that it has already determined? Can it maintain itself as power in itself, as "past", in the "present" of the act, and, in this same present act, exhibit itself as propensity, as "future"?

If the answers to these questions can be positive, by carefully and rigorously affirming "yes", then, in the being present of a determined act, its own power would be maintained as "propensity".

The dynamic category that, if well "used", can allow for an argumentative line capable of answering those questions with a yes is finality.

Conformity to an end, understood in a non-causal-mechanical way, leads thought to practice the art of grasping similarities and dissimilarities: to seek and invent real analogies. Analogies that do not show themselves, if the answer to those questions can be a “yes”, only by grasping them in the relations between different acts or entities, but ontologically even within the individual identity of a single act or a single entity. From this it follows that the intrinsic power of the identity of an individual remains power even in the present of this same singularity, in that, as power, it shows the finality, the analogies, that constitute that identity in itself.

Past, present and future thus show their ontological correlation and not only as exhibited by the linearity of time. In this way each of the three dimensions of time is removed from the “museum” hypostatization: of the past in a given present, as “representation”, of the future as a place of the indistinct and of the present as the here and now.

2. *Anthropology: Individual and Collective Action*

Agere sequitur esse: and if action is not erased in being, as if it were an implicit emanation of it, and if being is not formed from action, as its indistinct and presupposed accidentality, then it is right to answer “yes” to the metaphysical questions regarding the relationship between potentiality and act. Identity carries within itself the distinction: “it is” and at the same time it can become freely, following that modality of necessity that is not “an already given”, but can be cultivated as the soil of what follows from an existence without predetermining it. It is the real distinction that, constituting the ontological marrow of individual and collective identity, guarantees the possibility of freedom, of that free action that remembers the past, that recognizes the present, that awaits the fullness of the future.

But it is not enough to be able to answer “yes” to those questions from which we started: it is necessary to elaborate an epistemology of action, of ethics, of the human sciences in order to be able to correspond to a free purpose, endowed with meaning as a constantly active power. Answering “yes” must be able to be translated into the form of active responsibility towards oneself, towards the human race, as one’s own community of belonging, towards History and, perhaps even more, towards the future, not as a void to be filled ahead of time, but to which to tend with one’s own hi-

story: recounting the past, discovering it, as if it were itself a hope to which to give, once again, trust and concrete life.

The present can become a “sieve” to make the past and the future not confused but mutually analogous, which can meet, not infrequently, in the non-Euclidean time of the instant, grasped by individual identity and perhaps even more so by community identity, if only because daily life itself is a common, collective root, to which one belongs, in which one participates: the *participatio* is the ontological dimension of the *recta* analogia to be invent both between things and in each of them.

Necessity and responsibility, as ontological structures of human freedom, are the threads of the sieve frame, which makes memory and expectation intimate, despite appearances. Of course: we distinguish the past from the future at every moment, but if we do not arm them against each other, then the task is that of the translator of the already given into the “*dabile*,” into an “as if” that even makes the ircocervus an object of zoological research, even if only to smile about it, politely, at conferences, and then, trained by the ircocervus, to give reason to a new class of belonging, that of the platypus, to give science of the “new” and of its being in the history of science and, consequently, in the history of humanity.

The task for the human being, for his action, is like the “task of the translator”: to exhibit the analogies, the propensities, the dispositions of human reality, of its History, to exhibit them in the “tending towards”, making History experienced not as a museum, but as an archaeological site, capable of impressing, in a non-Euclidean way, on the unity of place, action and time a twist aimed at discovering the not yet given in the already given: the permanence of power in being already act.

3. A “critique of understanding” as a “common root” of technological innovation and spiritual permanence: the place of memory

“The usefulness of history for life”, archaeology as a place to “remember the immemorial”, are not more or less successful metaphors, but experiences to which one can become familiar: a slow but constant *habitus* leads the eye and the ear to the permanent “excavation” in the history to which one belongs, to then discover stories belonging to all of humanity. The flow of time lives off all the multiple cultural differences, but, as a non-indifferent and indistinct temporal flow in human space, it also performs the

“task of the translator”: it sifts, harmoniously distinguishes the past from the present, assuming, as a unit of measurement, the virtuous beauty of the future, assuming that it can still be given to us as a sense of orientation and not only as a flow as such.

4. *Of the observer who, without any personal interest, shows, in a public way, an enthusiasm for a historical fact that shows the direction “towards the best for the human race”: the common good*

Whoever observes history, without haste, with the *habitus* of responsible understanding, digs into the present using given tools, and seeks new tools to find, precisely, the new. Technique is the twin of action. Human intelligence has always made use of artificiality, artificial intelligence, if *intelligere*, that is if it reads into something determined, does not damage the fabric of things, indeed it can support it, with delicacy, discovering as yet unknown similarities that were waiting for a proper name and a place in the yet to be given that is the future.

The protection of the territory, both in the physical sense, the land, and in the sense of belonging to a community, to its values, is a form of ethical and political responsibility understood as not a simple relationship based on reciprocity: one becomes responsible also towards those who may not be reciprocally responsible, the parent is responsible towards his children, the politician towards the citizens, humanity towards future generations. Thus, an empirical and at the same time formal dimension (of legal protections) opens up for the implementation of the “common good”, understood as collective property to be maintained and developed as the purpose of historical action and a formal-legal evaluation criterion of the present. The common good, from a horizon of meaning, can become a concrete “cosmopolitan point of view”.

The challenges of the new anthropologies, if they are truly anthropological, in the sense of the *logos* of *antropos*, are challenges without winners and losers: the history of challenges becomes a duel, without bloodshed, between memory and expectation, between new technologies, anthropology and archaeology. Archaeology is the public place from which the observer who feels the responsibility of understanding the past, as an active and living power, not a museum, of what has been that, even just because it is “excavated”, “invented”, becomes a life experience, a narrative that ex-

plains with rigor what the past, its memory, asks us to bring to completion.

The responsibility of the historian, the archaeologist, the scientist of new technologies, is the power that maintains in potential every act endowed with meaning and history for the human race and for its transcendent action, for the “human ethos of transcendence”.

The Euclidean geometry of the museum is not to be denied, but to be inscribed, as a particular case, in the non-Euclidean complexion of “place, time and action” that occurs in the intimate connection between technology and archaeology: a place reappears with the arts that translate it into the future.

And mankind, for a while, can take a breather outside the museum: “and they returned to see the stars again.”

AN APOLOGETICS OF HOPE IN THE 21ST CENTURY: REREADING 1 PETER 3:15 IN A POSTMODERN WORLD

DAVID S. KOONCE

Abstract

This contribution explores the evolving role of Christian apologetics in the post-modern era, focusing on the interplay between apologetics, hope, and the interpretation of 1 Peter 3:15. It addresses the disassociation of modern apologetics from hope, which has led to a crisis of both concepts. Through historical and theological analysis, the chapter examines the development of apologetics from early Christianity to modern times, highlighting the need to integrate hope into apologetic discourse. Drawing on the works of St. Thomas Aquinas and other theological sources, it proposes a renewed apologetics that includes compelling narratives and a systematic theology of hope. This approach aligns with Pope Francis's call for a creative apologetics that engages with contemporary challenges. The research suggests that a new apologetics of hope can effectively respond to postmodern skepticism, fostering deeper engagement with faith and addressing the spiritual and existential concerns of the 21st century.

Keywords: apologetics; hope; postmodernity; 1 Peter 3:15; new evangelization.

My topic, *An apologetics of hope in the 21st century: rereading 1 Peter 3:15 in a postmodern world*, deals with four interlocking concerns and their mutual interactions. The four concerns, simply put, are (1) the science of apologetics, (2) the concept of hope, (3) the context of postmodernity, and (4) the message of 1 Peter 3:15. Each of these concerns on its own requires explanation; when they interact, however, they modify each other mutually, and therefore, my exposition of these interconnected ideas cannot simply be linear. I will take as my starting and end point the message of 1 Peter 3:15, cycling my way through the other three concerns to come back to

a contemporary rereading and reapplication of 1 Peter 3:15 in which the meanings of apologetics, hope, and postmodernity are mutually attuned.

1. *1 Peter 3:15 as the Scriptural basis for apologetics.*

From the earliest centuries of Christianity, 1 Peter 3:15 has provided a stimulus for Christian interaction with the wider culture. The apostle's letter provides a clear call to action: "Always be ready to give an explanation (ἀπολογία, *apologian*) to anyone who asks you for a reason (λόγον, *logon*) for your hope (ἐλπίδος, *elpidos*)"¹. The Greek word ἀπολογία (*apologia*) in both profane and Biblical usage often refers to a formal defense in a court of law². The context of 1 Peter 3:15, however, does not suggest the Christians to whom the apostle was writing were undergoing a legal persecution. Rather, the inspired author takes up anew the rich biblical theme of the suffering of the righteous, in the light of the crucified and risen Jesus³. The Christians the author addresses were to follow in the footsteps of Christ (3:18). When facing insults, they were to return a blessing (3:9); they were "suffering because of righteousness" yet should not be afraid or terrified (3:14). The suffering to which the apostle refers seems to be primarily the moral anguish of people who were maligned or defamed (3:16). Nothing in this context, however, suggests formal legal persecution. Therefore, the apostle's encouragement to give an *apologia* to anyone who asks a reason for Christian hope should be read taking into account a wider range of meanings of *apologia* than merely its technical sense as a legal defense. Thus, translations that favor words such as "explanation" or "account" probably offer the most apt rendering of the concept.

Whatever the apostle's intended meaning of this technical legal term in non-technical context, the text of 1 Peter 3:15 has provided historical impetus to at least four different Christian responses. The first three may

¹ *New American Bible*, The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC 2011 Revised Edition, 1 Pe 3:15.

² For biblical examples, see especially Acts 22:1 and Acts 25:16. Two passages from Philippians, 1:7 and 1:16, may also be included in this context, though the use of ἀπολογία in that context may suggest a wider meaning.

³ Cf. J.B. GREEN, *1 Peter*, The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary, William B Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 2007, pp. 110-118. It is noteworthy that Joel B. Green's commentary on the pericope of 1 Peter 3:13-17 is focused so exclusively on the theme of suffering that he omits any detailed exegesis of verse 15.

be identified by a terminological distinction that is useful but rarely observed⁴. In the first place, we may speak of *apology* as a basic attitude or readiness that all Christians should have, to give an account of Christian hope in both formal and informal contexts, whether in academic debates or with friends enjoying a mug of beer⁵. The second response can be identified with term *apologies*, referring to a specific literary genre in which the account of Christian hope moves from the sphere of daily life to the written page. The production of apologetic literature within Christian circles first occurred very early on in the history of Christianity. The first complete examples of apologetic literature date from the second century A.D. Broadly speaking, apologetic literature includes two types of works. Some were written in the form of dialogues, as a Christian variation of the philosophical and rhetorical literary traditions of late antiquity. Others were specifically titled as apologies, directed to important individuals (usually civil authorities) as a written response to specific attacks against Christianity in particular contexts⁶. The third response is that of Christian *apologetics*, by which I refer to a scientific and systematic defense of Christian faith. Although this third approach produced its own literature, its scope was not literary or rhetorical, but scientific, and its arguments were intended to have universal validity. Herein lies the distinction between literary apologies and scientific apologetics: apologies responded to particular occasions whereas apologetics aimed to provide a universal system of argumentation. The emergence of scientific apologetics, however, did not take place in a historical vacuum. The fourth and final response is that of theology itself which, independently of any adversary, seeks to understand the reasons for Christian hope.

My focus, however, is on the third response, Christian apologetics. During the early modern period, we find a transition from literary apologies to full-fledged attempts at scientific apologetics⁷. This new science sought

⁴ For the three-fold classification of apologetics as attitude or behavior, as a literary genre, and as a scientific discipline, see: G. LORIZIO, *Teologia fondamentale in La teologia del XX secolo: Un bilancio*, edited by G. Canobbio-P. Coda, Città nuova, Roma, 2003, p. 391.

⁵ E. BOSETTI, *Apologia*, in *Dictionary of fundamental theology*, edited by R. Latourelle-R. Fisichella, Crossroad, New York 1994, p. 40b.

⁶ Cf. W. GEERLINGS, *Apologetica e teologia fondamentale nella patristica*, in, *Corso di teologia fondamentale. IV. Trattato di gnoseologia teologica*, edited by W. Kern- H. J. Pottmeyer-M. Seckler, Queriniana, Brescia 1990, pp. 381-383.

⁷ Certain Medieval works, such as Thomas Aquinas's *Summa contra Gentiles* contributed valuable material for later apologetics. Nonetheless, in the Medieval period, apologetics

to provide universally valid reasons to three interlocking questions: why should I be a Catholic? Why should I be a Christian? Why should I believe in any religion whatsoever? The science of apologetics sought to build an argument for Christian faith from the ground up. Against atheism, apologetics offered a demonstration of the reasonableness of religion; against Deism, apologetics demonstrated the reasonableness of Christianity; lastly, in its Catholic version, argued against Protestantism for the reasonableness of holding to the Catholic faith within the Catholic church. Apologetics, in its structure, themes, and its rational approach to defending and proposing the Catholic faith, was a thoroughly modern response to typically modern concerns⁸. Along the way, the entire endeavor of apologetics became much more focused on reasons for *belief*, and more specifically, with belief in this or that doctrine, with a correlative disassociation from Christian *hope*, as originally proposed in 1 Peter 3:15. If apologetics, then, is no longer about hope, then where does hope fit into the Christian vision?

2. *The Theology of Hope: two ways of considering hope according to the example of St. Thomas Aquinas*

The historical development of the science of apologetics in the modern period led to a progressive disassociation from hope and correlative fixation on faith as the object and goal of apologetics. Hope was not lost, however; it was simply reassigned to the realm of theology, where, following the example of St. Thomas Aquinas, it was often considered under one of two headings. First, hope could be analyzed as a human passion, namely, something that happens in us as a response to a possible good that we perceive but do not yet possess⁹. Second, hope could be considered as

was not yet conceived as a fully distinct branch of theology. Furthermore, the socio-cultural conditions in Christian Europe provided few occasions for the kind of apologetic literature prevalent in the patristic period. See A. DULLES, *A history of apologetics*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco (Calif.) 2005, 91-144; G. LARCHER, *Modelli di problematica teologico-fondamentale nel medioevo*, in *Corso di teologia fondamentale*, cit. IV, pp. 396-412; A. SABETTA, *Un'idea di teologia fondamentale tra storia e modelli*, Studium Edizioni, Roma 2017, pp. 104-156.

⁸ Cf. J. REIKERSTORFER, *Modelli teologico-fondamentali nell'era moderna*, in *Corso di teologia fondamentale*, cit., IV, pp. 413-419; A. SABETTA, *op. cit.*, pp. 171-176; A. DULLES, *op. cit.*, pp. 205-208; R. LATOURELLE, *Fundamental theology: I. History and specific character*, in *Dictionary of fundamental theology*, cit., p. 324b

⁹ Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q.22, a.1, c.; q.40, a.1, c.

a theological virtue¹⁰. As a virtue, hope is seen as a good operative habit; in other words, it is something that we actively do both consciously and habitually¹¹. Insofar as it is a theological virtue, hope is virtue that comes from God and is oriented back to God¹². These two distinct ways of considering hope, as both a human passion and a theological virtue, illustrate the Catholic doctrine of elevating grace, whereby grace does not take away nature but perfects it (*gratia non tollit naturam sed perficit*)¹³. Like simple human hope, theological hope has as its object a good which is perceived but not present. It differs from simple human hope, insofar as the good of theological hope is unseen (cf. Heb 11:1) and is apprehended only by faith.

3. *The project of modernity and the advent of secular hope*

After having examined briefly the concepts of apologetics and hope, I now turn my attention to modernity, as the precursor and ground for understanding our postmodern context. In this section, I intend to illustrate the ways in which modernity shaped the apologetic endeavor and reshaped the concept of hope. On this basis, it will be clearer that the collapse of modernity and the shift into postmodernity brings with it new understandings of both apologetics and the role of Christian hope.

The broad tradition of Catholic theology, as represented by Thomas Aquinas, saw in hope both a passion embedded in human nature tending to the goods proportioned to that nature, and a theological virtue, whereby that same human nature was elevated by grace to tend towards a good beyond the wildest dreams of human nature. The dawn of modernity, however, brought with it the advent of a purely secular hope – to paraphrase Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) hope within the bounds of bare reason¹⁴. At first sight, this may seem like a restriction of hope to the merely terrestrial plane, eliminating any reference to a transcendent, supernatural goal of

¹⁰ Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q.17, a.1, c.

¹¹ Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q.55.

¹² Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q.62, a.1, c.

¹³ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Scriptum super Sententiis*, lib.2, d.9, q.1, a.8, arg.3. See also THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q.17, a.1, c.

¹⁴ The allusion, of course is to Kant's 1793 work *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* (German original: *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*, Nicolovius, 1793).

human life. The initial effect of secular reason on hope, on the contrary, produced a surprising and paradoxical result. Some of the more enthusiastic partisans of the Enlightenment project went to the extreme of portraying reason as a goddess¹⁵. Since divinized Reason knows no bound, unbounded reason could scarcely bind hope within its own non-existent boundaries. Secular hope, within its own sphere, seemed limitless.

Secular hope was not only allied with secular reason but also with the secular imagination. Modernity, enamored of its impressive achievements in both the physical sciences and in technological advancements, was convinced that it held the key for unending human improvement. Who needs heaven, when science can promise to create heaven on earth? The undeniable progress of modern times unfortunately spawned an insidious offspring, namely, the myth of progress, whose mantra was best expressed by the French psychologist Émile Coué de la Châtaigneraie (1857-1926): «Every day in every way, its getting better and better»¹⁶. The myth of progress penetrated and inspired the later developments of Modern thought. Hegel saw progress as the necessary unfolding of the Absolute Spirit, while Karl Marx thought he could trace the laws of human progress in materialist framework. Both thinkers, in distinct ways, represent the *Zeitgeist* of Modernity's secular hope.

In the 20th century, however, the promise of secular hope came crashing down, producing a three-fold crisis affecting modernity, hope, and apologetics.

4. *Postmodernity and the threefold crisis of modernity, apologetics, and hope.*

I now turn my attention to postmodernity, which I interpret as a reaction to a threefold crisis affecting modernity itself, apologetics, and hope.

While it is not easy to trace the birth of the postmodern mindset in the Western World, I would like to mention three major world events that

¹⁵ Cf. M. LAWLOR, *Reason, Cult of Goddess of* in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Catholic University of America, Washington DC, 1967, XII, p. 118b.

¹⁶ This formulation is the singer and songwriter John Lennon's paraphrase of Coué in the song *Beautiful Boy*. Coué's original expression was «Tous les jours à tous points de vue je vais de mieux en mieux» (Every day, in every respect, I am getting better and better). For the English translation of Coué's seminal work, see E. COUÉ, *Self Mastery through Conscious Autosuggestion*, American Library Service, New York, 1922, p. 23

illustrate the collapse of Modernity and its secular hopes¹⁷. Whether these events caused the collapse, or were symptoms of the existing crisis, I am unable to say. What seems clear, however, is that the first major crisis of the idea of Modernity can be pinpointed to 1914 and the outbreak of what we now call World War I. At the time, however, it was hailed as “The Great War” or “The War to End all Wars”¹⁸. The ideology of Modernity naively believed that the War was necessary to usher in a new age of peace, prosperity and progress¹⁹. This naiveté is marvelously portrayed in the biographical film *Tolkien* (2019); in a poignant scene in the middle of the movie Tolkien’s friends and classmates at Oxford break out into jubilation when Great Britain’s entry into the War is announced. They celebrated like merry fools on the lawns of Oxford. The viewer, however, cannot help but be appalled, since from start to finish the film is haunted by the horrors of the battlefield.

Europe would quickly discover that there was nothing “great” about war, and the sequel would show that the conflict did anything but put an end to all wars. If World War I shook the foundation of Modernity’s optimism to its roots, World War II should have delivered the definitive deathblow to Modernity. From mass extermination camps to the systematic bombing of civilian populations, ending with the twin tragedies of Hiroshima and

¹⁷ The transferal of the word “postmodern” from art criticism to philosophy and sociology is generally attributed to the influential book of JEAN-FRANÇOIS LYOTARD, *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir*, Minuit, Paris, 1979 (English translation *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, translation from the French by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1984). Lyotard, however, is merely identifying a tendency already present in society. For a discussion of various proposed readings of the end of modernism and the birth of postmodernism, see G.E. VEITH, JR., *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture*, Crossway Books, Wheaton 1994, pp. 38-46.

¹⁸ The expression “The war to end all wars” is a popular variant of phrase derived from H.G. WELLS, *The War That Will End War*, Frank and Cecil Palmer, London 1814. Wells, however, had no Romantic illusions about the war. He writes: «For this is now a war for peace...It aims at a settlement that shall stop this sort of thing for ever...This, the greatest of all wars, is not just another war – it is the last war!...we face these horrors to make an end of them», *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12.

¹⁹ The chief spokesperson for this view was the German general and military strategist Friedrich von Bernhardi, who argued in 1912 that «War is a biological necessity of the first importance, a regulative element in the life of mankind which cannot be dispensed with, since without it an unhealthy development will follow, which excludes every advancement of the race, and therefore all real civilization». F. VON BERNHARDI, *Germany and the Next War*, translated by Allen H. Powles, Longmans, Green, and Co., New York 1914.p. 18.

Nagasaki giving birth to the atomic age, the Second World War illustrated that humanity's scientific prowess and technological progress did not always tend to what is better for humanity. The myth of progress should have died altogether under the ashes of Hiroshima and Nagasaki²⁰.

Yet, one of World War II's victors seemed to carry the hopes of Modernity itself. The Soviet Union claimed the mantle of Marxism, and with it, the very project of creating a rationally constructed utopia²¹. Although the Soviet dream was a nightmare for many who lived inside it, it nevertheless captured the thoroughly Modern imagination of many among Western intelligentsia²². The illusion that state-run Marxism could save Modern rationality came crashing down with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union itself in 1991, effectively ending the Cold War that had dominated geopolitics since the 1950's.

The three major events just mentioned – World War I, World War II, and the collapse of the Soviet bloc – symbolized and revealed the underlying failures of the Modern enterprise. Each of the three crises exposed the fatal flaw in Modernity's blind faith in the myth of progress under the direction of deified universal reason. The Twentieth Century showed the world the dark side of Modernity, in which the myth of progress was used to justify war, genocide, and the systematic oppression of nations and peo-

²⁰ «What is beyond dispute is that the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki opened a new era in the history of humanity. In the twisted path of modernity, the bitter irony of the second half of the twentieth century was that it was a triumph of "theoretical reason" in scientific technological discoveries, including that of atomic energy, but a defeat of "practical reason". Neither the voice of moral conscience nor existing democratic institutions proved strong enough to prevent the use of this most powerful means for an inhumane end. In the Promethean-like challenge of God, Man went too far and lost his immortality». E. DEMENCHONOK, *Introduction: Philosophy after Hiroshima: From Power Politics to the Ethics of Nonviolence and Co-Responsibility* in «The American Journal of Economics and Sociology» LXVIII/1, 2009, pp. 22.

²¹ "The trust in human reason and the rejection of the supernatural took many forms, but nowhere did the modernistic impulse reach further or more ambitiously than in the invention of the Marxist state." G.E. VEITH, JR., *op. cit.*, p. 27.

²² Paul Johnson, in his monumental history of the 20th century *Modern Times: A History of the World from the 1920's to the Year 2000*, Phoenix Giant, Guernsey, 1999, chronicles various instances of the Western intelligentsia's blind and naïve appraisal of the Soviet Union. See pages 88 and 275-277. See also: R. ARON, *The Opium of the Intellectuals*, Routledge, London 2001 (translation of R. ARON, *L'opium des intellectuels*, Calmann-Lévy, Paris 1955); P. HOLLANDER, *Marxism and western intellectuals in the post-communist era* in «Society» 37 (2000) 2, pp. 22-28.

ples²³. Does this mean that Modernity itself is dead, definitively replaced by Postmodernity? Not entirely, for a portion of Modernity's spirit lives on, not unlike Tolkien's villain, Sauron²⁴. The collapse of Modernity, however, brought with it deep distrust of Modernity's version of hope and chronic crisis in Christian apologetics.

The crisis of hope is self-evident. The collapse of Modernity showed the emptiness of its secular promises and the vanity of secular hopes. The dream of universal human fraternity cannot be realized without the gift of divine charity. Postmodernism rejects the modern myth of progress and replaces it with one of two alternatives. Either progress is illusory and human beings, both individually and collectively, are just marching in place, or things are actually going from bad to worse, whether socially, economically, morally, environmentally, or all of the above. Faced with these alternatives, the postmodern instinct is not so much to return to a theologically grounded Christian hope, but to abandon hope altogether and cave in to anxiety and despair²⁵.

The crisis of apologetics is not as self-evident, but neither is it surprising. The science of apologetics was born in the Modern era, it was shaped by Modern concerns, and it responded to Modern questions. Most of all, it shared Modernity's view of science as an appeal to universal reason. The collapse of Modernity called into question the very foundations on which the science of apologetics was built²⁶. Postmodernity rejects the ideal of universal truths. At most, it can accept particular truth-claims, as long as they are empirically verifiable within particular circumstances. In a postmodern world, the prospects for a universal argument for religious, Christian, and Catholic belief is simply perceived as untenable.²⁷

²³ Cf. A. L. HINTON - K. ROTH, *The Dark Side of Modernity: Toward an Anthropology of Genocide*, in *Annihilating Difference, The Anthropology of Genocide*, edited by A. L. Hinton, University of California Press, Berkeley 2002, pp. 1-40.

²⁴ Although this metaphor captures the spirit of the Postmodern rejection of Modernity, it makes far too harsh a judgement on Modernity as a whole, which, despite its failures, also saw many significant advances in authentic human development.

²⁵ *Kant and the Possibility of Progress, From Modern Hopes to Postmodern Anxieties*, edited by S.A. Stoner-P.T. Wilford, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 2021, p. 16.

²⁶ R. LATOURELLE, *Fundamental theology. I. History and Specific Character* in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, cit., pp. 324b-326a.

²⁷ Cf. P. HEJZLAR, *Christian truth-claims in contemporary epistemological setting*, in «Communio viatorum» LIII/1, 2011, pp. 47-48.

5. *Hope for apologetics through an apologetics of hope*

Is there any hope for a renewed apologetic science in the 21st century? Despite calls for a “new apologetics” since the late 1990’s, few Christian thinkers have undertaken the task of renewing apologetics from the ground up to face the challenges of a presenting reasons for belief in a postmodern world²⁸. The most common tendencies are either to accept the inadequacies of apologetics in a postmodern context, or to declare postmodernity itself as the enemy. This is the position of H. Wayne House and Dennis W. Jowers in their appropriately titled book *Reasons for Our Hope* (B&H Academic, Nashville, TN, 2011). In this introduction to Christian Apologetics, the authors, both Evangelical Christians, hold that Christians should definitively reject postmodernism, which they identify with incredulity to toward metanarratives, the dissolution of the subject, and the impossibility of representing external reality. For House and Jowers, «both postmodernism and modernism, therefore, are anathema from the perspective of orthodox Christianity»²⁹. Consequently, they dedicate an entire chapter to explain how a Christian apologist in the 21st century might «reason with a postmodernist and attempt, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, to persuade him to abandon postmodernism and to embrace Christianity»³⁰.

While House and Jowers have produced a thoughtful and well-argued book, their arguments seem to lack self-awareness of both the influence of Modernity on the science of apologetics and the influence of postmodernity on their own approach. The authors, for instance, embrace an apologetic approach that makes use of the quite postmodern technique of worldview analysis³¹. Furthermore, the authors abandon the Modern assumption of

²⁸ The calls for apologetics to address the new situation of postmodernity are not new. See: L.L. SNYDER, *Apologetics Before and After Postmodernism* in «Journal of Communication and Religion» XXII/2, 1999, pp. 237-271; T. GUARINO, *Postmodernity and five fundamental theological issues*, in «Theological Studies» LVII/4, 1996, pp. 654-689; G.B. SINISCALCHI, *Postmodernism and the need for rational apologetics in a post-conciliar Church*, in «The Heythrop Journal», LII, 2011, pp. 751-771.

²⁹ H. W. HOUSE - D.W. JOWERS, *Reasons for our hope*, B&H Academic, Nashville, TN 2011, 249.

³⁰ H. W. HOUSE - D.W. JOWERS, *op. cit.*, p. 394. House and Jowers identify three kinds of postmodernists: academic postmodernists, superficial postmodernists, and persons who display postmodernist attitudes.

³¹ Both modern and postmodern thought use the concept of “worldview”, but in different ways. For modern thought, starting with Immanuel Kant, a worldview, or *Weltanschauung* represented a comprehensive perspective on the world and human existence.

universal arguments for apologetics. They hold instead that the Christian apologist should master the strengths and weaknesses of the existing approaches (classical, evidential, presuppositional and experiential), employing each one as the context merits. They acknowledge that «every person will react and be reached differently, so there is no one approach that will work every time»³². House and Jowers' book is a serious attempt at renewing apologetics for the 21st century, and it is deserving of attention. The authors' wholesale rejection of both modernity and postmodernity, though, seems to run counter to the prevailing Catholic proposal of an inculturated Christianity and an evangelized culture. A complete repudiation of postmodernity and a return to modern or pre-modern ways of thinking does not seem like a reasonable expectation. The authors, however, deserve praise for their concern to witness to various categories of people who are influenced more or less consciously by postmodernism.

A different approach is proposed by Pope Francis in the Foreword to the apostolic constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* on ecclesiastical universities and faculties (December 8, 2017). Harking back to Francis's programmatic apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (especially numbers 132-134), the Foreword to *Veritatis Gaudium* develops even further Francis's call for a 'creative apologetics' that helps to create the dispositions so that the Gospel be heard by all³³. The four main lines of action that Francis proposes are first, the centrality of the *kerygma*, namely, the narrative of the mystery of salvation; second, wide-ranging dialogue; third, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches to formation and research; and fourth, networking among institutions.

Nearly seven years have passed since Pope Francis entrusted the task of developing a new and creative apologetics to ecclesiastical universities,

Later modern thought broadened the notion to mean a comprehensive system of beliefs that provide a framework for understanding objective reality. Postmodern thought, however, emphasizes the social, cultural, and historical conditioning of worldview, affirming the plurality of worldviews and allows for multiple worldviews to coexist despite conflicting perspectives. The pattern of worldview analysis of House and Jowers is more closely aligned with postmodern techniques than with the modern concept of worldview.

³² H. W. HOUSE - D.W. JOWERS, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

³³ Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium* 132. The official English translation is rather insipid: the "creative apologetics" would simply «encourage greater openness to the Gospel on the part of all». The Italian text is far more incisive: «Si tratta dell'incontro tra la fede, la ragione e le scienze, che mira a sviluppare un nuovo discorso sulla credibilità, un'apologetica originale che aiuti a creare le disposizioni perché il Vangelo sia ascoltato da tutti».

faculties, and institutes³⁴. In this time, progress, if any, has been slow and barely perceptible. There is still no clear-cut proposal for a new approach to apologetics that rethinks this science from the ground up in a postmodern context.

In the end, if there is to be any hope for a renewed apologetics in the 21st century, it may be through an apologetics of hope. The creative apologetics that Pope Francis has called for needs to return to its roots in the Apostle's exhortation in 1 Pt 3:15. It is hard to say what this new apologetics will look like, but one may expect that it will emerge from a similar pattern as the one that produced classical apologetics. First, for a new Christian apologetics to flourish in the 21st Century, Christians need to be witnesses to an attitude of hope. No one will ask any Christians the reasons for their hope, if Christians display hopelessness in their daily lives. The witness to hope, today as two thousand years ago, must be the occasion which inspires others to ask for an account, an explanation for this hope. This, however, is only the beginning. The attitude of hope must produce narratives of hope. The postmodern world may doubt the existence of metanarratives, but postmodern people continue to be drawn to compelling narratives. One of the best ways of evangelizing the 21st Century is through good storytelling, in which the great themes of creation and sin, grace and glory, are retold again and again through the vehicles of literature and art. Finally, the Christian account of hope is called to go beyond the merely fragmentary insights of witness, apt for each occasion but nothing more. A systematic apologetics of hope needs the firm support of a theology of hope, on the one hand, combined with the ability for constructive dialogue with postmodern preoccupations, on the other. Postmodernity poses new challenges and creates new opportunities. New sets of questions require creative new approaches. A wide and exiting field of labor is open for exploration. The creation of a new apologetics for the 21st century is a task awaiting fulfillment, which calls for a new generation of scholars willing to undertake its risks and reap its rewards.

³⁴ Cf. A.V. ZANI, *Il ruolo delle università pontificie nell'evangelizzazione della cultura alla luce della Costituzione Veritatis Gaudium* in «Alpha Omega», XXII/2, 2019, pp. 231-250.

REMEMBER THE FUTURE: CONTENDING SEMANTICS OF HOPE AND THE NORMATIVITY OF THE FUTURE

ARMIN M. KUMMER

Abstract

In the face of polycrisis, contemporary societies are experiencing a profound need for hope. Yet, there is a lack of consensus among scholars on how to define hope. The simultaneous societal demand for hope and the ambiguity surrounding its definition create opportunities for ideological exploitation. This paper proposes a solution by focusing on a Christian interpretation of hope, which it defines as the normativity of the future. This form of hope is characterized by a positive attitude towards historical progress and an imperative to perform the divine vision for creation amidst the realities of the present. This paper concludes that the embrace of Christian hope, understood as the normativity of the future, should be the central objective of religious education.

Keywords: Hope, future, eschatology, religious education

1. *The social need for hope*

Today, the world finds itself in the midst of a polycrisis, an unprecedented confluence of several different crises – ecological, geopolitical, and socio-economic,¹ In times of crisis, the need for – and the lack of – hope is often invoked. Hope, it is thought, serves as a source of resilience, allowing individuals and societies to better endure and ideally overcome adversity².

¹ A. TOOZE, *This Is Why 'polycrisis' Is a Useful Way of Looking at the World Right Now*, *World Economic Forum*, March 7, 2023.

² A. SCIOLI, *The Psychology of Hope: A Diagnostic and Prescriptive Account*, in S.C. VAN DEN HEUVEL (ed.), *Historical and Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Hope*, Cham, Springer International, 2020, 137-164.

Hope is also seen as an important motivational driver sustaining social and political engagement.³ The discourses of prominent socio-political reformers like Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, and Malala Yousafzai bear witness to this power of hope.

2. Contending semantics of hope

Theology and psychology are two academic disciplines with vested interests in the phenomenon of hope. Theologians assert that hope constitutes the very heart of Christianity⁴. Clinical psychologists, on the other hand, emphasize that hope is crucial for the effectiveness of psychotherapy.⁵ Therefore, society often looks at theologians and psychologists in their various functional roles as professionals with a particular responsibility for the provision of hope. But, one may ask, are they really talking about the same thing?

The term “hope” is used with such a degree of polysemy that different notions of hope seem to be incommensurable, a matter of apples and oranges. This is not only true across different academic disciplines, notably theology and psychology, but also within these disciplines.

In psycho-medical research, one literature review identifies forty-nine different definitions of hope, and thirty-two different tools to measure it⁶. Among psychologists, some of the most influential hope theories conceptualize hope as a combination of disposition, goals, and agency⁷. Some schol-

³ J. MOLTSMANN, *Theologie Der Hoffnung*, München, Kaiser, 1964.

⁴ Cf., e.g., A. DILLEN, *Hope, the Motor of Life and of Faith*, in A. DILLEN - S. GÄRTNER (eds.), *Discovering Practical Theology: Exploring Boundaries*, Leuven, Peeters, 2020, 221–243; MOLTSMANN, *Theologie Der Hoffnung* (n. 3); N.T. WRIGHT, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, New York, NY, Harper Collins, 2009.

⁵ I.D. YALOM - M. LESZCZ, *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*, 6th ed., New York NY, Basic Books, 2020.

⁶ B. SCHRANK - G. STANGHELLINI - M. SLADE, *Hope in Psychiatry: A Review of the Literature*, in *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica* 118 (2008), no. 6, 421–433.

⁷ Cf., e.g., J. GROOPMAN, *The Anatomy of Hope*, New York NY, Random House, 2004; K.L. RAND - K.K. TOUZA, *Hope Theory*, in C.R. SNYDER ET AL. (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2021. C.R. SNYDER ET AL., *The Will and the Ways: Development and Validation of an Individual-Differences Measure of Hope*, in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 60 (1991), no. 4, 570–585. “publisher”: “Random House”, “publisher-place”: “New York NY”, “title”: “The Anatomy of Hope”, “author”: “[“family”: “Groopman”, “given”: “J.”]”, “issued”: “[“date-parts”: [[“2004”]]]”, “prefix”: “Cf., e.g.,

ars consider hope the product of goal importance and the probability of its achievement⁸, while others regard hope as an emotion⁹ or mood.¹⁰ Based on cross-cultural lexical analysis, Lomas counts hope among the ambivalent emotions¹¹. Oettingen uses the broad category of “future thought”, distinguishing between the subcategories of expectations and fantasies.¹² Important distinctions in psychology are drawn between “fundamental” and “ultimate” hope¹³, “active” and “passive” hope¹⁴, “state” and “trait” hope¹⁵, “generalized” and “particularized”¹⁶ or “situational”¹⁷ hope.

A recent conference volume that provides a comprehensive snapshot of the state of art of theological reflection on hope illustrates also here the elusiveness of an agreed definition of hope.¹⁸ Some theologians take recourse to Aquinas’ treatment of hope as a theological virtue.¹⁹ Although strictly speaking, in this view hope is not a genuinely human quality, but a virtue “infused” by God²⁰, this religious view of hope has been broadly received as compatible with, if not fully equivalent to, psycho-medical conceptualizations of hope as

“},{“id”:8052,”uris”:[“http://zotero.org/users/local/e0KhNmiX/items/4GPE4XM4”],”itemData”:{“id”:8052,”type”:”chapter”,”abstract”:”Hope is defined as the perceived ability to produce pathways to achieve desired goals and to motivate oneself to use those pathways. Definitions and explanations are given for the core concepts of Snyder’s (1994a

⁸ E. STOTLAND, *The Psychology of Hope*, San Francisco, CA, Jossey-Bass, 1969.

⁹ J.R. AVERILL - G. CATLIN - K.K. CHON, *Rules of Hope* (Recent research in psychology), New York, NY, Springer, 1990.

¹⁰ S.R. STAATS - M.A. STASSEN, *Hope: An Affective Cognition*, in *Social Indicators Research* 17 (1985), no. 3, 235-242.

¹¹ T. LOMAS, *The Value of Ambivalent Emotions: A Cross-Cultural Lexical Analysis*, in *Qualitative Research in Psychology* (2017), 1-25.

¹² G. OETTINGEN - A.T. SEVINCER - P.M. GOLWITZER, eds., *The Psychology of Thinking about the Future*, New York NY, Guilford Press, 2018.

¹³ SCIOLE, *The Psychology of Hope: A Diagnostic and Prescriptive Account* (n. 2),.

¹⁴ M. MICELI - C. CASTELFRANCHI, *Hope: The Power of Wish and Possibility*, in *Theory & Psychology* 20 (2010), no. 2, 251-276.

¹⁵ V. CARSON - K.L. SOEKEN - P.M. GRIMM, *Hope and Its Relationship to Spiritual Well-Being*, in *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 16 (1988), no. 2, 159-167.

¹⁶ K. DFAULT - B.C. MARTOCCHIO, *Hope: Its Spheres and Dimensions*, in *Nursing Clinics of North America* 20 (1985), no. 2, 379-391.

¹⁷ S. FOLKMAN, *Stress, Coping, and Hope*, in *Psycho-Oncology* 19 (2010), no. 9, 901-908.

¹⁸ M. LICHNER, ed., *Hope: Where Does Our Hope Lie? International Congress of the European Society for Catholic Theology (August 2019 - Bratislava, Slovakia)*, Münster, LIT Verlag, 2020.

¹⁹ A. PINSENT, *Hope as a Virtue in the Middle Ages*, in S.C. VAN DEN HEUVEL (ed.), *Historical and Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Hope*, Cham, Springer International, 2020, 47-60.

²⁰ D. ELLIOT, *Hope in Theology*, in S.C. VAN DEN HEUVEL (ed.), *Historical and Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Hope*, Cham, Springer International, 2020, 117-136.,

a spiritual disposition or character trait that supports resilience in adversity and adaptation to the social order²¹ Pastoral-theologians often embrace psychological notions of hope²², especially with a view to post-secular contexts of intercultural pastoral and spiritual care, where Christian and non-religious worldviews and vocabularies intermingle in a co-creative process.²³

For many theologians, however, Christian hope primarily refers to shared, biblically mediated visions of God's ultimate transformation of reality.²⁴ For some post-war theologians, such eschatological hope provides a compass for ethical orientation. God's dream of "comprehensive shalom", a "just and inclusive community for all creation" provides normative guidance for life in the present.²⁵ Bieriinger calls this approach to hope the "normativity of the future". While his work is mostly hermeneutic, Moltmann²⁶ worked out the systematic, Baldermann²⁷ the didactic, and H. Luther²⁸ the poimenic implications of Christian hope. What they hold in common is that the Christian vision of the future provides a critical measuring stick for the assessment of reality, which, marked by suffering, evil, and death, inexorably falls short of the eschatological vision. This shortfall creates a painful longing for a better world and thus inspires social and political activism. Henning Luther is adamant that rather than an analgesic for existential pain, hope is the loyal sister of grief.²⁹

²¹ E.g., H.G. KOENIG, *Religion and Mental Health: Research and Clinical Applications*, San Diego, Elsevier Science & Technology, 2018; E. OLSMAN, *Hope in Health Care: A Synthesis of Review Studies*, in S.C. VAN DEN HEUVEL (ed.), *Historical and Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Hope*, Cham, Springer International, 2020, 197-214.

²² DILLEN, *Hope, the Motor of Life and of Faith* (n. 4).

²³ E.g., C. DOEHRING, *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach*, Revised and expanded edition., Louisville, KY, Westminster John Knox, 2015; M.G. CHRISTOFFERSEN - A.H. ANDERSEN, *Post-Secular Negotiations in Pastoral Care: Models in a Danish Podcast Series*, in *Pastoral Psychology* 72 (2023), no. 5, 737-752.

²⁴ M. VOLF - W.H. KATERBERG, eds., *The Future of Hope: Christian Tradition amid Modernity and Postmodernity*, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 2004.

²⁵ R. BIERINGER - M. ELSBERND, *The 'Normativity of the Future' Approach: Its Roots, Development, Current State and Challenges*, in R. BIERINGER - M. ELSBERND (eds.), *Normativity of the Future: Reading Biblical and Other Authoritative Texts in an Eschatological Perspective* (Annua Nuntia Lovaniensia, 61), Leuven, Peeters, 2010, 3-25, pp. 11.

²⁶ MOLTSMANN, *Theologie Der Hoffnung* (n. 3),.

²⁷ I. BALDERMANN, *Einführung in die biblische Didaktik*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1996.

²⁸ H. LUTHER, *Die Lügen der Tröster Das Beunruhigende des Glaubens als Herausforderung für die Seelsorge*, in *Praktische Theologie* 33 (1998), no. 3, 163-177.

²⁹ Cf. H. LUTHER, *Tod Und Praxis: Die Toten Als Herausforderung Kirchlichen Handelns: Eine Rede*, in *Zeitschrift Für Theologie Und Kirche* 88 (1991), no. 3, 407-426, pp. 423.

Among the numerous, contending variants of Christian eschatology, distinctions can be drawn between, for example, individual or cosmic, embodied or disembodied, continuous or discontinuous, and terrestrial or other-worldly visions. Although an inter-religious perspective on eschatological hope can be fascinating,³⁰ the scope of the present discussion is limited to the Christian tradition due to given limitations of available space.

In summary, both psycho-medical and theological scholarship is marked by the absence of a singular and stable shared understanding of hope. The lack of an agreed subject obstructs interdisciplinary dialogue and threatens to make hope discourses susceptible to ideological manipulation.³¹

3. *Divergent assessments of hope*

Although most scholars in theology and psychology have considered hope as something positive and virtuous, there have always been voices warning that hope can also be a negative force that obstructs realistic situational assessments and detracts from active problem-solving. For example, hope discourses of total victory may prolong military conflicts and thus increase human suffering and deaths. In public as well as in private life, hope may delay or prevent necessary actions. The German systematic theologian Ingolf Dalferth groups and categorizes various philosophical and theological critiques of hope under seven claims, namely that hope was irrational, paralyzing, dangerous, self-deceptive, ignorant, illusionary and uncritical, redundant, and unworthy of the wise.³² In psychology, C.R. Snyder distinguishes three types of “false hope” criticism by their concern with the maladaptive use of either illusory expectations, inappropriate goals, or poor strategies.³³

To conclude this first section, it is important to understand the extent to which scholarly treatments diverge. As a result, many hope discourses suffer from some incoherence due to an unstable subject. More fundamentally, some scholars cannot even agree whether hope is a good or potentially a bad thing.

³⁰ Cf., e.g., V.-M. KÄRKKÄINEN, *Hope and Community* (A constructive Christian theology for the pluralistic world 5), Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 2017.

³¹ Cf., T. EAGLETON, *Ideology: An Introduction*, London, Verso, 1991.

³² I.U. DALFERTH, *Hoffnung*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2016.

³³ C.R. SNYDER ET AL., “False” hope, in *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 58 (2002), no. 9, 1003-1022.

4. *Christian Hope and the Normativity of the Future*

Against the previous section's conclusions regarding the contending and incommensurable conceptualizations of hope, the following section will focus on the more specific notion of Christian hope. When exploring the nature of Christian hope, it is important to carefully distinguish the notions of future, hope, and eschatology.

The term "future" is both a commonly used word in everyday language and a grammatical concept. However within the context of biblical narrative, it holds a unique theological significance. The god depicted in the Bible is a god of promise. God repeatedly promises a future that stands in sharp contrast to current reality. This envisioned future is described through various images, such as the kingdom of God, the city of God, new creation, new Jerusalem, or a new heaven and earth.

Similarly, the word "to hope" is often employed casually as a synonym to "to wish." However, the Christian notion of hope has a clearly defined object. Christian hoping is a human reaction to God's promises. Christian hope means living in anticipation of God's promised future. When Christians hope, they make God's future already a tangible force in the present.

Finally, the term "eschatology," unlike "future" and "hope," is rarely used in everyday conversation. Its use is primarily limited to theological discourse. It refers to the branch of systematic theology that explores the nature of hope and speculates on how God's future will differ from current human experience.

In 1964, German systematic theologian Jürgen Moltman lamented that eschatology had become a mere annex to systematic theology, largely ignored by most Christians. Although doctrines concerning Christ's return, judgment, resurrection, and eternal life are professed in the Creed in every Sunday mass, these doctrines received little attention in church life, theology, or religious education.

Against this widespread neglect of eschatology by most Christians, Moltmann argues that

«Christianity is eschatology in its entirety and not just in the appendix, it is hope, a prospect and orientation towards the future, and therefore also a departure and transformation of the present. The eschatological is not something about Christianity, it is in fact the medium of the Christian faith, the tone to which ev-

everything in it is tuned, the color of the dawn of an expected new day, in which everything here is immersed.»³⁴

The most central topic of Christian theology, according to Moltmann, is the future. God is the God of the future. Especially the Exodus narrative and the texts of the biblical prophets depict God as the one who meets his people in God's promised future.³⁵

Importantly, for Moltmann this future orientation is by no means understood to serve as a sedative or as cheap comfort. It is not meant to be what Karl Marx called 'opium for the people', something that numbs the senses and distracts people's attention away from the challenges of the present. On the contrary, Christian hoping for God's future makes believers critical of, and often opposed to, the reality that we find in the present world of suffering, evil, and death. Christian hope instils a restless longing and stimulates believers to change the world. Hope in God's future is a driving force of social transformation.³⁶

Flemish practical theologian, Annemie Dillen, also emphasizes the inseparable linkage between Christian existence and hope. In her discussion of hope, she enters into critical dialogue with various disciplines (esp. psychology) and their views of hope (a trait or attitude). Dillen recognizes the importance of Moltmann, and deplores that "his theology has long remained unexplored in dialogue with pastoral practices".³⁷

The biblical exegete, Reimund Bieringer, has elaborated a hermeneutic approach which he calls the "Normativity of the Future."³⁸ His quest touched on fundamental theology as he sought to identify "the locus of authority in our revelatory texts."³⁹ Bieringer based his approach on the hermeneutic theories of Hans Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, and Sarah Schneiders

³⁴ MOLTSMANN, *Theologie der Hoffnung* (n. 3), p. 12. Own translation.

³⁵ See MOLTSMANN, *Theologie der Hoffnung* (n. 3), p. 127.

³⁶ See MOLTSMANN, *Theologie der Hoffnung* (n. 3), p. 304-312.

³⁷ A. DILLEN, *Hope, the Motor of Life and of Faith*, in A. DILLEN - S. GÄRTNER (eds.), *Discovering Practical Theology: Exploring Boundaries*, Leuven, Peeters, 2020, 221-243, pp. 238.

³⁸ Cf. R. BIERINGER - M. ELSBERND, eds., *Normativity of the Future: Reading Biblical and Other Authoritative Texts in an Eschatological Perspective* (Annua Nuntia Lovaniensia, 61), Leuven, Peeters, 2010.

³⁹ BIERINGER - ELSBERND, *Interpreting the Signs of the Time in the Light of the Gospel: Vision and Normativity of the Future* (n. 38), pp. 50.

on the one hand, and on Vatican II's theology of revelation on the other.⁴⁰ For Bieringer, the alternative world projected by the text becomes "the real referent of the text, the truth claim of the text"⁴¹ and thus the locus of revelation. Later, Bieringer extended the *Normativity of the Future* approach into a general hermeneutical approach that is no longer limited to the interpretation of texts, but of life itself.⁴² The meaning of "future" has evolved from literary projection to a theological understanding of "the eschatological in-breaking of the future into the present."⁴³ In this later conception of the *Normativity of the Future* approach, texts no longer merely project their own futures, but "create conditions of possibility for the in-breaking of the vision of an alternative world, a just and inclusive community."⁴⁴ Bieringer argues that the *Normativity of the Future* approach can be employed as an "approach to life itself."⁴⁵ For him, the future enjoys a "*hermeneutic privilege* over the past and the present."⁴⁶

5. Christian Hope as an Attitude Towards the Future

In some of my own prior work, I have offered some reflections on the *Normativity of the Future* approach, and ventured to claim that for Christians, a hermeneutics of hope, an orientation towards the future, is indeed strongly supported by the Christian tradition. This claim can be supported with a philosophical and a theological argument.⁴⁷

⁴⁰ R. BIERINGER, *Biblical Revelation and Exegetical Interpretation According to Dei Verbum 12*, in M. LAMBERIGTS - L. KENIS (eds.), *Vatican II and Its Legacy* (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium, 161), Leuven, Peeters, 2002, 25-58; R. BIERINGER, *Dialogical Revelation? On the Reception of Dei Verbum 12 in Verbum Domini*, in *Asian Horizons* 7 (2013), no. 1, 36-58.

⁴¹ BIERINGER, *The Normativity of the Future: The Authority of the Bible for Theology* (n. 38), pp. 42.

⁴² BIERINGER - ELSBERND, *The 'Normativity of the Future' Approach* (n. 25), pp. 8.

⁴³ BIERINGER - ELSBERND, *The 'Normativity of the Future' Approach* (n. 25), pp. 9.

⁴⁴ BIERINGER - ELSBERND, *The 'Normativity of the Future' Approach* (n. 25), pp. 10.

⁴⁵ BIERINGER - ELSBERND, *The 'Normativity of the Future' Approach* (n. 25), pp. 8.

⁴⁶ BIERINGER - ELSBERND, *The 'Normativity of the Future' Approach* (n. 25), pp. 12 Italics in the original.

⁴⁷ The following arguments have been previously outlined in A.M. KUMMER, *Men, Spirituality, and Gender-Specific Biblical Hermeneutics* (Annua Nuntia Lovaniensia, 78), Leuven, Peeters, 2019, p. 78-82.

5.1. Future Orientation in Philosophy

Human life is often perceived as a temporal journey, with the human being inherently historical. Conversely, historicity can be regarded as integral to the human condition. Thus, defining one's relationship with history is crucial for the formation of human identity. In public discourse, particularly in political contexts, two primary approaches to history emerge: Embracing the future or attempting to relive the past. Consequently, motivations, both personal and social, are anchored either in the past or the future. A forward-looking, hopeful orientation is typically linked with sociopolitical progressivism, while a nostalgic, past-oriented attitude is often associated with sociopolitical conservatism.

Backward-looking rhetoric is easily identifiable in political slogans featuring terms like "back" and "again," such as "Make America great again" or "I want my country back."⁴⁸ These slogans share a linear view of history, where the past is viewed as superior to the present. This perspective portrays history as a slippery downward slope, a descent from an imagined golden age. Here, normativity is rooted in the past, and the future, representing change and deviation from this idealized past, is to be avoided. The ethical implication of this view is to halt historical progress and ideally, to travel back in time.⁴⁹

A forward-looking perspective, on the other hand, embraces the future and welcomes novelty and change. This outlook views the future as a source of hope and creative potential. History, in this view, promises improvement and is depicted as a steady upward trajectory. Normativity is not based on an ideologically constructed past but on the open-ended possibilities of dreams and visions. The ethical drive of this future-oriented perspective is to advance forward.

In public discourse, political debates are frequently framed within this binary. Political rhetoric often implies a choice between moving forward and going back, between accepting historical change and reversing it. However, philosophers would ask whether these alternatives are truly

⁴⁸ U.S. Republican Presidential candidate Donald Trump during the U.S. Presidential campaigns 2016 and 2024.

⁴⁹ Woody Allen depicts this worldview beautifully in his 2011 movie „Midnight in Paris“. A great proponent of such cultural pessimism was O. SPENGLER, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umrisse einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte*, 23rd ed., München, Beck, 1920.

viable. Can anyone truly turn back time and relive the past? Heraclitus aptly noted “πάντα ῥεῖ” (everything flows), asserting that “you cannot step into the same stream twice”.⁵⁰ Given the inexorable flow of history and the inevitability of change, turning back the clock is not a feasible option. Resisting the forward pull of history is an absurd proposition, ultimately leading to a form of nihilism. Along these lines one can formulate the philosophical argument against backward-looking worldviews.

5.2. *Future Orientation in the Biblical Tradition*

One can also formulate a compelling biblical-theological argument for a future-oriented perspective. One could observe that nostalgia finds no endorsement in the scriptures of the Jewish and Christian traditions. The past is never depicted as normative. Instead, normativity is consistently situated in the future.

In the Hebrew Bible, divine vocation of human beings always involves a forward movement towards a better place. For instance, when God calls Abram, his ancestral home in Haran is not depicted as the ideal place for human flourishing. Similarly, when God calls Israel out of Egypt, the exodus of God’s people represents a journey towards a better future. Although the Exodus narrative acknowledges the possibility of nostalgia, as seen when the Israelites long to return to the fleshpots of Egypt⁵¹, it never endorses such sentiments.

Arguably, the key biblical narrative concerning retrospection is the story of Lot’s wife. Lot and his family are the only ones saved from the destruction of Sodom, and they have been warned not to look back. Lot’s wife, unable to resist her nostalgia and backward-looking instincts, turns into a pillar of salt—a powerful metaphor for the calcifying, life-denying consequences of nostalgic nihilism.

In prophetic literature, the ethical message is never about returning to a superior life of a golden past. The prophetic call is always towards an alternative future. Even the experience of exile, while it can evoke tearful memories of a place, never amounts to a nostalgic longing for the past. The

⁵⁰ See L.D. CRESCENZO, *Geschichte der griechischen Philosophie I: Die Vorsokratiker*, Zürich, Diogenes, 1985, p. 85.

⁵¹ See Ex 16,3 (KJV, NRSV).

theological message in the Old Testament is that God acts in and through history towards a better future. This rules out any desirability of turning back the clock.

The New Testament offers its own, distinct hermeneutics of hope. Throughout the gospels, Jesus never expresses a longing for the past. In Luke 17:32, He uses the story of Lot's wife to caution His disciples. His teachings focus on the imminent future, the reign of God, and the eschatological gift of the Spirit. Jesus' parables often illustrate progress through agricultural metaphors, depicting slow but inevitable growth. The Johannine Jesus inspires His followers to look forward to a future that exceeds the present, asserting that "they will do even greater things than I have done."⁵²

In his letters, Paul reflects on his own past, and considers it literally as rubbish.⁵³ For him, the past holds no normativity. Instead, the Spirit-filled future shapes the lives and perspectives of God's children.⁵⁴

Emphasizing the future as the locus of normativity does not mean that the past has no value. Collective commemoration clearly differs from nostalgia. The narrative traditions of the Hebrew Bible testify to Israel's collective memory. Walter Brueggemann notes that "Israel characteristically retold all of its experience through the powerful, definitional lens of the Exodus memory."⁵⁵ To this day, Jews annually celebrate the Exodus memory with the Passover festival. However, Passover does not commemorate a golden past to which anyone wishes to return. The festival's central event is the Haggadah, a family ceremony culminating in the hopeful declaration "Next Year in Jerusalem!" This is not an expression of nostalgia but a collective hope for a better future. In fact, the purpose of biblical memory is to provide historical depth to our hope.⁵⁶

⁵² καὶ μείζονα τούτων ποιήσει. Jn 14:12

⁵³ Phil 3:8 (NRSV)

⁵⁴ See e.g. Ro 8; Gal 3:26-4:7

⁵⁵ W. BRUEGGEMANN, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*, Minneapolis, MN, Fortress Press, 1997, p. 177.

⁵⁶ This is also how I understand J.B. Metz's notion of 'dangerous memory': 'It is precisely because Christians believe in an eschatological meaning for history that they can risk historical consciousness.' See J.B. METZ, *A Passion for God: The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity*, J.M. ASHLEY (ed.), New York, NY, Paulist, 1998, p. 40.

6. *Christian Hope and Education*⁵⁷

Several scholars of religious education underscore the centrality of Christian hope in their field. In his textbook on biblical didactics, German scholar Ingo Baldermann posits that hope is the overarching theme of the entire Bible.⁵⁸ He argues that theology's purpose is to equip individuals to combat despair, necessitating a pedagogical approach that empowers every believer to confront it.⁵⁹ "Under all conditions and circumstances, [...] a responsible pedagogy today must see to it that it enables students to grasp something like a sustainable hope on their own."⁶⁰ Echoing Moltmann, he emphasizes that hope is only sustainable if it does not merely anticipate a future turning point but demonstrates how to act hopefully in the present and live in the spirit of this hope.⁶¹

In his 2016 Presidential Address to the Religious Education Association in Pittsburgh, Bert Roebben from Bonn University contends that fostering hope is the foremost responsibility of educators.⁶² Similarly, Mary Elizabeth Moore from Boston University maintains that the effectiveness of teaching is measured by the extent to which it fosters hope for a transformed world.⁶³

7. *Christian Hope as Performance*

Christian hope is not merely a passive attitude. It combines an attitude, future orientation, with a call to activism in the realities of the present. The British Dominican theologian and philosopher Herbert McCabe shows how both elements are fundamental for Christian religious education:

⁵⁷ This link between Christian hope, performance, and religious education has been previously outlined in A.M. KUMMER, *What Hope for Children? Eschatology, the Normativity of the Future, and Christian Hope in Godly Play*, in *Yearbook of Contextual Biblical Interpretation* 1 (2024), no. 1, 57–76.

⁵⁸ See BALDERMANN, *Einführung in die biblische Didaktik* (n. 27), p. 11.

⁵⁹ See BALDERMANN, *Einführung in die biblische Didaktik* (n. 27), p. 6.

⁶⁰ BALDERMANN, *Einführung in die biblische Didaktik* (n. 27), p. 14. Own translation.

⁶¹ BALDERMANN, *Einführung in die biblische Didaktik* (n. 27), p. 10. Own translation.

⁶² Bert Roebben, "Generating Hope: The Future of the Teaching Profession in a Globalized World," *Religious Education* 112, no. 3 (2017): 199–206.

⁶³ Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, "Teaching Christian Particularity in a Pluralistic World*," *British Journal of Religious Education* 17, no. 2 (1995): 78.

«There are many groups whose purpose is to ensure that something of the past is made real for the present, (whether it be the Glorious Revolution, the taking of the Bastille, the smashing of the Van); this indeed is the purpose of any group that seeks to preserve the historical identity of a people. Such remembrance is a very large part of the business of education - to recognise and realise our past is to discover ourselves. Now the business of the church is to remember the future. Not merely to remember that there is to be a future, but mysteriously to make the future really present».⁶⁴

McCabe emphasizes that the very essence of Christianity lies in the inspiring normativity of the future. This involves both remembering the future, and actualizing it in the present. Similarly, Reimund Bieringer and the British exegete Nicholas T. Wright illustrate how the church engages in this dual process of remembering and performing the future.

Bieringer argues that “the reading community has the task of reading and internalizing the ancient text as the first chapters of a chain novel of which they have to write the next chapter.”⁶⁵ Elsewhere, he points out the continued activity of the Holy Spirit in the church: “It inspires people and communities of any age to write their own “fifth gospel.”⁶⁶

Wright suggests in similar fashion to understand the biblical narratives as four acts of a five-act drama. The fifth act is still being written: “The church would live under the “authority” of the extant story, being required to offer an improvisatory performance of the final act as it leads up to and anticipates the intended conclusion.”⁶⁷

This insistence on performance is something the *Normativity of the Future* approach can fruitfully contribute to religious education. The challenge for religious education is to do more than just lead students through the museum of church tradition. Instead, religious education should rather be understood as performance under the creative curatorship of ancient narratives and rituals. The *Normativity of the Future* approach invites Christians to be not only spectators, but to become the actors in the performance of God’s eschatological promises.

⁶⁴ H. MCCABE, *Law, Love and Language*, London, Sheed & Ward, 1968, p. 141.

⁶⁵ BIERINGER, *Texts That Create a Future: The Function of Ancient Texts for Theology Today* (n. 38), pp. 110.

⁶⁶ BIERINGER, *Biblical Revelation and Exegetical Interpretation According to Dei Verbum* 12 (n. 40), pp. 52.

⁶⁷ N.T. WRIGHT, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God, 1), London, SPCK, 1992, p. 142.

Conclusion

Late modern societies, shaken in their intellectual foundations by poly-crisis, are in urgent need of hope. However, there is little agreement among the scholarly disciplines about how to define hope. The concurrent societal desirability and conceptual uncertainty opens the doors to ideological misuse of the hope discourse. This paper offers a possible solution. It concentrates on a specifically Christian understanding of hope, and conceptualizes it as the normativity of the future. As such, Christian hope is both a positive, forward-looking attitude towards the flow of history and a call to action in the realities of the present moment. This conceptualization of hope serves as a societal inoculation against ideological capture. This paper argues that Christian hope, understood as the normativity of the future, constitutes a supreme objective of religious education.

MIND AND BODY: KEY CONCEPTS IN A DIALECTIC RELATIONSHIP

DARIO MANFELLOTTI

Abstract

This article explores the evolution of the doctor-patient relationship, emphasizing the importance of empathy, communication, and mutual respect. It underscores the patient's right to autonomy and informed consent as central to ethical medical care. The narrative illustrates how historical and artistic representations of physicians reflect shifting attitudes in healthcare. Integrating body and mind is highlighted as essential for effective treatment, with hope playing a therapeutic role. The text critiques the growing influence of technology and artificial intelligence in care, urging human-centered approaches. It addresses challenges posed by frailty, complexity, and loneliness in modern medicine. The nocebo effect is examined as consequence of communication, affecting treatment outcomes. Legal frameworks like Italian Law 219/2017 are cited to support patient-centered care. The article emphasizes the hospital as a place of healing, community, and dignity. Ultimately, it argues that hope, personalized, human, and spiritual, remains a fundamental element of healing.

Keywords: Doctor-Patient Relationship, Hope in Healing, Mind-Body Integration, Informed Consent, Humanized Medicine

I believe there is no one who questioned the principle that the patient has the right to decide on his or her own health, thus creating the care condition closest to his or her way of living and thinking.

To do this, it is appropriate to talk about the qualities required of a doctor.

First, there is the need to build a good relationship of the doctor with the patient and with the family members or care staff.

In this sense, the value of the doctor's clinical work is fully realized in

their ability to inspire and cultivate hope—a universal need that arises in all individuals, whether religious or secular, when confronted with a health issue. This feeling and this ability to live optimistically, setting oneself health perspectives, is essential to face the disease in the best way and contribute to the effectiveness of treatment.

The relationship between body and mind appears to be fundamental in patient care, because it is not possible to deal with only one of the two components, but the doctor must know how to reconcile and integrate the needs of one and the other.

To do this, I would like to talk about the evolution of the doctor-patient relationship in the historical evolution of medicine.

Some images effectively represent the figure of the doctor.

In the first image (Fig 1) the doctor feels the patient's pulse with a paternalistic air and talks to a family member¹.



Fig. 1. - *Visit of the Doctor* by Jan Steen, 1661

¹ J. STEEN, *Visit of the Doctor*, 1661, oil on canvas, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/SK-A-2342>.

In another painting, “*The Doctor*” by Samuel Luke Fildes² from 1891 (fig 2), the doctor is seated near the bed of the sick woman, in this case a small girl with her parents close to each other, heartbroken and destroyed by grief. The doctor in some way expresses his substantial difficulty, dedicating concentration and affection and above all time, but demonstrating great helplessness from the point of view of diagnosis and therapy.



Fig 2. - *The Doctor*” by Samuel Luke Fildes, 1891

Another very well-known image is that of a very young Picasso who in 1897 made a painting entitled “*Science and Charity*”³ (fig 3) in which once again the elegiac image of the doctor sitting next to the bed, who feels the pulse of the pale and suffering patient and near her a nun, who probably holds the patient’s son in her arms and offers the patient a drink.

² S. L. FILDES, *The Doctor*, 1891, oil on canvas, Tate Britain, London. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/fildes-the-doctor-n01522>.

³ PABLO PICASSO, *Science and Charity*, 1897, oil on canvas, Museu Picasso, Barcelona. <https://www.museupicasso.bcn.cat/en/collection/science-and-charity>.



Fig 3. - *Science and Charity*, by Pablo Picasso, 1897

All these images have defined the type of doctor-patient relationship and its evolution over the years through various visions and approaches:

- An elegiac vision
- a mystical religious vision
- a paternalistic approach and vision
- a contractual-type approach and vision, such as the most modern one in which the doctor-patient relationship is based on a sort of agreement on the therapy program and the objectives of the treatment
- a business- and profit-oriented vision
- finally, a relationship mediated by technology and artificial intelligence

The problem is what the future offers us.

In other words, in the doctor-patient relationship, will the role of the doctor, his presence, his mediation and his ability to dialogue, and above all to listen, remain fundamental, or, as some fear, will machines and artificial intelligence be able to replace the human and professional figure of the doctor?

Or will the physician remain indispensable for effectively engaging with both the physical and psychological dimensions of the patient? All this has also gone hand in hand with the evolution of the “*healing*” and then hospital structure, which in the history of medicine has gone from a place of isolation and hospitalization of patients mainly suffering from infectious and communicable diseases (which had to be kept away from the rest of the population) to places where medicine must be practiced in an increasingly professional and hopefully effective way.

But also in the past, as in Greek and Roman medicine, there were activities that focused on emotions and tended to arouse the patient’s hope, such as the so-called *theophanies* and the various events that were organized within the places of treatment, with the simulated apparitions of the gods between fumes and disguises, in order to psychologically stimulate the patient and to act on the hope of healing.

More modernly, hope and great attention to the psychological and organic well-being of the patient (*mind and body*) has become more and more part of that process of *humanization of the hospital* that has so much affected the activity of religious hospitals in particular, with the fundamental figure of Father General of the Brothers of St. John of God, Pierluigi Marchesi, who already in the Eighties began to work for a more humane hospital.

Father Marchesi claimed that the humanized hospital is wide open to relatives and friends of the patients. That the humanized hospital has a very precise map of power. That the humanized hospital believes in teamwork. That in the humanized hospital there is a continuing education of health workers. That the humanized hospital is a family home, that is, a community that faces with seriousness and pain, that does not fear the defeat that produces and induces hope in people. It is the fulcrum around which the professional, emotional, intellectual life of professionals, patients, relatives revolve. The humanized hospital is the domus in which the patient feels at home, accepted, understood and helped in all fundamental needs.⁴

⁴ P. MARCHESI, *Rinnovarsi per umanizzare*. Documento redatto dal Priore Generale Fra Marchesi, Ordine Fatebenefratelli. Citato in: “Fra Marchesi: i principi dell’ospedale umanizzato”, *Fatebenefratelli* (15 giugno 2019).

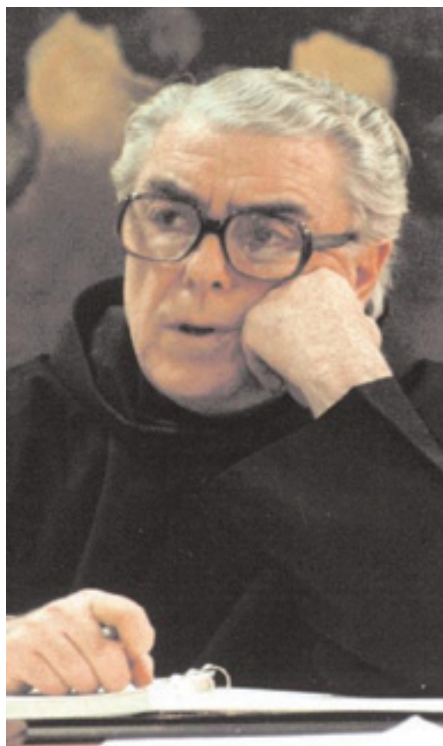


Fig 4. - *Pierluigi Marchesi (1929-2002)*⁵

Father Marchesi's reflections have become increasingly appreciated and in fact there is now widespread awareness that the good organization of health facilities contributes to the improvement of the quality of care.

Unfortunately, however, even today, good organization is not an *Essential Level of Assistance (LEA)*.

It is like saying that although there is a constitutional right to health protection, there is no right to this protection taking place in an organizational context that can increase the probability of having good care. In other words, to take care of the body and mind at the same time to ensure the best care. LEAs are now defined in terms of technologies

⁵ Foto di Fra Pierluigi Marchesi (ca. anni '70), fotografia, Archivio Centro Studi e Formazione Fra Pierluigi Marchesi – Fatebenefratelli.

(e.g. a drug therapy approved by AIFA), or in terms of procedures, such as screening, but the quality of the organization underlying the provision of that service is not defined as LEA.

Regarding the medical-patient relationship, some very inspired and fundamental words were written by Marguerite Yourcenar, in her novel “*Memoirs of Hadrian*” of 1951, to describe the relation between the emperor Hadrian and his doctor:

This morning, I went to my doctor, Hermogenes, who recently returned to the Villa from a long trip to Asia. He had to visit me on an empty stomach, and we agreed to meet early in the morning. I have laid aside my cloak and tunic; I lay down on the bed. I spare you details that would be as disagreeable to you as they are to me, and the description of the body of a man who is advancing in years and is about to die of dropsy of the heart. Let’s just say that I coughed, breathed, held my breath, according to Hermogenes’ instructions, alarmed despite himself by the rapidity of the progress of the disease, ready to attribute the blame to the young Giolla, who treated me in his absence.

It is difficult to remain emperor in the presence of a doctor; it is also difficult to preserve one’s own human essence: the doctor’s eye sees in me only an aggregate of humors, a poor amalgam of lymph and blood. And for the first time, this morning, it occurred to me that **my body**, a faithful companion, a sure friend and known to me more than **the soul**, is only a devious monster that will end up devouring the master.

Enough... my body is dear to me; he served me well, and in every way, and I will not spare him the necessary care. But, by now, I no longer count, as Hermogenes maintains, on the prodigious virtues of plants, on the precise dosage of those mineral salts that he went to procure in the East.

He is a fine man; yet, he has given me vague formulas of comfort, too obvious to be believed; he knows well how much I hate this kind of imposture, but medicine is not practiced with impunity for more than thirty years.

I forgive this faithful one of mine for his attempt to hide death from me⁶.

⁶ M. YOURCENAR, *Memoirs of Hadrian*. Translated by Grace Frick, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1954.

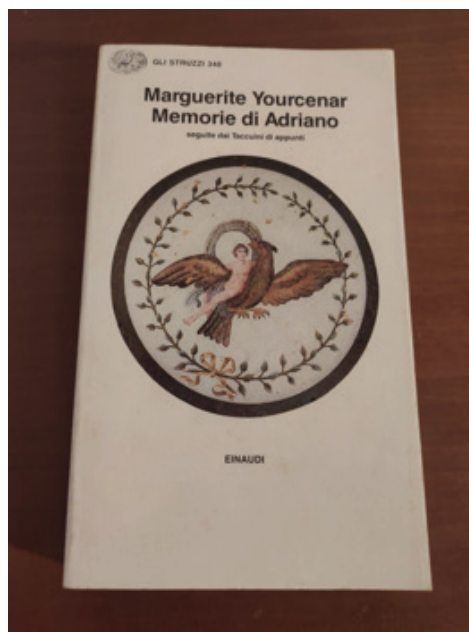


Fig 5. - Marguerite Yourcenar, *"Memoirs of Hadrian"*, 1951

Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi in a recent article in "Il Sole 24 ore" in September 2024, commenting on the words of Annibale Caro: «Everyone would like to be cured of bodily ills, but they cannot. Everyone would like to heal the ills of the soul, but they don't want to», so wrote:

The frenetic care of the body, which in our days relies on an impressive consumption of medicines or cosmetic surgery, fitness and so on, cannot stop the subtle ramifications of lethal diseases. Mortality is our common identity card and it is necessary to walk with our eyes open towards that border. On the contrary, the soul is often given little care. It is left to stiffen without quenching its thirst. His illnesses, which are the vices, do not worry us that much. It is allowed to lack that food that makes it live, as St. Catherine of Siena said: "the soul is a tree made for love and therefore can only live on love"⁷.

⁷ G. RAVASI, *Così la Bibbia divenne bestseller*, Domenica, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 15 settembre 2024.

Finally, Pope Francis, commenting on the “*Small lexicon of the end of life*” (2017) of the Pontifical Academy for Life, writes that «the individual functions of the body, including nutrition, especially if affected in a stable and irreversible way, must be considered in the overall framework of the person and his or her bodily dimension. But if technocratic logic becomes prevalent, the human body risks to be interpreted and administered as a set of organs to be repaired or replaced». _

In this line we can interpret Pope Francis’ statement, when he asserts that the «technological interventions on the body can sustain biological functions that have become insufficient, or even replace them, but this is not the same as promoting health. A supplement of wisdom is therefore needed, because today it is more insidious to insist on treatments that produce powerful effects on the body, but sometimes they do not benefit the integral good of the person».

These words strongly support the need to consider together mind and body for the best and the most correct clinical approach.

From a strictly legal point of view, the relationship between body and mind and the fundamental mediation of the doctor through a correct relationship with the patient is regulated by Italian Law 219-2017 which speaks of informed consent and the living will, underlining that «no health treatment can be started or continued without the free and informed consent of the person concerned, except in cases clearly provided for by law».

It is also emphasized in the law itself that «the time of communication between doctor and patient constitutes time of care».

These are words that the law defines very precisely, to underline how the treatment process must always be the expression of the patient’s free conviction, in a virtuous and very constructive relationship with his or her doctor.

Complicating these problems must also be considered the role of conditions such as *complexity* and *frailty*, which are two different medical concepts.

Complexity is defined as the presence of intricate composite conditions and the degree of complications of a system or a system component.

Frailty, on the other hand, defines a vulnerable state of health that derives not only from clinical complexity but also from the interaction, which is also complex, of medical, physical, mental, nutritional and even social problems.

The result is a reduced ability to respond to the stress of the disease and also a reduction in the patient's functional performance. In this context, a reduced cognitive capacity of the patient may also coexist, which makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to express informed consent to treatment and the need for prior express consent, or legal representative.

In the frail patient there is also a close relationship with loneliness, as defined by Megan Brooks:

Loneliness is widely recognized as a health risk factor, linked to conditions like cardiovascular disease, psychiatric disorder and increased risks for stroke and dementia. A large UK biobank study provides compelling evidence that loneliness may be a potential surrogate marker rather than a causal risk factor for most diseases. Instead, loneliness may act as a surrogate marker, explained by factors such as socioeconomic status, health behaviors, depressive symptoms, metabolic factors and comorbidities. These factors explained more than 79% of the associations between loneliness and disease.⁸

In the patient in general, but particularly in the complex patient with comorbid conditions and polypharmacotherapy, as those typically followed by internal medicine doctors, such as myself, much attention must be paid to the effects of drugs.

While *the placebo effect* is well known and has been well studied, much less is known about its counterpart, the so-called *nocebo effect*, which can be of considerable importance due to its impact on the effects of therapy and on public health.

The nocebo effect is defined as the induction or worsening of symptoms induced by sham or active therapies. This is a situation in which a patient develops side effects or symptoms that may occur with a drug or other therapies, simply because they think they might occur.

For example, in a clinical trial, patients who are not receiving a certain active treatment but who are told what side effects of active treatment may occur, may experience the same side effects as patients who are given active treatment, simply because they expect them to occur.

There are numerous examples and the underlying mechanisms are on the one hand psychological, such as conditioning and negative expectations;

⁸ M. BROOKS, "Loneliness/Disease Link Debatable?" *Medscape Medical News*, 24 settembre 2024.

on the other hand neurobiological ones that call into question the role of hormones such as *cholecystikinin*, *endogenous opioids* and *dopamine*.

Nocebo effects can modulate the results of a given therapy in a negative way just as *placebo effects* can do so in a positive way.

Verbal and non-verbal communication also contains numerous negative unintentional suggestions that can trigger a *nocebo response*.

All of this raises the important question of how doctors can administer informed consent and minimize the risks associated with the *nocebo effect*.

According to Luana Colloca external and internal factors intervene in this phenomenon.

To better explain, Colloca describes these factors with some examples:

Verbal suggestions (e.g., the treatment has been stopped), prior experiences (e.g., exposure to increased painful intensities), social observation (e.g., seeing someone suffering from a side effect), mass psychogenic modeling (e.g., believing wind turbines induce headache), treatment leaflets (e.g., list of side effects), patient-clinician communication (e.g., “this procedure is going to be painful”), contextual cues (e.g., smelling a chemotherapy), and overall clinical encounters are examples of external factors that trigger *nocebo* reactions. In contrast, negative mood and emotions, negative valence factors, maladaptive cognitive appraisal, personality traits, somatosensory features, and omics are among the internal factors that can share *nocebo* responsivity⁹.

If we then refer to aspects that in a religious environment like this must be kept in mind, a lot of discussion, but also a lot of research concerns the possible effects of prayer or, as the great Italian scientist Umberto Veronesi wrote on the Fondazione Veronesi Blog in 2012, whether prayer can also have a therapeutic power.

I am often asked if prayer can also have a therapeutic power. If you observe the myriad of old and new cults (including the fashionable ones of the New Age) many people claim to draw strength and well-being from them, especially when prayer is strongly ritualized, and the repetition of syllables or mantras obtains in those who pray an effect of estrangement, contact with what seems another dimension. This can be explained in the light of what we know about the biochemistry of the brain (for example, it is known that falling in love, a psychic emotion, raises dopamine levels, which induces a state of well-being), and therefore it is reasonable to say

⁹ L. COLLOCA, “The Nocebo Effect,” *Annual Review of Pharmacology and Toxicology* 64 (2024): 171-190.

that prayer has a certain beneficial effect. The case of those who claim to replace the medicine with prayer is different, with an absolutely irrational and dangerous fideism (not faith).

This is what has happened in the United States, where more than 300 people have died because they abandoned any treatment to turn only to a purported healing power of prayer. The most serious thing is that among these victims of an irrational decision there are also children, which reminds me anguishing of the cases of leukemic children who could have been cured and who were handed over by their parents to the “Di Bella cure”. International scientific journals are also dealing with this matter and have already shown that alleged scientific studies on the therapeutic power of prayer were weak and inconsistent, and started from false premises¹⁰.

Regarding this matter, after sixty years of activity, the Journal of Religion has published “*A Bibliometric Analysis of the Journal of Religion and Health: Sixty Years of Publication (1961–2021)*”¹¹.

In 1961, the Journal of Religion and Health (JORH) commenced publishing articles that examined modern religious and spiritual philosophy in relation to psychology and health. This research paper retrospectively analyses the journal’s content. It provides insight into JORH’s publication trends, citation records, prominent themes, authors’ collaboration and its aggregate contribution to the field of religion and health. Over time, the number of publications, citations and downloads of JORH articles have substantially increased, as has the journals’ prominence and diverse contributions to the study of religion, spirituality and health.

And in this sense, to conclude this article, reference cannot be missing to how much body and mind are interconnected, but how much Hope plays a fundamental role in the healing process of a patient, regardless of religious confession or political faith, becoming part of the patient’s experience.

The Jubilee of 2025 is all dedicated to Hope, referring to Encyclical *Spe Salvi* of by Pope Benedict XVI (2007) and finally to the bull of indiction for the 2025 Jubilee.

Pope Francis resumes the teaching of St. John XXIII, who spoke of

¹⁰ <https://www.old.fondazioneveronesi.it/magazine/i-blog-della-fondazione/umberto-veronesi/pregare-fa-bene-ma-non-guarisce>.

¹¹ C. LINDSAY B., et al. “*A Bibliometric Analysis of the Journal of Religion and Health: Sixty Years of Publication (1961-2021)*,” *Journal of Religion and Health*, vol. 62, no. 1, 2023, pp. 8–38, doi:10.1007/s10943-022-01704-4.

the “medicine of Mercy”, and of Paul VI who identified the spirituality of Vatican II with that of the Samaritan. The Bull explains, furthermore, various salient aspects of the Jubilee: firstly, the motto, “Merciful like the Father”, then the meaning of pilgrimage and above all the need for forgiveness.

«SPE SALVI facti sumus», in *hope* «we were saved», says Saint Paul to the Romans, and likewise to us (Rom 8:24).

«According to the Christian faith, “redemption”, salvation, is not simply a given. Redemption is offered to us in the sense that we have been given hope, trustworthy hope, by virtue of which we can face our present: the present, even if it is arduous, can be lived and accepted if it leads towards a goal, if we can be sure of this goal, and if this goal is great enough to justify the effort of the journey.

Now the question immediately arises: what sort of hope could ever justify the statement that, on the basis of that hope and simply because it exists, we are redeemed? And what sort of certainty is involved here?»

Hope, as it was written in an interesting and ironic article published by JAMA in 1990, must be considered as a real medication, even like a drug.

In this article, hope is defined as what “*gets us out of bed in the morning*”, and has its clinical pharmacology, its pharmacokinetics, its indications, its mechanism of action. Above all it has no contraindications, can be provided not in a standard dose and must be administered individually according to the needs and abilities of health professionals.

A careful analysis of the aspects of verbal and non-verbal communication and what develops in the doctor-patient relationship and in the patient’s body-mind relationship can help and suggest the best way for the provision of hope.

Hope, as this 1990 article by William Buchholz concludes, can be used as a real drug for the best treatment of a patient.

SECTION II

NEW INSTRUMENTS FOR A CRITICAL APPROACH

IS THERE A TECHNOLOGICAL REASON FOR HOPE? TECHNOLOGY AND HUMAN RELATIONSHIP IN THE AGE OF AI

MARKUS KRIENKE

“Computers are useless.
They can only give you answers”
(Pablo Picasso)

Abstract:

In the age of AI and digital technology, hope has shifted from a religious or human-centered virtue to a form of technological optimism. The challenge for Social Doctrine of Church is to define the criteria for considering technology in the service of human flourishing, giving to society new reasons for hope. Drawing on thinkers like Heidegger, Anders, and Han, this contribution argues that technology changes not only our environment but our self-understanding. True hope, however, does not come from technology itself but from relationships, ethical responsibility, and human intentionality (Gabriel Marcel). With the analysis of Donati and the anthropological view of Plessner, hope emerges through the recognition of human fragility, relationality, and the limits of technology. While reducing reality to data and binary logic flattens the human dimension, genuine hope requires resisting the closure of technological determinism and recovering the human capacity for new beginnings, rooted in dignity, relationality, and social responsibility.

Keywords: AI and Anthropology, Social Doctrine of Church, Spirit of Hope, Human Dignity, Otherness and Relationship

1. *Technology and Hope*

To live in the technological age means to live in tension. On the one hand, technology offers unprecedented power, convenience, and connection. On the other, it brings with it profound existential crises – the erosion of meaning, the automation of life, the displacement of the human being. Therefore, the age of technology – the “Fourth Industrial Revolution” has made technology a crucial factor determining life and social conditions –

has become an age characterized by the need for hope. Never before has humanity so intensely ‘hoped’ that technological development would unfold for its benefit¹. For the dangers have become increasingly apparent (nuclear threat, but also universal transformation of every day’s life in a technical realm), Günther Anders described these dangers as a result from the *Promethean gap*, the difference which has emerged between the technological performance and the effective possibilities of human nature. For Anders, this *gap* let the human being feel the *Promethean shame* which is not any more a moral feeling in the face of the destroying possibilities of technology but the feeling of not being coequal to technology². Today, perhaps we don’t feel any more this *shame* and therefore we don’t perceive any more the *gap* which separates humanity from the technological promises. In this way, it has become realised what already Anders himself had described as the transhuman dimension of technology – even if not with the ‘transhuman enthusiasm’ of its contemporary versions: «In no other sense than the one in which Napoleon spoke of politics 150 years ago, and Marx of the economy 100 years ago, is technology now our fate. And even if it may no longer be possible for us to guide the hand of our fate, or even to watch its fingers move – we should not, for that reason, give up trying»³.

But even Heidegger was already aware that the challenge of technology does not lie in the atomic bomb or any technical artifact, but in the way it transforms the human understanding of Being and of the self⁴: in other

¹ Bormann observes indeed that «the increasing penetration of our lifeworld by AI systems is becoming more and more positively perceived» (F.-J. BORMANN, *Ist die praktische Vernunft des Menschen durch KI-Systeme ersetzbar? Zum unterschiedlichen Status von menschlichen Personen und (selbst)lernenden Maschinen*, in *Digitalisierung im Gesundheitswesen. Anthropologische und ethische Herausforderungen neuer Entwicklungen der Mensch-Maschine-Interaktion*, ed. by A. Fritz et al., Herder, Freiburg 2021, pp. 41-64, here p. 42; all translations, unless otherwise noted, are by the author: M.K.).

² «To regard these defendants [in the trials in which ‘crimes against humanity’ were prosecuted] simply as random specimens of dehumanized or hardened individuals would be utterly mistaken. If they were incapable of feeling remorse, shame, or any other kind of moral reaction, it was not despite their participation – but in most cases precisely because they had merely participated. In some instances, it was even because they *had* participated – meaning: for them, being ‘moral’ coincided entirely with being a fully integrated member of their social environment. And thus, as ‘participants’, they possessed a clear conscience» (G. ANDERS, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen. Über die Seele im Zeitalter der zweiten industriellen Revolution*, Beck, München 1961, p. 287).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴ The way in which happens this revealing of Being in the technological era is the *Enframing* («Gestell»). Through this process, the world and everything within it – nature,

words, technological thinking transforms our entire attitude toward our self-understanding within reality, and therefore in general of ‘existence’. Therefore, already in 1953, Heidegger had to take refuge in Hölderlin, concluding his essay on the essence of technology with reflections on his famous phrase: «But where danger is, grows / The saving power also»⁵. He asks, in other words, whether the very extremity of technological “en-framing” might awaken a new openness to Being⁶. Will we ever be able to relate ourselves to Being and reality, to the others, in another but technical way? Will we anew be able to catch significance not by doing and producing but by listening? Hope, here, is not about technological progress but about *Gelassenheit* – a releasement, a letting-be, that allows for a different relation to the world. In this way, technology was elevated in the range of the future-forming force: not any more politics or the economy (at least if it is thought without technics), but technology is seen as the universal tool for finding ‘hope’, even if this is – as it will be shown – not more than mere ‘optimism’. And while Heidegger reflected this dimensions, Pope Pius “hoped” that the ethical consciousness of Humans can avoid the dystopic consequences of technology: «It is therefore necessary to devise appropriate measures from now on, so that the dynamism of technology does not turn into a public calamity»⁷. The question is, which diverse anthropological presuppositions let Pope Pius XII pronounce this perspective of hope which is convinced that humanity can preserve its autonomous agency and

objects, even human beings – come to be seen primarily as resources, standing reserve (*Bestand*), ready to be used, controlled, optimized, and exploited for human ends. In this way, the objectivization of Being which always was the problem of metaphysics, came to its perfection; cfr. M. HEIDEGGER, *The Question Concerning Technology*, in Id., *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, transl. by W. Lovitt, Garland, New York-London 1977, pp. 3-35.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁶ Cfr. also the recent analysis of Donati: «digital devices are not mere tools but rather social forces that are increasingly affecting our self-conception (who we are), our mutual interactions (how we socialize), our conception of reality (our metaphysics), our interactions with reality (our agency) and much more» (P. DONATI, *Being Human (or What?) in the Digital Matrix Land: The Construction of the Humanted*, in *Post-Human Futures. Human Enhancement, Artificial Intelligence and Social Theory*, ed. by M. Carrigan and D.V. Porpora, Routledge, London 2021, pp. 23-47, here p. 23).

⁷ Pius XII, *Discorso ai partecipanti al congresso nazionale dell'Unione Cristiana Imprenditori Dirigenti del 7 marzo 1957*, https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/it/speeches/1957/documents/hf_p-xii_spe_19570307_ucid.html (consulted on April 1st, 2025).

therefore find an ethical way to deal with the technological challenge⁸. As we can see immediately, two very distinct perspectives of ‘hope’ emerge in the way in which Heidegger and Pius XII deal with technology.

What is characterizing our today’s society, though, is neither the one nor the other dimension of ‘hope’ but a mere ‘optimism’: as we have seen, for sure no one feels anymore ‘shame’ because of the *Promethean gap*, and technics, also in their ‘transhuman effects’ on our society, is not anymore object of fear about the future. To the contrary, future has become the object of ‘design’ (or ‘configuration’), through technology. What Heidegger described about the ‘being’, has become true about the ‘future’: it is ‘on our disposal’. Isn’t it characteristic for our times that the doubt if the technological progress could flatten one day or stop, is not even considered – and that the only ‘hope’ has become the one that technological progress will never end and resolve the problems of human mankind? In this way, a real recognition of our human situation is missing out, and what is emerging under this ‘optimism’ is an indistinct feeling of anxiety. Hopelessness, indeed, can express itself as ‘blind optimism’ and ‘anxiety’, which determines then many dystopic visions of the future, and in many people assumes the form of ‘fear’. Anxiety and fear block us and let us become completely passive towards the technological advancement which proposes a comprehension of reality always less oriented to the centrality of human dignity, and which is in *this sense* ‘transhuman’ (not in the sense of the transhuman

⁸ The position of Pius XII is certainly based on an under-complex interpretation of the technological impact on society, which characterizes the ecclesial position on new technologies until today. The Vatican *Note* «Antiqua et nova» from January 14th, 2025, indeed, affirms that «the differences between human intelligence and current AI systems become evident. While AI is an extraordinary technological achievement capable of imitating certain outputs associated with human intelligence, it operates by performing tasks, achieving goals, or making decisions based on quantitative data and computational logic» (https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_dff_doc_20250128_antiqua-et-nova_en.html [consulted on March 2nd, 2025], n. 30). In this way, human agency is always presupposed as given, but Heidegger’s argument is that right this assumption has become problematic in the technological era: «There are almost no human abilities left that are not already attributed to artificial systems today: perceiving, recognizing, thinking, reasoning, evaluating, or making decisions. Conversely, human consciousness today often appears to many as merely a sum of algorithms – a complex data structure in the brain that, in principle, could also be realized by electronic systems and is no longer necessarily tied to the living body» (T. FUCHS, *Menschliche und künstliche Intelligenz – ein kritischer Vergleich*, in *ntelligenz – Theoretische Grundlagen und praktische Anwendungen*, ed. by R.M. Holm-Hadulla *et al.*, Heidelberg University Publishing, Heidelberg 2021, pp. 347-362, here p. 348).

agenda). If Turing and Heidegger have directed the philosophical gaze not toward what technology consists of in its individual manifestations, but toward what it means when technology takes over human functions, then likewise the perspective of hope in the technological age is not primarily about what one hopes for (*spes quae*), but about what it existentially means to be a hoping human being (*spes qua*) under the conditions of technology – and what anthropological and social-ethical prerequisites this requires.

What today is considered a reliable answer to the question of these fears are the ethical and political rules which, especially in Europe, are believed to be able to confront the dangers of technology *ex ante*. Besides the evident problematic how to ‘rule in advance’, and given the validity of the European *AI Act* – which was, in a dynamic called *Brussels effect*, emulated in many countries and parts of the world – it is clear, though, that ‘rules’ are not enough to face the real challenges of the new technologies for society. Besides them there is also need for hope, because while rules *imped* certain actions, *hope* is leading and inspiring us to find new solutions and to overcome the paralysing effects of anxiety. But to do so, it is important to focus on the foundations of hope, which are of a cultural and ethical nature. And it is precisely this dimension that is regrettably lacking in European reflection. What is missing is the awareness of the fact that if «technics only prevail when they can connect within their social context, then that means they solve a problem. So, both sides have to remain undefined: what problem, and what solution?»⁹ In other words, before the question of ‘which rules’ we have to face the analysis what technics is telling us about our society and how we can collocate it in a perspective of future which is *not only technical*.

2. *Technology and the Human*

In recent times we notice another ‘coincidence’ between the reflections of the Pope and a Philosopher: while the Church got prepared to the *Jubilee of Hope*, Byung Chul-Han published a reflection on hope in which he took the distance from a Heideggerian pessimism, interpreting *The Spirit of Hope* as the capability to face the threatening challenges of our times and concretely of technics, instead of a ‘blind optimism’ which

⁹ A. NASSEHI, *Muster. Theorie der digitalen Gesellschaft*, Beck, München 2019, p. 18.

he rejects. Hope means the opening of possibilities and of *time* which the technological dynamics ‘block’: «Those who hope, put their trust in possibilities that point beyond the ‘badly existing’. Hope enables us *to break out of closed time as a prison*»¹⁰. Therefore, the contrary to hope is not ‘despair’ but rather ‘anxiety’, because it trappers the individual and isolates or separates it from any relationship. This would be the perspective of a world in which all is reduced to ‘things’, even the ‘Others’¹¹. It is this the real social effect of technics, according to Han: we don’t perceive any more the presence of the Other, and therefore world and society are lacking of their most important dimension for the subject and its *intentionality*. Therefore, intentionality towards reality is deeply founded in an interpersonal context – and only in this interpersonal context hope as the «passion for the new»¹² can grow. It’s by otherness that persons become persons, and their interiority can flourish. As St. Augustin knew, the ‘interiority’ has its real spiritual dimension while opening the subject to otherness.

‘Hope’, therefore, is also a dimension of time, and not in the sense of mere utopia, but of a different present time: in its intentionality it is a counterbalance to the *acceleration* which characterizes the ‘time of technology’¹³. Therefore, AI can be translated as *accelerated intelligence*, and as Kahneman has shown, while human beings tend to avoid “System 2” which

¹⁰ B.-C. HAN, *Der Geist der Hoffnung. Wider die Gesellschaft der Angst*, Ullstein, Berlin 2024, p. 17.

¹¹ «Total interconnection and total communication by digital means does not facilitate encounters with Others. [...] The imperative of authenticity engenders a narcissistic compulsion. Narcissism is distinct from healthy self-love, which has nothing pathological about it; it does not rule out love for the Other. The narcissist, however, is blind to the Other. The Other is bent into shape until the ego recognizes itself in them. The narcissistic subject perceives the world only in shadings of itself. This results in a disastrous consequence: the Other disappears» (B.-C. HAN, *The Expulsion of the Other. Society, Perception and Communication Today*, transl. by W. Hoban, Polity, Cambridge-Medford (MA) 2018, pp. 9 and 26; cfr. id. *Der Geist der Hoffnung*, cit., p. 23).

¹² «The spirit of hope inspires action. It gives it a passion for the new. Action thus becomes passion. Whoever does not dream forward dares no new beginning. Without the spirit of hope, action withers away to mere activity or problem-solving» (B.-C. HAN, *Der Geist der Hoffnung*, cit., p. 53). This is a further step of the ‘de-reifying’ effect of information technologies: «The digital order *de-reifies* the world by *informatizing* it» (Id., *Non-things. Upheaval in the Lifeworld*, transl. by D. Steuer, Polity, Cambridge-Medford (MA) 2022, p. 1).

¹³ The analysis of the connection between ‘acceleration’ and ‘technology’ is very complex, though. An obvious seeming consequence should be avoided: to consider the first as a mere result from the latter, because this would lead unavoidably to a radical critique of technics; cfr. R. KOSELLEK, *Zeitschichten. Studien zur Historik*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 2000, p. 157.

is slow, deliberate, and logical and therefore requires effort and energy, this dimension is resigned always more to technology. In this way, we do not counterbalance anymore the “System 1” which is fast thinking that allows us to function efficiently, but can lead precisely for this characteristic to systematic biases and errors in judgment¹⁴. This observation reveals that it is not technology which by ‘cyborgization’ with the human brain transforms us (this happens in certain transhuman experiments), but rather by its cultural effects. It is by the way in which we use actively the new technologies that we transform ourselves and the ‘rational’ – which means ‘relational’ – structure of reality. But Kahneman himself, by describing our decisional structure, sees human judgements and actions always as a collaboration between both Systems, and in this collaboration, we can try to see a possibility for thinking about an integration of human and artificial intelligence in the realization of social complex situations. This means, that IA technology can only be understood as part of the realization of human intelligence and not vice versa. And this leads to the specific characterization of spirit as relational realization¹⁵.

Not by chance, Han refers to Gabriel Marcel when he specifies the hope as an interpersonal structure and relationship: for him, «the most appropriate and refined expression of the act that the verb *to hope* translates in a still confused and veiled way» is «I hope in you for us»¹⁶. By saying this, he places hope within the concrete dimension of the individual’s existence, which cannot stand apart from the relationship with the other. Therefore, he emphasizes the «superiority of the relationship expressed by the words *to hope in*. It seems that a philosophy based on the principle of contract is prone to ignoring what gives value to this relationship»¹⁷. In other words, if we realize humanity – and we cannot do it without realizing

¹⁴ Massarenti comments this actual dynamic in this way: «It is our tendency to rely too often on the speed of our thoughts that leads us to make foolish or wrong – if not dangerous – decisions. And this happens even if we are very intelligent!» (A. MASSARENTI, *Come siamo diventati stupidi. Una immodesta proposta per tornare intelligenti*, Guerini e Associati, Milano 2024, p. 154).

¹⁵ This was also the central insight of Hegel and the very distinctive dimension of *spirit* diverse from *materia*: the spirit is “in itself” only while being in otherness, and this constitutes its specific structure of “I that is We and We that is I”; cfr. I. TESTA and L. RUGGIU, “*I that is We, We that is I*”. *Perspectives on Contemporary Hegel. Social Ontology, Recognition, Naturalism, and the Critique of Kantian Constructivism*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2016.

¹⁶ G. MARCEL, *Homo viator. Prolegomeni ad una metafisica della speranza*, transl. by L. Castiglione and M. Rettori, Borla, Roma 1967, pp. 47 and 72.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

ourselves through relationship – than we raised the most effective defence wall against the ‘threatening’ of technology¹⁸. It is within this relationship that hope doesn’t remain a mere ‘subjective mood’ but becomes intention for action: the human being is characterised, in other words, by theoretical and practical intentionality. And here stands a characteristic of Christian hope, which is expressed by the Social Doctrine of Church: it translates hope into action and proposes a concrete way of living relationships¹⁹.

But maybe this ethical reflection is not enough. Because technology is not something that ‘looms over’ the human being from an external instance, but rather, it is shaped by the human being’s own self-understanding, which is realized through technology. It is thus mistaken to separate ‘human nature’ and ‘technology’; and if they can only be properly understood in their mutual relation, then this also means that the specific form of digital technologies corresponds to concrete human needs – particularly the need to organize oneself within the process of social realization²⁰. ‘Information’, therefore, is not a mysterious entity in which the whole reality is becoming transformed and where the human being is transformed into its ‘divine’ sublimation, but a way to *order* an extremely complex reality, and it is clear that this way of ordering social complexity does not ‘naturally’ assign to the human being its centrality. In the age of information, organization is completely horizontal, binary, and based on probability calculations grounded in an understanding of reality as data. And if ‘information’ always served to create connections and therefore organize society and establish power, what does it mean if it has lost any reference to an objective value – as it has been *human dignity* in modern social organization for example? Against Harari’s assumption that information never had this reference, the real

¹⁸ «The relational approach to social organisations can show why and how AI and robots cannot replace humans because of the specific generative character of inter-human relations» (P. DONATI, *The digital matrix and the hybridisation of society*, in *Post-Human Institutions and Organisations: Confronting the Matrix*, ed. by I. Al-Amoudi and E. Lazega, Routledge, Abingdon 2019, pp. 67-92, here p. 86).

¹⁹ Indeed, a critique which is often pronounced to Han’s consideration is that «[s]ome still won’t be impressed. The book is repetitive in places and stays at the level of theory. If you are looking for practical steps to slow climate change or achieve world peace, *The Spirit of Hope* will disappoint. If you are looking for arguments that are thoroughly qualified and nuanced, you won’t like Han’s bracingly strong claims» (S. KNEPPER, *Hope Out of Despair: A Review of Byung-Chul Han’s The Spirit of Hope*, in «Front Porch Republic», <https://www.frontporchrepublic.com/2024/12/hope-out-of-despair-a-review-of-byung-chul-hans-the-spirit-of-hope/>, consulted on March 9th, 2025).

²⁰ Cfr. A. NASSEHI, *Muster*, cit., p. 37.

question is which consequences does it have if information is only about creating connections, not being referred to reality. In this case, indeed, information can pretend to be the solution of all the problems, because the maximum of evidence is not reference but tautology ($A=A$). And without this reference, hope is not any more an issue: it implodes in the universal non-explicability of the system of information in which, indeed, we 'trust' the probability factor of information and take this assumption for granted as affirmation on reality. In this way, the system of information substitutes any metaphysical reference and «nourishes the hope of finally being able to once again rely on certainties and provide ultimate foundations»²¹. But hope lives of this «true creativity which consists in adding a new dimension to what already exists. The new point lies outside the plane of what is already known. For someone trapped within that plane – like an ant – it's impossible to see the point in space; they can only project it onto the surface on which they move»²². As Pierpaolo Donati puts it, what is happening is the division between the social dimension and the human dimension, and while the first one is the 'problem perceived' for which 'technology is the answer' (Nassehi), the latter one finds tendentially less possibilities of its expression and concrete recognition: «In today's future-oriented societies, it is becoming increasingly difficult to attribute a truly human quality to social life. The human has become an immense battlefield, where what is at stake is the very way in which relationships are conceived and practiced as the generative bond of human life. The social is no longer perceived as the place where the human dwells»²³.

Human dignity, in other words, is something practice, and without an intelligence which is able to form reality though the realization of practical judgements, it does not become real. «Judgments of practical reason not only have a semantic dimension and a reference to certain states of affairs in the world; because of their prescriptive character, they also aim at concrete action. The practical insight that certain normative reasons speak in favour of an action seeks to become effective in action»²⁴. In other words,

²¹ R. FEUSTEL, «Am Anfang war die Information». *Digitalisierung als Religion*, Verbrecher, Berlin 2018, p. 116.

²² R. MANZOTTI and S. ROSSI, *Io & Ia. Mente, Cervello e GPT*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli (CZ) 2023, p. 154.

²³ P. DONATI, *Il destino dell'umanesimo: il terzo (incluso) come relazione tra umano e sociale*, in «Annales Theologici», XXXVI, 2022, pp. 179-200, here p. 179.

²⁴ F.-J. BORMANN, *Ist die praktische Vernunft*, cit., p. 58.

hope is proactive²⁵, and therefore expresses an utopian force: it wants to transform reality. It introduces the ‘third element’ in the logic, which is important to perceive finality and a moral perspective, as already Simmel confirmed: «the structure of purpose is ternary, while that of mechanism is only binary»²⁶. But already Guardini demonstrated that binary structures are not generative, and that human polarities are diverse: while mechanisms are closed, predictable, and static and do not let room for surprise, development, or transformation, polarities generate energy, challenge, and possibility. In this way, technology brings back to human reality because only by the precedence of the ternary logic, the binary can be understood²⁷. At the same time, there is no need to reduce reality to the binary logic, and a perspective of hope is emerging beyond it. This dimension can be anthropologically confirmed, finding therefore the reason why for the Social Doctrine of Church, technology does not constitute a threat to the constitutive precedence of human being, and ethical advises result very clearly from this approach which therefore seems superficial only at its very surface of Magisterial pronouncement.

It is a very specific moment in the *corpus* of the Catholic Social Doctrine, that the Pope is referring explicitly to philosophical-anthropological considerations. In his Address to the G7 session on artificial intelligence, on June 14th, 2024, Pope Francis stated: «Our ability to fashion tools, in a quantity and complexity that is unparalleled among living things, speaks of a *techno-human condition*: human beings have always maintained a relationship with the environment mediated by the tools they gradually produced. It is not possible to separate the history of men and women and of

²⁵ «Hope has an *active core*. The spirit of hope animates and inspires our actions» (B.-C. HAN, *Der Geist der Hoffnung*, cit., p. 41).

²⁶ G. SIMMEL, *Filosofia del denaro*, UTET, Torino 1984, p. 302.

²⁷ «Not absolute variation therefore, but living variation, not rigid uniformity, but living. But all this means: rhythm» (R. GUARDINI, *L'opposizione polare. Saggio per una filosofia del concreto vivente*, Morcelliana, Brescia 1997, p. 115). And not only Donati confirms: «While binary bits are simply read as 1 or 0, quantum bits, on the other hand, allow computers to read any value between 0 and 1, making much more sophisticated and faster calculations possible» (P. DONATI, *Il destino*, cit., p. 187), but also the High Tech developer Federico Faggin: «consciousness cannot emerge from non-conscious matter, whereas unconsciousness can arise either as an absence of consciousness or as a very limited form of it. In the same way, free will – which requires indeterminism – cannot emerge from determinism. However, determinism can emerge from indeterminism, just as classical physics emerges from quantum physics» (F. FAGGIN, *Oltre l'invisibile Dove scienza e spiritualità si uniscono*, Mondadori, Milano, p. 14).

civilization from the history of these tools. Some have wanted to read into this a kind of shortcoming, a deficit, within human beings, as if, because of this deficiency, they were forced to create technology²⁸. A careful and objective view actually shows us the opposite. We experience a state of “outwardness” with respect to our biological being: we are beings inclined toward what lies outside-of-us, indeed we are radically open to the beyond»²⁹. A deeper and systematic reflection on this affirmation can help us to individuate the specific perspectives of hope through technology.

3. *The personological difference*

By explicitly rejecting the anthropological approach of Arnold Gehlen, and indirectly affirming the possibility to consider instead Helmuth Plessner's approach in order to develop a positive-critic perspective on the new technologies, Pope Francis gives in this *Address* an important hermeneutical tool: IA is not in a relationship of *concurrence* to human nature, and can give therefore important insights on how to realize the dimension of ‘hope.’ For Plessner, indeed, it is not about to theorize a static essence of human being, but to uncover its structural position: in the ‘new order’ of information, what is to be discovered is the ‘position’ of human being in the real world and how the real world should be understood from the ‘positional’ and not ‘essential’ point of view. If all life is different from not living beings, then it is characterized by a its characteristic positionality: by reflective relationships and behaving in the world, the human being has its world, not by being ‘put’ into a metaphysical order³⁰. While plants have an «open positionality», because they do not distinguish organically between themselves and the world around, a bodily life as that of animals is characterized by «centric positionality»: and here is a first characteristic for the confrontation with the digital matrix in which this centricity cannot be explained. The difference of human beings lies in the fact that they transcend this structure through their capacity

²⁸ Here the reference is to: A. GEHLEN, *L'uomo. La sua natura e il suo posto nel mondo*, transl. by C. Mainoldi, Feltrinelli, Milano 1983, p. 43.

²⁹ POPE FRANCIS, *Address to the G7 Session on Artificial Intelligence*, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2024/june/documents/20240614-g7-intelligenza-artificiale.html> (consulted on October 25th, 2025).

³⁰ Cfr. H. PLESSNER, *Levels of Organic Life and the Human. An Introduction to Philosophical Anthropology*, transl. by M. Hyatt, Fordham University Press, New York 2019.

to distance themselves from themselves. The human being is at once within its body and outside it, able to observe itself, to reflect upon its own actions, to anticipate, to laugh at itself, to feel shame, and to construct meaning beyond immediate experience³¹. This is what in Hegel is the dynamics of spirit in its difference to *materia*. So the human being *has* its body, *has* a world and a relationship to others, and *is realizing itself* only through this relationship. The specificity of bodily existence lies in the fact that the *limit* of the body is not a passive-ontological reality but the original realization of the living body, and the spirit is intimately bound on this structure. By being outside its centre³², human existence is realizing itself only through positive relationship to others³³. Even the relationship to itself is constitutively mediated by the category of otherness. That's why otherness cannot be distinguished from personal identity, and this dimension characterizes the person in its difference to things. This is, as we can say, the *personological difference*³⁴: «in principle the AI/robot can perform the first operation (being for oneself) but not the second (being for others), because to be able to implement second-order relational reflexivity it should have the same relational nature of humans»³⁵.

Plessner specifies this reality through the three laws of «natural artificiality», of «mediated immediacy», and of «utopian standpoint». By the first law, he expresses the positive way to confront himself with technology: it is not – as in Gehlen – an expression of a human ‘misery’ or ‘limiteness’ where the limit is always interpreted in a negative way and therefore technics appears as a concurrence to human being. If, the other way round, the human reality is for itself technical, then the dimension of technology is a positive reality of realizing the human being. Therefore, it can be avoided the methodology of the majority of theological approaches which collocate themselves in a confrontation with *transhumanism*, giving to this the interpreting precedence, while the reality is characterised not by transhumanism but by the *technological condition* of the human being. By the second law, human being realizes a dynamic which is characterizing its relationship in

³¹ «The animal lives out from its center and into its center but not *as* center. [...] it is a system that refers back to itself, a self, but it does not experience – itself» (*ibid.*, p. 267).

³² «If the life of the animal is centric, the life of the human, although unable to break out of this centrality, is at the same time out of it and thus excentric» (*ibid.*, p. 271).

³³ «The excentric form of his positionality ensures the real ity of the shared world for the human» (*ibid.*, p. 280).

³⁴ Here we can see the possibility for an important dialogue with Robert Spaemann.

³⁵ P. DONATI, *Being human*, cit., pp. 39-40.

a specific way: not by immediacy – as the artificial reality of machines – but by *mediated immediacy*, and the mediation is the body. So it is the biological body which – in its immediacy – guarantees the *mediation* that is characteristic for the spirit³⁶, and we have a proof of the substantial coincidence between the structure of the biological human body and the spirit (or the *hylemorphical union*, in Thomistic terms). And the third point is the one which engages the topic of hope: the human being is structurally a being of hope, and without hope, there is an anthropological lack in its realization. Plessner formulates this hope as grounding in «the consciousness of the absolute contingency of existence» which makes awaken the consciousness «of necessary being resting in itself, of the absolute or God» which is not faith (it becomes faith only if this absolute «reality corresponding to his excentricity» gets fixed): therefore what emerges here is a dimension of hope beyond (or better: before) any faith³⁷. This dimension emerges in the affirmation which at the same time confirms what was affirmed above: «The human is the shared world. The human is humanity— that is, as an individual he can be substituted and replaced in an absolute sense»³⁸.

What is called here the *personological difference* is the way in which the human *person* (not the subject) is realizing its uniqueness and therefore *dignity* (in the Kantian sense) by realizing reflexive relationships (to itself, the others, God), *through its bodily existence*. These are the *locus* of hope and of the realization of human projects³⁹. Relationship is therefore either reflexive (*intellectus*) either bodily (*voluntas*). The *chiffre* for human realization is therefore not the third person (it, the ‘robot’), neither the first person (the egologic transcendental subject) but the *other* (and therefore a you-relation). As we can see, Marcel’s structure of hope is confirmed by this anthropological ground-reflection towards the technological challenge.

³⁶ «This means, for one, that while his relationship to other things is indirect, he lives it as a direct, immediate relationship just like the animal – inasmuch as he, like the animal, is subject to the law of the closed form of life and this form’s positionality. Second, it means that he knows of the indirectness of his relationship; it is given to him as mediated» (H. PLESSNER, *Levels of Organic Life and the Human*, cit., p. 302).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 317.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 318.

³⁹ «What is certain is that AIs and robots cannot create social capital per se. They cannot define our well-being and they cannot create relational goods, such as trust or friendship. There can therefore be no ‘we believe’ between humans and robots» (P. DONATI, *Being human*, cit., p. 41).

4. *Technology and the question of God*

If technological production is an essential expression of human eccentricity – humans must build, extend, and supplement themselves because of their structural openness – then technology is not *in itself* a dimension which impedes the faithful relationship to God, but can – the other way round – be a *topos* or a hermeneutical way to understand something of this relationship. Could it be that in the end of the day technology brings us closer to God, and not by a Heideggerian *disperation* (“Only a God Can Save Us”⁴⁰) but in a positive-Christian matter?

One of the important outcomes of Plessner’s anthropology, indeed, was the possibility to understand the dimension of ‘hope’ as the perspective of the ‘perfection’ of the finite (which is not its ‘absolutization’) – in the transhumanist idea of an infinite augmentation of intramundane perfection, this per definition cannot be reached: «While transhumanist visions of the future seek to infinitely enhance and optimize the finite within the immanent, purely quantitative realm, the Christian faith envisions, by contrast, a qualitative and definitive fulfilment of the finite – setting theological finality against transhumanist infinity»⁴¹. In this perspective, hope becomes the capacity to admit and affirm entirely the worldly reality, and to live it also in its dimensions of fragility and pain which a transhumanistic optimism continuously negate. Hope, from a theological perspective, is the capacity to create new beginnings for this world, in attentiveness to the pain and suffering of the world. Neither for the Greek thought, neither for IA, the dimension of suffering can assume a potential sense for discovering humanity and therefore hope as significance for the present⁴². «Artificial intelligence is a mirror of ourselves as human beings. The question of whether robots are meant to replace us entirely or merely serve as our assistants comes only second. First and foremost, we need to confront the much deeper question

⁴⁰ M. HEIDEGGER, “Only a God Can Save Us”: *The Spiegel Interview* (1966), in *Heidegger. The Man and the Thinker*, ed. by T. Sheehan, Transaction, New Brunswick (NJ)-London 1981, pp. 45-68.

⁴¹ O. DÜRR, *Homo Novus. Vollendlichkeit im Zeitalter des Transhumanismus. Beiträge zu einer Techniktheologie*, Aschendorff, Münster 2021, p. 22.

⁴² «Without suffering, no form of knowledge is possible that could radically break with the past. [...] The negativity of suffering is constitutive for thinking. It is, therefore, suffering that distinguishes human thinking from calculation and artificial intelligence» (B.-C. HAN, *La società senza dolore. Perché abbiamo bandito la sofferenza dalle nostre vite*, transl. by S. Aglan-Buttazzi, Einaudi, Torino 2021, p. 53).

of who and what we, as humans, actually are»⁴³: therefore, the ‘hope’ is not that technology will resolve our problems but that human being will be able to discover itself, its dignity and social responsibility, also in the dimension of *infosphere*.

So the theological discourse of hope is not only meant in an eschatological perspective of faith, but also as a sense-giving dimension for a human society: «Where hope should arise, it ought to be established and secured as a new and original concept of earthly possibilities, set against those of the otherworldly»⁴⁴. Theology – especially in this *Jubilee of Hope* – should not skitter away from this social responsibility of the discourse on God, restraining the hope only to the field defined and prepared by faith. God should be a perspective of hope also for the secular society in its technological challenges: «Public debate needs an open, metaphysically aware discussion about God – precisely because the question is not only whether God exists, but also what kind of rationality we are willing to accept»⁴⁵.

And as we have seen, rationality is no longer anything theoretical, but has to do with human culture and the defeat of anxiety which has returned in our “crisis epoch”. «Today’s anxiety [...] takes place within the everyday consensus. It is an everyday fear»⁴⁶. Hope is not only about the openness to new possibilities of reality. It is not by chance that the whole Christian tradition has always distinguished between faith and hope. Hope is about the common realization of a human project: it does not research for ‘partners’ who share a common ‘faith’ but realizes a new form of humanity where others cannot see a way to change reality. The Good Samaritan is the archetype of hope which consists in the interruption – in the refusal to accept the world as it is. The Good Samaritan does not ask whether the wounded man deserves help, whether it is efficient, or whether someone else should act. He becomes hope for the wounded man simply by showing up, by being present, by crossing the boundary between distance and nearness.

The reason why we lose hope today is that we don’t care anymore about the quality of our social relationships: «it is not enough to improve

⁴³ G. STOCKER, *Von künstlicher Intelligenz zur sozialen Intelligenz*, in *Gott und die digitale Revolution*, ed. by S.J. Lederhilger, Pustet, Regensburg 2019, pp. 73-96, here p. 74.

⁴⁴ H. BLUMENBERG, *Säkularisierung und Selbstbehauptung*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 1983², p. 40.

⁴⁵ R. PRESILLA, *La società tecnologica senza Dio?*, in «Vita e Pensiero», CVIII, 2025, n. 1, pp. 77-83, here p. 83.

⁴⁶ B.-C. HAN, *The Expulsion*, cit., p. 34.

the abilities and performances of an individual (its body and/or mind) or a social group or organization, but it is necessary to verify that enhancement operations have positive repercussions on the persons' social (i.e., 'relational') life»⁴⁷.

Conclusions

Hope in the technological age cannot be naïve. It must pass through the lucidity of Anders, the attentiveness of Heidegger, the critique of Han, and the existential analysis of Marcel. Following the indications of the Social Doctrine of Church, it has to be anthropologically grounded and Plessner's view can give such a reason for rediscovering human dignity as distinguished quality of human relationships, as Donati claims. Through these analyses emerge a perspective of hope which does not ignore the dangers and alienations technology brings, and neither can it surrender to despair. What this approach wants to realize is an anthropological grounding of hope as an existential disposition of the subject which permits to face the challenges of technology in a constructive but not 'blind' way. Theology and Social Doctrine of Church should actively take part at this discourse. The question to which 'human projects' we want to use these technologies become, in this perspective, central – and an anthropological situated hope is the hermeneutical criterium for individuating them.

The loss of the existential sense of humanity, which emerges through the disappear of the 'Other' and the human condition as fragility and limitedness, can be illustrated by the fact that in the technological condition, "Being able to write a good prompt" has taken the place of the capacity of "being able to put the right questions": but in the measure in which all questions become tendentially the same, society loses hope. Rediscovering the Social Doctrine of Church and its anthropological implications in order to reflect on the concrete possibilities to realize humanity in the technological era, is an important contribution, because «[t]o the hopeful, the world appears in a different light. Hope gives the world a special *radiance*; it *brightens* the world»⁴⁸.

⁴⁷ P. DONATI, *Being Human*, cit., p. 24.

⁴⁸ B.-C. HAN, *Der Geist der Hoffnung*, cit., p. 39.

NEW HUMANISM IN THE TIME OF NEUROSCIENCE AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: AN INTERNATIONAL ACTION-RESEARCH PROJECT*

MATHIEU GUILLERMIN

Abstract:

This contribution presents NHNAI (New Humanism in the time of Neuroscience and Artificial Intelligence), an action-research project coordinated by Lyon Catholic University (UCLy) under the aegis of the International Federation of Catholic Universities. With a consortium of thirteen partners on five continents, NHNAI aims to harness the resources of partner institutions to strengthen the ethical orientation of all stakeholders, through collective exploration of what it means to be human in the age of AI and neuroscience. We outline the project's main philosophical orientations, as well as its organizational modalities, and we propose an overview of its first results.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Neuroscience, Humanism, Ethics, Collective exploration.

Recent developments in the fields of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Neuroscience (NS) raise a host of ethical issues. Some of these deeply question (or even disrupt and threaten) our societies, our lifestyles and the ways in which we relate to others and the world around us. How can we make sense of the ever-increasing insights provided by neuroscience into the biological aspects of our cognition, our free will and even our consciousness? Should we use this knowledge to capture people's attention and more or less guide their behavior? In commercial communication? Political communica-

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tion? Should we be looking for an alternative to an economic model based on an apparent gratuity, but with the counterpart of a certain form of predation on attention time? How should we relate to robots or virtual personas capable of imitating the cognitive or affective behaviors of living beings, and humans in particular, in an increasingly convincing way? What role can AI technologies play in public administration and democratic life, in healthcare and education?

The project New Humanism in the time of Neuroscience and Artificial Intelligence (NHNAI)¹ is a action-research project aimed at reinforcing the ethical orientation capacities of all players concerned by these types of issues linked to NS and AI. Under the aegis of the International Federation of Catholic Universities, the NHNAI project is coordinated by the CONFLUENCE: Sciences et Humanités (EA1598) research unit of the Lyon Catholic University (UCLy), and brings together eleven other partners from around the world². The aim of NHNAI is to put the resources of participating academic and scientific institutions at the service of collective reflection, in society, on what it means to be human, in order to better navigate in the age of AI and NS. The NHNAI project intends to contribute to strengthening collective capacities for ethical orientation along two structuring and intertwined axes: 1) contribute to the development of an “ethical compass” through reflection on the theme of humanism, and a renewed exploration of what it means to “be human” in the age of AI and NS. 2) to contribute to the development of this compass, not only through academic research, but also through an action-research initiative with the societal players concerned.

1. *Humanism, and ambiguous though indispensable idea?*

In which direction, to which magnetic north, should a compass that is supposed to support ethical orientation in the age of AI and NS point?

¹ For complementary information and more detailed results, see: <https://nhnai.org/>.

² In addition to the International Federation of Catholic Universities and the Lyon Catholic University, the NHNAI network currently includes the following partners: Santa Clara University and Notre Dame University (USA), Cégep de Sainte-Foy (Québec, Canada), Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (Chile), The Catholic University of Eastern Africa (Kenya), Fu Jen Catholic University (Taiwan), Université de Namur (Belgium), Universidade Católica Portuguesa (Portugal), Università di Roma LUMSA (Italia), Université Catholique de Lille and ICAM (France).

Faced with this major question, it would seem difficult to avoid an in-depth reflection on what “being humans” means, on what we are, but above all on what we want or need to be (hence the theme of humanism in its axiological sense). Numerous major principles of AI ethics appeal to the idea of the human: AI must be *human*-centric, at the service of *human* flourishing, the *human* must be kept on or in the loop, etc. More fundamentally, we can even see an almost organic link between ethics and the quest to understand what it means to be human. Ricoeur, for example, defines « ethical aim » as « the aim of the “good life” with and for others in just institutions³ ». How can we begin to forge the meaning of terms like “good life” or “just institutions” without at the same time reflecting on what it means to be human?

And it is indeed an effort to explore and deepen that is at hand. The notion of humanism is far from being clear and consensual, unproblematic and ready to serve the purpose of ethical orientation. Even taken only in the context of its emergence (in Europe with the Renaissance, then Modernity and the Enlightenment), the notion already incorporates multiple, disparate and sometimes conflicting dimensions⁴. Subsequently, many currents have opposed and continue to oppose the humanism of modernity head-on (anti-, post-, trans-humanism), highlighting its difficulties and limitations. Are there really precise characteristics that distinguish the human from the non-human? Are they universal? Isn't the almost absolute primacy granted by modern humanism to human autonomy and rationality problematic? Hasn't it led to the myth of the human as master and possessor of nature, with an automatic link between techno-scientific development and human progress? Today, these difficulties seem to be reinforced by the theoretical and scientific contributions of AI and NS, as well as by their technological spin-offs.

But perhaps the solution is not to reject the notion of humanism outright. It is also possible to put the notion back to work, through a renewed exploration capable of preserving and deepening the most fruitful contributions of the humanism of Modernity and the Enlightenment. It is common, for example, to retain from Kant only the idea of a human reason that can reach *a priori* conclusions in the spheres of science (about phenomena) and morality (with the categorical imperative) - pure theoretical and practi-

³ P. RICOEUR, *Soi-même comme un autre*, Éd. du Seuil, Paris, 1990, p. 202, our translation : « visée éthique » is defined as « la visée de la “vie bonne” avec et pour autrui dans des institutions justes ».

⁴ See for instance the illuminating historical and philosophical presentation of the notion of humanism: T. DAVIES, *Humanism*, Routledge, New York 1997.

cal reason. It is therefore all too common to point to the failure of Kantian epistemology (for example, the overcoming of Newtonian physics) and to discredit Modernity and humanism. But this would be to ignore the heart of Kantianism, with its central idea of the passage of humanity from minority to majority (the individual can and must think for himself, “*Sapere Aude*”) and the importance of the fundamental couple freedom-responsibility, which leads Kant to place practical reason, and above all the faculty of judgment, at the center of his entire philosophical system⁵. A « critical » rather than dogmatic modernity is conceivable⁶.

Depriving ourselves of this type of input in the age of AI and NS would only fuel the difficulties. It seems far more fruitful to deepen these resources, and to couple them with the exciting insights of AI, NS and cognitive science⁷ in order to outline the contours of a new humanism, opening up to a renewed understanding of our freedom, our intelligence, or our capacity to judge. From the limited epistemological and philosophical field in which I work, I see all the fruitfulness and necessity of an understanding that goes beyond the formal and algorithmic aspects to the living, lived dimension of who we are⁸. But it's more broadly an interdisciplinary exploration that we need to embark on, without prejudice as to which disciplines are likely to make a fruitful contribution. Anthropology, philosophy, sociology, NS, cognitive science, psychology, computer science, theology, law... and many more besides. Such diversity is essential if we are to address the issue of humanism in the age of AI and NS.

2. Structuring philosophical and epistemological commitments

As we have just seen, an interdisciplinary approach seems necessary if we are to successfully explore the notion of humanism. But the NHNAI

⁵ A. PHILONENKO, *L'œuvre de Kant - La Philosophie Critique Tome I : La Philosophie Precritique Et La Critique de La Raison Pure*, VRIN, Paris 1983. A. PHILONENKO, *L'œuvre de Kant - La philosophie critique : Tome II : Morale et politique*, VRIN, Paris 1997.

⁶ B. FELTZ, *La science et le vivant. Philosophie des sciences et modernité critique*, De Boeck supérieur, Louvain-La-Neuve 2014.

⁷ See for instance: H. MERCIER et D. SPERBER, *L'énigme de la raison*, Odile Jacob, Paris 2021. A. DAMASIO, *Sentir et savoir : Une nouvelle théorie de la conscience*, Odile Jacob, Paris 2021.

⁸ It seems to me, moreover, that the contributions of a phenomenology of life such as the one by Michel Henry could prove particularly valuable in this perspective. See: M. HENRY, *Incarnation. Une philosophie de la chair*, Éd. Du Seuil, Paris 2000.

project does not limit itself to such an interdisciplinary effort in a purely academic configuration. The NHNAI network partners in the nine countries involved are striving to contribute to strengthening the capacities for ethical orientation of all players concerned by the challenges raised by NS and AI, by putting academic and university resources at the service of collective reflection with societal players on what it means to be human in the age of AI and NS. Indeed, an academic and interdisciplinary approach to the question of humanism is essential, but certainly not sufficient to meet the ethical challenges raised by AI and NS.

2.1 « Wicked problems » and citizen involvement

The NHNAI project thus adopts a resolutely anti-technocratic approach, distancing itself from the traditional, highly unidirectional model of science as the holder of absolute truths which, in a position of epistemic surplomb, is tasked with informing society⁹. In this traditional model, scientific expertise is universally recognized as « the crucial component of decision-making¹⁰ ». Even supposing that a college of experts, albeit interdisciplinary, could determine what it means (must mean) to be human in the age of AI and NS, this solution would still have to be understood, accepted and implemented. But more fundamentally, this type of relationship between (scientific) expertise and political decision-making needs to be called into question, especially for epistemological reasons. Generally speaking, the idea that science is neutral and radically independent of politics and ethics is illusory¹¹. And the illusion becomes particularly dangerous when dealing with what we might call « wicked problems¹² » or « socially sensitive issues », such as « the nuclear phase-out, the dangerousness of GMOs, global warming », that is to say, « fuzzy problems relating to

⁹ M. GIBBONS, *Science's new social contract with society*, in « *Nature* » CDII, 1999, pp. C81-C84.

¹⁰ S.O. FUNTOWICZ and J.R. RAVETZ, *Science for the post-normal age*, in « *Futures* » XXV, 1993, p. 739-755.

¹¹ P. KITCHER, *Science, Truth, and Democracy*, Oxford University Press, New York 2001.

¹² C. POHL, B. TRUFFER and G. HIRSCH-HADORN, *Addressing Wicked Problems through Transdisciplinary Research*, in R. FRODEMAN (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity*, Oxford Academics, 2017, pp. 319-331.

decision-making¹³ ». These problems are as much scientific (including the human sciences) as they are political.

To tackle this type of thorny challenge, the contribution of technical and scientific expertise is essential, but not sufficient. A response will never be purely technical, but will also inevitably correspond to a political commitment (possibly implicit), to the adoption (voluntary or otherwise) of a way of living together. Just think of the algorithms used to recommend content on the Internet, designed above all to capture attention? How can we do things differently? With what economic model? Enlightened collective reflection and deliberation seem to be indispensable, on pain of tipping over into a technocratic approach that would be as ineffective as it would mutilate the freedom and autonomy of each and every individual. As Pope Francis affirms in his message for the fifty-seventh World Day of Peace, ensuring that AI serves « the cause of human fraternity and peace », it is not « the responsibility of a few but of the entire human family¹⁴ ». It's a question of freedom, but also of responsibility. It is the responsibility of each and every one of us to recognize, to welcome, to make ourselves available to the « ethical goad », to the « sincere concern for our common home and [the] real preoccupation about assisting the poor and the needy discarded by our society » (in the words of Pope Francis *Laudate Deum*¹⁵).

This affirmation, not only of the right (notably in the name of human freedom), but also of the responsibility of every member of the human family to engage in a collective effort of ethical orientation is highly significant for thinking about the specific responsibility of scientific, academic and university communities and expert groups. Faced with wicked problems such as those raised by AI and NS, the contribution of scientific and technical expertise must be humble and contribute to collective efforts in response to this ethical goad. It is in this spirit that the dimension of service to society (action-research) is placed at the heart of the NHNAI project. Academic exchanges within the network have great intrinsic value.

¹³ C. CHAUVIGNÉ et M. FABRE, *Questions socialement vives : quelles approches possibles en milieu scolaire ?*, in « Carrefours de l'éducation » LII, 2021, pp.15-31, our translation.

¹⁴ POPE FRANCIS, *Message for the 57th world day of peace*, 1 January 2024, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/20231208-messaggio-57gior-natamondiale-pace2024.html>

¹⁵ PAPE FRANÇOIS, *Laudate Deum*, Apostolic Exhortation, 4 October 2023, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/20231004-laudate-deum.html, sections 29-33.

Encouraging them is an objective in itself for the project. But it's crucial that these exchanges are put at the service of collective reflection, to enrich the societal discussions and debates organized by the various partners in the nine countries involved.

2.2 More than a juxtaposition of opinions, a joint elaboration respectful of complexity

Another distinctive feature of the NHNAI project is the way in which societal discussions are approached and organized. To put it succinctly, the NHNAI project aims to go beyond the simple juxtaposition of the individual opinions of the participants in the discussions, by encouraging a collective and rational elaboration of a shared understanding of the question of humanism in the age of AI and NS. In this respect, the epistemological background is of great importance. NHNAI stands in firm opposition to a culturally widespread conception that draws a principled demarcation between the realm of facts, susceptible to rational (scientific) investigation, and the realm of ought-to-be, politics or ethics, over which pure individual freedom (the right to think what you like, pure freedom of opinion) would preside. This dichotomous approach is partly based on the ideal of pure inquiry and an understanding of rationality as neutrality. In this perspective, rationality is achieved by relying solely on absolutely indubitable elements (such as raw empirical data and logic or mathematics), to the exclusion of any arbitration, choice or subjective feeling. From the outset, this conception condemns any possibility, in the political, ethical or moral fields, of a collective, rational effort to establish a shared understanding recognized as valid by the participants. Although rooted in a legitimate concern for emancipation and the preservation of democratic pluralism, this approach, by failing to lay down any conceptual or epistemological marker for reflection on what ought to be, opens a royal road to the abuse of freedom, to solipsistic or communitarian alienation, to a sterile pluralism which, being only "window-dressing", weaves nothing.

If only this dichotomous conception (factual rationality - pure freedom of ethical and political opinion) were founded philosophically and epistemologically, we could do no more than deplore this unsurpassable cognitive condition. But everything points to the fact that it doesn't hold. The neutrality of factual and scientific inquiry, which would confer on it

the status of pure inquiry, is an illusion, culturally tenacious perhaps, but easy to deconstruct philosophically¹⁶. No process of reflection or inquiry, be it scientific, factual or any other, can dispense with judgment, with being rooted in feeling, in a largely intuitive ability to recognize the obvious, to distinguish between what is reasonable and what is not¹⁷. There is therefore no reason in principle, no epistemological reason, to banish rationality and the relationship to truth from reflection on *ought-to-be* (from moral, ethical and political reflection). In this field too, we can agree on the validity of at least certain assertions, either because they are based on sufficiently solid and shared evidence, or because they are supported by reasoning that is itself rooted in such evidence. And so, perhaps more than the possibility – and even *since* this possibility exists – we actually have a duty and a responsibility to seek out the greatest possible agreement also in this area of *ought-to-be*.

It is in this spirit that the NHNAI project encourages a collective and rational elaboration of a shared understanding of the question of humanism in the age of AI and NS. The aim is to try and agree on statements that are sufficiently solid to create a kind of common ground from which to move forward and orientate ourselves. And once again, it's not *simply* a question of pooling subjective opinions that are shared, leaving aside divergences. The epistemological stance adopted in NHNAI allows us to go much further. While the aim of the exchanges is indeed to establish a kind of consensus, this consensus relates first and foremost to the validity of the contributions to the reflection. And, once freed from the straitjacket of pure inquiry, nothing prevents a contribution recognized as valid by the participants from coming into tension or conflict with another contribution also recognized as valid for other reasons. So, instead of simply tolerating others' differing opinions in the name of abstract democratic pluralism, we can try to reach a consensus on divergences as a sign of legitimate tensions inherent to the question being explored (and not of divergences between individuals and their respective subjective opinions).

Through its action-research effort in the service of collective reflection in society, NHNAI therefore intends to contribute to the development of

¹⁶ M. GUILLERMIN, *Non-neutralité sans relativisme ? Le rôle de la rationalité évaluative*, in L. BRIÈRE, M. LIEUTENANT-GOSSELIN and F. PIRON (eds.), *Et si la recherche scientifique ne pouvait pas être neutre ?*, Éd. science et bien commun, Québec 2019, chapter 15, pp. 315-338.

¹⁷ M. GUILLERMIN, *Bulletin Humanisme et rationalité*, in « *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* » CVI(3), 2022, pp. 489-543.

such a shared understanding of what it means to be human in the age of AI and NS, an understanding that builds consensus in particular on the complexities of this question of humanism. NHNAI aims to support the collective effort to identify and reflect on such points of tension and complexity intrinsic to the topic of humanism in the age of AI and NS in order to bring out commons capable of strengthening the ethical orientation capacities of those involved.

3. NHNAI project implementation

The current phase of the NHNAI project runs from January 2022 to December 2025. It is punctuated by the following stages:

- January - December 2022: Academic experts from the NHNAI network came together for a workshop in March 2022. The aim of this workshop was for everyone to contribute their vision of what, in their discipline, would be particularly important to mobilize as part of societal reflections on what it means to be human in the age of AI and NS. At the same time, the partners worked in collaboration with representatives of local societal communities to bring out the issues to be prioritized for discussion. The meeting of these two activities generated a synthesis of the expert contributions proposed by the network's researchers in response to the major groups of questions defined by societal actors¹⁸.
- January 2023 - April 2024: NHNAI network members organized a first wide wave of debates and exchanges in society. In each of the nine countries involved, face-to-face workshops with the various societal communities were organized. Discussions focused in particular on what it means to be human in the age of AI and NS in the fields of education, health and democracy. Each workshop was restituted in the local language on an online discussion platform, to enable further exchanges¹⁹.
- May 2023 - July 2024: NHNAI network members analyzed the various local corpuses of contributions to the societal discussion in

¹⁸ This first major deliverable of the NHNAI project is accessible here: https://nhnai.org/output_1-2/.

¹⁹ The various online debates can be found here: <https://cartodebat.org/nhnai>.

order to first generate local syntheses (for each country involved), and then international syntheses. Special attention was paid to the complexities and tensions emerging from the discussions. These initial results have been made available to those involved in the discussions (academic and extra-academic), in particular to enable them to delve deeper into these points of complexity²⁰.

- Ongoing - December 2025: A second wave of social debates and exchanges is currently underway. Its analysis will enrich the syntheses already produced. The network of researchers is continuing its work in support of societal reflection, in particular by endeavoring to provide relevant elements of expertise to shed light on the points of tension and complexity emerging from the discussions.

Let's add a few important figures to this panorama. The NHNAI network mobilizes some seventy academic actors from a wide range of disciplines, from the thirteen institutions currently participating in nine countries on five continents. The face-to-face workshops of the two waves of societal discussion brought together some two thousand participants. These included over seventy associations or organizations working with vulnerable or excluded people. The number of contributions restituted online or produced during the continuation of the exchanges amounted to more than three thousand seven hundred.

Through this organization, NHNAI strives to put the resources of its partner institutions at the service of societal reflection and capacity-building for ethical orientation of all stakeholders (including researchers in the network). The contributions of academic actors are made at different levels, always from a position of support and not of surplomb in relation to the discussion in the agora. A first type of contribution is organizational, enabling the opening of spaces (face-to-face and online) for exchange geared towards the collective and rational elaboration of a shared understanding of the question of humanism in the age of AI and NS. This notably involves an effort to mediate and facilitate exchanges. In particular, discussion organizers emphasize to participants the importance of giving reasons in support of assertions submitted to the discussion collective, as well as the distinction to be made between a willingness to express divergence from an idea that is nonetheless recognized as valid (a sort of "yes,

²⁰ The syntheses of this first wave of discussions are available online: <https://nhnai.org/2023-results/>.

but ...”, possibly signalling a point of complexity) and the expression of disagreement as to the validity of an idea expressed by others (in this case, it’s a question of expressing something like “I don’t understand this idea, I don’t understand why we should accept it in the shared understanding we’re trying to build”). A second type of contribution concerns the synthesis of exchanges, with special attention paid to points of complexity. Finally, a third type of contribution consists in providing participants with insights from the researchers in the network, based on their disciplinary expertise (both to support the discussions and with regard to the points of complexity identified in the syntheses).

4. An overview of first results

This collective exploration of the question of humanism in the age of NS and AI has already led to the syntheses mentioned above. To illustrate these results, let’s mention a few examples of places of complexity that have emerged from societal debates.

4.1 How to relate to machines?²¹

Some participants in the discussions (mainly in Portugal) point out that, as AI progresses, we will tend to develop machines (robots, chatbots) capable of imitating or simulating behaviors and capacities specific to humans and living beings, such as empathy, assertiveness, emotional and affective life. As a result, it will become increasingly tempting to relate emotionally to this type of machine (such as artificial companions or assistants, or robots for the care of people).

At the same time, many contributions to the discussions (in most of the participating countries) stressed the importance of not losing sight of the specificity of the living and the human as compared to machines. Machines are not conscious, do not feel emotions, cannot be wise, creative, critical or autonomous, and are not capable of spirituality, in the usual sense of these terms that implies rootedness in a lived experience, in a biological body.

²¹ More details available online: <https://nhnai.org/focus-on-nexus-of-complexity-transversal/>.

At best, they can simulate convincing behaviors in these registers (notably through conversation), behaviors that human beings or living beings would have in given circumstances.

Also emerging (mainly in France) is the question of the rights to be granted to advanced robots or intelligent systems. From this point of view, many participants agree that AI cannot be a subject of law. The issue is widely described as speculative or science-fictional, without being less than interesting.

Thus, it is quite widely expressed in the discussions that it is necessary to resist the (increasingly real and powerful) temptation to perceive certain robots or AI systems as genuine people and try to relate to them affectively (as we would to a human, or even to another living being). We must resist the temptation to substitute interactions with machines for genuine human relationships.

4.2 The challenge of sovereign AI capabilities²²

Only participants from Kenya explored this theme in depth. The contributions show an enthusiastic recognition of the potential benefits of AI (drones, translation, help for the most vulnerable...). The prospects for economic development were also highlighted. Nevertheless, concerns are expressed about the possibility of losing control of locally-generated data and not developing national and local technological capabilities due to Kenya's limited sovereign digital infrastructure. There is therefore a risk of technological dependence, in some ways akin to a new form of colonization (technocolonialism or digital colonialism), with a possible drain on AI-related economic benefits.

4. *Towards commons in support of ethical orientation*

Identifying places of complexity, such as those briefly mentioned above, is an important milestone in the effort to develop commons that could strengthen the ethical orientation capacities of the actors involved, through

²² More details available online: <https://nhnai.org/focus-on-nexus-of-complexity-democracy-5/>.

a shared exploration of what it means to be human in the age of AI and NS. It's important to insist on this: the idea is not simply to report on the perceptions and opinions of the participants, particularly with regard to international and intercultural contrasts. It is also (and perhaps primarily) about mutual enrichment. Certain ideas expressed only in certain countries or by a small fraction of participants (such as the issue of technological sovereignty raised in Kenya) are likely to inspire other participants. A major challenge for the NHNAI network is now to deepen these commons and make them live. To this end, the network's researchers, drawing on their disciplinary expertise, are striving to shed light on these areas of complexity in ways that are relevant to collective reflection. The NHNAI network partners then propose to pursue societal exchanges by further exploring these areas of complexity. Any person of good will who feels concerned is warmly invited to take part in the exchanges and contribute to the collective effort towards a shared and refined understanding of what it means and ought to mean to be human in the age of AI and NS²³.

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²³ Those wishing to find out more can find all the points of complexity identified to date and links to the debates at this address: <https://nhnai.org/complexities/>.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND HISTORICAL-RELIGIOUS RESEARCH: NAVIGATING NEW FRONTIERS THROUGH CASE STUDIES

AUGUSTO COSENTINO

Abstract

This paper explores the transformative impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on historical-religious research through case studies. AI tools enable scholars to process vast datasets, identify patterns, and uncover insights previously inaccessible through traditional methods. While AI accelerates discovery, it also raises critical questions about the evolving role of human researchers. The study emphasizes a cooperative model where AI complements human analysis. This synergy enhances critical thinking and interpretation while managing data complexity. Ultimately, AI is presented not as a replacement, but as a catalyst for deeper, more efficient academic inquiry. The essay introduces some practical examples of using AI apps in the religious studies' area, overseeing hermeneutical implication and potential risks.

Keywords: Religious Studies' methodology, AI research uses, AI Ethics, AI hermeneutics

1. The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Modern Academic Research

The rapid advancements in Artificial Intelligence (AI) have revolutionized various fields, including the domain of historical research. The integration of AI into academic research represents one of the most significant methodological advances in contemporary scholarship. AI-powered tools and techniques offer unprecedented opportunities to unlock valuable insights from vast troves of historical data, transforming the way scholars and researchers approach the study of the past.¹ As we stand at the intersection

¹ W. KANSTEINER, *Digital Doping for Historians: can History, Memory, and Historical Theory be rendered Artificially Intelligent?*, in «History and Theory», LXI, 4, 2022, pp. 119-

of cutting-edge technology and traditional historical methodologies, it becomes crucial to examine how AI can enhance, augment, and potentially reshape the landscape of historical inquiry.² As research volumes expand exponentially and analytical demands grow increasingly complex, AI technologies are transforming how scholars approach data collection, analysis, and knowledge synthesis across disciplines. This technological revolution is not merely augmenting traditional research methodologies but fundamentally reshaping the landscape of academic inquiry.³

The past decade has witnessed unprecedented growth in AI applications within academic contexts, from natural language processing tools that analyses vast textual corpora to machine learning algorithms that identify patterns in complex datasets.⁴ These developments have accelerated the pace of discovery while simultaneously raising important questions about the nature of academic investigation and the role of human researchers in an increasingly automated research environment.⁵

33; T.L. NICODEMO - O. PONTES CARDOSO, *Metahistory for (Ro)bots: Historical Knowledge in the Artificial Intelligence Era*, in «História da Historiografia: International Journal of Theory and History of Historiography», XII, 29, 2019, pp. 17-52.

² M. CARRETERO - E. GARTNER, *Artificial Intelligence and Historical Thinking: A Dialogic Exploration of ChatGPT / Inteligencia Artificial y Pensamiento Histórico: Una Exploración Dialógica Del ChatGPT*, in «Studies in Psychology: Estudios de Psicología», XLV, 1, 2024, pp. 80-102.

³ A.Y. KENCHAKKANAVAR, *Exploring the Artificial Intelligence Tools: Realizing the Advantages in Education and Research*, in «Journal of Advances in Library and Information Science», XII, 4, pp. 218-224; L. YU, ET ALII, *frances: Cloud-based Historical Text Mining with Deep Learning and Parallel Processing*, in 2023 IEEE 19th International Conference on e-Science (e-Science), Limassol, Cyprus, 09-13 October 2023, 2023; M.A. DHALI, *Artificial Intelligence in Historical Document Analysis*, Doctoral dissertation, University of Groningen Press 2024; cf. K. JARZYŃSKA, *An Unconventional Look at a Historical Monograph. Analysis with Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools*, in «Žurnalistikos tyrimai», XV, 2021, pp. 8-28; K. JARZYŃSKA, *An Unconventional Look at a Historical Monograph. Analysis with Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools*, in «Žurnalistikos tyrimai», XV, 2021, pp. 8-28.

⁴ M.A. MCLEAN - D.A. ROBERTS - M. GIBBS, *Ghosts and the Machine: Testing the Use of Artificial Intelligence to Deliver Historical Life Course Biographies from Big Data*, in «Historical Methods: A Journal of Quantitative and Interdisciplinary History», LVII, 3, 2024, pp. 146-62; M. MOON, *Big Data and the Prospects of Historical Research -A study of research in modern and contemporary Korean history*, in «International Journal of Korean History», XXIV, 2, 2019, pp. 99-132.

⁵ In an interesting paper (M. CHIRIATTI - M. GANAPINI - E. PANAI, ET ALII, *The case for human-AI interaction as system 0 thinking*, in «Nature Human Behaviour», VIII, 2024, pp. 1829-1830) an Italian team of researchers has proposed to consider the interaction between humans and AI as a new system of thought, called System 0: an innovative paradigm for integrating AI into academic research in a way that fundamentally enhances our research

This pre-processing capability is particularly valuable in modern academia, where researchers face an ever-growing deluge of publications, data, and research outputs. AI can scan through thousands of academic papers, identifying patterns and connections that might take human researchers months or years to discover. It can highlight emerging trends, suggest cross-disciplinary connections, and process complex datasets with remarkable efficiency.⁶

This limitation actually defines the optimal role of AI in academic research. Rather than attempting to replicate human understanding, AI should serve as a cooperative tool that enhances human cognitive capabilities. It can handle the heavy lifting of initial data processing, pattern recognition, and preliminary analysis, freeing human researchers to focus on what they do best: critical analysis, interpretation, and the development of meaningful insights.

This cooperative approach to research, where AI and human intelligence work in tandem, represents a powerful new paradigm for academic inquiry. It allows researchers to benefit from unprecedented computational power while maintaining the essential human elements that make research meaningful: critical thinking, ethical consideration, and deep understanding of context and implications.

The key to successful implementation lies in viewing AI not as a competitor or replacement for human intellectual engagement, but as a sophisticated tool that expands our research capabilities. When properly integrated, it can help researchers navigate the complexity of modern academic

capabilities while preserving human intellectual autonomy. In the academic research context, AI serves as a sophisticated cognitive extension, functioning as an “invisible” assistant that amplifies our natural abilities. This manifests primarily through its capacity to handle vast amounts of information that would typically overwhelm human cognitive capabilities. Before information even reaches a researcher’s consciousness, AI can filter, organize, and enrich it, creating a more manageable and meaningful research foundation. What makes the System 0 paradigm particularly interesting is its positioning as a complementary system rather than a replacement for human thought processes. Unlike human thinking, which encompasses both intuitive (System 1) and analytical (System 2) components (cf. D. KAHNEMAN, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, New York 2011), System 0 operates on a different plane. It processes information computationally without truly “understanding” it in the way humans do. This distinction is crucial: while AI can process the “syntax” of information, the “semantics” – the deeper meaning and implications – remain the domain of human researchers.

⁶ J. STERNFELD, *Archival Theory and Digital Historiography: Selection, Search, and Metadata as Archival Processes for Assessing Historical Contextualization*, in «The American Archivist», LXXIV, 2, 2011, pp. 544-75.

research while preserving the crucial human elements that give research its value and meaning.

2. Research Steps and AI Assistance in Academic Work

Let's examine the steps involved in academic research and how Artificial Intelligence can assist us in this work. Let's consider a specific case as an example: I need to write a contribution for a conference and need useful ideas to respond to a Call for Papers. I can ask the AI to provide me with ideas for a suitable topic. To do this, I can either:

1. Ask a simple question using a standard chatbot, or
2. For a more pertinent and precise response, directly upload the CFP text and have the AI work with that specific content.

Let's explore both possibilities in the following example⁷:

I need help brainstorming a focused, original topic for an academic paper. I'm responding to the attached Call for Papers. Please find the following details in the attached Call for Papers:

- *Conference/journal name*
- *Theme or special issue focus*
- *Submission deadline*
- *Word count/length requirements*
- *Any specific approaches or methodologies encouraged.*

My academic background is in [your discipline, sub-field, or area of expertise]. I'm particularly interested in [2-3 specific areas within this field that interest you].

To help me generate a suitable topic:

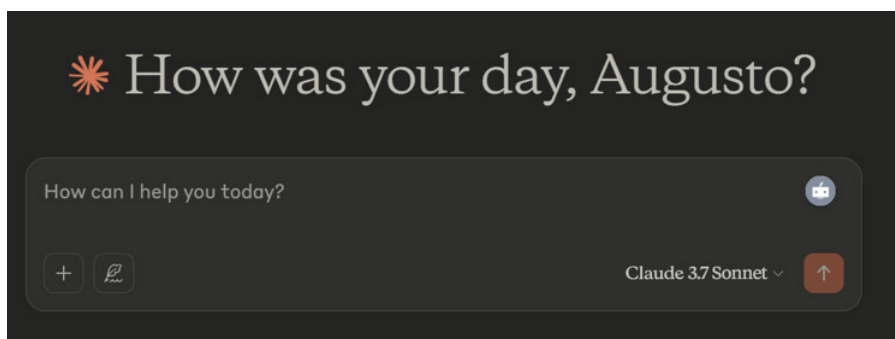
1. *Please analyze the key themes and requirements from this Call for Papers*

⁷ The best way to get an adequate response from the AI is to write an effective prompt. There are real prompt engineering techniques. Generally speaking, you need to take into account 3 factors: tasks, context, and examples. P. KORZYNSKI - G. MAZUREK - P. KRZYPKOWSKA - A. KURASINSKI, *Artificial intelligence prompt engineering as a new digital competence: Analysis of generative AI technologies such as ChatGPT*, in «Entrepreneurial Business and Economics Review», XI, 3, 2023, pp. 25-37; A. SARKAR, ET ALII, *Participatory prompting: a user-centric research method for eliciting AI assistance opportunities in knowledge workflows*, in Proceedings of the 34th Annual Conference of the Psychology of Programming Interest Group (PPIG 2023), 2024.

2. *Suggest 3-5 potential paper topics that:*
 - *Align closely with the conference/journal theme*
 - *Address current gaps or debates in the literature*
 - *Build on recent developments in the field*
 - *Would be feasible to research and write within the deadline*
 - *Match my stated research interests*
3. *For each suggested topic, please:*
 - *Provide a concise working title*
 - *Explain the core research question or argument (2-3 sentences)*
 - *Identify why this topic would be valuable to the field*
 - *Suggest 1-2 potential methodological approaches*
 - *Note any particular challenges I might face*
4. *Finally, if possible, recommend which of your suggested topics appears most promising based on:*
 - *Originality*
 - *Alignment with the call*
 - *Feasibility given time constraints*
 - *Potential impact*

Please be specific rather than general in your suggestions. I'm looking for precise topics I could realistically pursue, not broad research areas.

We can insert this prompt into a generic chatbot, for example Claude (<https://claude.ai/new>):



The AI will give us a series of topics in response. Among these we will choose the one that seems most interesting to us, perhaps further adapting it based on our scientific interests, the Call for Papers of the Panel or the conference.

Starting from the chosen topic, we can then ask the AI to suggest a title, an abstract and a series of keywords:

I need help crafting a well-structured abstract for an academic paper on the following topic: [INSERT YOUR SPECIFIC TOPIC HERE]

My paper will be submitted to [JOURNAL/CONFERENCE NAME] in the field of HISTORY OF RELIGIONS.

To help me create an effective abstract, please:

1. Develop a concise, compelling abstract [NUMBER OF CHARACTERS OR WORDS REQUIRED IN THE CALL FOR PAPERS] that includes:
 - A clear problem statement or research gap being addressed
 - The main research question(s) or objective(s)
 - A brief mention of the methodology/approach used
 - A summary of key findings or arguments
 - The significance and implications of this work
2. The abstract should:
 - Use precise, discipline-specific terminology without overusing jargon
 - Avoid citations unless absolutely necessary
 - Include 3-5 keywords at the end that reflect the core concepts
 - Follow the conventional structure for abstracts in my discipline

If any of the above information is unclear or missing, please create an abstract that demonstrates best practices for academic writing in general, making reasonable assumptions about my topic while keeping the abstract focused and substantive.

3. *AI for bibliographic research*

Bibliographic research is a crucial component of academic and scholarly work, as it helps researchers identify relevant literature, understand the current state of knowledge in a field, and establish the foundations for their own research. However, the process of conducting a comprehensive literature review can be time-consuming and labor-intensive, often requir-

ing researchers to sift through a vast number of publications. In recent years, the emergence of AI-based research assistant tools has the potential to streamline and enhance the bibliographic research process. These tools leverage advanced language models and data processing capabilities to automate various tasks, including paper summarization, data extraction, and findings synthesis.

There are a large number of AI tools that allow this type of investigation. Keep in mind that at this moment there is an enormous speed of evolution: new tools are born, some disappear, most evolve.

Here are some AI tools that are useful for bibliographic research and its management:

<https://www.semanticscholar.org/>

<https://labs.jstor.org/projects/text-analyzer/>

<https://www.connectedpapers.com/>

<https://elicit.com/>

<https://www.researchrabbit.ai/>

<https://consensus.app/>

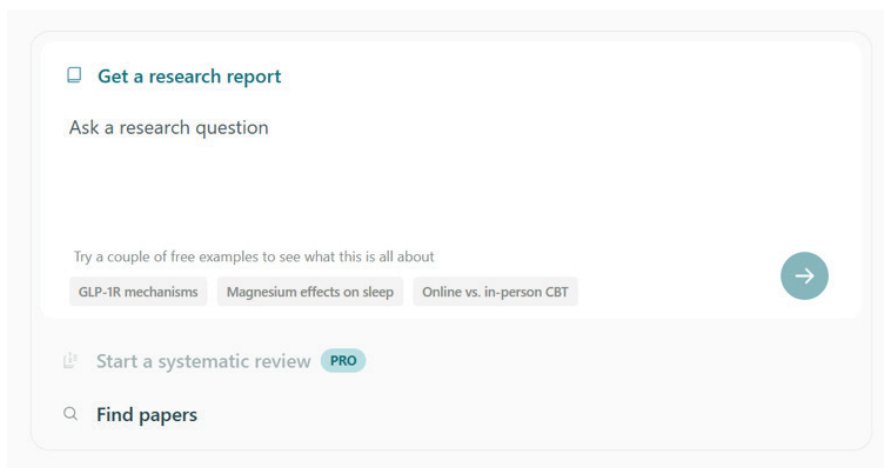
Let's see just some of these tools: *Elicit*, *Consensus* and *Researchrabbit*. We can see how AI builds our bibliography.

One such innovative tool is *Elicit*, an AI-powered research assistant designed to enhance and expedite the literature review phase of scholarly work.⁸ It automates various tasks associated with the literature review process. Developed by Ought, a public benefit corporation, *Elicit* utilizes natural language processing and machine learning algorithms to assist researchers in finding, summarizing, and organizing relevant academic papers. *Elicit* allows users to search for relevant papers by simply asking a research question or providing keywords. The tool then retrieves the most relevant papers from its extensive database of over 200 million academic documents. Moreover, it generates concise, one-sentence abstracts for the top papers, providing researchers with a quick overview of the key findings and insights; it can extract specific information from individual papers, such as study design, outcomes, and limitations, and organize this data into a structured table format. The tool can identify overarching themes and

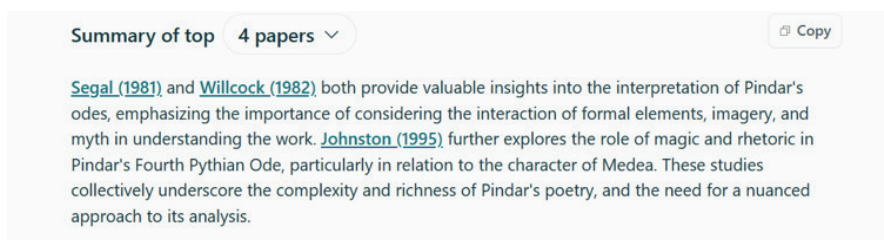
⁸ J. KUNG, *Elicit (product review)*, in «Journal of the Canadian Health Libraries Association / Journal de l'Association des bibliothèques de la santé du Canada», XLIV, 1, 2023, pp. 15-18; A. PREISLER, *Correctness and Quality of References generated by AI-based Research Assistant Tools: The Case of Scopus AI, Elicit, SciSpace and Scite in the Field of Business Administration*, Master Thesis, Graz 2024.

concepts that span across multiple papers, helping researchers gain a holistic understanding of the existing literature. Finally, it offers various filtering and sorting options, allowing users to refine their search results based on factors like publication date, study type, and journal impact. We can export search results in CSV or BibTeX format, streamlining the process of managing and organizing citations.

The main search window that *Elicit* presents is the following:



For example, if we want to do a search on “Medea in Pindar’s Fourth Pythian Ode”, *Elicit* will give us the following answer:



For each bibliographic reference found, it will provide us with the data already set in columns. By default, the following columns are provided:

- Paper
- Abstract summary

The columns can be customized, based on our needs, by adding the following fields:

- Summary
- Main findings
- Methodology
- Intervention
- Outcome measured
- Limitations
- Intervention effects
- Summary of introduction

Consensus is an AI-powered search engine that leverages large language models to discover and consolidate claims from an extensive repository of academic research papers. In this paper, we will explore how it can be utilized to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of bibliographic research. It draws its primary information from the *Semantic Scholar* database, which encompasses over 200 million academic papers across numerous scientific disciplines. This extensive database ensures that researchers can access a wide range of relevant sources for their bibliographic needs.

When a user enters a query, *Consensus* refines the search by eliminating “stop words” and performing a keyword search across its database of papers, narrowing down the scope of the search. This feature helps researchers quickly identify the most relevant sources for their research.

Consensus introduces a “Synthesize” model, which enables the AI to meticulously analyze multiple research papers and generate concise summaries of their findings. This feature can save researchers significant time and effort in reviewing and understanding the key insights from a large body of literature. It employs a vector-based search to evaluate the connection between the user’s query and the potential search outcomes. It then calculates a relevancy score, incorporating factors such as result quality, citation count, and publication date, to generate a list of the top 10 relevant results.

It offers users the flexibility to refine their search results by applying various filters, including publication date, study types, study details, journals, and domains. This feature allows researchers to tailor the selection of sources to their specific research needs. When users click on a resulting paper, they are presented with an overview that provides fundamental information about the paper, such as the publication details and the abstract. This context can help researchers quickly evaluate the credibility and relevance of the source.

Consensus's AI-powered search and synthesis capabilities can significantly reduce the time and effort required for researchers to identify, review, and organize relevant literature for their bibliographic needs. By leveraging a comprehensive database and advanced relevance scoring algorithms, it can help researchers find the most relevant and reliable sources for their research, reducing the risk of overlooking important literature. The "Synthesize" feature can aid researchers in quickly understanding the key findings and insights from a large body of literature, facilitating more effective knowledge synthesis and integration. The ability to filter and organize search results based on various criteria allows researchers to create customized bibliographies that are tailored to their specific research interests and requirements. By streamlining the bibliographic research process, *Consensus* can help researchers focus more on the analysis and interpretation of the literature, rather than the time-consuming task of source identification and management.

Let's look at the differences between these two software. Both use *Semantic Scholar* as their database. *Elicit* is focused on automating literature reviews, helping users find relevant papers, summarize findings, and extract key information. *Consensus* is a search engine that leverages large language models to discover and consolidate claims from academic research papers. It introduces features like the "Synthesize" model and the "Consensus Meter" to enhance the research experience. It offers more flexible search options, allowing users to refine their results using various filters (e.g., publication date, study types, journals, domains), while *Elicit* does not support advanced search techniques like traditional syntax or controlled vocabulary, and users are encouraged to enter full research questions. *Consensus* may encounter limitations when faced with queries that go beyond binary "yes," "no," or "possibly" classifications, as the "Consensus Meter" is primarily designed for such queries.

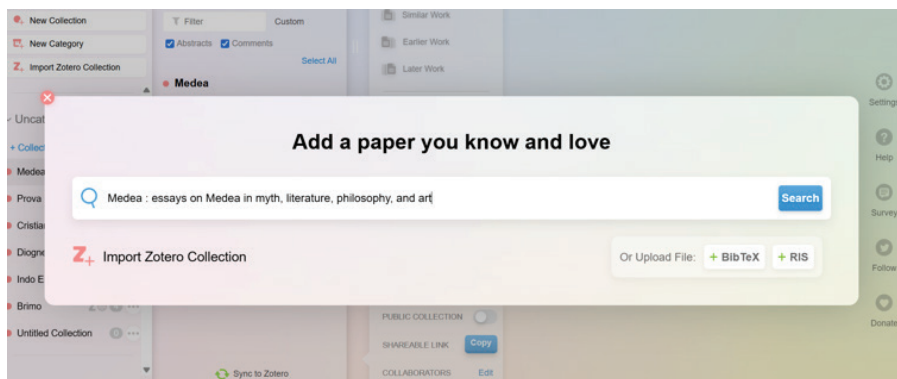
But surely the software that stands out for innovation and potential is *ResearchRabbit*, a citation-based literature mapping tool that allows researchers to efficiently explore the research landscape related to their area of interest. For historians, this tool can be particularly valuable in the following ways. Historians can start their research by entering relevant keywords, titles, or identifiers (such as DOIs or PMIDs) into the *ResearchRabbit* search box. The tool then identifies "seed papers" that

serve as the foundation for further exploration. The software generates interactive visualizations that showcase the connections between the seed papers and related publications.⁹ This network-based approach enables historians to uncover hidden relationships, identify influential works, and discover new avenues for investigation. It encourages collaboration by allowing users to create and share collections of relevant papers with colleagues. This feature facilitates the exchange of ideas, the identification of complementary research, and the collective refinement of bibliographic resources. Moreover, *ResearchRabbit* provides the convenience of downloading PDF versions of the identified papers, enabling historians to access and store the necessary research materials with ease.

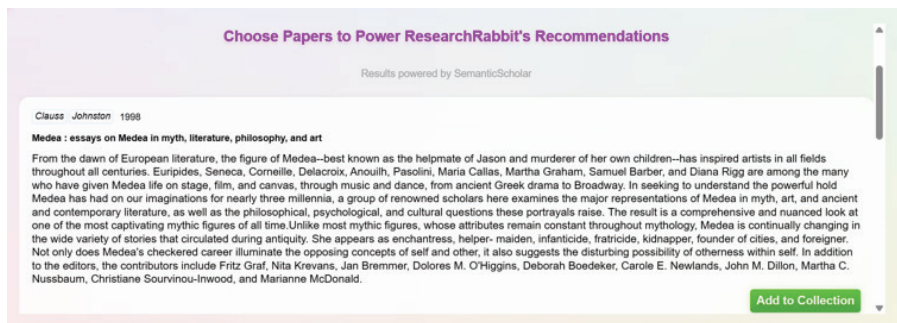
The use of this software in historical research can significantly improve the efficiency of bibliographic research. By automating the process of identifying relevant literature, it eliminates the need for manual citation mining and database searches, allowing historians to focus their efforts on analysis and interpretation. Its citation-based methodology ensures that historians can discover a broader range of relevant publications, including those that may have been overlooked through traditional search methods. But the great new element is something else: the visualization tools and collaborative features enable historians to make more informed decisions about the selection and prioritization of sources, leading to a more robust and well-rounded bibliographic foundation for their research. As the research landscape evolves, *ResearchRabbit's* ability to continuously update its database and identify new connections can help historians stay abreast of the latest developments in their field of study.

Let's see how it can be used in a bibliographic search. For example, I intend to start my research on "Medea" from the article suggested to me by *Consensus*. First I create a new collection, then, in the search window, I insert the citation, even partial, of the article that interests me:

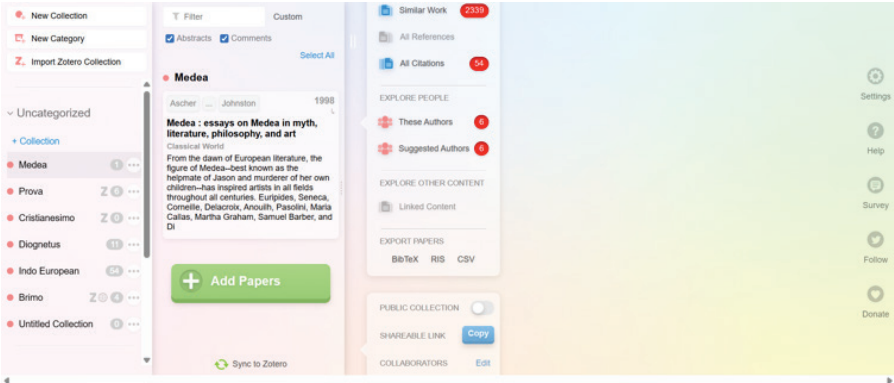
⁹ C. CHEN, *Visualizing Scientific Paradigms: An Introduction*, «Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology», LIV, 5, 2003, pp. 392–93; A.E. HASSAN, J. WU, R.C. HOLT, *Visualizing Historical Data Using Spectrographs*, in 11th IEEE International Software Metrics Symposium (METRICS'05), Como, 19–22 September 2005, 2005, p. 31.



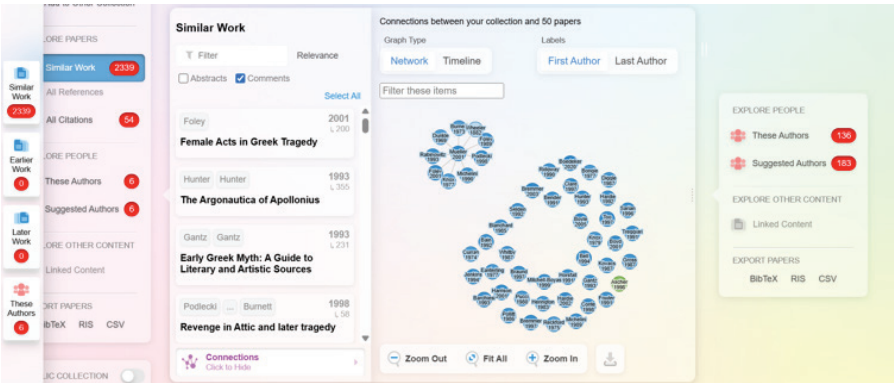
ResearchRabbit gives me a list of citations, the first of which will be the one I searched for, while the others are still connected. I can choose whether to add one or more citations to the collection:



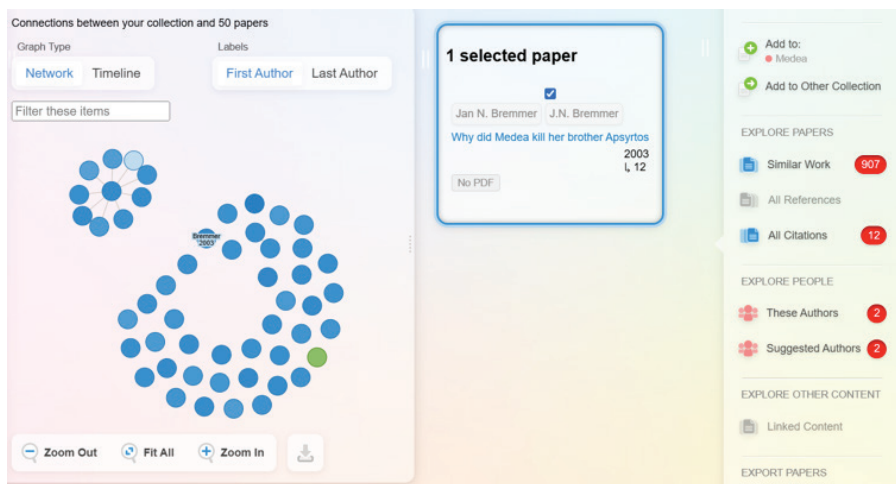
Once I have entered the paper, the system notifies me that there are other bibliographic references connected to it, both by topic and by author:



If I select the “Similar Work” button, the system opens a series of inferences, indicating other papers that are connected to the starting one. I can view this scheme of inferences in the form of the “Network” or the “Timeline”:



I can click on one or more of these flagged papers and see further inferences, creating a nearly infinite tree of references:



There are two extremely interesting elements: 1. For each article that it reports to us, *ResearchRabbit* provides us with the link to the database from which it was taken (scholar.google, semanticscholar, etc.) and, where available, it directly provides us with the .pdf; 2. It can connect to the *Zotero* bibliographic management system, both in import and export: we can therefore import existing bibliographic lists, or export the one we create with *ResearchRabbit*.

The integration of this AI into the bibliographic research process for historical papers can significantly improve the efficiency, comprehensiveness, and collaborative nature of this essential aspect of scholarship. By leveraging the tool's capabilities, historians can navigate the research landscape more effectively, identify relevant sources, and build a robust foundation for their analyses.

4. *Source Analysis with Artificial Intelligence*

Once we have built our bibliography we need to search for texts in digital format. If we can get them, we can “feed” them to the AI to “dialogue” with them. In other words, we can have AI interrogate a large number of texts in a short time, doing searches within them, summarizing them, giv-

ing us the report of what these texts say.¹⁰ Obviously, this type of research can be done on both ancient and secondary sources.

Almost all basic AIs have recently implemented the ability to insert texts, usually in .pdf format, to allow interaction with them. But there are some AI tools that are specifically designed to do this job. Some of them allow us to insert not only texts in .pdf, but also in other formats, and even video or audio. The ability to interact with these sources via AI allows the researcher to greatly streamline the time required for the first reading of the bibliography. As we know, the first phase consists of “searching”, of “scrutinise” the bibliographic list in search of those passages useful to our investigation. This work can be delegated to AI. Let’s look at some of these tools:

Logically.app (formerly Affor.AI <https://afforai.com/>)

NotebookLM (<https://notebooklm.google.com/>)

As we can see, it is possible to upload one or more texts in PDF format and then query them, summarize them, or simply have the key points in the form of bullet points. Of course, it is also possible to analyze a text to find its strengths and weaknesses. This is an activity that can be done in support of a review work for a journal, or on one’s own text before submitting it.

NotebookLM, a pioneering research tool developed by Google, represents a significant step forward in the integration of AI and academic research. This innovative platform harnesses the power of language models to optimize the use of notes, summaries, and source insights, empowering researchers to engage with their materials in a more intuitive and efficient manner.

One of the key features of *NotebookLM* is its ability to capture text from various sources, including journal articles, books, and archival documents, and then offer AI-based summarization, question answering, and source insights. By providing contextual responses rooted in the uploaded

¹⁰ D. KARELL - M. SHU - K. OKURA - T. DAVIDSON, *Artificial Intelligence Summaries of Historical Events Improve Knowledge Compared to Human-written Summaries*, «SocArXiv», 2024, pp. 1-43; B.N. LEE, *Automated Text Analysis of Historical Documents using Machine Learning Techniques*, «Journal of Information System and Technology Management», IX, 34, 2024, pp. 82-89; M.V. MARTIN - D. KIRSCH - F. PRIETO-NANEZ, *The promise of machine-learning-driven text analysis techniques for historical research: topic modeling and word embedding*, «Management & Organizational History», XVIII, 2023, pp. 81-96; E. TRAVÉ ALLEPUZ - P. DEL FRESNO BERNAL, A. MAURI MARTÍ - S. MEDINA GORDO, *The Semantics of History. Interdisciplinary Categories and Methods for Digital Historical Research*, in «International Journal of Interactive Multimedia and Artificial Intelligence», VI, 5, 2021, pp. 47-56.

materials, it enables researchers to comprehend complex concepts, create unique work, and improve the overall efficiency of their research process.¹¹

For historians and bibliographic researchers, *NotebookLM* can be particularly valuable in several ways:

- The tool's summarization capabilities can help researchers quickly grasp the key points and findings of relevant sources, streamlining the literature review process and allowing them to focus on the most salient information.
- *NotebookLM*'s question-answering functionality can assist researchers in delving deeper into specific aspects of their research, guiding them to the most relevant sources and facilitating a more nuanced understanding of the historical context.
- By identifying and highlighting connections between sources from different disciplines, it can help researchers uncover previously overlooked relationships and foster a more holistic understanding of their research topic.

Logically, a well-known machine intelligence tool for literary text management, offers a comprehensive suite of features that can significantly streamline the bibliographic research process. This AI-powered platform provides researchers with a range of tools for managing, annotating, and citing academic papers, addressing the common challenges associated with literature reviews and bibliographic organization. It can automatically format citations in various styles, ensuring consistency and accuracy, and saving researchers valuable time in the tedious task of manual citation management. The platform's AI-powered annotation and highlighting tools can help researchers identify and extract key insights from their sources, facilitating a deeper engagement with the material. Its database management capabilities allow researchers to organize their sources, track their progress, and easily retrieve relevant materials, enhancing the overall efficiency of their bibliographic research. By leveraging its features, researchers can construct comprehensive and well-structured literature reviews, seamlessly incorporating their sources, annotations, and insights into a cohesive narrative.

¹¹ A. WHEATLEY - S. HERVIEUX, *Artificial intelligence in academic libraries: An environmental scan*, in «Information Services and Use», XXXIX, 4, 2019, pp. 347-356; S. MALIK, S. MANDA, *Infusing AI for greater impact in academic libraries*, in «International Journal of Library and Information Science», XVII, 1, 2025, pp. 1-13.

5. *Prepare slides with AI*

Once the bibliography has been investigated, it is then possible, through AI, to write portions of a scientific work, or to carry out translation operations of a work from one language to another.

Furthermore, we can use AI to create slides useful for presenting a report at a scientific conference. There are also a large number of tools for this type of activity. The best of all is undoubtedly *gamma.app* (<https://gamma.app/>), a platform that merits scholarly consideration for its innovative approach to the creation and dissemination of academic discourse. This digital tool warrants examination through the lens of its functional capabilities and pedagogical applications. It represents a significant departure from traditional presentation software in that it integrates artificial intelligence with document flexibility, thereby facilitating the transformation of scholarly content across multiple formats. The platform's capacity for intelligent content generation based on research materials suggests potential benefits for academic knowledge dissemination.

The software's architectural framework supports several functionalities that align with academic requirements. Its capability for automated layout optimization addresses the challenge of visual representation in scholarly communications. Furthermore, the platform offers template structures specifically engineered for research exposition and pedagogical contexts.

Data visualization capabilities within *Gamma.app* facilitate the graphical representation of quantitative and qualitative research findings, an essential aspect of contemporary academic discourse. The platform's export mechanisms allow for the transmission of scholarly content through various channels, including traditional slide-based formats and interactive web-based presentations.

The procedural framework for utilizing *Gamma.app* in academic contexts involves initial platform access, selection of appropriate structural templates, importation of research material, content organization according to rhetorical requirements, visual customization in accordance with institutional parameters, and dissemination through selected channels. It should be noted that the platform operates on a tiered access model, with certain advanced functionalities reserved for premium subscription levels, though educational institutions may benefit from specialized pricing structures.

It is possible to create slides from scratch, but also to transform text into slides, following this procedure:

1. Insert the text as an attachment or by copying and pasting it. Click “continue”.
2. Configure the settings:
 - “Text content” (generate; condense; preserve)
 - “Amount of text per card” (brief; medium; detailed)
 - “Write for...” (free text)
 - “Tone” (free text)
 - “Output language” (free text)
 - “Images” (you can choose AI-generated images by selecting the AI image model, or use Stock Photos)
 - “Format”

With the free account, you can create up to a maximum of 10 slides. Click “continue”.

3. Choose the template.

4. You can present the slides directly from *gamma.app* or download them in pdf, PowerPoint, Google Slides, or PNG format.

In conclusion, *Gamma.app* presents a potentially valuable addition to the academic’s digital toolkit, offering a synthesis of artificial intelligence assistance and flexible presentation formats that may enhance the communication of complex scholarly concepts.

6. Conclusions

The integration of artificial intelligence into historical research represents a watershed moment for the discipline. AI tools offer unprecedented opportunities to analyze vast archival collections, detect patterns across disparate sources, translate and transcribe historical documents, and reconstruct fragmentary records. These capabilities not only expedite traditional research processes but also enable entirely new methodological approaches that were previously impractical or impossible.

However, the responsible adoption of AI in historical inquiry demands a thoughtful balance between technological innovation and disciplinary rigor. Historians must maintain critical awareness of algorithmic biases, interpretative limitations, and the fundamental epistemological questions that arise when delegating analytical tasks to machine learning systems. The most promising path forward involves collaborative frameworks where historians and AI systems function as complementary partners—with human

researchers providing contextual knowledge, ethical judgment, and interpretative expertise while AI tools extend our capacity to process information at scale. As the technology continues to evolve, the historical studies would benefit from developing field-specific guidelines for AI implementation, increased technical literacy among practitioners, and interdisciplinary dialogue with computer scientists and digital humanists. Future research should explore not only how AI can serve existing historical methodologies but also how it might transform our very conception of historical knowledge production. The ultimate value of AI in historical research will be measured not by technological sophistication alone, but by how effectively these tools enhance our understanding of the past in all its complexity and nuance.¹² Used judiciously, AI offers the potential to democratize access to historical knowledge, revitalize neglected research areas, and perhaps most importantly, help us ask new questions about our collective human experience across time.

¹² A. GUERSENZVAIG - J. SÁNCHEZ-MONEDERO, *AI Research Assistants, Intrinsic Values, and the Science We Want*, in «AI & Society» XL, 1, 2025, pp. 235-237.

SECTION III

HOPING BEYOND DIVISIONS AND CLASHES

TRUST AND SOCIAL COHESION BEYOND POLARIZATION: PERSPECTIVES ON THE EUROPEAN PUBLIC SPHERE

LUDOVICA MALKNECHT

Abstract

This contribution explores the possibility of building a European public sphere within a context marked by global challenges, disinformation, and growing polarization, reflecting on the connections between the public sphere, public discourse, and public opinion. The construction of a European public sphere entails not only institutional responses but also cultural and communicative transformations. One of the main risks lies in the convergence of political and communicative populism, which amplifies fears and promotes representations of antagonistic identities, fueling conflict and societal divisions. Simplified and disintermediated forms of communication reduce the capacity of public discourse to mediate complexity and manage crises. In facing these phenomena, it becomes essential to acknowledge our vulnerability and interdependence – elements that not only define our shared humanity but also characterize the condition of European and global interconnectedness. Reclaiming the public sphere as a space for shared interpretation and cultural mediation may represent a possible path toward fostering trust and cohesion in the face of uncertainty and ongoing transformation.

Key words: European Union, Vulnerability, Trust, Public sphere, Media, Polarization

Whether Europe is destined to remain an «imagined community»¹ is, as we know, a question that continues to affect the debate on European integration and beyond, and one that becomes all the more significant in light of new international scenarios. In Benedict Anderson's well-known theoretical framework, national imagined communities are those that

¹ B. ANDERSON, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983), rev. ed. Verso, London 1991.

display a certain degree of linguistic, institutional, and cultural homogeneity². Imagining the European Union in terms of cohesion based on a community-type social bond seems, in this sense, even more difficult. The perception of an imminent reconfiguration of global structures, however, reinforces the need for anchoring in community-type ties, which can be directed either nationally or supranationally. The Trump-era shift in the United States and its foreign policy, the role of Russia, the war in Ukraine, and Europe's positioning are all events bound to deeply affect EU citizens' sense of belonging to the Union, as these developments redefine the aims, interests, and actions concerning mutual relations among European states. If these elements reshape the boundaries of proximity and mutual action, they also simultaneously redefine the foundation of the social bond³. If it is difficult or even impossible to predict the political and cultural direction that change will take, it may be useful to begin with some reflections on the context in which this change takes shape, in order to make room – however marginal – for a cultural orientation that both expresses and encourages participation in the public sphere.

A specifically European mode of *being-together* is not grounded in fixed identity categories, but rather in the perception and awareness of this very *being-together* as an ongoing social process. In this regard, Simmel's conceptual framework may remain particularly relevant. The experience of belonging does not stem in fact from a cognitive grasp of what "being European" is, but from an awareness of the social bond itself:

Perhaps it should be called a knowing rather than a cognizing (besser ein Wissen als ein Erkennen). For in this case the mind does not immediately confront an object of which it gradually gains a theoretical picture, but that consciousness of the socialization is immediately its vehicle or inner significance. The matter in question is the processes of reciprocation which signify for the individual the fact of being associated. That is, the fact is not signified in the abstract to the individual, but it is capable of abstract expression⁴.

Within complex social systems – characterized by a high level of technological mediation and progressive disintermediation affecting both political in-

² *Ibid.*

³ G. SIMMEL, *How is Society possible?*, in «American Journal of Sociology», XVI, 1910-1911, pp. 372-391.

⁴ *Ivi*, p. 377.

stitutions and epistemic authorities – the «consciousness of being associated», or the awareness of the social bond, is more than ever tied to dynamics of trust. At the present stage, is it possible to refer to a – so to speak – “European state of consciousness” arising from processes of recognition or self-recognition, both internal and external to Europe, linked to social participation and to the symbolic effectiveness of its institutions?

Findings from 2022, conducted as part of the *European Values Study*⁵, show that in some countries, including France and Germany, the percentage of «people’s feeling of closeness to Europe» decreases across generations: the younger generations, the so-called Generation Z, feel less of a sense of belonging to Europe compared to previous generations⁶. Still with respect to this parameter, in general, Germany is one of the countries where the sense of «closeness to Europe» is strongest, while among the weakest in this regard is Italy, which shows the lowest level of “European feeling” among the 21 European countries included in the study⁷. In all the countries analyzed, «national pride» clearly exceeds «feeling European»⁸. Is Europe, then, an imagined community? It is – but imagination, as an activity of producing images, can also assume a cognitive and critical function that is essential for the transformative interpretation of reality, allowing us to conceive new and different configurations and constellations. This function of imagination is closely linked to the dimension of the future, especially insofar as it supports a critical view of the present⁹ and outlines alternative scenarios. Data from a Eurobarometer survey conducted in early 2025 provide additional insight by highlighting social expectations regarding Europe’s positive role in addressing change. The fundamental values associated with the EU and its “historical mission” are peace and democracy. For many of the European citizens interviewed: «peace (45%), democracy (32%) and human rights (22%) remain the top three values

⁵ L. HALMAN-T. REESKENS-I. SIEBEN-M. VAN ZUNDER (Eds.), *Atlas of European Values: Change and Continuity in Turbulent Times*, European Values Series, vol. I, Open Press Tilburg University, 2022, doi:10.26116/6p8v-tt12.

⁶ *Ivi*, p. 13.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ivi*, p. 16.

⁹ TH. W. ADORNO, *Die Aktualität der Philosophie* (1931), in *Gesammelte Schriften*, hrsg. von R. Tiedemann, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 1973, Bd. 1; ID, *Intellectus sacrificium intellectus*, in *Minima moralia*, trans. by E.F.N. Jephcott, New Left Books, London 1974, pp. 122-123.

that people want the European Parliament to defend»¹⁰. A large majority expresses confidence in the European Union: «89% believe that more unity is crucial to tackle global challenges. Consensus is high with 75% or more citizens agreeing with this in every Member State»¹¹. However, this data is accompanied by widespread negative expectations about the future: «33% expect their standard of living to decrease over the next five years. That's seven points more than right after the recent European elections (26%) and goes back to the level of spring 2024 (32%)»¹².

Imagining a Europe with a level of social cohesion comparable to that of a community bond means, first and foremost, imagining such a bond and placing it within a temporal horizon capable of taking shape in the historical process. The public space is the privileged site for the construction of social bonds and social cohesion – a process that is both imaginative and productive: a shared space that can be conceived in terms of a European public sphere¹³. Thinking about a European public sphere requires careful consideration of the interconnections between the public sphere, public discourse, and public opinion, as they manifest in the current historical and cultural phase.

The construction of a European public sphere faces several challenges – notably, that of confronting a cultural and communicative populism which captures and amplifies social fears and identity-driven impulses, triggering a vicious cycle of communicative polarization and conflict radicalization. As we can still infer from the studies collected in the *Atlas of European Values*, the societies that emphasize security and “survival values” «are generally characterised by low levels of trust, intolerance towards out-groups and low support for gender equality [...] feelings of insecurity, fear, or alienation» are spreading which, «may be the result of globalisa-

¹⁰ EUROBAROMETER, *Executive Summary*, Winter Survey 2025, <https://europea.eu/Eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3492>.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ AA.VV., *Mapping the European Public Sphere. Institutions, Media, and Civil Society*, edited by C. Bee and E. Bozzini, Routledge, Abingdon, New York 2016, 2^a ed.; AA.VV. *The European Public Sphere. From Critical Thinking to Responsible Action*, edited by L. Morganti and L. Bekemans, Peter Lang, Brussel 2012; AA. VV., *The Making of a European Public Sphere. Media Discourse and Political Contention*, edited by R. Koopmans and P. Statham, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2010; AA.VV., *The European Public. Sphere and the Media*, edited by R. Wodak, A. Triandafyllidou, and M. Krzyzanowski, Palgrave, Basingstoke 2009; H.J. TRENZ, *The European public sphere: contradictory findings in a diverse research field*, in «European Political Sciences», IV, 2005, pp. 407-420.

tion, economic crises, the rise of flexible labour contracts, climate change, or migration. These (perceived) threats can cause a return of traditional and “survival” values. The rise of nationalistic and populist movements fits this trend of cultural turnaround or backlash»¹⁴.

Certainly, the construction of a European public sphere also requires engaging with the limitations of a political liberalism based solely on the negotiation of procedural rules and on overlapping or intersectional consensus¹⁵ – an approach that starts from national spheres of interest, thereby narrowing the possibilities for effective integration on cultural and value-based grounds. Furthermore, the political model rooted in contractualist traditions has historically shown critical weaknesses both in managing conflict and – closely related to this – in excluding many social groups from the public sphere as a space of political decisions¹⁶. Meanwhile, a reflection on the nature of conflicts is required, which, in turn, calls for a reflection on dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, if we take as objectives the construction of an inclusive public sphere. Building an inclusive, participatory, and politically proactive public sphere is, more than ever, tied to the quality of public discourse. In this regard, even a Habermasian approach¹⁷ proves problematic, as it asserts a communicative paradigm that, like the tradition of political contractualism, risks excluding individuals who do not share – due to age, health conditions, or cultural reasons – the same standard of logical-argumentative rationality. Alongside the ongoing need to expand the public sphere of decision-making by promoting rational argumentation from an informed public opinion, it is necessary to introduce further elements of reflection aimed at addressing the transformations and transitions we are undergoing, and their genesis and expression in the public space.

It is therefore essential to take into account the role of mainstream media communication as well as the communicative and informational structures of the web and digital platforms, in their interplay with various forms of populism and political illiberalism¹⁸. The way in which public discourse

¹⁴ L. HALMAN-T. REESKENS-I. SIEBEN-M. VAN ZUNDER (Eds.), *Atlas of European Values*, op. cit., p. 37.

¹⁵ G. MARRAMAO, *La passione del presente*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 2008, p. 40.

¹⁶ M. NUSSBAUM, *Frontiers of Justice. Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 2006.

¹⁷ J. HABERMAS, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 1981.

¹⁸ V. ŠTĚTKA-S. MIHELJ, *The Illiberal Public Sphere: Media in Polarized Societies*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2024.

develops can, at various levels of analysis, impose strong limits on democracy and restrict the participatory sphere¹⁹. In the media and information systems, analysis and mediation processes are often replaced by an emphasis on risk factors, the representation of danger, and social fears: consider, for example, in the last decade, the portrayal of terrorism, migration phenomena, and the role of crime news in mainstream media. Not only is fear used as a persuasive agent – as seen quite explicitly, for instance, in the representations of migration phenomena – but such communication approaches also fuel insecurity through mechanisms of simplification and polarization of reality, due to a lack of explanation that stimulates immediate emotional responses, detached from mediation factors, expert-driven interpretation criteria, and, therefore, removed from processes of reflection, distancing, and critical understanding²⁰.

One need only think, for example, of the use of binary themes and categories that primarily affect the spheres of identity and values, simplifying the represented reality through mechanisms of polarization and promoting alignment with, and identification to, opposing factions. Simplification and polarization prove to be incapable of meeting the cognitive and interpretative needs of the audiences²¹. Communication in which identity categories have a high degree of denotative indeterminacy promotes the representation of simplified identities, which take on an emergency and potentially conflictual character²². Polarized and polarizing categories pro-

¹⁹ J. HABERMAS, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 1962; E. HERMAN-N. CHOMSKY, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, Pantheon, New York 1988; N. FRASER, *Rethinking the Public Sphere: a Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy*, in AA.VV., *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, edited by C. Calhoun MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1992.

²⁰ S. BENTIVEGNA-G. BOCCIA ARTIERI, *Voci della democrazia. Il futuro del dibattito pubblico*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2021; M. BELLUATI-R. MARINI, *Ripensare all'Unione Europea. La nuova ecologia del suo spazio comunicativo*, in «Problemi dell'informazione», I, 2019, pp. 3-28, doi: 10.1445/92853.; W. QUATTROCIOCHI-A. VICINI, *Polarizzazioni. Informazioni, opinioni e altri demoni nell'Infosfera*, Franco Angeli, Milano 2023; L. MALKNECHT, *Il rischio dell'identità. Etica e comunicazione nella web society*, Mimesis, Milano-Udine 2015.

²¹ S. CHERMAK, *Marketing Fear: Representing Terrorism After September 11*, in «Journal for Crime, Conflict and the Media», I (1), 2003, pp. 5-22; L. SERAFINI, *La partecipazione polarizzata: informazione popolare e discussione democratica nella sfera pubblica digitale*, in «METIS», XXVII (2), 2020, pp. 93-114; A.L. SCHMIDT-A. PERUZZI-A. SCALA, et al., *Measuring social response to different journalistic techniques on Facebook*, in «Humanities and Social Sciences Communications», VII (17), 2020, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-020-0507-3>.

²² L. MALKNECHT, *Terrorismo mainstream: bisogni informativi e costruzione delle identità nella narrazione dell'emergenza*, in AA.VV., *Vincere la paura. Una nuova comunicazione*

vide reassurance by simplifying a reality that, in this way, seems more accessible, just as the creation of factions provides provisional identities based on differentiation, which are all the more radical the less they are rooted in historical-cultural, and therefore political, terms. In this way, the circularity of communicative populism and political populism encourages the construction of an “imagined” or generalized enemy – foreign countries, migrant people, and even Europe itself:

So being neither right-wing nor left-wing, being against the caste, being against traditional politics falls within a narrative that creates a sharp opposition with everyone else. We are the new, and everyone else is the old. We are the people, and everyone else is not, and sometimes the others are immigrants, Europe, the political class, the powers that be and the international lobbies, historically identified in the collective imagination as the Jews²³.

These dynamics, which are fueled by both the logic of mainstream communication and highly disintermediated communication systems and contexts, make public discourse unable to assume a mediating function that could facilitate the understanding and management of situations with a high degree of complexity, including, of course, crisis situations. The simplification of complex situations indeed generates a sense of instability and insecurity when events occur that introduce unpredictable variables into social life, which is thus exposed to a process of reconfiguration²⁴ that would, on the contrary, require an increase in the interpretative and narrative capacities of individuals. Emergency narratives in public discourse and the emotional narratives that correlate with them are particularly detrimental to the segments of the population that are less socially and culturally protected, namely those who suffer from a lack of cultural mediation and from an intentional and responsible approach to the narration and representation of phenomena on which social resentment often gathers – a convenient premise for political developments that Martha Nussbaum

della sicurezza contro il mediaterrorismo, a c. di M. Gavrilu e M. Morcellini, Egea, Milano 2022, pp. 91-102.

²³ C.G. HASSAN, *Populism, Racism and the Scapegoat*, in AA.VV., *Clockwork Enemy. Xenophobia and Racism in the Era of Neo-populism*, edited by A. Alietti and D. Padovan, Mimesis International, Udine-Milano 2020, pp. 221-239, p. 224.

²⁴ L. MALKNECHT, *Terrorismo mainstream*, op. cit.

has effectively marked with the formula «monarchy of fear»²⁵. Emotional approaches based on identity and defensive claims reflect the lack of influence, and therefore, the full social integration of individuals, and institutional weakness. When the lack of cultural mediation, but also institutional mediation, is compounded by the absence of points of reference and the multiplicity of crisis levels that mark institutions and social bonds in recent modernity, individuals are relegated – especially those who are culturally disempowered – to a condition of powerlessness and isolation, both social and cultural, which makes the population more vulnerable to the “strong effects” of the media, as well as to the persuasive rhetorics enacted by the «politics of fear»²⁶. The state of exception risks, on one hand, granting the mainstream a sort of *plenitudo potestatis* in the symbolic and value-based restructuring of society, but, on the other hand, it relegates individuals to a condition of cognitive and cultural deprivation that fuels fears and insecurities²⁷. To find anchoring elements and points of reference, the easiest, but also the most unstable and dangerous path, is identity withdrawal itself, which draws strength from the opposition to an enemy that is all the more undefined and generalized the more it serves as reassurance through reinforcing pseudocommunitarian traits or – evoking Michel Maffesoli’s categories²⁸ – “neotribal”.

The need for cohesion, which becomes more urgent in emergency conditions, risks ultimately resulting in defensive – and, in the end, divisive – strategies that highlight the lack of material, cognitive, and symbolic resources, as well as political and institutional ones, with which to face traumas or, in general, social transformations, and that expose any change to be perceived as a potential trauma. The mobilization of such resources involves the responsibility of a wide range of institutional subjects and intermediary actors in the relaunch of a cultural project, which cannot be

²⁵ M. NUSSBAUM, *The Monarchy of Fear: A Philosopher Looks at Our Political Crisis*, Simon and Schuster, New York 2018.

²⁶ J. SIMON, *Governing Through Crime*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007; B. GLASSNER, *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things*, Basic Books, New York 1999; D. GARDNER, *The Science of Fear: How the Culture of Fear Manipulates Your Brain*, Plume Books, New York 2009.

²⁷ L. MALKNECHT-M. MORCELLINI, *Chi coltiva il virus della paura. Riflessioni conclusive dalla ricerca nazionale PRIN sui Mediaterrorismi*, in «Comunicazionepuntodoc», XXIII, 2020, pp. 11-16.

²⁸ M. MAFFESOLI, *Le temps des tribus; le déclin de l'individualisme dans les sociétés post-modernes*, La table ronde, Paris 2000.

developed outside a shared space for discussion – a space from which to restore the foundations of trust and social cohesion: a public space capable of providing and building broad interpretative horizons, capable of developing projects not limited to emergencies and structural or contingent crises. This implies a change in perspective. To the extent that post-truth itself has proven to be a divisive and polarizing factor in public opinion²⁹, centres of knowledge production and trust in epistemic authorities³⁰ assume a fundamental role in social mediation to promote trust and rebuild social cohesion in a context marked by a profound change in the criteria underlying the processes of legitimating authority, knowledge, and even sources of meaning. Leveraging these aspects becomes all the more necessary as, in the era of digitalization, deterritorialization, and dematerialization, there is no longer a coincidence between the public sphere and public space. Public discourse is deterritorialized. This makes it more challenging to promote trust and social cohesion. However, only by fostering these conditions can narrow and obsolete identity definitions be abandoned, and change be addressed and oriented – without leaving it, on one hand, to purely systemic dynamics, and, on the other hand, to narratives that abandon the very processes of mediation and social interpretation. This also means supporting those dynamics of trust (in expert knowledge, institutions, and the social body) capable of reactivating projective impulses – both individual but especially collective – beyond emergencies. The activation of those devices of cognitive reappropriation, and thus active engagement with reality by culturally situated subjects, who appropriate the coordinates and points of reference – primarily value-based – cannot take place without adequate social and cultural mediation processes aimed at promoting trust and cohesion.

Above all, the path of trust allows for the removal of the reconstruction of social bonds from emergency identities, and thus from factors of apparent anchorage, which are more exposed to emotionality, volatility, and conflict. Highly mediatized social and political contexts, ex-

²⁹ D. Palano, *La democrazia alla fine del "pubblico". Sfiducia, frammentazione, polarizzazione: verso una "bubble democracy"?*, in «Governare la paura. Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies», XXXV, 2019, doi: <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4935/9413>.

³⁰ A. BARTSCH-CH. NEUBERGER-B. STARK-V. KARNOWSKI-M. MAURER-CH. PENTZOLD-TH. QUANDT-O. QUIRING-CH. SCHEMER, *Epistemic authority in the digital public sphere. An integrative conceptual framework and research agenda*, in «Communication Theory», XXXV, 1, 2025, pp. 37-50, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ct/qtac020>.

posed to the influence and power structures of platforms and new actors, make it necessary to relaunch a public sphere capable of generating and instilling trust in the social body and its political, institutional, cognitive, and cultural expressions. It is the democratic institutions and the very structure of democracy that tie their legitimacy to dynamics of trust, which need to be nurtured and strengthened in the public space. If we look at the most recent crisis factors, such as the pandemic, the environmental crisis, terrorism, and wars, in these contexts – despite their many differences – political, institutional, and social crises find unprecedented elements of convergence. In the face of these phenomena, in their various forms, the reaffirmation of an «immunitary paradigm»³¹ – which is woven into the very fabric of modernity – has proven unfeasible. This paradigm is linked to a model of individual and collective subjectivity that primarily relates to the environment and contexts of action as an autonomous, self-sufficient, and dominant subjectivity, which defined the very project of the modern subject but also outlined the limits of its failure, at least in terms of the linearity of progress³². In light of these scenarios, it is essential to first acknowledge our vulnerability. This awareness is also an awareness of our interdependence, both as a constitutive element of our humanity and as part of the condition of European and global interdependence. It is from this realization of our vulnerability that we can strengthen intersubjective bonds as a starting point for reclaiming a space and environment that nonetheless reaffirms, sometimes in a tragic way, this condition of interdependence as something inescapable³³. On one hand, the paradigm of the self-sufficient and dominant subjectivity proves no longer viable; on the other hand, its historical exhaustion reasserts as points of strength precisely social and institutional cooperation, relationships of responsibility, and mutual care. If we are not immune, we need to be cared for, we must care, and take care (the «care for our common home»)³⁴.

³¹ R. ESPOSITO, *Immunitas. Protezione e negazione della vita*, Einaudi, Torino 2002.

³² M. HORKHEIMER-TH. W. ADORNO, *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente*, Querido Verlag, Amsterdam 1947.

³³ From different perspectives: M. NUSSBAUM, *Frontiers of Justice*, op. cit.; E. PULCINI, *La cura del mondo. Paura e responsabilità nell'età globale*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 2009; E. MORIN, *Cambiamo Strada. Le 15 lezioni del Coronavirus*, Raffaello Cortina Editore, Milano 2020.

³⁴ FRANCIS (J.M. BERGOGLIO), *Encyclical Letter "Laudato si'. On care for our common home"*, Vatican Press, Vatican City 2015.

A practice of hope, in this context, seems to share the foundations of a «public discourse ecology»³⁵ that impacts a properly ethical dimension with strong political implications, because an ecological approach to public discourse corresponds to an “ecological mindset” – «An ecological mind thinks within the world and takes responsibility for its part in solving common problems»³⁶. In contexts of communicative disintermediation, rampant post-truth, and a general crisis of sources of social meaning, thinking collectively «in the world» becomes an ethical and political task. If trust, like hope, are dimensions that are strengthened when they are put more at risk³⁷, they take shape in social interaction and its institutional expressions to enable and outline the co-construction of the socio-temporal horizon of action. Not only in the dimension of the project, but also in that of hope. Hope withdraws from possession, from the appropriation of the future because it encompasses within itself the limits and margins of uncertainty in planning, but the awareness of this limit – which is an awareness of the very vulnerability of the project and the individual or collective subjects who promote it – can constitute an element of trust that feeds on openness to relationships and perspectives that go beyond the projects in the present, in order to hope, precisely, for something we cannot plan, and which is entrusted to relationships and interactions that are not yet given, but that we can actively work to build.

³⁵ A.L. TOTA, *Ecologia del pensiero. Conversazioni con una mente inquinata*, Einaudi, Torino 2023, p. 182.

³⁶ *Ibid.* (own translation).

³⁷ B. BLÖBAUM, *Some Thoughts on the Nature of Trust: Concept, Models and Theory*, in AA.VV., *Trust and Communication*, edited by Id., Springer, Cham 2021.

BUILDING A NEW GLOBAL ARCHITECTURE OF PEACE

GIOVANNI POLIZZI

Abstract

The sharp and widespread increase in conflict and the world's growing geopolitical instability confirm Pope Francis' thesis of a "third world war in pieces". Starting from this premise, my paper addresses the theme of the desired "building of a new global architecture of peace", beginning by outlining the characteristics of the human soul, the nature of conflict and the probable reasons behind it, identified mainly in man's irrationality and his aversion to the "other than himself". It then dwells on war and the "culture of negotiation" as its valid alternative, a stimulus to dialogue and an unpredictable factor of new hope for peace. A hope that, regardless of any desirable measure or initiative, springs from a real understanding and respect for differences and a newfound trust in mankind and the natural aspirations of peoples.

Keywords: conflict, human soul, irrationality, culture of negotiation, hope.

Pope Francis was right: we are experiencing a "third world war in pieces"¹.

After more than seventy years of relative peace, conflicts in the world are again on the rise; and to these has been added the invisible and pervasive threat of terrorism. In 2024, the most authoritative research institutes recorded as many as 56 active conflicts (the highest number since the Second World War), which continue to involve, more or less directly, around 92 countries and which produced at least 233,000 victims and almost 100 mil-

¹ Pope Francis first referred to a "third world war in pieces" on 13 September 2014 during his visit to the Redipuglia military cemetery, which commemorates over 100,000 soldiers who died in World War I. Since then, he had often reiterated this concept, noting that the so many ongoing international conflicts are interconnected and affect the entire world.

lion internally displaced persons and refugees last year alone². The growing number of conflicts and countries involved in clashes is alarming. The proliferation of armed groups, the use of new technologies (since 2018, the use of drones has increased by 1,400%), the rise in military spending, the increasingly widespread crisis of governance and, more generally, growing geopolitical instability are also, and above all, increasing violence against civilians and the weakest fringes of populations (the elderly, women and children).

Nowadays, even those of us who have the good fortune to live in countries or areas of the world that have been at peace for decades see the news bursting into our homes with constant images of aggression, clashes, attacks, murders and other large or small daily acts of violence: criminal episodes that are often striking not only for their heinousness, but also for their absolute gratuitousness. One wonders then whether it is true - as Erich Fromm wrote in 1973³ - that “the characteristic of man is that he can be driven by the impulse to kill and to torture, feeling voluptuousness” and that he is “the only animal that can kill and destroy members of his own species without any rational advantage, neither biological nor economic”.

On closer inspection, it would appear so. No animal freely kills other animals of the same species. It does so either to defend itself, its family or its territory (so-called “defensive aggressiveness”) or to conquer a scarce resource by taking it from its fellow animal (so-called “predatory aggressiveness”). If the resource is then, as almost always happens, an animal of a different species on which the other feeds (examples of cannibalism involving one’s own kind are very rare among animals), then we see episodes of hunting, fighting or running away, but never gratuitous killing. “In the vast majority of cases”, wrote the founder of modern war studies Gaston Bouthoul in 1951⁴, “animals do not make war on each other. Their predatory activity in general is directed against animals of other species and on which they feed.” And in hunting - we may add - the prey almost never opts for combat, but for escape.

If we go back to consider human beings, we have to admit instead that the history we continue to learn in school is precisely made up of wars, rev-

² For a brief assessment, useful reference may be made, among others, to the website www.guerrenelmondo.it.

³ E. FROMM, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1973.

⁴ G. BOUTHOU, *Les guerres: éléments de polémologie*, Payot, Paris, 1951.

olutions, betrayals and murders; centuries of evolution and progress, moral or religious precepts, past tragedies or the interdependencies of today's globalisation have not yet succeeded in eradicating the human tendency to fight and overpower in order to attain one's needs or to assert one's will.

But then is man violent by nature? On this question, too, countless studies and theories have alternated over the centuries. In particular, two different schools of thought have emerged: one influenced by the teachings of Hobbes, according to whom men are nothing more than animals and as such violent by nature (*"homo homini lupus"*); the other inspired by the ideas of Rousseau who, on the contrary, considered men to be peaceful and good-natured by nature, but then possibly made aggressive and violent by external circumstances. The most widespread thesis today is the result of a compromise and is based on the observation that not all violence is the same. That is, there are fundamentally two different types of aggressiveness: a rational one, called "proactive", which is exercised "cold" and is always premeditated (and is very widespread among mankind); the other instinctive, called "reactive", which explodes suddenly "hot" as a reaction to anxiety, anger or fear and is never premeditated (and is less widespread than the first). In other words, this is what Richard Wrangham, Professor of Biological Anthropology at Harvard, in 2018, called the "paradox of goodness" (humans can be the most perfidious and vile species but also the kindest and most caring)⁵ and which is explained precisely by considering that planned aggression and social tolerance are not opposing behaviours, but complementary, since they derive from the two different forms of aggressiveness.

Having said this, the reflection goes first of all to conflict: to this dimension of being innate in the reality of things, congenital to our species and, for this very reason, an inescapable category of human action and history, recognized over the centuries by those unwritten norms legitimising (but, not by chance, only at the international level and never in domestic public order) recourse to the use of force and warlike violence.

In spite of a wide variety of interpretative models, most observers and scholars agree with the thesis expounded in 1956 by the American

⁵ R. WRANGHAM, *The Goodness Paradox: The Strange Relationship Between Virtue and Violence in Human Evolution*, Pantheon Books, New York 2018.

sociologist Lewis Coser⁶, according to whom every type of conflict can be reduced, in essence, either to a struggle over values or to a claim of rights over scarce resources (conflicts defined by some as “qualitative” and “quantitative”). Conflicts of the first type derive from ethnic, racial, national, religious, political or ideological confrontations and would rarely be resolvable, since any ideology (even the most tolerant and democratic) is by definition all-encompassing, and tends to replace, by erasing it, any different or alternative ideology. Those of the second type originate, instead, from efforts to acquire material or immaterial (such as a power or status or a specific professional position) resources, rendered “economic goods” by their real scarcity or predetermined by an organizational order, and lend themselves more easily to attempts at solution inspired by the possible balancing of the different interests at stake.

In this regard, it should be noted how equally widespread is the belief that there is never just one objective cause of conflict, even if it appears to be so or even if only one is the trigger. Thus, even those conflicts apparently attributable to only one of the two types always derive from a mixture of the struggle over values and the claim of scarce resources. Just as the latter could, in turn, consist of disputes over a good or the realisation of a purpose that are identical for both parties or over the acquisition of goods or the realisation of different and incompatible goals.

It also appears confirmed in theory and by concrete observation that, just as conflict most often arises from a mixture of factors that are difficult to separate and define individually, so too the parties involved in it do not always have a clear perception of the object of the dispute, since each instinctively refers it to its own system of values and its own yardstick. It is no coincidence that some scholars⁷ have already critically re-examined and ended up denying the recent thesis according to which, in every conflict, there are always possible “objective principles” capable of facilitating the reaching of an agreement. Such principles - it is argued - even if they can be invoked, are in any case of no help in resolving the conflict, since at the basis of every human decision there is always a subjective motivation, deriving from a wholly personal perception of the cost-benefit ratio of the agreement.

⁶ L.A. COSER, *The Function of Social Conflict*, The Free Press, Glencoe 1956.

⁷ Among others, G. POLIZZI, *Guerra e Pace: un'alternativa chiamata “cultura del negoziato”*, in Rev. Nuova Voce del Rotary, n.11, Rome, April 2018; as well as in AA.VV., *Conflitti*, Edicusano, Rome 2020 (Proceedings of the Conference of the same title, organized by the Italian Geographic Society and the “Niccolò Cusano” University, Rome, 2018).

This observation is even more evident in the case of conflicts over values. Values are in fact such only for those who share them (to the point that the common notions of “right” or “wrong” are in these cases devoid of any meaning) and determine the emergence of conflicts whenever their bearers attempt to unduly project them onto others, denying the latter’s different values. Transposed, then, at the level of the organised community (ethnic group, political party, national minority, etc.), they often become not only the unifying factor, but also the legitimising reason for that community, so that any attack on values is automatically perceived by those who share those values as an attack on the very existence of the community.

Whatever its type or dimension, historical experience and the observation of daily news confirm the common understanding of conflict only as a negative event, in the face of which there is no alternative to one of the three well-known options theorised as early as 1945 by the neuropsychologist Karen Horney in her “triangle of primary impulses”: flight, submission or fight⁸. That is, depending on one’s own strength or advantage, the conflict can only be avoided or suffered or faced. And beyond the first hypothesis, which is obviously unsuitable for settling the dispute, there is no other possibility but more or less conditional surrender or confrontation, with the latter always being long, costly, and devastating.

And so, our thoughts turn to the reasons for violence and war, even though we know that rivers of ink have always been spilled on conflicts and wars, their causes, developments and outcomes, as well as on the search for means to prevent or resolve them, without such analyses having contributed in the slightest to reducing their incidence in international or domestic reality. And above all, so far, without the future prospects of humanity appearing any less problematic and gloomy.

On the other hand, although war is also in a sense an instrument of conflict resolution, it is certainly not a good thing, since it always comes at an enormous cost of destruction, suffering and death (the old theory of the “just” war is now more than outdated, based on the fact that any war is almost always considered “just” by both belligerents). So, war is evil, most scholars and our common thinking conclude. And it exists because evil inevitably exists in life. “Reason absolutely condemns war”, wrote Kant in

⁸ K. HORNEY, *Our Inner Conflicts: A Constructive Theory of Neurosis*, Norton, New York 1945.

1795⁹. However, also the most recent contributions from cognitive neuroscience have confirmed that human rationality is often far less linear and coherent than we think. Add to this the fact that as early as 1954, Maslow's established theory of the "pyramid of the five basic human needs" revealed how the first three (survival, security, belonging to a group) are linked to instinct, the other two (recognition and self-fulfilment) to emotionality, but none to rationality¹⁰.

Let us go back for a moment and look at everyday life. Why do we come into conflict with our neighbour? Individual characters with varying mixes of positive and negative aspects, diversity of values, ideas and convictions, contrasting interests and goals perceived as irreconcilable, differences in instinctive moods, habits, tastes, and tendencies: all of these characterise our daily relationships with our fellow human beings. And each of these elements can generate opportunities for sharing and friendship or grounds for isolation and enmity. In other words, it is the type of relationship that exists or is to be established with the other that determines the possibility of useful collaboration or the risk of an exhausting conflict. Every human being is an extremely complex creature, with their own distinct individuality. We know what we are, what we think, desire or fear. We know our way of existing and living, and we trust in our acquired certainties. But, as for others, we really know none of this. The Czech poet and Nobel laureate Jaroslav Seifert wrote in the early 1980s: "Are you humanity? Me? No! Me neither. And everyone I have asked has told me that they are not humanity, but those others!"

Indeed, who or what, in our daily lives, most undermines our identity, making us more insecure and instinctively reactive and aggressive, if not the person or the thing which is "different" from us and our "self"? Is it perhaps this diversity, or rather this "otherness", which we do not know how to (or do not want to) perceive as a possible source of personal growth, that is the real prime cause of all conflict? The other, then, the great intellectual enigma and emotional challenge represented by those who are not like us! The other whom we would like to be the same as us, in order to be able to accept them without jeopardising our nature. The other who is instead, by definition, different from us and creates alarm and fear, since their diversity is seen as a potential threat to our deepest individuality.

⁹ I. KANT, *Zum ewigen Frieden. Ein philosophischer Entwurf.*, Nicolovius, Königsberg (Kaliningrad) 1795.

¹⁰ A.H. MASLOW, *Motivation and Personality*, Harper & Row, New York 1954.

Hence the risk of asserting one's own identity only "against" the other. And hence the conflict which starts precisely from the very existence of the other and - I would add with the great Italian philosopher Norberto Bobbio - from the "only enemy that is our irrationality"¹¹. Long gone are the times and the logic of Aristotle who, in defining the human being as a "social animal", maintained that all dissimilarity is creative and that therefore "one grows more through the dissimilar than through the similar"¹².

Yet it is precisely this form of rationality that should inspire us in "building a new global architecture of peace". And, if words have their own hidden meaning, we gladly insist on the term "architecture" and much prefer it to the term "order". The world order, or rather the "new global order", which is much discussed as an indispensable factor for peace, is a concept that, at the international level, evokes the authoritative imposition of rules by one or more dominant subjects; whereas the term "architecture", while implying the necessary work of one or more "architects", seems to express much better (and in a more democratic form) the idea of a result obtained by the voluntary collaboration of different subjects and the constructive interaction of their founding elements. "Order" is closed and immutable (until it is subverted); "architecture" is open and innovative. Order descends from above; architecture moves from below. Order belongs to a world that tends to be as "unipolar" as possible; architecture belongs to a widespread and "polycentric" structure.

A new global architecture of peace should therefore know how, and be able, to cope with the changing challenges that beset our contemporary world, recognizing and positively managing the deeper causes of the conflicts and geopolitical instability that afflict it, promoting respect for diversity, and developing increasingly intense and sustainable forms of dialogue and collaboration among international actors, reinforcing and extending recourse to the so-called "diplomatic method"¹³ both in the resolution of inevitable bilateral disputes and in the joint management of major global issues, such as overcoming economic disparities and development needs,

¹¹ N. BOBBIO, *Il problema della guerra e le vie della pace*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1979-2009.

¹² ARISTOTLE, *Politics*, book VI.

¹³ More than a real method, it is a value concept and a training criterion. Inspired by the principle of "good faith", the diplomatic method is, to use a beautiful and concise definition, "that way of conducting international relations that is based on negotiation and that tends to agreement" (A. MARESCA, *Dizionario giuridico diplomatico*, Giuffrè, Milan 1991).

combating climate change, the more profitable and appropriate use of new technologies, and so on. But it would also require – it should not be forgotten – a new, and hitherto totally unknown, humanistic, cultural and spiritual approach, based on the absolute rejection of any form of coercion or violence.

“Although a product of human political processes, war has its own internal logic that makes it independent of decisions, even of those who initiated it. War has its own intimate and evil force that overwhelms and swallows up everything: it is absolute evil because it creates a spiral of hatred and violence that is difficult to escape. That is why wars must be stopped as soon as possible”. So wrote Italian political scientist and former Deputy Foreign Minister, Mario Giro¹⁴.

Just as it is now commonly accepted that true peace is not only “negative peace”, i.e. the absence of war, so there is a very valid alternative to overcome our irrationality and escape Horney’s triangle: the so-called “culture of negotiation”, to be understood, of course, not as a continuous set of exchanges or minute and wearisome bargaining, but as that particular “process of activity of two or more parties, holders of divergent but interdependent interests concerning a common issue, aimed at reaching a (satisfactory, fair and lasting) understanding on the same issue through reciprocal concessions”¹⁵.

This discipline aims to develop a particular capacity for a rational approach to the issues of conflict, war and peace and a kind of behavioural and pragmatic self-awareness in interpersonal relations. A pivotal method and tool in the pursuit of the peaceful resolution of disputes, quite different from those disciplines, such as the ethics of politics or peace studies, that suggest an ideal and abstract society from which all conflict and war are banished, the culture of negotiation instead realistically accepts the existence of conflict, knows how to identify it and analyse it in depth, strives to replace conflict perceived as “adversity and enmity” with conflict understood as “competition and competitiveness” (also in the awareness that not all conflicts are negative, as they can sometimes turn into positive factors of

¹⁴ M. GIRO, *L’Europa avvelenata-L’arte del compromesso è necessaria per fermare la guerra*, on “Domani” March 2022.

¹⁵ G. POLIZZI, *La funzione del negoziatore: profilo e problemi giuridici*, in Rev. Il Nuovo Diritto, n. 10, Abilgraf, Rome October 1995.

stimulus and development) and seeks to control, manage and overcome it in the most convenient and appropriate manner.

Considered as an arduous, but always stimulating and productive, path from conflict to consensus, the culture of negotiation reveals a rich plurality of values. First and foremost, it has an intrinsic cultural value, for the refinement of intelligence and sensitivity, for the stimulation of rationality, reflection, creativity and the unexpressed potential of the minds, for the development of interactions and synergies between individuals and peoples of different mentality, character and culture. It reveals a high social value, as a means to establish more effective interpersonal communication, to allow controlled venting of collective tensions, to create and spread tranquillity and certainty, order and collective well-being. It has its own specific economic value, deriving from the increased possibility of satisfying needs, from the more efficient reallocation of resources, from the stimulation of inventiveness and productivity, from the creation of added value and, last but not least, from the saving of the costs of conflict. It has a significant political value, as an instrument for the democratic search for consensus, for the peaceful overcoming of conflicts, for the maintenance of orderly civil coexistence, for security and stability against war and violence. Lastly, it has a very high ethical value, as a means of individual development and personal enrichment, of deepening mutual understanding, of a positive approach to interpersonal relations, of education to promote understanding, tolerance, respect and co-operation against intimidation, blackmail, brute force and oppression.

All this is the “culture of negotiation”¹⁶. Expression of freedom (that freedom that Tacitus attributed to the parties to a negotiation, the sole architects of their right)¹⁷ and sense of responsibility (of the parties to a negotiation who are truly animated by “*voluntas negotiandi*” and “*voluntas concludendi*”), the culture of negotiation is the only key for the transformation of the “sense of why” of a conflict: a why no longer addressed to the past (for what reasons? and whose responsibility?), but to the future (to what end did we sustain a conflict? and what positive effects could its resolution now have?).

“The most important thing to be said about negotiation”, again wrote Mario Giro in October 2022, “is that it represents a world of its own, a

¹⁶ For a concise but complete and structured treatment of the subject, G. POLIZZI, *Compendium of Theory, Methodology, and Technique of Negotiation*, Lulu.com, Raleigh 2021.

¹⁷ P.C. TACITUS, *Annales*, Book I.

terrain unknown even to the parties, and that it can hold many surprises. While during a war the parties are at their worst, in negotiation everything changes and the opposite can happen. Negotiation should not be mistrusted, nor should it be regarded as a surrender or a *deminutio*: rather, it is a promised land for the parties that awakens within them a desire for the future”¹⁸.

A difficult and sometimes harsh clash of intellects and characters, in a seesaw of controlled communication and patient exploration and analysis of the interests kept hidden by the other side, a constant effort at creativity in the continuous game of options and the painful exchange of concessions, negotiation ultimately reveals all its pragmatic concreteness and its value as a factor of expectation and “hope”, in preventing conflict from degenerating into violence that destroys lives and resources and in promoting better understanding, tolerance, respect, and cooperation among human beings.

It is precisely these latter values that are proving to be increasingly decisive for the building of a new global architecture of peace, which can transform into daily and sustainable reality that ideal of universal peace that, ever since the Holy Scriptures, is still revealed to believers today not as an achievement attained by man, but as a divine gift. Before being the work of man, the Church teaches us, peace is a gift of God and is the first fruit of the Resurrection, as we read in the Easter Gospel when the risen Christ announces to the disciples still immersed in fear: “Peace be with you”¹⁹.

But to be able to accept the divine gift of peace, we must nurture hope and trust, the former towards our Creator, the latter towards our fellow human beings. The first is a matter of faith; as for the second, all the same, recent studies in group psychology reveal that mistrust does not depend on ethnic-cultural differences, but is rooted in human nature.

It is often thought that the animosity and violence that break out between different groups are the result of conflicts of interest and that, once the conflicts are resolved, peace will reign. Social psychology, however, teaches otherwise. It is well known that it is sufficient to induce a group of individuals who do not know each other to split into two distinct, albeit entirely fictitious, categories for a sudden internal solidarity to emerge and a barrier of hostility and discrimination towards the opposite group to be

¹⁸ M. GIRO, *Perché è arrivato il momento di negoziare*, on “Domani” October 2022.

¹⁹ *Jn* 20:19.

created. This is explained by the fact that for thousands of years human beings have lived in small groups based on a common culture and a shared vision of the world and life, in which the predisposition to cooperate was not universal, but rather an aptitude to cooperate only with those one trusts (and this trust is linked to intimate knowledge of the person to whom it is granted). One does not trust a stranger, and therefore does not cooperate with them. The ancestral tendency to separate the world into friends and foes, to cooperate with those who are similar and to view those who are different with suspicion, is thus activated by entirely natural cognitive processes.

The birth of nation-states, the great revolutions and wars of independence, then the oligarchy of the great powers that met in Vienna in 1815, the continuation of this latter system for a century until the outbreak of the First World War, then the multilateral experience of the League of Nations with its blatant inefficiency in preventing or repressing conflicts, the disaster of the Second World War and, at its end, the birth of both the United Nations Organisation and of those regional systems (among all of which there emerged over the years the current European Union), the grey years of the Cold War and the bipolar equilibrium guaranteed by the atomic bomb, and finally, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the start of what was believed to become a “new global order”: all great historical milestones in humanity’s ever-troubled journey towards the construction of a lasting system of peace.

If we were to interrogate an AI chatbot and ask it how to build a new global architecture of peace, we would get a series of operational indications like these:

- reform existing multilateral institutions (such as the UN, WTO, regional organisations) to make them more broadly representative, transparent and effective;
- alternatively, establish a “world peace assembly”, composed of all nations on an equal footing and empowered to issue binding resolutions on global issues such as climate change, pandemics, terrorism, arms control and reduction, and respect for human rights;
- promote the commitment of all states to ensure national governance that shares international responsibilities and actions to reduce economic and social disparities, manage resources (land, water, energy, etc.) more equitably and strengthen a shared global security framework;

- adopt the most appropriate AI technologies to develop effective forms of communication and implement advanced mechanisms for the early warning of potential conflicts and the rapid initiation of peaceful dispute resolution initiatives;
- face possible threats to “cyber-security” and develop international agreements to ensure peace in “cyber-space”;
- promote worldwide exchange and intercultural dialogue initiatives and education programmes for a better understanding of diversity and mutual respect among peoples;
- integrate education for mutual understanding, tolerance, peace and negotiated conflict resolution into national education programs from an early age.

These and many other similar measures could certainly, and should, be adopted for the building of a new global architecture of peace. But the real problem is only one: none of what has been described so far can be implemented without the concordant political will of all the international players or, at the very least, of the major powers (not by chance, all nuclear) on which the great choices of humanity depend. And this concordant political will requires in everyone a very strong motivation that can overcome, if possible without suppressing it but by adapting to it, the innate and natural prevalence of national interests.

After the tragic experience of the Second World War and the “double trauma” of Auschwitz and Hiroshima with the consequent onset of the first atomic, now thermonuclear era, peace is now an inalienable value and goal, not least because a nuclear conflict would lead to such an apocalyptic scenario that the survival of the entire human race would be endangered. In the second half of the 20th century, the “negative peace”, i.e. the absence of an open direct conflict between the two blocs, was mainly maintained thanks to the so-called “balance of terror”, despite the hundreds of civil or local wars (many of them in the form of “proxy wars”) that nonetheless took place. Then, the end of the Cold War did not bring, as expected, the start of a new era of peace, but rather a much more turbulent and paradoxically more dangerous phase in international relations, in which the already fragile balances of bipolarism seem to have dissolved definitively. Borrowing the fine title of another article by Mario Giro, we too could say that “the old global order is dead, but the new one is not yet born”²⁰.

²⁰ M. GIRO, *Old global order is dead, but the new one is not yet born*, on “Domani” May 2024.

But what is needed to bring it into being? What is needed first of all is the undeniable realisation that the world we live in today is increasingly chaotic and fragmented, and that therefore, if we want to avoid the self-destruction that would be caused by a third and apocalyptic world conflict, a new global architecture of peace can only be based on an international balance that should be not “multipolar”, but simply “polycentric”. What is needed then is an intellectual and cultural change of pace on the part of world governments, aimed at recovering the ability to rationally and objectively assess global interdependencies, which are today excessively obscured by a wave of gloomy and growing warmongering. And what is needed above all is a return of peoples and individuals – in particular, of those who have even the slightest influence over leaders, society and public opinion – to a new form of spirituality based on hope and trust in humanity.

There can be no search for peace without the recovery of trust. There can be no mutual trust without sharing common values and cultural legacies. And there can be no such sharing without deep mutual knowledge and understanding. “A good diplomat”, one of my former ambassadors, to whom I was very close, once told me, “must have the firm conviction that cultural, ideological, religious and ethnic diversities are a value and ground to be cultivated and that intercultural mediation is the high road to civil coexistence and thus to peace.”

That “positive peace” - in the words of the well-known Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung - which is not only the absence of war, but above all the presence of social justice²¹.

That “true peace” – to end with Pope Francis’ words again – which “reflects and realises human nature and the natural aspirations of peoples”.

²¹ J. GALTUNG, *Peace By Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization*, Sage, New York 1996.

BETWEEN MIGRATION AND ICT: SOCIAL PROJECTS FOR A MEDITERRANEAN URBAN HOPE¹

RENATA SALVARANI

Abstract

This essay explores how migration and ICT are reshaping Mediterranean urban life, offering opportunities for integration and shared cultural growth, and creating experiences of embodied Hope deeply rooted in contemporary society. The use of low-cost, open-access digital tools fosters social cohesion, especially in culturally diverse and historically rich Mediterranean cities. Key concepts such as legacy, community, and city are redefined as dynamic, relational, and open to innovation. Grounded, local projects – often EU-funded – demonstrate how digital technologies can support intercultural dialogue and inclusive heritage practices. Migration is portrayed both as a challenge and a cultural resource, enriching urban identities through collective memory and care. Researchers play a crucial role in rewriting fragmented histories by including marginalized voices through oral histories and community engagement. Digital tools – ranging from podcasts to VR and AI – can serve as bridges across cultural divides. Ultimately, the text describes some successful projects envisioning an urban future rooted in hope, inclusion, and shared humanity.

Keywords: Migration, Religious Studies, Heritage valorization, Low cost ICT, Social cohesion

Europe is currently facing two major challenges: on the one hand, migratory phenomena that affect the entire continent in various forms, and on the other, the social and cultural changes induced by the use of artificial intelligence. Can these transformations create the conditions for the emer-

¹ Roberta Rodelli and Arianna Battiato collaborated with the data collection.

gence of an embodied hope? Can ICTs be employed to foster integration and social cohesion?

Can the active and informed use of ICTs in complex cultural contexts reveal new positive potentials and foster the development of innovative applications?

An affirmative answer may be offered if we refer to certain key definitions that have guided scholarly, historiographical, and social debates over the past decades:

- the concept of Legacy, intended as a living heritage enriched by the experience and care of those who inherit and cultivate it²;
- the notion of Community as a “warm place”, encompassing a plurality of interpretations closely linked to the relational dimension and to the reconfiguration of shared spaces in the context of global modernity³;
- and the City as a living space, a site of “memory work”, a symbolic domain in which signs, buildings, materials, and architectural forms acquire meaning within a specific cultural code⁴.

² Key works stressing the definition of Heritage and Legacy: D. LOWENTHAL, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1985; L. SMITH, *Uses of Heritage*, Routledge, London 2006; M. AUGÉ, *Non lieux*, Edition du seuil, Paris 1992. For a more recent overview, see also K. FABBRICATTI, L. BOISSENIN, M. CITONI, M., *Heritage Community Resilience: towards new approaches for urban resilience and sustainability*, in «City Territ Archit 7», 17 (2020) <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40410-020-00126-7> accessed 23 January 2025; P. GIRARDELLI, *A living legacy: heritage across borders*, in «Disegnarecon», L'Aquila 2020 <https://doi.org/10.20365/DISEGNARECON.25.2020.ED2> accessed 23 January 2025.

³ Several different conceptions of community, including urban communities, political communities, and virtual communities are described in G. DELANTY, *Community*, Routledge, New York 2010.

See also: D. HARDCASTLE, P.R. POWERS, S. WENOCUR, *The Concept of Community in Social Work Practice, Community Practice Theories and Skills for Social Workers*, online edition, Oxford Academic, Oxford 31 October 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195141610.003.0004>, accessed 28 May 2025; MOHR CARNEY, M., ADAMS, D., MENDENHALL, A., OHMER, M., *The lens of community*, in «Journal of Community Practices», 30(2), 2022, pp. 105–108. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10705422.2022.2077598>, accessed 21 November 2024. Although the word ‘community’ is commonly used and generally has positive connotations, the term itself is problematic. It is used in many ways. See Z. BAUMAN, *Community: Seeking safety in an insecure world*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2001; S. KENNY, *Developing communities for the future*, Thomson, Melbourne 2006.

⁴ About the lesson of Henri Lefebvre and the contemporary debate: M. E. LEARY-OWHIN, J.P. MCCARTHY, *The Routledge Handbook of Henri Lefebvre, the City and Urban Society*, Routledge, London 2019; S. KIPFER, P. SABERI, T. WIEDITZ, *Henri Lefebvre: Debates and controversies*, in «Progress in Human Geography», 37(1), 2012, pp. 115–34; Z.P. NEAL, *The connected city: How networks are shaping the modern metropolis*, Routledge, New York 2013.

A general definition of low-cost, open-access ICT instruments can also be framed within this same perspective⁵.

However, more than theoretical reflection alone, a more nuanced and promising response emerges from ongoing experiences in areas most directly impacted by these transformations – namely, the major urban centers bordering the Mediterranean basin.

A range of dotted projects, often grounded in the initiative of local groups and supported by European financial instruments, are beginning to shape models for the co-construction of shared cultural forms: ways of living together, exchanges of information among diverse identity and religious groups, and systems for engaging with public spaces that give rise to common interpretations of everyday cultural heritage.

In such contexts, the stratifications of a millennia-old history are interwoven with the everyday use of ICTs by local populations.

The Mediterranean Sea has been a vital trade route since ancient times. Civilizations such as the Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, and later the Byzantines, Latin coastal cities and Ottomans used the sea for commerce, connecting distant lands and facilitating the exchange of goods, technologies, and knowledge. Conquests, colonization, trade, and migration brought together different cultures, fostering mutual influence, and cooperation.

As the birthplace of major world religious traditions, including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the region experienced a rich interweaving of ideas and practices of the Sacred, which led to interactions, debates, and conflicts. In addition, it has been a cradle of intellectual activity and new ideas, with major contributions to science, philosophy, medicine, and the arts. Waves of migration over the centuries have brought new peoples and ideas to the Mediterranean shores, contributing to the dynamic and ever evolving nature of Mediterranean societies.

During the 20th century, these place experienced significant changes and transformations, both territorial and cultural, which shaped their per-

⁵ For a cultural definition: M. CASTELL, *The Rise of the Network Society*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford 2010; J. VAN DIJK, *The Network Society: Social Aspects of New Media*, Sage, London 2012; P.M. KRAFFT, M. YOUNG, M. KATELL, K. HUANG, G. BUGINGO, *Defining AI in Policy versus Practice*, in «arXiv:1912.11095v1 [cs.CY]», <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.1912.11095> accessed 23 May 2025.

ception in the eyes of the world⁶. Several Mediterranean cities underwent rapid modernization and urbanization, fuelled by industrialization, population growth, and migration from rural areas, which produced urban sprawl, pollution, social inequality, and inadequate infrastructure. Other cities were under colonial rule or influenced by colonial powers.

Here, various experiences of migration in different Mediterranean areas have been superimposed, causing a complex impact⁷.

Because of its dual nature of giving rise to conflicts and tensions and being an opportunity for dialogue and integration, migration has always played a complex role in shaping urban life and societal development.

Mediterranean cities as places where contemporary migration flows, with their traditions, languages, and customs, intersect with the rich historical legacy of these cities, fertilising them through various cultural elements such as music, dance, craftsmanship, and storytelling.

At the same time, Mediterranean cities define themselves as places of migrants' care, through the collection of stories on caring for the whole individual dimension, including existential and identity-cultural aspects.

Such a process often intertwines with the legacy of colonialism, contributing to fight discrimination and racism, and creating models of intervention, planning, and management replicable in the Mediterranean area (and the whole Europe).

The most significant projects carried out (or in progress) are based on a number of general findings.

Many Mediterranean cities struggle with urban sprawl, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient planning for the needs of diverse communities⁸. Statistical projections indicate that by 2050, two-thirds of the world's population will reside in urban settlements. This proportion was already attained in the Mediterranean in 2014, and it is projected that by 2030, countries bordering the Sea will reach a concentration of three-quarters of

⁶ G. PACE, *Ways of Thinking and Looking at the Mediterranean City*, in «MPRA», Paper No. 10511, May 2002; J. E. RUIZ-DOMÈNEC, *Past and future of Mediterranean Cities*, in «Quaderns de la Mediterrània», 20-21, 2014, 103-109 <https://www.iemed.org/publication/past-and-future-of-mediterranean-cities/>.

⁷ Migration and Migrants: Regional Dimensions and Developments. <https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/what-we-do/world-migration-report-2024-chapter-3/europe>

⁸ A. PARANT, *Demographic Trends and Outlook in the Mediterranean*, in «Plan Bleu, Notes» #38, 2020. https://planbleu.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Note38_-English-version.pdf.

their population in cities⁹.

These urban contexts have also received (and continue to receive) directly a large part of the migratory waves from Africa and the Near East.

1. *Researchers in action*

In light of the aforementioned dynamics, there persists a significant lack of comprehensive and inclusive historical documentation concerning the contributions of successive migratory waves to the cultural and societal evolution of the Mediterranean region. Existing historical narratives are frequently fragmented and disproportionately centered on dominant cultures, thereby neglecting the perspectives, experiences, and cultural contributions of marginalized migrant and nomadic populations.

Addressing this historiographical gap requires the implementation of a multi-dimensional research strategy, encompassing: a systematic review of academic literature and primary historical sources, consultations with historians and cultural scholars, and empirical surveys aimed at integrating underrepresented narratives. These initiatives are essential for responding to the lacunae previously identified by regional historical societies and documented in the findings of EU-funded research programmes.

Within this framework, researchers assume a proactive and engaged role. Specifically, historians, local historians, and scholars of religion embedded in the social fabric of Mediterranean urban contexts are tasked with producing rigorous and inclusive historical analyses. Such analyses should prioritize the representation of marginalized groups through the use of oral history methodologies, archival research, and collaborative engagement with local communities.

In this perspective, researchers – together with stakeholders and community actors – are conceptualized as agents of social and cultural trans-

⁹ A. P. GARCÍA-NIETO, I.R. GEIJZENDORFFER, F. BARÓ, P.K. ROCHE, A. BONDEAU, W. CRAMER, *Impacts of urbanization around Mediterranean cities: Changes in ecosystem service supply* in «Ecological Indicators», 91 (2018), 589-606.

Consider also findings from projects like “Intercultural Cities” by the Council of Europe [https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities#:~:text=The%20Intercultural%20Cities%20Programme%20\(ICC,advantage%20\(more...\)\)](https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities#:~:text=The%20Intercultural%20Cities%20Programme%20(ICC,advantage%20(more...))) accessed 17 March 2025.

formation¹⁰. Their work contributes to the reconfiguration of historical memory and supports the development of more inclusive and responsive socio-cultural systems, attuned to the plural and evolving needs of contemporary societies.

These projects are aligned with the principles and objectives outlined in the EU Anti-Racism Action Plan (2020–2025), whose goals they actively support¹¹. They are also inspired by key international frameworks such as the Council of Europe's Faro Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society and UNESCO's Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape¹². Furthermore, they are consistent with policy recommendations put forward by international organizations, including the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Importantly, these initiatives are rooted in the use of low-cost ICT tools, aimed at expanding access to services and digital resources for citizens, particularly in underserved or marginalized communities.

In general, they highlight the role of urban spaces as places of care, integration, and shared heritage, emphasizing how these environments facilitate social cohesion and community resilience through both spontaneous and organized forms of social integration¹³.

Digital technologies have also been employed in innovative ways, including data storage systems and databases, messaging applications, content creation tools, social networks with integrated applications, podcasts, interactive maps, interactive video documentaries and virtual exhibitions, reusable 3D models of cultural heritage, tools for the co-creation of theatrical performances, virtual reality environments, digital ecosystems incorporating artificial intelligence, and online games.

Their use has been directed toward fostering mutual understanding among the groups involved, recognizing community ties and shared expe-

¹⁰ N. BORTOLETTO, *Participatory action research in local development: an opportunity for social work*, in «*European Journal of Social Work*», 20(4), 2016, pp. 484-496 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2016.1188770> accessed 10 October 2024.

¹¹ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/racism-and-xenophobia/eu-anti-racism-action-plan-2020-2025_en

¹² <https://whc.unesco.org/en/hul/#resources> accessed 11 April 2025.

¹³ An overview is in M. GARCÍA-HERNÁNDEZ, M. GRAVARI-BARBAS (edd.), *Cultural Heritage on the Urban Peripheries Towards New Research Paradigms*, Routledge, London 2025. See also: C. DEPLANO, *Antropologia urbana. Società complesse e democrazia partecipativa*, EdicomEdizioni, Milano 2009; L. LAZZARETTI, *The resurgence of the societal function of cultural heritage. An introduction*, in «*City, Culture and Society*», 3, 4 (2012), pp. 229-233.

periences within urban spaces, enhancing social cohesion, and reshaping the perception of the “other” within a dynamic framework of proximity.

2. *A mosaic of projects*

The *CultureLabs*¹⁴ and *Pluggy*¹⁵ network-based projects can be regarded as precursors to several subsequent project initiatives. Both launched in 2016 within different contexts, they successfully gathered and networked a range of local pilot interventions, laying the groundwork for more complex and participatory models of cultural engagement.

The first project aimed to preserve cultural heritage by promoting social innovation, focusing particularly on members of local communities who were less engaged in heritage activities, including migrants, women, the elderly, and persons with disabilities, as well as institutional actors such as museums, archives, galleries, libraries, and volunteer and charitable organizations. Acknowledging the shared goal of building a common future, the main obstacles identified were: the lack of specific skills and adequate infrastructure within museums and cultural sites; the limited engagement of adult migrants with the proposed initiatives; and language barriers.

One of the micro-projects included, *More in Common*, implemented in Manchester, UK, created a space for collecting thoughts, proposals, and visions of a shared future under the evocative title Wall of Hope.

Another micro-project, *Bridging Culture Through Arts* (carried out in Ancona, Italy), targeted the integration of refugees and asylum seekers through highly participatory initiatives aimed at helping them understand the culture of the host country, starting from the Omero Museum and the Teatro Educativo Pirata¹⁶. The project revealed the emergence of a sense of belonging that made the group cohesive and open to further initiatives.

Pluggy – the Pluggable Social Platform for Heritage Awareness and Participation – is the first European social platform enabling citizens to actively engage in heritage-related activities and to act as caretakers, creators,

¹⁴ Official website <https://culture-labs.eu> CultureLabs is detailed on Cordis <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/770158> accessed 23 October 2024.

¹⁵ Official website <https://pluggy.eu> Pluggy is described on Cordis <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/726765> accessed 10 November 2024.

¹⁶ In the website of CultureLabs <https://culture-labs.eu/pilotitaly-ancona/>, accessed 23 March 2025.

key influencers, and ambassadors of their country's culture and history. Although designed for all European citizens, it specifically includes measures to facilitate the participation of groups and age brackets traditionally less involved.

Through a smartphone platform equipped with augmented reality, geo-location, 3D sonic technology, and gaming features, users can share their own content and craft narratives about cultural heritage, publishing them directly on social media and making them part of a kind of virtual exhibition¹⁷. The everyday landscape is understood as the product of ongoing transformation resulting from the interactions between individuals, communities, and places; thus, it also contributes to the cohesion of European societies.

The **MEMEX** project, conducted in selected metropolitan areas across Portugal, Spain, and France, centered on urban heritage—both tangible and intangible—as a foundational element for the digital narration of experiences, personal stories, and travel memories¹⁸.

Events and initiatives within the project provided opportunities for individuals, particularly socially vulnerable populations who typically lack access to various cultural opportunities, to share their own stories with the community and engage with those of others.

A smartphone application was developed, incorporating essential tools for the visualization and creation of digital stories, alongside Knowledge Graph, an open-source tool for story creation, some of which were adapted into augmented reality experiences.

Within the project, pilot activities carried out in Lisbon were embedded in the relational and cultural dynamics of diverse migrant groups who had relocated to the city as a consequence of decolonization processes¹⁹. First- and second-generation migrants from former Portuguese colonies were engaged and organized into small groups to foster the recognition of specific identities and to promote the production of intercultural narratives, including the mapping of tangible and intangible heritage.

¹⁷ The virtual exhibition collected by Pluggy is composed of Blog stories, tours, games, soundscapes, witnesses <https://pluggy.eu/exhibitions?type=media>

¹⁸ Official website <https://memexproject.eu/en/> Page of the project on Cordis <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/870743> accessed 03 November 2024.

¹⁹ Web page of website MEMEX dedicated to the Lisbon pilot <https://memexproject.eu/en/pilots-en/lisbon-pilot> accessed 28 May 2025.

In Barcelona, migrant women were the primary protagonists of the project's initiatives. The project collaborated with laBonne, a cultural center dedicated to women located in Ciutat Vella. According to data from the Catalan Institute of Statistics, foreigners constitute 48.26% of the total population in this district, with women representing 48.4% of this demographic, primarily originating from Pakistan, Italy, the Philippines, Morocco, and France.

Using a benchmarking tool, the target group was invited to analyze their level of participation in the city's cultural life and subsequently received training in digital storytelling tools during workshops, which surfaced highly original stories and perspectives.

Traction is the name of a platform that integrates theatrical initiatives with digital tools aimed at actively engaging members of the most disadvantaged communities, enabling them – together with experts – to create performances that narrate their histories and highlight their unique identities²⁰. Within the project, digital tools for the co-creation of theatrical works were developed, including the use of virtual reality. Among these tools, *Co-Creation Space* is a web-based platform that facilitates content sharing, communication, and collaboration among participants around multimedia objects. It functions as a private social media environment that allows individuals to discuss and collaborate on a production throughout the creative process.

In contrast, *Co-Creation Stage* is a web-based tool designed to enable distributed performances by connecting multiple stages and participants²¹. Through this tool, artists can design a model for their performance, pre-defining the number of scenes, stages, screens, or other devices on each stage, along with audiovisual assets.

One of the pilot experiences took place in Barcelona, Spain, in the Raval neighborhood—one of the city's most complex, multiethnic, and stigmatized areas. Over 350 participants contributed, sharing their connections to urban space and its diverse communities from perspectives that had previously been marginalized and scarcely considered²².

²⁰ Official website <https://www.traction-project.eu/> Description of the project on Cordis <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/870610> accessed 10 October 2024.

²¹ Web page dedicated to ITC used in the project <https://www.traction-project.eu/technology/> accessed 12 December 2024. See also <https://www.traction-project.eu/resources/>

²² Web page of opera La Gata Perduda, <https://www.traction-project.eu/trials/liceu/>, accessed 12 December 2024.

ReRoot – Arrival Infrastructures as Sites of Integration for Recent Newcomers analyzes migration processes in Europe through nine case studies aimed at promoting new practices among actors involved in migrant integration²³. The project primarily targets recent immigrants and refugees. It highlights the cultural impact of arrivals in ports and migration hubs, capturing perceptions of these groups by urban societies, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the incorporation processes of newcomers and integrating these insights into broader policy frameworks. The investigation also entails a critical reflection on the concept of integration and the notion of cultural sustainability within society²⁴.

In connection with the “Balkan Route,” the project examined the situation of migrants in old railway carriages in Thessaloniki, the port city that experienced a significant influx of refugees in the 2010s, mainly from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, and North Africa. A portion of these migrants was stopped at the border with Macedonia in 2016 and subsequently relocated to fourteen camps located in the urban periphery. The study spanned eleven months, from August 2021 to July 2022, collecting participants’ observations, research notes, maps, and archival material including newspaper articles and websites, as well as conducting interviews with migrants, representatives and volunteers of humanitarian organizations, and local residents²⁵.

YouCount is a broader project that demonstrates how knowledge and improvements gained through immigrant integration activities can be effectively extended to diverse groups within European societies, which are often internally divided and burdened by social issues primarily affecting youth²⁶.

Subtitled “Empowering Youth and Co-Creating Social Innovations and Policymaking through Youth-Focused Citizen Social Science,” YouCount is a compendium of cases implementing practices aimed at combating youth social exclusion through Citizen Science, thus fostering more inclu-

²³ Official website <https://rerootproject.eu/>.

²⁴ These topics are discussed in the blog <https://rerootproject.eu/page45279441.html> accessed 28 May 2025.

²⁵ A synthesis on the case study of Thessaloníki <https://rerootproject.eu/publications/tpost/jye6epjmn1-migrants-in-old-train-wagons-inthessalo> accessed 06 November 2024.

²⁶ Official website <https://www.youcountproject.eu> Web page on Cordis <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101005931> accessed 12 November 2024.

sive societies by collaborating with young people of different ages and disadvantaged groups.

The project originated from the recognition that a considerable number of young people are at risk of social exclusion. It emphasizes the need to develop enhanced knowledge and innovations to create more inclusive, youth-friendly societies through Citizen Science—an active and innovative approach within the social sciences. Central to the project are researchers who not only observe ongoing social changes but also actively participate in the dynamics generated by the project itself.

YouCount's objective was the development of a conceptual and methodological intervention framework, defined collaboratively with a group of experts. This methodology was subsequently refined and tested in ten local projects directly involving young people. The project's impact was assessed to maximize the transferability and effectiveness of outcomes in other initiatives.

Throughout the various phases of the project, the European Citizen Science Association (ECSA) was actively involved: young participants were invited to collect data through interviews, creative activities, surveys, and via the specially developed YouCount application. The outcomes of these local projects demonstrated that young people actively engage in society, driven by a strong sense of belonging and involvement in both their communities and the broader national context. These results were subsequently disseminated through reports, blog posts, and brief documents, alongside the production of a manual and toolkit that consolidate key insights on social inclusion and the potential of Citizen Science as a tool for achieving this goal. Moreover, the project generated socio-ecological and economic impacts, as participants acquired relevant knowledge, skills, and competencies, and the initiative fostered supportive networks aimed at enhancing youth participation opportunities.

The project principally targets the inclusion of young people across different age groups and diverse social backgrounds, including migrants, refugees, rural inhabitants, and individuals with disabilities. The involvement of peers from comparatively advantaged circumstances allowed for a comparative reflection on varying perspectives, thereby enabling the co-design of more effective strategies tailored to the needs of both current and future youth populations.

The large project conducted and analyzed ten European case studies to highlight specific social and territorial characteristics. These case studies

also elucidate distinctive features of migratory phenomena across the continent. Below is a concise overview of the microprojects:

- Participation Opportunities for Young Migrants and Refugees (Austria): The University of Vienna collaborated with refugee youth aged 18 to 29, primarily from Syria, Afghanistan, and Nigeria. Participants engaged in surveys, workshops, focus groups, and forums, discussed findings by teams, and provided feedback via the SPOTTERON app²⁷;
- Old Industrial District of Copenhagen (Denmark): This rapidly developing area was urbanistically divided into two zones with notable economic and cultural disparities. Despite social and environmental initiatives, youth aged 14 to 20 remained economically marginalized or left the area. Aalborg University recruited youth as co-researchers, empowering them to innovate sustainable and inclusive solutions while fostering self-empowerment²⁸;
- Social Inclusion of Hearing-Impaired Youth (Hungary): This group faces substantial inequalities in education, employment, and social participation. Collaborative research conducted by both hearing and hearing-impaired researchers at the University of Szeged explored the challenges young people face entering adulthood, connecting them with key urban social actors²⁹;
- Social Inclusion and Community Cohesion through Rural Social Innovations (Hungary): In Siklósbodony, a village deprived of nearly all public institutions, residents face limited access to quality education, scarce employment, costly travel, and ethnic discrimination against Roma populations. Participants are developing a sustainable, socially innovative agricultural enterprise aimed at providing employment and strengthening community cohesion³⁰;
- Cohesion between Local Citizens and Migrants in Naples (Italy):

²⁷ Official website <https://www.youcountproject.eu> Web page on Cordis <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101005931> accessed 12 November 2024.

²⁸ Web page on the pilot managed in Denmark <https://www.youcountproject.eu/about-the-project/case-studies/case-studies/denmark> accessed 12 November 2024.

²⁹ Web page of the first pilot in Hungary <https://www.youcountproject.eu/about-the-project/case-studies/case-studies/hungarycase-a> accessed 12 November 2024.

³⁰ Web page of the second pilot in Hungary <https://www.youcountproject.eu/about-the-project/case-studies/case-studies/hungarycase-b> accessed 12 November 2024.

The University of Naples Federico II fosters a local social network involving associations to enhance the inclusion of a significant foreign resident population. A group of approximately ten young people, both local and migrant, were engaged as citizen scientists³¹;

- Empowering Local Youth through Employment and Social Entrepreneurship in Oslo (Norway): Gamle Oslo, characterized by considerable diversity and variable living conditions, presents both challenges and opportunities for youth. Young participants took part in dialogue forums, living labs, workshops, participant observation, field notes, walks, surveys, debriefings, recordings, and development/testing of the SPOTTERON app, utilizing the Inter-cultural Museum as the project's hub. The aim was to analyze youth challenges and opportunities³²;
- Support for Unaccompanied Foreign Minors and Young Adults in Gipuzkoa Province (Spain): Many unaccompanied minors and young adults struggle with adult life challenges due to loss of protective services. Two groups of about ten young people, alongside two local NGOs and the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, were trained to pilot strategies for social and labor market integration³³;
- Botkyrka Municipality (Sweden): Home to around 100 languages spoken and where 59% of residents are foreign-born or have foreign-born parents, young citizens aged 13 to 22 were invited to participate in local policymaking to influence social, political, and environmental decisions concerning youth. The project examines how engagement through the Botkyrka Young Council (BYC) fosters broader social inclusion in employment, education, and social life³⁴;
- Preston (United Kingdom): Historically, youth perspectives were seldom considered in public policy. The project engages 14- to 19-year-olds in artistic and participatory activities to explore place,

³¹ Web page of the pilot in Italy <https://www.youcountproject.eu/about-theproject/case-studies/case-studies/italy> accessed 12 November 2024.

³² Web page of the pilot in Norway <https://www.youcountproject.eu/about-theproject/case-studies/case-studies/norway> accessed 12 November 2024.

³³ Web page of the pilot in Spain <https://www.youcountproject.eu/about-theproject/case-studies/case-studies/spain> accessed 12 November 2024.

³⁴ Web page of the pilot in Sweden <https://www.youcountproject.eu/about-theproject/case-studies/case-studies/sweden> accessed 12 November 2024.

- connections, relationships, and social action, ultimately aiming to establish an intergenerational cooperative that amplifies youth voices³⁵;
- Panevėžys (Lithuania): This rural municipality faces limited employment prospects, driving youth emigration domestically and abroad. A local microproject identified factors contributing to economic decline and developed strategies to reverse this trend³⁶.

3. Overall provisional assessment looking forward a new framework

What insights emerge from the evaluation of these experiences? Can they be situated within a network aimed at exchanging expertise and creating an intervention model that could be replicated in different contexts? Given the diverse situations shaped by the complexity of migratory phenomena, is it possible to envisage a European perspective of cultural integration?

The projects discussed here, along with others of lesser scope, highlight a highly fragmented and partial landscape. These are mostly pilot initiatives undertaken by actors and groups who are only now beginning to frame the overall situation and to develop innovative strategies.

The goal of systematically monitoring outcomes and establishing a scientifically grounded methodology to assess the social impacts of these actions is also relatively recent and has yet to achieve broadly significant results³⁷.

This is compounded by a marked heterogeneity in situations and approaches across EU countries. Migration flows affect regions unevenly and have evolved over recent decades through overlapping waves and phases of internal movement. Moreover, individual governments, administrations,

³⁵ Web page of the pilot in United Kingdom <https://www.youcountproject.eu/about-the-project/case-studies/case-studies/united-kingdom> accessed 12 November 2024.

³⁶ Web page of the pilot in Lithuania, <https://www.youcountproject.eu/about-the-project/case-studies/case-studies/lithuania> accessed 12 November 2024.

³⁷ To consider the status questionis, see: J. STEPHENS, R. TIWARI, *Symbolic estates: community identity and empowerment through heritage*, in «International Journal of Heritage Studies», 21(1), 2019, pp. 99-114; V. HIGGINS, D. DOUGLAS (edd.), *Communities and Cultural Heritage: Global Issues, Local Values*, Routledge, London 2022 <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003031192>; F. BANDARIN, R. VAN OERS, *The historic urban landscape: managing heritage in an urban century*, Wiley Blackwell, Chichester-London 2012; F. BANDARIN, R. VAN OERS (edd.), *Reconnecting the city: the historic urban landscape approach and the future of urban heritage*, (John Wiley & Sons) Chichester 2015.

and local communities have implemented varied policies, often based on incomplete information and data.

Mediterranean cities and coastal areas of Southern Europe stand out as distinctive reception sites where people of diverse origins, including recent immigrants, find commonalities with the histories of existing residents, who themselves maintain links to previous places of origin.

The vibrant, complex, and historically layered urban Mediterranean communities present favorable conditions for structured cultural integration initiatives. The projects reviewed here reveal their particularities and the capacity of local experiences to illuminate multiple facets of migratory dynamics and, more broadly, the transformations affecting urban environments across Europe.

They serve as a litmus test for general social and environmental issues, acting as a bridge between different worlds – environments whose understanding can positively enrich the methodological framework of EU policies within social innovation.

These locales host a plurality of *de facto* experiences where mobile communities reshape the urban context. Only a small fraction of these initiatives are codified and included in projects of European scope, while many remain confined to the voluntary sector, emerging as spontaneous initiatives vulnerable to numerous variables that often jeopardize their continuity and rooting over time³⁸.

For these reasons, and building on the pilot projects already conducted, there is an expressed need to develop coherent plans to improve awareness of the historical complexity of Mediterranean cities.

Amidst numerous individual initiatives, there is a clear demand for broader actions capable of engaging diverse stakeholders and society as a whole within a medium-term perspective.

It also appears imperative to provide local communities with systematic knowledge to underpin participatory valorization efforts. Hence, reflection on applicable methodologies in different contexts constitutes a significant field of study, engaging multiple scientific disciplines – from sociology and history to regional economics and linguistic and literary studies.

³⁸ A theoretical perspective is outlined in Z. WU, S. HOU, *Heritage and discourse*, in E. WATERTON, S. WATSON (edd.), *The Palgrave handbook of contemporary heritage research*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke (2015), pp. 37-51. See also N. WALTER, *From values to narrative: a new foundation for the conservation of historic Buildings*, in “International Journal of Heritage Studies”, 20 (6), 2014, pp. 634-650 doi:10.1080/13527258.2013.828649

This methodological reflection opens a space for academic research, also linked to the active role of researchers within the application contexts of outcomes and tools, fostering engaged scholarship.

Historians, historians of religions, and local historians, including those affiliated with associations and groups active in public history, assume a specific and important role.

The potential of prior experiences in this area has yet to coalesce into a fully developed methodological synthesis, which could be promoted particularly in relation to projects oriented towards social cohesion and the construction of a culturally cohesive and sustainable European society.

Furthermore, educational curricula across Mediterranean countries often fail to adequately cover the rich cultural heritage and impacts of migration. Public awareness remains limited, fostering stereotypes and xenophobia. Therefore, there is a need to promote surveys and interviews with educators, review school curricula, and collect feedback from cultural organizations such as the Anna Lindh Foundation.

Data from reports by the European Commission on Education and Training, UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report, and local educational authorities reveal a lack of comprehensive educational materials and public awareness campaigns that highlight Mediterranean history and the positive impacts of migration through media partnerships, cultural festivals, and exhibitions.

There is a clear need to equip education planners, media, and cultural decision-makers with a robust, accessible online data repository.

Equally important is the legal dimension of such initiatives, as well as their institutional frameworks.

Policy-making and legal frameworks often inadequately support the cultural integration of migrants within Europe. Many migrant communities encounter legal and bureaucratic obstacles that hinder their full societal participation.

Similarly, cultural integration and sustainability initiatives are frequently disadvantaged by their temporal instability and lack of recognition by institutional actors.

This need has been identified through policy analyses, interviews with policymakers, and reports from organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Mediterranean Observatory on Migration (IOM Migration Policy Reports, European Commission's Migration and Home Affairs data).

Engaging legislators to develop and advocate for inclusive policies and legal frameworks supporting migrant cultural integration, alongside organizing workshops and forums to discuss and draft such policies, would be beneficial.

Overall, from a unified European perspective, the aim is to offer intervention models and strategic actions grounded in scientific standards of sustainable development.

Ultimately, these efforts contribute not only to the advancement of social cohesion and cultural sustainability but also to the construction of a future grounded in hope-one where diverse communities are empowered to coexist, collaborate, and collectively shape a more inclusive and resilient Europe.

WHAT DRIVES YOUTH TO PARTICIPATE IN CLIMATE PROTESTS? EXAMINING THE ROLE OF HOPE AND COLLECTIVE SELF-EFFICACY

LUCIANO ROMANO & ANGELO PANNO

Abstract

Climate change represents a reality that can no longer be ignored. Many young people mobilize through strikes and protests to demand policy changes considered insufficient in addressing this phenomenon. While negative emotions guide behavior in climate action, little is known about how hope influences perceptions of collective action efficacy and protest participation. This study examined, in Italian university students, the mediating role of collective self-efficacy in the relationship between hope and participation in climate protests. Results show that hope increases collective self-efficacy, which in turn is associated with greater likelihood of protest participation. Practical implications and future perspectives will be discussed.

Keywords: hope; climate change; collective self-efficacy; climate protests; university students

1. Introduction

Climate change constitutes an undeniable reality primarily driven by human activities. Global warming, for instance, represents a clear example of anthropogenic climate change: extensive and intrusive human practices, including deforestation, fossil fuel combustion, and promotion of non-sustainable agricultural methods, have resulted in elevated concentrations of greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere. This accumulation inhibits heat dissipation into space, causing temperatures

to escalate and reach unprecedented levels with each passing year¹. The impacts of this phenomenon result in significant consequences that destabilize the equilibrium of the entire ecosystem². The consequences of climate change are increasingly evident and will afflict subsequent generations even more massively than currently observed. For example, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) posits that, in 2050, those born in 2000 and beyond are likely to live in a climate reality with temperatures 0.8-2.6 °C higher than in 1990. Frightened and angered by the evident consequences of the phenomenon, many young people mobilize daily through climate strikes and protests to demonstrate against current policies, deemed inadequate in ensuring effective greenhouse gases reduction, and to demand greater involvement in decisions related to environmental sustainability. Therefore, understanding what drives youth to engage in climate protests is a critical issue for both psychological and social research.

While the literature has extensively explored the role of negative emotions (e.g., anger, sadness) as drivers of participation in collective actions for climate advocacy and as a common thread capable of contributing to the formation of norms and collective identity among young climate activists, the role of positive emotions in fostering climate protests participation remains relatively underexplored. Although the Social Identity Model of Pro-Environmental Action (SIMPEA)³ has posited that negative emotions serve as initial triggers for environmental awareness and foster an initial motivation to act, positive emotions, such as hope, may function as sustainable motivational resources that foster long-term engagement and resilience against climate anxiety and despair. Nonetheless, research with respect to the role of hope in relation to participation in climate protests has returned mixed results. Indeed, while van Zomerén and colleagues⁴ suggest that hope may serve as an emotion-focused coping mechanism, reducing perceived urgency and potentially undermining action, further

¹ L. AL GHUSSAIN, *Global warming: review on driving forces and mitigation*, in «Environmental Progress & Sustainable Energy», 38, 2019, pp. 13-21.

² A.V. SANSON-J. VAN HOORN-S.E. BURKE, *Responding to the impacts of the climate crisis on children and youth*, in «Child Development Perspectives», 13, 2019, pp. 201-207.

³ I. FRITSCHÉ-M. BARTH-P. JUGERT-T. MASSON-G. REESE, *A social identity model of pro-environmental action (SIMPEA)*, in «Psychological review», 125, 2018, pp. 245-269.

⁴ M. VAN ZOMEREN-I.L. PAULS-S. COHEN-CHEN, *Is hope good for motivating collective action in the context of climate change? Differentiating hope's emotion- and problem-focused coping functions*, in «Global Environmental Change», 58, 2019, 101915.

scholars⁵ revealed that hope might act as a problem-focused coping strategy, particularly when individuals perceive the success of collective action as possible, albeit uncertain. Furthermore, Nairn⁶ highlighted that hope functioned as a protective factor against extreme despair, helping to buffer it and preventing individuals from disengaging from climate activism movements.

The complex relationship between hope and participation in climate protests suggests the potential influence of additional factors not captured by the direct hope-climate strike/protest participation association. Therefore, in the current studies and based on the existing literature in the field, the potential mediating role of collective self-efficacy was taken into account, as it might elucidate the complex mechanisms through which hope influences engagement in climate activism.

According to Van Zomerén and colleagues⁷, collective self-efficacy can be conceptualized as group's shared beliefs regarding their combined capacity to successfully pursue collective objectives and implement desired social transformations through coordinated action. This construct represents a key component in Van Zomerén's Social Identity Model of Collective Action (SIMCA), where it functions as one of three primary predictors of engagement in collective action, alongside social identity and perceived injustice. Within the SIMCA framework, collective self-efficacy encompasses the group's confidence in its collective capability to produce meaningful change, the perception that collective action can yield effective outcomes, and the belief that group members, through coordinated efforts, can successfully overcome challenges. Van Zomerén and colleagues⁸ posits that groups with heightened collective self-efficacy demonstrate an increased propensity to engage in collective action aimed at social change, even when confronted with significant barriers or opposition. Furthermore, in line

⁵ S.M. BURY-M. WENZEL-L. WOODYATT, *Against the odds: Hope as an antecedent of support for climate change action*, in «British Journal of Social Psychology», 59, 2020, pp. 289-310.

⁶ K. NAIRN, *Learning from young people engaged in climate activism: The potential of collectivizing despair and hope*, in «Young», 27, 2019, pp. 435-450.

⁷ M. VAN ZOMEREN-T. POSTMES-R. SPEARS, *Toward an integrative social identity model of collective action: A quantitative research synthesis of three socio-psychological perspectives*, in «Psychological bulletin», 134, 2008, pp. 504-535.

⁸ M. VAN ZOMEREN-C.W. LEACH-R. SPEARS, *Protesters as "passionate economists" a dynamic dual pathway model of approach coping with collective disadvantage*, in «Personality and Social Psychology Review», 16, 2012, pp. 180-199.

with Van Zomeren's conceptualization of collective self-efficacy Hamann and Reese⁹ and Jugert and colleagues¹⁰, have highlighted that individuals who believe in the efficacy of joint actions are more likely to engage in climate protests.

Furthermore, previous evidence supports the relationship between hope and self-perceptions of collective efficacy in climate action contexts. Ojala¹¹ have shown that among young people, hope specifically directed toward climate change solutions serves as a significant precursor to enhanced perceptions of collective efficacy. Specifically, individuals exhibiting the so-called constructive hope, characterized by confidence in society's collective problem-solving capacity, subsequently reported stronger beliefs in the efficacy of collective climate action than those experiencing passive or denial-based hope. In line with this findings, Feldman and Hart¹² have shown that exposure to hope-inducing climate solution messaging significantly elevated participants' perceptions of collective efficacy. Furthermore, Bamberg and colleagues¹³ identified hope as a key emotional factor that converts general environmental concern into stronger perceptions of collective efficacy. Collectively, these findings suggest that cultivating hope regarding climate solutions may represent an important psychological lever for enhancing the perceived efficacy of collective efforts to address climate change.

1.2. Aim and hypothesis

Based on the abovementioned evidence, the current study sought to explore the relationship among hope, collective self-efficacy, and participation in the next climate protest/strike in a sample of Italian university

⁹ K.R. HAMANN - G. REESE, *My influence on the world (of others): Goal efficacy beliefs and efficacy affect predict private, public, and activist pro-environmental behavior*, in «Journal of Social Issues», 76, 2020, pp. 35-53.

¹⁰ P. JUGERT - K.H. GREENAWAY - M. BARTH - R. BÜCHNER - S. EISENTRAUT - I. FRITSCHKE, *Collective efficacy increases pro-environmental intentions through increasing self-efficacy*, in «Journal of Environmental Psychology», 48, 2016, pp. 12-23.

¹¹ M. OJALA, *Hope and climate change: The importance of hope for environmental engagement among young people*, in «Environmental education research», 18, 2012, pp. 625-642.

¹² L. FELDMAN - P.S. HART, *Using political efficacy messages to increase climate activism: The mediating role of emotions*, in «Science Communication», 38, 2016, pp. 99-127.

¹³ S. BAMBERG - J. REES - S. SEEBAUER, *Collective climate action: Determinants of participation intention in community-based pro-environmental initiatives*, in «Journal of Environmental Psychology», 43, 2015, pp. 155-165.

students. In detail, the mediating role of collective self-efficacy in the relationship between hope and participation in the next climate strike/protest was explored. The following hypothesis was formulated:

H1. Collective self-efficacy would mediate the relationship between hope and participation in the next climate strike/protest. Specifically, hope would lead to higher collective self-efficacy, which in turn would lead to an increased likelihood of participating in the next climate strike/protest.

The hypothesized model is depicted in Figure 1.



Figure 1. - Hypothesized mediation model

2. *Methods*

2.1. Participants and procedure

The study involved 200 Italian university students aged from 18 to 35 years ($M_{age} = 24.06$, $SD = 4.06$), of which 138 were women (69%) and 62 (31%) men. In detail, 5 students attended the first year (2.5%), 48 students attended the second year (24%), 26 students attended the third year (13%), 6 students attended the fourth year (3%), 29 students attended the last year (14.5%), 11 students were students outside the prescribed time (5.5%), and 75 (37.5%) preferred not to answer. Participants were asked to individually complete an online survey following the completion of the informed consent. No incentives were provided for their participation. The survey was anonymous, and anonymity and confidentiality standards were ensured at every data collection stage. The data collected was processed in accordance with Article 13 of EU Regulation No. 679/2016

of 27.04.2016, the “General Data Protection Regulation” (GDPR), and Legislative Decree No. 196/2003, the “Personal Data Protection Code”, as amended by Legislative Decree No. 101 of 10.08.2018. The research protocol adheres to the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki of 1964 and its subsequent revisions.

2.2. Instruments

Hope. Two *ad hoc* items on a 5-point Likert scale (1= Completely disagree, 5= Completely agree) were adopted to assess hope. An item example is: “I am hopeful that we will be able to fight climate change”. Cronbach’s alpha was .78.

Collective self-efficacy. Two items on a 5-point Likert scale (1= Completely disagree, 5= Completely agree) from the Collective self-efficacy scale used in van Zomeren and colleagues’ study¹⁴ were adopted to assess collective self-efficacy. An item example is: “I believe that I, as an individual, can make a significant contribution so that, through joint actions, climate change activists can influence politicians to improve current climate change policies”. Cronbach’s alpha was .90.

Participation in the next climate protest/strike. An *ad hoc* item on a 7-point Likert scale (1= Completely disagree, 7= Completely agree) was used to assess participation in the next climate protest/strike. The item is: “I am going to participate in the next climate protest/strike”.

3. Results

To verify the normality of the distribution, mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum values, skewness, and kurtosis were checked using SPSS v. 21¹⁵. The normality of the distribution was established, as none of the study variables had skewness and kurtosis values greater than |2| and standard deviation values equal to 0, therefore a Pearson correlation matrix

¹⁴ M. VAN ZOMEREN - T. SAGUY - F.M. SCHELLHAAS, *Believing in “making a difference” to collective efforts: Participative efficacy beliefs as a unique predictor of collective action*, in «Group Processes & Intergroup Relations», 16, 2013, pp. 618-634.

¹⁵ A.F. HAYES, *Partial, conditional, and moderated moderated mediation: Quantification, inference, and interpretation*, in «Communication monographs», 85, 2018, pp. 4-40.

was used to test the association between the variables for descriptive purposes. Results are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1. - *Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix*

	M	SD	Min-Max	SK	KU	2	3
1. HOPE	6.51	1.91	2-10	-0.14	-0.39	0.30**	0.17*
2.CSELF	6.01	2.27	2-10	0.08	-0.62		0.38**
3. PROTP	2.99	2.02	1-7	0.77	-0.71		

Note. *p<.05, **p<.01; CSELF= Collective self-efficacy, PROTP= Participation in the next climate protest/strike; M= Mean, SD= Standard deviation, SK= Skewness, KU= Kurtosis

Results from the correlation matrix revealed that hope was significantly and positively related to collective self-efficacy and participation in the next climate protest/strike. Moreover, collective self-efficacy was positively and significantly related to participation in the next climate protest/strike.

In order to verify our H1, we conducted a mediation analysis using Model 4 of the macro PROCESS v. 4.2. for SPSS v. 21¹⁶. The results are depicted in Figure 2.

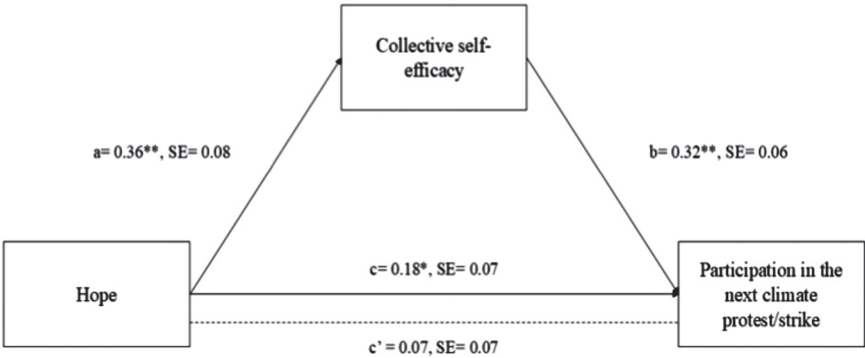


Figure 2. - *Mediation model results. Note. *p<0.05, **p<0.01; c= Total effect, c' = Direct effect*

¹⁶ A.F. HAYES, *op. cit.*

We estimated the indirect effect of hope on participation in the next climate protest/strike, quantified as the product of the ordinary least squares (OLS) regression coefficient estimating collective self-efficacy from hope (path a, Figure 2) and the OLS regression coefficient estimating participation in the next climate strike/protest from collective self-efficacy, controlling for hope (path b, Figure 2). Evidence of a significant indirect effect is established when the 95% percentile bootstrap confidence interval (CI) for the product of these pathways excludes zero¹⁷ (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

In the first step, hope was inserted as a predictor of collective self-efficacy. The model explained 9% of the variance of the outcome ($R^2 = 0.09$, $F = 20.62$, $p < 0.01$) and revealed that hope is positively and significantly related to collective self-efficacy (Figure 2, path a).

In the second step, hope and collective self-efficacy were posed as predictors of participation in the next climate protest/strike. The model explained 15% of the variance of the outcome ($R^2 = 0.15$, $F = 17.19$, $p < 0.01$) and revealed that collective self-efficacy was positively and significantly associated with participation in the next climate strike/protest (Figure 2, path b) over and beyond hope ($b = 0.06$, $SE = 0.07$, [95%CI = -0.07, 0.21]).

Furthermore, results showed a significant positive indirect association between hope and participation in the next climate protest/strike through collective self-efficacy (point estimate = 0.11; BootSE = 0.03, [95% Percentile BootCI = 0.05, 0.19]). This result indicated that hope leads to higher collective self-efficacy, which in turn is related to a higher likelihood of participation in the next climate strike/protest, confirming our H1.

4. Discussion

The current study aimed to examine, in a sample of Italian university students, the relationship between hope, collective self-efficacy, and participation in the next climate protest/strike. In detail, we sought to explore the indirect effect of hope and participation in the next protest/strike through collective self-efficacy. Our results confirmed H1, revealing that hope leads to an increase in collective self-efficacy, which in turn leads to an increased likelihood of participating in the next climate protest/strike.

¹⁷ A.F. HAYES, *op. cit.*

These results underscore the fundamental role of hope in fostering a sense of agency within collective action frameworks. Hope does not merely represent a passive emotional state but rather emerges as a dynamic motivational force that strengthens individuals' beliefs in their capacity to contribute to broader social movements. In line with prior research by Ojala and colleagues¹⁸, our study highlights that hope serves as a crucial psychological resource, particularly among young individuals, in sustaining engagement with climate activism. By instilling confidence in the effectiveness of collective efforts, hope appears to act as a catalyst for translating concern about climate change into tangible participation in protests and strikes. Furthermore, the perception that one's individual contributions meaningfully enhance the efficacy of collective action in achieving desired outcomes emerges as a critical factor in mobilizing youth participation in climate protest movements. These results extend the theoretical framework proposed by the SIMPEA model of Fritsche and colleagues¹⁹, demonstrating that positive, multifaceted emotional responses – particularly hope – function as significant catalysts for both community-based action motivation and enhanced perceptions of collective efficacy. Furthermore, the current findings suggest the need for educational institutions to integrate hope-based approaches into their educational programs and through structured and specific interventions. In this line, Finnegan and d'Abreu²⁰ propose the so-called hope wheel model, which outlines key strategies for fostering hope in climate education. These include confronting climate realities with honesty, fostering awareness of challenges, creating spaces for dialogue, and encouraging action. Their model further emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the complexity of climate issues, integrating social justice perspectives, and cultivating empathy while avoiding misinformation or false hope. Implementing these principles in academic settings can ensure that students are not only informed about climate change but also empowered to take meaningful action.

Despite the relevant findings, the study is not without limitations. Firstly, the cross-sectional nature of our study does not allow us to draw causal relationships among the study variables. Furthermore, it would be

¹⁸ M. OJALA, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ I. FRITSCHÉ - M. BARTH - P. JUGERT - T. MASSON - G. REESE, *op. cit.*

²⁰ W. FINNEGAN - C. D'ABREU, *The hope wheel: a model to enable hope-based pedagogy in Climate Change Education*, in «Frontiers in Psychology», 15, 2024, 1347392.

interesting to deepen the inter-relationship between the study variables through longitudinal approaches. Moreover, the sample is too small to generalize the results to the broader sample of university students. In future studies, it would be interesting to enlarge the sample and compare the results to those of both European and non-European countries.

In conclusion, the present study offers valuable insights into the psychological drivers of youth engagement in environmental movements. Encouraging and sustaining hope among young individuals may thus represent a key strategy for mobilizing large-scale collective efforts aimed at addressing the climate crisis.

SECTION IV

STRATEGIES TOWARDS RESOURCES AND FAIRNESS

NO PLAN, NO HOPE: RECLAIMING SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH PLACE-BASED TRANSITIONS

GIUSEPPE PACE

Abstract

This essay advances sustainability not as a fixed end state, but as a dynamic, culturally grounded process of societal transformation. Drawing on the Horizon 2020 TREnD project and the COST Action Underground4Value, it argues that transition studies offer valuable frameworks to navigate complexity without falling into determinism. A transatlantic comparison of four urban regeneration initiatives in the U.S. and Belgium shows how place-based, culturally resonant strategies strength innovation, equity, and civic engagement. The study highlights that successful transitions emerge not from standardised models, but from context-sensitive approaches. Finally, by reintroducing culture into sustainability discourse, the essay calls for a redefinition of planning as a reflexive, ethical, and hopeful act, connecting vision with reality, and empowering communities to co-create meaningful, just, and sustainable futures.

Keywords: Sustainability, Transition Studies, Planning, Green Initiatives, Cultural Heritage

1. Introduction

“Without a planet, there is no business”¹. This stark warning, once the rallying cry of environmentalists and now echoed across boardrooms and policy circles, captures the existential urgency of our time. Alongside this recognition, however, another insight is gaining ground: “Investing in the

¹ A. WINSTON, *The One Thing Every Business Dies Without*. Harvard Business Publishing, Harvard, 2015.

environment is a catalyst for growth”². Taken together, these statements recast sustainability not as a constraint on economic ambition, but as its most enduring foundation. Far from being a peripheral concern, sustainability emerges as the strategic horizon within which all meaningful development must unfold.

My engagement with these issues began in 1994, through a research project focused on sustainable development in the Maghreb region³. At that time, the concept - recently popularised by the Brundtland Commission’s landmark report⁴ - was still evolving, promising in theory, yet contested in practice. This early experience raised a foundational question: how can one design a roadmap for something so fluid, so perpetually unfolding, and so intricately interwoven with all aspects of human and ecological systems?

Over the decades, it has become increasingly evident that sustainability cannot be approached as a fixed end state. Rather, it represents an ongoing process of adaptation, an evolving negotiation across spatial scales, temporal horizons, and institutional regimes. It is less a static goal than a dynamic capacity to steer change within complex, interdependent systems. This realisation led me to consider sustainability not solely as a policy objective or scientific construct, but as a conceptual framework that must reckon with the underlying condition of impermanence⁵.

Humans are naturally inclined to invest emotionally and materially in perceived images of permanence: the protective structure of the home, the resilience of interpersonal relationships, the durability of institutions, and the solidity of the built environment. These elements provide continuity and orientation in an otherwise uncertain world. Yet at their core, each is marked by transience. We experience life moment by moment, often imagining permanence where only change exists. Homes, bonds, identities,

² WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, *3 Principles to Help Impact Investing*, WEF, 2024. Online: <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/06/redefining-economic-growth-impact-investing/>

³ G. PACE, “La tutela ambientale nel Maghreb: problematiche e prospettiva”, in *Maghreb: Algeria, Marocco, Tunisia verso uno sviluppo sostenibile*, edited by I. CARUSO, E. PETRONCELLI, E.S.I., Napoli, 1997.

⁴ UNITED NATIONS, *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future*, Annex to document A/42/427 - Development and International Co-operation: Environment. UN, New York, 1987.

⁵ The concept of impermanence refers to the transient and changing nature of all things, including reality itself. Everything is in a constant state of flux. Nothing is permanent or fixed. This concept is a core principle in numerous philosophies and religions, such as Buddhism and ancient Greek thought. See N. HEGARTY, *Impermanence. Essays*, No Alibis Press, Belfast, 2022.

and even nations, none of these are immutable. Historical narratives and personal experiences alike attest to the fundamental instability of our lives and institutions.

Viewed through this lens, sustainability is not about preserving a static order but about equipping societies to navigate transformation. It demands capacities that enable individuals, communities, and institutions to respond to disruption while maintaining coherence and direction. Accordingly, sustainable development should not be founded on rigid models or idealised end states, but on adaptive frameworks that embrace uncertainty, diversity, and complexity.

This perspective is particularly salient in the context of urban and regional planning. While it is relatively easy to conceptualise cities designed around green neighbourhoods, soft mobility, short distances, and proximity-based services, planners and decision-makers must contend with inherited realities of dense, layered urban fabrics, shaped by long-standing spatial, economic, and social patterns. Urban environments are not blank slates. They are the product of layered histories, embedded infrastructures, and path-dependent choices. These configurations present physical and functional constraints that cannot be ignored. These existing configurations present physical and functional limitations that cannot be disregarded. Moreover, urban systems must respond to a multiplicity of needs: efficient freight distribution, mobility solutions for individuals with special needs, and infrastructures that serve both central and peripheral populations. Idealised models of proximity urbanism⁶ must be balanced with the practicalities of contemporary urban life.

Throughout my research, ranging from sustainable transportation⁷ and

⁶ Cfr. C. MORENO, Z. ALLAM, D. CHABAUD, C. GALL, F. PRATLONG, “Introducing the ‘15-Minute City’: Sustainability, Resilience and Place Identity in Future Post-Pandemic Cities”. *Smart Cities*. 4 (1), 2021, pp. 93-111. doi:10.3390/smartcities4010006.

⁷ Cfr. V. REIS, J.F. MEIER, G. PACE, R. PALACIN, “Rail and multi-modal transport”, in *Research in Transportation Economics*, vol. 41, n.1, 2013, pp. 17-30; S. GAUTAMA, D. GILLIS, G. PACE, I. SEMANJSKI, “Cohousing and EV Sharing: Field-tests in Flanders”, in *E-Mobility in Europe. Trends and Good Practice* edited by W. Leal Filho and R. Kotter, Springer-Verlag GmbH, Berlin (DE), 2015; G. PACE, S. RICCI S., “Multimodal, Intermodal and Terminals”, in *Sustainable Rail Transport. Proceedings of RailNewcastle Talks 2016*, edited by M. MARINOV, Springer International Publishing AG, 2018, pp 193-206; G. PACE, “Sustainable ports for a Mediterranean blue economy”, in *Mediterranean Economies 2020* edited by S. Capasso, G. Canitano, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2020, pp. 247-288.

cultural heritage valorisation⁸ to European policy frameworks and community-driven transitions, it has become increasingly clear that the principal challenge of sustainability lies in its demand for integration. The environmental, economic, social, and cultural dimensions of development are not isolated variables. They are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. However, among these dimensions, the cultural aspect remains the most frequently neglected. Too often, it is treated as ornamental rather than foundational.

In fact, culture plays a decisive role in shaping how societies perceive problems, articulate values, and envision futures⁹. It influences whether sustainability is experienced as a technocratic imposition or embraced as a shared, meaningful endeavour. Without a cultural anchoring, sustainability risks becoming a procedural exercise. With it, sustainability can become a human project grounded in lived experience, collective memory, and civic imagination.

This recognition is especially vital in a context marked by overlapping crises, what some have termed a “polycrisis” or “permacrisis”¹⁰. Climate disruption, political fragmentation, cultural erosion, and economic instability all compound to erode societal confidence and coherence. In such a context, hope cannot be taken for granted¹¹. Like clean air or potable water, hope becomes a scarce and contested resource. It cannot remain a vague aspiration. Hope must be planned. It must be cultivated through inclusive, adaptive, and evidence-based strategies.

Under these conditions, planning assumes a role that is both civic and ethical. It becomes more than a technical discipline; it becomes a structured act of hope. Planning, when conceived as such, is not an expression

⁸ Cfr. G. PACE, “Planning Approaches for Heritage-led Community Development” in *Preserving, Managing, and Enhancing the Archaeological Sites: Comparative Perspectives between China and Italy*, edited by L. GENOVESE, H. YAN, A. QUATTROCCHI, CNR Edizioni, Rome, 2018, pp. 163-172; G. PACE, R. SALVARANI (eds), *Underground Built Heritage Valorisation: A Handbook. Proceedings of the First Underground4value Training School*, CNR Edizioni, Rome, 2021; S. MARTÍNEZ RODRÍGUEZ, G. PACE (eds), *Practices for the Underground Built Heritage Valorisation. Second Handbook. Proceedings of the Second Underground4value Training School*, CNR Edizioni, Rome, 2023; G. Pace (ed), *Il Rione Sanità e il cimitero delle Fontanelle. Un laboratorio vivente*, CNR Edizioni, Roma, 2023.

⁹ Cfr. L. FUSCO GIRARD, P. NIJKAMP, *Le valutazioni per lo sviluppo sostenibile della città e del territorio*. FrancoAngeli editore, Milano, 1997, pp. 29-32.

¹⁰ Cfr. C. SARKAR, P. KOTLER, E. FOGLIA, *Regeneration: The Future of Community in a Permacrisis World*, IDEA BITE PRESS, Austin, TX, 2023.

¹¹ Cfr. S. ZAMAGNI, *L'economia del bene comune*. Edizioni Città Nuova, Roma, 2007.

of passive or naïve optimism. It is a deliberate practice that builds resilience within impermanence, translates long-term visions into actionable pathways, coordinates across competing interests, and guides transitions across spatial and temporal scales. It is through planning that societies can learn to move not in spite of change, but with it.

This paper advances the argument that sustainability can be meaningfully reclaimed through the lens of the transition studies¹². This interdisciplinary field provides strategic tools – such Transition Management¹³, or Strategic Transition Practice¹⁴ – that enable societies to navigate complexity without falling into the trap of determinism. Transition scenarios offer multiple trajectories. These are grounded in current realities yet remain open to emergent possibilities. They acknowledge that the future is not predetermined, but shaped through processes of deliberation, design, and collective agency.

In this light, sustainability is not a final state to be achieved, but a collective capacity to adapt, regenerate, and imagine better worlds. Such transformation demands more than ambition. It requires method, strategy, and intent. It requires planning.

The reflections presented here draw upon insights developed through two European-funded research projects. The first, the Horizon 2020 Marie Skłodowska-Curie project “Transition with Resilience for Evolutionary Development (TRENd)”¹⁵ (2019-2024), investigated place-based strategies for inclusive and resilient territorial transitions. The second, the

¹² Cfr. A. Rip, R. Kemp, “Technological change”, in *Human Choice and Climate Change*, edited by S. Rayner, L. Malone, Washington DC, Batelle Press, 1998; F.W. GEELS, *From sectoral systems of innovation to socio-technical systems. Insights about dynamics and change from sociology and institutional theory*, Research Policy, 33 (6-7), 2004, pp. 897-920; J. GRIN, J. ROTMANS, J. SCHOT, F.W. GEELS, D. LOORBACH, D., *Transitions to Sustainable Development*. New York, Routledge, 2010; F.W. GEELS, R. KEMP, G. DUDLEY, G. LYONS (eds.), *Automobility in Transition? A Socio-Technical analysis of Sustainable Transport*. London, Routledge, 2012; F. MACEBO, I. SACHS (eds) (2015), *Transitions to Sustainability*. Springer Science+Business Media, Dordrecht, 2015.

¹³ Cfr. R. KEMP, D. LOORBACH, J. ROTMANS, *Transition management as a model for managing processes of co-evolution towards sustainable development*. The International Journal of Sustainable Development and World Ecology, special issue on “(Co)-Evolutionary approach to sustainable development”, 2005; R. KEMP, D. LOORBACH, ‘Transition management: a reflexive governance approach’, in *Reflexive Governance for Sustainable Development*, edited by J. VOSS, D. BAUKNECHT, R. KEMP, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, 2006.

¹⁴ Cfr. G. PACE, “Heritage Conservation and Community Empowerment. Tools for Living Labs”, in *Underground Built Heritage Valorisation: A Handbook*, cit. 2021, pp. 197-234.

¹⁵ See <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/823952>.

COST Action “Underground4Value” (2019-2023)¹⁶ explored the role of Underground Built Heritage in fostering sustainable community-led local development. Together, these projects offer a critical framework for interpreting sustainability transitions not as theoretical abstractions, but as concrete, context-sensitive practices, anchored in specific communities and territories, and shaped by the dynamic interplay between cultural values, spatial planning, and innovation.

2. *Toward a Convergent, Reflexive Sustainability Paradigm: A Transatlantic comparison*

As part of the TRENd project, we carried out a comparative analysis of green initiatives across the United States and Europe to explore how context-sensitive, place-based strategies advance sustainability¹⁷. This article focuses on four emblematic cases: two green neighbourhoods in peri-urban settings and two greenways developed along repurposed railway corridors. Together, these examples provide critical insights into how diverse models of urban regeneration and environmental innovation are shaped by specific socio-cultural contexts and institutional frameworks.

In the United States, the selected cases – the *Rock Island Greenway* and the *Trinity Bluff Project* – are located in Louisiana. In Europe, the *Brussels-Tervuren Promenade* and the *Vinderhout Cohousing* project are situated in Belgium. These initiatives represent distinct yet complementary pathways to green infrastructure and sustainable community development, informed by differing cultural values, governance logics, and spatial planning traditions.

¹⁶ See <https://www.cost.eu/actions/CA18110/#tabs|Name:overview>.

¹⁷ The comparative analysis presented in this work has been developed through the valuable collaboration of Donna Johnson (Louisiana Tech University), Gabriella Esposito (CNR IRISS), and Carmelina Bevilacqua (University of Rome La Sapienza). Their insights and expertise have been instrumental in shaping the methodological framework and enriching the interpretative dimensions of the study. Elements of this research have been previously tested and refined through a series of short papers and scholarly discussions presented at international academic venues, including the European Regional Science Association (ERSA) Congress, the Società Italiana degli Urbanisti (SIU) Conference, and the ITC-CNR Conference Days. Their contributions are gratefully acknowledged.

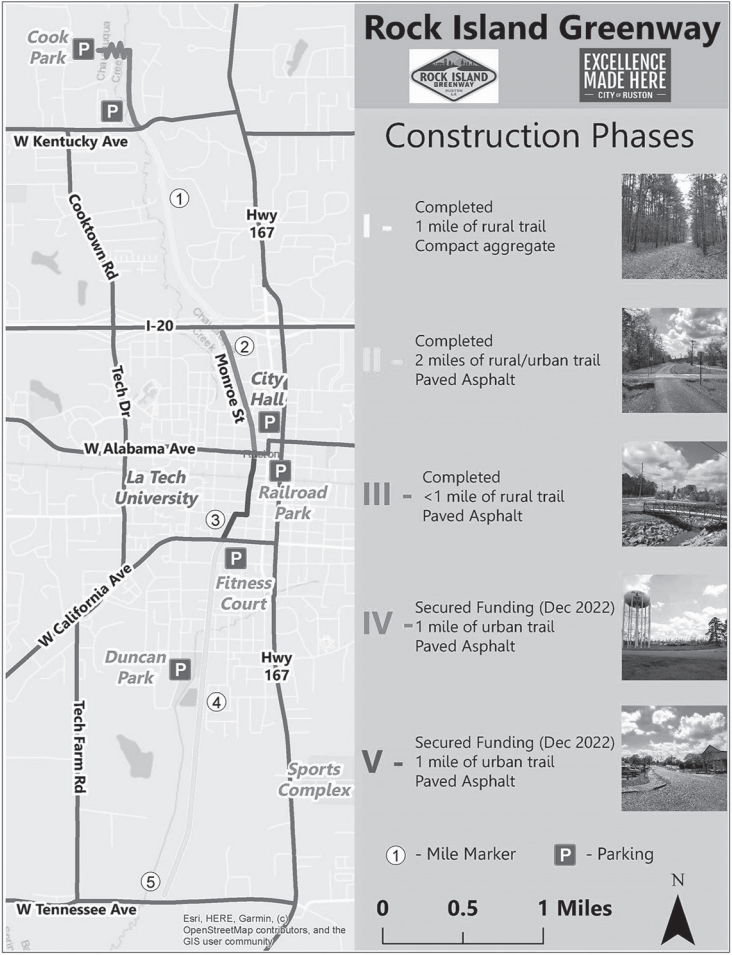


Figure 1. - *Rock Island Greenway map, Ruston (LA). Courtesy of the City of Ruston*

The *Rock Island Greenway*, located in Ruston, exemplifies the transformative potential of green infrastructure by repurposing disused railway lines to enhance urban connectivity and environmental quality. Extending over several miles (Fig. 1), the Greenway promotes non-motorised transport, improves stormwater management, and expands recreational access in a region historically characterised by car-dependence and fragmented

public space. Catalysed through federal-local collaboration, the project aligns environmental objectives with health, equity, and place-making. While modest in scale, it signals a strategic shift in infrastructural investment towards sustainability goals within smaller U.S. municipalities.

In contrast, the *Trinity Bluff Project* in Shreveport represents a market-driven approach to sustainability. Developed through a partnership between SWEPCO (a utility provider) and DSLD Homes (a private developer), the project integrates solar-powered microgrids, energy-efficient housing, and native landscaping near an affluent of the Red River, the ecologically sensitive Twelve Mile Bayou (Fig. 2). Despite its standardised housing typology, the project remains customisable and accessible, showcasing how economic scalability and technological innovation can be leveraged to achieve sustainability objectives.



Figure 2. - *Trinity Bluff Project, Shreveport (LA). Courtesy of DSLD Homes*

In Europe, the *Brussels-Tervuren Promenade* reclaims the path of Belgium's first electric railway, transforming it into a 10 km ecological corridor that links urban parks, supports biodiversity, and fosters soft mobility across four municipalities. Part of the broader "Promenade Verte", a 60-km green belt conceived in the late 1980s (Fig. 3), the project was developed through sustained regional and local planning efforts, reflecting Brussels' long-standing commitment to integrated ecological infrastructure. Managed by *Bruxelles Environnement*, it exemplifies the

transformation of mono-functional infrastructure into multifunctional ecological corridors. Footbridges have replaced former rail bridges to ensure continuity for both soft mobility and ecological flows (Fig. 4). The promenade also plays a key ecological role, with embankments that support native flora and fauna, while reinforcing a sense of place rooted in collective memory.

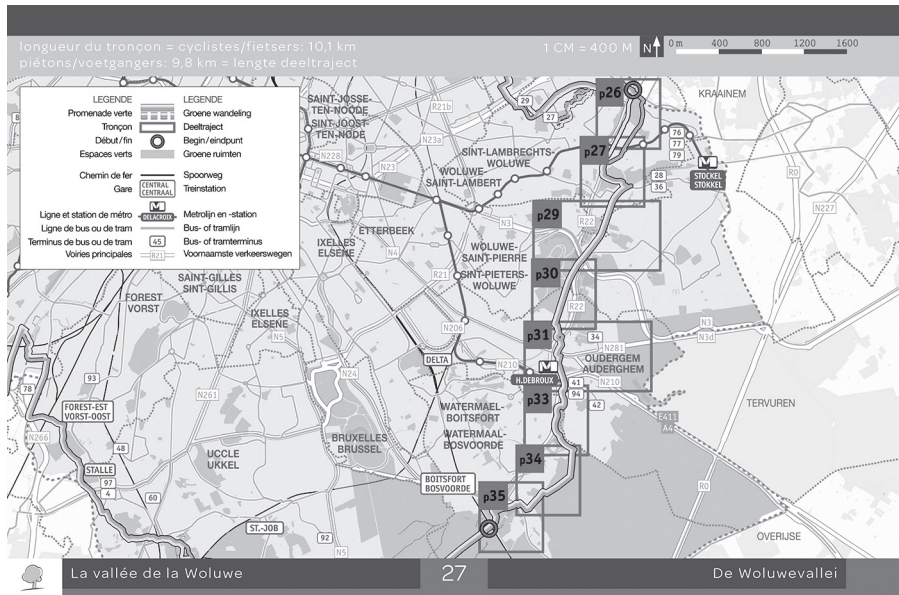


Figure 3. - *The Brussels-Tervuren Promenade Verte guidebook*



Figure 4. - *The footbridge on the Chaussee de Watermael. Source: Author*

The *Vinderhoutse Cohousing* project, located in Lievegem on the peri-urban fringe of Ghent, offers a powerful example of a community-driven model of sustainable living. Initiated in 2005 and inhabited since 2011, the development comprises 19 passive timber-framed homes designed for optimal solar gain and energy efficiency, through compact, south-facing units, strategic spacing for natural daylight, and extensive gardens (Fig. 5). Developed without a commercial real estate actor, the project reflects a strong ethos of collective ownership and participatory governance. Shared facilities – including a communal kitchen, guest accommodations, and a laundry room – are powered by a 10-kW photovoltaic system and booked via an internal online platform. In 2014, Vinderhoutse was selected as a pilot site for the Interreg IV “e-mobility NSR” project, testing electric car-sharing models in semi-urban contexts and placing the community at the forefront of regional sustainable mobility experimentation¹⁸. The project has since

¹⁸ Cfr. S. GAUTAMA ET AL., *Op. cit.*

inspired similar initiatives across Belgium, increasingly incorporating renewable energy systems and e-mobility infrastructure.



Figure 5. - *Map of the Vinderhout Cohousing, Lievegem (BE).*
 Source: Foundation for Intentional Community (FIC), 2010

Despite differences in governance and scale, the Trinity Bluff and Vinderhout cases share key objectives: reducing environmental impact, enhancing energy resilience, and improving quality of life. However, their contrasting national contexts reveal deeper divergences. Trinity Bluff reflects the American emphasis on technological innovation and market-led solutions, while Vinderhout embodies European traditions of social innovation, trust, and collective agency. As one Vinderhout resident aptly noted, “People don’t enter cohousing because it’s a good deal, but because they believe in the added value it brings”. That *added value*, whether expressed through environmental stewardship, social belonging, or cultural engagement, underpins long-term behavioural change and policy relevance.

Public support plays a central role in the Brussels-Tervuren and Rock Island greenways. Both projects underscore how institutional commitment and civic engagement can catalyse spatial transformation and embed ecological values within urban planning. While European cases emphasise collaborative governance and spatial justice, U.S. examples highlight technological pragmatism, economic viability, and infrastructural retrofitting.

Despite their differences in scale, governance, and cultural context, all four cases converge on a fundamental insight: sustainability is not a singular technical challenge, but a complex, multifaceted pursuit. Achieving meaningful and lasting transitions requires the integration of environmental, social, cultural, and economic imperatives – an approach that transcends narrow metrics and embraces the richness of place-based realities. These transitions, however, cannot be engineered solely through infrastructure or policy instruments. They demand cultural and political shifts in which citizens are not just passive recipients of change, but active agents in shaping it. Public participation – across visioning, design, implementation, and stewardship – emerges as a critical ingredient in aligning policy objectives with local values, experiences, and aspirations. It is in this collective engagement that planning begins to operate not only as a technical function, but as a hopeful act: a way of projecting shared futures and mobilising capacity for transformation.

Across the cases examined, several enablers recur: adaptive reuse of space, the integration of green infrastructure, and participatory governance. Yet, their success is never guaranteed by design alone. Rather, their effectiveness depends on the interplay of local culture, institutional capacity, and regulatory flexibility. European cases, such as the Brussels-Tervuren Promenade and Vinderhout Cohousing, benefit from robust multi-level governance frameworks and traditions of cooperative urbanism that support long-term alignment across sectors. U.S. cases, including Rock Island Greenway and Trinity Bluff, rely more heavily on entrepreneurial initiative, civic resilience, and innovation from the grassroots – particularly in settings where public institutions adopt a more hands-off role.

These comparative insights reinforce a key finding: there is no universal model for sustainable transition. Instead, successful pathways emerge through context-aware strategies and dynamic governance models – models capable of bridging technological innovation with social cohesion, and balancing top-down policy mechanisms with bottom-up initiatives. What ultimately unites these diverse experiences is not a shared methodology, but a shared ethos: sustainability as a living, evolving process grounded in place, guided by care, and animated by hope. Planning, in this light, becomes more than a tool for managing change; it becomes a medium for expressing collective agency, navigating complexity, and designing transitions that are not only feasible but also desirable and just.

This reflection invites a broader reconsideration of sustainability itself. Originally focused on environmental conservation, the concept has expanded into a holistic paradigm incorporating cultural, economic, and social dimensions. Influenced by interdisciplinary scholarship and transatlantic exchange, foundational ideas such as ecological integrity¹⁹, steady-state economics²⁰, circular economy²¹, and post-growth development²², continue to shape planning discourse globally. Despite methodological differences, these frameworks converge in their emphasis on aligning human development with planetary boundaries.

Contemporary conceptual models like Raworth's Doughnut Economics²³ and Elkington's triple bottom line²⁴ illustrate this paradigmatic shift toward systems thinking. Planning, in this context, must transcend its traditional technocratic role to become an anticipatory and adaptive practice an art of designing transitions. It requires bridging long-term visions with grounded realities and uniting fragmented agendas under a shared sustainability ethos. Rather than merely managing growth, planning should be understood as an ethical and creative endeavour – capable of navigating complexity, fostering resilience, and catalysing meaningful change. This reframing compels us, as planners, researchers, and citizens, to ask not only what future we want, but what future the planet can sustain.

¹⁹ Cfr. A. LEOPOLD, *A Sand County almanac and sketches here and there*. Oxford Univ. Press, New York, 1949

²⁰ Cfr. H. DALY, *Steady State Economics. The Economics of Biophysical and Moral Growth*. W.F. Freeman, San Francisco, 1977.

²¹ Cfr. K.E. BOULDING, *The Future of Personal Responsibility*. American Behavioral Scientist, 15(3), 1972, pp. 329-359. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000276427201500303>; A.C. SAVY, A. SARKAR, *Restoring the holistic circular economy for socio-ecological equilibrium with Boulding*. Congrès Interdisciplinaire sur l'Économie Circulaire 2024, Défi Circulades; AIFREC, Jun 2024, Montpellier, France.

²² T. JACKSON, *Post Growth: Life after Capitalism*, Polity, Cambridge, 2021. Cfr. also P. NIJKAMP, A. PERRELS, *Sustainable Cities in Europe*. Routledge, London, 1994; M. FELDMAN, M. RATNATUNGA, A. NIMS, *Place-based economic development: Creating growth in the heartland*. Heartland Forward, 2023. Retrieved from <https://heartlandforward.org/case-study/place-based-economic-development/>.

²³ Cfr. K. RAWORTH, *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist*. Penguin Random House UK, London, 2018.

²⁴ Cfr. J. ELKINGTON, *Cannibals with Forks: The Triple Bottom Line of 21st Century*. Capstone Publishing Ltd, Mankato, MN, 1999.

3. *Reframing Sustainability Transitions Through Cultural Heritage and Strategic Transition Practice*

Building on the comparative perspectives explored in the previous section, it becomes increasingly evident that the sustainability discourse must evolve beyond technical frameworks and economic metrics. While environmental, economic, and social dimensions have progressively shaped the global sustainability agenda, the cultural dimension remains critically underrepresented in mainstream policy approaches, despite its potential to anchor long-term resilience, identity, and transformative agency.

This gap was a central concern during my tenure as Chair of the COST Action *Underground4Value*²⁵, an initiative that brought together scholars, practitioners, and policymakers across Europe to explore how the reuse and valorisation of underground built heritage can catalyse sustainable transitions. The Action illuminated the transformative role of cultural heritage, not merely as a repository of memory, but as a vector of innovation, identity, and civic agency, particularly in places grappling with complex, overlapping crises.

To operationalise these insights, the Action developed the Strategic Transition Practice (STP)²⁶, a flexible, iterative framework designed to guide transformative change in heritage contexts. This approach was tested and refined through 13 Living Labs situated in diverse European environments, functioning as real-world experimentation arenas. These Labs enabled multi-actor collaboration, shared learning, and context-sensitive adaptation, revealing how heritage-led strategies, if co-created and continuously negotiated, could become catalysts for regeneration and social innovation.

These processes inevitably brought us to the sustainability concept as a central analytic node. In the context of urban heritage, sustainability is often invoked to reinforce the conservation agenda within broader development paradigms. According to UNESCO's Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach, the "active protection of urban heritage and its sustain-

²⁵ Cfr. G. PACE, "Heritage Conservation and Community Empowerment. Tools for Living Labs", in *Underground Built Heritage Valorisation: A Handbook. Proceedings of the First Underground4value Training School*, edited by G. PACE, R. SALVARANI, CNR Edizioni, Rome, 2021, pp. 197-234.

²⁶ Cfr. G. PACE, *op. cit.*, 2021. See also <https://toolbox.underground4value.eu/>.

nable management is a *condicio sine qua non* of development”²⁷, and heritage conservation itself is seen as “a strategy to achieve a balance between urban growth and quality of life on a sustainable basis”²⁸. HUL proposes a comprehensive and integrated planning model, aiming to mediate environmental, economic, and cultural priorities through inclusive governance and long-term stewardship. The approach defines sustainability as “a balanced relationship between the urban and natural environment, between the needs of present and future generations and the legacy from the past”²⁹.

However, HUL’s operational guidance remains somewhat limited in scope. It provides important principles – such as prioritising partnerships, local governance mechanisms, and stakeholder coordination – but it stops short of addressing the deep systemic and multi-scalar changes required to navigate sustainability transitions. Particularly absent is a clear recognition of the uncertainties, conflicts, and socio-cultural transformations that characterise such transitions³⁰. Effective adaptation, as Underground4Value found, requires acknowledging this complexity and embracing experimentation, learning, and situated responses rather than relying solely on formalised conservation³¹.

From this perspective, culture offers not only continuity with the past but also a forward-looking compass capable of restoring meaning and belonging in increasingly fragmented and risk-prone societies. Cultural sustainability does not merely protect heritage, but it activates it, enabling communities to reinterpret identities and environments as living laboratories for innovation and regeneration. This perspective aligns closely with the STP framework, which conceives sustainability transitions as normative and situated processes. Rather than focusing exclusively on technological or institutional change, STP underscores the importance of reorienting narratives, practices, and collective capabilities³².

At the core of this reframing lies the capacity of communities to engage with complexity, navigate uncertainty, and explore viable pathways for collective transformation. This involves not only technical knowledge and

²⁷ UNESCO, 36 C/23 *Recommendation of Historic Urban Landscape*, UNESCO, Paris, 2011. Available online <https://whc.unesco.org/en/hul>.

²⁸ *Ivi*, pp. 1-3.

²⁹ *Ivi*, p. 4.

³⁰ Cfr. G. PACE, *op. cit.*, 2021.

³¹ Cfr. G. PACE, *op. cit.*, 2021, pp. 229-230.

³² *Ibidem*.

institutional support, but also the ability to mobilise cultural resources, reinterpret shared values, and sustain meaningful participation over time. Yet, in practice, current policy frameworks often fail to integrate these symbolic, emotional, and narrative dimensions, by privileging instead quantifiable indicators and technocratic targets. This disconnects risks marginalising local knowledge, flattening diversity, and ultimately undermining the very resilience and legitimacy that sustainability strategies seek to foster.

In our work, we explicitly chose to confront this gap by moving beyond object-centred conservation paradigms. We opened up to cross-disciplinary and adaptive practices that respond to diverse contextual environmental, socio-economic, or political challenges. We found that heritage cannot be a stable or universal concept but must be continuously redefined in dialogue with evolving community needs, values, and aspirations. Global economic trends, environmental pressures, digital innovation, and societal change all shape the conditions under which heritage can contribute to sustainability.

This reorientation reframes cultural heritage not as an end, but as a means to facilitate wider societal transformations. It shifts focus from preservation of sites to the lived experience of communities. As HUL itself notes, heritage management cannot succeed without considering how people interact, their motivations, and their capacity to adapt lifestyles and values in changing contexts³³. Planning, in this sense, becomes a dialogic and reflexive process for co-producing meaning and negotiating change.

Within transition studies, these processes may be interpreted as niche-level innovations, emergent practices at the margins of dominant regimes that challenge established ways of knowing, producing, and living³⁴. Heritage-led initiatives grounded in participation and local agency act as testing grounds for these innovations, producing experiential knowledge and contesting mainstream development logics. Their transformative potential lies not in standardisation or replication, but in their capacity to produce social innovation, by prototyping new imaginaries and institutional arrangements.

Cultural sustainability contributes substantially to this dynamic by privileging relational knowledge and emotional attachment to place. It encourages communities to imagine futures that are not only ecologically viable or economically efficient, but also socially equitable and culturally

³³ Cfr. UNESCO, *op. cit.*

³⁴ Cfr. G. PACE, *op. cit.*, 2021, p. 214.

meaningful. This is not a call for cultural essentialism, but for critical engagement with the ways people experience, narrate, and co-create their environments.

Findings from Underground4Value reinforce this reading. Across the 13 Living Labs, underground heritage was repurposed as an arena for civic experimentation, which supported identity-making, governance innovation, and spatial justice. These cases exemplified what we define as STP: grounded, adaptive, and value-driven processes that connect high-level sustainability agendas with lived realities. Rather than delivering fixed solutions, these practices supported locally attuned processes of change, shaped by diversity, co-production, and iterative learning.

Taken together, these insights suggest the need to move beyond prescriptive, one-size-fits-all planning frameworks. Sustainability transitions require open-ended, pluralistic approaches capable of embracing uncertainty and contestation. They ask planners, scholars, and policymakers to rethink their role, not as designers of static systems, but as facilitators of emergent, culturally resonant futures embedded in place and community.

Concluding remarks for a future of Hope

Across both the transatlantic case studies explored within the TREN D project and the heritage-led innovations experimented through Underground4Value, one lesson becomes unmistakably clear: sustainability transitions cannot be caused solely by technical capacity or policy compliance. They require deeper and more reflexive approaches that foreground culture, community, and care as critical ingredients of lasting transformation.

In comparing greenways and cohousing initiatives in the U.S. and Europe, we observe how diverse governance logics, institutional capacities, and cultural traditions shape not only the form, but the very *meaning* of sustainability. Whether driven by civic experimentation, market mechanisms, or long-standing policy frameworks, these projects show that place-based transitions are not just spatial interventions. They are sociocultural processes rooted in identity, trust, and shared aspirations. In this light, sustainability is reframed not as an outcome, but as an ongoing negotiation, a collective capacity to imagine, inhabit, and adapt resilient futures in context-sensitive ways.

This interpretive shift finds powerful resonance in the work conducted through *Underground4Value*. There, heritage became a living medium for transformation, less a repository of static memory than a dynamic vector of civic agency and innovation. Through Living Labs in different UBH sites, the STP framework was tested and refined as a tool for adaptive, participatory planning. These stories validated how cultural heritage, once activated and not than merely preserved, can anchor transitions in symbolic meaning, emotional investment, and local ownership.

The STP framework's emphasis on iterative learning, co-creation, and systemic awareness reveals a critical gap in mainstream sustainability frameworks: the underrepresentation of culture as both a means and an end. While paradigms like UNESCO's Historic Urban Landscape have taken important steps in integrating cultural dimensions, they often fall short in addressing the radical uncertainty, contestation, and plurality inherent in real-world transitions. Cultural sustainability, as evidenced in both *TREnD* and *Underground4Value*, requires more than safeguarding heritage assets. It demands redefining narratives, retooling institutions, and restoring public meaning-making in an increasingly complex world.

What emerges from this convergence is a powerful call to reimagine planning itself, not as a technocratic exercise, but as a reflexive, ethical, and imaginative practice. Planning, in this sense, must go beyond managing land or delivering infrastructure; it becomes a medium for constructing shared visions, negotiating values, and mobilising collective capabilities. It must grapple with diversity and contradiction, enable situated experimentation, and accept that transition is not linear, but dialectical, that is, propelled by feedback, friction, and fragile consensus.

This reorientation compels a reconsideration of the planner's role: no longer a distant expert solving problems from above, but a cultural mediator and institutional broker, nurturing the intangible conditions – trust, dialogue, empathy – that enable communities to transition with dignity and purpose. In our greenways and green neighbourhoods' cases, we see that successful sustainability does not emerge from universal models but from plural practices grounded in place, memory, and mutual care. Thus, the true promise of sustainability lies not in standardisation, but in its capacity for contextual resonance. It is not a masterplan, but a kaleidoscope of situated responses. It is not a checklist of targets, but a choreography of values. To reclaim sustainability as a meaningful concept, we must restore its cultural depth and civic potential. We must listen to the stories that

people tell about their places and recognise in those narratives the seeds of alternative futures, not only environmentally sound or economically viable, but also socially just and culturally fulfilling.

In the end, there can be no hope without a plan, but also no plan without hope. And hope, as these cases demonstrate, is not naïve optimism. It is a practice of co-creation, imagination, and sustained engagement. It is what allows communities to move forward together not with routines but with a continuous dialogue. Not toward a predetermined destination, but toward a shared, evolving horizon.

HISTORICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL HERITAGE AS A DRIVER FOR PROMOTING SUSTAINABILITY

ROBERTA RODELLI

Abstract

This paper explores how historical and environmental heritage can serve as a catalyst for promoting sustainability, not only in environmental terms but as a multidimensional concept encompassing social, cultural and existential dimensions. Based on a theoretical interpretation of landscape as a cultural and symbolic construct, the paper reflects on a methodological framework for heritage-based territorial enhancement. Through three Italian case studies, it examines the interplay of community participation, institutional governance and technological solutions. The paper ultimately argues for a vision of heritage as a useful resource for future-oriented sustainability and shared hope, moving beyond its conventional understanding as an artifact to be viewed in mere nostalgic terms.

Key words: cultural heritage; sustainability; landscape; local communities; hope.

1. Introduction

In an age marked by ecological crises, social fragmentation and a growing sense of uncertainty about the future, the notion of *hope* can be also linked to tangible processes of cultural and environmental regeneration. Among these, the role of historical and environmental heritage emerges as both symbolically powerful and practically essential to achieve a better quality of life, healthier interaction within communities, along with more widespread awareness about environmental sustainability. This paper proposes that heritage – once understood as a living landscape infused with memory and identity and not merely as a collection of monuments or protected sites – can become a strategic driver towards these goals.

Drawing on European frameworks such as the *Council of Europe's Landscape Convention*¹ and the *Faro Convention*², as well as foundational theoretical contributions³, this study refers to methodological approaches to heritage enhancement and illustrates them through selected case studies. The core argument is that by fostering community engagement, by facilitating inter-institutional collaboration, heritage can catalyse processes of local empowerment and territorial resilience.

2. *Landscape, memory, and sustainability*

In many European contexts, landscapes have been shaped over centuries through continuous interaction between human societies and their environments. Far from being natural settings, these landscapes – *paysage* in French, *paesaggio* in Italian – are historical and cultural constructs. Their components are not simply spaces, but rather places where culture and nature intertwine, creating a tangible heritage that serves as a repository of memories, values and traditions. As such, landscape may be understood as a physical and symbolic texture, anchoring processes of meaning-making and experiential engagement.

The concept of landscape has evolved from it being considered a passive visual entity to its full recognition as a historically and culturally constructed space.

As Rombai⁴ emphasizes, landscapes are the result of centuries of interaction between human societies and their environment, embodying a stratified archive of human values, economic practices, symbolic structures

¹ COUNCIL OF EUROPE, *Landscape Convention*, European Treaty Series - No. 176, Florence, 2000. [<https://rm.coe.int/16807b6bc7>, Last accessed June 1st, 2025].

² COUNCIL OF EUROPE, *Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society*, Council of Europe Treaty Series- No. 199, Faro, 2005. [<https://rm.coe.int/1680083746>, Last accessed, June 1st, 2025].

³ Cfr. Y.F. TUAN, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1977; A. VALLEGA, *Le grammatiche della geografia*, Patron, Bologna 2004; R. SALVARANI, *Storia locale e valorizzazione del territorio. Dalla ricerca ai progetti*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2005; A. VALLEGA, *Fondamenti di geosemiotica*, Società Geografica Italiana, Roma 2008; UNESCO, *Recommendation concerning the Protection at National Level of the Cultural and Natural Heritage*, 1972. [<https://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext>, last accessed June 1st, 2025].

⁴ L. ROMBAI, *Geografia storica dell'Italia: ambienti, territori, paesaggi*, Mondadori Education, Milano 2008, pp. 4-5 and 40-45.

and ecological relations. This can be aligned with UNESCO's⁵ definition of cultural heritage as combined works of nature and peoples, representing the evolution of their societies and settlements over time.

In this context, the landscape ceases to be a simple background and becomes an active repository of cultural meaning. Drawing on Vallega's distinction between rationalist and humanistic interpretations of reality⁶, the landscape can be understood through a humanistic lens as a "referent for symbolization". It functions as the foundational starting point for the creation of symbolic, cultural, emotional and identity-related meanings that emerge from the ongoing relationship between individuals and their surroundings. Thus, the landscape constitutes a physical and semiotic fabric through which both personal and collective identities are continuously shaped and renegotiated. Similarly, Tuan⁷ introduces the experiential dimension, describing *place* as a centre of meaning made through affective and existential engagement. Experience transforms space into place by creating bonds that connect individuals to their environment on a personal and emotional level, generating sense of belonging, attachment and identity⁸.

This conceptualization invites us to move beyond a strictly material or conservationist approach. It challenges the notion that heritage is static and external to contemporary life. Instead, it positions heritage within a dynamic, performative and relational dimension – what the *genius loci* captures: the spirit of the place shaped by human presence and interpreted through lived experience. The failure to recognize this often leads to the risk of heritage protection being implemented as a top-down imposition, disconnected from the actual life of communities⁹. When decisions are made without the participation or engagement of those who inhabit and interact with these areas daily, preservation efforts may lack legitimacy and effectiveness. A typical approach to safeguarding heritage involves, for instance, the establishment of protected areas, which can take various forms such as national and regional parks, natural reserves, cultural routes,

⁵ UNESCO, *op. cit.*

⁶ A. VALLEGA, *op. cit.* 2004, pp. 226-228.

⁷ Y.F. TUAN, *op. cit.* p. V.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 149.

⁹ Cfr. J.P. LOZATO-GIOTART, *Geografia del turismo*, ed italiana a cura di F. Dallari, Hoepli, Milano 2008, pp. 163-173.

outdoor museums and ecomuseums¹⁰. While these frameworks aim to preserve environmental and cultural values, their success largely depends on the active involvement of local communities¹¹. Without their engagement, such initiatives risk empty formalities, failing to resonate with or benefit the very people they are meant to serve.

Moreover, the linkage between heritage and sustainability must be conceived as multidimensional. Environmental sustainability cannot be achieved without social and cultural sustainability. When heritage preservation includes participatory governance, educational involvement and collective identities, it becomes a driver for territorial development, well-being and intergenerational hope.

3. *A five-step framework for heritage-based enhancement*

In translating the theoretical premises into practical strategies, a structured methodology is essential for guiding sustainable heritage management. Taking inspiration from the works of Rombai¹² and Salvarani¹³, as well as from field-based applications, this paper tries to identify a five-steps framework for implementing heritage-based territorial enhancement.

A comprehensive heritage-based project begins with the acquisition of interdisciplinary knowledge about the area, encompassing its geographical, historical, archaeological, ecological and sociocultural dimensions. This foundational “first step” involves methods such as fieldwork, archival research, interviews, and social surveys, all aimed at uncovering the distinctive features of the *genius loci*, the spirit of the place as perceived and lived by local communities.

However, gathering knowledge alone is not sufficient. Therefore, secondly, an alignment between institutional decision-making and community-led initiative must be assured to guarantee an effective heritage governance. Bridging this gap requires a deliberate effort to harmonize top-down policies with the values, expectations and lived experiences of local stakeholders.

¹⁰ L. BAGNOLI, *Manuale di geografia del turismo. Dal Grand Tour al Covid*, UTET, Milano 2022, pp. 150-163.

¹¹ L. ROMBAI, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

¹² L. ROMBAI, *op. cit.*

¹³ R. SALVARANI, *op. cit.*

Third, integration of heritage initiatives within broader policy, financial and organizational frameworks should be considered. Without the coordination and support of local and supra-local authorities, including adequate regulatory and logistical planning, even the most visionary projects may struggle to take root.

Another essential consideration is ensuring access and usability. Heritage must not be preserved solely for its conservation value, but also for its capacity to engage people, both residents and visitors, in meaningful experiences.

Ultimately, heritage should be capable of generating added value. Through a continuous interaction between people and place, heritage can produce cultural, educational, emotional and economic benefits. In this way, it becomes not a frozen relic of the past, but a dynamic, living asset that contributes to the vitality and resilience of local communities.

4. *Some examples...*

To better understand the practical implications of the methodological model outlined above, this section presents three case studies from different regions of Italy. These examples may suggest how the success – or failure – of heritage-based strategies depends on the degree to which key methodological principles are respected. Each case highlights different dynamics of community involvement, institutional coordination and cultural interpretation, offering insight into what enables or hinders the transformative potential of heritage in real-world contexts.

4.1. Queen Camilla's Trail: community-led heritage revitalization

Located in the Amaseno Valley of southern Lazio, the *Queen Camilla's Trail*¹⁴ exemplifies a bottom-up initiative in which heritage preservation is driven by civic engagement. Developed by the local association *A piedi liberi*¹⁵, with scientific support from Roma Tre University, this 185-kilometer trail connects 13 towns and villages, weaving together natural landscapes and cultural landmarks into a coherent narrative.

¹⁴ <https://www.camminoreginacamilla.it/>, last accessed June 1st, 2025.

¹⁵ <http://www.apiediliberi.it/>, last accessed June 1st, 2025.

The project began with a thorough and interdisciplinary investigation into the historical geography of the area. This involved the systematic collection of historical maps and archival documents, alongside interviews and oral testimonies that helped uncover elements of local memory often overlooked in formal records. Fieldwork further contributed to the re-identification of forgotten trail sections, abandoned rural buildings, and landscape features whose meanings had faded over time¹⁶.

The initiative succeeded in bringing together a wide range of local actors. Associations, municipal administrations and individual citizens collaborated closely to develop the trail, ensuring that its design reflected shared values and priorities. The limited, yet necessary, funding and bureaucratic processes were accurately acquired and managed to ensure feasibility and stability for the implemented *cammino*.

The mapping and re-identification of historical places and routes bring them back into the living space of the community as valuable heritage, instead of long-lost and abandoned territorial clutter, making them accessible and active “places to live”.

By attracting visitors and resources, and by becoming an element for local pride, the trail drives enhancement of local economy and establishes new opportunities for education, public awareness and engagement on natural and cultural heritage. It demonstrates how a heritage project, when developed from the ground up and rooted in community memory, can serve as a tool for sustainable development and territorial revalorization.

4.2. Polvese island: institutional governance and territorial stewardship

A good example of institutionally-driven heritage management can be found on Polvese, the largest of Lake Trasimeno’s islands in Umbria. Here, a top-down governance model has proven particularly effective, demonstrating how public institutions (in this case the Province of Perugia and the Umbria Region) can actively generate social and cultural value from a distinct geographical asset.

In recognition of its environmental and cultural value, the island has been declared a *Parco Scientifico-Didattico* (science and educational park), in 1995,

¹⁶ S. CARALLO, *La valle del fiume Amaseno. Fonti geostoriche per la conoscenza del territorio e per la sua valorizzazione*, IF Press, Roma 2025.

a designation aimed at promoting environmental education, experimental teaching and scientific-naturalistic research¹⁷. As part of this initiative, the island's educational and eco-touristic activities are coordinated by the *Aula Verde – Centro di Esperienza Ambientale* (CEA) (green lab – environmental education centre), managed by Plestina Ambiente e Territorio. In 1998, the CEA was proposed, by the Province of Perugia, and formally accredited, by the Umbria Region, within the INFEA¹⁸ network of environmental education centres¹⁹. This institutional framework supports the island's dual identity recognition, as both a site of cultural heritage (featuring elements such as a medieval castle and ancient churches) and a set of ecologically significant habitats (protected under the Nature 2000 network). In line with this vision, the Province of Perugia has also initiated a series of restoration projects efforts targeting several structures on the island as part of the Rural Development Program for Umbria 2014-2020²⁰.

Today different “layers of value” coexist on Polvese, offering visitors the opportunity to explore a rich historical landscape while engaging with the biodiversity of the local ecosystem. The island, today, is easily accessible and actively used for a wide range of initiatives: from citizen science and ecological monitoring to school field trips and cultural events. The participatory dimension of these activities fosters a sense of shared responsibility, transforming the island into a living laboratory of sustainability and heritage stewardship.

Ultimately, Polvese island exemplifies how institutional ownership, when exercised with foresight and inclusiveness, can produce significant added value not only for the specific site, but for the broader regional context.

4.3. The Ponziano archipelago: balancing heritage and

Another significant case study can be found in the Ponziano archipelago, a group of small islands off central Italy's western coast. This area

¹⁷ L. GREGORI, S. BENNATI, *Isola Polvese (Lago Trasimeno-Umbria): un percorso didattico*, in *Bollettino A.I.C.*, n. 129-130-131, 2007, pp. 234.

¹⁸ INFOrmazione Educazione Ambientale.

¹⁹ <https://polvese.it/>, last accessed June 1st, 2025.

²⁰ G. GIANCIPOLI, *Il Paesaggio del Trasimeno: da e verso Polvese*, in *Paesaggi in Umbria. Atti del Convegno III Giornata Nazionale del Paesaggio*, a cura di G. Giancipoli, Morlacchi Editore, Perugia 2019, p. 125.

holds immense potential due to the coexistence of rich natural environments and a valuable cultural heritage. The largest island, Ponza, along with Palmarola and Zannone, widely known for its crystal-clear waters and diverse marine ecosystems, hosts important historical sites, including ancient Roman ruins, medieval churches and traditional stone dwellings carved into the rock²¹.

However, the preservation of these assets faces considerable challenges. The archipelago's heavy reliance on highly seasonal mass-tourism has created tensions within local communities and complicated relations with external administrations. The widespread embrace of tourism as the primary economic driver has led to environmental pressures and social strains, undermining long-term territorial sustainability²². This model has contributed to a demographic shift, with younger residents often considering migration in search of better future prospects elsewhere, weakening the local social fabric.

Ideally, the Ponziane could follow international guidelines such as those proposed by UNEP-UNWTO²³, which emphasize that preserving cultural and environmental heritage should extend beyond nostalgia or generic landscape protection. Instead, it should be viewed as a strategic foundation for ensuring that future generations enjoy healthy, sustainable, and culturally vibrant lives. Safeguarding these fragile ecosystems and traditional ways of life offers new opportunities for wellbeing through balanced development.

Some efforts to promote sustainable tourism on the islands can be identified, aiming to encourage visitors towards a deeper engagement with both natural and historical sites, in respect of the local ecosystems and heritage practices that have shaped the area for centuries. Unfortunately, such initiatives usually remain underdeveloped and economically weaker, compared to more intensive, less sustainable forms of tourism that dominate the local economy.

²¹ Cfr. G.M. De Rossi (a cura di), *Le Isole Pontine attraverso i tempi*, Guidotti Editore, Roma 1986.

²² Cfr. A. GALLIA, *Le risorse idriche nell'isola di Ponza. Usi, saperi, dinamiche territoriali e geostoriche*, Carocci, Roma 2019, pp. 97-98.

²³ WTO, *Making Tourism More Sustainable: A Guide for Policy Makers*, 2005 [<https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/epdf/10.18111/9789284408214>, last accessed June 1st, 2025]; cfr. C. NOTARSTEFANO, *European sustainable tourism context, concepts and guidelines for action in Turismo e turismo tra politica e innovazioni* a cura di A.M. Sala, S. Grandi, F. Dallari, Pàtron, Bologna 2008.

To address these issues, a research group is actively involved in the Italian national research project “Islands4Future,” coordinated by Roma Tre University²⁴. This project seeks to raise awareness among younger generations about the archipelago’s cultural and environmental heritage. Through educational programmes in local high schools, Islands4Future fosters a renewed sense of pride and belonging, in the attempt of encouraging youth to envision and contribute to a more sustainable and hopeful future for the Ponziiane.

5. From preservation to regeneration

The comparative analysis of the three case studies reveals important insights into the dynamics of heritage-driven sustainability. While each initiative operates within distinct governance, geographical and socio-economic contexts, their juxtaposition highlights three key dimensions of effective heritage enhancement.

First, participation and identity emerge as foundational. In the Queen Camilla’s Trail, the role of local communities was not ancillary but constitutive of the process. Knowledge production and territorial re-appropriation were rooted in the everyday experiences and memories of inhabitants. This participatory model contrasts with the more top-down structure in Polvese island, where institutional coordination provided order and resources but relied on external engagement to infuse vitality. In the Ponziano Archipelago, the lack of a consistent participatory framework contributes to fragmentation and weak identity reinforcement, especially among younger generations.

Second, the alignment of actors and agendas is critical. Successful heritage enhancement requires synergistic cooperation between policymakers, civil society, academic institutions and economic stakeholders. This is particularly evident in the Trail and island cases, where alignment enabled integrated planning and durable outcomes. The Archipelago’s difficulties illustrate how divergence (between seasonal economic exploitation and long-term ecological-cultural goals) can hinder sustainable strategies.

Third, creation of recognised values is essential. Heritage should not be reduced to economic returns, particularly through exploitative tourism.

²⁴ <https://is4future.uniroma3.it/progetto/>, last accessed June 1st, 2025.

Rather, it must be framed, in addition, as a multidimensional resource: a source of education, cultural capital, emotional attachment and civic empowerment. In all three cases, when heritage is treated as a lived and shared space, it fosters a sense of service and intergenerational responsibility: a condition for sustainability “grounded in hope”.

These reflections suggest that heritage policy must evolve from a paradigm of sole preservation to one of regeneration. This implies dynamic processes in which communities participate in constructing the meaning and function of heritage, supported by institutions and enriched by technology. Such regeneration is not nostalgic but forward-looking: it transforms the past into a foundation for a sustainable and meaningful future.

Promoting sustainability through historical and environmental heritage requires more than protective legislation or conservation strategies. It demands a holistic and participatory approach, one that integrates knowledge, governance, identity and innovation.

The five-step methodological framework discussed in this paper provides a replicable tool for enhancing heritage areas through interdisciplinary, inclusive and future-oriented actions.

Ultimately, heritage must be reimagined as a relational infrastructure for hope: a means of linking past and future, community and environment, memory and innovation. In doing so, it offers, beyond preservation of what is valuable, a formula to cultivate new visions of coexistence, resilience and shared meaning.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURE: HOW TO RECONCILE VALUES AND CREATE A FOUNDATION FOR POLICIES AND LAW IN THE EUROPEAN UNION?

ALEKSANDRA SYRYT¹, IGOR KILANOWSKI²

Abstract

The paper explores the link between culture and sustainable development within the framework of European Union policy. Sustainability is no longer just a theme for ecology; today, it encompasses social, economic, and ethical facets. Culture is an important component of heritage, serving as a reservoir of values and a stimulus to public policy. True sustainability, the authors maintain, can only be found in moral principles, in which notions of dignity, solidarity, prudence and justice are grounded. The EU aims to apply these values to all its policies in a manner that is feasible through legal systems, educational programs, and cross-cultural development. Reference is also made to the problems linked to the cultural richness of Member States and to the necessity of an adapted legal response. Attention is also drawn to the need for coordination between international and European protection, as well as the definition of cultural heritage. The article also addresses the challenges of globalization, digitization, climate change, and war. The authors advocate for establishing the rule of law and public policy on a more ethical basis, drawing upon classical virtues and Catholic social teaching. The final concludes that only value-based development is sustainable and truly humane.

Keywords: culture, values, sustainable development, Agenda 2023, European Union

1. Introduction

The project of sustainable development in the present has expanded

¹ Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw.

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from its ecological roots to encompass more broadly social, economic, and particularly political transformation. In the European Union (EU), this has been accepted as a one of central principle to help inform and guide EU policy. But the pursuit of sustainability is about more than regulatory calculation or technical coordination—it is about an ethical ground wherein shared values flourish. Particular attention has also been paid to the value of culture for sustainable development as an object for use, and an object in need of protection, as well as a source of inspiration.

At present, sustainable development has become not only the leading, but also a world development project. It was born on the impulse of a planetary crisis, one that is human-dimensional: the crisis of human values, of the principles of knowledge and of action, of ecology – due, among other things, to an irrational use of natural resources – and to society's institutions³.

The inter- and multidisciplinary nature of this notion makes it possible to apply its principles to many different issues in the fields of, e.g., economic, social, welfare, and environmental policy. The multi-dimensionality of sustainable development has resulted in the formation of many concepts created not only at academic centers, but also by actors in the socio-economic environment, understood in a broad sense.⁴ In response to climate change, the social crisis, and the economic concentration of wealth, sustainable development is now a political priority for the European Union⁵ and other international organizations (e.g., the UN).⁶ It seeks to promote an orderly and complementary development of society based on the meeting of present needs without compromising the well-being of future generations. Its aim is the reconciliation of environmental, social, and economic interests, while also ensuring that cultural values, which are instrumental in forging European identity, are able to thrive.

³ A. KLIMSKA, A. SYRYT, *Etyczne i prawne uwarunkowania zrównoważonego rozwoju – wprowadzenie do badań*, «Zeszyty Naukowe Politechniki Śląskiej: Organizacja i Zarządzanie» 123/2018, p. 199.

⁴ T. KLARIN, *The Concept of Sustainable Development: From its Beginning to the Contemporary Issues*, «Zagreb International Review of Economics and Business» 21(1)/2018, pp. 67-94, DOI:10.2478/zireb-2018-0005.

⁵ See more: Commission: https://commission.europa.eu/publications/sustainable-europe-2030_pl (accessed: 30.10.2024).

⁶ See: United Nations System Common Principles on Future Generations: <https://unsceb.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/Advance%20Unedited%20-%20United%20Nations%20System%20Common%20Principles%20on%20Future%20Generations.pdf> (accessed: 30.10.2024); SDG: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals> (accessed: 30.10.2024).

This article examines how the European Union's legal policies can incorporate cultural heritage and values into the broader sustainable development agenda. This essay argues that sustainable development can only find stability and durability in the long term if rooted in timeless moral traditions – from the principles of Catholic social teaching and classical virtues such as justice, prudence, solidarity, and human dignity. These philosophical and ethical underpinnings are not only coherent with sustainability, but are necessary for a complete application of sustainability. This article also provides some general diagnosis of the present difficulties and the conceptual lacunae in incorporating cultural values into the legal and institutional tools of the EU's sustainable development, and in doing so aims to create a foundation for a more coherent and value-oriented policy design.

2. *Culture and the Ethical Core of Sustainability*

Although culture has been the subject of interest for many thinkers and has been defined in almost two hundred ways, it remains a vague concept that is difficult to define unambiguously. Herder already noted its vagueness, and Williams emphasized its complexity, which shows that despite the passage of time, this problem has not lost its relevance⁷. According to Robert Bierstedt, «Culture is everything that people think, do, and possess as members of society.»⁸ Culture encompasses the entirety of humanity's material, intellectual, and spiritual achievements, including the results of human creative activity and the set of values, norms, and principles that apply in a given community.⁹ St. John Paul II stated that «Everything that man 'has' is important for culture and contributes to the creation of culture to the extent that, through what he possesses, man can at the same time 'be' more fully as a human being, become more fully human in all the dimensions of his existence that are proper to humanity.»¹⁰

The cultural sphere is built around three fundamental values: truth, goodness, and beauty. These values determine the role of culture in po-

⁷ P. Sztompka, *O pojęciu kultura raz jeszcze*, «Studia Socjologiczne» 1/2019, p. 7-8; DOI: 10.24425/122488.

⁸ R. BIERSTEDT, *The Social Order*, New York: McGraw Hill 1963, p. 129.

⁹ D. CAPAŁA, *Kultura*, in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, t. 10, Lublin 2004, para. 188.

¹⁰ JAN PAWEŁ II, *Przemówienie w UNESCO, Paryż, 2 czerwca 1980*, in: JAN PAWEŁ II, *Wiara i kultura. Dokumenty, przemówienia, homilie*, Rome – Lublin 1988, p. 55.

litical, social, and economic life and should serve as a framework for the actions of public authorities, international organizations, and other factors and actors that influence society. Culture shapes how societies understand progress, interpret justice, and assign value to nature and history. It provides the ethical and symbolic vocabulary through which policies gain meaning and legitimacy. In Catholic teaching, culture is regarded as a dimension of human flourishing, reflecting the God-given vocation to cultivate and transmit creation. Culture's formative power is not neutral: it shapes consciousness, instills virtues, and orients individuals toward the common good.

This anthropological understanding affirms that sustainability is not simply a technocratic challenge but a humanistic one. Culture supports sustainable development by embedding values such as stewardship, responsibility, and intergenerational solidarity. It encourages the preservation of heritage and diversity, which in turn strengthens social cohesion and fosters a sense of identity.

Culture is present in the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in an indirect way, although it is not explicitly listed as a standalone goal. Nevertheless, it plays a significant role in supporting sustainable development and appears in several goals and their respective targets. The influence of the culture is embedded in targets related to education (Goal 4.7)¹¹, urban development (Goal 11.4)¹², responsible production and consumption¹³, employment and tourism (Goal 8.9)¹⁴, and peace and justice (Goal 16)¹⁵.

¹¹ Target 4.7 of the 2030 Agenda stresses that education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles are promoted, with consideration for diversity and cultural contribution to sustainable development. Culture in Education promotes openness and respect as well as global citizenship.

¹² Target 11.4 explicitly deals with conservation of cultural and natural heritage. Culture is the essential ingredient for the development of sustainable communities that revere and capitalise on historic buildings and local traditions. It helps define a city's image and encourages social and economic urban development.

¹³ Local cultural norms surrounding consumption and resource use can promote responsible consumption behaviors. Local traditions and handicrafts can encourage the development of more sustainable, resource-efficient modes of production and consumption.

¹⁴ Culture is an engine of economic development, notably through the creative economy and cultural tourism, which sustain local economies, create jobs and foster a sense of place. Target of 8.9– sustainable tourism is to cultivate the culture and nature.

¹⁵ The culture and its role in building peace, stability, social order will be at the heart of this objective. Fighting discrimination, protecting human rights and fostering intercultural dialogue contribute to the development of resilient and fair institutions.

In this context, it is essential to emphasize that the European Union and UNESCO, in particular, highlight the role of culture in achieving the SDGs, underlining its importance in fostering peace, supporting social integration, and shaping long-term development. Through culture, more cohesive and socially accepted actions can be implemented, which are crucial for sustainable development and the strengthening of social identity and integration.

Although culture is indirectly present within the SDGs, it constitutes a fundamental element that supports the achievement of numerous goals, especially those related to education, social equality, environmental protection, and building lasting, strong communities. Culture is the foundation of communities, shaping how individuals and social groups view the world and defining their relationships with nature, the economy, and society. This is particularly relevant in the context of sustainable development, where actions aimed at environmental protection, social equity, and economic justice must be adapted to local cultural contexts. Cultural patterns influence attitudes toward environmental protection, consumption behaviors, and interpersonal relationships, all of which directly affect the effectiveness of sustainable development initiatives.

The European Union recognizes this broader function of culture, yet faces challenges in translating cultural considerations into coherent legal and institutional action.

3. The European Union's Approach to Culture and Sustainability

The EU's commitment to sustainable development is formalized in several key documents and legal frameworks. Chief among them is Article 3(3) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU)¹⁶, which states that the Union shall work for «the sustainable development of Europe based on balanced economic growth and price stability, a highly competitive social market economy, aiming at full employment and social progress, and a high level of protection and improvement of the quality of the environment.»

Additionally, Article 2 of the TEU outlines the Union's foundational values: respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minori-

¹⁶ Official Journal of the European Union, C 326/13.

ties. These principles are reflected in EU initiatives, such as the European Green Deal (2019)¹⁷, which integrates sustainability and culture into economic transformation, as well as programs like Urbact¹⁸ and the European Sustainable Development Week, which promote inclusive urban development and public engagement.¹⁹

Culture is also addressed in the European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage (2018)²⁰, which operationalizes cultural heritage as a strategic resource for sustainable development across EU policies. The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), in Article 167, mandates the EU to «contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States» and to encourage cooperation and the conservation of cultural heritage of European significance.

The principle of subsidiarity contained in Protocol No 2 on the Application of the Principles of Subsidiarity and Proportionality (attached to the TEU and to the TFEU) gives legal and moral architecture to such a balance between European ambitions and national self-reliance. If policies of sustainable development consistent with European culture(s) are to be implemented in Central Europe, nothing must be overlooked regarding specific circumstances and the diversity of Europe. If EU policies are to be meaningful, they must take into account the divergent traditions, values, and beliefs among member states. Even if Article 2 of the TEU declares that the Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the member states in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail, in practice, however, although those values are interpreted differently in different member states, which makes it difficult to shape the concrete legal solutions and standards.

The variety of these sentiments and attitudes stems from the different historical and cultural backgrounds of the member states, which necessi-

¹⁷ European Council/Council of the European Union: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/european-green-deal/> (accessed: 12.11.2024).

¹⁸ URBACT: <https://urbact.eu/> (accessed: 12.11.2024).

¹⁹ ESDW: <https://www.esdw.eu/esdw> (accessed: 13.11.2024).

²⁰ The text of a draft document is <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-07/European%20framework%20for%20action%20on%20cultural%20heritage.pdf> (accessed: 12.11.2024).

tate a differentiated policy approach within the EU. Therefore, developing coherent legal frameworks and standards that are not only accommodating but also respectful of this diversity continues to represent a central challenge.²¹

Therefore, it is necessary, in addition to the legislative measures, to also implement non-legislative measures that would contribute to the balance in the cultural framework, based on respect for the history and culture of Europe and bearing in mind its axiological roots. They could involve educational schemes, cross-cultural visits, and events that encourage intercultural dialogue, designed to support common European values and celebrate the differences that define individual nations.²²

These non-legislative tools help foster mutual understanding and camaraderie, thanks to the EU's unwavering commitment to pluralism and diversity, without compromising the core values that unite its member states. Among them is intercultural dialogue that fosters the sharing of experiences and best practices between countries. Between them, there is a conversation that enables the different cultural experiences to come to the fore and for there to be a recognition that cultures see sustainable development in different ways, so that better solutions, better alignment of policies with the community needs, result.

Education is also a key link between culture and sustainable development. Insofar as education is concerned, there is a need to develop formal and informal educational programs for this area. Increasing social awareness must go hand in hand with respecting local values and traditions to foster a deeper understanding of the importance of sustainable development. It must be emphasized that the production of laws compatible

²¹ See more: A. KOTOWSKI, A. SYRYT, *Wartości Unii Europejskiej w świetle art. 2 Traktatu o Unii Europejskiej* [Values of the European Union in Light of Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union], Warsaw 2023, <https://cbpe.pl/2023/03/24/wartosci-unii-europejskiej-w-swietle-art-2-traktatu-o-unii-europejskiej-red-artur-kotowski-aleksandra-syryt/> (accessed: 10.11.2024).

²² See more: D.A. JELINCIC, D. GLIVETIĆ, *Cultural Heritage and Sustainability: Practical Guide*, Interreg Europe programme: 2020, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343255611_Cultural_Heritage_and_Sustainability_Practical_Guide (accessed: 08.11.2024). Cf. S. LUTZ, G. KOCH, Sustainability, *Sustainable Development, and Culture: Diverging Concepts and Practices in European Heritage Work*, in: *Going Beyond. Heritage Studies*, M.T. ALBERT, F. BANDARIN, A. PEREIRA RODERS (eds), Springer, Cham. 2017, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-57165-2_6; L. PETTII, C. TRILLO, B. NCUBE MAKORE, *Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Development-Targets: A Possible Harmonisation? Insights from the European Perspective*, «Sustainability» 12(3)/2020, DOI:10.3390/su12030926.

with sustainable development principles and respectful of cultural values implies a flexible approach. For instance, legislation on sustainable urban development should take into account the cultural and environmental specificities of EU regions in order to ensure more successful and accepted actions from local communities. Also vital is respect for the national identity of each participating country and observance of the principles of proportionality and subsidiarity.

4. *Law, Culture, and the Moral Framework of Regulation*

Legal systems express a society's vision of the common good and justice. From a classical and Catholic perspective, law must promote virtue and protect the dignity of the human person. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000), legally binding since the Treaty of Lisbon (2009), affirms the right to cultural life (Article 22) and explicitly states that the Union shall respect cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity.²³

The effective legal protection of cultural heritage in the EU also draws on international instruments such as the Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe (Granada Convention, 1985)²⁴ and the Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro Convention, 2005)²⁵, both under the Council of Europe. At the global level, the UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972)²⁶ and the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003)²⁷ serve as foundational texts for international cooperation.

The European Union employs both binding legal instruments (hard law), such as regulations, directives, and international treaties, and non-binding in-

²³ Official Journal of the European Union, C 326/39. See more: X. ARZOZ, *Introduction: Respecting linguistic diversity in the European Union*, in: X. ARZOZ (ed.) *Respecting Linguistic Diversity in the European Union*, «Studies in World Language Problems» 2/2008, pp. 1-13, DOI: 10.1075/wlp.2.02arz.

²⁴ Council of Europe: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage/granada-convention> (accessed: 10.11.2024).

²⁵ Council of Europe: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage/faro-convention> (accessed: 10.11.2024).

²⁶ UNESCO: <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/convention-concerning-protection-world-cultural-and-natural-heritage> (accessed: 14.11.2024).

²⁷ UNESCO: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention> (accessed: 14.11.2024).

struments (soft law), including recommendations, communications, resolutions, and codes of good practice. This is evident in the Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning²⁸, which promotes cultural awareness as a fundamental competence, and A New European Agenda for Culture (2018), which outlines strategic priorities for cultural cooperation.²⁹

This complementarity allows for enforceability and flexibility. It reflects a prudent application of the classical virtue of phronesis (practical wisdom), enabling institutions to respond effectively to both universal standards and diverse cultural realities.

The European Commission mandates Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) as part of its Better Regulation agenda. RIA is guided by documents such as the Better Regulation Toolbox and the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making.³⁰ These tools are designed to assess not only economic effects but also social, environmental, and cultural impacts.³¹

When aligned with Catholic social teaching, RIA should be understood as more than a cost-benefit analysis - it is a moral framework for assessing whether laws advance the integral development of the person, the common good, and environmental stewardship.

5. Contemporary Challenges and Ethical Imperatives for the Culture

In a globalised world the conservation, creation and transmission of culture are all under intense pressure, from the contemporary and the historical. These are being compounded by globalisation, digitalisation, conflicts and climate change – which are endangering heritage, diversity and access. Tackling these challenges not only calls for ethical reflection, but also for the activation and implementation of international legal arrangements that understand culture as a basic human right and a key to achieving sustainable development. When free flow of cultural expressions

²⁸ European Commission: <https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/improving-quality/key-competences> (accessed: 10.11.2024).

²⁹ COM (2018) 267 final.

³⁰ EU: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/interinstitutional-agreement-on-better-law-making.html> (accessed: 14.11.2024).

³¹ EU: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM%3A01030301_1#:~:text=The%20European%20Commission%20%E2%80%99s%202015%20communication%20establishing%20the,bring%20tangible%20and%20sustainable%20benefits%20for%20EU%20citizens (accessed: 10.11.2024).

is encouraged, it naturally encourages cultural intermingle as well; however, globalization, on the other hand, has resulted in the standardization of culture. Dominant cultures may marginalize other cultures, a phenomenon that is particularly likely when one culture becomes economically dominant. Thus, the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005) has established a legal framework for preserving cultural diversity, recognizing the universal right of all peoples to express, preserve, and share their cultural heritage.³²

Yet, there are ethical questions whenever elements of a culture are appropriated without permission and without benefit-sharing, aspects of which international law should be utilized more effectively to facilitate the enforcement of cultural rights. The digitalisation has become a democratic vehicle for accessing cultural content and a moral and legal impasse over intellectual property, ownership and digital sovereignty. The establishment of the WIPO Copyright Treaty (1996) and the continuing work in this area at the WIPO are an expression of attempts to find the right balance between the protection of creators' rights and the right to access cultural goods by the public.³³

It is morally imperative that digital technology does not increase the divide between the Global South and North in terms of cultural participation and profit.

Cultural property has long been a casualty of armed conflict, from the raiding of museums to the bombing of religious sites. The 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its Protocols are essential legal standards that set out the State parties' obligation to protect cultural property during war.³⁴

The 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court also includes intentional cultural destruction as a war crime, evident in the Al Mahdi Case.³⁵

³² UNESCO: <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/convention-protection-and-promotion-diversity-cultural-expressions> (accessed: 10.11.2024).

³³ WIPO: <https://www.wipo.int/treaties/en/ip/wct/#:~:text=The%20WIPO%20Copyright%20Treaty%20%28WCT%29%20is%20a%20special,Berne%20Convention%2C%20they%20are%20granted%20certain%20economic%20rights.> (accessed: 14.11.2024).

³⁴ IHL Database: <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/assets/treaties/400-IHL-60-EN.pdf> (accessed: 11.11.2024).

³⁵ On 22 August 2016, the trial in the case *The Prosecutor v. Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi* opened before Trial Chamber VIII at the International Criminal Court in The Hague, the Netherlands. Mr Al Mahdi admitted guilt as to the war crime consisting in the destruction of

Morally, the world community is confronted with the need not to play the fire brigade when it comes to such a loss. Indigenous people still push for the repatriation of these and other items that were looted during colonial times. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) states the rights of indigenous peoples to their cultural property and traditional knowledge.³⁶

The return is now more and more accepted by the legislation and ethics, but it is still difficult to be put into practice, as a consequence of the specific interest of countries, resistance of the institutions and legal uncertainty. Sea level rise and climate events increasingly threaten both tangible and intangible heritage at historic and cultural sites and in the environment where these resources are located, especially in small island states and other vulnerable environments. International legal documents, including the Paris Agreement (2015), acknowledge that cultural aspects lie at the foundation of addressing climate change, although the enforcement is shallow.³⁷ The culturally ethical urge is to ensure that cultural resilience is woven into environmental policy, and that we honor the cultural ways of the communities most severely affected by environmental decline.

Rights in culture and heritage are not symbolic; they are integral to identity, dignity and social solidarity. The international legal architecture constitutes the framework for the protection and promotion of these rights, but without ethical commitment and solidarity on a worldwide scale law is not just enough. Culture's current challenges call for a collective response that respects justice, inclusivity and the freedom of the diversity of human expression. Enhancing interstate cooperation is the need to achieve the objectives of developing international legal norms and intercultural dialogue as on way of ensuring a balanced and sustainable existence in the cultural sphere.

A complete answer to today's challenges concerning cultural heritage and its legal safeguarding cannot limit itself to making technical and formal modifications. Such reinvigoration will need to cut at the cultural and moral roots

historical and religious monuments in Timbuktu (Mali), between around 30 June 2012 and 11 July 2012. This is the first international trial focusing on the destruction of historical and religious monuments, and the first International Criminal Court case where the defendant made an admission of guilt (<https://www.icc-cpi.int/mali/al-mahdi>, accessed: 14.11.2024).

³⁶ OHCHR: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/indigenous-peoples/un-declaration-rights-indigenous-peoples> (accessed: 12.11.2024).

³⁷ UN: <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement> (accessed: 11.11.2024).

of legal systems. Essentially, this task to to define and consolidate what cultural heritage definition would be, it's kind in all legal instruments that will be taken into consideration. And in the absence of a clear and agreed-upon definition of what cultural heritage is – whether tangible or intangible, historical or living – any legal protections are piecemeal at best. This harmonisation has to take place internationally as well as at regional level, especially in the European Union and in the context of major international instruments.

Just as importantly, we need to reinforce the existing instruments for their implementation. Several international treaties and EU directives also provide robust frameworks for cultural heritage protection; however, these are increasingly eroded due to poor enforcement or a lack of political will. Stronger collaboration amongst member states, through tighter control and better-resourced heritage organisations, will be necessary for these legal mechanisms to have concrete and real value.

More fundamentally, however, moral and cultural values should influence RIA, as well as policy, more widely. Policy does not occur in a moral vacuum, and it must understand and be sensitive to the cultural and spiritual aspects of human life. In the process, governments and institutions can prevent decisions that uphold the letter of the law from erasing the values and traditions from which those laws emerge.

This comprehensive strategy should also involve long-term investments in programs for civic and moral education. They are most successful when they have access to the resources of the classical and Christian humanist traditions—traditions that emphasize the innate dignity of every human being, the development of personal virtue, and the centrality of community and moral duty. A society based on education of that mold is not only one which respects the past, but also one that is moral enough to protect it.

The spiritual foundations of these endeavours can be usefully based on the teachings (values) promulgated in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*³⁸ (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004).³⁹ Noteworthy are the dignity of the human person which grounds the affirmation of cultural identity and memory; the principle of subsidiarity, which calls for empowering local communities in matters of heritage; and a moral

³⁸ Especially, a dignity of the person (Chapter III), the principle of subsidiarity (Chapter IV), and the moral responsibility for the environment (Chapter X).

³⁹ VATICAN: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html (accessed: 10.11.2024).

responsibility for the landscape, including cultural landscapes, and traditions associated with it. By linking legal and policy reforms to those values, the preservation of cultural heritage is transformed from an issue of law to one of a society's conscience and identity.

6. *Conclusion*

Culture can contribute to sustainable development by promoting values of solidarity, responsibility, and respect for nature. Local practices, which are commonly based on the sustainable utilization of natural resources, constitute a valuable source for the development of policies and laws. Cultural values can thus serve as a springboard for initiatives that are respectful for the environment and society, which is particularly relevant for the EU, as it is a diverse region in terms of culture. Sustainable development and culture, even if they appear to be separate, are deeply related to each other and mutually beneficial. Culture adds value of a different order and content, enabling the “what for” of sustainable development and opening opportunities for innovative thinking. By virtue of the shared identity and cultural diversity of Europe, these may be devised as not only efficacious but also consistent with communal values. The reasons underlying the diagnosis given above are substantial: culture remains poorly defined, legal fragmentation is far-reaching, application, likely with some realization and legal implementation, is at risk, enforcement is weak, and ethical behavioural discussions are too superficial in the regulatory process. These divides are symptomatic of a wider cultural and moral divide in European institutional and policymaking. The EU must seek answers to these problems by drawing on some of the perennial sources of wisdom that underlie its conception. Yes, the classical virtues – justice, prudence, fortitude, temperance – and the principles of Catholic social teaching – dignity, solidarity, subsidiarity, stewardship – are more than philosophic agglomerations; they are a coherent and time-tested framework for addressing the purposes of the day. If sustainability itself is to be sustainable, it must be conceived within a vision of the human person that includes memory, meaning, and moral responsibility. The European Union, with its deep cultural and spiritual roots, can make a significant contribution to this path. It must be more than a political, economic union; it must be a community of culture and of ethics, one that defends the patrimony of what it has inherited and strives for what it hopes to become.

SECTION V

CLASSICAL ROOTS FOR NEW ANTHROPOLOGICAL VISIONS

NUNC DEMUM REDIT ANIMUS (TACITUS, *AGRICOLA*, 3. 1):
HOPES AND EXPECTATIONS AFTER THE END
OF A TYRANNICAL GOVERNMENT*

GIORGIA LAURI

Abstract:

This essay explores the theme of hope in the literary production of second-century C.E. intellectuals, with reference to a selection of emblematic passages from Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, Cassius Dio and Dio of Prusa. In the climate of positive renewal perceived after the death of Domitian, these authors express favorable judgments on Nerva and Trajan, which reflect an expectation towards a future grounded in good governance and open dialogue between the *princeps* and the intellectual élite. This analysis highlights how these texts convey the perception of a transition from an oppressive regime to a renewed sense of trust in the figure of the emperor.

Key-words: hope, intellectuals, Nerva, Trajan, Roman history

1. *The Return of Hope: Tacitus and the promise of Principate and Freedom*

Within the framework of the theme of the Conference “The Future of Hope”, the reflections of second-century C.E. intellectuals – especially Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, Cassius Dio, and Dio of Prusa, on whom this brief essay focuses – are emblematic of how hope, in their writings, was closely linked to the expectations of good governance following the dramatic interlude of the tyrannical and culturally oppressive principate, imposed more recently by Domitian and, earlier, by the Julio-Claudians, especially Nero. In relation to the beginning of Nerva’s principate and

* Unless otherwise indicated, the translations are by the author.

the subsequent rise of Trajan, these authors express, in various ways, feelings of trust and expectations of political, cultural and moral renewal. The well-known sentence *Nunc demum redit animus* from Tacitus' *Agricola*, which serves as the starting point of this reflection, is particularly emblematic in this regard: it marks the beginning of a new phase of recovery not only for the empire in general, but also for the relationship between the *princeps* and the intellectual élite:

Now at last spirits are reviving. At the first dawning of this most fortunate age, Nerva Caesar at once combined principles formerly incompatible, principate and freedom. Day by day Nerva Trajan is enhancing the happiness of our times. Public security has not merely inspired our hopes and prayers but has gained the assurance of those prayers' fulfilment and, from this, strength. And yet, by the nature of human frailty, remedies take longer to act than diseases¹.

The word chosen by Tacitus, *animus*, moreover, means “vital breath”, “breathing”, “possibility to breathe”, which, in this passage, appears to be connected with the notion of hope². With these words, Tacitus compares the age of the Julio-Claudians and the Flavians – marked by a tyrannical regime and violent censorship of intellectuals³ – to the age of Nerva (96-98 C.E.) and Trajan (98-117 C.E.), characterized by the union of two elements that had until then been considered irreconcilable: principate and freedom⁴. Indeed, the contrast between a tyrannical past and a present marked

¹ TACITUS, *Agricola* 3. 1: *Nunc demum redit animus; et quamquam primo statim beatissimi saeculi ortu Nerua Caesar res olim dissociabiles miscuerit, principatum ac libertatem, augeatque cotidie felicitatem temporum Nerua Traianus, nec spem modo ac uotum securitas publica, sed ipsius uoti fiduciam ac robur adumpserit, natura tamen infirmitatis humanae tardiora sunt remedia quam mala*. Transl. by A. R. BIRLEY, *Tacitus. Agricola and Germania*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1999, p. 55, with an amendment on the translation of *principatum*.

² See, e.g., also the translation offered by E. ADLER, *Effectiveness and Empire in Tacitus' Agricola*, in «Ancient History Bulletin», XXX. 1-2, 2016, p. 2.

³ See, e.g., TACITUS, *Agri.* 2. 2: «No doubt they (*scil.* the previous emperors) thought that in that fire the voice of the Roman People, the liberty of the senate, and the conscience of mankind could be wiped out – over and above this, the teachers of philosophy were expelled and all noble accomplishments driven into exile, so that nothing honourable might anywhere confront them» (*Scilicet illo igne vocem populi Romani et libertatem senatus et conscientiam generis humani aboleri arbitrabantur, expulsis insuper sapientiae professoribus atque omni bona arte in exilium acta, ne quid usquam honestum occurreret*). Transl. by A. R. BIRLEY, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

⁴ However, it cannot be excluded, as stated by E. ADLER, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-14, that Tacitus' praise was not entirely sincere: despite his initial commendations of Nerva and Trajan, the two would prove unable to quickly reverse the moral decline of Rome. In the passage cited

by a widespread sense of well-being is evident: «None the less, it will not be an unpleasant task to put together, even in a rough and uncouth style, a record of our former servitude and a testimony to our present blessings»⁵. The theme most prominently highlighted in these passages is, more specifically, that of hope in an unprecedented climate of renewed freedom of speech. To this end, in *Agricola* 2.1, Tacitus mentions intellectuals who lived under the Julio-Claudians and the Flavians and who suffered censorship or were condemned to death for expressing libertarian and anti-tyrannical ideas: Arulenus Rusticus, sentenced to death by Domitian for having praised Thræsea Paetus, an anti-Neronian intellectual who had himself been forced to commit suicide; Herennius Senecio, also condemned by Domitian for a panegyric written in honor of the politician Helvidius Priscus, who had been executed by Vespasian⁶. In this oppressive climate, Tacitus states,

and the following statements, one can indeed detect a trace of pessimism – typical of this author – regarding the slowness of human nature to adapt to change, even when that change is positive: «And yet, by the nature of human frailty, remedies take longer to act than diseases. Our bodies, which grow so slowly, perish in an instant. So too you can crush the mind and its pursuits more easily than you can recall them to life. Indolence indeed has a charm of its own, to which we gradually yield, and we end up by loving the inaction that we at first hated» (*natura tamen infirmitatis humanae tardiora sunt remedia quam mala; et ut corpora nostra lente augescunt, cito extinguuntur, sic ingenia studiaque opprimeris facilius quam revocaveris: subit quippe etiam ipsius inertiae dulcedo, et invisa primo desidia postremo amatur*). Transl. by A. R. BIRLEY, *op. cit.*, p. 55). Thus, the remedies for the ills caused by Domitian are slow, due to the nature of human weakness, unlike *Agricola*, who improved the condition of the province within his first year of governance, as stated in 20.1: «By clamping down on these abuses at once in his first year, he gave peace a good name: it had been feared no less than war through either the negligence or the arrogance of previous governors» (*Haec primo statim anno comprimendo egregiam famam paci circumdedit, quae vel incuria vel intolerantia priorum haud minus quam bellum timebatur*). Transl. by A. R. BIRLEY, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-68.

⁵ TACITUS, *Agr.* 3. 3 (*Non tamen pigebit vel incondita ac rudi voce memoriam prioris servitutis ac testimonium praesentium bonorum composuisse*). Transl. by A. R. BIRLEY, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

⁶ Among the wide range of contributions on the relationship between the *princeps* and the intellectuals during the Julio-Claudian and Flavian periods, see, for example, R. SYME, *A political group*, in *Roman Papers*, vol. 7, ed. by A. R. Birley, Oxford Academic, Oxford 1991, pp. 568-587; V. RUDICH, *Political Dissidence under Nero*, Routledge, London-New York 1993; W. ECK, *Helvidius*, in *Der Neue Pauly*, vol. 5, Stoccarda, Metzler 1998, pp. 339-340; O. DEVILLERS, *Le rôle des passages relatifs à Thræsea Paetus dans les Annales de Tacite, Neronia VI*, in «Collection Latomus», CCLXVIII, 2002, pp. 296-311; W. TURPIN, *Tacitus, stoic exempla, and the praecipuum munus annalium*, in «Classical Antiquity», XXVII, 2, 2008, pp. 359-404; T. E. STRUNK, *Saving the life of a foolish poet: Tacitus on Marcus Lepidus, Thræsea Paetus, and political action under the principate*, in «Syllecta Classica», 2010, pp. 119-139; WOLFGANG-RAINER MANN, «You're playing you now»: *Helvidius Priscus as a stoic*

We have indeed provided a grand specimen of submissiveness. Just as the former age witnessed an extreme in freedom, so we have experienced the depths of servitude, deprived by espionage even of the intercourse of speaking and listening to one another. We should have lost our memories as well as our voices, were it as easy to forget as to be silent⁷.

2. *Voices of Hope: Pliny's Panegyricus and the Promise of Imperial Renewal*

Historians and intellectuals of second century C.E., in fact, generally agree in describing the principates of Nerva, Trajan, and Hadrian as a prosperous and peaceful era. In concluding his biography of Domitian, Suetonius recounts a meaningful and emblematic anecdote that foreshadows the promising change in direction that was about to unfold:

They say that even Domitian himself dreamt that a golden hump grew out of his back and he understood this as a certain indication that the condition of the state would be happier and more prosperous after his time, as indeed happened shortly afterwards through the self-control and integrity of the subsequent emperors⁸.

hero, in Roman reflections. Studies in Latin philosophy, ed. by G. D. Williams and K. Volk, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2016, pp. 213-237.

⁷ TACITUS, *Agr.* 2. 3-4 (*Dedimus profecto grande patientiae documentum; et sicut vetus aetas vidit quid ultimum in libertate esset, ita nos quid in servitute, adempto per inquisitiones etiam loquendi audiendique commercio. Memoriam quoque ipsam cum voce perdissemus, si tam in nostra potestate esset oblivisci quam tacere*). Transl. by A. R. BIRLEY, *op. cit.*, p. 55. This passage has many similarities with the preface of the *Histories*. (1. 1): «For many historians have related events of the preceding 820 years dating from the foundation of Rome. So long as republican history was their theme, they wrote with equal eloquence and independence. Yet after the battle of Actium had been fought and the interests of peace demanded that power should be concentrated in one man's hands, this great line of historians came to an end. Truth, too, suffered in various ways, thanks first to an ignorance of politics, which now lay outside public control; later came a passion for flattery, or else a hatred of autocrats» (*nam post conditam urbem octingentos et viginti prioris aevi annos multi auctores rettulerunt, dum res populi Romani memorabantur pari eloquentia ac libertate: postquam bellatum apud Actium atque omnem potentiam ad unum conferri pacis interfuit, magna illa ingenia cessere; simul veritas pluribus modis infracta, primum inscitia rei publicae ut alienae, mox libidine adsentandi aut rursus odio adversus dominantis*). Transl. by K. WELLESLEY, *Tacitus. The Histories*, Penguin Books Ltd, London 2009, p. 41.

⁸ SÜETONIUS, *Life of Domitian*, 23 (*Ipsum etiam Domitianum ferunt somniasse gibbam sibi pone cervicem auream enatam, pro certoque habuisse beatiorem post se laetiolemque portendi rei publicae statum, sicut sane brevi evenit abstinentia et moderatione insequentium principum*). Transl. by C. EDWARDS, *Suetonius. Life of the Caesars*, ed. by C. Edwards, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2nd ed., 2008, p. 294.

Nerva, formerly governor of Mauretania and consul under Vespasian and Domitian⁹, is portrayed by Cassius Dio, for example, as playing a key role in restoring institutional balance¹⁰. Pliny the Younger, in addition to stating that «although a private citizen, he was not indifferent to the public good», also claims that Nerva's era was «an example similar to ancient times»¹¹.

The system of adoptive succession¹² must certainly have played a major role in establishing the atmosphere of hope and courage that Tacitus speaks of in the *Agricola*. Dio, consistently, states that the choice was made primarily «for the good fortune of the Senate and the Roman people»¹³. Trajan's position as Nerva's successor¹⁴, personally chosen by the emperor, of senatorial rank, and possessing a wide military experience¹⁵, generated enormous expectations in public opinion, clearly reflected in numerous passages of Pliny the Younger's *Panegyric*. Trajan is portrayed as an ideal ruler, «beyond human hope and condition»¹⁶, whose virtues promise prosperity and stability for the future:

⁹ On the career of M. Cocceius Nerva, who had moreover maintained close ties with the Flavians prior to his imperial appointment, see e.g. CIL XI 5743, TACITUS, *Annales* 15. 72. Regarding the succession to Domitian, see e.g. *Fasti Ostienses* (ed. L. VIDMAN, *Ceskoslovenská Akademie Ved.*, Praha 1982, 2nd ed.), p. 45; CASSIUS DIO 67. 15. 5; *Ep. de Caes.* 12. For a general overview, see C.L. MURISON, M. *Cocceius Nerva and the Flavians*, in «Transactions of the American Philological Association» CXXXIII, 2003, pp. 147-157; A.W. COLLINS, *The palace revolution: the assassination of Domitian and the accession of Nerva*, in «Phoenix», LXIII. 1/2, 2009, pp. 73-106.

¹⁰ CASSIUS DIO, 68. 1-4. See, in particular, par. 2, in which measures to suspend *maiestas* (treason) trials and to condemn informers are mentioned.

¹¹ *Ep.* 7. 33. 9: *nam privatus quoque attendebat his quae recte in publico fierent [...] exemplum [...] simile antiquis.*

¹² On which see e.g. CASSIUS DIO, 68. 4: «Thus Trajan became Caesar and later emperor, although Nerva had some descendants. In fact. He did not place family ties above the safeguarding of the state, and it was certainly not the fact that Trajan was a Spaniard rather than an Italic or Italiote that prevented him from adopting him, given that no foreigner had ever before assumed the empire of the Romans; indeed, Nerva believed that his choice should be made based on a man's virtue, not his nationality» (οὗτω μὲν ὁ Τραϊανὸς Καῖσαρ καὶ μετὰ τοῦτο αὐτοκράτωρ ἐγένετο, καίτοι συγγενῶν τοῦ Νέρουα ὄντων τινῶν. ἀλλ' οὐ γὰρ τῆς τῶν κοινῶν σωτηρίας ὁ ἄνθρωπος τὴν συγγένειαν προετίμησεν, οὐδ' αὖ ὅτι Ἰβηρ ὁ Τραϊανὸς ἄλλ' οὐκ Ἰταλὸς οὐδ' Ἰταλιώτης ἦν, ἡττόν τι παρὰ τοῦτο αὐτὸν ἐποιήσατο, ἐπεὶ μὴδεις πρόσθεν ἄλλοεθνῆς τὸ τῶν Ῥωμαίων κράτος ἐσχίκει· τὴν γὰρ ἀρετὴν ἄλλ' οὐ τὴν πατρίδα τινὸς ἐξετάζειν δεῖν ᾔετο.). See O. SCHIPP, *Die Adoptivkaiser – Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, Marc Aurel, Lucius Verus und Commodus*, Herder Verlag GmbH, Darmstadt 2011.

¹³ 68. 3. 4: ἀγαθὴ τύχη τῆς τε βουλῆς καὶ τοῦ δήμου τῶν Ῥωμαίων καὶ ἐμοῦ αὐτοῦ.

¹⁴ See e.g. PLINY, *Pan.* 6.

¹⁵ See e.g. J. BENNETT, *Trajan. Optimus princeps. A Life and Times*, Routledge, London 2005 (2nd ed.), pp. 28-86.

¹⁶ *Pan.* 27: *supra hominis spem conditionemque.*

Great is your glory now and forever, Caesar, whether or not other princes follow your example, for is it not beyond all praise that a man, now consul for the third time, conducts himself as if it were his first election; that a prince should appear no different from a private citizen, an emperor no different from those under his command?¹⁷

According to Pliny's account, moreover, on his very first day in office, Trajan publicly declared that, although he was *princeps*, he would remain subject to the laws and would not place himself above them¹⁸. One of the main hopes expressed in the *Panegyric*, in fact, is that of a just and benevolent government. Once again, *libertas* lies at the heart of the intellectual's reflection:

At last, therefore, the nobility is no longer relegated to obscurity, but is placed in full light by the *princeps*; at last those illustrious descendants of great men, those illustrious posterity of freedom no longer have any fear of the emperor and no longer make him [...] On the contrary, he (Trajan), if somewhere there survives some descendant of an ancient family, if there survives some glimmer of a splendor not yet extinguished, surrounds him with his manifestations of benevolence, revives him and places him in evidence so that he may make himself useful to the state¹⁹.

Elsewhere in the *Panegyric*, Pliny emphasizes a point that echoes the pairing – already present in Tacitus – of principate and freedom: «Imperial power and liberty are brought before the same tribunal»²⁰. In the text, the terms *spes* (“hope”) and *sperare* (“to hope”), in various forms and conjugations, appear on multiple occasions. Below is a list of the most significant examples:

¹⁷ *Pan.* 64. 3-4: *Ingens, Caesar, et par gloria tua, sive fecerint istud postea principes, sive non fecerint. Ullane satis praedicatio digna est, idem tertio consulem fecisse, quod primo? Idem principem, quod privatum? Idem imperatorem, quod sub imperatore?*

¹⁸ *Pan.* 65. While Trajan presented himself as humble and respectful of the law, J. BENNETT, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-76, 244 suggests that his decision was part of a strategic political plan to consolidate his sovereignty through the ordinary consulship, ensuring the adoption of his reforms without opposition. His decision to accept a third consulship in 99, despite initial reluctance, would therefore have been part of a broader plan to secure the peaceful implementation of the reforms he wished to see enacted.

¹⁹ *PLIN.* *Pan.* 69: *Tandem ergo nobilitas non obscuratur, sed illustratur a principe: tandem illos ingentium virorum nepotes, illos posteros libertetus, nec terret Caesar, nec pavet [...] si quid usquam stirpis antiquae, si quid residuae claritatis; hoc amplexatur, et refovet, et in usum reipublicae promit.*

²⁰ 37. 4: *eodem foro utuntur principatus et libertas*. However, ADLER (*op. cit.*, p. 4) remains convinced that Pliny's highly laudatory perspective stems from the need to appear aligned with imperial propaganda.

You have shown great wisdom, Caesar, in taking upon yourself the task of preserving the hope of the Roman name. For there is no expenditure more worthy of a prince, and of one who wishes to live on in immortality, than that which is made for the benefit of posterity²¹.

- Indeed, the hope of receiving public support and gifts is a powerful incentive to become a father, but an even sharper incentive is the hope of giving birth to children in liberty and security²².
- That murderer and butcher of all the best men had filled us both with terror through the slaughter of our friends and the thunderbolts he hurled at us; for we had the same friends, we mourned the same losses, and just as now we share hope and joy, so then we shared sorrow and fear²³.

3. Hope after tyranny: intellectuals and the hope for an ethical kingship

I will now very briefly turn to mention an intellectual and author of discourses on good governance, whose thought aligns with the tradition of treatises on kingship (*Peri basileías*), a genre with precedents in Xenophon (with the *Cyropaedia*), Isocrates (*To Nicocles* and *Evagoras*), and the Pythagoreans, and which extends throughout the Hellenistic and Roman periods. These writings, whose stylistic register lies somewhere between laudatory and exhortative, were often addressed to specific individuals (as the titles themselves indicate), yet the ethical concepts they expressed were universally applicable and widely shared. Thematic and conceptual features typical of this literary genre – which displays numerous points of contact with various philosophical schools, particularly Stoicism – include the opposition between king and tyrant; the image of a ruler who, though not bound by the laws, acts as though he were and behaves toward his subjects like a good father; the parallel drawn between the relationship of ruler to subjects and that of soul to body; the emphasis on gentleness as an essential and appropriate virtue of the *basileus*; and the necessity for the ruler to exercise a salvific function. This vision is expressed, for example, in

²¹ Pan. 26: *Recte, Caesar, quod spem Romani nominis sumptibus tuis suscipis. Nullum est enim magno principe immortalemque merituro impendii genus dignius, quam quod erogatur in posteros.*

²² Pan. 27: *Magnum quidem est educandi incitamentum, tollere liberos in spem alimentorum, in spem congiariorum; maius tamen, in spem libertatis, in spem securitatis.*

²³ Pan. 90: *Utrumque nostrum ille optimi cuiusque spoliator et carnifex stragibus amicorum, et in proximum iacto fulmine afflaverat. Iisdem enim amicis gloriabamur, eosdem amissos lugebamus: ac sicut nunc spes gaudiumque, ita tunc communis nobis dolor et metus erat.*

several of Plutarch's minor works, all part of the broad collection known as *Moralia*: in *Ad principem ineruditum*, *Maxime cum principibus philosopho esse disserendum*, and *De unius in re publica dominatione*, Plutarch defines monarchy as the best form of government, advocating its efficacy in maintaining universal order. However, in order to fully carry out his duties, the *basileus* must seek the company of philosophers capable of guiding him toward ethical rule. *Praecepta rei publicae gerendae* and *An seni res publica gerenda sit*, on the other hand, offer examples of sound political conduct addressed primarily to members of the Greek city-state élites, encouraging them – despite the inescapable reality of Roman dominion – to govern in a way that preserves at least a minimal degree of internal autonomy²⁴.

In line with this type of treatise is Dio of Prusa (c. 40-120 C.E.), an orator active under the Flavians, Nerva, and Trajan, who places at the center of his reflection the ideal of *eunomia* (“good governance”), itself based on a balanced relationship between the emperor and his subjects. To this end, there is a strong emphasis on moral values and virtues, an emphasis that reflects the hopes and expectations placed in Nerva and, above all, in Trajan. This vision is expressed in particular in the four orations *Perì Basileías* (*On Kingship*). Among the most emblematic occurrences of the term *elpis* (hope) in these discourses is the following:

And so, the time granted to man is short and unpredictable; much of life is taken up with the memory of the past and the hope for the future. Which of the two men, then, do we think rejoices in remembering the past, and which is troubled by it? Which is encouraged by hopes, and which, on the contrary, is disheartened? Therefore, the life of the good king must also be the more pleasant one²⁵.

According to Dio, the good king is the one who, having ruled with righteousness, can look to the future with hope and confidence. The ideology underlying these discourses also seeks to redefine, in new terms, the relationship between the emperor and the elites (particularly those of the Eastern provinces), who acknowledge his divine origin and autocratic power, yet in turn hope for a degree of participation in the exercise of authority²⁶:

²⁴ G. ZECCHINI, *Il pensiero politico romano*, Roma, Carocci, 2018 (2nd ed.), pp. 120-121.

²⁵ DIO, *Or.* 3. 61: πότερον οὖν τοῖν ἀνδρῶν ἡγώμεθα εὐφραίνειν τὴν μνήμην καὶ πότερον ἀνιᾶν, καὶ πότερον θαρρύνειν τὰς ἐλπίδας καὶ πότερον ἐκπλήττειν; οὐκοῦν καὶ ἡδίωνά ἀνάγκη τὸν βίον εἶναι τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ βασιλέως.

²⁶ G. Zecchini, *op. cit.*, *Il pensiero politico romano*, Roma, Carocci, 2018 (2nd ed.), p. 122.

I have given no small and not short-lived demonstration of how much I cherish my freedom. And if I were to lie now that without any doubt everyone can tell the truth, I who was the only one who had the courage to proclaim it, at the risk of my life, when it seemed necessary to everyone to lie out of fear, it would really have to be said that I do not know how to recognize either the time for freedom of expression or the time for flattery²⁷

The same theme is addressed in Oration 56 (*Agamemnon, or On Kingship*): in response to an interlocutor who claims that kingship is a power not subject to accountability («this power you speak of – the power to command men with absolute authority and give orders without being answerable – is called kingship»²⁸), Dio counters by presenting a political ideal based on a mixed form of government. This government consists of a king (Agamemnon) who governs with the collaboration of a wise man (represented by the figure of Nestor) and a council of elders: «Then do you not call the rule of the Heraclidae in Sparta, which lasted for such a long time, kingship? Well, they did not act as they pleased, but were required to obey the ephors in many matters»²⁹. Here too, the hope is clearly expressed that the emperor will cooperate with men of culture. It is no coincidence that the content of all these works, aimed to present to the ideal reader, the *princeps*, a model of virtuous and just rule, as well as a relationship with subjects based on active commitment to the community and mutual loyalty, mirrors that of the *On Tyranny* discourses, which condemn the tyrannical rule of Domitian, who had sentenced Dio to exile³⁰.

²⁷ DIO, *Or.* 3. 12-13: οὐ γὰρ ὀλίγην οὐδὲ ἐν ὀλίγῳ χρόνῳ δέδωκα βάσανον τῆς ἐλευθερίας. εἰ δὲ ἐγὼ πρότερον μὲν, ὅτε πᾶσιν ἀναγκαῖον ἐδόκει ψεῦδεσθαι διὰ φόβον, μόνος ἀληθεύειν ἐτόλμων, καὶ ταῦτα κινδυνεύων ὑπὲρ τῆς ψυχῆς, νῦν δέ, ὅτε πᾶσιν ἔξεστι τᾷληθῇ λέγειν, ψεύδομαι, μηδενὸς κινδύνου παρεστῶτος, οὐκ ἂν εἰδείην οὔτε παρρησίας οὔτε κολακείας καιρόν.

²⁸ DIO, *Or.* 56. 5: ἡ ἀρχὴ αὕτη, ἣν λέγεις, τὸ καθόλου ἀνθρώπων ἄρχειν καὶ ἐπιτάττειν ἀνθρώποις ἀνυπεύθυνον ὄντα βασιλεία καλεῖται.

²⁹ *ibid.* Σὺ ἄρα οὐχ ἡγῇ βασιλείαν τὴν τῶν Ἡρακλειδῶν ἐν Λακεδαιμόνι τοσοῦτον βασιλευσάντων χρόνον; ἐκεῖνοι γὰρ οὐ πάντα ἐπραττον ὡς αὐτοῖς ἐδόκει, ἀλλὰ περὶ πολλῶν ὑπήκουον τοῖς ἐφόροις.

³⁰ Although Domitian is not explicitly mentioned, he is allegorized through the figure of the Persian king (on the works from the period of exile, see P. DESIDERI, *Dione di Prusa. Un intellettuale greco nell'impero romano*, D'Anna, Messina-Firenze 1978, pp. 187-260).

Conclusions

The sources analyzed bear witness to how, in the transition from the tyranny established by Domitian to the adoptive principate inaugurated by Nerva and consolidated by Trajan, a new collective hope emerged – not only for a return to the values of justice and freedom, but also for a relationship between power and intellectuals founded on open dialogue. Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, Cassius Dio, and Dio of Prusa all reflect in their writings a climate of trust in the future, in which the exercise of imperial power is no longer authoritarian, but authoritative, marked by balance, legality, and virtue. In the works of these authors, hope thus becomes a critical lens, a key to interpreting the past and envisioning the future. In this sense, the testimonies examined here resonate with the theme proposed by the Conference: they remind us that for events to have a fortunate outcome, hope must be conscious, rooted in history, and shaped by a collective vision of the common good.

HUMANISTIC INNOVATION BETWEEN VALUES AND SKILLS. THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES IN DEVELOPING SOCIAL IMPACT

PROF. JAVIER FIZ PEREZ

Abstract

We are living in a historical moment where universities have a great responsibility to promote the common good of education and humanities skills in the context of interaction with institutions and social policies. The mission of universities given the capabilities demonstrated over the centuries in teaching, educating and training as evidenced in the first part of this article. The second part highlights European initiatives that go in this direction thus creating operational models. In the third part we highlight examples of application, from theory to practice, on the impact of humanistic studies in the European context to arrive at the fourth point where we highlight the convenience of developing an observatory that can follow up on European policies oriented toward social and humanistic development through universities. In the conclusion we emphasize the goodness of this kind of approach in the university and business world nurtured by sound social policies at the European level.

Key words: Humanistic Innovation, Universities, Social Impact, Sustainable Development, Soft Skills, Core Values, Values Metrics.

INTRODUCTION: Historical moment and historical response

University knowledge is distinguished by the study of reality from its causes. We could say that today we have to be careful about the fragmentation of knowledge. The complexity of the world requires an empowerment of the general vision even before developing specialized disciplines. The real risk would be to lose sight of the unity of knowledge.

How can we build bridges between the islands of knowledge we have created? Perhaps we should start putting at the center not the disciplines, but the questions, the problems, the challenges, the meaning of life. This is precisely why the study of philosophy and social and humanistic disciplines are a real priority in the Universities.

The first task of the University is to offer an integral education so that people receive the tools they need to interpret the present and design the future.

It is nice to think that the University generates culture, it generates ideas, but above all it promotes a passion for the search for truth, in the service of human progress. We professors see year after year the change of generations because we have the opportunity to grasp the mental and lifestyle change that is coming. That's why we talk about vocational and human education for a better future where teachers face the challenges of contemporary society and students develop the foundation for a life project.

The historical moment we are living invites us to become aware of the responsibility we all have towards education in order to nurture the spirit of encounter between generations, religions and cultures as well as between humans and the environment.

Celebrating 936 years since the establishment of the first university (*Bologna 1088*) as we know it today, we can say that these institutions have successfully stood the test of time in educating generations of citizens and professionals alike. Universities do not pretend to have a monopoly on knowledge production. Universities can offer the exercise of reflexivity, knowledge and mindfulness.

That's why universities should be rewarded for scientific research oriented not only to production, but also to knowledge. I would like to remember here the saying of the European University of Rome:

- *Knowing how to be, knowing how to do, knowing how to live.*
- *Knowing*, which means, the knowledge
- *Knowing how*, meaning, the skills the abilities and experiences
- *Knowing how to be*, that is, the set of behaviors, attitudes and lifestyle.

That's why we talk about vocational and human education for a better future where teachers face the challenges of contemporary society and students develop the foundation for a life project.

A. The Mission of Universities in the European Context

In 2004 was born the European University of Rome as a forum for the exchange and discussion of ideas and experience through teaching and research at the highest university level as well as developing interdisciplinary research programs confronting contemporary European society and integral formation.

The notion of Europe has changed in the past years. The very idea of Europe is questioned from different perspectives. The question of values should be at the center of the debate on the identity of our European Community and the integration of all member states.

The issues Europe and the world face today are well known: war, climate change and the loss of biodiversity, shifting geopolitical constellations, security concerns, human rights, migration, the rapid advancement of digital technologies, and the crisis of democracy itself.

These challenges are not isolated, but interconnected and global. These issues would require transnational cooperation and innovative models for generating public value. This includes a much closer collaboration between politics, administration, academy, citizens, business, and civil society. The University has the value of data and research that underlies any political orientation that wants to come to terms with reality and devote itself to the true good of society.

B. Some principles about the goals of the Universities.

Perhaps we have more questions than answers:

- What ethical considerations and what kind of academics, teachers, leaders, professionals, should we train, and what skills do they need in a complex and fast-changing world?
- How can we educate them not just with knowledge, but also with the critical thinking, skills and adaptability required to navigate ongoing transformations and shape the future?

In this difficult situation, universities play an instrumental role by always helping to think through each topic from the causes. The question is: what place does the human being occupy in all this reflection. We need science to find meaning in our actions, and common sense to find balance in our global development.

At this historic moment, our continent needs – more than ever before in its history – a place of reflection, research and exploration to face existential and essential questions. There is Innovation only if we speak about integral innovation: humanistic and technological related to social sciences.

1. *Principles related to the traditional mission of the Universities: research, teaching and training.*

The crucial contribution of the social sciences and humanities is to provide solid interpretations of knowledge and collective sense-making. Our work should be driven by a strong ethos rooted in a desire to contribute to what is relevant to our lives and to future generations¹.

Research, teaching and training promoting the values and soft skills that help every human being to find his own identity and the most important thing, the way to participate to promote the common good for the good of the entire community. We should focus on political institutions, economy, well-being, justice, solidarity and equity. We could embrace our mission to rethink and deepen the European project, without falling into the trap of eurocentrism, but assuming Europe's responsibility within and towards the world rediscovering his soul

We could do this developing transversal themes that address complex, interconnected challenges. Research, teaching and training promoting the values and soft skills that help every human being to find his own identity and the most important thing, the way to participate in a very active way to promote the common good for the good of the entire community thanks to the strength and potential of knowledge.

A. *From technological to systemic humanistic and social innovation*

Innovation approaches are broadening to include technological, social and economic innovation in common agendas. Universities have a central role to play here due to the breadth and depth of their research and education agendas. Businesses, governmental agencies and universities are looking for systemic approaches to pressing challenges, often linked to topics

¹ Cfr. <https://idi-international.org/comitato-scientifico/>.

like digitalization and sustainable development, that can only be addressed with multiple actors' perspectives. Let's see some concrete examples:

B. *Integral Ecology - ESG Principles: Related to Environment, Quality of life and sustainability*

Responsible investment and ESG are the third way to the economic and social future. It is a first step but we will still have to do a lot to move from theory to practice by always identifying and promoting operational models to be replicated and scaled up².

C. *Values Metrics: Development of novel metrics and indicators*

A critical outcome of this project will be the development of innovative metrics and indicators to evaluate the social impact of sustainable finance³:

- *Development instead of infinite growth*: The word development also includes the concept of constant improvement where merit and effort should always be rewarded. On the other hand, development should be integral and in accordance with the principle of the common good to ensure the principles of justice and peace as well.
- *Infinite development in a limited system of resources is impossible*. The earth is a finite system of resources. If we want to understand the future, we have to look at the principle of common good. This is the great mission and true vocation of the university⁴.

D. *Start Up and Spin off*

Connective leadership and Youth. We should continue to develop long-term intellectual agendas while engaging more fully in public discussions. We could actively tap into the potential offered by (traditional and

² Cfr. <https://www.uer.it/economia/postlaurea/master-gestione-della-previdenza-pubblica-e-complementare/>.

³ Cfr. <https://www.valuesmetrics.org/>.

⁴ Cfr. <https://core-values.org/>.

new) media to enhance our impact, without compromising our intellectual rigor. The promotion of best practice with the new generation of entrepreneurs. The development of *Startup at the Universities* is an important challenge for this new generation promoting a network of talents among universities⁵.

The development of *Startup at the Universities* is an important challenge for this new generation. The mission of the University is to spread entrepreneurial culture, create growth and training opportunities for students, and foster a network of talents among universities, both locally and internationally.

E. Sme Development

The roll of universities with a positive interaction with Sme and the territories. Knowledge exchange to innovation systems. In today's innovation ecosystem, universities are no longer just centers for learning but to promote and lead concrete business activities⁶.

Universities play a vital role in bridging academic theory and entrepreneurial practice for three main reasons:

- They bring solutions, services, and products developed in classrooms and labs to the market.
- They create employment opportunities in developing or restructuring sectors.
- They support students and recent graduates in their first entrepreneurial experiences by providing unique tools and opportunities.

F. AI and Integral development: Ethical approach

Going beyond the focus on economic growth, it includes social innovation and the flow of knowledge across organizations as vital factors for effective social and cultural innovation. The roll of human intelligence and the promotion of algorithms of best practice. *The key is to look not for infinite growth but gradual development.*

⁵ Cfr. <https://www.enactusitaly.org/>.

⁶ Cfr. <https://www.smeconnect.eu/working-groups/emerging-markets/>.

G. *Social development promoting culture and Art (digital dimension)*

Every professor should be a co-creator of knowledge and ideas that continuously enrich our thinking and our learning starting from the historical roots⁷.

We can become a leading European hub to co-create sustainable models of society. We can reinforce our role as an open and reflexive community at the critical intersection of academia, politics, and society, bringing together worlds which are too often separate.

H. *European Network of Universities - From individual to collaborative and interdisciplinary innovation (E-Cost EUROPEAN Cooperation in Science and Technology)*

A collaborative interdisciplinary research and development become a necessity. External stakeholders find the university's most important role in innovation having the ability "to incubate interdisciplinary research" and to educate interdisciplinary thinking⁸.

I. *Mobility and Erasmus Programs*

In the crisis of values and educational poverty that is enveloping our countries, the answer lies in educating youth. The international approach and the social integration are the key. From Emotional Intelligence to Cross cultural intelligence offering innovative English programs of formation⁹.

2. *An example of best practice to promote Humanistic Scientific approach*

By offering a comprehensive method to recognize and measure the social impact of humanistic knowledge generated by university experts. This will involve:

⁷ Cfr. <https://core-values.org/>.

⁸ Cfr. <https://e-services.cost.eu/>.

⁹ Cfr. <https://www.uer.it/internazionale/>.

- *Multi-stakeholder analysis*: We will engage in reflective discussions involving multiple stakeholders to examine the relevance and adequacy of university functions and missions in addressing today's societal challenges. This approach will provide, for the first time, an in-depth analysis of the relationship between recent social challenges and the humanities' responses.
- *Response to EU priorities*: The framework will address the European Council call (November 2023) for universities to actively promote common human values. We will explore how these values can be advanced by humanities experts and, potentially, by professionals from other scientific disciplines.
- *Broader understanding of knowledge transfer*: Traditional measures of university knowledge transfer, such as patents, technological innovations, and spin-offs, are limiting, particularly in the context of the humanities. This project will redefine the concept of knowledge transfer, recognizing the broader spectrum of societal contributions made by humanities research.
- *Analysis of European national legislation*: For the first time, we will conduct a thorough analysis and compilation of European national legislation related to the evaluation of humanities. This will enhance our understanding of the legal frameworks and how they influence humanities research.
- *Conceptualization and novel research areas*: Progress will be made in conceptualizing under-researched areas such as the "third mission" of universities, the social impact of the humanities, and specific actions for knowledge transfer in the humanities. We will also investigate how European values like sustainability, gender equality, and social inclusion are integrated into these areas, providing new insights.
- *Engagement with research evaluation initiatives*: We will actively participate in ongoing discussions within research evaluation forums such as the Leiden Manifesto, DORA, and CoARA. By inviting representatives from these forums to our seminars, we will share our progress and incorporate their feedback, ensuring alignment with the latest standards and best practices.

3. *Some EU. PROGRAMS to promote Synergies with international initiatives*

- *European Values Study*¹⁰.
- *European Commission: EU policies and documentation*: An interaction with the European Union's policies and documents related to humanistic knowledge and innovation¹¹.
- *International humanistic management Association* to incorporate best practices in the management and valuation of humanistic knowledge¹².
- *Harvard's Institute for quantitative social science – The Human flourishing Program*. This program's comprehensive approach to measuring human well-being will inform about the impact of the humanities on society¹³.
- *Birmingham Conferences on values education*: Insights from these conferences will be critical in shaping our understanding of how humanities education and its impact can be evaluated¹⁴.
- *Humanistic leadership Academy*: Partnering with this academy will allow us to integrate leadership principles into our framework, fostering a holistic approach to evaluating the humanities' impact¹⁵.
- *European Alliance for Social Sciences and Humanities (EASSH)*: EASSH's advocacy for the inclusion of social sciences and humanities in Horizon Europe provides a strategic alignment for our project. Their ongoing dialogue with EU institutions will support our efforts to embed our framework within broader policy discussions¹⁶.
- *HEInnovate – Innovation in higher education*: Utilizing Heinno-vate's tools and resources, our network will adopt innovative approaches to education and impact measurement, ensuring our framework remains cutting-edge¹⁷.

¹⁰ Cfr. <https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu/about-evs/national-partners/>.

¹¹ Cfr. <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=22>.

¹² Cfr. <https://humanisticmanagement.international/>.

¹³ Cfr. <https://hfh.fas.harvard.edu/>.

¹⁴ Cfr. <https://www.conferenceineurope.org/birmingham.php>.

¹⁵ Cfr. <https://humanisticleadershipacademy.org/about/#academy-background>.

¹⁶ Cfr. <https://eassh.eu/>.

¹⁷ Cfr. <https://heinnovate.eu/en>.

- *UNESCO's MOST Programme*: Our interaction with the Management of Social Transformations (MOST) programme has confirmed their interest in our initiative. Their support will enhance our global outreach and ensure that our framework aligns with international standards for social impact assessment¹⁸.

4. *Plans for active stakeholder engagement – Permanent European Policy Observatory*

Given the above considerations, the need for the establishment of a Permanent Observatory on European Policies with the aim of monitoring and helping to disseminate information, promote constructive dialogue between EBU and EU institutions is highlighted. The European University of Rome is a guarantor of this thinking by establishing it at the Center for Integral Training-CeF.

This initiative becomes an effective means to help students in their Integrative Training and value orientation to professions in a European horizon of exchanges and future perspectives especially in the fields of business, personal services, institutions, and Associations and the Third Sector, Promoting certain aspects such as:

- *Immersive international workshops*: These dynamic events will not only facilitate dialogue but also include hands-on sessions where stakeholders can co-create solutions, ensuring their direct input shapes the project outcomes. As for example of a networking activity.
- *Interactive working groups*: Stakeholders will play active roles in specialized working groups, collaborating closely on different project facets, fostering deep, interdisciplinary national collaboration, being the National Young Entrepreneurs Observatory a very positive best practice.
- *Advisory think tanks*: We will establish think tanks made up of visionary stakeholders who will provide strategic insight. “Itinerari Previdenziali” as Study Center is a positive best practice.
- *Real-time feedback mechanisms*: Using different means we will implement real-time feedback tools that allow stakeholders to continuously provide ideas and comments, ensuring that our framework

¹⁸ Cfr. <https://www.unesco.org/en/management-social-transformations-most-programme>

evolves dynamically. The Sme Italian as “Capitalimpresa” is a best practice.

- *Interdisciplinary panels:* To enrich our discussions and increase the range of perspectives, panels will include participants from various disciplines. This will ensure a holistic approach to each topic, embracing complexity and multiple viewpoints.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Creating successful environments, initiatives, and programs within or in synergy with universities is vital for helping students and recent graduates enter the world of entrepreneurship equipped with all the necessary tools for success. These programs continue the education that students receive, ensuring that the seeds of ideas planted in academic settings blossom into enterprises that strengthen and enhance the broader ecosystem of entrepreneurship and innovation worldwide.

- To communicate our work and our mission with an efficient interaction with the local area through training and interaction with social policies We should continue to develop long-term intellectual agendas while engaging more fully in public discussions. We could actively tap into the potential offered by (traditional and new) media to enhance our impact, without compromising our intellectual rigor. In the crisis of values and educational poverty that is enveloping our country, the answer lies in educating youth. Vocational Training: it is pivotal point of education and is fundamental and useful for the country. But in order for vocational training to become even more effective in the educational life of the country, new changes and a more effective commitment to active labor policies are needed to follow up both training and job placement and thus a more proactive relationship with businesses.
- The true mission of the University is to become a beacon and a landmark anchored on the constant search for truth, thanks to its method related to the study of data and neutrality to the pursuit of the common good.
- The University is a source of awareness for every generation with special attention to young people who are beginning their responsible inclusion in society and need guidance and support.

- The University should promote integral formation and Leadership formation programs oriented to social responsibility as a mission and meaning of life for the good of social and personal life.
- We must move from a society based only on competitiveness to a society based on greater solidarity. The defense of the common home. And that is why true innovation must be above all humanistic in order to live a life respecting the dignity of the human being in every context and culture.
- The humanistic approach promotes vocational and human education for a better future where teachers face the challenges of contemporary society and students develop the foundation for a life project.
- The mission of the Universities is to develop social impact as a good way to promote integral social development. The word development also includes the concept of constant improvement where merit and effort should always be rewarded. On the other hand, development should be integral and in accordance with the principle of the common good to ensure the principles of justice and peace as well.
- Every professor should be a co-creator of knowledge and ideas that continuously enrich our thinking and our learning. We can become a leading European hub to co-create sustainable models of society. We can reinforce our role as an open and reflexive community at the critical intersection of academia, politics, and society, bringing together worlds which are too often separate.
- From these premises, we can say that the University is a source of hope, and certainly we should be proud to be part of an academic community if it is oriented in this direction. *Aware that knowledge without action is a great waste.*

SONIC AND MUSICAL CITIZENSHIP IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETIES

SARA NAVARRO LALANDA

Abstract

Music holds significant potential as a tool to address contemporary civil, social, intercultural, digital, and environmental challenges. Building on a theoretical framework that traces the historical evolution of civic rights and duties through a multi-dimensional model of citizenship, the study explores how sound management and musical practice contribute to the development of cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioural competencies essential for critical and engaged civic participation. Employing a grounded theory methodology, based on the analysis of case studies and supranational reports, the research adopts a transdisciplinary perspective to highlight the importance of integrating participatory acoustic design and sound and music literacy into urban planning, educational processes, and public policies. This approach promotes a model of active, inclusive, and sustainable citizenship, where sound and music function as catalysts for social transformation.

Keywords: citizenship, music, sound, sustainability, contemporary society

Introduction

The growing global interconnectivity and the complexity of contemporary challenges—such as climate change, socioeconomic inequalities, and geopolitical conflicts—have led to a reconfiguration of the concept of citizenship. The United Nations has emphasized the need to promote international cooperation and intercultural understanding as fundamental pillars for sustainability and global stability, highlighting culture and social practices as key elements in the development of a citizenship committed

to social justice and human rights.¹ Within this framework, UNESCO has advanced the concept of global citizenship, understood as a model that transcends national borders and situates individuals within a network of interdependencies, involving shared responsibilities and the need for specific competencies to operate in an increasingly complex and interconnected world, both in physical and digital environments.²

From a theoretical perspective, the concept of citizenship has undergone a historical evolution, transitioning from a narrowly defined notion focused on political participation in the classical polis to a more expansive model that integrates social, economic, and cultural dimensions. The notion of social citizenship, articulated by Marshall,³ expanded the traditional framework by including fundamental rights such as education and economic security. Later, the rise of multicultural citizenship in the 20th century introduced the recognition of diversity as a central axis of civic identity.⁴ Today, the development of global citizenship responds to the need to integrate new dimensions—such as ecological awareness, transnational ethics, and global cooperation—which reflect the interdependence of societies, and the shared challenges faced at the global level. This transformation has been accelerated by digitalization and the proliferation of new technologies, which have reshaped the ways in which civic rights and responsibilities are exercised, enabling novel forms of participation, education, and activism within digital spaces.⁵

In this context, global citizenship is not limited to legal or political dimensions but encompasses cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioural competencies that enable individuals to interact critically and reflectively in diverse settings.⁶ The cognitive dimension relates to knowledge of global structures, international systems, and the interdependence of social

¹ ORGANIZZAZIONE DELLE NAZIONI UNITE, *Trasformare il nostro mondo: l'Agenda 2030 per lo sviluppo sostenibile*, Nazioni Unite, New York 2015, pp. 5 ss.

² UNESCO, *Global Citizenship Education: Preparing Learners for the Challenges of the Twenty-first Century*, UNESCO, Paris 2014, pp. 12-18.

³ T.H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1950, pp. 10 ss.

⁴ W. Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1995, pp. 1-5.

⁵ UNESCO, *Education for Sustainable Development Goals: Learning Objectives*, UNESCO, Paris 2017, pp. 7 ss.

⁶ F. Reimers, *Empowering Students to Improve the World in Sixty Lessons: Version 1.0*, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, Boston 2017, pp. 15 ss.

phenomena; the socio-emotional dimension involves empathy, awareness of diversity, and respect for human rights; while the behavioural dimension refers to the capacity for active participation and commitment to sustainability, equity, and conflict resolution.⁷ Moreover, in the digital age, these dimensions extend into virtual environments, where social networks, educational platforms, and global communication tools have enhanced new forms of civic interaction, facilitating access to knowledge and enabling real-time coordination of social change movements.⁸

Within this framework, music emerges as an effective tool for the development of competencies associated with global citizenship. As a socio-cultural phenomenon, it serves as a transnational means of communication that transcends linguistic barriers and facilitates intercultural dialogue.⁹ Its impact extends beyond the aesthetic domain, influencing the cognitive dimension through the exploration of diverse musical traditions, the socio-emotional dimension through collective experience and identity expression, and the behavioural dimension through its connection to processes of social transformation and activism.¹⁰

Closely linked to these processes, the development of the digital environment has granted music renewed centrality in the construction of global networks of cooperation, enabling the immediate dissemination of cultural and political messages through streaming platforms, social media, and collaborative online spaces. The digitalization of music has not only broadened access to cultural expressions from various regions of the world but has also fostered the emergence of a transnational artistic space that reinforces a sense of interconnectedness and global belonging. In this context, the digital sphere does not merely amplify the reach of music; it transforms it into an interactive and participatory resource for civic engagement, cultural exchange, and the collective construction of inclusive and sustainable futures.¹¹

⁷ UNESCO, *Global Citizenship Education: Topics and Learning Objectives*, UNESCO, Paris 2015.

⁸ H. Rheingold, *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution*, Perseus, Cambridge MA 2002, pp. 109-124.

⁹ C. SMALL, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown 1998, pp. 9 ss.

¹⁰ L. HIGGINS, *Community Music: In Theory and in Practice*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2012, pp. 45-63.

¹¹ M. CASTELLS, *Communication Power*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2009, pp. 387 ss.

1. *Multidimensional citizenship*

In response to the need for a model of multidimensional citizenship that aligns with the dynamics of an ever-evolving world, this approach—structured around five interrelated dimensions and developed to foster a global culture in educational contexts—has been adopted.¹² This model is grounded in an evolutionary perspective, examining the historical progression of rights and responsibilities as they have been shaped and expanded over time.

Table 1. - *Dimensions of Global Citizenship*

Dimensions of Citizenship	Responsible civil citizenship
	Social and equity-based citizenship
	Intercultural citizenship
	Digital citizenship
	Sustainable citizenship

Source: Own elaboration based on Navarro Lalanda, 2022

First, we refer to responsible civil citizenship, which emerges from the recognition and exercise of fundamental individual rights and duties within society. This dimension evolves into social and equity-based citizenship, which ensures access to and protection of essential rights in areas such as health, education, employment, housing, and leisure. The third level of development corresponds to intercultural citizenship, which emphasizes interaction and recognition of others in multicultural contexts, promoting coexistence in diverse societies. In recent decades, this interaction has acquired a new dimension through the development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), giving rise to digital citizenship, which expands spaces for participation and redefines access to knowledge, communication, and global activism. Finally, in response to the emerging challenges of contemporary society, the international community adopted the 2030 Agenda for

¹² S. NAVARRO LALANDA, *Educando ciudadanos del mundo. Estudio comparado de la formación, prácticas y percepciones en España e Italia para la construcción de un modelo en educación global*, PhD thesis, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Madrid 2022.

Sustainable Development in 2015, with the aim of promoting an inclusive development model that is environmentally respectful and balanced both economically and socially. This perspective is integrated into the proposed model through sustainable citizenship, which acknowledges the interdependence of human actions and their global impact, fostering collective responsibility in the construction of a more equitable and sustainable future.

These dimensions not only support adaptation to contemporary challenges but also enhance citizens’ capacity to act ethically, critically, and responsibly within their communities and on a global scale. In this sense, the model seeks to promote, through education, a form of citizenship that is responsible on a personal, social, and environmental level—across both physical and digital environments.

Table 2. - Dimensions of Global Citizenship and Education

Responsible Civil Citizenship	
• Education in rights, duties, and freedoms	
Citizenship of Well-being, Social Justice, and Equity	
• Education for health, well-being, equality, and social justice	
Intercultural Citizenship	
• Intercultural education and culture of peace	
Digital, Critical, and Participatory Citizenship	
• Digital citizenship education and critical literacy	
Sustainable Citizenship	
• Environmental education and sustainable development	

Source: Own elaboration based on Navarro Lalanda, 2022

As a result, responsible civil citizens form the foundation of this model, ensuring the full exercise of fundamental rights, duties, and freedoms across all spheres of social life. This level of citizenship is expressed through democratic participation, respect for the legal framework, and commitment to the common good.

Building upon this foundation, citizens who advocate for social justice and equity promote a model of well-being that is both personal and col-

lective. Their actions are oriented toward the fair redistribution of wealth and equitable access to fundamental social rights, with the aim of fostering a more inclusive and cohesive society.

In the realm of cultural diversity, intercultural citizens play a key role in promoting dialogue and interaction with others, cultivating sensitivity and respect for differences. This form of citizenship is essential for fostering a global culture of peace, as the recognition and appreciation of diversity are fundamental to harmonious coexistence.

With the advancement of technology and the digitalization of everyday life, critical digital citizens emerge—those who use digital information and communication platforms in an ethical, reflective, and responsible manner. This form of citizenship involves the capacity to critically evaluate information, interpret global transformations, and actively participate in decision-making through digital environments.

Finally, world citizens committed to sustainability represent the ecological and ethical evolution of global citizenship. These individuals are aware of their role within the community and the world, understanding the interdependence of their actions in relation to the environment, social justice, and global and economic well-being. Their commitment is focused on making responsible decisions based on principles of sustainability and intergenerational equity.

2. *Music as a Catalyst for the Development of Citizenship Dimensions*

The concept of global citizenship has evolved in recent decades as a response to the growing interdependence among societies, the globalization of human rights, and the need to promote values such as cooperation, sustainability, and social justice.¹³ In this context, music has emerged as a powerful tool for fostering key competencies of global citizenship, directly contributing to the development of the five dimensions outlined in the previous section. These dimensions not only embody an ethical and participatory vision of citizenship but also highlight the transformative role of music in shaping values, constructing identities, and enabling collective action.¹⁴

¹³ F. REIMERS, *op. cit.*, pp. 19 ss.

¹⁴ L. HIGGINS, *op. cit.*, pp. 52 ss.

In the following sections, we will explore the different dimensions of citizenship, considering the key aspects related to sonic and musical citizenship, as well as the opportunities that education can offer in each of these areas.¹⁵

2.1 Sound, Music, and the Construction of Responsible Civil Citizenship

Civil citizenship involves the conscious exercise of rights and duties within the community, promoting democratic participation and a commitment to social justice.¹⁶ From this perspective, the construction of responsible civil citizenship requires not only knowledge of legal and institutional frameworks, but also the development of an ethical and social awareness oriented toward justice, equity, and solidarity.

Within this framework, sound acquires a fundamental civic dimension in everyday life, particularly in densely populated urban environments. The tension between the freedom of sonic expression and the right to rest highlights how citizenship is constantly negotiated in relation to the soundscape, the use of space, and shared time. Sound management—understood as the set of practices, regulations, and behaviours related to the production, control, and coexistence with sound in public and private spaces—is closely linked to civil citizenship, as it articulates individual rights with collective responsibilities. This management calls for awareness of the impact of the acoustic environment on health, coexistence, and urban equity, making sound a key element in contemporary civic experience.

Alongside this, music emerges as a specific form of sonic expression with strong symbolic, identity-building, and transformative potential. Throughout contemporary history, music has played a prominent role in social mobilization and in the construction of critical subjectivities. Iconic examples such as

¹⁵ S. NAVARRO LALANDA, Competences in Global Citizenship Education: From the Indications of the Italian National Curriculum to the Initial Teacher Training of Pre-school and Primary Education, in *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference of the Journal Scuola Democratica Reinventing education, Volume I. Citizenship, Work and The Global Age*, vol. I, Associazione “Per Scuola Democratica”, 2021, pp. 549-563; S. NAVARRO LALANDA, Creatividad y educación para el desarrollo y ciudadanía global en los currículos españoles de educación obligatoria, in «Creatividad y sociedad: revista de la Asociación para la Creatividad», n. 34, 2021, pp. 81-110; S. NAVARRO LALANDA, *Global Competencies and Music Education: Contributions to an Integral Learning Development*, in *Conference Proceedings CIVAE 2025: 7th Interdisciplinary and Virtual Conference on Arts in Education*, MusicoGuía, 2025, pp. 16-21.

¹⁶ T.H. MARSHALL, *op. cit.*, pp. 10 ss.

We Shall Overcome, adopted as an anthem by the U.S. civil rights movement, or *Give Peace a Chance*, by John Lennon, which became a transnational symbol of pacifism during the Vietnam War, illustrate how music can convey demands for social change and strengthen civic awareness.¹⁷ Beyond its aesthetic dimension, music articulates collective emotions, identity narratives, and forms of symbolic resistance. It can be a powerful tool to foster community cohesion and expression, although it may also generate tensions when it emerges in shared spaces without consensus.

From an educational standpoint, both sound and music offer valuable opportunities for the development of critical and participatory civil citizenship. Various studies have highlighted that reflecting on the urban soundscape can promote respect for the diversity of spatial uses and foster democratic consensus in the face of sound-related conflicts. At the same time, musical practice in collective contexts fosters critical thinking, social sensitivity, and democratic deliberation. Participating in musical experiences, both formal and informal, allows individuals to explore social issues, express themselves individually in dialogue with others, and reflect on values such as justice, equality, and peaceful coexistence.¹⁸

Ultimately, an educational approach to sound and music not only enriches the aesthetic or technical experience but also contributes to the formation of a mature civil citizenship, aware of the boundaries between the private and the public, between individual rights and collective well-being. In this sense, the sonic environment and musical creation become pedagogical and political tools for promoting democratic, inclusive, and solidaristic coexistence.

2.2 Sound and Musical Practices in the Promotion of Social Justice and Community Well-being

Inadequate sound management, such as continuous exposure to urban noise, can seriously impact physical and mental health, raising significant concerns in terms of social justice and environmental well-being. The World Health Organization guidelines on environmental noise emphasize

¹⁷ R. EYERMAN - A. JAMISON, *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, pp. 41-63; J. LENNON, *Give Peace a Chance* [canzone], Apple Records, London 1969.

¹⁸ J. O'FLYNN, *Music education and social capital: An exploration*, in *Sociology and Music Education*, a cura di R. Wright, Routledge, London 2010, pp. 17-38.

that long-term exposure leading to annoyance and sleep disturbance are critical public health indicators.¹⁹ According to the WHO, health is not merely defined as the absence of disease, but as a complete state of physical, mental, and social well-being.²⁰ In this regard, the absence of noise-related disturbances—both during the day and at night—is essential for ensuring quality of life and the protection of human health.

Daytime disturbances, such as the interruption of everyday activities, reduced concentration capacity, or chronic stress, produce harmful effects that add to those associated with insufficient rest. These annoyances have also been linked to cardiovascular and metabolic disorders.²¹ Data collected by the European Environment Agency,²² summarized in the table below, reflect the impact of noise pollution on public health across Europe, with over 12,000 premature deaths annually and millions of people affected by high levels of annoyance or sleep disruption.

Table 3. - *Impact of Environmental Noise on Health in Europe*

Indicator	Affected individuals (approx.)
Premature deaths	12,100 annually
New cases of ischemic heart disease	48,000 annually
People experiencing high chronic annoyance (daytime)	21,868,500
People experiencing high sleep disturbance (nighttime)	6,476,600
Children with learning difficulties due to aircraft noise	12,400

Source: *Own elaboration based on EEA Report, 2020: 51.*

¹⁹ WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, *Environmental Noise Guidelines for the European Region*, WHO Regional Office for Europe, Copenhagen 2018, pp. 14 ss.

²⁰ WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (International Health Conference), *Constitution of the World Health Organization*, WHO, New York 2002 (adopted 22 July 1946, entered into force 7 April 1948), art. 1.

²¹ C. ERIKSSON, G. PERSHAGEN & M. NILSSON, Biological mechanisms related to cardiovascular and metabolic effects by environmental noise, in *Noise and Health*, vol. XX, 2018, pp. 123-129.

²² EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENT AGENCY, *Environmental noise in Europe – 2020*, EEA Report No. 22/2019, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg 2020, pp. 51 ss.

Legislation and public policy play a fundamental role in the regulation of urban noise. Directive 2002/49/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council establishes a common framework for assessing and managing environmental noise levels in the Member States of the European Union. It mandates the creation of noise maps and specific action plans aimed at reducing exposure in critical areas. The WHO guidelines (Table 4) provide differentiated reference values for road, rail, air, and recreational noise, setting thresholds that should not be exceeded to prevent health risks. Reducing exposure is particularly critical in vulnerable environments such as hospitals, schools, and residential areas.

Table 4. - WHO Guidelines on Environmental Noise

Noise source	Guideline value (Lden*)	Night value (Lnight**)
Road traffic	53 dB	45 dB
Railway traffic	54 dB	44 dB
Aircraft noise	45 dB	40 dB
Wind turbine noise	45 dB	—
Recreational noise	70 dB (peak level)	—

Source: Own elaboration based on WHO (2018). Note: Lden*: Day-evening-night average sound level. Lnight*: Average sound level during the night.

In this context, sound is not merely a technical or public health issue—it is also a civic matter. The way individuals produce and experience sound in shared spaces reflects relationships of power, coexistence, and responsibility. This became especially evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when music played from balconies, terraces, or windows became a symbolically charged act aimed at reinforcing neighbourhood solidarity in the face of isolation.²³ However, in everyday situations, these same practices may be perceived as intrusive or disruptive, prompting regulatory interventions intended to balance personal enjoyment with collective well-being.

From this perspective, there is a growing need to develop a notion of acoustic citizenship (Labelle, 2010),²⁴ understood as the capacity of indi-

²³ P. ALVAREZ-CUEVA, *Music to face the lockdown: An analysis of Covid 19 music narratives on individual and social well-being*, in «Social Inclusion», 10(2), 2022, pp. 6-18.

²⁴ B. LABELLE, *Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture and Everyday Life*, Continuum, London–New York 2010, pp. 18 ss.

viduals to engage in and regulate their sonic practices with social responsibility. This approach promotes respect for the shared auditory environment, encourages active listening, and supports conscious participation in shaping the urban soundscape. Within this framework, acoustic literacy seeks to raise public awareness of the effects of sound and noise on health, social life, and overall well-being.

In parallel, music has proven to be an effective tool for promoting social justice and enhancing community well-being. Programs such as *El Sistema* in Venezuela have demonstrated the potential of music education to reduce poverty, foster inclusion, and provide young people in vulnerable situations with tools for personal and collective development.²⁵ Initiatives like *Musicians Without Borders* have used music as a means of healing and social cohesion in communities affected by conflict, facilitating resilience and emotional reconstruction.²⁶

These cases illustrate how music education not only strengthens creativity and personal expression but also acts as a mechanism for social transformation, building connections, rebuilding community networks, and creating spaces for dialogue. As a result, both sound and music—viewed from a critical educational perspective—offer valuable opportunities for fostering a form of citizenship committed to environmental care, equity, and democratic life.

2.3 Interculturality, Sound, and Music: A Bridge for Global Dialogue

Intercultural citizenship entails the recognition, appreciation, and respect for cultural diversity, promoting an attitude of openness toward other identities and traditions in an increasingly plural global context.²⁷ This conception requires policies, practices, and perspectives that are sensitive to cultural plurality, including in relation to the sound environment and the collective uses of public space.

In contemporary urban contexts, the soundscape reflects and expresses the cultural diversity of those who inhabit the city. Public music, cultural

²⁵ T. TUNSTALL, *Changing Lives: Gustavo Dudamel, El Sistema, and the Transformative Power of Music*, W. W. Norton, New York 2012, pp. 45 ss.

²⁶ M. PAVLICEVIC - G. ANSDELL (Ed.), *Community Music Therapy*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London 2004, pp. 79 ss.

²⁷ J.A. BANKS (Ed.), *Diversity and Citizenship Education: Global Perspectives*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco 2008, pp. 11 ss.

celebrations, marketplaces, religious practices, and artistic sound expressions shape a dynamic and multicultural acoustic environment. Managing this soundscape without excluding minority expressions requires an intercultural perspective—one that values diversity without imposing uniformity in the sound.

From a more strategic perspective, the soundscape also has the potential to differentiate a city in terms of branding and global competitiveness. Cities that effectively manage their sonic identities can strengthen their position in the global economy by creating a unique brand that attracts both visitors and residents.²⁸ Initiatives such as the creation of “sound zones,” where natural sounds are preserved or amplified, or the implementation of creative sound policies in culturally distinctive neighbourhoods, can contribute to making a city stand out by reinforcing its uniqueness and appeal.

Within this same framework, music emerges as a privileged tool for intercultural encounter. As a symbolic and affective language, music facilitates dialogue between communities, fostering mutual understanding, recognition of otherness, and intercultural learning.²⁹ A prominent example is the *West-Eastern Divan Orchestra*, founded by Daniel Barenboim and Edward Said, which brings together Israeli and Palestinian musicians in an artistic project that seeks reconciliation and mutual respect through collective creation.³⁰

In the field of education, the inclusion of musical repertoires from various cultures in curricula enables students to develop a deeper awareness of the richness of sound traditions, their connection to collective identity, and their potential to generate forms of plural coexistence. This practice not only enriches the artistic experience but also strengthens essential intercultural competencies in socially diverse contexts.

Together, urban sound and music represent key dimensions in the development of active intercultural citizenship, capable of embracing difference, promoting mutual respect, and building bridges of dialogue in a global and interconnected world.

²⁸ G. BLOUSTIEN, M. PETERS & S. LUCKMAN (a cura di), *Sonic synergies: Music, technology, community, identity*, Routledge, 2017.

²⁹ H. SCHIPPERS, *Facing the Music: Shaping Music Education from a Global Perspective*, Oxford University Press, Oxford-New York 2010, pp. 63 ss.

³⁰ D. BARENBOIM–E. SAID, *Parallels and Paradoxes: Explorations in Music and Society*, Pantheon Books, New York 2002, pp. 86 ss.

2.4 Critical Digital Citizenship in the Technological Era: Between Urban Sound and Global Music

Technological transformations are currently reshaping both the acoustic experience of cities and the ways in which cultural participation is enacted. In urban contexts, numerous initiatives have incorporated innovative technologies to address the challenges associated with noise pollution and quality of life. Across Europe, several cities have begun using real-time acoustic sensors to monitor noise levels and tailor sound policies to the specific social dynamics of each territory. This system enables the creation of detailed acoustic maps that identify critical areas and inform targeted interventions.

A complementary strategy is acoustic modelling, which simulates sound propagation in various urban environments. Through tools such as CADNA or Sound PLAN, planners can anticipate the effects of noise and evaluate the effectiveness of mitigation measures such as acoustic barriers or infrastructure redesign.³¹ The use of innovative acoustic materials, such as sound-absorbing panels and noise-insulating solutions, is also contributing to the enhancement of the sonic environment in buildings, parks, and public spaces.³²

Urban noise control further involves structural interventions. Acoustic zoning, which allocates human activities according to their sonic impact, is an effective measure to protect sensitive residential areas. Additionally, the promotion of public transportation, the adoption of electric vehicles, and the use of sound-absorbing pavements significantly reduce traffic-related noise pollution.³³

Within this framework, some cities have developed tranquillity zones, such as the “quiet areas” in London’s urban parks, which aim to provide

³¹ A.M. PETROVICI, J. L. CUETO, R. GEY, F. NEDEFF, R. HERNANDEZ, C. TOMOZEI & E. MOSNEGUTU, *Optimization of Some Alternatives to Noise Barriers as Noise Mitigation Measures on Major Roads in Europe. Case Study of a Highway in Spain*, in «Environmental Engineering & Management Journal» (EEMJ), 15(7), 2016, pp. 1617-1628.

³² M. PEDROSO, J. DE BRITO & J. D. SILVESTRE, *Characterization of eco-efficient acoustic insulation materials (traditional and innovative)*, in «Construction and Building Materials», 140, 2017, pp. 221-228.

³³ L. F. OW - S. GHOSH, *Urban cities and road traffic noise: Reduction through vegetation*, in «Applied Acoustics», 120, 2017, pp. 15-20.

peaceful spaces amid metropolitan noise.³⁴ Similarly, policies such as traffic restrictions in historic centres, implemented in cities like Amsterdam, have proven effective both in enhancing quality of life and in managing the urban soundscape responsibly.³⁵ Building on these efforts to rethink the urban acoustic environment, the integration of natural sounds and ambient music into public spaces—whether through algorithms or curated recordings—represents an emerging dimension of urban acoustic design. These practices, aligned with the concept of the *smart city*, seek to enrich citizens' everyday experiences by balancing the functional demands of the city with the sonic well-being of its inhabitants.

In parallel, digital technologies are redefining the ways in which music is accessed, produced, and disseminated, creating a new environment for cultural participation and the exercise of critical digital citizenship. Digitalization has transformed musical experience by expanding access to global repertoires, facilitating collaborative creation, and empowering identity expression.³⁶ Initiatives such as *Playing for Change* exemplify how technological platforms can connect artists from different countries to promote values of cooperation, justice, and cultural diversity.³⁷

However, this expansion of access also entails new challenges. Overexposure to musical content demands media literacy, as well as the development of critical thinking to discern authenticity, implicit discourses, and the sociocultural impact of digital messages.³⁸ In this regard, music education in digital environments should not be limited to technical dimensions; rather, it should aim to form ethically aware citizens capable of using technology to foster positive societal transformations.³⁹

³⁴ DEFRA, *Noise Action Plan: Agglomerations*, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, London 2019.

³⁵ J. GEHL, *Cities for People*, Island Press, Washington D.C. 2010, pp. 112 ss.

³⁶ M. CASTELLS, *Communication Power*, Oxford University Press, Oxford–New York 2009, pp. 54 ss.

³⁷ PLAYING FOR CHANGE FOUNDATION, available at <<https://www.playingforchange.com/>> (accessed April 8, 2025).

³⁸ H. JENKINS - S. FORD & J. GREEN, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*, New York University Press, New York–London 2013, pp. 123 ss.

³⁹ UNESCO, *Global Citizenship Education*, cit., pp. 34 ss.

2.5 Sustainability and Ecological Awareness through Sound and Music

Sustainable development constitutes a fundamental pillar of global citizenship, emphasizing the need to adopt responsible practices that reduce environmental impact and promote intergenerational equity.⁴⁰ Within this framework, both sound and music acquire particular relevance as mediums for rethinking the relationship between human beings and their environment.

From an urban design perspective, numerous studies have demonstrated that the integration of natural sounds into cities not only improves environmental quality but also has a positive effect on public well-being. R. Murray Schafer advocated for the creation of “soundscapes” in which environmental sounds – such as wind, water, or birdsong – could coexist harmoniously with human activities.⁴¹ In this line, Wang et al. point out that trees and vegetation not only act as natural sound barriers but also enrich the urban soundscape by introducing pleasant and ecologically meaningful auditory elements.⁴²

Spaces such as parks, gardens, and urban forests function as natural acoustic buffers, reducing noise pollution and offering environments of tranquillity. Studies such as that by Radicchi et al. have shown that acoustic biodiversity – the simultaneous presence of diverse natural sounds – is associated with greater perceptions of well-being and relaxation among urban residents. In addition to their acoustic benefits, these green spaces enhance biodiversity and promote physical and emotional health by offering sonic refuges from urban noise.⁴³

In parallel, music has proven to be an effective instrument for raising ecological awareness. Over the past decades, various artists and movements have used music as a medium for drawing attention to environmental issues and encouraging concrete action. A pioneering example was the *Concert for Bangladesh* (1971), organized by George Harrison and Ravi Shankar,

⁴⁰ UNESCO, *Education for Sustainable Development Goals*, cit., pp. 7 ss.

⁴¹ R.M. SCHAFER, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, Destiny Books, Rochester 1977, pp. 25 ss.

⁴² J. WANG, Z. WANG, C. LI, Z. YAO, S. CUI, Q. HUANG, Y. LIU, & T. WANG, An exploratory framework for mapping, mechanism, and management of urban soundscape quality: From quietness to naturalness, in «Environment International», 187, 2024, pp. 1-14.

⁴³ A. RADICCHI, P. CEVIKAYAK YELMI, A. CHUNG, P. JORDAN, S. STEWART, A. TSALIGOPoulos, L. MCCUNN & M. GRANT, *Sound and the healthy city*, in «Cities & Health», 5(1-2), 2021, pp. 1-13

which combined humanitarian aid with the publicization of ecological and social crises.⁴⁴ More recently, works such as *Become Ocean* by John Luther Adams explore the climate crisis through sound, inviting reflection on planetary fragility by evoking the vastness of marine ecosystems.⁴⁵

In addition, many festivals have begun incorporating sustainable practices into their organizational structures – from the use of renewable energy sources to waste reduction and the promotion of green mobility – thus linking musical creation to values of ecological responsibility. These initiatives contribute to rethinking both artistic production methods and cultural consumption habits, articulating art with environmental commitment.

Taken together, urban sound design, the integration of natural sounds, and environmentally engaged music creation offer complementary paths for fostering critical ecological awareness. In a global context marked by the climate emergency, soundscapes and music emerge as powerful tools for reimagining the relationships between humanity, nature, and sustainability.

Final Reflections and Future Challenges

Sound and music are increasingly recognized as fundamental tools for the development of a global citizenship committed to civil participation, social justice, intercultural understanding, digital transformation, and sustainability. From this perspective, the urban sound environment should not be understood merely as a collection of auditory stimuli, but rather as an active civic dimension that reflects relations of power, coexistence, and belonging. Conscious management of the soundscape not only enhances the environmental quality of cities but also strengthens social bonds and a shared sense of community.

Despite growing recognition of the role of sound and music in fostering critical global citizenship, several pressing challenges remain, requiring an interdisciplinary response. First, in the civil domain, there is a need to reinforce regulatory frameworks and participatory mechanisms that allow citizens to actively influence the management of the urban acoustic environment. This involves democratizing decisions regarding the use of

⁴⁴ G. HARRISON, *I Me Mine*, Simon & Schuster, New York 1971, pp. 133-136.

⁴⁵ J.L. ADAMS, *Become Ocean* [Score], Boosey & Hawkes, New York 2013.

acoustic space, ensuring equitable access to healthy sonic environments, and promoting co-design processes for soundscapes.

In terms of social justice, a key challenge lies in addressing acoustic inequalities that disproportionately affect vulnerable populations. Prolonged exposure to noise in neighbourhoods with limited green infrastructure, high traffic density, or poor acoustic planning constitutes a form of environmental injustice. These issues must be tackled through redistributive policies, targeted acoustic interventions, and educational strategies that recognize sound as a civic right.

From an intercultural perspective, it is urgent to systematically integrate sonic and musical diversity into cultural and urban policies. The marginalization of certain acoustic expressions—particularly those associated with ethnic minorities or migrant communities—undermines the potential of the soundscape as a space for encounter. Fostering intercultural citizenship requires making diverse sonic practices visible, legitimate, and protected in public spaces.

In the digital sphere, the challenge is twofold: on the one hand, ensuring inclusive access to technological resources for the creation and dissemination of music; on the other, cultivating critical competencies that enable citizens to engage ethically and reflectively with digital environments. Digital and sonic literacy should encompass the ability to interpret musical narratives and their sociocultural implications, as well as the development of responsible practices for online music production and consumption.

Finally, within the sustainability dimension, there is a pressing need to advance comprehensive policies for acoustic sustainability. This includes promoting research into sound-absorbing materials, green technologies applied to sound design, and low-impact models of music production. Greater coordination among the education, urban planning, technology, and cultural sectors is essential for creating resilient sound environments that promote collective well-being.

In conclusion, the challenges of the future demand a cross-cutting approach that places sound and music at the centre of educational, cultural, and urban agendas, recognizing their potential to transform not only aesthetic experiences, but also social structures, community relations, and the conditions of life in an increasingly interdependent world.

SECTION VI

LOOKING FORWARD THE NEW GENERATIONS

EDUCATION AS HOPE, EDUCATION IS HOPE. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICAL PATHWAYS TOWARDS A POSSIBLE FUTURE

GIANLUCA AMATORI

Abstract

This chapter explores the intrinsic and transformative relationship between education and hope, proposing that education is not merely a vehicle of hope, but the very embodiment of it. Drawing upon key theoretical frameworks, such as Snyder's Hope Theory, Freire's Pedagogy of Hope, and Appadurai's concept of the capacity to aspire, the text examines how hope functions as a motivational, cognitive, and relational process crucial for lifelong learning and social empowerment. The author discusses hope as a transversal competence and an act of personal and collective agency, capable of guiding individuals through adversity while inspiring educational communities to cultivate resilient and inclusive environments. Particular attention is given to the "enemies of hope"—resignation, cynicism, fatalism, and dogmatism—and to practical strategies for educators and communities to counter these dynamics. Ultimately, the chapter advocates for a renewed moral and pedagogical commitment to nurturing hope as a concrete force for personal development and societal transformation.

Keywords: Hope, Education, Empowerment, Future-oriented thinking, Lifelong learning

1. Education and Hope: an unbreakable connection

Education and hope are deeply intertwined, to the extent that some have proposed moving from the notion of "*Education as hope*" to "*Education is hope*". Indeed, there can be no education without hope, just as there can be no hope without education. These two realities are fundamentally connected, both pointing towards the possibility of change and improvement. Every educational act, in whatever form it may take, is permeated by

hope: whether education involves transmitting and sharing the traditions and cultures of the past or projecting oneself into the future and promoting transformation. In other words, education always implies an attentiveness to what is possible and an openness to what could be different and better. From this perspective, hope represents precisely the tension towards possibilities not yet realised.

This close relationship between education and hope is widely acknowledged in both academic literature and international educational policy. As Burde and King observe, «It is common wisdom, both in research and practice, that education fosters hope»¹ For instance, in regions affected by conflict or humanitarian crises, education is considered a crucial vehicle for restoring hope among young people. As one European commissioner declared, «It is our moral duty to bring hope to millions of children affected by crisis. Education in emergency situations is therefore an absolute priority». Similarly, international networks such as the Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies emphasise that schools can mitigate the psychological impacts of conflict by creating stability, structure, and hope for the future. These assertions underscore how, especially in challenging contexts, education becomes a means of instilling hope, offering prospects where uncertainty and fear prevail.

It is therefore clear that education and hope form an inseparable pair, oriented towards the future and towards change. Education nourishes hope by opening horizons, cultivating possibilities, and providing the tools to realise them. Conversely, hope acts as the driving force behind educational action: the conviction that it is worth striving for possible improvement. Without hope, education would lose its impetus and its transformative purpose. As Paulo Freire reminds us, «To attempt to do without hope, in the struggle to improve the world, is a frivolous illusion... hope is an ontological necessity which requires anchoring in practice to become concrete in historical reality»². In other words, it is hope that renders the educational aspiration to transform reality tangible: without at least a minimum of hope, we could not even begin the educational process or the journey of change.

¹ D. BURDE, E. KING, *An agenda for hope: How education cultivates and dashes hope among youth in Nairobi and Karachi*, in «Comparative Education Review», 67(3), 2023, 367-389.

² P. FREIRE, *Pedagogy of hope: Reliving pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum. (Trad. it. *Pedagogia della speranza*, Milano, Il Saggiatore 1992.

2. *Hope between Psychology and Education: a future-oriented process*

From a scientific perspective, hope should not be understood as a vague optimism or as mere passive desire, but rather as an active, future-oriented psychological process. In positive psychology, C. R. Snyder's Hope Theory defines hope as «the perceived capability to derive pathways towards desired goals and to motivate oneself (agency) to use those pathways»³. This theory identifies three key components underpinning hopeful thinking:

1. **Goals** – Hope begins with having clear and meaningful goals that guide future behaviour. Without a goal to strive for, it makes little sense to speak of hope.
2. **Pathways** – The ability to plan routes and alternative strategies to achieve set goals. Hopeful individuals imagine multiple ways to overcome obstacles and move closer to their objectives.
3. **Agency** – The motivation and confidence required to embark on these pathways and persist despite challenges. In other words, agency thinking reflects the belief “*I can do this*”, which propels action towards the goal.

According to Snyder, the stronger an individual's confidence in their ability to formulate pathways and their drive to pursue them, the higher their level of hope. Hope, therefore, is not an ephemeral emotion but a complex cognitive-motivational construct that encompasses both *planning ability* (knowing how to identify routes to achieve objectives) and the *operational will* to actively pursue them. This helps to distinguish hope from related concepts: for instance, optimism refers to a general expectation of positive outcomes, often regardless of one's actions, whereas hope entails an active role by the individual in achieving the desired outcome. Similarly, self-efficacy involves confidence in carrying out a specific action but does not necessarily extend to achieving the desired result; hope, by contrast, combines both elements, integrating self-belief (personal competence) with the vision of a goal attainable through concrete planning and effort.

From an educational perspective, recognising hope as a future-oriented process means fostering in individuals the very capacities outlined by the psychology of hope: the ability to set meaningful goals, to design their educational and life pathways, and to motivate themselves in the face of

³ C.R. SNYDER, L. IRVING, J. ANDERSON, *Hope and health*, in *Handbook of social and clinical psychology*, a cura di C.R. Snyder e D.R. Forsyth, Pergamon 1991.

obstacles and crises. In pedagogical terms, hope is often linked to *planning ability*: to hope is not to daydream or passively indulge in wishful thinking, but to possess the ability to design realistic and attainable alternatives. As Snyder emphasises, vague or unrealistic “wishes” do not constitute genuine hope: if a goal is entirely unreachable or fanciful, it cannot truly be considered hopeful, as it lacks the reality-oriented thinking and the presence of concrete pathways. Real hope is thus far removed from idle dreams or passive optimism, as it demands concreteness; it is anchored in the principle of *future-oriented thinking*, a mindset persistently directed towards the future and towards possible choices.

Another fundamental aspect of hope is that, once initiated, it tends to reinforce itself in a circular way: imagining multiple pathways boosts one's sense of efficacy and thus motivation (agency), while motivated action helps to uncover new routes even in the face of obstacles. In this way, hope generates a virtuous cycle: those who actively hope are better equipped to confront difficulties, perceiving them as challenges to be overcome through alternative routes, rather than as insurmountable barriers. This intrinsic resilience explains why “*people with high levels of hope achieve better outcomes*” in many areas of life, from education to sport, from psychological well-being to social adjustment. Numerous studies indeed link high levels of hope to positive outcomes: for example, more hopeful students demonstrate stronger academic performance, greater perseverance, and better overall well-being compared to their less hopeful peers. A recent meta-analysis confirmed that hope makes a unique contribution to academic success, independently of factors such as intelligence quotient or personality traits. Specifically, cultivating hope in students strengthens their ability to pursue academic goals despite difficulties, reducing the risk of burnout and safeguarding their mental health. Therefore, hoping is not merely “thinking positively”; it is a concrete factor of achievement and resilience within educational pathways.

3. *Hope as a transversal competence and transformative act*

Within the educational context, hope can be regarded as an essential transversal competence, one of those fundamental abilities that support individuals throughout their personal and professional lives. It is no coincidence that contemporary pedagogy places strong emphasis on fostering

personal planning, orientation skills, and self-motivation: all these competences find their core in hope. To hope means, in fact, to perceive oneself as an *agent* of change, to recognise in oneself (and in others) the capacity to make a difference. This agentic dimension immediately connects hope with education, since education is about helping individuals to find in their daily lives the meaning of their actions and to recognise themselves as capable of impacting reality

Luigi Pati aptly defines educational hope as «the desire to give concrete form to subjective potential, to pursue increasingly higher levels of awareness, imprinting a chosen direction upon one's personal development»⁴. From this perspective, educating for hope means accompanying individuals along a path of conscious self-realisation, where they can actualise their potential and orient it towards meaningful goals, progressively increasing their level of critical awareness (or, in Freire's terms, *conscientisation* — the critical consciousness of oneself and the world).

Hope therefore possesses a clear transformative and self-reflective value: it implies that individuals reflect upon themselves, their aspirations, and reframe their beliefs by opening their minds to new possibilities. In this sense, hope can trigger those processes of *frame of reference transformation* described by Mezirow in his theory of transformative learning. Unsurprisingly, Mezirow⁵ describes hope as an act of self-reflection and transformation: it is when individuals hope for something better for themselves (and for others) that they begin to *change the way they perceive themselves and the world*. Hope invites people to *re-examine* the status quo within themselves, to imagine alternative scenarios, and thereby to revise their mental frameworks to embrace new possibilities.

For instance, an adult returning to education after years of inactivity must first *hope* to improve their circumstances: this hope prompts them to reconsider previously limiting beliefs (“I am no longer capable of studying”) and to gradually transform them (“I can learn new things and change my job”). In this way, hope acts as a catalyst for empowerment: it initiates a growth process in which the individual, through reflection and experience, *transforms*, acquiring greater self-awareness, a sense of efficacy, and openness to change.

⁴ L. PATI, *Educare alla speranza*, in «Pedagogia e vita», 3(4), 2006, pp. 74-89.

⁵ J. MEZROW, *Transformative learning as discourse*, in «Journal of Transformative Education», 1(1), 2003, pp. 58-63.

A concept that effectively illustrates hope as an educational competence is that of guidance: in educational and career guidance activities, individuals are supported in *designing their futures*, imagining educational or career pathways, and activating themselves to achieve them. *Guiding hope* is precisely the ability to envision a future for oneself and to chart routes towards it.

The pedagogist Andrea Canevaro, reflecting on the educability of individuals facing disadvantage, writes that we must «identify a pathway connecting the situation a person currently experiences with an ideal place they wish to reach, which may seem inaccessible given their condition. Connecting these two points on a hypothetical map becomes the opportunity to discover that there is not a desert between them, but rather other elements that make up the landscape of future life, connected to past and present life, which enable one to follow routes that draw closer to that ideal place, even if it is not fully attained»⁶.

This compelling cartographic metaphor perfectly encapsulates the educational role of hope: helping individuals to map the journey from their current reality to a possible future, discovering that between the “here and now” and their aspirational goal, there is not an unbridgeable void, but rather a landscape filled with intermediate steps, resources, and opportunities waiting to be explored. Even if the ultimate ideal remains out of reach, the very act of hoping allows progress in the chosen direction, significantly improving the starting condition.

This process is inherently educational and transformative: by supporting someone in building hope for their future, we help them develop *life design competences*, resilience, autonomy, and the ability to learn from experience.

We can therefore affirm that hope, far from being merely an emotion, is a key competence for lifelong learning. It integrates cognitive aspects (such as planning and creative problem-solving), emotional dimensions (feeling motivated and confident despite uncertainties), relational skills (such as seeking support, collaborating, and drawing inspiration from others), and behavioural strategies (taking action, exercising personal agency). As such, it should be intentionally cultivated within educational settings.

For example, this can be achieved through teaching methods that pro-

⁶ A. CANEVARO, *Percorsi di integrazione*, in *Trattato di pedagogia speciale* a cura di D. Ianes, R. Vianello, Trento 2004.

mote student autonomy and active participation, goal setting and planning exercises, and opportunities for success that strengthen personal efficacy. Educators can foster hope by *teaching students to learn from failure* (interpreting setbacks not as definitive verdicts but as information to adjust their course), developing critical and creative thinking (to see alternatives where others see dead ends), and encouraging students to *envision their futures* in positive and realistic terms. All of this renders hope a true “life skill,” essential not only for learning but for personal and professional growth.

4. *Hope, Liberation, and Empowerment: the perspective of Critical Pedagogy*

Beyond the individual dimension, hope carries a powerful social and political significance, long recognised within the field of critical pedagogy. Paulo Freire, one of the foremost exponents of this approach, dedicated an entire work to the *Pedagogy of Hope* (1992), as a continuation of his seminal *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. For Freire, education is intrinsically an act of hope and liberation: teaching and learning mean believing in the *possibility* of transforming reality, especially for oppressed populations. Hope is what drives both educators and learners not to passively adapt to the status quo, but to strive to become “*more than what we are*” and “*different from what we are*”, as he writes. In other words, to hope within education is to reject the fatalistic acceptance of current conditions, imagining and collectively constructing more just and humane alternatives.

Freire insists that hope is neither pure illusion nor a messianic waiting: «without at least a minimum of hope, we cannot even begin the struggle, but without the struggle, hope diminishes, loses direction, and turns into despair». Authentic hope, then, is *concrete*; it must be “anchored in practice” (praxis) to become historical reality. In educational processes, this means that hope must translate into action: the hopeful educator is one who, despite being fully aware of present difficulties, stubbornly seeks openings for change and involves students in this effort of actively imagining the future. Freire’s *pedagogy of hope* is essentially a pedagogy of empowerment: it aims to return to learners – often from marginalised or oppressed backgrounds – the power to believe in themselves and to impact the world. He writes that one of the tasks of the progressive educator is «to reveal the opportunities for hope, however challenging the circumstances... After all, without hope, we can do very little». Educating,

therefore, means nurturing in learners that “capacity to aspire” (to borrow from Arjun Appadurai), which enables them to actively design their futures rather than passively endure them.

Appadurai, an anthropologist and development theorist, introduced the concept of the *capacity to aspire* to describe hope as a cultural and collective faculty. He emphasises that the capacity to cultivate aspirations is not equally distributed across societies — impoverished and marginalised groups often find their hopes stifled by contexts of deprivation. For this reason, «we must see the capacity to aspire as a social and collective capacity, without which words like ‘empowerment’, ‘voice’, and ‘participation’ are empty»⁷. This highlights a crucial point: hope is not solely an individual phenomenon but also a social and political one. A community deprived of hope will struggle to mobilise for change or to claim rights; by contrast, cultivating hope among people creates the emotional and cultural foundation for active participation, emancipation, and development.

In his influential essay *The Capacity to Aspire* (2004), Appadurai argues that empowering the poor requires, first and foremost, expanding their horizons of aspiration: when even the most disadvantaged social groups learn to “imagine elsewhere”, the *not yet*, then terms like empowerment gain tangible meaning. In education, this translates into practices that encourage all students — regardless of their socio-economic background — to hold realistic dreams and ambitions for their future, while also equipping them with the means to pursue them. For example, mentoring programmes, career guidance, and service-learning initiatives in underprivileged schools can increase young people’s capacity to aspire, exposing them to educational and professional pathways previously considered unimaginable and thus fostering an active form of hope.

It is important to recognise that the political dimension of hope concerns not only the oppressed but also educators and citizens more broadly. Martha Nussbaum has analysed in her works how societies steeped in fear and cynicism risk “stifling” collective hope, which is essential for sustaining democratic institutions and social progress. In *Political Emotions* (2013) and *The Monarchy of Fear* (2018), Nussbaum highlights how widespread negative emotions — such as resentment, cynicism, and a sense of powerlessness — can erode citizens’ motivation to engage for the common good,

⁷ A. APPADURAI, *The capacity to aspire: Culture and the terms of recognition*, in *Culture and public action*, a cura di V. Rao, M. Walton, Stanford 2004.

leading to apathy. Conversely, cultivating public hope means nurturing feelings of possibility and trust in change: this requires leaders and educators capable of inspiring positive and credible visions of the future.

Nussbaum identifies what she calls “*schools of hope*”, referring to five domains (critical thinking, volunteering, inclusive religion, the arts, and dialogue) that can counteract the culture of fear and foster hopeful and responsible citizens. Even in uncertain times, she argues, it is crucial not to succumb to resignation or cynicism, but to cultivate hope by striving for justice, equality, and human dignity. This message resonates strongly within the educational sphere: schools themselves should be spaces of hope, where students not only acquire knowledge but also learn to trust in their capacity to change their destinies and contribute to society.

5. *Obstacles and adversaries of Hope in educational processes*

If hope is so central to educational processes, it is also essential to recognise and address what undermines it. In real contexts, there are various obstacles that can “paralyse” hope, both in students and educators. At least four can be identified — aptly termed the “*enemies of hope*” — which represent cultural attitudes or psychological dispositions capable of extinguishing the proactive drive of hope:

- **Resignation:** a form of passive surrender in the face of difficulties or perceived limitations. Resignation manifests in sentiments such as “*there is nothing more to be done*” or “*we’ve always done it this way; it’s pointless to try and change.*” It is a dangerous attitude because it stifles any attempt at innovation or improvement at its inception. In educational settings, resigned teachers or students cease to make efforts and accept the status quo, even when it is dysfunctional. Resignation often stems from repeated negative experiences without adequate support: those who feel persistently defeated may end up succumbing to despair. Counteracting it requires restoring a sense of efficacy (even if limited) and reframing failure not as a definitive condemnation but as an integral part of the learning process.
- **Cynicism:** an attitude of scornful disillusionment, whereby every action is suspected of being self-serving and expectations of change are derided. In education, cynicism is particularly toxic: a cynical

educator communicates to students that striving is futile and that values such as effort or solidarity are naïve. This can devalue individuals entirely, making them feel “foolish” or naïve for having believed in something. Cynicism destroys hope because it *denies the possibility of sincerity and progress*. Combating it involves restoring confidence in values and in positive intentions: for instance, by highlighting real stories of improvement, showcasing acts of honesty and altruism, and demonstrating that change occurs because people dare to believe in it, despite cynicism.

- **Fatalism:** the belief that events are governed by fate or uncontrollable external forces, rendering human action irrelevant. In education, a fatalistic attitude leads to the perception that student outcomes are predetermined by factors such as family environment, luck, or misfortune, and that teaching efforts are inconsequential. Attributing success or failure systematically to external causes (“*it went well purely by chance*”, “*he failed because it was destined*”) results in disempowerment and self-devaluation. Fatalistic students do not credit themselves for their successes (“*I only got a good grade because the test was easy, not because I am capable*”) nor take responsibility for their failures (“*I failed because the teacher dislikes me, so there’s no point in trying*”). Such an attitude extinguishes motivation. To counter this, it is crucial to foster realistic attributions: recognising both personal effort and external influences, without losing sight of what we can control. Promoting a *growth mindset*, for example, helps replace fatalism with the belief that, despite constraints, there is always room for improvement through practice and strategy.
- **Propaganda and dogmatic thinking:** at first glance, it may seem unusual to include “propaganda” among the enemies of hope, but here it refers to the kind of *coercive collective thinking* that allows no divergence or alternatives. In educational contexts, this can manifest as an intolerant environment dominated by a single ideological, political, or even methodological approach that suppresses creativity and individual initiatives. If *hope* implies the plurality of possibilities, propaganda dictates that there is only one permissible path. This destroys hope because it renders dissent or exploration of new routes unthinkable. For example, in a school rigidly anchored to top-down programmes with no flexibility, both teach-

ers and students may lose hope of innovating or expressing diverse needs (*"this is how things have always been done, and questioning it is forbidden"*). Combating this enemy means defending freedom of thought and diversity of perspectives: democratic education encourages the exchange of ideas, participation, and the amplification of marginal voices, all elements that keep the horizon of possibility open and, consequently, nurture hope.

These *enemies of hope* can infiltrate educational environments insidiously, especially when operating under difficult conditions (schools with scarce resources, classes with severe disciplinary issues, socio-culturally deprived contexts, etc.). For instance, a teaching staff worn down by years of frustration may fall into cynicism or resignation, inadvertently transmitting this disenchantment to students. Likewise, young people raised in deprived environments, lacking positive role models, may develop fatalism or self-devaluation early on.

Recognising these attitudes and naming them is the first step towards overcoming them, refocusing attention on the fact that they are not inevitable truths but rather modifiable mindsets. In this regard, working on *emotions* and *narratives* proves beneficial: Nussbaum⁸ suggests that combating cynicism and resignation involves cultivating *alternative imaginaries* and practising *active empathy*, creating an environment where hope can flourish. For example, discussing with students the stories of individuals who have overcome obstacles (resilience) or of communities that have improved their circumstances through collective effort can help to challenge the notion that "nothing ever changes." Actively involving students in social projects or volunteer activities allows them to experience firsthand the power of contributing to change, providing a concrete antidote to fatalism.

Ultimately, maintaining hope in schools requires awareness and intentionality. This means monitoring the classroom and staff climate, recognising signs of burnout or cynicism, and intervening through mutual support, professional development, and collective reflection on the meaning of educational work. It also involves equipping students with *critical tools* to recognise feelings of helplessness or resignation within themselves and others, teaching them strategies to respond (such as setting achievable goals,

⁸ M.C. NUSSBAUM, *La monarchia della paura: Considerazioni sulla crisi politica attuale* Il Mulino, Bologna 2004.

celebrating progress, seeking help when needed, etc.). In this way, the entire educational community (teachers, students, families) can become a “stronghold of hope”, counteracting those psychological and cultural adversaries that threaten its flourishing.

6. *Cultivating Hope: the role of educators and communities*

Faced with these challenges and obstacles, the question arises: *how* can we effectively cultivate hope within education? This question is particularly pertinent in today’s world, marked by multiple crises (pandemic, conflicts, climate emergencies), which often leave young people disoriented about their future. According to many scholars, the answer lies in a renewed moral and professional commitment by educators, and in the collective engagement of the wider educational community to act as agents of hope.

First and foremost, teachers and trainers must themselves be bearers of hope. This does not mean adopting naïve optimism at all costs but rather embodying a *critical hopeful attitude*: believing in the growth potential of every student while maintaining a realistic awareness of the challenges at hand. Freire argued that educators should combine *pedagogical love* (care and respect for learners) with “*righteous anger*” towards injustice, and above all with an “*unshakeable hope*” that sustains their daily practice. Being a hopeful educator means, in concrete terms, not giving up in the face of initial setbacks, seeking new teaching strategies; it means conveying to students trust in their abilities, even when they themselves harbour doubts; it means recognising and highlighting progress, even when it is modest.

A student in difficulty, who encounters a teacher capable of saying “*I know you can do this – let’s work together to make it happen*”, and who genuinely believes it, learns not only mathematics or literature but also learns hope: the trust that effort is worthwhile because improvement is possible.

Several studies confirm that teachers’ positive expectations of their students can significantly influence student performance and attitudes (the so-called Pygmalion effect). Similarly, when a school cultivates a *culture of hope* – by fostering an inclusive climate, setting challenging yet achievable goals, and celebrating milestones – students demonstrate greater intrinsic motivation and resilience in the face of adversity. Conversely, educational settings perceived as cold, overly critical, or resigned tend to breed disengagement and drop-out. It is no coincidence that the loss of hope among

young people is cited as a root cause of school abandonment and other forms of distress. When an adolescent leaves school saying, “*there’s no point in staying*”, it reflects the *gap between the promise of education and the reality experienced*, a gap noted by many experts. The task of education, therefore, is to bridge this gap, *reconnecting young people’s hope* to the educational promise.

Another crucial role is played by families and the wider community. Educational hope is not built solely within the classroom: the extra-curricular environment must also contribute, offering opportunities and positive role models. Peer mentoring projects, engagement with successful alumni from the same neighbourhood, and stimulating extra-curricular activities (arts, sports, volunteering) are all ways to keep the flame of hope alive among young people, especially in disadvantaged areas.

Arjun Appadurai spoke of “*navigational capacity*”, the ability to *navigate* towards the future even amidst present storms. The educational community – comprising schools, families, social services, and associations – should serve as both *compass and wind*: providing direction and propulsion. This can be realised, for instance, through *local educational pacts* that ensure every young person receives the support they need – whether in the form of career guidance, academic tutoring, safe spaces for self-expression after school, or simply the shared expectation that learning has purpose and value for their future.

In this context, Andrea Canevaro’s concept of the alternation between the “established” and the “establishing” – drawn from institutional analysis – is highly relevant. The *established* represents existing norms and customs; the *establishing* is the innovative force, the grassroots ferment driving change. Canevaro notes that educational progress occurs through a continuous dialectic between these two dimensions: sometimes it is grassroots culture (the establishing force) that surpasses normative barriers and imposes change (a bottom-up process); other times, enlightened new norms anticipate cultural shifts (a top-down process), creating novel spaces for society to fill with meaning. In both cases, hope is the thread connecting this dynamic: it takes hope (and courage) to challenge the established order and propose new paths, just as it takes hope to implement reforms in advance of cultural readiness, trusting that society will eventually follow.

Consider, for example, the inclusion of students with disabilities in Italian schools: it was a *visionary choice*, enshrined in law in the 1970s (a normative act of the establishing force), yet it was supported by the ped-

agogical hope of figures like Canevaro, who believed that schools and society could grow by embracing everyone. That hope has been largely realised, transforming the Italian school system and generating a new inclusive culture. Similarly, every educational innovation — from environmental education to digital learning technologies — requires hopeful, establishing educators, capable of envisioning better futures and working towards them, even when the existing system initially resists.

Ultimately, to *educate for hope* and *hope for education*, concerted action is needed on multiple levels. On a personal level, every educator should cultivate within themselves a passion for and confidence in educational values, continually updating their competences to address emerging challenges (an empowered, well-prepared teacher is more likely to sustain and inspire hope than one left isolated and disheartened). On an institutional level, educational policies should invest in dignified working conditions for teachers, welcoming and stimulating school environments, and enriching learning opportunities for students: all these elements *communicate hope* by demonstrating society's belief in education. On a collective level, finally, we must promote a public narrative of education not as an irredeemably failing system but as a national horizon of hope — much as the post-war expansion of compulsory schooling represented hope in the future of Italy, or as today we see in the emphasis placed on education within the UN 2030 Agenda ("*quality education for all*" is Sustainable Development Goal 4, inherently filled with hope).

7. *Conclusions: rediscovering Hope in Education*

In conclusion, embracing the notion of "*Education is hope*" means recognising that hope is both the foundation and the outcome of education. It is the foundation, because every educational endeavour is born from the belief that it is possible to learn, to improve, to emancipate oneself — a belief without which there would be no purpose in educating. And it is the outcome, because a successful education should leave people with the very capacity to hope: to see possibilities where others perceive only obstacles, to imagine different futures, and to commit themselves to making them a reality.

We have explored how hope operates on multiple levels: within the individual, as motivation and resilience; within the educational process, as

a transversal competence linked to planning and self-determination; and within the social sphere, as a collective force for empowerment and participation. To renew the pedagogy of hope today means enriching it with contemporary theoretical and empirical tools, from psychological hope theories to inclusive and democratic educational practices, in order to face new educational challenges with both rigour and optimism. It also means grounding it in the findings of current research: we now know, for example, that targeted programmes aimed at developing hope (such as teaching goal setting, creative problem solving, and anxiety management) can enhance not only students' psychological well-being but also their academic performance, particularly among those in disadvantaged circumstances. This provides concrete guidance for future action.

Finally, restoring hope in education is crucial in an era where public discourse about schools and the future of young people is often dominated by pessimism. Without denying the real problems, it is important to reaffirm, with Freire, that to forego hope in the struggle to improve the world leads nowhere. Hope is an ontological necessity, an integral part of the human condition, and in education it is the leaven that enables every learning process and every transformation to grow. It is our responsibility, as educators, scholars, and citizens, to keep this hope alive, nurturing it through our daily practice and critical reflection. In doing so, education can truly continue to be – today and in the future – an enabler of hope: hope for individuals, who through education discover paths to personal fulfilment, and hope for society as a whole, which in the educational endeavour continually regenerates the possibility of a better future.

EDUCATION AND PEDAGOGY IN THE CHANGE OF AGE. A PANORAMIC VIEW ON SOME EXAMPLES OF RECENT CHILDREN'S LITERATURE.

ANDREA DESSARDO

Abstract

We are going through a time of transition, that is perhaps declaring the end of post-modern. This new epoch seems to claim for a new axiology, while society is worried by the need of protection and control, and invokes for limiting freedom in order to guarantee security.

This perspective has consequences also in education, that is maybe experiencing a quick change of paradigm. The present essay tries to outline this new trend, particularly through the analysis of some recent books for children written during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Key-words: hyper-modernism; axiology; Covid-19 pandemic; environmentalism; feminism.

Francis Fukuyama, who in 1992, after the Soviet Union collapse, solemnly declared *The end of history*¹, was clearly wrong, we can serenely affirm today without any doubt. But also that time, while they were fighting in Yugoslavia, it seemed too early. Actually, how we had always known, history never ends, if anything it re-presents itself always again in different forms.

The time we are living, for instance, has something in common with what our ancestors experienced a century ago, when a long period of economic development and wealth, the so-called *belle époque*, suddenly vanished in the World War blood-bath, to which at least twenty years of totalitarianism followed, until another war blew up, greater and hugely more savage and violent than the first one.

¹ F. FUKUYAMA, *The end of history and the last man*, Free Press, New York 1992.

Some important milestones of the period we are going through, are clearly the terroristic attacks on September 11th 2001 – this event was an evident watershed in our lives, as we realised in those exact moments -, followed by the wars in Afghanistan and in Iraq together with a massive wave of Islamistic terror all around the world, then the Lehman Brothers' bankruptcy in 2008, the short era of the "Arabic spring", followed by the massive migrations from Africa to Europe, and perhaps also the Covid-19 pandemic, that increased the general feeling of insecurity and, consequently, the public control on our everyday routine. We well know the rule of this trade-off: ceding freedom for security.

In the present paper I would like to present a reflection about the responsibilities of education and pedagogy in our epoch, an epoch that seems to be marking an authentic turning point in the values we share and in the economic system, in the geostrategic scenario. As I am going to explain in these pages, it seems that the way we used to educate children in the past decades is outdated, because the axiological frame in which it was conceived, has been overcome. Through the concept of «hyper-modern» suggested by some scholars, I will try to outline the main characteristic of our epoch, supporting the idea that something crucial is going on also in educational matters.

Romano Luperini², among others, situates the end of the so-called post-modernism on September 11th 2001, arguing that it changed, from different points of view, common people perception of their reality. Among them, he identifies a general renaissance in civic and moral responsibility and a lesser inclination to the black humour, a typical post-modern characteristic and literary *topos* of the second half of 20th century. Facing the downfall in invincibility of these Western countries winners after the Second World War and in the cold war, intellectuals and scholars felt the duty to product counter-narratives, that oppose to violence and fear of terrorism.

Pope Francis³ sharply observed that ours is not just an age of change, but instead a change of age. He affirmed that in Florence in 2015, during the Italian Catholic congress about «new humanism». Another famous

² R. LUPERINI, *La fine del postmoderno*, Guida, Napoli 2005.

³ FRANCESCO, *Il nuovo umanesimo in Cristo Gesù*, speech at the Italian Church 5th National Convention, Florence, November 10th 2015, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco_20151110_firenze-convegno-chiesa-italiana.html

definition he expressed, it is that we are already fighting the Third World War, but «into pieces». We are called to meditate about hope, when the attitude in thinking the future and the place of human beings on planet Earth is in fast transformation, and when even what actually is a human being, is no more so evident⁴.

Also the very idea of hope is in question, when the only accepted authority seems to be the positive science: but we know that hope is not just a statistic projection or a mathematical probability calculus.

1. *Back to modernity*

This change of age is been defined by some scholars in the first years of the new millennium⁵ as «hyper-modern», in order to mark the discontinuity with the previous period, that we used to call with Lyotard⁶ – especially in the United States - «post-modern» or, after Zygmunt Bauman⁷, «liquid modernity».

While post-modern was characterised by a general sense of nihilism and lack of stability in ideological issues and in axiology, hyper-modern seems to try, in an instinctive, confused and de-structured way, to frantically restore the most affordable aspects of modernity, looking for new meanings. This effort is largely spontaneous and not properly organised, but presents some common signs. «Lipovetsky highlights how hyper-modern does not see just consumerism and hedonism extension [...], but also the affirmation of some forms of solidarity, of ethical responsibility, of ecological activism: a logic of emergency [...], which prevents to speak of a current nihilism dominion, since it represents instead a remedial»⁸. Raffaele Donnarumma, trying to justify its choice for this definition of our time, explains that the

⁴ Y.N. HARARI, *Homo Deus. A brief history of tomorrow*, Vintage, London 2016.

⁵ F. ASCHER, *La société hypermoderne*, Éditions de L'Aube, La Tour d'Aigues 2005; N. Aubert, *L'individu hypermoderne*, Erès, Toulouse 2004; G. Lipovetsky, S. Charles, *Des temps hypermodernes*, Grasset, Paris 2004.

⁶ J.F. LYOTARD, *La condition postmoderne. Rapport sur le savoir*, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris 1979.

⁷ Z. BAUMAN, *Liquid modernity*, Polity, Cambridge 2002.

⁸ R. DONNARUMMA, *Ipermodernità. Dove va la narrativa contemporanea*, Il Mulino. Bologna 2014, p. 21. All the translation from Italian into English are made by the author of this paper.

prefix «hyper- is the must to be of contemporaneity, its prestational obsession»⁹. While he, after Gilles Lipovetsky, prefers to label our years as «hyper-modernity», other authors have explored different possible definitions, like «new realism»¹⁰. Umberto Eco¹¹ rather used to refer to the attitude of living in this period as «negative realism». The most significant characteristic of our time - I believe - is the reaction, perhaps not always totally conscious, to the values depreciation, in a sort of «comeback to order».

This renewed impulsive need for order and clearness translates, on one hand, into the request for social control, security and protection, as shown by the increasing results of populist and right-wing parties worldwide, especially in Western countries, and on the other hand with the growth and strengthening of laws, rules but also social conventions, a sample of which is offered by the woke movement and the cancel culture, and, on a different level, by the empowerment of supranational organisations like the United Nations, the World Health Organisation, NATO and the European Union, to which the global government is progressively transferred, often without directly consulting the citizens. These organisations are no more just organs of coordination among allied sovereign countries, but they tend to state rules and mandatory political goals, that seriously limit the voters' freedom.

In a pedagogical perspective, we can notice, instead of the support to critical thinking, that was the basis of education in the second half of 20th century until the 1990s, a new wave of conformism and the demand of compliance is arising, some-way that is similar to the social context of years 1920s. Also a hundred years ago, in the middle of the post-war crisis, European societies reacted with a strong and dramatic demand for safety and control in politics and in economy, that, as we know, tragically carried to authoritarianism.

2. *Sickness of a system*

I believe that the way we faced the recent pandemic in 2020-2021 offers a persuasive evidence of what I mean.

⁹ *Ivi*, p. 20.

¹⁰ R. LUPERINI, *La fine del postmoderno*, cit.

¹¹ U. ECO, *Cari filosofi, è l'ora del realismo negativo*, in «La Repubblica», March 11th 2012.

I analysed, in some previous studies¹² some Italian books that tried to explain the pandemic and its medical and social effects to children and teenagers, looking for their educational aims. I think that a fruitful perspective to analyse how the emergency has been perceived and, above all, which values and practices have been particularly promoted, is to read books and magazines addressed to children, because of their intrinsic and necessary clarity and conciseness. A book conceived to be read by a child (or with a child) must avoid complexity and it expresses unambiguously the message the author means the most urgent, with simple words, convenient examples and with persuasive narrations. I have reviewed some of the main works published in Italy in the last years, with an analysis approach of qualitative type, in order to classify the primary elements of what we could name the “social pedagogy” of the Covid-19 pandemic. I have identified the most sold books and the ones printed by the main national publishing houses and then I have observed who the authors are, on which aspects they focus, which style they adopt, trying to sum up the “pedagogical code”, that seems to be promoted among the youngsters facing the medical emergency, but also in a more general perspective. In facts, we can infer that some suggestions do not seem to respond just to the present conjuncture, but they hint to long-term horizon, that implies a wider change in everyday habits.

Instead of – as I naively expected – helping the youngsters in overcoming the lock-down shock, the discouraging isolation and the loneliness of a long period during which they were not allowed to meet either their mates and their relatives, particularly their grand-parents, the great majority of these books just limited themselves to recommend the strict respect of some rules like wearing the surgical mask, washing hands and avoiding personal contacts. These books were often nothing more than “good manners manuals”, without caring much about children’s psychological well-being. Grown up in a Western democratic country, I had never seen before a more extreme case of political compliance in culture and among intellectuals, who just in very few cases dared to claim against the almost total denial

¹² A. DESSARDO, *The pandemic in children's books: toward a hyper-modern society? The Italian case*, in «Lubelski rocznik pedagogiczny», XLI, n. 2/2022, pp. 87-100; Id., *La pandemia da Covid-19, frontiera del postmoderno? Qualche ipotesi a partire da alcuni recenti libri per bambini*, in F. De Giorgi, D. De Salvo, C. Lepri, L. Salvarani, S. Scandurra, C. Sindoni (eds.), *Passaggi di frontiera. La storia dell'educazione: confini, identità, esplorazioni*, Messina University Press, Messina 2024, pp. 193-202; Id., *Educating in a discouraged epoch*, in «Educa. International Catholic Journal of Education», n. 10 (2024), pp. 79-91.

of some obvious rights like meet, freely gather, go to work and even go on strike. Some doctors had been disbarred from their professional register and prevented to exercise, just because reluctant in accepting ministerial instructions. In any other circumstances, also feebler measures would be harshly criticised as dangerous attacks to democracy.

Children would never forget these two years and so we adults will do too, of course, with different degrees of awareness. But we must admit that we cannot foresee how children will elaborate this experience as grown up, in their future political and social decisions, and how they will judge the way the pandemic was managed. I fear a radicalisation of our youth in the next decades, as a consequence of the impoverishing of democratic debate in these two years and as a reaction to the actual injustice with which their childhood has been treated.

I think that the damages caused to economy, but above all to democratic life and even to our psychological health, will be largely worse than the benefits achieved in fighting the contagion, if any. According to Giorgio Agamben¹³, one among the very few intellectuals that have raised their voices against the rules implemented by the Italian authorities, I believe that health, *per se*, is just a relative worth, for which we should not sacrifice our fundamental freedoms, on which we built our societies. Agamben, during the pandemic emergency, wrote: «The first thing that the panic wave which has paralysed the country clearly shows, is that our society does not believe any more in anything but in bare life (in Italian: «*nuda vita*», literally «naked life»). It is obvious that Italians are ready to sacrifice almost all, ordinary life conditions, social relationships, job, even their friendships, the loved ones and religious and political beliefs for the danger to get sick»¹⁴. And moreover, pointing out the real risk, more dangerous than the simple provisional sanitary restrictions: «A society living in a perpetual emergency cannot be a free society. [...] What that worries is not at most and not only the present, but the further. As wars left as legacy to peace a variety of ominous technologies, from barbed wire to nuclear power stations, it is very likely that they will try to continue some experiments that governments did not reach to achieve also after the sanitary emergency»¹⁵.

¹³ G. AGAMBEN, *A che punto siamo? L'epidemia come politica*, Quodlibet, Macerata 2021.

¹⁴ *Ivi*, p. 17.

¹⁵ *Ivi*, p. 18.

During these months there were almost no contrast among political parties, that supported, on the left and on the right wings, the government almost unanimously, no more parliamentary debate, very few critical positions in media and press, that use to comment the government measures, the most extreme too, sometime even with enthusiasm, like it is done in totalitarian countries. When the distance from the events, in some years, will permit to consider with more serenity the experiences, analysing media and the cultural production of these days, historians in the future would (hopefully) notice the anomaly of the uniformity in communication, that, instead to educate citizens to critical thinking, aimed to melt the individuals into the mass and to involve them in a greater project¹⁶ that in that specific situation was the fight against Sars-Cov-2, but that could easily change in the next years, just identifying and defining new political goals.

At the moment, we can be surprised that, although the great success of Foucault's theories¹⁷ on control society and biopolitics, long-lastingly worldwide discussed in universities, almost nobody, either in academic milieu and among progressive intellectuals, seems to be worried by the drastic reduction of freedom spaces and by some authoritarian impulses.

It may be useful to read again Roberto Esposito's *Immunitas* (and also its precedent work *Communitas*¹⁸):

When politics takes on life as object of direct intervention, it ends to reduce it to a state of absolute immediacy. [...] That is like if politics, in order to face life, would need to deprive it of any qualitative dimension, to make it «just life», «plain life», «naked life»¹⁹.

This paradigm could have decisive implications in pedagogy and education: «The relationship between me and the other – between the immune one and the common – is represented in terms of a destruction, that in the end tends to involve the both into the conflict»²⁰.

Starting from their Latin etymology, Esposito explains how the two terms *immunitas* and *communitas* are in opposition: a suggestion that may be important to have present. The main educational paradigm, that the

¹⁶ E. CANETTI, *Masse und Macht*, Claassen, Berlin 1960.

¹⁷ M. FOUCAULT, *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison*, Gallimard, Paris 1975.

¹⁸ R. ESPOSITO, *Communitas. Origine e destino della comunità*, Einaudi, Torino 1998.

¹⁹ ID., *Immunitas. Protezione e negazione della vita*, Einaudi, Torino 2002, pp. 17-18.

²⁰ *Ivi*, p. 21.

pandemic may have produced, seems to be more concentrated on hygiene and health safety, rather than on social bonds or, we could also say, more focused on «immunity» rather than on «community». And it is maybe an axiological paradigm that concerns not only the emergency months of Sars-Cov-2, but the next future decades.

3. *Wash your hands and trust in science!*

Probably the book for children that got the highest success among the audience, due to the reputation and the notoriety of its author, was *Ti conosco mascherina*, written by the well known scientist, specialised in veterinary medicine, Ilaria Capua²¹, formerly member of the Italian Parliament (2013-2016) and at the present researcher at the University of Florida, almost permanently present on TV channels in the early months of the pandemic emergency, because of her past researches about the avian influenza, for which, at that time, she became popular to the largest audience.

It is a colourful hardback book with holes, levers and windows to open, published by La Coccinella, the first publishing house to produce this sort of books in Italy since the 1970s. The book, of which the main character is a young girl, begins explaining in an easy but incisive way, coronavirus nature and how it spilled over from animals to human beings (that concerns the author's main competence, dr. Capua is a veterinarian): this was the most accredited hypothesis, before the speculation about its artificial origins in the laboratory of Wuhan. Then there are some advices for preventing the spreading and protect you and the other people, especially the weakest ones.

The book main concern seems to be simply disciplinary and precautionary, as if the biggest challenge for children would be just hygienic and not existential. However, in my frank opinion, *Ti conosco mascherina* has been above all a sly commercial operation, that exploited the reputation of a well known personality present for a long time on the main media, in whom ordinary people trust more for her political and television fame than for her scientific competence, that, of course, is not questioned. Capua has also written a book for adult people, *Il dopo. Il virus che ci ha costretto a cambiare mappa mentale*²².

²¹ I. CAPUA, *Ti conosco mascherina*, La Coccinella Milano 2020.

²² Ead., *Il dopo. Il virus che ci ha costretto a cambiare mappa mentale*, Mondadori, Milano 2020.

Less ambitious, addressed to children in pre-school age, are the two little books by Nicole Vascotto published by Scienza Express, *Laila e il coronavirus*²³ and its sequel *Laila, il coronavirus e la mascherina. Torniamo a scuola!*²⁴. Also here the main character is a girl.

In the first volume mummy explains to Laila, a four years old child, why she cannot any-more attend the infant school, because of the coming of a new mysterious disease. The second one just clarifies how to restart everyday life safely, keeping distances and wearing masks. The idea of publishing the first book came after the author, an architect and designer actually mother of a young girl, posted some sketches on Facebook, that soon became viral and appreciated among infant schools teachers. The contents are very simple, but the drawing are colourful and joyful.

Another very simple work, but released by one of the biggest Italian publishing houses, Rizzoli, which owns the most read newspaper in the country, «Corriere della sera», is an illustrated e-book freely available on the Internet, *La nostra partita*, written by the sport reporter Marco Cattaneo²⁵. The fight against corona-virus is compared by Cattaneo to a football match, using joyful concepts and happy and trustworthy words. In its second part, the book requires the direct involvement of the young reader, who is encouraged to paint and draw his team to win the match. In comparison with other publications, I particularly appreciate this one because less pedantic and more positive. The sacrifice theme, however, is heavily present, even though in a less ideological way.

Very different is the perspective adopted by *Guida galattica al coronavirus! Per bambini e bambine curiosi* (officially translated in *A curious guide for courageous kids*, a non-literal translation), written by Erika Nerini and Daniela Longo²⁶ and promoted by the Children's Museums of Milan, Verona, Rome and Genoa, freely downloadable from the website of the last one, published simultaneously both in Italian and in English. It consists of twenty-four very colourful pages, in which prevails, in an almost obsessive way, trust in science as the key to leave the emergency: the word "scien-

²³ N. VASCOTTO, *Laila e il coronavirus*, Scienza Express, Trieste 2020.

²⁴ Ead., *Laila, il coronavirus e la mascherina. Torniamo a scuola!*, Scienza Express, Trieste 2020.

²⁵ M. CATTANEO, *La nostra partita. Tireremo un calcio anche al virus, e vinceremo noi!*, Rizzoli, Milano 2020.

²⁶ E. NERINI, D. LONGO, *Guida galattica al coronavirus! Per bambini e bambine curiosi*. Museo dei Bambini, Genova 2020.

tists” recurs four times in the pamphlet total nine written pages. Other two pages (19-20) report six rules to prevent the contagion. Actually it is hard to categorize it as a real book, being more effectively an informative brochure produced by the communication offices of the museums (that maybe explains also the particular concern for science).

The incipit says: «This story starts in a distant city, near the banks of the Blue River, in China. The city of Wuhan». Suddenly the character of dr. Li Wenliang is introduced, specifying that he discovered the new disease because he was «very curious». Consistently with its ambition to offer a “scientific” product, the book describes for a while Sars-CoV-2 specifics like the virus size and its possibility to spread, telling i.e. that «a sneeze is enough to make it travel almost 2 meters». There is no more space for narration: the pamphlet is indeed a “guide”, a simple handbook, that at most can say:

Not being able to go out with your friends is kind of sad. But it’s important that you don’t, because a sneeze, a hug, or even a handshake could be enough to get you sick.

Scientists say the virus spreads very quickly in closed quarters and crowded places.

It really gets on well with everyone, no matter what language you speak, where you come from, or how old you are.²⁷

4. *Other perspectives*

Among the various works circulating in Italy in this period, I think that the ones deserving more are *Nano Gianni e i granelli rossi* by Fabio Sbattella²⁸ and the short novel *Noemi nella tempesta*²⁹ published by De Agostini and written by Alberto Pellai, doctor and researcher in hygiene at the State University of Milan, but also psychotherapist and well known author for children and about children and teen-agers, and by his wife Barbara Tamborini, psycho-pedagogist. Aside *Noemi nella tempesta*, during the pandemic Pellai wrote also *Mentre la tempesta colpiva forte. Quello che noi genitori abbiamo imparato in tempo di emergenza*³⁰.

²⁷ *Ivi*, p. 15.

²⁸ F. SBATTELLA, *Nano Gianni e i granelli rossi*, Giunti, Firenze 2020.

²⁹ A. PELLAI, B. TAMBORINI, *Noemi nella tempesta*, DeA Planet, Milano 2021.

³⁰ A. PELLAI, *Mentre la tempesta colpiva forte. Quello che noi genitori abbiamo imparato in tempo di emergenza*, De Agostini, Novara 2020.

Differently from the other works, the authors of *Noemi nella tempesta* do not focus on the disease and on its prevention, neither they give a list of rules to follow or simple scientific information, but they catch conveniently the occasion of the pandemic, experienced traumatically by the youngsters, to offer a really educative story, even if frankly conventional and somewhere a bit stereotypical.

The plot, told using the first person like it was written in a diary by Noemi, a young girl attending the primary school in a town in Northern Italy, and by her brother Luca, attending the middle school, is plain but effective: Noemi does not want to work to a school project together with her Chinese mate Li, so she makes the wish to see him never more, using a little mirror given her by the grandmother, that is supposed to be magical. In the same evening, on February 21st 2020, the government announce the suspension of classes and of almost every economical activities in the region. That day, as also the book recalls, was actually discovered the first case of Covid-19 in Italy, in a 38 years old man of Codogno, a little town in Lombardy. The so called «red zone» would be enlarged in the following days to other several provinces in the North and to whole Italy from March 9th, ceasing almost all the economic activities and citizens' social life. Italians reacted to that extremely severe measures with unexpected obedience, strictly respecting the lock-down rules.

Li, the Chinese school-mate, gives up to attend his classes. Feeling guilty, believing that all the situation is caused by her selfish wish, Noemi, with the help of Luca and the girl he likes, Francesca, tries to find Li and to fix the situation, apologising and making him accepted. They discover that Li's family manage a tobacconist's, so they go to talk to his mother.

The happy end comes, but it is not so obvious either silly: the parents reconcile themselves but without getting together again, Noemi and Li do not become really friends, Luca and Francesca do not become a couple. Above all, the pandemic remains a worrying threat, we have not yet overcome.

The moral is explicit and it is explained directly by the authors:

We will learn the lesson that this experience taught us, that we cannot live without friends, that school seems to be a struggle, but its absence drives us to madness. And that life is the most beautiful thing we received and that we must celebrate it everyday and live it intensively without wasting anything of what it can gift us. We also learnt that we cannot control everything. But when you see a gigantic wave running toward to you and that is going to submerge you, you have to

run to find out a board and surf on it, finding new balances and trying to do what you have never done before³¹.

I particularly like this care, unfortunately lacking or not highlighted enough in other works, this attention to what that makes life worthy to be experienced, beyond the basic biological data, beyond health aspects, beyond the obsession of which we are the victims during these two years.

More interesting to us was the fable by the psychotherapist Fabio Sbattella, *Nano Gianni e i granelli rossi*³², published by Giunti with an afterword, in the form of a letter to parents, by the philosopher Umberto Galimberti.

Sbattella recounts the ongoing epidemic in an allegorical manner, without explicitly referring to Sars-Cov-2, but to generic «red grains», that infest Madia's fantasy realm. It is precisely this distancing from the chronicle that allows the author to avoid falling into the precepts of a pandemic «manual» or «etiquette», seeking instead to draw a moral lesson for dealing with the emergency. The solution is found by the wise Dwarf Gianni of the title, who enjoins the inhabitants of Madia to «make themselves small» just like the grains that cover their kingdom, so that they can destroy them from within, instead of looking for miraculous solutions in military force and technical-scientific development.

Making oneself small corresponds to taking care of everyday life with passion, accepting the hardships of the emergency, but without being crushed by them: children play with each other, grandmothers bake cakes experimenting with new recipes, merchants rest from their trade. In the book appendix, Sbattella himself offers young readers some hints on games to play at home and how to better spend time with mum and dad who are forced to stay home from work. The allegory is clarified by Galimberti³³, who invites adults to spend the suspended time of lockdown together with their children, perhaps reading together, not hiding from them the seriousness of the moment humanity was going through, and caring for their inner selves and their family relationships.

³¹ A. PELLAI, B. TAMBORINI, *Noemi nella tempesta*, cit., pp. 231-232.

³² F. SBATELLA, *Nano Gianni e i granelli rossi*, cit.

³³ *Ivi*, p. 33.

5. *Girls' power!*

In the most ideological specimen of book I examined, *Il dottor Li e il virus con in testa una corona* by Francesca Cavallo³⁴, the same author of the worldwide feminist best-seller for young girls *Storie della buonanotte per bambine ribelli*, the faith in science and the obedience to it were not just limited to the pandemic, but they were openly connected to the engagement for a fairer and more equal society. Therefore, who had some doubts about the actions against Covid-19 contagion, seemed to suggest the author, in some way could be an obstacle also along the way for the general scientific progress, for the safeguard of natural environment, the fight against racism and prejudices, for a more equal economic system and so on.

All the protagonists of the books published in Italy during the pandemic, in order to reason about it, were girls. Thus, while boys embodied, also in several literary works, the vanguards of 20th century ideologies – fascism and other authoritarianisms – girls seem now to be the forerunners of our 21st century hyper-modern times. Greta Thunberg herself could be considered the ideal leader of this crowd of «rebel girls». After her famous school strikes for climate, she has again and again demonstrated for other humanitarian causes: the migrants in the Mediterranean, the right of Palestine to independence (and the condemn to Israeli politics, quite often marked by anti-Semitism) and of women to safe abortion, Ukrainian freedom against Russian aggression and so on.

Girls are more and more often the protagonists of numerous novels and films written and produced in the last years. The main reason, probably, could be that this is a sort of compensation for the absolute traditional male predominance in the past decades, but maybe this happens also because girls are stereotypically perceived as more trustworthy and more compliant in accepting new rules, and are considered more naturally social than boys: so they can be presented as smart civic models. This idea can be true even if very often female characters are shown as rebels or non-conformists, odd and eccentric, usually refusing the traditional roles that the society set for them. Nowadays heroines are no more princesses or fairies, who accept passively to be rescued by knights and to marry the charming prince, but they act directly in order to realise their dreams and to achieve their own goals. But precisely in this refuse of tradition and in the subver-

³⁴ F. CAVALLO, *Il dottor Li e il virus con in testa una corona*, Feltrinelli, Milano 2021.

sion of the old rules lays the new educative paradigm, which is arranging a new normality, a new obedience, a new need for compliance.

But it can be seen that this message seems to be possible in all the publications I read, through the pledge of a sacrifice, through the proof of personal surrender, in order to achieve a higher collective well-being in the future. Conceptually, there is no difference between such a discourse and, for instance, the call to enlist in the army to fight the enemy in the trenches, as our forefathers did a hundred years ago, and how children's books actually told about it in the 1920s³⁵. The individual life can be sacrificed for the higher collective benefit: nowadays no more for the nation, of course, but for humankind.

In the last decades, we have educated children to think critically, to deconstruct stereotypes and social constructs – such as family, sex and gender, religion, nation. Today, I think, we are facing the *pars construens*: a new worship is growing over the ruins of our civilisation and it requires compliance and obedience.

I can confirm my hypothesis, reading, among others, *Il dottor Li e il virus con in testa una corona* written by Francesca Cavallo and illustrated by Claudia Flandoli. The text was originally freely available on Cavallo's personal web-site and then published, by the well-known progressive publishing house Feltrinelli, after a crowd-funding action.

Francesca Cavallo had already achieved international fame thanks to *Storie della buonanotte per bambine ribelli*³⁶, which sold hundreds of thousands copies worldwide. She wrote it together with Elena Favilli, drafting a kind of feminist encyclopaedia, which collects a hundred short biographies (per volume) of different women (the third book is specially dedicated to migrant women³⁷, the fourth to «Italian extraordinary women»³⁸). The selection is really wide and various, including, at the same time, Serena Williams and Rita Levi Montalcini, Malala Yousafzai and Frida Kahlo, Margherita Hack and Michelle Obama, all proposed as different models to emulate. Some of the mottoes with which the books have been advertised

³⁵ Cfr. i.e. S. GOTTA, *Piccolo alpino*, Mondadori, Milano 1926.

³⁶ F. CAVALLO, E. FAVILLI, *Storie della buonanotte per bambine ribelli*, Mondadori, Milano 2018-2020.

³⁷ E. FAVILLI, *Storie della buonanotte per bambine ribelli. 100 donne migranti che hanno cambiato il mondo*, Mondadori, Milano 2020.

³⁸ EAD., *Storie della buonanotte per bambine ribelli. 100 donne italiane straordinarie*, Mondadori, Milano 2020.

were: «Once upon a time there was a young girl who dreamt of... marrying a charming prince? No, of going to Mars!» and «To the rebel girls of the world: the story you cannot find out in the book, is the one you are already writing». Elena Favilli published also *Guida per bambine ribelli. Alla scoperta del corpo che cambia*³⁹, a progressive handbook about puberty and growth. «Rebel girls» hence became a rich brand to exploit, with a great deal of audience understanding, and were the sign of a profound change in common sense.

Coming back to *Il dottor Li e il virus con in testa una corona*, this book clearly points at trust in science as the only way to go through the emergency. This book is addressed to an older audience (aged 8-12 years), so the attention is not focused just on prevention and rules, but also on some civic values to enforce. Dr. Li Wenliang, the Chinese scientist from Wuhan, who was the first to denounce the virus spreading, is frankly presented as a martyr of the scientific new worship, almost a secular saint for our days and similarly other scientists (*scienziate*, «women scientist», mum literally says) at work in order to find out the origin of the virus, a vaccine and a therapy.

Francesca Cavallo insists also on the possibility of an active role for children, apart from the pandemic, desiring a «fairer world». It is properly a call to action, where the pandemic seems to be just a pretext, an excuse to do active politics. Dr. Li Wenliang and Greta Thunberg have very few in common, but in this vision they fight on the same side, for science and against obscurantism, prejudice, economic liberalism and the exploitation of the planet resources. Therefore, doubting the measures adopted against Covid-19, becomes fatally next to questioning scientific progress itself, but also environmental concerns and even social justice, peace and international cooperation and security. In this way, a new system of values is arising. And values, by definition, are not questioned, values demand faithful adherence and obedient compliance.

With some exceptions, we must acknowledge that the great majority of the books written during the pandemic, are concerned at best with preventive measures, especially the importance of the correct way to wear the surgical mask, on maintaining the hands clean and keeping social distance, justifying and confirming the restrictions that have prevented the young readers to go to school, to meet their friends and to see their grandparents.

³⁹ EAD., *Guida per bambine ribelli. Alla scoperta del corpo che cambia*, Mondadori, Milano 2021.

We can say that a number of these works look more like handbooks containing pieces of advice, and in some case like good manners pamphlets, rather than like imaginative tales written to comfort the youngest readers in difficult times.

These books are usually filled with subtle optimism and overall with the fundamental confidence in the power of science. A recurrent issue is, in fact, the “scientific” basis, that tries to explain what coronavirus is, its origins, how it spreads and, of course, how it can be defeated and how children can play their part in this big historical challenge. Optimism, indeed, persuades that the pandemic could be treated as a historical challenge to accept and not as a catastrophe to cope with. A challenge to win all together.

I quoted books about the pandemic, but we can find out other features of hyper-modern styles in other literary works. Raffaele Donnarumma employed the category of hyper-modern to review the recent Italian and international literature, marking the recurring use of tales in the first singular person point of view, even when the story is clearly fictional, but pretending to offer an authentic testimony. And that because, according to Donnarumma, after the post-modernist dissolution of traditions and ideologies, with the loss of social relevance by parties and churches, only the individual seems to be reliable: in a broken up society only the individual subject, with his or her weaknesses, in his or her loneliness, seems to be authentic and trustworthy.

Among other common traits of hyper-modernist literature there is the re-discovering of realism and recurring references to the past, often object of nostalgic representations, as if the lost meaning could be found only in history (or just in memories), while the present appears void and insignificant. Actually many novels written for the youngsters in the last twenty years – at least the Italian books I read⁴⁰ – are set in the past, particularly during fascism and World War II, inspiring children to fight against present time injustice and discriminations and invoking a sort of new resistance. But many books also describe in realistic narrative, through their protagonists’ eyes, our present days with their problems, directly calling the young readers to act for improving them. Call to actions are other traits of hyper-modern and they often have clear pedagogical goals.

⁴⁰ A. DESSARDO, *Sulle tracce dell'ipermoderno nella recente narrativa italiana per ragazzi*, in «Pagine giovani» n. 1/2023, pp. 6-10.

Quite the opposite, we could object referring to the great achievement of the fantasy genre, emerged exactly at the end of the last century with the beginning of *Harry Potter's* saga, followed by a large crowd of imitations in the first decade of the third millennium. But, according to Darko Suvin's explanation⁴¹, science-fiction, fantasy, utopia and dystopia are all artistic representations of the detected tensions between the unsatisfying reality and its possible alternatives. Fantasy, a genre established by two Catholic writers like J.K.K. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, reflects, according to Fredric Jameson⁴², to whom we owe the most influential essay about post-modern⁴³, an archaic and confused nostalgia for the agricultural and pre-capitalistic societies.

In fantasy novels heroes desperately, and sometime unsuccessfully, fight against obscure forces that pervertedly control their universes, with the aim to re-establish and restore an ancient and mythic order of justice.

Fantasy novels are in depth allegories of the disorder and troubles of our present days.

⁴¹ D. SUVIN, *Metamorphoses of science-fiction. On the poetics and history of a literary genre*. Yale University Press, New Haven 1979.

⁴² F. JAMESON, *Magical narratives. Romance as genre*, in «Critical challenges: The Bellagio Symposium», vol. 7 (1975), pp. 135-163.

⁴³ Id., *Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism*, Duke University Press, Durham 1984.

SECTION VII

ACTING IN A WORLD IN LABOUR

RECOMMENDATION ON EDUCATION FOR PEACE, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: A NEW CHALLENGE FOR SCHOOLS

MARIA BUCCOLO

Abstract

Educating for peace seems to be more than ever, in light of the ongoing wars, a categorical imperative through which to build a horizon of pedagogical meaning capable of promoting impactful educational actions on topics related to emotional education and education for active and responsible citizenship. These principles underlie UNESCO's recommendation on peace education¹, which represents a non-binding guidance document focusing on how teaching and learning should evolve to achieve lasting peace, reaffirm human rights, and promote sustainable development in the face of contemporary threats and challenges.

Schools, therefore, can strongly contribute to societal change and play a crucial role in educating for peace.

Key-words: Peace, hope, education, citizenship, inclusion.

1. Citizenship education: for a sustainable and lasting peace

The recent adoption of the UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights, and Sustainable Development, approved by the Member States during the 2023 General Conference, demonstrates how international institutions are responding to the new challenges of the 21st century. The main goal of peace education is to promote a change in values, attitudes, and behaviors to foster a classroom climate based on

¹ UNESCO (2024). *Raccomandazione dell'UNESCO sull'educazione alla pace, ai diritti umani e allo sviluppo sostenibile*. Parigi: Unesco. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000386924>.

tolerance, respect, solidarity, and justice. It is an education in values that aims to raise awareness among adults, growing individuals, and society in general about the importance of cooperation and solidarity among diverse cultures and respect for all living beings. In this sense, the UNESCO Recommendation on peace education provides useful guidance for the teacher who, in today's educational scenarios, is called to be simultaneously an educator, a researcher, and an experienced witness of the time in which students live, capable of bridging the languages of the new generations. This Recommendation, therefore, provides a roadmap to guide our societies towards a fairer, healthier, and more peaceful future for all. This means ensuring that learners, of all ages and throughout their lives, have the knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and behaviors necessary to take individual and collective action towards achieving this common future. Building on these pedagogical reflections, the contribution aims to analyze the impact of the UNESCO recommendation on teaching practices in early childhood and primary schools at the national level. Emotional education, creativity, and imagination are central elements in the teaching-learning processes. The experience presented focuses on the role of activities such as play, art, and reading in peace education to promote the construction of positive and collaborative relationships. If through play, children learn to respect rules, share, manage, and resolve conflicts peacefully, languages like art, play, writing through story creation, and reading offer spaces of expression that can help them process difficult experiences and develop empathy towards others. Therefore, the school plays a fundamental role in this process and represents a privileged place for the sharing and generativity of attitudes and values inherent in peace education. Peace education, echoing the thought of Maria Montessori who places it as an indispensable existential condition for the development of individual freedom, becomes a practice that requires commitment and dedication from educators and teachers to promote the daily development of positive emotions, respect, empathy, understanding, and solidarity. However, this approach requires a profound paradigm shift, as often in schools, situations are created that generate competition among students and lead to dynamics that predispose to conflict. It is an invitation to rethink the role of the school as an elective place for citizenship education with a strong reference to goals 4 (quality education) and 16 (peace and justice) of the 2030 agenda. It is the constant attention that teachers and students pay to attitudes, actions, and reactions. It draws inspiration from daily events and can be integrated into

the annual curriculum, connecting transversally to all disciplinary areas. Peace, therefore, is a cross-cutting and universal theme². It is present in various cultures, religions, and populations, and in each of these, it finds a specific argumentation. Humanity has always been engaged in its contexts of belonging for its realization, often testifying to it through its actions. Peace, as a personal, community, and even political condition, can be considered as an impulse and opening of “all” humanity to adhere to a plurality of values such as democracy, justice, and freedom; values that can impact the human and educational journey of each individual. Religions, in fact, have always proposed testimonies to share experiences that indirectly lead to peace education in this regard, Pope Francis refers to the three paths “for the construction of lasting peace”³:

1. The dialogue between generations to share common projects;
2. Education and instruction;
3. Job security for the realization of human dignity.

These three paths are particularly suggestive to delve into a discourse that recognizes peace as having a universal, educational, and projective meaning in line with the UNESCO Recommendation.

2. *The “Hope for Peace” Project: an experience in preschools and primary schools*

The International Research Center for Inclusion and Teacher Training (IRCIT) of the European University of Rome, on the occasion of the International Day of Peace held on September 21, 2024, invited preschool and primary school teachers to conduct educational activities in their classes related to peace education. The idea was to work on two key words: “Hope” and “Peace” to build a better future through drawings, phrases, thoughts on the meaning, stories about the hope for peace in the world, and any other activity capable of activating students’ creative and critical thinking.

The work was based on the 14 *Guiding Principles for Transformative Education* adopted by the UNESCO General Conference:

- 1) Based on human rights

² M. MONTESSORI, *Educazione e pace*, Edizioni Opera Nazionale Montessori, Roma 2024, prima edizione Garzanti 1949.

³ PAPA FRANCESCO, *Che la pace sia con te*. Newton Compton Editori, Roma 2022.

- 2) Accessible and of good quality (education as a public and common good)
- 3) Non-discriminatory
- 4) Oriented towards an ethics of care, compassion, and solidarity
- 5) Supportive of gender equality
- 6) Fair, inclusive, and respectful of diversity
- 7) Beneficial for the health, safety, and well-being of students, teachers, and educational staff
- 8) Sustainable, continuous, and transformative
- 9) Useful for co-creating knowledge
- 10) Supporting freedom of thought, belief, religion, and expression and against all forms of hatred
- 11) Inclusive, particularly through an ethical and responsible use of technologies
- 12) Based on an international and global perspective, demonstrating connections between the local and the global
- 13) Functional for dialogue between cultures and generations
- 14) Based on an ethics of global citizenship and shared responsibility for peace, human rights, and sustainable development for the benefit of all.

The project involved 7 classes of Primary School, which created artifacts on peace education of great interest and originality. Specifically:

- Class 1^A A, De Amicis IC, Buonarroti branch, Lissone (MB), produced an artifact titled: “The rainbow of peace.” The UNESCO Recommendation was useful for discussing peace in class; the children expressed their thoughts through words like: love as a fundamental principle of social relationships and respect.
- Class 2^B B of IC Via Santi Savarino in Rome created a collective drawing titled “Imagining peace.”
- Class 3^B B of IC Via Santi Savarino in Rome constructed a peace calligram titled “Educating ourselves to peace” to develop creative thinking and initiate reflection.
- Class 4^A A of IC Via Santi Savarino in Rome created an illustrated book titled “A great sun to warm us all.” The idea arose from a classroom conversation about the meaning of the words Hope and Peace: Hope represents the sun that warms everyone.
- Class 5^A A of IC Via Santi Savarino in Rome conducted an interdisciplinary workshop to develop students’ creativity and help

them recognize the value of solidarity, the need to overcome prejudices to appreciate diversity as a resource. Reflections emerged on the educational significance of the concept of peace in children's daily actions, which were written on drop-shaped cards.

- Class 4^A E of IC San Nilo in Grottaferrata (RM) composed a poetic text: "What peace means to us."
- Class V^A F of IC *Via del Calice* in Rome created a poster titled «The House of Peace.» Peace was symbolically represented by the students as a multi-story house, each floor containing an identified value. The children decided to entrust their future hopes to hot air balloons.

Regarding Early Childhood, educators and teachers working at Girasole, a Montessori method Nursery and Kindergarten in Rome, describe education as an experience of peace for children. It is a laboratory of life where energies are released, compressed souls expand and reveal themselves: this is where the new child, the new man of the near future, is born. The methodological proposal is cosmic education, where the child is hope for development and for the maintenance of the whole; if adequately supported and guided in their natural development, they collaborate and participate with their peers in the construction of work, cooperation, respect, and love.

Reading the UNESCO Recommendations, educators and teachers realized how these resonate as guidelines and inspiring principles for their daily work.

The teachers at the Municipal Nursery School *Torre di Babele* in Rome, after reading the UNESCO Recommendation, chose to focus on life's big questions in the words of children. They realized that "Peace" and "hope" are complex concepts, difficult to explain, leading them to ask the following questions: What does it mean to talk about peace and hope with 3, 4, and 5-year-olds? How to discuss these concepts with them without falling into stereotypes? How to build genuine thoughts around peace and hope that go beyond simple statements and transform into something internalized and actionable? In conclusion, the group of teachers reflected on the importance of reading and the careful and conscious choice of books to offer, trying to create a "bridge" between school and families, sharing some illustrated books on the theme of peace. The Erodoto Corigliano Nursery School (CS) presented a project titled "Living with respect and growing with kindness:

the pedagogy of hope for the construction of universal peace.” Referring to UNESCO’s Recommendation on peace education and the epistemological references of special and intercultural pedagogy, the following were proposed: moments of reflection in the agora with summarizing brainwriting, realization of linguistic and graphic-pictorial activities, choreutic activities, dress-up games, creation of a peace train, creation of a logo, sharing with families and the community through an exhibition of works at school, in shops, and in significant places in the city. The potential of artificial intelligence was also utilized to generate a story, some images, and a song. The experience was significant both for the themes on which it was possible to reflect and for the accountability towards the entire school and the community.

The experiences presented here have used educational approaches focused on cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioral learning and have led children to develop the following skills:

- self-awareness
- ability to anticipate
- citizenship skills
- interconnection, a sense of belonging to a diverse common humanity on planet earth
- empowerment, free will, and resilience
- collaborative abilities
- peaceful conflict resolution
- adaptability and creativity
- decision-making skills
- respect for diversity
- critical thinking.

3. Conclusions

From the presented experience, the need to educate for peace emerges by reinforcing - from early childhood - the ability to imagine it, desire it, understand it, defend it, and build it through the development of positive emotions that build meaningful relationships. It is therefore essential to embrace the theme of “lasting peace” as a renewed commitment, taking up and making our own the words of Maria Montessori (1952) engraved on her tomb: “I pray dear children who can do everything to join me in building peace in men and in the world.”

As previously stated, school inevitably plays a crucial role because it is freedom and inclusion. It is the place where relationships intertwine, but above all, it is a community capable of enhancing the educational dimension, experiences, and the value sphere of the entire school community.

If, when we speak broadly of education, we also refer to “a growth of humanity in man, such growth can only fully occur in peace. Therefore, the task of pedagogy is to think of peace as a condition for full education. And to contribute to an education capable of promoting a culture of peace”⁴.

Therefore, the new UNESCO Recommendation is connected to the UNESCO report of 2023, titled “Re-imagining our futures together: a new social contract for education,” which highlighted the need for a more relevant, forward-thinking vision for teaching, learning, and innovation, considering how the world has changed and will continue to evolve in the decades to come.

In this scenario, the school can strongly contribute to societal change and has a crucial role in educating for peace. It is precisely the new generations that can help us imagine and build peace and deeply understand its value.

There are various ways to address the themes of war and peace: building shared meanings, looking at what is happening in the world, reading a book, or exploring works of art are just a few possible examples that emerged from the “Hope for Peace” project.

Education for peace is therefore configured as education for a “constellation” of human rights: citizenship, interculturality, dialogue, coexistence, democracy, legality, justice, social and emotional skills, conflict management, nonviolence, equal opportunities, solidarity, sharing, respect for the environment, energy saving, critical and conscious consumption.

⁴ M. BALDACCI, *La via pedagogica della pace*, «Pedagogia più Didattica», 8(1), 2022, pp. 1-3.

THE INCLUSIVE TEACHER IN EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE WITH THE ERASMUS PROJECT

FRANCESCO PALMA

Abstract

School inclusion represents a central challenge for the European educational system, requiring effective strategies to enhance the diversity that characterizes today's school environments. This particularity necessitates transversal intercultural and relational skills, aimed at creating an equitable and welcoming learning environment that fosters the growth and development of every student. In this context, the Erasmus programme serves as a crucial educational opportunity for teachers, fostering the acquisition of new educational perspectives and the dissemination of inclusive teaching practices through mobility experiences. This paper aims to explore the role of the Erasmus project in teacher training, highlighting its impact on the development of methodologies sensitive to diversity and social cohesion.

Keywords: Erasmus, Inclusion, Training, Key competencies, Interculturality

1. Introduction

At the heart of the educational experience lies the encounter. This idea is powerfully expressed by the philosopher and pedagogist Martin Buber, who stated that “all real living is meeting.” These words compellingly convey the central role of relationships in human existence, as the space where meaning is generated and, more broadly, where learning takes place.

In today's schools, this perspective is embodied daily in increasingly heterogeneous classrooms, where students with different backgrounds, languages, cultures, and life experiences share the same educational space. For several decades now, the European educational landscape has reflected rapid and complex social, cultural, and economic transformations, turning

classrooms into true microcosms of diversity. This plurality is, on the one hand, an extraordinary resource for learning and personal growth; on the other, it presents significant challenges to the entire educational system, which is called upon to provide effective learning experiences for all students.

Within this framework, school plays a crucial role as a space for encounter, dialogue, and the construction of conscious citizenship. It is a place where every student should feel recognized, welcomed, and respected, so they can fully develop their potential. At the forefront of this process are teachers, key actors in educational change. They are required not only to master disciplinary content but also to develop transversal, relational, and intercultural skills that are essential in the teaching-learning process to address the complexity of contemporary classrooms. In fact, it is these skills, perhaps even more than disciplinary knowledge, that determine the effectiveness of educational action.

European educational policies, such as the 2018 Council of the European Union Recommendations on key competences for lifelong learning, as well as international documents like UNESCO's 2030 Agenda, strongly emphasize the need to promote high-quality, equitable, and inclusive education. These documents highlight the importance of educating conscious citizens within a pluralistic society such as our own.

It is within this complex framework that the Erasmus programme emerges as a valuable resource for the initial and ongoing training of teachers. International mobility experiences allow teachers to engage with different educational models, broaden their perspectives, and directly experience otherness. Through such opportunities, they can acquire tools to more consciously address the challenges posed by diversity in school contexts.

This paper aims to explore the characteristics of an inclusive teacher and the role of the Erasmus programme in teacher education, highlighting how firsthand intercultural encounters can translate into more attentive, flexible, and diversity-enhancing pedagogical practices. Through a qualitative analysis of international mobility experiences undertaken by future and in-service teachers, this contribution seeks to identify the factors that most significantly influence daily pedagogical practice and outline new perspectives for teacher training that responds to the challenges of today's educational landscape.

2. *The inclusive teacher: key competencies*

Inclusion is undeniably an urgent priority in today's educational landscape, more than just a challenge. The increasing cultural, linguistic, social, and economic diversification characterizing today's classrooms requires a profound transformation of the teacher's role. Inclusive teaching is becoming a categorical imperative – a deliberate ethical, moral, and even political choice¹. Teachers are expected to design learning environments where every student is represented and supported along their educational journey, using teaching methodologies that take differences into account and leverage them as resources.

From this perspective, inclusion cannot be reduced to a set of strategies applied in exceptional cases but must be understood as a structural dimension of the educational system. As Morganti and Bocci state², inclusive teaching «is not only about students who are 'included' or 'to be included' in 'mainstream' settings but aims to make school environments inclusive». This implies a profound cultural shift, seeing the teacher as a promoter of equity and a facilitator of learning for all. Such an approach acknowledges that inclusion concerns not only students with disabilities or various special educational needs, but all students. Every learner, for different reasons and at different times in their journey, may exhibit specific needs, demands, and vulnerabilities, which the teacher must be able to address in a timely, decisive, and effective manner. This approach seeks to overcome the conceptual and operational limitations of traditional definitions of inclusion, which often retain the idea of a group that has «the power or the right to include»³ another. As Canevaro and Ianes point out⁴, these limits can be overcome by adopting a new perspective grounded in the principle of *universality*, through teaching designed to work for as many students as possible. This approach is in full alignment with the Universal Design for Learning model, which involves actively removing learning barriers and designing accessible pathways for every student.

The central role of teacher training in an inclusive perspective thus becomes clear. Theoretical knowledge alone is not sufficient; it is essential

¹ P. AIELLO, C. GIACONI (A CURA DI), *L'agire inclusivo. Interfacce pedagogiche e didattiche. Manuale per l'insegnante*, Scholé, Brescia 2014.

² A. MORGANTI, F. BOCCI, *Didattica inclusiva per la scuola primaria*, Giunti, Firenze 2017.

³ V. GHENO, *Chiamami così*, Il Margine, Trento 2022.

⁴ A. CANEVARO, D. IANES, *Un'altra didattica è possibile*, Erickson, Trento 2021.

to develop a wide range of competences that deeply influence the teaching-learning process and ensure its effectiveness. Cottini states that «the profile of the inclusive teacher is based on four essential values of teaching and learning»⁵ which include: recognizing student diversity; supporting students with high expectations for each of them; working with others, promoting collaboration as an essential approach for every teacher; and engaging in continuous professional development, viewing teaching itself as a learning process.

These values translate into observable behaviours, specific knowledge, and attitudes that enable the teacher to recognize students' educational needs and adapt their teaching accordingly. Among the fundamental skills for this purpose, flexibility and adaptability are of central importance. The teacher must be able to adjust their practice according to the specific needs of the class and respond promptly to unexpected and complex situations. This requires the willingness to revise strategies, experiment with alternative approaches, and modify planning to ensure favourable learning conditions for every student. Closely related to this dimension is the capacity for problem-solving, understood as the ability to creatively address the difficulties that arise in students' school experiences. Alongside this, it is essential to respond with empathy and relational sensitivity to understand and respect students' experiences and backgrounds. Being aware of one's own emotions and those of others is crucial to building a welcoming and motivating school environment, allowing emotions to be used as tools for teaching and as levers for meaningful learning⁶. These competences fall under the relational domain, which is expressed through the ability to build meaningful and trusting relationships, an essential foundation for a positive and collaborative classroom climate and authentic learning for all students. Among these, effective communication stands out as especially important, a communication that is clear and assertive, serving as a powerful relational tool to strengthen students' sense of belonging and engagement, particularly for the most vulnerable.

The relationships formed and nurtured within the school context represent both the foundation and the essence of learning. The foundation, because, as has been discussed, every learning experience is closely tied

⁵ L. COTTINI, *Didattica speciale e inclusione scolastica*, Carocci, Roma 2017.

⁶ M. BUCCOLO, *L'educatore emozionale. Percorsi di alfabetizzazione emotiva per tutta la vita*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 2019.

to the emotions that accompany it: a calm and positive classroom environment is essential for effective learning. The essence, because it is through relationships that the educational process takes shape in its most authentic dimension. The educational relationship is not merely an accessory to teaching; it becomes the very object of learning. Each student, even before acquiring content and disciplinary competences, learns relationships and relational models, experiences what is “other” and learns to mediate with it, supported by peers and adults who act as facilitators of the learning experience.

In this regard, it is crucial to distinguish three types of relationships that the teacher is called to intentionally foster: relationships among students, which, with the teacher’s mediation, can form the foundation of learning and a lasting sense of belonging; relationships with students, based on active listening, trust, and respect, essential for creating a space where every student feels welcomed and understood; relationships between the teacher and all other school stakeholders, which provide relational models for students and offer valuable support for meaningful learning that involves the entire educational community.

Finally, among the key competences of an inclusive teacher are intercultural competences, which are essential for at least two important reasons.

First, interculturality should be understood as the ability to consciously and constructively manage cultural differences among students from diverse socio-economic, linguistic, and value backgrounds. As previously noted, today’s classrooms are increasingly heterogeneous: the presence of students with migratory backgrounds, and diverse ethnic, religious, or linguistic affiliations has become a structural feature of the school system. This requires that teachers know how to value these differences, turning them into educational opportunities through teaching practices that include, represent, and engage with multiple worldviews. In this sense, intercultural competence goes beyond cultural knowledge and becomes a dialogical attitude and cognitive decentring: the ability to suspend judgment, renegotiate meaning, and reframe expectations and teaching models in light of present differences.

Second, the concept of interculturality must be expanded beyond ethnic or national belonging, encompassing a broader ability to relate to what is “other.” This is a form of sensitivity that involves the teacher’s capacity to mediate between individuals with different backgrounds, identities, and life experiences, even when those differences are not immediately ap-

parent. Diversity can concern abilities, cognitive styles, learning methods, family experiences, or worldviews. Therefore, intercultural competence requires work on implicit stereotypes, emotional resistances, and automatic reactions, developing openness, cultural empathy, and interpretative flexibility. As Deardorff also states⁷, this competence includes the ability to build meaningful relationships in contexts of otherness, fostering coexistence, co-construction of meaning, and authentic interaction. According to the author, it is a transversal and indispensable dimension of inclusive teaching, as it enables teachers to consciously inhabit the complexity of today's classrooms, recognizing the "other" not as an obstacle but as an opportunity for mutual growth and enrichment.

Intercultural pedagogy, in its deeply inclusive essence, is based on the recognition of such diversity, promoting it as a source of growth for everyone. It constitutes a critical and reflective stance in educational action, also proposing strategies and techniques for managing cultural diversity in the classroom. As Nigris⁸ points out, it requires teachers to be constantly aware of their own representations of reality, educational models, and cultural frameworks. Recognizing the non-neutrality of our educational approaches means understanding that what we consider "right," "appropriate," or "desirable" in teaching is always the product of a symbolic reference system, a cultural framework that profoundly influences how we perceive students, behaviours, and situations, whether related to immigration or more ordinary school dynamics.

Intercultural pedagogy thus calls for decentring, that is, shifting from one's own frames of reference to actively listen to the other, challenge personal beliefs, and suspend judgment. Only through this movement can teachers truly integrate intercultural competence into their professional practice and create learning environments that welcome, represent, and enhance the plurality of perspectives. In this sense, interculturality does not merely offer tools to manage difference but demands a radical rethinking of the very way school is conceived: designing more flexible curricula, promoting authentic educational dialogue, and moving beyond transmissive models in favour of co-constructed and participatory practices. The

⁷ D.K. DEARDOFF, *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence*, Thousand Oaks 2009.

⁸ E. NIGRIS, *Fare scuola per tutti. Esperienze didattiche in contesti multiculturali*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 2003.

goal of pedagogy oriented in this way is to prepare students to live in an increasingly intricate and complex multicultural world, to educate for respect and empathy, and to provide the tools necessary to understand the challenges of contemporary society. It is an ethical and political choice that focuses on the humanity of the other and the potential to build, through education, a more just, dialogical, and cohesive society.

2. The inclusive teacher in European perspective

In the European context, inclusion, and particularly the role of the inclusive teacher, assumes a key position in responding effectively to growing cultural and social complexity. In UNESCO's 2030 Agenda, inclusion holds a central place among the Sustainable Development Goals, emerging as a key quality indicator for education. To echo the words of Maria Montessori: education «must be for everyone (and by everyone) or it is not education at all». It is also important to highlight that within the 2030 Agenda, inclusion is connected to the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all citizens.

In recent years, the European Union has launched numerous initiatives to achieve these goals, making inclusion a priority for society and, more specifically, for educational institutions. The Council of the European Union's Recommendation of 22 May 2018, regarding the *promotion of common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching*, emphasizes these very themes. It urges Member States to promote inclusive education for all students, providing the necessary support «according to their specific needs». The same recommendation also calls for the sharing and promotion of common European values «in order to strengthen social cohesion and a positive and inclusive sense of belonging at the local, regional, national, and Union levels». From an intercultural perspective, this recommendation takes on even deeper meaning. Inclusion becomes both a means of access to education and a tool for more effectively educating for active citizenship, democratic coexistence, and the appreciation of cultural diversity. Promoting education based on shared values such as tolerance, justice, and solidarity means equipping students with the tools to build meaningful relationships in plural and complex societies like those of today. According to this vision, the inclusive teacher is called to play both pedagogical and social roles, becoming a facilitator of intercultural

dialogue and a promoter of an open classroom climate «to foster tolerant and democratic behaviour as well as social, civic, and intercultural competences».

In this context, the Italian experience serves as a crucial driver for reinforcing a culture of inclusion at the European level, offering reference models and best practices that can inspire equity-oriented educational policies and foster participation. As Amatori reminds us⁹, Italy stands out as a unique case of *full inclusion* in Europe, a system that guarantees quality education for all following the abolition of special schools and separate classrooms through Law 517/77. In many EU member states, a *dual unified system* persists, with varying levels of integration between mainstream and special education services¹⁰. However, this recognized leadership position is not without its challenges and responsibilities. It is only recently that scientific literature has begun to focus on the training of inclusive teachers and on the emergence of new professional development needs stemming from the profound socio-cultural changes of recent decades.

It is therefore clear that the Italian educational context represents a privileged laboratory for reflecting on the most effective inclusion practices from an intercultural perspective, acting as a driver of innovation and dialogue within the European educational space. Italy not only offers examples of good practice but also pedagogical and cultural perspectives capable of nourishing a shared vision of schooling. As rightly stated, those who act inclusively do so «on the basis of a sincere adherence to universal values»¹¹ (Bocci, 2024, p. 12). It is thus essential to promote the exchange of an inclusion-oriented culture, so that it may take root in teachers' everyday pedagogical choices and practices.

⁹ G. AMATORI, *Cornici pedagogiche per la formazione docente*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 2019.

¹⁰ M. PAVONE, *L'inclusione educativa. Indicazioni pedagogiche per la disabilità*, Mondadori, Milano 2014.

¹¹ F. BOCCI, *Presupposti scientifico-culturali (quindi politici) dell'agire inclusivo*, in *L'agire inclusivo. Interfacce pedagogiche e didattiche. Manuale per l'insegnante*, a cura di P. Aiello, C. Giacconi, Scholé, Brescia 2024.

2.1 The Erasmus project for inclusion

The Erasmus+ project thus emerges as a valuable tool for promoting a European professional identity for teachers¹², one that combines pedagogical competences with a broad intercultural openness. In the 2018 Recommendations, the Erasmus+ programme is highlighted as a strategic lever for strengthening the European dimension of teaching by encouraging the sharing of best practices, cooperation among educational institutions, and training based on shared values of inclusion and solidarity.

Recent academic literature has shown growing interest in the impact of Erasmus mobility on teachers' pedagogical practice. Studies reveal that mobility projects can significantly contribute to the internationalization of schools, through the creation of collaborative networks and the exchange of ideas, values, and best practices among teachers and institutions. Within inclusive teacher training, Erasmus+ mobility experiences have a twofold educational value.

On one hand, they offer concrete opportunities for the exchange of ideas, methodologies, and best practices with colleagues from other European countries, fostering the circulation of innovative pedagogical approaches and the development of a transnational professional community. On the other hand, they provide a unique chance to directly experience cultural otherness, requiring the activation of transversal competences such as managing uncertainty, flexibility, adaptability, and problem-solving, skills that are essential for a pedagogy centred on the individual and responsive to the needs of all learners.

Living an international mobility experience means stepping out of one's comfort zone, engaging with different educational systems, encountering new linguistic and cultural contexts, and navigating unfamiliar relational dynamics. These direct experiences of otherness—often accompanied by communication difficulties, value differences, or organizational challenges, prove to be particularly effective in developing intercultural sensitivity and gaining a deeper understanding of the dynamics faced daily by students with migrant backgrounds or those experiencing marginalization. In other words, they foster new intercultural awareness and, more broadly, greater sensitivity toward any form of difference, effectively challenging

¹² F. PALMA, *L'insegnante inclusivo nella prospettiva europea*, PensaMultimedia, Lecce 2025.

stereotypes and prejudices that may serve as significant barriers to learning within teaching practices.

Language also plays a key role in mobility experiences. Teachers participating in Erasmus programmes can develop their linguistic competences through communication with international colleagues and by living daily life in a foreign country. These competences can provide a significant advantage when teaching in multicultural classrooms and increasingly diverse learning environments.

Furthermore, such experiences help strengthen the sense of belonging to a European educational community in which inclusion is recognized as a shared value and guiding principle of educational action. Teachers who take part in Erasmus projects enrich their professional toolkit and return to their schools with a broader outlook and an enhanced ability to understand the complexity of educational contexts. They are then better equipped to propose innovative teaching solutions and to promote change even among colleagues who have not experienced mobility themselves.

Clearly, Erasmus+ represents a space for experiential and transformative learning, a deeply immersive and practical opportunity for both personal and professional growth. As we have seen, these experiences can contribute to the development of inclusive, skilled, and prepared teachers who can operate effectively in increasingly diverse educational contexts. They promote critical self-reflection and a thoughtful assessment of one's competences and educational actions. Experiences gained through the programme encourage the adoption of more flexible and innovative approaches, born from interactions with other educational settings, positioning the teacher as an agent of change and a bridge between different ways of schooling. This perspective builds a bridge between theory and practice, values and educational action, local schooling and the shared global dimension of education—training more aware and motivated professionals ready to face the challenges of inclusion.

2.2 The Erasmus project for teacher training: an exploratory study

Within this conceptual framework, an exploratory study was conducted during the 2022/2023 academic year, aimed at investigating the impact of Erasmus+ mobility experiences on both initial teacher training and in-service teacher development, with particular attention to the growth of professional, transversal, and intercultural competences.

This qualitative research employed semi-structured interviews with a convenience sample consisting of in-service teachers and students enrolled in a Primary Education degree programme who had participated in international mobility initiatives in either university or school contexts. The objective was to understand the transformative impact of these experiences and how they concretely translated into the teachers' pedagogical practices.

The findings confirm the hypothesis of a significant impact of Erasmus+ experiences on the communicative, relational, intercultural, and organizational competences of participating teachers. Notably, participants demonstrated clear growth in open-mindedness, flexibility, initiative, adaptability, and problem-solving. These transversal skills proved crucial for classroom management, the design of inclusive educational activities, and the capacity to respond effectively to student diversity.

Moreover, the mobility experience brought about a profound personal transformation, strengthening participants' intercultural awareness, sense of self-efficacy, and commitment to more dialogical and participatory teaching practices. The interviews revealed that teachers adopted new methodologies learned abroad, successfully integrating them into their local school contexts. Even students not yet teaching independently expressed a clear intention to apply the competences acquired, highlighting the anticipatory and formative effect of mobility on their emerging professional identity. A particularly significant finding was the emergence of a heightened intercultural awareness and a critical-reflective attitude toward one's own practice. Participants reported a shift in their pedagogical outlook, becoming more attuned to students' needs, more sensitive to social complexity, and more inclined toward flexibility and personalization of learning paths. Additionally, the networks of collaboration established during mobility experiences became valuable sources of exchange and innovation, with direct positive effects on day-to-day teaching quality.

However, some participants noted the lack of formal recognition for the competences developed, expressing the hope that such experiences would be more adequately valued within their professional training paths. The study also highlighted the need for support in effectively transferring those competences into the school context. Furthermore, participants identified several challenges related to short-term mobility, particularly concerning organizational and bureaucratic aspects, issues also highlight-

ed in other studies¹³. Some interviewees also described difficulties related to communication and, consequently, integration into the host country and community. It is worth noting, however, that such challenges play a key role in transforming mobility experiences into opportunities for enhancing communicative and relational skills. In fact, interviews revealed a significant impact in this area: teachers who participated in short-term mobility stressed the importance of engaging in dialogue with students and encountering new environments. On the one hand, student participants reported developing communication and relational skills through continuous intercultural interaction; on the other hand, teachers shared similar growth through comparison with other educational systems, often having to explore diverse communicative strategies to overcome language barriers when communicating in English.

Overall, the study seems to confirm that Erasmus+ mobility is not merely an opportunity for internationalization, but a catalyst for pedagogical transformation, one that helps shape more aware, inclusive, and well-prepared teachers, capable of working in increasingly multicultural and complex educational contexts. The competences developed during such experiences, if properly recognized and supported, can decisively contribute to the creation of a more equitable, participatory, open, and responsive school system that reflects the complexity of contemporary society.

Conclusions

The path traced in this paper highlights how the inclusive teacher has become a key figure in today's European educational landscape, one capable of navigating the complexity of contemporary classrooms and, most importantly, of contributing to the construction of a fair, welcoming school that values diversity. The competences required for this professional profile, flexibility, empathy, intercultural awareness, relational skills, and critical reflection, are not merely additions to disciplinary knowledge but foundational elements of a new understanding of the teaching profession.

¹³ S.B. GOLDSTEIN, *A systematic review of short-term study abroad research methodology and intercultural competence outcomes*, in «International Journal of Inter-cultural Relations», 87, 2022, pp. 26-36.

Within this framework, the Erasmus+ programme emerges as a powerful and strategic resource to support and accompany this transformation. International mobility experiences represent high-impact training opportunities, capable of promoting an open, self-aware, and intercultural professional identity among teachers. These are invaluable moments of exchange and learning. Through exposure to other educational systems and direct engagement with otherness, teachers are given the opportunity to shift their perspectives, to question established practices, and to develop new ways of thinking and acting pedagogically.

Italy, with its long-standing inclusive tradition and its model of a school for all, serves in this regard as a privileged laboratory and an authoritative voice in the European debate on inclusion. However, as the latest academic literature suggests, to ensure these experiences lead to systemic change rather than remaining isolated, it is essential to invest more decisively and structurally in teacher training, recognizing competences acquired in international contexts and enhancing the inclusive practices that stem from them.

Ultimately, educating for inclusion means educating for democratic and compassionate citizenship, capable of engaging with complexity through responsibility and openness. A teacher who has experienced encounters with others, who has directly understood the value of communication, cooperation, and intercultural understanding, can truly become a promoter of a school that not only welcomes but creates opportunities; a school that not only integrates but celebrates difference. In this vision, Erasmus mobility is not an accessory experience, but a strategic pillar for training teachers capable of building the future, inside and beyond the classroom.

EDUCATING WITH HOPE: VISIONS, LIMITS, AND POSSIBILITIES OF EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE IN COMPLEX SOCIAL CONTEXTS

MARIA CHIARA CIANFRIGLIA, ENRICO MIATTO, BEATRICE SALTARELLI

Abstract

The chapter presents the results of qualitative research conducted with 44 social educators working in five different social areas. The aim was to investigate the social educators' idea of the human being that guides their activity and to understand the role they attribute to their professional activity. Starting from the prompting word *hope*, the educational vision and the unique characteristics of today's educator were gathered. This research argues that hope, actively developed through dialogue, is essential for effective education. It empowers social educators to foster personal and collective growth in people by creating trusting, understanding, and ethical environments. The study emphasizes the transformative power of hope and dialogue in creating more equitable and empowering educational experiences and suggests future research explores these dynamics in specific contexts and their long-term impact.

Key words: Participatory research; Hope; Social educational practice; Dialogue; Trust.

1. Introduction

Educators in contemporary education face an ongoing tension between hope and its challenges. Hope is viewed as a dialectical tension within individuals¹, rooted in dissatisfaction with the present and directed toward

¹ R. ZAVALLONI, *Psicologia della speranza*, Edizioni Paoline, Cinisello Balsamo 1994.

a utopian future². In *Hope Theory*, hope is not a vague concept; it encompasses not only aspiration, but also the process of pursuing that aspiration. Hope contributes to the construction of motivation, driving us to proactive action. Snyder's *Hope Theory* similarly posits that hope involves actively pursuing goals through cognitive strategies and mental energy³.

The results of our research introduce two additional concepts: limit and relationship. While the limit might seem contrary to hope, this opposition is only superficial. An implicit belief about hope (also evident in our research) is often linked to a *charity model*, where the social educator transmits hope to the people they take care of⁴. However, recognizing human limitations implies that hope cannot be imposed; rather, from an educational perspective, it is constructed within the educational context, through the relationships among participants.

This study explores the dual role of hope and trust in educational practice, emphasizing their influence on social educators' experiences, particularly in challenging and uncertain social contexts. Through qualitative analysis of social educators' reflections, the study investigates the nuanced relationship between hope, fatigue, and education's transformative potential, considering both personal and systemic dimensions⁵.

In educational settings, hope is frequently discussed in relation to personal resilience, motivation, and future aspirations. However, the deeper implications of hope, especially in conjunction with dialogue, have received less attention. This paper addresses this gap by examining hope as both an emotional and ethical tool in the educational process and by highlighting the importance of dialogue in fostering hope. Although hope is widely acknowledged as a crucial psychological and social resource, its educational significance, specifically regarding how social educators utilize hope to shape pedagogical practices, remains underexplored. Drawing on

² G.M. BERTIN, M. CONTINI, *Educazione alla progettualità esistenziale*, Armando, Milano 2004.

³ C.R. SNYDER, *Hope theory: Rainbows in the mind*, in «Psychological inquiry», n. 13, 2002, pp. 249-275.

⁴ B. VERJEE, *Service-learning: Charity-based or transformative?*, in «Transformative Dialogues: Teaching and Learning Journal», n. 4, 2010, pp. 1-13.

⁵ The chapter presents the partial findings of the research project *Pedagogy reaching out: explorations of the human today between theory and educational practice*, funded through a competitive grant by the Salesian University Institute of Venice. In addition to the authors of this chapter, the research was carried out with the collaboration of colleagues Margherita Cestaro and Luciana Rossi.

interdisciplinary fields, this study investigates how hope, mediated through dialogue, can function as a transformative force within education.

The central research question guiding this study is: *How do educators understand and enact the relationship between hope and dialogue in their practices?*

2. Theoretical Framework

Hope, as a construct, has been explored in different ways. Snyder, for example, sees it as a motivational force. In the field of social education, hope is not only seen as a personal emotion, but also as an ethical tool for dealing with social challenges⁶. Key thinkers, albeit from different epistemologies, such as John Dewey, Paulo Freire and Michail Bachtin offer significant insights into the power of dialogue in education, framing it as a means to build trust, promote mutual understanding and create transformative learning environments⁷.

Hope in education is often discussed as an essential element of resilience and motivation⁸. Educators who cultivate hope in the people contribute to their sense of agency and their ability to imagine a positive future.

Hope is often conceptualised as a powerful driver of personal and social change, but its application in educational contexts can vary significantly. Hope is understood not only as a psychological or emotional state, but as a dynamic relational process that links the social educator's vision to the people's potential. As such, social educators are not only called upon to cultivate hope in individuals, but also to embody and sustain it in the face of significant professional challenges.

The role of hope in social education is deeply intertwined with both internal and external dialogue, as emphasised in the concept of the *I-Thou* relationship investigated by Buber⁹, who posits dialogue as the foundation for authentic hope in educational interactions.

⁶ C.R. SNYDER, *Hope theory: Rainbows in the mind*, cit.

⁷ Cfr. J. DEWEY, *Democrazia ed educazione*, Anicia, Roma 2018; P. FREIRE, *Pedagogia della speranza: un nuovo approccio a "La pedagogia degli oppressi"*, Gruppo Abele, Torino 2014; M.M. BACHTIN, *The dialogic imagination*, University of Texas Press., Austin 1981.

⁸ J. DEWEY, *Democrazia ed educazione*, cit.

⁹ M. BUBER, *Il principio dialogico*, Edizioni di Comunità, Roma 1958.

Freire's emphasis on dialogical pedagogy as a means of empowerment is central to this study. Dialogue, in this sense, is not merely a conversation, but a practice of actions and ethical engagement, that can shape both individual and collective hopes¹⁰. Furthermore, Bakhtin's theory of the dialogic process highlights the importance of listening and responding as a fundamental element in the construction of hope within educational spaces¹¹.

The integration of hope and dialogue also raises important ethical questions regarding the role of educators in shaping the future possibilities of vulnerable individuals. This study will examine how educators perceive their responsibility in nurturing hope, as well as the ethical implications of fostering such hope within a diverse and sometimes adversarial educational landscape.

3. Methodology

The research involved 44 social educators, who were asked about their experiences with fostering hope in their work areas, as well as the challenges they face in promoting hope and dialogue in an often fragmented and challenging educational environment. The sample was constructed based on two characteristics considered relevant to the research hypothesis: educational background and the type of users of the services in which they work. In relation to educational background, the decision was made to consider for the sample only social educators with degrees in pedagogical disciplines, reserving the option to evaluate any other backgrounds, if the number of participants in the focus group did not reach a sufficient quantity¹². Informed consent was obtained, and participants were assured that their responses would be used only for the purposes of this study.

Five focus group interviews were conducted with a diverse sample of educators from different areas of social work¹³.

At the end of the sampling and construction of the interview grid, 5 focus groups were held, one per type of user, of about 2 hours each, with a participation distributed as follows:

¹⁰ P. FREIRE, *Pedagogia della speranza*, cit.

¹¹ M.M. BAKHTIN, *The dialogic imagination*, cit.

¹² M. CARDANO, *La ricerca qualitativa*, il Mulino, Bologna 2011.

¹³ S. CORRAO, *Il focus group*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 2005.

1. Difficult Minors: 10 participants
2. Early Childhood Education: 9 participants
3. Disability Inclusion: 11 participants
4. Elderly Care: 6 participants
5. Intercultural Settings: 8 participants

The focus-group interviews aimed to find out the participants' point of view on 4 prompting words. One of these was *hope*. All participants were invited to reflect on the term hope to highlight the role of hope in their educational practices and how they use dialogue as a means to promote hope. The data collected were then compared with literature that synthesizes relevant theoretical perspectives on hope and dialogue.

The study has adopted a qualitative approach¹⁴ to the ideas of social workers about various topics, including the perspective of hope and dialogue. The point of view is that human experience is a complex object of investigation and never completely investigated with only quantitative methods.

Interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes related to hope, dialogue, and their intersection.

This chapter presents the results that emerged through the prompting word *hope*.

Given the sensitive nature of the topic, special attention was paid to ethical considerations, including the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. A phenomenological hermeneutic approach was adopted, identifying the structuring themes of the experience investigated within the transcripts, with the aim not so much of *explaining*, but rather of understanding the complexity of the lived experiences moving from the narrative of those directly concerned to bring out what Wilhelm Dilthey called *the secret of the person*¹⁵. This process was carried out through an analysis and categorization of qualitative data using the software Atlas-ti (Version 23.4.0)¹⁶. All collected transcripts have been uploaded to the software. The

¹⁴ N.K. DENZIN, Y.S. LINCOLN (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. Sage, London 2011; L. MORTARI, *Cultura della ricerca e pedagogia*, Carocci, Roma 2007.

¹⁵ Cfr. A. BELLINGRERI, *L'evento persona*, Scholé, Brescia 2018; W. DILTHEY, *Descriptive psychology and historical understanding*, Springer Science & Business Media, Berlino 2012; M. VAN MANEN, *Phenomenology of practice*, in «Phenomenology & Practice», n. 1, 2007, pp. 11-30.

¹⁶ L. GIULIANO, G. LA ROCCA, *L'analisi automatica e semi-automatica di dati testuali. Software e istruzioni per l'uso*, LED Edizioni universitarie, Milano 2008.

recurrent themes in the material were then identified, in relation to the research demand and the conceptual reference model, creating a first level of analysis. The second level of analysis¹⁷ saw the effort to cross, compare and integrate the different categories emerged in order to bring out significant interpretative trajectories.

4. Findings

The findings revealed several key themes in social educators' perceptions of hope and dialogue.

Firstly, we observed the fatigue experienced by social workers who face challenges related to recognition and systemic barriers. A key challenge for social workers is the lack of full recognition of their professional contributions, particularly in comparison to other professions. They often experience frustration due to their work being undervalued, both in terms of legislative support and professional acknowledgment. This is particularly apparent in early childhood education and in sectors serving vulnerable populations. Some social educators expressed that the often delayed and intangible impact of their work makes it difficult to secure immediate recognition. Furthermore, systemic issues, such as inadequate legal protections and financial compensation, contribute to professional fatigue. This disillusionment is compounded by the perception that their work is undervalued by society, despite education's transformative role in shaping future generations.

Secondly, social educators described their emotional experiences in different areas of social work. The intense emotions experienced in education, particularly in situations involving hardship and suffering, can lead to what some social workers term *fatigue of hope*. Educators in fields such as social work with marginalized populations often experience feelings of helplessness and burnout. The emotional toll of working in under-resourced environments or with individuals facing significant personal challenges can diminish the sense of hope that educators strive to maintain.

However, many educators believe that hope must be tempered by an honest assessment of their operational limitations. Hope is not a panacea but a realistic acknowledgment of the constraints faced by both social ed-

¹⁷ M. VAN MANEN, *Phenomenology of practice*, cit.

ucators and people who they care about. Some social educators express that their aspirations often conflict with the realities of their work. The risk of false hope – the belief that change will occur without concrete effort – is a valid concern. This is especially true when outcomes fail to meet expectations, as when projects or initiatives are unsuccessful due to external factors beyond the educator's control. In these instances, social educators emphasize the importance of *doing the work* - not simply hoping but analyzing the current situation and actively addressing the challenges hindering progress. Hope, in this context, becomes a dynamic force that requires constant reflection and adaptation. This form of hope necessitates that educators engage in a broader dialogue concerning the conditions of education - its policies, structures, and goals. As one educator argues, hope must be coupled with action; it is insufficient to simply *wait for change* without *acting to create it*. Hope is therefore viewed as a force that propels educators toward advocacy and activism, urging them to address issues such as legislative reforms, educational equity, and the socio-economic conditions affecting the lives of those they serve.

Furthermore, for some, the fatigue is not simply discouragement but an opportunity to reflect on the deeper meaning of their work. As one educator notes, the tension between hope and disillusionment often prompts a deeper questioning of their potential impact. The recognition of limitations - whether related to resources, societal change, or individual transformation - does not diminish the importance of their work; instead, it underscores the need for a more realistic and resilient form of hope.

From this point, the interviewees highlighted how hope becomes a source of strength and change. Hope, in its most transformative form, is not a passive expectation that things will improve on their own. Rather, it is an active engagement with the world, a commitment to working toward a better future despite the challenges. As reflected by several educators, hope is tied to action: it involves advocating for change, both on a personal and systemic level. Social educators must not only hope for improvement in the lives of the people they serve, but also take concrete steps to facilitate that improvement. The key passage in the reasoning of the people involved in the focus group is the *hope to trust* that is the transformative power of relationships.

Ultimately, the persistence of hope in education is contingent upon the trust between social educators and the individuals they support. Trust is a prerequisite for meaningful educational relationships, as it creates the

environment in which hope can be nourished. Educators who cultivate trust empower the individuals to believe in their capacity for change and growth. As one social educator notes, trust is the cornerstone of effective guidance; it is the reciprocal trust between the educators and the individuals that enables genuine transformation. This trust is not unconditional; it requires constant nurturing, and sometimes, risk. Social educators guide the people through challenges and also take risks, trusting that their efforts will yield results, even when immediate outcomes are not apparent. The educator's role is not to ensure success but to foster an environment where trust and hope can thrive.

Yes, even for me a little bit of hope is about nurturing hope and also nurturing hope, a little bit I read it to trust, because at the base if there is not this trust, this faith, even educational action becomes performing everyday things. Instead there is also the idea that something generates. (FG_Difficult Minors)

Thus, while educators often confront the daunting reality that not all their efforts will succeed and that not all individuals will respond as hoped - a risk inherent in social and educational work - it is precisely through this risk that hope gains greater significance. By acknowledging the potential for setbacks, educators can approach their work with resilience, embracing challenges as opportunities for professional and personal growth, both for themselves and those they serve. The relationship between hope and resilience is crucial; hope fuels resilience, and resilience sustains hope. As one educator notes, the key to persevering through the challenges of social work is maintaining confidence in the process, even amidst uncertainty about outcomes.

Hope comes to me to say is also that which feeds and sustains all the things of before: the risk, (because I hope) which sustains the absence (because I take off and hope that) which sustains the doubt, the not doing, because it is not a mere taking off but it is also a having faith, a hope that however in my no, in my saying enough, I am sustained not by the effort, but by the hope that that choice of mine is the right one because I hope that however even through that, something else may come. (FG_Difficult Minors)

5. Discussion

Findings from the study suggest that hope, cultivated through dialogue, is a valuable pedagogical resource in social contexts. Hope fosters a sense of individual and collective possibility, while dialogue promotes the cultivation of mutual understanding, respect, and ethical responsibility. Yet, the research also underscored considerable difficulties in applying these practices, particularly in high-pressure educational settings, where the solution of practice problems and the red tape takes precedence over emotional growth.

From this standpoint, it is possible to highlight several key implications.

First of all, social educators play a crucial role in cultivating hope and fostering dialogue in their areas of social work. By integrating these elements, they can contribute to the holistic development of people they support in life achievement, with emotional and ethical growth. Findings suggest that they utilize this awareness to cultivate more space for dialogue and emotional connection in the setting.

Yes, then hope is what moves thought. The thinking that then leads to the factual change. In the sense that we don't all function in the same way, we function differently and everyone, no one is lost, and I think this is a dogma that every educator carries, and so in my opinion it's really hope that leads us to think about what to activate in order to be able to help the person in front of me to reach their goals. It's hope that brings us to that, it's the basis in the sense that if I didn't have hope that something can be done or built, I wouldn't be doing this job, I would be doing something else, I would be a bank clerk maybe. (FG_Difficult Minors)

In social educational practice, pedagogical action acquires the characteristics of hope when it involves projection, a term whose etymological roots in the Latin *pro - iecto* refer to concepts such as *throwing beyond*, *moving forward*, and *orienting thought toward possible worlds*¹⁸. Therefore, educating implies projecting a purpose that becomes a horizon of potential change, necessitating further steps and specific objectives. Future research could investigate the relationship between hope and dialogue within more

¹⁸ Cfr. P. ZONCA, *Progetto e persona. Percorsi di progettualità educativa*, SEI, Torino 2004; L. ZECCA, S. NEGRI, *Il progetto pedagogico organizzativo nei servizi e nelle scuole per l'infanzia. Nuova edizione riveduta e ampliata. Orientamenti e Pratiche 0-6*, Edizioni Junior, Bergamo 2023.

specific social educational settings, such as inclusive context. Additionally, longitudinal studies could examine how these practices influence individuals' long-term development and success.

Secondly, the focus group analysis consistently highlighted hope as an inherent aspect of educational action, directing the educator's focus toward the individual and the possibility of transformation. Hope is intrinsically connected to the function of education, understood as guiding individuals toward a vision of *the good*. However, what is meant by *the good*? *The good* is defined as a superior condition, an aim that justifies pursuit. While this *good* is a future state apparent to the social educator, it may remain imperceptible to the individual being served. The educator's function is to guide the individual toward this state, serving as a guidepost of potentiality amidst perceived ambiguity. In this context, hope is not sporadic; rather, it is an ongoing, daily presence in educational practice. It is as constant and essential as salt, accompanying educators as a steadfast presence throughout their professional journey. As one social educator reflects:

If we don't have hope that situations can change, especially in cases of social hardship related to disability, we are left asking: What are we working for? If I don't have hope, I don't know why I'm investing in a project or spending my time. Hope is the foundation of educational work (FG_3. Disability Inclusion).

This consistent thread of hope in educational action serves as the very essence of why social educators continue their work. Paulo Freire emphasizes the critical importance of hope when he asserts: «Hope alone does not transform the world... but depriving oneself of hope in the struggle for improvement is a frivolous illusion. Hope is an ontological necessity that needs to be anchored in practice, so it can be realized in the historical reality»¹⁹. Hope, for Freire, is not a passive waiting but an active, practical force within educational settings.

Furthermore, hope, conceived as the driving force of social educational action, propels every educational endeavor. This hopeful anticipation of the future represents the ethical core of educational life. However, this hope is not devoid of risk; it necessitates a leap of trust, a commitment to possibility, and an acceptance of the uncertainty inherent in transformative processes. As one educator in the focus group shares:

¹⁹ P. FREIRE, *Pedagogia della speranza*, cit., p. 10.

There is no assumption of risk without hope, and there is no hope without risk. This tells us about the possibility of exercising freedom within a complex horizon of meaning...hope opens new pathways, moves thought, and fuels the trust needed for transformation (FG_Intercultural Settings).

Hope becomes not only a vision of the future, but also a motivating force that propels action. Educators see it as their task to guide people from their immediate needs to their broader aspirations, creating a pathway that transcends the limitations of their current circumstances. The role of hope is echoed by Maria Zambrano, who describes hope as the *hunger to be fully born*, a desire to bring to fruition the possibilities within us that are only partially realized. Hope, for Zambrano, is the very substance of life, the force that allows us to face uncertainty and incompleteness with a forward-looking, projective perspective²⁰.

As hope serves as the engine of educational action, it must also be nurtured. Educators not only carry hope with them, but are also responsible for feeding it, for ensuring that it continues to grow and sustain their work. One educator says, underscoring the reciprocal relationship between their hope:

We live with hope and by hope [...]If we, as educators, do not see hope, our children will not see it either. They look to us to find that vision of the future and to help bring it to life (FG_Early Childhood Education).

Hope, in this context, is not a passive state of wishing; it is a dynamic force that requires concrete action. It is through the social educator's concrete work, their words and actions, that hope is given form and substance. One educator notes that hope must be actively carried forward:

We must be the ones to make hope real, to ensure it is not just an abstract idea but something that drives us to act (FG_Disability Inclusion).

This nurturing of hope is not a solitary task, but a collective one. Social educators recognize that hope must be shared and cultivated within a community of practice. In group settings, hope can become a shared resource, a collective vision that fuels the work of the team and fosters a sense of possibility.

²⁰ M. ZAMBRANO, *Verso un sapere dell'anima*, Raffaello Cortina, Milano 1996.

The work of hope must be shared, one educator insists, emphasizing the importance of collaboration: Together, we can create a life project, a future that includes multiple perspectives. Hope is not just about individual belief; it must be a collective vision (FG_Disability Inclusion).

Finally, how does hope manifest in the daily practices of social educators? The interviewees describe hope as an attitude, one that is often communicated nonverbally through a *positive gaze*, the first point of contact that allows educators to enter the inner world of the individuals. This gaze, imbued with positivity and availability, sets the foundation for building a relationship based on mutual trust. Through this lens, the educator's role is to see the people not merely for their limitations but for their potential, recognizing the *half-full glass* in every situation.

As another educator states:

The hope that we offer is not blind; it is tempered by a sense of limits, acknowledging what can and cannot be done. But it is through this recognition that we can create a shared vision of what is possible (FG_Disability Inclusion).

Hope thus requires a balance between acknowledging the limits of the present and imagining the possibilities for the future.

6. Conclusion

This study has illuminated the central role of hope, cultivated through dialogue, in shaping effective educational practices. Findings reveal that hope is not merely a passive sentiment, but an active force that empowers social educators to guide people toward personal and collective growth. Dialogue emerges as a crucial mechanism for fostering this hope, creating environments characterized by trust, mutual understanding, and ethical responsibility.

However, the study also acknowledges the significant challenges educators face, including systemic barriers and the tension between the high-pressure educational settings and emotional development. Social educators navigate these complexities by embracing a realistic and resilient form of hope, one that acknowledges limitations while maintaining a commitment to positive change.

Ultimately, the research underscores the transformative power of hope and dialogue in education. By recognizing the potential within each indi-

vidual and fostering collaborative relationships, social educators can create a more equitable and empowering educational experience. Future research should continue to explore these dynamics in specific educational contexts and examine their long-term impact on people's lives.

This volume presents the proceedings of the Conference *The Future of Hope: an Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, promoted by the European University of Rome in Brussels in 2024 as part of the journey toward the Jubilee 2025. Hope is explored as a dynamic concept: rooted in biblical and philosophical traditions yet crucial for today's challenges-artificial intelligence, migration, peace, education, sustainability, and innovation. The collected essays combine scientific rigor with dialogue between academia and politics, showing how hope can inspire critical reflection and concrete action, revealing possibilities of truth and goodness even in complex times.

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This volume comprises essays by:

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