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# From individual choice to collective voice

## Foundational economy, local commons and citizenship

by FILIPPO BARBERA, NICOLA NEGRI, ANGELO SALENTO

### 1. *Introduction*<sup>1</sup>

The crisis of industrial citizenship has left a «structural void» in Western societies (Streeck 2016). Following this line of thought (section 2), the paper argues for an alternative vision of citizenship based on the defence and management of local commons. We define commons as «things common to all, that is those things which are used and enjoyed by everyone... but can never be exclusively acquired as a whole» (Araral 2014, 12). The adjective «local» refers to the role – actual and/or potential – played in their defence and management by the citizens of a given local area in the course of their daily life activities.

Under what conditions and by which mechanisms do the defence and management of local commons open new spaces for the recovery of citizenship? To address this question, we propose to frame local commons within the range of «Foundational Economy» (FE). FE (section 5) refers to the «civic infrastructure» serving everyday household needs like utilities, health care, transportation and mundane goods and services (e.g. food) through networks and branches across populations (Bowman *et al.* 2014; Barbera *et al.* 2016; Collective for the Foundational Economy 2018). Although FE defines a set of activities that is broader than local commons – including for instance private goods and public non-local infrastructures and services, such as electricity distribution – we will argue that this framing helps to spell out

<sup>1</sup> Filippo Barbera wrote sections 1, 3, 4, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3. Angelo Salento wrote section 5. Sections 2, 6, 7 are common responsibility of Filippo Barbera and Nicola Negri. We are grateful to the three anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments on the first version of the paper.

a fruitful link between local commons and citizenship in terms of «ritual social practices» (section 6). As we will maintain, FE helps to clarify how the defence and management of local commons refer to citizenship as «the capacity and desire to act collectively» (Carolan 2017, 198). To this end, we will primarily argue that the key approaches to local development (section 3) and local commons display several potential risks (section 4) that FE helps to overcome (section 5).

## 2. *The background: the crisis of industrial citizenship as a new space for local commons*

Throughout the so-called *Trente Glorieuses*, the different worlds of welfare capitalism (Esping-Andersen 1990) converged on a reproductive model based on the middle-class lifestyle, which has become a common status symbol of the «ordinary citizen». Thus, access to the conditions of individual and family reproduction of the middle class became the legitimate model for the demand of social rights (Negri, Filandri 2010). This model guaranteed the spread of what we refer to – following Sen (1992) – as the capacity to «function» as a citizen. It is in connection to the guarantee of access to this capacity that in welfare capitalism several sectors of the FE have built an articulated «civic infrastructure» of everyday goods and services.

When welfare capitalism stalled, conservative neo-liberal policies between the 70s and 80s eroded the «civic infrastructure» of industrial citizenship, as well as the guarantees of access it. Everyday life became more reliant on the market, framing individual and familiar acquisitions as a matter of private resources (de Leonardis 1997; Negri, Filandri 2010). As comparative empirical research on social inequality shows, parents now mobilize their resources to the advantage of their offspring toward different socio-economic outcomes (Ballarino, Bernardi 2016). Winners in this «race for private acquisition» follow the idea of the «individu par excès» (Castel, Haroche 2001). They believe that their success is solely due to their own personal capacity to triumph in a winners-take-all game (Frank, Cook 1995), regardless of collective assets that they do not feel responsible for. Symmetrically, the feelings of the «losers» coincide with those of the «individu par défaut» (Castel, Haroche 2001), exposed to

psychological dynamics of discouragement and discount of their temporal horizons and loss of their collective capacity to aspire (Appadurai 2004; de Leonadis, Deriu 2012).

These societies can be considered as impoverished regimes (Baldassari 2005), that is, they lack social structures with a key player endowed with resources for and concerned with the production of collective goods. These regimes act against the growth of collective action that is needed to reincorporate in the political agenda of Western capitalism effective ways to fulfil the voids that followed the crisis of industrial citizenship. We argue that to address this problem, the groups and practices that support both the defence and management of local commons are relevant. As we will state in section 6, these groups can generate collective action and voice in favour of a new universalistic model of citizenship, strongly based on something one does rather than just on something one has (Barbera, Salento 2018). However, as we will discuss in the following two sections, fully appreciating the added value of this proposal requires tackling some weaknesses in the «post-district» debate, as well as some analytical risks of the customary approach to local commons.

### *3. What has been lost in the post-districts debate?*

Since Alfred Marshall's founding work on «industrial districts» (1890), territory has become key to explain local development processes and outcomes in development economics, regional studies, economic sociology and economic geography. Industrial district research inspired Piore and Sabel's (1984) «Second Way» of industrial development based on flexible specialization. Spatial proximity of both local players and assets has been a crucial dimension in explaining why local territories have succeeded in market competition (Barbera, Fassero 2013). Spatial proximity has been defined both as being agglomeration economies between firms and institutions, as well as the interdependence between a community of people and a community of firms. The second definition of proximity, as we will argue, is better equipped to deal with the idea of local commons, but it has been overtaken in the post-districts debate by the former which, given its reductionist approach, cannot be considered as suitable.

In Marshall's account (1890; see also Capecchi 1990), local development derived from virtuous interaction between «a community of people» and a «community of firms» in specific institutional settings. Accordingly, rather than mere productive environments, industrial districts were distinctive milieux in which a community of people lives and establishes the greater part of daily social relationships (Sforzi 2005, 8). Hence, localities were understood as «complete» societies, with interdependence between economic structures, political institutions and civil society (Bagnasco 1999). Small and medium-sized enterprises, widespread entrepreneurship and good economic performance were closely linked to a «communitarian market behaviour» instead of an «individualistic» one (Bagnasco 1987; Trigilia 1986).

Consequent to the crisis of industrial districts, local development processes have been referred to a plethora of different forms: hub-and-spokes, satellite platforms, State-anchored, technological districts, technopoles, scientific parks, empirical clusters, to name the more important (Barbera, Fassero 2013). These forms were classified under the conceptual umbrella of «local production systems» and in connection with their capacity to supply local collective competition goods (Crouch *et al.* 2001). «Cluster» is perhaps the key concept used to describe local systems after the crisis of industrial districts (Krugman 1991). This, according to Porter, means «geographic concentrations of interconnected companies and institutions in a particular field. Clusters encompass an array of linked industries and other entities important to competition» (Porter 1998, 78).

In the shift from industrial districts to local production systems, however, something important has been lost. As Harrison (1992) argued, the Marshallian concept of industrial district involves *much more* than the simple relevance of «agglomeration economies» and institutions. Rephrasing Marshall, we can state that in the economic life of industrial districts, agents pursued incommensurable economic and non-economic goals simultaneously, with actions not always instrumentally oriented towards short-term aims. It is in the complex interplay of family forms, opportunities and rules for social mobility, schools and civic associations that a particular conception of time flourishes. This specific cultural value of time rewards the delay of immediate and individual satisfaction for a collective and long-term goal (Giovannini 2007). In Marshallian industrial districts, the «non-economic» activities

affect the costs and techniques available for economic activities (Granovetter 2017). The «district code» – namely the set of cooperation norms that supported a communitarian market behaviour – was thus deeply embedded in the interplay between intrinsic (collective) values and means-end (individual) rationality. This interplay casts doubt on «the classical separability assumption that incentives and moral sentiments are simply additive in the implementation of desirable outcomes» (Bowles 2016, 41). It is this interplay that the post-districts debate has lost: localities are no longer conceived as «living places» endowed with daily-life practices that have an intrinsic value. Thus the non-contractual basis of local development and the key role of social routines embedded in daily social practices are obscured. The «community of people», which in the Marshallian perspective was as important as the «community of firms», simply vanished.

#### 4. *Local commons and community: promises and perils*

The relevance of non-economic motives and communal dimensions, lost in the post-districts debate, is key in approaches that link territory, community and local commons. In the following, we will consider three well-known approaches to local commons: a) community-based development, b) legal theory that conceives commons as political order and c) the territorialist school. These three approaches appear to provide the «lost» communitarian dimension, which we underline with regard to the limits of the post-district debate. But – as we will discuss – they also display three potential analytical risks. Specifically, we will argue that community-based development risks falling into the «local trap», commons-as-political-order does not compellingly deal with the management of local commons, and the territorialist approach lacks a full consideration of the role of innovation and organized diversity within local settings, giving a too much emphasis to the role of inherited local identities.

##### 4.1. *The local trap*

«Community-based» development of natural resources, such as water and forestry, is the key reference point for environmental

governance, particularly in the common-pool resources literature (Baland, Platteau 1999; Ostrom *et al.* 1999). Elinor Ostrom has painstakingly supported the idea that «for thousands of years people have self-organized to manage common-pool resources, and users often do devise long-term, sustainable institutions for governing these resources» (Ostrom *et al.* 1999, 278). The empirical evidence of successful management of common-pool resources around the world provides support for the self-regulatory effectiveness of «local groups» to develop social norms that limit the use of these collective resources. The emphasis on local community is closely linked to the «communitarian» mechanisms of norms/cooperation-enforcement. Ostrom's institutional design is accordingly based on «group size, cultural homogeneity, social capital or density of social networks, practices of reciprocity and the salience of the resource or lack of exit options for the resource users» (Araral 2014, 13). Subsequent studies have argued that the external validity of Ostrom's institutional design principles is flawed (Cox *et al.* 2010, see also Stern 2001). Araral (2014, 16) lists the challenges in applying Ostrom's design principles to global commons, stating that both global commons and local commons based on non-communitarian settings should require a different set of governance principles. This awareness is not part of those community and commons-based approaches, which often conflate the idea of «community» with that of «local community», and regularly assume that the local scale is better than larger scales, regardless of other factors (Purcell, Brown 2005). This generates the «local trap», namely the idea «that local scale decision-making is inherently more likely to yield outcomes that are socially just or ecologically sustainable than decision-making at other scales» (Purcell, Brown 2005, 280).

Two points need to be emphasized here: the first one is the concept of local scale, which should not be regarded as something with fixed properties, but rather as a group of strategies that «are pursued by and benefit social groups with particular social and environmental agendas. There is no reason to believe that it will necessarily empower groups who favour justice and sustainability. It could also empower those who benefit from oppression and environmental exploitation» (*ibidem*). In this regard, local-scale decision making can be exploited by «extractive» agents who extract resources from the many in favour of the few, instead of generating energy, creativity and entrepreneurship in society

(Acemoglu, Robinson 2013; Servillo *et al.* 2017; DPS 2013). As Acemoglu and Robinson (2013) argue, localities with a history of extractive institutions that generated impoverished regimes have not prospered because marginal voices and innovators have less chance to enter the agenda-setting mechanisms. If localism is not inherently virtuous, the implication is that re-localisation may be necessary but it is not in itself a sufficient principle to support local commons (Collective for the Foundational Economy 2018). Actions oriented to the commons in the perspective of FE are instead more protected from the risks of falling into the local trap for, as we will illustrate (section 5), FE goods and services are inherently trans-scalar. Accordingly, they are organized through networks and branches across populations, localities and regions and – if properly managed in the light of FE – can displace extractive local agents.

#### 4.2. *Neglected management*

The recent debate on the commons has been heavily influenced by legal scholars who widened the list of commons to include work, school, culture and knowledge, public transport, as well as urban spaces, public services, healthcare, etc. (Mattei 2011)<sup>2</sup>. In contrast to community-based approaches, legal scholars do not conflate community with «local» community at a fixed (local) scale level. This approach is very much aware that scale is first and foremost a matter of power and agenda setting mechanisms. The analytical risks of the commons-as-political-order approach is rather to boost a «Manichean» view of social conflict, which takes place always between commoners, on the one hand, and State-market, on the other. Conflict among commoners and the overlap between commoners and State-market are rarely – if ever – seriously considered (Somaini 2015). Therefore, this approach is well equipped to deal with the *statu nascenti* of insurgent identities in defense of the local commons, but it risks underestimating the institutional arrangements for their management.

<sup>2</sup> In Italy, the legal definition of common goods as *res commune* is offered by the Rodotà Commission, established by the Ministry of Justice in 2007. The Commission identified public goods as: irrespective of public or private affiliation, characterized by a bond of destination, functional for the creation of fundamental rights for all, of present and future generations.



To begin with, the political order of commons has to be built on both a new ontology and a new epistemology that express commons as a «qualitative relation» (Mattei 2011): we do not have a common good but we are the commons in as much as we are part of the environment. According to this logic, a common is not a «good» of whatever kind but rather a shared conception of the reality. Thus, commons are framed as resources that belong to the people as a matter of necessity and radically oppose both the State and market forces. As we just stated, while power and agenda-setting mechanisms are key in this approach, the emphasis is almost exclusively on the new constituent power of social movements vs. the State-market apparatus (Bailey, Mattei 2013). Hence, the commons-as-a-political-order is strongly focused toward the insurgent phase of «commoning». In this framework, which supports the constituent power of social movements, translating the «political grammar» for the defence of local commons into a detailed «institutional syntax» for their management is problematic.

This translation is far easier in the FE approach. As we will argue, (section 5), this approach directly tackles the problem of institutional designs for the management of local commons by addressing the problem of the different business models needed for the provision of basic goods and services. This shift requires, among other things, to focus not only on the conflict between commoners and the State-market apparatus, but also on their overlap.

#### 4.3. *The local identity fence*

Finally, the third approach to local commons – the territorialist school – focuses on territory as a common good with its own historic, cultural, social, environmental and productive identity (Magnaghi 2011). Contrary to legal scholars' approach – and in resonance with Ostrom's proposal – the territorialist school is explicitly focused on the problem of institutional design. Thus, the *statu nascenti* phase and the institutional design for the management of local commons find here a better balance. Moreover, the territorialist approach is aware of the local trap and does not hypostatizes the local scale as such: «[t]he term 'place' does

not refer to spatial dimensions, nor does it make reference to a particular scale. A place is not necessarily small» (*ibidem*, 4).

At the same time, the territorialist approach explicitly points to the centrality of local cultures as encompassing local values-system. It considers territory as: «made up of places (or regions) with their own identity, history, character and long-established structure» (*ibidem*, 3, emphasis added). Here there is a potential risk of local closure<sup>3</sup>. At the analytical level, the territorialist message risks giving undue priority to preservation of the multiplicity of lifestyles and bio-cultural diversity between places, but having much less to say about «cultural» diversity and innovative changes within localities. In a nutshell, this approach to local commons risks favouring homogeneity, similarity and inherited local cultures over heterogeneity, difference and innovation, thus promoting a nativist view of local commons. As we will show (sections 5 and 6), the FE approach overcomes this shortcoming by emphasizing the largely positive effect that social differences can exert on the collaborative production of goods and services (Ramella 2015). This claim is grounded on a number of empirical works which «demonstrates that individuals from socially distinct groups embody diverse cognitive resources and perspectives that, when cooperatively combined in complex or creative tasks produce ideas, solutions, and designs that outperform those from homogeneous groups» (Shi *et al.* 2017, 2).

All in all, the three approaches just illustrated support analytical strategies for the valorisation of non-economic dimensions of local communities, that is, of the dimensions that were lost in the post-district debate. Nevertheless, the exclusive emphasis on the local scale, on the *statu nascenti*, and on local identities, push these strategies back to a defensive logic and to the protection from negative externalities and interferences by «external» powers. The FE perspective shares many key elements with these approaches, but, as we have anticipated, it is better equipped to avoid these risks. We will now clarify this point (section 5 and 6) with the help of three illustrative examples (6.1, 6.2, 6.3). The rationale of this argument is as follows. To begin with, FE

<sup>3</sup> It is fair to say that the Italian territorialist Manifesto also tries to prevent the risks of local closure by stating that local identity should represent a project for the future. Nevertheless, these worries are mainly politically motivated against right-wing narratives (Magnaghi 2011).

does not underestimate the importance of organized arrangements for the management of local commons, nor does it undervalue the importance of the market as a partial tool, as it conceives economic life as being composed of many different layers, both autonomous and overlapping. Second, FE does not connect local commons to inherited values, local customs and given cultural traditions, for it endorses a view of innovation built on organized diversity within and between local settings. Third, FE considers the territory as a trans-scalar strategy tightly linked to the agenda of social groups that may or may not support local commons.

### *5. Foundational economy and local commons*

The FE approach looks at economic processes and their regulation, maintaining a pluralistic conception of economic life. In this perspective, no single means of regulating the economy can be considered optimal; no single category of economic actors can be considered more rational or morally better than others; last but not least, no single dimension of the economic space can be considered fully adequate to develop and regulate economic activities. As Fernand Braudel (1981; 1982) noted, in every epoch economic life unfolds on the basis of a variety of orders of worth and regulatory regimes, through the action of different players, and within a variety of social spaces. Let us consider specifically each of the three issues: a) regulation, b) players and c) social spaces.

a) Mainstream economics basically considers the economy as a homogeneous space whose performance can be assessed by means of a unitary set of metrics presumed to be universally valid. Accordingly, market coordination is assumed as the optimal form of regulation of economic activities. The FE approach does not reject market coordination as such, but poses two essential conditions. Firstly, in line with Polanyi (1944) and indeed Braudel, it contests that the market is, or should be, the only means of integration of the economy within the social sphere. Reciprocity and redistribution are strictly necessary to reproduce social cohesion and welfare. Secondly, it should be considered that often, in the political and economic discourse, the term market improperly replaces the term capitalism (Galbraith 2004). This has allowed to present as an expansion of the «free market» what has really

been the rise of a predatory capitalism: the growth of short-termism and value extraction, the pursuit of returns on financial investments in productive activities, the escalation of financial or merely patrimonial accumulation (Barbera *et al.* 2016). The FE – or the material infrastructure of citizenship – has not been spared by such tendencies. The liberalization of the markets in goods and services, of financial markets, as well as of the labor market, together with the privatization of public services, have fostered in many FE sectors the pursuit of excessive profits and rents, traditionally restricted to financial speculation and, since the 70s, widely present in the manufacturing sector (Collective for the Foundational Economy 2018). Even in the FE, maximizing the return on investment has become a driving strategy. This transformation can be understood (Polanyi 1944) as a process of disconnection of economic activity from the needs of social reproduction. A disconnection from work, i.e. the fundamental means of income distribution and social citizenship; a disconnection from the (slow) pace of social reproduction, towards the short-term maximization of returns on capital invested; finally, a disconnection from the space (places, territories) of social reproduction, by the relentless globalization of value chains (aimed at reducing labour costs and avoiding legal constraints). These disconnections, as we noticed, are echoed by the post-districts debate in its removal of the link between economic development and local everyday life.

The critiques of market coordination in favour of local commons have often hypostatized one optimal alternative: for example, the conviviality movement tends to prioritize reciprocity (Caillé 2016), while the commons movement insists on the relevance of insurgent social movements (Mattei 2011). According to the FE approach, denying that market coordination is the best form of regulation for every kind of economic activity does not imply that it should be entirely neglected, nor does it entail that a single «optimal» alternative should be espoused or prioritized. Rather, hybrid experiments can be a pragmatic way for re-organizing the FE. For instance, the social task in foundational activities is to discourage levered and high-return business models and engineer the funding of the sector at 5%. As the careful analysis of homecares for the elderly in UK shows (Burns *et al.* 2016), capital funding at 5% would allow a significant reduction of the price charged to guests, or a 10% increase in staff wages. This

requires designing different business models for the provision of foundational goods and services, and for the financing of the commons, as in the Rehn-Meidner System of social-democratic Sweden, whose relevance is sometimes acknowledged also by contemporary promoters of radical social finance experiments (see Lansley 2016).

The FE approach is pluralistic and anti-perfectionist. It does not exclude market coordination, nor does it assume that the market should have a principal role in regulating the economy; it clearly distinguishes proper market coordination from other forms of capitalist accumulation; it recognizes the indispensable nature of mutualism and reciprocity, as well as the role of redistribution and public regulation. However, it does not consider any of these regulatory forms as being ideal, that is, intrinsically provided with a superior rationality or a better morality.

b) As we pointed out, the neo-liberal approach fosters a notion of de-socialized economic actors. From a political perspective, it credits the idea of society based on «the autonomy myth» (Fineman 2005), sparking dynamics of competition in which «winners take all» (Frank, Cook 1995), in line with the concept of the «individu par excès» previously outlined. A long tradition of social-economic studies, rooted in contemporary economic sociology (Granovetter 1985), suggests including economic analysis within the broader study of social action, assuming that it is not possible to understand the economy (as well as economics) regardless of its historical and contextual dimension. This does not imply, as critical approaches often assume, that specific forms of economic rationality, embodied by certain social actors, have a «special» capacity to develop innovative economic action. For example, the civic economy school assigns a leading role to the third sector and to «responsible corporations» (Bruni, Zamagni 2004); the neo-rural movement emphasizes the potentialities of peasants» rationality (Ploeg 2008); the commons literature celebrates social movements and entrust them with a constituent role (Mattei 2011). Such simplifications do not help to establish a pluralistic and multilayer economic system. The FE approach has no particular preference for one or some social actors promoting the self-defence of society. What matters is the enacting of specific interaction regimes that are able to connect daily needs with broader conceptions of the «good life» and a «fair society».

c) One of the most widespread points of the critical approaches just illustrated is the insistence on the relevance of territories. In particular, in Italy this emphasis on the local dimension has different yet largely convergent origins. On one side, as we have seen, the experience of industrial districts, with its legacy in socio-economic research, based the argument that productive systems are anchored on specific forms of knowledge, competences, life styles, which are rooted in «local communities as living places». On the other, the emphasis on the local dimension spread from the tendency of local institutions – starting with the foundation of regions in 1970 – to become a «counterpart» of the State in welfare experimentation, and subsequently (in the second half of the 70s) true government institutions (see Magnaghi 1981). This process was mainly driven by local centre-left governments in the Central-Northern regions of Italy, where centre-left parties used to be much stronger than at a national level. The administrations of the so-called «Red Regions» promoted the idea that the local context (the territory) could be the main player of a deep transformation. Thirdly, from the early 70s, the territory was «re-discovered», on a cultural level, by intellectual élites raised in the social movement of the late 60s. After the decline of class identities, their emphasis shifted to local identities, and to a conception of territories as the depositories of «the happiness of Italy» (Bevilacqua 2017). Local contexts were therefore conceived of as trenches of a «resistance strategy» to economic exploitation, social marginalization and cultural impoverishment. The FE approach does not embrace this perspective and nurtures a trans-scalar conception of economic regulation. It acknowledges the importance of the local dimension, yet avoids the local trap, or the idea that scale is a fixed property. The fact that FE goods and services are organized through branches and networks allows regulatory intervention on a local scale: even the urban scale is relevant (Engelen *et al.* 2017). However, albeit rooted in local territories, the FE is not merely focused on the local economic sphere, or on the economy of the territory. The FE requires a trans-scalar approach: it is both possible and necessary to produce regulatory interventions on different levels and scales. No single regulatory level can be considered optimal and prioritized as such.

All in all, the FE approach is pragmatic and it has no ideological prejudices or particularly heavy moral pre-requisites. It

does not propose any «final choices», «changes of paradigms» or easy «recipes». It does however underline the need for continual adjustments. The FE is a space in which these adjustments are most urgent, and at the same time, feasible.

## 6. *Local commons and citizenship*

If framed in the perspective of FE, social practices aimed at the defence and management of local commons can promote the strengthening of the «civic infrastructure» of a universalistic model of citizenship weakened by the crisis of the previous model of industrial citizenship. To spell out this point in more detail, it is worth recalling Arjun Appadurai's analysis of those interaction regimes that enact people's «capacity to aspire», that is, the ability – as Appadurai defines it – to project oneself into the future on the basis of meaningful life plans, even from a situation of economic and social disadvantage (Appadurai 2004; de Leonardi, Deriu 2012).

Paying attention to the role of collective voice by the poor in India, Appadurai notes how in the course of these collective actions a symbolic repertoire is generated, transforming immediate daily-life needs from simple stimuli (hunger, cold, illness) to a set of intrinsic values for the participants. For the rest of the world, these values stand for the aspiration of «being together with others' in a non-instrumental way (Loury 2002, 44). Thus, in the course of collective action, joint aspirations to embed the action within a shared construction of the future emerge. These joint aspirations are never the sum of individual ones (Gilbert 2014; Appadurai 2004, 257): they translate into concrete social patterns, collective ideas and rules, family forms, job careers, property rights, and consumption habits which have a collective emergent scope.

How do joint aspirations arise? Durkheim's analysis (1912) and the connected «theory of rituals» (Collins 2004) are useful to dig deeper in the analysis of these processes. With reference to this theoretical frame, we can define the interaction regimes that enact the capacity to aspire as states of effervescence or «natural rituals». These states of effervescence thicken the social ties, endowing them with an emotional crescendo that eventually solidifies in shared moral values, in a sense of belonging to a

collective, as well as in the sacredness of «objects» taken as a symbol of the group (*ibidem*, 48 f.). The boundaries of collective solidarity emerging from ritual interactions can be more or less extensive. They depend on the symbolic repertoires – we could say on the narratives – activated during the interactions. Ritual-like interactions consolidate normative orientations, moral standards, and agents' behaviours accordingly. They shape individual identity, anchoring it to a wider identity, i.e. to a collective profile. Whoever fits the measures and standards dictated by such a scheme is recognized as a member (Barbera, Negri 2015). Whoever contributes to the defence and management of collective aspirations (including local commons) can become «one of us» and, therefore, worthy of trust and respect (Pizzorno 2006). Here is where the added value of the FE perspective for local commons rests: to defend and manage local commons, social actors connect mundane problems, through a collective voice, to a wider idea of the «good life» or a «fair society» which, in principle, is open to everyone in the course of their life, as we will illustrate in the three following examples.

### 6.1. *Accountable capital: the employee buyout phenomenon*

The economic crisis has brought once again attention to the so-called «employee buyout» phenomenon. This term indicates the production of goods and services following the transformation of an enterprise from private management to collective self-management by its employees (Orlando 2017). In these companies, workers are in charge of production and administration after the closure, bankruptcy or abandonment of the activity. These organizations are characterized by a marked territorial dimension of the production process (Tognonato 2016). The phenomenon has recently been analyzed in connection to the Argentine case of the *empresas recuperadas por sus trabajadores* (Marchetti 2013; Vieta 2015). As highlighted by Vieta *et al.* (2015), the economic crisis has seen renewed interest in the phenomenon also in European countries. These companies are deeply involved in the supply of local commons, since they explicitly recognize that business and innovation rely on collective resources they need to «pay back». They accordingly supply services in the environmental and social field, such as training and culture, green



areas, education, leisure services, social assistance for children and the elderly. Thus workers are also citizens who defend and manage local commons key to everyday life. Firms are crucial actors for the supply of goods and services that enrich the civic infrastructure of citizenship.

Vieta *et al.* (2015) distinguish three different models of workers' buyout, in relation to the presence of conflict between property and workers. The first, the labour conflict, refers to the illegal occupation of the production site and is the distinctive character of the *empresas recuperadas por sus trabajadores*. The second, known as employee share ownership plan, is characterized by the acquisition of company shares by the workers, who thus become shareholders. The third, known as negotiated workers' buyout, is an intermediate model between the first two and provides a negotiation between workers and entrepreneurs, with the mediation of the representatives of the cooperative sector and public institutions. This third model characterizes those European countries where the phenomenon is more widespread (Italy, France and Spain) and is built on a fairly complex trans-scalar architecture and institutional syntax. From an organizational point of view, these companies establish partnerships with new companies following a market logic that overlaps with alternatives orders of worth. They thus end up acquiring a polyphonic production-function (Andriani 2006) based on a «heterarchical» organizational structure (Stark 2009). The heterarchy underlines the importance of lateral control of the company, open to interests, projects and heterogeneous orders of worth. The companies are thus accountable to a multiplicity of actors who judge them based on different quality conventions (Boltanski, Thévenot 1991). Heterarchy recognizes the centrality of dissonant quality conventions (organization of diversity), combined with heterogeneous forms of association (diversity of organizations), as well as the action of entrepreneurs who are able to combine this diversity (Stark 2009). Here we see the pragmatic and anti-essentialist perspective of FE at work, which is based on the organization of diversity as a key principle.

## 6.2. *Re-building the civic infrastructure: community co-operatives*

In Italy, starting from the Second World War, the mountainous areas of the Alps and Apennines have witnessed «perverse

spirals» of underdevelopment marked by sequential phases of demographic and economic contraction, impoverishment of services and infrastructure. Synthetically, the exodus of manpower from the mountains to the industrial plain led to a decline in population and the consequent abandonment of agro-forestry-pastoral activities. For the national community, the crisis in mountain areas has resulted in the deployment of key local commons as rural architectural heritage, natural resources and renewable energy sources (Cerea, Marcantoni 2016). Community cooperatives represent a case in point for the defense and management of local commons in these areas.

Although the phenomenon is extremely limited, community cooperatives (Bandini *et al.* 2014) represent a telling example for the connection of local commons and FE. Let us begin from a brief portrait of three key cases. «E-Werk Prad Genossenschaft» of Prato allo Stelvio/Prad am Stilfserjoch (South-Tyrol), was founded in 1926 due to the inhabitants' need to bring electricity into marginal areas, thus compensating the lack of service by public and private bodies. Today, the cooperative is completely self-sufficient in terms of its ability to meet the energy needs of the area, with a distribution network of 74 km, and offers new models of clean energy and heat production and distribution from different sources (hydroelectric, photovoltaic, wind, biogas and biomass). The cooperative «L'Innesto» (Cavallina Valley, Bergamo province), was created in response to the abandonment of traditional economic activities like agriculture and forestry, and the following crisis in industrial and craft production. These difficulties pushed a group of 20 members to promote a collective entrepreneurial activity with the aim of creating job opportunities, especially for socially disadvantaged people. Its main activities range from the care and protection of the territory, to the restructuring and construction of buildings, the recovery and dissemination of culture, history and local traditions. Finally, the «Valle dei Cavalieri» community cooperative (Succiso, Reggio Emilia province) was created to avoid the depopulation of a small mountain village on the Tuscan-Emilian Apennines. Today, this cooperative runs many activities (a bar, a grocery store, a farm, agricultural activities such as sheep breeding, tourism and other social activities), having succeeded in generating stable employment and investment in a variety of sectors. Its 33 members represent about half of the village population; they are partly

non-residents, but are linked to the local area through family ties and affection.

These cases show how, in community cooperatives, the defence and management of local commons is directly linked to the guarantee of a range of services and goods capable of satisfying the daily life needs of the community. Community cooperatives are territorially bounded communities that share resources, work opportunities and services to improve a specific territorial context, binding this supply to a collective construction of the future. To be a citizen means to be involved in the social practices of defence and management of the local commons that constitute the backbone of daily-life. Within this framework, community cooperatives are owned and managed by their members on the basis of inclusive principles. They are rooted in a community of people understood not only as residents of a given territory, but also as a group of people who share interests, resources and projects for the well-being of their territory. They guarantee to all members of the community non-discriminatory access to the goods and services, which are provided and managed through a broad range of activities and sectors (agriculture, tourism, environmental management of natural parks, retail trade, etc.). The stakeholders are of different kinds (public, private for-profit and non-profit) and the production process sees the members of the local community active both as producers and as buyers (Bandini *et al.* 2014). Actions taken in defence of the local commons, as understood in the light of FE, provide the basis for an inclusive local community that is coupled to a detailed institutional syntax.

### 6.3. *Displacing extractive elites: the Italian Strategy for Inner Areas*

The topic of the development of inner areas stems from the strategy for «place-based territorial cohesion» outlined in the «Barca Report» (Barca 2009)<sup>4</sup>. Inner areas constitute a very

<sup>4</sup> The Report looks at *place-based* policies, that is those public interventions that rely on local knowledge and are verifiable and submitted to scrutiny. The Report argues that this strategy is superior to alternative strategies that do not make explicit and accountable their territorial focus, or even hide it behind a screen of self-proclaimed *space-blindness*. Space-blind interventions fail to integrate services, and either assume that the State knows best or rely on the choices and guidance of a few private actors. The

large part of the Italian nation (about three fifths of the territory and just under a quarter of the population) and are relevant all over the world (Rodriguez-Pose 2017). They have demographic problems and economic weaknesses, but they are also strongly polycentric and with robust potentials. From these local areas originate commons that are necessary for all: water, clean air, good food, beautiful landscapes, culture. From a methodological point of view, the measurement of inner areas follows two steps:

1. The identification of poles as centres for the supply of essential services;
2. The classification of the remaining municipalities in 4 bands (peri-urban, intermediate, peripheral and ultra-peripheral areas) based on the distance from the poles in travel times. Starting from this picture, the strategy identifies three lines of intervention key to local commons: (i) protection of the territory and safety of the inhabitants; (ii) promotion of cultural and natural diversity and polycentrism; (iii) development through the use of unexploited or misused resources.

The key idea of the strategy is that citizens of inner areas must acquire the necessary knowledge to take care of the local commons by maintaining activities that are rooted in their daily lives (Carrosio, Osti 2017). The civic infrastructure of services such as education, health care and transportation is framed as a precondition for decent living, as much as the creation of employment opportunities. This civic infrastructure is trans-scalar and is built through the enactment of social practices that unfold in daily life. In making this connection, the strategy re-frames the meaning of protection and conservation so that they no longer represent a constraint for the population. Overcoming the boundaries of local identity, inner areas are intended as «living places», in which everyone can choose to live in connection to the pursuit of shared life-plans. Belonging to the local community is thus open and based on «performance». At the same time, the support for local commons benefits from the life-plans of

Author, Fabrizio Barca, was asked to contribute to the debate on future cohesion policy by the Commissioner Danuta Hübner while he was Director General of the Ministry of Economy & Finance, Italy. Before he was in charge of the DPS (Department for Development Policies) of the Italian Government (2001-2006) and then became Minister of Social Cohesion under the Monti cabinet (2010-2011). The genesis of place-based policies is grounded on the «local development framework», which emphasizes the relevance of places and local institutions and is well-known and influential in the Italian context.

the people who inhabit these local areas. The missing dimension of the post-district debate we referred to in section 3 is thus a crucial pillar of the strategy.

Beside participation by the local community, other dimensions qualify the strategy for inner areas and protect it from the risks of focusing only on the *statu nascenti* and local trap. On the one hand, there is the centrality of services and their connection to «service production chains», which constitute also cognitive supply chains that collect a significant part of the local ruling class, whose importance has often been underestimated in the local development strategies. School managers, health service personnel, local transport experts are actors who have a «fine-grained» knowledge of the territories and their problems and represent a source of diverse applied business models for the provision of foundational assets. On the other hand, the inner areas strategy requires a new look at interdependencies and synergies between inner areas and poles, in connection to the trans-scalar dimension. In this regard, the inner area strategy confronts fully the role of extractive élites previously illustrated: to conserve power, local élites derive legitimacy from the mechanisms of underdevelopment, reproducing it in alliance with external élites (Carrosio, Osti 2017). Hence, in inner areas, élites often assume the characteristics of «rentiers» of underdevelopment, assuming an extractive logic with respect to local resources (*ibidem*). The inner area strategy therefore avoids the risks of the local trap and acts as a displacement factor for extractive élites, promoting the establishment of new inclusive ruling classes and of innovation at the political-institutional level.

## 7. *Conclusions*

Local commons point to the relevance of collective efforts and choices of whole generations at all levels, from the local to the national territory, right down to the local neighbourhood (Kohn 2016). The flourishing of human societies, in other words, derives both from individual initiative and from collective infrastructures that belong to everyone. In the FE perspective, framing local commons as the «civic infrastructure» of citizenship emphasizes actions at different territorial scales (including the national one) that are aimed at the de-commodification of

goods and services which serve everyday needs. We have argued that the connection between local commons and «foundational» goods and services breeds effervescent rituals, enacting the capacity for collective action and voice to include in the political agenda of Western capitalism the need to fill the voids opened in social reproduction by the crisis of industrial citizenship. We argued that these effervescent rituals connect daily-life needs to broader conceptions of a fair society. Following Michael Carolan (2017), we differentiate between actors of citizenship and those who hold the status of citizenship: «The latter category refers to citizenship as a bundle of legal rights and responsibilities, signifying membership in a State. It is something one has. Actors of citizenship constitute subjects who are not citizens, in the aforementioned socio-legal sense, but still act as citizens, and some of those acts have the potential to engender articulations with questions of rights, equality, difference, justice, and democracy. Citizenship in this sense is something one does» (*ibidem*, 198). Actors of citizenship, the argument goes on, can be divided in «active» and «activist» citizens. Active citizens are involved in non-conventional political participation, such as donating money to charities and community organizations, writing letters to the editor, and signing petitions. These activities are clearly important, but they have little capacity to stimulate novelty. Activist citizens, on the contrary, are «interested in challenging routine, understandings, and practices, which makes theirs a political project versus politics as usual» (*ibidem*).

The difference between active and activist citizens, we maintain, is built on the role of effervescent rituals. In the previous examples, the groups and social practices at the base of these rituals are quite heterogeneous. This heterogeneity does not impede collective action. Indeed, it aids it from a practical point of view. Firstly, because the comparison between heterogeneous groups aids plans of action that, for their very partiality, realize that the «right» action may mean that some questions are left unanswered (Vitale 2006). Collective action of «activist citizens» thus does not require a full moral agreement. Rather, all groups agree that collective action is important as such and, therefore, they agree that it cannot provide a comprehensive solution to all problems to be undertaken. Every concrete collective action has always some limits (not only cognitive but also moral) of

sustainability and its consequences can generate frictions on the key moral values.

Secondly, and related to this, the effective rituals of activist citizens in defence of the commons require a degree of creativity and innovation. From this perspective, the heterogeneity of mobilized circles (de Vaan *et al.* 2014; Ramella 2015) decreases the probability that their actions might be subsumed within «business as usual» (Sassatelli 2015, 5). Heterogeneity is thus a key structural ingredient to spark Durkheim's effervescent ritual situations, necessary to build a new model of citizenship rooted in local commons at the intersection of different scales. Certainly, the solidarity at the basis of this effervescence is quite different from «class» solidarity, typical of welfare capitalism. Nevertheless, it is the basis of the aspirations to flourish according to a «good life» in a «fair society», connecting everyday needs to large-scale aspirations and collective projects. Local commons are therefore potential centres of influence for the launching of a new model of citizenship (Crouch 2011; 2013) framed in the context of an assertive – not merely defensive – social democracy.

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### **From individual choice to collective voice. Foundational economy, local commons and citizenship**

Under what conditions and by which mechanisms do the defence and management of local commons open new spaces for the recovery of a universalistic model of citizenship, after the crisis of welfare capitalism regimes? To deal with this question we propose first to frame local commons within the range of Foundational Economy, namely the «civic infrastructure» of mundane goods and services that serve daily-life needs. We then discuss some analytical risks of the customary approach to local commons, arguing that the Foundational Economy approach may help to overcome them. Finally, we illustrate several cases of collective effort that support both the defence and the management of local commons. These cases are grounded in collective action and voice in support of a new universalistic model of citizenship where ritual social practices, legal rights and responsibilities are intertwined.

*Keywords:*

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