Systemic Regeneration and Circular Society

Annamaria Rufino

1. **Author information**
   Annamaria Rufino
   Department of Engineering, University of Campania Luigi Vanvitelli,
   Aversa (CE), Italy

2. **Author e-mail address**
   Annamaria Rufino
   E-mail: annamaria.rufino@unicampania.it

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Annamaria Rufino*

Corresponding author:
Annamaria Rufino
E-mail: annamaria.rufino@unicampania.it

Abstract

The spread of the pandemic represented the upheaval of the order constituted (status quo), as the most evident data. It's possible to think of the dynamics within the EU, the relationship between the various political systems, taken as single entities and in their inter-institutional relationships. The Coronavirus also called into question strategies that seemed politically well established, for example the ways the US electoral campaigns are conducted and shed a light on political dynamics and practices that usually are less talked about, if not in a detrimental manner, such as the polices carried out by political representatives such as Mr Erdoğan and Mr. Orbán. It has unbalanced economic-financial domains, which imposed themselves as unassailable, as it has been the case for China. But, not least, the pandemic has disarticulated social and relational models, in every country of the world. Not even the First and the Second World Wars had achieved that. Everything, inevitably, will result in a rethinking of the regulatory and decision-making processes; likewise, the 'way' of life and the ways relationships are built will undergo a 'restoration' process based on the redefinition of needs, expectations and, above all, desires. Those will have to be identified according to a new series of elementary and essential rights to be guaranteed to everyone.

Keywords: social change, norms, pandemic.

The impact of the exceptional and unpredictable scenario of the *emergency* determined by the Coronavirus – made even more macroscopic due to the multilayer complexity of the various lockdown phases – can be assessed in

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* Department of Engineering, University of Campania Luigi Vanvitelli, Aversa (CE), Italy.

terms of a necessary rethinking of existing regulatory processes, which they had made it possible to identify the specific issues on which the very structure of the society was based. Matters of merit which, over time, have become the premise and objective of all decision-making processes, but also of social models shared by citizens in the 'normal' dimension of existence. The social change taking place all over the world, triggered by the contagion, has suddenly unmasked the distance between institutions and society, but also between the States, the territories and their cultures.

The backstage of the official representation of the pandemic offered an important insight into the discontent of millions of citizens across the world, who wanted to oppose and counter the narrative of the institutional (mis)management of the pandemic and its inability to manage and contain the emergency. The general dissent that emerged has – so far – been characterized by a variety of expressions and variegated chorus of oppositional voices.

Who instead has showed a united front have been the institutional actors with their consistent – over time – lack of responses and convincing explanations: they have acted in a way that the actual 'drama' of general pandemic has been amplified by the lack of a concerted action, so much needed in a time of emergency and uncertainty.

If it is true 706561 – that the pandemic has immediately revealed the need to redesign a new way of structuring and managing time and space – as individuals, as family units , as social clusters – it is equally true that the human world has felt the need to redefine tasks and objectives to be pursued precisely as a 'human system'. This specific need seems to be widespread and common. It crosses over societies and their social armoury; it is entangled with the activation (or re-activation) of human, social, cultural and communicative resources, real and latent, of singular individuals and of each and every State.

According to a new observational and interpretative paradigm, the need to link primary needs and productivity, security and freedom, hardships and expectations, sharing and identity has been *emerging* as in progress, following the various stages of metabolization and management of the pandemic. Most of these *topos* have been 'filtered' by the words circulated in virtual communication. The relevance of the virtual forms of communication and of their pervasive presence, in every aspect of the everyday life and relationships, (that could be interpreted as primary amid widespread 'needs') has emphasized the real issues at stake, the gaps in the system, but also the relationship between reality and potential, between true and untrue. The communication dynamics, by extending consensus and dissent, between narratives and *counter-narratives* of things to say and do in their immediacy, have turned into an omnivorous container, timeless and without space. Not surprisingly, the spread of the risks involved with the manipulation of information has alerted of the dangers related to conspiracy

theories and censorship which, as topics in the liberal West, had seemed to have disappeared from the public debates of a shared normality. This renewed concerns were in a way the proof of the exceptional character of the situation and of its dangerous developments.

The institutional actors as the simple citizens were called into question and were made responsible for the decisions to be made. In such a paradoxical situation where public and private collapsed into each other, an extreme emergency dimension has emerged, in all its criticality, attesting to the difference and diversity, indefinable in their microscopic fragmentation and, with them, the category of the 'enemy'. The enemy has re-emerged as a new pervasive category, in terms of interpretative decalogue of the surrounding reality, of proximity and distance, indifferently. Fear, disseminated by the contagion and its communicative force, has conveyed, knowingly and unknowingly, mixing them in the collective imagination, expectations and needs and, at the same time, has frustrated them in their potential and exclusive satisfaction. This 'oppositional' category constituted the fundamental symbolic rift with respect to the previous social dimension and allows us to define the pandemic as a phase of almost radical elimination of the socio-institutional structure experienced to date, based, that is, on cohesion and on sharing, normalized and structured.

Although the problems and the level of inequalities (the very *matters of merit*) related to the job market, the structures of racism, the implementation of rights, the achievements as the failures of the welfare system, the institutional, political and ideological workings cannot be considered new in absolute terms, however, the pandemic has disseminated the perception of the 'necessarily new' to be sought and defined, with all the risks that, as always, this qualitative/quantitative perspective has entailed and may entail. We can define novelty as a 'total social fact' which, from an anthropological point of view, has involved everyone, locally and globally. In a way we are witnessing a trend where we are the same, as all different, or all different in an equal manner.

In the face of such a-nomic involutions, traditional sociological knowledge and analysis can no longer produce an adequate response to the understanding of current events: analysis, policy advices, tables, statistics, clouds-clusters, parameters, indicators, taxonomies are in need of being re-elaborated and conceived. The 'mirror effect' of every single scenario influenced by the current pandemic asks for a course of action that could be represented, figuratively, with a tunnel without margins, where every discourse and practice, in a very Foucauldian sense, seem complicated to be performed. Likewise, natural and hard sciences should be invested by the same seismic and radical change, similar to the ones that social sciences are experiencing, sometimes unwillingly, in terms of their epistemology and applied methods.

In this sense, the dynamics generated by the Coronavirus have taken on a circular pattern that seems unable to point to a specific direction.

From the scientific truths, affirmed and then doubted, to the economic-financial solutions, sworn over and then rejected, from the institutional statements offering an ensemble of oppositional voices that eventually have been evened out to the same tune; everything has been engulfed by a contradictory fashion characterized by a faltering progress.

The 'cloud', where everything came together virtually, represented the failure of the expertise, not only in a technical sense, such as the medical one, but also political, institutional and, precisely, regulatory.

The same society, considering the primary need as emergency, namely health, has flattened and become addicted to the emergency, in an attempt to understand, first of all, what differentiated public health from personal health, economic survival from physical survival. The use of knowledge, as Foucault (1992) would say, no longer has a decipherable purpose.

The same category of 'social' has been deprived of its original function that was built upon the practice and (the meaning) of solidarity and shared identity; it has rested instead on the relevance of the *virtuality* of communicative cohesion as the very reason for existing, thus prefiguring, as a future hypothesis, the possibility of defeating fear and danger, eventually. The same expression 'social distancing' indicates this very paradox.

The use of this expression in terms of 'physical distancing', has carried out the function of progressive dilution of the very function of sociality: the danger is *in* the social and not in physical contact between people. The functional datum, thanks to which the same social reality had been defined, was placed before the real one. In any case, both social and physical distancing represent the significant measure of the social change taking place, concretely structuring the communicative and relational fracture, for which, at least for now, certain and lasting solutions do not seem to emerge.

According to the traditional forms of categorization, like those ones elaborated by Talcott Parsons (1977), the social system functions if there is an interchange between inputs and outputs, between internal and external stimuli. Social interaction legitimizes the acknowledgment of the primary value of a social system and its de facto cohesion. Social and legal systems owe their stability to the binding function of the rules they have established and to the shared value of those very rules. The pandemic has shown that this is a case in point, in the sense indicated by positivism as scientific knowledge, and nothing can be considered as a shared value. The unquestionability of scientific knowledge, as celebrated by the philosophers and thinkers of the Enlightenment, had proposed Reason as the very tool for testing reality; Reason was conceived as the only device useful to quell fears and limit risk. In this new

scenario, this belief in the power of scientific investigation has been weakened by the inconsistency of the truths communicated. The space for the manipulation of information has overlapped the inconsistency of decision-making and regulatory choices, as well as operational indications for economic, political and, above all, social systems. In the meantime, everything seems to have changed, but without the prospective support of clear indications from which to be routed. False and unknown, as categories, have replaced the certainties of regulatory propositionalization and empirical verification.

The problem of order and consensus to be built, based on shared norms and values, ultimately on 'orientation' for the purpose necessary for the conservation of the same society, is again topical. The pandemic and the following lockdown strategy have led to a social change due to 'dysfunction', in the exchange mechanism between internal and external inputs, weakening the fundamental values of the organizational and regulatory systems, experienced as a guarantee of identity and social action.

Luhmann (1984) had defined the reduction of complexity as the main function of the systems. The lockdown, as a model, represented the end of complexity as an extreme outcome of its experimentation, that indicates - tautologically its inability to safeguard predictability, complementarity and reciprocity. The 'noise', as theorized by Luhmann (1984), was made extreme by the general application and practices of the Lockdown and eventually, it turned into silence. Beyond the tautologies and paradoxes of what was said and done in the extreme phase of the pandemic, despite the inability of communication to contribute to the creation of a common sense in terms of resilience, that is, a common meaning for the social system as an institutionalized system based on trust, society seems to be routed in the sense of 'de-paradoxicalization' and 'de-tautologization' of the actions to be taken, as theorised by Luhmann (1984).

The remains of a contradictory normality, which characterized the pre-COVID-19 period, can be found in the new social dangers, made up of impromptu categories of new discriminations and new sanctions. The forms of control and self-control, the behavioural choices, the expressive ones, the dissents, the need to belong, the appeal to responsibility, often all unreal in its manifestation (brought to light by the emergency) have materialized in 'dispositions' of needs (need-dispositions) that cannot be categorised.

Environmental disasters have produced the need to save the planet and translated into the circular economy. The same has happened with the current pandemic: society pushes towards the recovery and 'reuse' of values and needs, which can contribute to structuring and systematize a new inter-relational paradigm. A 'social runner', symbol of the present needs and of the contradictions of the past, at the service of the new poor and the new 'social immigrants', runs in the streets of a new human dimension, to be nourished,

without the perspective of safety and protection. Deprivation, in terms of human and social relations, was offset by the rewards for the reactive skills experienced in the emergency.

This newly formed knowledge will have to deal with this mid-society, beyond the micro and macro-analysis of a chapter of history already ended.

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