

FONDAZIONE
di COMUNITÀ
di MESSINA





Global flows

Today dominant socio-economic paradigm moves from anthropological assumptions of hobbesian origin, advocating for a substantial economic egoism, and it can be held responsible for the progressive estrangement of the economic sphere from other spheres of human knowledge and action. Within such individualistic society, stemming from political economy, no specific conception of "good" is pursued. The concept of "common good" is sacrificed to individual rights and at the same time principles of justice and of environmental responsibility, which should substantiate those rights, are not based on any notion of solidarity or sustainability.

Such utilitarian approaches, together with the Digital Revolution and the following accelerations in technical and technological evolutions, engendered disequilibria and paradoxes both at a global and a structural level. At the structural level, such disequilibria are led by the separation between knowledge and consciousness. At the global level, contradictions are expressed by: social and economic inequalities whose criticality is such to impair any development hypothesis; predatory production systems extracting raw materials at a rate that exceeds Earth's capacity to regenerate those resources; out-of-control GHG emission levels causing a worrying climatic transition on a global scale. This kind of contradictions seem particularly evident in the Mediterranean area.

Human action has come to represent a critical force in determining the development of bio-physical systems on the whole planet. This represents a transition in human history. As a consequence, any attempt to explain and design possible future life conditions on our planet should move from an assessment of human action as a whole: culturally, technically and economically described.

Environmental phenomena, socio-economic trends, social as well as environmental inequalities are nowadays structurally correlated. According to the Norwegian Refugee Council by the end of 2050 200/250 million people worldwide will flee from ecological disasters, with an average of 6 million of men and women forced to leave their homeland every year.

Urban centres will act as demographic attractors and thus represent the new pivot of such momentous shifts in demographic equilibria. Urban population is expected to increase by 84% in the next decades, moving from 3,4 billion in 2009 to 6,4 billion in 2050.

Sicily represents a paradigmatic case in this scenario. On the one hand, for its geographical position, it represents a strategic frontier for migration flows. On the other side, Sicily is subject to desertification processes which might affect 70% of

its territory by 2050. This kind of contradictions turn Sicily into a natural lab for innovative socio-environmental experimentations.

It should be clear now why democratic models for common goods management, such as water and energy, will play a pivotal role in determining a way out of poverty. It should be also clear that fostering human development strategies and counteracting settlement decline in inner areas is of strategic importance.



Territories

The “Fondazione di Comunità di Messina - FdCM” (Messina Community Foundation) is today active in territories characterised by different environmental and socio-economic conditions. Our research-action approach has allowed us to implement systemic policies that acquired, at least in part, a paradigmatic value.

FdCM concentrates most of its action in Messina, a city of less than 250.000 inhabitants and characterized by extreme inequalities in income as well as urban space distribution. Within the city centre per-capita income is 4 times higher than in northern outskirts and 6 times higher than in southern outskirts. Furthermore, the southern city area is afflicted by a strong urban, social, cultural and overall structural decay. For instance, more than 2.000 families dwell in slums built in the aftermath of 1908 earthquake and enlarged after the II World War shelling. Today such structures represent an instance of social segregation and an instrument for mafia clientelist control.

According to the cluster analysis developed by FdCM, Messina should be counted among other big urban areas of Southern Italy stuck in a self-perpetuating condition of poverty and demographically “dismal”. Notwithstanding present urban and social decay, Messina is still one of the greenest provinces in Italy and it boasts a unique natural landscape and a lively and powerful biodiversity. Furthermore, Messina displays a substantial divide between today low quality of life and a millennial history of anthropization processes. This natural and historical heritage makes the Messina territory unique within the Mediterranean area.

We refer thus to historical, anthropological and environmental resources which are able to increase urban resilience: such *beauty*, when fully recognized and aptly promoted, might represent an extraordinary asset for the future.

In 2015 FdCM launched a fund dedicated to the development of the inner area of Mirabella Imbaccari. According to the historical analysis of demographic data, from the year 2000 local communities in Mirabella are experiencing a gradual aging process and demographic depletion connected to the crisis of agricultural

economies and the difficulty for traditional women's textile handicrafts to enter and survive a strongly industrialized market.

In addition to this, through the exploitation of the Foundation's own assets on the island of Salina (Aeolian archipelago), FdCM launched systemic and lasting development projects on the small island territory in 2020.

Salina occupies a 26,1 square kilometres area and it counts 2.598 residents scattered in three different Municipalities. Its territory is thus characterized by a strong social and institutional fragmentation. Its economy is tied to seasonal tourism. This dependence on seasonal tourism has engendered a distorted conception of time, space and work. Migrant population is growing, but is exposed to the irregularity and uncertainty of seasonal jobs. In the winter months, the population lives in conditions of strong social inequality and accessibility to services.

Nevertheless, Salina is one of the seven islands of the Aeolian archipelago, which stands out for its cultural and natural heritage: the rich marine wildlife, the lively geo-environmental dynamism and the unique millennial history led UNESCO to declare the whole archipelago a World-heritage Site.

The Foundation is further working on the creation of funds to be dedicated to the territorial development of the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region. Such resolution stems from a twenty-year experience in research and cultural cooperation programs among Mediterranean territories and from more recent programs to promote social and ethical finance and environmentally and socially responsible entrepreneurship.



History

1998 - the social cooperative Ecos-Med is created to launch the first experimentations for advanced models of community welfare in Messina. Following a research-action approach, Ecos-Med fosters innovative socio-economic systems providing to marginalized people alternative options on the main areas of human *functionings*, inspired by Amartya Sen's *capability approach*.

1999 - the consortium Sol.E. is created to gather different local social cooperatives in Messina aiming at the development of marginalized subjects' *substantive freedoms*.

2001 - the Padre Pino Puglisi Foundation is created as main financial instrument to counteract usury in the Messina area, and it also fosters projects of social and inclusive economy.

2001 - the Horcynus Orca Foundation, joining several Universities, research centres, Municipalities and social economy organisations, is created as an international centre for technological and environmental research, acting as a scientific and cultural dissemination centre and educational space.

2010 - such experimentations paved the way to the creation of a wide social economy cluster composed of highly diversified entities, called "Advanced Social Cluster". Such cluster decided to create the "Fondazione di Comunità di Messina" as leading entity, charged to coordinate the cluster and design, co-finance and implement social development policies. Several additional partners, representing social economy and social finance at national and international level, joined the creation of the Foundation.



Mission and Policy

Local communities and territories seem to follow *chaotic dynamics*, in scientific terms, similar to those of other complex systems in nature. In this context, a given fluctuation in the system might trigger a different course in the history of local communities and it might modify apparently unavoidable negative trends.

FdCM aims at activating systemic, lasting initiatives in the local communities involved in order to generate that trigger event. Such initiatives, then, should represent a cornerstone of a different territorial development.

The critical context we are living today and that we will have to co-exist with in the next decades requires humankind to undergo a metamorphosis and develop a new humanism within which new relations and approaches incorporate the notion of *constraint*.

An operational strategy capable of testing such metamorphosis processes must necessarily foresee the transformation of:

- the socio-economic paradigm;
- the knowledge system;
- the energy models;
- the local and global governance models.

It is now clear why the Foundation goes beyond the traditional dynamics of philanthropy, and explicitly pursues social justice and economic development in the communities in which it is active. The Foundation has been established in order to foster and experiment with new, inclusive socio-economic approaches based on a long-term horizon, efficient in the fight against mafias as well as in the socio-economic inclusion of marginalized people. The Foundation, furthermore, pro-

vides a conceptual framework to counteract the ideological conformism that has started undermining the principles of equality, liberty and dignity granted by the Italian Constitution.

Therefore, the FdCM's mission consists in promoting a sustainable human development, by encouraging the creation of fruitful interconnections among welfare, cultural and productive systems in order to: foster research and technology transfer programs for the enhancement of social economy, attract creative and scientific innovators, implement urban regeneration programs and enhance the social capabilities of local communities.

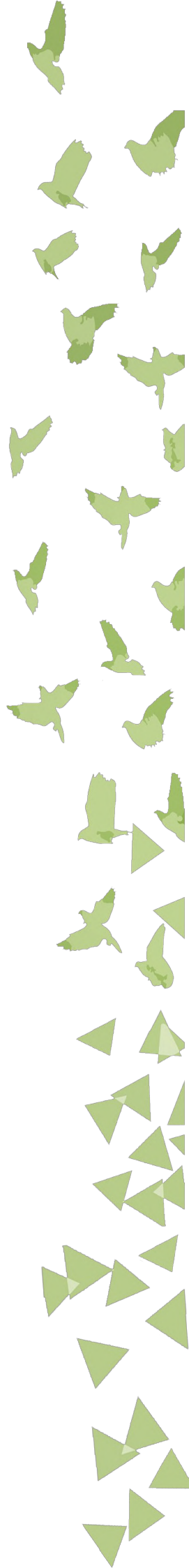
More specifically, FdCM is testing economic paradigms which put the following external constraints to utility maximization: the progressive expansion of the substantive freedoms of the more disadvantaged people to live the life they value; the construction of social cohesion; environmental sustainability and the unveiling and enhancement of *beauty*.

From a strategic and functional viewpoint, the FdCM openly follows the *capability approach*, and it thus promotes:

- ⇒ on the one side, the creation of high-quality urban and socio-economic systems capable of generating viable alternatives for target materially and culturally disadvantaged beneficiaries relating to knowledge, social relations, housing, income and employment dimensions. In this way such systems should also boost the development of the imagination, of desires and aspirations on social spaces and on common goods;
- ⇒ on the other side, the deployment of individual and community social support projects that aim at aiding those beneficiaries to fully understand the new alternatives, thus allowing them to recognize and grasp those more suitable for their own well-being.

The FdCM activity has been deemed highly innovative and it is considered as one of the most interesting cases in Europe by several organizations, such as:

- the European Network of Cities and Regions for the Social Economy (REVES);
- the European Federation of Ethical and Alternative Banks (FEBEA), in its "Atlas of job creation - good practices for social inclusion";
- the OECD, within the LEED programme;
- the Kip International School (Knowledge, Innovations, Policies and Territorial Practices for the United Nations Millennium Platform), which has recognized FdCM as a mature example of integrated local development and as an innovation-action generation centre. For this reason, the KiP has included FdCM within its global network of research and education structures;
- the UNDP under the ART Initiative, a global programme that promotes sustainable human development at the local level, which has translated the



experience of the Foundation in a Policy Guideline for Local and Regional Governments;

- finally, the Global Alliance for Banking on Values (GABV), which has selected FdCM among 23 stories worldwide for its level of social innovation and for its efficiency in fostering human development.

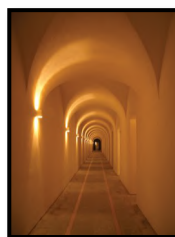


Impacts

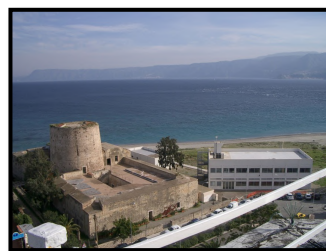
In ten years, the Foundation's assets have grown from 500.000 € to more than 13 million € and through its approach and the engagement of the whole "Social Advanced Cluster", it has been able to deploy:

- articulated programmes of **urban regeneration and requalification** of common goods, aimed at enhancing the social capabilities of the territories: it coordinated and financed the renovation and refunctionalization of 6 highly valuable environmental and architectural/monumental areas, that were abandoned or had been confiscated from the Mafia.

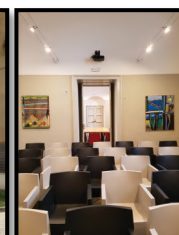
Fort Petrazza in Messina, part of a defensive system built by the Army between 1888 and 1903, then abandoned and illegally occupied by local criminals. It has been requalified and hosts now the headquarters of the Foundation and several other social organizations.



Monumental Area of Capo Peloro, in the extreme north-western tip of Sicily: it hosts an ex-shooting range and a lighthouse built during the Roman era. The whole area had been abandoned and used as illegal landfill, becoming a drug-dealing area. It has been regenerated, becoming a protected natural site and today houses a scientific and cultural research center, the museum of contemporary art, etc.



Biscari's palace, a noble castle in Mirabella Imbaccari, built in XVII century and donated to the Foundation. It has been renovated and will become an hub for the local development of the whole area.



Santa Marina di Salina, in the Aeolian archipelago. Two stately buildings owned by one of the most important families of the island have been donated to the Foundation, which is renovating them to host social and cultural activities to foster a more sustainable development of the whole island.



The slum of Fondo Saccà. This is one of the slums of Messina, where the Foundation designed and carried out a structural regeneration programme. On the infrastructural side, part of the slum has been dismantled and in that area a urban park and a eco-building have been generated. In the new eco-building the most advanced technological and architectural solutions have been implemented to achieve the highest energy efficiency performance. The building hosts disadvantaged families and educational services for the community.



Novara di Sicilia. In this historical little village in an inner area of Sicily, named as "one of the most beautiful villages in Italy", a few buildings are being donated to the Foundation, that will transform them in hubs to launch its local sustainable development policies, tackling the depopulation issue.



- actions for the **development of social and solidarity-based economy** and the promotion of responsible consumption principles: it has supported and financed the start-up and/or consolidation phase of **about 120 companies** and micro-enterprises, corresponding to **over 400 job places** created and/or consolidated, out of which almost **100 are for highly disadvantaged people**, in the following sectors:



* the renewable energy sector

Ex.: the Foundation created a shared solar power plant of 1.4 MW, engaging several local families and organisations. Several people have been employed for the installations and maintenance of the plant.



* the technological innovation sector

Ex.: several "cultural enterprises" have been promoted, focusing on the innovation for the enhancement of cultural heritage, for example through the production of immersive and interactive sets.



* the design and fashion sector

Ex.: the Foundation has supported the creation of several women's businesses in the field of ethical fashion (wedding dresses, vegan fashion accessories, traditional bobbin lace, etc.)



* the food and beverage sector

Ex.: the Foundation has supported since the ideation stage the workers' buyout of the local historical brewery (founded in 1923), gone bankrupt. It has accompanied 15 workers through all the steps, re-launching the beer production, from 0 to 40.000 hectolitres/year.

The Foundation has also launched several **spin-offs**, that provide additional technical support to the implementation of its policies. The main ones are:

- * **MECC, microcredit institution** registered as social enterprise. Through its microfinance products the institution supports the strengthening and development of: new social economy enterprises; long-term job places in the territories; social and economic inclusion; the networks of the social economy.
- * **Solidarity & Energy, an Energy Service Company (ESCo)** registered as social enterprise and engaged in providing energy solutions (design, installation, management and maintenance of photovoltaic plants; industrial and public lighting efficiency interventions; creation of energy communities; initia-

tives and projects tackling energy poverty) combined with a social approach: its profit is allocated to finance social development projects in the areas where it delivers its energy-related services.

- **technology transfer programmes** aimed at supporting sustainable human development and tackling inequalities. Numerous research institutes at national and international level collaborate on a permanent basis with the Foundation. About ten prototypes have been created, tested or are in the testing phase, all supporting the green transition and the fight against inequalities and poverty. Here below are few examples:

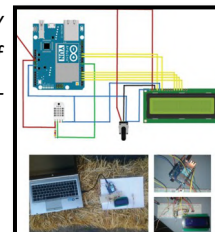
- * *Prototype for micro-generation of energy from marine currents. The first one to be connected to the national grid. Project developed under the aegis of the UN / UNIDO in collaboration with the National Research Council.*



- * *Prototype of third generation photovoltaic cells for energy production from organic and non-organic dyes. Project developed in collaboration with the National Research Council.*



- * *Advanced environmental monitoring systems for energy efficiency and health. Project developed with the M.I.T. of Boston and with the Engineering Department of the University of Messina.*



- * *Microgrid system tackling energy poverty in energy communities through energy storage and mutualization processes based on social algorithms. Project developed in collaboration with the National Research Council. It was mentioned in the 2019 country report of the Smart Grids Innovation Challenge relating to the international initiative MISSION INNOVATION.*



- **personalized social support programmes** for over **700 people**, within articulated programmes that generate for them **alternatives** on the main areas of human *functionings*. Some examples:

- * **60 internees of the local Judicial Psychiatric Hospital** were brought out and reintegrated into society. Today they live free and, by enhancing their skills and abilities, they have gradually conquered the main citizenship rights (home, work, sociability, knowledge);



- * **200 families (about 600 people**, including many children) have left the slums of Messina and regained their right to housing, often becoming direct owners of a proper house.



For instance, focusing only on the housing issue, the urban renovation programme of the Messina slum offered **two possible alternatives** for the beneficiaries. The first solution consists in the purchase of houses on the private market by the Municipality, which then assigns them to the beneficiaries through a participatory process, while keeping the ownership. The second option consists in the assignment of a so-called “**personal empowerment budget**”: a lump-sum amount assigned to the beneficiary as contribution for the purchase of its own house on the private market, often integrated with a loan. In this solution the beneficiary becomes therefore house owner.

Given the beneficiaries come from a very deprived background, they have been accompanied by the technical and social experts of the Foundation to fully understand the two options that were offered, in order to be aware

of their implications (for instance, getting a loan) and letting them make a conscious choice according to their own personal preference.

- **high quality cultural products and internationalization processes**, attracting external creative and technical-scientific talents and developing local talents. Here below are few examples:

- * *The Foundation has provided education services for thousands of students and children, many of whom in educational poverty;*
- * *The Foundation co-organizes every year a Euro-Mediterranean festival, dedicated to performing arts;*



- * *It has created the first contemporary art museum in Messina, renovating an historic lighthouse built during the Roman empire;*



- * *It has produced a movie based on the stories of the internees of the local Judicial Psychiatric Hospital reintegrated into society.*

