



Culture e Studi del Sociale-CuSSoc

ISSN: 2531-3975

Editor-in-Chief: Emiliana Mangone

*Everyday Life “Turned upside Down”:
Disasters, Future and Resilience*

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Come citare / How to cite

MANGONE, E. & ZYUZEV, N. (2020). Everyday Life “Turned upside Down”: Disasters, Future and Resilience. *Culture e Studi del Sociale*, 5(1), Special issue, 175-193.

Disponibile / Retrieved from <http://www.cussoc.it/index.php/journal/issue/archive>

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Articolo pubblicato online / Article first published online: June 2020



- Peer Reviewed Journal

INDEXED IN
DOAJ

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Note of Editor-in-Chief

This is the first Special issue of the journal *Culture e Studi del Sociale-CuSSoc*. The idea behind the special issue comes from this consideration: around the world, individuals are facing a critical moment, the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences require some reflections on many topics, often forgotten by scholars. This is the reason why many Italian and foreign scholars have been invited to give their contribution. Furthermore, now more than ever, it is crucial to share knowledge coming from multiple disciplines and that's why it was decided to write an entire issue in English.

For scientific and intellectual correctness, the contents of single articles refer to the situation as in mid-May 2020. It is necessary to clarify that because this Special issue was published when many countries were starting to reduce their emergency measures to cope with the pandemic.

Everyday Life “Turned upside Down”: Disasters, Future and Resilience¹

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Abstract

Disasters change individuals and the social structure. Two categories are essential to study disasters: time and space. To these, we should add risk that is a cultural object resulting from interpretation. Its representations are subjective and they stem from the socio-cultural framework of reference. In the article, we will apply to the COVID-19 epidemic in Italy the four risk-related issues emerging by the interplay between the degree of knowledge (certain/uncertain) and that of consent (contested/complete) as in Douglas and Wildavsky. We will describe the four types of problems about the evaluation of the consequences concerning this health risk and we will consider the role of institutions. Since disasters disrupt the regularity and predictability of everyday life, the temporal dimension individuals experience is flattened onto the present. Our conclusions reflect on the possibility to counteract this and on available tools to foresee when constructing a future after a disaster.

Keyword: Disasters, Risk, COVID-19, Future, Resilience.

1. The disruption of everyday life: Sorokin and disaster studies

We will start from the idea that, in the current time, disasters are recursive. In addition, they impact greatly on many aspects of everyday life, from forms of thoughts to behaviours and from social life to societal cultural processes. Sociology is not new to disaster studies. The 1950s saw the publication of Sorokin's *Man and Society in Calamity* (2010 [1942]), in which disasters (wars and revolutions, plagues and famine) were defined and identified with the historical period.

Today, the lexicon has changed (preferring the term “disaster” to “calamity”) but their effects, regardless of their nature, have not. While scholars disagree on which events should and/or can fall into this category, they all concede that disasters upset the regularity of individuals' daily lives. The category “disaster” is a very large container which includes many events; not just wars, plagues and natural disasters (earthquakes, floods, tsunamis, health emergencies, etc.), but also events yielding a wide range of effects, changing individuals' and societies' normal flow of everyday life (Mangone, 2018a, 2019). Should not also a cyberattack, a terrorist attack or the thousands of migrants who continue to die in the Mediterranean, or on the border with Turkey, or the thousands of deaths due to the spread of viruses, be considered disasters?

Sorokin defines the “typical effects” that occur every time disasters of the same type strike. He affirms: «The life of any society is an incessant fluctuation between periods of comparative well-being and those of calamity. [...] Sooner or later this

¹ This article is the result of active collaboration among the authors. In the final version, Emiliana Mangone wrote paragraphs 2, 3 and 4, and Nikolay Zyuzev wrote paragraph 1.

phase is succeeded by a new stretch of well-being, which is replaced, in turn, by a further period of calamity. And so this alternation goes on, throughout the entire duration of society in question” (Sorokin, 2010[1942], p. 13). The Russian-American sociologist then clarifies: «I would stress the general principle of the *diversification and polarization of these effects* in different parts of population. By this principle is meant that *the effects of a given calamity are not identical - indeed, often are opposite - for different individuals and groups of the society concerned*, since individuals and groups differ from one another biologically and psychosocially» (Sorokin, 2010 [1942], p. 14). This also depends, of course, on the degree of exposure to the disaster. Different categories could be exposed to risk in varying degrees. Let us consider two examples: war and an epidemic particularly affecting the elderly population. In both cases, different categories experience the fear of dying in different degrees. In the case of war, the military and the population experience and face the same type of disaster, but differently (Gillespie, 1942) and the former fear of death is much higher. Similarly, in the case of a pandemic, the elderly will fear death much more than the younger population.

The effects are not only on emotional aspects, such as fear, but also on the cognitive processes of representation, memory, imagination and structuring of thought. The first change in this sense is «in the tendency of all the cognitive processes to be concentrated more and more upon the calamity and the phenomena *that are directly and indirectly connected with it, together with increasing insensitivity (beginning with sensation and perception) toward extraneous elements*» (Sorokin, 2010 [1942], p. 28). The second important change is: «*in a tendency toward disintegration of the unity of our “self” and of mental functioning. It manifests itself in an increasing incapacity to concentrate on objects unrelated to the calamity, in a growing dependence of our thinking upon fortuitous external influences; in a decreasing autonomy and self-regulation of our thoughts, independently of external stimuli; and, finally, in an access of various forms of mental disease. In brief, calamities promote the growth of mental disorderliness and disorganization*» (Sorokin, 2010 [1942], p. 35). These effects often weaken the self that tends to become amorphous and self-doubling, creating dissonance (Festinger, 1957) and different behaviours in the part of the population directly or indirectly involved in the disaster.

What Sorokin stated in the 1950s is still valid when describing the dynamics that occur in societies subjected to disasters. The crisis caused by disasters is not to be considered *sui generis*: it represents a normal moment in the life-flow that allows for the recognition of the characteristics of social systems that might not otherwise remain clouded, since the calamity generates social change and consequences on both life and the socio-psychological regulatory mechanisms.

The final chapter of *Man and Society in Calamity* is dedicated to the future (*A Glance into the Future*) and to what could be the means to exit the disaster-induced crisis (wars and revolutions, famines and pestilences) but also to the anarchy of values that can only be overcome with their greater integration and rooting. Consequently, thinking about the future during or after a disaster cannot be separated from the existence of a community (Mangone, 2018b), or grouping of individuals that is configured as such, since it is from the relationships established within the communities, in themselves positive, that will stem the planning and the reconstruction of the identity outfits and new system of needs and values.

Therefore, we need to highlight that the law of diversification and polarization of the effects of calamity is still valid today, and that, in disaster-prone communities, regardless of their nature, there is always a “before” and “after” (Van den

Eynde & Veno, 1999). Addressing the problem of overcoming the emergency becomes a priority. To this end, we should outline the dynamics characterizing the populations when a new order is being established (Mangone, 2018b).

Disasters disrupt the networks of social relations making the definition of the social structure chaotic, a process that becomes a powerful factor of socio-cultural change. Among the many examples are the occurrences in enemy-occupied territories; those – such as those hosting refugee camps – that become the destination for the part of the population that migrated to escape the harmful effects of conflicts, famine, epidemics; those contaminated by chemical agents with the consequent effects on the population. More directly related to our topic, the quarantine of part of (or all) the population to reduce the effects of an epidemic. Disasters change greatly both individuals and the social structure. They generate the need to start again, to reconnect the life-threads of individuals and the community, thus trying to imagine a possible future, looking for a project that can bring out the whole community from a crisis (unbalanced) situation and channel it towards a new equilibrium.

To understand the real consequences of a disaster for a community, beyond the victims and material damage, we should not stop at the actual moment of the disaster but go further (to the “after”) and observe what happens in later years through various paradigmatic and disciplinary lenses. We should consider the persistent sense of uncertainty for the future experienced by people affected by the calamity, their regret for the loss of both assets and loved ones, their disorientation due to forced separation from everyday habits and the inability to recognize themselves in a given historical and cultural context.

After many years, the lexicon has changed, preferring the term disaster to calamity but the effects that perturb the regularity of the daily life of individuals – on their thought, behaviour, social organization and cultural life – of the events that we call disasters have not. This is true even though scholars not always agree on which events should and/or could fall into this category².

Sorokin’s general principle thus anticipates the research approaches for studying disasters from the 1980s, based on the closely interrelated concepts of social vulnerability (Phillips *et al.*, 2010) and resilience (Manyena, 2006). As Sorokin maintained, the effects of calamities (disasters) are not the same for all individuals and their communities, and not just for the different direct or indirect involvement of individuals but also for the different types of disasters they are involved in.

In light of Sorokin’s idea that «The life of any society is an incessant fluctuation between periods of comparative well-being and those of calamity» (2010[1942], p. 14) and the subsequent *law of diversification and polarization of calamities' effects*, we can affirm that, to study disasters and their effects, time and space are two essential social categories. They are also two distinctive and constitutive elements of the phenomenology related to disasters and the everyday lives of the individuals involved in them. These phenomena can be studied in their continuous unfolding, as they flow into the unity of the individual experience and situation; or they may become the subject of a subsequent reflection if we reflect on them after they have been experienced. In the first case, personal history coincides with experience and cannot be separated from it; in the second, instead, reflecting on past actions means

² Disasters are usually divided into two broad categories: natural disasters (including epidemics) and man-made disasters. The latter, in turn, are divided into a) accidental, due to human error (*e.g.* derailment of a train due to driver error); b) intentional, such as murder and mass violence (war and terrorism).

that they are treated as something disconnected from personal experience. In this way, time is no longer unitary, and being aware of this means that individuals are oriented in their actions/interactions by the temporal and spatial dimensions (social and historical context).

In the 21st century, disasters have become much more complex than they previously were – although Sorokin had already highlighted the complex nature of these phenomena and the multiple consequences on the personal, cultural and social level. Consequently, we venture to formulate the following reflections: 1) all the disasters that occurred in the last decades and continue to happen have taught us that vulnerability is increasing (both for the transformations in nature – such as the effects of pollution – and for individual risk-seeking), which is why it is necessary to set up prevention and early intervention actions at a local, national and international level; 2) the category of “disasters” should be considered virtual in the sense that it cannot encompass only events that are defined as disasters according to common sense (natural disasters, wars, terrorism, etc.) but also all those events entailing conjunctions of physical conditions and social definitions of human harm and social disturbances (Kreps, 2001) such as epidemics.

2. Disasters and risk: a symbolic-cultural reality

Disasters and the development of humanity guide our reflections – necessary for a sociological reading of socio-cultural phenomena – towards the “risk culture” and the awareness of the risks taken to “colonize the future”. Giddens (1991) insisted that these dynamics lead to the individualisation of life. Personal identity has become a reflexive project to be realized in its social environment, characterized both by strong technicality and moral dryness. We add, therefore, another element to the above-considered time: risk. By combining risk and time, we determine an idea of future in global society linked to the concept of uncertainty. Individuals have always tried to find sources of knowledge that would allow them to expand their degree of certainty (security), but this need often remains unsatisfied. And it is precisely being besieged by fear that conditions individual decisions and often pushes people to fall back on sub-optimal but possible (more controllable) solutions rather than taking “risks” (less controllable).

If social action is the key to understanding society, attitudes towards risk and the future do not appear to be dominated by purpose-oriented rationality. Rather, they appear to be dominated by a logic based on the search for a balance between cultural “goals” and “means”, starting from the selection of “cultural goals” on a hierarchical scale.

There is no unequivocal definition of risk, nor there is a single approach for its analysis (Barbieri and Mangone, 2015): several disciplines have dealt with this issue, each basing its contribution on its own peculiarities. When social sciences decide to study the concept of “risk”, three authors come to the mind of researchers, and especially of sociologists: Luhmann (1991), Beck (1986) and Giddens (1990). To these, scholars who prefer approaches more focused on socio-cultural dimensions and context add Douglas (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1983). These are reputed to be key authors for the development of the analysis of this concept.

The various definitions coined over the last few decades have not managed to make this concept clear, and it remains very ambiguous. On the one hand, people are attracted by risk or even fascinated by it; on the other hand, they are wary and fearful. The reason is that this concept is highly dependent on some aspects, among

which two stand out: on the one hand, the influence of culture and context, on the other, its inextricable link with other concepts (risk, uncertainty, confidence, security, modernity, globalization, etc.). This indissoluble bond with other concepts underpins the reflections by contemporary sociologists on this theme, starting from Luhmann (1991), who compellingly links risk to the ideas of probability and uncertainty, differentiating it from the concept of danger. It is not possible to talk about risk when the result of an act is certain, and therefore primitive cultures had no knowledge of this concept. Hence the idea that risk is typical of modernity and should not be confused with hazard or peril. Rather, it indicates risky choices that are actively pursued in view of future possibilities (Giddens, 1990). What is considered risky (behaviour, practices, environments, etc.) depends on what Beck (1986) called “relations of definitions”. This means that every society, at a given time, determines its risk hierarchy; however, the perceptions (underpinning the construction of said hierarchy) do not always correspond to objectively measurable risks, nor they are generated by individual decisions. This is mainly because the attention of the public has shifted towards needs related to the quality of life, due to both the influence of mass media and the overall increase in wealth. We thus shift from an approach reducing risk to its mere economic aspects to one considering the overall interactions between these and other important social and cultural variables.

Culture is often overlooked in risk studies (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1983), as it is not considered a problematic aspect of society but rather an “accident” in the regular course of social events. In such a complex scenario as the contemporary society, relationships (at different levels) play a dominant role in both social phenomena and the processes of *social construal* of risk – meaning how people perceive, understand and interpret the world around them (Douglas 1997).

It is thus easy to understand how the concept of risk has changed (and is still changing) in contemporary society, following the latter’s transformations. The transition from local to global society has generated the idea of “global risks”, which in turn has prompted the statement that this is the “risk society” (Beck, 1986). We have adopted the idea that risk factors are not hidden only in nature anymore, but also in humans, their behaviours, their freedom, their relations, their association, the whole of society (Ewald, 1993). In the following pages, our attention will be focused on key elements of everyday life that must be considered when dealing with the processes of construction, identification, and selection of risks. Supported by the meso-range theories³ (Collins, 1988) developed in recent decades, that studied the relations between social system and lifeworld, we will therefore try to describe the links between risk, culture and social relations.

Culture is a fundamental dimension of everyday life and it is necessary to understand it in relation to the various situations of the social world, including those defined “risky”. In this way, we can theorize paths aimed at improving the relations and forms deriving from culture, through which we express the interactions among people as well as those between them and the other elements of the system.

This interpretation of the relationship between risk and culture draws a complex scenario, in which the world and the people in it constitute an endless web of relationships based on events that intersect, overlap, influence each other – and that can also often be discordant (Festinger, 1962). The everyday sequence of events, through definition and elaboration, allows for the reproduction of “meaning” through “symbolic mediation”, which favours the interpretation and, more impor-

³ The *meso* dimension, focused on the relationships between social system and lifeworld, where the latter is understood as the set of meanings and representations of culture.

tantly, the very construction of reality. Social reality – and, therefore, also the construction, identification, and selection of risk – stems not only from the social meanings attributed to a certain phenomenon (cultural object) but also from the products of the subjective world of people. People’s patterns of action and relationships are built according to the meaning that they attribute to daily existence. In other words, individuals achieve a world of meanings and events that become real for them as conscious and perceiving “social beings”.

Risk is a reality for people, deriving from the relations that people establish with others and that are manifested through everyday roles. In general, risk can be considered *a social problem* because it stems from the relationship between “fact” and “structure”, it results from interpretation and therefore it is a cultural object. And precisely because risk is interpreted as a culturally defined social problem, over time its shared forms of representation can either increase or decrease. In such a scenario, risk representations express both the subjective sense attributed to this category and the cultural and social reference framework available at a given time and space (Schütz, 1932): construction and representations of risk exist both in the micro-everyday scene and in the macro-institutional one.

On these premises, Mary Douglas (1985) argues that culture is a “mnemonic system” that helps people in calculating risk and consequences and shifts the focus from the idea of individual risk to that of collective risk. Of course, Douglas’ cultural theory of risk should be seen in the broader context of her studies on primitive thought and taboos (Douglas, 1966), some of which are developed by linking them with modern human behaviour in risky and dangerous situations. This interpretation is based on the principle that in every place and age the universe is interpreted in moral and political terms (Douglas, 1992) and the concept of risk becomes paramount in this sense. In modern societies, however, risk does not perform the same function that danger covered in pre-modern ones. Contemporary societies typically replace “sin” with “risk”, because the processes of globalization have helped in establishing cultural systems able to integrate ever-larger communities – whose vulnerability, however, has increased precisely because they have become “world systems”. Douglas’ cultural-symbolic analysis is not limited to attempting to explain the influence of culture on the concept of risk: in her book *Risk and Culture*, co-authored with political scientist Wildavsky (Douglas and Wildavsky 1983), she also deals with the issue of knowledge by stressing knowledge of risk(s) is never exhaustive. The scholar highlights four risk-related issues emerging by the interplay between the degree of knowledge (*certain/uncertain*) and that of consent (*contested/complete*).

These connections generate four types of problems concerning the evaluation of the consequences when faced with a risk (Tab. 1). While three of them can be solved through specific actions, one remains unsolved.

In the first situation, if we have certain knowledge and complete consent – among “laymen” rather than scientists – the problem is “technical” in its nature and can be solved by calculating the probability of the event, then choosing the alternative that produces the greatest positive effects. If we have uncertain knowledge and complete consent, instead, the problem is “informational” and therefore the solution is the search for further knowledge. Finally, if we have certain knowledge but controversies (contested consent), it is a problem of “disagreement” that must be solved through either coercion or discussion.

Tab. 1 – The four Problems of Risk

		Knowledge	
		Certain	Uncertain
Consent	Complete	Problem: <i>Technical</i> Solution: <i>Calculation</i>	Problem: <i>Informational</i> Solution: <i>Research</i>
	Contested	Problem: <i>(dis)Agreement</i> Solution: <i>Coercion or Discussion</i>	Problem: <i>Knowledge and Consent</i> Solution: <i>???</i>

Source: Douglas and Wildavsky (1983, p. 5)

In the last situation, we have both uncertain knowledge and a dispute by the “laymen”, *i.e.*, non-experts. In this case, the problem is no longer widening knowledge, but of how to create consent around it, considering that the perception of risk is a social process that depends on the combination of “trust” and “fear”. Therefore, there is no solution to the problem of combined uncertain knowledge and lack of consent because we face with a further problem concerning policies: the cultural approach can show us how the consent of the community in selecting certain risks is oriented by the public interest according to the strength and direction of social disapproval. This also shows how this selection changes together with the community or social organizations in general, and how individuals who belong to different social organizations are willing to face some risks rather than others. As Douglas and Wildavsky write, «In risk perception, humans act less as individuals and more as social beings who have internalized social pressures and delegated their decision-making processes to institutions. They manage as well as they do, without knowing the risks they face, by following social rules on what to ignore: institutions are their problem-simplifying devices» (1983, p. 80). In their everyday lives, individuals try to avoid harmful events. To this end, they base their reasoning not on precise economic or probabilistic calculations but rather on conditions that allow them to overcome the crisis by identifying objectives that are tangible and flexible at the same time, often delegating this function to social organizations (including the institutions).

Although it appears static, the cultural-symbolic approach allows us to define, through the general cultural theory, the conceptual boundaries (Tansey and O’Riordan 1999) within which we can then review and redefine the *social construal* processes. By doing so, we can add new tiles to the mosaic describing and interpreting the reality of the social dynamics connected with risk. However, the four issues posed by Douglas (1992) as the starting point for a comparative study of risk perception remain of primary importance. These are a) the influence of risk on the goals of the individual perceiving it; b) whether the original community is part (integral or not) of the individual’s goals; c) understanding the influence on the individual or collective good of the risk depending on the type of community; and finally, d) classifying the various communities based on the support, commitment, organization, and boundaries defined by their members.

Summarizing, we can state that the cultural approach helps us to understand the perception of risk by non-experts through a systematic view of the range of objectives that an individual may try to reach. In other words, risk should not be consid-

ered a technical problem but rather a problem of everyday life for which we must take into account political implications and people's positions in relation to both individual and collective objectives.

3. The four problem of the COVID-19 epidemic risk in Italy

In the previous pages we have highlighted the theoretical and methodological elements needed to study social dynamics and the symbolic-cultural reality with regard to how individuals combine certain aspects that permeate daily life, the idea of the future, uncertainty, risk, and, last but not least, the disasters that disturb the already precarious balance between all these aspects.

From now on, we intend to correlate what previously said to the problems stemming from individual action during an epidemic, considering the risk factors that they involve for people's health. The case examined will be the SARS-CoV-2 virus or COVID-19 which is the name of the disease (better known simply as coronavirus). We will pay particular attention to Italy, the pandemic epicentre in Europe.

On 8 December 2019 the World Health Organization (WHO) ascertained the first case of a patient infected by a new virus akin to SARS (*Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome*). The latter spread between late 2002 and early 2003, representing the first major pandemic threat to the Western world in the 21st century, this virus caused serious respiratory crises and pneumonia and currently knows neither therapy nor vaccine. To the disease of new virus (SARS-CoV-2) will be given the name COVID-19, from the words *coronavirus* (COVI) and *disease* (D) and the last two digits of the year of its spread (2019). A few months later, it will be discovered that China's "patient zero" in the Hubei province was far from being the first case, as the virus had most probably started circulating in the region since mid-November. When China raised the alarm on December 27, the spread in the Hubei province had already taken the form of an epidemic: hundreds of thousands of individuals had already become infected. Nevertheless, the situation was underestimated and a few months later the virus will reach Europe with the first European (Italian) patient certified on February 21, 2020 (in the previous month, Italy also recorded two other cases concerning a couple of Chinese tourists). The thousands of infected people and the ease of transmission meant that, when the WHO declared the pandemic status on March 11, 2020, the countries involved have become 114 worldwide.

The reality outlined in the first months leads to the hypothesis that both individual and institutional actions lack awareness on the COVID-19 problem in terms of the *pandemic emergency* and the health risk run by the population. After the first cases in Europe, governments and institutions acknowledged the need to address the problem in a decisive manner and switched to "risk-aimed" communication⁴ to contain the contagion. The most urgent issue is to build up knowledge for both "experts" and "laymen", to affect their behaviour and attitudes. This can be achieved only by interweaving objective scientific information and training in self-

⁴ We should distinguish between a "risk-themed" communication from a "risk-aimed" one. This distinction refers not only to the content but also to the relationship. The first, "risk-themed", refers to the *object* of the communication, while the second, "risk-aimed", to its specific *recipient*. To simplify, we could distinguish the communication event referring to risk by identifying two moments: the first of an *informative* nature ("risk-themed", information process) and the second of a persuasive-preventive-participative nature ("risk-aimed", communication process).

responsibility (perception of oneself and others. These targeted interventions aim at building the foundations for a safe and responsible coexistence between all generations, regardless of their degree of vulnerability to the virus. These interventions cannot then be left to the media, which often aim at “sensationalist” information – sick-blaming and circumscribing the problem to certain categories or social groups, while nurturing in others the perception of being somehow shielded from the contagion. Such an attitude of denial is usually problematic and particularly in this specific case. This brings us back to communication. In a situation in which emotions run high and values and socio-cultural resources are deeply involved, communication cannot be limited to mere informative interventions, as active changes in behaviour and lifestyles are necessary to reduce the risk of contagion.

To better understand, we will apply to the COVID-19 epidemic what Douglas and Wildavsky (1983) said about the problem of knowledge: that about risk it is never exhaustive. We will also refer to Simon’s principle of bounded rationality (1983).

As mentioned above, the scholars had identified four problems related to knowledge and risk by crossing two dimensions: the degree of certainty/uncertainty of knowledge and the degree of consent (contested/complete). We will apply this model to the COVID-19 epidemic in Italy, declining the four types of problems concerning the evaluation of the consequences in dealing with this health risk. In addition, we will take into account the role of institutions. Our analysis is divided into three phases, consisting of five timeframes: phase 0 (the initiation phase of the infection), phase 1 (the phase of full emergency with the growing number of infected individuals), phase 2 (phase of slowdown of infection and gradual exit from the emergency) - however, this phase as conceived here does not correspond to the second official phase of the Italian government which was implemented in early May. The last two phases (phase 1 and phase 2) are both divided into a first stage and a second stage. As we are writing (April 2020), the phase 2 is considered partially hypothetical trying to foresee the situation and the measures implemented, because when we has finished to write this article in Italy the emergency was not yet finish and the entire country was been in lockdown from 11 March to 4 May (in fact on March 11 the nation was proclaimed “red zone” – or “protected zone”, as the Prime Minister, Antonio Conte, rather puts it).

In relation to the COVID-19 in Italy, for easier reading, we will propose two tables (Tab. 1 and Tab. 2), distinguished by the dimension of “complete” an “contested” consent. Our discussion will be general and all-encompassing, as some stages see the juxtaposition of several problems at the same time. In the phase 0, for example, the condition of certain knowledge and complete consent (referred not to “experts” but to citizens) was never reached. Rather, in this phase there was a “problem of knowledge and consent” (uncertain knowledge/contested consent), as the uncertain knowledge led to oppositions among both “experts” and “laymen”, different stakeholders and local governments. It should be noted that the spread of the virus in Italy was initially recorded in the North-East of the country (Lombardy and Veneto) with the identification of two “red zones” (Codogno in Lombardy and Vo’ in Veneto) which were completely quarantined for two weeks (14 days is the incubation period of the virus according to virologists) suspending all activities and mobility from/to the two towns. Following Douglas’ scheme, this case presents an unsolvable problem from the point of view of risk. The actions must aim at creating consent around the existing knowledge since the perception of risk is a social process that depends on the combination of “trust” and “fear”. It follows that we are faced with a further problem concerning policies: Douglas’ cultural approach

shows us how the consent of the community in selecting certain risks is oriented by the public interest according to the strength and direction of social disapproval.

Tab. 1 – Relationship between the degree of certainty/uncertainty of knowledge and complete consent

		Knowledge	
		Certain	Uncertain
Complete Consent	Phase 0	-----	-----
	Phase 1 (first stage)	-----	<p>Problem: Informational Citizens confused by the lack of clarity in institutional communication</p> <p>Solution: Research Search for information on the risk of contagion and possible negative consequences for the population</p>
	Phase 1 (second stage)	<p>Problem: Technical Need to contain the infection</p> <p>Solution: Probabilities calculus Calculation of the contagion rates among the population and consequent containment actions</p>	-----
	Phase 2 (first stage)	-----	<p>Problem: Informational Information to the population are insufficient and unclear about the future</p> <p>Solution: Research Search for appropriate shared actions and policies for the recovery of the country</p>
	Phase 2 (second stage)	-----	-----

In the next phase (phase 1, first stage), more than one of Douglas’ conditions occurred simultaneously: there is both a “problem of disagreement” and an “informational” problem. On the one hand, there was “full consensus” about the virus’ extreme infectiousness, with requests for quarantine. On the other hand, local institutions and stakeholders disagreed, favouring profit and productivity over reducing risk of contagion. As a counterbalance, the vast majority of the population was beginning to express consensus on actions to contain the contagion, despite the lack of clarity in institutional communication.

Tab. 2 - Relationship between the degree of certainty/uncertainty of knowledge and contested consent

		Knowledge	
		Certain	Uncertain
Contested Consent	Phase 0	-----	<p>Problem: Knowledge and consent</p> <p>Lack of clarity from the “experts” on the dangerousness of the contagion, leading to opposing positions on both the institutional and the scientific side.</p> <p>Solution: ????</p> <p>Underestimation of the risk of contagion with no decision taken.</p>
	Phase 1 (first stage)	<p>Problem: (dis)Agreement</p> <p>Request for risk containment actions by “experts”.</p> <p>Opposition by the citizens (deprived of their freedom) and local institutions because of the possible economic repercussions.</p> <p>Solution: Coercion or discussion</p> <p>Establishment of “red areas” in some regions of Italy.</p>	-----
	Phase 1 (second stage)	<p>Problema: (dis)Agreement</p> <p>Lack of agreement on the establishment of the “red zones”.</p> <p>Soluzione: Coercion or discussion</p> <p>Further implementation of coercive action.</p> <p>Proclamation of the whole of Italy as a “protected” or “red zone”.</p>	-----
	Phase 2 (first stage)	-----	-----
	Phase 2 (second stage)	-----	<p>Problem: Knowledge and consent</p> <p>Lack of clarity on the part of the European Community and national political institutions on the actions to be taken for recovery.</p> <p>Solution: ????</p> <p>Implementation of the appropriate policies for the economic, social and cultural recovery of Italy.</p>

The “technical” problem emerges in the second stage of the phase 1, as it is now clear to all parties involved that the virus is highly contagious and dangerous, especially for the weakest among the population. The solution translates into the simple

calculation of the probability of virus spread in order to allow the choice of the best alternative for its containment that produces the greatest positive effects for the entire population. In this same phase (phase 1, second stage), however, there is also a further “disagreement problem”. Although the consequences and the pattern in which COVID-19 spreads are now clear, the first containment action have been ill-received by part of the population, who saw their freedom of movement curbed. Faced with these forms of dispute, the authorities had to resort to coercion and force compliance with directives through checks by the police or the army. It was in this stage that the whole country was proclaimed a “protected zone” (red zone).

As anticipated the phase 2 – being the phase of slowdown of infection and gradual exit from the emergency – is here considered hypothetically for the reasons specified above, still taking into account what happened in the previous phases. Also in this case, a first and a second stage can be distinguished: in the first stage, an “informational” one (uncertain knowledge and complete consent) basically due to a high degree of uncertainty for the future perceived by the population (the actual moment of the recovery of social and economic life is not yet known), also because the institutions are lacking or ambiguous in transmitting information - especially on the emergency closure times. In this case, being maximum confidence in the institutions because, given the situation - there is no alternative, the solution of the problem and the search for actions that can reduce the sense of uncertainty of the population. In this case, as confidence in the institutions is high (since, given the situation there is no alternative), the solution to the problem is to seek actions that can reduce the sense of uncertainty of the population; in the second stage, instead, the problem is that of “knowledge and consent” since there is (as is physiological) lack of clarity on the part of the political institutions on the actions to be implemented for the recovery. This is true for both the European Union (the first signs of this were recorded with the opposition of some countries to the issuance of Eurobonds to cover the heavy debts faced by some states to counter the epidemic), which will have to face a generalised economic crisis (as well as crisis of other nature), and national government. We are no longer talking about risk but about crisis management. Therefore, the solution is adopting the appropriate policies for the economic, social and cultural recovery of the nation.

These dynamics show how the same social problem (the Coronavirus-related risk) is perceived differently by the community or social organisations in general even with respect to time, and how individuals who are part of different social organisations (*e.g.* stakeholders, such as industrialists or commercial operators who base their activities on profit) are willing to take some risks rather than others. Individuals try to minimise harmful events, first for themselves and then for others – as the survival instinct is first individual and then collective. To do this they do not rely on economic or probabilistic calculations, but on conditions that allow them to overcome the crisis situation by identifying tangible and, at the same time, flexible objectives, often delegating this function to institutions.

The model presented is obviously an artifice to simplify the dynamics of social construal experienced by an entire population during the complex process of construction, identification and selection of risks, as well as how to deal with it. In synthesis, we could say that with the help of the cultural approach – presented in the previous pages – we can understand how the “laymen” perceive the risk by offering a systematic vision of the very wide range of objectives that the individual tries to achieve. The various social parties (stakeholders) produce different social representations (world ideas) and, therefore, different cultural reference systems become the frames within which to interpret attitudes towards risk and the attribu-

tion of responsibility.

In other words, risk and health risk in the case of COVID-19 cannot be addressed exclusively as a technical problem, but rather as a problem in the daily life of individuals for which we should consider both the political and economic implications and the positions of individuals with respect to individual and collective goals.

4. Future, community, and resilience

The sociological reflections here presented starting from Sorokin’s theories have highlighted that the daily experiences of individuals in emergency or risk situations can be perceived – and therefore studied – in their continuous unfolding, as they flow within the unity of the individual experience and situation; or, they can become the object of subsequent reflection when reflecting on them after they have been experienced. In the first case, personal history coincides with the experience and cannot be separated from it; for disasters it has been said that there is a “before” and an “after”. In the second case, instead, reflecting on past actions means that they are considered disconnected from personal – for example, the survivors of a disaster. In the case of the COVID-19 in Italy, at the height of the emergency the number of deaths had already exceeded the total number of victims recorded in China at the end of the emergency. On March 21, 2020, 793 deaths were recorded in a single day, with an average age of 80 years, a sort of “generation gap” that the virus created (almost all the victims were over 65 years old). Thus, time is no longer unitary and becoming aware of this means that individuals are oriented in their actions/interactions by the temporal and spatial dimension (social and historical context).

In the case of disasters, the temporal dimension and in particular the idea of the “after”, the future, the life of the survivor is of considerable importance, whether they are natural disasters (earthquakes, floods, typhoons, epidemics, etc.) or produced intentionally or accidentally by humans (wars, terrorist attacks, chemical accidents, etc.) whose primary effects are the destruction of material goods as well as human lives. Thus, after a disaster causing widespread destruction (as is the case for COVID-19 in Italy), the question that everyone asks is: can there still be a future?

Some years ago, the anthropologist Marc Augé, published a pamphlet entitled *Où est passé l’avenir ?* (2008), in which he asked what had happened to the future, highlighting its main paradoxes. The question posed by this scholar had no reference to disasters, trying instead to find an answer to the prevailing idea of contemporary society living on immanence. Our purpose is to start from the paradox that every individual exists in a time following their birth and preceding their death (finite and infinite) to arrive at the idea that, despite their finitude, individuals can still imagine a future dimension of time and consequently act – or not act – consequently even after having experienced a disastrous event accompanied by the need to grieve.

Time is a polysemic concept and is inseparable from individual actions. And yet, for many years it has been considered an unproblematic aspect of everyday life (Adam, 1995, 2004). The scientific traditions that addressed time are, on the one hand, philosophy, with the idea of the linear or circular time (individual times), and, on the other hand, the physical and natural sciences, up to Einstein’s relativity

and quantum physics (natural times). Between these two lies the sociological research, that tried to mediate between the minuteness of the first and the magnitude of the second (Ricoeur, 1991) by focusing the attention on “social or collective time”, which is linked to all aspects of everyday life (psychological, social and cultural ones). However, a social reading of time in the global society requires the analysis of temporal cultures.

It should be pointed out that there are different social models and practices inherent to time. According to philosophical tradition, there is a chronological time (Chrónos), consisting of a measurable triad that represents its quantitative aspect: past (yesterday), present (today) and future (tomorrow). In the case of disasters, this conception is reduced almost and exclusively to the present because in the immediacy one only tries to get out of the social and institutional emergency determined by the disaster as soon as possible and then tries to activate actions of the community aimed at re-constructing its future and that of individuals. Uncertainty in the biographies of individuals who have escaped a disaster leads them not to design a long-term project, thus to a contraction in the “duration” of the temporal horizons (Leccardi, 2014) which makes individuals focus on the present.

Kairós (time of action) consists instead in the opportunity that can happen at any given time, the so-called “right time, opportune time, time for”. If Chrónos represents the “time of truth” and the quantitative dimension (measurability and duration), Kairós represents the qualitative dimension of time, related to the search for meaning in human action (“time of action”). In ancient times Kairós was dominated by fate, but if stripped of this magical halo it allows the understanding of many dynamics of contemporary society. Kairós allows us to state that, both in individual and collective experience, time is not uniform: it does not have the same value at different moments and junctures, nor over the same day. This impacts on everyday activities and on the forms that individuals adopt to communicate. This fragmentation and temporal acceleration that characterize contemporary society (Rosa and Scheurman, 2009) – starkly evident in the case of disasters – entails the need to redetermine the relationship between biographical and social times in a community whose imminence is to escape the emergency, flattening everything out onto the present. It follows that the experience of time not only differs from individual to individual and from society to society in their everyday activities but is also different for those who survived a disastrous event.

If one can imagine a future dimension of time by individuals who survived a disaster, these two models of temporal cultures (Chrónos and Kairós) merge. This because Chrónos refers to the present, to a “forced culture of immanence”, which in turn brings individuals back to the ancient idea of Kairós that bound them to fate. While it is true that individuals act with respect to the future based on instrumental rationality, they very often give in to fatalism. In other words, the experiences of time (temporal cultures) in everyday life – beyond common aspects such as its measurement – affect individuals differently because they are a symbolic mediation between society and individual subjectivity, outlining, time after time, new time horizons on which to base the decisions for future projects.

Trying to draw conclusions from the above reflections, we can say that: *a*) the dimension of time – in a social context that has experienced a disaster and is still experiencing its effects – should be reordered in its cultures (Chrónos and Kairós) in relation to the disrupted everyday social life (*e.g.* the many irresponsible Italians not complying with the order to stay at home to minimize the possibility of contagion). The relevant aspects of a process of this magnitude mainly involve the social

and individual dimensions – see Beck (1986) when he underlines the aspects characterizing the individualisation of human life. On the one hand, there is a dissolution of pre-established forms of social life and, on the other, new institutional claims, controls and constraints for individuals; *b*) individuals tend – for their own preservation and reproduction – to look for ways to reduce the uncertainty that flattens the dimension of time to the present, shortening the “temporal horizons”. Social relations, in their daily unfolding, contain both relations with the other and relations with the institutions; the picture emerging from the above reflection (including the example of the social construal of the COVID-19 epidemic in Italy) shows that individuals are conditioned by the perception of the condition they are experiencing.

If these are the conditions of the individual trying to escape the emergency situation, the theory of rational choice is not applicable to the dynamics connected to “future time”. Rather, they could embrace a model of choice closer to that of bounded rationality (Simon, 1983). The bounded rationality model holds the following aspects as its general scheme of execution: *a*) individual decisions do not concern the whole of human life, but consider only limited areas of it; *b*) when individuals make a choice, even a very important one, they do not consider future scenarios but look at the present and at most to possible perspectives; *c*) the very fact that the individual is seeking the solution to a problem, causes her to focus on certain aspects of his life rather than others; *d*) a major part of the individual’s efforts in a choice is absorbed by frantically collecting information and facts about the decision in question (problem of knowledge).

In the bounded rationality model, individuals do not project themselves in time indefinitely (the future time horizon may be longer or shorter). In the everyday reality of an individual experiencing an emergency and health risk situation, as in the case of COVID-19, or who survived a disaster, the environment in which they live is divided into separate and distinct problems. To apply the bounded rationality model, the individual needs to be able to focus his or her attention to the factors that deserve it from time to time. The ability to acquire knowledge of the situations and environment in which individuals live is necessary both to facilitate the creation of alternatives and to estimate the possible consequences, allowing the individual to preserve the image of that part of the world involved in his decisions and to set her decision (action) on the basis of that image, which should aim not at his or her own well-being but to the well-being of every individual in the community. The latter which is re-evaluated in the case of disaster-stricken territories.

In recent decades, when reflecting on how communities overcome disasters, the focus is not only directed to the lacks and losses, but also to the ability of individuals and communities to adapt and grow despite the critical conditions.

The concept of “community”, which seemed to be abandoned, is being greatly revived as regards the possibility to explain the changes and the interventions in a territory. Today a new form of community, understood as collective intelligence, must be rebuilt if you want to start escape routes from a disaster in a territory. This is because collective intelligence has to be intended as a form of intelligence distributed everywhere, constantly improved and coordinated in real time, leading to a real mobilization of resources and competences of a specific context. It is based on people’s acknowledgement and mutual enrichment, not on the worship of “fetished” communities (Lévy, 1994). Policymakers who aim to start a territorial sustainable development have to facilitate and enhance the creation of “communities”, as they are fundamental structures in which it is important “to think about”: they represent the “factory” of a territorial human and social capital (territorial intelli-

gence).

Therefore, the word “community” in a global society does not have a negative sense, as the community considers individuals in their plenitude and not in one of the roles they have to play in the society. It is a whole of experiences and thoughts, tradition and engagement, participation and willingness, and at the same time it enhances the social dimension of the existence, the sense of belonging to a common destiny - the case of the COVID-19 epidemic is just one of these moments, the whole community belongs to a common destiny without any distinction from individual to individual.

The key concept is that of resilience (Manyena, 2006) which is generally defined as the ability of an individual or group to return to their normal life after catastrophic events (Bonanno, 2004; Bonanno et al., 2006). This can be considered on two levels: a personal level (how the person is and how he or she responds to the events), and a situational one.

The situational level turns the spotlight onto the community and, in particular, the concept of resilient communities (Norris *et al.*, 2008) that is bound to the concept of social capital and the meaning the latter takes in the process of building resilience along with other components that contribute to the adaptation to a disturbance. Through the community are affirmed social commitment, respect of rights and freedom, the balance between needs and civic responsibilities as well as the reconstruction of satisfying relationships among individuals. These features would allow for defense from exclusion processes: the resilient community becomes an instrument of action if it is considered as an “open space” in which environmental and social networks are interrelated, to ensure sustainable development initiatives and social protection. According to Norris and colleagues (*ibidem*) resilience stems from resources in the community: a) economic development; b) social capital; c) information and communication; d) the competence of the community. And in this sense, the role that social capital assumes becomes of fundamental importance. This concept, due to its interconnections with many other elements of society, contributes to a greater extent to the construction of a community that is the protagonist of its rebirth.

This new model to govern and manage the community to escape from the emergency situation in the aftermath of a disaster can be put into effect only by mobilizing social resources, relations and opportunities. In other words, this process depends on and needs the *social capital* of such territory. The term *social capital* was introduced by Loury (1977, 1987) who meant by it all the resources existing within family relations and the community social organization that come to be useful for individuals’ development- even Bourdieu (1979) saw it from this perspective. Despite that, we should stress that we owe the most important contribution to the definition of the concept of social capital to Coleman (1990), who argues that it «is created when relations among people change in ways that facilitate action» and it is not tangible because «it is embodied in the *relations* among peoples» (*ibid.*, p. 304). Such relations can be seen as forms of capital because like other capitals they produce material and symbolical value; in fact, the value of social capital is inherent in the fact that it «identifies certain physical objects by their function, disregarding differences in form, appearance, and construction. The function identified by the concept “social capital” is the value of those aspects of social structure to actors, as resources that can be used by the actors to realize their interests» (*ibid.*, p. 305).

In the last decades, analyses of territories have relied mainly on the explanation based upon the concept of social capital. This is because such concept has no clear-

cut boundaries, since social capital is made up of trust relations (strong and weak, extended and interconnected) apt to improve the ability to recognize and understand each other, to exchange information, to help each other and to cooperate for common purposes. Such formal and informal reciprocity relations are anyhow regulated by norms that define the form, contents and boundaries of exchanges in a more or less flexible way and are made effective by sanctions for the individual that are either inner or outer. This relations network is the intentional or unintentional product of social investment strategies oriented towards the establishment and reproduction of social relations that can be used over time, namely lasting and useful relations able to yield material and symbolical profits. Such relations improve the capacity for action of the individual and collective actor and, if extended enough, even the social system’s capacity for action.

Social capital inherently contains a view of development that is not confined to economic aspects but is linked to the degree of *civicness* (Putnam, 1992) and community freedom and above all to adopting correct behaviours based on trust (Fukuyama, 1995). All these elements refer to belonging and reciprocity. The social capital, by involving directly social actors in exiting a crisis, stimulates individuals’ urge to be at the centre of attention through actions leading to a shared path towards a common objective (well-being). Social capital appears to be a “multiplier of the possible”: it has a meaning only if it is aimed at ‘multiplying’ its potential, that is, at producing and reproducing itself.

It could be said that the social, value-related, cultural, relational component can represent the multiplier of well-being without which any piece of work, structure, service and so on is sterile or perceived as unimportant. Within this perspective, acting *with* becomes paramount. In this way, the community in its territory is not merely an abstract notion: it is a place of production and produces itself. The community assumes its identity through the social capital that constitutes new reciprocities between individuals and territory.

The social capital for its intangibility and it is generating of collective benefits it hasn’t to be considered a property of actors, but it has to be considered as a “public good” (Coleman, 1990) and therefore it must be protected as such: to build up social capital instead of wasting it one path only must be followed to strengthen social ties through trust and empowerment; this is the only way in which even territories that may seem, at a superficial glance, “hopeless” would become productive locations and producers themselves of development processes allowing the community to survive and to improve its quality of life.

In conclusion, a world free of disasters is not conceivable, but we can imagine a world in which the negative consequences of these events are minimized or even avoided starting from the assumption that collective damage requires collective strategies. As Sorokin argued, the future of mankind and its development are in the hands of mankind itself (1958): neither law nor education, nor religion or the economy, or science – even though the latter has a specific role in accompanying the processes of improving the lives of individuals and communities – can be enough for this task. This task is assigned to the whole of mankind, and therefore to its communities that can exist only if they have certain characteristics: «A peaceful, harmonious, and creative society can exist only when its members possess at least a minimum of love, sympathy, and compassion ensuring mutual aid, co-operation, and fair treatment. Under these conditions, its members are united in one collective ‘we’ in which the joys and sorrows of one member are shared by others» (Sorokin 1948, p. 57). Acting on the community means acting on multiple levels (individual, family, institutional and social), and it is the whole community the object of since a

normalization process of the community needs to be undertaken by reinforcing the existing networks and structures, reestablishing the previous ones and creating new ones.

Of whatever nature and origin the disasters are, they face humanity with a dilemma still to be resolved: “By the mysterious forces of destiny mankind is confronted with a stern dilemma: either to continue its predatory policies of individual and tribal selfishness that lead it to its inevitable doom, or to embark upon the policies of universal solidarity that brings humanity to the aspired for heaven on the earth. It is up to everyone of us which of the two roads we prefer to choose” (Sorokin, 1954, p. 489).

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