

## Conclusions

### 12. There is no sustainable development without subsidiarity

The challenges to be faced by 2030 are closely related to the ongoing global change of the anthropological framework. The query is decisive: How can actual sustainable development be reached if the basic principles of cohabitation are questioned? Even more today, in a context where Western Countries, which should guide the virtuous process towards such a development, are undoubtedly the first “actors” to struggle, to suffer from this structural crisis.

The 2030 Agenda has not been developed out of nowhere. The reasons that have led to its drafting are the result of a cultural, social and economic rather than political process. It has been ages since sustainable development became, indeed, a central issue in the civil cohabitation as fundamental and somehow acknowledged ambition of all, before its codification in different definitions and before being a priority of governmental and institutional policies.

Consequently, the most important feature that has awakened policy makers’ consciousness and has led to the identification of the MDGs and SDGs is related to the deadline set for their implementation, rather than to the contents of the goals, developed in civil society and business community over a long time. And we may realistically believe that those goals are not achievable by 2030. What we cannot ignore is that the urgency of pursuing them decisively in order to reach them rapidly is linked to the (decent, respectable and physical) survival of mankind and the entire planet.

This is why the ongoing change in the anthropological framework at global level is the first, and maybe the only, real challenge to face for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Perhaps, at the same time, it is also the greatest opportunity. As a matter of fact, this change obliges to work together. During the last twenty years, remarkable results have been achieved in relation to some goals in several parts of the world, mainly thanks to a new idea based on the importance of shared values to reach common goals. Goals of and for everyone. In a daily and in-depth work. To leave no one behind.

And once again, the sharing of common goals and the work to accomplish them are firstly developing among civil society and business community rather than among the policy makers, who, apart from specious statements of principle, sometimes risk distorting meanings for partial aims.

Today, sustainable development represents the most consolidated and unifying reference point, the possible common objective, the most promising arena for communication for anyone who aims at the good, the common good, well-being, and peace for itself and for all.<sup>1</sup>

In this framework SMEs are providing their decisive contribution everywhere, especially in Europe and Italy, by guiding the territories they belong to and the whole planet with its inhabitants towards sustainable development paths.

There are 23.85 SMEs in Europe and 4.45 million in Italy. These data are sufficient to understand that there will be no sustainable development without their support in the right direction. Actually, apart from these figures, the SMEs’ proper contribution is crucial for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, since they represent the vital nourishment of the territories they belong to and without their help there will be no possibility to turn the challenges that the ongoing great transformations are posing to different territories into opportunities.

In this light, we would like to express two synthetic remarks, some policy recommendations and a final comment, which is also a wish, referring to the various chapters for the richness of their contents.

The first remark regards the relation between SMEs, territorial systems and sustainable development. SMEs, especially by virtue of their subsidiary culture, are decisive actors in the processes that lead a territory to be a “territorial system”, thus to determine its potentialities in terms of sustainable development. Also, they are often become “systemic actors”, that is, actors who work in the target territories with a multilevel vision, able to involve other actors’ resources towards a common goal (Celentano *et al.*, 2019); Centro Studi & Cultura di Impresa Fondazione UCIMU, 2019; Centro Studi FederlegnoArredo, 2019). Consequently, the future of the different territorial systems is even more connected with that of their SMEs, which represent the vital nourishment, also in terms of local and international integration, and a decisive

<sup>1</sup> The statement of Pope Paul VI was really prophetic: “Development is the new name for peace” (Paul VI, 1967).

element for being or not a system (Zucchella, Magnani, 2019; Garrone, 2019), especially when they are facilitated to access the necessary financial resources (Erzegovesi, 2019; Brugnoli, Matraia, 2019).

In this direction, the contribution that SMEs, together with their reference institutions, can provide for the implementation of the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda, is crucial. In particular, the Agenda encourages to promote partnerships between public and public-private actors and within civil society, on the basis of the experience and the strategies of partnerships' resource accumulation (Brugnoli *et al.*, 2019). At the same time, SMEs are directly or indirectly called upon to implement all the SDGs, since they are considered decisive players for the territories they belong to (Bramanti, Brugnoli, 2019).

The second remark concerns the relation between SMEs, young people and sustainable development. As we have already highlight in the introductory chapter of this Report, young people are at the heart of the more authoritative and consolidated definition of sustainable development, since it links this last concept to that of "responsibility towards future generations". In light of these ongoing deep transformations and of the evolving global-local relations, we have to invest adequately and innovatively in young people, in their employability (not qualifications but competences), in their (auto) entrepreneurship (Bertagna, Magni, 2019; Minola, 2019), in training courses, which, as OECD has recently reported, have the aim of preparing young people to jobs that do not exist yet, to technologies that has not yet been invented, to solve problems that has not yet been conceived (OECD, 2018). SMEs contribution in this direction, – with a particular attention to innovative start-ups with young founding members (Minola, 2019) – especially through the training apprenticeship, is great and opens to high integration between institutions (family, school, university, company etc.), essential to the consolidation of any viable sustainable development path. The chance of this happening, also considering the extension to employability training at all ages, is mainly a cultural challenge which calls for a constant responsibility from all the actors involved, so that everyone is able to deal aptly with the ongoing changes (Bertagna, Magni, 2019).

In terms of policy, according to the perspective outlined in this Report, in Italy, the importance of some investments in capitals, which can no longer be postponed, emerges. These investments must be modulated according to multiple combinations of action, which take account of the different features of the territorial systems and of the levels of interrelation between the involved actors. First of all, we consider the investment in human capital, especially in that of young people, that is investment both in technical and professional skills – among which the digital competence is the most strategic – and cultural investment in "why" and "how" to do business. In parallel, we need investments in social capital, which have to be investments in the relations with stakeholders of the target territory, even of a wider area, according to the characteristics of companies that are increasingly global. Then, there is the investment in economic-financial capital, especially to facilitate the access to credit and to commercial functions in the territorial systems considered and debureaucratisation. Strictly related to the previous one, there is the investment in infrastructural capital, that is, in connecting infrastructures in order to link supply chains to their different territorial structures, whether they regards transport to develop infrastructure and logistic systems, connectivity to support the digitalisation of manufacturing and service activities or other quality infrastructures (energy, management of industrial waste etc.). Also, we need investments in environmental capital, in order to preserve the natural, cultural and agricultural heritage and investment in institutional capital, in order to strengthen the ability to monitor the different stages of the policy/project cycle. Research and development applied to relevant issues are transversal critical factors for the strengthening of all territorial systems.

Therefore, we need more targeted policy actions with considerable allocations than the policies contained in the recent Decree Law No 34/2019 (Growth Decree) approved by the Council of Ministers at the end of April 2019.

In conclusion, the last comment concerns the contribution that subsidiary culture, in its wider definition, can offer for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. We only add one remark to what we have previously introduced about this matter (Brugnoli *et al.*, 2019). The success of the path towards sustainable development requires, first of all, a rethinking of traditional business models, in the direction of a stimulating promotion of the approaches that include sustainable processes from the beginning of corporate competitive strategies, without considering sustainability a secondary step, as it often happens despite complying with the principles of corporate social responsibility. This rethinking is challenged by the change in the anthropological framework previously mentioned. Therefore, the necessary contribution that subsidiary culture can provide may be searched in the capacity of encouraging this rethinking and in the collaborative relations it leads to. This is why there will be no sustainable development without subsidiarity.