

Education and the Mediterranean

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Abstract: The relevance of the existing processes of change returns visibility to the Mediterranean both as a geographical area and in its various cultural forms. This double relevance justifies a sociological review of related educational issues. Moving from a perspective that considers education as a dynamic element, closely connected to the complex socio-cultural Mediterranean context, the aim of this paper is to reconstruct the outstanding features of the Mediterranean area and to provide a possible contribution to a more human evolution of the present social context, through the achievement of a socialization model based on the person and the improvement of relational dynamics. It focuses on an analytical perspective as opposed to perspectives which consider the subject as a variable dependent on the context. In the first part we provide the most important contributions to the Mediterranean question, while the second section raises some important cultural questions. The conclusions consider the prevailing educational model and trace the main features of a new alternative.

Keywords: cosmopolitan education, new Mediterranean perspective, cultural forms, opportunities of change

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The setting

The profound and rapid changes of the past decades have reshaped the idea of space in its multiple perspectives: economical, anthropologic and territorial. Although these changes also involved the Mediterranean area, here the transformative action involves a context characterized by a high symbolic value and ideally situated between the north and the south of the world.

One of the main features of this area (the Mediterranean) is its complexity: it is a place of differences, a shared space where cultural values are transmitted - the same values that in many parts of the world are identified as local or national cultures. However, problems and tensions are also present in the Mediterranean, producing inconsistencies in local development models as well as varying hardships and needs.

That is why Mediterranean is an *open project* insofar as it is marked by a dynamic towards ongoing enrichment. It is a gathering and comparative space for different cultures, societies and economies, which do not overlap or cancel each other, but which are interconnected and hybridized. In the Mediterranean area, signs of deep change, whether forced or spontaneous, are easily visible. Additionally, traces of past historical experiences, based both on cultural meetings and deep divisions, are often visible. Accordingly, the Mediterranean is a geographically fluid and changeable setting that can only be understood through integrated analysis (economy, politics and culture).

Looking at the different interpretations associated with this area, it is easy to understand why variability is one of its main features. Evaluation of this variability may require a new approach to interpretation, different from the classical or territorial models.

The *classical model*, proposed by economic and social geography, created sectarian interpretations based on a Mediterranean seen as a utopia, a non-place, or else a geographical space stretched out around the Mediterranean basin².

The *territorial approach*, presented by geographers, economists and sociologists, is different from the classical model in that it focuses on the

² This is the case of Salento. *Salente* is the place chosen by Minerva where the king Idomeneo could develop divine political directions. *Salente* is the name given by Robespierre to what he wanted realize with the Revolution.

rule of space in socio-economic dynamics and looks at territorial, local and global transformations

Other methods of categorization (that will not be presented in this essay³) are *quantitative*, *orientalist*, *historical-ecological* and *romantic-erudite* as well as *realist*, *constructivist* and *developmentist*.

The main objective of the realistic approach is the attempt to answer the question: *what is Mediterranean? How is it structured? What are its borders? What are its essential and constitutive elements?*

The *constructivist approach* points out the difference between Mediterranean and mediterraneity and reconstructs the distinctive elements of Mediterranean starting from its different interpretative models.

The starting-point of the *developmentist approach* is the elaboration of development issues both at semantic and pragmatic level.

The research model of *developmentist* scholars is based on ethnocentrism; although it is important to consider, its results are deeply ideological. It involves an interpretative model that ignores the diversities of the Mediterranean (in terms of politics and goals), and highlights the need of homologation, reducing the existing variety of meanings and perspectives to the Western model of development.

Because the area has always been subject to such change, it follows that a definitive understanding of what the Mediterranean is can be difficult to ascertain⁴. That is why every interpretation of Mediterranean should consider the fragmentary and non-homogeneous nature of its components, the high level of conflicts, and the fluidity of its borders. It negates the logic of modern cartography used in mapping and classifying the Mediterranean, which is based on the use of *fixed* categories (in/out and the borders).

The problem in using fixed categories is that the Mediterranean is geographically defined but perpetually changeable; it is a *real space*, but one which has been marked by great diversity in terms of development, identity, modernization processes and hybridization of different cultures, and one which continues to be an area of contingent interactions.

With these issues we must return to primary considerations: the Mediterranean can be identified, not as a defined space, but as a plurality of

³ See: De Rubertis (2008).

⁴ This feature becomes recurrent when reconstructing common meanings of "Mediterranean culture", and the results are problematic, because of stereotypes and oversimplifications.

spaces characterized by variety, and by the coexistence of the possible and the real.

There is also a lack of multicultural approaches, which are essential if one is to overcome homologation tendencies that are based on universalistic categories.

To compensate for this methodological and conceptual deficiency, it is necessary to overcome closures and ambivalences determined by the use of interpretative models that tend to simplify and homologate the complex issue of the Mediterranean.

Given the above considerations, it is clear that 'Mediterranean' is a complex object and one which is subject to debate, particularly on the Internet. One of the more lively debates in question is that of R. Pepicelli⁵, where the scholar raises the issue of the actuality of the Mediterranean issue, and the possibility of its being an alternative to globalization.

The discussion presented by the forum offers a representation of Mediterranean as fixed; stuck in a static view that denies its character of complex, dynamic and multiple reality.

This is the same static vision that Pepicelli (2004) associates with unbending discussions and idealistic polarizations that reinforce an ahistorical perspective (viz. 'cradle of the three civilizations', 'land of olive trees', etc.).

This perspective misses the main feature of the Mediterranean: the fact of its being: *a sea between lands* (Cassano, 1996; Cassano & Zolo, 2007), a collection of places with many things in common, but also with different traditions, religions and cultures. The Mediterranean area is a border open to 'the other', where purity turns into contamination. According to Cassano this border is characterized by a fluid limit that divides without paralyzing, that alludes and captivates but also allows for transition to other (geographical, social and cultural) lands.

It is about flexible borders that facilitate external projections, ideal inclusion of territories, areas and cultures; but also of peoples formally excluded by the geographical perimeters of a State. It is about an allocative model that remains open to the presence of the foreign, that recognizes differing identities based on a common belonging to the human race. This

⁵ Pepicelli is a scholar that dedicated her research activity to the issues and problems of the Mediterranean area. See: Pepicelli (2004).

openness based on values of shared humanity can represent a chance for the regeneration of the social fabric that has been frayed due to globalization.

The reception, the dialogue and the coexistence between cultures and ethnic identities are the main features of Mediterranean-ness – and they can also be the backdrop to a perspective on co-evolution; a perspective that doesn't deny or undervalue the conflicts that such openness can generate. Supporters of this *weltanschauung* (Cassano) consider that this is the 'differential DNA' of the Mediterranean: that there is an osmotic limit between pragmatism and dream, in opposition to a 'mainland' point of view.

With these considerations in mind, we return to the beginning: the Mediterranean as a solid reference, open to transformation, and to relationships between cultures and people; an object that changes in time, articulated and enriched by new issues.

These characteristics are well synthesized at the end of the movie *Almanya* (directed by Y. Samdereli), where the main character says:

A wise man once, when asked who and what we are, answered: we are the sum of everything that happened before us, everything that happens ahead of us and everything that has been done to us. We are every person, everything influenced us and we influenced everything with our existence. We are everything that happens after we don't exist anymore, and everything that would have happened if we never existed.

The recovery of this richness requires the development of appropriate levels of awareness of the Mediterranean, in order to turn it into useful capital for reconstruction of the future.

Authors

In the following section we will present some theoretical contributions to the study of the slippery reality of Mediterranean, slippery because it is difficult to map due to the lack of homogeneity and to the variety of significances. Our aim is to use these analyses in order to focus the key points of our reflection.

The common point of the contributions is to consider Mediterranean as lacking unity, made out of different narrations on what it is and what it can be.

The historian F. Braudel was influenced by L. Febvre⁶ and he was the representative of the Annales Schools. In his book *Mediterraneo* (1988, p. 23) he writes:

Mediterranean is a family of different historical being, opposite but linked, harmonized by the banding needs of a set. It is a complex of strong enclosed seas and lands. The history of Mediterranean is not a monolog, but a dialog of solid and liquid spaces⁷.

Having said that, Braudel highlights the methodological question, insofar as he is looking for a methodology adapted to broadly understand mediterraneity, a method able to explain the structure of historical events and to gather the lasting reality that resists under political events.

According to Braudel, to study Mediterranean, we need to have in mind the perspective of *longue durée*, the only one apt to understand the social structure that strongly resists external cultural solicitations.

Braudel is one of the first to state the polysemy of Mediterranean. He writes:

History is no more than a continuous series of questions aimed at the past in the name of the problems and curiosity – as well as the concerns and anxieties – of the present that surrounds and besets us. More than any other human universe the Mediterranean is proof of this, endlessly narrating itself and living on. Having been is a condition for being. What is Mediterranean? The Mediterranean is thousand things together. Not a landscape but numerous landscapes. Not one sea but a succession of seas. Not a civilization, but a series of civilizations one after the other (Braudel, 1988, p. 45).

According to the author, Mediterranean is a crossroads of histories and cultures, a setting where everything has been constructed, hardly more than in other places. The author defines Italy as the “meridian axis” of

⁶ Febvre, the founder of *Annales*, claims that history accomplish a scientific and social task: to organize the past according to the present.

⁷ This and all other quotations in the text are translated by the author of this paper.

Mediterranean, the meeting point between western and eastern cultural tendencies.

This dynamic promotes openness toward diversity, the common character of Mediterranean, a place similar to a concert where western man can listen to familiar and foreign voices.

P. Matvejević⁸ offers a “poetic” interpretation of Mediterranean, characterized by a critical matrix able to offer an alternative to the vision that considers Mediterranean as a whole set. In his book *Mediterranean Breviary*, the author moves away from previous interpretation (as the geographical approach), suggesting that we view Mediterranean as the place of comparison between social, political and economical forces that share a ‘game’ of common interactions, ties and histories.

Matvejevic theorizes the need to overcome both the single vision and the strictly geographical one, proposing to consider these issues as a starting point since Mediterranean can be considered as the whole of numerous subsets that are similar and in opposition but always interdependent. He emphasises a different view of borders that, like waves and winds or ventures and inspirations, enlarge and shrink, being never completely defined spatially or temporally.

Starting from this different interpretation of Mediterranean, Matvejevic’s aim is to deconstruct representations that distort its configuration of a place rich in history. He also denounces the confusion generated by commonplaces that represent reality through stories and in the case of Mediterranean, overlapping image and reality according to the observer and his worldview.

It is a difference similar to the existing one between identity of being, which is difficult to define, and identity of making, which is not really determined. The reason for this confusion is the overcoming of retrospective (representations) on perspective (reality), consequently driving reflection as victim of stereotypes.

In order to overcome this vicious circle it is important to highlight the *plural anthropological identity* of Mediterranean since it is the place of historical and cultural differentiation.

The feasibility of this goal depends on the development of a new approach based on the *right to difference*, in other words on the implementation of the *relationship between differences*: typical of both

⁸ The author lives the dynamics of transformation that characterize Mediterranean, in particular the hard changes involved in the Balkan war.

Mediterranean and Europe. It is only in the complex game of *relationships between differences* that it is possible to find a new representation of Mediterranean. It follows the affirmation of a new laic perspective based on the plurality of points of view, the development of a critical view apt to facilitate the distancing from other conception or ideologies. This is Mediterranean for Matvejević: a laboratory of transformations.

S. Latouche is also interested in the problem raised by cultural pluralism, by the dialogue between cultures and the construction of a common identity. The scholar, using an interpretative approach, anthropologically and economically oriented, focuses the central issues of socio-economical processes in a non conventional way. He highlights the importance of a critical analysis⁹ of classical categories of economy, proposing the deconstruction of concepts as development, rationality and efficacy¹⁰.

The key point of the cultural and political project proposed by Latouche is the overcoming of the universalist perspective (labelled as imperialist project). The theoretical interpretation of the scholar is influenced by the fear of diffusion, due to globalization, of a single cultural model (the western), that denies cultural pluralism.

It follows from the proposition to focus on cultural relativism which does not involve the exaltation of particular cultures. This attitude often generated division and fights in the name of the affirmation of a strict and selfish view of particular identities.

According to Latouche, cultural relativism is the valorisation of the aspiration to create dialogue between cultures. The author also contrasts cultural universalism to plural universalism, that is the acknowledgment and the coexistence of diversity and dialogue across diversity.

According to Latouche, ignoring this perspective means accepting a future vision based on individualism and rational calculation. The inhabitant of late-modernity is “condemned” to individualism and rejects the lack of alternative to the individualistic perspective; he concludes: has the South of Europe to be ashamed of its own identity?

To answer this question, he argues that this inferiority complex influences Mediterranean identity and allows one side to distance itself from the Anglo-Saxon West and to get closer to the African or middle-east world.

⁹ Braudel combines theoretical arguments with an empiric methodology.

¹⁰ These are the main references of formal economy, based on the rational choice.

It would be another Europe, like another Africa, and this new Europe would not be the Europe of a globalized Stock Exchange, Central Bank of Frankfurt and Euro, of foolish Americanization. It would be the Europe of a more convivial, human, social, tolerant and cultural civilization, based on Mediterranean values that nowadays have been exhausted and disregarded: solidarity, sense of family, art of living and conception of time and death.

Even though Latouche's point of view can be criticized for being based on a limited economic theorization, it offers an alternative to the *dejà vu* employed in the analysis of contemporary social reality, in other words, it is a critical acceptance. Without doubt, the proposition of the French philosopher, based on a set of social values that are considered as superior, dash the comparison and the dialogue between different approaches.

Latouche also offers an innovative analysis of Mediterranean in his "De-growth" paradigm that contests the idea of a growth as a goal in itself, infinite and incompatible with a *finite world*.

The suggestion of Latouche of a new paradigm able to solve the limits of capitalism and of its contradictory relation with nature is just one of the many points of view.

Moreover the de-growth approach is just a proposition, a tool of work for scientific community, since it is based on a particular representation of social-historical reality of the late modernity and a specific vision of development (unidirectional) and of relations of production.

If Latouche is one of the authors that better represents the European debate on Mediterranean destiny, F. Cassano is without doubt the scholar that faces the question from an original perspective: the *pensiero meridiano* (*meridian thought*). With this concept the author expresses a system of ideas, a way of thinking that is typical of the south of Italy, focused on dialogue, a lost practice which needs to be *(re)constructed*.

In his book¹¹, where the main point of his contribution on Mediterranean is summarized, Cassano (1996) starts from the urgency to reassert the recognition of greek-ness and Mediterranean-ness of Europe. The same Europe that he defines as maritime and local, horizontal and inter-local, more than vertical and planetary, open to the other and in relation with the same East that was the south side of *mare nostrum*¹².

¹¹ The *meridian thought* is again the fundamentalism that recognizes only one's history and considers the other as different, a negativity that need to be transformed.

¹² The idea of international we are used to in the last three centuries, is only the extreme point of the inter-local European drift and the forefront of cosmopolitanism.

For Cassano, as for Latouche and Matvejević, a change of perspective is necessary when talking about Mediterranean, otherwise the risk is to change every discussion into a comforting apology for marginal layer, for imaginary main actors of a minor history.

This perspective could spread the risk of inactivity, the risk of forsaking a project of big political importance and also limiting the communitarian life to a reduced space where every piece of news is like an old practice.

Cassano's concerns are sustained by modernity: changing the form without changing the content. He stipulates the crisis of perspective of a different future that establishes the transformation as an insubstantial rhetoric (Cassano, 2006, p. 5).

The controversy between North-South, two realities traditionally in opposition, has to be understood through this interpretative model.

If the South has to learn from the North, from the so called developed countries, it also has to teach the North, as there is reciprocity between them. The above mentioned is the only perspective that can hinder the requirements of adaptation to the vision of the world imposed by the north of the world.

The goal of the South, according to Cassano, is to imitate and claim critical capability towards a world obsessed with profit and speed, by changing the essential standard of reference. The affirmation of economic standards brought the stereotype of the unequal development of the world's nations, labelling them developed and the developing, forced to become similar to the others.

The author considers that this is a mistake since the average incomes of developed countries cannot be generalized and every country retains its own history through which it understands development and establishes it on the base of its own necessity and its own history.

The theoretical contribution of Cassano raises issues related to Mediterranean-ness, such as the speeding up of time and slowness taken as backwardness for the south.

Slowness, according to the author, has to be spread to the North (developed) countries, as experience, the main feature of learning, is feasible only through slowness.

Other central question in Cassano's thought is the valorization of plurality of voices that crossed the Mediterranean Sea and that can be assumed as *critical voice* in discourses on development.

Development is one of the issues proposed in *Il pensiero meridiano*, where the starting point is why it is necessary to chase the development model proposed by the west. The answer lies in the lifestyle of the south, in its history, in its traditions, its field of cultural hybridization and of millenary wisdom.

To drive this change it is essential to be aware that history holds many resources for the future. It follows the necessity of the creation of meridian thought as an alternative to the single thought.

The peculiarity of meridian thought lies in putting in contact different people and different cultures. That is why it can be assumed as a tool to construct a destiny that is different from the present (of peace and communication) and that combines a multiplicity of people.

The history of Mediterranean is in opposition to the individualistic disposition since it is composed by a multiplicity of different histories where everyone can share their own and know it will be listened to by others.

In short, meridian thought, in our globalized times, proposes a program of work on central questions that involve plural culturalism and also the comparison between cultures and the relationship between North and South. The Meridian thought could protect from the risk of weakening old national solidarity. This tendency drives territories to consider the others as burdens and competitors. The risk is to read this dynamic in a *devolution* perspective where Mediterranean is a consolatory circle for peripheral areas.

The application of the meridian thought would also help in avoiding the drift of the opposite's fundamentalisms. This spiral starts when some groups claim their superiority considering the difference of the others as some kind of anomaly that needs to be cured.

The Mediterranean then, being a common sea between lands, exclusive to no nation in particular, doesn't recognize primacy, but constructs itself in the place where the north-west and the south-east of the world meet. It is the place where people can learn how to get to know each other and how to communicate, and aim for friendship and fraternity¹³.

In the analysis of Cassano it is possible to understand the importance of the lessons that history gives to us and particularly the history of

¹³ There is people considering this perspective as utopia although defines himself a realist.

Mediterranean. It follows that the view of the sociologist on *mare nostrum* is not easy to label as archaic or incompatible since it is one of the visions that invites us to reconsider the lessons offered by the Mediterranean sea. His reflection contains the history of Mediterranean both as a place of conflicts and of exchanges and cohabitation. This dynamic is well explained by the numerous events in the Balkans, where peaceful cohabitations turned into wars.

According to this perspective, the key point of exclusion is not understandable only using the West reference model of production. In this case, we would fall back into an economical approach that has to take into account the impossibility of transforming everything into money or analyzing it financially.

To conclude, the mentioned theoretical references present some central questions on Mediterranean and some innovative directions for formulating a new theory that could protect against the current tendency towards fragmentation. They also facilitate new relations between civilizations: here is where Mediterranean culture has something to say.

The Mediterranean *man* and the challenges of education

As we demonstrated, Mediterranean has been defined in many ways by historians, sociologists, political scientists and scholars from different areas. The statements of Nietzsche on Mediterranean as the place of philosophical wisdom, beauty, art and Dionysian spirit, could be a good summary of our contribution. Starting from a consideration of Mediterranean as a reality with multiple meanings, we proceed in considering the challenges of education and the contribution that Mediterranean-ness can offer to change in education.

The first point is *temporality*: an approach to time different from the one in use. Traditionally Mediterranean has been identified with the *past*, in other words with a vision of the world overcome by present societies, based on the *present* and projected in the *future*.

These temporal dimensions are improved by mass communication, media, transport and technological development that override space-time distances and drive values of productivity, efficiency and spirit of enterprise; in sum the values of change.

The availability to change becomes the main social orientation imposed by technology on the social, economic and productive worlds.

The productive world understood the impulse to change as the persisting rhythms of productivity, of the search of success.

Mediterranean lifestyle, values and practices of life offer opposing features when compared to the above named and are representative, as Cassano states, of ways of feeling and a philosophy of life.

The *meridian thought* expresses the synthesis of this lifestyle, often confused with a backward thinking.

The ideas expressed above confirm the distance between Western and Mediterranean culture. Mediterranean is the place of differences and comparisons of different worlds and civilizations, particularly between the *despotic culture* of the east and the *democratic culture* of Europe.

Unquestionably Mediterranean is a perfect setting for comparison:

- *East, Middle-East world and African experiences*. These worlds are often closed and many have long avoided openness to other nations. Not much may be known about them as they didn't share anything about themselves. When they first cracked, a strong need for change emerged.
- The world of *western capitalism* that bears signs of implosion due to its transformation in a financial form and the annihilation of values (as work), sacrificed to consumerism.

The anthropological corresponding to the financialization of the capitalistic model is a man, whose perceived nature, as Perrow (1970) says, is super-technologic. This perspective penetrated educational institutions that, according to this model, have been transformed into corporations, creating a representation of the student as provided by a cultural capital resumed in super *curricula*, with a huge amount of credits and ability and committed in gaining great skills.

Niall Ferguson considers that this is the reason why Europe will implode; he discusses his ideas in *Civilization: the West and the Rest* (2011). In this essay, the author highlights that all along anthropological and cultural diversity has been the strength of western civilization. 500 years ago Europe was characterized by fragmentation and it was the main point for European states to build their power. The diversity of European

states, according to Ferguson, is the feature of innovation and enlargement of Europe¹⁴; it follows that division is not a condition of weakness.

Latouche agrees with the ideas of Ferguson; the former denounced, ten years ago, the insecurity of the perspective of a single Europe determined by the intrinsic feature of Mediterranean: its *dissociation from cultural conventionalities*.

It is about a forecast confirmed by the movement of the so called, *Arab spring*, a set of events that show the need for differentiation, confrontation, freedom and democracy. These events involved contexts that are characterized by the lack of practiced democracy, it is about distorted forms of democracy that Matvejević labels as *democrature*. In these countries the free market is often mentioned, even though elemental goods are lacking; respect for religious beliefs is expected, in spite of the presence of attitudes that ignore any form of tolerance.

It follows that there is more than a crisis of culture. It is about a crisis of trust in the culture (Matvejević, 1991, p. 109) and in men and women of culture¹⁵. This situation has been generated by the confrontation of the countries involved in the *Arab spring* with the western culture that is stocked in its self-referentiality. Western culture is planning to fight against the crisis that characterizes our times, pushing for the constitution of supermen provided with special technical knowledge. It hopes for the arrival of an *homo technologicus*, an individuality deprived of the insight, less rational (apart from the sheer contractual rationality) and deficient in the field of knowledge.

And these are also the main features of the fluid modern culture that does not need to learn and gather anymore. It presents itself as the culture of *disengagement, discontinuity, oversight and velocity*. When life was lived at a slower pace, people believed in reincarnation and in resurrection in order to overcome the gap between the feeling of a short life and the awareness of infinity. The present world does not admit limits to acceleration; people have given up both hope and making plans and the

¹⁴ This condition is the opposite of “monolitism” (see the Chinese Empire) that turns societies in static.

¹⁵ Due to the lack of stabile values and consolidated ideology, there is a deficiency of strong ideas and references. The lack of references causes mistrust in politic, loss of religious and secular faith.

generalized aim is to find our own autobiographical solutions (Bauman, 2003).

This choice justifies the present educational ideal based on the education of geniuses with the attitudes of babies that need to be (re)educated. J. Atlas (2011) denounced this process in the “*New York Times*”, asserting that Western developed societies created an anthropologic ideal: a new man, representative of a superior species.

It is a suitable subject for our competitive society that is obsessed by degrees and that hardly produces winners with oversized skills (Atlas, 2011); a society whose aim is to educate perfect robots, competitors and super students.

Ironically, J. Atlas points out the reasons behind this rationale involve diet and physical exercise, but it is about a new ideology oriented to changing technique as the main reference.

Atlas’ main conclusion is that these changes are directed by economy bringing its own values to education, with a consequent concern and obsession for outcomes. It follows that we are in the era of anxiety, and more than ever of ‘performance anxiety’; this is the perfect base for social inequality.

Anxiety is a feeling that influences people’s lives and also cohabitation (Atlas, 2011; Warner, 2005) establishing subjectivities linked to the “here and now”.

This process, also called ‘individualism’, became an image of western cultures closed in the defence of its own values and lifestyles that produces the effect of destabilizing societal integration.

The possible future

The strong request for democracy which emerged during the Arab spring could represent a challenge to re-think present processes and to create a new project of society and man (with many dimensions) different from the *super homo technologicus*.

We are called to plan the *society of tomorrow*, to create new institutions capable of sparking public debate representative of the whole society. The aim is to generate a new institutional level, transversal to the different kind of social aggregation present around Mediterranean.

That means that the credibility and trust crisis of institutions, depending on the context, highlights the need for empowerment of the civil society.

The reasons for the mentioned setting lie in the process of globalization, especially in its economic and media model, where the base of institutions lose their value as social fabric and turn their attention to the economic and media power, concerned only with the product of its actions. Public institutions are distorted since they become unable to filter and contain economic pressures. The present process of change drives the transformation of territory and context and also the shift of identities. In order to be structured, identity needs continuous awareness of its origins. To do this it must be in relation to otherness, which must be neither global nor virtual, but rather culturally based.

In the same vein of seeking alternatives, we should consider the claim of the generations involved in the Arab spring. The *model of Mediterranean man*, referring to an ideal of autonomous and unique man on biological, social, cultural and cognitive levels, could be a solution to explore.

This model of man represents a structure made out of multiple and relational identities, since it is able to engage in multiple other identities. It is an ideal whose main reference is a culture focused on the person and on human-based socializing practices.

It is about an anthropologic model able to limit the risk of implosion of the new (western) cultural forms whose target system is financial. It is this same financial system that dictates the political agenda and the agenda of social and educational politics.

The Mediterranean anthropological model stands apart from cultural conventionality, being based on thoughts, values and meanings entrenched in multiple and different cultural territories, both local and national (see the meridian thought).

This perspective is shared by Braudel, who proposed an *Italian model of man*, a man of success, with multiple references (see for example the economical dynamism, artistic and scientific liveliness), socialized in an educative model that is structured on innovation-education.

But the project of Mediterranean man, that resumes the interaction between tradition and the present, crashes with the social widespread representation of the transformation of socio-territorial belonging and the weakening (when not the loss) of relationships (Pollini, 2008; Giaccardi & Magatti, 2003).

Matvejević instead proposes to contrast the picture of a universe made of individuals as isolated points in a space with no fixed cultural references, fragments of an exploded modernity.

According to this interpretation, the claims of democracies coming from the southern side of Mediterranean represent an invitation to go beyond the Western impasse, give value to the confrontation with cultural differences and revise previous educational models.

Conclusions

With the ideas expressed above, we hope to describe the present society as called to face the challenge of homologation, commercialization and fragmentation processes.

These processes are characterized by the inability to assume a common finality, due to isolation and atomistic representation of itself and due to the weakening of social ties that brings a lack of perspective “of community” based on common project and perspectives (Taylor, 1993, p. 131).

This process is well synthesized by Cesareo who writes:

With retrenchment of the rhetorical and grand post-modern narrative, which celebrated social actors finally free to experiment playfully with their identities (...) within a progressively deinstitutionalized social arena (...), a new mood has arisen in sociological analyses which stress, in sometimes dramatic and apocalyptic tones, the problematic that Bauman terms the ‘new human condition’ (...) in which the acquisition of greater freedom by actors is accompanied by an endemic fragility (Cesareo, 2005, p. 13).

The Mediterranean culture can assist in imposing limits on this situation, being characterized by strong reciprocity and the importance of exchange of cultural forms between northern and southern countries.

The present transformations call sociology of education to contribute to the dialogue between different cultural worlds and different political-educational systems and also to reconsider established socialization processes. Sociology of education, due to its epistemological background, can help in elaborating a different ideal of man, based on the valorisation of humans.

Sociology of education will work out a new project having in mind the links presented by present changes and also the chances of the Mediterranean plural culture.

It is though necessary to take into account the transformations that involved the position of young people. Western youths included in surveys held by sociology of education, hope for a future which will guarantee the present positions. This ambition highlights the dissolution of any horizon of hope and trust in the future. Stativity is then the common feature of western youth, whereas in the southern countries of Mediterranean the youth of the revolution are striving for change.

Through the actions of young people belonging to the movement of *Arab spring*, there has been the emergence of young people who are seeking change and who would produce wealth if they had the right surroundings to do so.

The two youth realities highlight a shift between the two universes that is difficult to overcome due to the fact that the western youth are characterized by a lack of perspective of changing their conditions and producing wealth.

All in all, whereas the southern Mediterranean youth present a strong claim for changing, the others prefer to keep their position.

A difficult task remains therefore for sociology of education that has to bear in mind the social representations of the future: pessimists consider that it will be a commodification of contexts and education.

Optimists instead see the opportunity of change of the present situation and propose as a reference the Mediterranean *lifestyle*, since it improves processes of socialization oriented to personalization and valorization of experience.

These processes of socialization will involve a pro-active subject, with initiative, communicative, interpersonal and decision-making skills. It is about a subjectivity free to build up its own personal and social identity, to organize its own biography in different fields (work, family, social), able to manage the game of evolution, adaptable but not homologated, open and flexible. This subjectivity is skilled in relationship management, able to use relationships and communication to define or redefine itself and able to choose between different educational proposals.

These tendencies find a space for elaboration in Mediterranean cultures; they have the chance to experiment with new cultural forms, be open to the future and able to allow a dynamic reevaluation of the relationship between individual and society.

It emerges then the need for a broad and articulated research program, able to generate new knowledge.

The belief in the importance of the above mentioned program has been the main point of this essay, together with the enforcement of the reflection on *Mare nostrum*, whose knowledge needs to be honed through research processes able to reveal the role of Mediterranean, defined by Paul Valéry (1994, p. 276) as a *machine for civilization*.

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