

Corrado Poli

Environmental Politics

New Geographical and Social
Constituencies

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Arquà Petrarca
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Prologue

The argument presented in this book originates both in my academic studies and from direct participation in environmentalist political campaigns in Europe and in the United States. I elaborate ideas by observing the way citizens act, the language they use, and the values at stake. I also compare observations and empirical research findings with theoretical studies that in part preceded my analyses and influenced my observation.

In some cases I joined citizens' committees and supported their protests. In others, I participated in negotiations as an expert in urban and environmental planning. When I held political offices or was directly involved in politics, I operated as a decision-maker. Depending on the position you are in, you see problems from different perspectives so that sometimes they appear very diverse. This does not mean that you change your mind opportunistically, though every form of knowledge unavoidably – and in my case unconsciously – tends toward some sort of opportunism. Having been in different positions, I had the chance to directly perceive the numerous aspects of the decision-making processes and the reasons why political actors thought and acted very differently.

The readings and the mentors that mostly influenced my education drove me to that scarcely inhabited no-man's-land lying between political involvement and intellectual research. I remember a sentence by Francesco Compagna that has remained engraved in my mind since I was a young grad student searching for a methodological approach and an intellectual identity. Referring to himself he said: "Indeed, I'm not a politician and even less an academician: I'm a writer, a reporter!" Incidentally, he was also elected several times to the Italian Parliament, served as a minister in the government, published a number of influential essays, and has been a full professor all his life. Another author whose influence has been fundamental in my education was Albert Hirschman. Although I only spent a few weeks with him at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton, I thoroughly enjoyed reading his "essays in trespassing," so called because they cannot be located in one single traditional academic discipline. There's a simple and effective

definition of culture that goes: “culture means to know a little of everything and everything of something.” Professor Compagna maintained that he knew nothing, but he was specialized in connecting everything. I myself adopted this approach knowing that it is at the same time presumptuous and humble. In my civic and political militancy, essentially in my whole life, I have never forsaken the knowledge gleaned from my studies. At the same time, my scholarly and professional research has always been inspired and linked to political and civic commitment of which I have never been oblivious. The attempt to be a politician while thinking as a scholar and vice versa may be the soundest explanation for why I failed in both politics and academia. With some sort of complacency, let me suggest that this hybrid position helps me to have less biased viewpoints when acting as a politician and hopefully to write more thought-provoking reports when in my role as scholar. This is what I like to believe in order to help me cope with my several frustrations.

The arguments and the case study presented in this volume aim at proposing a new political environmentalism. The book is addressed both to political actors and to scholars. The former need to be encouraged to identify new strategies relevant to the current times instead of repeating old schemes and beliefs that can only lead to moral and civil decay, not to mention possible political setbacks. The latter need to gain inspiration and experience for proposing new mind-sets and elaborate paradigms suitable for application to the political arena. At the end of World War II, Thomas Mann uttered: “Democracy is thought; but it is a thought applied to life and action.” With this sentence he meant to criticize intellectualism that treats culture and political action separately. He went on to say (I quote by heart): “No intellectual in the pre-democratic era ever took action into consideration, nor which kind of action would derive in case their thought was applied. It is a characteristic of non-democratic countries that the thinking of intellectuals proceeds without any reference to reality, as pure abstraction, in a thorough separation of mind from life itself, and without the least consideration for the real consequences of thinking.” I also recall a sentence that Giuseppe De Rita – at one time my boss at CENSIS and a prominent Italian sociologist – one day told me distractedly: “your idea is good if it will eventually produce some effect; if it remains a mere idea, it means it was not a good one.”

With this essay, I want to fill a gap in the environmentalist literature of the last 25 years. My goal is to elaborate a radical environmentalist political discourse. Some sections of this book are broadly revised editions of articles and chapters published in *Human Geography: A New Radical Journal* (Poli 2010, 2012, 2014) and in the introduction of *Mobility and Environment. Humanists vs. Engineers in Urban Policy and Professional Education* (Poli 2011). Part II includes some ideas drawn from an unpublished lecture I presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers in Los Angeles, 2014, where I was invited to participate, thanks to a grant awarded by the same AAG and by the Geography

Department at Clarke University. Chapter 11, in Part III, is the elaboration of my project for an International Master's Program in *Sustainable Urban Management: Communication, Economics and Social Science for Innovative Managers and Administrators* that I designed and direct at Libera Università IULM, Milan (Italy).

Few repetitions in the text make it possible to read single chapters without losing the book's overall meaning.

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Introduction

The Sun Sets on the West

The global financial crisis and the economic competition that newly developed countries present to the Western world are a major issue both in the media and academies. Global warming and health problems caused by environmental pollution also recur in the public debate. However, the environmental question is only occasionally and somewhat inadequately connected to the economic and social crisis. To tackle the crisis, we apply the same interpretative paradigms and political tools that originated in the last two centuries. Frankly, in times of trouble, it is difficult to accept that we can act differently: While the house is on fire, one cannot waste time discussing the color of the walls. It is a common – though not always confirmed – belief that crises favor a deep transformation of social and productive systems. During crises, conservatism is also likely to take over. This is what has happened in the last decade. Nonetheless, tensions and fears may also favor the elaboration of new paradigms and ways of thinking that will convert into an available social capital people will employ as soon as they become more optimistic and the economy takes off again. Thus, this is the right time to elaborate new ideas and prepare the ground to act.

It might seem too optimistic or look too far forward; however, some encouraging signs let us presume that the time is ripe to start building the foundations for a radical change. Sound interpretative paradigms are required because we are still in love with the old ones and for most of us it is quite hard to repudiate them. On their behalf, the conservatives hinder and slow down change. What else would the conservatives do? They brilliantly play their own role both avoiding excessively harsh accelerations and forcing innovators to make their ideas more consistent and evaluate all the consequences. Perhaps Galileo owes Bellarmine something because the latter urged Galileo to better formulate his still mostly unproven hypotheses, as Feyerabend somehow claimed in his *Against the Method* (1995).

The road to go is still long, but with this book I mean to suggest the direction we need to take. When Lao Tze spoke that each long journey begins with a single

step, Seneca replied that no wind is favorable to a sailor who does not know where to go. Today, there is plenty of environmentalist research on new technologies and alternative consumption. Several authors have outlined the alternative model they would like to accomplish, in an environmentalist perspective. Some studies are technically very well elaborated and take into serious consideration the social and organizational aspects. Quite the opposite, we still lack elaborated sociological and political considerations of a change process that quickens and makes viable the passage from the current situation to the new desired one. We do not know enough about how governmental institutions and laws operate in the change processes. Political radicalism, when focused on the environmental question, lacks a theory and a practice of change. We should focus on transforming social structures, economics, finance, and, even more so, people's mind-sets. A real and widespread environmentalist revolution cannot happen out of the blue. A transformation is definitely in progress, but it takes place outside the institutions and the main structures of an economy that has produced environmental disasters, but it has also guaranteed a wealth, health, and, last but not least, a freedom that are hard to substitute with something different. So, why should we renounce our lifestyle if it might be possible to improve our quality of life by changing just a few details and keeping what is working well? One of the major problems of political environmentalism – or better, the lack of a political thought centered on the environmental question – is the dominance of cathartic positions. Instead, we should focus on the route between the present condition and the vision of the future, namely, a revolutionary process. It is necessary to investigate and detect the social components and the shared ideas on which we can depend to promote change. Moreover, we need to individuate the most opportune alliances among people who practice or would like to practice environmentally friendly lifestyles and share most of their beliefs.

Seeking Environmentalist Voters

In Western countries there is a potential large constituency that would be ready to vote for a successful environmentalist platform. Environmental policy is meant in a comprehensive sense: It includes a vast number of related issues such as historical heritage conservation, health protection, animal rights, pacifism, authenticity, spiritualism, idealism, and, in general, the overall relation between humanity and nature. Currently, the vote of this possible constituency is highly dispersed, and a part of it converges on successful European so-called populist movements. Environmental problems are a crucial issue in progressive politics. Good politics should take into consideration the centrality of the environmental question in contemporary politics. Many voters (and abstainers) are unsatisfied with the available political offer, hence it is worth working at a political platform based on people's current needs and demands, no matter if still partly unexpressed. Then, we should identify a political

institutional and democratic process that accelerates a profound reform of the social-political relation between humanity and nature.

If we apply a factor analysis, which is a technique originated in psychology and also commonly adopted in marketing research (Spearman 1904), or in general multivariate analysis (such as principal components and/or cluster analysis), we could answer the following questions: What is the potentiality of a latent factor of the first or second order, called “environmental sensitivity”, in politically aggregating a relevant constituency? How much does this factor weigh compared to other factors that are more traditional in aggregating political consensus, such as social justice, welfare policies, economic development, and so on? How do constituencies “cluster” according to a group of related variables? Factor analysis is a statistical technique applied to uncover relationship patterns underlying hundreds of interacting social phenomena. It is used in several fields in order to describe variability among observed correlated variables in terms of a potentially lower number of unobserved variables called factors. It is possible that the variability of (usually no more than) three or four observed phenomena includes the variability of several other phenomena. The factor analysis lets you identify a few significant “factors.” In marketing and customer satisfaction research, this method is largely adopted to identify groups of consumers with similar preferences. This conceptual approach – not necessarily the surveying method – can help to individuate groups of citizens who now aggregate according to a political offer that is no longer meaningful, while a more comprehensive investigation could detect “latent factors,” thus a new political offer, that match citizens’ real preferences. I’m not proposing a quantitative factorial analysis research – that includes relevant hermeneutical difficulties – but a productive approach to changing politics. In political campaigning, this method is also adopted, but generally it is applied in a passive, short-term manner that is to detect a standing electorate instead of a potential one. Whether such research proves that there is a possible and large constituency that aggregates in an environmentalist political program is irrelevant. Reasoning in these terms helps to propose an innovative political program. The paradox is that, to produce meaningful quantitative research, we need reliable data and even sturdier hypotheses, which can hardly be proved by numerical data. The basic conceptual assumption of this book is that there is a potential constituency that visionary politicians could and should help to create in the next few years. My goal is twofold: one, to prove that there are good arguments to maintain that there’s a possible constituency and, two, to suggest that it is desirable to advocate in order to make it real.

Quantitative research could either confirm or deny this possible constituency and could assess its size. If the research proves that the constituency is not as large as presumed, it doesn’t mean that we should abandon the political project. What really matters to principled politicians is to act in order to promote what they think is right to do. If we believe in representative democracy – the one in force and those we ought to envisage – it is necessary to reason in terms of political strategy, voting systems, consensus, and institutions. This book assumes that the proper strategies must be the ones that are the most suitable to advance an environmental policy on which all polity is hinged.

Science and Democracy

There is another political dimension that, since the times of Descartes and Galileo, has been cast aside from mainstream thinking and the political debate, but conditions are favorable to bring it to the limelight: The relation between epistemology and democracy could be the most appropriate critique to get to a new interpretation of the current polity and could help to build the foundation for a new system of knowledge and values. The environmental problem is the starting point for revising a science that has transformed into mere technology. Even worse, we have lost control over a technology based on the exploitation and transformation of nature. This book does not aim to develop a new epistemology, but it raises the question and suggests a route to introduce philosophical and epistemological studies into the current political discourse.

Besides the relations between epistemology and democracy, if we want to center the political debate on the environmental question, it is also worth reconsidering the relation between the natural and social sciences. We bestow too much importance on the social origin of our political and personal choices. Since a couple of decades or so ago, the idea that only society and education are responsible for human behavior has been challenged on a nondiscriminatory basis. The mind is not a “blank slate” (see, e.g., Goleman 1995; Pinker 2002), and some innate attitudes do not depend on how we have been raised or how society has forged our system of values. De Waal (1996) has taught that emotions and ethical values can also be explained by biogenetic factors, which play as fundamental a role in shaping human values as they do with animals. Previously, Wilson in his very controversial *Sociobiology* (1975) concluded that some universals, including the moral sense, might come from a human nature shaped by natural selection. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Nazis and Fascists shamefully supported biological racism. Some conservative and libertarian thinking also admit that in a competitive society, a natural (or social) selection originates in some intrinsic qualities that pave the way to success for the better-adapted individuals. Fortunately, all these biases no longer exist in such dangerous forms as they did up to World War II. Since then, few have dared to maintain the possibility that human behavior is determined or even influenced by people’s genetic pool. More recently, some scholars propose that political behavior is also influenced by diverse feelings, psychology, and eventually natural attitudes. In the last decades, gender and feminist studies have been at the forefront in this debate synthesized in the gender vs. equity feminism (Sommers 1994; Pinker 2002: 341). I consider myself a radical progressive and environmentalist although I purposely quoted authors that have been strongly criticized by the leftist academic and political milieu. I myself am quite critical of several conclusions to which Sommers’ and Pinker’s – to quote but two – approach leads and how right sector spokespersons use such an approach. However, the provocation is in the spirit of this book that refuses worn clichés about political change and about respect of people’s rights starting from those of the poor and disadvantaged. Natural attitudes become significant when the relation with nature is

at stake since a codified rationality may play a lesser role in driving human behavior. This book suggests that we should conceive a new political approach starting from the human/nature relation, instead of with the traditional issues – such as individual rights, social justice, and income distribution – that have characterized political practice and philosophy in the past.

Part I
Environment: From Quandaries
to a Political Question

Chapter 1

The Sustainable Development Pseudo-solution

Abstract Up until the early 1990s, scholars and western public opinion were making progress in developing an environmental ethics fitting for an active environmentalist political platform. The 1987 U.N. Sustainable Development compromise has inhibited this process by transforming the environmental problem from a political and ethical issue into a technical, economic and scientific one. Sustainable Development discourse has become a pseudo-ideology that has defused the possible revolutionary potential of a radical ‘green’ thinking.

Keywords Environmental policy • Sustainable development • Political platforms • Public opinion • Mass media

Sustain or Progress?

Would you be happy if, being young and in love, filled with enthusiasm and expectations, your beloved partner replied to your proposal to pursue a lifelong relationship by saying: “It’s ok, I think we can have a ‘sustainable’ relationship and our ultimate goal will be to make it last as long as possible, no matter how we feel and what we do. Hence, don’t ask me to change any of my routine and I’m not going to do anything to deal with my possible shortcomings”? You would probably not appreciate such a response, unless you were so dejected and your life was so miserable that you couldn’t even conceive any real improvement in your gloomy existence. Surely you’d prefer a response along the lines of: “Yes, I am going to share my life with you and this relationship will help us both to realize a real improvement in our lives. Together we might even be better off, but what really matters is our emotional fulfillment. Our lifelong relationship will make us better human beings and we will fulfill our personalities and satisfy our everyday needs. We will even contribute to the welfare of others, albeit indirectly. We will pass on appropriate values to our offspring and we will look ahead to our relationship continuing and flourishing through generations”. If we would be happier with the second answer, then why, for ourselves and for the rest of the world, should we accept the dull perspective of “just sustainable” development? Why should we not strive for rewarding, marvelous, brilliant development or, even better, just for “development”, without attributes? Admittedly, in real life one should allow that in relationships, after some years, “sustainability” might become the only possible

solution for the mere conservation of a family *ménage*. However, even if the main priority is the dull sustainability of the relationship, any family counselor would suggest to the partners that, in order to muddle through a sustainable relationship, they should find something new to pursue together, make new goals and eventually a new covenant between them. In this metaphor, the partners are, on one hand, humankind, society and economy; on the other hand, nature and environment, the definitions of which I'll return to later.

The Sustainable Development approach has become the sole strategy available to deal with the environmental crisis and it operates as the proxy of a missing ideology. The removal of any alternative to environmental policy is paralleled with the elimination of a century old political dialectic between capitalism and socialism. This temporary lack of conflicting comprehensive political projects has impoverished the current intellectual and political debate. I will claim that the elaboration of a political alternative – based on new social and political values related to a radically new covenant between humanity and nature – would help to recreate a new dialectic and the conditions for human progress.

The Quest for a New Environmental Ideology

In spring 2007, with the timing and sensitivity of an experienced journalist, Thomas Friedman (2007) addressed a crucial contemporary issue in a *New York Times Magazine* article. While the 2008 Presidential campaign was entering its primary stages, he claimed that Americans did not need to choose between a libertarian and a liberal President, nor between a woman and a man, white or black. Rather, they needed to choose a 'green' President. The best chance America would have to play a positive role in the world would be by bringing a "new environmentalist ideology" into domestic and foreign policy. The goal of Friedman's article more than likely was to support a new Democratic nomination for Al Gore who had recently been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize (and an Oscar Award) on the grounds of his commitment to environmental protection and specifically to combat global warming.

In principle, I could not agree more with Friedman's view. The problem with his proposal is that we cannot buy ideologies at the corner store. Ideologies develop in culture and require time to be cultivated, diffused and broadly accepted. In relation to the environmental crisis, we are just at the start of this process. In fact, we have already lost valuable time – at least 25 years – due to the unjustified enthusiasm about the sustainable development fallacy. Although Sustainable Development was nothing more than the outcome of a modest compromise following a negotiation at the U.N. Brundtland Commission in 1987, it was presented as a brilliant solution to environmental problems. Unfortunately, many activists who might have originally opposed it, eventually welcomed the compromise and failed to realize that sustainable development did not question the basics of the present economic growth model. More opportunist activists took advantage of the considerable resources that

western governments had appropriated to “sustain” mildly green projects. Thus, polluting industries could continue their business as usual. The mindless enthusiasm for the sustainability compromise has inhibited any intellectual and political progress toward a sound green ideology. In this sense, sustainable development has represented a conservative approach, though it has been successfully marketed and bought as an environmentalist progressive ideology.

As early as 1992, higher education institutions and western public opinion were much more advanced in constructing an environmental ethic fitting for an operative green political platform. Al Gore, campaigning for Vice-Presidency, proposed a Marshall-like environmental plan to help the former Communist countries to develop a cleaner and more efficient economy. This plan was never fully implemented, but Clinton won a number of votes, thanks to his running mate’s environmental commitment. Gore’s proposal was anything but a new radical green ideology; rather it was a reasonable step forward in the direction Friedman had suggested.

All this happened a long time ago, in 1992. Years have gone by and now all political parties are, to a certain degree, concerned with environmental problems. Even the most conservative factions list environmental problems in their political agenda. To this, we need to add that we have become used to seeing and interpreting political facts through the thick lens of century-old ideologies that are hinged on the principles of liberty and justice. Environmental ethics and philosophy can help in this venture once environmentalists awake from the hypnotic sleep induced by the sustainable development myth. Additionally, it is also important to recognize the risk that a true environmentalist ideology – though necessary and welcome for the safeguarding of the planet – would imply radical consequences in domestic and international politics.

Environment Enters the Political Arena

The environmental question entered the political arena in the early 1970s. Of course, we should not forget to mention some groundbreaking authors such as Rachel Carson (1962) with her celebrated *Silent Spring*, not to mention Aldo Leopold (1949) among others. Nevertheless, when they first published their essays, they were isolated writers, no matter how influential in environmentalist thought they later became. The publication of the Club of Rome was one of the earliest influential appeals for more concern regarding environmental issues (Meadows et al. 1972). The Club of Rome’s recommendations mainly focused on the depletion of resources. At the time, the term “environment” was not as frequently used as it is now in scholarly, political and media debate, and it was certainly not employed in the same sense. Few were engaged in environmental advocacy, which was combined with other issues, such as Ralph Nader’s pioneering consumerism in the 1960s. Environmental policy was something that was still undefined and marginal. In Western countries, the political struggle was focused on economic development and on progress in industrialization and urbanization. The competition between welfare

policies and the market-oriented option was at the core of politics. In countries like Italy and France, and later (after the fall of dictators) in Spain and Portugal, Communist parties, closely tied to the Soviet Union, were playing a major role in those countries' domestic policies. The environmental issue was not commonly considered by academic research and teaching. The Club of Rome itself did not dispute any other fundamental environmental issue except the possibility of running out of ores.

In the late 1970s and 1980s, a growing number of scholars opened a new research field approaching the environmental question as an ethical, political and human problem. They urged governments to adopt a specific environmental policy. Also in the scholarly milieu, several essays were published regarding the fundamentals of the environmental question in many disciplines. Economists and statisticians introduced the environmental issue into their studies by proposing new budgeting systems, which included environmental values alongside the traditional financial accounting. Others proposed alternative economic systems more respectful of the environment, and called for a technological revolution and a new organization of production. Influential scientists and epistemologists, such as Nobel Laureate Ilya Prigogine and Edgar Morin, questioned some basic paradigms that had accompanied the development of science in the last four centuries. They claimed that we needed new scientific paradigms since the old ones were the real culprits for the environmental crisis. As a matter of fact, the application of scientific knowledge to industrial production and social organization had generated a change-resilient society dominated by powerful professional and academic guilds.

Before the publication of the Brundtland Report (1987) and the ensuing Rio Conference (1992), the intellectual atmosphere seemed ready to advance toward an alternative thinking and politics. At that time, both radical politics and thinking were inspired by a widespread perception of the environmental crisis. Political groups and environmental activists were connecting with the new cultural milieu and were trying to find new arguments to oppose the triumphant Western model. The fall of Communism was apparently imminent due to its economic, political and military failure. Western Communist parties were losing votes and in some countries they were quickly disappearing, transforming and making deals with their former opponents.

How Did We Get to Sustainable Development?

Up until the early 1980s, environmentalists only occasionally questioned the overall economic and political establishment. Both socialists/communists and liberal capitalists agreed on the idea of industrialization and technological advancement as the only possible development path. The option of a possible re-negotiation of the relation between humans and nature was ancillary, if not completely foreign, to the mainstream political debate. The core of political dispute was the organization of production, namely the "progress" in exploiting the world's natural resources. Only

in this respect were different options possible regarding how to distribute a growing income and reshape class relations, balance inequalities, and guarantee civil and human rights.

During the 1980s, the environmental question was becoming a very sensitive and crucial concern both for radicals and conservatives. The former could have used it as a catalyst to promote an alternative anti-capitalist movement; the latter immediately realized the possible danger nested in the evolution of a possible environmentalist ideology. In international politics, the Soviet Bloc was about to collapse with the consequence of dissolving the ideology it was based on. The world's socio-political situation was favorable to creating the conditions for making the environmental discourse a credible and almost immediately available substitute for the socialist/communist ideology.

As mentioned above, regarding Thomas Friedman's call for an environmental ideology, an ideology – meant as a shared political discourse – needs a cultural milieu to flourish. It requires time to be broadly acknowledged. Then we must proceed by subjecting possible ideologies to debate in the public arena by comparing them with contrasting ones. Some 40 years ago, in environmental studies, this virtuous process – no matter how immediately and thoroughly implementable – was on the brink of taking off. The environmental crisis was widely acknowledged by citizens in industrialized countries, and it was becoming a regular domestic political issue. The debate would have likely driven us to the building of a new environmentalist and revolutionary ideology.

Those who picked up on environmental issues were generically considered open-minded and progressive people. Environmental protection had been advanced both by radical movements and by more conservative, self-defined non-political associations and opinion-making groups, which were absolutely alien to any subversive idea. An example is the conservative Sierra Club and the Club of Rome, which were anything but revolutionary groups. Environmental issues presume the necessity of a comprehensive approach and one can hardly escape being “political” when speaking about environmental policies. Therefore, the formation of new environmentalist (green) parties raised alarm among those who: (a) founded their power on an ideology that negated ideology itself; (b) refused the idea of a dominant political discourse; and (c) accepted the inexorableness of a society based on neo-liberal market capitalism. It was not convenient for these conservatives to involve themselves in the discussion regarding essential considerations on ethical values or fundamental principles such as the relation between humans and nature.

Simultaneously, while the competition between the developed capitalist countries and the communist bloc was rapidly vanishing, another dualism was arising in the global economic system: Chinese and Indian economies were about to boom, having been preceded by some smaller South East Asian countries, the so-called ‘Asian Tigers’, namely Taiwan, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia, which can only be considered “small” when compared to China and India. Most South East Asian countries have a population comparable to that of the European Union, the United States and the Russian Federation. These countries had begun what Walter Rostow in the 1950s would have defined as the development “take off stage”, i.e. a period of

intense and rapid industrialization. I have mentioned Walt Rostow with good reason. In the 1950s, Rostow, a prominent economist and advisor to John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, proposed a development theory that would supposedly explain the “stages” of economic growth and was to be transformed into a development policy. His most famous essay (1960) bears as a sub title “*A non-Communist manifesto*”. His ideas have been applied to South Asian development policies and have been harshly criticized, from a methodological and theoretical point of view by several scholars whose main criticism was that Rostow’s development stages implied a non-political and deterministic vision (Myrdal 1968). As well as in sustainable development, Rostow did not question the growth model and proposed only one possible route to progress. Despite being both an influential scholar and a powerful politician in the 1960s, his simplistic ideas were soon dissolved and forgotten.

It was immediately apparent that an intense and unbridled industrialization in countries with a population of more than two billion inhabitants would have implied “unsustainable” environmental impacts for the planet. However, it was neither convenient nor easy for the developed countries’ elites to refuse the right to development in accordance with the current technological and economic organization. It didn’t matter that western citizens had begun to be seriously concerned with the health and technological risks brought about by pollution and the application of Faustian technologies, which were perceived as being too sophisticated and seemingly out of control. Western leaders needed to strike a new deal, both with their citizens and with the leaders of the booming Asian countries. Citizens from western democracies could have assumed more radical political positions, enhanced by successful green movements which were banding together at the time and could have used some of the ideological apparatuses and even physical facilities left behind by the defeated communist organizations. New green parties were successfully recruiting most of the radicals who were the veterans of the battles fought and (partly) lost in the late 1960s and 1970s. The case of Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the leader of the 1968 Paris student revolt, is probably the most representative in Europe, but similar examples are common all over Europe. In the 1980s Cohn-Bendit became a major figure in the German Green party and still sits in the European Parliament. The same has happened to several European radical leaders who moved from former Marx-inspired communist parties (though often critical of the Soviet model) into newly founded green movements.

Nevertheless, in this period, the construction of the global market was in rapid progress and western corporations needed to reorganize their strategies and productions in order to resist the competition brought by new developing countries. If India, China and the “Asian Tigers” had not entered into the global market so powerfully, thereby opening a new quantitative growth frontier to the traditional industry, the political-industrial western apparatuses might have been more available to restructure themselves in an environment-friendly way. Moreover, in this possible scenario, the radical anti-capitalist ideology would have gone on, developing a more radical green ideology, the seeds of which had already been sown.

In academic progressive milieu, postmodern critique and the flourishing of ethical and political studies regarding the environment and the relation between humans and nature supplied the necessary cultural background for establishing a competitive political movement. To achieve this goal, it was necessary to shift the revolutionary focus from class relations to human/nature interaction. In this manner, it would have been possible either to definitely subvert the capitalist system – as a maximalist approach – or to illustrate a political alternative that reframed the missing political dialectic. I am aware of the principal difficulty in shifting the focus of the political debate from class conflict to human/nature relations. It would mean getting rid of an entire language and its tools along with its linguistic and political heritage. Nonetheless, this was – and may still be – a strategy viable to recreate a political democratic dialectic.

Chapter 2

From Compromise to Fraud

Abstract It was mainly the economic industrial boom of huge countries like China and India that drove the international community to the Sustainable Development compromise between growth and environmental protection. The shift from a compromise to a fraud happened when it was adopted as a progressive policy also in the Western countries whose economies were more prepared to accept a more intensive environmental policy. Instead, the conservative groups and the traditional (over-polluting) industries allied with the emerging countries and used the Sustainable Development compromise to slow down and stop a substantial ecological reconversion of the industrial production.

Keywords World economic geography • International affairs • International economics • Environmental ethics • Philosophy of science

From Compromise to Fallacy

According to Dale Jamieson, “the phrase ‘sustainable development’ originated from an obscure report produced by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources in 1980, and trickled through several popular “green” books, to become the central organizing concept of the Brundtland Commission Report, issued in 1987. “Convened by the general Assembly of the United Nations and known officially as the World Commission on Environment and Development, the Brundtland Commission identified sustainable development as the criterion against which human changes of the environment should be assessed, and defined it as development that ‘meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’” (United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development 1987: 43; Jamieson 1998:183–184).”

The Brundtland definition of sustainable development overtly includes the notion of “compromise”. Yet the compromise was not between present and next generations, as solemnly announced. The next generation does not have a stake in the game. Thus, the real deal took place between industrialized western countries and (mainly) booming Asian economies. In fact, the word “development” has an ethical, value-loaded content, while “growth” is merely quantitative and computational. Hence, when we add an attribute to the word “development”, which is meant to question

and weaken the intrinsic goodness of it, we are speaking of something other than development. The attribute “sustainable” added to “development” implies that we need to slow down on the path along which humanity is proceeding. This means that, in the best case, we are doubtful that this development model is a promising one, or even more precisely, that this is a real development model.

The previous considerations prove that the Brundtland Commission applied a linguistic trick: they used the word “development” when they actually meant “growth”, or even more bluntly “quantitative growth”, as measured by customary economic indicators. Although an increasing number of western countries’ citizens, politicians and scholars had been raising earnest doubts about the two century-old development model, the Brundtland Commission preferred to avoid a critique of it because such a critique would be refused by the developing countries, eager as they were to emulate the western affluence model. Obviously, this compromise was also “sustained” and welcomed by the conservative industrial western establishments that did not have to worry about possible drastic changes in the productive structure. If we consider the Brundtland Commission’s compromise as an enlightened conservative solution, sustainable development makes a lot of sense. In fact, the international community introduced some limitations in order to slow down a deterioration process of hypertrophic growth – shrewdly defined development – that was nonetheless considered necessary to meet some immediate basic needs in poor countries.

Nevertheless, how can we have a real development of humanity if its outcome is an ecological disaster, which will prevent future generations from enjoying a good quality of life or even from surviving? This image is further worsened when we consider that the present generation is openly complaining and calling for a policy change. Present-day citizens complain about their decreasing quality of life, about the higher risk of catastrophic disasters and non-catastrophic but frequent accidents, about health disorders that include both deadly diseases (e.g. cancer) and frequently occurring illnesses (e.g. asthma). Their complaints may also stem from a personal ethical unease, no matter how confused and differently expressed by diverse groups of people: there is a sense of guilt for a lifestyle that both destroys natural resources and excludes next generations from enjoying those same resources.

From Fallacy to Fraud

The problem is that, in the years following the publication of the U.N. Report, even those who might have been in a position to challenge the Brundtland Commission’s conservative goal enthusiastically endorsed the sustainable development fallacy. Therefore, any ethical and political dialectic was swept away from the political debate. The conservative goal of the Commission was not unethical *per se*, since one may legitimately claim for both the necessity of a compromise to face immediate problems, and the need to slow down change in order to keep the system going. In the early 1990s it was still common to speak about “sustainable change”

as opposed to a fast adoption of a “sustainable development” model. The term “sustainable change” was borrowed from the literature of education and psychology and applied to economic change. Sustainable development was smuggled into the political debate, allowing even progressive groups to understand it as a radical change of the development model, specifically in the relation between humanity and nature. The Commission’s conservative goal turned out to be unethical, or more precisely, created an unethical situation, when it became the only environmentalist credo available. World political leaders and opinion-makers succeeded in co-opting most of the possible opponents in the compromise. The “sustainable development compromise” should have been considered a transition phase toward a more radical change, but a misunderstanding occurred: sustainable development soon became the sole environmental option to challenge the development model and the two century-old relation between humanity and nature. Why did radical environmentalists immediately surrender to the successful sustainable development conservative strategy?

The real turning point was the 1992 Rio Conference that transformed the sustainable development fallacy into a sustainable development fraud. In the same year, Al Gore, who was running for Vice President in the U.S. presidential election, published his *Earth in the Balance* (1992). Scholars, practitioners and politicians did not take his essay seriously; it looked like the customary pre-election book that candidates write for propaganda purposes, and indeed, it was that. But Gore’s 1992 essay also revealed the basic environmental policy framework that was to be implemented in the following years. Gore simplistically proposed an environmental Marshal Plan in order to help ex-Communist countries to recover from environmental disasters provoked by the overthrown regimes. The crucial idea was that you could make good business with environmental policies and that environmental protection was an opportunity rather than a limitation to development. It took a few years before Gore’s proposal was unanimously acknowledged as the official credo of all governments. Unfortunately, it was also endorsed by most of the oppositions and even by the most powerful environmentalist groups that in the meantime had flourished in Western countries. Again, there is nothing politically wrong in proposing this conservative approach. The problem was that it inhibited and neutralized all the radical and possible real change, which was implicit in the uprising of the environmental question in the form framed by several scholars and environmentalist groups in the 1970s and early 1980s.

To say that it was possible to approach the environmental crisis in a radical way, i.e. to choose the option of a thorough change in development policies, does not necessarily mean that this possible “revolution” was going to take place overnight, or that it ought to be directly political if not even military. Nor should we assume that it would have implied the immediate overthrowing of the capitalist system. To a certain extent, the environmental revolution could have been embraced in the process of a Schumpeterian creative destruction, which confirmed, rather than negated, the structure of the capitalist system. In Schumpeter’s view, capitalism needs a repeated “creative destruction” to be able to survive and progress. These recurring destructions are anything but revolutionary as they wipe out everything

except the structure of the system that remains unaffected by change. The change required might have been more environment-oriented than the sustainable development solution.

In the 1980s some authors, mainly economists who participated in development programs with powerful institutions such as the World Bank, proposed a new kind of economic development concerned with the need for a different relation with nature. These radical intellectual and political manifestoes were not desperate utopias. Influential institutions such as the World Bank employed environmentalist authors, e.g. the economist Herman Daly who published very critical essays about the development model (1977, 1989, see also Georgescu-Roegen 1971). Although few believed that they could be instantly implemented, once a possible revolutionary goal and a process were identified, there might have been several options regarding the pace of appropriate change. Prospecting a possible alternative to business-as-usual development would have created a dialectic, as well as creative competition in the political arena. The alleged victory of the liberal capitalist system over communism had recently removed the most popular alternative option, which had been at the core of the political dialectic for 200 years. For more than a century socialism and communism, either in their revolutionary Marxist form or in more reformist and welfarist varieties, had been able to stand as an alternative to what eventually became a new triumphant ideology. The new ideology, following Swyngedouw (2007: 24) is based on three unquestioned icons: (a) a neo-liberal capitalism, as an economic system; (b) parliamentary representative democracy, as the political ideal; and (c) humanitarianism and inclusive cosmopolitanism as a moral foundation.

This missing dialectic could have been substituted by a new ideological alternative based on a different relation with nature. The sustainable development fraud prevented its plausible occurrence.

The Missed Opportunity for a New Environmentalist Ideology

The possibility of establishing a green alternative to the capitalist system was lost for a number of reasons, including the sustainable development fallacy/fraud followed by the decisions of the crucial 1992 Rio de Janeiro Conference (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development). First of all, after years of opposing ideologies, i.e. the capitalism vs. socialism pattern, people had lost faith in ideologies and politics; hence the most successful political language was the one calling for practical solutions to everyday problems. Advocacy groups, in order to be successful and win followers had to claim to be non-political, independent from discredited party organizations and had to openly declare that they did not pursue any other long term goal except the solution of the specific problem for which they came together. People were convinced of the ineffectiveness of linking the problems' solutions to some general change in the political organization that in any case was considered impossible. Thus the anti-system political leaders needed to be consistent with people's mood if they wanted to conserve their constituency

in the short run. They were confused and drifted because they were forced to give up their ideological scheme and substitute their way of thinking and acting. At the same time, the construction of an environmentalist ideology required time and no substitute for the old schemes was yet available.

There were many factors playing in favor of a possible opposition based on environmentalist politics. Among them, there was (a) the mounting fear of technological risks and man-made natural disasters; (b) the growing inefficiency of the solutions to urban problems offered by customary technologies; (c) the crisis of science, of scientific methods, and of trust in scientists' credibility; (d) the transformation of science into mere technique; and (e) an emotional rejection of the artificialization of the world, brought on by extensive and untamable industrial production. Capitalism – in its new forms – had been successful in guaranteeing affluence to many people, mainly in Western countries. It was easy to think that the same system could also work effectively in less developed countries, possibly with some minor adjustments. The difference in income between poor and affluent countries was so striking that, in the developing countries, people's hope for the future more than compensated for the perception of problems connected with unequal distribution and with environmental risks.

On the contrary, citizens of western countries no longer hoped for further improvements in the traditional way of life, and, as a result, the elaboration of a new relation with nature was becoming an option. Along with this possible new relation with production and nature, it would also have been likely to propose a new model of citizenship, which was able to create a new association between people and places. The bio-region movement tried to say something *à propos*, but the literature on "bio-regionalism" has never taken the political question seriously, thus remaining completely confined to geographical and biological studies. It might have included innovative considerations about area and administration, federalism, self-government of communities, welfare states and so on. This would have helped in integrating global migrants by applying more updated paradigms rather than those developed for no-longer existing national states. It was possible to claim that the system was unable to coordinate with nature and was economically inefficient if non-monetary values were taken into consideration. Finally, the widespread distrust of ideologies and grand discourses, the lack of a political leadership interested and educated in environmentalism, and eventually the success of the sustainable development fallacy/fraud, hampered the creation of an alternative.

To create consensus around the sustainable development industrial policy, governments needed to defuse the oppositional power of radical environmentalist political parties and movements that aggregated in the 1980s. Because of people's strong sensitivity to the environmental crisis and the consequent success of green parties and the like, these groups had become a significant stakeholder in the political debate and might have opposed this conservative policy. The sustainable development fallacy/fraud was also applied to political groups and leaders. Most of the leaders of the green parties and environmentalist advocacy groups had been educated in a political philosophy which was almost completely unaware of environmental issues and ethics. Their political training and experience was based

on civil rights, labor relations and equality issues. Only some of these issues had an environmental content and generally, environmental concerns occurred as a tangent to other concerns, such as in reducing cancer risks for workers employed in polluting industries. Due to the growing environmental consideration of citizens, major parties supported parallel environmentalist associations. These associations were meant to operate outside official politics, and were becoming more and more discredited as a result of their poor environmental decision-making. At the same time, political leaders of major labor parties were able to keep environmental discontent under control through these associations. Some of them, namely the ones closely connected to the parties, became very large and powerful. Therefore, they had to hire staff and manage thousands of volunteers, the organization of whom eventually needed to be somehow financially “sustained”. When it was not possible to integrate the most radical organizations into the sustainable development policy, they were considered outside the law, and treated as extremists, if not outright terrorists (Agamben 2005).

The political discourse did not entail the specificity of the environmental question and relinquished the crisis as much as possible into the hands of scientists. Notwithstanding the growing mistrust for science and scientific corporations, people expected a solution from rational and possibly trustworthy scientists, rather than from a rational ethical discourse (Shrader-Frechette and McCoy 1993). This attitude leads to a tendency to avoid questioning the power of scientific and professional corporations, no matter how crucial that questioning may be. Grassroots scientists often successfully challenge scientists hired by large corporations or belonging to powerful professional guilds and even have some effect on the public opinion. Nonetheless, the discourse is still circumscribed in the scientific domain, resulting in a resource redistribution issue among scientists. In order to facilitate the change in the approach to the environmental question, the redistribution of resources and influence should pass from scientists to humanists.

A Bike Route Beside the Nuclear Plant

The Rio 1992 Conference was the turning point for the definitive defeat of environmentalism as a possible alternative to the capitalist system. Everyone welcomed the idea that governments should invest in environment-friendly technologies and behaviors. Governments took advantage of the new situation by funding industries in order to allow them to reconvert a part of their productions and make them “sustainable.” Governments’ funding did not really modify the staple productions or the overall organization. It allowed new investments in lower impact technologies, whose real effectiveness has often been questioned. A good example of this is the car industry, which in the sustainable development era has not made significant progress in reducing emissions, despite having regularly obtained relevant incentives. Moreover, while the emissions problem has been taken somewhat into consideration, very little has been said about all the other environmental impacts generated by traffic,

car construction and recycling, parking, road construction, social life, etc. The sustainable development fallacy/fraud also introduced the sanctification of public transportation which justified the construction of transportation infrastructures that added to total mobility rather than operating as a substitute of private cars and reduce overall mobility. Sustainable development allowed the building of new, supposedly clean, waste incinerators instead of questioning the disproportionate production of waste.

The dismissal of a possible environmental revolution was accomplished. After the 1992 Rio Conference – and the European Conference of Sustainable Cities and Towns, held in Aalborg (Denmark) in 1994, which was also crucial – all the governments of developed countries financed sustainable development programs and projects that “sustained” a growing number of self-defined ‘environmentalist’ associations. Research into sustainable development industrial technology was also copiously sponsored. The Marshal Plan idea was *de facto* implemented, although it primarily benefitted the ecological reconversion of western economies toward a marginally more friendly relation with the environment, rather than being applied to developing countries that have gone on adopting older technologies with more and more serious environmental impacts.

The contradiction was that often, in order to produce final products for developed countries, which had a lower environmental impact, most of the ecological components were manufactured in countries with no environmental regulation applied to the production process. The funds granted to environmentalist advocacy associations for implementing marginal projects in the name of sustainable development were crucial in the manipulation of public opinion that eventually accepted the Brundtland Commission’s approach and the Rio Summit’s policy tools as a conclusive solution. Former advocates of an environmental revolution lost interest in acting politically, as they were: (a) busy applying for funds available for ecological projects, (b) involved in cooperative efforts with industry, (c) focused on implementing minor local projects, and (d) lacking a coherent ecological system of values. Except for point (d), all these outcomes of sustainable development strategy have had some positive effects: e.g. they have created an environmental consciousness among the people who are now more informed and educated in environmental issues. Sustainable development’s environmentalists were content with the smaller, more visible successes such as, for example, they showed pride in having realized a bike path in a neighborhood, despite the fact that it was located near a nuclear power plant. Environmentalism as a political ethical philosophy lost a large part of its influence and became unable to produce any real change. Environmental policy remained firmly in the hands of those who had created the problems, namely scientists, industrialists and technicians.

This development has continued, despite the financial crisis, which began in 2008. As a matter of fact, during the crisis, sustainable development’s approach and policies were reinforced rather than weakened. Nonetheless, the crisis is affecting the way of thinking and has produced significant changes in politics.

Chapter 3

Four Stages of Environmental Political Consciousness

Abstract The environmental crisis is an epochal event to the extent that some have argued that Earth has entered a new geological era. There are several interpretations about the relation between humanity, nature and environment that range from conservative to radical. After having framed the philosophical and epistemic foundations of the approach adopted, I propose four stages of people's sensitivity to the environmental problem and identify a clear divide between the progressive and the conservative political approaches. This is meant to be the interpretative foundation of part two and three of this essay.

Keywords Geography • Ethics • Epistemology • Future generations • Polity

An Epochal Divide

Since antiquity, philosophers have explored the relation between humanity and nature. However, around the middle of the twentieth century the relation changed more than it had ever done since humans appeared on Earth. Hannah Arendt argued that a symbolic date should be fixed on the day when Yuri Gagarin was the first man to see the earth without being part of it. That epochal date could also be fixed on the day Hiroshima and Nagasaki were bombed. In that moment, for the first time in human history, it became clear that nature should fear humanity. Until then humans were scared by nature, as it was mostly beyond their control. Today, when earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes or devastating floods occur, rather than being scared, we blame ourselves for not having prevented the disasters. Thus we show our superiority even over the most powerful natural events. We can claim that this epochal juncture was reached at the moment the human genome was mapped, opening the way to cloning the human being and to the biogenetic revolutions already in progress. All this happened in the mid-1900s. Arendt, like other philosophers and epistemologists, identifies the remote origin of this epochal change in the diffusion of the Copernican theory and in Galileo's discoveries, which proved that:

... the worst fear and the most presumptuous hope of human speculation (...) and the Archimedean wish for a point outside the earth, from which to unhinge the world, could only come true together, as though the wish would be granted only provided that we lost reality and the fear was to be consummated only if compensated by the acquisition of

supramundane powers. For whatever we do today in physics, (...) we always handle nature from a point in the universe outside the earth. (Arendt, 1998: 262)

The radical epistemic critique has been a major source of inspiration for many environmentalist scholars. This became widespread in the 1970s, led by Berkeley's Thomas Kuhn, Imre Lakatos and Paul Feyerabend (Currie and Worrall 1980) whose thinking is also related to Adorno and Marcuse's critical views of contemporary society. Probably Hans Jonas' reading of Sophocles' *Antigone* Chorus (translated by Jebb 1893) offers the most elegant description of the new situation:

Wonders are many, and none is more wonderful than man; the power that crosses the white sea, driven by the stormy south-wind, making a path under surges that threaten to engulf him; and Earth, the eldest of the gods, the immortal, the unwearied, doth he wear, turning the soil with the offspring of horses, as the ploughs go to and from year to year.

And the light-hearted race of birds, and the tribes of savage beasts, and the sea-brood of the deep, he snares in the meshes of his woven toils, he leads captive, man excellent in wit. And he masters by his arts the beast whose lair is in the wilds, who roams the hills; he tames the horse of shaggy mane, he puts the yoke upon its neck, he tames the tireless mountain bull.

And speech, and wind-swift thought, and all the moods that mould a state, hath he taught himself; and how to flee the arrows of the frost, when 'tis hard lodging under the clear sky, and the arrows of the rushing rain; yea, he hath resource for all; without resource he meets nothing that must come: only against Death shall he call for aid in vain; but from baffling maladies he hath devised escapes.

Jonas is mainly quoted for his "imperative of responsibility", namely the responsibility that contemporaries should have toward future generations (Jonas 1979). In this respect, Jonas is usually included among the so-called "anthropocentric" environmental philosophers (who are opposed to "eco-centric" ones and claim a parity between humans' and nature's rights) because he builds his ethics on human needs. However, there is another crucial theme of Jonas' arguing that is sometimes overlooked, which is the consequent responsibility for nature on which human future generations depend. Thus, what really matters for Jonas and for the "imperative of responsibility" is neither humanity nor nature, but the relation between the two as implicitly reported in Jonas' opening quotation of *Antigone's*. Jonas, moving from the crisis of Western rationality, prospects a radical change in the subject/object relation with respect to nature and humanity, to the extent that he can be legitimately included among the so-called "deep ecologists" (Tallacchini 1996: 4).

Jonas, in the beginning of his essay (1979), maintains that these lines no longer describe the current relation between humans and nature. For the purpose of these introductory notes, we need to add and focus also on the following lines of *Sophocles' Antigone* Chorus:

Cunning beyond fancy's dream is the fertile skill which brings him, now to evil, now to good. When he honors the laws of the land, and that justice which he hath sworn by the gods to uphold, proudly stands his city: no city hath he who, for his rashness, dwells with sin. Never may he share my hearth, never think my thoughts, who doth these things!

This last part of the chorus is meant to restore the question of the human/nature relationship to a political and ethical discussion.

Since the beginning of the industrial revolution, thinkers have become conscious of the unprecedented critical change that occurred in the relation between humanity and nature. Today, everyone realizes that we are catalyzing a momentous change and that the transformation of the planet has apparently spiraled out of control. The widespread consciousness that we are responsible for a change never seen or imagined before has grown as rapidly as the transformation of the planet. Thus, geographers and natural scientists, typically fascinated by taxonomy, declared that we have moved from the Holocene geological epoch into a new one, which they call the Anthropocene (2011). Despite a certain degree of healthy skepticism – due to the obvious trouble in defining a geological era-shift while we are still living in it – there are at least two reasons to (at least partly) endorse this statement: (1) the physical change of the planet's environment is taking place at an exceptional speed, and (2) if we assume that the change began approximately three centuries ago, at the dawn of the industrial revolution, we acknowledge the phenomenon has been active over a reasonably long period and across many generations.

Gibson-Graham and Roelvink suggest: "... suddenly we are not just billions of individuals and millions of collectivities but a single species alongside other species, one whose survival is threatened by its own behavior" (2010: 321). Climate scientists, quite naively, call for a concerted and rational human action that will be able to avert the upcoming catastrophe. This of course is not wrong, but it does not help to construct a solvable political problem, a task that does not fit the rationality of natural scientists. We cannot expect natural scientists to provide sophisticated arguments about the process of social and behavioral change. In fact, the scientific reaction has included the implementation of a series of "solutions" such as green technologies, impossible-to-enforce international treaties and hopeless pleas for corporate responsibility.

The Environmental Political Case Reframed

Before continuing on the critique of the sustainable development pseudo-ideology, firstly we need to define the environmental problem from the political point of view.

Analyzing the definition of the environmental problem from the political perspective in the contemporary environmental political debate, we may identify four types of environmental consciousness, which give way to consequential political actions. We may assume that the four types are also stages, ordered in terms of intensity of concern for the environment. Moreover, although the four types are neither listed nor intended as a chronological succession, we stand for an affirmative evolution from the first to the fourth.

The First Stage of Environmental (Non-)consciousness

In the first stage, we can completely deny the existence of problems defined and catalogued as “environmental”. The “environmental file” comprises so many entries that it has become predictably nonspecific. Air, water, and noise pollution, as well as waste disposal, traffic congestion, endangered animal and vegetal species and so on, are such diverse phenomena that they are not necessarily supposed to be grouped together. Different disciplines and diverse professionals are in charge of studying and dealing with the aforementioned list of problems. Obviously, this position is now outdated: at least three decades ago we learnt to catalogue a group of issues defined by common sense as ‘environmental’. However, although we have adopted a different taxonomy and have grouped them in the novel entry named “environmental”, when we deal with the problems in practice, we still approach them separately. Until a quarter of a century ago, most scholars still refused the idea that a comprehensive approach to environmental problems was necessary. From an epistemic point of view the prevailing idea was that the progress of each science and the advancement of applied technologies used by professionals and practitioners was the obvious solution to problems that were not “environmental” but rather chemical, biological, physical, engineering, genetic and so on. Until 1980, there were very few higher education programs in anything called environmental studies, nor had traditional teaching subjects – such as chemistry, engineering, geography – yet added the adjective “environmental” to indicate either a new content or an innovative approach. Economics was the discipline that would have synthesized, in the market monetary solution, each single problem that was worth separating from the others.

The Second (Still Conservative) Stage

The second stage entails a higher degree of concern regarding the environmental crisis: people admit that the relationship between humans and the environment ought to be somehow revised. Therefore, we select a series of different issues worth being categorized in the same entry as “environmental”. This is a step forward from the first stage because the new classification is meant to lead to building new links between phenomena and situations, and focusing on these links rather than on the single issues. From the scientific method point of view, we can tentatively assume that the first stage accepts the classical reductionist approach; while this second stage is more concerned with an interdisciplinary approach and/or with system analysis. For this reason there has been intense debate among epistemologists about whether or not “ecology” should be considered a “subversive science” (Shepard and McKinley 1969). The ethical and epistemic debate about science and environment, still quite alive in the 1990s, also focused on how to use ecological methods to understand and/or handle environmental problems (Shrader-Frechette and McCoy

1993). Nonetheless, at this stage the scientific approach is still prevailing over any political and philosophical arguing. Thus, the proposed solutions to the newly grouped-together problems, recently defined as “environmental”, proceed in the traditional fashion, i.e. keeping them rigorously separated when we need to manage them practically. Nowadays, this is the most broadly adopted approach. It implies that all environmental problems can be addressed in a purely technical manner. The approach insists that in order to solve environmental problems, it is enough for each operative organization to merely contribute to their own part. This consequentially leads to a comprehensive vision. At most, we can speak of interdisciplinary knowledge and coordination. Sustainable development belongs to this level of concern. People endorse this second level when they assume that traditional technological progress is not only the sole viable means of solving environmental problems, but that this type of solution will also favor further economic growth.

A Progressive Shift

At the third stage, we break into the field of real environmentalism, which can be more or less extreme. The suffixes “ism” and “ist”, added to the word “environmental”, indicate the idea of the development of a political movement, which goes beyond the single issue and implies a social critique. In other words, we can avow a shift from environmental “issues” into an environmental “question”. This is something substantially different from the basic recognition that problems exist to do with the environment, which can be conventionally grouped and possibly given priority over other problems. This third level of concern implies the existence of a real “environmental question” whose solution would require a change in lifestyle, ethics, laws, technology and production systems. New techniques are not enough to solve the environmental crisis. Rather, we need a new scientific approach, new paradigms. From this perspective, the environmental crisis is not a technical problem. Instead, it is an ethical, social, organizational, and ultimately, a political issue. For this very reason, environmentalists insist on actions unrelated to traditionally splintered bureaucratic competence. They move beyond solutions organized around the operative and administrative structures of most governments. Consequently environmentalism is revolutionary, i.e., in order to overcome the typically conformist responses to environmental problems, environmentalists believe that the problem should be approached mainly from a political point of view. They assert that, if we do not intend to change the existing relationship between humans, technology, and nature, then the current breakdown is just being “patched up” using known technology. In this case, current social, political and scientific structures are preserved, becoming even more powerful and sophisticated.

The approach outlined as second stage is not “environmentalist.” It demonstrates a generic sensitivity to environmental problems that can be somehow shared by virtually anybody, independent of their political beliefs. Environmentalism is meant

to pick up the environmental issue as a political one and associate it with other crucial political issues such as labor relations, civil rights, citizenship, political participation, citizens' privacy, tax systems, etc. Moreover, the environmental question has its own specificity and is different from other more traditional political questions.

The Radical Option

The fourth stage of concern is the most intense. Radical environmentalists claim that the environmental question today is the pivotal political issue around which all other political and social problems orbit. Environmentalism is viewed as the approach to start with, in order to solve all other political and social issues. In the last three centuries of human history, the political debate has been hinged on social justice and individual freedom. Most of the political theory elaborated in this period was conceived in relation to different and contrasting ideas on how to combine and pursue social justice and individual freedom. This was happening in an era in which a growing wealth needed to be redistributed among peoples and social classes. All other considerations were often deemed a consequence of this priority.

Radical environmentalists claim that we need to start our political militancy and our theoretical elaboration with considerations concerning striking a new deal between humans and nature. Although social justice and individual freedom will always be crucial, the starting point of the political debate should give priority to environmental preservation, non-human entities' rights, the relation between people and territory, bio-citizenship, etc.

The two intermediate positions (stage two and three) are the most likely to be adopted. Yet, the political success of the U.N.'s sustainable development approach has overshadowed the third level. These two positions – both seemingly reasonable and moderate – are indeed separated by a clear philosophical divide, which involves opposing environmental and political ethics, and a non-reconcilable epistemology. The dramatic break between these two positions has been underestimated and overlooked. As a result, we do not want to try a negotiation between these two philosophically distinct and seemingly incompatible positions. Rather, we need to make the conflict discernible and hence make both these positions “political”, instead of leaving them to rot in a sterile academic controversy. As we will see below, a new dialectic – which substitutes the vanished dualism between Western democracies' capitalism and Soviet communism – can be created if the crucial difference is recognized and given political status.

The following chapters will discuss how an authentic and radical environmentalist way of thinking requires citizens to intervene differently in the political controversy. We must end the idle focus on piecemeal solutions. The theory is that the only chance for change is through a cultural revolution, which locates the environment at the center of the political debate and makes all other issues

subsidiary. Some increasingly unbearable situations, regarding the deterioration of both physical and social conditions of life, may be the fuse to prime the process, i.e. a favorable starting point for creating a political alternative to neo-liberal capitalism. In a certain sense, you do not have to be necessarily “anti-capitalist” or thoroughly revolutionary to support the creation of a sound alternative to neo liberal capitalism. Facing an opponent may even help to reinforce the current system.

Chapter 4

From the Post-Political Condition to an Environmentalist Polity

Abstract To contest the currently triumphant neoliberal order it is necessary to advance a new dialectical alternative which substitutes an environmentalist radical strategy for the defeated Communist project. We should deeply revise the Marxist heritage of some radical leftist literature about environment (surveyed in this chapter) in order to open a viable intellectual and political radical change in contemporary domestic and international politics. It is assumed that the environmental issue is the most likely catalyst of a feasible radical change. The chapter also includes considerations about current international politics and science policy/politics.

Keywords Environmental policy • Science polity • Postmodernism • Environmental ethics • Philosophy of science

Definitions of Nature and Environment

Nature and environment are different concepts and there is remarkable philosophical arguing about their meaning. Dale Jamieson claims that in some cases they can be used interchangeably. Although I agree with Jamieson in relation to the theme of the book in which he advanced this utterance (Jamieson 2008: 2), the distinction between the two concepts proves useful when we introduce the problem of sustainable development's pseudo ideology.

The word “environment” comes from French and means “all that is around you”. It concerns both human built artifacts and that which interacts with humans. The use of this word has recently become popular also in scientific and economic language such as in ecology. From an epistemic point of view, using the word ‘environment’ suggests a shift from a science focused on the particular, to the analysis of the relations occurring among diverse and multiple phenomena. Instead, the word and the concept of “nature” are as ancient as philosophy itself, if not older.

In an inspirational essay, Erik Swyngedouw (2007) elaborates on Žižek's argument that there are “several natures” and that the construction of nature is a political action (Žižek 2002). This statement should be debated, though not completely rejected; if we neglect to distinguish between nature and environment, we lose a critical tool to readdress environmental policies. In fact, by moving from the second to the third stage of environmental concern, as previously described, we may find it helpful to distinguish between environment and nature.

On one hand we accept the application of the term “environment” to the product of different cultural-political constructions, according to Swyngedouw and Žižek. On the other hand, we also use the concept of “nature” to describe an entity or subject that holds its own standings although it is not part of humanity. There is an abundant bibliography about the dualism between anthropocentric and eco-centric environmental ethics and about the distinction between “Deep” and “Shallow” ecology, to quote Arno Naess’ original words. A pioneering essay on the theme bearing an effective title is Stone’s (1974) “*Should Trees Have Standings? Toward Legal Rights for Natural Objects*”. In other words, we introduce another “subject” different from humanity rather than assuming that we deal with nature as with an “object” or even a human artifact. Hence, we assume that a singular nature – which, as a subject, is intended as an end *per se* – should be considered in the environmentalist political debate. It is not necessary to discuss this issue if we stay at the first two stages of environmental consciousness. At the same time, we can maintain that it is possible to conceive and design multiple environments. In the first two stages, we do not need to distinguish between environment and nature, the latter being an object owned by humans and possibly within their control. Nature is completely reified. That is why environmental scientists and activists “invariably invoke the global physical processes” and “insist on the need to re-engineer nature so that it can return to a ‘sustainable’ path” (Swyngedouw 2007: 20). The questions are: (a) do we hold the right to treat nature as an object and, hence, are we allowed to engineer it without any moral limit? And (b), do we consider humanity as part of nature – where humanity should be morally committed to her conservation as much as to its own? If we respond affirmatively to the first question, we do not need to distinguish between nature and environment. If we respond affirmatively to the second question, then we need to consider human development as intrinsically connected to and dependent on the respect for nature. The choice here is between exploitation of nature and attunement with nature. Both positions may imply moral limits to growth and both may presume a transformation of nature. However, the relation between humans and nature, the consequent policies, and the conditions for the construction of an environmental discourse are very different in the two cases.

The idea that environment is not distinguished from nature and that both environment and nature can be engineered and handled with economic and technological tools, is the keystone of sustainable development policy. The human and political dimension of the environmental question has been circumscribed into the borders of well-established economic and technological paradigms elaborated in order to embrace, manage and understand the functioning of society. What has been ignored is the existence of nature as a separate entity. As long as we consider nature (and hence “natures”, as Swyngedouw/Žižek claim) as a projected image of humanity and fail to give it a subjective status, we ignore the necessity to renegotiate human/nature relations on an ethical and thus political ground. As a consequence, we also miss the opportunity to strongly criticize the production system and the political-geographical content of citizenship – i.e. relations between the sustainment of peoples, settlements, and political organizations – from this point of view. Another ambiguity of sustainable development concerns a different meaning of

the word “sustainable” that recalls the necessity – crucial for poor countries – to provide an adequate “sustainment” to very poor, mainly African, countries’ people, whose economy has been devastated by globalization and urbanization. Sustainable development may be intended also from the perspective of “sustaining” (feeding) starving peoples. In this perspective, long-term environmental sustainability becomes secondary to the priority to provide food to people. Thus, another possible limit to growth is cancelled on the grounds of a moral principle that helps to avoid any discussion on the capability of the capitalist system to both create and solve regional poverty.

Swyngedouw and Žižek do not discuss the definition or the status of nature. In the sustainable development approach, it is not nature that we consider harmonious: what is harmonious and unquestionable is the production system, the market and political economy which is assumed as (or very close to) a natural science. In this respect, Swyngedouw and Žižek’s position is much closer to the sustainable development approach than it may appear at first glance. Their critique explores the same battleground where sustainable development maneuvers. Sustainable development supporters include nature in economics, depriving it of any political and ethical status. Therefore, as Jamieson puts it (2008: 22), “disagreement is allowed, but only with respect to the choice of technologies, the mix of organizational fixes, the details of the managerial adjustments, and the urgency of the timing and implementation”. If this is correct, it is applied in exactly the same way as the Marxian approach, which implies that social change is fundamentally driven by economic facts and that “environmental problems are caused by the distribution of property rights and incentives”. Sustainable development economists and Marxians may disagree about “exactly what is the correct explanation, but they agree about the terms” (Jamieson 2008: 22). For both of them, the correct explanation of environmental degradation is one that is fundamentally economic in character. This position is justified if we assume a materialistic idea of nature and believe that natural forces drive humans and determine their behaviors. In a situation like this there is little place for deliberate rational human political action. Although it is acceptable to define this situation as “post-political” (Žižek 1999: 35, 2006; Mouffe 2005), as reported by Swyngedouw (2007: 23), and because we have accepted to critically define this situation as post-political, we need to go beyond this dead-end approach and look for what can become “political” – what we can transform into “political” in the coming years. An everyday life consequence of this intention of sustainable environmental policies and social change is that, when one tries to organize an environmentalist advocacy committee in any town of the Western world and wants to win followers, potential members need to be reassured that the committee does not have any political goal, not to mention any party affiliation. All that is permitted is to declare the desire to solve a specific problem. Then time is wasted trying to find a scientific explanation on which nobody will ever agree.

Swyngedouw is convincing when he describes the post-political condition built around the inevitability of “neoliberal capitalism as an economic system, parliamentary democracy as the political ideal, and humanitarianism and inclusive cosmopolitanism as a moral foundation”. However, the next step should be to make

an effort to move from the post-political condition to a pre-ideological or neo-political condition. True that this is not an easy task, but, as Žižek (quoted by Swyngedouw) proclaims, “authentic politics . . . is the art of the *impossible*” (Žižek 1999: 199, emphasis in the original) or as a famous 1968 motto goes: “be realistic, go for the impossible”. Brilliant politicians are not the ones who keep the promises made to their constituency. If politicians deliver on all that they have promised, it means that they have not promised enough. Democracy is not only competing to win elections. A major goal of democracy and of political campaigns is education and information about the possible collective choices. Unfortunately, campaigns have lost sight of this and have become just a competition to win power.

Sustainable Development and the Science Authority

The weak point of contemporary populism, of which sustainable development is one of the most prominent tools, is the necessity to rely on legitimized science and technocracy. But, as Sheila Jasanoff (2010: 695) has recently written, “science and technology are rapidly losing their reputation as the only possible saviors of humanity from natural danger and poverty. It is no longer enough to establish what counts as good science; it is equally important to address what science is good for and whom it benefits”. On one hand, science has become the slave of a technology dominated by economic and professional corporations, so much so that it has become difficult to rely on the independence of scientists and their institutions. On the other hand, the complexity of the effects of scientific and technological innovation has made it necessary to include value-based and ethical considerations, regarding technology and research, in any assessment. In the populist system, citizens desperately quest for an independent scientific opinion, which should come from a legitimate scientist in order to permanently solve problems. However, the truth they long for is not going to emerge and instead, the decision comes from a process of negotiation. Negotiation would be political, except that the participants involved deny the political content of the decision. The consequence of this refusal to consider the intrinsic ethical-political content of the decision is that nobody focuses on devising political institutions suitable for dealing with environmental decision-making, which may include ethical and political arguments as well as scientific and technological matters.

Swyngedouw points out the populist tactics of “not identifying a privileged subject of change (like the proletariat for Marx, women for feminists, or the “creative class” for competitive capitalism)” (2007: 33). The proletariat revolution seems to have failed, although the dialectic juxtaposition between capitalism and communism and the labor movement has helped to considerably enhance workers’ rights. The traditional proletariat is no longer a possible subject of change. Feminists and women are a more viable subject of change *vis-à-vis* the environmental problem since feminist theory has already argued that the woman/nature relation is radically diverse from the dominant man/nature exploitative and “male-rational” relation

(Plumwood 1991). We believe that this approach is helpful, but it can only really work as a side argument. In fact, it is divisive and it is not likely to become a shared discourse. This issue will be further explored in Part III, Chap. 10. The so-called creative class, proposed by Richard Florida (2002), also mentioned by Swyngedouw, operates inside the current system, follows business as usual, and adopts a predictable technology. Thus we assume that creative class, now so popular, is nothing more than a conservative approach, which cooperates with the sustainable development fraud.

This gloomy scenario can be made brighter if we try harder to identify new possible subjects of change. Global warming has been fetishized and used as a bogey to justify an international policy to allegedly protect the entire environment. But people perceive the effects of the environmental crisis in everyday life in different and diverse areas: the amassing of waste, the loss of green land, noise, disproportionate use of energy, traffic, growing distance between place of production and place of consumption, etc. These everyday problems have intense psychological effects since they create an overall sense of up-rootedness. This crisis is also to do with the 'built' environment where most of the world's people now live. We should focus on the transformation of urban design and on the elimination of city slums and mass housing in metropolitan peripheries, and grey shopping centers with their never-ending parking lots (Fox 2000). All this produces a lifestyle that is very dependent on driving, living in isolated houses and apartments, shopping in anonymous global grocery stores, packaging and preserving food, commuting to work and to any other daily activities including leisure. Some claim that this lifestyle is the outcome of people's market choices. It is true that we choose this lifestyle, but only because there is no alternative available for most of us (Poli 2011).

These feelings of refusal of a noisy, dirty, isolated and high environment impacting lifestyle – i.e. a rejection of the most common organization of contemporary life – have spread among several individuals and have become a conscious attitude for many. The sociologist Paul H. Ray and the psychologist Sherry Ruth Anderson (2000) claim to have identified 50 million adult Americans and another 80–90 million Europeans who they define as “cultural creatives”. These people would be willing to change their standard lifestyle, albeit with different intensities, if they were given the chance. Even if one may dispute the details of Ray and Anderson's research, the very fact that they have tried to identify a subject of change means that there is a quest and a need for it. The problem is if and how is it possible to transform the “cultural creatives” from a sociological classification into a political subject of change.

A New Dualism Is Needed

We should not overlook the fact that the cosmopolitan order may be fragile and short term. We can already envisage an emerging political and ethical dualism between the West and Islam; a renovated political hegemonic conflict with Russia that is back

to claim its temporarily lost role of super-power; and the economic competition with China. Hence, while the so-called cosmopolitan order works in Western countries, it is harshly questioned and fought on a global scale. All new possible dualisms challenge the Western model. Let's just focus on Islam since it is the most original and most difficult to interpret with contemporary cultural tools. In the last decade, Islam has become a political adversarial theory, which embraces some modern beliefs and rejects others. Islam fights against capitalism and secularity, opposing religious and political principles. On one hand, this is still an old fashioned, non-global approach to world politics since it takes into consideration religious, ethnic and territorial conflicts. On the other hand, Islam has spread all over Europe and North America and proliferates in the still hegemonic cosmopolitan order. In Europe and North America, Islamic organizations are flourishing and they often catalyze – better than traditional leftist-socialist parties – the poor's discontent giving them hope and identity: a cause to fight for. Because of the global order, the most likely scenario is a dialectical conflict that will take place inside the global society. If it is advanced by violent ideologies, it may explode into civil wars and into a series of riots and never-ending turmoil. In Europe and North America, the anti-Islam parties and ideologies, which are becoming popular and politically meaningful, reinforce the anti-western, anti-modern Islamic movements rather than curb them. Several contemporary authors have questioned whether Islamic fundamentalism is indeed a postmodern feature rather than an attempt to restore a traditional order. In this context, the goal is to change the system and found a new political, democratic and just order based on values different from most of the ones put forward by anti-western Islamist political-religious movements. The old-modern western society's likely reaction is to fight violence with violence with little possibility of success.

Instead, a radical substitute for the juxtaposition West vs. Islam, which is a dialectic alternative to the postdemocratic, postpolitical, cosmopolitan order, would consist of an effort to construct a new intellectual and hence political ideology based on a different relation with nature. This is nothing new, as it would mean reconnecting with environmentalist movements whose origins go back to the pre-sustainable development green movements. These movements – in which we may include the New Age pop-culture – and the theoretical thinking that supported them, have never disappeared although they have temporarily lost their appeal because of the sustainable development fraud. (The New Age movement is meaningful because it developed in the West but was characterized by its heavy borrowing from native, eastern, Buddhist, and in general “other” cultures). Modernization and capitalism have been extensively studied from a social and political perspective. Several scholars have also addressed the dramatic changes that industrialization has provoked on the relations between society and nature. However, the latter has never gained the limelight in political discourse. The opportunity to readdress political and psychological discourse in order to make it more suitable to deal with the new relation between humanity and nature was developed in the early 1990s by the political philosopher Eckersley (1992) and by the ethicist and psychologist Fox (1990). They identified the eco-philosophical attitude as identification with

others and as an extension of the self. This approach introduces eco-feminism, which tends to associate women and nature, as they both are objects of men's exploitation (Tallacchini 1996: 58–59). Eckersley and Fox are just two of the several scholarly attempts to create a new political and ethical basis for a revolutionary environmentalism advanced in the early 1990s.

One could bizarrely argue that some natural or human-provoked catastrophe could help to regenerate the human species and therefore we should not concern ourselves so much about the present and future situation. This absurdity raises the point that most of us emotionally and rationally refuse the idea that a human catastrophe may be worth regenerating and reinforcing the human species on the grounds of an ethical judgment. Likewise, why should we not accept that restoring a fair balance between humanity and nature is a moral principle we should endorse? As Mouffe (quoted by Swyngedouw) rightly claims, bioengineering, extremely advanced de-humanized medicine and bioethics have boisterously entered the political arena creating new divisions among traditional political and religious parties and opinion groups. Thus, why shouldn't a more extended concept of bioethics, applied to the overall relation between humanity and nature, become a crucial political battleground? In the 1980s there was a chance for this to take place, however it was lost as a result of the victory of the conservative and fraudulent sustainable development approach. As for the New Age movement, this new approach would have the great advantage of being born in Western culture, but with the main intent of borrowing from and integrating with other non-Western traditions. Therefore, differently from the Islamic antagonism, a radical environmentalist opposition to the neo-liberal capitalist order would be deprived of territorial and traditional content and would become purely ideological.

We would come to a dead-end if we based our search for a new policy to contrast the current situation, on the usual class exploitation and social justice categories. Historically, one of the main characteristics of capitalism and industrialization has been high-energy consumption and resources transformation. Paul Samuelson provocatively claimed that the Soviet Union production system was not less "capitalistic" than western countries. In fact, the Soviet industrial system devoted as much physical capital as the so-called capitalist economies to production, except that it was state owned capital. This metabolic aspect of capitalism, although it has been treated by scholars since the beginning of the industrial era, has always been kept aside in the political debate. Even the issue of body politics has not been passionately dealt with in the natural realm. For a long time, communist and socialist parties considered the industrial revolution as a "goose of the golden eggs" – using the definition given by Filippo Turati, the founder of the Italian (reformist) Socialist Party – since industry was seen as a tool for the *liberation of humanity* from mass poverty. Therefore socialist parties, which were concerned with exploitation and redistribution of the new industrial affluence, did not discuss, and therefore actually preserved and encouraged, the transformation of the economy that was taking place. I used italics because: (a) I do not intend "liberation" as being only from social class exploitation and injustice as the extremist socialists were calling for, but also from

contingent poverty; and (b) only “humanity” matters and we give no consideration to any kind of interspecies or natural justice which, at the time, was an issue completely ignored by the political debate.

Hence, we agree with Swyngedouw’s opinion that environmental populism – evoked by the threat of an impending environmental catastrophe – “silences ideological and other constructive social differences, and papers over conflicts of interests by distilling a common threat or challenge to both nature and humanity” (2007: 32). But, in order to move the debate further, we should conduct research to answer the following questions: why do people rely on populism and disregard other solutions? Can we simply utter that people have been effectively manipulated by the sustainable development fraud? Can we blame capitalism because a shift occurred from political to post-political condition? If the current situation proves that a new post-political ideology has taken over the old communism vs. capitalism dualism, and “all people”, at least in the affluent western countries, “are affected by environmental problems”, why should we apply the same analytical and ideological concepts that have been used in the past when the main social problem at the time was income distribution? It is not effective to propose the same approach to a new situation; it is necessary to find a new one. Finally, we should consider that the present post-political condition is not the outcome of a unilateral decision of a presumed ruling class, but it is itself the result of a conflict, that is either a synthesis or an entropic state. The environmental issue has been put forward by the opponents of the capitalist system, who chose a new battleground instead of the traditional class conflict for the redistribution of growing production.

Conclusion

I concur with Swyngedouw’s analysis and Slavoj Žižek’s belief who, in *Looking Awry*, suggests that the current ecological crisis is indeed a radical condition that not only constitutes a real and present danger, but, equally importantly, “questions our most unquestionable presuppositions, the very horizon of our meaning, our everyday understanding of nature as a regular, rhythmic process”. This crucial utterance clearly paves the way for a broader argument about the centrality of the environmental question in the political debate.

Žižek and Swyngedouw claim that it is easier to predict an environmental catastrophe than to envisage relatively small changes in the socio-political and cultural-economic organization of local and global life here and now. It is definitely easier and customary to foresee the final ecological Armageddon rather than a transformation of the neoliberal capitalist order. But why is this happening and how can we change this condition through political action and intellectual elaboration? *Prima facie*, we can argue that a millenarian attitude can either work for conservation or for change. Thus, we need to answer other questions: why do contemporary people – mainly affluent western countries’ citizens – fear a possible Armageddon to the extent that it has secured such a noteworthy position

in contemporary political discourse? Why is this genuine widespread fear, founded among people, causing such a strong reaction? Why has the reaction been to such an extent that the environmental crisis, much more extensively than any other political emergency, has been chosen by the conservation forces as the main battleground, and the cornerstone of their customary and cyclical “revolutions”?

Do we really need the threat of an Armageddon in the guise of global warming or nuclear power to promote social change? Is it so impossible to simply long and fight for an improvement in our lives, namely in a real development rather than a depressing “sustainable” one?

We should accept that the environmental crisis is different from all the previous ones. First, as reported above, an epochal change, never experienced before, occurred in the mid- twentieth century. As a consequence, the environmental crisis should not be analyzed as one of the recurrent revolts against an unjust political system and should be managed in the usual way. As a matter of fact, sustainable development strategy has been one of the many successful attempts to cope with the recurrent crises in a traditional manner because the challenge has presented itself in a traditional manner. The originality of the current situation lies in the fact that the political debate’s focus has shifted from social to natural issues, i.e. from class relations to human/nature interactions. The traditional interpretative paradigms have clearly failed in creating the grounds for an adequate political action and in creating a link between scholarly thinking and the beliefs of the people. If in the past they have helped in constructing a dialectic and revolutionary discourse which stood as an alternative to a corporate neoliberal system, nowadays the social conflict categories – be they applied in the terms of Marxist class struggle or in the terms of inherent libertarian market social competition – are failing to satisfy a large part of public opinion in western countries.

Before approaching the socio-political specific organization problem, we need to accept that modernization and industrialization have a lot to do with a particular relation between humans and nature. The evolution of the current science-based technology, introduced in the sixteenth century, is the outcome of a philosophical negotiation with nature. Suggestively, Fritjof Capra maintains that, if Leonardo’s systemic and holistic post-medieval scientific approach had prevailed on the more successful Descartes and Galileo’s method, we might have experienced a different evolution of science and of the relationship between humans and nature. Capra’s idea is evocative no matter how arguable his thesis is. We have mentioned it because in relation to the environmental question, we need to call for a paradigmatic shift not only in science and political analysis, but also in political action.

Thus, instead of reiterating the paradigm of nature as a political construct, it would be more useful, from a heuristic point of view, to distinguish between nature and environment and give nature the status of a political subject.

Moreover, the centrality of work and labor as a transformation process, as advanced in Marxist theory, has created the grounds for treating Nature as an object exploited by the system in the same way as workers are. We do not deny that recent and less recent Marxist and Marx-inspired literature has treated this issue at large, producing an extensive bibliography. However, the humanity/nature relationship has

occupied neither the core of scholars' concern nor has it won the limelight in the political debate. The relation between human beings and Nature includes an issue of justice. There is already a rich literature about environmental justice, but most of it focuses on how environmental risks and harm are unequally distributed socially and geographically. Nonetheless, environmental justice may include a broader concern and be applied to nature.

Part II
New Constituencies for Social Change

Chapter 5

Populism and Environmentalism

Abstract In Europe, populist parties are winning plenty of consensus. Also in the U.S. protest movements are becoming more and more active. An analysis of the populist movements' background and values is presented to evaluate how they may relate to the environmentalist movements. The two traditional political groups – conservative/libertarians and progressive/welfarists – whose conflict dominated the twentieth century politics now often ally to contrast the emerging populist movements, no matter how confused and diverse they are. Where does environmentalism fit in this new political framework?

Keywords European politics • Populism • Regionalism • Economic crisis • New lifestyles

European Populist Movements

The ongoing financial and economic crisis, which exploded in 2008, has once again returned the political language to the only immediately available and shared rhetoric. Poverty, inequality, social justice and welfare are the key issues of any discourse that inexorably converts into a plea for more growth. Although the characteristics of western people's poverty and inequality are dramatically different from those that bred the elaboration of old political philosophy rooted in the classic nineteenth and twentieth century theories, activists and politicians speak the only language they know and apply the schemes they are familiar with. Those ideological schemes and that specific language are still effective in mobilizing thousands of people to rally and even to trigger some ineffectual riots, but prove completely inadequate in building a coherent and feasible political project.

In Europe, so-called populist parties are winning plenty of consensus. Even in large and developed countries like the UK, France and Italy, they have often been the most voted in several occasions, including the 2014 European Parliament elections. These parties – or movements as they often prefer to be called, since they consider the party system discredited – are quite distinct from each other as they range from the right to the left sectors and significantly include large groups that no one can reasonably categorize into the old political heritages. No surprise that they attract the young voters in higher percentages than other parties. The consequence is that the former antagonism between progressive/liberal – often

(and wrongly) in Europe identified with the socialists – and conservative is more and more frequently replaced by Grand Coalitions between these two historical twentieth century political traditions. They ally against the threat brought by anti-European and anti-system parties. The regrouping of old parties is happening in the EU Parliament whether the coalition is officially avowed or if it operates *de facto*. The same process occurs in some major countries, like in Germany, in Italy and most likely in the UK and France before long. The harbinger of this phenomenon was the second round of the French presidential election in 2002 when the French had to choose between the conservative Chirac and the populist Jean-Marie Le Pen. On that occasion, socialists and libertarians allied against what was perceived as an anti-system, fascist threat. Thus, the bi-polarization of the political process is assuming a different form. The conservative and progressive traditional blocs can dialogue and work on the common ground of mostly shared values. They also participate in a well-structured power network established over the course of a few decades in the EU and in each country of the Union.

The enduring merging of bureaucracy and politics, which is both a cause and an effect of large corporations and huge bank trusts' increased power, has transmuted the "political" into a bureaucratic technocracy that the traditional parties' coalition can still control and/or be part of. Their opponents are highly dispersed and confused. Some are inspired by old, once popular, ideologies – mainly fascists, nationalists and communists – that are difficult to apply to the current times having been systematically belittled in the public opinion. Because these old ideologies have been marginalized in governments for decades, populist vote may find but a shallow inspiration in these old ideological groups. People may turn to already defeated ideologies to express a generic discontent that the crisis unsurprisingly nurtures, but it has little to do with their real cultural and political content. Moreover, most citizens still profoundly despise them.

The term "populist" requires some explanation: the political and cultural establishment applies the term to discredit the new successful political movements, but there is no clear definition of what it really refers to. In the conservative everyday language of politicians, "populist" is anything that doesn't fit into the party system or old ideologies. They label as "populist movements" those political groups that win electoral consensus by adopting platforms that gain people's consensus with allegedly shallow arguments and are not inspired by any well-established academic thinking or political tradition. Admittedly, the platforms of the so-called populist movements are often confused and incoherent and are even more unsystematic if examined with the traditional analytical schemes. However, by derogatorily labeling them as populist, scholars refrain from seeking the possible hidden meanings they bear, and politicians overlook the political demand they convey, no matter how confusedly. An example of a movement, typically described as populist, is Marine Le Pen's French "Front National" (FN), which is probably best characterized as a right sector ideology. Others are new movements whose ideological platform is even more generic, confused and contradictory in the terms of the accepted political language. Among these we may include Nigel Farage's British Independence Party (UKIP) and the Italian Five Star Movement (FSM). Note that the five stars stand for

five items, specifically: water, environment, transportation, Internet, development. It is a list of issues, rather than an integrated project. As a matter of fact, the movements typically deny having a systematic approach that you may call an ideology. Nonetheless, they commonly endorse most of the principles the Western political culture is based on: libertarianism, parliamentary democracy and – to a certain extent – cosmopolitanism. These three icons of the neoliberal ideology, as Swyngedouw and other radical scholars quoted in the first part of this essay call it, are partly accepted and partly refused by the movements. They strongly endorse democratic principles although they might question the centrality of Parliament and call for more direct and deliberative democracy.

Libertarianism as an economic system is more controversial, but UKIP, Front National and FSM criticize the malfunctioning of the system rather than the system itself. Certainly they do not call for a re-edition of socialism, although in some cases they might include some sort of communitarianism, mostly in an open challenge to bureaucracy and cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism is definitely the most challenged icon, even though the positions are variegated also in this case. The movements challenge large international corporations and organizations; at the same time they do not question most of the so-called cosmopolitan lifestyles they share with the rest of the world, although they perceive them as their own. In few words, the populist movements' positions are quite confused, but people who vote for them express both a generic unease and new values that are not yet recognized nor accepted.

Political Platforms . . . If Any

It is difficult to compare the platforms of the European so-called populist movements. Even if we limit the analysis to the three main movements – Front National, UKIP and FSM – it is clear that their charismatic leaders, their political careers, language and political platforms are profoundly diverse. But for each country there are other successful populist movements with even more diverse platforms and leaders, including the separatist parties. Thus, in the following paragraphs, I'll advance generalizations that are just a little more than clues. Nonetheless they are useful to show how an environmentalist movement could propose a consistent ideology and find a large electorate.

Because the populist movements represent a reaction to people's discontent and catalyze protest, the idea that corrupted ruling classes have betrayed the traditional democratic principles is one of their central issues. They generically call for more democracy in the western tradition, but they still fail to precisely define the structure of the democratic institutions to come. In this phase, the new movements think that the first indispensable step to restoring democratic values is to remove the corrupted ruling classes rather than change the system. Moreover, government and politics require deep reforms in order to make citizens' participation more effective. Icons like elections and Parliaments are still the core of democracy, but they should be

re-thought in order to open to broader and more direct citizen participation. New technologies should be applied to improve the democratic decision-making and the selection of the representatives. Consistent with the populist approach, they fail to consider any role for possible elites who could be necessary to develop a new set of ideas to consolidate the political goals, the strategies and the platforms.

As for liberalism, the new movements are rather confused mostly because their voters come from different political traditions. Nonetheless, they share some common values on which their constituencies might find some agreement. Firstly, they openly criticize huge – and allegedly corrupt – welfare institutions because they are firmly in the hands of the established ruling classes they want to overthrow. Due to the lack of trust in the ruling class, people perceive paying taxes as neither a legitimate solidarity deed nor a necessity, but a thorough abuse. In this sense, they might resemble radical libertarians. Nonetheless, an anti-libertarian attitude is also rooted in the mentality of the many raised in the socialist and communist tradition. They think that a regenerated government is still the most legitimate subject that should be in charge of the redistribution of wealth. In general, though, a penchant for free market and free enterprise is at work, except that they must happen at a humane dimension. This approach is easily combined with communitarian lifestyles and solidarity.

Cosmopolitanism is a more controversial issue. On one hand the movements claim individual rights and they are open to humanitarian issues. On the other, the populist leaders contrast the frightening lonesomeness and unrecognizability of the feelings that pervade the global people by proposing a communitarian solution and by fostering the search for identity. The latter is often found – or imagined – in some old local cultures that are resumed in order to aggregate people. The sociologist Gino Germani (1975) identified European regionalism in the period starting from the early 1970s, as the post/anti modern reaction to the dissolving national identity. This often confused and contradictory approach leads to different solutions that go from a return to a national/nationalistic resurgence to regionalism or communitarian approaches. All these solutions are clearly unhistorical fake proxies for the lack of a more structured political thought, but they include the necessity to fight the current political system and favor intolerance against immigration and integration. While the French Front National's and Northern Italian Lega Nord's platforms are typically based on anti-immigration issues, others, such as the Catalans and the Scottish independentist parties have more articulated positions.

Populist movements' arguments are not yet well developed and often prove inconsistent if examined with the traditional academic and cultural approaches. Frankly, they are inconsistent with any intellectual rational tool we approach them with, but they aggregate millions of voters who share confused emotions. Emotions are part of reality and often hide true as yet-unacknowledged facts. Psychoanalysis has taught that, after emotions are given order, they are not as irrational as they may appear. Though confused, these emotions have something important in common as well as many contradictions that often hinder people from staying together and are cunningly exploited by experienced politicians. The reason these movements are so successful and difficult to understand and detect is because of our flawed analytical

tools. Therefore we end up labeling them with the generic comprehensive definition of “populism”, which is itself a term that belongs to twentieth century politics. The dangers that successful populist, nationalist, neo-fascist, neo-communist, and more movements may pose to some founding values of our civilization, such as tolerance, justice, and equality should not be underestimated. But of all dangers, the greatest danger is excluding them from the democratic dialectic and refusing to understand their call for urgently needed change. On the other hand, we need to fear the disappearance of a ruling class able to implement organized values. If the now-so-popular grand coalitions just defend the *status quo* and don’t accept any of the “populist/emotional” instances, the loss of consensus for governmental and representative institutions will become unsustainable even in the democratic western countries.

The Crisis: An Opportunity for Progress?

The financial crisis is producing two effects on the environmentalist cause and, more generally, on the possibility of a radical reform of the production system. There will be immediate consequences and long-term effects. On one hand, as argued above, the financial and economic crisis might have distracted public opinion from the necessity of a radical change in the relation between humanity and nature. On the other, for some decades, analysts have questioned the link between growth rates in heavy and high environmental impact industry and the overall growth rates in Europe. There is a negative relation between the per capita income and the growth of polluting industry.

The critique is twofold: one is economic, the other ecological, but they work together pushing for change. From an economic point of view, in Western Europe, heavy industry, construction and low-tech manufacture are no longer competitive with the new developing countries, which have almost closed the gap between themselves and long industrialized countries. Thus, during the crisis and because of it, the idea that Europe should reconvert its economy into high-tech and low environmental impact productions opened a breach in the conservative and unreceptive mindset of many investors, manufacturers and of the people in general. The idea has been universally accepted that the next frontier of development and the last possible lifeboat to keep the current life standards will be an economy based on research, education, tourism, art and soft productions. Governments, operators and analysts may disagree on two main aspects. Firstly, should the disarranged European economies begin by setting their pitiable budgets with austerity policies and then kindle a demand-side economics? Or should they overcome the crisis by investing in the new supposedly competitive productions and risk a disaster – such as inflation – if they do not prove immediately effective? Secondly, the other major uncertainty concerns the pace of industrial reconversion. The transformation process needs to be “sustainable” otherwise we might destroy a production system without having had the time to build the new one. In this respect the never-ending dialectic between

change and conservation will help find a proper balance. Eventually, there will be a widespread consciousness about the opportunity for change. The supporters of the so-called protest vote embody this feeling and call for the hastening of it; on the other hand, conservatives want to slow it down. They might also agree about the need for change but they see it as a longer-term development. In this political and economic framework, the environmental issue plays a crucial role because environmentalists support a radical change in technology and in the relation between humanity and nature, a relation that challenges one of the basic modern ideas, namely the right to transform the world and make it artificial.

Chapter 6

Political and Social Changes

Abstract The chapter introduces a critique of the political strategy of radical environmentalists. It is introduced by a review of radical literature in environmental policy, the goal of which is to argue how it can be misleading for an effective political action. By applying the four stages approach, the chapter proposes an alternative definition of the conservative and the progressive. Eventually, the intellectual terms of a political alliance are sketched that overcome the traditional political loyalty when dealing with the environmental question.

Keywords Grassroots movements • Post-democratization • Social justice • Corporativism • Human/nature relation

The Need for Communication with Mainstream Public Opinion

The success of the populist movements has relegated the traditional radical organizations to an unimportant position in contemporary politics. The radical left and the fundamentalist greens, though still active, no longer play a role in contemporary politics nor are they effective in advocacy. If there is a clear vision about the future, namely an ideology that allows a well-defined plan of the steps to take in order to achieve a final goal, revolutionary actions make sense. What I called a “clear vision” operates like an “ideology”, as Hirschman suggested (1963), because it allows to envision the future steps toward a well defined final goal. The availability of a consistent thought and of a goal to pursue generates two essential resources: time and disposition to sacrifice. In fact, citizens are more motivated to accept temporary costs and losses on the way to progress if they are explained by a belief they convincingly share.

The classic nineteenth and twentieth century revolutionary approach – first seize ruling class power and then proceed to transformation – is no longer popular among radical thinkers and activists. This rational and modernist approach is outdated and the parties who, in principle, call for a radical change have abandoned this nowadays unlikely strategy. The most popular contemporary revolutionary movements – such as the Zapatistas, the “Movement of Movements”, “We are Everywhere”, “Other Economies Are Possible”, “One No, Many Yeses”, “Life after Capitalism”, the “Reclaim the Streets”, not to mention “*Indignados*”, “Occupy Wall Street” and

so on – all share the gloomy belief that they will never be able to overthrow the capitalist system and the dominating neo-liberal order. As a consequence, they adopt what Bennett (2001) defines the Zapatistas’ “playfulness and humor which would toss us onto the terrain of the possible” (quoted in Gibson-Graham 2006: xx, Introduction). Even worse, they do not have a coherent alternative model to propose; therefore they might be easily accused of nihilism by the establishment. True that some scholars, writers and activists in the last 20 years have been spreading some generic environmentalist ideas, such as Latouche’s de-growth theory (1993, 1996) and other evocative pop thinking. However, they still linger in a pre-ideological status. They are effective as communication and educational tools, but hitherto have failed to become “political”.

The opinion that the movements will never be able to overthrow the capitalist system and the dominating so-called neo-liberal order is doubtlessly realistic, the only pity is that it is conservative instead of revolutionary, as it would like to be. Along the same lines, Swyngedouw (2007) – whose ideas we have argued in Part I, Chap. 4 – does not propose any intellectual alternative which links analysis to action, although he advances a sound critique of the neo-capitalist use of the sustainable development compromise. All these revolutionaries (who will never dare to start a revolution and consider themselves defeated from the outset) crave for, is to carve a niche where they can hide and live as they like. This statement may seem contradictory with my call for an “urban secession” (Poli 2009) whose main argument is to create local spaces outside the neo-capitalist global order and favor the establishment of urban communities. Urban communities will form by seceding from the metropolitan government and are self-sustained in terms of economy, dwellings, jobs, education, and health care. The communities should mainly be self-governed so as to emphasize diversity and creativity. Although this position, at first glance, may seem similar to the movements and to the anarchist approach, it essentially differs because I develop a theoretical argument to apply to the overall politics and to parliamentary elections. Organizing protests and focusing on specific cases, as reported in the following chapter, is interesting only if it opens to a generalization. The grassroots movements wish to operate as a virus that in the long term will infect the global system and drive it to its own destruction. Waiting for the long term to happen, activists can have a lot of fun safely enjoying their innocuous revolutionary identity (Žižek 2006: 237). Unfortunately, we have gone through this phase without making any real step forward in the direction of spreading new contaminating ideas. On the contrary, the movements have been marginalized and are brought into the limelight only occasionally, possibly when they are instrumental to the (so-called) neo-capitalist order. If we think that revolutionary change is a serious ethical issue, we need to identify a common goal and conflicting political strategies capable of involving at least part – possibly the majority – of mainstream public opinion. If the movements really want to contaminate society’s beliefs with new ideas, they must create an open interaction with the system they want to overthrow. Otherwise they are neither political nor ethical and end up drawing together merry bunches of good old fellows who enjoy life as much as they can! It is useless implementing minor projects instead of dealing with our

neighbors, no matter how differently they think. Political – hence relational – action is the main and only possible source of change. Those who fear change, curb politics. The only hope of a better quality of life is in a renovated political action that must be based on a now-missing affirmative political thought. Without a meaningful interaction between competing parties there is no real conflict, thus not even effective communication, since conflict is a valuable form of communication. Contemporary radicals consider themselves to be outside a society (a system) they do not acknowledge and from which they want to part, rather than change. The foundation and the rationale of the long-lasting conflict/communication between capitalism and socialism was their shared opinion about the benefits of industrial growth and modernity. No matter how in disagreement they were about almost everything, socialists and libertarians concurred with the idea that they both were part of the same society, which was pursuing the same project of modernization and industrialization. They both saw the traditional society as a threat and an enemy to defeat. Therefore, they had a crucial common ground to meet on and eventually fight. We need to re-introduce political and intellectual radicalism *into* society to really give change a chance. If we believe that radical change is a serious issue and a real political option – if only to stimulate a political dialectic – we need to identify a common goal and conflicting political strategies capable of involving part of mainstream public opinion. Finally, we should not consider the actual society as a foreign dimension.

The Non-political Environmentalists

As this first group of environmentalist movements is steeped in a maximalist revolutionary legacy, another group claims that they are not “political”. The latter focuses on specific issues and insists that it doesn’t want to involve in political campaigns for the election of representatives in federal, state and local governments.

The first group’s associates refuse to participate in the current production system, in the class structure that generated it, and in the parliamentary democracy. By rejecting representative democratic institutions, they prove that they are not interested in discussing a better decision-making process or in being represented in governmental representative bodies. The second group’s associates do not question the system’s structure, hence they: (a) typically reject any ideology; (b) do not advocate any comprehensive strategy for change, thus proving to be patently conservative as they do not really question the *status quo*; (c) (exactly like the first group’s associates) they are not interested in using a supportive public opinion to win political power in the institutions. This attitude does not mean that they refuse parliamentary or representative democracy in principle. In this case, they would advance a revolutionary ideal and they would be immediately requested to declare what they propose instead. As a matter of fact, the claim of being not “political” implies that this group of environmentalist movements is interested in solving single situations and doesn’t want to get involved in regular politics. The participants in this

group, on one hand openly despise politics, and on the other they choose to have a stand in the establishment when it's time to deal with other issues. When it's time to vote, part of the participants form the traditional parties' constituency and vote according to long standing values, old platforms and customary loyalties; the others, who lack any real contact with the parties organization and are more and more numerous because of the crisis of the party system, constitute the hunting ground of the new populist parties. The outcome is that parliamentary democracy and institutions are not challenged; and discontent and protest is significantly weakened because it is limited to street protest and to Courts' decisions.

Eventually, the "revolutionary" and the "non-political" are more similar than expected: they both show the same attitude in that they consider the environmental issues to be less significant in politics than the traditional political themes such as employment, income distribution, welfare, education, health care, security, etc. Nonetheless, both groups, no matter how different from each other, are available to dialogue about the implementation of a series of technical "solutions" such as green technologies, impossible-to-enforce international treaties, and hopeless pleas to corporate responsibility. All this would only be possible under the condition that alleged "real politics" is kept aside. They apply an incremental piecemeal approach to change, which results in no change at all. Until now, radical environmentalists have been refusing – or are just not interested in – cooperation in enlarging voters' approval among a possible constituency based on a broadly shared environmentalist ideological platform. This is even more surprising because their way of coping with the environmental crisis does not question the current production system and the asserted neo-liberal global order – which, by the way, is far from really being "in order". Therefore, radical environmentalists present themselves as representatives of a new world to come, but they have biases towards participating in democratic institutions to make change possible.

Academic debate is full of essays and scholars who relate issues such as gender, religion and ethics to the environmental crisis. When I directed an international research program in the 1990s about "Ethics and Environmental Policies" financed by a major Catholic Foundation, highly qualified and influential scholars participated in several conferences and seminars organized by the Foundation in Europe and the US. I also invited some radical scholars, to let them have a say in the matter. High rank politicians listened attentively to the famous and influential scholars when they were speaking about social justice, international politics and bioethics. When the time came to discuss environmental issues, politicians overlooked those thoughtful arguments and considered them no more than minor topics suited to idle dinner conversation. In short, the intellectual debate did not make it into the political discourse. Part I of this book sketches a historical and epistemic explanation as to why this happened. If world-famous scholars¹ were incapable of having their ideas

¹In that period I organized several seminars and three International conferences with the cooperation of the United Nations Human Dimension for Global Change Program, the University of Georgia at Athens (Ga.) and the University of Padova (Italy). Scholars such as the economist

permeate the everyday discourse, how could marginalized radical scholars have a chance of diffusing their ideas? We blamed the Sustainable Development fraud for this involution of a possible environmental (r)evolution. The second chapter of Part III suggests how this problem also concerns the education and training of professionals involved in environmental policies.

Over the last few years, the situation has been changing again: the financial crisis is a major turning point and at the same time environmental ethics is back to being an issue in some solemn declarations uttered by religious and political world leaders. Thus, a new opportunity to promote change is now at hand, and radical thought could become a possibility again. In the case study reported below, we will see how the lack of a link between protest and the political-institutional process dooms advocacy movements to ineffectiveness. The problem is also more serious if we consider how, after so many defeats, the grassroots-led movements have lost hope in change and, instead, have learnt how to cope with their own repeated failures. They win broad consensus among citizens, but they cannot transform consensus into political power in the representative institutions, which is what really counts in any political system, and even more in a democracy. When the time comes to transform the single environmental issue into a political case and an electoral platform, environmentalists lose unity and effectiveness since they lack a common political vision and an ensuing strategy. As a consequence they fail to become a possible mass movement ready to mobilize against the current production system in the name of the environmental question.

Corporatist Society and New Subjects of Change

The idea that the decline of capitalism would have inevitably led to a corporatist society has existed since the first decades of the twentieth century. With the terms “corporatist society” and/or “corporativism”, we refer to “a type of society in which various large-scale corporate organizations with powerful vested interests are involved in the economic, social and political decision-making process. Examples of groups of people acting jointly in their interest include business groups, the professions, trade unions, and pressure groups” (Scott and Marshall 2009). Today, huge bureaucratized organizations and self-protecting/self-enhancing associations have established an exaggerated influence on governments’ policies. More and more often, this involves a recurring alliance between workers’ unions and their formerly antagonist parties, specifically large corporations. Such an association has annulled the traditional radical dialectic between capitalists and working class

Kenneth Boulding, the theologians Franz Boekle and Juergen Moltmann, the environmental ethicists Holmes Rolston III and Dale Jamieson, the epistemologist Kristin Shrader-Frechette and the Chinese economist Yu-Shi Mao took part in the program. See Poli and Timmerman (1993), and Ferré and Hartel (1994).

and has profoundly changed the structure of current capitalism, which is different from what it used to be when the class conflict was effective and currently raging. It is now difficult to distinguish social classes: the proletarian mass and poor farmers have transformed into groups of citizens with dignity, cultural identification, organizations and even-too-powerful vested interests. In Western societies exploitation is no longer intertwined with a passive acceptance of an invincible quasi-intrinsic inferiority by some social classes as used to be the case in pre-modern society. People may still consider themselves exploited and in a temporary position of inferiority, but they have interiorized the principle of equality for each and every individual. They consider the fight to fulfill equality and personal freedom a fundamental human right. There are no more religious credos that preach or political theories that assert the acceptance of social cast/class segregation. Traditional social classes having dissolved, workers' loyalty and solidarity with the corporations tend to prevail over class solidarity and also over loyalty to the country whose institutions have lost representation in the decision-making system. Several and diverse authors like Zygmunt Bauman, Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, David Harvey, Slavoj Žižek, Giorgio Agamben, Erik Swyngedouw, and others, have recognized and explained this profound societal transformation. Though they have offered different interpretations, they all refer to a "postmodern condition" and have overlooked the dramatically changed relation between humans and nature. The shared political discourse is still based on the classist society, a heritage of the pre-modern era. Some scholars and social analysts have substituted the classist society with *la société des modes de vie* (society of lifestyles) as in Latour (2012) and Viard (2011): the subdivision of social groups no longer happens not only in relation to income and/or occupation, but it emerges in a series of lifestyles and different shared beliefs. Marginalization affects new social subjects who do not play a role similar to the exploited proletarians or sub-proletarians.

Reconstructing a Helpful Dialectic

As argued in Part I, the re-negotiation of the covenant between humanity and nature will directly affect issues such as the organization of labor and production, the balance of power between capitalists and proletarians, social justice, individual freedom, and so on. The current production system – which may be based on the exploitation of workers as much as it is based on a specific form of (ab)use of natural resources – needs to be radically changed in order to fulfill the requirements of a fairer relation between humanity and nature. A change in the way we relate to nature may be a viable starting point for a new politics, which will also significantly affect relations among humans. A new view would help to radically transform the production system, not because it is unjust in the usually considered terms, but because it endangers nature and humanity. While the threat on nature is apparent, human society is also jeopardized. The current production system is also

engendering more and more inequitable relations among humans, other species and nature at large. The growing differences among social groups are a result, not the cause, of an unjust exploitation of nature. What really matters is that a different relation between humans and nature entails substantial political consequences, particularly in the now-missing radical option.

A crucial change is required regarding the environmental crisis. We may still need to radically subvert the current production system. However, we should prime change from the viewpoint of its physical implications. The priority is to fix the metabolism of the planet. As a result, the social structure and the forms of social injustice will also be modified. Nonetheless, the fact that social structure and class relations will hopefully change in the direction of a more just society should not generate any logical confusion between means and ends: the political goal is to re-negotiate the covenant between humans and nature in order to preserve the environment and the survival of human and non-human species. If this is the goal, the un-negotiable constraint is to preserve social justice and individual rights.

New Possible Constituencies and Old Political Platforms

Beginning approximately 150 years ago, political parties and public opinion groups formed in order to protect and enhance the rights of recently formed social groups in the competition for a more profitable and/or equitable appropriation of a growing wealth (we may call it “production surplus”). One faction engaged the defenders of the working class, the ones who typically urged that there cannot be freedom without social justice, that is, first restore equality; then we’ll be able to talk about freedom seriously. In the other grouping were the ones who maintained that individual freedom will lead naturally to social justice; free people will generate an economy that will guarantee more equity although in the beginning we have to accept some disparity and tolerate some social differences in the course of time. This statement is largely inspired by the Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal who claimed: “Liberal economists . . . were always guided by a “communistic” ideal, namely, by “interest of society as a whole” (reported by Arendt 1998: 33n). About the left/right definition, I refer to Bobbio (1996) and to the classic Laponce (1981). Finally, the sentence includes an obvious reference to Rawls’s Theory of Social Justice (1971). The synthesis of this dialectic has produced more or less extensive welfare policies in the course of the twentieth century. Thus the language of the political conflict has transformed into more vs. less government intervention in private lives, more or less welfare, more or less control by governments in economies. Concerns were overlooked, which might have kept people politically separated due to different beliefs about other crucial matters such religion, ethnicity and different sensitivity toward other species and nature.

A New Political Goal

Therefore, the goal becomes identifying new competing political discourses that generate new parties or two (or more) projects relevant to society and humanity. The new parties will aggregate people who might be very diverse from each other according to traditional interpretative standards. The new parties' members will abandon their traditional political affiliations, often adopted unquestioningly as a family or regional heritage, based on obsolete ideologies and inconsistent platforms. This process is not going to be a quick and easy one because it implies a radical change in the way people think and in the way scholars elaborate their ideas. Political action may and should hustle this process for two reasons: one ethical and one opportunistic. The ethical reason is that, if environmental issues are not taken seriously and do not win a representation in democratic institutions, both the human world and/or democracy will soon go awry. The opportunistic and quite cynical reason is that the fulfillment of this demand may lead to political success, because there is a growing political demand for representation of people who endorse environmental values and other connected subjects.

In order to revitalize the political discourse, we should first abandon the now almost universally adopted materialist discourse and introduce ethical and biological aspects to explain human behavior (Jamieson 2008: 22). If we link this political and intellectual operation to the relation between humans and nature and to the environmental question we have some chance in winning people and voters' attention. Some people may disagree on several issues, but they converge on the priority given to the environmental question, thus they may aggregate in a novel political constituency. With the introduction of a new political discourse, the divide between the progressive and the conservative will become different ideas about the diffusion of more ecological values, its overall opportunity, and the proper pace of the transformation process. Specifically, the progressive will speed up change in the direction of a new low environmental impact economy; the conservative will try to slow it down (or prevent) change in order to preserve the established industry and socio-political institutions.

Environmental Ethics and the Political Crisis of the Neo-liberal Order

Eric Swyngedouw, in his essay on post-democratization (2011), focuses on the "dynamics of de-politicization, the 'disappearance of the political', the erosion of democracy and of the public sphere, and the contested emergence of a post-political or post-democratic socio-spatial configuration. Swyngedouw openly claims that his analysis is post-Althusserian and elaborates on emancipatory democratic politics around the notions of equality and freedom. He maintains that "the crux of the

argument unfolds the tension between politics, which is always specific, particular, and ‘local’ on the one hand and the universal procedure of the democratic political that *operates under the signifiers of equality and freedom* (my italics) on the other” (2011: 371). In this statement, it is implicit that equality and freedom are assumed as generic values, inspired notions, rather than as projects to pursue. Swyngedouw’s goal is to revitalize “the political possibilities of a spatialized emancipatory project” (2011: 370). The essay is thoughtfully developed and honestly aims at proposing a viable social critique. It is – together with other critical essays on Sustainable development’s critique – an interesting starting analytical point in the search for a new strategy for change because it shifts attention from the sky to the earth, from philosophy to geography, from the development of a universal discourse to its implementation in real communities. However, Swyngedouw notices how “post-Althusserian thinkers Jacques Rancière, Alain Badiou, Etienne Balibar, and Slavoj Žižek reject the attempt to re-found political philosophy on the basis of the ‘political difference’ as articulated above. Their conceptualization is driven by a fidelity to the possibility of a revived emancipatory political project that moves beyond the efforts to re-inscribe political democracy in philosophical thought (Badiou and Žižek, 2010; Bosteels, 2005)” (2011: 374).

Swyngedouw’s ultimate goal is to identify emancipatory democratic politics, which can be reclaimed around notions of equality and freedom – as has been habitual in most liberation movements. Swyngedouw elaborates on the importance of spatial emancipatory projects, that is people’s attempt to claim the right to their own time and place, “to produce their own geographies, to think, to play, to seize the terrain that was allocated to the bourgeoisie. Rancière (1989), who describes a situation in mid-nineteenth century Paris, refers to “workers”; I purposely changed the term into people. Emancipatory politics is the refusal to be restricted to the places distributed to them in the police order (the factory/the home)” (2011: 375). However, something is missing in this statement: “producing geography” includes re-creating a link between local physical and natural resources and communities. This is the beginning of a possible new “political” and is obviously connected to the nature exploitation vs. stewardship dialectic. To open up to new possibilities, we need to make different lifestyles possible by increasing the range of lifestyles and economies available. Creativity in contemporary society – whether it comes from the people or from capitalists in the profit mongering system – is revolutionary because it diversifies the world by contesting the modern centuries-old tendency to uniformity, which translates into standardization, urbanization, globalization, etc. From a geographical point of view – geography is the discipline Swyngedouw and I roam in – also the creation of larger and larger states, federations, up to the establishment of a global order is part of a tendency towards uniformity and a lack of diverse possibilities. Thus, the so-called “performative practices of dissensual spatialization” are more than welcome. This process involves, as Davis (2010: 84) points out, “argumentative demonstration, a theatrical dramatization and a ‘heterologic’ disidentification”. Subjectivation is “never simply the assertion of an identity but the refusal of an identity imposed by others ...” (Davis 2010: 88).

The literature quoted above is admittedly “insurrectional” and therefore alien to my approach, as we’ll see soon. Nonetheless, it is useful to report it because it opens the way to the three crucial issues of this essay: (a) the new social demands; (b) the spatialization of the political, in Swyngedouw’s geographical terms; (c) the strategy for change and, indeed, a passion for it, that Albert Hirschman (1995) taught me more than 30 years ago.

Chapter 7

New Social Demands and the Confusion of Constituencies

Abstract In this chapter and in the following, I examine the political case of a controversial polluting cement plant by analyzing both the beliefs of the people involved and the language adopted. The considerations reported are drawn by this specific case and compared with other cases which occurred in several European countries and in the U.S. The goal is to envisage a strategy to shift from a non-political situation into political and institutional action.

Keywords Grassroots movements • Environmentalist advocacy • Political language • Geographical theory • Political theory

Introduction

In the following sections I report on an Italian advocacy case in which I was directly involved. I take this case just as an example and most of my considerations are drawn also from many other similar situations in which I took part in Europe and the US in different roles such as researcher, consultant and journalist. Sometimes, typically in Italy, I also joined one of the conflicting parties thus acting politically as an insider and an advocate. This position allowed me to better understand the internal social dynamics of the advocacy groups, including their underground strategies and emotions. I must admit that often I had an inner conflict between my aspiration to objectively understand what was really going on – so acting as a professional and considering the opponents' reasons – and, on the other hand, the inevitability of taking an advocate attitude whose goal is just to win the case.

By describing the case, I focus on the lack of political representation of people whose main concern is environmental and health protection. I wonder if the time is ripe to dare a political campaign centered on environmental policy. I am reserved about it because we lack a political language, not to mention an ideology, capable of connecting and unifying people's disjointed interests and beliefs.

The Advocacy Case of a Hazardous Plant

During a pre-election rally in a protected area, Susanna Camusso, leader of Italy's largest union, voiced a controversial statement. The Union that Ms. Camusso represents is CGIL (Confederazione Generale Italiana dei Lavoratori, which translates into Italian Workers' General Confederation). Besides being the largest Italian union organization it is also (or claims to be) the most progressive, radical and leftist. In the past it was strongly connected to the Communist Party. Its ultimate declared goal has always been the promotion of all workers' rights, with a preference for industrial blue-collar workers.

Toxic emissions produced by an outsized cement plant were causing problems in a district located in the hinterland of Venice (Italy), specifically in the Colli Euganei Regional Park, an environmentally protected area. Due to conservation laws and political agreements, the cement plant – owned by the world's fifth largest cement transnational company (Italcementi) – was to be closed immediately. To avoid this, the company had proposed a “revamping” investment that would keep the plant on the site for 30 more years. The revamping would have implied a substantial reduction of toxic emissions and – in the company's words – even an aesthetic improvement of the old plant. The company's project needed approval from the Park Board and other local and State governmental institutions. The new investment would have obliterated for good the possibility of getting rid of the cement factory in the protected area. Citizens' opposition had become so strong as to produce a stalemate and a postponement of the decision. More than a hundred thousand people live in the area affected by the pollution generated by the cement factory. The geographical configuration and the region's climate are also responsible for high pollution levels that often exceed the legal parameters established by both the Italian government and the European Union.

All this is nothing surprising or peculiar: similar cases come about all over the developed world when hazardous plants want to locate in a community. The novelty of the situation originates from: (1) the unprecedented – and inconsistent – deployment of political parties; (2) the new citizens' and politicians' political language; (3) the possible interpretation inspired by the analysis reported above and in Part One of this book.

While the battle against the new cement plant was raging, the union leader, herself a former member of the Italian Socialist Party, in order to justify her full endorsement of Italcementi's revamping, firmly voiced that: “unions respond to workers, not to citizens”. She also bluntly added: “environmental protection is not in the unions' competence”. By force of habit, Ms. Camusso spoke a language she was familiar with. She presumed that her words would appeal to most of the leftist audience that she was addressing. Instead, most of the workers she thought to represent were no longer the large majority of the constituency who intended to vote for the leftist coalition. The possible leftist voters were to a large extent middle class, students and professionals. In addition, most of the blue collars attending the rally were employed neither at the cement plant, nor in any other

local big factory. Manufacturing employment in the area was mainly guaranteed by a variety of small and middle-size companies whose workers were concerned for the environmental risks spawned by the cement plant. Most of the new jobs were created in environment-friendly tourism businesses, service economy, agriculture and local food production, and education. The Italcementi employment case involved no more than 80 workers, most of them close to retirement, who would have in any case kept their position for at least 5 more years. As one can expect, the exact figure of workers who were really affected by the investment was quite controversial especially if we include employment in the linked industries. In the end, the unemployment problem affected just a few dozens of workers and the local governments could easily help them to find them another job. This case was rarely a front-page issue in the local media, nor did it appear in the national press.

All independent economic analyses proved that the employment situation was not critical in the area compared to others. Italy has an efficient system of protection for workers whose jobs are jeopardized. Moreover, the plant lies in a region of five million inhabitants, who have been in a condition of full employment for 30 years. In the last decades, foreign immigrants have taken virtually all the new low-ranking – not necessarily poorly paid – jobs. At the same time the educated youth lacks qualified jobs and people are deeply concerned about health risks caused by the plant emissions. Until 40 years ago, the area was economically depressed and many citizens had to emigrate abroad or to other Italian regions to find a job and avoid destitution. This situation created a political language and an emotional attitude that supported the rhetoric of all the union leaders, including Ms. Camusso. Speaking in public, people were embarrassed and loath to refuse solidarity to the few workers who might lose their job if the investment was definitively dismissed. Officially, workers in other industries felt they should show cohesion and endorse the investment approval – from which only the multinational would really profit – no matter how dangerous for people's health. They believed that fighting for better health was unethical if the alternative was losing jobs, no matter how few. Some people – including politicians' communication advisors – think that public opinion perceives health as a luxury good although most individuals put it at the top of their list of priorities. This attitude is reinforced by old beliefs that do not fit in the present situation, but they are the only language currently available.

In contrast, when asked personally, almost all the workers and citizens admitted that they were scared by the investment's health consequences. Most of them were also severely critical of the visual impact of a huge new plant in the protected area. Visual impacts were considered another luxury good and less educated people were reluctant to mention it as a social demand, although most of them were sensitive to landscape conservation and enhancement. When the committees were collecting signatures for a petition to authorities and for the following class action, some people, mainly women, argued that they would have liked to sign because they agreed with the necessity to stop Italcementi's investment. However, they did not dare to endorse the cause because they were scared of being reprimanded by their neighbors and in general by public opinion. As in many other cases, women were much more concerned than men about health risks, but some of them refused

involvement in the advocacy action. On the other hand, men proved to be: (a) less risk averse and needed to show a *macho* defiant attitude regarding possible health and environmental harm; (b) more keen to adopt the old rhetoric and ideological language. It was even more striking how workers and clerical employees in small and mid-size companies in the area, felt frustrated and bitter towards both the multinational and unionists who cooperated with the authorities. Nonetheless, in public, it was not easy even for them to abandon the old language.

Two Grassroots Advocacy Groups

Citizens reacted by organizing themselves into two grassroots advocacy committees. One committee – “*Lasciateci respirare*”, which translates as “Let us breathe” – gathered leftist parties and radical voters. Its leader was a veteran of the 1968 and 1970s’ revolutionary movements. The committee was established 15 years before to fight against the pollution caused by the cement plant. The other committee – “*E noi?*” (“What about us?”) – was founded 5 years ago and grouped citizens who, to a large extent, voted for right wing parties, including the extremist Lega Nord, the Northern Italian separatist, populist and allegedly racist party. The two committees worked side by side for more than a year. Surprisingly, they spoke the same language and cooperated effectively and loyally. Besides the companionship created, it was striking to realize how they shared the same beliefs regarding future environmental and economic policies, which in the past had been the most divisive issue. Also the social class composition of the two advocacy groups did not show the expected homogeneity. In both groups there were professionals and blue-collars, affluent and low-income people, self-employed, businesswomen, businessmen and employees. Instead, the representatives of all major political parties – the parties that ran for elections and thus were represented in councils and governments – showed internal divisions regarding the revamping of the cement-plant. The environmental activists and the committee members censured as instrumental the multiple positions inside the parties. They accused the parties of double-crossing by having two (or more) opposite positions in order to gain consensus from both factions on an issue that really concerned the large majority of the citizenship. But the party leaders were confident that they could trust their constituency’s loyalty when it came to voting for institutional representation, which was what they really cared about. They knew that an environmental case was not yet important enough to shift votes from the traditional parties’ affiliation. If the deceitful attitude of the parties’ leadership had been conscious, the problem would have proved less serious. The real problem was that it was not a deliberate action (although, as it is customary, party leaders immediately tried to take advantage of the situation). In fact, this happened because the electorate votes according to a loyalty based on a well-established political discourse and on a specific fossilized rhetoric.

Therefore, although the citizens’ main concern was clearly health protection and qualified jobs in new industries, environmentalists were unable to overcome

century-old cultural and political divisions that still determined how they voted to elect the official representatives. Loyalty to family and local communities also played a meaningful role. Thus, constituencies did not significantly change their usual vote, not even at local elections. The political-institutional competition did not take place in society, but inside lobby-dominated parties. Their consensus was not the outcome of some sort of manipulation, not to speak of an authoritarian directive: it was part of a shared belief, still unchallenged by a sound alternative option. Nonetheless, discontent was clearly widespread among the people and would have burst into a protest vote in the following political elections when the “populist” FSM won up to one fourth of the Italian votes and became the most voted party in the country.

This local case shows that the historical dualism between capital and labor, still at the heart of basic political divisions, does not allow a meaningful description of a radical alternative to the current economic and political system.

The Communication Issue

The town Mayor – a member of the right wing conservative libertarian party – was the most reliable and convinced ally of the workers’ union who was also cooperating closely with the multinational company. The workers’ most active and charismatic leader was a member of a radical party, still inspired by a Marxist legacy. I doubt that young unionists and radical activists still admit their Marxist heritage and/or have ever read a line of Marx’s essays. Nonetheless, they grew up in a social milieu that used Marxist paradigms to interpret economics and social conflict. Again, this would be nothing new since this alliance had already happened several times when a polluting plant intended to settle in an area with poverty and unemployment problems, which, incidentally, were not so urgent in this case. The novelty of the situation is that both the leftist unionists and the libertarian Mayor spoke the same language to support each other. And it was also the Italcementi’s capitalist language. The Mayor did not emphasize at all the necessity of development in order to create new jobs, as one would expect from a libertarian who might consider crises as necessary cyclic turning points for industrial reconversion and further development. He declared that his main concern was employment and “conservation” of jobs. Calling for “conservation” or “protection” of jobs implies that the priority is not an efficient and profit-oriented industrial system; priority would be some sort of government intervention to protect jobs rather than profits that should hopefully be distributed among the workers. This is an acceptable approach, except that it does not belong to the libertarian platform declared by the Mayor and his party.

On their behalf, Unionists claimed that the cement industry is necessary for “further development” and for the building of more infrastructures. They bluntly denied any health problem and defended investment in obsolete low-skills jobs instead of worrying about their educated and unemployed children who would never accept a job in a cement plant. It has already happened many times and in many

places that occasionally, in a specific controversy, capitalists and workers allied against non-vested interests, but till then I never witnessed them using the same language and the same vision of the future so convincingly.

The Old-Fashioned Committees' Strategy

The committees' strategy was ineffective both in preventing Italcementi's project and in the promotion of civic environmental consciousness. The committees – as all the other environmental advocacy groups do – operated on two levels as they had been doing for decades in many other disputes. Typically, one action was to try to mobilize people by organizing rallies, inundating newspapers' editorial offices with letters and e-mails, and by employing the well-tested movements' toolbox. In general they were effective in gathering many people and in informing them about the problems and the risks they were running. The second action was to plead to any kind of Court (administrative, civil, tort) trying to demonstrate that the projects violated the law, no matter if they were merely trivial quibbles. Most of the time, violations were difficult to prove and the judges' verdict was controversial both if it was in favor or against the movements. Thus, the losers – whoever they were – always appealed the verdicts, their goal being to delay or overturn the decision rather than definitely hindering it. Both actions had pros and cons. The first action was somehow helpful in informing many people and in bringing the issue to the media's attention, at least for a while. On the other hand, this kind of mobilization fails to convert into a possible political power and spreads discontent and frustration rather than the hope of influencing the decisions. When the time comes to vote, the citizens who endorsed the committees' pleas and actively participated in the environmental activism do not find an organized political party to vote for, so their will is dispersed and inconsistent. When the protest movements try to transform into a running party, they may turn out to be successful, as has recently happened in most Western European countries. The problem is that the new parties that are trying to satisfy the new political demand still lack a comprehensive platform that goes beyond mere protest. The established political forces blame the new formations of being populists and not without reason. In fact they have not yet elaborated a coherent project and comprehensive platforms.

Chapter 8

New Constituencies for Social Change

Abstract To make a new radical environmentalist policy viable it is necessary to create a political-cultural background which brings environmentalists together with people inspired by new economy, cultural creatives, wikinomics, organic farming, cultural and immaterial consumption models, etc. The alliance will be grounded on a new covenant between humans and nature, and on a non-materialist interpretation of politics. Therefore, new research helps to radically change the political and the production system, not because the system is unjust in the usually- considered terms, but because it endangers nature and society. The criticality of social justice and individual freedom in everyday life is not denied. Rather, meaningful political reforms, and consistent political platforms, will be possible if we include as a priority the relation between humans and nature in the political debate.

Keywords Unemployment • Education • Creative industries • Voting behavior • Voters' anthropology • Cultural creatives

The Activists' Anthropological Setting

At the public hearings about the cement plant's revamping project, one could distinguish a strikingly different attitude between two factions, something that could be better studied by social anthropologists and psychologists rather than by specialists in political studies. If we approach the analysis of the citizens grouping in the Committees as an ongoing process, rather than an occasional event, one possible step forward would be the transformation of the activists' shared emotions and attitudes into political ideologies and platforms.

How can we classify the two groups? The contest was between the “dreamers” vs. the “let’s be practical’s”; the “risk averse” vs. the “you need to take risks to progress” or the “there’s nothing you can do to avoid health risks”; the supporters of “science (technology) as usual” vs. “alternative science and technology.” The plant-revamping’s supporters showed aggressive feelings and, hence, they were also daring about health risks and environmental transformation. This section of the population accepts violence and antagonism as positive moral values. They have specific consumption and life-style patterns: they drive big SUVs, love hunting and eating meat no matter how genetically modified, attend bodybuilding gyms, practice expensive and violent sports, enjoy bars and discos, etc. They may either have strong

and conservative religious beliefs and church belonging, or are militant atheists and agnostics. Certainly though, they are materialistic, accept modern values and are career-oriented. The pro-revamping group does not care too much about local heritage and traditions. If somehow they do, they believe that technology as usual does not conflict with the possibility to protect heritage and traditions and can even help conservation. They might have biases against other cultures and immigrants if they do not conform to the modern values. On the other hand, though, they might be tolerant and inclusive because they endorse the globalization ideology. The condition for inclusion is that immigrants are assimilated to the standard modernity schemes. Their voting behavior ranges from left to right sectors, with a slight preference for the latter. In the pro-revamping group, men are definitely more numerous than women.

The anti-revamping people belonged to a social group who prefer to drive low emission cars – or, if possible, bike and use public transportation – buying and cooking and growing organic food, attending yoga classes, practicing open-air sports, taking care of pets, organizing (possibly veggie) barbecues in country facilities, and the likes. They may participate in the church organization or not, but certainly they are concerned with spiritual issues although some of them may claim to be atheists and even anti-clerical. Most of them are tolerant of immigrants and open to learning from other cultures. At the same time they care about local heritage and their ancestors' traditions and are afraid that they might be wiped away by the physical and social effects of modernity. From many points of view they have deeply embraced modernity values because they also support social innovation and creativeness.

If re-grouped according to their voting behavior, the same citizens would reshuffle randomly. This apparently incongruous behavior can no longer be explained by the usual materialist class-centered approach. My thesis is that the environmentalist attitudes depend on a particular relation between humans and nature that concerns also genetics and ethics. Some authors (de Waal [1996](#), [2014](#)) have concluded that even among apes it is possible to identify what we can call ethical attitudes. The arcane fear of a barely comprehensible Faustian technology surmounts most people's interest for more income and material consumption whose marginal utility is irrelevant in contemporary Western countries; not to mention the disappearance of social classes' cultures. Lifestyles today play a crucial role in defining the position in the society and they are not so strictly related to income and social classes.

Certainly, at the anti-cement plant rallies and meetings, there were several contradictions. Statements made by some rightist activists about the integration of immigrants and about some international policy issues were quite disturbing. On the other hand some pro-revamping workers showed a sincere human solidarity although they were ready to destroy the landscape. Although the anti-cement plant supporters did not share the same political principles, politics implies negotiation: if the core discourse was environmental protection about which it was necessary to have strong positions, then, on other issues, one should accept a dialogue that is likely to end up in agreement because of the basic principles elaborated in the environmentalist discourse. In the 1950s it was quite customary in the secular

modern parties (including the communists) to have internal controversies about issues such as homosexuality and even about women's rights. Most of the party members were not yet ready to change deeply rooted biases. However, the general structure of the political discourse led to the final acceptance of the new progressive principles. Some people speak a discriminatory language because they are simply uneducated, not because they are immoral.

An Inconsistent Voting Behavior

Notwithstanding the shared beliefs, when the advocates against the hazardous cement plant were called to vote for representatives at Local, National and European Parliaments and Councils, they revealed a tendency to split again into two groups. Self-employed and/or people working in the private sector perceived themselves as belonging to a different social class or, probably more precisely, to another cultural anthropological group, whose interests supposedly contrasted with (using the terms derogatorily) communists, environmentalists, blue collars, government and bureaucratic employees, and people who belonged to state subsidized corporations (including academicians, medical doctors and so on). The two groups: (a) were very similar in the most urgent and meaningful beliefs, i.e. they thought that both health and environment were seriously threatened by the revamping of the cement plant; (b) were completely different in their social behavior from the supporters of the revamping of the hazardous plant; but (c) they were skeptical about sharing broader political views and aggregating around a comprehensive political project. As a matter of fact such a comprehensive political project was and still is missing.

Prof-letarians of All Countries, Divide!

The self-identification of the innovative small business entrepreneurs in the capitalist and libertarian parties slows down the transformation of the political discourse and the aggregation of innovative political constituencies. The contemporary labor and capital markets have changed considerably, much faster than people's perception, which happens through the lens of old ideologies and established political discourses. Most of the assistance that the new environment-friendly entrepreneurs might receive from the governments to support the new economy is drained by powerful industry lobbies intertwined with gargantuan government-lead bureaucratic apparatuses. The obvious outcome is the conservation of obsolete productions and low-profit jobs. Even worse, the power of industrial and union lobbies hampers a possible industrial regeneration. Unions, bureaucrats and capitalists perceive the new economy as a threat to their established privileges. The leftist environmentalists also unwittingly support conservation. Most of them are still inspired by an archaic welfare ideology and – more or less consciously – show a penchant for a state-

controlled economy that protects only old jobs and is hostile to change. They distrust and fear a competitive market-oriented economy. Moreover, this old ideology, with its emphasis on large organizations and mass dimensions, is quite inappropriate for promoting environmentally friendly solutions at a human scale of social relations. Young professionals – the new “prof-letarian” mass whose unemployment rate in Europe and U.S. is the highest compared to other age and social groups – need to be given the opportunity to do what they have learnt and like to do. Even more correctly the “prof-letarians” would not expect that someone in power should resolve their problems. Instead they should fight for their own rights. The reason they don’t is because a political discourse, which includes a sound new vision, is still missing.

Two Contrasting Economic Industrial Models

In the course of the last two centuries, large corporations and their workers have significantly contributed to creating the current wealth, albeit at the cost of having wreaked havoc on the environment, caused unforeseen health diseases, and exposed citizens to unknown hazards. Not to speak, of course, of social and territorial injustice. The new alliance between the corporate bureaucracies and the large Unions has transformed a supposedly competitive, free-market society into a corporatist one. Socialists have always challenged the idea that the free market was anything but free. Therefore, they have called for more government in order to fix the flaws of pure economic competition in income and profit redistribution. To a certain extent and for some time, this strategy was necessary and effective. However, the organizations devised to protect the poor and the marginalized became larger and stronger; even worse, they were not dismissed – not even remodeled – when they achieved the goal. Thus, while the problem they were started for was solved, the organizations, instead of being dismantled, grew bigger and more powerful. When asked what was best between a libertarian economy, a government-led one, or a mix of the two, Albert Hirschman maintained that there is a fourth and better possibility: a cyclical or a recurring succession of the two radical positions (1982). This approach would at least partly hamper the self-empowering organizations that not only survive the problem they were created for, but grow although the problem is no longer there. A military metaphor may help in the understanding of this point. Lord Wellington’s famous quote “the second most difficult task after a battle lost, is a battle won” could be paired with another consideration drawn from military strategy: when you are about to win a war, you better begin waging operations by thinking how to implement the peace process. Otherwise, you may not be able to reconvert both war-economy and war-society and make them suitable to a peace situation.

The corporatist drift of society is also revealed by the now recurrent proposals to let the workers participate in the companies’ profits. Today, in Western countries heavy industry is not competitive anymore and it is doomed to shrink because: (a) it cannot expand anymore because of physical limits to growth, such as lack of space,

pollution, and depletion of resources which includes both ores and cheap labor; (b) it cannot compete with corporations located in countries where manpower is abundant and cheap, and where there are fewer environmental regulations; (c) a dwindling demand depending on both saturation and change in consumers' preferences. Since a decade or so ago, this is a somewhat shared idea whose implementation is (probably too) slowly growing. On the other hand, there is a new public opinion that still lacks self-identification and political representation. It typically – but not necessarily – consists of educated people who are more interested in immaterial goods – such as education, training, research and development. You may still call them *petit bourgeois* except that now they represent a vast majority and the real mass whose income and future perspectives are rather gloomy. They are the “proletarians”.

Creative craftsmen, organic farmers and artists – just to mention some archetypes of the new economy – also challenge part of the large corporate model. If this new economy takes off and is not curbed by governments' policies, the traditional manufacturing sector – which still stands at the foundation of developed countries economies – will incur a rapid restructuring. This is something to be concerned about because too fast a reconversion might destroy the economy before the new one has taken off. We can identify the seeds of the new ideology – which might prime a change that is already in the air – in that growing number of people who accept a new ethics of the relation between humans and nature that is sometimes mixed up with spiritual attitudes. Religious leaders, including the Dalai Lama and the Pope, have recently taken positions about the environmental crisis and about the limits to science. At a more pop level, we are all aware of healthy habits also inspired by ethical convincement (see vegetarians), and have met with movements calling for a back-to-nature lifestyle. This new attitude – you may call it “naturalism” – is now fashionable among a large part of affluent Westerners. These opinion groups, whose numbers have grown dramatically in the last decades, occasionally come together. Although they share most relevant values, life-styles and goals, currently they stay aloof from any political involvement aimed at a radical transformation of the political and production system. Certainly, in the long term, the new attitudes and behaviors are likely to alter the structure of the economy, but the idea of a radical change, which needs to be sustained by a sound thought and a new political discourse – if not a new ideology – is still quite a remote vision to come for many.

Chapter 9

The Irrelevance of History and Geography in Politics

Abstract New technologies and extensive environmental impacts require a reassessment of interpretation paradigms both in history and in political geography. Established ideologies and shared values no longer shape the way people organize facts and ideas. Local communities have lost the power-structure that created a consensus based on a long lasting communication and education process. Environmentalist movements are rather successful in almost all countries, but not enough to win a majority and to contrast populist movements because they are perceived as a branch and a natural ally of the traditional left wing (Socialist) parties rather than a brand new alternative political proposal. Radical approaches fail either to prove themselves completely separated from the traditional political system or to be effective in producing change.

Keywords Political theory • Post-democratization • Elections • Political movements • European politics • Political ideologies

Mass Politics on Internet

The Internet has recently fostered the success of both large populist movements and smaller parties that propose new ideas and political approaches. They have in common the characteristic of lacking a territorial connection and aggregate only on the Internet following some communication guru who is able to give a voice to and convey people's needs and feelings. We do not know yet if the success of the political movements that are fully taking advantage of the ICT's opportunities will be lasting or transient. However their organization and their constituencies are new and peculiar. Socialist, Christian and Libertarian parties have constructed the narrative of European politics for at least a century and a half. For a couple of decades now, the Greens and the ecologists have also won a stake in the European Union and in single states' Parliaments, although most of them have hardly separated from the socialist community and heritage, and often see themselves as a minor branch of the left sector. On the contrary, one of the main features of the new movements – that being new are full of contradictions and some confusion – is that they lack both history and geography. In fact, they neither reconnect with the established western political traditions, nor are their constituencies rooted in specific areas since their representatives respond to some

sort of cyberspace leaders. It's no surprise that some countries have changed or are trying to modify the electoral laws in order to hinder the proliferation of too many parties that, thanks to the Internet, could eventually be in the position to send representatives to Parliaments. The proliferation of minor parties typically happens at the European Parliament. In fact, EU legislation requires that member states' citizens elect their representatives with a proportional system.

There is no longer the filter of: (a) established ideologies and shared values that shape the way people organize facts and ideas; and (b) local communities whose power structure creates a consensus which is based on a long lasting communication and education process. The populist movements' platforms include most of the issues related to environmental and health protection, cultural creatives, light industries, communication and the likes. They are also somehow contradictory and most of their success is the result of protest rather than of a conscious endorsement of their platforms. Nonetheless, their success proves that: (a) there is a political demand about certain issues not considered by traditional ideologies and overlooked by established parties; (b) the Internet allows aggregation of large constituencies that lack geographical proximity and a direct contact between power and territory.

The Underrepresentation of Environmentalists in Politics

These movements might anticipate the possible creation of new constituencies formed around environmental (and in general new) issues who unify a dispersed political demand. Environmental problems, and the people who put them on the top of the priority list, are under-represented in the political debate for elections and consequently in representative bodies. This occurs all over Western Europe and the US. To win European and North American citizens' votes, political campaigners still focus mainly on traditional issues such as income distribution, employment, infrastructure building, economic policies, and occasionally on individual rights, national pride and international policy; the last two items regard mainly the United States. The recent crisis has reinvigorated the attention put on welfare policies, class struggle, and fiscal burdens. Certainly, the environment is also considered, but it is never located at the top of the priority list, nor it is conceptually linked to the other questions. Most of the time, it is an addendum to the mainstream political discourse at national level. Occasionally, environment becomes a political issue at election time if there is some specific occurrence, such as a hazardous plant location, or a new high impact construction. Nonetheless environmental issues are much more popular in local controversies than at national level. This also depends on the political tactics politicians employ in campaigns and platforms: communication specialists prefer to apply a well-tested language rather than introduce innovative issues, which might be divisive and eventually prove a disaster in winning votes. Therefore the old rhetoric keeps reaffirming itself. This consideration also applies to radical parties and constituencies. The revolutionary content of radical environmentalism is not used in

political campaigns although since at least three decades ago, many observers and scholars have claimed the potential of environmentalism and environmentalists as privileged subjects of change. The time may be ripe to launch a political campaign centered on environmental policy.

Strategy for Change

We need to identify new subjects and strategies out of old and new biases. In the 1950s and the 1960s, Rosa Park, Martin Luther King Jr. and others didn't call for an overturning of values or of a political system in order to guarantee Afro-Americans' civil rights long since denied. Rather, they fought against the contradictions of the American society that was flagrantly failing to apply the same values they claimed to believe in (Foner 1998; Melucci 1996). Similarly, the environmentalist approach does not imply overturning the entire political and economic system. It would, however, represent a profound change when it appears manifest how new social demands, namely in health and environmental protection, and in more democratic participation, are not fully implemented in the current political system. Even libertarianism and free market competition would be an old/new value to apply if approached from a leftist and egalitarian perspective. We would not waste time overturning the unquestioned icons of the post Iron Curtain ideology, i.e. the neo-liberal capitalism, as an economic system, the parliamentary representative democracy, as the political ideal; and the humanitarianism and inclusive cosmopolitanism as a moral foundation. Rather, environmentalists will propose their new values and make the institutions work at their best. Acting in such a way is now conceivable because there is a potential constituency conveying revolutionary values, although most of the potential voters consider themselves anything but radicals. They believe themselves to be conservatives because they believe in most traditional political values, but they are real revolutionaries in respect to new environmentalist and cultural creative attitudes.

Badiou – also quoted by Swyngedouw (2011: 370–371) – calls for overturning what he defines the “capitalo-parliamentary order” which spells in arrangements of impotent participation and consensual ‘good’ techno-managerial governance (see, among others, Agamben 2005; Crouch 2004; Mouffe 2005; Swyngedouw 2005; Žižek 1999). This consensualism in policing public affairs is paralleled by all manner of often-violent insurgent activism and proliferating manifestations of discontent, such as the *indignados* (indignant) in Spain or the *αγανακτισμενοι* (outraged) in Greece, as well as the immense success of insurrectional literature like “*The Coming Insurrection*” (The Invisible Committee (2009). Los Angeles (CA). Semiotext(e) edition), not to mention Hessel's celebrated Indignants' manifesto (2010). The movements' names are explicative of the protest's primary goal. In Italy, the FSM organized a rally bluntly called “Vaffa Day” which literally translates into “Fuck You Day”.

However, this is real consensus in “policing public affairs” and not “consensualism” as Swyngedouw maintains. Participation is impotent and we are governed by consensual “good” techno-managers. There are good reasons to fight against a system, which is clearly wrong and unfair, but most people do not want to change, having found their place in it. Thus, reactions are violent and desperate. They are instigated by minorities who dream of an insurrection – not even a revolution – that the large majority of the voters don’t really want. Insurrection is different from revolution because the first is just a protest; the latter presumes a real change and a project. When the media emphasize this aimless protest, they conceal the real demand for a true political change. When unemployed young people march against the bank system that has allegedly provoked the crisis, they fail to consider that they are depending more than anybody else on the bank system and it is in their main (immediate and long term) interest to restore its good functioning, which, by the way, may include wealth redistribution. A strategy for change requires some resources to be employed to support change. At present, it is worthless to start a revolutionary change with a voiced destruction of a system that is already dying. When some calculations are done, protesters realize that they survive because their savings are in the banks or invested in the stock market or in some real estate. The welfare system, which to a different extent applies in all countries including the U.S., also requires a vital economy. If we approach the crisis in mere economic and materialistic terms, the only possible conclusion is that we need to restore the system and the best we can do is to make it a little more just. But not too fair, because if the distribution of income is too equal, then the system doesn’t work. In Rawlsian terms, we need and are ethically allowed to accept some economic injustice as long as it benefits the poorer. This attitude is the ultimate defense of the status quo. To change society, we must appeal to new principles, such as democracy and participation, individual freedom and solidarity values, representation and legitimate institutions whose performances should be improved. However, all these ideas have been around for too long a time and have been somehow incorporated into social and political life, and into our own conscience. To spur a new revolutionary change – highly welcome as a result of the current crisis – we need to elicit more haunting and relevant values in the name of which people would be ready to act.

Crouch rightly claims that while “elections certainly exist and can change governments, public electoral debate is a tightly controlled spectacle, managed by rival teams of professional experts in the techniques of persuasion, and considering a small range of issues selected by those teams”. Crouch also adds: “behind the spectacle of the electoral game, politics is really shaped in private by interaction between elected governments and elites that overwhelmingly represent business interests. Under the conditions of a post-democracy that increasingly cedes power to business lobbies, there is little hope for an agenda of strong egalitarian policies for the redistribution of power and wealth, or for the restraint of powerful interests” (Crouch 2004: 4). What is more arguable is that the “mass of citizens plays a passive, quiescent, even apathetic part, responding only to the signals given them” (2004: 4). This position – also endorsed by Swyngedouw – is arguable on the ground of the cement plant’s empirical experience described above. The case proves that citizens

are very active in environmental activism, and not quiescent at all to big powers and lobbies. True, activists are ineffective and the goal is to find out the reasons for their ineffectiveness. The “post-democratic” and “post-capitalistic” bias is one major reason. We undervalue the consensus that democratic rules and institutions still retain among most people. Because the democratic order is not vanquished in people’s perception, we should rely on the consensus in democratic values and prove how they are neglected and violated. Then, we should create a constituency around both the legitimacy of the institutions – which is taken for granted by most people – and around themes that are deeply considered by a large part of the people. Then, we can aggregate these citizens into a political constituency. This is a typically political process. The so-called (by Beck 1997) ‘unauthorized actors’ (experts, managers, participatory governance arrangements, consultants, and the like) can be fought if we call for more legitimate institutions rather than refuse them by labeling them as post-democratic. We should look to new representative institutions conceived around the availability of telecommunications and social networks. Only if we restore the primacy of the political, can we return allegedly abusive pundits to the corral of their specific role. Good politics requires a balanced mix of (a) thinkers who provide visions, (b) politicians who connect people, and (c) pundits capable of solving practical problems. To achieve this goal, we need to improve the representative system and the decision-making process. Currently, political and technical roles are highly confused for many reasons, which I have more broadly discussed in “*Mobility and Environment*” (Poli 2011). In this essay, I focus on one specific point of view, i.e. we’ll have good politicians if they represent important rights, values and claims that now are not considered in the political debate. Bad politics is a consequence of the irrelevance of the problems and of the constituencies that should be represented in the political debate and in the representative bodies.

Swyngedouw (2011: 373) concludes that “Post-democratization is a particular procedure of colonization of the political predicated upon the disavowal of antagonism through the progressive inauguration and institutional arrangement of consensus in a pluralistic liberal order and the de-politicization of the sphere of the ‘economic’ understood as the procedures of wealth creation and distribution”. I agree with this position, but this is exactly why I propose a new competitive dualism between a conservative-modern society willing to slow down change, and an innovative new constituency open to a new relation with nature, willing to adopt new lifestyles in the framework of the institutional order.

Part III
Gender and Education in Urban Policies

Chapter 10

Gender, Polis and Nature

Abstract An ecological and eco-feminist critique may promote an innovative environmentalist urban policy. A new relation between humanity and nature implies a different aesthetic and architecture of the city. In the past, in control of the public sphere, men built their cities according to their attitudes and values. Traditional (masculine) behavior produced an efficiency based on dominating a resilient nature. This approach is no longer viable given the environmental crisis. Women are the privileged subjects of radical change, assuming a leadership role in the environmentalist movement and proposing cities envisaged according to a new way of thinking and feeling that accords with a reconsidered relationship between humanity and nature.

Keywords Urban geography • Radical urbanism • Environmentalism • Eco-feminism • City architecture

Introduction

The third part of this essay elaborates on two somewhat different topics. The first chapter explores a gender argument of policies of social and political change, approached from the perspective of promoting respect for nature. A gender analysis helps to both tackle practical problems and explain some wide-ranging questions in contemporary politics. It connects with Part I and Part II because it reports on the new values that are called to create a new politics and, more practically, new constituencies. Chapter two deals with the education and training required for professionals who adopt a new approach to urban management. The chapter is drawn from the project of an International Master Program in “Sustainable Urban Management” that I direct at Libera Università IULM, Milan, Italy. Education and professional ethics are also crucial issues in enhancing new values and attitudes.

From Social Justice to Responsibility for Nature

An ecological and eco-feminist critique may promote an innovative environmentalist urban policy. A new relation between humanity and nature implies a different aesthetic and architecture of the city. In the past, in control of the public sphere, men built their cities according to their attitudes and values. Traditional (masculine) behavior produced an efficiency based on dominating a resilient nature. This approach is no longer viable given the environmental crisis. Women are the privileged subjects of radical change, assuming a leadership role in the environmentalist movement and proposing cities envisaged according to a new way of thinking and feeling that accords with a reconsidered relationship between humanity and nature.

As a geographer, I also put the spatial implications of politics at the center of my reasoning and focus on issues of urban justice. In this chapter, I treat the topic from a gendered perspective, which includes a different approach to science, city design and environmental policy. Environmentalism has become a core belief for a growing number of people active in Western countries during the last 30 years. Ray and Anderson (2000) estimate these represent approximately one fifth of the U.S. and European populations. Bruno Latour (2012) discusses the “*anthropologie des modernes*”, namely the co-presence of different “*modes de vie*” in contemporary modern society, from a philosophical and cultural-anthropological perspective. Most contemporary empirical research and intellectual elaborations accept that environmentalist and female values are crucial in shaping people’s current and future lifestyles (Viard 2011). The new social groups, often defined as “cultural creatives”, adopt, or would be ready to adopt, a way of life characterized by the diffusion of psychoanalysis, self-consciousness/self-empowerment, neo-spiritualism and a growing influence of Eastern philosophies that have inspired serious (though controversial) epistemological studies (Capra 1975, 2007). This culture has absorbed and/or merged with other radical movements, mostly established in the 1960s. They are typically non-violent and give priority to human rights and quality of life, rather than to economic growth. Empirical studies indicate that among “cultural creatives”, women represent a majority (Agarwal 2000). Environmental epistemologists have also found inspiration in Edgar Morin’s systems theory epistemology, so that a theoretical apparatus would be available as groundwork to develop a political strategy (Morin 2008; see also Bocchi and Ceruti 2008). Nonetheless, cultural creatives still linger in a pre-political dimension.

An Environmentalist ‘Gender Trouble’

A different, and specifically female, approach to science, city design and environmental policy leads to different and welcome consequences on social change. Therefore, this chapter constitutes another step towards a radically different approach to a political analysis and practice whose central issue is the relation between humanity

and nature. Gender analysis tackles practical problems in the context of explaining wide-ranging questions in contemporary politics.

Identifying women as subjects of this change entails moving from those cornerstones of an urban management based on reason and planning towards the promotion of creativity and attunement with nature. This implies an inversion of the centuries-old attitude to solving city problems by limitlessly expanding urban areas, and a return to thinking about the architecture of the single abode within a well-defined physical (natural) space.

With the exception of radical environmentalism, social movements are no longer the privileged subjects of change as they had been considered for the last four decades. Because women, to a larger extent than men, are concerned with environmental issues, a gendered environmentalist policy would help to overturn the dominant male rationality. In contemporary western society, women are no longer a political and cultural minority, and women's liberation movements have fully achieved their goals. Women's movements have transcended the goals they pursued at the beginning of liberation and equal rights activism. However, the revolutionary potential of women's movements has not yet been completely achieved. Women should abandon the usual social and political issues in favor of refocusing on a more theoretical approach that questions the current technological paradigms and public policy models, especially environmental protection which, by the way, encompasses most contemporary public problems. In Chap. 1 of Part I, four levels of environmental consciousness were identified. The fourth level is fully revolutionary as it accepts that the environmental question is to be the fundamental starting point for political thought and practice. While at both the second and the third level, feminism may also play a role, at the fourth level an approach based on women's thinking and feeling is the most suitable for kindling a radical change process. Women are more sensitive to environmental protection and show a less aggressive relation with nature than men. We should investigate specific female ways of thinking, feeling and acting, and from this, elaborate new strategies, new policies and a new technology.

A Threefold Argument for a Gender-Oriented Urban Policy

The argument develops in three parts: (a) cognitive and scientific paradigms; (b) aesthetics and built environment; (c) social dialectics. This section briefly introduces the three parts while the following sections expand each part.

Section (a) – the most radical and philosophical – concerns the dialectic between rational analysis vs. emotional perception in urban policy. The two approaches imply different political and technological consequences. Urban policy includes topics such as government, democracy and management. A gendered analysis, based on masculine/feminine dialectic, helps investigate decision-making methods and considers how a rational and all-inclusive analysis of urban design can still be efficient in solving recurring urban problems. By applying a gendered critique,

we can evaluate technologies employed in urban management from an unusual point of view. A new science and an innovative technology, inspired by different values and feelings, should be substituted for the old technology that men developed to subordinate nature. It should also replace the traditional science that accepts human ownership of nature, and therefore authorizes humanity to fully manage and exploit her. The two models can coexist and represent a new political dialectic that exceeds those of the past and have lost meaning. Urban and environmental problems have different solutions if we give different priorities to questions such as: to what extent are we allowed to build a new road if we modify property values, redistribute wealth, eliminate a grove and do it against the neighborhood dwellers' will? Who decides and how? What are the legitimate decision-making criteria? Contemporary urban and environmental conflicts are treated ineffectively and unjustly, trusting in self-referential economics and technological discourses. Almost all environmental cases are treated: (a) from the economic convenience and technological risk assessment point of view; or in utilitarian terms of cost-risk-benefit analysis (Shrader-Frechette 1985, 1991; Shrader-Frechette and McCoy 1993; Tallacchini 1996); (b) in conformity to laws inspired by the same concepts (Jasanoff 1995; Tallacchini 2009). The prevailing political debate includes neither an ethical concern for the protection of nature, nor countless people's feelings, and even less the legitimate geopolitical space where decisions should be taken. Why could a gendered policy help in better understanding environmental problems? Because with the classic rational model we have difficulty in setting problems and generating consensus on decisions made. The dream of building and governing a rational city vanished decades ago, but we haven't yet elaborated a new alternative approach, or even a new dream (Boyer 1986). There exists a plethora of city metaphors. After having made a close examination Rykwert (1963) concludes that if a city resembles anything, it is nothing but a dream. Returning to the critique of rational models applied to the city, the most severe criticisms were presented more than half a century ago by radical sociologists such as Mumford and Jacobs who recognized the limits of simplified and reductionist rationality in an urban society characterized by complexity. Authors such as Christine Boyer (1986), David Harvey and his students, inspired by Foucault, Lacan and the new French philosophers, also contended the dream of a rational city. Without denying the Marxian roots of their thinking and the classical studies of Lefebvre, they resumed the analyses of Simmel and reworked them in the postmodernist style (see also Berman 1982).

Section (b) regards aesthetics and architecture. In the past we were amazed by the human challenge to nature, by man's (male) achievements, such as the highest skyscraper, the longest bridge, the deepest tunnel, not to mention urban renewal projects that cleared medieval neighborhoods to build contemporary cities. Housemann's Paris and Fascist Rome are two well-known oft-quoted examples, but similar developments took place in most European cities, including some small and mid-size ones. In the name of rationality, modern architects, oblivious to the natural landscape, applied geometrical plans and expandable grid-shaped cities that generated broader and broader urban settlements. Today, we admire medieval towns enclosed by walls and demarcated by natural elements. Old towns'

convoluted plans demonstrate a hard-to-detect rationality that one can perceive only *a posteriori* and that no single master builder ever designed. These towns have become appealing, precious because we can no longer build them, nor dare to let them expand without trying to fully control their growth. Loss of control is one of modern man's unconscious fears; it drives him to unreasonably trust on planning and on *a priori* rationality. After the construction of a long bridge connecting Malmö to Copenhagen, a company attempted to build an old style village in between the two cities to accommodate commuters. It was a resounding failure because instead of retrieving the human "warmth" of the old villages, they had instead constructed a cold and artificial environment (Poli 2009). This excess of confidence on emotionless reason implies a simplification of reality that paradoxically leads to the same loss of control that it seeks to avoid. As a matter of fact, the "incomprehensible" can hardly be part of a rational, reductionist and simplified analysis, but it is entwined with the real world: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio/Than are dreamt of in your philosophy"! (Shakespeare's Hamlet). When the unsaid resurfaces, it affects the formal perfection of plans and longing for an *a priori* rationality may in fact produce an *a posteriori* irrationality. For a long time, some practitioners – especially in continental Europe – equated urban planning to urban architecture, and some still do. A gendered analysis can help us think of an alternative – feminine – mode of contemporary urban and environmental policy practice. This would imply a shift from a city described by a mechanic metaphor, to a new city better depicted by an organic metaphor (Lynch 1981); and from large-scale architecture to an architecture focused on small dimensions and details.

In Section (c), the conclusion, I call for an alternative vision of the contemporary city that is no longer man's imposition on nature, but something that is part of her. In the past we have dealt with women's city, women's time, women's services and eventually with a city organization that took women's needs into serious consideration. Nonetheless, we identified women's needs in the frame of an unquestioned relation with nature so that it fit into traditional (masculine) schemes. Women still ask men – precisely to a masculine thought and a male technology – to solve urban problems. They perceive themselves as one of the many groups of a society formed by social classes, casts, ethnic and interest groups, lifestyle communities, and so on. The need to solve incumbent short-term practical problems diverted women from thinking of more radical change; hence women's urban problems have been dealt with inside the usual ideological frame. Since men have been in charge of urban design, contemporary cities are likely to be less comfortable for women than for men because the modern city is a masculine city, based on a belligerent attitude, against nature. The next step in progressing towards different urban culture and city design is not coping with, and improbably solving once and for all, current problems, but removing them, while substituting new questions for old. Solving women's problems in the same male-designed antagonistic ideology is a conservative approach, whether or not women legitimately ask for short-term change that would make their lives better. Crucial political action, also in gendered policies, aims at canceling distinctions in the name of a universal society. Women

as such are not meant as bearers of a radically different culture of their own, thus they do not act as change promoters. Calling for more rights and services inside the current urban scheme is a short-term target and at the same time it is unachievable. It's trivial because it doesn't offer a radical challenge to the way cities are built and managed, and because it accepts a city that is violent towards nature and people. It's impossible because current urban problems are unsolvable inside the available technological and organizational limits.

Women and Environment in Cognitive and Scientific Paradigms

Some empirical and theoretical research suggests that women are more sympathetic to environmental questions than men (Somma and Tolleson 1997; Dietz et al. 2002). This happens all over the world despite relevant geographical, political and cultural differences. Men are active in environmental advocacy, but of 100 activists opposing bridge construction that involves the removal of a wood, 70 are probably women (Ray and Anderson 2000). This percentage is higher if animal rights are involved. Women play a leading role in anti-pollution movements, in the conservation of historical heritage, and in the preservation of green spaces. Women's perception of the relation between people and nature opens to a new idea of progress that all humanity will increasingly take into consideration. Leahy (2003: 106–125) surveys the discussion on essentialism and constructionism in ecofeminism from a theoretical point of view. The city is the environment where most human beings now live. The physical aspect of the women's city is different from the men's city. The city is both a complex system of relations and an artifact created by transforming natural environments. The way cities are built and look includes a significant symbolic message.

If we focus on the syntax of the phrase the “city of women” we find an expressive difference if we write “women's city” or “women city”. In the first case we use the possessive, meaning the city women own and rule having at least in part expropriated men of their power. On the other hand “women city”, introduces a genitive case and we use “women” as an attribute, meaning a feminine city, a city generated by women. Liberation movements needed to focus on “women's city” (possessive) because women had to lessen men's political power in order to gain a role in urban politics and policies. In this sense, the city is a *civitas*, a term that in Latin refers mainly to a political community. If we accept the definition of “women city” (genitive), we refer mainly to an *urbs*, that is Latin for the physical city, its constructions and symbols. A “Women city” is one with feminine characteristics. In this case the city is the physical projection of female feelings and female thinking, in counterpoint to men's. These two Latin words – *civitas* and *urbs* – are fused in the Greek term “*polis*” that includes both power relations and physical environments. Obviously, to generate a feminine city, women had to challenge men's power that

had excluded women for centuries. However, in the past, a female culture – seldom explicit or acknowledged as such – fashioned cities and societies with feminine characteristics, even if males still managed them. Today, a feminine way of thinking and acting can originate profoundly different cities and city environments. The question is: Can we distinguish male and female cities? Is there gender-oriented architecture and urban planning? Is it possible to think of a masculine urban policy as opposed to a feminine one? We do not dare say that environmentalism belongs only to women, but is it a plausible claim that there is a female approach to environmental issues that men nonetheless accept?

In environmental policies the technical-scientific approach is still prevailing in the solution and understanding of urban problems. Nonetheless, more and more scholars include ethical and political evaluations when thinking about environmental problems. The seemingly incorrect order of the words – with solving preceding understanding – is actually intentional: in solving urban problems today we start from the solutions available rather than from unbiased analysis. You see the problem through the lens of the solution that you think you have because science and free society have succumbed to various corporations, which have formed a monopoly on the solution of each problem. This idea comes from various studies, but in particular from the readings of Michel Crozier (1964, 1995; Crozier & Friedberg 1980), reworked in Poli (2011).

In the last 20 years or so, social research has gone back to using analytical tools from human genetics in order to explain personal and social behavior. Certainly, a critique of an excessive use of this approach should not be ignored. However, when dealing with the relation between humanity and nature, a cognitive, neuroscientific and biological explanation, which includes gender differences as well as cultural ones, can inspire better understanding of social and behavioral phenomena.

Ecofeminism

Val Plumwood (1991) has rigorously examined the environmental question in relation to the critique of rationalism in nature and gender studies. Plumwood navigates the troubled – though creative – waters lying between classical philosophical and socio-political approaches to gender and environmental studies, and new ones that open to a peculiarly female mode in the humanity/nature relation. Specifically, she studies environmental ethics from both the Kantian perspective and from the interpretation proposed by Paul Taylor dealing with non-human animals' rights. Taylor refuses the “widespread Western treatment of nature as instrumental to human interests and instead takes living things as teleological centers of life” (Plumwood 1991: 142). All living things are worth respect since they bear a right of their own that is not bestowed by humans. Nevertheless, Taylor develops his thesis in a Kantian scheme; hence he relies on the reason/emotion dichotomy. Plumwood argues that this approach is exaggerated, misleading and eventually an “enemy of women”. Taylor maintains that human actions do not deserve to be considered moral

if we perform them by inclination. To be considered moral, human actions must be performed in order to respect a principle we perceive as mandatory and pursue our actions unselfishly. In Taylor's words: "If one seeks that end and solely or primarily from inclination, the attitude being expressed is not moral respect, but personal affection or love" (Taylor 1986: 85). In Plumwood's opinion, Taylor fails when considering inclination and desire as irrelevant for morality. Plumwood rejects that series of dualism – mind/body, reason/culture, reason/emotion, personal/universal and, eventually, masculine/feminine – that has characterized the opposition between a world of emotions as unreliable, untrustworthy, and morally irrelevant (and feminine), that is to be dominated by a superior, disinterested (and of course masculine) reason (Plumwood 1991: 143–144). For a long time we have been studying this contrast within the paradigm and the language of a modernity aiming at defeating tradition. Once modernity – and its sub categories of secularization, urbanization, and industrialization – definitely takes over the old world, tradition will disappear and critical thinking will deal with different issues. Many of those who call on ancient traditions, in fact, perform an explicit and rational gesture that challenges the dominant modern idea. In this sense, even without claiming so, they perform a task that is, in itself, modern even if carried out in the name of the restoration of a tradition which in fact is not a real tradition. The Latin root of the word "trade" (where the term "tradition" comes from) means "to move or carry on", hence it implies continuity with the past. If there has been a clean break from the past, there is nothing to "continue" and we start from scratch with themes and paradigms of a past of which we have no cognizance. Traditional aspects persist in the folds of modernity, but they are minimal residues that pale in comparison to the new world created on the basis of modern principles on which social and political criticism now concentrates. Post-modern thought – which still refers to modernity and not yet to something radically new – seems to re-evaluate some traits of traditions, but the argument is more multifaceted than that. There's nothing bad in being inspired by so-called post-modern theories; at the same time, if we want to found something new, that goes beyond the post-modern, and opens to a "pre-something" or at least to a "neo-something", we need a radically new elaboration. Environmentalism and a revolutionized relation between humanity and nature may herald change. Plumwood's and other ecofeminisms (Leahy 2003) challenge some basics of Western thought, mainly the fact that we define what is authentically human as what is "only" natural. This is a classical, very broad argument in philosophy. Plumwood's merit is that she linked this to both environmental ethics and to the innovative (for the times she was writing) gender studies that focused on gender differences and gender deconstruction (Butler 1990).

However, radical ecofeminist and environmental ethics studies require some updating. "Ethical universalization and abstraction are both closely associated with accounts of the self in terms of rational egoism" (Plumwood 1991: 144–145). This approach stands virtually without opposition in economics: from Smith to Rawls who admittedly claims Kantian roots for his argument (see also Jamieson 2008). Rawls (1971) justifies by means of a rational (and admittedly fascinating to me) process the ethical acceptability of social inequalities. This goes against an intuitive

(or natural?) distaste for the injustices and inequalities between human beings. The individual is uprooted and independent in libertarian political theory while rationally “egoist” in market theories. According to this approach, humanity’s moral progress was perceived as the progressive inclusion of new subjects – women, animals, plants, landscape – to which we legitimately attributed moral dignity. Plumwood argues this line since she considers it as a progress toward further abstraction and generalization (Plumwood, p. 144–145), which, in her opinion, is no longer the correct way for humanity to evolve. The opinion is ingrained that emotions and the “particular” are enemies of rationality and sources of moral corruption. However, since half a century ago, influential philosophers have disputed this opinion and recently also a relevant part of the everyday discourse – especially in relation to the environmental crisis – challenges this once-prevailing belief. Many people have gradually moved away from the creed of modernity to embrace a new popular thinking inspired by principles developed among cultural elites between the 1960s and the 1990s. Caring for the neighbor (Dogson 1994) and the particular should not be considered a hindrance to the establishment of universal thought but, rather, a different way to pursue progress.

For example Thomas Aquinas – later imitated by Kant – argued that we should avoid cruelty to animals for the mere fact that cruel habits could be passed on to humans. Environmental ethicists and advocates of animal rights argue that both Thomas Aquinas and Kant only care about human beings. Consequently, cruelty to animals and nature should be limited in order to make humans morally superior. I would like to highlight another aspect of the statement of Aquinas: cruelty and aggression toward animals and nature are an environmental behavior quite common among humans and affects human relationships. Following Thomas Aquinas, one must conclude that human beings can substantially differ in their attitudes towards nature and other human beings. A more peaceful and less aggressive attitude could become a goal for a large part of the population. Human aggression towards nature and towards other human beings - as alien in general to my way of thinking as it is to my own temperament - is not something to be rejected completely. In the past it favored the progress of humanity and has played a crucial role in human evolution. Today, however, aggression may seem outdated and inefficient in dealing with the current problems, but still represents a value for many and this approach to progress is still embedded in many social institutions. If this political discourse is established, we can develop good arguments to focus on the relationship between humanity and nature and environmental issues rather than on the classical dualism against welfare liberalism.

In the 20 years since Plumwood published her essay this position has spread among scholars coming from diverse traditions. The development of neuroscience-inspired social studies has strengthened this approach, which in the case of Plumwood and other radical scholars mainly originated in Lacanian psychoanalysis. Plumwood elaborates a critical thought. Others, more recently, have reached similar conclusions by applying biology, neuroscience, cognitive science and evolutionary theories to socio-political behavior. In this framework, the male/female dualism allows us to understand creatively some contemporary problems, especially urban

and environmental ones. Not surprisingly, I recently ran into a new Italian critical edition of Lombroso's "*L'uomo delinquente*" (translated and published in English as "*Criminal Man*"), edited by Lucia Rodler (2011).

Geography

Plumwood's ecofeminist thinking can apply to urban studies: (a) from a geographical perspective and (b) in urban planning and design. From a geographical point of view, spaces, times and organizational structures of the city could influence social change either by speeding it up, or slowing it down. From the urban planning point of view, normative thinking indicates how to build the cities of tomorrow.

Environmental problems are not only a by-product of the capitalist human exploitation system. Environmentalism is, and has been, a privileged subject of change, like more classic ones such as third world, proletarian, feminist and gender movements. However the exploitation of nature, and of other non-human subjects, hasn't yet entered the limelight in political language and theory. In the 1980s, Butler (1990) thoroughly transformed gender studies, and a few years later Plumwood connected them to the environmental question. Most radical geographers and Marxian social scientists had also adopted psychoanalytical Lacanian political theory and recognize that we are now living a post-modern condition (Harvey 1989, 2000; Swyngedouw 2005, 2007, 2011). Nonetheless, they kept a completely anthropocentric – and consequently androcentric, as Plumwood would point out – approach, neglecting cognitive processes based on compassion, emotion and intuition.

The survey of the cultural origin of my analysis on gender, architecture and the city is completed by some observations drawn from Fritjof Capra's studies about the Science of Leonardo. Capra proposes a critique of the Cartesian method claiming that its widespread application to science and technology is responsible for the contemporary environmental crisis. The author of the "*Tao of Physics*" (1975) maintains that the success of Descartes, Galileo and Newton's scientific methods obliterated a possible alternative implicitly proposed by Leonardo. Leonardo studied natural phenomena on the basis of experience and reconciled art with science, especially figurative art. The substantial difference between Descartes and Leonardo can be synthesized by the preference of the latter for a comprehensive vision of natural phenomena, while the former adopted the reductionist principle, namely a comprehension achieved by the factorization of the observed object in parts. A physicist by education, Capra also focused on mathematical tools. Newton, who employed the Euclidean geometry, was not able to express the complexity of nature with mathematical formulas. Only at the beginning of the twentieth century did Henry Poincaré develop a new mathematics that could show in mathematical formulas some of Leonardo's intuitions on transmutations and continuous quantities (Capra 2007: 6).

Capra claims that, differently from Descartes, Leonardo never imagined the human body as a machine and refused the idea of a separation between mind and body, the latter being “an outward and visible expression of the soul; it was shaped by its spirit” (Irma Richter 1952, quoted by Capra 2007). In this sentence one can see the analogy with Le Corbusier’s modernist urban design and the epistemic critique – perhaps even an instrumentalization of Leonardo by Capra – to a science and a technology that are enemies of nature. But Capra goes even further when he recalls how, a century later, Francis Bacon would overturn Leonardo’s principle by saying that the task of science is to dominate nature. This idea was a leading principle in the following centuries and I find it magnificently expressed by Wolfgang Goethe and reported by his biographer Johannes Eckermann. Goethe uttered: “It is by this that Rubens proves himself great, and shows to the world that he, with a free spirit, stands above Nature, and treats her conformably to his high purposes . . . But if it is contrary to Nature, I still say it is higher than Nature . . .” (Eckermann 1998: 196). Leonardo, instead, had a deep respect for animals and a reverence for the complexity of nature.

Eros and Nature

In the cult movie *Basic Instincts*, many remember the morbid scene in which Sharon Stone is interrogated by a group of nasty policemen fascinated by her defiant lusty attitude. They need to penetrate her inner thoughts to find out if she’s a real murderer or just a fiction writer, but her superior mind baffles them by using her erotic power. Both metaphorically and in reality, the policemen try to penetrate every fold of her dress and her body with their probing eyes. The word *penetrate* possibly comes from the Latin *penem trahere*, i.e. “penis going through in depth” or “pulled in deeply” depending on one’s perspective. To attain their goal, the policemen need to use their power to prevaricate the woman’s will. Etymology helps again: you need to prevaricate (from Latin *pre* = in advance; *varicare* = open, specifically a woman’s legs) if you really want to penetrate.

When the actress eventually uncrosses her legs, letting the policemen see – and see not – for a split second what they have been aiming at during the entire scene, the tension surges to its climax. The scene, and the movie as a whole, shows how a woman can control men with her body. It also describes what attraction is in an aesthetic sense. Men are not attracted at all to plain nudity. To tell the truth, a woman is never really naked, as all that is important for men’s basic instinct is carefully hidden inside. A woman’s sex is invisible in almost any circumstance. This drives men crazy. All that men desire is to enter a woman in order to know the mysteries lying inside that magnetic source of pleasure. It would be simplistic to believe it is mere physical covetousness. Physically penetrating a woman’s body is an act of utmost and hopeless desire of knowledge, which ends up being a mediocre proxy of a fuller comprehension of the mystery of life and death. We do not need Freud

to know that an orgasm is a minimum time in which life and death, eternity and instant become indistinguishable: in that moment you open to an unending future by continuing the human species. For a moment you feel as if you are dead because in that very moment your own life is irrelevant.

Women are considered complicated beings in as much as men look allegedly simple. While the first have their elaborate bodily and mental tempos and adapt to them, the latter aim at being always the same in time and space. If not, they strive to subdue time and space to their will; they want to forge time and space rather than linger there. Men act to dominate the environment: they know they need to be tough and not to adapt. Women are, and act, conversely.

City and Architecture Beyond the ‘Conscience of the Eye’

A gendered and erotic analysis of contemporary urban architecture is possible beginning from these common sense utterances. When men – or rather a male culture – have been in control of the public sphere, they have built their cities to impress women. They have pursued the goal of ignoring the natural environment by overlaying the city plan on it. We should not blame past attitudes too much. This male behavior proved efficient when the human race struggled to dominate a threatening and resilient nature. But we wonder if this is still worth practicing today vis-à-vis the environmental crisis. It’s trivial to notice how skyscrapers (or sky-rapists?) may recall huge penises, which represent male power to impress women and kindle the reproduction process. It is also superficial to compare domes, cloisters and porticos to protective uteruses where human beings yearn to return to feel sheltered. They are both represented in past and contemporary architecture and urban design, and many architectural writers have already elaborated on this. I want to focus on the overall idea and management of city instead of on the single building in order to distinguish a woman-conceived city from a man-planned one. Two typical city models are the grid and the random town pattern. They represent a dualism between a development oblivious of the natural environment and another mainly concerned with keeping continuity between humanity and nature.

The City as a Reproductive Act

We can think of the city as we think of a reproductive act: the city produces ideas, power, goods, and more. Then, it comes as a consequence that we need both the male and female to have a fertile city. Sennett studied the visual perception of cities in his *“The Conscience of the Eye”* (1990), an essay that associates a sociological and philosophical approach to spatial and geographical considerations. The medieval early-Christianity-inspired human settlements had to look humble and unpretentious. Only the space of God was allowed to show order and splendor. The

space of God in the medieval city was symbolized by a magnificent Cathedral whose spires aimed at climbing to the heavens among earthly low buildings.

One enters a typical medieval town through a gate opened in a wall that clearly defines the city limits: there's a sharp distinction between "in" and "out", and there's no way to expand the city beyond the walls, not even the possibility of thinking about it. Nonetheless, some transition is still offered, since the gate is not just a single door, but is a series of barriers: from the grass of the countryside you approach a bridge, a large arch, then a smaller one and finally an entrance to the shaded town streets. In the damp medieval towns, you can hardly perceive which is the main street and you lose orientation in the winding little streets. Wandering around the random pattern of the town settlement you are likely to lose orientation, feel lost, and even panic. You feel both protected by the shade and scared by the loss of orientation. Nonetheless, every step you take, any glance you cast, any movement you make creates a new unexpected pleasure, a new urban experience. At every corner something worth observing pops up. Thousands of little pieces of unplanned urban patterns and architecture are unendingly spread everywhere. The city of humans is to look humble in its entirety compared to the huge cathedral, but the citizens still like and are allowed to embellish, decorate, and make their dwellings more comfortable so that hundreds of inventions and pieces of art are all over though barely noticeable.

Venice is the utmost example of this urban experience, and nobody described her better than John Ruskin (1851–1853). No surprise that in the radical modernists' Manifesto, Marinetti (1909) utters old Venice's conclusive eradication.

Nonetheless, once the initial tension you experience entering the medieval town is overcome, you soon realize that this apparent lack of logic in the city plan is nothing to be scared of. A way – back or forth or out – is always at hand, and in the meantime you have the chance to run into several interesting spots you'd never suspect could be there. The foreigner never knows where he really is and searches for some meaningful place – a market square, the cathedral, a meeting point – which he eventually stumbles upon unexpectedly. Little houses, hovels and magnificent palaces sit, one beside the other without showing any ranking associated with location. In as much as the city is clearly separated from the countryside, while inside the walled circle, there's not a clear border to separate public from private space, as happens in modern architecture where often just a thin and transparent glass-sheet establishes what's "in" and what's "out". Although the medieval town is clearly divided from the countryside by a massive wall, when eventually you're in, you move from public to private space in some sort of never-ending progression: from the countryside you enter the city, then move to streets that become more and more narrow and reserved, often lined by porticos and watched by people living and working in first floor shops and dwellings. When finally you enter the building you are going to, a courtyard opens up that is not yet completely secluded from outsiders. Even the space where the family – sometimes families – live, is heralded by a foyer where many people are still permitted. You need to enter your own room – going across a living room where guests are always welcome – and close the door

behind you to complete the full transition from the public space to a fully private dimension. Locks are unnecessary because in the medieval town's *Gemeinschaft* you'd be surprised to meet someone that inhabitants don't know. The opposite of what happens in the big city where you are amazed when you run into someone you do know. In Sennett's (1990) opinion, the German word *Gemeinschaft*, borrowed by Tönnies, means "sharing what is within me". The physical and social space perception in the medieval town is soft and adaptable. It seems that there's always a place to hide and still you're never alone. There's seemingly no rationality, no asserted intention to build a well-functioning city. Nonetheless, the medieval she-town is there, strong and sound with all its physical reality and social relations.

Gender Trouble in Urban Management

Besides the sexual, visual and experiential metaphors I've been admittedly lingering on in the previous paragraphs, the idea of a she-city also bears an epistemic meaning, in consonance with the aforementioned Plumwood's and Sennett's considerations.

The ancient Egyptian hieroglyph for "city" was a cross surrounded by a circle. The cross bears the idea of human/male (a priori) rationality, order and artificiality. The circle means that a city requires a definition, specifically a boundary separating it from the countryside with which, nonetheless, it closely interacts. Since the times of the Assyrians and Babylonians, cities have often been built adopting the idea of the grid. Roman cities were the model for eighteenth-century American cities. Despite its appearance, the grid is anything but a neutral paradigm: it can have different meanings, and the symbols may be interpreted in different manners. Nonetheless, all grid patterns ignore the natural landscape as much as they reaffirm man's dominance over nature.

The male grid-city is the opposite of the medieval she-town. The modern male-city is conceived on the basis of rational urban planning and *a priori* design. Moreover, the grid-city is designed to be continuously expandable – rather than self-contained – by repeatedly applying the same founding logic to new areas. In the grid-city, the characters and the identity of the areas, which are included in the expansion of the city, are meaningless because what really matters is the general conceptual (abstract) design. You cannot realize exactly when you truly enter the grid-city because the transition is incredibly stretched, and there's no clear sign that separates the "in" from the "out". In principle, this responds to a democratic criterion of place indifference opposed to the many variances fundamental in the medieval city, specifically tolls, laws, government as reported in the celebrated Lorenzetti's "Good and Bad Government" frescoes in Siena (Italy) City Hall (*Palazzo Pubblico*). Having no city limits, the citizens' and administrators' drive is to solve problems by enlarging, instead of nurturing what is already available. The metaphor of colonizing men, who strive to reproduce themselves by having the most possible partners, also fits into this gender symbolic approach. In the walled medieval city, instead, life is nurtured and protected, so that development does not imply an immediate expansion outside.

The male-city responds to a linear conception of time and space that involves a continuous expansion so that citizens perceive the solutions to problems as a mobile frontier and as borders to pass. Quite the reverse, the female-city adopts a cyclical idea of time and the solutions to problems are supposed to happen in a given space and time. Elisabeth Grosz (2005) claims that rethinking time might generate new understandings of nature, culture, subjectivity, and politics. Significantly she assumes that citizenship is also a temporal as well as a spatial phenomenon and discusses issues of sexual difference, identity, pleasure and desire. Grosz's studies prove useful when applied to the idea of belonging to a specific space and consequently they can be applied to area and administration and to the political rights to vote and to take part in decision-making, as Viard has also noted from a sociological point of view (Viard 2011; see also Poli 2009).

My description of the medieval city recalls the concept of porosity, applied to urban life, and the difference between boundaries and borders about which Sennett elaborated in his more recent books. Sennett interpreted urban space by describing three meaningful dualisms worth discussing also from a gendered and environmentalist perspective.

Twenty years after the "*Conscience of the Eye*" (1990), in a trilogy titled *Homo Faber*, and specifically in the last one titled "*Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Co-operation*" (2012; see also 2008, 2011), Sennett returns to the idea of the importance of disorder that has always been crucial in his writings since his early "*The Uses of Disorder: Personal Identity and City Life*" (1970). Specifically, Sennett identifies three dualisms as patterns in human relations: dialectic vs. dialogic, declarative vs. subjunctive, sympathy vs. empathy. These either prevent cooperation among citizens or encourage citizens to participate in community affairs. While Sennett focuses on human cooperative relations, his argument can also be applied to human/nature relations. Sennett's argument recalls the dichotomies mind/body, reason/culture, reason/emotion, personal/universal and, eventually, masculine/feminine that have already been explored in this chapter. When you move to a geographical analysis of the city, these dichotomies can be synthesized in two types of edges that can be either "boundaries" or "borders". Sennett, using a biological language, says that the former are like a "cell wall" fit to contain and separate what's in, from what's out. The latter resembles a "cell membrane" that is typically more flexible and open. Membranes are both porous and resistant. They're not simply open doors, but work out the balance between porosity and resistance. That combination of porosity and resistance is a spatial precondition for cooperation between people who differ (Sennett 2011). Simmel's metaphor of the "bridge and the door" is another main source of inspiration in this topic (Simmel 1994–1909). It's possible to apply this metaphor to the gendered analysis of the city. The medieval town is clearly porous in as much as borders ("membranes") separate private and public space. When we consider nature in the city, the problem appears in a similar way: in the modern male-city we have separated nature from the built environment. A typical example is gated urban parks. In the medieval she-town there are gardens merging with the people and their dwellings; the stones buildings are made of, come from the region so that their color integrates with

the landscape; finally, the very architecture and building design recalls springs, heights, caves, lowlands, glens, etc. However, the most important characteristic of medieval towns is that they are small and dependent on the countryside lying around them. Thus, some European areas – such as Tuscany, Provence or Flanders – historically developed a highly developed urban culture, although they were founded on a plurality of small and mid-size centers dependent on, and merged with, the natural/agricultural landscape. Therefore, Sennett's question: "how can we design spaces in the city which encourage strangers to cooperate?" should be integrated with another question: "how can we design urban spaces which create a stronger link between humanity and nature?" A stereotypical female culture – namely a different relationship between humanity and nature – lends itself more to creating the conditions for cooperation.

Women as Subjects of Radical Change

Most of what has been reported is quite trivial and has already been said. What is new in this essay and what really matters is that in the last four decades or so, women have been indicated as possible subjects of change together with other social movements. Because women, much more than men, are concerned with environmental issues, we need a gender environmentalist policy that overturns the dominant male rationality. In contemporary western society, since a decade or so ago, women are no longer a minority and the women's liberation movements have even more than fully achieved their goals to the extent that some scholars and governments have already claimed that there is a problem with men's rights. Women's liberation movements have gone beyond the goals they pursued at the beginning of the liberation and equal rights movements. That's why they cannot proceed further on this dead-end road: if all roads lead to Rome, when you're there, you need to choose a new destination or just stay. The revolutionary potential of women's movements has not yet completely lapsed provided they abandon the usual social and political issues and shift to a more theoretical approach that will question the current technological paradigms and public policy models in several fields, including of course, environmental protection which, by the way, encompasses most of the contemporary public problems. As I argued in two previous essays (Poli 1994a, b, c, 2010), the fourth level of environmental consciousness is really revolutionary as it accepts that the environmental question is to be the starting point of political practice and thinking. At this level an approach based on women's thinking and feeling is the most suitable for kindling the change process. Of course, it's not a matter of sex and many men can certainly do what women do and (why not?) do it even better than women. Nonetheless, the fact that women are more sensitive to environmental protection and have a more atoned relation with nature, makes it convenient to inquire into a specific female way of thinking, feeling and acting and from this elaborate new strategies, new policies and a new technology. In

a controversial essay, Elisabeth Badinter (2010) claims that environmentalism is the enemy of women and a means to return them to the non-social role of mother, to be played at home and in the family, rather than women with a social position. I think that this is an old approach that circumscribes the debate into a one-dimensional idea of society and of gender.

Social Dialectic and a Conclusion

In the middle of the last century three revolutionary events took place. The first has so much of an epochal character that, in 2008, a proposal was made to the Stratigraphy Commission of the Geological Society of London stating that we entered a new formal unit of geological epoch divisions, called Anthropocene (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink 2010). The evidence that human activities have a significant global impact on the Earth's ecosystems justifies the necessity to define a new epoch. For the first time in human history we have overcome the reverential fear of a powerful nature we strive to tame and subjugate, and we are rather scared by the real possibility of finding that we ourselves are a threat because we can destroy life on the planet. The second event concerns women's condition under many points of view. First, technology has diminished the importance of physical strength, so that women can perform most of the jobs that once only men could do. Incidentally, men developed that specific technology just to liberate themselves from hard labor. "Equal opportunities" is not only an ethical justice goal, but also a technological consequence. The third epochal revolution is due to DNA mapping and the consequent possibility of knowing the paternity of a child. It has deeply changed the relations between men and women and made a large part of social institutions obsolete. Technology also includes contraception practices that have separated women's sexual pleasure from the consequences of maternity. Some of the consequences of these dramatic changes will take place in the long term; some others even in human evolutionary times. Many generations and centuries will be necessary to complete them. However, some of the changes are in progress, and we are rapidly proceeding towards a society in which the feminine mode is more competitive and acceptable, as it has been in the past, and in some cultures. We should not confuse this long-term change with a competition between genders and sexes that will make women dominate men in the same manner as men have dominated women in the past. We are speaking about a way of thinking, rationalizing and feeling that has mostly to do with culture, and very little with sex. Thus the possible change can happen in the course of a generation. Women's mode does not exclude men from power or from developing a creative role in the dominant feminine world. Men are completely capable of behaving like women and can do everything that women can do if they want to and if society doesn't hinder them from doing so. At the same time, gender diversity and the preservation of some male attitudes cannot help but dialectically enrich society.

The city of women should be the model for the city of tomorrow. If men and women – because not all women accept a feminine mode – were able to build a female city (not a women’s city), an alternative to the failed, high-environmental-impact current city model would be available. The female city will be a low-energy-consumption city, where social and personal relations will be developed at the community level. The female city – which will be realized thanks to the intellectual contribution of men who can also think like women – will put the environmental question at the top of the priority list. To solve current urban problems we need a feminine approach and we need women (or men thinking like women) to take the lead in a revolutionary change.

Lacan’s psycho-political planning had introduced the dimension of self-consciousness into the criticism of the capitalist system. Despite academies continuing the tradition of studies initiated in those years, the political link with the protest movements, which was formed in the 1960s and blossomed in the next decade, diminished and the movements eventually disappeared. However, they were not completely canceled and they keep re-appearing now and then in different forms and places like a karstic underground river. The apparently disappeared movements’ ideas contribute to form a culture that is quite widespread. Sometimes this is fused with an apparent return to tradition, but in reality it represents something new (Ray and Anderson 2000). Environmentalism is an important aspect of this culture, as are psychoanalysis, self-consciousness, neo-spiritualism and the influence of the Eastern philosophies. The New Age movement of the 1990s was a popular expression of this, as is now the spread of yoga classes, vegetarian and vegan diets, and certain lifestyles and “ways of life” (cf. Latour 2012), and other Eastern practices in the West. Giving some dignity to these cultural movements were authors of a certain academic prestige, such as Fritjof Capra with his famous “The Tao of Physics” (1975) or Daniel Goleman (1995) with “Emotional Intelligence”. Now, this underground river of alternative culture of the 1960s could re-emerge and merge into a more solid way of thinking. After the fall of the contrast between East and West and between the ideologies of liberalism and communism, the lost dualism between opposing models of society must be recreated. In some papers (Poli 2010, 2011, introduction and first chapter), I argued that we should consider the cultural and political opportunity to put the environmental issue at the heart of contemporary politics in order to reconstruct this necessary dualism.

Chapter 11

New Education and Training for Innovative Urban Management

Abstract The paradigm change that this essay calls for requires new professionals and a new educational approach. In traditional bureaucracies, planning methods are to be substituted (or at least integrated) with innovation. A higher education program is presented in the chapter, which is designed to readdress public administration policies along the lines identified in this book.

Keywords Higher education • Cultural policy • Planning • Cultural creatives • Innovation

Innovation in Urban Managers' Professional Education

The widespread diffusion of the Internet is only a 10-year-old phenomenon, a time too short to change people's mentality and production structure. Although we spend hours working and amusing ourselves on line, and cannot survive without a cell phone, we have not yet changed the old paradigms we adopt in everyday life, in thinking and in investing. This applies indifferently to both old and new generations. It is not a matter of mentality and attitudes, which can presumably vary according to age groups. In fact, our mental patterns and social organization have not yet been subverted by the all-encompassing communication technology. Thus, the application of telecommunication and information technologies has not yet produced essential effects on many aspects of city organization and administration. At the same time, and for similar reasons, the environmental concern is profoundly affecting our preferences and consumption attitudes. New environmentally friendly lifestyles are becoming more and more popular and trendy. Thus, they are likely to shift some investment flows from traditional productions to new ones. New technologies and new lifestyles will also hasten the transformation of urban society and politics.

This seems to take place at a slower pace than expected. At individual level, an acceleration of the change process will take place in the coming years, when children who grew up in the telecommunication environment enter the job market

This chapter is partly drawn from the project of the International Master in Sustainable Urban Management, which I wrote for Libera Università IULM, Milan (Italy).

and participate in the decision-making processes. To understand when the critical point of social change occurs, we should shift the attention from the people who first adopt a new behavior, to their children, who are taught since childhood to think differently. No matter how skilled you are in a specific activity or how rationally convinced you are about a line of conduct, when the time comes to make decisions, people's inner self, that is the psychological and educational background, still plays a significant role in their choices. Thus, we are influenced by what we have learnt in the past and tend to adopt old behavioral patterns. Moreover, adults belong to organized groups, including powerful guilds and corporations, which make it difficult for them to adopt change for opportunistic reasons, mostly unconsciously elaborated.

In the global world, Western economies are also facing competition in traditional and heavy industries brought by China, Russia, India, Brazil and other booming countries. The unemployment of young professionals and the structure of the labor market require a shifting of investments in economic sectors in which Western economies enjoy a comparative advantage. A thorough re-organization of production, a radical reform of administration and the enhancement of new life styles is a mobile frontier for further progress, perhaps the only possible one. In the mid-to-long run, new technologies, the environmental concern, and the need to restore a competitive advantage will definitely change people's behaviors, industry, settlement patterns, and urban planning. Cities and communities that succeed in reforming their administrative structure and their policies will become competitive in terms of quality of life and wealth production.

In the last decade, "innovation" has become a significant topic in urban studies. While we have adopted several technologies that have considerably influenced social behavior, innovation has not yet adequately modified public policy, economics of culture, infrastructures and decision-making procedures, including politics. Innovation may happen organically or we may purposely foster it by applying specific policies. However, there is a growing awareness that we require innovation to overcome the urban and environmental crisis. We need to favor change and to renew the approach to many current city problems. Finally, a new urban and environmental policy is needed to face the current economic and financial emergency.

A New Approach to Public Administration

Effective city administration and management require both a new way of thinking and new professionals who are trained to conceive and implement groundbreaking policies. At present, innovation in urban policy is hindered by the structure and power of traditional bureaucracy and by the shortage of specifically trained "innovation professionals". We need to educate and train young professionals and administrators so that public and private institutions will be able to hire them in high-rank administrative positions. It is crucial to train personnel who are capable of

thinking differently and can provide creative solutions to new and traditional urban problems. This operation is not easy and requires extensive research and intellectual elaboration.

In the 1960s and 1970s many urban governments established planning and research and development (R&D) departments. Academic institutions, on one hand matched the demand for trained officers to create their staff; on the other, they re-elaborated the theoretical framework for the planning discipline. Nowadays, the situation is quite different: local governments are dwindling or closing R&D and planning departments due to a widespread loss of confidence in research as a tool for the advancement of public administration. Planning was essential when there was a pervasive consensus about the objectives and the problem was how to efficiently and effectively pursue them. In the current situation, we have problems in defining largely shared goals and there is no longer a mass society likely to assume the same goals as if it were a single individual. The transition from the old mass society – a typical feature of modernity – to an aggregation of different urban dwellers requires a deep re-thinking and re-designing of several institutions and behaviors imagined to cope with the old times' problems. We need to proceed, even gradually, toward a new epochal change. Because standardization is to be substituted by diversification, creativity becomes a leading concept, especially in the current phase when the real fight is between the old, which is dying, and the new that cannot yet be born.

To promote change, at IULM University, Milan (Italy), Pierluigi Sacco and I have designed a Master Program in Sustainable Urban Management whose goal is to educate a new generation of professionals (<http://www.iulm.com/wps/wcm/connect/iulmcom/iulm-com/Study-at-IULM/Master-s-Degrees/sustainable-urban-management>). We are training and educating students to put them in a position to introduce creative thinking into public administration and hence promote and manage innovation policies. Because the approach is original and there is not yet enough experience, teaching and research will proceed side by side.

Successful innovation implies a cultural change, which only happens over a long period and most of the time doesn't happen at all. When it does occur, rarely it completely lives up to the foresights of the visionaries who dared to plan it rationally. Nevertheless, the efforts we may make to foster change are never worthless as they stimulate thinking and creativity. If we circumscribe innovation to the technical domain, we produce technological progress; yet it might not have any real effect on cultural change. Innovation-oriented education and training of professionals is a step forward in advancing an effective change process. Today, innovation is often associated both with sustainable development and with progress in technology. More specifically, innovation is related to urban policy issues such as: environmental and historical heritage preservation, protection and enhancement of citizens' health, mobility and traffic, economic development, green technologies, telecommunication technologies, small businesses, etc. At the same time, some of the traditional themes of public policy – namely the integration of immigrants, urban poverty, housing, youth employment, and security – have moved to the top of the priority list, while others – construction, heavy infrastructure, population growth, city expansion, urban design, and related issues – have decreased in importance.

From Smart Cities to Civil Cities

Scholars in environmental studies claim that we need a more comprehensive approach to urban policies if we want to effectively face the environmental crisis. In the course of time – and specifically with the resurgence of the environmental crisis – the very structure of many urban problems has changed. Nonetheless, for some time now, powerful professional and educational organizations have been in charge of applying old technical paradigms to the solution of conventional problems. Innovation will always be limited if it takes place inside old paradigms. Ironically, when central governments appropriate funds for which local governments can apply to develop presumably new projects, they begin operating for conservation. A decade ago, some urban scholars and innovative businessmen launched the “smart city” idea to promote urban management and planning based on new and soft technologies that companies were rapidly elaborating. In 2012, the European Union appropriated funds, which the city could apply for to employ those new projects. To win the competition for the funds, investors and local governments had to follow precise and codified rules, as is normal when they use taxpayers’ money. One typical rule, which operates as a guarantee, is that funds will go preferably to projects adopting “best practices”, namely the ones inspired by – if not identical to – some successful previous venture. The system of public incentives cannot reasonably be different in its overall structure, but it creates a problem. Innovation happens into a well-defined framework. Moreover, as in the specific case of the “smart city” project funding, public money promotes technological progress, but it is totally unaware of social change that new technology prompts or may provoke. We can accept and even welcome the fact that social change is not government-lead. Nonetheless, two more facts require attention. First, we need to think about the possible impact of technology on society. Second, a new idea of smart city stems from the system of social and political relations, not only from technology. Thus, we have two possibilities. One, we can engineer new institutions and envisage rationally conceived social change. Two, we can create the conditions for creative and innovative society and individuals in the social domain. It is not even necessary to choose between the two options. What really matters is to elaborate and spread a culture for a humanist approach in urban management and train professionals capable of applying it to administrations.

From Planning to Innovation, to Creativity

A few decades ago, approximately from the 1950s to the 1980s, city administration and management were associated with the idea and the practice of physical and social planning much more than in the present time. Planning is defined as a category of social change, one that is deliberately envisaged. The untamed process of urban and metropolitan concentration, that took place in that period, required a systematic

approach to city administration and management. Planning, in its multifaceted versions, was a viable answer. The planning procedure was consistent with a shared modern belief, i.e. one that assumed the possibility to govern urban phenomena by employing a comprehensive and rational approach. This idea of planned city management fits into a period in which development was proceeding along quite a uniform path and needed to be regulated rather than reformulated. Universities offered courses and degrees in planning which became a well-established academic discipline. Some might think that planning was seldom applied as thoroughly as they expected. Others adopted a lower key approach and assigned a lesser importance to planning. However, the ambition of managing urban growth using social and physical planning tools shaped most urban growth policies in Europe and the U.S. In Communist countries, planning was completely government-led, as it was part of the State's ideology. In Western societies planning (and planners) had to find an appropriate balance between democratic institutions, the free market principles, and the requirements of technocratic decision-making. Two main planning schools confronted each other: the first called for rational planning, the latter for advocacy planning and citizen participation.

Since the 1990s, urban planning – especially in its extreme “rational” version and its dreaming of the rational city (Boyer 1986) – has not been as popular as it was in previous decades. Politicians and public opinion, as well as scholars, have abandoned the planning option. Even the mere use of the term ‘planning’ was discredited in some political and scholarly milieus. Instead of “advocacy planning”, we now prefer to use the term ‘citizen participation’, which is not exactly the same thing although it stems from the same cultural background. Since the early 1990s, urban policies have focused on single projects both when dealing with infrastructure construction and with public policies, and have abandoned the idea of a long-term vision to shape the form of cities and urban society. While planning – as it was conceived in the past – is quite outdated, nonetheless some method of development and change is still necessary. Thus we need to find a contemporary substitute for planning in promoting change. Nowadays, although we desperately need to promote change to reverse the decay of our cities, it would be pointless to resuscitate planning as it was conceived in the past. Therefore, we assume that we need to revitalize urban administrations by effectively (and systematically) conceiving and promoting innovative projects and original decision-making procedures. This is necessary for two main reasons. First, the development of information and communication technology requires a profound re-thinking of urban problems and cities' organization thus opening to a bonanza of new opportunities. Second, cities are competing with each other in the global market by offering services and products. Regarding the re-thinking of urban problems, we do not only need professionals who master new technologies. City administration also requires high-rank officers and administrators who are in a position to coordinate the introduction of new technologies in the current situation and apply them to diverse departments of city administration. We need to re-establish R&D offices in central and local governments. New professionals are needed who: (a) know the potentialities of new technologies: (b) elaborate a vision of a city organized around them and reform

bureaucracy in order to manage them effectively; deal with the social, economic, and political consequences of new technologies, especially if we want to hasten their introduction. While a sound background in humanities, communication and information technologies is a major asset in these professionals' skills, they also need to be trained in administrative science and law, sociology of organization and public management.

We also need to take into consideration the policies of city governments, including small and mid-size urban centers. Successful cities in the global market must be able to provide original services and products, including an overall better quality of life. They also need to be marketed and to become "visible" thanks to a unique identity that may be created on the ground, for example, of their historical heritage or other cultural policies. The comparative competitiveness of Western cities depends on the abundant availability of human capital that can create opportunities in culture economy, in R&D and in specialized small businesses which are not necessarily high tech, but must be trendy, original and properly merchandized and supported by an efficient service economy.

All this must happen in a social, economic and physical environment that offers integration and social justice, health protection and personal security leading to new lifestyles and cosmopolitanism associated with social and communitarian institutions. From a public policy point of view, advanced administrative units are in the position to develop innovative urban policies. A more effective local democracy and citizens' participation is both a goal and a means to move away from the idea that progress requires only physical infrastructures. Such a social milieu is the keenest to generate reform, innovation and creative thinking in public administration.

A Master Program

The IULM Master Program aims to promote this new idea of progress and to educate and train high-rank professionals and urban leaders with a humanist and social science background. As I argued in another essay (Poli 2011), the most influential professionals operating in urban policies and planning generally have a technical education. This doesn't help to reformulate the problems, viz. to innovate, and diminish the role of politicians who are forced to rely on the technicians' conservative approach. However, if I myself were in charged with hiring (say) a mobility planner, today I would choose some highly skilled engineer, not because I trust them, but because there is no one else available.

At present, educational institutions provide an abundant supply of highly skilled professionals in city building, architecture, construction, road and public transportation facilities, and in general in physical planning. A number of qualified courses are offered in legal administrative education. Traditional education has introduced the sustainability issue into teaching and developing new techniques. The graduates from these programs are intended to hold high-rank positions in public and private

administrations. However, there is an apparent shortage of professionals who are specialized and trained in social policies, communication and economics applied to both customary and newer urban problems. While educational institutions provide several undergraduate programs in human sciences, there are still few post-graduate advanced courses that approach urban policy in a comprehensive way and most of them are quite traditional. Thus, it is not easy for professionals in social sciences to achieve high-rank positions in administrations. At the same time, we lack a social science and humanist culture in administrations that can bring new ideas to problem solving and to choosing new development options.

Pundits in economics, communication and social sciences should be educated with the objective of holding high rank in the administrations and to study and professionally manage major urban policy affairs such as housing, security, mobility, integration, employment, development, sustainability and quality of life. We should create and make available a new knowledge which: (a) helps in tackling and reformulating long-standing urban problems; (b) allows creative high-rank professionals to be trained to solve urban problems from an economic and social science perspective which integrates the more traditional technical approach.

The Course's Content

The Master's ultimate goal is not to provide a theoretical education, but to train and educate professionals to deal with practical management problems. However, to foster innovation, mostly during the first semester, we will proceed with a critical analysis applied to subjects such as urban geography and planning, economics and social science methods. If you approach a problem without understanding the overall implications and meaning, you may find an efficient and rapid solution and even develop new techniques. Nonetheless, if you remain in the same analytical framework, you'll never be able to change the nature of the problem. You'll demonstrate the equivalent of the creativity of a chess player who can envisage up to the next 20 moves, but will never get out of the chessboard. To be really creative, we need professionals who are able to re-frame urban and environmental problems as much as it is possible. To do this we need to forget – for a while – the urgency of the solution and focus on the comprehension of the problems. Admittedly, this is possible in an academic milieu rather than in the everyday administrative and management routine, but unfortunately also in academics sometimes we do not take into enough consideration the necessity of examining the fundamentals hidden in the problems and take for granted the way they look. Thus, for example, the synopsis of the urban geography course includes: (a) cities' classification from the points of view of physical form, landscape, social and infrastructural functioning, and administrative institutions; (b) an analysis of cities' problems from the cultural, social and political points of view, e.g. issues in urban anthropology, economics, social justice related to urban problems are treated in this introductory course; (c) a description of the city as a historical and artistic object; (d) how cities have been

described and perceived in the past and in literature; (e) models for the cities of tomorrow; (f) the cities in the world. At the end of the course students will be able to read the cities, understand their basic characteristics and different features, interpret the ongoing trends, and have a general view of world urban geography.

The courses in social science, research methods and techniques, are directly related to the analyses of urban and environmental problems as described above. Students will study survey techniques in relation to the problems identified so that it might become necessary to elaborate, propose and implement some new quantification method on the basis of a new reading of the city.

The ICT are posed in relation to the interpretation and analyses so that they can be shaped by human needs instead of being responsible for shaping them. Often it happens that managers who have been educated and trained in technological disciplines, at a certain point begin being interested in social science and communication. With this Master program we want to proceed the other way around. Our aim is that, after a sound education in humanities, communication and/or social sciences, students and managers may become interested in new techniques and study them professionally.

To be “sustainable”, urban management must be creative and innovative. Thus students, and managers to be, must become aware of how everyday people’s life is influenced by economic behaviors, ethical values and by the relation between urban space and community. A professional knowledge of the society dynamics and value is fundamental for enabling the introduction of administrative reforms requested by a sound sustainable urban management.

Knowledge of ICT and in general of technology-based administrative tools is a basic asset for the future managers of a sustainable city. The student training does not contemplate technology design and it is rather focused on offering a broad overview on the possibilities offered by information technologies in public administration and in innovation diffusion. Technology is applied as a fundamental tool in citizen participation as well as in management.

At national level, so-called creative finance has been proposed to cope with the current financial crisis. Creative finance can be even better applied to approaching local development issues, such as financing sustainable projects, green and cultural projects. The Master program offers (a) an overview of local public finance theory and laws; (b) the examination of case studies; (c) some attempts to develop new ideas on how to use or reform local finance in an innovative way.

Environmental policy and culture enhancement policies are not exactly synonyms but they have a lot in common. Thus, they are treated as part of public policy because both environmental and cultural policies are suitable for solving social problems and to modify social and administrative behaviors. As for the disciplinary framework, the course’s topic is approached from a sociological and cultural anthropology point of view. The students learn about issues such as immigration, integration, community organization, citizen participation and how these themes are related to environmental policies and sustainable projects.

If we want to manage a sustainable city, we need to change some of its physical and social features. Therefore, students are to learn planning techniques, economics

tools, sociological analysis and laws. Nonetheless, it is also necessary to elaborate a creative thinking which indicates the way. For instance, the study of the city in literature in visual and in performing arts helps in the understanding of the preferences of the citizens in advance and proposing solutions not yet implemented and never before thought of. The course is divided into two parts: (a) a theoretical session in which a geographer explains the use of art and literature in describing the city life and the city problems; (b) the presentation and discussion of pictures and readings about the city.

Students learn a series of environmentally friendly technologies in the field of communication and organization. The Sustainable Urban Management International Master course, in fact, is focused on how humanists can be effective in managing urban spaces and cities by adopting soft technologies and the tools of disciplines like economics, sociology, psychology, etc. However, a sound knowledge of the potentialities of the tools offered by advanced technologies in communication is necessary. The master's graduates must be able to suggest, design and propose solutions to urban problems, which are more green, innovative and unconventional.

Epilogue: A Non-conclusion

In the last 40 years, whoever tried a new definition of a social or political phenomenon couldn't help labeling it with the prefix "post", "de" or something similar, but always in a negative form. Much like the title of this epilogue. Therefore we go through post-modern, post-industrial, de-growth, citationism, deconstructivism and more. Recently, I read about the post-global era and post-Islamic thinking, while arguing about a post-Western society is so trivial that it's not even worth mentioning. Also when we use the prefix "neo" that apparently calls for innovation, often we mean a re-edition of the past. Coining a brand-new term seems out of question! Contemporary imagination of the future regularly turns backward. This attitude proves a decadence that includes either a desperate lack of ideas or an unspoken desire of something radically new. Two approaches prevail, both inadequate. The first presumes that we should advance along the well-known paths and that the crisis is just a temporary backlash: soon we'll find once again the way to progress since modernity is still our goal, an "unfinished project" (pop-quoting Habermas) (Habermas and Luhmann 1971). Thus, it is convenient to keep the old paradigms and continue elaborating on them because they can still help progress. Technology would incrementally solve all the new problems that the "risk society" continuously creates. Social justice, political freedom, individual and human rights, in the form they were defined as three centuries ago and now almost universally accepted in the Western world, wouldn't be argued. Western political principles are altogether perceived as universal human rights. Modernity still being the goal, we need to stick to the traditional dialectic between socialism and libertarianism, with some possible integration with Christian social doctrine and other minor beliefs, including the Greens. The second approach involves a destructive attitude and does not imply any endeavor to envisage a new possible better future: the priority is the demolition of the present order and then we'll think about the new one. Perhaps the time is ripe to consider a third approach, namely we should begin substituting the "post-everything" with a "pre-something". In other words, we need to have an idea of the future desired, no matter if it is more utopia than a project.

Certainly the “pre-something” features are not yet fully defined, but what really matters is defining some founding concepts and moving toward a political and social model based on new values and principles. Let’s call it a pre-ideological phase, as there have been a few throughout history. This essay identifies the relation between humanity and nature as the starting point of elaborating the new epistemic paradigm and a new politics. This is a long-term process, but it affects everyday politics because a common sense is spreading among citizenries that something is going awry with the natural balance. Hence, there is a potentially large public opinion and political constituency sensitive to the environmental issue, but they still lack ideological and cultural coordinates.

For some decades, a number of epistemologists have challenged modern science, but the institutions that it has produced and the consequent social and economic organization are resilient, having put deep roots in people’s mentality, in socio-political institutions and in the production system. Most of the political philosophy of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was based on the socio-economic system originated with the industrial revolution. The challenge was the distribution of power and of an incredibly growing wealth among newly formed social classes. Political philosophy and practice elaborated mostly on this. Also, the everyday people’s discourse all over the globe uses the categories developed by nineteenth century philosophers and political leaders to interpret facts and express opinions. Just as it took centuries to complete the scientific, urban and industrial revolutions, in the same way, decades and centuries will have to pass from a politics hinged on the distribution of power and income to another where nature stands at the center of all concerns. The foundation of modern science, politics and social organization implied a revolution in the relation between nature and humanity: industrialization and urbanization are essentially a consequence of the manner in which humans treat other animals and other earthly entities. This point of view has been completely overlooked because we’ve been focused on the relations among human beings, namely power and wealth distribution.

The construction of a sound system of thinking requires a lot of time, historical conditions and a group of scholars whose ideas are connected with politics and social phenomena. Finally, political leaders will show up as a consequence and ideas will trickle down into politics. It has been said that, because in the long term we’ll all be dead, the long term is not a political category. This does not justify inaction though. Indeed, we can begin to prepare the ground as in the past utopist socialists did before Marx elaborated a full theory. A couple of millennia ago, even Jesus Christ needed John the Baptist to prepare the ground for his new Gospel. Jokes apart, we are in a preliminary phase in which the greatest possible achievement can’t be anything more than turning our head from looking at a well-known but expiring past to staring into a foggy future. It’s time to shift this attitude from the intellectual domain and make it political. The situation is such that the long-term vision is helpful for being successful in current everyday politics. It happens sometimes.

To do it we definitely need courage, and I do not hesitate to claim that this is a courageous book. It is certainly incomplete and flawed, but it opens to further political discussion. I tried to demonstrate – or at least I suggested with my arguments – that there are good reasons to believe that the daring proposal of a new environmentally based politics is not a “fearful bravery”. It is not a desperate attempt to fight battles that you feel you’ve already lost before entering the battlefield. I don’t want to call for those impossible revolutions of which I have been hearing about for the last 40 years, one of the most politically conservative periods in history. I call for just a first step, but an important one, as I know the direction I’m heading in.

The current growing unease – to a large extent inexplicable in rational terms and perceived mostly emotionally – cooperates to spread all over the world new beliefs, behaviors and attitudes that are becoming more and more common among a significant portion of the bored and frustrated western citizens. In the short run, that is, in the real political time-dimension, there are the conditions for acting politically and striving to get power. Environmental politics is also strictly related with people’s territorial identification and citizenship.

Cultural elaboration is also necessary both to sustain the real politics and for creating the foundations for a pre-something ideology. No surprise that, in the political and media language, words like ‘creativity’ and ‘innovation’ are now more frequent than concepts such as planning and growth, which today suggest a somehow negative connotation or, at least do not ignite any enthusiasm, especially among the youth.

We are living in the most unstable political condition since World War II. New ideologies challenge the old ones and are often based on religion and on a thinking alien to the Western tradition. The environmentalist approach and politics would grow inside our culture and save some Western inalienable principles through recovering the emotional and natural component for a long time put aside. Political and cultural conditions are favorable, hence stop writing and act.

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