Social Precarity and Sustainable Growth: Reflections on Dangerous Contradictions

Premise

The framework within which to include the evaluation of the phenomena concerning employment instability [11] and social precarity is constituted by the current process of globalization; a complex ongoing process which deals with economy, sociality, culture, politics, institutions; a process generating changes which calls into question many well-established values and situations: ideas, ethical principles, preferences, habits, lifestyles of individuals and communities, economic balances, employment, institutional traditions, and so on. Globalization’s impact is all over the world, and this process is very different from the previous one of the internationalization, which was identified with the increasing dimension of the international trade [Херрман, 2014, 20, с. 17–22].

The global era generates costs and benefits. The costs are all that human beings are suffering as well as the damages caused by a structural change. The benefits are represented by the extraordinary growth of some economies (the countries of the Pacific area, China and India, some countries of South America), their increasing role in the world arena, the spread of wealth (still far from being distributed equally to all), the spread of social protection in a general situation of modernization.

As an ongoing process, globalization is continuously changing its own structure and its points of balance. A systematic and organic collection of many information and data available about, shows clearly, for example, that during the 90s the driving forces of this process had drawn a worldwide system similar to a solar system, with United States and Japan at the center as the most important players, while in the first decade of the new XXI century, the world system has changed structure and results much more like an archipelago for the set-up of distinct geo-political and geo-economic areas, concentrated mainly on the dynamics of internal development and the prominence of new active players (eg. the BRICS). In any case it is process under a further evolution and it is currently difficult to forecast what kind of new structures and points of balance it will be able to build; and this because both the effects of an increasing number of innovative factors and the influence of the forces of resistance (the emergence of new forms of protectionism).

A basic question: globalization is an order or a disorder?

Faced with these characteristics of the globalization process, one of the basic questions is the following: this process reflects an «order» or a «disorder»? The fact that even at the international summits of heads of states and governments constantly emerges the need to give an order to the development — the issue of the new governance — means that what we are experiencing is rather a period at least of great disorder. Globalization, in short, reflects a chaos — a chaos that can be also creative, not just destructive — because in this process it is difficult to predict and control the consequences of plans, programs, actions.

To this first consideration, a second may be added: usually, is just the weakness or, worst, the lack of an order that let emerge what might be described as the struggle for power, that is, the attempt by some subjects to abolish the existing order and to organize a new order, a new system of rules to impose on others. This attempt always produces winners and losers.

Who is trying to assert its own order, starts always by the devaluation of the existing order, weakening its rules, taking advantage of its contradictions and limitations, enhancing its contrast elements; and all this with the aim to impose his own rules [Марнеева, 2014, 22, с. 56–68]. One of the main factors on which he acts is that of change. A change bound to a mobility pushed to the extreme of the nomadism, to overcome any possible tie and relationship system, for example, with a community or a territory [Бобков, Черных, 2014, 21, с. 39–55]. Enough with the long term! — says Richard Sennett in The flexible man [14] — the occasional relations of association are more useful than long-term bonds. In this new space-time dimension, relationships become occasional and ephemeral, the constraints and long-term bonds lose any value [1]., the benefits are meaningless if they are caught immediately, the ideas have worth only if they produce income, everything is transient, fragmented, «liquid» [2]. In the globalized world we must travel «light», without the burden of particular conditions, we must avoid to have lasting ties with our goods; we must be mobile and flexible [13]. The culture of the present is going to cancel the past and the future, with all the risks and contradictions that this fact implies.

The global elite, the global market players committed to take the opportunities of the «disorder» have no boundaries, are not tied or constrained by
certain situations, such as the policies of nation states or trade union agreements, etc.; they may, or try, to abandon them at any time, de-localizing the activities as the opportunities they see or the new situations they are able to build in the most different areas of the world. These global elites, in short, are acting with strong mobility in a dimension of space and time which is quite different from that in which the majority of citizens lives and works, in which the traditional institutions act [3].

Herein lies the source of the uncertainty prevalent in contemporary society; in the large asymmetry between the capital, that is increasingly global, and the labour and the politics which remain bounded to the local scale. An employee is tied to his community, the company for which he works always less. A public authority is bound by definition to the service of its territory, but the strong economic actors with whom it faces have very different and wider scope for their action. For them, as well ISRIL states, a leading Italian institute of industrial relations analysis (2012, local situations are as airfields on which the global fleet lands and takes off [4]. Therefore, the conditioning capacity of the economic players on the public institutions is much stronger today than ever before. The uncertainty that, consequently, is generated, by this new system of relations between the development actors — institutions, workers, business — end up to widespread and to affect the entire.

Thus, today the power of the impact of economic players in public institutions are much stronger than ever before. Uncertainty that develops as a result of this new system of relations between the parties — institutions, employees, business, eventually widely distributed and affects the entire system at the national or local level [Mabuza, Maslov, 2014, 26]. In fact, the higher the uncertainty spreads, the more players in the global market are able to use the advantages stemming [Sankova, 2014, 25]. The destruction of the previous order — a situation unprecedented and unexpected; situation, it is important to add that looks in the format of increasing uncertainty as an integral element of the new global disorder, which, moreover, is very functional. For this reason, it is important to quickly find the right solutions in terms of management of these processes; in order to avoid catastrophic risks, the effects of which lead to the financial and economic crisis [12], the worst of which occurred after the Second World War.

**Global governance — global government**

To the goal of a new governance of the globalization processes — a governance adequate at least to limit job instability and social insecurity — it is necessary: first, that the scientific community should be able to promote a convergence among various disciplines as well as to adopt an analysis method substantially oriented to the systems analysis, the only one able to assess the interrelationships between the many different factors, the plurality of elements and forces that affect the development of the contemporary world; in this framework, the scientific community should also promote the development of interpretative models of the contemporary society — commonly defined as post-industrial society — in order to understand its possible future evolution [Яковлев, 2014, 23]. Secondly, it should be necessary that the main development actors — political parties, institutions, businesses, professional associations — act in a way to promote the convergence of the systems of rules and regulations which are governing the development process. Of fundamental importance are the building of a positive relationship between state-actors and non-state actors, between the system of rules that relate to national and international institutions and the rules that emerge from agreements between private subjects (such as the collective agreements between trade unions and management associations). That is the open problem of the relationship between government and governance, of the capacity of the rules to manage the globalization process, of the growing importance of the so-called institutional economics.

Improving economy and social welfare as well as promoting a sustainable growth depends, ultimately, by the capability to adapt institutions, norms and behaviors. Here are the problems which refer to the governance-government of such processes. Surely competition needs regulation: this is a necessity first for the same economic players, which only in a fair and transparent environment have the possibility and find the opportunity to verify and eventually affirm the real value of their own ideas, projects and initiative [7]. But since time it is more and more clear that the key-passage is that from the rules of competition to the rules of governance, that is the quality of the regulatory system dealing with economic and social performances (system of laws, rules, procedures, contracts, industrial relations acts). Analysis showed clearly that the societies able to improve the quality of their regulatory system, and to adapt it to the new conditions of development, are also the societies that have been able to react better to the global pressures.

**The open question of sustainable development**

One of the key-aspects of the new governance concerns the definition of norms, rules, conditions to guide the globalization processes in terms of sus-
taneous development, that is a type of development balanced in all its aspects, right in its guiding principles, careful to meet the needs of the current world population but also of the future generations. The commitment to a sustainable development is now assumed and confirmed, even with a lot of emphasis, both by all international institutions, national governments and local authorities. It is necessary, however, to make clear the terms of the issue of sustainability because it is closely linked just to the problems of work instability and, more broadly, of social insecurity.

The idea of sustainability has a very long evolution. Drawn up for the first time in 1972 in relation to the environmental problems, it has been gradually linked to various aspects of the development process: economic, social, cultural, urban [32, c. 22, 23].

In 1972, a team of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) published «Limits of the Growth» [9] the report of a study in which a computer model (World 3) was used to examine the interaction of five subsystems of the global economic system, namely population, food production, industrial production, pollution, and consumption of non-renewable natural resources [15]. This well-known and much criticized study was aimed to the public and served as an eye-opener with regard to mounting pressure of humanity on the Earth’s resources. The first real collective international sign of concern about sustainability came in the same year, in 1972, with the U.N. Conference on the Human environment held in Stockholm. As a result of this conference, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was established, as well as a large number of national environment protection agencies.

The 1980 World Conservation Strategy, aimed at advancing sustainable development by identifying priority conservation issues and key policy options, forged a collaboration between the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUNC), the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and UNEP. In 1983, the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) was established by the U.N. [16]. This commission, chaired by Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland and composed of representatives of both developed and developing countries, produced in 1987 the famous report “Our Common Future” (the Brundtland report). This report defined sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” [5]. Additional insights have been recorded, for example, in the 1992 Rio Summit (Rio Declaration on Environment and Development), as well as in the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, 2002.

In particular, since the Brundtland Report, the commitment to a sustainable development progressively was put in the agenda of international organizations, like the U.N., the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization, of national and regional governments, of the private sector, and of many scientific institutions and NGOs [6]. In Europe, the Lisbon Treaty of 2007 included the principle of sustainability among the fundamental principles of the European Union.

The main problem of sustainability is that it is still today a vague concept, not well defined, in particular when it refers to the social and cultural dimensions of development and to what these dimensions imply: the social dimension, with reference to an equitable distribution of resources, inclusion, development of human resources; the cultural dimension, with reference to cognitive aspects of people, their conventions, values and attitudes. As a result, as demonstrated by many scholars, this concept is often used for different purposes and in different situations.

Recently an increasing attention has been put on the urbanization processes for their relevance just to the point that many authoritative scholars recognize a sustainable urban development as a condition for the overall sustainability, the real new frontier of the sustainability.

As compared to 2008, when 50% of the world population lived in the cities, by 2050 this number will have risen to 70%, with most of the growth occurring in developing regions. Even though many new megacities (more than 10 million inhabitants) and hypercities (more than 20 million inhabitants) will emerge over the next few decades, most of the new city inhabitants will be found in smaller, often institutionally weak settlements of 100,000 — 250,000 people. If we also take into account that, today, about 1 billion people (one third of the world’s urban population) live in slums in inequitable and life-threatening conditions and are directly affected by increasingly frequently occurring environmental and social crises, it becomes clear that much of the developmental work toward sustainability will have to be directed at cities — and (ultimately) be carried out by cities. As an important U.N. documents states (UN Habitat, For a better Urban Future, Paris 2009) “the first decade of the twenty-first century has been marked by overwhelming challenges including a food crisis, an energy crisis, a financial crisis, and growing realization of the consequences of climate change. Thousands of organizations are developing tools and offering policy options to meet these challenges. But these activities are disparate and tend to ignore an
equally unprecedented mega trend: that the world is undergoing an irreversible process of rapid urbanization. Failure to accommodate this mega trend has resulted in unsustainable forms of production and consumption, poverty and social exclusion, and pollution”. More and more this topic of the urbanization processes are becoming a key condition for any meaningful discourse on sustainability.

In any case, we must have clear that acting for a sustainable development means ensuring the continuity of a society and the duration of its growth, to proceed without too many tensions, divisions, risks of rupture, to progress in stability, to work better in the medium-long term [33, c. 6]. Sustainable development requires a systemic culture and a planning capacity, to get over visions, methodologies, analysis which at the present are too partial, fragmented, unrelated to the multiple dimensions that currently define the idea of sustainability, as, we repeat: environmental, economic, social, ethical, cultural, urban [10]. A sustainable development requires, by its nature, policies able to promote balanced interventions in these dimensions and, in particular, with regard to the specific socio-economic dimension, to reduce inequalities as well as to support the inclusion processes.

In particular, truly sustainable policies should, on the one hand, identify patterns of development of modern society based on new quantitative and qualitative parameters, and, on the other hand, courageously face those situations — such as the excessive fragmentation of the labor market and the widespread social insecurity — which represent the true element of risk of failure of a system [Бошков, 2014, 31, c. 104–110]. All this to avoid that the type of pursued development proves, over time, to be «unsustainable» with regard to economic performance (destruction of human and material resources), social cohesion (increasing tensions between social groups), the relationship between citizens and institutions (detachment from politics and democratic life). The same «fate of the market economy — stated the liberal economist Wilhelm Roepke — with its wonderful mechanism of supply and demand, it is decided beyond supply and demand».

The need of a qualitative approach to the development processes

No doubt that the continuous fragmentation of the labor market — a result of the new forms of global competition and technological progress — is giving the rise to situations of increasing precarity, moving from labour to the entire society. A turnaround is possible only by resetting the inherent links between the two processes of production and distribution of wealth — a real challenge to the prevailing contemporary economic and political culture — recognizing the economic value of social action (the welfare system not as simple cost for the society but as a basic production factor), promoting the quality of development and of its many factors, both human and material.

There in lies what is referred to as the urgent need for a big correction: in recovering the basic idea of the common good, in organizing a system of governance that aims to promote cooperation rather than confrontation between the main public and private actors of the development, in connecting the economic and social advantages, in building a more balanced relationship between public and private consumptions; in other words, by pursuing more the quality than quantity of the growth [Терехин, Чернобровова, Бухенский, 2014, 30, с. 86–96] The persistence of the contradiction that currently exists at the international level between the need for economic growth and the spreading of social insecurity, will inevitably lead to produce increasingly prominent tensions and dangerous situations of breaking both at global level and within individual regional and national communities., Member States need to ensure their communities a sustainable growth, ie, stable, balanced, long-lasting; and for this purpose, they can not avoid to address the need to reduce the phenomenon of social insecurity which is, by its nature, likely to be the true element of rupture of each consolidated balance.

In this direction, for example, are going the initiatives promoted by international institutions and individual states to measure the development process with different parameters from those used so far (the new parameters for the calculation of the GNP) as well as to evaluate the processes of change which are taking place in the labor market on the basis of new qualitative elements, such as the enhancement of human resources and their assets of knowledge and experience. In this case, for example, is worth remembering that in the last «Employment Outlook 2014», the OECD, the largest organization of industrialized countries — just to illustrate the complex effects of what is happening in the labor market — considered necessary to integrate the traditional data on employment flows, with data relating to the findings in statistical surveys of different nature, including sociological surveys. As a result, the traditional data on employment / unemployment have been linked, for example, with the data on economic inequality (Gini Index), as well as with data on the birth rate, the demographic trends, school dropout, poverty levels, the relationship between income and health-nutrition-
education, social spending, confidence in financial institutions and, more generally, in public institutions.

In this case, on the basis of this new approach, the OECD «Employment Report 2014», brought out a big warning signal not only on unemployment levels, but especially on the risks of the growing and widespread insecurity in contemporary society.

From social precarity to existential precarity

If the application of Gini index on inequality (adopted by United Nations) is able to highlight an element of structural weakness of an economic and social system, the sociological analysis highlight the deep transformations of the cohesive and identity values, which guide the life of individuals and communities, the influence as well as the limits of the individualistic culture, the widespread fear of diversity.

Under these conditions of structural changes, the corrective interventions in the labour market may well provide a valuable contribution to the recovery of certain aspects of the widespread social insecurity and ensure that the required flexibility to the labor force could be also experienced in positive way.

To the many young people who live daily the negative aspects of flexibility, what is failing, with the source of income, is something far more valuable: the certainty of their social identity, the ability to better organize its existence, the feeling to be part of a shared positive experience, to look with confidence to the future. These elements are all linked to the cognitive and cultural heritage of the person, the validity of ethical values on which its life is based, the same concept that he has of the life.

This is why social precarity — the negative aspect of flexible working — is illustrated in far more different terms: the starting point of the analysis may well be the work precarity, which is originated in the working places [8]. But the phenomenon take a more precise meaning when, starting from that, we get to consider the consequent transformations, as: professional precarity (due to the depletion of the store of knowledge), economic precarity (related by extreme to the poverty conditions), social precarity (linked to the fall of social mobility), existential precarity (linked to the difficulties of formulating a project for the life). It is up to these factors, largely related to a development model generator of increasing inequality, that our societies set up that hierarchical and pyramidal structure, well described by the sociologist Richard Sennett, raising many questions about its real democratic solidity.

And the more this complex area of social precarity, that lies at the basis of the pyramid, broadens and moves away from that area where the opportunities for growth and success are more easily accessible, the more, as already mentioned, our societies accumulates tension and risks of approaching a real breaking point of its weak balances. In this process of deterioration, serious negative effects are also produced, especially in the political and institutional life (marked by increasing absenteeism, alienation, indifference), in the community solidarity (such as isolation, generation break, indifference to the other, the loss of sense of what may be the common good), in culture (with the prevalence of so-called «culture of the present», as already mentioned, that destroys any notion of past and future. In this respect, the Italian scholar Remo Bodei highlights that contemporary society is drastically reducing the ability to imagine a collective future, to imagine it beyond the private expectations... We are facing the desertification of the future).

Conclusions

A new development planning, aimed at achieving the real progress of a society, not only in economic but also in civil terms, should show the capacity to intervene on the multiplicity of causes that underlie the widespread social precarity, on the multi-dimensionality that characterizes this serious phenomenon. There is no doubt that we are facing with structural changes affecting deeply the community order. And the scenarios that lies ahead indicate that these changes will be increasingly marked in the near future. It is just the reflection on the elements that connect work precarity with social and existential precarity, that can provide useful guidelines to promote corrective actions, as required by the quality of growth.

Glossary

Richard Sennet: definitions and interpretation of social precarity. American sociologist Richard Sennett has identified several areas where precarity turn out, for example:

Existential precarity it deals substantially with the difficulty to formulate a project for the future life, to think in terms of planning [17]. In this regard, very practical and useful indications are often provided by the school teachers and university docents on the students’ uncertainty about the path of future inclusion towards which to direct; or by social operators, when a young man employed in an atypical work expresses his doubts on the possibility of organizing a family, to have children, to emigrate or not [Локтюхина, Рожков, 2014, 24; Коулман, 2014, 27; Ионцев, Прохорова, 2014, 28, с. 83–91; Красинец, Шевцова, 2014, 29, с. 92–99], in short, how to orga-
nize his own life plan; by psychologists and sociologists, when a young man shows to be not adequately equipped, because the lack of references to cultural or ethical values, to address the precarity that is inherent in the human relations system, for the continuous changing of the problems and needs of people. It is the area, measurable, of social quality, where development and progress are evaluated not only in terms of quantity (of goods and services produced and traded in the market) but also in terms of quality (ability to civil advancements by individuals and communities).

Social precarity: it deals with the difficulty of identifying its own role in the community of reference, including the work community. What social role plays, in fact, a young man who works temporary for a project as a tutor of a training course? How may be it defined in terms of social value? What meaning to give to the perception of marginality in this case the subject has of himself? This is the area, certain measurable, of social mobility.

Professional precarity: it deals with the difficulty of accumulating knowledge and skills that can be transferred and used in subsequent work experiences, especially when there is a lack of opportunities, within the firm or outside, to reworking its own experience. This is the area, measurable, of the exclusion by an active participation in the labor market initiatives as well as in the positive dynamics of a democratic society.

Economic precarity: it deals with the difficulty associated with inadequate wages, in absolute terms or because delayed in time, occasional, etc... which obliges to resort to external support or to cancel also essential spending commitments (eg, such as the loan to buy a house). This is the area marked by discontinuous work, atypical, irregular, by time, by project, by blurred boundaries and contents. In any case it is an area still measurable and where the precarity conditions are linked more closely with those of poverty.

For Sennett, the combination of these different precarity situations determine the position of an individual in the social pyramid, where the top is marked by flexible working, with the risks but also the opportunities it offers to a person who has the ability to grasp them; but where the base is its negative side, the vast phenomenon of social precarity, marked by the inability of people to be able to construct and enforce their own plan of life. It is the area of a «radical feeling of insecurity for the loss of jobs but also of its lifestyle», where every idea about a positive and constructive future is, at least, set aside.

For Sennett, therefore, flexibility and precarity, are not, in substance, contrary to the prevalent opinion, the two sides of the same coin. These two issues are certainly linked, but the first, flexibility, is more closely tied to the issues of work organization and finds its answers in them; the second, precarity, is undoubtedly also linked to the issues of work, but is more extensively involved and influenced by other factors, which go beyond mere workplace to address the organization of the entire social system. Both, they are still part of a different structure, the so-called social pyramid, whose base is precarity. The extension of this pyramidal base and its volumetric projection upward, indicates the risk of breaking which is over a particular social system. Its assessment and measurement represents a scientific and political challenge; however is the obligatory way to follow to corrective actions that will reduce the danger for the whole.

References
5. Komissiya ES [EU Commission]. Люди, экономика и чистая планета: Идеи устойчивого развития / People, the economy and pure planet: Sustainable development insights.


20. Херрманн П. / Herrmann P. Прекаризация — вызов к пересмотру политики повышения благосостояния (на английском языке) // Уровень жизни населения регионов России. 2014. № 3. С. 17–22.

22. Матвеева Т.А. Влияние неустойчивости занятости на трудовые доходы российских работников и на их удовлетворенность трудом // Уровень жизни населения регионов России. 2014. № 3. С. 56–68.
23. Яковлев Р.А. Неустойчивая занятость и регулирование минимальной заработной платы // Уровень жизни населения регионов России. 2014. № 4.
24. Локтюхина Н.В., Рожков В.Д. Регулирование иностранной трудовой миграции как механизм снижения неустойчивости занятости // Уровень жизни населения регионов России. 2014. № 4.
26. Федченко А.А., Маслова Е.В. Роль неустойчивой занятости в кластеризации общества // Уровень жизни населения регионов России. 2014. № 4.
27. Коулман Данил А. Международная миграция в Европе в XXI веке: настоящее и будущее // Уровень жизни населения регионов России. 2014. № 3. С. 69–82.
28. Ионцев В.А., Прохорова Ю.А. Международная миграция и рабочий контингент в контексте демографической теории // Уровень жизни населения регионов России. 2014. № 3. С. 83–91.
29. Красинец Е.С., Шевчуш Т.В. Миграция как фактор и следствие развития рынка труда // Уровень жизни населения регионов России. 2014. № 3. С. 92–99.
31. Бобков В.Н. Модель «Благосостояние» для оценки и прогноза качества и уровня жизни населения региона // Уровень жизни населения регионов России. 2014. № 1. С. 104–110.

34. Loktyukhina N.V., Rozhkov V.D. Regulirovanie inostrannoy trudovoy migratsii kak mehanizm snizeniya neusotychnosti zanyatosti [Regulation of foreign labor migration as a mechanism to reduce the instability of employment]. Uroven zhizni naseleniya regionov Rossi [The standard of living of the population regions of Russia]. 2014. I. 4.