ECONOMY AND SOCIETY CHANGES IN THE POST-COVID ERA

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As Western countries are approaching post-Covid normality, the common sentiment is that the pandemic has been an epochal watershed for the international economic and geopolitical landscape. It is not difficult to predict that the world will be significantly different to what it was before 2020. However, even before the pandemic, some to long-term trends − such as the digital and ecological transition − were already clearly visible. At the same time, a redistribution of global economic power had already been underway for some years, with China (and the Asian countries linked to it) as a primary actor of an apparently unstoppable growth capable of questioning the leadership of the United States. In this context, Europe is losing ground due to a stagnant economy and a critical political-institutional inertia. The pandemic has accelerated these trends, but also spurred stronger policy responses from governments.

Looking at the next years, four main trends deserve to be highlighted. The first is linked to the fight against climate change: to overcome this challenge, it will be essential that the recent announcements for the pursuit of climate neutrality by 2050-2060 are accompanied by concrete actions. So far not all countries have shown similar sensitivity to these challenges, both for political reasons and because of their different levels of economic development.

Furthermore, some countries may not have sufficient financial autonomy to support their energy transition. This is also why it is increasingly important to have common and shared rules on how much sustainability is worth. This is an essential information, so that investors can base their choices on plausible projections. The ecological transition towards new 'clean' and 'green' business models will be successful only if the world of business and finance find the right incentives to invest in new energy sources and aim for more sustainable production.

The second trend is related to the digital transition. Technologies such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, internet of things are becoming more and more pervasive. However, digitization could further amplify inequalities, both between countries and within them. If in the past many studies reported a positive impact of digital technologies in terms of energy saving or for the substitution effect of the change in the industrial structure (Takase and Murota, 2004; Rexhäuser et al., 2014), more recently the debate highlighted the negative impact in terms of energy consumption and consequent emissions deriving from the diffusion of certain innovations, first of all cryptocurrencies (Gallersdörfer, 2020; Vranken, 2017; Lange *et al*., 2020; Gelenbe and Caseau, 2015).

In all cases, the technologies falling within the category of industry 4.0 generate effects on employment that have been little considered except through studies that demonstrate the positive employment effects from the adoption of digital technologies (GeSi, 2012).

Recent analyzes (Dantas *et al.,* 2021) have highlighted that the effect of innovations related to industry 4.0 can also lead to negative results. One of the recognized problems is related to the impact on a social level and in particular on the generation of jobs (Bai *et al*., 2020; Korhonen *et al*., 2018). It is estimated that about 8.5% of the global manufacturing workforce

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will be replaced by technologies related to industry 4.0 by 2030, corresponding, in the case of China alone, to 14 million jobs (Oxford Economics, 2019).

The greater efficiency that is determined at the system level and the lower need for human work should leave room for a corresponding development of social and welfare activities, allowing the reallocation of the many people who, inevitably, will be replaced by machines that will be increasingly autonomous (Dantas *et al*., 2021).

The third trend is that related to demography and the aging of population. In recent years Europe faced this issue more than the other continents, showing a ratio of over 65 to under 15 of over 130%, with obvious implications in terms of sustainability of the welfare systems. The rapid aging of the population represents a great challenge for Europe, with the need to find the resources to provide services to a population more in need of care and assistance, in the face of an ever-lower share of workers. In any case, all sectors related to services for the elderly are set to grow in the coming decades.

Finally, the fourth major trend concerns distribution systems and the way in which they impact on consumer behavior. The pandemic has generated an acceleration in a process of change in consumer behavior that was already underway (Druica *et al*., 2020). This is happening not only with reference to the purchase of products, but also for the social aggregator role that traditional retail palyed. In fact, the way in which retailing has so far contributed to characterize the places of sociality (town centers, shopping centers) is destined to deeply change.

The growing share of e-commerce is leading to redefine the business models of companies. Many businesses around the world have become aware of having to reconsider their market relationships starting from marketing channels (Fortuna *et al*., 2021). The shift to online sales has been much faster than expected, pushing companies to rethink their strategies as regards the way of relating to the market, both in terms of communication and in the use of marketing channels, from multichannelling, to omnichanneling (Musso and Adam, 2020). The new scenarios that will emerge will in any case be characterized by high variability, given the developments in technologies that continually evolve and put into question every progress, making it only temporary. The articles in this issue of IJEB deal with some of the main issues involved in these changes.

The first article from Maria-Magdalena Roșu and Răzvan-Mihai Băcanuand entitled "Bridging Intention-Action Gap for Healthcare Measures During the COVID-1 19 Emergency Period" focuses on the distance between intention and action in the case of the healthcare measures during the Covid-19 lockdown. The results of the study confirm the existence of an intention-action gap regarding general healthcare measures, and it highlights the mitigating role of the context-related impediments on the engagement with healthcare measures.

The article from Mehrnaz Kouhihabibi, entitled "Feeling the Pulse of Trade in the Age of Corona: Artificial Intelligence and E-Commerce" provides an overview on the effects of the Coronavirus epidemic on the global economy, especially the world's major economies and countries most affected by the crisis. The study puts in light that future discussions should focus more on measuring the impact of COVID-19 on innovation, efficiency, teamwork and on collaboration, with an orientation towards common good as a purpose of brands and organizations.

The contribution entitled "Corporate Social Responsibility Practices in the Retail Sector: A Multiple Case Study Analysis of Us Retailers", from Laura Bravi, presents a longitudinal analysis on five American companies, leaders in the retail sector, as regards social responsibility practices. The study shows that long-term collective benefits is the main goal for large retailers and it is not just a matter of green/social washing initiatives.

Joseph O. Jiboku, Peace A. Jiboku and Adeyemi O. Babasanya are the Authors of the article entitled "Poverty and Unemployment in Nigeria: The Case for Advancement of Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET)", that puts in light the lack of skilled human capital as one of the main reasons for increasing levels of poverty and unemployment in Nigeria. The study indicates the Technical Vocational Education and Training program as a strategy for addressing the issue.

The article entitled "The 'Torre Del Cerrano' Marine Protected Area and The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas as an Ecotourism Management Tool", from Guido Capanna Piscè, proposes a critical analysis of the documentation produced by the Torre del Cerrano Marine Protected Areas (Italy), according to the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism (ECST) in Protected Areas. ECST is a voluntary management tool and certification that enables protected areas to develop sustainable tourism for the benefit of the environment, local populations, businesses, and visitors.

Huseyn Mammadov, with his contribution entitled "Car Price Prediction in the Usa by Using Linear Regression", proposes a model, based on linear regression, to predict car prices in the U.S market, in order to help new entrants to understand the pricing factors/variables in the U.S automobile industry.

The last article from Mario Risso and Andrea Paesano is entitled "Retail and Gamification for a New Customer Experience in Omnichannel Environment". The article aims at exploring the use of gamification to improve the customer experience in retailing, facing the new challenges of omnichannelling.

Finally, in this issue there is a book review that worth to be considered. The book is authored by Vasant Raval and its title is "Corporate Governance. A Pragmatic Guide for Auditors, Directors, Investors and Accountants" The book provides practical insights illustrating theory with recent cases, proving to be a great source of information for anyone that has to do with the ecosystem of corporate governance such as professional accountant, securities lawyer, economist, financial analyst, and auditors.

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