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## INTRODUZIONE

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Questo numero della rivista JUNCO – Journal of UNiversities and international development COoperation - è dedicato al tema “ICT, sviluppo e cooperazione: ricerca visuale e partecipazione”. Con l’espressione ICT4D (ICT for development) si fa riferimento ai dibattiti, alle esperienze di progettazione, alle pratiche di utilizzo delle tecnologie dell’informazione e della comunicazione nell’ambito delle politiche e degli interventi di sviluppo.

Si tratta di un ambito di studi estremamente attuale e intorno al quale si sono consolidati nell’ultimo decennio contributi in letteratura e dibattiti a livello internazionale. Se da un lato le ICT rappresentano uno dei principali fattori abilitanti, capaci di determinare un’efficace lotta alle disuguaglianze, dall’altro, al contrario, possono contribuire ad allargare il divario non solo digitale, ma anche economico e sociale.

Si tratta di un tema, quello delle connessioni tra ICT, sviluppo e cooperazione che sollecita in più direzioni l’attenzione di chi studia, lavora, o svolge attività di ricerca al crocevia tra cooperazione internazionale e utilizzo delle tecnologie. Per esempio, invita a ragionare su come raccogliere dati nell’ambito di progetti di emergenza o sviluppo attraverso l’utilizzo delle ICT (attraverso open data, participatory mapping, ecc.), o su come le ICT possano essere utilizzate in processi di coinvolgimento della cittadinanza e della società civile, per esempio nella

costruzione partecipata delle politiche territoriali attraverso piattaforme digitali collaborative. Le ICT, inoltre, giocano un ruolo sempre più rilevante nelle campagne di prevenzione sanitaria, spesso condotte tramite l'utilizzo di strumenti digitali, o nel monitoraggio di indicatori di salute. Similmente tanto in agricoltura quanto nella lotta al cambiamento climatico, le ICT trovano crescenti spazi di applicazione innovativi; ad esempio, risultano rilevanti nelle valutazioni di impatto rispetto all'utilizzo di nuove tecnologie, come la blockchain, parimenti ad ulteriori ambiti. Anche per quanto concerne la promozione della giustizia sociale e dei diritti umani sono molte le sfere indagate; tra le altre, si ricorda il tema dell'interdipendenza tra ICT e democrazia.

Se le opportunità e i vantaggi offerti da questo tipo di strumenti sono ampiamente discussi nella letteratura internazionale, la pratica ha evidenziato la presenza di alcune sfide che è opportuno tenere in conto e gestire nell'implementazione di progetti che prevedano il loro utilizzo. Tra queste, come già accennato, occorre discutere la potenziale disparità di accesso legate a squilibri territoriali, generazionali e culturali (digital divide), l'inclusione ed equità nel coinvolgimento di tutte le categorie di possibili utenti, incluse le fasce fragili a rischio di auto esclusione, la gestione della privacy e della sicurezza dei dati, la necessità di accompagnamento e formazione di competenze digitali, nonché definire e introdurre efficaci metodologie di monitoraggio e valutazione di impatto.

Ciò implica una visione meno tecnocratica, accompagnata da un processo di implementazione tecnologica che guardi alle persone, al contesto di riferimento, alle risorse, ai bisogni specifici, ai rischi e alle barriere (es. culturali, economiche, sociali, infrastrutturali), alle capacità e agli interessi, in cui i potenziali utenti non sono solo beneficiari ma attori di un cambiamento sentito come necessario.

Entro questo insieme di riflessioni, il presente numero raccoglie dunque una ricca collezione di contributi da parte di ricercatori e ricercatrici che hanno lavorato e ragionato sulle relazioni che intercorrono tra ICT e le attività di cooperazione internazionale in contesti diversi. Si sono così raccolte riflessioni provenienti da diversi ambiti disciplinari, con particolare attenzione a ricerche e contributi che hanno impiegato metodi e strumenti di ricerca qualitativa e visuale.

L'articolo "Restart: servizio collaborativo per l'innovazione sociale" di Debora Giorgi, Sofia Collacchioni, Francesca Falli, Chiara Rutigliano apre la discussione mostrando come il design dei servizi può sostenere l'empowerment socio-economico dei giovani nel Maghreb, attraverso la creazione di imprese sociali che valorizzano il territorio.

Segue, poi, il testo "University teaching and potential of geographic information systems in project cycle management cycle in international development for cooperation" di Silvia Grandi, Cristina Brasili, Giuseppe Vico e Aurora Circhetta concernente un'analisi sull'uso dei sistemi di informazione geografica (GIS) nel ciclo di gestione dei progetti di cooperazione internazionale; in particolare, si evidenzia un progetto pilota dell'Università di Bologna che integra teoria e pratica per sviluppare competenze applicabili in varie fasi del ciclo di progetto.

Successivamente, Andrea Carraro nel suo contributo "ICT come enclosures? Il caso-studio del mobile money keniano" discute anche l'impatto sociale e economico delle piattaforme di mobile money, con un focus particolare sul caso di M-Pesa in Kenya, esaminando le dinamiche di inclusione finanziaria e le tensioni emergenti tra utenti e grandi multinazionali.

Parallelamente, il contributo di Antonio Archetti, Luciano Baresi, Francesca Bruschi, Roxan Cadir, Luis Domingos, e Daud Jamal, intitolato "ICT4Dev for the Social and Economic Development of Mozambique" illustra come un'iniziativa congiunta tra il Politecnico di Milano e l'Universiade Eduardo Mondlane stia promuovendo l'innovazione IT e lo sviluppo imprenditoriale, contribuendo alla riduzione del divario di genere nel settore ICT.

Ancora, Ron Salaj nel contributo "Digital development and digital frontier technologies: some

cautionary notes”, attraverso un'analisi critica delle tecnologie digitali di frontiera e il loro impatto sul raggiungimento degli obiettivi di sviluppo sostenibile dell'ONU, suggerisce un approccio più comunitario e orientato ai diritti umani.

Infine, due contributi mettono in discussione il paradigma corrente nel campo dello sviluppo digitale. Il primo, anch'esso elaborato da Ron Salaj presenta il nuovo programma di Master "ICT for Development and Social Good" dell'Università di Torino, delineando come la formazione accademica stia preparando una nuova generazione di professionisti a utilizzare le ICT in modi innovativi e socialmente responsabili.

Infine l'articolo “FirstLife, un social network civico, al servizio della cooperazione internazionale” di Monica Cerutti, Guido Boella e Egidio Dansero illustra come una piattaforma digitale si possa prestare ad essere utilizzata nei progetti di cooperazione internazionale sia per connettere le comunità che cooperano in un reciproco scambio di informazioni sulle realtà specifiche, anche in fase di coprogettazione, che per offrire un quadro d'insieme dei progetti di cooperazione che insistono su una particolare area geografica.

## RESTART: SERVIZIO COLLABORATIVO PER L'INNOVAZIONE SOCIALE

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### Abstract

La piattaforma collaborativa Restart Maghreb (<http://restartmaghreb.org>) è stata sviluppata nell'ambito di due progetti di cooperazione internazionale, finanziati da Aics in Tunisia e dal programma EuropAid in Marocco, Tunisia ed Algeria, con l'obiettivo di favorire l'occupazione e l'*empowerment* socio-economico dei giovani attraverso la creazione di imprese sociali sostenibili finalizzate alla valorizzazione e riqualificazione territoriale. L'articolo in oggetto si propone di mettere in luce come il *Service Design*, in virtù del proprio approccio interdisciplinare ed alla propria capacità di visione sistemica, rivesta un ruolo strategico nei processi di innovazione sociale all'interno di contesti socio-economici frammentati e di grande instabilità internazionale.

Restart Maghreb collaborative platform (<http://restartmaghreb.org>) was developed within the framework of two international cooperation projects, funded by Aics in Tunisia and by EuropAid programme in Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria, with the aim of fostering employment and the socio-economic empowerment of young people through the creation of sustainable social enterprises aimed at territorial valorization and redevelopment. This article aims to highlight how *Service Design*, by virtue of its interdisciplinary approach and its capacity for systemic vision, plays a strategic role in social innovation processes within fragmented socio-economic contexts of great international instability.

### Keywords

Innovazione sociale, Service Design, empowerment, Icts, Ess.

### **(Società) in transizione verso nuovi paradigmi**

#### *Il concetto di innovazione sociale*

Con il termine *innovazione* [dal latino *innovatio-onis*] si indica “l'atto, l'opera di innovare, cioè di introdurre nuovi sistemi, nuovi ordinamenti, nuovi metodi di produzione...” e ancora, in senso concreto, “ogni novità, mutamento, trasformazione che modifichi radicalmente o provochi comunque un efficace svecchiamento in un ordinamento politico o sociale” (Enciclopedia Treccani, voce



innovazione).

L'innovazione dunque volge lo sguardo al futuro e racchiude in sé tutta la tenacia ed il coraggio del cambiamento, “racconta di un processo che comprende nuovi modi di organizzare l'attività umana” (Lo Storto, 2015 p. 11) e quando si riferisce alle persone, alle relazioni tra di esse, viene definita innovazione sociale.

Il concetto di innovazione sociale è il frutto di una crescente insoddisfazione del ruolo dell'innovazione tecnologica nella risoluzione di problematiche di tipo sociale (Caulier-Grice et al., 2012). Infatti i vantaggi apportati dall'innovazione tecnologica non si sono rivelati in grado di risolvere, a lungo termine, i problemi di ordine economico e sociale.

Da qui la necessità di individuare un nuovo paradigma che indichi una rottura nel modo di trovare soluzioni” (Maiolini, 2015, p. 23). I modelli rigidi, gerarchici e centralizzati, provenienti da una società industriale, sono mutati in un'era di servizi attenta all'innovazione, alla complessità e alla sostenibilità, dove è possibile ipotizzare una transizione verso nuovi paradigmi (Cipolla, C., Joly, M. P., Watanabe, B., Zanela, F., & Tavares, M., 2016).

Il fenomeno dell'innovazione sociale non è univoco e può essere descritto come

una soluzione ad un problema sociale che sia più efficace, efficiente e sostenibile, e in cui il valore creato vada a vantaggio della società prima che dei singoli individui (Lo Storto, 2015, p. 11).

Ragionando, quindi, in termini di collettività, l'innovazione sociale rappresenta la sintesi dei concetti di cambiamento istituzionale, fine sociale e bene comune (Pol e Ville, 2009); essa va oltre i limiti della *path-dependence* (Moulaert et al., 2005), ovvero quella condizione per cui, in un determinato contesto, gli attori non riescono spontaneamente a modificare una situazione di equilibrio (David, 2000) senza che vi sia un intervento che alteri lo status quo attuale a causa

dell'accumulazione di conoscenze e abilità con le quali l'individuo contribuisce al processo di produzione di ricchezza in un determinato contesto sociale e comunitario (Guida e Maiolini, 2013, p. 60).

Infatti, l'innovazione sociale è capace di modificare il sistema, di stravolgere le percezioni, i comportamenti e le strutture che hanno maturato quelle complesse sfide che oggi si trova ad affrontare. Generalmente, quando si parla di innovazione sociale si identificano tutte quelle tipologie di realtà che rispondono ai nuovi bisogni sociali in modo innovativo, costituendo nuove relazioni tra pubblico, privato e terzo settore. Estremamente importanti a riguardo sono il ruolo capitale del destinatario e la

sensibilità che guida le attività volte al benessere della società nella cui si collocano.

Un esempio interessante è rappresentato dalla Fondazione per l’Innovazione Urbana (FIU) della città di Bologna che, affrontando sfide sociali, ambientali e tecnologiche della città del nostro secolo, si è con il tempo affermata come un “cervello collettivo” e un luogo di incontro per attività e iniziative di cittadinanza attiva. Oppure, il caso del quartiere NoLo (North of Loreto) di Milano, meta di street artist, oggi riqualificata attraverso una serie di iniziative sociali *bottom-up* che l’hanno trasformata in un quartiere dalla cultura ed identità fiorente nella riflessione urbana della città di Milano. E ancora, la piattaforma Produzioni dal basso<sup>1</sup> che fornisce servizi per la creazione di nuove comunità economiche che favoriscano iniziative con un impatto positivo in ambito sociale, culturale e ambientale. Ed infine, Inner Nørrebro - quartiere etnico ed economicamente diversificato della città di Copenhagen - noto per il progetto di rigenerazione urbana ed innovazione sociale Superkilen, realizzato tramite un processo partecipativo che ha coinvolto 60 nazionalità differenti della comunità del quartiere ed in cui intelligenza collettiva, progettazione *bottom-up*, partecipazione - messe a sistema - sono state fondamentali per promuovere inclusione sociale ed invertire situazioni di declino del quartiere stesso (Pultrone, 2017).

### **Service design for social innovation**

#### *Il design come driver per l’innovazione sociale*

La progettazione contemporanea si inserisce in vari contesti socio-economici, difficili, mutevoli e imprevedibili, che necessitano di un cambiamento radicale ed identifica nella sostenibilità - intesa non come visione immutabile, ma come processo continuo in cui i valori di sostenibilità economica, sociale e ambientale interagiscono e sono interdipendenti tra loro - il proprio obiettivo esplorando, sostenendo e orientando processi promotori di questo cambiamento.

Il concetto di innovazione sociale è fortemente in relazione con la sostenibilità, poiché all’interno di questo fenomeno, essa induce la trasformazione nell’agire dei soggetti e delle istituzioni ri-articolando e ridefinendo gli ambiti di azione tra società civile, Stato e mercato (Mingione, E., & Vicari, S., 2015). In questo campo il design permette di inquadrare le necessità e i bisogni sociali rimasti irrisolti, o a cui vengono date risposte inadeguate e insufficienti, attivando, promuovendo e orientando processi collaborativi e/o *bottom-up*. L’attivazione strategica di questi processi, favorisce una fase condivisa di proposta-ascolto, che consente alle persone di utilizzare la propria identità come motore di diffusione

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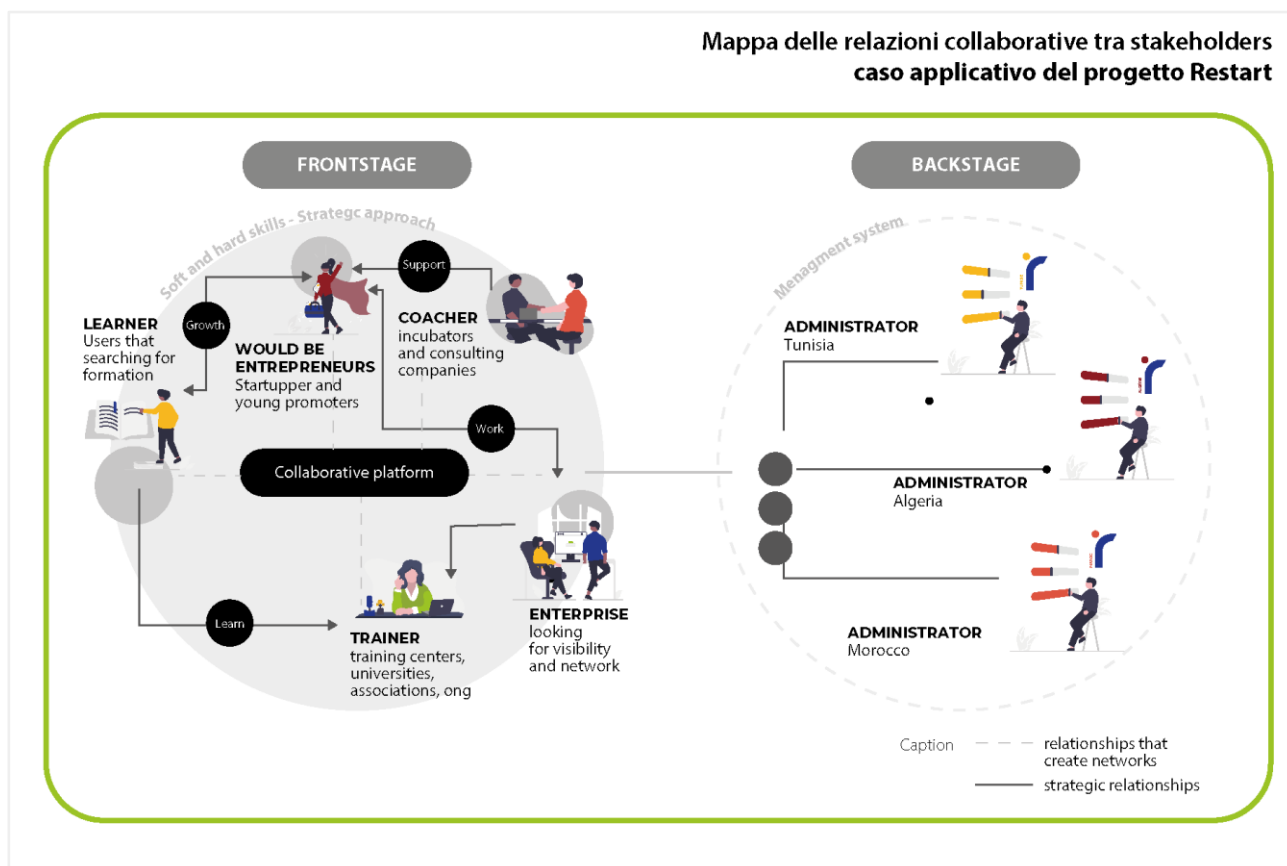
<sup>1</sup> <https://www.produzionidalbasso.com/>

e di generazione di valore.

La crescita rapida di queste attività di *share* abilita uno scambio fra pari che aumenta non solo la possibilità di sviluppare sinergie e punti di contatto ma fornisce il mezzo per visualizzare soluzioni concrete: si parla di processi collaborativi che, alimentati dalle tecnologie - sempre più accessibili, come la **blockchain**, ovvero un registro distribuito di transazioni basato sul consenso tra i partecipanti della rete stessa la quale conferisce totale fiducia e trasparenza ai soggetti coinvolti in

Figura 1 – Mappa delle relazioni collaborative tra stakeholders per il progetto Restart

fonte: Service Design Lab - DIDA Unifi



determinate operazioni e garantisce l’immutabilità del dato - permettono di velocizzare la diffusione e lo scambio di conoscenze, di abilità, di risorse e “ci permettono di interagire con persone e cose ovunque nel mondo senza spostarci da dove siamo” (Manzini, p.17, 2021). È qui che il *Service Design* assume un ruolo significativo, poiché fornisce gli strumenti utili ad innescare connessioni e relazioni (Fig. 1) basate su approcci *peer-to-peer* in grado di abilitare innovazione sociale.

### *Pratiche collaborative bottom-up e sistemi aperti*

All'interno di questo scenario in trasformazione, si riconosce che anche il focus del design si sia spostato dal concetto di mero prodotto a quello più ampio del sistema prodotto. Si può, quindi, parlare di sistema prodotto-servizio, il quale viene definito da Manzini (2002, p. 4) come

risultato di una strategia di innovazione, che sposta il focus aziendale dalla progettazione e vendita di soli prodotti fisici, alla vendita di un sistema di prodotti e servizi che sono congiuntamente in grado di soddisfare la domanda specifica del cliente". L'idea centrale è che "gli utenti non vogliono veramente un prodotto o servizio, ma piuttosto ciò che questi prodotti e servizi consentono a un utente di raggiungere (Manzini, 2002, p. 5).

Quindi, se il design ha subito un adeguamento per stare al passo con il cambiamento, in particolare, il *Service Design*, offre una direzione possibile per soddisfare i nuovi bisogni della collettività. Nello specifico, quando tale disciplina si occupa della progettazione di sistemi collaborativi, si propone di generare soluzioni di *empowerment*.

Il compito del design, e del designer di conseguenza, consiste nel porre l'attenzione sulla società, osservare le soluzioni nate al suo interno e, sulla base di queste, offrire strumenti, mezzi e tecnologie che le supportino. Il processo di innovazione, infatti, avviene quando la creatività generata in una comunità viene implementata dal design stesso mediante un processo di analisi delle idee, delle modalità di organizzazione della comunità e di sintesi pratica di progetti di servizi, prodotti o sistemi potenziati.

Nell'attività del *Service Design* si progetta lo spazio fisico e virtuale in cui hanno luogo le interazioni tra il sistema di erogazione del servizio ed i suoi beneficiari, ossia l'insieme delle informazioni funzionali e simboliche necessarie per fruire del servizio stesso. Attraverso le metodologie del *Service Design*

si cerca di progettare le condizioni affinché un servizio si svolga in maniera efficace, efficiente e piacevole, auspicabilmente sostenibile da un punto di vista ambientale e sociale. Non è una scienza esatta, perché il comportamento delle persone (e quindi la reazione degli utenti) non si può progettare; si progettano, appunto, le condizioni favorevoli<sup>2</sup>.

Ecco quindi che va configurandosi un modello di democratizzazione dei processi di innovazione e progettazione in cui ad ogni fase, dall'ideazione, allo studio di fattibilità fino all'implementazione,

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<sup>2</sup> Intervista a Daniela Selloni in <https://www.labsus.org/2016/09/cittadini-creativi-un-fab-lab-di-servizi-dove-cittadini-designer-e-istituzioni-si-incontrano/>

attori che precedentemente si posizionavano univocamente in una delle suddette fasi, partecipano assieme. Dunque è necessario un passaggio da modelli di innovazione “chiusi” a modelli di innovazione “aperti”. L’approccio *top-down* lascia perciò il posto a dinamiche *bottom-up*, atte a promuovere la partecipazione democratica e pluralista, dando voce alla società civile e focalizzando maggiormente l’attenzione sui diritti umani: gli attori locali, e dunque coloro che beneficeranno di quelle stesse politiche di sviluppo, diventano anche protagonisti di scelte e strategie, nonché della loro attuazione.

Per abilitare e promuovere processi di innovazione sociale tramite il design, è, dunque, necessario un cambiamento di direzione sostanziale: capovolgere il ruolo dell’utente da passivo ad attivo, renderlo partecipe nell’individuare il problema e fornirgli la possibilità di co-produrre soluzioni per mezzo delle proprie risorse intellettuali e pratiche (Manzini, Jegou, 2003; Cottam, Leadbeater, 2005; Young Foundation 2006). Infatti,

Il successo di un qualsiasi progetto di innovazione sociale dipende, dunque, dalla capacità di accrescere la consapevolezza dell’importanza di partecipare in modo attivo alle scelte e ai processi di sviluppo e implementazione. I benefici sociali che scaturiscono dall’implementazione di progetti innovativi si rivelano attraverso lo scambio tra attuatori, promotori e finanziatori dei risultati ottenuti, in una logica di condivisione e di creazione di valore (Maiolini R., Fracassi E., 2015).

Ecco dunque che si configurano le comunità, o *community*, attorno alle quali si definiscono i sistemi collaborativi di relazione.

#### *ICTs: un mezzo democratico per lo creazione di comunità*

È stato osservato che il Web 2.0, il social networking, le piattaforme *peer-to-peer*, e così via, generano nuove opportunità di cambiamento radicale nel modo di essere e di fare nella vita quotidiana, e il loro impatto colpisce sia il digitale che le reti fisiche. In particolare, la comunicazione mobile dovrebbe fornire importanti tecnologie abilitanti per la promozione di una vita quotidiana sostenibile in cui sono implicati servizi collaborativi.

L’esperienza del **software** libero, infatti, ha dato vita a comunità digitali, comunità in cui la pratica di condivisione della conoscenza e creatività sono il fondamento. Il continuo fermento delle reti ha portato comunità più ampie ad unirsi nella produzione di conoscenza e nella condivisione: è, infatti, nell’ambito delle reti digitali che osserviamo una partecipazione rapida e virale da parte dei nuovi utenti al processo di generazione dei contenuti. In questo senso, gli strumenti di comunicazione dell’informazione rappresentano la capacità degli utenti di attivare nuove relazioni. L’uso efficace di

Internet è stato raggiunto attraverso il suo utilizzo come mezzo di comunicazione, per il trasferimento di informazioni e come meccanismo primario per le interazioni tra individui, in un approccio sostenibile in rete e comunitario.

Queste energie individuali degli users, ossia di tutti coloro che usano il web per avere informazioni, tessere relazioni, portare avanti idee di business, artistiche, culturali, scientifiche, creare e propagare significati, sommate tra loro generano valore come frutto di tante iniziative nate dal basso. Questo valore, dunque, viene sempre di più co-prodotto adottando forme organizzative coerenti con l'*open innovation*, le quali consentono a ciascuno di usare il capitale, le capacità, le conoscenze di altri, con i vantaggi conseguenti.

Si nota quindi, in questo processo di conoscenza ed espansione dei sistemi collaborativi, che le tecnologie dell'informazione e della comunicazione - Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) - sono state il principale propulsore.

Il ruolo delle Ict nella progettazione di servizi collaborativi può essere triplice: diffondere informazioni come idee innovative, connettere le persone e migliorare la funzionalità dei servizi. L'identificazione di questi ruoli porta a fornire ai progettisti una guida per utilizzare le Ict per progettare un sistema di servizi di prodotto che rafforzi il senso di comunità tra gli utenti, consenta alle persone di connettersi con coloro che condividono gli stessi valori e interessi e quindi di diffondere le loro idee innovative al di fuori della loro comunità (Baek, J., Manzini, E., & Rizzo, F., 2010).

Esse si configurano, dunque, come soluzioni abilitanti che facilitano le innovazioni sociali dal basso, favorendo quei servizi in cui gli utenti finali collaborano tra di loro per offrire soluzioni ai loro bisogni sociali insoddisfatti. Sono queste soluzioni alternative che facilitano una transizione verso una società sostenibile (Meroni et al., 2016).

Prendere sul serio tutto ciò significa concepire e sviluppare sistemi in grado di considerare e valutare le capacità delle persone in termini di sensibilità, competenza e intraprendenza: sistemi che consentano alle persone di esprimere il proprio potenziale, utilizzando al meglio le proprie capacità per realizzare al meglio i propri risultati desiderati. Questo approccio implica l'introduzione di due concetti, a mio avviso, molto importanti per la cultura del progetto: il concetto di capacità, per quanto riguarda il ruolo degli utenti, e quello di soluzione abilitante, per quanto riguarda i rapporti tra sistemi tecnologici e benessere raggiunto (Manzini, 2006, p.11).

Le ICTs sono diventate così la base per la creazione di un ecosistema di servizi volto alla democratizzazione dell'innovazione introducendo nuovi modelli relazionali che offrono opportunità in un contesto di emarginazione economica e sociale.

Nonostante la diffusione pervasiva dei dispositivi digitali abbia ampliato, in una logica di

democratizzazione della conoscenza e lotta alle disuguaglianze, il numero di persone nel mondo con la possibilità effettiva di accedere alle rete, occorre precisare come il divario digitale tra varie regioni nel mondo persista e continui ad escludere alcune fasce più svantaggiate della popolazione in base a: condizioni economiche, livello d'istruzione, qualità delle infrastrutture, differenze di età o di sesso, provenienza geografica ecc.

## **Innovazione sociale nei progetti di cooperazione allo sviluppo**

### *Economie Sociali e Solidali e sviluppo sostenibile*

Il concetto di innovazione sociale, calato in un contesto internazionale di marginalizzazione socio-economica, necessita di una riflessione in merito all'importanza dell'uso corretto del termine sociale.

In effetti,

“l'innovazione, in generale, ha una sua dimensione sociale, che si esprime attraverso modelli relazionali e collaborativi” e “ogni innovazione sociale è tale se attiva una collettività di soggetti” i cui “risultati ottenuti siano di beneficio a tutti e non a pochi” (Maiolini, 2015, p. 37).

L'Unione Europea, tra le strategie di Horizon 2020, sottolinea come il carattere dell'innovazione sia sempre più plurale e non lineare. Inoltre, i campi in cui essa opera si basano su sistemi aperti che si scambiano risorse, determinando emergenze innovative complementari.

L'ambito delle economie sociali e solidali (ESS) è ricco di innovazioni: tecnologiche, per la produzioni di apparati per energie rinnovabili; socio-istituzionali, per l'attivazione di forme di partecipazione *bottom-up*; politiche, per l'evidenza del nesso tra consumo critico, democrazia e re-iscrizione della domanda sociale (Orazi, D. C., Turrini, A., & Valotti, G., 2013). Si nota come, spesso, tutte queste organizzazioni si costituiscono dal basso in risposta a bisogni condivisi da intere comunità locali o ad opportunità avvertite da gruppi di cittadini. Il loro obiettivo non è la creazione di profitti da distribuire tra i proprietari, ma perseguire degli interessi dei propri membri e della comunità in generale, infatti,

la struttura organizzativa dell'ESS assegna i diritti di proprietà a una varietà di portatori di interesse (o “stakeholder”), piuttosto che ai soli investitori (come nel caso delle imprese convenzionali)” (Borzaga C., Salvatori G. e Bondini R. 2019).

Si potrebbe, dunque, affermare che le iniziative delle ESS sono innovatrici per la loro forma di amministrazione del potere, di organizzazione del capitale umano e delle risorse. La base, infatti, delle ESS è quella di attivare una sistema di cooperazione tra diversi attori che influenzi la nascita di

politiche pubbliche, innovatrici anch'esse.

Del resto, attraverso l'acquisizione di competenze, lo scambio di informazioni e la messa in atto di solidarietà, si forniscono (agli utenti) degli strumenti per una minore dipendenza e una maggiore autonomizzazione dei singoli ([https://www.socioeco.org/bdf\\_dossier-5\\_it.html](https://www.socioeco.org/bdf_dossier-5_it.html)) (14/09/2022).

Si tratta dunque di una forma di organizzazione inclusiva, democratica ed estremamente dinamica, capace di coinvolgere nel processo decisionale diversi tipi di portatori di interesse e di crescere in molti paesi più velocemente rispetto al resto dell'economia grazie ad una buona capacità di innovazione. Inoltre risulta sempre più evidente come alcune delle caratteristiche di questa tipologia di organizzazione le permettano di superare le difficoltà che altri tipi di imprese (sia pubbliche che private) si trovano ad affrontare quando si tratta di produrre servizi di interesse generale.

Le economie sociali e solidali, quindi, si rivelano in grado di creare forme di impiego più flessibili e di abbassare i costi di produzione tramite il coinvolgimento di utenti e volontari. In altre parole, riuscire a coinvolgere queste organizzazioni nei processi di *co-design* è un requisito fondamentale per trasformare le sfide della società in opportunità per migliorare la qualità della vita delle persone, soprattutto per i paesi in via di sviluppo. In questo senso, gli approcci di design strategico rivestono un ruolo importante, sia diffondendo la cultura dell'impronta sostenibile, sia potenziando le reti sostenibili (Valsecchi, F., & Gong, M., 2009).

#### *Una buona pratica di innovazione sociale: la piattaforma collaborativa Restart*

Il progetto Restart - Riqualficazione Ecologica e Sociale dei Territori Attraverso il Rilancio dell'imprenditoria giovanile in Tunisia, Algeria e Marocco - nasce dalla volontà di Cospe, Cefa e Nexus, tre Ong italiane radicate in Tunisia, di mettere a sistema le loro consolidate esperienze sul sostegno all'impresa sociale e all'economia sociale e solidale, capitalizzando la rete di relazioni locali e le capacità di intervento capillare e diffuso in regioni strategiche del nord, centro e sud del Paese. Restart si colloca all'interno di uno scenario di marginalizzazione socio-economica giovanile, carenza di opportunità formative, assenza di lavoro dignitoso e diffuso sentimento di alienazione dei giovani rispetto alle loro comunità e territori.

Il progetto Restart Maghreb, amplia l'area di intervento del progetto pilota Restart Tunisia, a tutta la regione del Maghreb, affiancando alle cinque regioni della Tunisia (Jendouba, Sidi Bouzid, Gabès, Mahdia e Sousse), anche le zone rurali di Bouira, in Algeria, e le aree di Rabat, Tangeri e Tétouan in



Marocco, ossia i territori più colpiti dalla crisi economica con tassi di disoccupazione giovanile decisamente elevati.

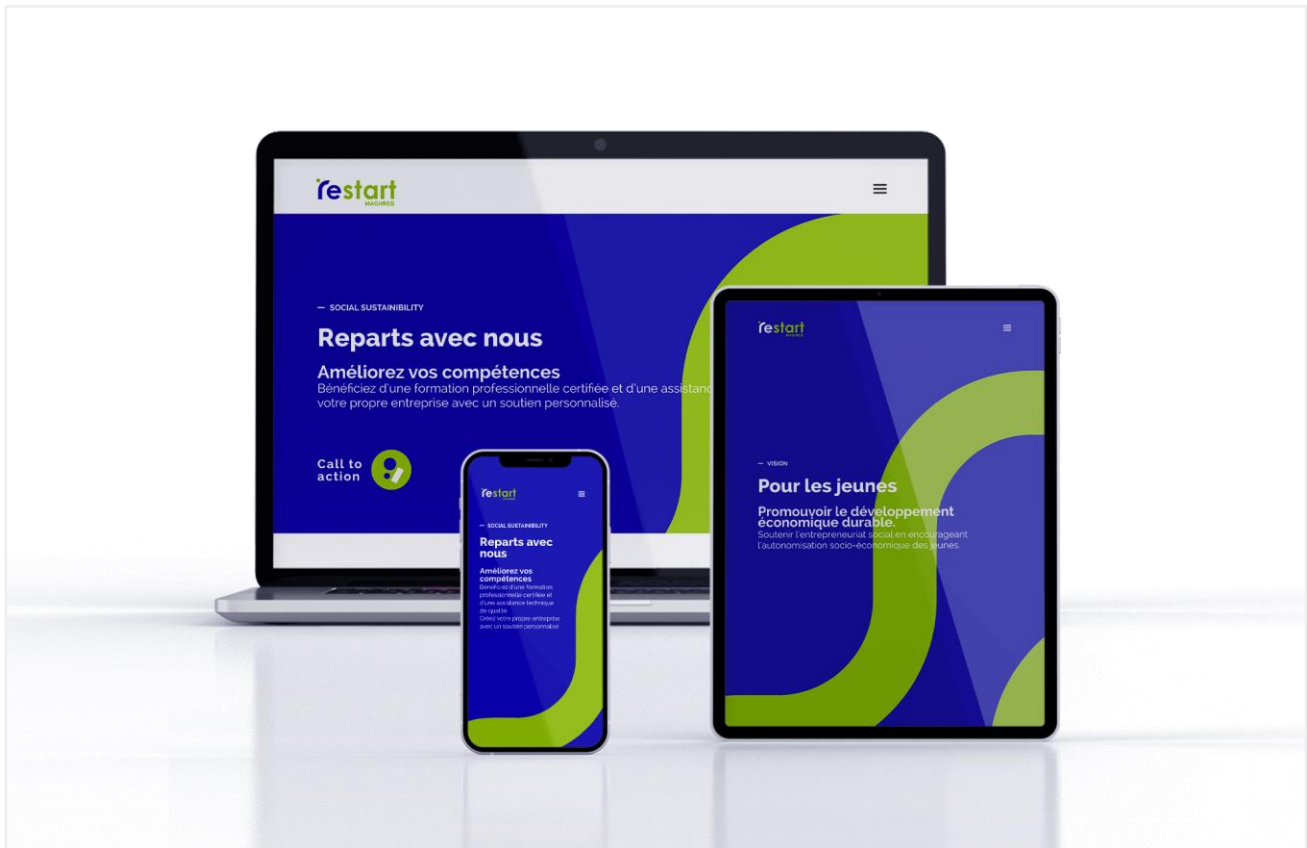
Restart, in qualità progetto di cooperazione allo sviluppo, intende dimostrare il potenziale dell'economia sociale e solidale come alternativa economica reale, promuovendo lo sviluppo di imprese sociali eco-sostenibili, opportunità di formazione professionale e lavoro dignitoso per i giovani, favorendo l'innovazione, la tracciabilità ambientale, la competitività delle imprese e lo sviluppo di servizi a sostegno della riqualificazione e valorizzazione territoriale.

Il gruppo di ricerca Dida, con il coordinamento scientifico di Debora Giorgi per il Dipartimento di Architettura dell'Università di Firenze, si è occupato della progettazione di una piattaforma collaborativa (<https://restartmaghreb.org/>) per la creazione di un ecosistema di servizi adeguati alla formazione, al sostegno, al finanziamento della nuova imprenditoria ed alla creazione di sinergie tra imprese sociali, istituzioni e comunità locali. (Fig. 2)

La piattaforma collaborativa presentata vuole essere un esempio di buona pratica di applicazione dei metodi del *Service Design* ad un progetto di cooperazione internazionale, il cui obiettivo è incentivare processi *bottom-up* che abilitano innovazione sociale. Essa si pone, dunque, come strumento per favorire connessioni e relazioni che creano nuove opportunità per contrastare la

Figura 2 – Mock up piattaforma collaborativa Restart

fonte: Service Design Lab - DIDA Unifi



marginalizzazione e le disuguaglianze all'interno dei tessuti sociali dei paesi sopracitati.

Un ruolo di un ricercatore di design in questo campo è comprendere il fenomeno dell'innovazione sociale a livello di base in vari contesti, identificare la sua relazione con la sostenibilità e progettare condizioni che consentano alle persone di usare la loro creatività per ideare, implementare e diffondere le soluzioni per i loro bisogni (Baek, J., Manzini, E., & Rizzo, F. , 2010).

Il team di ricerca, per lo sviluppo del progetto, ha adottato le metodologie partecipative del *Service Design* in un processo di co-progettazione, con l'obiettivo di generare valore per gli stakeholders, coinvolgendoli in tutte le fasi di sviluppo della piattaforma.

Il progetto di piattaforma, tuttora in fase di testing, è stato avviato nei primi mesi del 2020 in concomitanza con il lockdown causato dalla pandemia Covid-19. Le tecnologie digitali, dunque, alla luce del particolare momento storico, non sono state soltanto il fondamento per raggiungere l'obiettivo principale del progetto, ma si sono rivelate essere uno strumento indispensabile per l'applicazione delle metodologie partecipative e collaborative del *Service Design*.

In particolare, le Icts hanno permesso lo svolgimento di numerosi Atelier di *co-design* (in modalità a

distanza), fondamentali per la co-progettazione della piattaforma, in cui tutti gli attori hanno partecipato attivamente allo sviluppo delle idee alla fase di testing, inducendo essi stessi bisogni e soluzioni di valenza sostenibile e qualitativa per la comunità.

### *Gli Atelier di co-design*

Dunque, come anticipato, il processo di *co-design* (Fig. 3) è stato svolto attraverso piattaforme web di videoconferenza e ha visto il coinvolgimento, da diverse parti del mondo,<sup>3</sup> degli attori del progetto (Ong, associazioni, istituzioni, incubatori e partner locali) nelle varie fasi: dalla user research e definizione di profili personas, all'ideazione di soluzioni rappresentate tramite user scenarios. Utilizzando un approccio user-centered ogni utente diviene un attore attivo e sviluppa, in sinergia con i progettisti, idee utili per comprendere le reali esigenze degli utenti della piattaforma.

#### STEP 1: Focus group

In primo luogo, il gruppo di ricerca Dida, in seguito a vari incontri con il capofila del progetto COSPE ha stabilito gli obiettivi su cui basare il processo di *co-design*, ed individuato gli attori (Fig. 4) - frontstage: giovani promotori, lavoratori dipendenti, startupper, società di consulenza, cooperative, studenti, università, associazioni locali, finanziamento di micro-credito, centri di formazione, fasce discriminate della popolazione, incubatori, disoccupati, giovani neet, consulenti d'impresa, industrie manifatturiere, liberi professionisti, design team, artigiani, imprese, istituzioni di micro-credito, finanziamento a progetto; backstage: banche nazionali, scuola, ONG, istituzioni pubbliche, consulente universitario, agenzie governative, autorità locali, associazioni no profit - della piattaforma - allievi, formatori, coach e mentor, imprese, start up - da coinvolgere e nonché le loro abilità nell'utilizzo degli strumenti proposti. Questa fase è stata importante per avere una visione eco-sistemica e condivisa del progetto con l'obiettivo di definire una strategia di azione.

#### STEP 2: Personas

Tramite dei template progettati dal gruppo di ricerca, i partecipanti al *co-design* hanno sperimentato la creazione di profili Personas, studiando il livello di competenze che questi utenti (ipotetici) possiedono rispetto ai canali di comunicazione della piattaforma e, in particolare, elencando i loro punti di forza e di debolezza, avviando una riflessione profonda sulle successive tappe da percorrere

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<sup>3</sup> Italia, Tunisia, Algeria e Marocco

ai fini della progettazione della piattaforma.

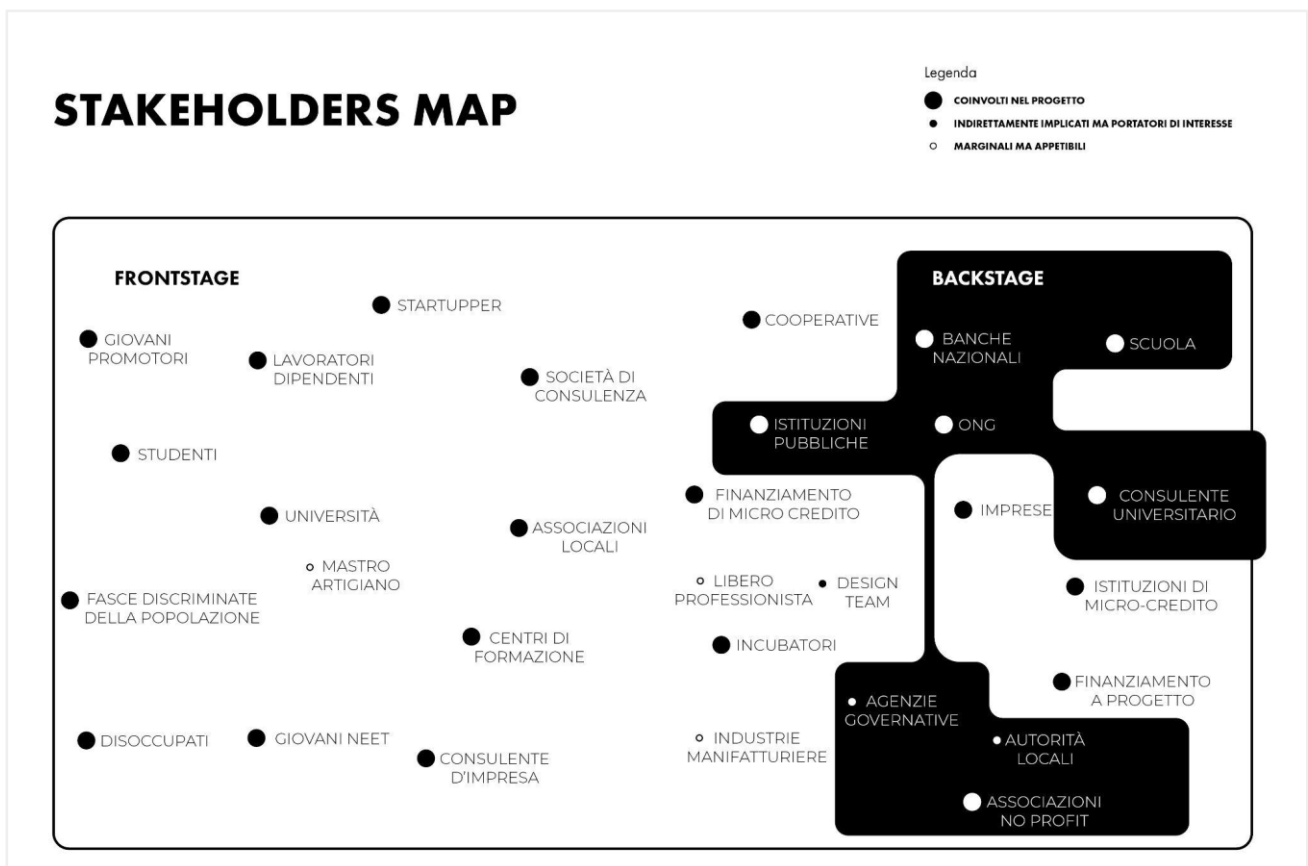
Figura 3 – Le fasi dell’Atelier di co-design

fonte: Service Design Lab - DIDA Unifi



Figura 4 – Gli attori del progetto Restart

fonte: Service Design Lab - DIDA Unifi



### STEP 3: User Scenarios

Successivamente i partecipanti hanno descritto le azioni principali e fondamentali dell'utente durante un utilizzo ipotetico della piattaforma, compilando template loro forniti.

Questa fase è stata fondamentale per individuare le principali problematiche d'uso e mettere in evidenza le attività più importanti che l'utente deve poter svolgere, al fine di individuare i nodi progettuali su cui concentrarsi durante il processo di *user experience* (UX).

### STEP 4: Brainstorming

Con lo strumento collaborativo web “Answer Garden” sono state poste ai partecipanti domande - Who/What/Why - relative agli utenti della piattaforma Restart. I partecipanti hanno inserito in modo completamente anonimo la risposta, per mezzo di parole chiave, e questo ha generato una gerarchia di concetti sui vari punti di interesse.

Secondo i partecipanti, i principali utenti della piattaforma Restart sarebbero gli investitori e le associazioni, seguiti dalle strutture di supporto e dagli imprenditori ed, inoltre, le attività svolte dagli utenti sulla piattaforma sarebbero legate principalmente alla condivisione, promozione ed ispirazione.

#### STEP 5: Feedback

Le diverse fasi del processo hanno permesso di identificare le principali tematiche e, grazie allo strumento di brainstorming, sono emerse diverse proposte creative raggruppate per grandi aree tematiche.

Il processo di co-progettazione è stato quindi funzionale per conoscere le reali esigenze degli utenti ed il contesto generale. Grazie all’Atelier di *co-design*, è stato possibile avviare la fase di user research: rielaborando i template compilati da tutti i partecipanti del workshop è stato, infatti, possibile definire i profili personas e gli user scenarios del progetto.

A fronte dei risultati del processo di progettazione partecipativa, è emerso che la tipologia di servizio più adatta al raggiungimento degli obiettivi preposti, è proprio quello di una piattaforma collaborativa, capace di mettere a sistema tutte le realtà territoriali indicate nel progetto Restart, con la finalità di creare uno spazio di formazione, sostegno alla formazione d’impresa (coaching) ed offrire una vetrina per imprese e start up, creando così dialogo, coesione e dinamicità tra tutti i soggetti implicati nel progetto.

#### Conclusioni

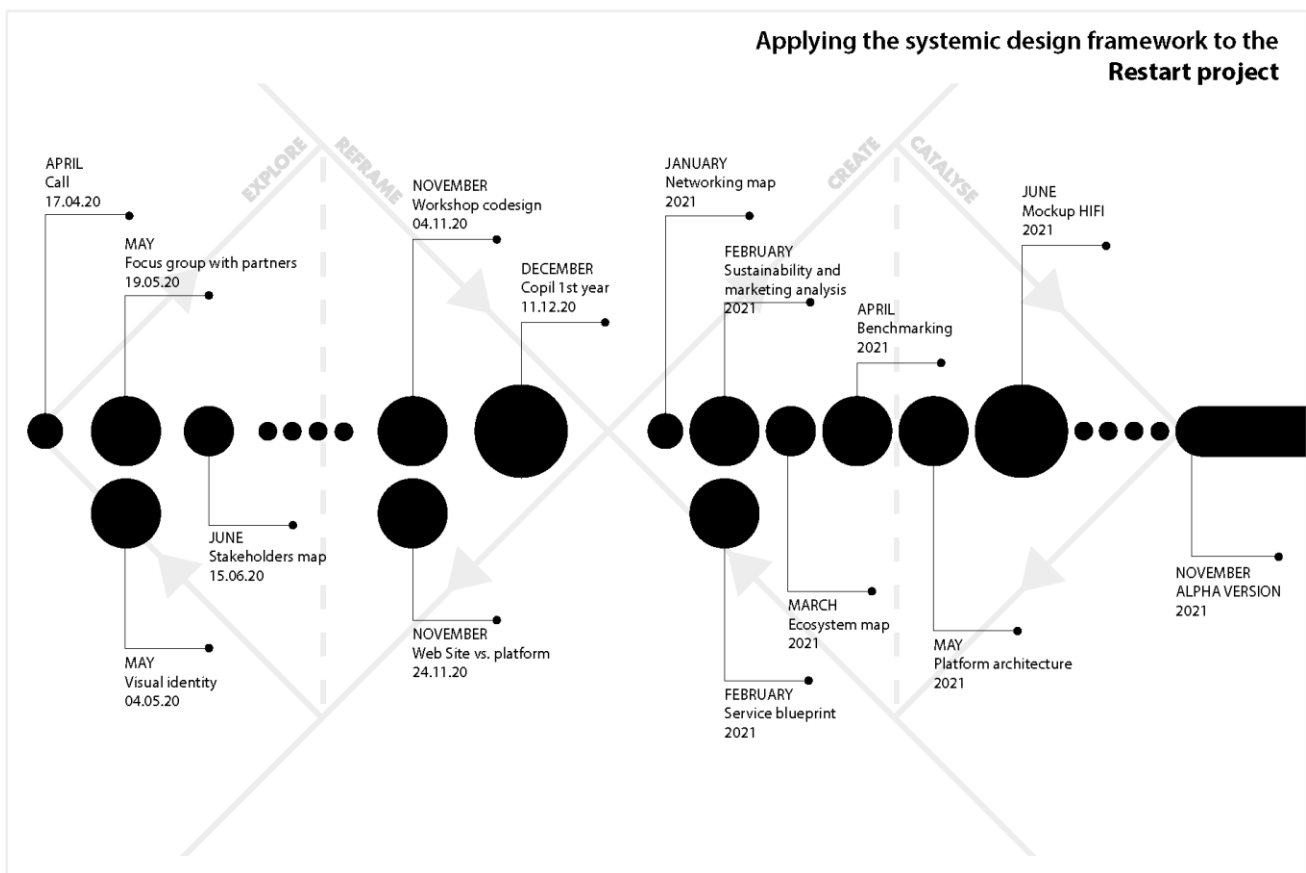
L’approccio interdisciplinare e collaborativo del progetto ha messo in luce l’instabilità delle relazioni su cui si basa un progetto di cooperazione allo sviluppo, all’interno di un contesto di collaborazione internazionale, da cui emerge l’esigenza di applicare assieme alle metodologie del processo partecipativo del *Service Design*, quelle strategiche del **Systemic Design Framework** e definire una visione condivisa di risposta alle sfide di cui questo necessita, in modo continuativo. Proprio l’adozione di questo approccio iterativo ha permesso di fronteggiare i cambiamenti e le problematiche che nel tempo si sono presentate, non fermandosi ad un’unica e definitiva soluzione, ma generandone

sempre di nuove. Un esempio è quello dovuto alla situazione determinata dalla pandemia COVID-19, che ha richiesto di (ri)discutere e rivedere le modalità di erogazione di alcuni servizi come la formazione e l’accompagnamento delle nuove imprese, e di conseguenza di rivedere e riprogettare gli strumenti dedicati a questi servizi sulla piattaforma.

In conclusione, la versione alpha della piattaforma è disponibile online e, attualmente, viene utilizzata dai beneficiari del servizio, dal gruppo di ricerca e dai vari attori come strumento di *testing*. Questo permette di verificarne l’usabilità ed evidenziarne le criticità, al fine di completare la sua versione beta, mantenendo aperta la possibilità di effettuare implementazioni future, in una logica di circolarità progettuale. (Fig. 5)

Figura 5 – Applicazione del Systemic Design Framework al progetto Restart

fonte: Service Design Lab - DIDA Unifi



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## **Lista degli acronimi**

Aics

Agenzia italiana per la cooperazione allo sviluppo

Cefa	Comitato europeo per la formazione agraria
Cospe	Cooperazione per lo sviluppo dei paesi emergenti
Dida	Dipartimento di architettura
Ess	Economie sociali e solidali
Icts	Information and Communications Technology
Ong	Organizzazione non governativa
Restart	Riqualificazione ecologica e sociale dei territori attraverso il rilancio dell'imprenditoria giovanile in Tunisia
Ux	User Experience

## UNIVERSITY TEACHING AND POTENTIAL OF GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS IN PROJECT CYCLE MANAGEMENT CYCLE IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR COOPERATION

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### Abstract

This paper presents the first results of a pilot project tackling the nexus among Gis and spatial analysis, international cooperation and higher education. This experience shows that it seems appropriate to use a dialectical approach between theory and practice to develop knowledge, competences and operational skills to be used potentially in all project cycle management phases. The teaching pilot project held at the University of Bologna within the undergraduate curriculum in Development and International Cooperation (Svic) has led to develop a syllabus and a methodological framework for a full laboratory-course allowing students to be professionally ready to apply Gis in practice.

### Keywords

Gis, international cooperation, university teaching, Gis training, spatial analysis

### Introduction

The growing importance and the application potential of spatial analysis has been following the works of geographers and all actors since their involvement in discoveries, explorations, ‘territorialisations’ and sustainable development projects. In this perspective, Alexander Von Humboldt’s (1769-1959) works can be considered a seminal scholar (Wulf, 2015; Pausas and Bond 2019) setting the basis of this correlational science, i.e. methodological data collection by measurement of environmental variables, by observation of places in their natural and social aspects and then describing, modeling and visualizing them.

In the late 1960s, the significant growth of Information and communication technologies (Ict) started in parallel to the international cooperation processes and, as of the 1970s, by combining the potential of cartography, Ict, relational databases and digitization processes, Geographical information systems (Gis) have been developed turning into a powerful tool to support spatial analysis, monitoring and

decision-making in policies and projects (Dallari e Grandi, 2005; Pesaresi, 2017). The power of visualization, inherent in cartography, is enhanced with Gis, which also became a significant communication tool to be used in field participatory project (Conti, 2011; Burini, 2016), in crisis management (Grandi and Bernasconi, 2021a), in monitoring programs, in designing new sustainable development infrastructures (Kraak *et al.*, 2020), etc.

However, in the field of international development cooperation, Gis are still not sufficiently widespread in project practices and, therefore, there is a need for accelerating cross fertilization processes in disciplinary practices. Towards this goal, education and training can play an important role.

A complex mosaic emerges between opportunities, contamination and the complexity of interdisciplinarity that is necessary for the use of technologies in a conscious manner in order to simultaneously comply with the necessary analytical capacity of the territory, the technical-cartographic knowledge, the variability and uncertainty of cooperation and the informatic-technological aspects, as well as possible costs for appropriating or constructing data, cartographies and visual representations of the territory in areas where Ict technologies languish.

In this perspective, this paper is focusing on the experiences in university teaching of Gis for local development and international cooperation held at the University of Bologna. In particular, this paper presents the first results of a pilot project tackling the nexus among Gis and spatial analysis, international cooperation and higher education. This experience is a laboratory aiming at setting the basis for a didactical approach to spatial analysis and Gis for social sciences, especially those into political science and development studies.

### **The rise of computer-based spatial analysis**

Throughout the last century, spatial analysis has found wide interest among scholars from different backgrounds of social sciences such as sociologists, geographers, economists, anthropologists, epidemiologists, and psychologists. The former have exploited the potential by analyzing the size, density and homogeneity of spatially situated social processes (Martinotti, 1993; Mela et al, 2000; Nuvolati, 2002; 2007); human geographers have focused their studies on the distribution of phenomena over the territory (Wirth, 1945); economic geographers and economists have analyzed production patterns distributed over a specific area, their employment structure and prevailing consumption (Lynd and Lynd, 1970; Dicken and Lloyd, 1993); anthropologists have introduced the

variables of tradition and culture as key elements of the analysis, analyzing the historical features of experience that make social reality a unit with a distinct demographic and spatial structure (Banfield, 1976); epidemiologists have analyzed the natural and anthropic characteristics of the physical environment (Snow, 1854); psychologists have focused their attention on the behavioral variable and on the system of social interactions distributed over a given space (Logan and Collver, 1983).

As defined by Janelle and Goodchild (2011), relatively to Spatially Integrated Social Science (Siss) are analysis techniques that make it possible to study local and global social groups, spatial diversities, and the clustering of spatial entities without these analyses being delimited within well-defined physical or political boundaries. Moreover, they can also be traced back to perceptions of the entities to which these analyses are applied.

The study of problems involving precisely the concept of 'space' in the narrow sense is fundamental in spatial statistical analysis and Gis, since any type of phenomenon, be it social, economic, demographic, environmental or other, will always be linked to the distribution and territorial conformation of the given study area. This goes to define the so-called 'spatial dependence', due to the spatial relationship between the data present in a given territorial unit and what happens elsewhere. Consequently, the 'unidirectional' dependence of statistical analyses characterized by the variable 'time' becomes a 'multidirectional' dependence when the spatial dimension is considered.

The application of this analysis consists, first of all, in georeferencing the available data, i.e. locating an event by associating it with a pair of coordinates (whether flat or geographical) such that it can be unambiguously identified in real space or on a map, by means of a Gis system, whatever it may be. In this way, the events being analyzed are linked and connected to the territory through a system of coordinates. Multi-temporal analyses then are those that can reveal how the phenomenon under study has changed (or not changed) over time in a given territory. In fact, by analyzing the types of change, it is possible to establish a legend of the transformations in order to associate colors and dithers to highlight the phenomenon in its aspects.

One of the main functions of Gis analysis is to explain the non-uniform nature of the distributions of phenomena in space. Indeed, tools are sought to better analyze the typical forms and situations of spatial aggregations of social phenomena (Anderson et al., 1999, La Greca 2011).

The so-called Spatial Multicriteria Analysis (Sma) constitutes an analysis and evaluation tool that has recently been developed in the international field but is still scarcely experimented at a national level (Malczewski, 1999). A Sma model can be defined as a procedure aimed at identifying and comparing solutions to a semi-structured spatial decision-making problem, based on a combination of factors that can be, at least partially, represented by maps (Malczewski, 2006) and it represents one of the

most recent developments in evaluation procedures in the sphere of spatial transformation interventions. Multicriteria analysis makes it possible to combine environmental data with economic and social information, to compare them, and to represent the outcome according to specific thematic maps, so that Sma guarantees significant support in the development of decision-making processes that can be central in international cooperation programmes and projects. Nowadays, geographic information and its use in spatial planning is a well-established practice, thanks also to Spatial Data Infrastructures (Sdi) for sharing and circulating information. To these practices, the potential related to the analysis and interpretation of Geographic Information derived from Social Media have been added (Zupi, 2017).

The main functionality of Gis is the possibility of associating one or more attributes, i.e. descriptions concerning one or more phenomena, with a spatial datum. In this way, the georeferencing of information that can be derived from a wide range of sources, not necessarily statistical in nature, can lead to the spatial analysis of the data considered. Consequently, by tracing and mapping the areal distribution of phenomena through the associated data, thematic distribution maps can be obtained, and the overlapping of the same, by intersecting several pieces of information, leading to the formation of classes of categories that can be both the starting point and the result of research and discussions on environmental and social effects and their monitoring.

At a practical level, operations commonly used for spatial analysis also in the context of development cooperation can be:

- "queries": to extract information from the database to be displayed on maps;
- zone creations or "buffers": to create a buffer area around elements in the database;
- superimpositions or "overlays": to superimpose several maps in order to obtain a map that gathers more information;
- spatial interpolations: to produce a statistical surface representing the variation of a quantity in space, even where it has not been measured;
- dashboards: to monitor & communicate (see Grandi & Bernasconi, 2020);
- infographics & stories: to communicate (Grandi and Bernasconi, 2021b).

This is also accompanied by the INSPIRE directive (INfrastructure for SPatial InfoRmation in Europe), which is a European directive establishing an infrastructure for spatial information in the

European Community<sup>1</sup>, which came into force on 15 May 2007. A directive that intends to create a common infrastructure that makes the spatial information of the various states compatible and usable in a cross-border context, so as to overcome problems regarding the availability, quality, organization and accessibility of data, in order to be able to correlate also data on an international scale, which are already provided according to the standards dictated by the directive itself. Once operational, it enables cross-border data to be seamlessly combined between Member States and shared with applications and between users providing a common framework to better cooperate and develop policies.

### **The case study of the Svic course at University of Bologna**

#### *The Undergraduate curriculum in Development and International Cooperation (Svic)*

Given the high potential of Gis in social sciences, the context in which a teaching of Gis has been experienced is that of the “Development and International Cooperation (SVIC)” program, a three-year undergraduate degree course at the University of Bologna that belongs to the course class 'Social Sciences for Cooperation, Development and Peace' (L-37). It has been considered mature to experiment a dedicated Gis laboratory as the course provides a versatile and multi-purpose training that enables students to acquire the necessary skills to understand and analyses globalization processes from various social, legal, political and cultural aspects, particularly in the fields of international development, social and peace policies<sup>2</sup>. The course devotes special attention to developing countries in order to promote a comparative analysis, both qualitative and quantitative, aimed at highlighting the weight of structural and sectoral differences in the various local systems and at identifying key factors for adopting pro-development policy measures.

The course consists of two years with core courses and a third year in which specific in-depth courses are offered in the various areas, including geography, statistics, economics, etc. The degree course also places great emphasis on internationalization and encourages its students to gain experience abroad. There are also many opportunities for direct encounters with the main working realities in the sector, through work placements, which allow students to gain initial experience in the world of work, and also through workshops, some of which are in English, which allow students to delve into development and cooperation issues in order to put the skills acquired into practice.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://inspire.ec.europa.eu/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://corsi.unibo.it/laurea/SviluppoCooperazioneInternazionale/studiare>

Optional courses have recently been included to further promote quantitative knowledge, to address development issues in multidimensional terms and to support the growing focus on emerging global issues related to the environment and climate change.

On the occasion of the Cyclical Review of the course of studies (in early 2022), a consultation with social partners that focused on the validity of the educational objectives and the management system used by the course of studies was held. It emerged from the focus group that the specific training objectives of the degree course are appreciated for their validity and relevance and in particular the importance of the cross- and inter-disciplinary nature of the teaching offering is recognized. The combination of theoretical teaching and laboratory activities are considered good, but the more operational and professionalizing skills should be further enhanced in order to better meet the needs of the world of work. In terms of transversal skills, those relating to the ability to analyze data and databases, design, teamwork, argumentation, communication and interpersonal skills are in greatest demand. It is precisely with this in mind that the proposal has been made to activate a "Gis and spatial analysis for international cooperation and local development". The model used is a laboratory-course of four European credits (in the 2020/2021 academic year), in order to strengthen the proposal of an educational offer that allows for the acquisition of more operational and professionalizing skills by supplementing the theoretical knowledge that is provided in some courses.

Gis where considered useful advanced tools of analysis that Svic students should acquire in this area, as they will be useful in facing the challenges that continually arise as experts in 'development' according to a contemporary, multifaceted and multidimensional, sustainable and universal conception (Sen 2000, Tulumello S. 2022).

The ability to thematically geo-localize is a prerequisite for analyzing and deepening the context under study in order to identify the consequent policy measures to be taken; complex thinking and multicriteria decision making can be strongly supported by Gis.

Development in its current vision must, in fact, be approached with a set of instruments and competences that allows for multidimensionality. Thematic maps of indicators are useful for the spatial analysis of global and local phenomena, cartography for the preparation and evaluation of local development and international cooperation projects can be a critical support system (Tulumello Foderà Pipitone 2007). Moreover, cartographic representation could become an important interpretation tool and a powerful form of visual communication to support decision makers in cooperation programs and projects. Students who become familiar with Gis tools will be able to "visualize" the interconnections between the phenomena studied by superimposing images of the



economic, social and political context in order to gain an insight into the complexity of the territory so as to support decision-makers in taking action with the ultimate goal of "development".

*From Gis basic introduction to a course in “Spatial Analysis and Gis for local development and international cooperation*

As part of the lectures of the course in “Geography and sociology of the territory”, for three academic years, a growing number of lecture hours have been dedicated to the introduction of the basic elements of Gis-based cartography and digital cartography. This has been a pilot project, experimenting both traditional frontal lecturing as well as digital one, even before Covid-19. The aim of this sub-module was to provide students with the elements of spatial analysis and Gis to be used as support for the analysis of spatial phenomena and spatial planning. At the end of the course, it was expected that students acquired the foundations of cartography and digital representation using basic Gis features autonomously and thanks to the growing diffusion of open-source systems such as QGis. Students were expected to develop the ability to produce thematic maps relating to elements and indicators useful both for the spatial analysis targeting global phenomena, local development, and international cooperation projects. Furthermore, they were expected to improve awareness and the ability to carry out the basic operations of spatial analysis of phenomena, basic Sma and create a cartographic project.

Thanks to the students’ review system of the University of Bologna, yearly fine-tuning and improvements have been made according to table 1. Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic accelerated digitalization and online lecturing, adding new technological opportunities in the pedagogy of the course.

**Table 1 - Summary table of the evolution of the piloting of the introduction of GIS in the SVIC course**

<b>Academic Year</b>	<b>Content of the course</b>	<b>n. lecture hours and expected working time for students</b>	<b>Review of the experience &amp; Improvements</b>
2018/2019 (before Covid-19)	1. Elements of classical cartography (definitions, properties, scale, projections, reference systems, symbology, types of maps, etc.).	Two hours, traditional lecture	This part of the course was particularly appreciated by about one third of the students as it aimed to provide practical skills and

<p>Total hours</p>	<p>2. Spatial data in the Gis environment (shapefiles and rasters) and basic use of QGis for constructing a geodatabase to design a thematic map using QGis.</p> <p>3. Self exercise at home in designing a world thematic map using the Human Development Index or other indicators of the UNDP statistical online statistical database</p>	<p>Two hours, lecture with a simple introductory guided exercise in computer science lab</p> <p>Four hours of independent practice work with the support of video-tutorials (not compulsory, rewarded with extra-points at the exams)</p>	<p>a methodology for the development of autonomous skills in the production of digital maps. A group of students (approx. 10%) used this competence in the application of the project work in the sociology part. One-third of the students complained that the necessary computer skills were too high or that they could not easily produce the required map because a sufficiently similar exercise had not been done in class. One third of the students considered this methodology not particularly interesting because it tended to be too practical and quantitative compared to the theoretical framework of the degree course and their expectations.</p>
<p>2019/2020 (before Covid-19)</p>	<p>1. As in the previous year</p> <p>2. Introduction to Gis and Spatial data (shapefiles and rasters) and main operations (overlying, buffer, visual analysis, etc). Basic elements of relational database management. Databases and georeferencing. Building simple databases with spatial data and Join operations</p> <p>3. Basic use of QGis, retrieving data and structuring a database for spatial analysis in projects for international cooperation and local development using HDI indicator of the UNDP online statistical database</p> <p>4. As in the previous year</p>	<p>Two hours, traditional lecture</p> <p>Two hours, traditional lecture</p> <p>Two hours, lecture with a full guided exercise in computer science lab to prepare a world thematic map on HDI</p> <p>Four hours of independent project work (alone or in</p>	<p>In order to meet requests for more practical support, the operational part was further strengthened by running an extra two hours, including elements of theory on relational databases and a computer room exercise that accompanied step-by-step procedures and commands to be used to build the thematic map.</p> <p>Extended the possibility to work in pairs in order to</p>

		couples) with the support of video-tutorials (not compulsory, rewarded with extra-points at the exams)	improve peer-to-peer learning processes.
2020/2021 (during Covid-19)	<p>1. As in the previous year</p> <p>2. As in the previous year + examples of applications.</p> <p>3. As in the previous year</p> <p>4. As in the previous year + a page on spatial analysis description based on the results</p> <p>5. Problem solving tutoring extra-time lecture</p>	<p>Two-hour lecture, online only</p> <p>Two hours lecture, online only</p> <p>Two hours lecture online with a full guided exercise online with full sharing screen of the lecturer to prepare a world thematic map on HDI</p> <p>Five hours of independent project work (alone or in couples) with the support of video-tutorials (not compulsory, rewarded with extra-points at the exams)</p> <p>Two extra-hours of rehearsal, question and answer session, and problem solving to students that requested help</p>	<p>Lectures where fully recorded and shared in the Moodle platform.</p> <p>To provide a more practical insight, some examples of application of spatial analysis and GIS applications in international cooperation and local development practices have been presented.</p> <p>Shape files and the .xls file were provided in the Moodle platform, to ensure everybody would finish the exercise.</p> <p>On top of the map, students were requested to add a short one-page report to demonstrate understanding of main concepts of spatial analysis.</p> <p>To support students that had practical problems, this extra open session acted as a simulation of a helpdesk service to solve problems that could halt the conducting of project work</p>

In a few years, this submodule moved from a minor part of the geography course to 25 per cent of it, and some final dissertations have significantly foreseen the use of Gis in their case study applications. The number of students involved was about 100 each years. This experiment has led to the design of an autonomous laboratory-course of 24-teaching-hours that could expand the objectives, competences acquired by students and the span of knowledge in Gis technologies as well as on

practices, case studies and critical analysis capabilities. In particular, the laboratory course has been composed of theoretical parts and a practical part aimed at developing a final complex project work. The content of the theory, held in traditional and digital blended fashion, part of the course could be then summarized as follows:

1. Introduction to cartography: from the first forms of spatial representation to Gis, Gps and other satellite geo-technologies;
2. Basic elements of classical cartography (definitions, properties, scale, projections, reference systems, symbology, types of maps, etc.).
3. Basic elements on relational database systems for constructing a geodatabase. Databases and georeferencing. Building simple databases with spatial data and Join operations.
4. Gis. The format of spatial data in the Gis environment (*shapefiles* and *rasters*). Retrieving data and structuring a database for spatial analysis in projects for international cooperation and local development.
5. Building cartograms with Qgis and overlaying operations.
6. Gis and digital cartography for participatory mapping: case studies.
7. Cartographic representation as a form of visual communication and decision support in cooperation programs and projects: maps in infographics, geo-dashboards, geo-visualization systems. Get a critical analysis on which technology and software select.

Lectures were organized in two parts, the first covering theoretical elements while in the second part direct practices through a full guided exercise involving a tutorial covering these operations and features, i.e. those presented in paragraph 2 (Data collection and management; Orientation between software; Performing queries; Use of the "buffer" functions; Performing "overlays" and Spatial interpolations). Tutorials performed in class were fully recorded and shared in the Moodle platform and were dedicated to (a) Introduction to QGis and tutorials; (b) Creating a world thematic map with QGis using HDI data, (c) Exercise on Italian region cartography; (d) Creating a route with GPS data using an application for smartphone and QGis; (e) data visualization with Flourish; (f) using Geoportals to retrieve geodata via Web map and web feature services; (g) Use of plugins (use of OpenstreetMaps cartography in QGis).

*Peer-to-peer & expert involvement*

Two former students, leveraging on peer-to-peer pedagogy approach, were participating to a brief, 30-minute seminar to present their case studies respectively applied into international cooperation realm (i.e. the use of Gis to monitor a project progress in rural areas of Niger) and into local development (i.e. the use of Gis to analyze spatial pattern of sustainable agricultural practices in the Salento area). This latter case was chosen because it can be considered a good example of application of practical skills in research of undergraduate level when referring to local development projects. The peer-to-peer lecturer provided first a theoretical part, aimed at teaching the students on the possible methodological steps to follow (data collection, data analysis, and data presentation) when implementing a spatial analysis in a final dissertation research, hence a reporting in the cooperation field. Some insights were also given on how to organise semi-structured interviews, as a tool to complement the Gis analysis. This theoretical part was followed by an exercise on how to retrieve statistical data from reliable sources and how to use the collected data to implement a joint function in QGis: the shapefile of the Italian regions was downloaded from ISTAT (Italian National Institute of Statistics), and uploaded as a vector file in QGis; a .csv was uploaded in QGis; the joint function was applied; the set of symbols for the newly created layer and final layout was created, including a legend and scale. The above-described seminar helped to understand the possible benefits stemming from a peer-to-peer approach. Moreover, this approach can contribute to increasing the acquisition of more professionalising skills (see paragraph 3.1) to be operationalised in the cooperation field. The particular attention on maintaining an interdisciplinary approach leads students to better face the multidimensional and multifaceted aspects of development in their future career.

Finally, a seminar was organized with an expert to transfer the sense of the more complex scientific and technological horizon of digital cartography, GIS, and spatial analysis.

## **Conclusions**

The analysis of the application potential on the creation of professional skills entangling spatial analysis and international cooperation are increasingly possible thanks to a new diffusion in the application field that has reached in recent years, also thanks to open-source software and open-data. The sphere of action of development cooperation in its various components and phases creates a significant interest in young students. Therefore, a framework of work can be constructed to identify the most important phases of Gis applications in development and learning needs. In particular, the teaching pilot project presented has led to develop a methodological framework in order to explore the cases for the use of Gis in support of international development cooperation. To further develop

this work, it seems appropriate to use a dialectical approach between practice and university teaching, i.e. between potential applications in project cycle management, competences and the skills developed or to be developed in existing university courses. For instance, the following phases the project and programme cycle could be considered:

1. The identification and study phase of the territory under investigation or construction of a project;
2. The data collection phase, especially when potentially geo-referenced and thanks to the use of Gps;
3. The support phase for the design of a programme or feasibility project also in remoteness conditions thanks to the processing of satellite raster images;
4. The operational planning phase by exploiting both the potential of spatial analysis and forecast modelling of Gis systems and in its potential for Sma, as well as applications in bottom-up participatory processes;
5. The external and internal communication phase thanks to the visualization tools;
6. The project progress monitoring phase to maintain a strong geospatial data connection and linkage;
7. The evaluation phase, both *in itinere* on the progress made and *ex post* on the impacts of a more or less complex project or programme.

Each of these should be accompanied by a spatial analysis technology and methodology that the knowledge and critical analysis of professional shall select appropriately. Hence, the role of education in preparing these competences is strategic to strengthen application of Gis. Research to further develop the nexus among Gis and spatial analysis, international cooperation and higher education pedagogy could be a future evolution of this work.

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### Acronyms

Svic – Development and international cooperation undergraduate degree  
Gis – Geographical information system  
Gps – Global positioning systems  
Hdi – Human development index  
Ict – Information and communication technology  
Istat – Italian National office of statistics  
Inspire – INFrastructure for SPatial InfoRmation in Europe  
Qgis – Quantum Gis  
Sdi – Spatial Data Infrastructures  
Siss – Spatially integrated social science  
Sma – Spatial multicriteria analysis



## ICT COME ENCLOSURES? IL CASO-STUDIO DEL MOBILE MONEY KENIANO

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### Abstract

M-Pesa è la prima piattaforma per il trasferimento di denaro tramite telefono cellulare. Nacque mentre emergeva con forza il “discorso” (Foucault 1972) relativo all’“inclusione finanziaria”, che considera l’accesso al debito la strada privilegiata per la fine della povertà (Graeber 2012). Analizzando la nascita di M-Pesa, i suoi usi, i rumors che la circondano, questo saggio si chiede se la piattaforma sia un elemento di “accumulazione originaria” (Marx 2008) e se su di essa si stia costruendo un conflitto tra multinazionale e utenti.

M-Pesa is the first mobile money transfer platform. It was born while the "discourse" (Foucault 1972) relating to "financial inclusion", which considers access to debt as the privileged path for the end of poverty (Graeber 2012), was strongly emerging. Analyzing the birth of M-Pesa, its uses, the rumors that surround it, this paper asks if the platform is an element of "primitive accumulation" (Marx 2008) and if there is a conflict between multinational and users.

### Keywords

ICT, Inclusione Finanziaria, Mobile Money, Piattaforma, Redistribuzione.

### Come nacque M-Pesa

Nel 2000 il *Department For International Development* del Regno Unito istituì il *Financial Deepening Challenge Fund*, che metteva a disposizione 15 milioni di sterline per investimenti congiunti pubblico-privato in progetti che contribuissero a migliorare l'accesso ai servizi finanziari. Vodafone ottenne dal fondo un finanziamento di quasi 1 milione di sterline, che utilizzò per progettare e testare, attraverso la sua controllata keniana Safaricom<sup>1</sup>, una piattaforma che consentisse a un cliente di ricevere e rimborsare un piccolo prestito utilizzando il proprio telefono. Il rimborso sarebbe avvenuto attraverso piccoli pagamenti fatti in modo comodo e semplice, come se si acquistasse una ricarica telefonica.

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<sup>1</sup> Safaricom è, con oltre 35 milioni di iscritti, una delle più grandi aziende di telefonia mobile in Kenya. Nel 2000, Vodafone è diventato il maggior azionista, acquisendo il 40% della proprietà dell’azienda. Il governo del Kenya possiede invece il 35% del pacchetto azionario. Le azioni rimanenti sono distribuite su percentuali molto basse. Fonte: <https://it.marketscreener.com/quotazioni/azione/SAFARICOM-PLC-6500172/societa/>, visitato il 31/12/2021.

Dopo aver configurato un software che permettesse di sfruttare il sistema *Short Message Service* (SMS) per inviare dati che potessero equivalere a denaro, ne avviò la sperimentazione nel 2005 (Huges-Lonie 2007).

Il progetto pilota ebbe luogo in due aree di Nairobi: nel centro e a Mathari, uno *slum* a circa 20 minuti di auto dal centro della città. Otto agenti ricevettero i loro telefoni e sessioni di formazione ripetute. Quasi 500 clienti parteciparono alla fase di sperimentazione, incentivati da un telefono gratuito e da qualche dollaro nei loro *e-wallet*.

Acquisita una partnership con Faulu Kenya, un istituto di microcredito keniano, la sperimentazione intendeva perfezionare la piattaforma intesa, appunto, come un prodotto tecnologico che facilitasse il rimborso di micro-prestiti.

Ciò che avvenne fu, invece, sorprendente.

M-Pesa era stato usato molto poco per i motivi immaginati. Le persone si erano approcciate alla piattaforma con fantasia e creatività.

Alcuni avevano, infatti, rimborsato prestiti altrui in cambio di servizi, altri avevano usato M-Pesa come canale di pagamento e deposito (dato il difficile accesso ai servizi bancari). Altri ancora - e forse questo era stato l'utilizzo più spiazzante – lo avevano usato per acquistare ricariche telefoniche Safaricom che poi avevano inviato ai loro parenti come forma di rimessa informale.

By the end of the pilot, executives at both Safaricom and Vodafone realized we might be onto something big, despite M-PESA's unusual origins. For Safaricom, the big opportunity was to extend its service into a completely new kind of business as a Payment Service Provider (Huges-Lonie 2007).

M-Pesa fu lanciato a marzo del 2007. In soli sei mesi aveva già un milione di iscritti.

### **“Airtime is money”<sup>2</sup>**

Ciò che la sperimentazione permise di svelare fu una serie di pratiche informali attraverso cui i keniani utilizzavano il credito telefonico in sostituzione del contante.

The basic beginnings of M-Pesa can be traced back to 2002 when Kenyans started trading with airtime. This was a simple way of buying bulk airtime as sold in shops or in scratch cards and then slice into small units to sell or to settle debts or even to share with friends and relatives when they ran out of airtime (Ndung'u 2021).

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<sup>2</sup> The Economist 2013.

Nel 2013 *The Economist* pubblicava un articolo in cui analizzava contesti e modalità in cui il credito telefonico veniva utilizzato come una valuta (*The Economist* 2013). Riconoscendo a M-Pesa sempre maggior popolarità, allo stesso tempo notava la sopravvivenza di alcune pratiche precedenti, in cui i minuti di credito telefonico venivano utilizzati come valuta *de facto*, trasferiti tra telefoni, scambiati in contanti con rivenditori che affittavano cellulari, o barattati con altri beni e servizi. Secondo Kusimba, in Kenya, ancora nel 2009, i chioschi soprannominati *simu ya wanainchi* (“telefoni dei cittadini”) erano in ogni mercato: noleggiavano telefoni, caricavano la batteria a pagamento e scambiavano credito telefonico con contante in cambio di piccole commissioni (Kusimba 2021).

*The Economist* evidenzia che nel 2013 la pratica era ancora diffusa in Costa d'Avorio, Egitto, Ghana, Uganda e in Nigeria. Ma anche in Kenya, nonostante M-Pesa, continuava a persistere. Inviare credito telefonico è rapido e può essere una buona soluzione in mancanza di contante.

### **ICT come *enclosures*?**

Denaro e merce non sono capitale sin dall'inizio, come non lo sono i mezzi di produzione e sussistenza. Bisogna che essi siano trasformati in capitale. [...] Il processo che genera il rapporto capitalistico non può essere altro che il processo di separazione del lavoratore dalla proprietà delle sue condizioni di lavoro. [...] Perciò l'accumulazione originaria non è altro che il processo storico di separazione del produttore dai mezzi di produzione (Marx 2008).

Shaw-Taylor (2001) definisce il fenomeno delle *enclosures* quel processo, avvenuto in Inghilterra tra il 1700 e il 1850, di trasformazione della gestione della terra. Il sistema ibrido, in cui convivevano diritti privati e usi collettivi del suolo, fu sconvolto e trasformato in un ordinamento basato esclusivamente sulla proprietà privata.

Secondo Marx (2018), il processo di privatizzazione sarebbe stato la base di un'ulteriore trasformazione, la “proletarizzazione”, ovvero l'espropriazione per una parte dell'umanità dei mezzi dell'esistenza e dell'attività umana. Parte fondamentale di questo processo di espropriazione sarebbe stata l'introduzione di macchinari (Antunes et al. 2021), che ha reso produzione e riproduzione dipendenti in misura crescente dai loro proprietari.

Sassen (2014) evidenzia come questi processi ricevano un ulteriore sviluppo a partire dagli anni '80 del Novecento, quando, l'emergere della finanza come logica preponderante dell'accumulazione capitalista fa sì che la produzione e il consumo non siano più sufficienti per la creazione di valore in una gamma crescente di settori economici. Il valore viene invece estratto attraverso tecnologie sempre più raffinate (l'esternalizzazione, il land grabbing, l'estrazione offshore, gli algoritmi finanziari, le

varie forme di inclusione finanziaria), seguendo una logica predatoria di cui la finanza è un fattore-chiave e le tecnologie di informazione e comunicazione uno strumento fondamentale.

Today, enormous technical and legal complexities are needed to execute what are ultimately elementary extractions (Sassen 2014).

Le piattaforme sono, a mio parere, un esempio estremamente significativo di queste contemporanee complessità estrattive.

Nick Srnicek (2017) definisce le “piattaforme” uno specifico modo di produzione capitalista contemporaneo. Nel fornire quelle “infrastrutture” (tecnologiche e umane) che rendono possibile una determinata attività umana, le piattaforme estraggono e controllano enormi quantità di dati, rafforzando la loro stessa indispensabilità man mano che aumentano gli utenti che sulla piattaforma interagiscono.

Sono due le conseguenze di questa tendenza al “modello-piattaforma” di almeno una parte del capitalismo contemporaneo:

1. un crescente vincolo e incorporazione nel mercato di strutture e pratiche sociali, con il conseguente aumento del bisogno di denaro per la semplice riproduzione sociale (Wiegratz-Cesnulyte 2016);
2. la crescente capacità delle “piattaforme” di assorbire pratiche sociali e innovazioni che su queste si riproducono, mettendole a profitto (Van der Boor et al. 2014).

Secondo Meagher (2018) è ampiamente riconosciuto che Vodafone e Safaricom, attraverso l’elaborazione e il lancio della piattaforma M-Pesa, acquisirono e mercificarono la pratica, nata in contesti informali, di utilizzo del credito telefonico come sostituto del denaro. Meagher non ha esitazioni a definire questa pratica come una forma di “cannibalizzazione” di pratiche informali da parte delle multinazionali di telefonia. La cannibalizzazione non si fermerebbe al solo “furto” delle pratiche, quanto piuttosto allo sfruttamento di quelle stesse reti umane informali che davano vita alla pratica stessa. Infatti, come ben argomenta l’autrice, un’ampia gamma di istituzioni informali ha giocato un ruolo nel successo di M-Pesa. Cooperative di credito e reti di negozianti informali hanno svolto una funzione centrale, fornendo l’infrastruttura su cui M-Pesa si è “appoggiato”. Prima del 2010, la multinazionale avrebbe assorbito all’interno della piattaforma questa infrastruttura informale, che avrebbe contribuito a una veloce espansione e all’introduzione di un’ulteriore gamma di innovazioni. Dal 2010, invece, Safaricom, applicando un “aggregator model”, ha centralizzato il controllo del sistema e della redistribuzione dei guadagni, riducendo il numero dei rivenditori ufficiali M-Pesa (meglio remunerati) da centinaia a circa una decina e rendendo strutturale la figura degli agenti (precarì e peggio pagati). Meagher osserva, evidenziando quanto già segnalato da Foster e

Heeks (2013), che questa strategia di selezione e presa egemonica di pratiche umane ha consentito la “cattura” e l’“incorporazione” di innovazioni informali nel marchio Vodafone/Safaricom.

Grazie a M-Pesa, quindi, la multinazionale è stata in grado di:

1. selezionare una ben specifica pratica e le reti informali che la rendevano viva;
2. recintare pratica e reti umane rendendole proprietà privata.

Ma non solo.

La piattaforma ha finalmente reso possibile l’accesso al debito a strati di popolazione prima esclusi a causa dei bassi redditi o della posizione geografica lontana dalle infrastrutture bancarie.

Dal 2012 M-Pesa, infatti, dà accesso al servizio M-Shwari, che permette di ottenere prestiti in modo istantaneo da un minimo di 100 scellini kenioti (Kshs; pari a 0,75 euro il 19/01/23) ad un massimo di 50000 Kshs (373 euro circa nella stessa data) al costo del 9% in commissioni (7,5% commissioni reali e 1,5% accise). Per accedere a questi prestiti è sufficiente essere abbonati a M-Pesa da sei mesi.<sup>3</sup>

Quindi, non solo M-Pesa ha reso possibile l’estrazione di un profitto da pratiche e reti informali a lei pre-esistenti che ha saputo assorbire e privatizzare, e per l’utilizzo delle quali ora si paga una sorta di “pedaggio” (Maurer 2012)<sup>4</sup>; ha anche reso possibile l’accesso al debito (e ai profitti che esso produce) per una parte di popolazione prima esclusa, rendendo finalmente possibili collegamenti tra semplici transazioni di strada, anche minime, e la finanza globale (Hart e Ortiz 2014).

Analizziamo nel dettaglio questi due profili estrattivi.

### **Il lato umano del *mobile money***

La piattaforma M-Pesa è un ibrido di infrastrutture tecnologiche e umane.

Ma, piuttosto che essere un ibrido paritario, la tecnologia sembrerebbe assorbire (o estrarre) il lavoro umano, rendendolo una sorta di “lavoro fantasma” (Gray e Suri 2019). Gray e Suri ritengono che quelli che noi chiamiamo “sistemi automatici”, alla base della cosiddetta “Gig Economy”, pur avendo bisogno dell’umano, in particolare nelle prime fasi dell’automazione e per rispondere a impulsi inaspettati, al contrario che riconoscerne e valorizzarne il peso, ne permettono nascondimento e precarizzazione.

Anche il sistema M-Pesa utilizza queste logiche.

Maurer, Nelms e Rea (2013) ritengono la funzione degli agenti umani cruciale. È questa che permette l’*agency* e il funzionamento del sistema *mobile money*. Gli agenti, infatti, oltre a trasformare il

<sup>3</sup> Fonte: <https://www.safaricom.co.ke/personal/m-pesa/credit-and-savings/m-shwari>, visitato il 26/10/2021.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.safaricom.co.ke/personal/m-pesa/m-pesa-rates>, per conoscere nel dettaglio i costi dell’utilizzo di M-Pesa. Si tratta di commissioni molto variabili che dipendono da una serie di fattori, impossibili qui da riassumere in modo completo.

contante in e-money e il contrario, si occupano della registrazione e dell'introduzione al funzionamento del servizio per i nuovi utenti, e offrono un lavoro *front-line* di ascolto e risoluzione dei problemi nell'utilizzo della piattaforma (Global System for Mobile communication Association - GSMA- 2011), oltre che reclutare nuovi clienti (Maurer et al. 2013).

Il concetto di “agente” nel *mobile money* deriva dal lessico della micro-finanza ed è parte del “discorso esperto” sull'inclusione finanziaria. Partendo dal presupposto per cui le infrastrutture bancarie sono costose, e quindi diventa proibitivo o non appetibile aprire filiali bancarie, specialmente nelle aree rurali, la svolta dei servizi di micro-finanza sta nello slogan “instead of bringing people [...] into the bank, bring the bank to them” (Maurer et al. 2013).

Leggendo questo slogan da un'altra angolazione, diventa chiaro che il sistema bancario rifiuta di fatto la costruzione di infrastrutture in determinate aree e si appoggia, piuttosto, a ciò che già esiste. Che cosa esisteva prima di M-Pesa?

Con la diffusione della telefonia mobile si era costituita una rete di distribuzione di telefoni e credito telefonico che utilizzava anch'essa piccoli negozi, chioschi, servizi postali informali.

Mann e Nzaysenga (2014) hanno mostrato come questo “pre-esistente” fosse di fatto composto da lavoratori informali. Secondo le autrici, infatti, per le multinazionali e gli investitori internazionali l'accesso ai mercati sub-sahariani è stato reso possibile da una massiccia “deregulation” e dalla presenza di reti ed istituzioni informali utilizzate per rendere “leggibili” (Scott 1998) quei mercati.

In Ruanda, *MTN*, *Tigo* e *Airtel* non hanno particolari procedure di reclutamento dei rivenditori di ricariche telefoniche. Chi vuole vendere ricariche telefoniche entra in uno dei loro uffici, compra le ricariche e poi le rivende. Ai rivenditori vengono dati un gilet, un box in plastica e un ombrellone con i marchi della compagnia. A parte questi materiali utili a rendere visibile il marchio, non c'è nessun altro tipo di supporto: né formazione, né ricerche di mercato, né suggerimenti di vendita. Lasciano che i venditori usino la loro stessa ‘*market intelligence*’ e di fatto spostano su di loro il rischio di invenduto. I rivenditori lavorano su percentuale di vendita, quindi non è necessaria nemmeno una qualsiasi forma di contratto. Nonostante ciò, “for many, selling airtime is the closest they have come to formal employment” (Mann e Nzaysenga 2014).

Secondo Bocquier (2005), a Nairobi, addirittura sette lavoratori su otto sarebbero impiegati informalmente da imprese formali.

È proprio da questa rete informale che nasce l'invenzione del mobile money. L'utilizzo del credito telefonico come una sorta di moneta digitale che poteva poi essere cambiata in contante era un modo per arrotondare le entrate (Maurer et al. 2013; Meagher 2018; Kusimba 2021). Potremmo definire quest'innovazione una sorta di appropriazione della Base della Piramide (Prahalad 2004)

dell'ecosistema tecnologico e delle spinte commerciali degli operatori telefonici. L'espropriazione di questa pratica da parte di Safaricom inizialmente sembra far guadagnare tutti: le multinazionali telefoniche, gli agenti e gli utilizzatori che non avevano accesso a servizi finanziari. Tuttavia, come Maurer e colleghi enfatizzano, nel 2011, tra i professionisti del *mobile money*, il modo di riferirsi alla rete degli agenti cambia drasticamente:

agent networks, we were told, do not build themselves, but require constant investments of money, time, and attention. Agents, all of a sudden, were [...] a major cost and constant concern in making a mobile money service feasible and profitable (Maurer et al. 2013).

Insomma, l'ICT, nel caso del *mobile money*, è uno strumento della multinazionale per rendere leggibile e utilizzabile (nel senso di profittevole) quello che c'è già, evitando strategicamente qualsiasi investimento infrastrutturale o nel personale. L'ICT, come una sorta di piattaforma petrolifera offshore, sembra permettere l'estrazione di "materiale utile" al profitto, mentre esclude e rifiuta quello che rimane (Cfr. Sassen 2014).

### **Mobile money, accesso al debito e "inclusione predatoria"**

Maurer, Nelms e Rea (2013) riportano il dato fornito dagli operatori di telefonia mobile: più dell'80% della popolazione mondiale ha accesso ad un telefono cellulare, sia esso di proprietà personale o in prestito, ma meno del 10% ha accesso a servizi finanziari.

L'industria della telefonia mobile, ONG e fondazioni filantropiche (ad esempio Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation) hanno trovato nel *mobile money* lo strumento principale dell'inclusione finanziaria. Ad oggi la rete globale dei professionisti del *mobile money* è diventata molto articolata: si compone di giuristi, politici, lobbisti, investitori, fondatori di start-ups, affaristi, programmatori, ricercatori, ONG, filantropi, e così via.

Trevor Manuel, ministro delle Finanze del Sudafrica dal 1996 al 2009, invitato ad un convegno sul futuro della finanza digitale in Africa tenutosi a Johannesburg dal 22 al 26 ottobre 2018, ripropone, nel suo discorso di apertura, alcuni concetti che sono lo sfondo discorsivo (Foucault 1972) della nascita e dello sviluppo del *mobile money*.

The object of the debate about digital finance is to explore ways of transcending past limitations. This requires innovation in respect of access and products, with an emphasis on inclusion as well as on indigenous products. Success should be measured in terms of whether hitherto underserved people will gain greater access to financial services. This can be evaluated in terms of the participation of vulnerable people, especially women (Manuel 2018).

Il mobile money e la finanza digitale rappresenterebbero un'innovazione che riesce a superare i limiti del passato, soprattutto in termini di accesso ai prodotti finanziari per le persone vulnerabili (le donne in particolare) e alla creazione di nuovi prodotti, perlopiù indigeni.

Questo nucleo di concetti mainstream sul mobile money fa riferimento al nesso tecnologia-sviluppo proposto dall'economista Schumpeter, secondo cui i cicli di crescita economica sono guidati dai cambiamenti del paradigma socio-tecnico (Murphy-Carmody 2015). Tale quadro teorico di riferimento non è solo un nucleo di concetti per scopi analitici, ma è diventato spunto per azioni concrete. Ad esempio, il programma infoDev ([www.infodev.org](http://www.infodev.org)), sponsorizzato dalla Banca Mondiale per 204,8 milioni di dollari, cerca di sfruttare le capacità delle ICT e delle nuove piattaforme su telefono cellulare per stimolare l'imprenditorialità e l'innovazione nelle regioni considerate in via di sviluppo. Il potere del quadro teorico schumpeteriano risiede nell'affidarsi all'elemento tecnologico con uno sguardo modernista: l'ottimismo sta nell'innovazione tecnologica, che cancella il passato, ci ripositiona tutti allo stesso livello e spalanca porte che prima erano chiuse.

Secondo la Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, l'espansione della tecnologia informatica e l'emergere dei pagamenti digitali è così potente da assicurare una crescita economica tale per cui è possibile prevedere l'eliminazione della povertà assoluta a livello globale entro il 2030 (Zucarro-Bridwell 2016). Se notiamo, molti dei concetti, proposti da Bill Gates in un suo articolo del 2011, coincidono con quelli dell'ex ministro Manuel:

Technology can be a major force to advance financial inclusion, which can help improve the lives of the poor in the developing world. This is an important focus of the foundation's efforts. At the Global Savings Forum, we pledged \$500 million over five years to help create access to savings accounts that will help increase the financial security of the world's poorest. I'm personally very excited about these efforts, which have the potential to replicate in other key markets. As I mentioned at the forum, I look forward to seeing similar partnerships replicate at scale in big countries such as India, Ethiopia and Nigeria (Gates 2011).

Secondo Murphy e Carmody (2015), saremmo di fronte ad un vero e proprio movimento, che chiamano ICT4D (Tecnologie Informatiche e di Comunicazione per lo Sviluppo), la cui ascesa va correlata all'emergere, alla fine del ventesimo secolo, di un'economia globale, di cui il Nord del mondo era il centro nevralgico, basata sull'informa(tizza)zione.<sup>5</sup>

Strumentalizzato da molti soggetti del capitalismo neoliberista, l'ICT4D assume le sembianze di un vero e proprio movimento sociale, promuovendo creazione e sviluppo di mercati capitalisti utilizzando un lessico movimentista, spesso quello dei diritti umani. Creare accesso al mercato,

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<sup>5</sup> Il gioco di parole "informa(tizza)zione" è degli autori citati.



secondo le narrazioni dell'ICT4D, è spesso inteso come rendere possibile il debito (cioè eufemisticamente definito "inclusione finanziaria"), attraverso l'utilizzo delle tecnologie informatiche e comunicative come portali quasi magici, la cui forza avrebbe il potere di annullare una condizione di arretratezza (che personalmente definirei, piuttosto, disuguaglianza e sfruttamento) lunga secoli.

Gli interventi dell'ex ministro sudafricano e di Bill Gates sembrano tralasciare e ignorare una serie di elementi critici. Veramente le ICT sono state portali di accesso ad un'inclusione positiva, arricchente e benefica nel mercato capitalista? Veramente possono contribuire ad un'inclusione finanziaria che può diventare opportunità di *leapfrogging*?

Kusimba (2021) sostiene che se di inclusione si tratta, è un'inclusione "predatoria".

Il debito digitale è sempre più una dimensione condivisa nella società keniana.

About 100,000 digital loans are taken out per day in Kenya and about 70 million digital credit loans were issued in Kenya from 2014 to 2017. At least 35% of Kenyans with a phone have taken out one of these loans (Kusimba 2021).

Quello che era iniziato nel 2012 come un mercato servito da un solo operatore, M-Shwari, è ora un mercato affollato da oltre sessanta marchi (per esempio Kopa Cash, Branch, Eazzy Loan, Get Saida, Tala etc. etc.). La mancanza di una legislazione sul credito permette, infatti, a chiunque di pubblicare un'applicazione telefonica e iniziare a prestare denaro, rendendo il debito una pratica sempre più diffusa. Nel 2015 The Economist ha riferito che il Kenya era il secondo paese più indebitato al mondo dopo il Sudafrica: l'80% dei keniani di età superiore ai quindici anni ha riferito di aver contratto un prestito nel 2015. Secondo Financial Sector Deepening Kenya (FSD Kenya), il credito digitale è sempre più utilizzato per pagare le tasse scolastiche e l'assistenza sanitaria, fino addirittura per affrontare esigenze routinarie, come le spese quotidiane (FSD 2019).

Ma il debito digitale costa di più di quello bancario: se la Banca keniana KCB fa pagare i suoi prestiti a scadenza 30 giorni il 6%, M-Shwari il 7,5%. Ma non si tratta di un tasso fisso: questo tasso raddoppia se il prestito non viene pagato entro quei 30 giorni e, sommato a tutti i costi effettivi che chi ottiene il prestito deve affrontare per incassarlo, si traduce effettivamente in un TAEG (tasso percentuale medio, il costo del prestito per un anno) del 91%. M-Shwari non è nemmeno la peggiore da questo punto di vista. Nell'aprile del 2019 il TAEG di Kopa Cash era del 442%, quello di Branch del 182%, di Eazzy Loan del 110%, di Get Saida del 286% e di Tala del 180% (FSD 2019).

Richieste di interessi e spese per accesso al debito così alte comportano una situazione di stress finanziario. Fino al 2017 circa il 10% degli adulti keniani era inadempiente per prestiti digitali. Circa 400.000 persone sono state inserite nella lista nera del Credit Bureau of Kenya (chi vi è iscritto deve

estinguere i debiti precedenti per accedere a nuovi debiti) per importi inferiori a 2 dollari, rappresentando un chiaro caso di esclusione, non di inclusione finanziaria. Tattiche di marketing aggressivo sembrano essere diventate comuni. Possono includere pressioni frequenti tramite SMS e campagne di vergogna sui social media (Kusimba 2021).

### ***Mobile money e rumors: il furto***

Nella loro etnografia sull'uso del telefono cellulare in Giamaica, Horst e Miller (2006) evidenziano come, dai loro interlocutori, le compagnie telefoniche fossero spesso trattate come personaggi di una storia narrata.

La tendenza è la stessa anche in Kenya, dove *rumors* e aneddoti circondano la storia “ufficiale”, confondendola e discutendola.

Secondo Kroeger,

rumors are more than just wrong or incomplete information; they are socially constructed, performed, and interpreted narratives, a reflection of beliefs and views about how the world works in a particular place and time (Kroeger 2003).

Tra i *rumors* principali sulla nascita del *mobile money*, Kusimba ne raccoglie uno particolarmente interessante per la nostra analisi (Kusimba 2021), secondo cui fu uno studente keniano (di cui non si conosce l'identità) del Jomo Kenyatta College of Agriculture and Technology a sviluppare per primo il sistema di trasferimento di denaro attraverso il telefono cellulare. Voce piuttosto diffusa, Kusimba la raccoglie tra i suoi studenti all'Università di Egerton nel 2009.

Parlandone con un lavoratore dell'Università, Kusimba ottiene un'altra versione: lo studente era, in realtà, studente di ingegneria all'Università di Nairobi e, presentata l'idea di M-Pesa a Safaricom, ne era stato derubato, dopo che la compagnia telefonica aveva deciso di sviluppare l'intuizione ed escluderlo dagli sviluppi del prodotto.

Altre persone riportavano altre versioni. Alcune sostenevano che questo studente aveva richiesto un brevetto al governo keniano, che aveva, invece, inviato l'idea a Safaricom segretamente. La compagnia, attraverso i suoi associati internazionali di Vodafone, avrebbe rubato e brevettato l'innovazione. Per altri lo studente sarebbe stato un Luo, gruppo generalmente associato all'opposizione politica (anche l'attuale presidente è di famiglia Kikuyu).

Nel 2012 Nzioka Waita, all'epoca responsabile degli affari aziendali di Safaricom, attraverso un articolo sul sito web *humanIPO*, risponde a tutta una serie di “equivoci” (Waita li definisce così).

Più di metà dell'articolo è, in realtà, una risposta diretta a Nyagaka Anyona Ouko, che si auto-dichiarava il vero inventore di M-Pesa, in quanto ideatore del sistema di invio di credito telefonico

come trasferimento di denaro.<sup>6</sup> La risposta di Waita è articolata e la riporto qui più che altro perché è l'unica testimonianza rimasta di ciò che Nyagaka sosteneva. Waita evidenzia come l'utilizzo del credito telefonico come equivalente dei contanti fosse una pratica molto diffusa in Kenya e, quindi, fosse piuttosto complicato individuarne il vero iniziatore. M-Pesa comunque sarebbe un'innovazione di questa pratica: l'*e-wallet* M-Pesa è un portafoglio separato rispetto al credito telefonico. Questa sarebbe la vera invenzione brevettabile, mentre l'uso del credito telefonico come equivalente del denaro è discutibile che lo sia. Vodafone avrebbe depositato una richiesta di brevetto internazionale per M-Pesa l'11 agosto 2006, ma la domanda di brevetto era stata già depositata in Inghilterra un anno prima; secondo il racconto di Nyagaka, egli avrebbe registrato l'idea del trasferimento di denaro tramite l'invio di credito telefonico nell'aprile del 2006. Waita così dimostra che comunque Vodafone aveva già richiesto il brevetto per M-Pesa prima che Nyagaka registrasse la sua invenzione. Infine, Nyagaka sostiene di aver ottenuto un certificato KECOBO (Kenya Copyright Board) sulla sua invenzione nell'aprile del 2006. Waita fa notare che KECOBO si occupa solo di copyright e non di brevetti e quindi, anche se veramente l'avesse ottenuto, sarebbe insignificante, in quanto gli darebbe dei diritti su materiale scritto, ma non costituirebbe un brevetto.

Insomma, è molto interessante vedere come questo *rumor* abbia scomodato addirittura il responsabile degli affari aziendali di Safaricom, diventando comunque, in qualche modo, una cosa vera. Interessante come continui a persistere nel tempo e si arricchisca ogni volta di particolari differenti, a seconda di chi lo racconta o lo performa.

Ci sono degli elementi di questo *rumor* che mi interessa sottolineare:

- il furto. Vodafone/Safaricom rubano l'idea e poi la brevettano. Non si tratta di un'idea pensata in laboratorio o negli uffici ingegneristici. Si tratta di qualcosa che le persone già facevano e su cui, poi, Vodafone/Safaricom ha messo il suo marchio. La voce non sembra rimpiangere il passato, ovvero quando ci si scambiava credito telefonico in equivalenza di contante, senza fosse stato ideato un prodotto apposito. Riguarda, invece, un desiderio di riconoscimento e la sensazione di essere stati espropriati.
- il vero ideatore è keniano. La voce, rivendicando la provenienza di M-Pesa, denuncia velatamente un esproprio fatto da una multinazionale europea nei confronti del Kenya. In questa denuncia c'è

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<sup>6</sup> Sul web ancora si trovano un paio di articoli che riportano questa versione dei fatti. Si veda, per esempio, <https://www.kenyabreakingnews.co.ke/meet-nyagaka-anyona-ouko-the-kenyan-man-who-invented-m-pesa/>, in cui il signor Nyagaka sarebbe in realtà il famoso studente del Jomo Kenyatta College e <https://ke.opera.news/ke/en/economy-finance/fd60103b87b894dc551fd06a9a8547a0>, che racconterebbe la meravigliosa vita di Nyagaka dopo la scoperta di M-Pesa e dopo che gli “sarebbe stata assegnata una quota importante nell'azienda”. Entrambi i siti sono stati visitati l'11 gennaio 2022.

anche una componente di auto-compiacimento per essere stati soggetti attivi e innovatori, e non solo elementi passivi, nel contesto economico internazionale.

- il vero ideatore è uno studente. Questo elemento sembrerebbe riproporre l'immagine di un soggetto debole, in quanto ancora in formazione e privo di un ruolo ben definito, che si sta preparando per il suo ingresso in società. Proprio perché, mi verrebbe da dire, è in una condizione liminale, è anche portatore di novità e freschezza, sussunta e inglobata dalla multinazionale.

- alcune versioni riportano che sarebbe stato il governo keniano il vero autore del furto, per conto di Safaricom. Questo elemento rende conto di una complicità tra multinazionale e governo. Se in alcuni momenti storici la multinazionale è stata vista come un elemento esterno al contesto di corruzione e violenza e, in quanto tale, meritevole di fiducia<sup>7</sup>, in altri i legami tra governo e multinazionale, e la loro complicità, sono stati visti come fraudolenti. Va ricordato che alla base di questo elemento c'è, comunque, un dato: il governo keniano possiede il 35% del pacchetto azionario di Safaricom.

- in alcune versioni del *rumor* lo studente è Luo. Secondo Maupeu (2005), fin dall'epoca coloniale, è stato costruito uno stereotipo<sup>8</sup> simmetrico in cui al "Kikuyu lavoratore" si opporrebbe il "Luo pigro". La storia di questo *clichè* è piuttosto articolata, ma le radici risiederebbero nella strategia coloniale inglese del *divide et impera*. Nel tempo, e in particolare con la decolonizzazione, il *clichè* si è trasformato e il Kikuyu, da "lavoratore", è diventato "il capitalista", con tutti i significati ambivalenti che il termine può avere. Il rumor acquisirebbe qui un significato multi-strato: lo studente Luo ("pigo") subisce il furto di un'idea straordinariamente innovativa dall'élite capitalista Kikuyu ("lavoratrice"), in accordo con la multinazionale.

### **Conclusioni: Inclusione finanziaria versus redistribuzione?**

C'è una sorta di conflitto nell'utilizzo di M-Pesa tra chi gestisce questi servizi e chi invece li utilizza. Dal 2012, l'anno del lancio di M-Shwari, Vodafone/Safaricom sembra concentrarsi in modo sempre più sofisticato sull'elaborazione di modalità di accesso ai circuiti finanziari per utenti a basso reddito. Eppure, i significati e i modi con cui la gente vede e usa M-Pesa sembrano focalizzarsi di gran lunga sulla loro rete sociale e sul mobile money come strumento redistributivo (Kusimba 2021).

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<sup>7</sup> Secondo Morawczynski e Miscione (2010), complici dell'immediato successo di M-Pesa furono le violenze elettorali del 2007-08. M-Pesa, infatti, in quel contesto, rappresentava qualcosa su cui porre la propria fiducia perché elemento "esterno" ai conflitti politici in corso. M-Pesa era considerato, infatti, un servizio di proprietà dei "muzungu" (uomini bianchi).

<sup>8</sup> "Les stéréotypes participent de microprocessus à travers lesquels l'identité ethnique est intériorisée" (Maupeu 2005).

Certo, il debito digitale è in forte aumento, ma l’impegno e la concentrazione sull’elaborazione di strumenti di “inclusione predatoria” è stato importante, a discapito di altre possibilità; nonostante questo, le persone si rivolgono ai micro-debiti digitali con molti timori e paure, preferendo indubbiamente affidarsi alle loro reti sociali come scelta primaria (FSD Kenya 2019).

Secondo James Ferguson (2015), questa richiesta di redistribuzione sarebbe una sorta di tendenza della nostra contemporaneità neoliberista.

[It] is not some archaic and reactionary remnant of the paternalistic past but a very up-to-date (and in at least some measure effective) response to current economic conditions (Ferguson 2015).

E parrebbe essere una tendenza, perché ritorna spesso, anche questa sorta di sensazione di furto di cui il *rumor* analizzato nel paragrafo precedente da conto. In un lavoro, purtroppo solamente iniziato, di osservazione di gruppi Facebook costituiti attorno al *mobile money*, ho registrato quanto un utente di M-Pesa scriveva il 16 novembre 2021:

Safaricom is part of the cartel that steals from its customers. I was paid by a company I worked for in two installments, later on after one week my money 17k [17.000 scellini kenioti] was reversed without my knowledge.<sup>9</sup>

Ho contattato l’autore di questo commento diverse volte per sapere cosa fosse successo e per ottenere un’intervista sulla sua visione ed esperienza con M-Pesa e Safaricom. Purtroppo, l’invito è stato declinato, per cui non sapremo mai nel dettaglio cosa fosse successo. Non posso, però, che notare come le definizioni Safaricom/M-Pesa “parte del cartello che ruba ai suoi utenti”, o “idea di uno studente rubata dalla multinazionale in combutta con lo Stato”, o, infine, “topo che la notte dà la caccia al denaro”<sup>10</sup>, siano modi differenti di riproporre la stessa sensazione di furto.

M-Pesa, nella sua fase sperimentale, era nato come servizio di micro-credito. Fu l’utilizzo del prodotto da parte del campione sperimentale di utenti a modificarne del tutto la natura, ricostituendolo come servizio per pagamenti e trasferimenti di denaro.

Interpreto questo risultato della sperimentazione come una delle più grosse smentite al discorso esperto sull’inclusione finanziaria. A me pare che quel campione di utenti, più di tutto, abbia manifestato il bisogno di avere a disposizione prodotti che rendano possibili dinamiche redistributive, smentendo l’affermazione per cui sarebbe l’accesso alla finanza la soluzione alla povertà.

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<sup>9</sup> Cfr. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/714317609306227>, visitato il 29/11/2021, commento ad un post del 16 novembre 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Questa è la definizione raccolta da Kusimba (2021: 128) che Brendah, insegnante di 27 anni, dava di M-Shwari, il servizio di micro-debito digitale collegato a M-Pesa.

Gli usi redistributivi, piuttosto che finanziari, di M-Pesa, le sensazioni ambigue che gli utenti hanno nei suoi confronti, i rumors e le accuse più o meno velate di furto mi sembrano i segnali di un conflitto che si sta svolgendo sulla piattaforma, su cos'è e cosa dovrebbe essere.

Quanto questo conflitto sia ampio purtroppo rimane ancora difficile da decifrare. Per questo rimando a futuri lavori, se ce ne sarà occasione.

### **Lista degli acronimi**

FSD Kenya: Financial Sector Deepening Kenya

GSMA: Global System for Mobile Communication Association

ICT4D: Information and Communications Technologies for Development

KECOBO: Kenya Copyright Board

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## ICT4DEV FOR THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF MOZAMBIQUE

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### Abstract

This paper introduces ICT4Dev (Information and Communication Technologies for Development), a joint project between Politecnico di Milano and Universidade Eduardo Mondlane in Maputo (Mozambique), funded by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation. The project aims to: (i) improve the ICT-related skills of students and faculty members at the Universidade Eduardo Mondlane, (ii) strengthen the development of innovative IT applications in the context of development initiatives, (iii) support the birth and development of new entrepreneurship, and (iv) help develop a knowledge network among research centers. ICT4Dev also wants to contribute to the reduction of the gender gap in Mozambique.

Questo articolo presenta ICT4Dev (Tecnologie dell'Informazione e Comunicazione per lo Sviluppo), un progetto congiunto tra il Politecnico di Milano e l'Università Eduardo Mondlane di Maputo (Mozambico), finanziato dall'Agenzia Italiana per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo. Il progetto mira a: (i) migliorare le competenze relative alle TIC di studenti e docenti dell'Università Eduardo Mondlane, (ii) rafforzare lo sviluppo di applicazioni informatiche innovative nel contesto di iniziative di sviluppo, (iii) sostenere la nascita e lo sviluppo di nuova imprenditorialità e (iv) aiutare a sviluppare una rete di conoscenze tra i centri di ricerca. ICT4Dev vuole anche contribuire alla riduzione del divario di genere in Mozambico.

### Keywords

ICT, Higher education, Development, Mozambique.

## Introduction

Information and Communication Technologies are often considered key enablers for the achievement of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals <sup>1</sup>, but they can also help us live better lives. Ponelis and Holmner state that Africa must improve and extend the use of ICTs for capacity-building, empowerment, governance, and social participation, but these technologies are also useful for strengthening scientific research, sharing information, and for creating culture (Ponelis and Holmner 2015). Digital technologies can play a prominent role in economic and social transformation in Mozambique and ICT4Dev (Information and Communication Technologies for Development), aims to play a role in it.

This project funded by AICS (Italian Agency for Development Cooperation) and implemented by Politecnico di Milano (PoliMi) and Universidade Eduardo Mondlane (UEM) in Maputo (Mozambique) addresses some of the issues related to the development of ICT in Mozambique. It responds to the needs for training and skills building in a rapidly evolving sector, to support the development of ICT applications that can foster, govern, and boost the social and economic development of the country. More specifically, ICT4Dev covers a wide spectrum of activities aimed to train students and faculty members and encourage entrepreneurial initiatives. The final goal is to contribute to the development of a new culture of novel, cutting-edge information and communication technologies.

The project was conceived by the Dipartimento di Elettronica, Informazione e Bioingegneria (DEIB) of the Politecnico di Milano in collaboration with the Universidade Eduardo Mondlane. The project then involves DEIB, as for PoliMi, and the Informatics Center (CIUEM), with the Innovation Space, and the Faculties of Science and Engineering, as for UEM. The activities are coordinated with AICS in Maputo for technical assistance, monitoring, and assessment. AICS Maputo is directly responsible for the activities related to entrepreneurship support, together with the Innovation Space.

The project started on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021, and it is being managed and administered in Maputo and in Milan in close cooperation between the parties and according to the administrative and financial rules dictated by AICS. The bilateral agreement signed between PoliMi and UEM in January 2022

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<sup>1</sup> “ICTs as a catalyst for sustainable development”, <https://sdgs.un.org/events/icts-catalyst-sustainable-development-28937>.

was the last step to enact planned activities. The limitations imposed by the pandemic and other constraints significantly hurdled the first months of ICT4Dev, but during the rest of the first year which is the time frame covered by this paper, partners did everything possible to carry out the activities initially planned in the description of work.

The pandemic has severely impacted the different activities since the outset, from the delayed signing of the agreement to international mobility on both sides: from Maputo to Milan for UEM faculty members to attend master courses and start PhD programs, and from Milan to Maputo to offer planned training activities at UEM. We were forced to adopt a flexible hybrid model to start implementing educational and research activities, shifting smoothly from remote to in-person activities as needed and imposed by external events.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 contextualizes the project and tries to link it with the Sustainable Development Goals set by the UN. Section 3 sketches the main goals of the project and the corresponding concrete actions. Section 4 discusses the foreseen outcomes, while Section 5 discusses how results are being evaluated and communicated. Section 6 summarizes the key results achieved so far, and Section 7 concludes the paper by identifying the next steps.

## **Context**

With widespread poverty and vulnerability, Mozambique ranks 181 out of 190 countries as for the Human Development Index. After an impressive decade of economic growth, from 2016 the country entered an economic crisis recently exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The crisis has provoked severe job and income losses both in the formal and informal economy. Half a million new job seekers have been entering the labor market every year (Lachler and Walker 2018), and evidence shows that there is a mismatch between the skills supplied by Mozambique's formal education and vocational training systems, the skills youth and women need for (self) employment and those required by companies in fast-growing sectors. This mismatch between supplied and required skills, along with the reduced competitiveness of Mozambique, can result in the country forgoing the significant, upcoming employment opportunities: if well managed, they can produce, directly or indirectly, 1.5 million jobs in the next 15 years (World Bank 2021).

Mozambique has the lowest mobile Internet cost in sub-Saharan Africa (1.97USD per gigabyte) with a 50.4% mobile phone penetration rate (Gilbert 2019). Regulatory reforms have fueled competition in the telecommunication market, and mobile broadband penetration has been growing rapidly in recent years, with some 16 million Mozambicans who have access to mobile broadband (Digital 2021). It is estimated that the associated economic benefits of ICTs have reached up to 370

million USD, 2.7% of the total GDP created in Mozambique during the period 2012-2019 [7]. In addition, 40.3% of companies registered in Mozambique operate with their own website, close to 10 points above the average of sub-Saharan African countries (World Bank 2019). Improved digital connectivity is one side of the coin. On the other side, the desired transformational impact on social development and inclusive growth can only be achieved if it is combined with improvements in digital literacy and skills, support to start-ups and existing businesses, and access to other digital services (e.g., payment and financial services). According to the World Bank: “With such capabilities, the Mozambican economy can harness digital data and new technologies, generate new content, link individuals with markets and with government services, and roll out new and sustainable business models” (World Bank 2019). Economic opportunity and inclusive growth must also work on creating a “safety net” that safeguards the inclusive growth from being overshadowed by the economic opportunity.

In this context, ICT4Dev aims to address some of the key issues related to the development of ICT in Mozambique, with particular emphasis on training and skills building. By developing relevant skills capable of realizing the potential of the ICT sector in Mozambique, the project is expected to contribute to the economic development of the country, create new jobs, reduce inequalities, and make progress on diverse UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). ICT is intended as enabler for the achievement of all SDGs, but ICT4Dev aims to contribute specifically to:

- Ensure by 2030 equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational, and tertiary education, including university (SDG 4.3)
- Increase substantially by 2030 the number of youths and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs, and entrepreneurship (SDG 4.4)
- Enhance scientific research, upgrading the technological capabilities, and expanding higher education scholarships in ICT and engineering offered to students and researchers (SDG 4.8)
- Develop the industrial sector in Mozambique, encouraging innovation, and increasing the number of research and development workers (SDG 9.5)
- Share knowledge and cooperation for access to science, technology, and innovation (SDG 17.6)
- Strengthen the science, technology, and innovation capacity (SDG 17.8).

In the context of the SDG Voluntary National Review processes in 2020, Mozambique has defined a National Framework of SDG indicators, with specific targets to 2024 and 2030 for several SDGs (Republic of Mozambique 2020). Drawing from these National Indicators, we have chosen a few relevant impact-level SDGs indicators of interest for the project: Number of students in tertiary

education per thousand inhabitants (M/F) (4.3.1), Proportion of adults and youth with ICT skills, by type of skill (M/F; Age) (4.4.1), Research and development expenditure as proportion of GDP (9.5.1), Researchers per million inhabitants (M/F) (9.5.2).

## ICT4Dev in a Nutshell

ICT4Dev aims to train students and faculty members and support the creation of a cultural environment that enhances the use of ICT for the economic and social development of Mozambique. More specifically, the project intends to:

- Improve the knowledge, skills and abilities of students and faculty members in the broad area of ICTs at UEM, through theoretical and practical training initiatives, scientific and technical innovation, and entrepreneurship support. The involvement of female candidates is key to contribute to the reduction of the gender gap in Mozambique.
- Strengthen the capacity of developing IT applications to support and promote the development of projects in fields like e-Government, e-Health, e-Commerce, e-Agriculture, and e-Learning.
- Support the birth and development of new entrepreneurship initiatives and culture in the ICT sector to meet the needs of the country, with attention to overcoming the existing gender gap in the access, use, and knowledge of ICT.
- To help develop a scientific and technological knowledge sharing network with Italian, African, and other ICT research centers to create useful synergies and stable collaborations.

To pursue these high-level objectives, ICT4Dev is organized around three main threads, each with its dedicated activities and outcomes.

**ICT4Dev wants to train students, professors, and researchers on new ICT technologies for the development of innovative solutions to problems in different sectors of society.** The training plan includes short-term summer courses for students in Mozambique, participation of Mozambican professors in six-month (13/14 weeks) master's degree courses at PoliMi, and the training of PhD candidates at PoliMi. The research and specialization areas will be chosen so that they can be applied to the Mozambican context and reused within master's courses at UEM. The project is also supposed to investigate possible improvements to the curricula currently taught at UEM. This activity is further articulated through the following actions:

- Realization of short intensive courses (Summer School),
- Participation of UEM professors and researchers in master's degree courses at PoliMi,

- Attendance of PhD program in information engineering at PoliMi,
- Support for the realization and supervision of degree theses at the Innovation Space,
- Realization of IT applications using the results of the research carried out,
- Calls for ideas to promote the creation of ICT4Dev-related start-ups by students and researchers to foster self-employment.

**ICT4Dev plans to equip the business incubator with furniture and instruments to allow start-ups to carry out their activities by using the services they need for a period of one year.** UEM and AICS have plans to launch a business incubator at the Innovation Space, to allow for the application of innovative solutions to concrete societal problems. The business incubator will offer the possibility of creating start-ups to students and researchers who present appropriate initiatives. This activity is further articulated through the following actions:

- Acquisition of supplies and IT equipment to allow the innovation space to incubate start-ups,
- Communication campaign and selection of business ideas,
- Participation of the Innovation Space in national and international competitions.

**ICT4Dev aims to position the Innovation Space within a national and international collaborative network of research centers in innovation and communication technologies (for development).** The Innovation Space promotes (virtual) seminars on ICT, called ICT4Dev talks, and invite people from the UEM's ecosystem to attend them. ICT4Dev organizes specific events, called Marketplaces of Needs and Ideas, where university, companies, and other institutions can meet identify and discuss novel solutions for social development. Project members will participate in international seminars to be exposed to and become part of a wider community, and to gather similar experiences in other contexts. The final goal is to become part of a network of national/international research centers to widen its capabilities, exchange know-how, and share experiences. This activity is further articulated through the following actions:

- Creation of the "Marketplace of Needs and Ideas",
- Stipulation of research and innovation agreements with international research and development centers,
- Participation in international seminars.

## **Outcomes**

This section identifies the main outcomes foreseen by the project in terms of both training activities and support to and development of the Innovation Space. As for the first part, we start by sketching the methodology identified to carry out related activities. The second part focuses on the main actions foreseen to give more visibility, opportunities, and energy to the lab.

### *Training methodology*

The training methodology adopted by the project is based on active and participatory teaching methods applied through advanced collaborative classroom techniques, that is, based on active groups assisted by experts. The didactic objective is to transfer the main ICT-related theoretical and practical knowledge. The different types of training activities are also supposed to insist on the ability to work in groups to address problems, design solutions, and produce results.

Furthermore, teaching activities are aimed to emphasize the importance of innovative research. They have been designed to form students to acquire new knowledge by means of basic and applied research, mainly in the form of homework and individual/group projects, to be able to manage self-learning practices in the future. The culture of research and its ability to always update and enrich the training activities is a distinct feature of the proposed methodology.

Finally, the methodology also tries to emphasize soft skills: besides focusing on computer science, ICT4Dev wants to expose students to the social, economic, and cultural issues that need to be known to address the economic and social problems of their country by means of ICT.

The training methodology is therefore closely integrated with the set of activities that will be undertaken by the project as for research, practical development of projects, collaborative relationships with national/international research centers, marketplaces of needs and ideas, and participation in international conferences. Teaching and academic activities are held in English, while dissemination actions are both in English and Portuguese, to ease the participation of the local stakeholders. The evaluation is of a continuous type (formative evaluation) and of a final type (summative). The first has the goal of constantly adapting the teaching methods to the characteristics of the students, the second takes place by examination or by final evaluation.

The proposed training offer is divided into four levels, each aimed at specific groups of beneficiaries: undergraduates, graduates, PhD students, and professors and researchers serving at UEM.

### *Summer schools, PhD program, and training activities*

The summer schools in Maputo are aimed at university students in the last years of degree courses in Computer Science, selected through a public competition. They comprise two/three intensive courses for classes of 25 students each. These courses are divided in 20 hours of classes, along with 40 additional hours of individual exercises and project development. After the classes, students develop specific projects to apply what learned over the course.

Two/three summer school courses are planned to be held annually for the development of innovative software solutions (for example, mobile technologies, Web-based systems, data management and mining, and machine learning techniques). The actual content of the courses will be decided year by year, based on the needs of UEM and the availability of instructors.

The selected teaching methodology follows the practical approach of learn-by-doing. The teachers are supposed to assist and guide the students' work at both individual and group level. Each edition of the summer school will focus on the development of specific software projects. Greater participation of women in courses is promoted, giving priority to female enrollments with equal merit, to possibly reach a higher percentage than that of the university courses of origin.

The training of PhD candidates at PoliMi is aimed to: (i) acquire the skills necessary to carry out highly qualified activities at universities, public bodies, or private subjects, (ii) develop scientific and technological progress, and (iii) shape people with a high-level professional culture and a corresponding international openness. In particular, the course proposes a suitable path for the training of professionals capable of developing high quality and innovative research-oriented solutions to development problems. This also moves in the direction of helping UEM to become a research-lead university and an international hub for the country and for the geographical area in general.

Because of the initial delays, the project can only support one PhD candidate. The scholarship, which is part of the structural agreement between UEM and PoliMi, allows the student to spend most of the PhD program in Milan and become part of one of the research groups at DEIB, where he is required to carry out study and research activities on topics of interest for the project.

The candidate was identified through a public selection process coordinated by AICS. The winner has been enrolled as PhD student at DEIB, where he was presented some alternative research projects for his PhD studies. The program requires the compulsory attendance of doctoral courses at the Politecnico in collaboration with world-renowned researchers. The courses range from research methodologies to specific elements related to current scientific topics.

The professional training and development for UEM professors and researchers on teaching and research topics is based on their active involvement in the initiatives carried out by the project and



on the collaboration between Mozambican and Italian professors and researchers. ICT4Dev plans to support these activities by research periods of UEM faculty members at PoliMi (some six months per visit) and by PoliMi professors at UEM for short periods and for focused courses.

The goal is to establish a Mozambican-Italian research group, with interests in the different areas of ICT for development, and that can last after the end of the project and can become the spark for many other initiatives. The cooperation between specialists who work in different fields and with different backgrounds, and who can see the same problems from different angles, is fundamental to obtain proper results with social and economic impact.

### *Curricular revision at UEM*

Given the project has no resources to incubate and start a new master's program, ICT4Dev aims to support UEM to review and ameliorate their bachelor's and master's programs with the goals of (i) helping them provide their students with a better offer, (ii) fostering a multi-faceted approach towards the adoption of modern and sustainable ICT solutions for development, and (iii) providing the seeds for additional courses and degrees (outside the scope of the project).

The bachelor's degree at UEM lasts four years and provides a wide and well-articulated coverage of the main ICT topics and technologies, with more emphasis on the theoretical basis, instead of insisting on particular technologies, which can always be learnt afterwards. There is not much the project can contribute here: maybe more attention to soft skills and a wider variety of project proposals directly related to sustainability and development could help the students get better opportunities to complete their studies. Instead, the master's program has room for improvement, even if the project has no dedicated budget to support any concrete action. Similarly to what is offered in Italy, the current master's program lasts two years and is divided into two phases: the first year is dedicated to more theoretical courses, while the second year is spent on applied research and preparation of the final thesis. The total number of credits is 120, and there are two specializations: information systems and software engineering, which sound a bit dated today.

The actions proposed by ICT4Dev are moving into three parallel threads. First, we propose the addition of further courses and threads related to data science, computer and cybersecurity, and machine learning and AI in general. The second thread refers to the addition of soft skills needed to address social innovation and development not only from a technical perspective, but towards a more inclusive and complete approach. The master's program could provide students with a combination of skills, both technical and contextual, in the field of ICT for development,

sustainability, and social innovation. These courses should include both theoretical and practical aspects: the goal is to both provide the basis and ask the students to apply them on the development of projects aimed to the creation of innovative software solutions related to e-Government Systems, e-Health, e-Business, smart agriculture, and social inclusion. The soft skills could add capabilities towards project and business management, oral and written presentations, innovation management and entrepreneurship, and socio-economic development. While rooted in computer science, the newly shaped master would be in line with the most advanced training courses on ICT for development and would follow a training approach that values the promotion of human rights, gender equality, environmental protection, social inclusion, and sustainable development.

The final dissertation, pre-condition for earning the degree, could be based on the development of a significant project, carried out in strict cooperation with important stakeholders in the country. This could be a win-win solution, where stakeholders propose projects and ideas, and students develop them by adopting modern technologies and use their enthusiasm to carry out new and appropriate solutions. Being developed by students, the costs of these proof of concepts would be limited and the stakeholders would have a proper means to carry out experiments with novel ideas and trends.

The last hypothesis refers to the opportunity of exploiting existing teaching material to complement some of the deficiencies of the current system. Nowadays, many universities offer online courses (and PoliMi is one of them): if ICT4Dev were able to solve both the linguistic barrier (most of these courses are taught in English) and the problems related to the fees behind these courses, this could become a feasible and quick solution to diversify the current offer.

An additional aspect ICT4Dev might try to address is the scarce appeal the current master's program has for potential students. We must consider the context and the fact that students have already spent four years to get the bachelor's degree. We must also consider that local companies tend to hire young professionals as soon as they are available, and a master's degree could then become an unneeded delay. The hope is that a more diversified offer, aligned with some of the current trending topics, more emphasis on soft skills, and a more application-oriented approach could help change the perception and could attract more students.

### *Strengthening of the Innovation Space*

The Innovation Space is an important hub for training and research initiatives and activities. It is the place where selected stakeholders will be able, through dedicated meetings (Market Place of Needs and Ideas), to identify the actual needs and put forward ideas and proposals for their

implementation. The Innovation Space, through the involvement of students, researchers, professionals, and entrepreneurs, is a center dedicated to developing innovative solutions for these needs and will be paired with a business incubator (outside the scope of this project) to offer those who propose innovative solutions the tools required to develop their business ideas.

The Innovation Space wants to ease the access to a wide audience of students and faculty members from different areas and economic and social categories, as well as of potential entrepreneurs. A key additional goal is also to become a viable means for bringing women closer to ICT-related opportunities.

ICT4Dev is supposed to help the Innovation Space establish collaborations with other similar hubs and research centers in Africa and Europe, with the aim of sharing mutual experiences. UEM students are being able to use the premises of the Innovation Space to prepare their final dissertations, with the support of Italian and Mozambican professors and researchers involved in the activities of the project.

### **Evaluation and communication of obtained results**

All activities are governed by the technical and administrative project managers and by more focused and dedicated project groups. In addition, obtained results are monitored constantly to understand how the project is developing and progressing, possible problems and bottlenecks, and significant deviations. This is achieved through systematic data collection and their analysis, periodic meetings with all involved parties, and online collaboration tools to allow for an always-updated view of the project's activities.

As for communication (of obtained results), UEM is giving wide visibility of the initiative through press release, institutional web sites and social networks, seminars, workshops, and public competitions for the selection of involved students, personnel, and professors. The Innovation Space is promoting the initiative in the ICT business sector to organize the Marketplace of Needs and Ideas, where businesses and civil society meet to identify and propose innovative solutions for social development by means of ICT.

In terms of external communication, ICT4Dev is following the orientation of the AICS Communication Guidelines to convey the progress of the initiative and the achievement of results and objectives through web channels (UEM, PoliMi, and AICS) and media (Mozambicans and Italians). The project is also contributing to the achievement of the strategic objectives of the Italian

Cooperation with the involvement of the relevant stakeholders to demonstrate the effectiveness and relevance of the intervention.

## First Results

Even if all first-year activities were delayed because of the pandemic, the project managed to devise alternative plans, when needed, to carry out what foreseen over the first year. Some of the activities had to be postponed, and we are pretty sure we can catch up if no new unforeseen huge events happen. The main activities planned and carried out so far are:

- We have been working from the very beginning on creating a comprehensive, synergetic, and well-balanced project group. This also meant identifying all key figures and setting up all modern tools needed to work cooperatively in a very distributed context and be able to share documents and artifacts properly. For example, we have an initial web site ([ict4dev.uem.mz](http://ict4dev.uem.mz)) to both communicate results and advertise open positions.
- We organized different online events ---through Zoom--- to let people become aware of the project, and to start the promised dissemination activities. We then organized special-purpose events to present the PdD program in computer science and the master's courses taught at Politecnico in the context of the master's degree in computer science and engineering. We also organized four ICT4Dev talks to start presenting some of the research activities carried out at DEIB.
- We organized the first summer school in Maputo in July/August 2022, even if it was planned for January/February. We taught: Web development with Python and Django (20 students, 31.6% female), Mobile applications with Flutter (22 students, 19% female), and Data Mining (24 students, 17.4% female). We had a total participation of 66 students to the three courses, an average participation of 25% female students, with roughly 45% of students who successfully submitted their final projects on time and completed the courses.
- After selecting a first PhD candidate, he started the PhD program in May, and has also started attending classes and joined the DEpendable Evolvable Pervasive Software Engineering (DEEP-SE) group at PoliMi.
- We launched a first call for ideas in June, and we collected some seventeen expressions of interest.
- After distributing the list of master's courses taught at PoliMi, UEM faculty members expressed interest in attending some of them. The colleagues attended different courses online during the first semester of the academic year 2022-23. The plan is to be able to host them in Milan for

the second semester to foster in-person attendance. The total number of attended courses by UEM staff foreseen for the first semester is 18 and 14 for the second semester.

- Finally, we also started preliminary analysis of existing curricula in computer science at UEM, and some of the initial outcomes and proposals have already been reported in this paper.

### **Next Steps and Conclusions**

This paper presents ICT4Dev, the context in which it is operating, its envisioned organization, and the main expected outcomes. After a bit more than one year, out of a project's duration of three years, we have also identified the activities we carried out, even if most of the project was severely delayed because of some internal problems and because of the COVID 19 pandemic.

The first year has also been useful to know and understand each other. While the project proposal was written long ago and with just on physical meeting, the first activities gave us the opportunity to become aware of the different contexts, needs, and habits. We wanted to work together, but we had to understand how, we had to create a team of motivated people and to learn to behave as a cohesive team. We had long-lasting meetings to always decide and act when the deadlines were almost over.

The group is now settled, and the project is on the right track. We must still coordinate better and learn that we can work asynchronously through mails and shared documents, but things are improving. If we can get back to a “new” normality, we are confident we can continue implementing the project as originally planned, catch up with the delay, and pave the ground to a very fruitful cooperation and develop additional, unforeseen results within the context of the project and beyond.

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## DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT AND DIGITAL FRONTIER TECHNOLOGIES: SOME CAUTIONARY NOTES

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### Abstract:

This article explores the Digital-for-Development (D4D) paradigm from a critical standpoint, scrutinizing the role and implications of digital frontier technologies within the D4D paradigm. It questions the promises these technologies hold for advancing the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. By exploring the hyperbole surrounding digital frontier technologies, the ideological underpinnings of the D4D paradigm, and the (in)compatibility of these technologies with established Digital Principles, the article aims to foster a more nuanced and critical approach on the integration of cutting-edge technological innovations in development initiatives. The article proposes a shift towards more community-driven, democratic, and human rights-oriented approaches in utilizing digital frontier technologies for development.

### Keywords:

*Digital-for-Development, frontier technologies, ICT4D, international development*

### Introduction

Technology has always been a cornerstone in the discourse of human progress. Technological paradigms and accelerations, historically, have also caused strong polarizations in society. Two-hundred years ago, in the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, a community of textile workers feared that the newly introduced cost-saving machines were taking their jobs. These machines were now doing the work, cheaply and less artfully, that had for generations formed the foundation of their lives and their communities (Merchant 2023). The unrest initiated by them came to be known as the Luddites movement. In the aftermath of World War II, Truman's inaugural address advocated for leveraging the benefits of technical knowledge to improve lives, a sentiment that has persisted in development discourse. This ethos reemerged in the Millennium Development Goals, specifically MDG 8, Target 8.F, advocating for the dissemination of new technologies, especially in information and communications. It continues with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), where technology is seen as integral across numerous SDGs. With the invention of the Internet and world wide web new horizons and paradigms opened for the world, revolutionizing communication, commerce, international cooperation and development, and access to information. As the Internet was constantly looking to expand its applicability in other parts of the world and sectors, the development sector was seeking to deploy new Internet

inventions in the Majority World as a solution to help those most in need. It was an organic marriage between the two during the period of dot-com boom. This marriage grew as a field of research and practice under the umbrella of Information and Communications for Development (ICT4D).

Following Richard Heeks' classification of ICT4D periods/paradigms (Heeks 2019), we can trace the evolution of ICT4D as follows:

1. *Pre-digital paradigm*, referred also as ICT4D 0.0, which spans from mid-1940s to mid-1990s and predates modern technologies.
2. *The ICT4D paradigm*, which includes: ICT4D 1.0 covering the period between mid-1990s until mid-/late-2000s and it is centered around the concepts of internet-connectedness and telecentres; and ICT4D 2.0 which encompasses the period between mid-/late-2000s until the present times and it represents, perhaps, the peak of deployments of ICTs in development. This period is accompanied also by the rise of Web 2.0..
3. *Digital-for-development paradigm*, also referred to as ICT4D 3.0, emerged in late 2019. It is associated with reproduction, diffusion, mutation, and intensification of the dominant mode of the competitive markets, and hierarchical controls associated with capitalism and with traditional state-citizen relations. Simultaneously, the paradigm is also associated with growing examples for an alternative economics and an alternative politics (Heeks 2019).

This article aims to engage with the Digital-for-Development (D4D) paradigm from a critical studies perspective—from theoretical concepts to its practical applications. In the light of fast-growing popularity of *frontier technologies* that guide, mediate, and shape D4D paradigm, this article seeks to answer to the following questions: In the context of a 'polycrisis,' characterized by the tangled intersection of multiple crises occurring simultaneously, does the promise of digital frontier technologies represent a genuine opportunity or merely another example of overselling hyperbole? What are the political and ideological implications, considerations, and entanglements between the D4D paradigm, private tech firms, and the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda? How can the D4D paradigm evolve and reorient itself to prioritize community-driven, democratic, and human rights-centered approaches in the deployment of digital frontier technologies?

The article, therefore, elaborates on three broad areas of contention to foster more rigorous



discussion; specifically: 1) recognizing the hyperbole of the digital frontier technologies and their worldwide operationalization through *futureing*, *scaling* and *deterritorialization*; 2) understanding the ideological nature of D4D paradigm and its intersection with digital frontier technologies; 3) acknowledging the (in)compatibility of the digital frontier technologies with D4D paradigm. This article is positioned as a transdisciplinary theoretical inquiry, integrating insights from a variety of disciplines including science and technology studies, philosophy of science, development studies, social design, and digital social innovation. The draws from a diverse range of scholarly works and publications from the aforementioned disciplines to construct a comprehensive analysis. By weaving together these varied strands of scholarship, the methodology aims to uncover and question the underlying assumptions, values, and potential impacts of the Digital Development (D4D) paradigm. Central to this article is a critical review and synthesis of scholarly literature, including theoretical frameworks, empirical studies, and case analyses across the aforementioned fields. This process involves identifying and interrogating key concepts and debates relevant to the digital development (D4D) paradigm, particularly in relation to the challenges and opportunities presented by frontier technologies. The result is a nuanced understanding of D4D that acknowledges the complexity and (in)compatibility of integrating digital frontier technologies in development initiatives, while also spotlighting paths towards more equitable and sustainable technological futures.

### **Recognizing the hyperbole and the risks of the frontier technologies**

First, let us clarify what is meant with frontier technologies. Frontier technologies refer to cutting-edge and advanced technological innovations that are at the forefront of scientific and technological progress. Frontier technologies are characterized by their novelty, complexity, and promise transformative capabilities. We can identify three overarching types of frontier technologies (see : World Intellectual Property Organization Fact-sheet [https://www.wipo.int/about-ip/en/frontier\\_technologies/pdf/frontier-tech-6th-factsheet.pdf](https://www.wipo.int/about-ip/en/frontier_technologies/pdf/frontier-tech-6th-factsheet.pdf)):

1. *Digital technologies* such as: The Metaverse, Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR), Blockchain, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Big Data, Quantum Computing, etc..
2. *Physical technologies* which includes: autonomous driving, 3D printing, hardware innovations such as robotics or 5G technology, and more.
3. And lastly, *biological technologies* such as: bioprinting, organoids, genetic engineering, human augmentation and the brain-computer-interface, etc..

Certainly, frontier technologies represent not the first instance of overselling and hyperbole for the development sector. However, the promises of frontier technology are significant (see: UN's "World Economic And Social Survey 2018: Frontier Technologies For Sustainable Development"; UNCTAD's "Technology and Innovation Report 2023"; World Economic Forum's "Fourth Industrial Revolution: Frontier Technologies"; among others). The promises of frontier technologies, however, entail a profound paradox. It is perplexing how the ambitious promise of frontier technologies to bolster and hasten the achievement of the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda has not been fully realized, given the current global challenges. We have entered a turbulent era of 'polycrisis'. New wars, conflicts and military coups are emerging on almost every continent in the world with "a quarter of humanity is involved in 55 global conflicts around the world" (Türk 2023). The escalation and increase in natural disasters caused by climate change marked 2023 as the warmest year on record. The Covid19 pandemic led to a severe global recession, the effects of which are still being felt today, affecting especially the poorer social classes. We are witnessing the rise of far-right politics, which is increasingly taking control of governments in Europe and beyond, questioning the global architecture of international cooperation. Finally, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are, for the first time, in peril. For the third year in a row, global progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has been static, and 'none of the goals will be achieved by 2030, and on average, less than 20% of the SDG targets are on track to be achieved' (SDG Report Press Release: 2023). When it comes to emerging technologies, World Economic Forum's "The Global Risks Report 2023" warns that "[even] for countries that can afford it, these technologies will provide partial solutions to a range of emerging crises, from addressing new health threats and a crunch in healthcare capacity to scaling food security and climate mitigation. For those that cannot, inequality and divergence will grow. In all economies, these technologies also bring risks, from widening misinformation and disinformation to unmanageably rapid churn in both blue-and white-collar jobs". Inevitably, we should ask: now that the global development, cooperation and security order needs (frontier) technology to transform its 'polycrisis' predicament, how (frontier) technology is helping to tackle some of the world's most pressing issues and transform the lives of those most in need? While technology, I argue, holds transformative potential, there is a critical need to scrutinize whether its application effectively addresses the world's most pressing issues and truly transforms the lives of those in need. This skepticism is grounded in the observation that,

despite technological advancements, tangible improvements in global crises management remain yet elusive.

Frontier technologies, specifically its flagship technology-system known as ‘Artificial Intelligence (AI)’, represent the overselling hyperbole whose successes remain yet in the speculative realm while its harms are empirically proven (Couldry, Mejias 2019; Eubanks 2019; O’Neill 2016; McQuillan 2022; Benjamin 2019). The hyperbole of digital frontier technologies is manifested through three main operations: 1) futuring; 2) scaling; and 3) deterritorialization. We will see next how these are working towards re-shaping the D4D paradigm.

### *Futuring*

Frontier technologies are primarily developed and shaped by the private sector, mainly by start-up companies and established tech firms. Since innovation is expensive and requires ‘resources and financial investment’ (Mazzucato 2018), companies offering frontier tech services secure funding through different investors: accelerators, angels, venture capital VC, private equity, family offices, government non-profit funds, and corporate investors (Komljenovic et al 2023). For instance, Microsoft owns 49% of OpenAI, one of today's leading AI companies<sup>1</sup>. As it is often the case, most investors provide financial support in search of return on investment (ROI). This is achieved by creating value in the future (Varoufakis 2017). Part of this process is the discursive construction of narratives aimed at creating and cultivating a gradual consensus among the general public and policymakers about the *future imaginaires*<sup>2</sup>. I call this process the *futuring of everyday life*. The act of futuring, within the social-theoretical scholarship can be defined as “the identification, creation and dissemination of images of the future shaping the possibility space for action, thus enacting relationships between past, present and future” (Oomen J.I, Hoffman J., and Hajer A. M. 2021).

Frontier technologies function as ‘rhetorical weapons’ to (re)construct the *futuring of everyday life*. The operation of ‘futuring’ paves the way and prepares the public—and institutions—for the

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<sup>1</sup> As of November 20, 2023, Investor’s Business Daily listed on their page:

<https://www.investors.com/news/technology/microsoft-stock-software-giant-hires-openai-executives/#:~:text=Microsoft%20owns%2049%25%20of%20OpenAI,Altman%20was%20leaving%20the%20company>

<sup>2</sup> I rely here on the exemplary work of Janja Komljenovic, Ben Williamson, Rebecca Eynon and Huw C. Davies in unveiling the investors’ future imaginaries in the education sector through their empirical examination of VC Edtech investors. Komljenovic J., Williamson B., Eynon R., Davies. C. H. (2023) “When public policy ‘fails’ and venture capital ‘saves’ education: Edtech investors as economic and political actors”.

upcoming hyperbole. One frontier technology currently leading this hyperbole is AI. This is not coincidental, as one of the core tenets of AI technologies lies in the ‘science of predictability’. AI emulates science by collecting data and making models, but the predictions of AI diverge from scientific process; they are not the expressions of hypothesis, a coherent theory about the way things work, but simply extrapolations from superficial patterns (McQuillan 2022). As McQuillan (2022) argues, “AI is not realist but instrumentalist: it only models the world to get something out of it”, that is, a futuring of everyday life that relies on correlations, not causation. Futuring through ‘prediction’ is, therefore, risky territory for the development sector, particularly if this is shaped and led by the private firms alone. It leads to the financialization, marketization, commercialization, and assetization of the international development field, and to a certain degree, the nonprofit sector. This contributes to displacing the focus, resources, and efforts towards the tools for futuring rather than addressing the urgent human needs of the present.

### *Scale*

Scaling has become central to both the current functioning and future envisioning of society. Frontier technologies are designed for transnational scaling. Pfothner et al. (2022) observe that “in the era of big tech, the aim is frequently to scale up first and profit later. Silicon Valley financiers explicitly select new ventures for their (blitz-) scalability in all-or-nothing domination strategies”. Scaling operationalizes in practice what the futuring of everyday life constructs through narratives.

The logic of scaling has permeated other fields, such as policymaking, public research, development, and nonprofit organizations. Policy initiatives and public research programs are increasingly justified in terms of addressing 'grand societal challenges,' as seen in the European Commission's upcoming Horizon Europe funding program and various initiatives related to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. These challenges call for scalable solutions, such as 'mission-driven innovation' that breaks socio-technical transformations into manageable and scalable segments (Mazzucato, 2018, as cited in Pfothner et al., 2022). Discussions around 'social innovation,' traditionally more focused on bottom-up dynamics and local alternatives, are now also advocating for scaling up (Gabriel, 2014; Musa and Rodin, 2016; Westley et al., 2014, as cited in Pfothner et al., 2022). The Principles for Digital Development<sup>3</sup> even include a specific principle

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<sup>3</sup> For more please see Principles' page here: <https://digitalprinciples.org/>

named 'Design for Scale,' albeit with a more nuanced definition. Pfotenhauer et al. (2022) rightly argue that the concept of 'scale' has evolved beyond merely denoting geographic reach to become an actor-centered category. In this framework, 'scale' becomes an "imperative and framing device for businesses, governments and NGOs alike that prescribes what seems worth doing, what the rules of engagement are and how we define problems or solutions" (Pfotenhauer et al. 2022). The allure of frontier technologies for investors, policymakers, and development actors is undeniable, offering rapid solutions – 'technological fixes' – to complex social challenges. However, the 'politics of scaling' often favors technical solutions which cut problems into narrow and discrete pieces that may be solved by the owners of ready-made scalable platform technologies (Pfotenhauer et al. 2022). One example of this is Amazon's Mechanical Turk platform. This platform gave rise, in scales unforeseen before, to 'crowdwork': the practice of dividing large volumes of time-consuming tasks into smaller ones that can be quickly completed by millions of people worldwide. It was thanks to thousands of crowdworkers engaged through Mechanical Turk that paradigmatic dataset ImageNet, which was instrumental in advancing computer vision and deep learning research, achieved to label more than 14 million images, each of which is tagged, belonging to more than 20,000 categories. However, many of the frontier technologies that have reached high market shares are built and maintained by thousands of 'ghost workers' in the Majority World who are underpaid, sometimes as little as few cents, with no agency/subjectivity given that they work under complete conditions of anonymity, and with "little institutional, regulatory oversight" (Heeks, 2017). This exploration into 'scalability' encourages deeper reflections on the D4D paradigm questioning the power dynamics within the 'politics of scaling', who determines the scaling agenda—both technologically and geographically—and how the 'scale-or-die' ethos of private tech firms impacts efforts like climate change. Above all, echoing Gayatri Ch. Spivak, we should ask: can the Subaltern scale? Scaling as promoted today constructs a reality that is monocultural, centering the West as a single reality. Consequently, devoiding subalternity from their desires, aspirations, *their* vision of futuring, and the sense of identity and belonging. Moreover, current scaling practices reinforce existing power dynamics of subjugation between the Center and the Periphery, neglecting the

world of many centers. Scaling, as understood and practiced today, leads thus to processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, further entrenching these disparities.

### *Deterritorialization and reterritorialization*

Through futuring and scaling, frontier technologies significantly contribute to the operational dynamics of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. This process unfolds gradually, beginning with the construction of a new type of reality that aligns with the narratives of technology firms and investors. Subsequently, it involves developing and expanding technologies aimed at addressing the world's most critical problems, through 'deterritorialization and reterritorialization of development sectors'.

The interplay between futuring and scaling within the D4D paradigm underscores a transformative process, where established territories of development are dismantled (deterritorialized) and new configurations and structures are established (reterritorialization). This operation has the functioning of displacement. Frontier technologies, acting as main actors in this paradigm, contribute significantly to shaping the contours of this displacement, influencing not only the geographical and socio-political landscapes but also the conceptual frameworks that define development. In essence, they become pivotal agents in the ongoing process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization within the realm of D4D. For instance, education is one of the most established 'territories' of development. Historically, investors were hesitant to invest in the education sector due to low returns, long investment cycles, fragmented markets, heavy regulation, and public hesitancy towards privatization (Komljenovic et al. 2023). However, over the past decade, we can observe a steady exposure of the education sector to the processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. This trend accelerated and reached its peak during the Covid-19 pandemic. The number of educational technology (Edtech) 'unicorns', companies valued at more than \$1 billion, increased from 0 in 2014 to 62 in 2021 (Brighteye Ventures 2022, as cited in Komljenovic et al. 2023), and venture capital investment in Edtech rose from \$500 million in 2010 to more than \$20 billion in 2021 (Komljenovic et al. 2023). The process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization of the education field can be observed in an analytical essay by Williamson et al. (2022) titled "*Amazon and the new global connective*

*architectures of education governance*". The authors identify five interlocking governance operations and their effects:

- *inscribing* commercial business models on the education sector;
- *habituating* educational users to Amazon technologies;
- *creating new interfaces* with educational institutions;
- *platforming* third party education providers on the cloud;
- *re-infrastructuring*, involves migrating an educational institution's digital infrastructure to a private tech firm's infrastructure, such as Amazon Web Service, thereby transferring provision and control of key information infrastructures of education.

The first four of Amazon's governance operations ('inscribing,' 'habituating,' 'interfacing,' and 'platforming') can be viewed as the process towards deterritorialization of public education. Meanwhile, the fifth governance operation ('re-infrastructuring') represents the attempt at reterritorialization where the old reality is displaced by the newly constructed one.

These forms of deterritorialization and reterritorialization will be increasingly more present and further accelerated in international development. One frontier technology that will amplify, accelerate and intensify further this process is AI. Other sectors, such as health, agriculture, environment, etc., may be even more exposed to the process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization by AI-driven technologies and automations.

We have examined how the hyperbole of frontier technologies is constructed, operates, shapes and impacts the D4D paradigm. These technologies, characterized by their cutting-edge nature across digital, physical, and biological spheres, promise transformative capabilities but also introduce a paradox. Despite their potential to support the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, the realization of these promises remains limited amidst existing polycrisis and lack of progress of SDGs in the last three years. The operations of futuring, scaling, and deterritorialization underscore a complex interplay that reshapes the landscape of development. These operations are largely ideological in nature. We will try, in the next section, to examine ideological nature of D4D paradigm and its intersection with frontier technologies.

### **Understanding ideological nature of frontier technologies and its intersection with D4D paradigm through 'Techfluence Model'**

'Technology is not neutral', states the first principle of the late-1990s Technorealism Manifesto (Bennahum et al. 1998), written collaboratively by twelve technology writers. But in what sense

technology is not neutral? Technology as such is designed by humans, is deployed and used by humans, is adopted and re-appropriated by humans in different contexts around the world—its complexity is, therefore, inherently shaped by human perspectives, values, beliefs, motivations, and experiences (Salaj 2023). The built-in design of technology not only guides but also influences how it will be used. For example, a microphone is designed and crafted for amplifying speech. One cannot use the microphone as a screwdriver. Yet, with exceptional 'hacking capabilities,' one might repurpose its design for unintended uses. Thus, *technology is not neutral, but neither is it deterministic*. This is where we can lean on the concept of technology affordances, introduced by Hutchby (2011), as a non-deterministic perspective that acknowledges the unique material characteristics of technologies while allowing for diverse interpretations and uses. Hutchby uses the example of a bridge which can be presented in at least two competing ways: as a means of carrying people over a road or as an instrument for the perpetuation of racial inequality. Inherently, technologies carry both intentional and unintentional biases that mold our social, political, and economic views, influencing our worldview and interactions significantly.

At this juncture, introducing the "Technology Design and Influence Model Analysis" (briefly, "Techfluence") becomes crucial, enabling an examination of how the design and application of technology mirror the motivations, socio-political contexts, and ideological leanings of those in control.

Technology Design and Influence Model Analysis

### **Techfluence Model**

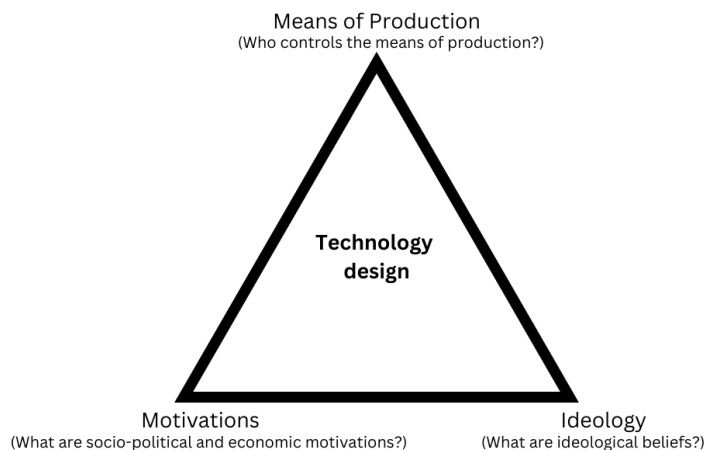




Figure 1 - Technology Design and Influence Model Analysis

The design of technology is significantly influenced by three key elements: 1) the means of production, specifically, who controls them; 2) the underlying motivations, particularly socio-political and economic motivations; and 3) the ideological beliefs driving its development. These elements collectively play a crucial role in shaping how technology is designed, promoted, deployed, and utilized. To illustrate this argument, two historical examples provide insightful context.

The first example takes place before and during World War II. Nazi Germany maintained a long-lasting business relationship with the U.S.-based multinational, International Business Machines (IBM), to develop punched card technologies. These technologies helped the Nazi regime organize its national census, provide a quantified portrait of the nation and its citizens, and identify Jews, Roma, and other ethnic groups deemed undesirable. They were later used during concentration camps to statistically measure their capacity. And this was how “human progress” was defined by the Nazi Regime in Germany.

On the other hand, other motivations and ideological beliefs were shaping Chile’s Project Cybersyn between 1971-1973. Project Cybersyn was launched during the presidency of Salvador Allende aimed at constructing a distributed decision support system to aid in the management of the national economy. The project consisted of four modules: an economic simulator, custom software to check factory performance, an operations room, and a national network of telex machines that were linked to one mainframe computer. Project Cybersyn was based on a viable system model theory approach to organizational design, and featured innovative technology at its time: it included a network of telex machines ('Cybernet') in state-run enterprises that would transmit and receive information with the government in Santiago. The project, after the military coup on 11 September 1973, was abandoned, and the operations room was destroyed. In a 2014 essay for The New Yorker, technology journalist Evgeny Morozov argued that Cybersyn helped pave the way for big data and anticipated how Big Tech would operate, referring to Uber’s use of data and algorithms to monitor supply and demand for their services in real time as an example.

Table 1 - Techfluence applied two Punch Card technology and Project Cybersyn

Elements/Aspects	IBM-Nazi collaboration during World War II	Project Cybersyn in Chile
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<b>1. Means of Production</b>	Private corporation (IBM)	State (Chilean government under Salvador Allende)
<b>2. Motivations</b>	Profit generation; Facilitating Nazi regime's objectives	Economic growth and efficient national economy management; Supporting socialist policies.
<b>3. Ideology</b>	Technology used in alignment with extreme right ideology	Left (Socialist principles for collective management and decision-making)

Although the two examples mentioned above belong to the pre-digital paradigm, it is worthwhile to examine digital frontier technologies and apply the model analysis to more contemporary instances. Exploring two additional cases, I believe, will further enrich our analysis.

In a research paper “Gender shades: intersectional accuracy disparities in commercial gender classification” (Buolamwini and Gebru 2018), the authors uncovered large gender and racial bias in AI systems sold by tech giants like IBM, Microsoft and Amazon. Given the task of guessing the gender of a face, all companies performed substantially better on male faces than female faces. The companies that the authors evaluated had error rates of no more than 1% for lighter-skinned men. For darker-skinned women, the errors soared to 35%. AI systems from leading companies have failed to correctly classify the faces of Oprah Winfrey, Michelle Obama and Serena Williams. Another, even more recent, study “Large language models propagate race-based medicine” (Omiye et al. 2023) evaluated four large language models (Bard, ChatGPT, Claude, GPT-4), which are trained using using backpropagation as part of the broader training process, with nine different questions that were interrogated five times each with a total of 45 responses per model. According to the study, “all models had examples of perpetuating race-based medicine in their responses [and] models were not always consistent in their responses when asked the same question repeatedly.” All of the models tested, including those from OpenAI, Anthropic, and Google, showed obsolete racial stereotypes in medicine. GPT-4, for example, claimed that the normal value of lung function for black people is 10-15% lower than that of white people, which is false, reflecting the (mis)use of race-based medicine.

There is a clear pattern from the findings of both studies, that is: despite advancements in AI technologies and the passage of five years, the power relationships, stereotypes, prejudices, and

biases remain deeply embedded in AI systems designed by the private sector. Both examples illustrate how AI, across different applications—from facial recognition to large language models—continues to reflect and perpetuate societal inequalities. This persistence of biases in AI, regardless of the technology type or application, underscores a pattern within the tech industry's approach to AI development. The private sector's control over AI production and the lack of diversity among those who design these systems result in technologies that fail to accurately represent or serve all segments of society.

Table 2 - Techfluence applied to two distinct researches on AI technologies

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Gender Shades (2018)</b>	<b>Race-based Medicine in Language Models (2023)</b>
<b>1. Means of Production</b>	Private (IBM, Microsoft, Amazon)	Private (OpenAI, Anthropic, Google)
<b>2. Motivations</b>	Profit generation; Market leadership (and monopoly) in the field of facial recognition technology,	Profit generation; Market dominance in the field of Generative AI.
<b>3. Ideology</b>	Neoliberal; libertarian. With a strong focus on market solutions and innovation.	Neoliberal; libertarian; technocratic. Prioritizing technological advancement and efficiency.

The intersection of technology, ideology, and political movements is not a new phenomenon. More recently, with the rise of Web 3.0—characterized by decentralized networks, blockchain technologies, semantic web, artificial intelligence, and enhanced personalization and security—the connection between technology and ideology has deepened significantly. For instance, Bitcoin, blockchain-based decentralized cryptocurrency, touted by many as alternative currency, harbors a strong ideological appeal: “it often embodies profoundly ideological and overtly conspiratorial anti-Central Bank rhetoric propagated by the extremist Right in the US” (Gombia 2015). Similarly, the association of AI with eugenics and the neoreactionary movement "Dark Enlightenment" is

extensively documented in recent scholarship (McQuillan 2022, Arcas et al. 2017, Pasquinelli 2023, Panofsky 2015, and Williamson et al. 2023). “Freedom and democracy are not compatible”, wrote (in)famously Peter Thiel (Thiel 2009), a notable proponent of libertarianism, co-founder of Paypal, Palantir Technologies, and Founders Fund venture capital. His ventures, including Palantir's involvement in Cambridge Analytica's efforts to influence the 2016 U.S. elections and its links to controversial startups like Clearview—whose connections with the USA’s alt-right movement have been well documented (O’Brien 2020)—highlight the potential social harms of these technologies. This is particularly concerning when such technologies are adopted by government law enforcement or international development agencies under the guise of Digital Development. In February 2019, a \$45 million partnership between the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) and Palantir Technologies raised concerns about data privacy and the ethical implications of such collaborations, highlighting the need for transparency and accountability. Palantir Technologies is the US software firm known for its association with CIA and Cambridge Analytica and its work on predictive policing, advanced biometrics, and immigration enforcement (Madianou 2019: 1). The signing of this deal raised many concerns about whether Palantir will have access to the sensitive data or metadata of the 91.4 million people served by WFP each year, prompting 65 civil society organizations and individuals to write a letter to David Beasley, WFP’s executive director, asking for “concrete steps to mitigate the serious harm arising from the agreement” and full transparency which is essential for meaningful accountability (Madianou 2019: 1). As we move into the era of Generative AI, which promises high efficiency with minimal resources, the question arises: should international development depend on the private sector, especially when its agenda—Sustainable Agenda 2030—is identified as *enemy* to the private sector's drive for techno-acceleration agenda, as articulated in Marc Andreessen’s recent “Techno-Optimist Manifesto”<sup>4</sup>?

The exploration of technology's ideological nature in this section reveals the profound influence of control, motivations, and beliefs on technology's design and deployment, underscoring the non-

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<sup>4</sup> Marc Andreessen is Cofounder and General Partner at the venture capital firm Andreessen Horowitz whose a16z portfolio has \$35B in assets under management across multiple funds. In his recent Techno-Optimist Manifesto, he writes: “Our present society has been subjected to a mass demoralization campaign for six decades – against technology and against life – under varying names like “existential risk”, “sustainability”, “ESG”, “Sustainable Development Goals”, “social responsibility”, “stakeholder capitalism”, “Precautionary Principle”, “trust and safety”, “tech ethics”, “risk management”, “de-growth”, “the limits of growth”.” Accessed on 23 February 2024: <https://a16z.com/the-techno-optimist-manifesto/>

neutrality of technology. This complex interplay demands a critical examination of technology's role in society, especially as we confront the challenges posed by digital frontier technologies. Moving forward, we will delve into the (in)compatibility of these technologies within the D4D framework, examining them through the framework of Principles for Digital Development.

### **Acknowledging the (in)compatibility of the frontier technologies with D4D paradigm**

This section will explore the (in)compatibility of frontier technologies with the D4D paradigm. We will do this by taking the Principles for Digital Development as an organizing framework (see: [www.digitalprinciples.org/](http://www.digitalprinciples.org/)).

The Principles for Digital Development known shortly as ‘Digital Principles’ are a set of nine guidelines for integrating best practices into technology-enabled development programs for international development and cooperation. They were initiated in 2009 when UNICEF launched their Principles for Innovation and Technology Development. Over 200 organizations worldwide endorsed the new Principles for Digital Development, recognising them as a tool for helping organizations to facilitate and deploy ethically-driven ICT initiatives. Created in a community-driven effort, and as the result of many lessons learned through the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in development projects, the principles include guidance for every phase of the project life cycle. Digital Principles emerged during the ICT4D 2.0 paradigm, marking a time when the development community's interest in Web 2.0 technologies—known for user-generated content, user-friendly interfaces, and a participatory culture—significantly increased. While digital technologies offer significant (potential) benefits, enhancing global communication and connection at unprecedented speeds and scales, thus acting as enablers for vital human values and activities—the critical research technology studies highlight the adverse societal impacts of these technologies, which affect many worldwide and lack effective management, control, or governance. Given the widespread endorsement of Digital Principles by the international development community and their central role in guiding ethical and responsible technology use, we will use this framework to examine the (in)compatibility of a *small set of selected digital frontier technologies* by analyzing a few examples from recent literature.

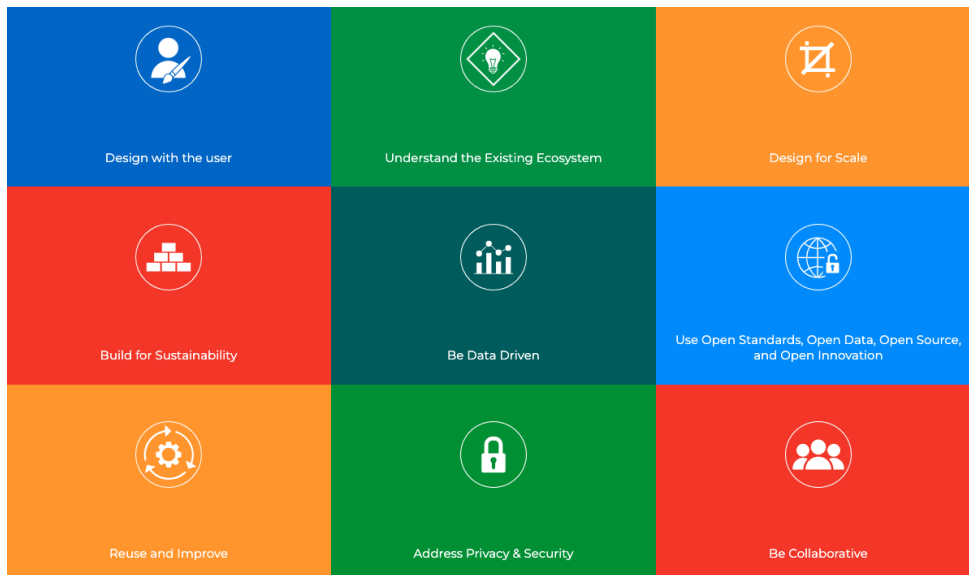


Figure 2 - Principles for Digital Development

- AI technology:* AI's reliance on extensive (personal) data for algorithm training may conflict with the principle of "Address Privacy and Security," risking infringement upon individual privacy rights. The proprietary nature of AI algorithms may also conflict with the commitment to "Use Open Standards, Open Source, and Open Innovation," potentially hindering transparency and collaborative progress. Furthermore, the often opaque decision-making processes in AI could be at odds with "Building for Sustainability," due to challenges in ensuring transparency and accountability—essential aspects of trust and long-term sustainability in digital development. While AI technologies may hold the potential to significantly "Design for Scale," catering to a wide user base rapidly and effectively—this scalability carries a great risk. If AI is designed with biased data, the scale at which it can perpetuate harm is substantially amplified, spreading biased decisions quickly across vast networks and user groups. have become increasingly common in humanitarian contexts over the years. For instance, the Silicon Valley start-up X2AI launched 'Karim', a psychotherapy chatbot, to support Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Madianou (2021) highlights several concerns associated with chatbot deployment, including risks related to data security and the spread of misinformation. Furthermore, by reducing participation to mere 'box-ticking exercises' and leveraging data for experimentation without meaningful consent, argues Madianou, these technologies extract

value from data and experimentation with new technologies and by asserting Eurocentric values in humanitarian contexts chatbots reproduce the asymmetries between affected people and humanitarian organizations.

- *Blockchain technology*: The application of blockchain technology presents several challenges when evaluated against the Digital Principles. “Design for Scale” principle becomes incompatible, especially in under-resourced environments where the digital infrastructure may not support the extensive demands of blockchain networks. In terms of sustainability, the high energy consumption associated with blockchain, particularly proof-of-work systems, not only directly challenges the Sustainable Development Goals by significantly increasing carbon footprints, but also potentially minimizes the long-term sustainability of the project or programme (principle “Built for Sustainability”), particularly in low-resourced environments. “Address Privacy and Security” and “Be Collaborative” principles are also at stake. The technology's replicable and public nature prompts concerns about privacy and data protection, especially when blockchain-enabled cash transfers employ biometric verification reliant on algorithms. Furthermore, blockchain's immutability—no single user can control the whole network, and at the same time, information cannot be deleted, new blocks can only be added—which in other contexts may be a desirable feature, can have disastrous consequences in volatile situations if records are erroneous (Madianou 2019), posing an a significant challenge with the principle of collaborativeness. This characteristic, while advantageous in stable contexts, complicates collaboration, privacy and security in humanitarian or crisis environments, where the need to update or correct information is critical.
- *Metaverse, VR, and AR technologies*: while innovative, these technologies present unique challenges to the Digital Principles. These technologies can intensify digital divides, raise privacy and ethical concerns, and demand high computational resources, potentially conflicting with sustainability goals. For instance, VR headsets can collect more and richer data about users compared to traditional screens; simultaneously, malicious users can monitor and collect metaverse users' behavior (e.g., interaction with other users, purchase actions) and biometrics (e.g., facial expressions, vocal inflections) in real-time, which could be used to recognize the user (Dwivedi et al. 2023). Moreover, metaverse systems may also cause physical harms. Researchers found that by exploiting and hacking VR

systems, it is possible to control the activities of immersed users and physically move them to a location without their knowledge (Casey et al., 2021, as cited in Dwivedi et al. 2021). For instance, by manipulating a VR platform and resetting the hardware's physical boundaries, an adversary can influence a user to take actions that make them *fall down a flight of stairs* and cause serious *injuries* (Dwivedi et al. 2023). In addition to VR, security breaches associated with AR can have even more serious consequences. As Dwivedi et al. (2021) highlights, users could potentially be misdirected into a street, which can lead to a dangerous physical situation such as robbery, mugging, assault and even trafficking (Nichols 2022).

This brief exploration of a selected set of digital frontier technologies through the lens of the Principles for Digital Development reveals a challenging landscape, identifying various incompatibilities between the selected technologies and the principles. AI technology, with its reliance on extensive personal data, large and expensive computing infrastructure and opaque decision-making processes, challenges the principles of privacy, security, openness, and sustainability. The implementation of blockchain technology, while innovative, faces significant hurdles in scalability, energy consumption, security, and collaboration, particularly in under-resourced and low-rights environments and humanitarian contexts. Similarly, the advent of Metaverse, VR, and AR technologies introduces new dimensions of privacy, ethical concerns, and sustainability challenges, with risks of intensifying digital divides and potentially causing physical harm. While digital scientists, technologists, development, and humanitarian actors bear a significant societal responsibility in addressing these challenges, there is also a need to update, and perhaps expand, the framework of the Digital Principles to adequately respond to the latest technological advancements.

## **Conclusions**

We are living in a predicament deadlock marked by a profound global crisis, encapsulated in what Ziauddin Sardar (2010) termed 'postnormal times.' All that was 'normal' has now evaporated; we have entered postnormal times, the in-between period where old orthodoxies are dying, new ones have not yet emerged, and nothing really makes sense (Sardar 2010). This period of transition, argues Sardar, is marked by three c's: complexity, chaos and contradictions. Consequently, 'these forces propel and sustain postnormal times leading to uncertainty and different types of ignorance that make decision-making problematic and increase risks to individuals, society and the planet'



(Sardar

2010).

The current polycrisis is the symptom of a deeper crisis of commons, spanning to peace, environmental degradation, biogenetics and other frontier technologies, digital governance, financial instability, new forms of segregation, challenges in managing crises, debates over intellectual property, and the erosion of (personal/collective) freedoms. Yet, most of these crises are in a stalemate. Wars drag on or morph into intractable conflicts without clear resolutions, climate change accelerates unabated without a unified global strategy, and the governance of new technologies remains contested, caught between market and social values. Notably, in a period where global cooperation is paramount, we witness a re-emergence of Cold War-era divisions and polarizations between Western and Eastern blocs, with Non-Aligned countries navigating the spaces in between.

The tensions, dilemmas and cautionary notes outlined in this article regarding the D4D paradigm do not occur in vacuum. They are deeply intertwined with the broader crisis landscape we have described. Therefore, a pertinent question arises: amid the current global complexity, chaos, and contradictions, how can the D4D paradigm effectively reorient itself to serve humanity at large—especially those most in need? One response to this crisis is in ways and extends in which we are able to reimagine and regenerate the commons. This action of ‘commoning’ is inherently tied to the principles of democracy and human rights, providing a framework for an equitable and sustainable D4D paradigm.

Consider, for instance, how Big Tech companies—Alphabet (Google), Amazon, Meta (Facebook), Apple, and Microsoft, along with China’s own Big Tech giants such as Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent, and Xiaomi (BATX)—have significantly monopolized the technological landscape. This monopolization, concentrating immense power within a few entities, undermines two fundamental principles of (liberal) democracy: 1) *Power distribution*, which is intended to facilitate dialogue and establish a consensus among varied actors, free from polarization; 2) *Equality*, which takes the form of proportionality, that is, equality in diversity or among the diverse (Sartori 2023). The laws apply equally to all (‘equal treatment’), argues Giovanni Sartori, while direct taxation should be proportional (‘to each equal the same’), in proportion to one’s richness. Therefore, the proposition ‘equal for equal but unequal for unequal’ as argued by Sartori (2023) suggests that the same outcome means to disadvantage the favorites and favor the disadvantaged. Additionally, as commons such as water, education, genetic heritage or culture are increasingly privatized in the

name of financial state of exception (Caperchi 2012), the relationality of the community to the commons needs to be reasserted (Mattei, 2011, cited in Caperchi 2012). This process involves the support, facilitation, and integration of decentralized and alternative community solidarity initiatives, which are emblematic of social and economic micro-democracies, as defined by Sartori (2023).

Such spaces can manifest as light, open communities—a concept defined by Ezio Manzini (2019). These communities are characterized by their small size, hyper-localized focus, and collaborative nature, uniting individuals to address specific challenges within the realms of sustainable design and community-based solutions (Manzini 2019). In these groups, the individuality of each member is harmoniously balanced with a collective desire to achieve a common goal. A reorientation of D4D paradigm words regeneration of commons means also moving away from the imperatives of acceleration and scale-up towards embracing horizontal and scaling-down, fostering genuine interaction and action at the (hyper)local level. This involves proposing 'alternative ways of knowing [and collaborating], rooted in the lived experience of people who are marginalized or minoritized' (McQuillan 2022). One proposal for how to do this comes from Post-Normal Science which proposes 'Extended Peer Communities' (EPC). P-normal science was proposed in 1990 by Silvio Funtowicz and Jerry Ravetz as a way of positioning science within the wider matrix of social factors, especially when acts are uncertain, values in dispute, stakes high, and decisions urgent' (Ravetz, Funtowicz 2003). Extended Peer Communities (EPC) represent a democratic approach to policy-making, governance, and scientific legitimacy: in post-normal science, the manifold uncertainties in both products and processes require that the relative importance of persons becomes enhanced. Hence the establishment of the legitimacy and competence of participants will inevitably involve broader societal and cultural institutions and movements (Funtowicz and Ravetz 1993). Through a variety of participatory mechanisms (e.g. neighborhood councils, public hearings and assemblies, focus groups, etc.), EPCs actively involve community members not just as recipients but as contributors of knowledge, from anecdotal evidence to investigative findings. This framework encourages the extension of government accountability to the governance of science and technology, promoting a shift from rigid scientific demonstrations to inclusive dialogues. EPCs foster policy formation, implementation, and monitoring through collective, interepistemic conversations and actions, thereby paving the way for concepts like Post Normal AI (McQuillan 2023), which seeks to integrate immersive

relationality into AI technology governance. While light, open communities are configured in project-centered distributed micro-democracies, simultaneously enabling EPCs to engage in alternative knowledge production for policy-making and governance—it's also important to revisit the work of philosopher and social critic Ivan Illich when discussing technology. For Illich, a vital part of producing convivial technology was the idea of *negative design criteria* to define the limits within which tools are kept. He anticipated the potential of large-scale harm and threats of contemporary technologies: 'there are two ranges in the growth of tools: the range within which machines are used to extend human capability and the range in which they are used to contract, eliminate, or replace human functions' (Illich 1973). Illich's negative design criteria is inherent also within democratic and human rights frameworks. For instance, as discussed above, the importance of limiting power thresholds and distributing it to prevent any single entity from becoming so dominant that it undermines the democratic fabric itself. Similarly, in the context of human rights, Illich's perspective aligns with the idea that rights such as freedom of expression have boundaries; when exceeded, these rights can harm society. For instance, freedom of expression is protected, but 'given that it comes with duties and responsibilities' it is also subject to limitations when it incites violence or spreads hate speech. illustrating a 'negative criteria' where certain limitations are necessary for the greater good of society.

In contrast to Ivan Illich's negative design criteria, contemporary frontier technologies in general, and AI technologies specifically, are driven by an ethos of indefinite growth and expansion. AI technologies, for instance, are designed to continuously grow their models, requiring infinite amounts of data for training, its application is spanning across vast numbers of domains, consequently 'contracting, eliminating, or replacing human functions'. More largely, the limitless expansion and application of AI technologies reflect and aligns with the capitalist imperative of infinite accumulation and growth. As the D4D paradigm seeks to navigate these challenges and reorient itself in the face of global complexity, chaos, and contradictions, the integration of democratic and human rights principles becomes crucial. The D4D paradigm should replace the language of market shares, equity funds and venture capitals, with that of solidarity, equality, and commons. Its agenda should serve towards the creation of social utilities, social economies, and civic/convivial technologies rather than integration and consolidation of Big Tech monopolies. The extent to which the D4D paradigm

can effectively serve humanity, particularly those most in need, will largely depend on how deeply democratic and human rights principles are embedded within its framework and operation. This necessitates a post-normal critical examination of technology choices, prioritizing those that align with Illich's vision of conviviality, that is: a convivial society should be designed to allow all its members the most autonomous action by means of tools least controlled by others (Illich [1973], 1975).

If the final outcome of frontier technologies deployment in the real world is greater injustice, inequality, and marginalization, on one side, versus ‘more efficiency, growth and acceleration with less resources’, on the other, the differences between the two sides—injustice, inequality, marginalization vs. more efficiency, growth and acceleration with less resources—shall be calculated as democratic and human rights deficiencies, and the most vulnerable people shall pay the highest price.

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## ICT FOR DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL GOOD: BUILDING THE NEW GENERATION OF YOUNG PROFESSIONALS IN THE FIELD OF ICT4DEV

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### Abstract

This article summaries the work of the first-level Master programme “ICT for Development and Social Good” co-designed and launched by the University of Turin (Department for Culture, Politics, and Society) and ImpactSkills. The first of its own in Italy, the Master tries to build the new generational of young professionals in the field of ICT for development and international cooperation. Ultimately, the article provides also brief rationale about why this Master programme has been initiated, and what are some of the key features and outcomes of the programme.

### Keywords

ICT for Development, International cooperation, Technology for development

### ICT for development and social good: building the new generation of young professionals in the field of ICT4Dev

In a world where some of the most pressing problems are problems of the commons, such as hunger and poverty, climate change, financial inequality, sustainable cities, inaccessible healthcare, peace, etc.—the questions we should ask is: can technology be an *enabler* of positive social change that tackles the problems of commons, or technology itself may be used as an *intensifier* of reproduction of the social power relations, inequalities, and injustices?

This ambiguous question should be situated within today’s society which is the society of acceleration. It produces more than it can consume, whether it is material goods (i.e. objects for everyday use) or immaterial goods (i.e. information, code, apps, platforms, etc.). It is also the society of ‘semiotic inflation’ (Berardi: 2014) where more and more signs are buying less and less meaning. Semiotic inflation is, interestingly, also accompanied by high economic inflation rates. Semiotic inflation is one symptom of today’s society. The other symptom is hyper-information. So, on one hand, we have a large amount of information which can be considered as mere ‘noise’ in the infosphere, and, on the other hand, we have an excess of (digital) information, namely, there is more information produced than we can consume.

A recent article in online magazine “The Conversation” provides some data that illustrate the world of hyper-information. Each day on Earth we generate 500 million tweets, 294 billion emails, 4 million gigabytes of Facebook data, 65 billion WhatsApp messages and 720,000 hours of new content added daily on YouTube<sup>1</sup>. In 2018, the total amount of data created, captured, copied and consumed in the world was 33 zettabytes (ZB) – the equivalent of 33 trillion gigabytes. This grew to 59ZB in 2020 and is predicted to reach a mind-boggling 175ZB by 2025. One zettabyte is 8,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 bits<sup>2</sup>. Taking into consideration these data, the path to the ‘digital sustainability’ within the society of acceleration seems more a discursive operation rather than a will of all actors to seriously engage with digital sustainability.

However, more information does not mean better information, nor information for all. Despite the increased connectivity its effect was limited in reducing information inequality, for example: there are more contributions to Wikipedia from Hong Kong SAR, China, than from all of Africa combined, despite the fact that Africa has 50 times more internet users<sup>3</sup>. On the other hand, digital technologies have dramatically expanded the information base, lowered information costs, and created information goods<sup>4</sup>. This has facilitated searching, matching, and sharing of information and contributed to greater organisation and collaboration among economic agents—influencing how firms operate, people seek opportunities, and citizens interact with their governments<sup>5</sup>.

When it comes to Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) there is no correct answer or position. Even less in an ever-more complex and polarising world with problems that require a transdisciplinary and holistic approach as well as multi-stakeholder groups to engage with. Indeed, ICTs have produced even more ambiguity and complexity in the domains of international cooperation and development. Despite this, fueled by the narrative of digital innovation, ICTs have become the new frontier for development agencies and institutions. ICTs were not anymore only tools to be outsourced externally, but agencies like UNICEF already in 2010 launched its network of Innovations Lab<sup>6</sup>, followed by the Global Pulse<sup>7</sup> of UN, Amnesty’s Tech<sup>8</sup> hub, etc..

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<sup>1</sup> The world’s data explained: how much we’re producing and where it’s all stored:  
<https://theconversation.com/the-worlds-data-explained-how-much-were-producing-and-where-its-all-stored-159964>

<sup>2</sup> Idem.

<sup>3</sup> World Bank, World Development Report 2016 “Digital Dividends”, pg. 8

<sup>4</sup> Idem.

<sup>5</sup> Idem.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/innovation/topics/innovation-labs>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.unglobalpulse.org/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/tech/>

This ‘wind of change’ did arrive in Italy too. For example, in 2014 The Italian Government launched its open data portal called Open Aid Italia<sup>9</sup>. In the same domain of open cooperation, transparency and accountability, the online data-aggregator portal Open Cooperazione<sup>10</sup> was launched by a number of organisations to foster the cooperation, transparency and mapping of organisations and entities who operate in international development. To support these efforts and contribute further in the growing community of practitioners of ICT4D in Italy, the organisation Ong2.0 (today known as ImpactSkills) published a mapping study “ICT4D: An introductory guide for the use of ICT for Development”<sup>11</sup> which provides the essentials of the ICT4D, as well as a collection of best practices in the field of ICT4D.

After the study, a new need was identified by the Ong 2.0, that is, creating an educational space which can equip younger generations of development workers, both in Italy and beyond, with competencies in their field of ICT4D. Therefore, in 2015 and 2016 Ong2.0 launched two editions of the online pilot long-term training course on "ICT for Development" which aimed to support the theoretical and practical development of participants in the field of Information and Communications Technologies for Development. The course, over two editions, received great attention not only at national level in Italy, but at international level too. Over 450 applications were received for 25 seats. During 9 months of the course, 53 participants from different parts of the world graduated from the course.

Drawing from the experiences of previous two iterations of the course, in 2018, the University of Turin (Department for Culture, Politics, and Society) and ImpactSkills launched the first edition of the Master programme "ICT for Development and Social Good"<sup>12</sup> with the support of AICS (Agenzia Italiana per Cooperazione e Sviluppo) and Cariplo and San Paolo Foundation.

Master’s main aim is to support the theoretical and practical development of students in the field of Information and Communications Technologies for Development, as well as support their critical thinking towards existing initiatives, methods and tools; and enhance their ability to develop, adopt

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<sup>9</sup> <http://openaid.esteri.it/it/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.open-cooperazione.it/web/default.aspx>

<sup>11</sup> <http://bit.ly/guidaICT4D>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.ictforsocialgoodmaster.eu/>

and re-appropriate various technologies and social innovation methodologies for local, national or international development.

The first of its type in Italy, the Master's didactic curriculum was built around three main characteristics:

1. It brings a *transdisciplinary and holistic approach* to ICT4D, as one of the Master's ethos is that to address highly complex issues, we need to dissolve the boundaries between conventional disciplines. This is why we think that ICTs should not be studied alone but always situated into the complexity of Development and International Cooperation. This means that ICTs such as: Data Visualisation platforms, Human-Centred Design methods, Artificial Intelligence techniques are always explored transdisciplinary—and critically—by analysing their impact in Agriculture, Human Rights and Democracy, Civic Engagement, Health, and other disciplines. Only in this way can we approach highly complex issues as solutionary thinkers and creators.
2. The second characteristic of the Master programme is the dedication to build *practical skills* among students. We believe that theory is important, but without practical skills it remains sterile. Therefore, whether in online lectures or residential Crash Courses, practical and experiential learning lie at the core of the Master's didactic curriculum.
3. Lastly, while theory without practical skills may remain sterile, we also believe that the practical skills without *theoretical critical learning* can be de-orienting. Thus, the curriculum of the Master's draws from a wide range of theoretical disciplines that aim to de-construct and then re-build some of the myths around ICTs and Development. This is done through dialogical learning where the lecturer and students enter into critical dialogue about some of today's most pressing issues.

In the last four academic years the interest to enrol in the Master has been exceptional. Over 700 students have applied, among them 80 students from 15 countries, covering all continents of the world, have graduated successfully. Approximately 95% of students have received job placement during their studies in Italian and international organisations, social enterprises and university-led research projects, during which they produced tangible projects and research work. This great diversity of students, not only at the cultural level but also at the professional level, has brought great depth of content which has helped students and lecturers to reflect and question more deeply about the role of ICT in development and international cooperation.

To paraphrase french philosopher Alain Badiou, perhaps, it is this rich multicultural environment and professional diversity one of the unique features of the Master which fosters the combination of intellectual constructs, which are always global and universal, with experiments of fragments of truths, which are local and singular, yet universally transmittable. Only like this can we usher in the new era of ICT for Development where the pledge “Leave No One Behind” does not remain as yet another slogan, but it is rather operationalised concretely locally and universally for all.

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(<https://www.ictforsocialgoodmaster.eu/>) (last consultation 19/12/2022)

## Acronyms

ICT4D ICT for Development

ICTs Information and Communication Technologies

SAR Special administrative regions of China

UNICEF United Nations Children's Fund

UN United Nations

ZB Zettabyte



## **FIRSLIFE, UN SOCIAL NETWORK CIVICO, AL SERVIZIO DELLA COOPERAZIONE INTERNAZIONALE**

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### **Introduzione**

FirstLife è il social network civico sviluppato dal Dipartimento di Informatica dell'Università di Torino per la creazione, la condivisione e lo scambio di informazioni tra tutti gli attori privati e pubblici coinvolti in iniziative territoriali civiche, sociali, commerciali e ricreative e nella gestione dei servizi locali, a diverse scale che vanno dalla piazza alla città e oltre. Si tratta di una piattaforma di crowdsourcing basata su una mappa interattiva in cui i contenuti riguardano le attività e i progetti associati ai luoghi dove si può interagire con gli altri utenti partecipando a discussioni, gruppi tematici ed eventi.

Date queste caratteristiche, FirstLife si presta ad essere utilizzato nei progetti di cooperazione internazionale sia per connettere le comunità che cooperano in un reciproco scambio di informazioni sulle realtà specifiche, anche in fase di coprogettazione, che per offrire un quadro d'insieme dei progetti di cooperazione che insistono su una particolare area geografica.

La piattaforma rende possibile monitorare l'attuazione di un progetto, rendendo visibili i suoi contenuti insieme ai risultati. Nello stesso tempo, può essere costruita una base dati di buone pratiche, permettendo la consultazione dei progetti realizzati, il loro impatto, associato ai territori, in modo da avere una memoria storica e la base di partenza per costruire nuove progettualità, oltre alla realizzazione di laboratori di educazione alla cittadinanza mondiale.

Ci proponiamo dunque di approfondire come la cooperazione internazionale possa utilizzare FirstLife come valido strumento, facendo riferimento ad alcune applicazioni realizzate o in fase di realizzazione, in Paesi come il Congo e il Benin. Illustreremo anche il modello dati standard da impiegare per rappresentare i progetti, adottato nella mappatura dei progetti di cooperazione dell'Università di Torino, fornendo una visione inedita d'insieme delle progettualità realizzate in modo dinamico, aggiornabile progressivamente.

## **FirstLife**

FirstLife si propone di (ri)connettere fisico e virtuale per stimolare nuove forme di cooperazione per il miglioramento della qualità di vita in città, o in una specifica porzione di territorio, offrendo un social network dove le informazioni sono aperte a tutti/e e focalizzate sulla comunità. Contribuisce a generare consapevolezza nei/nelle cittadini/e rispetto al contesto territoriale in cui vivono e alle opportunità di partecipazione, ma anche rispetto a un uso civico delle nuove tecnologie, attivo e positivo nei confronti della realtà reale e virtuale di appartenenza.

La mappa di FirstLife può essere popolata sia da informazioni di carattere istituzionale in maniera redazionale, sia da informazioni “dal basso”; queste ultime possono essere aggiunte dai singoli soggetti istituzionali e della società civile protagonisti del progetto di cooperazione, sia dalla comunità nel suo complesso sotto forma di segnalazioni, proposte.

Le funzionalità di geo-referenziazione, categorizzazione e i filtri supportano una consultazione interattiva, oltre a funzioni di monitoraggio e coordinamento.

Le funzionalità di social networking permettono di ricevere aggiornamenti sugli eventi di interesse, creare gruppi per condividere osservazioni e proposte.

L'utente visualizza contemporaneamente la mappa e il newsfeed (bacheca) corrispondente.

Il newsfeed rappresenta gli elementi presenti nella parte di mappa visualizzata, ed eventuali altri elementi fuori mappa ritenuti importanti. Il newsfeed contiene elementi di primo o secondo livello (che compaiono nel newsfeed delle entità di primo livello) dei tipi scelti nel progetto (ad es luoghi, eventi, gruppi, news, storie).

Il newsfeed è composto da card con immagine, titolo, eventualmente indirizzo ed informazioni su eventuali commenti o sottoentità. Vi sono inoltre bottoni che incentivano l'interazione degli utenti, ad esempio per la condivisione su altri social, inserimento del newsfeed tra i preferiti per ricevere notifiche sugli aggiornamenti. Il passaggio del cursore sulla card fa evidenziare il punto sulla mappa (o la direzione in cui si trova il punto se è fuori dalla mappa).

Un servizio di notifiche permette di ricevere aggiornamenti real-time sulle attività recenti di proprio interesse o che l'utente ha creato.

*La cooperazione internazionale*



Le funzionalità della piattaforma FirstLife si prestano ad accompagnare i progetti di cooperazione, sia nella loro realizzazione che nella restituzione dei loro risultati, focalizzando l'attenzione su una area specifica, offrendo anche l'opportunità di coinvolgere le comunità interessate che possono accedere direttamente alle informazioni o aggiornarle.

L'ambito di applicazione delle prime esperienze strutturate di cartografia partecipativa è stato proprio quello dei progetti di cooperazione internazionale, permettendo la gestione delle risorse da parte delle comunità rurali, con la coproduzione di conoscenza cartografica. Si è trattato dei primi sistemi di Volunteered Geographic Information (VGI), utilizzati per la raccolta di dati direttamente dagli utenti su base volontaria.

La piattaforma Firstlife risulta dunque uno strumento particolarmente utile nella gestione di un progetto di cooperazione, contribuendo anche alla sua trasparenza e alla democratizzazione delle informazioni. Nel caso si riesca a coinvolgere la comunità interessata dalle attività di cooperazione, può inoltre aumentarne la legittimità oltre che il grado di accettazione, vincendo anche possibili diffidenze. Per contro, bisogna tenere presente che l'utilizzo di uno strumento come Firstlife può comportare il rischio di un'ulteriore marginalizzazione delle fasce più fragili, non in grado di accedere alla piattaforma.

Accanto alla partecipazione delle comunità locali coinvolte, l'uso di FirstLife permette la condivisione dei dati di progetto e il loro aggiornamento da parte di tutti gli stakeholder, vale a dire enti locali, associazioni (organizzazioni della società civile, associazioni di volontariato, associazioni che rappresentano le diaspore, ...), enti di formazione (università, istituti scolastici, centri di formazione), enti culturali, istituzioni religiose, società pubbliche, PMI, associazioni di categoria, cooperative, ..., in una logica di sistema che deriva naturalmente dalla legge nazionale 125/2014 (Disciplina generale sulla cooperazione internazionale per lo sviluppo).

Infine, la piattaforma permettendo la consultazione dei progetti attuati in una specifica area può essere proposta come un laboratorio di educazione alla cittadinanza mondiale.

I progetti o le singole attività di un progetto possono anche essere classificati su FirstLife in categorie corrispondenti agli ambiti interessati, come civic engagement, salute, agricoltura, ambiente, diritti umani, e anche agli obiettivi di sviluppo sostenibile dell'Agenda 2030 (SDGs).

Seguono le descrizioni dell'utilizzo di FirstLife in alcuni progetti di cooperazione realizzati o in corso.

### *MAISON DU CITOYEN*

L'associazione torinese Equilibri Onlus ha attivato una collaborazione con Dipartimento di informatica nel 2020 per l'uso di FirstLife nei suoi progetti di sviluppo sostenibile in Africa.

La piattaforma FirstLife è stata adottata per mappare gli investimenti pubblici comunali in tre città della Repubblica Democratica del Congo, volti al miglioramento dell'accessibilità ad acqua potabile e a impianti igienico-sanitari salubri nelle scuole, negli ospedali e nei mercati pubblici,

Il suo utilizzo è finalizzato al monitoraggio partecipato degli interventi da parte della società civile organizzata.

### *TINGANGUE VOGURE'*

L'unione Montana Valli Orco e Soana (TO) ha avviato una collaborazione con l'associazione Equilibri Onlus e il Dipartimento di Informatica dell'Università degli Studi di Torino per mappare l'utilizzo dei suoli della Foresta di Goadà, in Burkina Faso, dove sta intervenendo per tutelare i terreni protetti, valorizzando la filiera dell'agro-foresteria e incentivando l'agricoltura sostenibile al di fuori delle aree protette.

La piattaforma è stata predisposta per permettere ad alcuni partecipanti al progetto di monitorare in prima persona le attività svolte e i risultati derivanti, ma anche per offrire uno spazio di conoscenza e scambio di informazioni diretto tra le amministrazioni comunali e le società civili italiane e burkinabé.

Diverse attività di progetto, e di conseguenza l'inserimento dei dati sulla piattaforma, sono stati però al momento sospesi per cause di forza maggiore legate ad instabilità politica e conseguente spostamento delle popolazioni dai villaggi interessati.

### *T.O.G.O.U.N.*

Il progetto "T.O.G.O.U.N. - acTion de cOhesion sociale et de formation bioloGique pour la cOMmunauté de adjohoUN" si propone di dare continuità, implementazione e stabilità alle azioni effettuate e ai risultati raggiunti in Benin con i precedenti progetti E.R.I.C.A., F.E.D.A., S.F.I.D.A. e TALEA, all'interno del programma ALODO ADOME, e come questi vuole contribuire al miglioramento delle condizioni socioeconomiche della popolazione vulnerabile del Comune d'Adjohoun, quali le donne e le adolescenti in età lavorativa.

TOGOUN (che in lingua locale significa comunità) è coordinato dal Comune di Borgomanero e conta su un ampio partenariato, composto da EnAIP Piemonte e numerosi altri soggetti.

In questo caso, è stato realizzato per il progetto TOGOUN un prototipo sulla piattaforma FirstLife, che si presta a offrire la restituzione aggiornata delle attività portate avanti nel tempo all'interno dell'intero programma, oltre che una visione d'insieme per tutti gli stakeholder.

### *UNITO e l'Africa*

L'opportunità offerta da FirstLife di offrire una visione d'insieme delle progettualità in un territorio è alla base dell'applicazione Unito e l'Africa, in cui sono mappati i progetti di cooperazione dei diversi dipartimenti dell'Università di Torino.

Il modello dei dati rappresentati è strutturato sulla base del report "Unito e l'Africa" pubblicato nel 2019, nel quale sono raccolte tutte le iniziative svolte con attori e in territori africani attivati congiuntamente all'Ateneo. Successivamente, la raccolta è stata ampliata aggiungendo progetti avviati negli anni seguenti, in particolare dopo il periodo di pandemia.

Le informazioni ottenute sono suddivise in base a tematiche di inerenza, rispettivamente secondo tre ambiti: organizzativo, geografico e di attività.

Per quanto concerne l'ambito organizzativo, l'indagine comprende i dati relativi al nome del progetto, l'ente capofila, l'ente finanziatore, i partner coinvolti e il budget complessivo. Oltre all'Università di Torino, sono presenti nell'elenco Organizzazioni Non-Profit che operano su territorio italiano e africano, ed enti territoriali oltre alla Regione Piemonte.

Dal punto di vista geografico, il modello è suddiviso su tre aree: Africa Settentrionale, Africa Centrale ed Africa Meridionale.

In ultimo, la parte relativa alle attività include aspetti relativi alla durata del progetto, gli obiettivi generali e specifici, i risultati ottenuti e i relativi settori di riferimento in materia di SDGs e secondo la normativa OCSE/DAC, ossia le linee guida in materia di cooperazione internazionale che comprendono una classificazione dei codici volti a definire l'area specifica di sviluppo su cui l'ente intestatario del progetto intende lavorare, come "Government and Civil Society", "Education", "Health", "Water and Sanitation".

La piattaforma FirstLife mette così a disposizione una visione d'insieme e sempre aggiornata delle diverse attività di cooperazione internazionale svolte dall'Università di Torino in Africa, sottolineandone l'importanza, in termini qualitativi e quantitativi, oltre a renderla visibile all'esterno

del mondo accademico, e successivamente integrabile con i progetti realizzati anche da altre organizzazioni.

Nelle ultime due edizioni del progetto UNI.COO, che prevede l'attivazione di percorsi di mobilità per studenti e studentesse nei Paesi in cui sono attuati i progetti di cooperazione internazionale dell'Università di Torino, la piattaforma FirstLife è stata anche utilizzata per condividere le esperienze vissute.

## **Conclusioni**

Queste prime applicazioni dimostrano come FirstLife sia uno strumento adatto ad essere utilizzato sia per i singoli progetti di cooperazione internazionale per rappresentarne le singole attività e mantenere aggiornata la loro rappresentazione in base alle classificazioni del settore interessato, anche coinvolgendo le comunità locali, sia per mappare i progetti di cooperazione che insistono su un'area specifica e avere una visione d'insieme.

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