

An Erasmus Project about Digital Supported Sustainability and Sustainability Oriented Educational Centres of Excellence – The Giotto-Olivi Senior High School of Borgo San Lorenzo (Florence, Tuscany) : “An update of the Food Chain Management Project”- Feb. 26<sup>th</sup>, 2021

## Closing Remarks and a Few Suggestions for Future Developments

by Claudio Peri

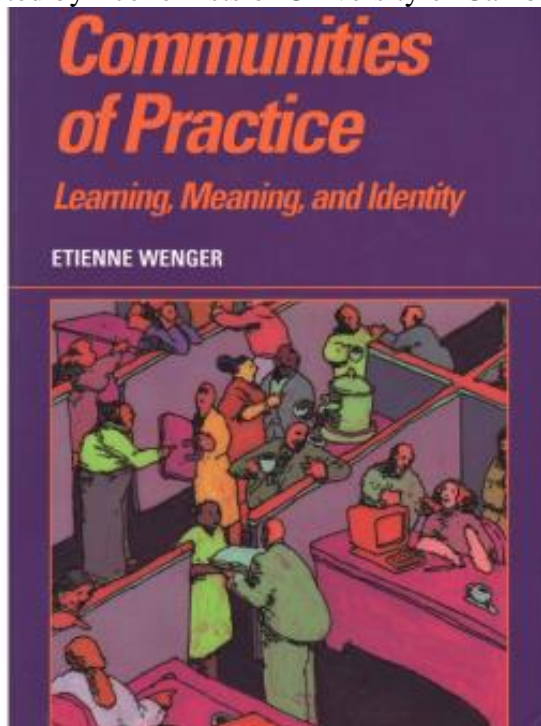
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Three years ago we started the project "Agrifood Chain Management and Communities of Practice". involving the Senior High Schools of Borgo San Lorenzo and some farms, companies and businesses of agri-food chains. We agreed on two main goals:

First, to educate students of Senior High Schools to leadership roles. In fact, they should become able not only to carry out technical duties but also to be leaders of working teams or companies or Institutions.

Second, to foster an evolution of individual businesses into *Communities of Practice*, according to a definition invented by Economists of University of Cambridge on 1998 [slide 1]



An idea for the  
XXI century:  
Communities of  
Practice ,  
Communities of  
Purpose

1998

. Our long-term goal was creating a Mugello community of farmers, food industries, food marketing, restaurants and agri-tourisms, sharing the common purpose of increasing the value and appeal of the Mugello production and marketing of food items.

During the second year of this project, over one hundred students from the local high schools and about thirty companies from agri-food chains were involved, as summarized in the video MUGELLO AGRIBUSINESS. Thanks to this experience, we began to understand the importance of system thinking to collect meaningful and critical information about businesses and companies, the importance of training by associating the students to business operators and managers. We saw new ideas being generated by discussions about threads and opportunities. This experience allowed to show the students the practical effects of market globalization, climate change, soil and water pollution... One of the companies participating in this project, the Villa Campestri Olive Oil Resort, organized in Borgo San Lorenzo an international conference on “Sustainable Diet and Food Values” with speakers from Universities of UK, California, France and the Culinary Institute of

America. We also presented our project at a conference on “*Consumers’ Perception of Food Processes*” at the Academy of Georgofili (Florence) with speakers coming from Universities of Milan and Bologna and the Italian Ministry of Justice.

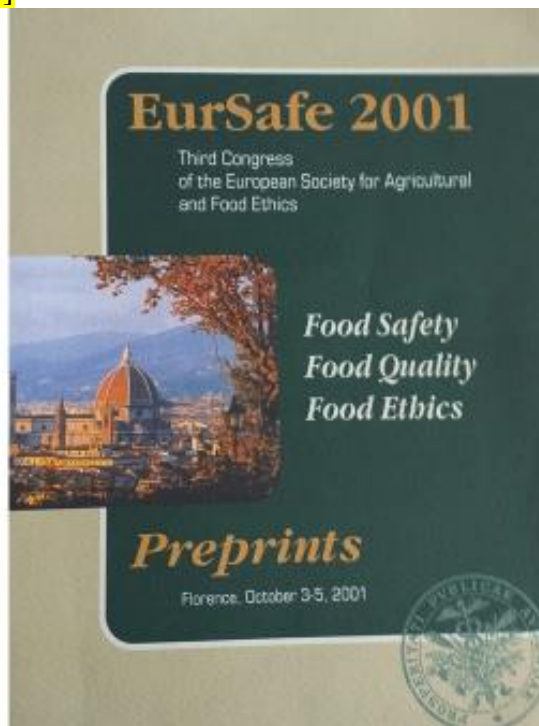
The results of the first two years were encouraging, but far from achieving the goals that we set for this project.

We were asking for 1) an educational system introducing leadership teaching and training and 2) companies collaborating in a Community of Practice. **These goals are difficult to achieve because both education and economy are based on a tradition where excellence is pursued through selection based on competition, rather than on synergy based on collaboration.**

My impression is that even the problems of a sustainable economy: less plastic, recycling of waste, energy saving, new energy sources, biodiversity and sometimes even social initiatives to support children, the people with disabilities or the elderly are often used as advertising topics or keywords to get the access to public funds, instead of focussing on structural innovation and human promotion. **But .....**

Covid-19 pandemic is destabilizing our way of thinking as well as our educating and operating systems. What the philosophers of Post Normal Science predicted about twenty years ago, is becoming real. At a congress in Florence organized by the Academy of Georgofili in October 2001

[ slide 2 ]



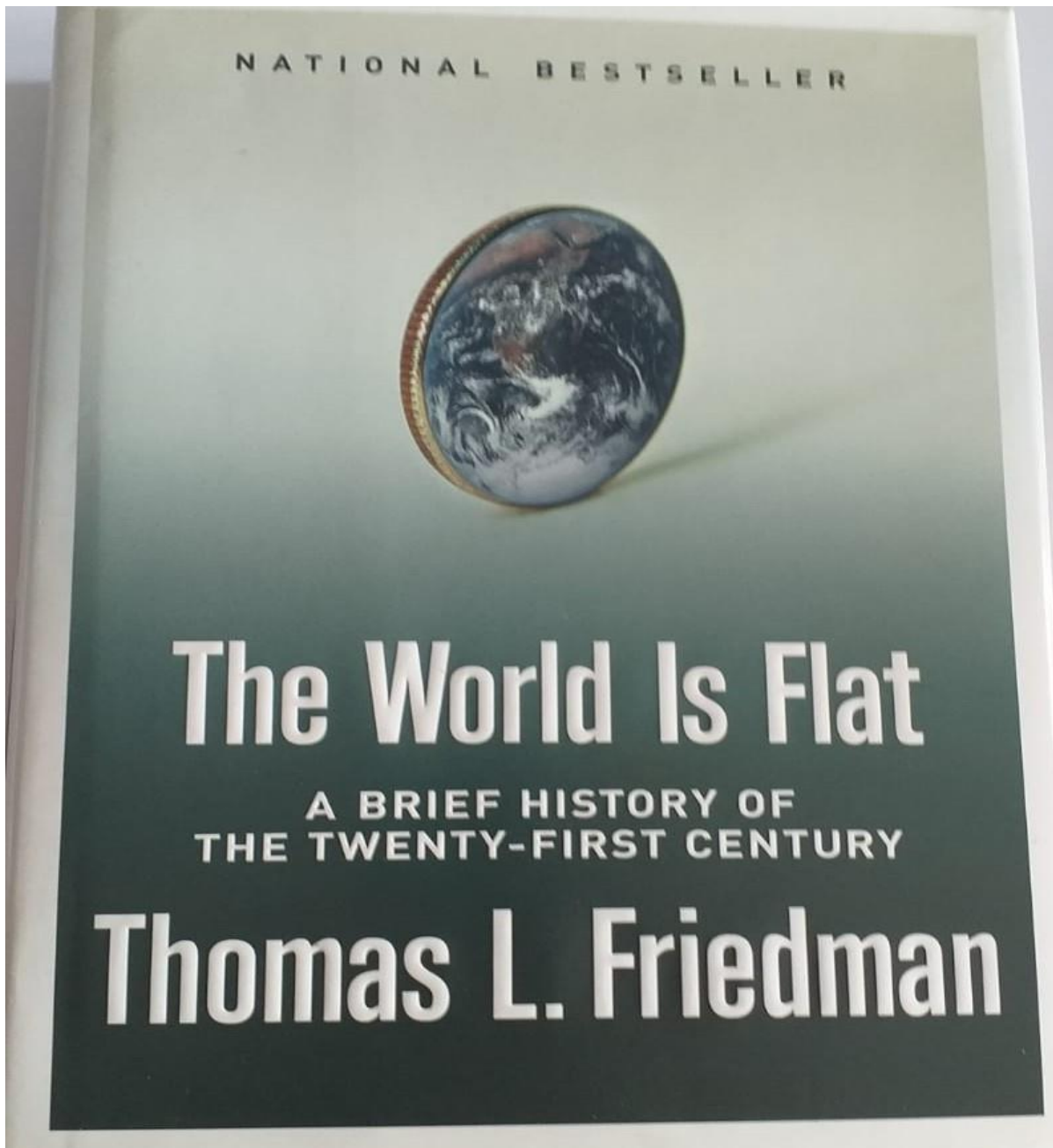
**An alert for the XXI century:**

«facts are uncertain,  
values in dispute,  
stakes are high and  
decisions are urgent»  
*S. Funtowics*

2001

on “*Food Safety, Food Quality and Food Ethics*”, Silvio Funtowics, one of the founders of the Post Normal Science Movement, summarized in a few words the situation that we were going to face in the XXI century. He said: «... *facts are uncertain, values in dispute, stakes are high and decisions are urgent ... Comfortable assumptions about science are in question together with traditional risk and cost-benefit analysis ...* » [i fatti non sono chiari – sui valori di riferimento non siamo d’accordo – la posta in gioco è molto alta – e le decisioni son urgenti!] An impressive anticipation of the Covid-19 crisis!

Not paying attention to the philosophers alarm, but continuing and intensifying the competitive commercial approach led to the wild, uncontrolled globalization that journalist Thomas Friedman presents in his book, “*The World is Flat*” [ 2005 slide 3 ].



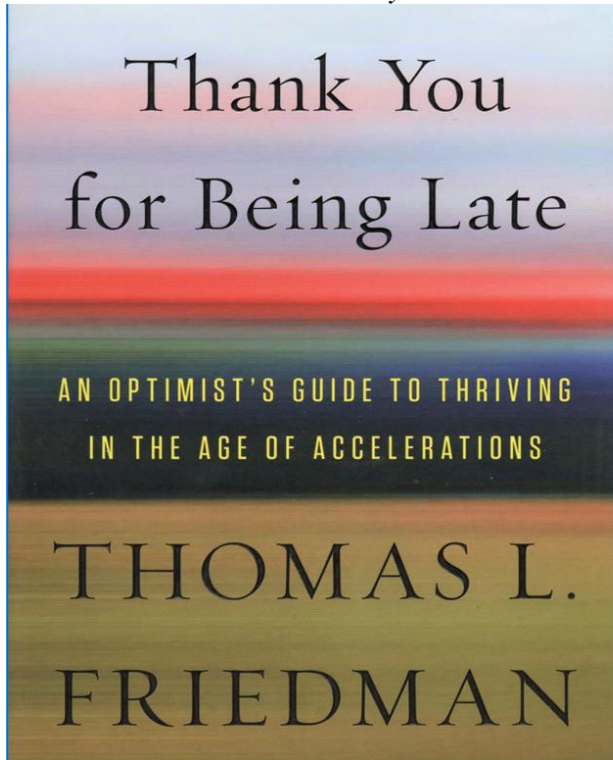
Globalization of businesses has flattening effects, he said: flattening of traditions, flattening of peculiarities, flattening of cultures. Flattening and polluting, ... flattening and increasing social disparities.

Let's be honest... We will not solve economic or social problems in our territories if we do not go beyond the traditional model of economic development.

The money that companies are going to receive from public administration to repair the damages of the pandemic, will not guarantee the future of our territories. Only healthy, well organized, deeply committed communities can guarantee long-term territorial development. Because, as Thomas Friedman says in his book "*Thank you for being late*"

[slide 4]: «When people feel embedded in a community, they feel protected, respected and connected.... And that feeling is important because when people feel protected, respected and connected in a healthy community, it generates enormous trust among the community members as

well as between the community and its customers ... "



**Hope for the XXI century**  
«When people feel embedded in a community, they feel protected, respected and connected ...»

**2016**

Everyone understands that the most interesting project presented by prof. Antonio Mainolfi would have no real impact if adopted by a single company, while it could become very effective if applied by hundreds of Mugello businesses well connected in a community. Everyone understands that if the workshops of prof. Francesco Lupi would involve dozens of arts and craft operators, it could become an attracting feature of the Mugello area. The participation in a community obviously multiplies suggestions and opportunities.

**Do we understand** that without a structural change, a sustainable economy in our territories is at risk? What can we do to overcome old economic systems and promote new, more effective ones? Just to stimulate your thoughts, I'll present two proposals for effective and structural changes.

**The first proposal** is to create a *Multi-Sector Community of Purpose*, as an evolution of our previous idea of Food Chain Community. Perhaps people in the agricultural businesses do not believe that arts and craft businesses can have interesting synergies with them, nor perhaps craftsmen believe that museums or concert operators can have interesting synergies with them, nor do concert operators believe that wineries, olive oil mills, or vegetable gardens can have interesting synergies with them. But if the purpose is to promote the territory that contains them all, then synergies may be very effective. You, the young people, should find the courage and push to start such a revolutionary change.

In order to better define the content and goals of this proposal, I suggest organizing an International Conference on "*Multi-Sector Communities of Purpose for Sustainable and Social Development*"<sup>1</sup>.

**The second proposal** is to create, together with and inside the Community of purpose, an "*Immigrants Inclusion System*". The problem lies before us in full evidence: the children of our professional operators refuse to do the same job that parents and grandparents are doing in agriculture, industry or services. There is a urgent need for inclusion of immigrants. We must guarantee them recognition, decent housing, effective health care, school for their children, schooling in our language, our history, our constitutional structure, practical training in our schools,

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<sup>1</sup> [We can ask for collaboration the *Slow Food Movement and University of Pollenzo*. They have a worldwide experience on this theme in both developed and under-developed Countries.]

laboratories, farms, and shops. We should find in ourselves the courage for such a revolutionary initiative.

In order to better define the content and goals of this proposal, I suggest organizing an International Conference on “*Immigrants Inclusion for Sustainable and Social Development*”<sup>2</sup>.

The two proposals are less difficult than we imagine, because they are both rate-limited and dimensionless. They are rate-limited because everything involving a change in mentality takes a long time. We need to think long-term and “*Towards the horizon of 2040*”. The two proposals are also dimensionless because they can be realized in small-scale prototypes and then progressively expanded. These two qualities are adaptive: they allow to make mistakes and give the time to correct them.

The advantages of these two projects are so evident that they could stimulate imitation in other areas of the world. I’ve no doubt that our two conferences well organized in two different Countries could attract contributions of Nobel laureates and the interest of policy-makers and famous journalists.

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<sup>2</sup> [We can ask for collaboration the *Global Migration Center of the University of California*. They can give us a very interesting view of the economic impact of this initiative.]