



Introduction

## The Emerging Intangible Globe Age

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‘Everything solid melts into air’ (Marx-Engels 2018: 28)

‘The soufflé isn’t the soufflé, the soufflé is a recipe’ (Doctor Who, TV Series)

Maybe you like it more intellectual and are fascinated by Marx and Engel’s statement, or maybe you like it more popular, through mass media icons, and you prefer Doctor’s Who famous quotation, both above. In any case, and beyond their original contexts, the lessons for our times is clear: the unrestrainable process, which turns everything tangible into its intangible assets. Both statements probably meant something different from the meaning we can construct from them nowadays. Nevertheless, what we worked out from there leads us to an Intangible Globe Age which requires an interdisciplinary complex systems approach to be described and modelled, hence, future cannot be predicted but can be designed and invented.

Having stated that, it is a great honor and pleasure to present this monographic section of Cambio Journal in partnership with World Complexity Science Academy (WCSA – [www.wcsaglobal.org](http://www.wcsaglobal.org)). This section is designed from the perspective of a complex system approach to global social change. Since its foundation in December 2009, WCSA has been focusing on the study of complex systems theories which evolved through the key studies of Heinz von Foerster, Ernst von Glasersfeld, Niklas Luhmann, Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela. Ulrich Beck applied the most important concepts of these authors in his works on sociology of risk and cosmopolitan vision. Neil Johnson (2009: 3-4) provided a basic definition of complexity studies according to which *complexity science* is considered ‘as the study of the phenomena which emerge from a collection of interacting objects’. However, what Johnson’s did not consider is that complexity is always observed by a system. This monographic section wants to build upon

these studies to approach complexity from a complex systems perspective. The aim is to facilitate knowledge sharing and circulation of strategic know-how and best practices in a transnational scale as, in the same vein, WCSA's initiatives are dedicated to the promotion of intellectual interactions among scholars, policymakers and entrepreneurs at a global scale. The synergy between Cambio Journal and WCSA is inscribed in this trajectory.

The opportunities and challenges of this Cambio's monographic section are therefore to stimulate the debate on topics related to the current global scenario and to contribute to the in-depth understanding of the structural changes in progress. To this end, an open field of research is adopted as a tool to interconnect and incorporate different social sciences areas, and to cope with the complexity of social phenomenon. According to this methodological and epistemological choice, the contributions selected to this monographic section explore different topics that range from social cohesion, international relations and corporate sustainability to credit and taxation policies.

Despite the thematic broadness of the studies conforming this monographic section, it is possible to identify a common framework among the essays: the interdisciplinary analytical approach. This complex system oriented approach is incorporated in every article. Rosalia Condorelli contribution inaugurates the section by claiming the reinforcement of policy-making processes as an instrument to face social integration crisis and proposing to bring the current debate on social cohesion into a complexity epistemological field. The scholar contends that the new acquisitions on systems working and evolutionary mechanisms offer a safer ground to frame the discontinuity of natural and social life as a creative phenomenon; thus subject to emergent, unexpected, surprising and unpredictable self-organization processes which are immersed in historical time of non-linearity and irreversibility.

Vasja Roblek, Mirjana Pejić Bach, Maja Meško and Friderika Kresal explore the realization of corporate sustainability concept in the fourth industrial revolution. The scholars sustain that the notion of corporate sustainability, built upon the principles of the United Nations Global Compact, allows the transposition of the concept of sustainable development to the business level. Daniela Caruso presents the particular features of China's educational cooperation programmes in the African continent and discusses how these programmes can be seen as a manifestation of the country's use of soft power and cultural diplomacy.

Andressa Jarletti Gonçalves de Oliveira analyzes the potential of microcredit regulation as a path to social and economic development. The author introduces a systemic view of the co-relation between development and the idea of social function under the Brazilian law. This represents a heterodox approach as systems and processes, not people, are the ones to shape the world order. Ezgi Arik contribution is an invitation to a philosophical re-thinking of international tax law with a particular focus on the current international standard on harmful tax competition set by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The author claims the review of the standard to turn it from the international to the global level, taking into consideration the recent developments in the global governance of taxation.

At a first glance, the topics of these papers can seem rather heterogeneous, notwithstanding, they provide a general frame based on the following features:

- They are interdisciplinary, mostly focused on a balance of sociological, economic, legal and political studies.
- They cope with systemic problem setting and, as much as possible, with problem solving, for instance when discussing the social discontinuity and the legitimacy deficit of social integration in modern occidental societies.
- They also deal with global impact phenomena which requires broader policy-modelling such as: the globalization of education between China and Africa; the sustainability pillar of ecological and business strategies worldwide; the centrality of microcredit in development policies – not so different from Brazil to India – where it was conceived – and to Italy in its economically weakest areas; and the strategic function of taxation policies in the shift from an international-intergovernmental shaped world towards a multilateral, trans-supranational one with the new emerging role of the OECD.
- They provide descriptive analysis, however, with the challenge of focusing on global change scenario, whose emerging core are dematerialization and intangible asset portfolio, which represent the true face under the mask of globalization. The driving force of intangible assets underlies all the topics debated in this special

section. Putting it differently, it is the intangible 'fil rouge', among hypothetically heterogeneous topics, that bounds them together, as a key for gaining leverage and scale.

To sum up, the key element holding together all the works presented in this Cambio Journal monographic section is a common systemic vision; a complex system perspective, which provides a powerful instrument to analyze the dynamic multidimensional processes approached in the essays. The outcome is therefore a collection of studies that invites the reader to re-think systemically the emerging Intangible Globe Age.

We hope you enjoy the reading,

### *References*

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