

The Cultural Dimension of Sustainability

It is time to find new ways of injecting culture into business strategy. Economic downturn is quickly spreading across the big Western democracies because of an interconnected and global production system, causing a negative impact in terms of growth, employment and social cohesion. The recent financial crisis also brings to light the structural limits of a development model based on the anachronistic equation between richness and well-being.

The success of this overestimated theory derives from the idea that the more a country produces the more its population's well-being increases. Over the years real world situations have shown us a different scenario: wealth and possibilities to satisfy an increasing number of needs have enhanced day by day in developed countries, but at the same time the feeling of happiness has decreased in those same developed populations. This is a phenomenon known since the '70s and defined as the "Easterlin Paradox" which takes the name of the economist who theorized it in the 1974 paper "Does Economic Growth Improve the Human Lot? Some Empirical Evidence".

The main implication of Easterlin's thought is the existence of a strong correlation between human satisfaction and frequency and intensity of interpersonal relationships, social interactions and participation in cultural activities organized by local communities.

In the contemporary economic system, companies have to face a huge variety of challenges: competitiveness, innovation, sustainable development, and social and environmental responsibilities in order to survive in a global market. According to the so-called "happiness paradox" and paraphrasing a famous expression, the right answer to the recent economic and financial crisis cannot be "production for production's sake." In a world overstocked with goods, we need to reverse our lens and start exploring and explaining the power of culture to business.

This issue of Tafter Journal provides a reflection on the notion of sustainability from two different points of view. In her paper on the urban transformations of small historic and artistic cities, Natalina Carrà invites us to pay attention to the risks and damages – potentially irreversible – linked to a lack of both strategic planning and adequate conservation and regeneration policies.

The article by Virginia Palm about future trends in Cultural Diplomacy, offers an innovative interpretation of Corporate Social Responsibility through the concrete case study of the Deutsche Bank and its activities in the cultural field. According to Palm it is necessary for companies to rethink their role in the economic realm, acquiring a strong awareness of their social and cultural nature in order to keep the production sector in touch with the cultural one.

The precarious conditions of our planet tell us that it is time to make a radical and courageous choice because if we do not change our ways we will be on the edge of a cliff in a few years. Some academics and researchers continue to defend the leading position of manufacturing capitalism because, in their opinion, substituting the previous economic paradigm with a new one is a complicated process characterized by utopian alternatives, extremely time consuming actions, and aims too difficult to reach. On the contrary, others believe that if a willing and determined political class supports our actions and our motivations, it is possible to achieve a paradigm shift right now.

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Culture should play a central role in the production system in order to turn an ideal principle into reality, because without cultural enrichment in every single element of our society, it will be much more difficult to attribute an ethical value to our actions.



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