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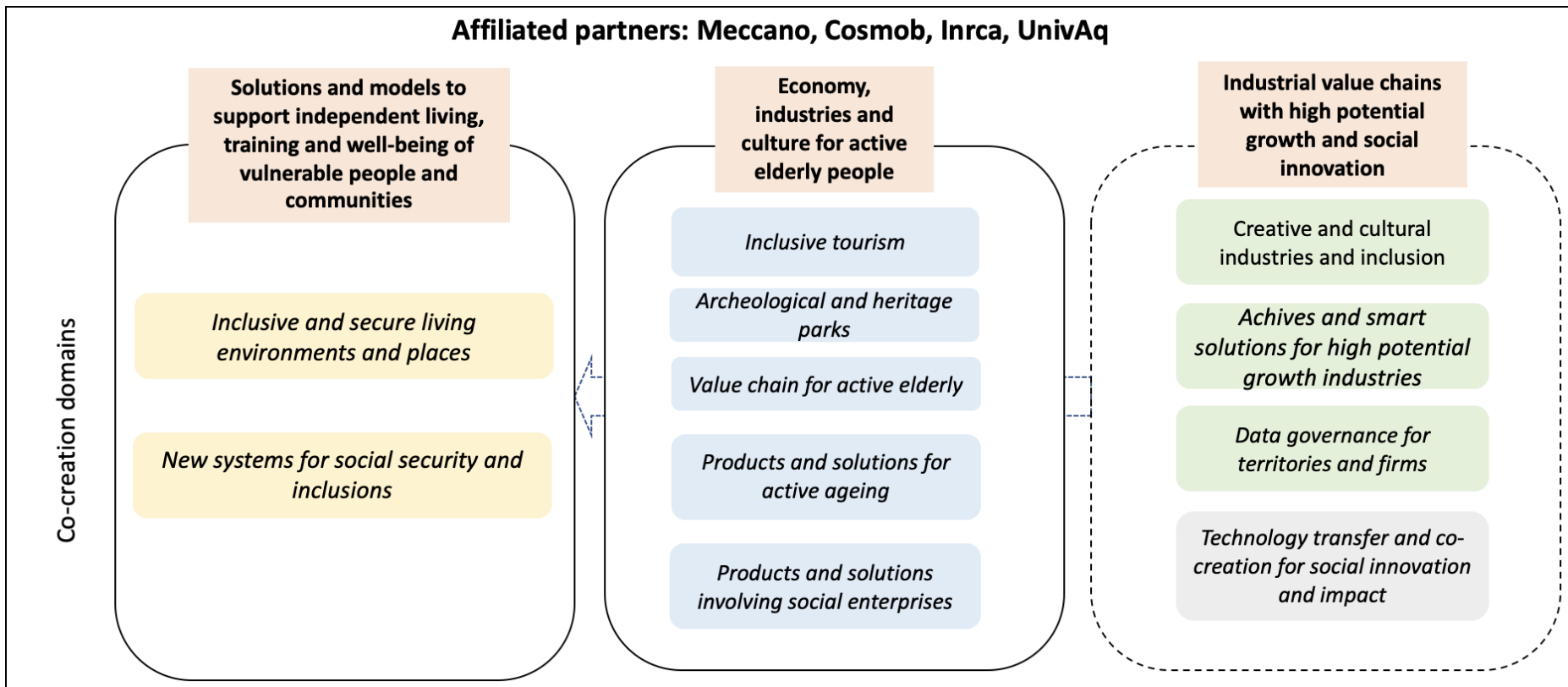


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24th Conference of the Utopian Studies Society/Europe  
BUDAPEST  
**UTOPIA AND DEMOCRACY**

***The Never-Ending Task of Inclusion: a Utopian Trait for Democracy***

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*This work has been funded by the European Union - NextGenerationEU under the Italian Ministry of University and Research (MUR) National Innovation Ecosystem grant ECS00000041 - VITALITY - CUP D83C22000710005.*

## 1. *What does it mean a utopian way of thinking*

Paul Ricoeur points out: “If we consider utopias according to their contents, we even find opposing utopias. [...] So we cannot define utopias commonly by their concepts. In the absence of utopia’s thematic unity, we must seek unity in its function” (Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, engl. transl. 1986, p. 16). In this regard, he highlights the starting point from the idea of “no place”, which is implicit in the term “utopia”: “what must be emphasized is the benefit of this special extraterritoriality. From this ‘no place’ an exterior glance is cast on our reality, which suddenly looks strange, nothing more being taken for granted. [...]; it is a field, therefore, for alternative ways of living” (ibid.).

Karl Mannheim had already stated that utopia tends “to shatter, either partially or wholly, the order of things prevailing at the time” (Mannheim, *Ideologie und Utopie* 1929; engl. transl. p. 173). This feature qualifies utopia as the opposite of ideology.

- Utopian **intentionality**
- **Realism**: reveals more about the world than any of the ordinary concerns
- Rooted in a **kind of belonging**
- **Pathologies**: escapism / impatience

## *2. Considering the good place through the lens of justice*

Whether it is **problematic to describe the characteristics of the good place utopia performs at all**, because they can be only determined from time to time in confrontation with the contradictions and wounds of the world in which one lives, however we can say that **utopia performs for liberating humanity from any bad conditions that harm human dignity and hinder human flourishing**.

**Utopia fights against existing injustice, so that justice exists.**

What does injustice mean?

Iris Marion Young considers that oppression and domination are the two social conditions that define injustice.

**Domination** is the institutional constraint on self-determination

**Oppression** involves material deprivation or maldistribution but also issues beyond them, it is the institutional constraint on self-development. **Oppression** properly names a family of concepts and conditions, clustered into five categories: **exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence**.



### *3. Inclusion: a topic for justice?*

Since the **Lisbon Summit in 2000**, the promotion of social inclusion and social cohesion have been central strategic goals of the **European Union**.

**Ruth Levitas**, *The Inclusive Society? Social Exclusion and New Labour* writes: “I am deeply sceptical of the effects of discourses of exclusion and integration, which so easily obscure rather than illuminate patterns of inequality, and which do not question the nature of the society in which people are to be included. [...] I am still searching for a route to a just and sustainable future.” Moreover, the question is not simply whether there is more or less social exclusion, but what kind of inclusion has been delivered for whom, and on what terms

**Judith Butler**, *The psychic life of power: Theories in subjection*, warns that individuals so desperately need the recognition of others to survive as social selves, that they would rather cling to painful and subordinating forms of identity than be unrecognizable.

I consider inclusion **a way to operationalize the concept of justice** in confrontation with existing injustices.

It is a **problematic** concept that needs to be critically supervised, but it is a **powerful** concept, above all because of its flexibility and sensitivity: 1) at an individual level it mobilizes personal fears of being excluded or left out; 2) at a political level it has broad appeal, both to those who value increase participation and those who seek greater social control.

By clarifying the semantic potential of “inclusion”, it is possible to set the contours performing its heuristic push towards a good place, and to recognize the issue utopian traits.

Almost two conditions should be satisfied:

1) **Why inclusion? Because human being’s ontological relationality**

Inclusion grounds on some characteristic of the human being and not on a claim from outside, and thus operates considering human being as an end and not as a means (this implies that it is decoupled from the mere goal of social stability)

2) **How inclusion?** It operates as a critique of the conditions of injustice in a transformative and positively intersectional manner.

## 4. *Grounding inclusivity on human ontological relationality*

Human beings are **constitutively relational**, they build themselves through and from the relations they live (Hegel, Mead, Honneth, Fabris). Human beings are all **vulnerable and interdependent** beings.

Therefore, to promote justice requires to recognize both human dependence and in the meanwhile human relational autonomy.

Since **ontological vulnerability** means both the possibility of being wounded as well as of being helped to flourish, this opens up for everyone the multifaceted space of responsibility and the urgency of practices working not only on formal principles and for containing and tackling the possibility of harm, but also enabling embodied subjects – who always live with others in concrete *milieu* – to flourish (C. Mackenzie-W. Rogers-S. Dodds; N. Maillard; C. Pelluchon; A. Berque).

Inclusion does not apply only to people with “special need” because vulnerability is an ontological human feature; however, it does not mean to be blind on contingent vulnerabilities.

Because grounded on an ontological feature, inclusion refers to human being considered as an end in oneself.

The construction of just societies must avoid exclusion processes and promote inclusive ones.

Inclusion can not be considered only a mean for building social stability.



## 5. *Grounding inclusivity on justice*

For human beings, who are vulnerable beings, justice requires **to remove** barrier and **to provide** accessibility, by means of interventions that **not stigmatize anyone**.

Accessibility refers to **countable goods**, but also to **capabilities** (A. Sen, M. Nussbaum) and to relations of **recognition** (N. Fraser- A.Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*) and “to be included” means the opportunity to participate in practices for acquiring them.

However, what matters for people is not only the level of functioning one can enjoy at a certain point in one’s life, but also the expectation of maintaining that level (J. Wolff - A. de-Shalit, *Disadvantage*). To be exposed to major risks and to a condition of pronounced precariousness puts people at a disadvantage compared to those who do not suffer them: they are disadvantages in themselves, irrespective of any actual occurrence of negative events.

Moreover, inclusion means the opportunity to participate **to establish the agenda for participation** (here also questions about epistemic justice/injustice should be considered: M. Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 2007)

**This deeply connects inclusion and democracy.** The more inclusive participation is, the stronger it will favour processes of inclusiveness, because participation means collective construction of the agenda, that is the widest possible consideration of all the different aspects relevant for eliminating domination and oppression and promoting the relational autonomy for pursuing human flourishing for all.

## 6. *Inclusion and conflict*

**Democratic inclusion opens to conflicts:** this is an aspect intrinsic to an inclusiveness that is neither homologation nor integration. The broader the inclusion, the more chances of divergence and conflict arise, because inclusion avoids fragmentation but at the meanwhile it does not mean fusion.

It is important the **distinction between conflict and violence**: conflict means *cum-fligere*, to collide with someone; violence means to use force for damaging, and does not involve any positive relational dimension.

Violence is disruptive, conflict is a contrast which does not imply damages and refers to possible relations, even if these are hard and complicated (Novara). The confusion between the two concepts is very dangerous, because when significant divergences emerge, it causes fear and alertness, which do not help to find solutions. Individuals and groups used to situations of violence are unable to bear relational tension or disagreement, and they feel threatened by them. Violence arises when aggressive feelings, worries and contrasts are denied, cannot be recognized and shown: when they cannot conflict, they cannot be restrained and educated through the relational work with other people. Moreover, to be able to deal with conflicts gives people the most fruitful antidote to violence.

Inclusive societies must **learn to conflict well**, to be creative in conflict and to avoid violence.

## *Conclusions*

Confronted to the democratic instance, **the issue of inclusion should be critically monitored** with respect to at least two implications:

- 1) to whom inclusion is addressed, and thus if someone is excluded;
- 2) what inclusion provides and what it requires from those who are included.

Conversely, **the democratic form of life can be questioned** about its own form of being, by testing the ways and extent of its inclusiveness.

The meaning of the concept is better expressed as a **verb** than a substantive,  
it does not establish a situation, but qualifies a **process**,  
it does refer to individuals in their **relations**,  
it is a **contextual** concept.

Therefore, inclusion is **a never-ending task**, always “to do”: because there is always the possibility that someone has been excluded or has become excluded, that what was previously inclusive has become exclusionary, that inclusion becomes pathological and therefore reductionist and oppressive instead of open and liberating.

Like true democracies, democratic inclusion is **always “to come”** (Derrida).

<https://www.safina-vitality.it/>

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Deliverable:

*Directions to overcome growing challenges toward inclusive educational institutions*

*Growing challenges for inclusive working environments for companies: preliminary directions*

*This work has been funded by the European Union - NextGenerationEU under the Italian Ministry of University and Research (MUR) National Innovation Ecosystem grant ECS00000041 - VITALITY - CUP **D83C22000710005***



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