



RE.CRI.RE

BETWEEN THE REPRESENTATION
OF THE CRISIS AND THE CRISIS
OF REPRESENTATION

TR –DESIGN OF GENERAL CRITERIA FOR POLICY MAKING

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CULTURE-CENTRED POLICIES FOR ADDRESSING THE CRISIS. WHY CULTURE MATTERS AND HOW TO TAKE IT INTO ACCOUNT

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1 Executive summary

The present document provides the theoretical and methodological framework for setting the criteria guiding the design of policies that are both **culture-sensitive** and able to address the current **socio-institutional crisis scenario**.

In recent years, a more realistic understanding of human behaviour and decision-making has challenged the often-implicit assumptions about people on which policies were often conceived. From the individual rational choice based citizen, many scholars moved to a bounded rationality perspective. A further step, outlined by the Re.Cri.Re. project, is to take the **interpretative and cultural nature of human behaviour** into account as a fundamental element to be considered both at the stage of design and of implementation of policies.

This step is consistent with the growing recognition of the relevance of culture in social sciences and more specifically in policy making and politics. **Culture is the on-going dynamics of sensemaking through which people interpret the world** - and in terms of which they feel, think and act. This on-going dynamics is channelled by generalized meanings (symbolic universes) embedded within the cultural milieu and working as affective-laden systems of assumptions.

In accordance with this view, the Re.Cri.Re. project carried out a systematic analysis of the cultural milieu of European societies, aimed at getting a better understanding of the current socio-political and institutional crisis scenario. The purpose of this analysis was the definition of criteria orienting and supporting policy makers in their effort to design and implement policies that are congruent with the challenges of the crisis.

This approach does not concern all kinds of policies; policies that are inherently universalistic do not have to consider differences within the population. However, most policies operate either within one specific cultural milieu - policy within culture - or by means of the activation of cultural elements (e.g. values, beliefs, social scripts, discursive practices) as drivers of the interventions (e.g. think of policies fostering ecological behaviours like recycling; or respect among ethnic or cultural differences) - policy through culture.

The document offers several **methodological suggestions** aimed at supporting policy makers in designing policies that have to work within a given cultural milieu and therefore have to take the target population's culture into account and/or aimed at promoting cultural resources (i.e. *policy through culture*) – e.g. *Cultural segmentation Demand at the core of policy, Pluralism*.

Taken as a whole, these suggestions outline the general view that policies cannot be performed regardless – or even in spite of – the ways they are interpreted by the target population; on the contrary, the impact of the policy depends on how meaningful the content is and how consistent it is with the target population's culture. Moreover, these suggestions provide the idea that policy making can make the target population's culture a resource insofar as the people's ways of feeling and thinking are not regarded as noise, but as the “fuel” fostering the population's commitment to the intervention. From this it follows that the valorisation of the target population's culture requires a policy able to design and implement meaningful frames of involvement, where both

policy and target population can develop through their dynamic interaction and reciprocal engagement.

Finally, the document provides analyses of the crisis scenario as well as **methodological suggestions** and **exemplificative interventions** designed to support policy-makers on the issues requiring a direct approach to cultural change (i.e. *policy upon culture*). This approach is relevant when the cultural milieu is in critical shape, thus becoming a problem in itself.

In previous reports, Re.Cri.Re. analysed the European societies' cultural milieu underpinning the current scenario of crisis. The analysis highlighted two main factors: a) **the lack of semiotic capital** – i.e. the cultural resources enabling the internalization of the systemic level of social life; b) the spread of a critical form of belongingness (defined: paranoid belongingness) that sees the world as an active threat, and leads to the **enemization of the other** (whoever the “other” is – e.g. “bureaucrats in Brussel”, political caste, refugees, Romani, homosexuals, Muslims...).

The Re.Cri.Re. analysis suggests that the demand for sense underpinning phenomenologies of intolerance and distrust is at the same time a **demand for protection and empowerment that requires demand-centred policies**.

The lack of semiotic capital and the spread of the enemization of the other should be the concern of specific policies upon culture. **Policies can and must sustain the socio-cultural producers of semiotic capital**.

On these grounds, the current document proposes some methodological tenets – e.g. *Performativeness, Identity, , Weak Boundaries*, – and areas of intervention – *New institutional deal, Meaningful economics, Vital Welfare* – meant to support policy makers in designing policies aimed at promoting semiotic capital.

Taken as a whole, these proposals are designed as examples of interventions aimed at promoting social practices favouring the vital experience of the political and institutional system as a live subject involved in supporting the individual/local projects as well as in protecting them from the most disruptive impacts of globalization.

Policy makers can decide how to translate this methodological perspective into concrete objectives, policies, and actions in terms of the contextual conditions as well as their political and axiological orientations. It is hoped that they may find in the proposals and analyses contained in the current document a conceptual and methodological framework supporting them in the hard task of designing strategies to cope with the current challenging socio-political scenario.

The crisis requires a deep cultural innovation in policies and politics – a kind of **anthropological drift** is occurring before our eyes, in the way people think of themselves and the world. To counteract such a drift, institutions have to restore their function of designing and guiding societies towards possible worlds.

Institutions have to re-introduce the future as the core parameter of policy making; only viewed in the long term can the current dramatic turmoil be addressed and creative synthesis among current conflictive interests, demands and dynamics be envisaged.

What is needed is a new institutional culture – the **politics of desire**. On the other hand, it is not a real innovation, but a way to return to the future – today the EU exists because it was dreamt of by decision makers endowed with the strategic capacity of making dreams realizable.

2 Focus and aims

Social and political scientists have recognized more and more that **culture plays a relevant role in policy making and politics**.

The Re.Cri.Re. project carried out a systematic analysis of the cultural milieu of European societies, designed to get a better understanding of the current socio-political and institutional crisis scenario. The purpose of this analysis was the definition of **guidelines** supporting policy makers in their effort to design and implement **policies that take into account the culture of the target population in order to be congruent with the challenges of the crisis**.

The present document outlines why and how to design culture-sensitive policies (for details and more depth, cf. TR 5.1, retrievable at <https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/documents/download?documentIds=080166e5b429c80c&appId=PPGMS>).

Part I. Framework

3 Why culture matters. What Re.Cri.Re. findings highlight

3.1 *From homo economicus to homo semioticus*

In the past years, the dominant model in the world of policy making was the one coming from economics: the *rational choice model*.

The validity of the rational choice model to explain human action and its use in all aspects of social and economic life has been strongly criticised. This led to the rational choice model of *homo economicus* being replaced by the research program in behavioural economics. Behavioural economics is a new combination of psychology and economics that studies deviation from standard assumptions of rational choice (i.e. bounded rationality), instead grounding the understanding of human behaviour on cognitive psychology. The contribution of behavioural economics led to the definition of *homo behaviouralis*, a model of the human being that includes rational decision-making but also the use of mental shortcuts (heuristics) and the presence of systematic errors or bias of judgment.

Sociological and psycho-social critiques of the cognitivist/behavioural shift, while recognising the value of the critique of rationalism and cognitive individualism (i.e., view of the actor as a solitary agent thinking and appraising usefulness as if he was Robinson Crusoe) of standard economics, hold that it still searches for the micro-foundations of a 'universal nature', and that it is inspired by a cognitive universalism neglecting synchronic and diachronic social and cultural differences.

The sociological and psycho-social approach reminds us that we also think and cognitively process stimuli as **members of particular communities**. Cognitive schemas are grounded and embedded in culturally, historically, and sub-culturally specific traditions and worldviews.

According to the Re.Cri.Re. framework, **culture is the on-going dynamics of sensemaking** through which people interpret the world - and thus feel, think and act. This on-going dynamics is

channelled/mediated by generalized meanings - named **symbolic universes** - embedded within the cultural milieu and working as affect-laden systems of assumptions.

The focus on culture leads to foreground *homo semioticus*, namely the view of people engaged with the need to make experience meaningful – i.e. justifiable, thinkable, reasonable (*tenet of the centrality of sensemaking*).

This on-going activity of sensemaking is inherently social and situated - it is performed within and through the cultural milieu of which the sensemaker is part (*tenet of cultural embeddedness*).

The interpretation of experience is not a neutral process, but an affirmation of identity: through how people feel, think and act, they strive to make their social life a lived reality fulfilling the sense of who-one-is (*tenet of subjectivity*).

3.2 *Re.Cri.Re. findings and their implications*

Framed on the homo semioticus assumptions, the extensive Re.Cri.Re. analysis of the European societies' cultural milieu has produced several sets of findings (cf. reports TR 3.1 and TR 3.2, retrievable

at https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/documents/download?documentIds=080166e5a8a54e29:Attachment_0&appId=PPGMS

and https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/documents/download?documentIds=080166e5ade8ff26:Attachment_0&appId=PPGMS and www.recrire.eu). These findings provide evidence

supporting three fundamental facets of the cultural dynamics that have relevant implications for policy-making.

- A) Cultural mediation
- B) The actor's interpretative autonomy
- C) Affective sensemaking

3.2.1 Cultural mediation

People do not represent and respond to reality as it is - i.e. in terms of the objective, same-for-all states of affairs. Rather, each person interprets reality using a system of implicit, only partially conscious, generalized assumptions that provide a consistent snapshot of how the world is/ought to be and what one's position before it is. Each system of generalized assumptions is a global, affect-laden worldview (*symbolic universes* in Re.Cri.Re. terms) comprising the actor's personal and social identity. It works as a lens through which any element of the experience is filtered and thus made meaningful (which is the mediational role).

Re.Cri.Re analysis of the cultural milieu identified 5 Symbolic Universes.

Symbolic Universe 1. *Ordered universe*

This worldview is characterized by two important facets. On the one hand, a generalized positive attitude toward the world (institutions and services, the people, the place where one lives, the country, the future) which is considered trustworthy, receptive of the efforts to engage with and to improve it. On the other hand, there is identification with transcendent values and ideals (e.g. justice, morality, solidarity; rejection of opportunism, conformism and power) that foster commitment to making things better - where such

commitment is seen as a value in itself: the way of making life meaningful, rather than of pursuing material interests. The combination of these two facets outlines what we interpret as the basic assumption substantiating this symbolic universe: **faith in the inherent ethical order of the world**. Rightness, morality and efficacy go together, what is just is also efficacious in rendering things better, because the universe follows its own harmonious design. Behaviour has to conform to and reflect this universal order and in so doing one can trust in being on the right side of history.

Symbolic Universe 2. *Interpersonal bond*

This symbolic universe comprises a group of responses detecting a positive, optimistic vision of the world, as a place that is meaningful and fulfilling. On the other hand, the world these responses refer to is not the universalistic one of the previous symbolic universe; rather it is **the vital world of interpersonal, emotional bonds**. To be part of such a world is an end in itself: sacrifices (in terms of adaptability and conformism) are needed for it and are repaid in terms of safety and fulfilment, as well as in promoting a moderate sense of agency, trust and openness to the new. The line of the famous song – *all I need is love* – depicts the basic assumption of this symbolic universe.

Symbolic Universe 3. *Caring society*

This symbolic universe is characterized by a **vision of society and institutions as trustworthy providers of services and commons** (e.g. education, health, security, development). Society is receptive to the demands and needs of people. This vision fosters a generalized feeling of confidence in life, optimism in the future and a sense of agency – what one has to do is to keep oneself within the rules of the game, there being those who take care of handling it for the best. It is worth noting how in the case of this symbolic universe, the trustworthiness attributed to institutions does not mean passivity and dependency. Rather, it works as grounds for a sense of agency: people who identify with this symbolic universe feel able to pursue purposes because they feel part of a system that supports and allows their efforts.

Symbolic Universe 4. *Niche of belongingness*

This symbolic universe shares a similar anchorage to the primary network characterizing *Interpersonal bond*. Yet, in this case, such an anchorage is combined with a negative generalized connotation of the world outside the primary network – in terms of pessimism about the future, fatalism, untrustworthiness of agencies and institutions. In such a context, **the primary network is a necessity responding to the need of finding shelter from and surviving the anomic, threatening outside**, rather than a matter of pleasure, an end in itself. Consistently with such a feeling, the primary network is connoted in terms of familistic power.

Symbolic Universe 5. *Others' world*

This symbolic universe outlines a fully **negative, even desperate vision of the world** – generalized untrustworthiness, sense of impotency, lack of agency, anomie. The world belongs to those who have power – the defeated have only the chance to try to survive day-by-day, surrendering to those with the power to lead the game. Morality and values are a luxury one cannot afford when the only possible concern is to limit the damage.

It is worth highlighting that these generalized meanings do not lie in people's head. Rather, they are embedded within the cultural milieu; people are exposed to them and thus they interiorize them.

Moreover, Re.Cri.Re. analyses have shown that symbolic universes are not only ideas about the world. Rather, they proved to be **embodied modes of being-in-the-world**, which channel/affect a person's way of life – i.e. the way of feeling, thinking, acting, and making decisions. More particularly, the latter conclusion is based on the following findings.

- UK regions where the proportion of leave votes at the recent Brexit referendum was higher differed from the regions with lower levels of leave votes by the combination characterized mainly by high incidence of the following three symbolic universes: *interpersonal bond*, *niche of belongingness* and *ordered universe*.
- People identified with symbolic universes regarded as cultural resource (*ordered universes* and *caring society*) are characterized by functional forms of thinking (risk propensity, flexibility), openness to experience, commitment to relating, positive feelings, valorisation of otherness.
- The latter symbolic universes seem to feed an explorative embodied attitude, as shown by the fact that people characterized by them, when asked to look at a picture (a photo showing a group of European politicians), spent more time in the visual exploration of the peripheral part of their attention focus.
- The symbolic universes are also salient at the level of how important topics (immigration, Islam, homosexuality, health, participation and democracy, subjectivity) are addressed by the media.

3.2.2 The actor's interpretative autonomy

Secondary elaborations on the Re.Cri.Re. findings (reported in the publication: Ciavolino et al, 2017, retrievable at <http://siba-ese.unisalento.it/index.php/ejasa/article/view/18160/15516>) have supported the interpretation of symbolic universes *as a-semantic generalized, affect-laden worldviews*. More particularly, it has been shown that:

- Each symbolic universe is a system of meanings consisting of a network of less generalized meanings that are linked in accordance to their affective valence, regardless of their semantic relationship. We use the term “a-semantic” in order to highlight that the generalized affect-laden meanings are the expression of a level of sensemaking working in accordance to a different – but not fully alternative - logic from the rational one, namely, the logic of the emotional, affect-laden daily thinking.

- The generalized meaning plays a higher-order, regulative function in sensemaking. As said above (cf. § 3.1.1), it works as an embodied system of assumptions that channels how the less generalized meanings are used, in so doing guiding the way of feeling, thinking and acting.
- A generalized meaning exercises its regulative function over the sensemaker's field of experience as a whole, rather than over only single parts of it (i.e. specific events and objects). This means that it works as the *universe of sense* in which individuals are completely embedded.

Due to these characteristics, symbolic universes must be conceived as the **basic system of assumptions framing the way experience is interpreted**. This means that they are not changed by experience; rather, experience is shaped by them. It follows that any person feels, thinks and acts from within his/her own symbolic universe, and in so doing she/he tends to reproduce it¹. This is what interpretative autonomy consists of: whatever the external input addressing the actor may be, the latter will not incorporate its objective content, but will interpret it in terms of her/his inner system of assumptions.

This means that the policy-maker cannot assume that the policy is interpreted by the population as she/he means it. In other words, the policy is unable to "impose" its own meaning from the outside - people will attribute significance and value to any aspect of interventions on their own. Needless to say, this does not mean that people interpret policy in irrational terms; rather, it means that policy makers cannot assume a universal normative criterion of rationality – of which they are the depository– and have to recognize that the plurality of significances the population attributes to the policy – and therefore their responses to it – emerges from the contingent balancing between the cognitive constraints of reasonableness and the demand for identity inherent to any act of interpretation

3.2.3 Affective sensemaking

One Re.Cri.Re. finding supports the psychodynamic/psychosocial hypothesis that the more uncertainty and instability the person has to address, the more the person interprets experience in terms of identity-based, affect-laden generalized, standardised meanings.

This finding comes from the comparison of how different social objects (Islam, homosexuality, migration, health, democracy and participation, subjectivity) are represented in the press across several European countries (Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Rumania, UK), over a period of 16 years (2000-2015). The comparison showed that the more the topics involved an exposure to otherness (e.g. "Islam" implies a higher level of exposure than "health"), the more similar the semantic structures (i.e. how the topic is represented by newspapers) were among the European countries. In other words, the more the topic destabilizes the sense of identity, the more it triggers generalizing, standardising basic affect-laden interpretations, which by their nature, are similar across the European countries.

¹. It is worth specifying that this does not mean that the people are unable to change their worldview as a result of experience. Yet this process of learning from experience unfolds over the long term

The nexus between uncertainty and affective sensemaking can be understood if one takes into account that the affective meanings comprising the symbolic universes work as **stabilizers of experience** - each symbolic universe provides a powerful symbolic framework in which person is enabled to assimilate the rupture of the canonicity, and therefore to make what is unfamiliar familiar. Thus, the more challenging the system of assumptions is, the more the individual and social group's sensemaking becomes enslaved to the need to defend/restore their identity, namely their system of assumptions. This means that the more there is the need for rational, analytic and creative thinking (as when major changes require innovative approaches), the less it is available in the cultural context.

3.3 *Synthesis*

- Culture affects ways of feeling, thinking and acting (cultural mediation).
- It cannot be bypassed by the reference to abstract normative framework defining what is right, just, functional (actor's interpretative autonomy).
- The greater the uncertainty and instability, the more people feel, think and act in terms of affect-laden generalized meanings that defend the sense of identity but provide simplified maps of the world, therefore make available few resources for understanding problems and finding solutions addressing the challenging changes (uncertainty-affective sensemaking link).

Accordingly, culture - and more in general the basic mechanisms of sensemaking (i.e. how people feel, think and act) - have to be recognized as a dimension that cannot be reduced to others (e.g. to the economic and legal factors), but require: a) to be taken into account in policy-making and b) to be considered as a specific goal of policy-making.

Part II. Methodological proposals

4 A typology of interventions

It is worth making a general distinction between two types policy related to culture. We have named them, respectively: policy **through** culture and policy **upon** culture

- *Policy through culture.* Policies relate to culture because of the very fact that they are designed and implemented within a situated cultural milieu. Accordingly, the cultural context is both a constraint and a key resource for policies. Indeed, the cultural elements (e.g. values, beliefs, social scripts, discursive practices – more in general: symbolic universes) that mediate the relation between policy and target population can therefore work as drivers of the interventions as well as their limits (cf. the tenet of interpretative autonomy). Accordingly, **the policy has to adopt an active attitude toward the cultural milieu**, aimed at: a) recognizing and adjusting to the cultural constraints; b) identifying and valorising the cultural resources.
- *Policy upon culture.* At this level of intervention, the policy does not take the cultural milieu for granted, but sees it having its own specific, strategic purpose. This level is particularly relevant when the cultural milieu is in critical shape, thus becoming a problem in itself, namely when it works as a constraint on policy, rather than a resource.

5 Policy through culture. How to take culture into account

In what follows, 10 methodological tenets concerning the design and implementation of policies through culture are outlined:

- Cultural segmentation
- Demand at the core of policy
- Target population's otherness
- Flexibility to cultural pluralism
- Interpretative agency
- Dynamicity
- Backward regulation
- Agreement through constraint
- Prosumership
- Intersubjective density

5.1 Cultural segmentation

Segmentation is largely used in policy-making. On the other hand, usually it is based on socio-demographic factors (e.g. age, gender, income, geographical position); what the Re.Cri.Re. findings suggest is that cultural differences within the population are a major source of variability that has to be taken into account in designing and implementing policies, because the way of reacting to

policy may largely depend upon it (cf. the tenets of cultural mediation, interpretative autonomy and uncertainty-affective sensemaking link). Accordingly, the different symbolic universes within the cultural milieu can be used for differentiating the population, in order to identify sub-sets of people, each of them characterized by a particular system of meanings.

Segmentation is usually associated with *profiling* - the description of pertinent characteristics of the cultural segment identified - socio-demographic characteristics, job position, geographical and spatial position; health status; attitudes towards important facets of the policy.

Roser-Renouf and colleagues (2014) segmented the US population into 6 groups (the “Six Americas”), each of them characterized by a specific, internally consistent set of beliefs and attitudes towards climate change. The authors also provided socio-demographic profiling of the segments. In so doing, communication strategies aimed at sensitising the population and promoting commitment can be differentiated in order to make them fit with the target.

It has to be noted that unlike Roser-Renouf and colleagues, and most other approaches, Re.Cri.Re’s segmentation and profiling is based on the global worldviews that are active within the cultural milieu, rather than on intervention-specific criteria.

5.2 Demand at the core of policy

The **need** is an objective condition of necessity or of a critical lack that the policy intends to address. The need is defined independently from the target – it is a fact that justifies the intervention per se (e.g. from the medical standpoint, the disease defines the need of medical intervention regardless – even in spite of - the sick person’s view of his/her state of health).

The **demand** is the *target individual’s interpretation of his/her condition* – why it happened, if and how to address it and with what aims. Thus, the demand goes beyond the need – it consists of the meaning in terms of which the target makes sense of his/her current state in the context of her/his world (i.e. sense of self, expectations, values, projects, social roles and so forth).

According to the tenet of the cultural mediation, the value that the target population attributes to the policy as well as the level of commitment and cooperation depends on the demand, namely on how the target population interprets the policy. Moreover, from the tenet of interpretative autonomy it follows that need and demand are not necessarily associated with each other. There can be *need without demand* (i.e. many people live in a state of educational deprivation, yet they do not consider that as a problem that needs to be addressed) as well as *demand without need* (e.g. the problem of the abuse of drugs and medical interventions).

In many, even most, cases, the policy is focused on the need, namely on the definition of goals and actions based on the objective conditions the policy intends to address. *Putting the demand at the core of the policy means recognizing that goals and actions have to be defined not only in terms of the state of affairs identified by the policy-makers but also by taking into account the meaning that people attribute to them.*

This therefore makes the criterion of **appropriateness** (to the target’s project) important.

Appropriateness. The value and efficacy of goals and actions do not depend on their inner functional/technical quality only, namely on how consistent they are with the objective conditions

addressed. Rather, value and efficacy also depend on if, how and to what extent the policy is perceived as meaningful by the target population as well as a resource for their projects and developmental tasks.

In the health context to put the demand at the core of the policy means to design interventions that consider the subjective meaning of the disease and treatment (logistic, organizational, social, physical, economic, psychological, ethical and all other components comprising it) part and parcel of the interventions, both as source of its value and efficacy and as their aim. In other words, a demand-centred health policy views the patient not only as the conveyer/container of the disease, but as a person that asks for help to defend/restore/adjust the whole course of his/her life, broken by the disease

5.3 *Target population's otherness*

The centrality of the demand implies that it must also be recognized that one cannot take it for granted that the **target population interprets the policy in the same way as the policy-makers, or at any rate in a way consistent with their view**. Accordingly, the policy has to adopt devices aimed at understanding and monitoring the target population's interpretation of the policy, in order to make it as consistent as possible with the policymaker's framework.

An example of the interpretative distance between policy-making and target is provided by a study (Gneezy & Rustichini, 2000), which analysed the case of a school that had the problem of parents dropping off their children late for school. The senior management of the school decided to intervene and voted for the introduction of a financial fine to impose on those parents that arrived late with their children. Yet, paradoxically enough, the outcome of this intervention was that more children were late than before!

This was because of the interpretative distance between policy-makers and target. Indeed, the school's senior managers interpreted the intervention as the provision of a negative incentive, and therefore they expected that parents would stop being late as a response to it. On the contrary, parents' interpretation was very different: due to their interpretative autonomy, they viewed the fine as the "price" to be paid for being allowed to be late. They responded to their own interpretation, rather than to the one that motivated the policy-maker's decision.

5.4 *Flexibility to cultural variability*

The target population is culturally plural: people vary in their way of feeling, thinking and acting, because each sensemaker interprets the reality in accordance to one of the several symbolic universes that are active in the cultural milieu. Therefore, the policy has to be designed in ways that allow the flexibility required for taking into account the cultural dimension of differences in the target population, as well as other dimensions (e.g. socio-demographic, linguistic, and so forth).

The teaching of catholic religion in the Italian school system is an example of how hard it can be to introduce flexibility to cultural variability. Until 1989, even though Italian legislation envisaged the principle that the teaching of catholic religion was optional, various practical and procedural constraints limited its application. It was only with the intervention of the Constitutional Court (i.e. the higher Italian Juridical Body) – namely an intervention external to the legislative system – that these constraints were overcome and the option nature of the subject was assured to students.

5.5 Interpretative agency

The policy is not meaningful in itself for the target population. Rather, people make meaningful the (engagement with) policy *through the very process of interpreting it*. This means that, in order to promote the target population's commitment and cooperation, the policy has to leave room for – even trigger – the population's active interpretation and negotiation of meanings. In other words, actors can be “assimilated” by the policy only if and insofar as they can assimilate the policy.

This might seem counterintuitive, given that in many cases the target population's demand is conflictual and centrifugal with respect to policy's goals and requirements. On the other hand, leaving room for the expression of the demand does not mean being forced to accept any form of it. Rather, it means making the functional boundaries of the policy as flexible as possible in order to enable it to include forms of demand that otherwise would be considered critical deviations. From a complementary standpoint, it means designing and implementing *ad hoc* institutional and organizational settings that allow the demand to be expressed in compatible ways, namely in forms that promote – rather than damage – the target population's engagement with the policy.

The very many forms of community participatory processes are instances of this criterion. Citizens participate in discussion where they can actively express their point of view, and discuss it with others. By interpreting and negotiating it, they appropriate the subject of the discussion and, at the same time, they become involved, an integral part of the collective action on it.

In the final analysis, these instances show how the person becomes part of the whole when she/he can make the whole part of her/himself.

5.6 Dynamicity

A major implication of the interpretative agency is that policy has to be conceived in dynamic terms, namely as a socio-technical system that evolves over time as a result of the progressive development of the relation with the target population. According to this conception, both the policy drivers and the target are viewed as endowed with the **capacity to evolve**. Thus, the dynamicity consists of the idea that the match between the policy and its targets is not a pre-condition, but a dialectical process that – starting from a minimal initial common ground – evolves over time, in terms of the recursive development of both subjects, resulting from their reciprocal commitment (cf. Figure 1).

Dynamicity emphasizes the idea that policy making has to be conceived of more as a process than a state or a discrete event. If incorporated in the evaluation process of programmes and interventions, dynamicity introduces *recursivity* as an additional key term, besides *dose* (how much of the intervention is delivered?), *uptake* (how much is actually received by participants), *reach* (how much of the target population is covered by the intervention), and *adherence* (to what extent is the program implemented as intended?) (Moore et al., 2014).

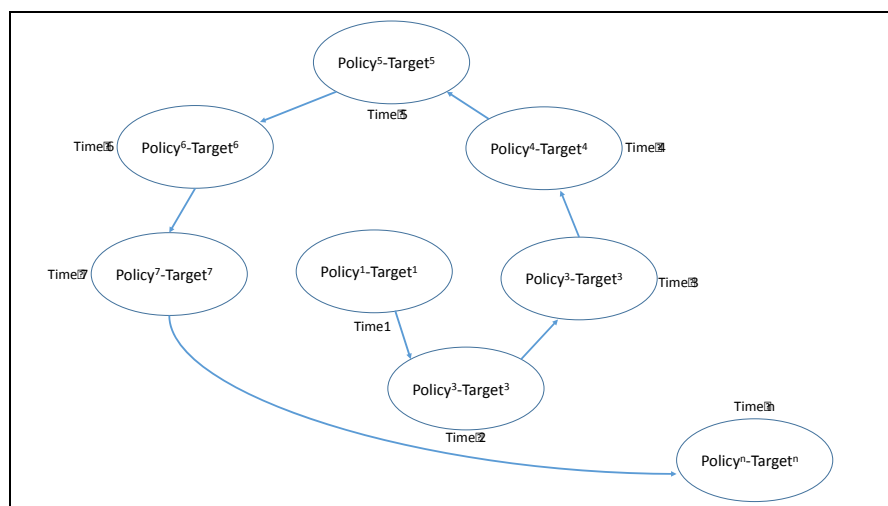


Figure 1. Dynamic model of the policy-target relationship

5.7 Backward regulation

In most cases policies are conceived as decisions that, once made, have to be acted upon. Here it is suggested to expand this schema with the complementary sequence: *first action, then decision*. This means designing devices, organizational settings and drivers that allow to regulate the policy reactively, through step by step adjustment to the target population's response.

The progressive, reactive adjustment to the target population's response has two main functions. On the one hand, it enables a dynamic approach to the policy, because it allows the – more or less expected - evolution of the policy to be dealt with. On the other hand, it defines an interactive, negotiating setting through which the policy can assimilate the target population's interpretative agency and in so doing increase the level of target cooperation/engagement (see *Interpretative agency*, § 5.5)

When the policy involves a legislative frame, a chance to implement this criterion is provided by the displacement of a large proportion of decision making to the level of executive agencies. Accordingly, whereas the strategic aims and general criteria are fixed at the legislative level, the way of implementing them can be established flexibly at the level of executive agency. In so doing, the policy lends itself to be rewritten in important respects close to and consistently with the response of the target population – but within the constraints defined at institutional and legislative level.

5.8 Agreement through constraint

As already observed, insofar as one recognizes the inherent autonomy of the target population, one has to recognize that it is not possible to adopt a shared framework between policy and target as the pre-condition of cooperation (cf. *Target's otherness*, § 5.3). This raises the central issue of how cultural convergence can be promoted between policy and target population.

The *agreement through constraints* is a way of responding to this issue. According to this criterion, the mutual engagement between policy and target population starts with a minimal shared cooperative framework, enabled by the resources (i.e. rules, goals set, levels of trust, willingness to cooperate, commitment) the policy can find within the target population's cultural milieu. This minimal framework is used as the starting point to be developed through marginal adjustment (cf. *Dynamicity and Backward regulation*, § 5.6 and § 5.7).

In order to develop it, the minimal initial framework has to be defined in quite a generalized, polysemic encompassing way, so as to leave room for the co-existence of both the policy framework and the target population's demands. This means that the minimal framework does not consist of a definite agreement between participants, but of a not-steady condition where, due to the genericity and polysemy of the framework, each participant can assume the other's cooperation as given because there are no major signals disconfirming such an assumption.

In other words, in the minimal cooperative framework, it is the absence of signals of disagreement, rather than the presence of signal of agreement that enables the mutual engagement. The more the mutual engagement goes on, the more it enables the cooperative framework to develop.

This tenet echoes Lindblom's *muddling through* approach (Lindblom, 1959) to policy making. Indeed, it shares with it the recognition of the incremental nature of policy making (see also the recognition of the impossibility of grounding policy making on a preliminary, once-and-for-all, shared framework and the consequent recognition of the ambiguity, situativeness and partiality of any process of decision making).

An example given by the author in his classic work provides a clear illustration of what in this context has been defined cooperation in terms of the absence of signals of disagreement, based on the polysemy of the framework.

"It has been suggested that continuing agreement in Congress on the desirability of extending old age insurance stems from liberal desires to strengthen the welfare program of government deferral and from conservative desires to reduce union demands for private pension plans. If so, this is an excellent demonstration of the ease with which individuals of different ideologies often can agree on concrete policy." (p. 83).

Thus, cooperation is based not on a shared framework, but on the fact that there is no disagreement on the premises grounding the proposal (extension of old age insurance), as a result of its polysemy, namely the fact that it is set in a way that does not limit interpretative pluralism (i.e. the liberal as well as the conservative interpretations).

5.9 Prosumership

This suggestion concerns the model of value construction elaborated in the domain of service management. According to this model, the policy-target relation is considered a component of the intervention, namely a factor of production. In other words, the client is not only the target of the intervention but is involved in the intervention as a co-driver. In the language of service management, the client becomes a prosumer: both *producer* and *consumer*.

The literature on service management underlines that the tenet of prosumership makes the relation with the client the key point of the provider's success, given that the very construction of the service depends on the dynamic, co-constructive integration of the client within the boundaries of the productive process of the service.

In the context of policy, prosumership is to be seen mainly as a strategic and organizational device that puts mutual engagement at the core of interventions. In so doing, it favours the mobilisation of the target's desire, working as a catalyst to increase the intersubjective intensity of the interventions.

Participatory and inclusive decision making processes, inspired by deliberative theory, are examples of how the notion of prosumership can be transferred to the policy sector, with no reference to the marketing and business mentality. The co-design of policies, or at least a regulated collaboration between the policy target and policy makers, along with the interactive process through which it can be achieved, enables citizens to serve as both the users and the co-planners of policies themselves. The so-called participatory governance may benefit from the concept of prosumership insofar as it helps to conceive the involvement of citizens in policy making as a structural component of the policy itself.

5.10 Intersubjective density

The policy (aims, actions, rules) has to be internalized by the target individuals. Internalization is the psychosocial process through which people make the content and the aim of the policy something meaningful and vital, part and parcel of their domain of life.

Internalization occurs through intersubjective processes. Indeed, in intersubjective contexts people experience the policy in terms of concrete interpersonal patterns of feeling, thinking and acting, in so doing making it psychologically salient.

It follows that it is useful to design interventions endowed with high intersubjective density. A policy that has high intersubjective density policy is an intervention that is implemented through actions involving interpersonal social exchanges as one of their major components.

In prevention programmes for adolescents, systematic interpersonal exchanges, interactive instructions and hands-on experiences are considered some of the factors that increase the effectiveness of the interventions (Nation et al., 2003), as opposed to programmes where the prevention aims are achieved (but to a lesser extent) via unidirectional information conveyed by experts to a passive target audience.

6 Policy upon culture. Why and how to change culture, and what for

6.1 Why we need policy upon culture

6.1.1 The cultural milieu of the European societies

Taken as a whole, the Re.Cri.Re. analyses of the cultural milieu have highlighted two important issues. First, European societies **lack semiotic capital** – i.e. the *semiotic resources* (e.g. meanings, cognitive schemas, values, social representations, attitudes, behavioural scripts, etc.) that enable individuals to interiorize the collective, supra-personal dimension of life, namely to experience the systemic regulative framework as a vital dimension, a concrete fact impacting on the way of thinking and acting. Less of 1 out of 4 European citizens (though with differences among countries) proved to have access to these resources of the cultural milieu.

Second, the cultural milieu of the European societies appears to be significantly characterized (about 40% of the population of the 11 sampled countries, though with differences among countries) by a cultural form we defined **paranoid belongingness**. People identifying with this worldview look at the external world as if it were full of threats which might disrupt their living spaces. This worldview has been defined “paranoid” in order to highlight how it personifies the external world as an active threat, an enemy with a destructive will from which one has to defend oneself.

The **enemization of the other** fed by paranoid belongingness works as a powerful device of identity construction, providing people with the possibility of recognizing themselves as unified by the shared threat, regardless any cultural, social or economic difference.

6.1.2 Cultural milieu and systemic dynamics

It is proposed to view the lack of semiotic capital and the incidence of paranoid belongingness as the result of the impact of two major characteristics of the dynamics of globalization in which individual and social life is embedded: hyper-connectivity and opacity.

Hyper-connectivity here means the dynamics induced by globalization leading to the increasing reduction of material and immaterial distances physically and subjectively separating individuals, systems of activities and collectives.

Opacification is here meant to denote that the global systemic dynamics are increasingly massively dependent on abstract and distributed mediators/processes. Due to their abstractness and distributedness, these processes operate according to logics and modes that are less and less representable (starting from the very possibility of identifying space-time location and physical and subjective drivers).

For many people, the relation between hyper-connectivity and opacity corresponds to a disorienting condition: being subjected to disruptive, critical changes (e.g. climate change, demographic transformations, unemployment, dismantling of welfare services, rupture of social linkages, need to change place of residence), which, the more they exert their conditioning power upon people’s lives, the less they can be represented. Thus, what people experience are critical

changes that are at the same time hard to represent and that are a sign of the weakening/disruption of the boundaries of their local, situated forms of life (the community, the situated domain of activity, the local group, the place where they live). Thus, people find themselves confronted with a radical **deficit of sense** - they experience critical changes having high existential impact but the processes that generate and drive those change remain hidden-people experience *what* happens, but not *how*, *why*, and *what for*.

Paranoid belongingness can be seen as the semiotic consequence of the disruptive impact of the two faces of globalization (i.e. hyper-connectivity and opacity) on people's forms of life. People perceive these critical impacts in terms of diffuse and overwhelmingly uncertainty, loss of cognitive and pragmatic control over their life. In turn, this global perception triggers a large spectrum of emotional reactions according to the psycho-social characteristics of the sensemaker (anger, impotency, distrust, fatalism, denial), but all associated with the basic affective interpretation - generally working implicitly, as an embodied habit at the margin of their awareness - of being subjected to the destructive attack of a foe coming from the outside.

In so doing, the emotional category of the *threatening/hurting enemy* becomes far more the way of connoting the alleged source of this or that critical state, but, more radically, the *fundamental way of interpreting and engaging with the world*, applied globally and homogeneously on potentially any form of otherness that can be somehow associated with any perturbation and uncertainty of one's sphere.

Accordingly, paranoid belongingness can be seen as an extreme and at the same time distorted form of communitarian linkage, which turns it from a system of bonds *for* into a systems of bonds *against* life.

6.1.3 Crisis and identity

The Re.Cri.Re. analysis provides an empirical framework for interpreting the current socio-political scenario in a cultural key – i.e. the centrality of the identity issue, populism, growth of ultra-right parties, Euroscepticism, widespread intolerance, xenophobia, and so forth. More particularly, the identification of the incidence of paranoid belongingness helps to understand some important facets of the many phenomena of closure towards otherness that are not directly observable at the descriptive level.

First, as already observed, paranoid belongingness is an emotional construction that grounds the identity on the enemization of the other. Accordingly, one has to recognize that intolerance/aversion for the other is not only the consequence of the latter's threatening power, but the basic semiotic mechanism of identity: it is the way a large segment of the population satisfies the need for identity and making sense to their experience. Needless to say, this is not intended to deny that the other can be consistent and even anticipate its representation as enemy (Daesh terrorism is a clear instance of a strategy aimed at accelerating and radicalizing the enemization of Muslim communities, in order to promote their counter-radicalization); however, such "collaboration" with its own enemization accelerates and radicalizes the process, but it is not an integral part of it. If one should need a counter-proof of how the enemization of the other is independent from the actual aggressive force of the latter, just consider how it works for social categories which provide no reason to be considered a source of peril (e.g. homosexuals, Jews).

Second, it has to be noted that the enemization of the other, due to its emotional nature, works in a generalizing and homogenizing way (see the affective sensemaking tenet): it is a way to make sense of the world as a whole, rather than of specific objects of experience. Once the world is affectively construed as *we-threatened-by-them*, any major aspect of experience is linked to the friend-foe schema (indicative of this process is the fact that, as observed by many analysts, the reference to an enemy is constitutive of populism). The generalized and homogenizing valence of paranoid belongingness clarifies why this form of sensemaking need not refer to facts – i.e. interests to protect, material conditions to enhance, social practices to promote. The *we* the paranoid belongingness refers to does not concern any material basis, but derives from the attribution of the value of foe to otherness. As a result, it can be applied to an infinite set of forms of life and contexts (the territory, those-like-us, the soccer team, the nation, the West, and so forth) that can vary over time and across discourses and practices with high flexibility (an instance of this is the evolution of the Italian “Lega Nord” from local, identity-based party to national populist movement).

It follows that it is necessary to consider the single critical forms of the current socio-political scenarios (i.e. xenophobia, populism, politicization of the EU institutions, radicalization and so forth) as one of the many sides of the same dice. Needless to say, this does not mean eliminating the different socio-political implications of any specific critical phenomenon and event, or the particular process and conditions associated with each of them. Rather, it means recognizing the need to consider phenomena of intolerance as the contingent manifestations of the very same *fundamental systemic dynamics of identity construction* – that need to be dealt with as such.

Thus, it can be observed that paranoid belongingness is the outcome of a process of **irradiation of the identity bond**. Irradiation here refers to the tendency to define the *we* in terms of dematerialized, mythical symbolic objects - weakened in their anchorage to/confinement within places, practices, interests, social positions - therefore capable of extending themselves in an unlimited and asymptotical way, despite social, cultural and economic differences. Populism is the paradigmatic form of this homogenizing process of irradiation. Grounded on such a definition, the *we* evoked by populism is a mythic entity endowed with an organic and unitary will, with indefinite and indefinable borders. In the rhetoric of populism, the people are not an aggregate of individuals grouped on the basis of an inclusion criterion (for example, those who possess the nationality of a certain state); on the contrary, who and what constitutes a people is tautologically defined: the entirety of those who participate in the common ground shared by the population, *because of their being against whose who are outside*.

Accordingly, paranoid belongingness has to be considered the way in which the community bond changes shape to defend itself from the systemic dynamics: membership is freed from its roots within the vital territorial bond, and takes as its reference point a mythical generalized entity (the people, the nation, the values of Western society), which has as its foundation and its vital source in the enemization of otherness.

This shift **makes belongingness, no longer the solution, but the fundamental problem of contemporary European societies**. This conclusion is irrespective of ethical or axiological reasons: the paranoid drift undermines society and institutions because it conveys a hyper-simplified

interpretation of the world, as such incapable of generating projectuality to cope with the challenges raised by the current systemic dynamics.

6.1.4 The strategic need for policy upon culture. The promotion of semiotic capital

The lack of semiotic capital prevents the positive development of the socio-political scenario. There are two major reasons for this.

First, the lack of semiotic capital implies that actors are unable to identify deeply with the social and cooperative dimension of their life. As a result, institutions are weakened in their capacity of grounding and regulating civil and political life – of incorporating particular interests and identity. Above all, the poverty of semiotic capital, as observed above, means that the cultural milieu does not make available enough “semiotic antibodies” to counteract the tendency to adopt defensive, identity based reactions to the overwhelming uncertainty induced by systemic dynamics.

Taken in itself, paranoid belongingness is not a totally new cultural phenomenon – yet the diffusion it has reached within European societies, together with the poverty of alternative forms of identity construction, makes it quite a critical issue. Counteracting it needs to be recognized as a core strategic priority both at supranational, national and regional level. This is because its manifestations in terms of enemization of the other (e.g. xenophobia, hate crimes, radicalization, intolerance, destruction of the inter-ethnic dialogue) undermine the social cohesion as well as profoundly transforming the institutional and axiological foundations of the European space. Above all, the systemic force of the risks associated with the current diffusion of paranoid belongingness lies in the fact that it implies a radical devaluation of supranational institutions together with a progressive informal (in certain cases also formal – cf. the constitutional reform in Hungary) re-shaping of national institutions in authoritarian, and illiberal terms. Due to its emotional grounds, paranoid belongingness is equally able to fulfil the demand for sense induced by the systemic crisis as it is unable to provide functional analysis and solutions to the big problems making up the crisis.

This leads us to recognize the strategic need for *policies addressing the European societies’ cultural milieu with the purpose of promoting the development of semiotic capital.*

Indeed, it is not possible just to act on the external triggers of the critical cultural dynamics. This is so because, once the cultural dynamics has been activated, it keeps its autonomy; therefore, it cannot be counteracted simply by switching off its trigger. Even if and when the trigger has been weakened, the cultural dynamics will still be able to adopt new ways of self-feeding, by turning to further forms of critical ruptures and/or identifying new socio-political drivers. Therefore, any policy aimed at promoting cultural change has to complement both indirect and direct interventions - namely, both the interventions focused on the systemic conditions underpinning the cultural dynamics and intervention directly focused on the way the cultural dynamics develops.

6.2 *The aim of the policy upon culture. The internalization of the system*

As discussed above (cf. § 5.1.1), semiotic capital is the meaning that is active within the cultural milieu that substantiates the vital experience of the super-ordered systemic dimension of one’s

life. Thus, people that have access to this meaning feel their life is embedded within a broader super-ordered meaningful, subjectively salient, over-arching framework, transcending situated experience and providing the confines of its subjective meaning.

The meaning substantiating the experience of the super-ordered system has to be seen as a *generalized, embodied, affect-laden* significance, embedded within routine social practice. It is generalized in the sense that, due to its over-arching valence, it encompasses the whole domain of experience, rather than specific segments of it. It is embodied, in the sense that it is not a discrete representation, but a form of procedural knowledge, namely a habit shaping routine social practices - behaviours, ways of feeling and thinking of collective matters. This is because the super-ordered systemic dimension is by definition beyond the domain of experience and therefore cannot consist of the representation of something. It is affect-laden, in the sense that it consists of a vital experience, subjectively dense (i.e. having value of life for the sensemaker), of a live object endowed with a relational intentionality toward the sensemaker, as happens with other persons. Indeed, it is only on this condition that the feeling of the systemic dimension can acquire identity valence and operate as the sensemaker's frame of meaning.

Due to these characteristics, the meaning substantiating the feeling of the systemic dimension can be internalized by the sensemaker, namely it can work as a fundamental taken-for-granted background assumption shaping the subjective world. This means that the systemic dimension is not something that is experienced, but the frame in which the experience is interpreted – i.e. thanks to the semiotic capital, people do not think of the systemic dimension, but *through* and *in terms of* the systemic dimension.

The internalization of the systemic dimension is the fundamental background assumption that enables the sensemaker to recognize and provide subjective valence to important aspects of collective life that are at the core of scientific and political discourse on society and its development. First, it is the presupposition for recognizing and feeling the general collective interest as something that matters – namely to assume the common good as the super-ordered outline of sense framing the way of interpreting and giving value to contingent events, projects, decisions and acts. Second, the feeling of being embedded within a system leads us to recognize the need for “rules of the game” (e.g. formal and informal norms, social and institutional scripts, laws, codes of conduct) as a *sine qua non* condition for collective action, in the many fields where it unfolds (business, political participation, private exchange, the market and so forth).² Indeed, the internalization of the systemic dimension is the basis for recognizing the interdependency among the system's actors as something that matters and therefore the need for structures of cooperation/coordination, and for the resources (institutions, norms, trust) required for grounding them.

². It is worth underlining that the valorisation of and the trust in rules of collective action do not mean that the content of rules cannot be criticized. Indeed, the internalization of the systemic dimension concerns the recognition of the structural value of the rule, namely its indispensable function of regulation of collective action; therefore, the internalization of the systemic dimension enables the sensemaker to distinguish between the need for regulation and the contingent way of carrying it out. This makes it possible to avoid the emotional generalization of the latter's criticism/rejection of the former – as if a bad norm required the abolition of the normative function, rather than changing it.

In sum, many resources that the political and social sciences have recognized at the heart of social development (civic-mindedness, trust) can be viewed as grounded on and/or instantiation of the psycho-social cultural process of internalization of the systemic dimension.

Last but not the least, the considerations above should have clarified why it is assumed here that the internalization of the systemic dimension is the way to counteract the main critical aspect emerging from the Re.Cri.Re. analysis of the cultural milieu - the enemization of the other. The recognition of the systemic dimension is the “semiotic antibody” of paranoid belongingness: it does not deny the increasing impact of otherness on local life; rather, it represents the semiotic resources– i.e. the valorisation of the rules - for elaborating the potential valence of enemy-ness that is inherent to otherness. This elaboration consists of feeling, imagining and then enacting the mutual participation in the system and therefore the chance of otherness to work also as the condition and not only as the limit, of one’s identity project. In this hard balancing-act lies the chance of humanizing otherness and empowering the institutions – which represents the field where the future of Europe is being played out.

6.3 *How to promote semiotic capital*

Five methodological tenets integrate the criteria outlined above (cf. § 5.1). They are intended as the framework enabling the design of policies upon culture aimed at promoting semiotic capital (cf. 6.4).

- Performativity
- Identity
- Semiotization
- Weak boundaries
- Systemic effect

6.3.1 Performativeness

The tenet of performativeness highlights how the cultural generalized meanings are reproduced over time and within the social group through the very fact of being enacted – namely, used as assumptions grounding beliefs, actions, and choices. In other words, the dynamics of generalized cultural meanings is not a matter of explicit negotiation; rather, the cultural generalized meanings are reproduced – and they may develop – because of (and in the terms of) their being embedded within sensemaking, as the grounds of the social practices comprising sensemaking. In short, while on the one hand the generalized meaning enables social practices, on the other hand, social practices convey the meanings they are grounded on. Accordingly, if one wants to change the cultural milieu, one does not have to declare contents (beliefs, values, principles), but must design the social practices encapsulating them: symbolic resources are not produced by enunciations, but by *generalizations of action structures*. First comes action, then meaning follows: a generalized meaning is consolidated within the cultural milieu not because it is enunciated (for example in terms of petition of principle) but because it is enacted - namely a certain social practice, in which it is implied as its inherent criterion of regulation and justification, takes root and spreads through the social body. It follows that to promote a certain generalized meaning within the cultural

milieu, it is necessary to create social action settings that, in their structure, contain the meaning that is to be promoted.

6.3.2 Identity

The recognition of how the enemization of the other responds to a basic need for identity construction has two major methodological consequences. On the one hand, it cannot be conceived (and counteracted) as if it were a form of mere cognitive bias - namely through policies aimed at correcting the misperception associated with the representation of others. Indeed, the bias is the consequence, not the cause of the enemization – it is the way the cohesion of the self is carried out; and this means that it is a *matter of identity and at this level has to be addressed*³.

On the other hand, the enemization of the other and the many phenomena of (passive and active) intolerance in which it manifests itself, cannot be counteracted by means of a call for values or by top-down normative interventions that do not take into account the psychosocial function of such phenomena. Indeed, it has to be recognized that in the context of the current socio-cultural scenario characterized by poverty of semiotic capital and paranoid belongingness, policies that see the enemization of the other only as something to oppose, without considering the demand for sense underpinning such socio-political phenomena, would be perceived by large segments of the population as meaningless obligations, constraints imposed upon identity and desire from an external enemy, and as such they would be more or less violently opposed and rejected. In brief, they would end up paradoxically fuelling the spiral of irradiation of belongingness, favouring rather than contrasting the enemization of the world (i.e. what is outside belongingness). Thus, phenomena of enemization of the other have to be addressed by policies that go to the heart of the underpinning semiotic dynamics – i.e. what Re.Cri.Re. identified in the drift of belongingness in paranoid terms as the way of fulfilling a radical demand for sense.

Needless to say, this does not mean giving up normative and counteractive interventions especially when active forms of intolerance are at stake. Rather it means integrating “negative” policies with “positive” ones and bringing the latter into the foreground. “Positive” here refers to policies aimed at promoting the vital experience of the systemic dimension – and of the rules that derive from and instantiate it. This means thinking of policies as the way of building conditions that enable the target population to experience the systemic dimension as the driver/resource for their projects, rather than as just a normative limit - *allowing*, rather than preventing.

6.3.3 Semiotization

One of the main claims made above is that enemization of the other is a way of fulfilling the demand for sense triggered by the overwhelming uncertainty induced by globalized hyper-connectivity. As discussed above, the opacity of the processes and mechanisms mediating the impact of systemic dynamics make people face critical changes and disruptions that cannot be interpreted; they thus trigger and fuel the totalizing emotional interpretation of being subjected

³. Kahan (2015) provides convincing empirical evidence on the importance of identity motivation in affecting how people organize their scientific knowledge, think and position themselves with respect to relevant political and ethical issues (e.g. evolutionary theory; climate change).

to the attack of a global enemy. On the other hand, psychology - and psychoanalysis even more - has shown that people can develop more differentiated interpretations of experience when they can take other standpoints and theories into account. Indeed, in so doing the sensemaker is enabled to put constraints on the original totalizing emotional interpretation. This has a subjective cost – indeed, it involves giving up to the good-for-all-uses semiotic key of access to the world; yet, it can comprise such a cost because of the advantages it obtains in terms of cognitive and pragmatic agency on the phenomenon being interpreted.

This is what the tenet of semiotization consists of: in order to develop the paranoid interpretation of experience towards more differentiated forms, people have to be enabled to represent and make sense of the processes and mechanisms mediating the relation between local spheres of life and systemic dynamics.

Needless to say, the development of the ability to make sense of the systemic dynamics meets some major obstacles – on the one hand, the opacity of the latter; on the other hand the scarcity of semiotic resources (explicative models, narratives, metaphors, contexts and practices)⁴ that could scaffold the effort of making sense and provide a positive balance between the advantages in terms of empowerment and the subjective cost associated with giving up the all-encompassing, identity-laden interpretative key. Accordingly, at the very centre of policies upon culture there must be the creation of conditions that enable people to semiotize the systemic dynamics. This means, on the one hand, working on reducing the opacity and, on the other hand, promoting the social conditions and semiotic resources that serve as scaffolding to people's ability to understand the world in which they are embedded.

6.3.4 Weak boundaries

In past decades, political and social sciences, as well as political action, identified the paradigm of the community as the symbolic and socio-political form capable of reconciling the conflict between the self-referentiality of the individual vital sphere of life and systemic normativity. As observed above (cf. § 6.1.3), the incidence of paranoid belongingness suggests that under the pressure of the growing dependence of local environments on systemic dynamics, the community bond has been showing its limits - the effects of globalization are having a destructive impact on the community bond, which requires systemic responses that communities alone cannot provide.

However, the recognition of the limits of the community must not lead to the baby being thrown out with the bath water. In the final analysis, the internalization of the systemic dimension is a way of rescuing the basic function of the community, namely that of making social relations meaningful and in this way providing vital content to collective life. On the other hand, the call for a re-vitalization of the system claims that nowadays the only way to make the community an

⁴. Just to provide one instance of that poverty, one can consider the way the refugee crisis is represented by the media – regardless of the attitude and the political orientation of the source, aspects concerning the events (humanitarian emergency, number of arrivals, political and institutional reactions, biographical aspects) are in the foreground, whereas analysis of the mechanisms, reports on the dynamics triggering the migration remain in the background. In this way, public opinion is exposed to the representation of an overwhelming wave, remaining blind to the underpinning dynamics, as if the phenomenon were a self-contained process having meaning in itself.

instrument for humanization is to weaken and enlarge its boundaries progressively and asymptotically, in order to encompass what is outside it. The world has become too intertwined for narrow boundaries.

This means promoting multiple belongingness (see below, point d) and introducing integrative elements of universalism within the process of development of the community bond, in order to weaken the community boundaries and promote the capacity of belongingness to valorise what is outside it.⁵ A way to implement this methodological tenet is to work on the community-to-community exchange in the perspective of promoting *communities of communities*.

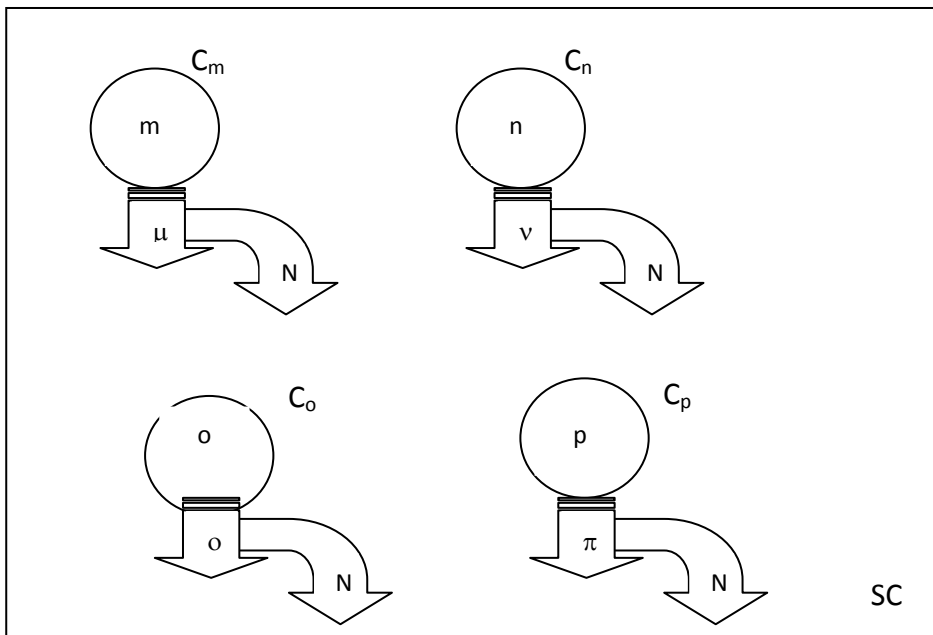
6.3.5 Systemic effect

This tenet is strictly related to the previous ones. It states that each specific content has to be considered in terms of the fact that it interacts with other contents because of its latent generalized worldview. Accordingly, semantic contents always have a potentially contagious effect – they are not to be considered in themselves only, but for their capacity to prime/trigger/reproduce the worldview they convey across the cultural milieu.

This can be expressed as follows. Consider the social practices A, B, C, D, each of them behind a specific content – say content $\alpha, \beta, \chi, \delta$. Despite the difference between them, these contents convey the same generalized meaning, the same worldview – say M⁶.

⁵. This means foregrounding the bridging capital over the bonding one (Coleman 1990; Putnam, 1993). An example of how the weakening of the community boundary does not necessarily mean a reduction of the capacity of belongingness to ground identity and sense is provided by the recent protest action that occurred in South Salento against the passage in that territory of the Trans-Adriatic pipeline (TAP). Protests were motivated mainly by local and identity concerns –e.g. the impact of the pipeline on the landscape, the conflict with the tourist vocation of the territory - and found their symbolic form in the strong opposition to the eradication of the centuries-old olive trees, that represent an identity marker of that territory. Now, these concerns would still have been recognised if they were integrated into a broader, beyond-community argument concerning the problems of democracy characterizing the supplier country for whom the pipeline is necessary.

⁶. For instance, say A is the voice against a new Mosque in town, conveying the meaning (α): [Islamic religious practice has to be discouraged because it can be a source of dangerous agreement]; and B is the request to get rid of any constraints on milk production, implicitly conveying the meaning (β) [we have to decide how much milk to produce, and nobody seated at Brussel must have any say in what concerns us]. Now, both α and β convey the same M – the absolutization of belongingness and the view of what comes from outside as a threat/aggression (i.e. paranoid belongingness).



Legend. SC= Cultural milieu; m, n, o, p=situated practices/interventions; C_m, C_n, C_o, C_p= domain/contexts of practices/interventions; $\alpha, \beta, \chi, \delta$ = specific contents enacted by the practices/interventions in reason of the contexts; N= generalized meaning driven by the specific contents

Figure 2. The logic of policy upon culture (from Fini et al, 2012)

This tenet leads us to envisage how the integration of policies can be pursued by designing interventions that, through their different local content, push the same M - where the latter is the semiotic capital or a generalized meaning working as a semiotic antibody to the enemization of otherness. The figure 7 shows the logical structure of such a model of semiotic integration.

6.4 What to do. Instances of systemic interventions upon culture

A few examples of interventions are presented below. Taken as a whole, interventions such as the ones outlined are a way of achieving two main purposes: on the one hand, to define social practices that promote the positive experience of institutions and more in general of the systemic rules; on the other hand, to introduce constrains on the opacification of the system, in order to reduce the deficit of sense it feeds.

The 13 policies upon culture proposed below are not the only ways of addressing the lack of semiotic capital - other interventions can be designed to complement, or even as an alternative to, the policies proposed here. These were selected in accordance with the criterion of valorising socio-political dynamics that are already active in the current socio-political scenario. This was done on the grounds of the general view that policy upon culture cannot invent new forms of interventions *ex nihilo*, but that it has to be thought of as an effort to promote the foregrounding of potentially convergent lines of socio-political development, in order to generate virtuous systemic effects.

From a complementary standpoint, it has to be recognized that the interventions proposed below are based mainly on theoretical arguments (albeit grounded on the findings of Re.Cri.Re.'s

empirical analysis of European societies' cultural milieu and integrated with reference to the empirical and theoretical sectorial literature). This means that these policies cannot be considered fully validated – rather, they need to be subjected to further stages of empirical analysis aimed at testing their appropriateness, feasibility, efficiency and efficaciousness. On the other hand, the 13 interventions are proposed with an illustrative purpose - for the sake of showing how it might be possible to translate methodological criteria aimed at promoting semiotic capital into practice. Our expectation is that in doing so, a fruitful discussion with policy makers and institutional actors could be triggered, in the perspective of building a global cultural-informed strategy for coping with the crisis and to prepare a better future for Europe.

In the final analysis, the 13 proposals are meant to show that the policy upon culture is not a sectorial policy; rather it resembles environmental policy (actually it can be considered a specific form of this kind of policy, addressing the *cultural* environment). It consists of a second-order framework guiding and providing a strategic, systemic aim to several sectorial policies. Thus, just as environmental policy frames interventions concerning consumption, production, recycling, energy saving, education, and so forth, policy upon the cultural environment frames interventions concerning, among others, institutions, welfare, economics (the three domain considered below).

6.4.1 A new institutional deal

Though it is a controversial matter, various authors believe that the economic crisis provided the chance for an enforcement of EU institutional integrations, with the displacement of strategic dimensions of policy – first of all in economic and financial areas - at supranational level.

On the other hand, as the Re.Cri.Re. analysis showed, people perceive the institutions as part of the problem or as being unable to provide protection from the turmoil to which they are subjected. Accordingly, a new institutional deal is greatly needed, in order to stop and invert this cultural drift. The following lines of intervention are framed by the idea that in the current context of socio-political crisis, characterized by critical cultural conditions, institutional empowerment is not only a matter of technical, political and administrative enforcement, but also, and above all, of the capacity of the institutions to be attuned to people's way of feeling and thinking.

1. Supranational, national and regional institutions have to regain and enforce their capacity of strategic governance of systemic dynamics. Insofar as institutions adopt a short-term horizon, confined to managing and reacting to contingencies – or at least insofar as people see them - populism and radicalization cannot but be appealing. Where there is no room for imaging the future, the only ways of representing it become fear and fatalism.⁷ The Re.Cri.Re. analysis suggests

⁷. The appeal of populism lies in the fact that – as Elchardus, and Spruyt (2014) state - it is a *politics of hope*. “(...) paradoxically, populism appears as a politics of hope –some would undoubtedly say a desperate politics of hope –a politics that expresses the hope that where established parties and elites have failed, ordinary folk, common sense and the politicians who give them voice can find solutions, halt the decline, return to the heartland, to a society that in retrospect – a no doubt partly nostalgic and romanticized retrospect –seems good and just.” (p. 16).

In time of crisis people do not look for solutions necessarily – they seek to escape from their current state. According to this perspective, what the Leave choice may have represented for many UK people was the chance of enacting a possible future.

that the demand for a sense underpinning phenomenologies of intolerance and distrust are at the same time a demand for institutions, namely a demand for protection and empowerment that require demand-centred policies if they are to be fulfilled.

2. Efforts have to be made in order to promote the perception of supranational and national institutions as supporting interlocutors of local institutions and communities, committed to the promotion of local empowerment and development. Needless to say, this does not mean eliminating regulative and constraining functions, but recognizing the necessity for dynamic forms of balance between functional and normative criteria and the strategic aim of valorising the local demands and dynamics of development.

Accordingly, innovative forms of inter and intra-level institutional cooperation and models of deliberative and participative democracy have to be developed and implemented at different scales. The contrast between the “Europe of the institutions and bureaucrats” and the “Europe of the people” is at the core of the populist narrative – the new institutional deal lies in tearing down this symbolic opposition.

3. Efforts have to be made to reinforce and re-build the role of intermediate bodies (not only as they have traditionally been seen, i.e. political parties, trade unions, non-governmental organizations). The progressive weakening of these bodies has to be considered a main driver and at the same time an important marker of the current socio-political crisis. Indeed, due to their mediational role between institutions and society, intermediate bodies are the symbolic and pragmatic places where the vital worlds, the subjectivity of individuals and groups is framed by super-ordered rules, yet close enough to the exchange to allow their internalization. Accordingly, the intermediate bodies are the *gym of otherness*, the contexts where people can develop competence to interact with strangeness – in sum, they are the socio-cultural producers of semiotic capital.

4. A new, demand-centred, administrative culture has to be developed. This requires investing in training and organizational innovation to promote a new identity and a new vision of what it means to work as *civil servants*, at the service of the institutions and citizens. This is a strategic aim because it is the condition to enforce the discretion and autonomy of institutional decision making, in so doing enabling it to interact with the demand dynamically.

6.4.2 Meaningful economy

The Re.Cri.Re. aim and focus are not the economic factors of crisis per se, but their interplay with cultural dynamics. Accordingly, the lines of intervention outlined below are not meant to address economic problems but to reflect two main aims: a) to develop protective institutions from the overwhelming, disruptive impact of global dynamics; b) to promote innovative social practices fostering a constructive vision of otherness.

5. Devices and normative frameworks should be designed to reduce the opacity of the economic global dynamics and increase the capacity of collective representation and accountability of

diseconomies associated with financial and productive activities. This kind of devices and normative frameworks would have a twofold impact on the cultural milieu – on the one hand, it would promote the perception and valorisation of the institutional and political system as the protective barrier from the “aggression” of the globalized outside; on the other hand, it would have the semiotic function of favouring the recognition and therefore the socio-cognitive appropriation of at least some of the ways the financial and economic dynamics impact on the domains of life⁸.

6. Relational economy⁹ represents a potentially important source of social and cultural development. Indeed, this kind of practice may fuel new ways of understanding the relation between needs, social exchange and systemic frames. On the other hand, it is hard to think that the relational economy can go beyond a testimonial role only by itself – in order to work as a hub of innovative semiotic capital, its structural and institutional consolidation and social incidence have to be supported and promoted by means of normative, functional and economic incentives.

7. Investments in relational goods, quality of life and social infrastructures should be promoted at both supranational and national level. This means making efforts to promote the vision of the political and institutional system as being committed to making individual and social needs a fundamental regulative tenet of the economy.¹⁰

8. Resources and goods that are at the grounds of the individual and collective life (e.g. water, biodiversity, air, climate) have to become the core of an institutional action of de-commodification, aimed at putting constraints upon the market’s tendency to expand its domain asymptotically. From a complementary standpoint, this entails designing innovative models of governance that promote responsible ways of usage and consumption.

⁸. The Tobin Tax is an emblematic example of this kind of device. It was proposed for the first time by James Tobin in 1972, conceived as a minimum tax rate on financial transactions (quantified by Tobin himself at 1 per cent). It pursues two main aims. First, it aims at reducing financial speculation. Second, it aims at increasing tax revenues. On the theoretical ground, the Tobin Tax proposal rests on the view that financialization generates a reduction of the rates of growth, increasing unemployment, increasing income and wealth inequalities. Importantly, financialization is also associated to the increasing political power of the rentiers (Epstein, 2005) and, therefore, to their increasing possibility of affecting economic policies to their benefit. Proponents of the Tobin Tax are aware that it is nothing more than “a grain of sand” with respect to the aim of stabilizing financial markets (e.g. Bellofiore and Brancaccio, 2002). In this respect, it is conceived as a measure of *symbolic impact*, which, in the current crisis of de-legitimation of the Institutions governing the Eurozone, could generate positive political and cultural effects.

⁹. Relational economy here refers to forms of economic activities framed by social and ethical criteria rather than profit maximisation.

¹⁰. The Erasmus programme is maybe the most successful and emblematic form of systemic, long-term investment in relational goods. An entire generation has experienced the European institutions as the driver of an experience of inter-cultural encounter that has consolidated reciprocal knowledge, trust, networking - namely relational goods that have grounded the European identity as well as working as the social infrastructure of economic and institutional innovation.

6.4.3 Vital welfare

Welfare is the domain where people experience the institutional-political system in the context of the satisfaction of basic social and political needs and demands. For this reason, welfare policies and organizational models play a central role in shaping how people perceive, feel, trust and make commitments towards the institutional and political system. Accordingly, the indications proposed below are designed to promote people's experience of the welfare services as meaningful, vital exchanges with a systemic interlocutor committed to the demand of the user.

9. The promotion of semiotic capital requires a strategic investment in education, school systems, and life-long learning. Needless to say, semiotic resources do not correspond to specific subjects, but consist of – and/or are favoured by – the diffusion of transversal competences. Competence with strangeness, tolerance, reciprocity are some of these transversal competences whose promotion requires ad hoc implicit and explicit curricula.¹¹

10. Efforts should be made in order to integrate the welfare services so as to enable them to address consistently the unity of the user's demand. Indeed, the institutional, organizational, functional and logistic segmentation of services do not correspond to the inner organization of the demand – on the contrary, it is the rule that the processes required to address a demand cross several welfare subsystems (e.g. school, health care, social security). The more such subsystems work in an integrated way, the more effective the intervention, and, above all, the more the users experience involvement with a systemic actor endowed with a single, meaningful intentionality to work as a resource for him/her¹².

11. Though welfare services usually concern individual user's needs, however they can – and should – foreground collective and systemic purposes. It is worth pointing out that the relation between these two levels of goals cannot be taken for granted – the pursuit of the former does not guarantee the achievement of the other per se; on the contrary, regarding the service supplied to the individual user as the way to pursue a systemic intervention entails in most cases designing services that do not fit fully with the individual demand.¹³ Accordingly, the

¹¹. For instance, subjects like literature, arts, and history can work as the enactment of identity closure or as a practice of exploration of otherness. From a complementary standpoint, the class and the school environment can – but also may not – provide students with the experience of a vital bond of belongingness opened to and empowered by systemic rules having universal breath.

¹². For instance, from the standpoint of the person suffering it, a state of disease is not only a demand for health. It is a more general demand to be cared for, that encompasses aspects such as: transportation, management of daily life duties, work requirements and so on.

¹³. This aspect is paradigmatically evident in the domain of health care services – in that domain it is clear that interventions are carried out generally on the basis of individual demand and for the sake of addressing the individual health need. On the other hand, the purpose of these interventions is systemic – to guarantee the population a certain level of health. Individual interventions – both in their organizational and technical aspects – are designed and constrained by this super-ordered systemic purpose. This means that a health treatment supplied by the welfare system is guided not only by the criterion of optimizing the individual user; rather, resources are implemented as a function of the super-ordered criterion of making the single intervention functional to the need to replicate it at the level of population.

foregrounding of the systemic purpose requires a balance with the commitment to the individual user's services. Thanks to this balance, the individual user can experience the integration between the satisfaction of one person's demand and the pursuit of super-ordered systemic aims.

12. It is certainly worth designing organization and supply processes of welfare services in accordance to the criterion of the demand/production intertwinement (i.e. *Prosumership*, cf. § 5.9). This means weakening the boundaries that separate providers and users in order to involve the user in the supply process. In so doing, the user becomes part of the welfare system's inner environment, participating in the latter's life. As already underlined, the adoption of such a criterion may provide several functional and institutional advantages for the welfare system – e.g. a more efficient use of resources, higher user commitment, more efficacious reciprocal attunement between provider and user, participative democratic management of the service.¹⁴ Yet the criterion is suggested here for one more reason: the participation of the user in the inner environment of the welfare system provides the latter with the chance of making a meaningful, vital experience of engagement with the service as a systemic actor. Indeed, the inclusion of the provider-user interaction within the boundaries of the welfare organization leads both participants, on the one hand, to make changes in their domains and, on the other hand, to recognize the structure of reciprocity underpinning such changes – namely the fact that they are the way the relationship works. As a result, the user is favoured in its ability to feel the welfare organization as a living entity involved in a constructive engagement with her/him. Moreover, it has to be remembered that the user normally interacts with the welfare organization due to major needs, and therefore regarding subjectively significant areas of his/her identity. Therefore, the vital experience of the welfare organization in terms of mutual engagement further favours the internalization of the system.

13. From the previous point, it follows that the organization of welfare services needs to be designed consistently with the aim of making the user's participation a meaningful experience of reciprocity. This means that the supply and delivery processes through which the service is supplied have to be built in accordance to a tenet of maximization of the engagement, namely what has been defined *intersubjective density* (cf. § 5.10). In other words, the service has to be conceived as a relational process, framed and constrained by rules, yet entrusted to the dynamics of reciprocal engagement between users and providers; where the latter aims to shape the local solution that optimizes the fit between the welfare system's resources and the specificity of the user's demand. This model is in a sense the opposite of the paradigm based on the application of invariant procedures grounded on pre-defined typologies of users and requests/needs. The core difference from the latter model is the recognition of the provider-user relation as the process through which the service is construed and valorised – rather than only delivered. Needless to say, the design of high intensity vital welfare services requires major development both at the level of structure and culture of the welfare organizations – the main change at stake may be summed up

¹⁴. For instance, this is the case of the Italian school system, which foresees seats in the school's administrative board for elected representatives of parents and students (the latter only in high school).

thus: to view the mutual engagement with the user as the resource to get involved with, rather than noise to defend oneself from.

7 Conclusion

The lines of intervention proposed above have been selected as instances of actions to reach goals that are methodological rather than normative – that is, they are aimed at promoting dynamics expected to drive the desired processes of development – namely the promotion of social capital and the reduction of the enemization of the other. Very briefly, such goals can be boiled down to one general perspective: *the promotion of social practices favouring the vital experience of the political and institutional system, as a live interlocutor involved in supporting the individual/local projects as well as in protecting them from the most disruptive impacts of globalization.*

Policy makers can decide how to translate such methodological lines of intervention into concrete objectives, policies, and actions in terms of the contextual conditions as well as their political and axiological orientations. It is hoped that they may find in the previous discussions a conceptual and methodological framework supporting their hard task of designing strategies for coping with the current challenging socio-political scenario.

In the final analysis, the previous discussion has highlighted in very different ways that the crisis requires a deep cultural innovation in policies and politics – a kind of anthropological drift is occurring before our eyes, in the way people think of themselves and the world. To counteract such a drift, institutions have to restore their function of designing and guiding societies towards possible worlds. Institutions have to re-introduce the future as the core parameter of policy making; only viewed in the long term can the current dramatic turmoil be addressed and creative synthesis among current conflictive interests, demands and dynamics be envisaged.

What is needed is a new institutional culture – the politics of desire. On the other hand, it is not a real innovation, but a way to return to the future – today the EU exists because it was dreamt of by decision makers endowed with the strategic capacity of making dreams realizable.

8 Glossary

Culture. In the Re.Cri.Re. framework, culture is intended as the on-going dynamics of sensemaking through which people interpret the world - and thus feel, think and act. This on-going dynamics is channelled by generalized meanings – named *symbolic universes* - embedded within the cultural milieu and working as affect-laden systems of assumptions

Cultural milieu. The cultural milieu is the social arena where people communicate, act, think and experience life and in so doing reproduce and elaborate symbolic universes. The cultural milieu consists of a plurality of symbolic universes; each of them emerging as a particular interpretation of the cultural milieu.

Homo semioticus tenet. This tenet enlarges the view of the human being in terms of *homo economicus*, which is the dominant model in the world of policy making. Whereas according to the homo economicus model human behaviour is guided by rational choice aimed at maximising utility, homo semioticus is guided by the need to interpret the experience, to make it meaningful. Homo semioticus is not irrational; yet, it is rational within the constraint of the fundamental need of keeping one's worldview stable and coherent.

Irradiation of the identity bond. The tendency to define the *we* in terms of dematerialized, mythical symbolic objects - weakened in their anchorage to/confinement within places, practices, interests, social positions - therefore capable of extending themselves in an unlimited and asymptotical way, despite social, cultural and economic differences. In other words, the bond is not anchored in concrete social practices and contexts (e.g. the community of people sharing a given territory) anymore; rather, it is referred to as a mythical entity (e.g. the Nation, the people).

Semiotic capital. Semiotic capital denotes the set of symbolic resources (e.g. meanings, cognitive schemas, values, social representations, attitudes, behavioural scripts, etc.) that enables individuals to interiorize the collective, supra-interpersonal dimension of life, namely to experience the systemic regulative framework as a vital dimension, a concrete fact impacting on the way of thinking and acting.

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