

Inclusion, Sustainability, and Equity at the Heart of a 5.0 Society

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Abstract. Our everyday reality is perceived as more complex, unpredictable, and filled with barriers created by not-so-evident factors that can stifle thought, reflection, and the desire and energy to act. All of this intertwines with the reduction of physical and psychological well-being for many people, encouraging the presence and escalation of situations of vulnerability which are rapidly increasing nowadays. In addition to the more traditional and known ones, such as vulnerabilities connected to the presence of disabilities or diseases, today other forms of vulnerabilities are strongly emerging, such as environmental vulnerabilities or vulnerabilities connected to climate change, ecologic vulnerabilities, financial vulnerabilities, ‘health-related’ vulnerabilities, digital vulnerabilities, and professional vulnerabilities. Considering this standpoint, in this chapter we will focus to inclusivity, sustainability, social and environmental justice, human rights. Furthermore, we introduce the construct of Society 5.0 that aims to improve the living conditions of everyone and to relatively resolve problems at the micro-, meso-, and macro-social levels.

Keywords. vulnerability, inclusion, sustainability, social justice, environment justice

1. Introduction

There are many threats and challenges to face in the present and the near future. At the same time, inequalities, especially economic and social, are multiplying and are filling every gap in the fabric of community life, making a full quality of life increasingly difficult. Our everyday reality is perceived as more complex, unpredictable, and filled with barriers created by not-so-evident factors that can stifle thought, reflection, and the desire and energy to act.

The pandemic has contributed to this and the war now affecting Europe can only further exacerbate the negative global conditions. Balbaa et al. [1] have highlighted the geopolitical and cultural tensions and the lowering of global growth expectations due to uncertainty about the impact of the conflict, especially on the global supply chain. Conflicts have led to energy, commodity, and trade supply shocks, and to rising energy, food, and commodity prices, thereby causing global inflation in many countries, increased economic and political instability, and social and civil unrest [2].

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All of this comes at time of growing poverty, high rates of emigration and immigration, persistent levels of social heterogeneity, exploitation of natural resources, and environmental degradation, amplifying the presence of negative conditions and the reduction of physical and psychological well-being for many people, and encouraging the presence and escalation of situations of vulnerability, which are rapidly increasing today [3].

2. Growing vulnerabilities

Let's start with the concept of vulnerability, which generally indicates the susceptibility (“vulnera” in Latin) to being damaged by natural phenomena or human activities [4], to experiencing conditions that may lead to difficulties, discomfort, and negative consequences from a social, economic, and psychological point of view [5]. Research over the last decade has highlighted that there is no such thing as vulnerability; there are vulnerabilities [6]. In addition to the more traditional and better known forms of vulnerability, such as those connected to the presence of disabilities, disease, conditions of economic poverty, and migration, other forms of vulnerabilities are now strongly emerging and, by intertwining with the traditional ones, are exacerbating their consequences. The emerging vulnerabilities are environmental or climate change vulnerabilities, ecological vulnerabilities, financial vulnerabilities, ‘health-related’ vulnerabilities, digital vulnerabilities, and professional vulnerabilities.

Environmental vulnerability expresses the degree to which a system or individual is unable to cope with the negative consequences of climate changes; it represents the degree of exposure to such changes together with that individual’s sensitivity and ability to adapt [7]. Nguyen [8] identifies the three main aspects of climate vulnerability: the degree of exposure to significant climate variations (floods, droughts, storms, soil erosion, etc.), the sensitivity to these variations and the associated damage, which is perceived more by certain groups (elderly people, farmers, etc.) and the adaptive skills linked to the presence of social, physical, and financial resources. Guillard-Gonçalves and Zêzere [9] highlight the need to use complex indicators to measure this type of vulnerability. These indicators can simultaneously take into account social aspects (e.g., the age of people, their employment status, etc.) and environmental characteristics (e.g., safety of buildings, accessibility, etc.).

Health vulnerability refers to exposure to the risk of developing disease or suffering physical harm. These aspects can be made more consistent by a number of different personal, collective, and contextual aspects [10]. A recent example we are all familiar with is the exposure to the COVID-19 pandemic. This phenomenon is associated with significant physical and psychological health risks [11]. In addition to this, today and in the near future, health vulnerability will be exacerbated by environmental pollution.

The Who has reported that in 2016, about 600,000 children died from acute lower respiratory tract infections due to air pollution [12]. Moreover, the risk of chronic diseases such as cardiovascular diseases increased for different age groups.

Financial vulnerability is defined as the exposure to different forms of financial shocks that may lead to an unexpected loss of income and/or a sudden and uncontrollable increase in expenditure [13]. Chipunza and Fanta [14] note that the financial structure of our society is a complex system, penetrable for the few and impenetrable for the many. Understanding it requires a set of specialised information that only certain groups of people have. Thus, financial vulnerability is linked to the less than optimal management

choices of one's own assets compared to those who are not exposed to the same difficulties, whether it be the management of savings (difficulty in putting money aside), investments (high-risk gambling) or the adoption of a more advantageous lifestyle (mismanagement of money to meet one's needs). Moreover, these situations can be even aggravated by scams and manipulations perpetrated by those who tend to exploit the lack of skills of certain people have in this area and their naivety [15].

Digital or cyber vulnerability is defined as the exposure to the risk of being attacked in the system processes or internal checks of a computerized processor. These digital vulnerabilities can lead to actual cybercrimes, allowing hackers to illegally access systems and cause serious damage to data privacy [16]. Therefore, cybersecurity vulnerabilities are extremely important to monitor for the overall security posture, as gaps in one network can lead to a large-scale system breach. With this in mind, Wijayanto and Prabowo [17] highlight how the COVID-19 period and the subsequent increase in the amount of time people spend on the internet, has exposed them more to cybercrime phenomena. Through the Cybersecurity Behavior Vulnerability Scale, the authors measured the level of cybersecurity in universities and, in particular, in data management. The collected results showed that the lack of knowledge connected to cybersecurity is linked to high rates of digital vulnerability and to the possibility of being exposed to a higher number of cybercrimes. Ong et al. [18] use this scenario to describe parents sharing behaviour (sharing pictures of their babies or children on the internet and social media). While acting in the hope of receiving feedback and support, these parents expose themselves and their children to a form of digital "predation".

Lastly, *professional vulnerability* is linked to the proposal of undignified jobs, which expose people to various forms of exploitation and prevent them from drawing personal and social value from their different work experiences that, in addition, occupy a large part of the day and life [19]. Gutiérrez-Barbarrusa [20] highlights the four main dimensions that characterise professional vulnerability: insecurity regarding the continuity of the employment relationship, which makes it difficult for workers to exert control over their future professional and social life; a 'poor' salary that does not allow them to adequately face costs and expenses; the weakening of workers' social protections with the consequent progressive weakening of the legislation in support of quality working conditions; increased discretionary power of employers, combined with insufficient coverage of public social protection systems. This is particularly true for unemployment benefits and pensions, thus increasing the levels of workers' insecurity in the face of market forces.

From the above, it is clear that there are numerous vulnerabilities, of which we must learn to speak in the plural. These tend to affect an increasingly growing portion of the population and are intertwined and are capable of creating systems that trap people in ever deeper forms of impoverishment.

3. Inclusive, sustainable, socially and environmentally just context

We must oppose this spread of vulnerabilities and the substantial devaluation of the idea of the human person: the progress and flourishing of communities are achieved through cooperation, coexistence, and the construction of inclusive, fair, and supportive contexts.

It is important to start from the idea of inclusion, which has nothing to do with the idea of placement².

Inclusion is not about being interested in the single individual with vulnerabilities but focusing on the context and the capabilities our living environments have to allow *everyone* to actively participate and have a satisfying level of life [24]. Inclusion explicitly considers, with equal emphasis, the right everyone has to receive the attention, flexibility, and adaptations they need. According to the writings and words of Shafik Asante, former leader of the New African, inclusion is, on the one hand, closely linked to ‘uniqueness’: “Inclusion is recognizing that we are ‘one’ even though we are not the ‘same’”. On the other hand, inclusion is connected to the recognition of the heterogeneity of all contexts and working to ensure that said contexts can allow every person, with their uniqueness, to actively participate in social and civil life [25].

We would like to focus our attention on a core idea of the concept of inclusion: vulnerabilities are considered context-dependent, and require, as argued in the universal design approach, the breaking down of contextual barriers [26]. If, on the one hand, there are individual aspects such as the presence of impairment, diseases, etc. that can characterise people’s lives, on the other hand, it is important to highlight the significance of events (traumatic or not, temporary or permanent), contextual, economic, legal, administrative, and ideological conditions and other circumstances linked to the macro-system, often activated by those with more power and opportunity to influence, which characterise, multiply, and accentuate the difficulties people have [5]. Carelessness, ignorance, and cynicism give rise to different conditions and create pain, insecurity, discomfort, and loss [27]. Vulnerability cannot be the explanation for struggling phenomena [28]. An individual has a vulnerability, or worse, is vulnerable (this means they are vulnerable in all circumstances and forever, there is no way out), because they have poor risk management skills, are less able to defend themselves and face negative events, and to protect their interests. The idea of inclusion does not consider all this as an individual responsibility and a defeat of an individual. It encourages us to consider the role of the contexts and the conditions that can create vulnerabilities, barriers, and obstacles; it invites us to highlight them and examine them carefully in analyses and intervention projects.

Sustainability is a complex construct that is articulated in environmental, economic, social, and educational sustainability [29].

Environmental sustainability considers, firstly, the integrity of the terrestrial ecosystem and the quality of the environment intended as an asset that improves the quality of life and, consequently, leads to development.

Economic sustainability involves creating income and working for people's sustenance with a long-term view for sustainable and intergenerational equality. This is achieved through the rational and efficient use of resources and reducing the use of non-renewable resources [30].

Social sustainability aims at an equitable social distribution of benefits and costs in a world where men and women can manage the environment. This should be done on a global scale to diversify and integrate both socio-cultural and economic human resources, to value heterogeneity and diversity, local identities, and biodiversity, thus fulfilling the values of universal design [31].

² placement refers to the right minority groups have (people with disabilities, with stories of migration, people with problems regarding mental health, etc.) to use common spaces and services, to experience less and less restrictive conditions to reduce the risk of institutionalization and marginalization [21][22][23].

Educational sustainability aims to build awareness and knowledge of sustainability issues as well as to develop students and schools that can think critically, innovate, and provide solutions towards more sustainable patterns of living, developing a transformative, participatory, cosmopolitan, and eco-centric agenda. This agenda should be based on taking a step back from neoliberal policies, overhauling existing institutions, integrating environmental values, and expanding participatory governance [32].

For these reasons, sustainability is at the centre of national and international efforts, so that policies and actions at different levels can be inspired by it. To support this idea, let us mention just two documents, the 2030 Agenda and the recent amendments to the Italian Constitution. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, signed in September 2015 by the governments of the 193 countries of the United Nations, has developed an action plan expanding the *intervener* context, that is to say, the fields and actions that concern organisations, systems, policies, and social practices that can be modified to pursue the goal of a sustainable world from an environmental, economic, and social point of view [33].

Looking at Italy's Constitution, since 8 February 2022, sustainability has been included, specifically in articles 9 and 41. The new article 9 of the Constitution states that the Italian Republic protects the environment, biodiversity, and ecosystems also in the interest of future generations. The new article 41 states that if private economic initiative is free, it cannot take place in contrast with social benefit or in a way that damages health, environment, safety, freedom, and human dignity. These deep considerations are in line with Groppi's work [34], because sustainability is about the aspiration that a certain present value – environment, the wealth of a country, cultural heritage, etc. – will continue to exist in the future. The use of an asset or a resource does not destroy it but allows it to be passed on to future generations. This is also in line with Cella's work [35], which emphasises the topic of 'social dilemmas', situations in which interdependent individuals face choices in which maximising short-term interest produces results that leave everyone worse off. In essence, sustainability is a complex issue that involves the ability to deal with the dilemma of balancing the very short term with the long term in order to create the conditions to reduce the afore mentioned vulnerabilities.

These contents are linked to the topics of *social justice* and *environmental justice*. Among the different definitions, we mention the following: the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, colour, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. They will be achieved when everyone enjoys the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards and equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment where to live, learn, and work [36]. Recent literature highlighted that the promulgation of environmental and social justice issues may be mutually reinforcing [6]. Environment-social justice promotes climate policies that also address social inequities, such as affordable housing, green jobs, renewable energy projects in traditionally disadvantaged communities, and access to public transportation [37].

It is increasingly clear that if we care about improving the living conditions of people and reducing the possibility of experiencing vulnerabilities, we must take action. We have to stop the so-called 'natural and social lotteries' [38], i.e., the inequalities linked to one's genetic and/or social (family) background that work to the disadvantage of many people. We also need to act with increasing urgency also to avoid the negative

consequences of what we can call ‘geographical and temporal lotteries’, i.e., the inequalities associated with the place and time of birth.

According to Japanese Professor Fukuyama [39], in order to make life possible in the future and to ensure quality lives, it is necessary to support the evolution of society not only in terms of economic and individual well-being but also of environmental and social well-being, encouraging the development of a good life with and for others, and supporting sustainability and justice.

4. Toward a 5.0 Society

We must recognise that we have the duty to promote the worldviews that take into account the abyss that lies before us. We are ‘threats to the creation’ and, at the same time, we are ‘guardians of the creation’ [40]. This worldview must involve a new idea of quality life for everybody, focused not only on personal well-being and the ‘I’ but also on the ‘we’, the earth [41], environmental and social characteristics, the quality of air, water, and soil, and the characteristics of inclusion and social justice [42]. Today, the idea of hedonistic well-being requires to add value to happiness created by sustainable responsibility and processes of careful and responsible consumption. At the same time, the eudemonic construction of meaning should be increasingly focused on the contributions to sustainability and inclusion. The European Commission itself underlines the importance of focusing our attention on social justice and sustainable development and the need for a profound transformation. It does so in the document “Industry 5.0 - Towards a sustainable, human-centric, and resilient European industry” [43] and in the idea of a 5.0 society in general [44].

Society 5.0 aims to improve everyone’s living conditions and to solve problems at the micro-, meso-, and macro-social levels. This will be possible thanks to technological support and a socio-economic system that is no longer centred on unstoppable profit, but that instead respects the value of human and natural capital. Therefore, to be effectively recognised as a Super Smart Society, as we hope, it must also demonstrate that the well-being of people and our planet is its primary interest. In support of this, it must also prove to have successfully addressed the fears and perplexities associated with the development and spread of automation in the world of services and products [39]. This is a society that, according to Bryndin [45], will have to be characterised by the “creation of equal opportunities for all and also providing the environment for realization of potential of each person” and, through the use of emerging technologies, will have to remove physical, administrative, and social barriers to allow people to achieve self-realisation. In this way, every individual, including elderly people and women, can live a safe, secure, comfortable and healthy life and each and every individual can realise their desired lifestyle.

From this perspective, from this moment on, we all have to commit ourselves to tackling the health, social, and environmental threats and problems identified [46][47]. This must be done while avoiding the use of visions, paradigms, and tools of the past, some of which are even considered accomplices or even causes of the malaise we wish to remedy [48].

5. Conclusion

Societies 5.0 are not born alone; they need the investment and work of everyone. They need strong and incisive legislative, economic, and cultural processes. Above all, they need strong cultural processes: a culture based on a critical awareness of various factors, primarily those that are fuelling inequalities and vulnerability, widespread poverty, and concentrated wealth. From this point of view, it is necessary to move on to carefully consider inclusivity, sustainability, social and environmental justice, human rights without ifs and buts, and the dilemmas they entail, to finally move to indignation and collective commitment [49][11]. There is a need for research and professional responsibility for all disciplines and knowledge to focus on the constructs described, together with a deep awareness of the inequalities, the various complex dynamics that define them, and the relationships between local and global. Moreover, it is necessary to create connections with other disciplines, activism, and intertwined collaboration between different scholars and professionals to tackle such complex problems [50]. In cases where we try to act in this way, it seems to be possible to “move” in this direction, with children [51] and adults alike. Focusing on the latter, the pilot and innovative experiences started with the National Federation of the Italian Press, with the Advanced Training Course “Telling the Truth. How to Inform While Promoting an Inclusive Society” for journalists [52]. This shows that it is possible to build challenging but incisive and transformative community-building experiences. These make it possible to instil in those who work a culture for new societies, for a regenerative process, an energetic one, within a path of collective social flourishing.

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