Marco Cremaschi
Carlotta Fioretti
Terri Mannarini
Sergio Salvatore

Culture and Policy-Making

Pluralism, Performativity, and Semiotic Capital

Springer

Culture in Policy Making: The Symbolic Universes of Social Action

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Sergio Salvatore, Department of Dynamic Psychology, La Sapienza Università di Roma, Rome, Italy

Terri Mannarini, Department of History, Society and Human Studies, Università del Salento, Lecce, Lecce, Italy

Jaan Valsiner, Psychologie, Aalborg Universitet, Aalborg, Denmark

Giuseppe A. Veltri, Department of Sociology, Università di Trento, Trento, Trento, Italy

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Marco Cremaschi · Carlotta Fioretti ·
Terri Mannarini · Sergio Salvatore

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Marco Cremaschi
Centre d'études Européennes et de
Politique Comparée
Sciences Po, Paris, France

Terri Mannarini
Department of History,
Society and Human Studies
University of Salento
Lecce, Italy

Carlotta Fioretti
European Commission
Joint Research Centre (JRC)
Seville, Spain

Sergio Salvatore
Department of Dynamic and Clinical
Psychology, and Health Studies
La Sapienza University of Roma
Rome, Italy

Foreword: Cultural Perspective on Human Subjectivity in Social Policies

Policymaking processes in politics, economics and public systems are embedded in culture and history; their complex formations and maintenance undergo continuous changes as novel problems emerge, lead to setting agendas, making decisions and putting them into practices. At all stages of these processes, tensions and conflicts between individuals, groups and institutions necessarily arise due to the disparity between participants' heterogeneous interests and expectations on the one hand, and institutional procedures on the other hand.

This volume builds on, and further elaborates, the *Semiotic Cultural Psychological Theory* that was developed in the extensive European project concerned with the identity of the EU members and their commitment to European institutions. The core concepts of the *Semiotic Cultural Psychological Theory* (Chap. 3) constitute integrated components in all chapters. Specifically, they show their relevance in problems arising from policymaking processes and the diversity of subjectivities in multiple cultural systems. The authors state that the crucial task of their project is to advance 'a model of subjectivity—to understand better what subjectivity is and how it works—to address the challenges that human diversity poses to any effort to comprehend and govern social dynamics' (this volume, p. 7). Within this context, I shall highlight some dilemmas that the authors address in their effort to fulfil this goal.

The Relation Between Diversities of Humans and Societies

Social sciences emerged only towards the end of the seventeenth century and in the early years of the eighteenth century during the rise of modern political, economic and social movements. Industrial revolutions, the formation of new nation-States and curiosity about other cultures led to the development of nationalism and to interest in the study of languages, beliefs, myths and the histories of communities. These advancements inspired changes in relations between the individual and society, bringing them into the foreground. Individuals and groups were no longer prepared to

accept the unquestioned rules of established institutions that had for centuries dominated the order in communities and in daily life. They demanded their human rights and the freedom to make their own decisions about their lives. One consequence of these changes was that homogeneous societies fragmented into smaller groups, with each proposing their own rights and goals. These new phenomena, accompanying the transition towards modernity, involved dilemmas arising from industrial revolutions, changing economic relations, moral uncertainties destabilising the existing States. With these changes, the modern self-concept came to the fore and led to conflicts between subjective experiences of the self and institutions, and among them policy-making processes. It became apparent that human subjectivity could no longer be ignored by societal institutions and policies.

This recognition has become one of the main features addressed in the present volume, and it 'has brought the notion of culture to the forefront of contemporary social science, as the key concept in the understanding of the relation between subjectivity and society' (this volume, p. 7). It also underscores that the understanding of the relation between human subjectivities in diverse societies requires a cultural-historical perspective.

Culture as a Chameleon

Key concepts pertaining to relations between subjectivity and culture are expressed and transmitted in social-scientific terminology. As the authors of this volume show, social sciences such as sociology, anthropology, economics, political science, psychology and linguistics, have brought into focus concepts such as 'identity, values, cultural motives, socio-cognitive patterns, worldviews, narratives, social representations, feelings and perceptions, systems of meanings and so forth' (this volume, p. 7).

The use of specific terms influences scientific thinking and simultaneously, meanings of terms change as humans conceive phenomena in a new light (Crombie 1995). Relations between language and scientific thinking were already established by Aristotle, and these relations continue to be discussed and disputed nowadays. The analysis of such links remains a subject of extensive interest and disputes (e.g. Copley and Martin 2014). Natural sciences—studying mechanical forces, causes and effects, non-temporal relations, taxonomies, and universal laws—developed their terminologies in a relatively univocal scientific language, enabling an easy transmission of knowledge and communication of ideas. This made it possible to establish common methods and theways of thinking appropriate for the study of natural phenomena in their different forms.

Such progress was scarcely possible in social sciences, which are concerned with the study of complex human phenomena. Due to their complexity and dynamics, such phenomena defy systematic study and their terminology resists unification. Consequently, despite enormous efforts, social sciences have not developed common

scientific methods and have not postulated common laws and concepts. One cannot expect that diverse social sciences would agree upon definitions of complex social phenomena that are enmeshed in networks of other phenomena, such as 'totalitarianism', 'community', 'society' or 'democracy'. For example, Naess et al. (1956) listed 311 definitions of democracy that were expressed by politicians, journalists, or lay people during different historical periods. Our own research into citizens' ideas about democracy showed that democracy had different meanings in different cultures and political systems. These meanings were also altered by adjectives that were attached to 'democracy', such as 'bourgeois democracy', 'Soviet democracy', 'proletarian democracy', etc. (Moodie et al. 1995). Ideologies, political interests or simply the common understanding based on life experience, turn 'democracy' into a desirable, or undesirable, phenomenon.

A well known cultural psychologist, Jahoda (1988), an ardent critic of approaches that were lacking precise definitions in social sciences, was for many years preoccupied with the question as to how should 'culture' be defined for the purposes of psychology. As he admitted, originally, he had thought that the conceptual clarification and definition of 'culture' was possible and desirable. However, after many years of struggle, he finally concluded in his classic paper on 'the colour of a chameleon' (Jahoda 1993), that such a quest was illusory. He commented that it was striking that definitions of culture were so diverse that, therefore, it was likely that no definitions of culture could meaningfully be given. Jahoda showed that some of the existing definitions were logically and substantively incompatible. In their zealous attempt to give evidence for their 'correct' definitions of culture, some authors presented empirical data of 'culture' in their defence implying that culture was an entity rather than a social construct! Gustav Jahoda observed that the term 'culture' was often coupled with different kinds of adjectives 'to indicate some undefined properties of a category, such as "adolescent culture," "consumer culture," "literary culture," "tabloid culture," "visual culture," and so on' (Jahoda 2012, p. 300). He suggested, nevertheless, that despite the difficulty in defining 'culture', the term plays an important role. It has uses in daily speech, and its concrete meaning should be clarified only when it is essential to explain a specific theoretical or empirical issue.

The Diversity or Unity of Social Theories?

The difficulty of finding a common language in social sciences is viewed as part of their increasing fragmentation which, during the last five decades or so, has become a frequently discussed topic, and it was referred to as the loss of common purpose. As more and more social theories emerge, offering their specific solutions to societal, political and ideological problems, social sciences have been facing questions: is there any conceptual common ground to theories, or should each theory be treated independently of others as unique? In other words, should social sciences aim at

ontological and epistemological unification of their theories or should each of them value its independent status?

In their major *Companion to Social Science Theories,* Ritzer and Goodman (2000) state that to attain a better understanding of social theory it is necessary to make a systematic effort at clarifying relations between the individual and society. This could be made possible by constructing overarching and systematising sociological metatheories (Fiske and Shweder 1986; Ritzer 1991; Shweder 1991) that would surpass fragmentation. Metatheories pay attention to manifold historical, cultural, political and other issues, and they classify and link them together by creating categories that organise diverse approaches into order. The efforts to develop metatheories involved questions such as how to understand the past, contemporary events and how to predict the future of societies, groups and individuals? One attempt to develop metatheories led to the study of narratives and life stories in their historical and cultural contexts (Czarniawska 2004; Goody 1986) or to 'dialogical narratives' (Levine 1995). A narrative is underlain by the semiotic and symbolic nature of human activities, and it aims to establish relations and intersubjective understanding between selves and others. For example, Habermas (1981/1984, 1981/1987) idealised the concept of communication and viewed dialogue as a way towards the advancement of knowledge and wisdom through the search for a common ground. A 'dialogical narrative' (Levine 1995, 2018) offers a constructive solution to the fragmentation of sociological theories and provides the basis for communal ethics.

From the point of view of the *Semiotic Cultural Psychological Theory* which emphasises the diversity of socio-cultural perspectives and of humans, the search for a unique metatheory—or narrative—is questionable. Several Chapters (e.g. 2, 5, 9) of the present volume conceive narratives in a different light than those that search for a unification of social sciences. Discussing the role of narratives, the authors argue that specific narratives and images reflect a selective understanding of society, that they model the trajectory of change and guide policy choices. The authors emphasise the semiotic nature of language in understanding human activities and they insist that narratives are never neutral transmissions of information, but that they place emphasis on specific values. Different kinds of narratives require diverse forms of thinking, judgement, deliberation and choice. Consequently, as narratives express relations between the self and social institutions, they are concerned with a variety of relations, such as conflict-creation and resolution, as well as with balance and equilibration. These relations are determined by the interaction between the storyteller and the audience. As it is emphasised in Chap. 2 (p. 50), 'cultural institutions exert a violent control over marginalised people and their interests because they hide the origin of concepts that are in fact culturally path dependent.' The authors' apt example of these matters concerns collective memories. Collective memories (Chap. 5) guide the choice of public narratives and their meanings. They affect representations of visual symbols, e.g. of statues, places, grave-yards, parks and so on. The preservation or removal of visual symbols, such as monuments, representing achievements of past events, has become a highly controversial issue for policymakers who must deal with public protests, their defences and resulting criminal activities. Narratives in

debates on multiculturalism provide many examples of diversities that depend on the perspective of the storyteller and the socio-historical context as interpreted by the audience (Chap. 6).

Multiple Forms of Human Variability in Cultures

Variability in humans as well as cultural pluralism take on diverse forms. These are due to ethnic differences, political and economic threats, as well as ideas of democratic citizenship, and the decline of trust in political leaders and of solidarity with other groups. We arrive at another form of the disparity between individuals' needs and expectations, and societal demands. The fragmentation of society encourages 'a new form of subjectivity made up of (mainly negative) emotional enactment; absolutisation of identity motives; ideological and political polarisation; generalised distrust; blindness to the future; closure and aversion to and dehumanisation of foreigners and more in general of the outgroup' (this volume, p. 5). This form of subjectivity has erupted in Western liberal democracies, where results of diverse opinion surveys and statistics show that over decades, citizens have become more and more critical of their political leaders, of the value of democracy and of democratic institutions. Although these results present widely contradictory pictures due to methodological as well as to semantic and political problems, they all indicate the rise of extreme-right opinions. Using data from years 1995–2014 based on the World Values Surveys, Foa and Mounk (2016) looked at several measures that indicate legitimacy of the political system, citizens' support for the system, the degree to which they support key institutions, their openness to authoritarian alternatives such as the military rule, among other counts. Their data suggest that primarily young people are dissatisfied with liberal democracy and that they show preferences for authoritarian alternatives. The data (Foa and Mounk 2016; 2017) indicate that whilst for many Americans it is still essential to live in a democracy, this percentage declines with the time of birth. Whilst for nearly 80% of Americans born in the 1930s, it was essential to live in a country that is governed democratically, the same was true for only less than 30% of those born in the 1980s. This trend is somewhat more moderate in Europe. The post-Cold War generation in liberal democracies did not experience dictatorships or military regimes, and therefore, this generation hardly imagines what it means to live in an authoritarian or a totalitarian regime. Other surveys across different countries show that even if people do not reject democracy, they favour a strong leader, or a *strongman* (Mounk 2018). *Strongmen* emerge in liberal democracies, where they lead populist parties threatening the established order. The public distrust of the established politicians and institutions encourages the emergence of leaders who challenge the existing order and make promises of change, gain unprecedented influence. *Strongmen* promise people the return to the golden old ages by formulating assurances such as 'making America great again', building a 'big, beautiful wall' (Ingelhart and Norris 2017) or 'getting control back' in the case of Brexit (Veltri

et al. 2019). These promises thrive on ignorance, uncertainty, and fear of citizens, and therefore, *strongmen* desperately need the support of dissatisfied masses, and they easily change their rhetoric to uphold their support. These promises of return to the imagined better past recall the critique of Romanticism of the nineteenth century by Max Weber (1968). Romanticism, too, sought refuge in social representations of the golden ages and simple forms of life in the past. The *strongmen* play with the desires of ordinary people and they promise things that can never be fulfilled.

Semiotic Capital

Whilst recognising dilemmas of liberal democracies, the present volume elaborates the concept of semiotic capital (Chap. 8), which is crucial for understanding individual and collective activities in cultural dynamics of the *Semiotic Cultural Psychological Theory* (Rochira et al. 2019; Salvatore 2018). Building on their earlier work, the authors show that semiotic capital develops in and through sense-making, social exchange and channelling of meanings in implicit symbolic universes. Semiotic capital is an interiorised feature of collective life, and to that extent, it could remind us of the phenomenon of social representations (Moscovici 1961, 1976). In contrast to the theory of social representations, a core aspect of semiotic capital is trust. Trust refers, on the one hand to the network of cooperative exchange among different social groups and on the other hand, to the integration among levels of the social structure, linking individual, groups and institutions, and so to the creation of the *ordered universe* and the *caring society*. Semiotic capital, emphasising o*rdered universe* and *caring society* must cope with challenges of the negative forms of subjectivity arising in emotions of fragmented groups exposing the heterogeneity of humans and its problematic dispositions.

Incompleteness of the Search for Subjectivity in Policymaking

Since their origin as independent disciplines, social sciences and humanities have been preoccupied with oppositions between the individual and society, diversities of individuals and cultural meanings, pluralities and subjectivities, fragmentation and unification and conflicts and convergencies among these oppositions. Some theories claim their originality and contribution to the advancement of social knowledge in focusing on one or the other opposition, and still others recognise their interdependence. The authors of this volume take a dialectic perspective with respect to these oppositions. For example, they emphasise the negative and violent features of fragmentation as well as the value of semiotic capital in developing the *ordered universe* and the *caring society*. The unique value of the *Semiotic Cultural Psychological*

Theory in this volume is the presentation of a *new conception of culture and its bond with policy-making*. This process necessarily remains incomplete: its dynamics are continuous, and confrontations and struggles which it emphasises, offer the deep recognition of the place of subjectivity in policymaking.

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Ivana Marková
University of Stirling
Stirling, Scotland

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Foreword: Precious Lessons Learnt

Borrowing a warlike formula from the political vernacular of these dark times, we can say that the long war of position against the predominance of the "rational fools", as Amartya Sen called them, has finally been won, that we have overcome the reductionist and instrumental visions of social life and, in particular, of its rules. Cognitive and normative infrastructures, ideas and values, are what governing is about. Our understanding has gained depth and can now face up to the intrinsic complexity of social action, with its never clear-cut nor simple vocabularies of motives.

This book is the culmination of these findings. By retracing the stages of the affirmation of culture as an indispensable link in the relationship between mind and society—to take up a classic formulation of the American pragmatist tradition—the book manages to systematise culture's role in the political process, and specifically in policymaking. Taking culture into account is what makes the difference in public life when it comes to governing, whatever the issue and the policy dealing with it. Otherwise, as is argued in the book with a wealth of arguments, government, and even any attempt at good governance, will always stumble upon the plural and changing nature of subjectivities.

To give recognition of the importance of the cultural dimension in the political sphere, therefore, has both an analytical and a pragmatic value. It may tell us what social researchers should look at to understand, in retrospect, what did or did not work in an apparently well-designed and promising policy that supposedly corresponded to the expectations of a vast and varied audience of recipients. It also tells us, a priori, what scholars and policy designers need to take into account for the desired process to have any chance of getting underway and unfolding in the right direction.

All the more so, if one aspires to produce innovation. Innovation compels actors to change their way of thinking, seeing and feeling; in a word, it imposes a cultural change. This, in turn, necessitates a change in the social practices, the ways of acting and experiencing situations, problems and solutions.

When tackling urban policies, or welfare policies, both the design of places and the organisation of social services are subject to the same requirements when they take the cultural dimension into account: they have to humbly accept the conditions of uncertainty and the fact that construction processes remain open to a plurality of perspectives; they must cultivate the ability to recognise and elaborate the meanings

that actors in the field attribute to situations, structures and relationships; they must be able to change the instruments of knowledge and ethical-normative requirements in the course of action; they have to make room for *logos* and *ethos*, as well as for *pathos*, taste and pleasure.

For these capacities to arise, scholars and policy designers shall develop a rich and varied endowment of repertoires of symbolisation to connect different and perhaps incompatible symbolic universes. In other words, it is necessary to have what is called here "semiotic capital", a metaphor that traces and extends Bourdieusian "social capital", and the anti-economic function that distinguishes it. Like its big brother, semiotic capital is the key criterion by which to measure the thinkability of the future but also, in Bourdieu's words, the "misery of the world".

Semiotic capital injects a degree of reflexivity into policymaking that helps institutional actors "to bounce back to better face the unknown" as Mary Douglas said to explain her notion of resilience (Douglas and Wildavsky 1982). In other words, recalling Karl Weick, another of the reference points, semiotic capital keeps the pipelines of sense-making open. In the context of the economy, too, and even more so in the knowledge-based economy, "semiosis", as Bob Jessop has more recently argued, plays a constitutive role.

The case reported in chapter five of the book is an emblematic example of semiotic capital in action. It is therefore worth recalling here. The Victory Monument, which was the focus of Bolzano's urban development in the Fascist era by the regime's architect Piacentini, has long fuelled the recurrent rift that runs through the city between the two populations, German and Italian speaking respectively. Since then, incompatible meanings have accumulated on this site: in terms of time, because of the divisive dynamics that historical memory triggers, and equally in terms of space because the sense of place is a source of conflict. The monument has become the emblem of an intractable problem, defined by the alternative between preservation and demolition, an ultimatum without solutions. Unblocking the situation by making other, "third", possibilities thinkable and practicable was precisely the endowment of semiotic capital mobilised by the actors in the field—first and foremost the institutional actors. An exhibition was set up around the monument, activating multiple symbolic registers to populate the place with a plurality of meanings, thoughts and feelings that neutralised the attraction to binary logic.

There is definitely a family feeling here. The Bolzano example recalls the long process of emancipating the "excluded third" that I have been focusing upon since the late 1980s (de Leonardis 1990): a strong similarity lies in the effort to combine the cognitive and practical dimensions, the aesthetic and ethical conditions, an effort that dismantles the binary logic and conceptual walls this logic tends to establish. This effort sums up the book's ultimate purpose: in a nutshell, enhancing the cultural dimension of policies leads to the politization of issues, thereby restoring the political value of governing public affairs, making it an art again, the art of good governance.

Taking up the initial warlike metaphor, as usual in culture wars, victory is not final. The pandemic that has set in this year may indeed produce a sharp reversal. Although the circumstances are unforeseen, the processes set in motion to deal with

it belong to the familiar, to the old, outdated paraphernalia, with which this book seeks to settle the score.

The reaction triggered by the pandemic seems to want to impose yet again a drastic simplification of the issues. Policymaking has once again become a field for the exercise of expert, functional and instrumental knowledge, without nuances or alternatives, and the cultural dimension a useless if not dangerous complication. Whilst government becomes depoliticized, an unprecedented semiotic desertification of living together is looming.

<div align="right">
Ota de Leonardis
Università di Milano Bicocca
Milan, Italy
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Introduction

The raging river
is called violent
But nobody calls violent
the riverbed constricting it.

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Bertolt Brecht's Me-ti:

Book of Interventions in the Flow of Things

Bloomsbury Publishing.

Don't Waste the Crisis

The 2008 subprime crisis caught institutions and experts off guard, laying bare the interdependence of societies and markets but also the fragility of the global economy, and the inability of states to govern these challenges. The crisis accentuated the difficulties that many countries already encountered in global competition. The forms of austerity imposed progressively on public budgets brought to harsh political confrontation and contributed to the growing inequalities. Although crisis and austerity have been experienced globally, since then, it had a major impact in the Mediterranean and Southern European countries (including Italy and in some particular regions and cities in the South), which had undergone stop-go austerity processes since the beginning of the 90s, declining further since 2001.

This book—and more, in general, the *Culture and policymaking: The symbolic universe of social action* series of which this volume is the third book—has its roots in such a scenario. The problems and issues motivating it and the main ideas it attempts to address were firstly elaborated within the framework of the Horizon 2020 *Re.Cri.Re.* research project (*Between the Representation of the Crisis and the Crisis of the Representation;* www.recrire.eu). The purpose of the project was to assess the impact of the crisis on the European identity within the societies of the European member states. The project responded to an EU call, officially drafted between 2013 and 2014, that saw the economic crisis as a major challenge, and

accordingly, asked for analyses aimed at assessing its possible negative effects on citizens' feeling of membership of the European Union and commitment to the European institutions as well as for the proposal of measures aimed at addressing such negative effects. Re.Cri.Re. project interpreted the call as requiring a deep understanding of the cultural dynamics underpinning the feared change in the European identity. In doing so, Re.Cri.Re. introduced the culture as the mediator between the material context (i.e. the economic crisis) and its psycho-social and institutional consequences (i.e. the value people attributed to European citizenship and the attitude towards/commitment to European institutions).

Based on this framework, the project was launched in May 2015; yet, after about an year it became clear to the research staff—a network of 13 academic centers distributed over several European countries—that something deep was changing in the phenomenon under analysis. The affluent and seemingly stable European societies were being profoundly shaken, even more than had happened during the previous economic upheaval, as a result of an additional series of emergencies: the 2015 peak in the arrival of refugees, the terrorist attacks in Paris, London, Nice, Vienna; the successful secession of Britain from Europe, Brexit (though not yet concluded); Catalonia's dramatic secession bid from Spain; the rising wave of populism, both left and extreme right.

These events were the drivers—and at the same time the signs—of a dramatic radicalisation of the crisis, whose impact proved rapidly to go far beyond the feared weakening of the sense of European citizenship, to take on the contours of a global rupture of the consolidated balances among individuals, social groups and institutions at the foundations of Western liberal democracies. At the core of such a dynamics, one witnessed—is witnessing—a sort of *anthropological drift*: the irruption of a new form of subjectivity made up of (mainly negative) emotional enactment; absolutisation of identity motives; ideological and political polarisation; generalised distrust; blindness to the future; closure and aversion to and dehumanisation of foreigners and more in general of the outgroup—what two of us have proposed to see as the politicisation of otherness and the privatisation of the enemy (Mannarini and Salvatore 2020).

The radicalisation of the crisis scenario was a twofold challenge to the Re.Cri.Re. project as well as to any analyst of cultural dynamics. On the one hand, a *demand for knowledge*—the comprehension of the novelty of the cultural dynamics in act—actually a novelty that appeared fearfully similar to the course of events culminating with World War II. On the other hand, a *demand for action*—the design of strategies and formats enabling policymakers and institutions to cope with the array of new problems and old issues manifesting themselves in ways and with an intensity never seen in recent decades.

However, it is also true that this twofold challenge conveyed an extraordinary chance for scientific development. The destabilisation of the consolidated forms of relationships between individuals, social groups and institutions, the irruption of new (critical) forms of subjectivity resulting from such dynamics, have brought the *issue of the subject*—therefore the themes of meaning, and sense-making, the dialectics between affects and thinking, desire and action—to the core of the scientific agenda.

What has been becoming clearer and clearer is that the reconstruction of the linkage between actors, society and institutions cannot but pass through theoretical and methodological innovation—the elaboration of a *new conception of the culture and its bond with policymaking.* This new conception should frame a deeper recognition of the role of the subjectivity in the socio-political arena, and in doing so, help institutions and policymakers to rethink themselves in accordance with the new anthropological scenario.

The previous two volumes of the *Culture and policymaking: The symbolic universe of social action* book series was aimed at developing both theoretically and empirically this subject- and meaning-oriented conception of culture—the *Semiotic Cultural Psychology Theory*, and to use it to understand the current cultural and institutional scenario. On this basis, with this last volume of this ideal trilogy, we want to take a step ahead in the modelling of the relation between culture and policy-making. More particularly, this book aims to show the multiple trails that the cultural turn has carved out between the domain of culture and the design and making of public policies. For the last few decades, a whole set of theoretical advances have been showing how fertile and sorely needed this dialogue can be. At the same time, the two realms have evolved from such distant sources that this dialogue is still faltering. Besides, both are performing difficult yet urgent tasks in the theoretical as well as the empirical domain.

Viewed in retrospective, the emergence of common concerns makes no doubts, as confirmed by the expanding body of literature. A significant development in the understandings of culture is present in many fields, where critical theorists broke the boundaries of disciplines bringing the cultural dimensions into the analysis of practices, development, institutions and globalisation (e.g. Bourdieu 1977; Hirschman 1971; De Leonardis 1990; Sassen 1998, 1999; Schliewe et al. 2018).

However, the variety and richness of the practices and corresponding theoretical positions in both fields demand some additional work. A few years ago, in one of the seminal books that helped to make the connection (Vijayendra and Walton 2004), Arjun Appadurai aptly reminded readers that the 'omnibus definition of culture' is not useful; he also called for "a sea change in the way we look at culture" (Appadurai 2004, p. 59), in particular intending to open up the black box of the future and to enable people to aspire.

In a previous work (Salvatore et al. 2018), with others, we explored the extent to which the last crisis undermined and jeopardised the cultural milieus of European societies. Among our findings, we documented a worrying rise in anomy and the diffuse growth of polarised identity motives. In subsequent studies, we concentrated on policy issues like vaccination hesitancy (Rochira et al. 2019), Brexit (Veltri et al. 2019), populism (Mannarini et al. 2020), and the underlying cultural dynamics that we interpreted as 'enemisation of the other' (Salvatore et al. 2019; Mannarini and Salvatore 2020).

On this basis, we aim at developing a further step in the direction of irrorating policy interventions with culture awareness that parallels the wider invitation to develop "a set of tools for identifying the cultural map of aspirations" (Appadurai 2004, p. 83).

The Cultural Limitations of Policies

Policymaking, policies and politics are processes carried out by human beings that address other human beings through the mediation of devices (norms, resources, tools) that have both a material and a symbolic component (e.g. a banknote is a piece of the material world endowed with a conventional, instituted meaning). Thus, like any human activity, policymaking is performed by means of, within the constraints of, and in spite of persons, and more specifically of their subjectivity.*By means,* because the devices mediating policies have to be interpreted both by addressers and addressees. *Within the constraints*, because this interpretation sets the limit of the ways the activity can be carried out. *In spite of*, because any policy tends to pursue a purpose that concerns the whole target population (or segments of it) and therefore it has to go beyond the idiosyncratic state of the single individual.

As a first approximation, subjectivity is intended here as the capacity of the human being to vary (in feelings, thinking and acting), both within her/himself over time and with respect to others, in ways that are not due to material, objective factors. Thus, subjectivity is the engine of the human diversity that is inherent to society and that any policy and political action have to address.

Over the last forty years, there has been a progressive consolidation of the idea given that subjectivity cannot be put aside in the institutional, political and economic spheres of social life, it needs to be comprehended in depth. This recognition has brought the notion of culture to the forefront of contemporary social sciences, as the key concept in the understanding of the relationship between actors and society. Psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, linguists, even economists have started to focus on concepts such as identity, values, cultural motives, socio-cognitive patterns, worldviews, narratives, social representations, feelings and perceptions, systems of meanings and so forth.

The plurality of concepts and analytical approaches contained in the cultural toolkit has had the undoubted merit of enabling us to go beyond the simplified view of the human being in terms of either maximisation of utility or pure information processing. On the other hand, the way culture is currently conceptualised leaves several issues open that prevent a complete understanding of the *dynamics of subjectivity* involved in social, political and economic behaviour. These limitations reduce both the heuristic and practical fecundity of the concept in the understanding of socio-political phenomena as well as in the design, governance, analysis and evaluation of policies. Thus, we still need a model of subjectivity—to understand better what subjectivity is and how it works—to address the challenges that human diversity poses to any effort to comprehend and govern social dynamics.

This volume has the ambition to provide a decisive contribution in that direction. To this end, it provides a dynamic, processual conception of the culture and a general view of the role played by cultural dynamics in policy-making, drawing methodological implications and some practical suggestions from it.

The Research Fields: Psychology and Urban Policies

In the course of the Re.Cri.Re. research project that gave rise to this work, several case studies have been addressed (they are presented in the first volume of the series, Salvatore et al. 2019). The case studies were deliberately selected in different policy areas: policies for job mediation, health, education, social integration and immigration, administrative simplification, etc. The different partners of the original working group, each with specific competencies, participated in these case studies. To make progress in the work of this book, the authors decided to focus on their areas of expertise, cultural psychology, on the one hand, and urban policies, on the other hand. The reasons for this choice may seem obvious in some respects, particularly for the first theme, which directly introduces the main theme of this book.

On the one hand, the dynamics of subjectivity are at the core of psychology—actually one could say that psychology is the science of subjectivity. Yet, one has to recognise that psychologists see subjectivity in very different ways, and not all of them are consistent with the aim of understanding the anthropological drift which, as it seems to us, qualifies the current forms of subjectivity. Indeed, mainstream psychology is affected by two general assumptions that constrain its capacity to elaborate a global understanding of the deep changes in the ways of feeling, thinking and acting, which have characterised Western societies for the last decade. First, psychology is mainly focused on the individual mind; needless to say, contextual conditions are taken into account, yet they are generally considered exogenous factors that moderate (e.g. that trigger, facilitate, enable, constrain) the work of the individual minds. Second, mainstream psychology is largely interested in the mechanisms—rules, determinants—underpinning human behaviour, rather than in the meaning of the experience that shapes—and is shaped by as well—the behaviour; in other words, the mind's functioning is brought to the fore, whilst the subject's desire is left in the background (or treated as a further mechanism, e.g. as motivation). These two assumptions have had major consequences—they led post WWII psychology to give up the effort of building a general theory of the human being (Valsiner et al. 2016), substituted with a continuously increasing array of more and more specialistic empirical models, each of which focused on a domain-specific form of acts (e.g. consumption behaviour, voting behaviour, cooperative behaviour and so forth). Given the weakness of a general theoretical framework, these empirical models help to explain the target behaviour in relation to given contextual conditions; yet they are structurally unable to shed light on the making of such contextual conditions. Thus, for instance, mainstream psychology contributes to understanding the impact of contextual uncertainty on how people think and act (e.g. Greenberg and Arndt 2012), as well as to identify the group of people that are more exposed or resilient to the socio-political scenario; yet it leaves other social sciences to deal with the issue of the *why* and the *how* such a scenario emerges. However, the psychological view that this book adopts is quite far from the one outlined briefly above. We believe that the current times require psychology that is able to combine attention to the mechanisms with the focus on subjectivity: the intertwinement between desire and culture that

makes the human being human (Valsiner 2020). To move in that direction means to rescue the ambition to build general theoretical frameworks enabling the global understanding of the recursive linkage between mind and society—those frameworks that characterised the history of the discipline from the beginning to the Sixties (e.g. Freud, Wertheimer, Vygotsky, Lewin, Werner, Piaget, Bruner).

On the other hand, urban spaces are the natural laboratory of such an understanding. Cities are undoubtedly at the crossroads of culture and policies. Whilst the growth of cities constituted urban planning as a prominent technical domain, the cultural turn of the 80s allowed for an almost complete overhaul of planning theory.

A global urban issue has arisen in recent decades thanks to a phase of increased demographic growth, mostly handed over to the informal sector. Growth policies devoted to urban growth raised extraordinary issues of citizenship and environmental sustainability. The recent neo-liberal development had the questionable merit, through terrible costs, of involving China and other countries in the global growth process.

In Europe, the promise of urban renaissance has enjoyed extraordinary success. European cities are originally placed in the overall process of global rescaling (Brenner 1999). However, urban transformations have been treated mostly as real estate opportunities. The leading expectation was that recycling industrial areas would contribute to the revitalisation of the economic base by introducing new competitive activities.

Real estate was supposed to facilitate the post-industrial transition, a vague term indicating a bundle of innovations in all sectors that however conceal the fact that industrial activities and urban manufacturing are still the crucial sectors for many cities both in the North and the South. Since the end of the 1980s, new commercial buildings, office towers, smart neighbourhoods have filled cities with pedestrian bridges, theme parks and aquariums, stations and, more rarely, technology and research laboratories.

In general, urban policies developed since the 80s are one of the outcomes of the ongoing global urbanisation process. In Europe, they are part of a local development orientation based on a place-based research orientation that has been adopted in the European Union guidelines (Barca 2009). These new urban strategies depend on "thick" narratives and images, which interpret the position of the territory and the issue of development, often in a more inclusive stance. Very often, however, the representation of European cities focuses on either the nostalgia of growth or the struggle to grasp the often-contradictory novelties that come from the globalisation process. As a consequence, urban policies deal increasingly with social issues, the growing urban inequalities, the increasing immigration and through it all, with the conflictual representations of change.

Caveats

First, a disclaimer. This book is not about cultural policies. An emerging field of policies, relevant for many actors in both advanced economy and the global South, cultural policy delves into the public concern for high or popular production of symbolic artefacts. Our interest is for the impact of policies on the making of meanings and vice-versa.

Second, a statement. The concern of this book is for a *policy on culture*—i.e. for the involvement of the governance system with the production and reproduction of meanings. There are several reasons for this concern that the book will explore: for the moment, it is sufficient to say that all policies are policies on culture, and this explains the imperative to consider the cultural dimensions of policies. All policies deal with culture because policies, as well as actors, are various, plural, dialectical and sensemakers by definition. Policies mediate between different forms of cultural understanding; different actors and rationalities convene to produce policies in plural and sometimes contentious contexts; as a consequence, language and images frame policies and both speech and action implement policies; however, the action produces meaning in a recursive link since cultural meanings reframe policies; and finally, policies frame the collective understanding of people's mutual interdependence, opening the way for a systemic concern to put down its roots in the lifeworld of meaning.

Third, an ambition, possibly a disproportionate one. The main reason for writing a book is that such a book is lacking. Although we have been looking in the more prestigious fields of social sciences, namely economics and political science, for proposals and systematic reviews that help to fill the gap between culture and public policies, we have been unable to find a satisfying introduction to policies and culture. This awareness is not new, and a tentative critique of instrumental rationality has been pursued in several fields. Inspirational thinkers have dug deep in the history of social sciences (Hirschman 1971) and in particular, the field of economic development (Nussbaum 2000; Sen 1980), focusing explicitly on public action at the international levels (Rao and Walton 2004).

Since the cultural turn, many theoretical efforts have tried to trace a common path between the two domains of culture and policies: their success has been limited, however. The only reference to the cultural policy was in Peters and Pierre (2006), for instance, and to diversity in Goodin et al. (2006). However, once political scientists recognised the lapse, progress in filling the gap has been consistent. Durnova and colleagues (2016) emphasise the production and use of (cultural) meanings by actors during the (social) process of construction of discourses and argumentations that eventually shape both issues and solutions. Bobrow (2006), argues convincingly in favour of a cultural approach to policies, yet he deals mostly with the acknowledgement of human variety. Hoppe (2006) and Geva May (2005) made a full acknowledgement of the issue but referring mostly to Cultural Theory, an important and precursive interpretation that however seems to limit possible developments. All these aspects have fundamental importance but lack a unitary frame and a proper methodological development.

This book provides a framework for situating the debate of culture in relation to the evolution of policy studies (Part I); it develops a specific theoretical advancement on how cultural meanings influence and derive at the same time from social actions (Part II); finally, it establishes a few operational tenets—plurality, performativity and semiotic capital—illustrating them in a series of examples and case studies (Part III).

This Volume

The volume is divided into three parts.

The first part provides an overview of the main conceptions of culture active within the social sciences and of the way the relationship between culture and policy has been addressed.

Chapter 1 briefly outlines three general conceptions: culture as structure, as distribution of psycho-social traits, as interpretative activity. Specificities, similarities and differences among these approaches are discussed. Moreover, in order to provide common ground to these conceptions, a semantic space of culture is defined. This semantic space is obtained from the combination of two analytic dimensions: the level of analysis (micro vs macro) and the ontological status (culture as process vs culture as entity). Rather than providing a comprehensive definition, the four quadrants obtained by the intersection of these two dimensions map the inevitable pluralism of culture.

Chapter 2 analyses the way the notion of culture has approached the realm of policy studies. A burgeoning literature addressed the notion of culture establishing some elements of dialogue: the grid-group theory, ethnography, the argumentative turn and pragmatism, the more insidious position of radical constructionism. Findings from researchers face a more anodyne world of policymaking, where culture is often mobilised as a self-reassuring mantra or for fuelling the retrieval of nationalistic identities or "imagined communities". In correspondence with the approach developed in the previous chapter, the review of theoretical encounters between policy and culture gives some suggestions for practical advancement.

The second part is focused on the theoretical framework at the core of the volume– Semiotic Cultural Psychology Theory (SCPT).

Chapter 3 outlines SCPT. SCPT defines culture as the dynamics of sense-making enacted by a social group defined by common participation in a given environment (e.g. a territory, a system of action, a communication setting). Such a dynamic of sense-making is channelled by embodied, generalised, affect-laden meaning (Symbolic Universes, according to the SCPT terminology) that are active within the cultural milieu. The SCPT view of culture leads us to focus on the processes of interpretations through which social actors shape, react and act upon the socio-political, institutional and economic reality, as well as on the way the symbolic fields generated by these processes shape their form, in a recursive semiotic dynamic. Emphasis is placed on how the focus on the recursive linkage between sense-making and symbolic fields enables us to go beyond the essentialist and descriptive view of

the role of culture in society and economy, as well as to bridge micro and macro levels of analysis.

Chapter 4 provides a cultural interpretation of the current scenario of socio-institutional crisis through the lens of SCPT. The analysis focuses on the recursive interplay between the socio-economic transformations and the culturally framed way in which peoples make sense of them. At the core of the interpretation discussed in the chapter lies the recognition of the role played by affective sensemaking in the public domain—or the "affectivisation of the public sphere" according to the terms adopted. Several manifestations of these dynamics are analysed together with a general interpretation of it as the way broad segments of societies adapt to regulate semiotically the uncertainty fostered by socio-economic turmoil.

Chapter 5 briefly outlines the three general ideas, drawn from SPCT, in terms of which the relation between culture and policymaking is conceptualised—cultural pluralism, the performativity of sense-making and the relevance of semiotic capital. The cultural pluralism concept claims that the objective characteristics of reality—however one wants to intend objectivity—are unable to reduce fully the space of freedom that qualifies any subjective act of interpretation, and this makes any policy a plural space of interpretation. The performativity of sense-making claims that generalised cultural meanings are reproduced over time and within social groups through the very fact of being enacted—namely, used as assumptions to ground beliefs, actions and choices. The semiotic capital concept claims that cultural meanings fostering socio-political and civic development are a scarce resource, unevenly distributed within the society and for this reason requires to be the target of a strategic policy on culture. The three criteria are illustrated with the support of a case study; the conversion of a contentious monument into an open cultural artefact. This case enables us to highlight the relevance of the three tenets in concrete circumstances of policymaking.

The third part is aimed at an in-depth examination of the three concepts, each of which is discussed in one chapter. Chapter 6 focuses on cultural pluralism. The phenomenology of cultural pluralism is outlined along with the way the concept is addressed in social and political sciences and policymaking practices; finally, some evidence of the cultural pluralism is provided together with some operative implications for policymaking.

Chapter 7 introduces the notion of performativity, first by examining the importance of communication and the role that discourse analysis has played in shaping policies. Connecting representations and actions is the first dimension of performativity that has already been focused upon by several approaches in policy design and policymaking. The chapter tries to go further and look at performativity as a way of overhauling the design of policies, making room for improvisation, adaption and experimentation. To this end, two case studies are discussed. One of them deals with the rebuilding of trust in post-trauma communities; the other with the open programming of uses in the case of the temporary occupation of an urban development project. The two cases show how performativity in policymaking can go far beyond the simple mixture of linguistic acts and social practices.