

Plural identity and territory: the “Calvello Model”

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“The conception of identity influences, in many different ways, our thoughts and actions (...). Civilizational or religious partitioning of the world population yields a “solitarist” approach to human identity, which sees human beings as members of exactly one group (...). In our normal lives, we see ourselves as members of a variety of groups – we belong to all of them. A person’s citizenship, residence, geographic origin, gender, class, politics, profession, employment, food habits, sports interests, taste in music, social commitments, etc., make us members of a variety of groups. Each of these collectiveness, to all of which this person simultaneously belongs, gives her a particular identity. None of them can be taken to be the person’s only identity or singular membership category.”

Amarthya Sen, *Identity and Violence: the illusion of destiny*, 2006

Our starting point is two short extracts from one of the most recent works by Amartya Sen, two fragments of thought by a Nobel prize-winner that would seem to have little to do with the argument of this issue of *Communitas*.

The publication you are reading deals with the many ways in which a large enterprise – in this case, Eni – interacts with a territory – in this case, Basilicata in Italy. It is an encounter that generates experiences that, over time, combine to create what can become a model of relations aimed at promoting sustainable development. The name we have given to this model is the “Calvello Model”.

We call it a model not because we want to codify it, lock it up in a formula or, worse, a corporate procedure, but simply in order to outline some of the characteristics that enable us to reflect on and share an approach which, we hope, can become an example of an innovative strategy for companies in the territories in which they operate.

Let’s start with the concept of identity. Eni is a “cornucopia” of identities, or differences. The identities of the people who work for the company - more than 75,000 individuals in around 20 countries - are different. Many of these people are of a different nationality to that of the country in which they work, many are “expatriates”; Italians working abroad, but also New Zealanders working in Ecuador, for instance. Cultural identities, habits and lifestyles get mixed up and plural identities are formed that live side-by-side, enriching and completing along the way.

There are also other types of difference that, over time, shape the company and that are profoundly interconnected to the type of activity involved. In the energy sector – and in Eni in particular – a determining factor is, for example, technology. History, the past and future of the company are closely related to the development of advanced technologies that are usually developed in response to operational requirements in complex contexts, from glaciers to deserts and deep-water offshore platforms. There is, then, an Eni identity that is influenced by the “*tecne*”, in the sense of the skills and knowledge assets that distinguish the men and women who work in the company, creating internal communities with strong and clearly marked identities. And it is one of the most evident characteristics of Eni’s overall business culture.

To individual identities, that are already in themselves composite, and to “corporate” identities, that demand of people a capacity to innovate and operate in a business highly influenced by diversity

and the difficulties of operational contexts, a further element must be added, and it is perhaps the most important.

Eni is a company that, in the words of Aldo Bonomi, operating in the flow, encounters places. When a company like Eni arrives in a territory, whether in Italy or in any other part of the world, it is never a “silent”, unnoticed arrival. Exploration activities generate a combination of expectations and fears in those who are involved, even as simple bystanders. In fact, the discovery of oil or gas wells and beginning their development involves adding a new identity to those already present.

It means expecting, legitimately, that the use of these recently discovered assets will create new opportunities. But, at the same time, it also means, fearing the impact that the exploitation of these resources will have, not only on the environment, but also on communities. In fact, it means learning who to interact with a new social figure that, like Eni, has a complex, articulated, multicultural, technical identity. A subject that will be a part of the territory for a long time, given the long cycle of petroleum production, though not forever.

A number of elements underpin such fears. First of all, there is the fear regarding the knowledge of and relationship with the company. The big, international economic powerhouse that “lands” in a new area can be seen, firstly, as an alien, and then as a foreign body. The same technical identity of the business can create obstacles to mutual understanding, both on the part of the company, that finds it difficult to explain activities, processes and roles that for the company are a natural expression of its being, and on the part of other subjects in the area, be they public bodies, local business or citizens.

The sensation of being a foreign body is a direct consequence of a failure to understand one another. The company risks arriving, producing and leaving without ever becoming integrated with the territory. Claudio Descalzi¹ describes this risk well when he talks about the “fortified citadels” that some oil companies construct in countries in Africa, Asia or South America. In these protected forts the expatriates that work for the company live, deprived of any contact with the local community and, at the same time, physically hidden from the view of the people who live there. Descalzi connects this phenomenon to the rising perception of insecurity that workers feel and the ever-present potential for conflict with local inhabitants.

This is a situation in which the company loses, because it is unable to find the best conditions in which to operate, but the area also loses, because it fails to take advantage of the many opportunities that the presence of a large enterprise can offer.

The second reason for concern in an area after it has “discovered” its wealth in terms of natural resources and, consequently, a new identity, is that it can irredeemably undermine the other sources of wealth that it has. Can an area that is engaged in hydrocarbon extraction maintain its attractiveness as a tourist destination? Will traditional economic activities, from farming to local crafts, be negatively affected by the arrival of a new and very strong identity, so visible as to make the territory the main player in the public debate that surrounds the world of energy? The acquisition of a new identity is perceived as a risk for pre-existing identities, as if a - not necessarily concrete, but certainly symbolic - “territorial occupation” were underway.

Finally, the positive expectations associated with the arrival of a large enterprise can be counterbalanced by the fear of what could happen when it leaves. This is in part related to the fear that the company that is seen as an alien can provoke irreversible damage to the natural environment, but there is also something else, the fear of missing out, and not only in economic terms, on a series of development opportunities.

Eni began operating around the world in the mid fifties and, thanks to the complex and articulated corporate culture that has always distinguished the company, it has been able to establish positive relationships in the contexts in which it operates. The diversity of its people has made it possible to encounter diversity in the places in which it has found itself, avoiding those “fortified citadels”, not only made of bricks and mortar, that for other oil companies have become an operating paradigm. On a technical level, the same culture has made it possible to overcome differences. Many years ago, a journalist wrote that, “work can do everything”. He was talking about Eni’s workers from Emilia who worked alongside Egyptians in Sinai².

It is a phrase that remains powerful. An inclination to and the need for innovation has made it possible to create solid agreements for development in different countries around the world, allowing for the transfer of technology, processes and skills. The “Calvello Model” is the meeting of Eni’s plural identities, as they have evolved over time, and the plural identities of the territories, including both expectations and fears.

The principles on which the “Community Mission” – the project that lies behind these reflections – are based are reciprocal understanding and a capacity to valorise the potential of all of the social players in the territory.

The scale of such knowledge is at the centre of the “Knowledge Pact”, a process that involves universities, schools, the research environment and authorities and has as its main focus – in the present and the future - the Fondazione Eni Enrico Mattei in Basilicata, the new offices of which were opened in Viggiano last year. The “Knowledge Pact” aims to create a culture of energy in the territory, starting from Eni’s experience and the company’s willingness to “open up” and share its knowledge and skills assets.

It does this starting with schools, as you can see from the piece written by Gino Giannone about the School Project, in which the “extensive networks” of the large enterprise are transformed into networks of relationships between pupils in different continents.

This is supported by the “Development Pact”, that, once again, brings together a diverse range of social players: from tour operators to timber merchants, craftsmen and farmers, and from local authorities to non-profit associations. Within the “Development Pact”, Eni has taken on the role that together we have defined as “accompanying development”. This means making available economic resources, through royalties on production, and, above all, knowledge assets, and the network of relationships and skills of a large enterprise to strengthen a sustainable and autonomous development process.

These two terms are the most innovative aspect and provide the guidelines for both our experience and this issue of *Communitas*.

In fact, it is only the shared research of sustainable development that can allow the territory to fully take advantage of the opportunities connected to the use of hydrocarbon resources and the presence of a large enterprise; and for the company to operate effectively and efficiently, over an extended period of time, creating value for all of its interlocutors. In other words, only a Development Pact can make it possible for both the territory and the company to avoid the fears and live up to the expectations. It is, on the one hand, a reply to the need to reinforce and valorise the plural identities, whether they are part of the productive context or local traditions; the necessity to maintain the social cohesion of the community and opening it up to globalisation; the desire to reconcile security and business. This is, evidently, the essence of a sustainable company, able to put down deep roots in a territory.

The autonomy of this development paradigm makes it possible to underline that last point that is important to us. The “Calvello Model” involves a change of perspective for everyone involved. If the large enterprise is seen as a predator in the territory, whether or not this perception is based on fact, it creates over time a vicious cycle of compensation: demands and concessions for economic resources in exchange for environmental resources or damaged social capital. This mechanism, which impoverishes without creating development, has no sense if the company has become an active citizen of the area, of which it has become an integral part. At the same time, there is an increase in the involvement – and consequently the responsibility – of all the social players involved, who are called to draw up a vision of the sustainable future of the territory together. A positive and important message, especially for the south of Italy, that can be heard in the discussions between Aldo Bonomi and the mayors of Calvello and Abriola, that you can find on the following pages.

Enjoy.

¹ Claudio Descalzi, *Catalogo della Mostra La Vita Nuda*, Electa, 2008

² Sandro Salvatori, “*Italiani al lavoro nel Golfo di Suez*”, from *Il Gatto Selvatico*, Eni corporate review published from 1955 to 1964