

A lesson from Pietro Leopoldo

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1. Significant experience

It was in the year 1770 when Pietro Leopoldo Asburgo-Lorena (or Peter Leopold Hapsburg-Lorraine), setting out for Vienna, where he was to become Emperor of Austria, left behind him a sheaf of *Relazioni sul Governo della Toscana* (“Reports on the Government of Tuscany”) which, as we shall see, *mutatis mutandis*, offer valuable pointers for the present day territorialist approach – and more besides.

In fact, the reports add up to a detailed account of the situation in the Grand Duchy, the purpose of which was to guide his successor to the role of Grand Duke of Tuscany through the bewildering, disquieting and exciting world that was just coming into sight.¹

It may prove interesting – in today’s no less bewildering but, perhaps, less hopeful world – to see how Peter Leopold, an illuminist by the grace of God and Grand Duke of Tuscany by decree of the Habsburg dynasty, had approached his duties as ruler in the three hefty volumes of the *Relazioni sul governo della Toscana*, edited by Arnaldo Salvestrini, and published by Olschki in 1969.

2. Relating to the territory

There would indeed be much to say about this memorable document, but I am not the one to do so; it would call for a historian! Here, however, I will dwell on just a few specific aspects of Peter Leopold’s rapport with the ‘territory’ – or in other words the populations and their habitat – of

* For their observations on previous drafts of this work my thanks go to professors Marco Dardi, Mauro Bonaiuti and Piero Tani.

¹ For an entertaining portrait of this Grand Duke see, for example, Mattolini (1981), who supplements and corrects the coeval pamphlet (anonymous, but in fact by Becattini, 1796).

his mini-kingdom, in order to glean some insights for today's neo-territorialist campaigns.

Territory, in the strict sense of the word, is clearly there in Pietro Leopoldo's painstakingly detailed account, demonstrating the need for close and sharp focus from every angle on the physical, sociological and psychological state of the various portions of the Grand Duchy for wise government of the populations. Much room is given to the natural setting – the rivers, hills and valleys, but also the vineyards, thickets and, in particular, the malaria-infested areas (hence the Grand Duke's obsession with reclamation of the Maremma) – with a view to protection and, where necessary, intervention.

3. The populations of Tuscany

What, however, interests us most about these *Relazioni* – being, paradoxically, newer and more significant – is the picture of the local communities, all meticulously described, each, small as it might be, seen, as it were, as a foot of the Tuscan millipede.

Let us take the example of two contiguous populations – those of the cities of Prato and Pistoia. We begin with the productive infrastructure:

“The city of Prato is fairly well populated; there is much industry and trade, in particular in the manufacture of cloths, woollens, copperware and paper, supplying virtually the whole State. Now we come to the people: the nobility shows no great culture, the wealthy are all dedicated to trade and the lower class are noisy, ignorant and very superstitious. The clergy are numerous, ignorant and equally superstitious. Finally, education. Besides the college teachers are a number of others in public education; and there is a public library and also a teacher of drawing. The college of Prato, founded by the Cicognini family, is in a fine, extensive building with ample entrances” (Salvestrini, 1969).²

2 “La città di Prato è popolata sufficientemente; vi è molta industria e commercio, in specie per le sue manifatture di pannine, lavori di lana, rame e cartiere, che forniscono quasi tutto lo Stato. Si passa poi alla gente: la nobiltà vi è mediocrementemente istruita; i benestanti si danno tutti al commercio e il popolo basso è rumoroso, ignorante e superstizioso assai. Gli ecclesiastici sono numerosi, ignoranti e superstiziosi ugualmente.

In the other hand:

“The city of Pistoia is not particularly well populated [...] the nobility are numerous, which is no bad thing, but they live mostly in idleness and show little application [...]. The people are rather good, but the nobility and the people lean strongly towards the precepts of the Court of Rome” (*ibid.*).³

The picture of Pistoia that emerges, then, shows little dynamism or, from the point of view of the Grand Duke, loyalty, while the impression of Prato is more distinct, and decidedly more lively. In conclusion, Pietro Leopoldo remarks: “There is far less to fear in Pistoia than in Prato, the people being more docile” (*ibid.*).⁴ But, we feel he would add, there is less to hope for, too.

These details may sound like journalistic stereotypes, but when we go into them and observe how widely these assessments range, we can see that they derive from knowledge, reflection and evaluation, whether direct or indirect, of the prevalent state of affairs in all the various corners of the Grand Duchy.

The local psychological stereotypes then merge into an average character of the Tuscans of the time – a typical figure that the Grand Duke portrays thus:

“The Tuscan nation, in general talented and of lively, gentle disposition, is very readily governed with kind and persuasive methods [...] the inhabitants of Tuscany are in general of a gentle, docile nature, showing little courage but a certain shrewdness, little sincerity but considerable refinement, pursuing their interests and ready to achieve their ends with

E infine l'istruzione. Vi sono a Prato vari maestri del pubblico, oltre quelli del collegio, una pubblica biblioteca ed inoltre un Maestro di disegno. Il collegio di Prato fondato dalla famiglia Cicognini è una bella e vasta fabbrica con sufficienti entrate” (our translation). For ‘verification’ of Pietro Leopoldo’s account of the circumstances of the city of Prato, see Guarini (1986).

³ “La città di Pistoia è mediocrementemente popolata [...] vi è molta nobiltà, che è sufficientemente comoda, ma vive per la maggior parte oziosa e poco si applica [...]. Il popolo è piuttosto buono, ma la nobiltà e il popolo sono molto attaccati alle massime della Corte di Roma” (our translation).

⁴ “Vi è molto meno da temere in Pistoia che in Prato, per essere il popolo più docile” (our translation).

deception. Of extremely curious disposition [...] always divided amongst themselves, diffident and envious of one another” (*ibid.*).⁵

In short, every ‘people’ of the Tuscan Grand Duchy from Florence to Montepulciano finds its historical-naturalistic and, even more importantly, its social-psychological conditions outlined in Pietro Leopoldo’s *Relazioni*.

What, then, is the point of retrieving these old papers from their dim resting place? The point is to demonstrate that there was, in the Enlightenment of the Tuscan Grand Duchy in the latter part of the 18th century, a reasonably distinct perception of the importance of a detailed knowledge of the characteristics of, on the one hand, the various social classes – observed at the local level – and at the same time of their ‘territory’, with its limitations and potential, or, to put it in modern terms, of the original and/or the derived naturalistic and historical-psychological foundations of human progress.

4. The Italian tradition in social studies

The 19th-century Italian thinker who comes closest to this 18th-century ‘intuition of the world’ was in his way, I believe, Carlo Cattaneo with his “Earth as human construct”. But after Cattaneo came a void, or virtually a void: just the pairing of terms, ‘agricultural economists – rural sociologists’, albeit a prey to the recurrent temptation to ape transalpine economic science, has in its limited way generated some power for a searchlight sweeping through 360 degrees, generating extensive researches (Franchetti, Sonnino, Valenti, etc.).

What, then, is the great dividing line between the approach taking in the broad historical-social context and the stance that rests on mere

⁵ “La nazione toscana, che in genere è di talento, viva e dolce di carattere, è facilissima a regolarsi colla buona maniera e colla persuasiva [...] il carattere degli abitanti della Toscana in genere è dolce, docile, di poco coraggio, ma accorto, poco sincero, di molta finezza, portato all’interesse e a cercare con raggiro di pervenire ai suoi fini. Estremamente portati alla curiosità [...] sempre disuniti fra loro, diffidenti e invidiosi gli uni degli altri” (our translation).

quantitative documentation, or that is satisfied with nothing less than thoroughly rigorous demonstration?

5. The philosophy of public intervention

The problems of government that Pietro Leopoldo addressed in the late 18th century were indeed formidable, but the intuitive understanding of good sense – beware, not common sense! – led him to devise a method of investigation that distinguished between what we now call the “funds” (the land and the characteristics of the populations) and the “flows” (the actions of individual citizens and public authorities).

When it comes to governing a territory, any intervention should combine awareness both of the effects on the area in question and of the general temperament of the people concerned. A measure that applies for the people of Prato, such as a variation in certain duties levied, would not automatically apply in the case, say, of the people of Siena.

Any decision affecting such diverse and multiform realities as to be found in Tuscany must be duly calibrated to the characteristics of the populations involved. Governing is not only a matter of issuing edicts – whether infamous or justly famed, like the one abolishing the death penalty – but also, and above all, it means working to channel the energies observed with the survey so as to turn ‘place’, people and territory all together in a certain direction.

Fine tuning of intervention in accordance with conditions in a certain part of the territory and the ‘representative temperament’ of the people living there thus constitutes the burden of the message Pietro Leopoldo passes on to us with his three volumes of *Relazioni sul Governo della Toscana*.

6. The essence of Pietro Leopoldo’s message

Thus we have the basic elements to formulate a measure of social well-being for a certain population settled in a given place and to weigh

up the implementation and/or potential deterioration of the territory consequent upon a certain decision. The key to territorial planning, therefore, would appear to lie in bringing into sharp focus the general disposition of a population and analysing the local conditions in terms of natural and historical infrastructures. Here we see *in nuce* both the powers to change and the limits to our ambitions and decisions.

In conclusion, what is the message Pietro Leopoldo has for us? Actually, it falls into two parts: a) the awareness of the dynamic independence – including *feedbacks* – of social phenomena; b) the need to ‘soil our hands’, getting down to the work of characterising the various populations, which may be quite large, individual peculiarities balancing out statistically, leaving the cultural traits to emerge. Thus we have our programme of ‘research for intervention’, calling for considerable ‘intelligent, sensitive observation’, revealing an underlying need for social psychology.

7. Funds and flows

Let us now take Pietro Leopoldo’s approach in the explicit terms of procedures for regional development based on what is now known as the flows of funds model.⁶ In doing so we are able to identify at least four funds: a) the natural conditions, b) the productive infrastructures – including the know-how inherent in the working population, c) the level of education and, last but not least d) the disposition of the people. The flows emerge with the various decisions arrived at by the population, including the government.

Of course, there can be no getting away from the fact that, as a certain operation is contemplated – say, overcoming an obstacle presented by a river, throwing a bridge – the conditions of cost remain to be reckoned with, together with forecast of the use that will be made of it, without forgetting that it will in any case mean doing without a school, a

⁶ Reference here is to the analytic model offered by Georgescu Roegen (1971, pp. 211-275).

courthouse or a stadium, and so on. Implicitly, therefore, it is a matter of manoeuvring amongst the manifold possible patterns the territory may take on.

8. The disposition of populations

Coming, now, to the characteristics of the people, if we find them excessively frivolous, or too bent on business, we might contemplate plans for a music conservatory or some other cultural institution to raise the cultural tone of the city. This means not using public resources to encourage futile proclivities (as lotteries do, for example), channelling them in the direction of positive interests, sadly lacking, so as to enhance the temperamental mix ‘spontaneously’, we might say, or rather unconsciously, formed over the centuries.

In his references to Prato and Pistoia, Pietro Leopoldo seems to favour a – roughly intermediate, as it were – mix between the overexcited temperament of Prato and the sleepier citizens of Pistoia.

What really counts is that the local government should have a sense of the different impacts that building a stadium, for example, or an auditorium have on the character of the average citizen.

This approach to the problem seems to have fallen into disuse now that economic decisions, even of a public nature, no longer take into account the effects on the unsurveyed – but by no means irrelevant – ‘statistically representative individual character’ of a particular place. In part this is due to increased mobility of people, but possibly also to a waning regard for the moral and civic aspects of the ‘representative character’ of the population in comparison with 1770!

Similarly, problems like the “reclamation of the Maremma marshland” no longer worry our central and local governments, as is witnessed in one way or another by the sprawl of encroaching concrete, also spilling over our shores, while piles of rubbish accumulate along the roads.

In conclusion, I believe that one step towards a more conscientious approach to public intervention could be inspired through systematic study of these *Relazioni sul Governo della Toscana*.

9. Leopoldo's lesson

What, in a word, is the lesson we learn from Leopoldo? Let us briefly consider it. The logical framework of public intervention rests on some essential requirements:

- a) accurate, unbiased and as far as possible comprehensive inventory of the existing state of affairs;
- b) clear (for a full understanding) and reasonable (and thus implementable) pursuit of an objective;
- c) consistency and, hopefully, synergy between the various interventions planned (adequate development plan);
- d) capacity to create favourable conditions for subsequent developments, as yet indistinct but imaginable in outline.

Let us take a closer look at d). The measure contemplated:

- 1) must not breed moral decline (especially if with irreversible variants) in the character of the agents;
- 2) must not lastingly impoverish any of the basic resources of the territory (air, water, viability, means of instruction and education in the fine and fair, etc.).

In fact, impoverishing the territory's basic resources means a poorer natural scenario for the future populations. And if, moreover, it should have deleterious effects on the average character of the population, various future possibilities will inadvertently remain shut off.

While it is not hard to see what is meant by enriching or impoverishing an area in certain basic resources (the hydrogeological system, etc.), what it means to enhance or deplete the representative human character of a certain area is not quite so clear. And it is here that the social psychologists should step in!

More generally speaking, if our view of social realities has enhanced 'positivity' but at the same time generated more aggressiveness – as is often the case – are we better or worse off?

From the point of view of a dictator, albeit an enlightened one like Pietro Leopoldo, the answer would be worse off – as also, possibly, from the point of view of the so-called ‘economics of happiness’, but for different reasons.

Thus there is an ineradicable moral basis to judgements in economic policy. What does this mean? It means that if, for example, transition from situation *S1* to *S2* also sees an increase in opportunism it can, despite increasing GDP values, be considered retrogressive.

Accordingly, government proposals are to be judged in the light of their presumable lasting effects, whether direct or indirect, uncertain and/or probable, on the average character of the population and the territory.

10. The territory-character dialectic

Pietro Leopoldo’s policy may well have had, all things considered, a positive effect on the fortunes of the Tuscans, but, at least as far as the ‘individual character’ prevalent in the region is concerned, it brought out certain – if not anti-political – certainly apolitical tendencies in his people. From the point of view of the Austrian Grand Duke this was no bad thing, but it clearly was in the following century for Tuscan patriots like Giuseppe Giusti, whose celebrated “Tuscan Morpheus” who “comes dawdling along” in the process of Italian unification, in his famous poem *Lo Stivale* (“the Boot”), says a lot about the expectations cherished by many Tuscans for national unity.

11. What general lessons are to be learned from this brief foray into 18th-century Tuscany?

First and above all, at the methodological level, that approaching social phenomena – even unwittingly, like Pietro Leopoldo! – in the context of Georgescu-Roegen’s analysis, distinguishing between *funds* and *flows*, and introducing *feedbacks*, generates new, far finer, more

articulated distinctions between *causes* and *effects* than are applied by the “standard economist”, as Georgescu would define the figure; the flows consisting in the everyday actions of citizens and government, the funds – let me repeat – in the effects of these actions on the character of the people and on the territory.

From the abstract point of view, both effects are important but, while with a good deal of imagination we might picture terrestrials continuing their lives on a different, physically intact planet (the dream-nightmare of colonising Mars!), if we stay earthbound, *laissez faire, laissez passer* policies can only lead to increasing scarcity and consequent regression in the social relations to the law of the jungle (*homo homini lupus...*). Forewarned is forearmed, as Nicholas Georgescu Roegen would say.

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