

INTRODUCTION

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As highlighted in the EU Report “A New Era for Europe” (Luxembourg, 2022), released by the High-Level Group convened by Commissioner Paolo Gentiloni to examine post-COVID economic and social challenges, the contemporary world is undergoing an in-depth transformation. This shift is characterized by interdependent processes that are redefining the structures of social organization, political governance, and cultural paradigms. According to scholars involved in the Report’s ambitious project, at the heart of these observed changes lies the concept of the “triple transition”, originally theorised in the field of policy analysis and socio-economic research to describe the simultaneous transformation of sustainability, inclusion, and innovation as key drivers of societal change.

Over the last three years, this framework has been particularly developed in European discourse, where scholars and institutions have emphasized its role in guiding governance strategies to address complex global challenges. This is particularly evident in areas such as climate change mitigation, digital transformation, and economic resilience, where policymakers have increasingly relied on this approach to design more adaptive and inclusive policies. For instance, the European Green Deal incorporates elements of this framework to foster sustainable economic growth while ensuring social equity and environmental responsibility. Similarly, in the digital sphere, the EU’s Artificial Intelligence Act reflects a governance strategy that balances innovation with ethical safeguards, ensuring that technological advancements align with fundamental rights. In the same way, several research and theoretical studies have been carried out to analyse this transition in terms of both theoretical approach and empirical application in EU citizens’ daily lives. Therefore, the “triple transition” framework has evolved from theoretical discussions to practical implementations, shaping policy decisions that impact millions across the continent.

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From a sociological perspective, academic literature has stressed how the three fundamental dimensions of the “triple transition” – namely, sustainability, inclusion, and innovation – collectively shape the trajectory of modern societies. Theoretical analysis and empirical research have pointed out that these dimensions are not independent variables, but interconnected forces that influence each other, generating both opportunities and tensions in the development of new institutional models, economic arrangements, and normative frameworks. In an era marked by ecological crisis, demographic shifts, and technological acceleration, academic studies have also emphasized the sociological relevance of these transformations, which becomes increasingly evident. For example, sustainability is no longer only a matter of environmental protection but has evolved into a broader reconfiguration of production systems, health policies, and individual behaviours to ensure long-term resilience. In the same way, inclusion is not a mere rhetorical aspiration, but a structural requirement for the legitimacy of democratic institutions and the efficacy of welfare models. Finally, innovation is not a neutral process, but a socially embedded phenomenon whose consequences depend on regulatory frameworks, ethical considerations, and accessibility conditions.

This issue of *Salute e Società* explores these themes through a selection of contributions that analyse how different sectors of contemporary society engage with these challenges, offering insights that bridge empirical investigation and theoretical reflection.

1. Sustainability as a Social Imperative

As a sociological construct, sustainability extends beyond its environmental dimension to encompass health governance, behavioural transformations, and institutional adaptations to systemic risks.

The study on youth smoking prevention (authored by Emilio Greco, Eliseo Sciarretta, Riccardo Mancini, and Riccardo Sebastiani) highlights the need to integrate public health strategies within broader sustainability frameworks, illustrating how individual choices are shaped by policy measures, socio-cultural norms, and risk perceptions.

The analysis of the One Health approach (carried out by Chiara Fanali and Nicola Ferrigni) reinforces this perspective, emphasizing how the interconnection between human, animal, and environmental health requires trans-disciplinary analysis and integrated policy interventions to bridge the gap, in

people perceptions, between knowledge and understanding, interest and feasibility, awareness and trust.

At the same time, Gea Ducci's exploration of public sector communication on sustainability underscores the role of institutional discourse in constructing social awareness and shaping collective action, highlighting the complex relationship, in the Italian scenario, between the public institutional dimensions of sustainability narratives and the political one.

The role of communication resonates with the empirical investigation of crisis communication strategies in the Bargi-Suviana explosion (authored by Paola De Rosa), which illustrates how local and digital mechanisms interact in the management of multidimensional crises with environmental impacts, demonstrating the necessity of adaptive and context-sensitive responses, tailored to the different actors involved in a multi-stakeholder crisis.

Finally, the intersection of sustainability with welfare policies is evident in Romano Benini's study on active inclusion as a tool for sustainable development, which underscores how economic security, labor market policies, and social protection mechanisms are fundamental to ecological transitions, challenging the traditional separation between economic and environmental concerns.

2. Inclusion as a Pillar of Social Cohesion

Inclusion, as a core element of the triple transition, emerges as a prerequisite for the legitimacy and effectiveness of socio-political systems in the face of demographic diversification, migration dynamics, and digital transformations.

The study on midwifery services for migrant women (authored by Luca Benvenga, Valentina Fedele, and Sabrina Garofalo) exemplifies how healthcare provision intersects with issues of accessibility, cultural mediation, and social rights, illustrating the necessity of inclusive welfare models that respond to the heterogeneity of contemporary societies.

Similarly, Sciarretta and Greco's analysis of accessible eHealth in Italy highlights the tensions between technological innovation and social equity, showing how digital infrastructures can either mitigate or exacerbate pre-existing inequalities in healthcare access.

The cultural dimension of inclusion is further explored in the study on on-screen activism (carried out by Antonella Mascio and Marica Spalletta), which examines how serial dramas contribute to shaping public discourses

on disability, illustrating the performative role of media representations in constructing social norms and challenging stigmatization.

Finally, the investigation of adolescent health perceptions on social media (authored by Francesco Vigneri, Lorenza Parisi, and Arianna Bussoletti) reinforces this argument, revealing how digital spaces function as arenas for identity negotiation, trust construction, and knowledge dissemination, highlighting the sociological significance of digital literacy and algorithmic visibility in shaping contemporary subjectivities.

3. Innovation as a Driver of Social Change

Innovation, while often framed in terms of technological advancements, is inherently a sociological phenomenon that reflects broader structural transformations, power relations, and institutional dynamics.

The study on medical intelligence (authored by Mariateresa Gammone and Francesco Sidoti) explores how artificial intelligence and data-driven processes are reshaping medical decision-making, raising questions about expertise, professional boundaries, and ethical governance.

The intersection between innovation and inclusion is particularly evident in the analysis of digital health infrastructures (see both Sciarretta and Greco, and Vigneri, Parisi and Bussoletti) which, while promising greater efficiency and personalization, also pose challenges in terms of accessibility, data privacy, and algorithmic biases. Similarly, the role of institutional actors in mediating these processes is crucial, as demonstrated in Ducci and De Rosa's discussions on communication strategies and their impact on transparency, trust, and public engagement.

Furthermore, one of the key lessons emerging from this collection of studies is the necessity of critically assessing innovation within the broader framework of sustainability and inclusion: technological transformations must be accompanied by regulatory foresight, participatory governance, and ethical accountability to avoid reproducing or exacerbating social asymmetries.

Conclusions

As previously highlighted, this special issue of *Salute e Società* delves into the “triple transition” through the lens of social studies, with the aim not

to provide answers, but to raise questions, concerns and opinions to be discussed both in academic fields and in the public debate.

In our view, the most relevant conclusion emerging from this issue concerns the importance of multifaceted approach. Indeed, investigating the “triple transition” requires not to consider sustainability, inclusion, and innovation in isolation, but to approach these dimensions through multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary perspectives that integrate empirical research with critical theory. Therefore, the intersectionality of sustainability, inclusion, and innovation challenges us to rethink normative assumptions, institutional configurations, and governance models in ways that respond to the complexities of contemporary societies. By addressing these themes through diverse case studies, this special issue contributes to an ongoing dialogue within sociology and related disciplines, offering analytical tools to navigate the profound transformations that define the present and shape the possibilities of the future.