

April, 2024



In this interview, Enzo Mingione traces his personal and research biography with Alberta Andreotti, spanning from his initial experiences to his involvement in international research networks. This involvement enabled the development of his comparative approach within urban studies. During his career, Enzo Mingione has dealt with urban classic themes such as the urban informal economy, urban poverty, unemployment and marginality, first adopting the Marxist approach, and then the Polanyian one. Enzo Mingione provides three tips for the younger generations: 1. collaborate, because research is always a collective enterprise; 2. experience the international context; and 3. dialogue with other disciplines having your solid sociological roots.

**How did you approach sociology considering that you were predestined to be a lawyer, like your father as the Italian habits of mobility?**

I was indeed destined to be a lawyer, and I enrolled in law school in 1966. However, I encountered sociology as a discipline early on, when I took one of my first exams at the Faculty of Law - the Sociology of Law course. I immediately developed a deep fascination for sociology. The political climate at that time was particularly fertile, given the growing student movement of 1968, along with the social changes we are all familiar with. In my first year at university, right after passing the Sociology of Law exam, I took part in a sociological research, where I acquired valuable skills in designing questionnaires and conducting interviews. Remarkably, I was even paid for my contributions.

Shortly afterwards, while still a student, I was involved in a major national research project coordinated by Alessandro Pizzorno. This was a huge social research project that trained and engaged a young generation of Italian sociologists. Pizzorno provided exceptional leadership and there were many young collaborators, including Guido Martinotti, Alberto Martinelli, Bianca Beccalli and others.

The next milestone, while still a student, was the year 1968. Together with Guido Martinotti, who was older than me and already working in the field of sociology in Milan, we carried out a research on the university students occupying the campus. It was a period of strong political commitment; research and activism were closely intertwined. When I was about to graduate, three of my colleagues (Alberto Giasanti, Mario Boffi and Stefano Cofini) and I carried out an empirical research on the Garibaldi-Isola district. Out of that research we published a book in Italian with the Feltrinelli publisher, and it was very successful and widely spread.

The district we studied is the same one where the Bosco Verticale and modern skyscrapers now stand, fundamentally changing the profile of Milan. The process of transformation of this district began in those years. The inhabitants of the Garibaldi-Isola district, mainly working-class people, vehemently opposed the idea of transforming the area into a centre for business and the upper middle class. They successfully protested against rising rents and evictions. In our research, we sought to examine the interaction between workers and the city from a Marxist

perspective. We pointed out that the working class was internally heterogeneous, with a component that had just arrived in Milan from the South of Italy and was mainly employed in construction, rather than in large-scale industry. In the Garibaldi-Isola district, this segment of working class was very present, living above all in old houses whose owners had not invested in the buildings waiting for renovation and gentrification.

**Since you mentioned the relationship between political and scientific engagement, I'll ask you straight away what your relationship and experience is in this respect.**

From a personal point of view, there was a long-term transformation in my academic approach, from a Marxist perspective to a Polanyian approach. As we will see later, an itinerary similar to the one of Giovanni Arrighi. In the early Seventies we had a common political militancy in the left-wing student movement, in the Gramsci groups, then we didn't see each other for many years until we met by chance again at the Malpensa airport, and we became very close again.



**Returning to your political engagement...**

I have always been more engaged in the intellectual politics of radical anti-capitalist thought. First Marxist, then increasingly Polanyian, but it never translated into any particular political participation.

**Let's take you back to 1970, when you graduated and immediately encountered the ISA.**

In 1970, I had just graduated. Guido Martinotti and Angelo Pagani had to organise the ISA congress in Varna, Bulgaria and they asked me to help them. I organised a group of about twenty young Italian undergraduates and graduates to support them. It was a rebounding Congress: Angelo Pagani was elected member of the executive committee, Guido Martinotti became the General Secretary of the ISA and he appointed me as deputy secretary of the International Sociological Association.

**Shortly after you graduated, you were deputy secretary of ISA. This is unthinkable today.**

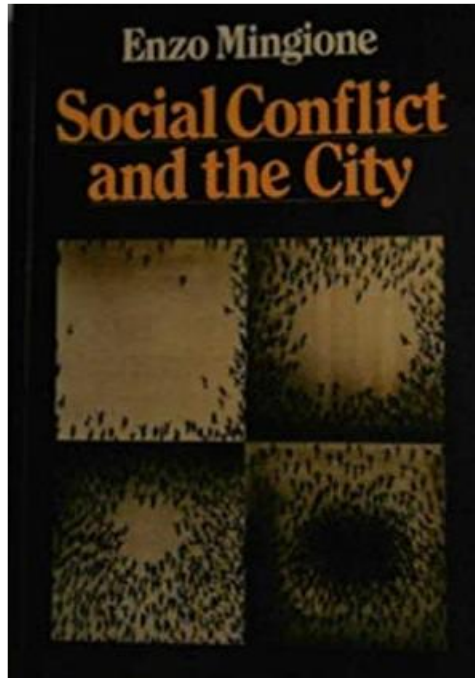
You know, we were few and we started to build an Italian path, then it was crucial I could speak English and French well alongside my sociological expertise. I started a work experience for the International Sociology Association that opened me all international relations.

**Why was that one a rebounding Congress?**

There were some very important changes with Varna, which is why I call it a rebounding or refounding conference. As I said, I was in the organising team and we had the intention of making the conference a truly worldwide reference. In fact, participation at that conference was very large. The previous ISA conference had less than 1,000 participants; in Varna it reached more than 3,000 and from that moment on the number of participants remained always very high. Since the Varna conference, the social sciences of Eastern Europe have been incorporated. Later on, the participation of sociologists in the ISA events increased considerably and expanded to Latin America and Asia.

From the point of view of organisation, then, when Martinotti and I became secretaries, by mandate of the executive committee, we transformed the ISA into an organisation no longer based on national associations but on individuals. Since then the ISA has been organised mainly through individual membership and the research committees, even if of course the national

associations remain important. From that moment on, individual members who paid their fees to the association and the committees became central to the ISA organization.



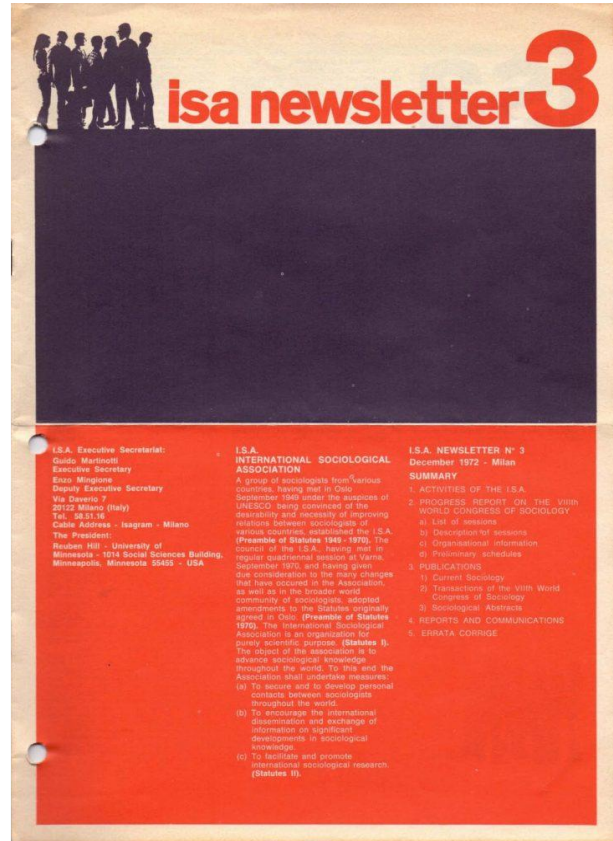
There were already a few research committees in Varna, one of which was Urban Sociology headed by Ruth Glass, but it was not very active and it had few members.

The ISA asked to form a new working group on Urban Sociology, and that group was composed of three souls: the first with Manuel Castells and a group of sociologists from the Western countries, especially French and Italian sociologists, with a predominantly Marxist approach who did not recognise themselves in Ruth Glass; the second, composed of sociologists, and planners mainly from the Eastern Europe; the third component was more Weberian-inspired and gathered around Ray Pahl and his students such as Chris Pickvance, Michael Harloe, Tom Davies, a sociology in any case that had contacts with Marxists. I was part of the first soul. Along with me, there was a large number of French colleagues. There was Edmond Préteceille, Francis Godard, Pierre Kukafka, who was from Grenoble and then organised the RC21 conference in Grenoble (1975). Then there were Ray Pahl's collaborators and there was also Ivan Szelenyi. Then Szelenyi organised a meeting in Budapest, where we approved a kind of Budapest Manifesto. The Committee was born there, but at the same time we had been asked to close Ruth Glass's Urban Sociology committee and I took it upon myself to convince Ruth to accept the closure and I went to talk to her.

## But why you?

I told her that it was a problem for her to manage a Research Committee that was no longer active and she had no people who could help her. In the Centre for Urban Studies that she ran in London, a very nice centre, training was mainly done for professional sociologists and land administrators, that is, people who were involved with local government, especially in the countries of the Global South, in Latin America and India. Ruth Glass had this important mission that she carried out. The Committee was somewhat secondary. She then agreed to dialogue with us, in fact she came to the Grenoble conference where she clashed head-on with Manuel Castells, and the RC21 was reorganised. On that occasion, she also asked me to go and work with her at her centre, and from there we started a collaboration. She needed a collaborator because Licia Valladares who was her collaborator was finishing her PHD in France and was about to return to Brazil. I had attended urban sessions when Ruth was president of RC21 and I had a great admiration for her. I found her very good so I had, let's say, a very strong channel of communication with her.

I knew Licia long before Edmond, because we met in Ruth Glass's offices. It was during this period between 1970 and 1974 that the formation and consolidation of the RC21 took place.



### **Edmond Préteceille, how did you meet him?**

I think Edmond was at the Varna conference, while Licia was not at the Varna conference. He was definitely at the Grenoble conference. There are a whole series of people who worked a lot with our research committee: Michael Harloe, who was one of Ray Pahl's students, Chris Pickvance who was another student of Ray, Tom Davies, Elizabeth Lebas, Doreen Massey, although she was never fully engaged with RC21, Chris Paris who later on went to Australia and invited me there.

### **So Ray Pahl has a central role in RC21 birth?**

Ray Pahl was the master; he had just written this very popular book *Whose City?* published by Penguin and it represented the new English urban sociology. It was not Marxist, it was more Weberian, but he was very open, also very radical compared to the classical tradition of urban sociology. In 1974 at the Toronto World Congress, Pahl became the President of the RC21, I became the Secretary, and Manuel Castells became the Vice-President. We continued, let's say, between '74 and '78 this itinerary, then in '78 Manuel Castells became President at the Uppsala World Congress (1978) and in 1982 I became President, it was the World Congress in Mexico. The itinerary of the first years of the Research Committee was this, then at the end of the 1970s there was also the foundation of the International Journal of Urban and Regional Research (IJURR).

In the late Seventies, I organised a RC21 Conference in Messina and Reggio Calabria. In order to get financial support from both the region Calabria and the Sicily region, the participants had to commute from Reggio Calabria to Messina. It was difficult from the bureaucratic and organisational point of view, but a great success of attendance. It was there that the membership of the research committee expanded towards all parts of the world. A large number of Spanish urban sociologists met for the first time because of the Franco regime. Colleagues from Australia, Latin America, North Africa, the US reminded me the event for many years.

**In those years, what scientific and political strategy did you have for RC21?**

From a political point of view, we especially wanted to involve the Eastern European countries, where urban sociology was underdeveloped, but planning was very strong. In reality it was both true and untrue. Both Musil and Szelenyi were real urban sociologists, and they had a real urban sociological approach, not so much as planners. It was also true that there were a few sociologists from the East, and they were more interested in planning, though. We also wanted to open to Latin America and the Global South.

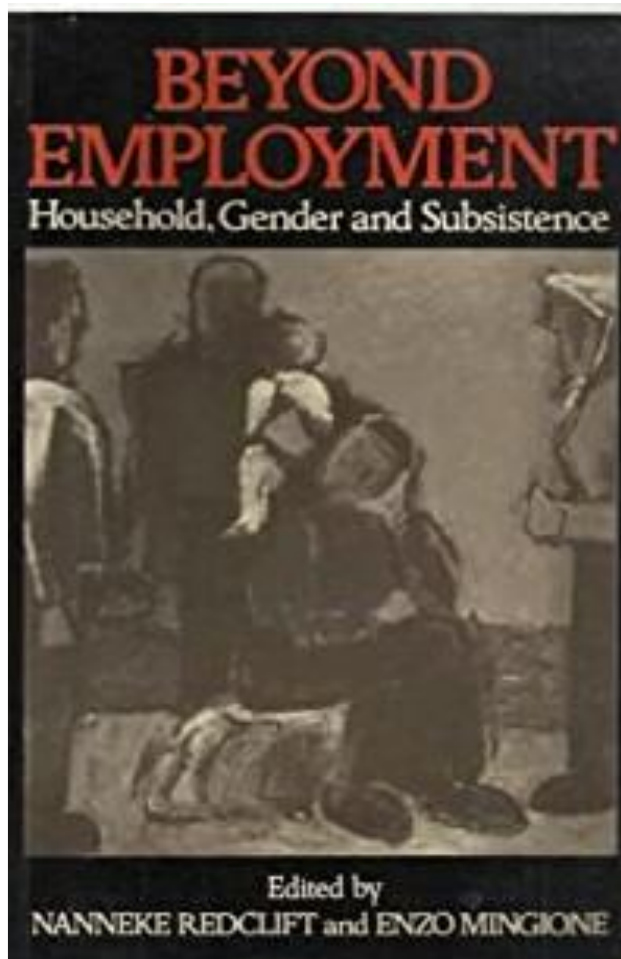
From the scientific perspective, the strategy was this combination of urban sociology with a Marxist and Weberian focus on the city, the city as a place of the working class and as a place of class conflict, as a place of capitalist oppression. Castells' book *La Question Urbaine* and *Monopolville: L'entreprise, l'Etat, l'urbain* written with Godard, were a reference. On the other hand, this Weberian idea of the city by Pahl - they were very attentive as well to inequalities within the city and to speculative tendencies that had to be countered. Let's say that both new Marxist and Weberian urban sociologists were very critical of the vision of the American urban sociology centred on the ecology of the Chicago School. The important reference point in the US was Herbert Gans. He started the criticism to the Chicago School, but he was never involved in the RC21. David Harvey, who later moved to the US, at the time was a prominent geographer in Oxford and was often involved in the RC21 and in particular with the IJURR.

**To put it simple, the Weberian group perhaps had more focus on the agency of actors and on the capacity of politics to alter the course of actions in cities, while the Marxist group insisted more on other forces of change. How did you reconcile these two souls?**

If you read the first issues of the IJURR, you see that in reality there are very strong meeting grounds, because the Weberian focus on agency goes hand in hand with a focus on urban class conflicts. These are less class-based than one imagines. In fact, already in my work on the *City and Social Conflict* I was pointing out that there was a strong working-class component that joined up with a component of old artisans, of people resisting urban speculation, with a frame of



reference that was not just working-class. Rather, it was the defence of urban, petty-bourgeois or self-employed traditions. So, from this point of view, if you like, there is a terrain that is typically the city and its transformations, and how the city is being transformed in which the interest of sociologists of Marxist approach and sociologists of Weberian matrix meet. For example, the fight against speculation is a very strong area of encounter. Ray Pahl in *Whose City?* argued that you have to make a city for the people, not for bureaucrats, for speculators. So, there was a contestation of the capitalist city, speaking in Marxist terms; also Chris Pickvance was in the same direction.



**I would have a hard time saying that Chris Pickvance was a Marxist, reading his writings.**

He was not a Marxist. He was, someone who understood the theorisation of conflict and the idea that the city must be a bulwark against speculation. Hence also Lefebvre's matrix, which was Marxist. Lefebvre was hardly taken up by French Marxist sociologists. It was later taken up by the Americans and the British much later with a radical vision, not necessarily Marxist.

**But was Lefevre a cultural reference of yours?**

He was not a reference for the RC21 or IJURR, but I invited him to Messina. He came and we stayed in contact for many years, until his death. In Messina he left his mark, he gave a beautiful lecture. So, let's say that in RC21 there was this openness to a radical sociology that was opposed

to urban speculation, if you like, and to urban development driven by big speculation, as Manuel Castells later said.

**In the account you've given, even with regard to Ruth Glass, there is little space for women's roles.**

Ruth Glass was a mythical figure in the sense that she had escaped from Nazi Germany. She was a radical journalist. She was always very left-wing. In fact, she talked about the Communist Party as if it was a corrupt social-democratic reality. I remember when we used to go to dinner at Eric Hobsbawm's, she always treated him badly because he was too social democratic and she was much more radical, but of a very concrete radicalism, very British, in the sense that she repudiated the strongly ideological ways. She had her own approach, so much so that this approach was difficult to export. If you think of Ruth's main concept, gentrification, she worked it out in a concrete context of urban transformation, and she only saw it in these concrete contexts. She did not see it within the transformations of capitalism, in the confrontation with speculation. She saw it as a complex social process where a part of a specific social group, perhaps even a very left-wing social group made of intellectuals, artists, with innovative ideas, occupy certain neighbourhoods, somehow also favouring innovation.

She read gentrification from a micro point of view, as a transformation that took place in certain urban contexts and that explained why a part of the population was expelled. Later, it became clear that she also saw the processes of power, i.e. in the sense that the homeowners were all happy because they valued their houses. From this point of view, there was speculation behind it, but she didn't see speculation first. She saw the interest of these new intellectual, artistic, etc. classes to go and live in a place that was cheap enough, was central enough, was easy to get to.

**Apart from Ruth Glass, were there other women who contributed to the birth of the Committee?**

I had a personal relationship with Francis Fox Piven, but she never went to RC21 very much.

Then there were Susan Faistein and Norman. We are very close friends and we saw each other a lot. Licia had kind of disappeared in the beginning because she got married, she had two children. Then in the early 1980s she reappeared. Then, Larissa Lomnitz although she was never directly involved with the Research Committee, was a great urban anthropologist and I had a very close contact with her.

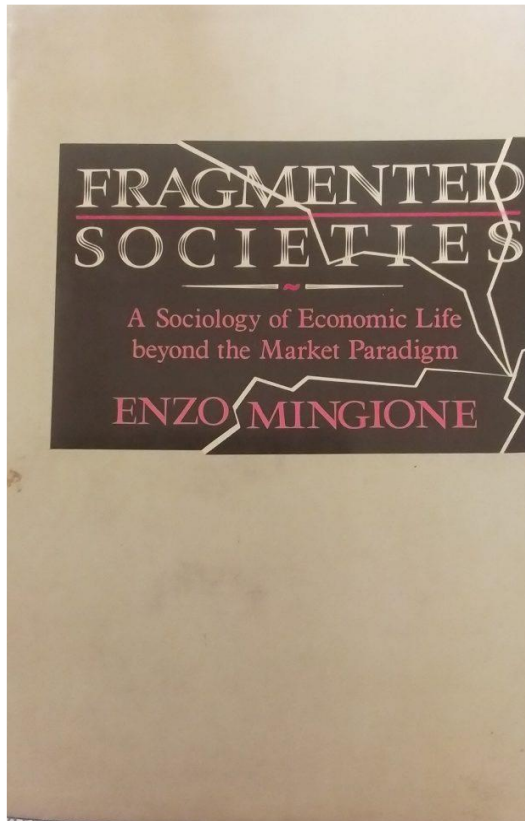
**Undoubtedly, a great anthropologist. Too bad she was not involved.**

Other pioneers include Martha Schteingart (see [interview](#)) and Elizabeth Lebas, but the latter didn't stay in the business very long and I didn't have much contact with her personally. Another important person close to RC21 was Dina Vaiou. We had a very strong common ground. She, her husband Costis Hadjimichalis and other colleagues used to organise these conferences, which were attended by many RC21 members and many geographers in the Greek islands. We had a long history of conferences in the Greek islands on urban issues, especially urban conflicts, but more so in the 1990s.

**Going back to your biography, at that time in the early 1970s, you were also travelling a lot across the United States and South America.**

In those same years, I was also in the United States, in Santa Cruz, and I worked a lot with William Friedland who was working on agricultural workers, and I began to have close contacts with some American colleagues. Among others, the meeting with Jim O'Connor was very important. I have always remained in contact with him. We had important exchanges both when he dealt with the fiscal crisis of the state and when he began to deal with the environment and ecology. This led me to discuss the ecological-environmental transition because he was very interested in this already at the end of the 1980s. He was one of the precursors of the ecological transition theme. It is always in the Eighties, but perhaps also in the early Nineties, when I was going frequently to the United States, that I met Frances Fox Piven, Richard Sennett and Saskia Sassen, Susan and Norman Faistein, John Mollenkopf. I also started meeting again with

Giovanni Arrighi, as I already mentioned. With all of them, I continued a relationship of great friendship that still lasts today.



**Let's continue with the story of the early Seventies and the international experience.**

I did a lot for the ISA. It was a period of travelling and organising conferences. In particular, I travelled a lot for the ISA. I organised the Toronto Congress in 1974, then I was involved as a representative of RC21 in the congresses in Uppsala and Mexico City, and later in New Delhi (1986). After Mexico I went to the National Australian University in Canberra, where I was hosted by the Urban Studies Centre and worked with several urbanists, sociologists and geographers. I had a close relationship with Chris Paris, who was also a former student of Ray Pahl. I was travelling a lot at the time and that was definitely not the norm.

**You were a global trotter ante litteram! Your attention to the comparative dimension is also born within this international context and within the RC21 framework.**

It was practically taken for granted because we were confronted and discussed changes in our countries. The first comparative research I directed was funded by the Centre for Environmental Studies of London which no longer exists, but at the time it was a particularly important research centre. Keep in mind that there were still no funding programmes from the European Commission. We are in the early 70s. This centre gave me an important grant for a little boy like

me. The research focused on the development poles in Italy. Here we see the intertwining with economic sociology very well. I recruited a group of researchers who did the case studies on the petrochemical centre of Augusta Priolo in Syracuse and Porto Torres in Sassari. That research has been practically lost; there have been no major publications. Such a pity.

**It is no coincidence that you immediately started talking about ISA in this interview, about your international relations which were very important. I think they are really your distinctive trait, especially for that time in the Italian context. The ability to be in the international debate and the attention to comparison are your constant.**

One of the first big comparative works I did was on the informal sector in Europe, funded by the European Commission. A great job we did with Ray Pahl.

I had written two monographs: one on Italy and one on Greece. The only country where there was really data on the informal economy was Italy, thanks to a very good team at the Italian National Statistics Institute. They had elaborated a historical series with the estimates of the informal economy in our country. The estimate of the informal economy was no longer given only by the difference between the population census and the industry census, ISTAT had crossed all possible data and found a way much closer to reality to estimate the informal economy.

It was also a very nice experience in Greece because I interviewed the trade unions of the immigrant organisations and other privileged witnesses.

In that work we highlighted how extensive and diversified informal work was in the Southern European countries. It connected with family businesses, but also with the employment of immigrants who started to arrive also in Southern European countries. We highlighted the difference between industrial immigration in the countries of central Europe and the condition of immigrants who found employment in the informal economy, under heavy conditions. The research unveiled working situations that were thought to be lost, to be a trait of ancient societies, but were actually compatible with capitalism, with capitalism of a certain type.

The other great originality of the research was the international team. There were German, French, Scandinavian researchers and it emerged that in all European countries, even Scandinavian ones, there was a considerable share of informal work, and that it was part of a work system within capitalist societies. There was not only regular employment, but many different forms of work. Modernisation is not only the creation of abstract, dependent, regular employment but is a whole series of forms of work that are intertwined with abstract, regulated employment. This was the interest of this research report which has been reprinted several times.



The thing I am quite proud of is that behind the two reports on Italy and Greece there are monographic qualitative insights also made by other researchers which were very interesting. We are between the 80s and 90s. Thanks to the Report on Informal work, I was then called as an expert on informal work by the European Commission and then I had another assignment from the Commission in 1994, again on the subject of informal employment. From the point of view of publications, there is a lot of Ray Pahl's influence in my publication *Beyond Employment* (1985).

**In those years, you were in Messina, a city in the South of Italy, Sicily, but commuting to London all the time. How did you arrive in Messina?**

At the time there was much more academic mobility in Italy. I already had a series of publications, like the book *City and social conflict* and some articles, I had all the requirements to win the post as researcher and I won it, so I became a lecturer in Political Theory of Development. I arrived in Messina in 1973. During the Messina period, I travelled a lot abroad. The first few years I commuted to London where I worked at the University College of London's Urban Studies centre directed by Ruth Glass that I have already mentioned.

In Messina I became more and more interested in the question of regional development. I did a lot of research on Messina because Messina was a particular city, destroyed by the earthquake of 1908 and had created a very important informal housing sector; temporary barracks as they were called. These temporary barracks built during the First World War to house the earthquake victims, were still operational as a place of residence in the 1960s and 1970s, and they hosted a part of the very marginalised working class of Messina.

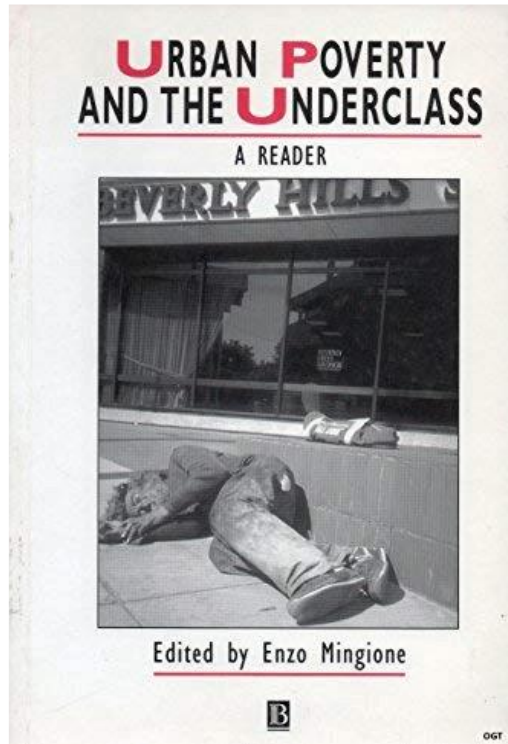
In Messina I also worked a lot on the unemployment/employment relationship and then on poverty, which I developed in particular in the Nineties. I would say that the interests I developed in Messina, have maintained in different and more articulated ways over time. First of all, the regional and development issue, particularly in the South of Italy. Then the informal sector, in its various articulations; unemployment/employment and the profiles of the unemployed with attention to territorial and gender inequalities; poverty and welfare with social policies declined at the local level and the question of social rights. All this is within the theme of the transformations of capitalism, which is what I have always dealt with. There is already a lot of the idea of the book *Fragmented Societies*.

**In fact, it is during the Messina period and your continuous stays abroad, especially in the UK and the USA, that you set up your book *Fragmented Societies*.**

Perhaps the most important legacy of Messina and of all contacts, especially Americans, is my volume *Fragmented Societies*. I started writing this book in Binghamton, when I was visiting Giovanni Arrighi and he was writing *The long 20th century*. I was in Wallerstein's office who was on leave.

If I think back to all this wave of studies on the informal sector and unemployment and then on the new forms of poverty, I think about them all within the Polanyian framework.

At that time, my understanding of Polanyi was not yet so strongly centred on the double movement as it is now, but on the idea of embeddedness, the tension between economy and society.



In my personal trajectory, I arrive at Polanyi by re-orienting the Marxist paradigm. This allows me to interpret reality by leaving the simple description. On the concept of informal, for example, using the Polanyian approach allows not to be too descriptive, but to show that this is the outcome of a tension between a regulatory process and the impact of the market. The market makes it necessary to set a regulatory process in motion and Polanyi develops a theoretical framework consistent with this idea that the market creates unsustainable tension. To challenge this tension, you have to respond to the market with a regulation process that supports the market and keeps it alive because an unregulated market cannot survive.

Though, Polanyi is also a bit contradictory. It is not clear how the market works on its own. I went towards my own interpretation, in fact, contrary to what the narrow Polanyians say. Now I am absolutely convinced that there is no disembeddedness. This is an evolution that I had in my thinking compared to the early days, at the time of *Fragmented Societies*.

At the beginning of *Fragmented Societies*, in fact, I say that the English society in Victorian times was uprooted because the market was devastating the social bonds, and people were desperate because they had no way to survive. There are the stories of Booth and many authors who show us the dramatic conditions of the second half of the 19th century in England, in which the social ties in the new industrial cities are really very weak and you have urban poverty.

The market has a devastating impact, but the institutional regulation is there, so it is not disembedded, which I did not say at the beginning. There is an embeddedness built by family relationships, by social relationships, by solidarity, by the fact that you have social movements that protect you.



After all, even today it is a bit similar. Institutional regulation, political actors understand that they cannot create poverty indefinitely, that regulatory institutions must be rebuilt. The Polanyian paradigm thus reworked seems to me very effective in seeing the tension between society and the market, a continuous tension. For me today the double movement is an analytical lens for reading reality and contemporary capitalism. In *Fragmented Societies* there was already this tension but not yet the vision of the double movement thus outlined.

**Before moving to Padua, you spent your sabbatical in Los Angeles and this is crossing again with RC21.**

I became full professor of sociology in Messina in 1993, and around the same time I went on leave to Los Angeles to teach, and then I moved to Padua.

**Where were you in Los Angeles?**

I was in the sociology department which was headed by Ivan Szelenyi, a close friend. He had left Hungary in the mid-1970s, had also been to England with Ray Pahl and we had worked together. He was also on the board of RC21 in the Seventies and we became great friends. In LA we had an important RC21 Conference on Urban Conflicts. I chaired a session on poverty and this was the basis for my important edited book *Urban Poverty and the Underclass: A Reader* published in 1996. Before the volume, I published a special issue in the IJURR.

I also met there the economic geography that has always been very important in the United States (Allen Scott and Michael Storper). Then Manuel Castells was also there that year. He was intellectually stimulating. The theme of poverty was often intertwined with that of unemployment in the South of Italy, and in the 1990s I explored this issue, also with important institutional collaborations and local actors. Upon returning from Los Angeles, I never returned to Messina because I moved to Padua, and I stayed until I arrived at the University of Milan - Bicocca in 2000 where I stayed until my retirement.

So, let's pick up the thread of your interests to get to the *Urban Poverty* volume. You said that in the Nineties some themes continued, especially poverty and unemployment, in addition to the theme of regional development.

In the Nineties I developed the theme of poverty and unemployment with more attention. On the poverty side, my activity has developed into a whole series of empirical studies that we carried out in Milan with Yuri (Kazepov), and David (Benassi) and Simone (Ghezzi). We had some



agreements with the Municipality and the local social services. Within this framework and based on the Bignaschi Foundation, of which I am president, we founded the Observatory on new urban poverty. The experience was born with a national project on the New Urban Poverty in which we analysed the cities of Milan, Messina, Rome and Naples and one of the objectives was the establishment of longitudinal citizen observatories (1994). Then I was coordinator of another strategic project, Income Distribution, Inequalities, Social Exclusion and Effects of Economic and Social Policies, always on the same subject. The synthesis of all these studies is the volume I edited *Urban Poverty and the Underclass: A Reader* published by Blackwell in 1996, which collects international contributions including the famous chapter by Wacquant, and that of Peter

Marcuse. In reality, the volume does not have so much to do with the underclass, rather with unemployment and poverty, but the publisher wanted to insist on the underclass, because in the United States that was the debate. Research on poverty and anti-poverty policies then continued in European projects.

**Your relations with extra academic institutions emerge well.**

It's an important piece of research and advice that you need to keep alive. The relationship with the trade union, as I said, has always been present since the Nineties - the national one and then the more local one. In Milan, with the Chamber of Labour I have intense relationships even now that I am retired. Then with the Municipality and the social services sector I had great relationships which then got lost. At the local level today, I have a very intense relationship with the Feltrinelli Foundation which has become an important centre of public debate and makes culture. The Foundation partly follows and partly set the agenda of the Municipality. I had been on the Scientific Council of the Feltrinelli Foundation for three years.

The European Commission is an institution for which I have worked and with which I have carried out many projects. As I told you, the research on the informal work started out as a consultancy for the Commission. I worked again for the Commission in the early 2000s, I worked on the Supiot report on the Future of work. There were economists, jurists; I believe I was the only sociologist. This is a crucial theme that I also revisited in the recent volume for the Feltrinelli Foundation titled *The Transformations of Work*.

**The European Commission is certainly a key player, even in the great impulse to comparative research. I would come back to this point, because if I'm not mistaken it is in this period that you are very involved in European projects.**

The mid/late Nineties and the first decade of the 2000s are the period of the great European projects. Here we see the great impetus of the European Commission. Previously there were

mainly projects for individual assignments, even if there were collaborations as in the case of informal work. With European comparative projects there is an academic turn; research groups are structured both at national and at European level.

During the 1990s, I developed particularly close ties with Sciences-Po and Henri Mendras. Henri Mendras had these two young colleagues, Patrick Le Galès and Marco Oberti, and a very strong relationship with Arnaldo Bagnasco. We had the common interest for how regional differences play in the economic development of France and Italy in comparative terms. Mendras had asked us to do a work on transformation trends in Italy and with Bagnasco the dialogue was always open on the Three Italies and the persistence of the North-South dualism that re-emerged overwhelmingly in the 1990s.

I have been involved in several European projects and some networks. The first major European project was ESOPPO (The Evaluation of Social Policies Against Social Exclusion at the Local Urban Level, 1996) coordinated by Chiara Saraceno which involved 4 other European countries. There was Marco Oberti for France, and Marisol Garcia for Spain; they are important references also today, as well as dear friends. We analysed the implementation of the minimum income in different countries and in different localities, highlighting the importance of the local level and the intertwining with the national one. From that research, I started to work on local welfare, an interest that I developed with you. I made another European project, a few years later, TSFEPS (Changing Family Structure and Social Policy: Childcare Services in Europe and Social Cohesion, 2001), in which we looked at early childhood policies and services at the local level. At that point I was already at the University of Milan- Bicocca.

**You have done a lot of European projects and also collaborated with many Italian and foreign colleagues.**

Yes, only Yuri (Kazepov) has participated and won more projects than me! Research, especially today, is a collective adventure, necessarily. I find myself better and better working with other colleagues, exchanging ideas and correcting myself. I find that exchange of ideas and

collaborations enrich our work. I wrote a whole series of publications as a single author such as the book *Fragmented Societies*, but I always liked to let my colleagues read what I wrote to get their opinions; trying to always be in a context of cooperation and connection because this is very important to us. In European projects this is necessary and therefore I have involved several colleagues. The last big comparative network I joined was funded by the European Research Council and was entitled GRECO with PI Susanna Narotzky of the University of Barcelona. It involved two post-docs for each of the four Southern European countries (Italy, Spain, Greece and Portugal) lasting 5 years. We have had many meetings, conferences on the resistance of the low-income classes in some Southern Europe cities. The goal was to understand how people in each country coped with the economic crisis of 2008.

**I guess the idea was to work on the Southern European model and understand if we can still talk about its specificity.**

We have investigated a wide range of coping strategies. From the point of view of anthropology, it is always a bit difficult to talk about models. In any case, a typical Southern European character emerges still centred on involving family and parental structures, cohabiting and non-cohabiting, in these coping strategies that we called practices of resistance. There are also other common practices like the double work, illegal and informal work, putting all family resources in common. On the housing strategies this can be seen well, for example renting some rooms of the house especially in the country houses, or staying in old houses instead of moving to the city. Practices that allow to survive the periods of crisis, but that lower the quality of life.



Round table organised on the occasion of Enzo Mingione's retirement at the Feltrinelli Foundation.

**Among the European projects and networks, there is the great network for young researchers that you coordinated, RTN-Urban Europe.**

I am particularly proud of that, because we have grown a group of young researchers who have made career around Europe. The partners of that project were the LSE with Richard Burdett and Richard Sennett, Sciences-Po Paris with Patrick Le Galès and Marco Oberti, the Humboldt University with Hartmut Hausserman, the University of Amsterdam with Sako Musterd, the Urbino University with Yuri Kazepov, the University of Barcelona with Marisol Garcia, and the Helsinki University with Anne Haila. All these scholars have made their expertise available to young researchers to discuss their projects, host them in their offices, involve them into their networks. Stefania Sabatinelli, Francisco Moreno Fuentes, Manuel Albers, Francois Bonnet,

Marianna d'Ovidio, Bruno Cousin, Barbara Da Roit, Giulia Sinatti, and you too have passed through that network. That project involved the Doctorate Urbeur - Urban Studies based at the University of Milan-Bicocca that I was coordinating, and was afterwards coordinated by Serena Vicari, a dear colleague who was also part of the RC21.

**On the national side, you were amidst the founding fathers of a new university, the University of Milan-Bicocca, a new adventure.**

When I was Department Director in Padua, I was asked to join this project for the foundation of a new university and a new faculty of sociology in Milan. Sociology did not exist in Milan. At the same time, Giovanni Arrighi proposed me a job at the John Hopkins University. I was tempted, but the Bicocca project was just born and it didn't seem fair to me to leave like this. In addition, at that time my mother was already ill and I didn't want to go far. I stayed in Bicocca. It was a period of excitement at the beginning; a new university with possibilities and certainly good resources. I was dean of faculty for two terms (six years), and this prevented me from participating in other major European projects.

**After your presidency you took an academic leave and went to Stanford.**

I was tired, and in Stanford I was in a beautiful and stimulating place. I had the idea of working on the concept of embeddedness, developing the idea of the tension of the double movement. I did it only partially. Anyway, I went to Granovetter and attended many of their seminars. I had met Granovetter in the Nineties, in Crete, thanks to a mutual friend, then we kept in touch and I went to Stanford.

**And it comes the time of your retirement; in reality, only formal.**

Well, yes. You gave me a super surprise with Yuri, David, Simone with the volume *Western*

*Capitalism in Transition: Global Processes, Local Challenges* that you edited in my honour. You have gathered some dear friends, with whom I have confronted over time and had an intellectual exchange that the volume returns well. It is in the chapter of that book that I pay much more attention to the issue of the Global South which is now at the centre of my attention. In reality, the interest for the South of the world was already there at the beginning of my career, when I was working with Ruth Glass in her programme aiming precisely at urban operators of the Global. We need to think of how the development is changing today. It was previously centred only on the experiences of the Global North. We need to look at the North and South and at their mutual relationship.

### **Today you are working on?**

Now I am working on the editing of the collective volume *Modern guide on urban poverty*. When the publisher proposed it to me, I would have said no, because I don't feel like working hard again, but David (Benassi) and Enrica (Morlicchio) spurred me on. I accepted but with the idea that this volume should be projected above all on the Global South. We could not reproduce a volume about the Global North. I proposed to think about poverty in the countries of the Global South. This interested me a lot so we invited a whole series of people working on the Global South and we tried to keep, even if we didn't succeed completely, the priority on researchers working on poverty in the Global South: Indians, Africans, Latin Americans, a Chinese scholar.

### **At this point, I can't help but ask, how does this volume fit into the comparative Global North-South debate?**

We always underestimated the processes of change in the Global South and actually today it is evident that the processes of change in the Global South are a very important part of the change. Globally, the majority of new industrial workers and new manufacturers are in the Global South. The majority of city dwellers are now in the Global South. It is true that even forty years ago there were big cities in the Global South like Cairo, Mexico City, but maybe there was not this



super urban concentration. The vast majority of the world's urban population is now in the Global South and it is the living conditions of this population that make the difference. As Wallerstein argued, fifty years ago, Western countries used all their resources to create their welfare states to cover their citizens. The question is now how will the Global South, if it succeeds, provide protection for a population that is several billions? That is the question. And this is opening new tensions that we do not see, of urban poverty. Why? We often don't see them because we are tied to formal economic data, whereby if one urbanises, one automatically earns more. This is true, but this increasing urbanised population cannot rely on the community subsistence economy. These new urban populations have increased their income, but they have also become poorer, because they cannot solve their problems with the little income they earn, which is higher than what they had in the countryside, but still very poor.

**This process reminds me a lot of what many scholars and you wrote about the labour force migrating from the countryside to the cities in the period of industrialisation in the Global North, but no longer being able to rely on self-subsistence systems and community. Do you think that we can find common elements?**

You cannot use the same concepts, because the dimensions, the size are different, the times are different, the times of urbanisation and technological transformation are different. The current urbanisation process in the Global South is taking place with advanced technologies, within much faster timescales, so it no longer takes a generation but only a few years. From this point of view, it is not a replica, it cannot even be understood as the same process. It is not necessarily the case that the new urban dwellers have a deficit of welfare, maybe they have different forms of protection. It is a different way of combining community life with urbanization. Obviously, there are tensions and conflicts but they are different from the ones typical of the first wave of capitalist urbanisation in the industrially advanced countries of the Global North.

**An important debate on the comparison that goes on, in which you fit.**

The contexts of the South cannot be compared to those of the North. They must teach us new recipes. They must have new recipes and they must also teach us these new recipes. We must be so humble to take the new recipes that come from the Global South.



Enzo Mingione in 2018 at the XIX ISA World Congress of Sociology (Toronto), during the round table The Future of Western Capitalism. Global Forces and Local Challenges.

**We are closing, what other advice you would like to give to young scholars who begin this journey today?**

There are three things that are important to me, which also emerge from my journey and which I hope I have left as a suggestion. The first is that of collaboration: as I said, research is undoubtedly a collective enterprise, and increasingly so. You have to know how to balance and alternate between multi-handed and individual work, but the comparison and the collective work is fundamental. Second, the importance of the international dimension. It is important to be involved in the international context/debate and this is partly done by participating in international conferences, participating in projects. We need to get out of the only local dimension because it helps to have a comparative perspective, to have new ideas and to understand better what is happening in your own context. The third point, which has perhaps not come up much, but which I have practiced a lot, is the dialogue with other disciplines. I have worked a lot with anthropologists, with lawyers, with geographers, knowing that we bring the sociological perspective with our tools. They are not all the same, but working with different disciplines is interesting and helps to broaden the perspective. I would say that the more collaborations and cross-fertilisations there are, the more enriched we are.

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March 9, 2017, Enzo Mingione's home. David Benassi, Enzo Mingione, Nicoletta Carmi, Simone Ghezzi, Yuri Kazepov and Alberta Andreotti celebrate Enzo's retirement by revealing the manuscript *Western Capitalism in Transition*.

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