

## Fondamenti di scienze sociali non convenzionali

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## Fondamenti di scienze sociali non convenzionali

La collana ospita volumi di ricerca in campo sociale, i cui contenuti sono caratterizzati da “transdisciplinarietà”, che include ma va oltre:

- la multidisciplinarietà, che implica una cooperazione tra discipline differenti, mantenendone contemporaneamente le reciproche distanze ed evitando contaminazioni tra le stesse;
- l’interdisciplinarietà, centrata su nuclei tematici di nicchia definiti da interazioni di limitate sezioni di più discipline.

La transdisciplinarietà implica legami più ampi e profondi, e un’integrazione tra discipline: metaforicamente, si tratta di una “contaminazione” allargata tra diverse ortodossie e pensieri scientifici mainstream.



# **A New Social Market Economy for the 21st Century**

Emilio Fontela: Economist and Global Researcher

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Dialoguing with Emilio: . . . If only God, in launching the dice,  
could give the blow to you to beat your butterfly wings.

(from *Letters to Emilio Fontela*, 2007)





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## Foreword

GIORGIO ALLEVA\*

All those who have met Emilio Fontela certainly noticed the mobility of his face, moving promptly from the concentration and attentiveness of listening, to a good-natured and open smile. This mobility of expression mirrored the swiftness of his thoughts as reflected in his bright and clever eyes, that moved fast, but also easily focused on a face or a detail. Even those who do not endorse physiognomics must concede that these physical traits corresponded not only with his disposition and character — it is not surprising that the nature of a man leaves a trace on his looks — but also with his interests. His scientific production ranged from long-term economic and technological forecasting to general equilibrium models and Input–Output tables, from development economics (also and especially at regional and local scale) to the economics of energy sources, from the issues of international trade to the problems related to the calculation of total factor productivity, from the role of technology (he first published a paper on ICT in the early 1980s) to the knowledge society.

These diverse and multiple interests can be found in the bibliography attached to this book. They should not be seen as a symptom of eclecticism — although Emilio Fontela was certainly eclectic and versatile — but rather as a mark of his brilliant curiosity. This too was an element that stood out since the first conversation with him. He never took anything for granted as concerned subject matters and when meeting people he was willing to believe that they were clever and in good faith, at least at first. From the intersection of these features derived his willingness to explore new roads, sometimes far away from the well-trodden ones. In his bibliography many titles confirm his inexhaustible curiosity as well as his ability to extract scientific lessons even from the most occasional and even trifling stimuli (he also worked in the field of consultancy and applied economy).

Emilio Fontela certainly possessed a free mind but he cannot be defined a heterodox economist: he was well-grounded in mainstream economic theory, as confirmed by his early interest for the Walrasian general equilibrium models and his lifelong adhesion to the Leontievan Input–Output

\* President of ISTAT.

scheme. He was not heterodox in his way of working, either, as we can see that even his most speculative research work always took account of the need for measurement and tried as hard as possible to support any statement with quantitative empirical evidence. And this effort makes him one of us, statisticians and quantitative economists.

However, heterodoxy can be found in his dissatisfaction with the state of the art of world economy (he thought that the market alone was unable to solve all the problems of globalization and that it would be necessary to mobilize all the resources of society to face this new challenges) and with the theoretical models of economics and of the other social sciences. Years before Sarkozy created the Stiglitz–Sen–Fitoussi commission, he had identified a possible solution in putting together economic development, removal of inequalities and sustainable growth:

Economists, or at least a non-negligible part of them, are increasingly searching for an approach to economic growth for countries, regions, enterprises or people which can be compatible with a reasonable use of natural resources, environmental preservation in a broad sense and a fair distribution of economic welfare on a global scale, even among future generations. (Fontela & Pulido 2004, p. 10)

In addition, this perspective — he stressed — makes it necessary to rethink our theoretical framework (neither Keynesian nor neo-classical models seem adequate) and the very accounting schemes, that he considered “meaningless”. This dissatisfaction is certainly widely shared today and, if you allow me to make a reference to the Institute that I am chairing, it is a guiding principle in our work in that large experimental laboratory represented by the BES Project, the project for the measurement of equitable and sustainable development. Simple answers to complex problems do not exist: the creation of a series of specific indicators to describe the dimensions of equitable and sustainable development is a necessary first step forward, but it is not sufficient to provide the answers expected from a consistent accounting system capable of explaining and quantifying the economic, social and environmental aspects. In this work, one of the spearheads of our research as public statisticians, the lessons of Emilio Fontela can still provide valuable guidelines.