

# EQUILIBRI

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RIVISTA PER LO SVILUPPO SOSTENIBILE

Al lettore 361

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## DOSSIER: LE CLASSI MEDIE TRA ASCESA E DECLINO

Classi medie. Dalla tecnologia alla «fine del mondo»  
di Giulio Sapelli 365

---

Nuovi strati sociali di un nuovo Brasile  
di Renato Meirelles 379

---

La classe media in Cina: sogno o realtà?  
di Zhou Xiaohong 390

---

India. Ascesa dei consumi e ricerca di comfort  
di Stefano Caldirola 413

---

L'Obamacare e la classe media americana. Lettera da New York  
di Sandro Malavasi 431

---

## GRANDE INTERVISTA

Non focalizzarsi solo sul clima  
di Jean-Claude Ameisen. Intervista di Nicolas Truong 439

---

## ECONOMIA E SOCIETÀ

Fino all'ultima goccia  
di Michel Camdessus e Giulio Sapelli 451

---

## GEO & POLITICA

Birmania. Tra tensioni politiche e inflazione crescente  
di Emanuele Bompan 465

---

La deriva dei continenti di Franco Farinelli	472
L'impatto del CETA sui settori strategici: scambi e investimenti internazionali in campo energetico di Fabrizio Di Benedetto	480
In che direzione va la Cina? di Jeff W. Clarck	489

## SURPLUS

Libia. Un paese senza Stato: il tribalismo come opportunità di Sara Brzuszkiewicz	515
Sciiti, sunniti e l'ascesa dello «Stato Islamico» di Lorenzo Kamel	533
L'immagine va alla guerra. Iconoclastie d'Oriente e Occidente di Bruno Pedretti	543
Tra più mondi di Claudia Sonino	553

## LETTERA A «EQUILIBRI»

Un'attitudine della mente di Nicola Zanardi	561
Abstracts	567
Hanno collaborato	575

**A**bbiamo assistito, in quest'inizio di secolo, alla crescita tumultuosa delle classi medie nei paesi emergenti e alla stagnazione e trasformazione delle stesse in Occidente. La svolta storica, che accomuna paesi tra loro molto diversi, come il Brasile, la Turchia, l'India, la Cina, l'Africa del Sud ecc., rischia oggi di segnare il passo a causa del rallentamento delle loro economie basate essenzialmente su una manodopera a basso costo e sul commercio delle loro risorse naturali. Ma procediamo con ordine.

Definire la classe media non è semplice: per i sociologi è sempre stato un argomento «scivoloso» perché si tratta di un gruppo sociale non omogeneo ma stratificato. Gli organismi internazionali e gli istituti statistici nazionali, nel classificarla e così definirla, partono sempre dal reddito, il dato più immediato. Per esempio, la Banca Mondiale fa rientrare in questa classe sociale chiunque abbia superato la soglia di povertà e disponga, quindi, di un reddito giornaliero di almeno due dollari. In Africa del Nord il reddito sufficiente per essere considerato appartenente alla classe media è di circa 13 dollari giornalieri.

Anche parametrando queste cifre al loro potere d'acquisto «locale», questa definizione tutta economica pecca d'imprecisione (non tiene conto degli *alea* delle statistiche ufficiali) e d'incompletezza. Ma anche definire le classi medie unicamente a partire dai loro comportamenti è insufficiente, perché reddito e comportamento sono tra loro strettamente interdipendenti. Più utile, allora, ragionare in termini di classe media globale, che raggruppa coloro che nel mondo hanno una possibilità di spesa che va dai 10 ai 100 dollari al giorno. Al di sotto di questo strato sociale c'è un'ampia fetta di popolazione che rappresenta il ceto più basso della classe media globale, con una disponibilità di spesa giornaliera che oscilla tra i 4 e i 10 dollari. Da qui la sua vulnerabilità a una possibile caduta (o ricaduta) in uno stato di povertà.

Proprio perché la definizione di classe media deve tener conto di uno stile di vita che riveli benessere, del livello d'istruzione medio-alto, dell'aver un'occupazione stabile o liberale, dell'essere proprietario di un certo nu-

mero di beni durevoli e dell'aver accesso a una serie di consumi distintivi, ecco allora venirci in aiuto Abraham Maslow, che con la sua teoria tiene assieme bisogni-motivazioni-comportamenti.

La «piramide di Maslow», applicata come griglia alle classi medie emergenti, chiarisce come queste, oltre all'accesso al consumo di beni e servizi, reclamino riforme politiche e istituzionali che permettano loro una maggiore partecipazione sia politica sia economica. Per restare ai paesi di cui questo numero si occupa, l'espressione di tali richieste è visibile nelle proteste in India contro la violenza sulle donne, nelle mobilitazioni dei network sociali in Cina contro l'inquinamento e la corruzione e nelle manifestazioni dei giovani brasiliani che, grazie alla democratizzazione dell'insegnamento superiore, hanno conseguito un titolo di studio ma non trovano nel mercato del lavoro un'occupazione remunerata secondo le aspettative.

Come abbiamo accennato all'inizio, l'economia dei paesi emergenti, dopo anni di crescita sostenuta, sta rallentando, con ripercussioni notevoli sulla loro classe media, che rischia di perdere il relativo benessere conquistato in quest'ultimo millennio, grazie alla globalizzazione. Ovviamente questo processo non lascia indenne le società, i commerci e la produzione dei paesi ricchi. E ciò avviene nel momento in cui in Occidente assistiamo a una redistribuzione del reddito, che modifica il profilo stesso della stratificazione sociale, e quindi la struttura della società, trasformandola sotto i colpi dei rilevanti cambiamenti economici e tecnologici che scorrono sotto i nostri occhi.

### RISE AND DECLINE OF THE MIDDLE CLASSES

#### **Middle Classes. From Technology to the «End of the World», by *Giulio Sapelli***

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Nothing could be more wrong than believing that the latest economic and technological changes are responsible for the world's new social stratification. This process had already started two or three years ago. It is in line with twenty years of technological progress, but it marks a turning point, nonetheless. The article describes this change, the fall of the old middle classes and the rise of the new ones in a twenty-year period dominated by globalization and by the oligarchic power of new proprietary managers.

**Keywords:** Technological progress, Social stratification, Middle Classes

#### **New Middle Classes in a New Brazil, by *Renato Meirelles***

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Stating that Brazil has changed over the last ten years is a platitude. As President of Data Popular, a Research Centre established in 2001 to study and monitor the growth and development of the Brazilian population, I have followed the transformations of the new social layers that compose the middle classes. The article describes the progress made, and the need to consider the prospects of the new middle classes to understand the reasons for their present dissatisfaction and their expectations for the future.

**Keywords:** Brazil, Middle Classes

#### **Middle Classes in China: Dream or Reality?, by *Zhou Xiaohong***

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The Chinese middle class is no longer an illusion. It exists, but its nature remains controversial. In China this social group can be called in at least five different ways: «intermediate layer», «medium-level wage earners», «medium-level owners», «petite bourgeoisie», «white collars»... These expressions are

accurate, but none of them describes the category in its entirety. Who represents the middle classes in China? Who is excluded? When and how were these classes formed? Do they have the same characteristics of the American or European middle classes? This article is one of the first in depth reflections on this topic. It was written in late 2005, but it has not yet lost its efficacy.

**Keywords:** China, Middle Classes

**India. The Rise of Consumption and Demand for Comfort, by *Stefano Caldirona***

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Defining the «middle class» of a huge, diversified and socially complex country such as India is a real challenge. Most scholars believe that the Indian middle class will be the greatest contributor to consumption, and that it will make India one of the five most important global markets. Today, however, the Indian middle class is going through a contradictory phase. The rural middle class started growing stronger in the 1970s, especially at the political level. The economic reforms of the 1990s have further contributed to reinforcing the middle classes throughout the country.

**Keywords:** India, Middle Classes

**Obamacare and the American Middle Class. Letter from New York, by *Sandro Malavasi***

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ACA, but everybody calls it Obamacare. The initials of the American health reform stand for a specific program, the Affordable Care Act. It is a reform for economically affordable health care, regardless of the income level and of the state of health. The article explains the main points of the reform, how it was criticized and the answers given by its supporters. The author also reports the recent doubts of the American middle class and its past expectations.

**Keywords:** American Middle Classes, Obamacare

## THE INTERVIEW

### **Do not just Focus on the Climate, *Nicolas Troung interviews Jean-Claude Ameisen***

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The Climate Conference that will take place in Paris on November 30th is attracting the attention of political leaders on the environmental issues induced by climate change. Climate change, however, should not be the sole focus of attention, as it could distract us from the efforts that need to be made to protect our health, reduce inequality and preserve the environment. We must attempt a different approach to Nature, treasuring Einstein's advice: «We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them».

**Keywords:** Paris Climate Conference, Climate Change, Nature

## ECONOMY & SOCIETY

### ***Up to the Last Drop, by Michel Camdessus and Giulio Sapelli***

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Despite the efforts, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have only been partially achieved. Many countries are still without water, and over one inhabitant out of three is still a victim of famine and cannot live a life of dignity because of water-related problems. Three more goals should be added to the original MDGs: providing universal access to sustainable sanitary services and drinkable water, improving drinkable water security, improving waste water management and pollution prevention, and improving the management of integrated water resources and water use efficiency. These measures require an appropriate financial strategy to solve the water governance issue.

**Keywords:** Water, Millennium Development Goals

## GEO & POLITICS

### **The Continental Drift, by *Franco Farinelli***

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Why is Antarctica the only continent unaffected by the tragedy of migrants and refugees? The Western press encourages our emotional involvement, but if we really wish to understand what is happening, we might find an answer in the continents themselves.

**Keywords:** Antarctica, Migration, Continental Drift

### **The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), by *Fabrizio Di Benedetto***

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This article analyses the impact that the Comprehensive Trade and Economic Agreement (CETA) between the EU and Canada might have on the European energy sector once concluded by the Parties. While the CETA should contribute to boost the cooperation among governments, this shouldn't happen for the cooperation between enterprises. Indeed, the investment chapter of the CETA shouldn't allow a higher degree of openness to foreign investments between its Parties in the energy industry, which is considered a strategic sector both in the EU and in Canada. The article tries to suggest a solution to this problem from the European side. The considerations on the treatment of the energy sector provided by the CETA and on the investment chapter included in this agreement may be doubly useful. On the one hand, to better understand the relation among the new free trade agreements that the EU is negotiating with third countries and the protection of strategic industries, on the other, to have some guidelines to analyse the other treaties in negotiation as the TTIP with the USA.

**Keywords:** CETA, Europe, America



### **Myanmar: Political Tensions and Rising Inflation, by Emanuele Bompan**

International media have Myanmar's November key election under their spotlight. Meanwhile the open-market frenzy is changing Yangon, the financial capital of Myanmar. Caught in an inflation spiral and battleground between Asian and Western investors, the city is rising as a rich megalopolis, one of the six most expensive cities in South-East Asia. Asian Development Bank assesses inflation over 8.4% as a consequence of real estate prices skyrocketing. The city's financial businesses are thriving, making it appealing for investors and venture capitals. The future will bring new business powerhouses, but it will deepen the income gap between the wealthy and the poor, and it will ignite further ethnic struggles in the country.

**Keywords:** Myanmar, Financial Growth

### **Where Is China Going?, by Jeff. W. Clark**

The fight against corruption has been Xi Jinping's main goal since he was elected Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party in 2013. This fight requires a strong leadership, and both the international press and political commentators agree in describing Xi as «the most powerful Chinese leader after Mao Zedong», the «new emperor». But who is Xi Jinping? What problems is he facing and how is he dealing with them?

**Keywords:** China, Xi Jinping

## **SURPLUS**

### **Libya and Statelessness, Tribalism as an Opportunity, by Sara Brzuszkiewicz**

Libya has been at the center of the worldwide geopolitical debate for the past five years. However, the many identities that characterize the country are often confused. This article takes an original approach and analyzes

tribalism, which is the social institution most susceptible to misunderstanding and simplification. It proposes a perspective where tribalism is not considered an inhibitor of national cohesion, but a social trait that can contribute to state identity for the establishment of a new Libya.

**Keywords:** Libya, Tribalism, State Identity

### **Shiites, Sunnis and the Rise of the «Islamic State», by Lorenzo Kamel**

This article aims to analyze the complexity of the sectarian divisions that run through the contemporary Middle East. The first part focuses on the cleavage between Sunnis and Shiites – more in general on religious diversities and the minority/majority dichotomy in the Eastern Mediterranean – and observes the region from an «internal perspective», thus contextualizing concepts and words that, up to the recent past, had little or no value if not outside of the Middle East. The section that follows takes Iraq as a case study and analyzes the roots of the sectarian clashes in the country. The conclusions suggest the need to «unlearn» many of the assumptions and the concepts commonly adopted for approaching the past and the present of the region.

**Keywords:** Islamic State, Shiites, Sunnis

### **The Image goes to War. Eastern & Western Iconoclasm, by Bruno Pedretti**

The recent destruction of works of cultural heritage in the Middle East by Isis militias, suggests a comparison between the Western and Eastern forms of iconoclasm in modern times. If in Islamic cultures iconoclasm seeks legitimacy in religious texts, confirming its opposition to the secular world of image, in Western countries too iconoclasm was often practiced during revolutionary conflicts and by avant-garde artists against the so-called society of image and spectacle.

**Keywords:** Eastern and Western Iconoclasm

### **Torn between Worlds, *by Claudia Sonino***

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The core of the Israeli issue cannot be understood without considering the emblematic role that Zionism, Palestine, and then Israel, have had in 20<sup>th</sup> century culture. This is true even when we reflect on some of the authors that have lived this complex and contradictory experience, a dream, a utopia that was and still is at the center of an unsolved conflict. The article discusses the issue of the «return to Eretz Israel» based on the works and experiences of authors and thinkers such as Gerschom Scholem, Else Lasker-Schüler, Arnold Zweig, Hugo Bergmann, Gabriele Tergit and Paul Müsham.

**Keywords:** Israael, Palestine, Zionism

### **LETTER TO «EQUILIBRI»**

#### ***A Mental Attitude, by Nicola Zanardi***

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Is economy shared or poorly distributed? Will it increase or decrease work? Will this be a good thing or a bad thing? The sharing economy is not yet a new economic system, it is an approach. Depending on the direction it will take, it will be either an asset or a loss for Third Millennium post capitalism. A lot will depend on how much the economy will be shared and how much it will be economy. Or just finance.

**Keywords:** Sharing Economy, Post Capitalism

