



## *Sardinia and the right to self-determination of peoples*

*Document to be presented to the European Left University, Berlin 23rd-27th of July*

### **Historical outlines**

Sardinia is an island situated in the Middle of Mediterranean Sea. It is separated eastward from the Italian peninsula by 200 km of Tirreno Sea, southward from the coasts of Northern Africa by circa 180 km of the Sardinia Canal, and northward it is separated from the Corse by “Le Bocche di Bonifacio”. Westward it is separated from Spain by the Sardinian Sea.

Insularity condition contributed to a peculiar condition in comparison with nearby historical countries. Sardinia had an autonomous historical development, which went through subaltern relationships and even colonialism, with the almost continuous collaboration of local élites.

During the centuries Sardinian people suffered colonization and plundering of their material and human resources. It suffered even cultural colonialism.

We do not want here to summarize the long history of a people, which very rarely exercised sovereignty in its homeland. The language and the *long durée* characteristics of this people are the results of these stratifications.

The dismantle of the feudal way of production began in the first decades of XIX century, and slowly appeared a new underdevelopment: more modern, more capitalistic than the previous one. In Piemonte and in northern Italy the industrial capitalism was developing. The engine of that system needed enormous quantities of resources and raw materials: timber, coal, minerals were robbed in big quantities from Sardinia, the only land at their disposal, at least until the conquest of Southern Italy and the Italian unification (1861).

After decades of shootings, people hanged, migrations and world wars the things changed another time. With the “Rebirth Plan” at the beginning of the sixties, Sardinia entered modernity. Finally the big leap forward, the big change. But this entrance into modernity had a price: we could enter it, but only as underdeveloped. Each development project that originated from local sources was abandoned in favor of another principle: “industrial centers”. We experienced a parallel and distorted modernity. Nevertheless, this way was idealized as the only way to development.

All this was offered to Sardinian people at the condition of downgrading the local way of living and the local culture, in its own way complex and refined. Sardinian culture and history were the symbols of a backwardness to destroy. We share this distorted relationship with modernity with many other peoples in the world, which, like us, passively got the modernity from the West.



A characteristic of underdeveloped economy is that it focuses on few activities: extraction of raw materials or a particular agricultural production. For instance, the word “monoculture” was born in those nations almost entirely cultivated with cocoa and coffee. They are not self-sufficient economies, they depend from other economies, from other countries, from external market prices. “Underdevelopment” and “dependent economy”, a perfect wedding from which, in the next decades, will originate the “debt”.

With *modernity* in Sardinia another “monoculture” was introduced: petrochemistry. Others monocultures were already existing: one linked to mines and coal, and another linked to the sheep and the dairy industry. The world made of sheep farming and breeding was attacked and divided. It was not as useful as before: it was an obstacle to the *modernity*. Also the mines were declining, causing a lot of pain and sufferings to the miners.

Before the definitive affirmation of *modernity* another monoculture appeared in Sardinia, just after World War II, much more silent than petro chemistry: military polygon and bases in Quirra, Teulada, Capofrasca, and US bases for nuclear submarines. The Italian and Nato Navy and the Aviation were active. Big portions of land were transformed in experimentation and bombing areas, with large-scale manoeuvres, Navy and Aviation manoeuvres from Nato and big private companies, that soon became multinationals.

In those same years local history and local culture became the symbols of a backwardness to dismantle. Local cheese was sold as “toscanello”, the local bread called “carta da musica”, the traditional houses replaced with anonymous apartments. The “giudicale romano” became the “romanico pisano”. Sardinian language was considered inferior and, in any case, a language that could not be used in the public space.

In the meantime the world was changing. Even the petro chemistry was ending and almost suddenly *modernity*, with its values and promises, fell with it. While in the rest of the world *modernity* died between 1989 and 1991, in Sardinia the so-called *post-modernity* arrived a bit later, silently. While *modernity* arrived with petro chemistry, *post-modernity* introduced itself with mass tourism and coastal overbuilding, but also with the dismantle of petro chemistry (but not everything). Like the other period, this new one does not eliminate completely the old, but its entrance has not been painless. The change is still taking place, with its sufferings.

### **Present situation**

Today in Sardinia there are three areas where Italian and multinational capitals focus their interests: energetic, touristic and military chain. The lack of balance caused by this development goes along with a large public sector, that employs 9,2% of the population, without the linked activities.

Military experiments in Sardinia have achieved a great importance. 60% of all Italian military installations are in Sardinia.

Italian Army rents the polygons to allies and private companies. They are not only a strategic advantage for Italy, but also a business.



Tourism is an economic resource for Sardinian people and for a wide range of enterprises. It's a source of work, even if seasonal and not registered.

Every euro that a tourist spends to arrive to the "Italian swimming pool" goes in the pockets of a small number of airlines or transport companies, that have nothing to do with Sardinia, apart from Meridiana. Furthermore, Meridiana today is experiencing a big crisis.

Tourist concentration in coastal areas goes along with other phenomena: building speculation, agricultural land that becomes buildable, corruption, destruction of the landscape. Sardinia today is fashionable, it is a desired location, with high prices and a lot of cement.

Tourism, even if it belongs to the tertiary, is based on the exploitation of a resource, the landscape, that is not renewable. On the contrary, it is a perishable resource, above all when it is exploited without limits or regulations. When the seasonal invasion of tourists will end, what will remain to us? Nothing.

The energetic chain is composed of all the system of renewable energies and of a part of petrochemistry, that produces energy from rests of their works. Companies like Saras do it, and companies that have not entered this new wave of development, like Eurallumina, Alcoa and Vinyls, now have closed.

Energy production has a strategic value. Italian interests and private interests are also here very closely linked.

We have seen that these activities need big empty spaces, and very often unspoiled land. These activities need few workers, with the partial exception of tourism, that need seasonal workers. Today, with post-modernity, settings can even worsen; monocultures do not permit the development of any other economic activity, they exploit the land and they clean the local economic and social environment out.

To satisfy these strategic interests of a system external to Sardinia has a price, and this price must be paid from Sardinia and Sardinian people. The Italian and multinational capitalism needs its vital space.

We have to measure some social processes that are taking place: first of all, the demographic (under)development. Between 1991 and 2001, 71,4% of Sardinian villages have lost population, 32 more than 20% and 115 between 10% and 20%. The affected areas are the central and internal ones, not really reachable. The attraction poles are Cagliari and Olbia areas.

To internal migration we must add migration towards Italy and the rest of the world. The migration rate in Southern Italy are the same we had during the "big migration" between 1961 and 1963. Only in 2013 5.000 people have abandoned Sardinia to go abroad, outside Italy.

Today in Sardinia unemployment rate is 17,5%, and youth unemployment rate reaches 54%.

Also the aging of population goes fast: in 1992 people older than 65 years old were 12,6% of the population, and in 2009 they were 18,7%.

These phenomena are taking place in many areas in Europe and in Italy, but in Sardinia they are clearly exceptional, so that they become something qualitative different.



People are migrating towards areas with more economic vitality, because they hope to have more possibilities. The alternative is a proper migration.

Agricultural balance, in an area where the primary sector was very important, is heavily disbalanced in favor of the import, above all in the fruit and vegetable sector. Sardinia imports mostly from France (27%), Spain (18%) and Ukraine (9,7%). It is clear the existence of a relationship between the decrease of people employed in agriculture, the decrease of agricultural production and the big increase of imports of agricultural products.

### **The European Left, the self-determination right of peoples and Sardinia**

Comuna recognizes in the European Left the political area where it's possible to build a project of emancipation and freedom for the European workers, and for all the subaltern in general.

European Left is plural, and we do not always share the same tactic and strategies of some of their components. But that is the political space we belong to.

Regarding the self-determination rights of peoples, the 4<sup>th</sup> Congress political document is clear.

*“- One particular issue is that of the new tendencies for regional separatism. Following the recognition of peoples' historical rights, we have known how complex these issues are and, according to the territories in question, how heterogeneous they can be. Hence the need for case-by-case analysis and the guarantee of an informed debate and peaceful democratic consultation of the peoples concerned”.*

We agree with this passage. It is not a case that Sinn Fein (Ireland) and Bildu (Basque countries) are part of the European Left and GUE respectively.

Generally speaking, the sovereignty issue must come back to the political agenda of the European Left. “Sovereignty belongs to the people” is written in the Italian Constitution, but the reality is another. Sovereignty should be intended as self-government.

In Sardinia people that are against neo-liberalism are potentially the majority. “Altra Europa”, people that fight for self-determination, communists, indipendentists, part of Five Stars supporters share, at a popular level, the same development model: a model that is alternative to the present way of development, auto centered, without military bases, close to the person and not to the indiscriminate profit.

We can and we should put together a social majority, until it becomes a political and electoral majority. Let's open a process. We must change the way we make politics, and also the contents. Let's start a process that should be first of all cultural, able to give new life to our awareness, able to wake us up from the lethargy in which dissatisfaction and disillusion caused by actual politics has brought us.



We want an autonomous project, that could talk with the European Left, that goes through the recognition of the right to self-determination of peoples.

We dream about an organization that includes these political actors and many others, and that uses modern communication instruments. We want an organization that recognized and encourage rejuvenation of politics and forms of direct democracy, in order to establish relationships with a people that is tired, poor, disenchanted. Data on abstentions are clearly showing it.

Moral virtue and mutual confidence are the pre-conditions: war refusal, refusal of neo-liberalism, a new way of development and an effective sovereignty are our political pillars.

We cannot let too much time pass. We assume our responsibility. Otherwise it will be another lost opportunity. We ask for support to the European Left.

In this way we will be able to build a new political subject, that could fight for the defense of the poorest and the subalterns, for the sovereignty in Sardinia and in the world, for a new way of development, completely sustainable. A political subject that will have the European Left as reference.