

The Silent Revolution of Global Citizens

The most important news of our time is not making the front pages of newspapers.

As we watch with anguish the wars, the rearmament race, the return of nationalism, and the competition among the world's great powers, a silent revolution has already taken place. Not in foreign ministries, not in parliaments, but in university classrooms, airports, exchange programs, international companies, and friendships that began online and became real.

I have been fortunate enough to enjoy a privileged vantage point from which to observe this transformation. Through my son and my grandchildren—both those born into my family and those “adopted” through life, such as the children of friends—I have been able, almost on tiptoe, to enter the human geography of their lives. It is a remarkable map: friends and fellow students come from every part of the world, with different mother tongues but the same dreams to share.

For the first time in history, there is a generation that does not think of the world as divided into “us” and “them.” It simply inhabits it.

They are millions of young people in their twenties and thirties who have had the opportunity to study, travel, and gain international experience. They speak English with the same ease that previous generations spoke the dialect of the neighbouring village. They have friends in Berlin and Nairobi, Buenos Aires and Seoul, Sydney and Toronto. They do not collect flags on a map: they build relationships.

This difference changes everything.

To them, a Palestinian, an Israeli, a Ukrainian, a Russian, a Chinese person or an American is not an abstract category. More often than not, each has a face, a voice, a personal story. It is much harder to hate a people when you know one of its members. It is much harder to believe the caricatures created by propaganda when you have shared a home, a university, a workplace, or simply a dinner table with people from every corner of the planet.

Europe, for all its limitations, has played a decisive role in this transformation. Erasmus was not merely a university programme. Freedom of movement was not merely an administrative rule. Together, they helped create a generation that has learned to feel European without ceasing to be Italian, Spanish, French or Polish. And this very experience teaches that identities are not erased when they meet: they are enriched.

These young people look with disbelief at many of the leaders who govern today's world. They see men, often elderly, who continue to think in ancient categories: territories to conquer, enemies to defeat, national interests to impose, spheres of influence to defend.

It is as if two different eras were coexisting within the same historical moment.

On the one hand, international politics continues to operate according to patterns that belong to past centuries. On the other, millions of young people are already living within a global society that regards those very patterns as simply irrational.

From this network of young people, a new idea of global governance seems to be emerging—one based less on fear and more on shared responsibility. These are young people who know the value of places because they have lived in them, who have met people profoundly different from one another, and who feel that the planet is a common home that deserves to be cared for.

Of course, they are not saints. They are not inherently better than the generations that came before them. They have their own vulnerabilities, fears and contradictions. But they possess an advantage that no previous generation has ever had: the possibility of comparing ideas and experiences in real time about almost anything, even while living in different countries, sometimes thousands of kilometres apart.

They have begun to know the world before having to judge it.

They have walked through its cities. They have listened to different languages. They have discovered that happiness, fear, love, suffering, injustice and hope wear the same face everywhere.

For this reason, many of them find it difficult to identify with the old ideological divisions. The categories of left, centre and right, while they still retain meaning, are no longer sufficient to answer the questions of the present. Their compass points elsewhere.

It points to the great Charters of Rights.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The democratic Constitutions.

In Italy, our Constitution.

There they find a political programme that remains extraordinarily relevant: equality, human dignity, freedom, solidarity, peace, and the removal of the obstacles that prevent the full development of every individual. They are not looking for new principles. They are asking themselves how to give concrete form to those that have already been written, so that they may finally become reality.

Some will object that these young people represent an elite. That is true.

But it is an elite unlike any that has come before.

The elites of the past were far more restricted and defined themselves against someone else: through birth, wealth, national identity or cultural belonging. This one, instead, recognizes itself through dialogue. It does not exclude: it connects. It does not build walls: it builds networks. It does not concentrate power in one place: it distributes it through relationships.

These young people seem to have understood that violence is not a demonstration of strength but the failure of intelligence: a cognitive trap before it is even a moral one.

It is perhaps the first potential leadership class in history to emerge simultaneously across all continents.

While they are learning that the most difficult—but also the most fruitful—form of power is the ability to transform conflict without destroying one's opponent, today's politics continues to debate the problems of the last century.

They are already living in the next one.

And they know how to listen carefully to the point of view of adults—provided that adults prove equally capable of listening to them.

The question is not whether this generation will one day take the destiny of the world into its hands.

The question is whether we will be wise enough to pass the baton to them before our instincts, our fears and our habits end up compromising what they have already begun to build.

If that happens, it will be our finest legacy.

Antonella Bellino