



THE ZOOM ECONOMY IN THE POST OFFICE ERA (IN PROGRESS – 19 FEBRUARY 2021)

Vision is a think tank and UK Charity dedicated to better understand how INTERNET related technologies are shaping radically new opportunities and risks.

Vision was born out of the initiative of European researchers and managers educated in UK and is getting increasingly global as for the scope of its projects. Vision director is Francesco Grillo, he teaches at SANT'ANNA in Pisa and at UIBE in Beijing and he is a PhD at the London School of Economics and visiting scholar at Oxford. He is columnist of Corriere della Sera and contributor to The Guardian and to Open Democracy. Bill Emmott, former editor of The Economist, and Ernst Wilson, former dean of the Annenberg School of Communication (LA) are also trustees of VISION.

Among the most recent [projects](#), the one on a "Taxation System for the 21st century" and "Technologies for the Reform of Civil Justice".

Vision is also developing Social Innovation projects in Europe and Italy that see young people developing technologies that allow the elderly to access remote health services and the elderly engaged in mentoring young people seeking their first job (the Vision's model of Social Innovation is currently being tested in Italy in Novara, Lucca, Caserta, Cosenza).

At the beginning of October 2020 the first [conference](#) on the future of Europe organized by Vision in Messina/Taormina saw the participation of thirty political scientists, economists and intellectuals who produced a MANIFESTO suggesting reforms of the way European Institutions work.

In the months of the first Lockdown (March - July 2020), Vision presented its "Post-Covid Series" with [proposals](#) on the "cities of the future", tourism, compulsory civil service and school.

With 2 million deaths from COVID19 to date, and the largest global economic shock since 1945, the pandemic has been often compared to the two world conflicts which shaped the twentieth century. Wars, however, are also one of the greatest accelerators of innovation we can think of and the Pandemic has also been the largest natural experiment of organization transformation we have ever witnessed in history. The latest VISION project on the “Zoom Economy” has got the objective to better understand what can we learn from such an experiment and provide concrete recommendations to policy makers, entrepreneurs, managers and workers on how to navigate the brave new world which is unfolding.

Remote working had been attempted by different countries and different industries with different intensity. The recent PANDEMIC, however, and the ensuing mandatory or semi mandatory arrangements to work from home, are making organizations and workers to, all of the sudden, discover that yes working without being at the office or taking a flight, is possible and may be – up to some extent - more efficient.

The radically new experience that the PANDEMIC has imposed, as, thus, removed archetypes that we took for granted and proved that another world is possible. The very idea of the office born in London, at the big insurance brokers at the beginning of the nineteenth century, seems to have suddenly become a relic of a past which is not going to come back.

Since March a number of questions are creeping into the daily preoccupations and wishes of millions of employers and employees who suddenly become remote workers: what was the point of all the commuting by car to get to my desk if it looks like which I am able to deliver as much as before without all the time wasted in traffic? were all those flights really so useful if we can meet up by ZOOM with no hassle? is my work really so indispensable if few seem to suffer from my absence? and is the very organization that I am paid for, really of any value if I and my colleagues can self-organize our work and sell the product through digital platforms? The answers can obviously change our lives and the consequences are both on an individual and society wide levels. An entire office based working arrangement around which urban societies have been organized, appears all of the sudden fragile as inertia had saved it for decades (see The Economist, Is the office finished?, 12th Sep 2020).

The COVID-19 related policies pose a number of questions which are not new. Yet, after one year of such a learning experience, notwithstanding a number of studies, we still don't have precise enough answers to five fundamental questions (whereas each of them need to be differentiated amongst different industries, different countries, across genders, age and role) which are the following:

- 1) The impact of remote working on productivity. This means that we need to better understand how competitive dynamics change (especially in service industries), success factors are reshaped, boundaries amongst industries are redefined and firms (as well as their relationship with clients) are re organized around data: this will be investigated through cases of spectacular success and sudden failures which sign posted the 2020.
- 2) The effects of the new arrangements on the quality of life of individuals and families, as well as the regulations of labor markets and welfare systems which are going to be reconsidered.
- 3) The impact on the shape of cities, and more generally on agglomeration of people and the very price of houses.

- 4) Technologies themselves because it is evident that the current supply of technological interfaces is both too generic to accommodate for the needs of specific segments (elderly and kids may be the ones being cut off) and risks (during the 9 months of the PANDEMIC people have surrendered to technology providers an amount of personal data which is estimated to be twice as large as in the ten years before).

The four questions are obviously connected amongst them and they structure the research.

1. THE IMPACT ON THE VERY NATURE OF ORGANIZATIONS AND THE FIRM OF THE FUTURE
2. LABOUR MARKET AND WELFARE SYSTEMS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY
3. THE CITIES OF THE FUTURE IN A SMART WORKING ENVIRONMENT AND THE IMPACT ON REAL ESTATE
4. BEYOND ZOOM. THE CHALLENGE TO TECHNOLOGIES THEMSELVES (WITH MUCH BETTER HUMAN - MACHINE INTERFACES)
5. HE WAY FORWARD: HINTS FOR BUSINESS LEADERS AND POLICY MAKERS