

Hirschman, development and democracy¹

Few friends know that, while approaching the end of the Marshall Plan, Albert looked for a new job in Italy. He had taken side for Europe (against the US Treasury he basically belonged to) and discarded the idea of looking for a comfortable job in some International Organization in Paris. Instead, he wrote to a family friend, Manlio Rossi-Doria: a well-known agrarian economist located in Portici (Naples), to make a new experience on economic development in the Mezzogiorno.

The reason was that Hirschman did not believe that the development of underdeveloped areas was at hand. But he thought, however, that the Marshall Plan success had provided an opportunity for entering that immense problem into the world agenda. The illusory nature of quick results notwithstanding, Albert understood that that was a great opportunity, and during his long life he was used to say that “a better world” was anyway coming through it.

Therefore, when he detected a position as adviser of the Colombian Government in Bogotá, he seized it. His “possibilism” in nuce pushed him and his family to start his famous and courageous “Colombian adventure”. A decision that is at the very heart of his well-known “trilogy” on development: *The Strategy of Economic Development*, *Journeys toward Progress*, and *Development Projects Observed*. But it is not all.

Actually, shortly before his two year contract expired, a coup d'état occurred in Colombia. Albert decided, with a friend, to open up a consulting office for local firms and for international institutions. Many ideas of his came up from this second, grass-roots Colombian experience. More: the very problem of development and democracy he had started to think about in Europe and in the US took a new shape - that later came up, all over again, in his writings on “three continents”. A line of thinking in which democracy has a greater role; and that eventually brought him to write *The Rhetoric of Reaction*, *A Propensity to Self-Subversion*, and *Crossing Boundaries*.

An obvious ambition of our Fourth Conference on Albert Hirschman Legacy might be to refer to his trajectory on Development and Democracy, *as a whole*, to discuss present predicaments – in theory and practice.

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