Foreword

This volume consists of ten papers, most of which were originally presented at the workshop "Scenari utopistici nella comunicazione pubblica e d'impresa" ("Utopian scenarios in public and corporate communication") in December 2014. The workshop was held within the framework of an interdisciplinary and inter-departmental project on the concept of utopia, funded by *Università degli Studi di Milano* (Milan).

The term *utopia*, as coined by Thomas More in 1516, contains an inherent semantic ambiguity: 'utopia' can be defined as *eu topos* (good place) or *ou topos* (no place). It is an incredibly powerful, though polysemic notion for imagining and producing a "better world" that has always been associated with a place, a territory, a circumscribed space where utopian ideals are realized. If the bounds of a utopia were to be overcome, that world could become universal. Such a fascinating notion can, of course, be related to the time and place where it is used. In the light of such (non) definitions, a number of intersections, representations, re-elaborations, and re-contextualizations allows for analyses using different critical methods, and a variety of tools from different disciplines. The rich and diverse set of critical approaches, ranging from discourse analysis and intercultural studies to the social sciences, perfectly mirrors the wide variety of ways in which the term *utopia* has been defined and used regarding content, form, and function.

The authors of the following essays are experts in a number of disciplines, including sociology, economics, computer science, literature and linguistics. The papers focus on the idea of utopia by considering it from the author's specific disciplinary perspective. Accordingly, each essay offers ideas unique to their disciplinary point of view, and taken together the articles comprise an interdisciplinary volume. Structured around three thematic sections, the articles in this collection have been organized as follows:

1. Society and Communication.
2. Economics and Communication.
3. Education and Communication.

Papers by Miriam Bait, Federico Boni and Paola Bozzi are included in the first section "Society and Communication".

Bait presents observations and findings gleaned from an exploratory analysis conducted on a corpus of texts taken from public websites of city councils in the United Kingdom. She investigates the discursive practices of the public discourse

deployed by local authorities in their communication to the public, analyzing whether, and to what extent, a new managerial logic in the public sector has been adopted in order to reach the utopian goal of effective integration between citizens and governments.

In his essay, Boni aims to investigate a particular kind of utopia of communication: the idea of communication as a positive value. Following Mannheim's work, the concept of utopia is turned into a situational and socially conditional concept. This leads to a semiotic concept of 'myth' in which 'myth' refers to an unarticulated chain of associated concepts and discourses by which members of a society understand certain topics.

In her paper, Bozzi explores the politics of place branding and the process of urban reinvention in Berlin after 2001. In the context of the dramatic socio-economic restructuring processes and physical transformation of the city following the fall of the Wall, the new Mayor of Berlin, Klaus Wowereit, tried to replace Berlin's financial squalor with the beauty and joy of sex, sketching the utopian scenario of a creative city, which "is poor but sexy".

The second section, "Economics and Communication", includes essays by Paola De Vecchi Galbiati, Raffaella Folgieri, Angela Lupone and Gloria Regonini.

De Vecchi Galbiati's article provides an interesting overview of the main outcomes obtained in managing change management projects with an innovative approach that imitates natural organisms' structure and behaviors. The apparently utopian result of this study is that the participants started seeing themselves as "natural and cultural environments" able to adapt and change in several situations. After a brief introduction about what adaptive systems are and how they work, the article provides a case study detailing the evolution of three real communities that have applied these approaches based on self-adaptation processes and achieved successful results.

Folgieri highlights the impact of advanced emerging technologies on the current economic situation, with a particular focus on artificial intelligence. Recalling Keynes' famous speech on future economy, she offers an overview of potential technological factors that may be contributing to accelerating the present economic crisis. Folgieri also analyzes the question of whether recent progress might represent an opportunity or an obstacle in the search for a new system of economic balance.

Lupone's article deals with the topic of fair and free trade by comparing it with the main theme explored in French director Serreau's film *The Green Beautiful* (*La Belle Verte*). The Green Beautiful is a planet very much like planet Earth, but a utopian society has emerged there. Lupone's perspective on fair

trade is twofold, as she manages to counter the harshness of daily reality with the hope of a better future.

Gloria Regonini's study demonstrates the necessity of adopting multiple disciplinary perspectives when complex economic problems with a long history of failures come into play, such as the measures that have been taken in Italy to simplify the bureaucratic requirements for small and medium enterprises. In such cases, complexity – when it is not recognized and analyzed through a variety of paradigms – will take its revenge on solutions that seem easy upon first sight but are, in truth, completely ineffective. In relation to regulative policies, the difficulties of learning from the best foreign experiences are aggravated by misalignments of meaning between English and Italian terms that seem to be very similar but are actually very different, like "policy" and "politica", or "regulation" and "regolamentazione". Such mistranslations are not merely linguistic mistakes, but stem from different visions of the public sphere and its institutions.

In the third section entitled "Education and Communication", articles by Marina Brambilla / Valentina Crestani and by Giampietro Gobo investigate the concept of utopia by referring to the two main groups of actors in academic settings: (future) lecturers and students. The paper by Claudia Gualtieri is also included in this section, as it focuses on Indian Residential Schools in Canada.

Brambilla and Crestani research the process of communication between the university and its students by analyzing the online presentation of the German *Universität Duisburg-Essen*. They concentrate on the relationship between the graphic and verbal components of the website, which is not always a one-to-one connection. In some cases, the words underscore utopian concepts like meritocracy and gender equality, while photographs emphasize other aspects.

Gobo examines disparities in the university setting, suggesting a thought-provoking relation between care activities and scientific production in academic contexts, and to what extent the former might slow down the latter. The author suggests that one affirmative action, in academic environments, might be the use of the Care Factor, a tool used to weigh the scientific productivity of a candidate bearing the child-rearing.

Gualtieri's contribution takes up the findings presented in the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Findings on Indian Residential Schools in Canada*, held in June 2015, to explore the issue of indigeneity in contemporary Canada. This essay examines the colonial history of residential schools for indigenous people, how national politics dealt with the issue, and describes the social and cultural consequences of the unequal educational system in Canada. The debate triggered by the release of the TRC's findings speaks to the need for urgent political action

to establish a new, just, and more stable foundation for a more inclusive – and maybe less utopian – society.

The variety of contributions contained in this volume reflects the different perspectives from which the phenomenon of utopia is 'realized' in communication situations. The oxymoron of the 'realization of utopia' is indeed present in communication as a verbal and non-verbal process involving many aspects of people's lives as part of a linguistically and culturally defined community. Society, in the following papers, consists of a system in which internal and external relations and regulations are analyzed and determined according to cultural, economic and educational parameters. The complexity of society leads to the emergence of dystopian situations in a system that purports to be based on utopian ideals, but where these ideals often remain abstract ideals – or become their opposite.

Miriam Bait, Marina Brambilla, Valentina Crestani