

---

**Roberto Giulianelli**, *L'economista utile. Vita di Giorgio Fuà*, il Mulino, Bologna, 2019, pp. 346.

An economist's biography is usually bound up with the evolving political, social and cultural environment of his times. Historical reconstruction must take into account complex and sometimes unpredictable scenarios, all the more when research focuses on a figure who lived in the kaleidoscopic twentieth century.

The life of Giorgio Fuà reflects that era of tumultuous change, spanning events and issues that include the persecution of Europe's Jews, post-war uncertainty, economic reconstruction, participation in world economic organizations, the pivotal role of energy supplies for modern civilization, the need to establish solid international alliances, economic planning, and the building of a university system responsive to the demand for cultural democratization. Fuà was, in his own words, "a civically and culturally committed entrepreneur," by which he meant an innovator in contexts that continually posed new challenges and opportunities. His life also underscores the value of teamwork, despite the divisions of tasks and hierarchy of functions that this necessarily entails.

Born into a Jewish family in Ancona in 1919, Fuà enjoyed a comfortable childhood. Reading an abundance of works recommended to him by

his mother helped him form independent opinions, which he wrote down in comments showing an acute critical awareness. Italy's 1938 racial laws caught Fuà in his first year of law studies at the Scuola Normale of Pisa. They left him deeply embittered, for until then he had gone along with the educational models imposed by Fascism. The regime's decision to "ghettoize" Italy's Jews, who had been an integral part of the nation's public life, struck him as unfathomable.

At the end of 1938 Fuà moved to Lausanne, where he continued his studies at the Faculté de Droit and also developed a deep interest in economics. After earning his Ph.D in political economy, he went on to the Institut Universitaire de Hautes Études Internationales in Geneva. The time Fuà spent in Switzerland proved very enriching, not least because he became familiar with the Quakers, appreciating "the experience of human brotherhood, their liberality and truly Christian simplicity." In the early months of 1941 Fuà returned to Italy. In Pisa, he faced many hardships, trying unsuccessfully to have his Swiss doctorate recognized in Italy. He settled in Milan, where he had the opportunity to meet some of Italy's most renowned academic economists. It was at this time that a turning-point in his life came when he received a job offer from the Piedmontese industrialist Adriano Olivetti. In the convulsive war years Fuà worked diligently for Olivetti, a man who fired his imagination. Writing to his sister-in-law, Natalia Ginzburg, Fuà observed: "[Olivetti] was always around, always close to others and ready to smile. And others respected him as they would respect a saint." Fuà was put in charge of Nuove edizioni Ivrea, a publishing house which Olivetti hoped would be act as a bridge between culture and politics. In Ivrea, Fuà also came into contact with Ernesto Rossi, whom he later called his "conscience director."

Immediately after the war Olivetti named Fuà head of his company's research department and, after Fuà moved to Rome, consultant for Edizioni di Comunità, the successor to Nuove edizioni Ivrea. Editing *Comunità*, the publishing house's magazine, Fuà honed his skills in making the discipline of economics comprehensible to the general

public. During this period Fuà underwent an intellectual transformation, forsaking reformist liberalism for socialism, and the magazine consequently became an important forum for the analysis of the relationship between state and society and between territory and market. Fuà was attracted to Soviet planning and openly distrustful of the economy's self-regulatory abilities. With this conceptual approach, he took part in drafting the "Labour Plan" of the Italian General Confederation of Labour. Working with Italy's main trade-union organization was a stepping stone to political engagement, and Fuà became aligned with the positions of the Italian Communist Party, which he believed had the greatest capacity to forge a link between the state and the territory. The early 1950s opened a decisive season for Fuà when he began working in the Research and Planning Division of the Economic Commission for Europe in Switzerland. The goal was to build a cooperation strategy in order to affirm, as the organization's first reports stated, "an analysis of the dominant features of the economic situation of Europe as a whole rather than a series of separate studies of the situation in individual countries." Daunting obstacles lay in the way to achieving this ambitious goal, for the division of Europe into two blocs was growing ever more evident. In this new environment, Fuà's research work attracted biased interpretation, especially in relation to studies on Italy. There was, in fact, strong pressure from Italian diplomatic officials to deter researchers from presenting a negative picture of the country.

Switzerland proved a temporary base for Fuà, who longed to return to Italy. The opportunity to do so came from Eni, Italy's state oil company, but, as on other occasions, the invitation to join Eni reflected Fuà's commitment to networking. He got to know Eni's head Enrico Mattei, like Olivetti a charismatic leader, but in this case Fuà had the chance to build his own team. The research office entrusted to him had taken on a highly pragmatic outlook. Research and statistics had to be usable, while at the same time it was urgent to establish external relations to permit wide-ranging comparative analysis. Starting in 1957, when the

corporate planning strongly advocated by Mattei was imposed on Eni, the challenge became still more demanding: more intense international contacts were needed in order to develop a three-year program, which Fuà dubbed the “little plan” (“*pianino*”).

But this was far from the end of Fua’s life’s work. At the peak of his maturity he launched large-scale projects, which Giulianelli calls “architectures.” The first was the Economics and Commerce Faculty in Ancona, in which two distinct sides of Fuà’s personality could be linked: the determination to build a cultural enterprise and the desire to engage with teaching. The Ancona project enabled him to do so in the place where he had his roots. He selected teachers, both old acquaintances and young, rising intellectuals, to make sure that the new university would be a leader in the study of economics in Italy. Many fruitful studies were born, including the three-volume work called *Lo sviluppo economico in Italia*. Another research topic that rose to prominence during the 1960s was economic planning, a theme with which Fuà was long familiar but which now became the centerpiece of national economic policy following the publication of Budget Minister Ugo La Malfa’s *Nota aggiuntiva*. This resulted in an intense collaboration with Antonio Giolitti and Giovanni Pieraccini, a relationship later to deepen during the preparatory phase of Italy’s new regional system. After the new regions were born, Fuà founded the Istituto Adriano Olivetti (ISTAO), a business school in Ancona, as a “laboratory” for development projects in the Marche region.

Fuà remarked late in life that political economists must “pursue greater collective well-being”. Thus, it was the universities’ mission to provide solid professional training. In his vision, culture, commitment and politics were intimately interconnected, and this is, in fact, a justly recurring theme of Giulianelli’s book, giving its methodological approach both balance and breadth.

Francesco Dandolo

*Federico II University, Naples*