

UNIVERSITY OF SALERNO
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCES AND COMMUNICATION



XXXV RESEARCH DOCTORATE
IN
LANGUAGE, SOCIETY, POLITICS AND EDUCATION SCIENCES

CURRICULUM: COMMUNICATION SCIENCES

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The expansion of public gaming in Italy in the contemporary age

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A.A. 2022/2023

ABSTRACT

The expansion of public gaming in Italy in the contemporary age

Uncertainty and unpredictability of the future are the rules of the game of life, but the dream of being able to overcome these constraints has always accompanied man's effort and fatigue in his commitment to reality; invoking the goddess Fortuna to overcome this challenge has never been considered a sign of weakness. Today, however, this dream has new symbols, new priests, new temples and above all it has a magical tool: money, to be won with the "big shot".

Mountains of money that arrive without effort, but thanks to pure luck, automatically solving all the problems of everyday life.

For this reason old and new rituals are offered in abundance: lotteries, television games, Bingo halls, real and virtual casinos and all the old and new world of "bets", on numbers, on football, on horses, on whatever one can risk.

Thus two great dreams add up: "the desire to win the future" without any more effort, without any more commitment through "easy money" together with the thrill of success.

But there are those who, dreaming, get sick of gambling to the point that they can't do without it, and they persist, even losing the sense and the taste of the dream, a slave to a risk in which one can only lose.

In this way pathological gambling, as well as other addictions, can become disastrous not only for the person but for the whole family; not only economically but also for the identity of the person himself.

Gambling as well as being an event of high economic proportions also expresses the attraction exerted on man by chance and risk.

The first part of the research deals with the theories that have analyzed the concept of "risk" in post-modern society as a fundamental by emphasizing two elements of the concept of "risk" its inevitability and on the cultural factor present in it.

In particular the subject of analysis were the studies of Zygmunt Bauman who was the first to infuse the concept of “risk” with the dynamics of chance. In his work “The society of Uncertainty” he outlines the profile of the gambler by describing his personality as “redefined”, “depersonalized” and “ identified” through the elements proper to the gambling activity. Above all, Bauman emphasizes the element of time spent playing, a time he defines as “finished”.

The second part of this work will be dedicated to gambling in its anthropological and cultural characteristics. The social element of the game will be highlighted, especially the Lotto game, as a formula that participates in reality, creating elements of it. The game will be told through its conditions and its rules, through the language of players and some imperatives of ludic activity such as the “ challenge with fate” and the “ competition with luck”.

The link between gambling and today’s society was documented through the interview method and the role of the State was defined in the study and what dynamics arise through the intervention of the mass media that promote it, up to deepening the darker side of the game that of pathology and addiction.

Everyone has gambled at least once, this does not mean that gamblers are, or will become, problem gamblers, or even pathological gamblers. In fact, the number of social players is high, which includes both “occasional” and “ regular ”players; it is a type of players who can interrupt the game when he wants and who, in the majority of cases, will not experience an unfavorable evolution in his relationship with the game.

Eugen Fink wrote: “The game resembles an oasis of joy reached in the desert of our striving and our tantalizing search. The game enraptures. Playing we are freed for a while from the gears of life, as if transferred to a world where life appears lighter, more golden happier”. The game in today’s society is seen above all as an “ escape valve”. Like the tropical beach where you can take refuge and get away from everyday problems. For these reasons gambling must not be conceived in the form of “waste” or even “addiction”. The game seems to be a “social damper “ that distract

society from the strong and looming uncertainty that grips it. This explains the cunning slogans of some betting agencies that attract players inviting them “ to enter to make a fortune”. Perhaps it is precisely on the profound sense of “ defeat” that one lives every day towards oneself and one’s life lived in futile and fragile daily relationship, in the sense of dissatisfaction with the realization of one’s work that this desire for “ revenge” is fomented through the game. And very often this gesture, which begins as a harmless and pleasant activity, sinks into places of anguish and perversion.

Problem gamblers are unable to have full control of the game: they are at great risk of becoming pathological gamblers even if they have not yet reached the stage of despair. Being a pathological gambler means completely losing control of your behavior, so much so that you can’ t stop gambling until you’ve lost everything. The game, in this case, compromises the emotional, social and working life of the person. But what drives the “social gambler” to gamble? What need is satisfied by the one who tempts fate by betting on the outcome of a football match, on numbers or on a horse race? The game has its own independent and inexhaustible strength and it is used as a form of entertainment to evade reality, thus trying to live with it in a better way. Thus, it allows for a sort of “ psychic escape” from reality, an escape that protects him from the problems of the outside world and helps him to live with it. This is the theme of the last part of this work which will lead us to spy on “ the world of gaming” through the help of the stories of those who daily immerse their lives in gaming. Through their testimonies, the points in common that are typical of gamblers and the mechanisms that have promoted their inclusion in this world will be revealed. The purpose of the interviews will be to highlight the personality and social status of these players. We will want to extrapolate their “definition” and underline the illicit trends that sometimes imply this activity.

A sociological research commissioned by the National Council of Anti usury Foundation, published in 2013, reveals that the phenomenon of legal gaming not only has significant consequences on the health of the Italian social fabric, but its growth

corresponds proportionally to that of illegal gaming. In other words, in this expanding market, criminality offers its products in competition with the State (totonero, clandestine gambling dens, illegal bets, etc) by approaching new potential and, above all, young customers, fascinated by a more exciting risk. A relationship, that between legal and illegal bets, whose most macroscopic effect on the life of families is usury for gambling debits.

Several studies clearly indicate that the greater availability of games corresponds to a greater number of problem and pathological gamblers, according to an incidence ranging from 3 to 5% of the adult population¹. The reality that is presenting itself in Italy contradicts the stereotype according to which gambling is an extreme phenomenon, circumscribed in specific areas, inhabited by “wicked and decadent” heroes: on the contrary, gambling concerns normal and banal social contexts and environments, a subcultural world of consumption and existential marginality, where the “substance” and the need are in the emotion and in the parenthesis that the protagonist manages to carve out in the “normal life”.

It is very difficult to be able to measure the social costs of problem and pathological gambling, as the potentially involved social and personal dimensions are numerous and complex: the family system and the player’s social network (as for other forms of pathological addiction), the suffering and the cost are not a private affair of the person but also involve relatives and friends. The gambler is often nervous, worried, red accounts, debts, unpaid utilities, lies are discovered. If discovered the player can deny or promise to quit, but he can also ask for money claiming that he needs it to pay off debts, only to then invest it again in the game with the hope of a ransom.

A first social cost could refer to the risk of poverty of the most avid gamers. Behind the promise of easy earnings and desperate compensation for money lost through a stroke of luck, behind the institutionally widespread idea that gambling can contribute to safeguarding the country’s artistic heritage, there is also the bitter reality

¹ ISTAT, Commissione parlamentare di inchiesta sul gioco illegale e sulle disfunzioni del gioco pubblico, Roma, 2022.
Cfr. https://www.istat.it/it/files/2022/06/Istat-Memoria-Commissione-Gioco-Illegale_01_06_2022.pdf.

of other people who don't play the superfluous for an motion or for a big win, but play the necessary, in the hope of compensating for an increasingly difficult life.