

*The Quality of Democracy.
Participation and its Dilemma: How to Go Beyond?*

The extension of democratization processes in various geo-political areas of the planet was a major phenomenon of the 20th century. In this scenario, the theme of citizen participation – one of the constituent contents of the definition of democracy itself – is of decisive relevance to the surrounding debate. The significance of such participation, its actual conditions and its development are integral to a reflection on forms of living and their regulation.

It is helpful to review the principal stages of such a vast process. In the mid 20th century, the defeat of Nazi totalitarianism and of decolonization signaled an important turning point. On the world map at that time there were twenty-two electoral democracies that, according to current definition, met the principal requirements of democracy. In addition to these countries, representing thirty-one percent of the world population, twenty-one states had restricted democratic practices; that is to say that although there were multi-party elections, these states denied voting rights to women and other racial minorities¹.

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¹ To the data on the expansion of democratic governance in the world, we must add the formally independent countries that, at the beginning of the 21st century, numbered 192 with 59 connected territories. On the definition of democracy, L. Morlino, *Democrazie e Democratizzazioni* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2003).

With the approach of the end of the century, following a “third wave” of democratization, the process underwent an acceleration, and democratic government definitely became predominant. In particular, this change affected much of the post-communist world, as well as South America and regions of Asia and Africa. As of the year 2000, there were 120 electoral democracies, representing 62.5 percent of the global population.

Taken altogether, it can be affirmed that 20th century democratic politics clearly acquired an element that, from this time forward will define it in general terms: the *horizontal* dimension of participation of the masses. This development had already appeared in some countries as early as the 19th century, most notably via universal suffrage, but this growing participation had a tumultuous evolution in consequence of the political questions of current events. Today, it represents an unequivocal content of a model democracy. It is not an overstatement to say, for example, that the widely varying percentage of participation of civil society worldwide that accompanied the debate about the war in Iraq, in the early months of 2003, was evidence of a new phase of the spread of the democratic ideas, with characteristic modes and motivations, that have influenced an entire generation.

From these foundations, prevailing scientific perspectives are blazing new research paths, ranging from analysis of the dynamic events that marked institutional transitions (in particular, as has been noted, in the course of the 20th century), to the study of the qualitative characteristics that define the actual assets of democracy, once established. What is of increasing interest, as

a result, is the objective of progressively refining the definition of democracy, and of approaching the concept of “quality democracy,” with a serious examination of its structure, its procedures and its comprehensive project.

We are speaking about a development that grows ever more interesting. If, in fact, we intend to promote, even through the study of political relationships and institutions, a practice of justice and of territorial equality, and of sustainable development and social responsibility, it is not inconsequential that the democratic form – more or less achieved – of our political system results in functioning more or less efficiently. In a global context in which phenomena, such as the multi-cultural fracturing of society, the spreading of government of economic and financial processes, the corporate monopolies of communications and information systems – to name only a few – have the potential to transform social, economic and political systems permanently, the questions that are posed to democratic theory cannot be deferred. In consequence, participation itself must be deeply analyzed, not only in regard to its actual resources, but also in its problematic aspects.

The method I am using, exploring opportunity and participative logic, examines participation beginning with its risk factors. To some degree I take for granted participation's fundamental positive relationship to the definition of democracy, in order to better review the principal weak points that burden it and that have been acknowledged in political science for some time. This reflection, therefore, looks at the problems that participation places on politics, not so much from one of its standard and ideal analyses but from an empirical

basis, where it is conditioned by hard complications.

The analysis is going to compare such participation to a specific definition of social bonds – the political idea of universal fraternity. If, in fact, freedom and equality have already contributed by determining the content of the democratic form, in the face of the old and the new problems that present themselves today, it will be interesting to discover if there is a place where the concept of fraternity can intervene with a specific contribution.

The questions that occur to me are many. If we assume fraternity to be a political category and we introduce it into a realistic picture of participative relationships and processes, does something change? Where participation actually crosses swords with very thick problems, does the category of fraternity have something to offer? Of what does its contribution consist and in which aspects can it concretely intervene?

The objective of this paper essentially is to construct a dialog between these two aspects: the characteristic tensions of the political exercise of participation within the context of contemporary democracies, and the political idea of universal fraternity. I am choosing to define fraternity here as the conjugation of the relationships of reciprocal belonging and responsibility, and as the principle of recognizing the identity and unity of the social body, in respect to single and multiple differences.

DEMOCRACY AND PARTICIPATION

It is not controversial that citizen participation, as described, represents one of the constituent contents of the definition of democracy. It is enough to recall

the concept of *demos*, a part of the etymology of the word democracy ever since fifth century Greece B.C. Today, the meaning of participation is embedded so deeply in the concept that it represents one of its most relevant yardsticks, from a point of view both quantitative and qualitative. There is also the fact that a consolidated definition of democracy, one based on empirical data, integrates four aspects, and all of them consider participation to be a central element: universal suffrage; free elections – competitive, recurrent and fair; a pluralistic system of political parties; and diverse and alternative sources of information (Morlino 2003).

It seems evident, according to this approach, how a strong participative profile sustains the principal characteristics of the democratic system. Nonetheless, there is no shortage of political theories that have proposed a different theory. These affirm, on the contrary, that participation greatly impedes democratic consolidation. It is the thesis known as the “excess of democracy” formulated in the United States by the *Trilateral Commission* in the mid-seventies of the last century (Huntington, Watanuki and Crozier 1975). This perspective maintains that increasing participation opportunities could bring the democratic structure into crisis, and that an overburdening by the participative request from civil society could end up blocking the system's functioning. In the name of stability, therefore, it should be necessary to limit participation opportunities for individual citizens and civic groups in order to avoid creating problems of social control that can delegitimize political authority. The prevailing orientation, on the contrary, is to emphasize the conservation of political assets on the basis of a strong affirmation of trust in

representatives elected according to democratic procedures. Internal and external conditions of the system must be functional: for this reason, a certain degree of apathy and civic disinterest could be necessary and the same “non-participation” is seen as a tool for cohesion and growth of the system as a whole.

This approach of decisively devaluing the logic of participation has been accompanied by several comparative studies and investigations, conducted over the years in various countries, that have examined civil settings characterized by participation. A reading of the results leads to consideration of a primary question: is augmentation of opportunity for inclusion and granting responsibility to civic subjects in the political processes always an engine of development for civil society? As everybody knows, a highly critical response comes from the thesis of “social centrality.”

Several studies on individual political behavior have revealed that those who participate in political processes are people from the higher levels of social stratification, from the inner, more established circles, who tend toward conservation of the *status quo*: predominantly male, higher level of education, middle class and majority racial groups, urban residence, and late middle age. Prerequisites for effective participation, moreover, are essentially the availability of economic goods and cultural resources such as prestige and reputation, with the sense of competence and influence that go with them. Those who have previously participated can repeat the process more easily, i.e., those who were already personally involved in social, economic or public affairs can move with greater ease into the political sphere.

The picture that emerges resembles that of a closed circle, given that the possession of political resources (the possibility to influence decisional processes) translates easily into socio-economic resources (major availability of material and immaterial goods). Vice versa, those who possesses major resources knows the shortcuts to gain influence over collective choices. In summary, we could say that there is unequal capacity to utilize the right of participation. Democracy appears, therefore, to be able to exist with very low rates of participation, and with the number of people involved reduced little by little while the commitment required is increased. If a functioning democracy theoretically must have an actively committed and informed citizenry, this rational model cannot withstand scrutiny. Participation remains a selective process (Cotta, Della Porta and Morlino 2001).

As an illustration, selection and even exclusion effects are linked in a direct way to the costs of participation on an individual level. However much increased the opportunities and tools of participation that are offered to the citizenry by networks of modern, urban democracy (neighbourhood counsels, school committees, citizen juries), it doesn't at all diminish the difficulty of squeezing some time out of a daily calendar overburdened with activities in order to dedicate oneself to a political interest, related to anything other than something to do with basic survival.

A special comment is needed to highlight the importance given to the principle of participatory democracy in the arena of the European system, a principle that has become one of the functional pillars of the European Union,

even included in the *Draft Constitutional Treaty*². Notwithstanding the failure of the ratification process, it must be recognized that openness of community institutions to participation by civil society is a principle increasingly more affirmed. But, if it is true that this recognition, as it is now, certainly represents a step forward in the building of Europe, it isn't answering what was requested by several organizations of civil society. What the Treaty was addressing related mostly to consultation activities. The civil society representatives themselves, however, still remain far away from the political agenda and from the process of decision-making, its actuation and evaluation.

PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

We have to closely examine the elite mechanisms that imprison the exercise of participation within the institutional context in which we live, that of representative democracy. Response to the demand for equality, notwithstanding, if the exercise of participation is unable to avoid selective effects and runs the risk of translating itself into a tool of social inequality, then it is necessary to question the actual functioning of the system of representative democracy.

In the design of a representative democracy that seeks to have major quality, the electoral vote, though strongly expressive of the political responsibility that is granted every citizen of the civil community itself, isn't sufficient. To vote isn't enough, although the rigid procedural approach affirms the contrary, asserting that "democracy means only that the people

² See: http://europa.eu/constitution/futurum/forum_convention/reftext_en.htm - Art. I-47: "Principle of the participative democracy".

have the opportunity to accept or refuse the persons who must govern them” (Schumpeter 1942). The primary meaning of participation should carry the possibility for all citizens to be in a continual dialog with their elected representatives, and to be able to call on them to respond promptly in regard to the decisions made. What, in fact, defines the representative system – the fundamental political relationship – is that *vertical* that rises from the bottom toward the top, between the elected and the elector but, and this is the basic point, it is a relationship that must express itself in a way that should be more rich in content and permanence.

It means a question of responsibility that those who are elected should take care to observe throughout their whole mandate, rather than the scenario where citizen sovereignty expresses itself in the moment of the vote only, this followed by long periods, more or less, of real political alienation. The requirement that the citizenry must be able to participate in the political actions of their representatives not just once in a while by going to the polls, but also in the ongoing discussion and research, and in support or in opposition, is one of the crucial questions that modern democracies have to decide to confront adequately.

In the first place, then, what we need are new forms of participation for civil society, that is to say for individual citizens who are entitled to represent their own interests in the public sphere even as an individual, just as their particular social aggregation. In the second place, we need to grant major attention – not only in order to consult them, but also to involve in defining the political agenda – to the representation of those subjects that can turn out

to be marginal from an economic or cultural point of view. To give preference to the views of political specialists or professionals who, as we have seen, in general share the same social and economic status, serves to halt participation itself, obstructing access to institutions for those who come from a weaker social strata, with their related issues.

Recent studies (Fazzi 2003) have confirmed the productivity of this choice: to recognize the political subjectivity of all citizens through efficacious forms and tools represents a decisive option to increase the quality of modern democracies. This can produce important and yet unexplored consequences, with regard to the emphasis that until now has almost exclusively stressed the electoral moment.

Another aspect to consider, among the numerous profiles that the theme of participation provides, is the favour through which the principle of horizontal subsidiarity is achieving a presence in legislatures, after that of vertical subsidiarity³.

As regards the Italian Constitution, in 2001 a move to modify the text of the constitution specified that institutions must foster independent initiatives from individual citizens and citizen groups who propose development of activities of general interest⁴. The news wasn't in the fact that some private

³ Today the vertical subsidiarity, recalling one of the cardinal principles of the social doctrine of the Christianity, is affirmed also as a general principle of the European law, in order to guarantee that decisions are adopted the closest possible to the citizen, and to verify that the action undertaken at the European level is justified with respect to other political and administrative institutions who operate at the national or local level. In 1992 it is the Edinburgh European Council to establish the main elements of the concept of subsidiarity, after the Treaty of Maastricht signed on February 7, 1992 (art. 3B).

citizens can initiate action in the general interest, but rather that they can do so autonomously without waiting for public officials to give them authorization or to ask them to do it, and that these actions are entitled to full recognition as expressions of general interest. The innovative trait introduced by the principle of horizontal subsidiarity reverses the traditional direction of the flow of power, of information, and of decisions that previously moved from the administration downward the citizenry; now the latter have a specific power to propose initiatives.

In this way, vertical and horizontal subsidiarity are each serving the other. Required to implement proper distribution of government and administration functions throughout the various institutional levels, vertical subsidiarity allows identification of the most appropriate level, not only in terms of proximity to citizens, but also in relation to the capacity of each level to satisfy the general interest. Then, horizontal subsidiarity allows institutions to serve the general interest no more by acting alone, but by working together with the citizenry – individual and associated – and by opening new spaces for public powers to carry out their function. Private citizens are no more turned to as mediators and beneficiaries only, but as independent and responsible allies.

Concerning the modification introduced in the Italian regulations, it is still too early to know its effects; more time is needed to assess the

⁴ Italian Constitution, Art. 118: “State, Regions, Metropolitan Cities, Provinces and Municipalities favour the autonomous initiative of the citizens, individual or groups, who act for the general interest, on the basis of the principle of subsidiarity.” The actual formulation was introduced by constitutional law n.3 on October 18, 2001: “Modification to Title Five of the second part of the Constitution.”

opportunities provided by the new Article 118 of the Constitution. In any case, it is important to note that its enactment will encounter many obstacles unless subsidiarity is supported by a coherent prescriptive and economic system at the national level. Often, in fact, the principle of subsidiarity stands in for a kind of, so to speak, invitation to endure. This can be roughly illustrated in the following way: what the State doesn't do, the Region does; what is not done by the Region or the Province, the City does; and when even the City does not act, then the citizens are obliged to take care of it themselves.

THE DECISIONAL PROCESS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

As we can see, the participative relationship can be analyzed beginning both from the bottom, emphasizing the initiative and action coming from the citizens, individual and collectively, toward the political institutions, and beginning from the government structure, taking into consideration specific interventions favoring and supporting the interests and the involvement of civil society. This latter perspective, in particular, recognizes some significant developments in public administration where numerous endeavors are tending increasingly toward inclusion of diverse subjects representing specific interests relative to the matter under deliberation in the decision-making processes (*stakeholders*)⁵.

As an example, we can consider the planning process of social policies run by the public institutions, a sector in which, due to the complexity of the

⁵ Many political scientists have recently explored this innovative sector; among them, L. Bobbio, *A più voci. Amministrazioni pubbliche, imprese, associazioni e cittadini nei processi decisionali inclusivi* (Napoli: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 2004).

problems, the administrations generally choose to place their trust in professionally competent figures and experts who conduct surveys, collect data and plan projects. But, as far as such contributions can prove to be efficacious, they are not sufficient, when they come to the point. The social aid professionals, in fact, have a different perspective on problems than that held by the inhabitants of a territory, a perspective that is deeper in certain aspects, more superficial in others. This poses the risk of undervaluing important issues and ending up with an organization of services that is not useful and that neglects the needs of users who are less represented. Those who are not less qualified to speak are the citizens and their families, the associations of the third sector, and the volunteers and groups who have been facing the difficulties in the territory for years and can suggest solutions that only can be imagined by someone who knows the social problems firsthand. It is for this reason that, year by year, the number is increasing of administrations that are setting their social operations planning on the participative model.

In the light of the affirmation of the logic of inclusiveness in administrative decisional processes, it is not surprising that this approach is being described as "intelligent democracy." In effect, it increases the brainpower that is put at the service of finding effective solutions, and it truly begins with the citizenry. But this rationale doesn't ignore some problematic aspects. At times a participative decisional process is too complicated, or too slow. Sometimes some subjects or some significant data are ignored and the process runs aground on unforeseen obstructions, or mires down in misunderstanding and conflicts. Results are frustrated and precious energy

and resources available from people are lost. It is not an uncommon experience, for example, to decide to participate in a public assembly – accepting the sacrifices that this will entail – and to find oneself, exhausted at the end of a long day's work, subjected to recitations of complicated stories, petty behaviors, and recurrent conflicts and improvisations.

The tension between those who exercise decision-making power in matters of public interest and those who are effectively owners of such interests, is only one of the conflictual aspects that emerges in this participative environment. The other profile that merits consideration is the characteristic fracturing that occurs when administrative functions concern the allocation of goods or services that produce a strong social or environmental impact: the building of a waste disposal site, the closure of an outlying area hospital, or the construction of a new highway, as examples. In these cases it often happens that highly energized citizens rise up independently and organize local opposition, thus bringing into conflict two or more interested parties who, though by nature homogeneous, have become inhomogeneous because of their different local positioning.

The classic example is the conflict that arises between a local group and the community at large, specifically a small village versus the administrative region surrounding it. Both have the aim of prevailing with their respective interests in deciding the public politics of urban waste disposal management. In the concrete, when administrative authorities decide on the location of a waste disposal plant intended to serve the entire territory, it is not unusual that the general interest runs up against opposition from inhabitants of a little

community that is located in close proximity to the proposed site. This community would find itself bearing the consequences of the plant operations that would actually devalue and impoverish its immediately surrounding area. Though, at first glance, the interests seem divergent, in reality the citizens of the small village are also interested in resolving this problem, one that cannot be simply dismissed and that, if not properly resolved, will affect the quality of their lives in the future.

The questions are complex. In these cases, the citizenry rising up in outrage is such a common reaction that it is referred to as a syndrome known by the acronym NIMBY, from the initials "Not In My Back Yard!". We recently read of 190 infrastructures and plants in Italy that, during the year 2005, became points of contention between the citizens and the public (Bobbio 2004). But of these, the number of cases still was very low that were resolved in a way that invited participation of the local community, thereby demonstrating awareness of the importance of recognizing reciprocal interests in arriving at a settlement of the problem. The task of the public institutions should be to coordinate an intense and inclusive process that emphasizes integration of different points of view. This entails abandoning the classic model of action (the so-called DAD: decision-announcement-defense) in which a public choice isn't announced until the moment it already has been decided in its principal aspects, and is then defended as best as possible in the face of the ensuing criticism, commentary and developments.

It seems evident, also in this case, how an increase of participation and a growth of local democracy can be impaired by strong aspects of selectivity and

exclusion. When aggregation and representation of interests is limited to reinforcement of closed circles of *stakeholders*, even if this process can consolidate identities and place value on competence, the pursuit of these partial advantages weaken social cohesion and increase fragmentation.

PARTICIPATION AND GOVERNANCE

In the debate on new forms of network regulation, able to manage an increasingly decentralized, discordant and complex political arena, the concept of governance has emerged, a concept of very recent definition and challenging to define (generally included only a decade ago in English language dictionaries). A characteristic of the idea of governance, relating its mediation and resolution processes of the public conflicts typical of modern society, is that the hierarchical principle of distribution of resources has been replaced by a cooperative principle, one that places the state or local administration in a collaborative role with the players involved rather than in a strictly hierarchical one. At present, many tools that utilize the logic of networking for territorial planning are available to administrative institutions. Among the most well-known are: the strategic plans for the development of urban and metropolitan areas, the territorial pacts, the area contracts and the inclusive processes named “Agenda 21” for sustainable development⁶.

Notwithstanding that governance represents a further important elaboration of the participative moment, its development can easily generate problems similar to those already noted. Yet again, the decision-making

⁶ We are speaking about planning instruments that the public administration is adopting with

community can end up reproducing a select circle of interests and legitimizing a marked dynamic that excludes weaker subjects who would like to have a say in the matter, but who would in some way disturb the geography of power. There is another risk. Rather than favoring transparency, the process can preserve a certain opaqueness and can hide parallel agreements and profiteering, that is to say a selling out the process behind the scenes before it even begins. Moreover, while emphasizing professional competence, efficiency and a pragmatic approach to resolution, it is easy to reinforce the logic of the closed group rather than the dynamic open to participation. In this way, there is a risk of vanishing the public arena, that space in which collective problems become visible and are acknowledged by everyone. Even the role of the political institutions is weakened, as it should be evident that the public administration cannot be an actor along with others in the partnership of those involved, and still fill a crucial role, that of mediating between the individuals and the collective in the name of the general interest.

The greater part of the ambiguity that emerges in the processes of governance stems from the deliberation techniques, running the operations of such decisional arenas⁷. As everybody knows, in fact, there is a growing tendency to adopt a kind of deliberative procedure in the political and administrative decisional positions, along with the more traditional techniques

ever increasing frequency, characterized by different participative modalities, in order to run processes of territorial transformation agreed upon, implementing a project shared by the local community: the district, the city, the metropolitan area, the territorial region otherwise defined. Among these, the plans of "Agenda 21" constitute a participative protocol introduced at the International Conference of the United Nations on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, 1992).

⁷ Researches on deliberative democracy intend to focus on an essential condition of the

dictated by majority rule and negotiation. What is underestimated is the danger of transforming deliberation into an empty form, in which recognition of the petitions of the parties is only symbolic. It happens, in fact, that the stronger the interested parties are the less trustworthy they become, because they are able to exercise their influence outside the arena.

It must be recognized that the exponential growth of mediation spaces among non-institutional subjects is also due to the weakening of the resources of state authority and of public institutions in general. It is true that a growing complexity of the political problems, that are points of political deliberation, requires to involve the competence and experience of a series of economic experts, technicians and arbiters who largely operate outside the institutions. But this development must be regarded with a requisite caution, given that removing responsibility from public institutions can open the door to self-regulation mechanisms. These latter tend to limit the specific power of institutional government, advancing that this process can introduce damaging elements of distortion into the dynamics of what is defined as the political marketplace. But a self-regulating system, too easily, can yet again favor economic and financial interests more rich in resources.

democratic process, the direct confrontation among citizens, emphasizing two moments: the need of public debate forums open to all who will be affected by the decision, and the production of collective choices on a rational and impartial basis through discussion. This stream of theory is going to imagine again the democratic model, first of all, as an ideal communicative community, shifting the accent that today largely falls on the selection of those who govern. On the argument, there are numerous publications: L. Bobbio, "Le aree deliberative", in *Rivista italiana di politiche pubbliche* (n.3/2002); G. Bosetti, S. Maffettone (edd.), *Democrazia deliberativa: cosa è?* (Roma: Luiss University Press, 2004).

BETWEEN INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION

The questions flow, one after the other. Does participation make sense when, all things considered, the one who decides is the one who has more resources? The fundamental question is always the same: who governs? And is it enough simply to put a generic measure of obligatory consultation into the decisional process? Isn't it too little to offer debate on predetermined political matters? Is it necessary or not to assign an order of precedence and first of all consult those designated as competent, expert and organized? Where does participation end and government begin in the complicated arena of governance?

These are questions that delineate important problems and that are definitely far removed from a certain soft vision of participation that is quite traditional, but less objective. The previous observations should prove that there are not only light regulatory tools that open possibilities, invite innovation, and recognize rights, but also, in reality, the raw challenges and inflexibilities of the mechanisms of power and of its distribution. Underestimating these aspects can be risky. Among other things, this itself could be a confirmation that freedom and equality – the cornerstones of the modern democratic project on which the western liberal-democratic model is based – continue to reveal their insufficiency to thoroughly settle political relationships and institutions according to principles of equity and lasting peace.

If, in fact, we refer to freedom as a cause and rational justification for a creative and open political space, where each person is able to choose

independently his or her own expressions of individual and social life; if equality implies recognition of the right of everyone to represent – with equal dignity and opportunity – their own positions in the political community; though, the progressive actuation of the two principles, while offering a way to refine the methods and tools of participative politics, do not appear to be able to provide in themselves fully satisfactory answers to the problems that the participatory democracy model is posing.

The effort to concentrate research on the ambiguities and contradictions of the participative experience now bring us to a further inquiry. At what point and in what way can universal fraternity add its contribution? Utilizing a criterion that some political scientists have profitably adopted (analyzing the *welfare* crisis and the processes of Europeanization), we can identify, at the heart of the various queries that spring up during the exercise of the participative dynamic, an essential conflict that weakens the meaning of participation and creates ambivalence: the tension between a perspective of inclusion and a perspective of exclusion.

If to participate means to activate resources – this would be the perspective of inclusion – in order to take part in and determine the structure and values of the social system, this occurs to the detriment of one or more subjects that, in various ways, are excluded from the process. The bonds that are created or reinforced on one hand, at the same time throw up a barrier of exclusion to others. You could think that a stronger subjectivity in civil society, improving the quality of the internal bonds of the collective and the sense of identity and of belongingness, cannot occur without a simultaneous

affirmation of some external rigidity that marks the limits of the territory⁸. To further synthesize, it could be claimed that the inclusive process, in which all participative procedures are concentrated, “necessarily” implies the exercise of a logic of exclusion against everyone else outside.

In my opinion, the category of universal fraternity can intervene in this debate with considerable effect to interrupt and, to some degree, heal the perverse effects of the logic that transforms inclusion into exclusion. From a political point of view, fraternity is above all a foundation to build social living, where the other man or woman, if we can define ourselves as brothers, isn't someone other “than me”, but is someone other “as me”. Fraternity's relational significance and, therefore, dynamic, leads us to search for and reciprocally recognize those features that are similar among persons and groups, who are socially and culturally diverse. Moreover, the identification of a relationship of fraternity as reciprocal belonging, even among political actors, implies the activation of relationships of sharing and responsibility that we could usefully explore.

If, as often is affirmed, participation is essentially an identity matter and, in consequence, a conflictual one, first of all what fraternity offers is a redefinition of social bonds, beginning from a recognition of a fundamental, constitutive relationship between the various subjects in political relationships. A typical connotation is to assure the specific identify of everyone (and the

⁸ In other words, we could say: “*internal bonding through external bounding*”, an expression that I heard from M. Ferrera, in his introductory speech about “*Confini e solidarietà: spazio politico e welfare nell'Unione europea*”, at the XIX Assembly of the “Società Italiana di Scienza Politica” (Cagliari, September 2005).

defense of his or her rights) within a unitary reference framework that is the whole human family.

On these premises, from a theoretical point of view fraternity would appear to be a categorial tool, no less valid than freedom and equality in order to proceed to a deep analysis of political developments, to understand them and interpret their evolution. And as a political category, universal fraternity could introduce innovative elements also into the blocked processes of participation processes.

TO TEST FRATERNITY. THE PACT OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The choice to assume universal fraternity as a political category offers to research some indications that, however preliminary, do not seem without significance. The “Pact of Political-Participation” is one of these, a flexible experience in methodology that, in the light of fraternity, re-views the fundamental political relationship we spoke, that among the citizen holders of sovereignty and their representatives. As from some pilot experiences in the course of the nineteen-eighties in Italy⁹, this relationship became a real Pact, honored during the entire period of a mandate between those elected and the citizens of their territory who, moving beyond the confining restrictions of individual needs, decide to collaborate to build a political agenda, which can

⁹ For a general view, with data and interviews, D. Ropelato, “The Pact of Political Participation” (soon to be published). To know the proposal in the moment in which it is delineated, T. Sorgi, “Votare non basta”, in *Città Nuova* (n.11/1985); see also a summary balance in D. Mangano, “Il patto eletti-elettori,” in *Città Nuova* (n.24/1993); A.M. Baggio, “Sovranità in crisi”, in *Città Nuova* (n.10/1994), “Eletti ed elettori,” (n.11/2004).

pledge the representatives.

There are a variety of consequences. In the ongoing dialog between the elected and the electors that the Pact provides, the contents of the political debate and the resulting regulatory proposals are enriched, those contents and those proposals that more often are shielded, that is to say, kept away from the contributions of the weakest subjects. Participating in the *Pact*, in fact, are citizens of diverse professional competence, cultures and socio-economic status. In this way, given that those who are entitled to participate in the dialog are the citizens as such, the *Pact* turns on new spaces for representation of the whole social body within the institutions, going apart from the content of the vote and other political belongings, favoring the contribution of the greater number of subjects who had the right to express themselves, with regard both to a sector problem and a matter of general interest.

In describing a sort of formal structure of the Pact of Political-Participation, there are three prominent aspects, each one corresponding to one of the most significant fractures that the analysis of the participation dilemma has revealed¹⁰.

1. Individual Profile. Where a participative modality of the selective type is often adopted, based on peculiar social and political resources as a legitimacy, the Pact is characterized by a strong *anti-elite* option and recognizes in each citizen as such the capacity and responsibility to participate in the elective

¹⁰ The following notes just offer some first indications, in order to introduce a major research on this argument.

mandate throughout its term. His or her contribution is something apart from cultural and technical specialization and competence, from the content of the vote expressed and from particular interests that, time after time, can identify him or her as a receiver of the political acts which are under debate. Fraternity, concerning this point, comes to light as a relationships of reciprocal belonging, based on equal dignity of the subjects, deriving from a unitary reference framework.

2. Interpersonal Profile. Where the positions and the interests represented often assert themselves as irreconcilable, expressive of rigid and unyielding identities, the Pact becomes a place of transversal dialog with regard to the diverse ideological and party groupings, focused on the positive content of the political debating, according to a set of fundamental options. The elected are called on to represent the general interests: they recognize they cannot work abstractly on the basis of a presumption and accepts the concrete involvement of the citizens, their approval and their support, as well as their dissent and criticism.

Fraternity, concerning this point, comes to light as a foundation to build social living, a principle that recognizes the dynamism of the interests composition. Universal fraternity guarantees that the diverse personal identities will not be devalued; indeed, it precedes and founds them on a common, collective identity.

3. Collective Profile. Where the *top down* initiative is privileged, adopting

restricted and more easily regulated participative forms, the Pact increases the space for civic action and fosters self-organization. The group identifies itself as political subject, given the numerous interactions and political operations that it works out. There is a voluntary bond between the elected and the electors, but it is reciprocal: not only the representatives elected must consider themselves pledged, also the citizen electorate knowingly must consent to a precise bond, that implies a recurrent restitution of the output to the people and produces lasting effects on the territory.

Fraternity, concerning this point, comes to light as a principle of collective responsibility in the common goods production, where a constant political negotiation reinforces the relationships of reciprocity among the different, legitimate interests of the civil society.

PARTICIPATION AND QUALITY DEMOCRACY

As we have already noticed, numerous political scientists of the nineties converged their studies on transition and consolidation processes of the new democratic regimes. Nowadays investigations are mainly concerned with the functioning and the distinctive features of a quality democracy. This stream of theory is increasing for three, broad motives. First, that deepening democracy can be considered a moral good, if not an imperative. Second, that reforms to improve democratic quality are essential if democracy has to achieve the broad and durable legitimacy that marks consolidation. Third, that long-established democracies must also reform if they want to attend to their own problems of public dissatisfaction and even disillusionment, concerning their actual

institutional assets (Diamond and Morlino 2004).

That being stated, we can proceed with a further analysis. If the enforcement of the principle of fraternity to participation processes effectively contributes to look for a grater quality democracy, it should be possible to measure this “value added” through appropriate indicators. First of all, the definition of quality democracy¹¹ we are referring to is that of a stable institutional asset where the quality of democracy essentially relates to three dimensions, focusing on the progressive implementation of the principles of freedom and equality:

1. *in terms of content*: when citizens, associations and communities enjoy extensive freedom and political equality, over the minimum standards;
2. *in terms of result*: when a broadly legitimated regime satisfies citizen expectations of governance, with respect to the demands expressed;
3. *in terms of procedure*: when the citizens themselves have the sovereign power to control and evaluate whether the institutions provide freedom and equality, according to the rule of law.

Among the three dimensions, once again the one that monitor the quality in terms of procedure is central. Because we are working within a representative

¹¹ Bibliographic references of the team of researchers on “The Quality of Democracy” are available in: M. Almagisti, “Capitale sociale e qualità della democrazia,” in *Foedus*, (n.5/2002).

democracy, in fact, the request that decision-makers must answer for decisions made (expressed in Italian as *responsibility* and in English as *accountability*) provides an effective check on political institutions by individual citizens and civil society groups.

By this way, we are reminded of the idea of quality generally used in the industrial world and in marketing. Here the product must correspond with delineated characteristics of form and function (the content), come out from accurate productive techniques (the procedure) and provide satisfaction to the consumer (the result).

It is evident that this definition of democracy cannot avoid some problems, because it is a normative formula characterized by intense responsiveness, that is to say by the “constant capacity of the government to satisfy the citizens, who are considered politically equals, by executing the policies that corresponds to their preferences” (Dahl 1970). Theoretically, this is an extremely demanding scenario that, on an empirical basis, raises more questions than it is able to solve: how can we verify, and to what extent, whether the policies of the government effectively correspond to the demands of the citizenry? How can we identify and gather all their preferences? Who are the legitimate voices entitled to express and represent them? How do we guard against manipulations in this process? What are the relationships to consider between preferences of the majority and those of the minority? And yet, on the basis of these questions indeed (an unexplored territory of such great interest for empirical investigations), the choice to carry on within a strong theoretical framework, that is founded on a unitary concept of

democratic citizenship as a fundamental of the institutional frame, seems to me even more valid.

A methodology such as the Pact of Political-Participation can be evaluated and understood in the light of the previous outline and the result is extremely encouraging. In synthesis, concerning the quality of the content, we can observe that citizens involved in the participative experience can express to a greater extent their contribution to the political debate and, as a consequence, they can influence in a more direct and creative manner the content of the decision making processes, from a position of equal opportunity assured by the *anti-elite* option of the Pact. Concerning the quality of the result, we can see that adopting this specific participation methodology, a number of citizens can experiment a different course to articulate and aggregate their demands, orienting personal interests to the common good. Given that the Pact offers a new place where various groups of citizens can settle their own diverse political positions, while the distance between civic society and politics decreases, responsiveness and satisfaction for the adopted policies cannot but increase. And, finally, concerning the quality of the procedure, we note that the main assumption of the Pact is precisely to make available to a larger number of citizens a participative experience where the exercise of accountability can rise in the institutional framework, and where other forms of social action can grow.

Thus, where the Pact is implemented, a test based on the three profiles should measure a global increase of the quality of the democratic system. In this sense, I think that fraternity can truly express “the intelligence of a

democracy”, to some extent its heart, that is to say it probably can grow the capacity of a democracy to make what is authentically human harmonize with the normative structure, for a peaceful and stable living together.

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