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# BEYOND TOCQUEVILLE, BUT IN A WORLD OF POLITICAL PARTIES. IS SOCIAL PARTICIPATION A SCHOOL FOR (POST)DEMOCRACY?

## THE CASE OF LOMBARDY

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### Abstract

Scholarly debates discuss the neo-Tocquevillian socialization thesis, either sustaining or questioning the idea that active participation in voluntary associations increases pro-democratic skills, civic attitudes and general trust. The literature is highly developed but tends to work with secondary sources, analyse individual beliefs and behavior separately from those of organizations. Frequently, institutional and political contexts are not considered in the explanatory framework. Based on diachronic research on participation in the Lombardy region of Italy conducted in 1992-3 and 2007-9 on individuals and organizations and their networks, using both quantitative and qualitative techniques, we consider the relationship between civil society and the political system. We argue that associations have adapted to this environment and changed their strategies. A socialization process is acknowledged within voluntary organizations, but its content it is not fully democratic. In a post-democratic institutional and political environment, citizens learn how to build coalitions to interact with a dis-intermediated public, to deal with new cartel parties and to lobby through associational engagement.

### Key words

Association; Civil Society; Political Socialization; Post-Democracy; Tocqueville; Party System; Lombardy.

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## 1. Participation as a school of post-democracy?

The main argument of this paper is that the socialization effect produced by participating in associations is highly dependent on the political and institutional environment in which the civil society is embedded<sup>1</sup>. In the last 15 years, the main debate around social participation and politics has focused on the so-called neo-Tocquevillian thesis, supporting and attacking the idea that associations socialize citizens in political skills relevant for democracy. It is the idea of associations as a “school of democracy” where people learn the deep art of “combining”. The case for the relevance of this art for democracy was made strongly by Alexis de Tocqueville<sup>2</sup>, and has come back into fashion in the last 15 years, especially amongst European scholars, due to growing migration and the consolidation of a new cleavage between integration and demarcation (Kriesi, *et al.*, 2008). But the point has been highly controversial. According to comparative research showing the absence of a socialization effect, and claiming the weight of a selection effect, associations involve people already socialized to public life, and attentive to politics. In this paper we try to move beyond this debate. We point to some signs that suggest we think about the presence of a socialization effect, but unlike neo-Tocquevillian scholars, we do not consider the socialization effect of social participation as universalistic and leading to the same pro-democratic outcomes. Since we are more interested in the relationship between associational participation, the party system and the political process, rather than in democracy per se or issues of trust, we plead for a “contextual approach”, where institutions and relational dynamics make the difference. Without indulging in a simplistic formula, we want to show that when the political system changes, the kind of socialization effects that result from engaging in civil society can also change dramatically. If we take the evolution from a democratic to a post-democratic condition seriously (Crouch, 2004), what would be taught at the school of civil society?

## 2. Literature and theoretical outline of the argument

Scholarly literature on association and political commitment has increased in the last 15 years. The interplay of comparative quantitative survey and in-depth case studies cumulates strong results and permits to frame our interrogation: how socialization in associations has changed? We clustered the literature relevant for our main question around three points.

Firstly, we consider the debate around the neo-Tocquevillian thesis that associations are able to support the learning of skills and norms pertinent for democracy. Here we are interesting in the literature suggesting the limits of this thesis, but admitting a socialization function.

Secondly, we discuss a strong cleavage in civil society literature between approaches looking at individual commitment in voluntary action, at the micro level, and research programs at the meso

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<sup>1</sup> We are aware that words count, and perform. The semantics of concepts such as “civic”, “civil society”, “third sector”, “social participation”, “activist”, “member”, “militant” vary greatly from country to country, and have disparate pragmatic uses within each associative sector. We do not therefore hold to the meanings attributed directly by the actors, and use these terms in a more undifferentiated manner, from the outside.

<sup>2</sup> “In democratic countries knowledge of how to combine is the mother of all other forms of knowledge; on its progress depends that of all others” (de Tocqueville, 1969, p. 517).

level, on associations - mostly on their economic role for new active labour market policies and for social care policies at the local level. We will look especially at reason why articulating these two levels of analysis.

Finally, we examine the literature digging at a more macro level, or encouraging to do so, and its emphasis on institutional and political embeddedness of civil society. This heterogeneous corpus of scholarly research is very important for our argument, because it permits to overcome a certain universalism of the neo-Tocquevillian approach, showing that associational outcomes does not depend only from the internal structure of organization, or from their ability to balance binding and bonding ties (Putnam, 2000), but also from the external context in which they act.

## 2.1 A Challenge to the neo-Tocquevillian socialization thesis

The idea that participating in a voluntary association is a “school of democracy” (Tocqueville 2000 (1835–1840)) is a very elegant way to frame the relation between “social participation” (van Deth, 1997) and the political sphere. For years this idea remained nothing more than a political theory (Bachrach, 1967; see also Ayala, 2000, p. 99). In more recent years, several pieces of research have demonstrated a strong correlation between civic participation and political action (Baumgartner, Walker, 1988; Strate, *et al.*, 1989). Brady, Verba and Schlozman (1995) claim that activity in non-political organizations has a positive effect on the individual's level of political participation. Time-based and volunteer oriented activities in particular have the greatest effect on political participation in the USA (Ayala, 2000). Also in Europe comparative research shows that members of voluntary associations are characterized by higher levels of political engagement than non-members (van Deth, 2010, referring to 19 Countries). The basic mechanisms of this correlation were drawn from qualitative research (Erickson, Nosanchuk, 1990). While participating, individuals are socialized to a democratic way of dealing with decision making, and also to an agenda of public problems, and develop relationships based on trust and mutual commitment<sup>3</sup>. They do something useful with concrete and visible results that improves their self-esteem. In addition, many of these organization have a political culture, including sporting associations (Donovan, *et al.*, 2004), or belong to a political network (Biorcio, Vitale, 2010). All these elements redefine reference norms for activists, and push them to look at and discuss political life, public policies and government accountability.

There are three basic elements of the socialization thesis:

- (1) evidence of a positive *correlation* between social (or civic) participation and political behavior, whose
- (2) strength differs according to the extent of involvement<sup>4</sup>, and which is

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<sup>3</sup> But also status attainment (Lin 1999, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Van Der Meer and Van Ingen insist on a more complex reconstruction of the neo-Tocquevillian approach, focusing on the fact that in comparative research it is assumed that the strength of this relationship differs according to the type of voluntary association, that the “relationship is universal for all (Western) democratic

(3) explained by socialization.

Nonetheless, this socialization function of voluntary participation in NGOs is not accepted by all scholars. Armingeon (2007) sustains that people who are more pro-active and attentive to public life are more inclined to join voluntary associations and heed political life<sup>5</sup>. Political socialization thus precedes social participation. This is the so-called *selection thesis*. Van Der Meer and Van Ingen (2009) also criticize the idea that the (strong) association between civic participation and political action is explained by civic skills (Ayala, 2000) and civic-mindedness, and not any additional mechanisms. In their comparative research on 17 European Countries using the first wave of the European Social Survey collected in 2002 and 2003, they conclude cogently that voluntary participation does not generate politically engaged citizens. Social participation is not a school of democracy, but a “pool of democracy”. In their words, “(v)oluntary associations do not make citizens politically active, but bring politically active citizens together” (p. 303), and so they serve the democracy by strengthening the (already) critical citizen (see also Fung, 2003).

If we take this argument seriously, political action among adults is *probably* stimulated by the workplace (Greenberg, Grunberg, Daniel, 1996), “the kinds of jobs people have” (Verba, Schlozman, Brady, 1995, p. 316), union participation in the workplace, church, school and family (against this hypothesis, see Ayala, 2000). Despite this, there is yet no research that focuses on the life-cycle of the socialization effect, and we have no evidence about whether early socialization effects hold throughout a lifetime, or if acquired social norms are volatile and unstable, and need to be put into practice in order to be confirmed.

*Proposition 1. Comparative research has not confirmed the socialization thesis of the neo-Tocquevillian approach, even if confirming an important role for social participation in democracy and political life and socialization effects.*

*Proposition 2. If associations are pools of democracy, their political agency is not so clear, nor is the meaning individuals attribute to the relationship between civic engagement and political life.*

## **2.2 Individual commitment vs. organizational strategies?**

In empirical research on civil society there is a notable cleavage between research that adopts individuals as units of analysis, and research that considers organizations as units of analysis. The two methods tend to be mutually exclusive: either the researcher looks at individual attitudes and socio-demographic attributes (with qualitative or quantitative methods), or they look at organiza-

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societies”, and defining operationally the socialization mechanism in terms of increasing “civic skills and civic-mindedness” (2009, p. 283).

<sup>5</sup> Van Deth (2000) insists on the distinction between political interest (the degree to which politics arouses a citizen’s curiosity) and political saliency (the relative importance of political matters as compared with other activities), showing that social capital leads to a lower level of political saliency among people who are characterized by higher levels of subjective political interest, i.e. considering politics “as interesting but irrelevant” (p. 138).

tions, their networks, their strategic actions and their relationships with public administration and markets. While some French qualitative case studies from the last ten years suggest the relevance of proceeding by combining these approaches (Cefai, 2007; Hamidi, 2010), not much effort has been made to marry these two levels of analysis in comparative research. Most of the surveys available, following in the tracks of Almond and Verba (1965), seek to understand - at best - the differences between individuals participating in civic engagement and those not participating (Maloney, Roßteutscher, 2007). They thus work with representative samples of the population, and have no way of linking the individual to one particular organization. Even scholars who compare organizational behavior sample NGOs and stress organizational features do not inquire about the personal commitment of members, their visions and divisions.

But by ignoring this link we lose important insights that may help us to understand social participation better. What is at stake is not only the relationship between the micro and meso level of explanation (Jepperson, Meyer, 2011) but also the possibility to understand the socialization effect of social participation, not only as a by-product of "group style" - of an internal conversation between members (Eliasoph, Lichterman, 2003) -, but as an interplay between organizations' choices in the political environment, and individuals' sense making.

*Proposition 3. Empirical research on civil society is highly polarized between analyses of individual attitudes and studies of organizational populations. Some steps toward combining the two have been taken in qualitative studies, but not for larger samples requiring comparative techniques.*

On the basis of this brief outline we can also push our argument a little bit more. There is no doubt that issues of political socialization and personal commitment cannot be assumed but must be backed up with evidence, and this requires empirical research more than normative inquiry. This may appear obvious, but not so foreseeable while most of the research takes Tocquevillian assumptions for granted without testing them (Wollebæk, Strømsnes, 2008). Likewise, there is no doubt that in order to deal with individual expectations and engagement, some form of methodological individualism has to be chosen. Following the actors, or asking about their opinions, preferences and experiences, in each case the individual is the basic unit for this research. But what kind of research question can be raised within one methodological individualist approach? We have said that the strategies of organizations in a political environment have to be considered to fully understand the relationships between activists and the political sphere. But, while individuals and organizations act in broader political contexts, which form both the target and the environment of their action, some macro dimensions have to be included in the analysis to enlarge the range of feasible questions, and to historicize them.

*Proposition 4. Personal commitment in voluntary action and civil society groups could be studied by starting from individual behavior and attitudes. The vocabulary of methodological individualism and action theories is very rich, but cannot grasp the institutional configurations so relevant for political sociology. The limitations of methodological individualism means we are required to collect data at a different level, and to develop a framework with multiple levels of analysis.*

This last proposition is in fact highly exigent, and has, first and foremost, implications for the research design. But it also obliges us to contextualize and introduce a macro level of analysis.

### 2.3 From universal civil society to embedded forms of civic engagement

Baldassarri and Diani (2009) have convincingly insisted we should have to add a third level of analysis: we should research not only at the individual or organizational level, but also at the level of networks of organizations. At the same time, they focus on the local embeddedness of civic networks in local political contexts with specific political opportunity structures. We want to take the relevance of a contextual approach, able to consider the institutional and political dimensions of the local environment in which persons, organizations and networks of organizations act, seriously (Kriesi, *et al.*, 2007). But we also have to recognize why the study of associations and civil society is often so indifferent to political and institutional context.

Most of the syllabi of introductory courses on political sociology fail to talk about associations and NGOs. There is certainly a focus on social movements and interest groups, and so associations become relevant for political process in some of their action forms only. Researchers takes seriously the fact that lobbying and contentious mobilizations form part of repertoires of action (Diani, Bison, 2004), and that the same association could act as an interest group or as a node in a social movement<sup>6</sup>. But associative participation is also a perfectly legitimate field in political sociology, especially in the light of the legacy left by research on civiness (Almond and Verba *docet*, see Theiss-Morse, Hibbing, 2005), and social capital (see primarily Roßteutscher, 2008, without denying the huge influence of Robert Putnam), or the path first trodden by Habermas, who insists on the role of sociability, and discourse developed in formal and informal settings, in opening up a discursive public sphere, relevant for a vibrant democracy. Two dissimilar traditions, but convergent in terms of the focus on civil society as something productive: able to produce socialization, *mores* and participatory tools, and correlated or strongly causing some forms of common good, i.e. economic development, democracy, universalism, solidarity, effectiveness, pluralism, or government efficiency. In addition, these two research programs (comparative studies on civiness; normative foundations of the public sphere) were both mobilized in the 1990s. In Europe, the Delors White Paper of 1993 on 'Growth, competitiveness, employment: the challenges and ways forward into the 21st century', was highly influential in pushing for a new employment strategy focusing on third sector expansion, seen as a key actor to balance and express connections between social cohesion and economic development: "no one excluded". The same focus on civil society performance was brought into play to frame the European emphasis on the positive role of civil society in governance (Boussaguet, Dehousse, Jacquot, 2010: 8-9) and on subsidiarity (Kazepov, 2010).

In reference to most of the scholarly literature from the second half of the 1990s, both on associations and economic development, or on the third sector and welfare delivery, some common assumptions can be underlined:

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<sup>6</sup> At the same time, very little research follows associations as actors, looking at sequences of action, and how community based organizations, or other NGOs, change their repertoires.

- (1) a variety of corporate forms (associations, committees, cooperatives, umbrella organizations, foundations, advocacy groups), and sectors and goals (sport, social care, healthcare, culture, peace and human development, education, religion, ethical consumerism, environmentalism, gender) are framed as unitary;
- (2) their internal structures were envisaged mostly as democratic, participatory, and deliberative; exceptions were considered as not belonging to the “true” third sector and did not touch or trouble the core definition;
- (3) a miscellany of terms (civil society, social participation, voluntary action, third sector, associations, non-profit organizations) were used synonymously, sharing common semantic references, which was consistent with the political scope of coalition building among heterogeneous actors;
- (4) conceived thus, this “peculiar” form of participation was framed as separate from the state, in some cases not independent - but absolutely separated (Ray, 2001).

Little literature approached the theme of the “dark side” of associative participation (Fiorina, 1999). In comparative research, van Deth (2010) has recently shown that when looking at each country separately, any type of association can potentially be depicted as a “bad” form of social capital (i.e. not benevolent for democracy), also if proved that they “are not widely found among voluntary associations in Europe” (p. 654).

Some scholars of organization studies pointed to the limit of normative views on associations, focusing on third sector “privatism” and the risks of contracting-out (de Leonardis, 1996), or on “governance failures” (Clarks, Newman, 2001). Outside Europe, the most developed criticism was advanced by Theda Skocpol (2003) in a study stretching over one century of change in the organizational forms of associations in the USA, from membership to management, and the consequences on democracy. Qualitative studies, particularly of the Bellah and Wuthnow school on religious groups, have looked at environmental or civic groups, emphasizing the effects of individualization (Lichterman, 1996) and depoliticization (Eliasoph, 1998), and stressing the importance of looking empirically at the interaction dynamics within each association instead of taking de Tocqueville’s dream for granted (Lichterman, 2006). The basic idea is that the “group style” of each organization filters the way in which members signify their activities (Eliasoph, Lichterman, 2003), and that participation in local, face-to-face organizations could imply “a rejection of professional and institutionalized special interest organizations and the way political decision making is functioning in mass democracies” (van Deth, 2010, p. 643).

Unfortunately, scholars of political development, whilst attentive to institutional dimensions and the rule of law, have not investigated the relationship between civic engagement and democracy, with the exception of Ariel Armony (2004; but see also van Deth, Zmerli, 2010, p. 638). He shows how the vibrant civic activism which emerged during the military dictatorship in Argentina developed in support of democracy and human rights and championed re-democratization. However, increasing inequality, corruption, weakness and the inefficiency of state institutions “eroded the democratic potential of civic groups”: by the 1990s, many of the democracy and human rights

groups had low levels of generalized trust and displayed instead exclusivist, racist, and even violent features. Several hypotheses explain the logic of these causal processes in detail (pp. 37-54), as Kristina Mani (2005, p. 737) has summarized so remarkably:

“When the state and its legal system fail to “set norms of legality” that facilitate voluntary compliance with laws; when the state and its agents fail to hold themselves accountable to principles of constitutionalism and transparency that promote societal acceptance of the regime; and when the law applies only selectively rather than predictably and fairly to promote citizens’ trust of each other and of the state – then social trust is at best parochial and civic association results in undemocratic forms of engagement (pp. 43-44). In short, “‘winners’ trust widely and ‘losers’ do not” (p. 28). Structural inequalities affect these dynamics by determining the victims of institutional failure: the underprivileged – the poor, unemployed, ethnic minorities, and immigrants – are the worst affected when rule of law fails (p. 51).”

Similarly, the relevance of institutional context has also been proved by Albano and Barbera (2010), with results consistent both in a cross-country and a within country comparison. Using the concept of negative social capital to address the contextual impact of explanatory mechanisms, they show that helping behavior in weaker welfare regimes has detrimental consequences for political legitimacy and attitudes toward the political system. With an innovative study of political and cultural context of associational life, comparing 7 cities in Spain, Germany and Switzerland Kriesi *et al.* (2007) clearly proved the institutional consequences of federalism on the level of activities and on the contact with local authorities of associations and civic networks.

Another impulse toward a more contextual approach to the study of civil society comes from comparative political economy. Authors influenced by the legacy of Esping Andersen’s work (1990) have sought to develop a typology of Third Sector Regimes, highly dependent on larger forms of institutional regulation (Anheier, Salamon, 2006; Archambault, 2009). Scholars of urban politics also provide important inspiration. In their focus on community power, élite reproduction, electoral turnouts, and especially when dealing with constituency building, they account for the relationship between associations and political parties in terms of political exchange (especially clientelism), enriching the debate between corporatism and pluralism. In urban studies, the debate on political exchange and the role of associations became more and more important from the end of the 1980s, particularly when looking at urban politics in the US, thanks to the research program inaugurated by Clarence Stone. In Europe too, urban research on policy networks and partnerships against social exclusion give us some evidence about the relationship between associations and political parties, on the forms of competition and struggle between the two, and on the distinctions within the associative sector (Le Galès, 2011).

If criticism from organization studies has not had any strong impact on social participation scholars, the results of urban studies have been mostly ignored by sociologists and political scientists working on civicism or the third sector (for an exception, see Ascoli, Ranci, 2002). This does not mean that research on civil society ignores the political sphere, but that approaches to the political process are not considered pertinent. Issues of political culture socialization and their impact on political involvement (Van Deth, 2010), of the political and cultural context of associational life

(Kriesi, *et al.*, 2007), of trust in institutions (Stolle, 1998; Anheier, Kendall, 2002)<sup>7</sup>, and political empowerment (Daycan, Denters, Van Der Kolk, 2010) are taken seriously in comparative research on civil society and activism in Europe. But the strategic behavior of associations in dealing with their political environment is not at the core.

*Proposition 5. To consider macro-institutional factors it is necessary to contextualize and introduce the main political elements of the scenario. Changes in macro-institutional variables (prevalent form of regulation; form of government; types of policy instruments for civil society inclusion) have to be combined with a synthetic analysis of how civil society is framing the same changes and strategically reacts.*

### 3. Hints, Methods and Data

Summarizing, from the literature we can extract some methodological recommendations (MR<sub>i</sub>) and relevant issues (RI<sub>i</sub>) to try to advance our knowledge about the relationship between social participation and political life.

MR<sub>1</sub>: start from individual beliefs and commitments, but combine them with considerations of organizational behavior<sup>8</sup>.

MR<sub>2</sub>: consider variation in time.

MR<sub>3</sub>: distinguish associational sectors of activity.

MR<sub>4</sub>: focus on internal stratification in associations .

MR<sub>5</sub>: have some measure or representative sample of the whole population.

MR<sub>6</sub>: differentiate methods of analysis, introducing qualitative observation to account for mechanisms and political processes.

RI<sub>1</sub>: focus on interest in politics and political behavior but not on trust in institutions (see for instance Mayer, 2003).

RI<sub>2</sub>: focus on individual multiple memberships (see for instance Baldassarri, 2010).

RI<sub>3</sub>: focus on deliberative and participatory devices in urban and social policy (see for instance De Brelaz, Aquino Alves, 2009; Donoghue, 2009).

RI<sub>4</sub>: focus on organizations' strategies in dealing with contextual political and institutional changes.

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<sup>7</sup> On the contrary, analyzing statistical data from 28 mature and new democracies (World Value Survey and other sources), Armony (2004) finds that income inequality is a significant determinant of social trust (p. 189), whereas civic engagement is not (p. 187).

<sup>8</sup> We consider organizational networking as part of organizational behavior.

To study the relationships between civil society and the political system our first choice was to delimit the field, and we thus designed comparative research with data focusing on the Lombardy region (the biggest Italian region, currently counting about 10 million inhabitants). Due to the quasi-federal Italian institutional system, and the relevance of the region in policy making in the health and social care sectors, as well as for cultural and sports policies, we have no doubt that this territorial limit will not impoverish the institutional environment.

Therefore, with the research group PolisLombardia, directed by Roberto Biorcio at the State University of Milano-Bicocca, in 2006 we designed a survey of militants (SM<sub>07</sub>) in various associational fields in the Lombardy region of Italy. We decided to focus on individuals and what they could tell us as such. At the same time, however, we stressed multiple levels of analysis in order to try to overcome some of the limitations of methodological individualism. We built a reasoned sample of local organizations (community based), stratified by sector of activity, territorial area, small, medium and large towns. We use the same method developed in 1992 for a similar research (SM<sub>93</sub>, see Biorcio, Diani, 1993; 1994), considering all the associations sampled that still existed. In 2007 and 2008 we collected individual structured questionnaires filled in with an interviewer present. We arranged with each association to attend an evening meeting for activists, and were sure not to collect informations only from leaders, but from all kinds of ordinary participants. The meeting was never organized specifically for our research, but had a general purpose, even where the first hour was dedicated to filling in the questionnaire. At the same time we asked the organization's representative to fill in a specific questionnaire on organizational activities. Most of the questions were similar to those of 1992/3, and thus permit comparison. It took 17 months to collect the data and we obtained 1.071 valid questionnaires, from 161 organizations working at the local level (17 specialized in health and social care, 11 in culture, 13 with a youth membership, 9 were parish recreation centers, 10 environmental organizations, 9 pacifist, 11 were active on gender issues, 15 on critical and ethical consumerism, 13 were engaged in international aid provision, 11 were sporting associations, 6 neighborhood committees, 7 radical squatted social centers, 19 family associations, 19 immigrants' associations). SM<sub>93</sub> had a sample of 151 groups, and 1.089 valid questionnaires, plus 90 in-depth interviews (ID<sub>93</sub>). While the national public research multi-objectives (ISTAT multiscopo) did not help us capture the relationships between participants and politics, and their differences with non-participating citizens, in 2009 we decided to design a CATI survey (CS<sub>09</sub>) containing 15 questions, administered to a sample (N=1.519) representative of the adult population in Lombardy according to gender, age, education, and geo-political territorial area. Also in 1993, a CATI survey was realized (CS<sub>93</sub>) (N=784). We then planned protocols of participant observation in 4 cultural community based associations (Citroni, 2010), 1 umbrella organization in one province (Mantova, see Bassoli, Biorcio, Vitale, 2011), 6 pacifist organizations (Tosi, Vitale, 2009), 1 provincial third sector coordination (Polizzi, Vitale, 2010), one network of critical consumerism (Tosi, 2009) and a longer, two year presence in the lobbying group of social-care umbrella organizations at the regional level (Vitale, 2011). We also collected 32 in-depth interviews about the quality of participation in the territorial planning of welfare (Polizzi, Tajani, Vitale, 2011). Finally, we devel-

oped a method of working with associations unwilling to allow us to contact their activists during their evening meetings, and analyzed the declared reason for refusal (Giorgi, Tosi, 2007).

#### **4. Contextual Political Analysis of Civil Society: Lombardy 1992-2009**

It was Tilly (2008) who repeated that to deal with macro factors means to contextualize, and to contextualize means to historicize, or at the very least to compare two moments, in order to catch macro-variations in time. As said in the previous paragraph, we decided to compare associational participation in 1992/3 and in 2007/8 in the Lombardy Region. There are two main elements of interest in this comparison, and they are strictly interrelated:

1. In 1992 the Italian party system collapsed under the weight of scandals and the actions of magistrates who investigated on bribery and corruption. These were years of profound civic arousal, the denouncing of corruption, and calls for morality in public life. At the same time, this political passage, known throughout the world as “Mani Pulite” (clean hands) or “Tangentopoli” (land of bribes), had other components relevant to political culture: populism and anti-politics being the most significant (Biorcio, 2003; Mete, 2010).
2. Most of the Italian political scientists refer to the period after 1992 as the Second Republic. There were important institutional reforms and a new configuration of the party system, with the collapse of traditional mass parties, the beginning of ethno-regionalist protest in the Northern Regions, and the founding of new, highly cartelized (in the sense of Katz and Mair, 1995) political parties.

In this section, in order to introduce a contextual political analysis of civil society we have to consider the mixture of change and stability in regulation and other institutional variables, and then discuss some of the empirical results of the research.

##### **4.1 Civil society and political life, during the earthquake of the mass parties**

The judiciary action started in the Lombardy Region, which currently counts 10 million inhabitants, up from nine million in 1992, and is the richest of the Italian regions. The largest street demonstrations against party corruption were held here, and here started the mobilization of the Lega Nord, currently the oldest party in the Italian Parliament. Here is the economic headquarters of Silvio Berlusconi, who would hold the balance of power of Italian political life in the following years. A large, diffused and stratified associative universe traditionally characterized the Lombardy region alongside a tradition of pragmatism in providing responses to social and urban problems without resorting to public regulation, state interventions and services.

Here, in 1992-1993, the discourse on civil society was impressive. Civil society was considered as a moral heritage, a reserve to pit against the corruption of politicians, and to support the development of a modern civic life. NGO leaders were called on to enter politics or take over the direct

leadership of new political parties. On top of this, the idea of a self-governing society, with a reduced role for political parties and a stronger role for civil society in a more subsidiary institutional system evolved. In some senses, this regional context was a little bit different when compared to the general development of the neoliberal policy paradigm then spreading throughout Europe. The story we are telling is certainly immersed in this broader policy shift, but with some specificities: the main city of the region (Milan) was governed by a left wing coalition (or a center-left wing coalition) from the end of the Second World War; there was a large right wing Catholic movement (Comunione e Liberazione, CL) calling for a reduction in state intervention, and traditionally attentive to and inspired by UK policy reforms; finally, throughout the region, elites tended to avoid political careers (especially national political careers), valuing economic power over political power (Biorcio, 2001): Lombardy was “an economic giant, but a political dwarf” - as the populist ethno-regionalist leader Umberto Bossi put it.

In fact, in 1993 in Lombardy there was a higher participation rate (7,1%) than the average of Italian regions (6,1%), considering the traditionally low level of active participation in association in Italy (Almond, Verba, 1965; Immerfall, Priller, Delhey, 2010, p. 18; Mayer, 2010, p. 250). Instead the participation rate to political parties was considerably lower (3,9%) than the Italian average (4,7%). Public expectations of a proactive role for civil society were therefore enormous. While in the public discourse, associations (especially involved in social care and the fight against social exclusion) were considered as a deterrent to anti-solidarity attitudes, in fact there were non significant differences between participants and the rest of the population (and also less attentive to the defense of more needy groups, i.e. poor people, and elderly).

In Lombardy (and elsewhere, of course), (a) the end of the labour protest cycle and the inability of the political system to respond to numerous demands for modernization (Melucci, 1984) and (b) the crisis of the mass-support parties and the emergence of interest-group and populist parties operating on a regional platform worked to sideline political participation in the narrow sense and opened up a window of opportunity for other forms of collective action to be diffused and developed.

Volunteers in nearly all sectors were diffident when faced with the demands of politics strictly understood, or even refused to engage with them altogether. At the same time, they were developing a particular role in democratic vigilance and concern for public affairs, albeit one lacking in efficiency. In the words of a member of a cooperative working for the quality of life of drug addicts: “I feel like a drop in the ocean. We’re resisters, but we’re not managing to bring about change”. This sense of isolation, abandonment and mistrust towards other collective and institutional actors stretched not only to parties and institutions, but also to social movements.<sup>9</sup> Some volunteers followed political dynamics, others were highly concerned with the problems of social policy, but

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<sup>9</sup> Beyond the evident and general sympathy shown for the volunteers, members of Lombardy associations show little concern with social movements and non-party political movements (judged worthy of trust only by 40% of civil society activists, and by a small minority of members of other sectors), or indeed for the environmental associations.

neither large-scale institutional reforms (regionalization, direct election of mayors, reform of voting regulations) nor the reform of the political system and the governing class across all levels of government succeeded in changing the typically negative judgement held by most.<sup>10</sup> Their action was directed not at reforming politics, but rather at cultural change and moral reform of society. But starting from social questions, most civil society activists did aim in the long term to influence the insitutional and political sphere.

There was in any case a certain number of activists involved also in “traditional” party-political or trades union organizations; a number more or less similar to that of activists who – able to do so for biographical reasons – had already been been active in these organizations in the 1970s and ‘80s. In light of the high number of our interviewees who left parties and trades unions after the ‘70s, the finding given above also indicates that there were a significant number who, having participated in association in the ‘80s or even later, in fact started working with traditional political or trades-union organizations at the same time. That is, alongside a well known shift from the “old” politics to civil society, another path of participation seems to emerge, based on a more or less simultaneous involvement in both sectors at once.

	Activity followed in the '80s and subsequently abandoned							Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
<b>ACTIVITY IN THE '90s</b>								
1. 'Old' politics	---	14	21	16	15	18	13	17
2. Catholic associations	20*	---	29	26	10*	36	51*	29
3. 'New' politics	21	29*	---	23	26	27*	30*	19
4. Ecologism	22	19	23	---	31*	24	19	18
5. Cultural associations	43	36	40	45	---	56*	72*	41
6. Sports/recreational assoc.	34	24	29	42	34	---	19*	31
7. Social help assoc.	27*	55*	38	29	34	37	---	38
N	131	58	126	31	61	98	53	1089

\*: divergence from the average values significant at  $p < .05$

Table 1. Forms of participation in the 1990s of those who had carried out different activities during the ‘80s. Source: SM<sub>93</sub>. N= 1089. See: Biorcio-Diani/Iref 1993.

In any case, many of the associations operated with the aim of influencing public opinion through campaigns (Schmitt-Beck, Farrell, 2002), either in the traditional form of direct initiative (peaceful demonstrations, petitioning, collecting signatures for referendum-type consultation) or through media campaigning intervention (source: SM<sub>93</sub>). In this logic, continuities with the new movements of the 1970s and ‘80s can be found in the majority of sectors and particularly among social assistance volunteer groups (Melucci, 1996).

Let us now look at the activists’ perception of the frequency with which the association to which they belong uses different forms of intervention. Table n. 2 shows the percentage of interviewees

<sup>10</sup> Judgments on newly-emerged political forces were none too flattering, although novel elements were recognized in the birth and constitution of parties such as the Lega del Nord or Forza Italia. These parties were criticized also because in their early test-periods in government they were seen to take on a traditional format.

who state that a particular form of action was adopted at least a few times by their group. Some of these forms are part of the “collective action repertoire” (Tilly, 2004) that characterizes any Western democracy. Slightly more than a third of interviewees make reference to the promotion of peaceful public demonstrations, and about the same number to gathering signatures for petitions and referendum campaigns. The diffusion of these techniques, however, differs significantly between sectors: they are mentioned by three quarters of civil association members, by a third of those active in cultural groups, and by less than a quarter of interviewees in other cases. Awareness of various forms of action and pressure are also internally divergent. The strategy of contacting, for different reasons, members of the political parties or trades-union does not seem to be widespread. Indeed, it is cited by only a quarter of the interviewees, a number that reaches a third when the question is asked on the basis of contact with individual political actors. These percentages double among members of civil associations, and fall even further among those involved in social assistance and sports groups. The strategy of contacting public actors/civil servants is slightly more popular, mentioned by 40% of respondents with a higher frequency among members of civil and social assistance organizations. On the other hand, recourse to the legal sphere is rare, and concentrated almost exclusively in the civic groups.<sup>11</sup>

	social assist.	cultural	civic	sport - recreation	total
Promoting petitions and referendum***	15	33	74	20	36
Promoting peaceful demonstration***	23	37	70	22	39
Contacting parties***	12	22	52	13	25
Contacting individual political actors***	21	29	58	20	33
Contacting trades unions/professional assoc.***	17	24	47	13	26
Contacting public actors/civil servants***	48	34	50	27	41
Presenting appeals to the judiciary***	6	5	33	5	13
Appeal to the media***	48	45	69	40	51
Seeking support from the Church***	33	36	46	21	34
N	301	227	304	257	1089

\*\*\*: p <.001

Table 2. Percentage of individuals who associate their group of membership, at least occasionally, with a particular form of action, per sector. Source: SM<sub>93</sub>. N= 1089. See: Biorcio-Diani/Iref 1993.

It is worth noting that among the motivations for participation, altruism and social commitment are clearly more important than more ‘political’ motivations such as replacing the state in the provision of certain services; similarly, political activity rarely figures in the definitions that regular activists give of the actions of their own groups, including among public interest groups whose action certainly follows the contours of politics (albeit not party politics). Altogether, the diffusion of the culture of volunteering contributed to a further re-dimensioning and desacralization of politics. Its influence generated a greater diversification and fragmentation of interest and types of representation at that time.

<sup>11</sup> This increased dramatically over the following years.

In fact in Lombardy – even more than in Italy as a whole – as of the post-WWII period, all associative sectors entertained strong relations with the principal mass-support parties as well as the Catholic Church. A tendency towards autonomy had developed starting in the 1970s, but in the perceptions and expectations of activists it was still not developed enough in 1992/3 but set to advance, with a general secularization of associations and an increase in ideological pluralism working to stabilize direct relations with *several* parties and institutions, as well as strengthening inter-associational relations (SM<sub>93</sub>). At any rate, activists had a considerably higher trust of the positive role of direct participation in managing social care programs and assistance services. The trend was for active members of associations to be ‘prone to subsidiarity’, whatever their field of action or political self-positioning.

One fundamental point needs to be explored: what type of relations between the (local) state and associations, what type of subsidiarity was in fact targeted by the activists? A participative subsidiarity including in planning and co-decision making, or subsidiarity in the management of responses to new social trends? The data we have available (SM<sub>93</sub>), now analyzed with 18 years of retrospect, make most interesting revelations about the subsequent political behavior of the third sector in the institutional political context of Lombardy. While associative involvement is certainly a sign of greater concern for public life and in particular for the public sphere, it does not necessarily equal a greater sensitivity to certain fundamental values linked to the idea of democratic participation. On this point it should be added that, while levels of effective commitment such as trust in participation are undoubtedly higher among activists than among the population of Lombardy in general, the same association members’ optimism about the importance of direct citizen action is by no means unbounded. The percentage of interviewees who identify higher citizen participation as a priority requirement rises above 20% only among members of civic and cultural associations, while all other sectors hover around the average (and low: 13%) regional value (see Table 3). The proportion of those who count a stable and strong government as an essential priority (within the category of association members) is significantly higher. Even amongst those who are less concerned with this (civic and cultural associations), the percentage that prioritizes a stable government is roughly double that which focuses instead on citizen participation.

	Cultural and civic	Sports and recreation	Social care	TOTAL
A stable government	42.8	43.2	57.7(+)	45.0
A strong government	28.5	36.4	42.2(+)	34.1
Limit on party power	26.7	39.1	29.5	36.8
Fewer strikes	14.2	14.8	23.9(+)	17.2
Greater order and discipline	33.9	44.5	54.9(+)	45.5
Lower taxes	39.2	39.1	30.9	49.1
More citizen participation	23.2(+)	16.2	15.4	13.3

Table 3. Interviewees’ perceptions of what is desirable. Source: SM<sub>93</sub>. N= 1089. See: Biorcio-Diani/Iref 1993.

There was also critical reflection on this “centralist” conception of subsidiarity, but it was less

widespread and came out only in in-depth interviews. These bring out particularism as the main limitation of associational efforts: the tendency to establish personal ties with public authorities, and the lack of coordination. In-depth interviews highlighted the danger that relations of ideological, Catholic and Marxist affiliations (which these associations were founded upon) might be transformed into lobby-type, or even Mafia-type relations (ID<sub>93</sub>). There was significant fear that marginalization of party and Church affiliations would be replaced by forms of fundamentalism and dependency further increased by institutions, with financial dependencies and a tendency of elite co-optation emerging (ID<sub>93</sub>).

As a matter of fact, in the following years social organizations were called on to assume a stronger role, not only in furnishing services but also in discussing social planning, challenging the public administration's ability to command and control. Members were asked to assume public roles, to renew leadership not only among policy makers, but also within electoral constituencies. And indeed, over the following years, it became clear that associations had made significant contributions to the process of change and new modes of electing the political class (Biorcio, 2001): associationism in Lombardy was providing politics with a new generation of leaders.

#### **4.2 After the storm, the right wing moment**

The power of political parties in Italy, and the capillary occupation of public and semi-public posts by their affiliates, was "dictated, at least in part, by a concern for the unity of the Country and its 'preservation' from worse evils (breaking up of national unity" (Piattoni, Brunazzo, 2010, p. 333). It was not by chance, then, that the collapse of the party system in Italy unleashed the territorial cleavage, and coincided with the increased political success of territorial mobilization, especially in the North (Biorcio, Vitale, 2011). The new political turn led Italian elites to consider the reform of centre-periphery relations. Strong institutional reforms were then implemented: devolution (a kind of federalism, see Piattoni, Brunazzo, 2010, p. 334) and strong regionalization on one hand, and a change from a model of consensus democracy (Lijphart, 1999) to a more competitive but not fully majoritarian political dynamic, on the other. No significant devices of direct democracy were diffused, but some experiments of participatory governance were implemented, involving associations and social co-operatives in the planning of social and environmental policies.

So in 2009 the institutional context appeared quite different. But also the demographic, economic, and political context has changed. The region now has 10 million inhabitants, and has seen an large increase in the number of immigrants. All levels of government are monopolized by the coalition between Lega Nord and the Popolo della Libertà (led by Berlusconi). Political parties remain very strong and are highly cartelized (Katz, Mair, 1995), i.e. they are not easily distinguishable from the State. They control public officials and manage a stronger spoils system. Deep institutional reforms have been carried out, reinforcing regional competences on health and social policy, and transforming its power balance into a veritable *monocratic government* (Musella, 2009). The Region-

al Governor is the expression of the CL movement, and is in his third mandate (he was subsequently re-elected in 2010).

Subsidiarity (in its passive declination, Kazepov, 2008) has become the keyword for all reforms. Participatory tools to include civil society in the planning and implementation of environmental, educational, and social policies has been introduced at the Regional, Provincial, and Municipal levels. Political action has been focused on continuous small incremental changes, through administrative decrees, cumulating new rules and selecting the enforcement of the pre-existent ones (mechanisms of *layering* and *displacement*, see Palier, 2005) to limit controversial matters, and influencing political procedures, to defuse the potential contention of municipalities and unions. Most anti-poverty policies are implemented and financed by charities, bank foundations, or directly by the Catholic church. The public discourse about the role of civil society has declined somewhat and is framed in a very different way: from the promise of civilization and moralization of the political system in 1992/3, to the principal actor of a subsidiarity architecture in 2007/9.

In this very different institutional environment, what has happened to civil society and voluntary action? How do they deal with the political sphere?

#### 4.2.1 *Interest in politics*

Although a fall in party membership occurred throughout Italy, the country average for this trend is relatively contained, falling from 4.7% to 4.2% with a reduction of only 0.5%; the contraction of party activism in the Lombard case is far more consistent with a reduction of 3.9% to 2.6%. The differential between Lombardy and the Italian average, already present in 1993, thus increased further, since party membership in Lombardy was 17% lower than the country average in 1993 and falling to 38% lower in 2007.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, the involvement of Lombardy's citizens in volunteering reveals a significantly upward trend. In contrast with an essentially constant national percentage (6.3%), volunteer participation in the Region of Lombardy increased far more sharply to 9.9% (in other words, one and a half times the national figure). A similar trend can be observed for civil commitment associations (ecologist, pacifist and civil rights association) and for cultural associations, in which the gap does not increase but the level of participation remains higher in Lombardy than the national average.

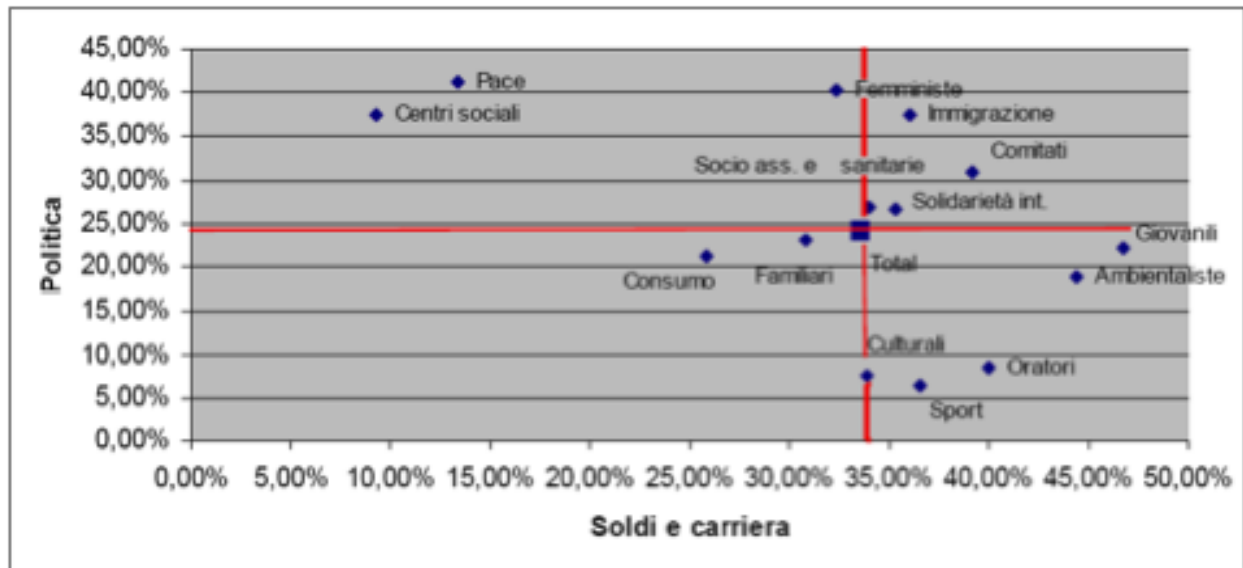
Looking at the data from our associational surveys (SM<sub>93</sub>; SM<sub>07</sub>), we can observe that in the 2007 sample, the percentage of those who attribute a political meaning to the action of their own associations has increased compared with the survey carried out in 1993. Indeed, the increase is fairly

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<sup>12</sup> The data on trades-union activists is even more impressive: if in 1993 the percentage for Lombardy (9.3%) was still higher than the national figure (8.3%), in 2006 the tables are turned: with a fall in the country average to 7.2%, the figure for Lombardy falls sharply, not only in comparison with 1993 but in fact falling below the national average to 5.9%.

significant, having more than doubled from 4.3% to 9.1%.<sup>13</sup> To synthesize effectively the relations between activists of the various associations with politics and other values, we present below a factorial analysis that has generated the following orientation map.

Chart 1. Factorial analysis; associations distributed by values of their activists. Source: SM<sub>07</sub>. N= 1.071.



Let us therefore consider a first type of activity which, in political theory, identifies the requirements for citizen political participation: the fact that a given individual discusses politics on a regular basis, talks about it in a family, work or leisure context. Discussion is basic and essential because it enacts disagreements and cleavages, which are the elementary basis of politics (Duchesne, Haegel, 2007). If we look at the sample in the ISTAT survey “multiscopo”, it is clear that the percentage of individuals in Lombardy who discuss politics daily or several times a week was 37.2% in 1993 and fell to 33.1% in 2006, demonstrating that discussion was indeed more intense in the period of political upheaval catalyzed by Tangentopoli.

	2006		1993	
	No	Regular discussion	No	Regular discussion
Parties	19,3%	80,7%	17,5%	82,5%
Trades unions	35,5%	64,5%	34,8%	65,2%
Volunteers	45,2%	54,8%	45,7%	54,3%
Movements	21,6%	78,4%	33,0%	67,0%
Cultural Association	42,7%	57,3%	40,0%	60,0%
Total	45,6%	54,4%	40,2%	59,8%

<sup>13</sup> In the increase of a sense of political action attributed to the groups we have investigated, evidence can be seen of a more consistent politicization of ‘movement’ organizations, eg. pacifist or feminist, compared with the 37% and 27% of 2006, and more generally a politicization of civil commitment organizations which in 1993 gave only a 13.6% figure. On the other hand, there is no evidence for this in ecologist associations, witnessed by their different development from other areas that at one time were also identified as new social movements (Biorcio, Lodi, 1988; Diani, Donati, 1998).

Table 4. Regular political discussion. Source: Istat multiscopo. Lombard sample, 1993 (N= 4.264) and 2006 (N= 3.404).

To avoid stopping at simple bivariate relations, we tested a logistical regression model that allowed us to verify the very highly significant values of cultural, social and civil commitment in the relationship that we identified. Our model illustrates how, both in 1993 and even more so in 2006, beyond the significant influence of gender, age, frequency of churchgoing and socio-professional category – and *above all* of educational qualifications – the fact of having a form of associative commitment had a positive (and independent) impact on whether individuals discussed political subjects in their own conversations. If in 1993 there was a significant impact generated by trades-union membership – but also NSM or cultural association involvement, though not volunteer involvement which was mainly dedicated to social or long term care services – in 2006 the odds of an individual discussing political subjects among those taking part in voluntary associations becomes significant, 68% higher than the odds of an individual not taking part in volunteering activities.

Focusing on our 2009 data (CS<sub>09</sub>) we have constructed a model to estimate the strength of the relationship between participation and *interest* in politics, taking into account also the political self-positioning variables on a left-right axis in order to control for the possibility that political interest might be an effect only of left-leaning beliefs<sup>14</sup>. The model confirms gender as the most significant and highly relevant variable: the odds on political interest for the female part of the sample are 73% lower than the odds for male individuals. Those who claim to lie outside the right-left cleavage have odds 50% lower than those positioning themselves on the centre-right (which doubtless is the key variable in Lombardy). Positive factors are age, given that for every year added the odds increase by 0.01%, as well as having a higher education diploma or degree which increase the odds of political interest respectively by 83% and 200% compared with the odds of those who have completed only compulsory schooling. Self-positioning on the left or centre-left also has a very significant impact, increasing the odds respectively by 124% and 68% from those who identify as centre-right.

With these variables controlled, participation in certain associational sectors is revealed as significant in any case with a noticeable strength: only social assistance and long term care associations have a negative impact on the odds, reducing them by 57% compared with the odds of those who do not take part in these types of association. The sectors that have the most consistently positive impact on political interest are cultural associations, which increase the odds by 72%, migrant solidarity groups which increase them by 106%, and neighborhood committees by a full 122%.

The literature on political participation has made much of the crisis of representation as an identity marker, and more specifically on the reduced identification power of mass-support parties (Pizzorno, 1981). This point is extremely important also for local politics, because the

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<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately we can not consider the distinction between interest and saliency (see note n. 5).

reduction in the identification power of parties arguably brings up difficulties for local politics – even more than local governments – in providing themselves with mid- to long-term goals. The crisis of the mass-support parties and of their function/identification power is not an exclusively Lombard, nor indeed exclusively Italian, phenomenon. In particular, the crisis of identification power of mass-support parties has diminished their capacity to select, reduce, reformulate, transform and omit “the amorphous demands that put the pressure on ‘from below’” (Pizzorno, 1996: 984).

However, it is noticeable that at a descriptive (bivariate) level a strong relationship emerges between being involved in certain civil society bodies and the degree of party identification (CS<sub>09</sub>). This relationship remains higher than the Lombardy average, though less marked for those involved in the field of social assistance and long term care.

	No	Merely sympathetic	Much more + quite
Cultural	59,50%	19,70%	20,90%
Social assistance/long term care	61,70%	18,80%	19,60%
Sports and recreation	58,90%	22,00%	19,00%
International and intercultural solidarity	57,10%	20,60%	22,30%
* Immigrant solidarity and aid	59,60%	18,10%	22,30%
Civil commitment:	54,40%	22,10%	23,50%
* Pacifists	55,70%	14,20%	30,20%
* Defence of civil human rights	61,00%	16,20%	22,90%
* Ecologists	59,10%	19,40%	21,50%
Others (social/youth centres + others)	64,80%	14,30%	20,90%
Non-participants	64,20%	21,90%	13,90%
Lombardy Total	62,20%	21,70%	16,10%

Table 5. Party identification. Source: CS<sub>09</sub>. N=1.519.

To interpret these data, we must first of all check again that this is not an effect of the social attributes of those who participate actively rather than a correlative of participation itself. Indeed, controlling for age, educational qualifications, political self-identification, frequency of churchgoing, it appears that only the area of civic groups is significant (sig = 0.037). For those who are part of this field, the odds of having a strong party identification are 64% higher than those of non-participants. In this area, the percentage of those who define their own action as markedly political is higher. It is, furthermore, a field that pushes individuals to discuss political debates and questions, in which the style of the group feeds into concern for the political sphere. This “style” can be understood as a means of organizing democratic and decisional processes internally, as well as the prevalent tone of conversations between associates (Eliasoph and Lichterman, 2003). We might also interpret this data differently, in terms of greater clientelism and dependence of the field of civil commitment on political parties. However, this hypothesis does not seem correct to us, in view of the fact that this field is the one that requires the least public financing (except for ecologist associations), and which therefore has a lower economic dependence and less need for party relations in its essential functioning. In addition, the associational sector within this area that gives the lowest percentage of identification with a party is the ecologist sector, that is the sector which has project-

ed itself into a party organization in a stronger and more structured way than any other (Biorcio, 2001b) and which therefore has developed the most effective relations with it.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, at the individual level, we can cluster activists considering two main dimension: the level of trust in democratic institutions, and sense of efficacy for voluntary action. We have realized this typology, having in mind what we have said about social participation in 1993 when the main meaning attributed by volunteers to the sense of efficacy of their action was related to the competence in managing services, and not of influencing policy making. Here we wanted to classify individuals on the basis of a broader meaning, so to say directly linked to the sense of efficacy in political pressure and policy change, following some analysis developed by Roberto Biorcio (2007) on political participation. Looking at different sector of activities, and comparing with non-participants, we can observe the distribution of the 4 ideal types.

	<b>pleased</b>	<b>subject</b>	<b>critical</b>	<b>distant</b>
	High faith in democratic institutions and high efficacy	High faith in democratic institutions and low efficacy	Low faith in institutions and high efficacy	Low faith in institutions and low efficacy
Cultural	14,30%	47,20%	6,20%	32,40%
Social assistance/hygiene	9,60%	47,70%	6,60%	36,10%
Sports and recreation	11,30%	49,60%	6,40%	32,70%
International/intercultural solidarity	12,30%	44,80%	8,00%	34,90%
Civic commitment	11,20%	47,00%	5,00%	36,80%
Others (social/youth centres + others)	6,20%	52,40%	9,70%	31,60%
Non-participants	9,30%	34,40%	12,10%	44,20%
Lombardy average	10,00%	39,00%	10,30%	40,80%

Table 6. A typology of citizens; distribution in associational sectors. Indexes of trust in democratic institutions and of sense of efficacy. Source: CS<sub>09</sub> N=1.519.

#### **4.2.2 Political behavior**

We have until now discussed perceptions, representations, conversations, visions and orientations. In synthesis, we find that political discourses, personal curiosity to politics and also identification with political parties are higher for participants in social organizations, even if in a very different way according to the sector of activities, as suggested in the literature (MR<sub>3</sub>).

Let us now consider what activists as individuals and members of organized groups do actively: what is their repertoire of political action? Do they negotiate or bring pressure? Do they take part in periods of deliberation and co-planning? Do they protest, and if so, how? And how do

<sup>15</sup> And indeed, if we remove ecologist associations from the field of civil commitment, not only the significance of the field increases (sig = 0.009), but the strength of the odds ratio (coefficient Exp (B) = 1.885) also becomes more marked. We should remember that as concerns the ecologist sector, the international literature has several times called attention to the apparently paradoxical effects of the depoliticization of the second phase ecologism, which started after the foundation of the green parties (Lichterman, 1996), with the corresponding exception of the so-called new ecologism active principally in urban campaigns.

they position themselves with regard to public resources? How, if they do so at all, do they take up the institutional opportunities that open up to them at several levels?

In fact also looking at individual commitment in demonstrations and protests, using official data, we that people involved in voluntary groups protest more than the average of the population, and that this relation has become stronger in 2006.

	1993		2006	
	no	yes	no	yes
Unions	78,50%	21,50%	78,50%	21,50%
Volunteers	85,10%	14,90%	84,00%	16,00%
Ecological, Civil Rights, Peace	71,50%	28,50%	61,40%	38,60%
Cultural, recreational	83,50%	16,50%	84,50%	15,50%
Non Participants	96,60%	3,40%	97,60%	2,40%

Table 7. Participation to demonstrations. Source: Istat multiscopo. Lombard sample, 1993 (N= 4.264) and 2006 (N= 3.404).

Our data from 2009 (CS<sub>09</sub>) permit to look at details of this political commitment, considering also non participating individuals. In every sector of activities, sporting and culture included, the individual commitment is acutely more determined.

<i>Number of political activities in the foregoing month</i>	0	1	2	3 or more
Civic association	39,40%	30,20%	17,40%	13,00%
Other (social/youth centres + others)	41,20%	28,20%	15,50%	15,10%
Cultural	42,20%	30,20%	13,50%	14,20%
Sports and recreational	43,10%	29,90%	14,40%	12,50%
International and intercultural solidarity	45,70%	26,40%	14,40%	13,40%
Social care and assistance	49,30%	28,20%	12,00%	10,40%
Lombard average	63,70%	22,90%	7,80%	5,50%

*Forms of political action considered: participation in a committee, demonstration, political debate, party initiative, urban or neighbourhood committee initiative, signing for a referendum.*

Table 8. Index of individual political participation. Source: CS<sub>09</sub> N=1.519.

#### 4.2.3 Political socialization?

Looking at this data it is difficult to doubt a socialization effect from being a members of an association, especially in some sectors. We know that those who claim the existence of selection mechanisms would affirm that we have not proven the presence of a socialization mechanism. And indeed we admit that we do not have sufficient evidence. But, before discussing some mechanisms

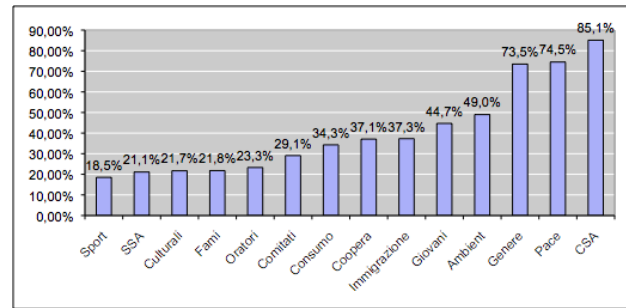
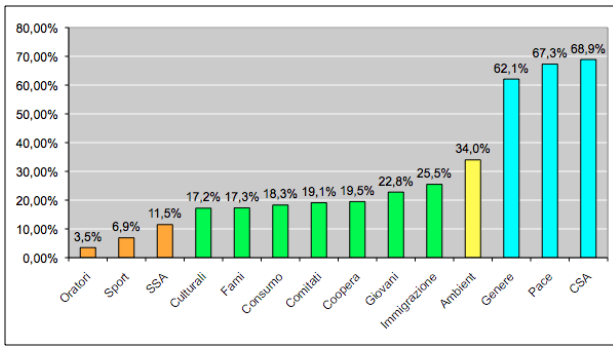
of socialization within associational collective action, we prefer to discuss a point which lies at the heart of our concern. Most of the evidence against the socialization thesis shows that associations are not a school for democracy. Looking at our data, we confirm this hypothesis. Participating in associations does not always socialize members in democratic skills and values (and obviously selection mechanisms are important). If we look at the following indicators (tab. 8), we see - as we have seen already for 1993 - anti-political beliefs, sentiments of inefficacy, likely low political self esteem, and some hints of disempowerment. Data on social care community-based organizations are particularly explicit.

	<b>External political efficacy</b>	<b>Anti-politics ("qualunquismo")</b>		<b>Internal efficacy</b>
	Parties are interested only in votes, not in people's opinions	Whoever's in power, right of left, nothing changes	People like me have no influence on what the government does	Sometimes politics seems so complicated that you can't understand what's happening at all
Social care and assistance	80,1%	64,5%	56,7%	78,4%
Sports, recreation	77,4%	60,3%	56,9%	69,1%
Cultural	78,8%	59,6%	53,9%	68,9%
Consumer rights	82,5%	62,4%	59,0%	75,9%
Pacifist assoc.	77,8%	51,9%	52,9%	63,9%
Ecologist assoc.	82,1%	69,0%	48,6%	68,3%
International solidarity	79,9%	54,7%	52,9%	72,6%
Defence of civil/human rights	77,3%	56,5%	59,9%	72,6%
Youth	73,4%	52,3%	62,8%	70,5%
Solidarity with immigrants	75,3%	57,3%	45,9%	58,0%
Groups for fair-trade	79,9%	51,6%	50,4%	66,1%
Social centres	75,2%	63,4%	65,7%	79,2%
Parish Recreation Centers	77,5%	61,7%	51,7%	75,6%
Neighborhood committees	77,1%	51,2%	52,2%	73,2%
Non-participants	76,9%	64,7%	56,6%	74,3%

Table 9. Antipolitics and sense of efficacy. Source: CS<sub>09</sub> N=1.519.

Yet recognizing the spread of distrust in politics does not mean that no socialization effect is present. In fact, our hypothesis is that associational life in the Lombardy region, differentiated by sector of activity, has a socialization effect, but not strictly in terms of democracy. It is a political socialization, in the sense that it deals with the political sphere of representation and behavior. Two question therefore remain to be answered: can we provide evidence to sustain this hypothesis? And, if it is proved, what do associations socialize in?

To provide some evidence about the presence of a socialization mechanism we consider the organizations in which there are periodic moments of formal political discussion during internal meetings. These are organizations from very different sectors of activities. Obviously, formal discussions are more common in some sectors than others. And formal discussions are not necessarily more concentrated in sectors where informal discussions are more present (see chart n. 2).



Formal discussion during associational meeting

Informal discussion during associational meeting

Chart 2. Political discussion in associations. (SM07). N= 1.071.

We are not then necessarily talking about associations that select and attract members already socialized to talk politics. We are talking about organizations that as an internal rule discuss the policy environment, decision making in specific policy sectors, how to place themselves in the political field and in a relational strategy with local institutions, in meetings. According to the information we collected for the qualitative part of our research program, it seems that in each of the sectors considered the associations found did not tend to attract a specific kind of activist already highly socialized to political action. In fact, we are not talking about large national or regional organizations that are highly politicized, able to target their potential militants and attract members on the basis of a strong identity. They are community-based organizations with specific internal habits (that also discuss politics and policy during their meetings). To better understand socialization and politicization, Hamidi (2007) suggests we distinguish between footing (Goofman, 1979) and political skills, and their mutual interaction. We followed this framework in our qualitative insights in order to verify if we were indeed in the presence of an exit effect in the sense of if there was no selection of incoming members, there was a potential selection effect of individuals exiting the organization because unused to the kinds of habits and meeting rules of the organization. We did not however find any hints of this expulsion mechanism. We cannot prove on the basis of a statistical analysis the presence of a “pure” socialization mechanism, but we have some qualitative clues for it.

Looking at the data about volunteers belonging to associations in which there are formal moments of political discussion, the impact on individual behavior is impressive (see also Mayer, 2010: 259-69). Without introducing synthetic measures of the force of this relation, let us look directly at the extensive table n. 10.

Formal discussion during associational meeting.

Articles on politics in newspaper

Political broadcasts

Political discussion with friends and acquaintances

Talk in, assemblies, demonstrations

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Solidarity with immigrants	No	40,5%	36,1%	55,6%	19,4%
	Yes	91,7%	66,7%	91,7%	83,3%
Cultural	No	40,0%	34,0%	28,3%	0,0%
	Yes	80,0%	66,7%	70,0%	70,0%
Youth	No	52,6%	53,8%	70,5%	12,8%
	Yes	56,5%	63,6%	72,7%	22,7%
International aid	No	57,6%	46,9%	46,2%	12,3%
	Yes	81,3%	68,8%	87,5%	66,7%
Social care and assistance	No	65,0%	55,7%	47,4%	11,4%
	Yes	81,8%	90,0%	90,0%	66,7%
Ecologist	No	25,8%	32,3%	41,9%	16,1%
	Yes	81,3%	68,8%	87,5%	43,8%
Neighborhood committees	No	62,2%	55,3%	63,2%	26,3%
	Yes	88,9%	66,7%	100,0%	55,6%
Family	No	63,3%	66,7%	55,7%	5,0%
	Yes	76,9%	84,6%	84,6%	38,5%
Ethical consumerism	No	50,0%	47,3%	46,6%	13,9%
	Yes	62,5%	37,5%	75,0%	31,3%

Table 10. Political discussion in associations and individual political behavior. (SM<sub>07</sub>). N= 1.071.

If until now we have looked at a basic internal mechanism (recurrent political discussion during a meeting), we can now also try to underline an external institutional mechanism of socialization. In Italy in the year 2000 a participatory instrument of discussion and deliberation to plan local welfare services in districts of more or less 100.000 inhabitants was introduced. Named the "Piano di Zona" (Area Plan), this form of participatory planning involved different municipalities, with incentives to plan together for some additional resources for social care (Bifulco, Centemeri, 2008). Non profit organizations, formal and informal groups were invited to participate, bring ideas, support projects and provide collaborative forms of evaluation. While primary research showed obvious differences in the implementation of this policy tool, more systematic analyses of the first three waves of participatory planning (2003, 2006, and 2009) in different local welfare districts have delved into these differences, showing the importance of effectiveness in the use of the outcomes of the deliberation processes (Polizzi, et al., 2011). In the first two wave especially, associations involved in participatory planning worked hard with their volunteers in preparing proposals, claims, lists of problems, hypotheses for experimentation, and also to understand administrative codes and procedures, standards, or contradictions in local policy implementation.

This simple “instrument” (Lascoumes, Le Galès, 2007) opened up room for great expectations and deep engagement, partially modifying the way non profit organizations worked. It involved hierarchical networks, and, like many other similar local governance instruments, could be criticized for excluding denizens from participating, and for failing in creating a common vision or new forms of cooperation (García, 2006). Nevertheless, departing from an exigent normative point of view, we can note that this tool of participatory planning provided a public arena in which many associations experienced their first formal moments of discussion, co-planning and working with other organizations on specific issues, and with the public administration. Many of the associations involved changed their agendas, passing from “doing” to “voicing”. Our research (SM07) shows that in 2007, individuals engaged in social care associations involved in this deliberative arena displayed more politicized behavior than volunteers working in social care associations who do not participate in the territorial planning of local welfare.

		Participation to Area Planning for social care	Articles on politics in newspaper	Political broadcasts	Political discussion with friends and acquaintances	Talk in, assemblies, demonstrations
		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Participation to area planning for social care	Yes	68,60%	65,30%	66,70%	25,50%	
	No	58,80%	54,00%	36,70%	8,30%	

Table 11. Political behavior of individuals participating in social care organizations involved in participatory area planning. (SM<sub>07</sub>). N= 1.071.

#### 4.2.4 Institutional commitment

These results seem to confirm the importance of the distinction introduced by Camille Hamidi (2010) between the learning of pro-democracy skills and politicization. Her comparative qualitative study permits us to underline interactional mechanisms that explain why participation in associations sustains forms of politicization even in the presence of obstacles to fully democratic learning. Obviously, socialization in pro-democracy skills and politicization are not completely independent or opposite phenomena. Let us consider the division of activists between the 14% in charge of internal and network leadership (Janus leader), as distinct from those who take care only of the coalition (17,1%) (network leader), the internal coordinators - caring for their own groups (27,7%) -, and ‘simple’ activists (27%). We can remark that the first group, the real brokers between the internal life of the particular association and broader alliances, has more intense political tendencies, working frequently with local authorities and participating in deliberative arenas opened by new participatory local policies. But this inclination also extends to participation in local representative bodies (see table n. 12).

		Janus Leaders	Network Coordinators	Internal Coordinators	Activists	Others	Average
Town/District Commissions	Council or	25,9	20,5	8,2	8,2	9,8	13,1

Province/Regional council or National Parliament	1,5	2,0	1,1	1,2	2,3	1,5
Committee of Health Units or other Public Services	8,8	4,8	3,9	1,7	3,1	4,1
School commissions (committees for parents)	44,7	44,0	32,3	26,1	34,1	34,7
Tourist board, cultural authorities, sport agencies	40,9	41,3	29,2	18,4	20,0	28,9

Table 12. Activists who participate in representative bodies too. (SM<sub>07</sub>). N= 1.071. See Tosi, Carletti (2011).

One of the main problems raised by politicized individuals voluntarily engaged in civil society is that they feel ignored by the institutions. This is stronger for those activists in civic organizations or organizations that provide social services and public goods. In fact, the more volunteers a sector has involved in relationships with institutions, the stronger the impression of being ignored by institutions that pay no attention to social problems except during electoral campaigns (see table n. 13).

	Contacting institutions	Contacting parties/trades-union	Consulting institutions	Impression of being ignored by institutions
Civic commitment	18,60%	16,10%	30,10%	65,10%
Assistance to those in need	16,70%	5,20%	15,70%	56,30%
Services	24,20%	11,30%	40,60%	64,90%
Mixed (average profile)	16,50%	4,90%	16,70%	51,80%
Leisure and sociality.	8,60%	2,00%	8,50%	37,00%
Total	16,70%	8,40%	20,40%	56,20%

Table 13. Political action undertaken on behalf of associations. (SM<sub>07</sub>). N= 1.071.

#### 4.2.5. Coalition building and lobbying

But the feeling of being ignored does not always paralyze activists. In some conditions it can enact contention or public criticism. Comparing 6 European cities Lelieveldt and Caiani (2007: 186) proved a strong connection between the number of associational ties in networks and civic coalitions and their political action. One of our qualitative case studies shows that this may also happen to activists and leaders not socialized within left wing social movements, and with no significant previous experience in claims-making. In our participant observation of lobbying conducted by leaders of non profit umbrella organizations to influence law making and policy making in regional welfare reform, we saw the importance of a deliberative self governed forum for the third sector (Vitale, 2011). As usual, this forum was inaccessible to less well organized associations (for the relevance of this feature, see Lelieveldt and Caiani, 2007: 190). Even if civil society leaders were highly skeptical and distrustful, contentious forms of action and the focus on inclusive coalition building had important outcomes. They permitted the participants to modify their repertoires of action (improving campaigning and reducing political exchange) and to learn and modify some of their ways of framing the relationship between individual rights and community works. In this case a socialization effect could be interpreted as due to a process of cooperative deliberation amongst

individuals from different organizations, often in competition, or with alternative ideological inspirations (see also De Brelaz, Aquino Alves, 2009).

The political context was characterized by (a) the increasing centralization of regional social policy; (b) the weakness of left-wing party opposition; (c) the strengthening of the executive; (d) focused regional investments rewarding and valorizing associations clearly affiliated to a single hierarchical religious or political community (Giorgi, 2009); (e) a typical politics of “mobilization of bias” (Bachrach, Baratz, 1962), to limit the scope of the political process to the public consideration of comparatively innocuous issues. In this situation, the process of civic coalition making is explained thanks to the long standing mechanism whereby “the enemies of your enemy are your friends”. Analytically, it could be dissected into (see also McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly, 2001):

- (1) a mechanism of boundary deactivation, with the decrease in the salience of the us-them distinction separating two political actors (small groups from large groups; groups of communist legacy and groups of Catholic legacy, advocacy groups and groups providing services; groups helping people with disabilities and groups for youth education);
- (2) a mechanism of the attribution of similarity, with each of the leaders involved in the identification of another actor as falling within the same category as their own;
- (3) a mechanism of certification: an external authority’s signal of its readiness to recognize and support the existence and claims of a new coalition (in this case the University, and also the Church);
- (4) a mechanism of emulation, but at a more local scale, with coalitions forming at the provincial level, creating new, visible, and direct coordination of claims between previously distinct organizations, and coordinating an agenda with the regional mobilization to emulate campaigns with the deliberate repetition of a repertoire of learning and contentious activities within a given territorial context, observed at the regional level;
- (5) a mechanism of coordinated self-representation: this coalition of social care organizations started campaigning to publicly display its WUNC (worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment, see Tilly, 2004). While the political opposition were weak, and the political majority closed and overbearing, there was no social appropriation, and so no conversion or incorporation of these associations into political parties<sup>16</sup>.

## 5. Conclusion and paths for future research

What can we learn from the Lombardy case? We hope to have shown good reasons to maintain a focus on the socialization effect of associational active participation. The main question now concerns the content of this socialization. We can try to provide a cautious answer to this question.

In some senses, it seems to us that under some conditions some associations are schools of democracy. We have provided persuasive data about internal and external mechanisms (formal political

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<sup>16</sup> This multilevel civic network also obtained some important results in terms of vetoing two law reforms and influencing several specific regulations.

discussion during recurrent meetings; participatory devices for co-planning) which seem to have a direct effect on some democratic skills (but we cannot measure the impact on relevant cognitive skills as tolerance of others' points of view; see Hamidi, 2010: 157-62). We have also shown some evidence about the effect of the politicization of issues and behaviors that emerges when looking at different sectors of associational activities. In some cases, especially where there is a good balance between network transactions and bonding relationships, we see the formation of civic networks in which we found socialization effects in terms of "counter-democracy". It was Rosanvallon (2006) who insisted on the importance of "saying no", of a negative dialectic, of criticism and vigilance, for advanced democracies. And the emphasis on the balance between bonding and binding transactions noted through qualitative observation is consistent with the results from the quantitative comparative network analysis conducted by Baldassarri and Diani (2009), who also suggest that a structural configuration may be characteristic of civic networks able to produce social integration: coalitions that are polycentric, horizontally integrated with strong identity ties and the ability to build more instrumental, ad hoc alliances, or "transactions", to operate across clusters (p. 771).

Yet in Lombardy not all the associations have become schools of democracy. A number of them suffer enormously from the evaporation of the public sphere due to the reduction of public dialectic on policy issues in elective arenas. The lack of the old forms of party representation of civil society claims has produced a true syndrome of neglect. They lack institutional recognition, and develop a feeling of powerlessness without translation in terms of new political alliances, lobbying, campaigning or claims-making. Some of these organizations have tried to *substitute* themselves for political parties, assuming an equivalent role, and try to directly represent some specific public problem and exploit previous contentious identities to organize some political ritual or symbolic campaign. Others try to enter more directly into the policy making process, once again substituting themselves for political parties, but without success and with huge conflicts with their own members.

These are not however the only cases. Other organizations have overcome the lack of mass parties. The main result of our study emphasizes that associations in Lombardy suffer not only from the lack of mass parties, or from doing well in terms of socializing to pro-democratic skills. Associations are also schools of something else. While working to provide public goods, mediate between the private and public sphere (Mayer, 2003: 60) and create sociability for their members and users, they become progressively more embedded in an institutional milieu where political parties and the state are not clearly distinct. Everywhere in Europe, and more seriously so in Lombardy, political parties have more ambivalent memberships, use consultants and experts, take many "garbage can" decisions under pressure from companies and entrepreneurial lobbies, and are more and more influenced by conflict on the basis of a new cleavage between demarcation and integration (Kriesi, *et al.*, 2008).

The end of the "democracy of the parties" (Manin, 1995) as we knew it has had consequences in terms of *disintermediation*: political parties and local councilors do not filter political demands and

social claims. Also, when local authorities are legitimate enough to collect territorial demands from citizens' and interest groups, they are not always able to represent those demands and look for resources, even where they elaborated those demands, by taking a decision (Vitale, Tosi, 2011). As a consequence, local advocacy coalitions as well as interest groups look directly to the executive regional power to express their demands and find new forms of intermediation. In the Lombard policy sectors of social and health care this has become decisive (Bifulco, Vitale, 2006), even more so than in other European regions or countries where different institutional configurations, not without their tensions (Petrella, 2009), link different levels of power and authority, different actors, and different modes of governance (Ascoli, Ranci, 2002).

In Lombardy the right-wing political coalition between a strong cartel party (FI-PDL) and a populist ethno-regionalist party (Lega Nord) is matched by a huge vertical network of religious groups and business interests (CL). Furthermore, this situation is combined with the difficulties of the opposition parties to maintain their own agenda and represent other organized interests (especially on social policies, and on policies to sustain community development and cohesion). It is a particular case of what Colin Crouch (2004<sup>17</sup>) brilliantly defined as post-democracy, in which - while the forms of democracy remain fully in place, "politics and government are increasingly slipping back into the control of privileged elites in the manner characteristic of pre-democratic times; and that one major consequence of this process is the growing impotence of egalitarian causes." (p. 6)<sup>18</sup>. It is characterized by a form of more "flexible" political responsiveness (p. 21), the vast extension of circles of advisers (concerned with opinion research and expert policy work) and lobbyists around the leadership, with the inner core of the political parties "stretched from being an inner *circle* of the party to being an ellipse stretching way out beyond the party's ranks" to lobbyists within firms (p. 73). The consequences are critical in terms of the commercialization of the citizenry (p. 78-103; for the Lombard case see Bifulco, Vitale, 2006).

What about the third sector in a 'post-democratic' Lombardy? To sum up, our main results may be interpreted within this framework. Associations are becoming a school *for* post-democracy. Not a school *of* post-democracy: we are not talking about highly reflexive organizations, always engaged in analyzing the political and economic context, in positioning themselves and influencing policy outcomes. But at the same time, if we look at the empirical data in 1992/3 and in 2007/9, we can grasp a general trend. Professionalization and commercialization were the two most relevant trends at the beginning of the 1990s for welfare retrenchment and contracting-out, with consequences in terms of "involution" (Tarrow, Tilly, 2007). We saw the shift of social movement organizations towards increasing emphasis on the supply of social services to their constituencies. But after 15 years, most of the associations are coping with three new major changes, to different de-

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<sup>17</sup> It is no accident that the first edition of the book was initially published in Italian in 2003, and then translated into English.

<sup>18</sup> It is important to remember that concerning associations and social capital, Crouch (2004: 16) strongly criticizes Putnam's interpretation of the Italian case for ignoring the fundamental role of "*local politics*" in sustaining norms and practices of community co-operation, thus joining the Italian scholars' position (Bagnasco, Piselli, Pizzorno, Trigilia, Sabetti, Saraceno...).

grees, with differences among sectors of activity, and among distinct roles within each organization:

- social organizations are dealing more and more with campaigning and the use of media to influence the dynamics of public opinion. Contentious action is not routine, but claims making is not refused. The more pragmatic aid associations are also turning towards communicative campaigning, reducing the gap with non-profit organizations which serve as the base of social movements. The cleavage between social movement organizations and non contentious charities is weakening, while new coordination is being produced by the combination of mechanisms of (1) brokerage, (2) diffusion of local third sector fora as self governed deliberative arenas, and the incremental (3) attribution of similarity.
- associations and voluntary action groups maintain a high level of distrust and suspicion regarding political parties, but they do not refrain from dealing with them. Within the third sector, traditionally highly comprehensive forms of party affiliation have decreased but not expired, while party identification remains high as do new forms of consulting and expertise to advise and influence them. Some timid, easily frightened and not yet effective new processes of coordination between associations and political parties are emerging, on the left as well as on the right. At the moment they are processes in which associations and parties mutually signal and make claims in parallel on the same subject, with some demand for political exchange, and some effects of clientelism, but these are decreasing.
- a process of the vertical coordination of community based organizations and social cooperatives with intensive voluntary commitment is (re)starting. If in the 1990s this took place around professional and administrative services, economies of scale, or for calls for tender, new aims now push the actors. We have seen a displacement of goals and tactics by lobbying - applied to interactions among political actors, high local, regional and European officials, but also bank foundations and other private corporations. Motives for fundraising are viewed in the more general scope of rights advocacy, of recognition of identities and of claiming for accountability in welfare administration (considered too discretionary and unfair). Lobbying is a new instrument in the already rich repertoire of action of associations. This does not seem to produce a refusal from ordinary activists, as an extreme form of action managed secretly by some top officer. Instead of provoking a decline in the commitment of individuals or political actors to previously sustained beliefs, lobbying seems to attract highly skilled and educated volunteers. It is often used to perform a scale shift, looking towards upper levels of government.

These strategic changes (coalition building and campaigning; applying pressure to political parties; lobbying with expertise) are not completely institutionalized, are obviously diffused to different degrees, and open up tensions and contradictions within single organizations and in local civic

networks. At the same time they are a sign of vitality, and of learning and adaptation by civil society. They are coherent with some of the general political and economic reorientations of affluent society and with the emerging forms of politics in post-democracy (Crouch, 2004, p. 122)<sup>19</sup>. In fact, these three features redefine a framework for the public role of civil society.

In Italy we have been used to talking of “*collateralismo*” (being on the same side) to identify the strict relations between a political party and a family of civic and social organizations. The change in the nature of the mass parties, and the transformations of the political system and of policy governance, have produced a new context for civil society action in which continuity and legacy interact with post-democratic scopes and strategies. In Lombardy we do not see resistance against post-democratic trends, or calls for a return to the past. Skeptical and tenacious organizations have adapted to the new system and learned by coalition formation and by coordinated action how to survive and increase forms of self-representation and influence. In this environment, and with partial innovation in their repertoires and plans of action, the content of civic socialization for activists is not exactly “democratic”. We are not saying that it is a post-modern, hybrid bricolage of opposed content: we are well aware that political socialization in associations as well as in social movements has always been dynamic and relational (Tosi, Vitale, 2009), rich with noteworthy internal contradictions even during the 1950s and 1960s in a period of party democracy with no sign of the dark side of the “democracy of the public” (Manin, 1995). We are only now noticing that individuals engaged in associations are acquiring skills to act in a post-democratic environment, not to counter it, but to pursue their goals within it, however they are framed.

The level of efficacy of these actions, as well as their impacts on policy making to promote redistribution of resources and capabilities, remains to be analyzed. Debates on civic attitudes and associations were relevant because we disposed of systematic observations not only on the process of democratic participation, but also on its outcomes in terms of influencing civil rights and social citizenships. But:

- we have no systematic empirical data on the effectiveness of associational coalitions’ impacts in a post-democratic context (see also Dupuy, Halpern, 2009; Staggenborg, 2010: 327);
- we lack research comparing sub-national contexts, taking into account institutional and political variables
- we lack coherent categories to distinguish and cluster these organizations, with the accompanying risk of returning to a unitarian vision of the third sector;
- referring to the Lombard case, but perhaps not only that case, we have no rigorous and non partisan research on the networks of associations that choose a completely different strategy from

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<sup>19</sup> Crouch (2004) insists on emphasizing the need “to keep the two apparently contrasting forms of action - cause movements and parties - in relation to each other” (p. 112), mobilizing new (political) identities from emerging social movements *and* working through the lobbies of established and new cause organizations (“because post-democratic politics works through lobbies”; p. 122) *and* work through parties (“because none of their post-democratic substitutes can replace their potential capacity for carrying through egalitarian policies”, p. 122).

that described: nestled within cartel parties, bonding their members inside firms, churches and public administrations, mapping and occupying veto sites and regulatory agencies.

As usual, more than a conclusion, this section opens the way for new research.

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