Abstract

Social capital and deliberative democracy theories share a crucial assumption: political participation can have – under certain specific conditions – positive developmental effects on individuals. Participation in deliberative institutions or voluntary associations should create “better citizens”. One crucial question for this general self-transformation hypothesis is whether values generated at the local level, within small-scale institutions or associations, i.e. between close-knit individuals, can be generalized to the rest of society? It has indeed been underlined that social capital born within groups at the local level could sometimes lead to stronger parochial communities rather than to generalized trust and reciprocity. This question is adressed by focusing on a case-study, the Argentine popular assemblies appeared in December 2001 that, given their deliberative organization, should have positive effects on their members, which could then be generalized. After discussing why the Argentine popular assemblies fulfil the formal criteria stressed by both social capital and deliberative democracy theorists as conditions for the development of civic virtues among their members, I show that this procedural organization has substantive effects on the participants. I then explain this change by focusing on the socialization process that takes place within these institutions, demonstrating that the collective identity building that goes with it closes the group on itself, thereby impeding the generalization of the positive effects appeared at the individual and personal level. I finally conclude by distinguishing between two forms of generalization – the first constrained to the participants’ point of views and the second aiming to affect the whole civic culture of a country – stressing the fact that some form of social capital can foster the former, but not the latter.
Introduction

Social capital and deliberative democracy theories share a crucial assumption: political participation can have – under certain specific conditions – positive developmental effects on individuals. Participation in deliberative institutions or voluntary associations should create “better citizens”. Generally, two types of democratic outcomes of social capital are distinguished: internal and external effects. Internally, networks of civic engagement are believed to have positive effects on their members; they socialise them into democratic culture and teach them trust, cooperation and tolerance, making them better citizens. Externally, these networks lubricate institutional settings, making them more legitimate and efficient. As Robert Putnam puts it, they make democracy work better, by increasing institutional performances.

The same kind of argument can be found, more or less explicitly, in the deliberative democracy literature. Educative or transformational functions of deliberation underlie indeed its definition. Joshua Cohen is perhaps the clearest on the political relevance of this process of collective will formation: “Democratic politics involves public deliberation focused on the common good, requires some form of manifest equality among citizens, and shapes the identity and interests of citizens in ways that contribute to the formation of a public conception of the common good.” Participation in deliberative institutions, as they foster processes of mutual information and conviction, would enlighten and enlarge individuals’ preferences and interests, making them more tolerant, other-regarding and aware of the public good. Not only would deliberation shape participants’ attitudes, but it would also affect individuals’ identity, since, as Jon Elster underlines, it is not possible to argue about the public good half-heartedly.

One crucial question for this general self-transformation assumption is whether values appeared at the local level, within small-scale institutions or associations, containing close-knit individuals, can be generalized to the rest of society? It has indeed been underlined that social capital generated within groups at the local level could sometimes lead to stronger parochial communities rather than to generalized trust and reciprocity. There is no clear evidence that repeated face-to-face interactions in small networks increase the level of trust in a society. It could, on the contrary, fragment it between different small groups with high levels of internal trust, but distrustful of and antagonistic to outsiders. Solidarity within the group may indeed lead to a greater defiance towards outsiders and strangers. Far from promoting democracy and the common good, highly trusting groups can promote particularistic demands, driven by the self-interest of local communities. The NIMBY syndrome is a striking example of such parochialism. Margaret Levi stresses this potential dark side of social capital: “Neighborhoods (and certain other networks of civic engagement) are a source of trust and neighborhoods are a source of distrust. They promote trust of those you know and distrust of those you do not, those not in the neighborhoods or outside the networks.” This question will be directly addressed here, in order to evaluate the necessary conditions for the development of a positive type of social capital that allows the generalization and bridging of civic virtues formed within a group of personal acquaintances. Are the deliberative procedures adopted by some associations or social movement organizations enough to avoid parochialism? Under which circumstances can social capital lead to stronger parochial communities and sometimes, on the contrary, to generalized trust and reciprocity?

Accordingly, deliberative procedures should avoid the risks of parochialism and allow the generalization of trust and reciprocity. For Putnam, one of the central criteria for the development of civic virtues among individuals is the horizontal structure of the association: “If horizontal networks of civic engagement help participants solve dilemmas of collective action, then the more horizontally structured an organization, the more it should foster institutional success in broader community. Membership in horizontally ordered groups (like sport clubs, cooperatives, mutual aid societies, cultural associations, and voluntary unions) should be positively associated with good government.” This question will be addressed more directly later, nevertheless one can already stress that the emphasis put on “horizontality” is close to what most scholars understand by deliberation. Furthermore, the definition of a deliberative procedure itself seems to impede any possibility of parochialism. Inclusiveness, equality, and publicity are indeed three central features of ideal deliberative processes, which militate much more in favour of openness, pluralism and universalism.
than of strengthening the strong social bonds of a closed community. Our main hypothesis is therefore that the deliberative organization of a voluntary association should allow the generalization of the civic virtues generated internally.

The best way to test this theoretical hypothesis is to confront it with an empirical case-study that fulfills both the preconditions of social capital and deliberative democracy theories. This approach is, in a way, original. Even if these two sets of theoretical debates share a common assumption about the virtues of political participation, they have never been addressed together.\textsuperscript{11} Two social science debates have developed simultaneously, yet without any shared understanding. It seems to us, on the contrary, that specialists within both fields have much to learn from each other’s research and findings. By confronting this broad theoretical assumption on the developmental effects of political participation to empirical research one could overcome “academic walls” built without any scientific justification. To do so one should select a case that fulfills both social capital and deliberative democracy theories requirements and criteria. It should therefore be a voluntary association organized along deliberative procedures. The best and more accurate object to bridge a too long living gap thus belongs to civil society. More precisely, certain deliberative social movements, as specific types of voluntary associations organized in a deliberative way, seem to be the most interesting cases to do so. The study of social movements could learn much from social capital and deliberative democracy scholars, and the latter could fruitfully enrich their own understanding of their topics of research by examining specific social movements.\textsuperscript{12}

The Argentine popular assemblies, which appeared in the wake of the December 2001 crisis in the neighborhoods of the capital city Buenos Aires and then spread all over the country, seem to fulfill such conditions. As a social movement organized along deliberative procedures they should foster internal democratic effects among participants. They are certainly not the only case to fulfill the conditions necessary for the development of civic virtues among participants. Some European SMOs among the “new global” movement also share such characteristics, especially the deliberative emphasis.\textsuperscript{13} The study of Argentine popular assemblies can, nevertheless, offer an interesting and refreshing insight on these theoretical questions. First, it might be illuminating to study the construction of social capital in times of crisis and to compare the findings to the more routinised and stable situations that have generally characterized social capital research. Times of high contention and dispute can reveal hidden aspects that are often not visible under more “normal” conditions. Then, participation to Argentine popular assemblies can be defined as high cost activism\textsuperscript{14}, since it is very demanding for their members in terms of time, loyalty and commitment. Again, the high intensity of participation should have more visible and lasting consequences on individuals than traditional activism and, as such, could reveal interesting internal effects. Finally, and this is the main argument, the Argentine popular assemblies as they are organized on a local territorial basis – the neighborhood – brought together people from heterogeneous social, political and ideological backgrounds, fostering social ties and interactions among the community, between former isolated individuals. This heterogeneity, not so common among social movements, should have, according to most social capital and deliberative democracy theorists, important effects on participants. Especially, a significant number of participants were new to politics and activism; as such it has been easier to evaluate the specific effect of participation on these individuals, in comparison to more politicized ones.\textsuperscript{15}

The sociological study of Argentine popular assemblies will therefore be used as a test of our hypothesis about the potentiality for generalization of the civic virtues appeared within deliberative organizations. In order to test this hypothesis we have adopted a purely qualitative method. Our interest does not lie here in the transformation of preferences, which would require on the contrary a strict quantitative approach.\textsuperscript{16} Since we assume that change in values is a much more diffuse and slow process, our qualitative method seemed the most appropriate. Through direct observation of the meetings it was possible to evaluate the discursive strategies linked to the necessity of public justification and their potential effects on individuals’ long term values. Thanks to in-depth interviews we have been able to reconstruct individuals’ trajectories and to evaluate their potential bifurcation in relation to their participation to the popular assemblies.
These questions will thus be addressed in three steps. First, I will try to show how the social interactions resulting from the deliberative procedures within the Argentine popular assemblies have shaped participants' values and fostered civic virtues. Then, it will be shown how the formation of a collective identity can impede the generalization of these internal positive outcomes. Finally, I will distinguish the specific characteristics that allow but also limit the generalization of these democratic outcomes.

I. The educative effects of a deliberative institution

Within the few months between October 2001 and January 2002 the Argentine people moved from silence to noise and then to political mobilization.\textsuperscript{17} The October 2001 legislative elections already embodied the growing legitimacy crisis of Argentine democracy; even though voting is compulsory in this country almost 40% of the electorate did not participate; the lowest electoral turnout in Argentina’s democratic history.\textsuperscript{18} This has been called the “bronca vote”, symbolizing Argentine citizens’ anger towards their representatives. From the beginning of December 2001 onwards, tension started to increase in the country, with increasing lootings of stores and pacifist demonstrations in response to the deteriorating economic and social situation.\textsuperscript{19} The crisis reached its climax the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} of December. Hundreds thousands Buenos Aires’ inhabitants went down the streets banging pots and pans to protest against the state of siege proclamation by President Fernando de La Rua. It was the night of the \textit{Cacerolazo}. The following morning, his authority weakened, the President had to resign. Nevertheless, the mobilization did not stop there, new cacerolazos were organized the following Fridays. Inhabitants of most Capital city neighborhoods met at the corners of their district’s main streets to go demonstrate together. Rapidly, however, these informal gatherings, which were originally aimed at mobilizing people for protest, transformed themselves into local assemblies. Through this form of organization citizens managed to move away from noise and protest to make their voice heard and express new forms of political discourses. Somewhat surprisingly, they organized themselves in a deliberative way, the principle of “horizontality” being central to their mobilization. The central claim of Argentine popular assemblies, which emerged in the wake of the first cacerolazo, is the famous “\textit{Que se vayan todos!}”, which literally means “they all have to leave”, referring to politicians and more generally to the political and economic elites, who were then considered as responsible for the disastrous economic and social situation that the country was in at the time.

A radical critique of political representation therefore underlies of Argentine December 2001 mobilization. The conflict has been framed along an adversarial discourse. It seems that it is through the creation of a radical “otherness”, with the use of this 3\textsuperscript{rd} person of the plural, this “they” embodying political representatives, that a “we”, a social movement, has been able to appear. We will try to understand here (1) to what degree the Argentine popular assemblies fit the social capital and deliberative democracy settings; and then (2) what are the developmental consequences of deliberative interactions on participants’ values and behaviours.

1. A deliberative institution

Social capital and deliberative democracy theorists assume that voluntary associations or participatory institutions should follow a certain number of criteria to fulfill their developmental potential. We will show in this section that the Argentine popular assemblies respect all these criteria.

To put Putnam’s approach in a nutshell, one could say that three conditions are necessary to reach the internal democratic transformation of individuals engaged in secondary associations: (1) relationships among networks of civic engagement should allow direct face-to-face interactions among participants\textsuperscript{20}; (2) these relationships should take a horizontal shape; (3) and, finally, associations should cut across social and cultural cleavages.\textsuperscript{21} It is not the place here to discuss Putnam’s theory\textsuperscript{22},
and we will return later to the type of social interactions and effects he assumes these criteria produce, but we can compare them to Argentine popular assemblies’ mode of organization:

- As local institutions, they are based on face-to-face interactions among their members. Argentine popular assemblies generally don’t bring together more than 100 members, which means that anybody knows each other, and that physical proximity is facilitated.
- As examined below, the assemblies are formally ruled by horizontal procedures and interactions.
- As neighbourhood organizations they cut across social, cultural and political cleavages. Even if the middle-classes are over-represented, low income people also represent significant part of the members. They are also politically very diverse, since the popular assemblies don’t have any fixed ideology or program. They thus gather together very heterogeneous people from anarchists to Christians, to “a-political citizens” and Trotskyists.

Argentine popular assemblies therefore seem to fulfil Robert Putnam voluntary associations’ criteria and, as such, could have positive developmental effects on participants. This seems to be confirmed by the analysis of their procedural organization. Not only did the Argentine popular assembly emerge but they immediately organized along “deliberative norms”. The identity of Argentine popular assemblies is indeed directly linked to the concept of “horizontality”. It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine the genealogy of these deliberative procedures. A central reason for this type of organization, often claimed by participants, is that popular assemblies, as natural emanations of the “Que se vayan todos!”, could not organize themselves in any other way. The conflict was framed from the beginning according to a radical critique of representative democracy. The legitimacy of the political representatives being weakened, protesters proposed to “take the power into their hands.” The Argentinian people, having being betrayed by its representatives, had to take its constituent power back. Many popular assemblies’ leaflets and magazines refer to this kind of discourse. Despite this direct democracy frame, representative institutions were rapidly created within the movement, notably the Interbarrial, the weekly coordinating assembly gathering assemblies’ participants from all parts of Buenos Aires. As such, the Interbarrial functioned for four months without any system of representation: anybody could come, speak and take part in the votes. Soon, however, the influence of certain left wing political parties was so strong that the Interbarrial had to change its organization. A form of representation was introduced, every assembly being represented by two delegates. Nevertheless, following the same democratic frame, popular assemblies opted for a form of popular (vs. representative) sovereignty, with rotating delegates and imperative mandates.

This democratic frame directly influenced the procedural organization of the assemblies. They were shaped along a set of strict rules that had been decided from the start. The deliberative organization was generally discussed and voted in the first sessions of most popular assemblies, in January 2002. The rules are the following:

- Discussion in popular assemblies is made in an argumentative way, which means that participants make propositions that are then discussed and criticized by others. This does not mean that only rational arguments are voiced within popular assemblies, since very often personal testimonies, opinions or emotional accounts are stated.
- Popular assemblies’ sessions are public. They take place in public spaces: in the streets, in municipal or associative meeting rooms, and sometimes in squatted buildings. Everybody is welcome and no membership card is necessary.
- Popular assemblies’ sessions are inclusive. Formally no one can be excluded from the discussions. Any participant is free to speak up, to make a proposition, to criticize others’, and to vote for or against these propositions at the end of the session. They are nevertheless organized along territorial lines, the neighbourhood being the basic unit of membership. The inclusiveness is, however, highly affected by the fact that some participants speak much more than others.
- Even if the assemblies generally attempt to reach a consensus, it is often hard to do so in a limited amount of time. They therefore have to take decisions on majority votes. In these cases, a formal equality is attributed to every participant, each one having one vote (being a one week or a one year member).

These procedural rules, which are usually not written but respected by custom, were deduced from direct observation during more than two months in 9 different popular assemblies. They seem, from a formal point of view, to correspond to the defining criteria of deliberative democracy. Even if the number of criteria varies from one scholar to the other, five formal criteria are generally considered to characterize a deliberative procedure:

- **Rationality**: Deliberation is a collective decision-making process ruled by the force of the better argument. Participants are required to state their reasons for advancing proposals, supporting or criticizing them in a collective effort of critical evaluation. The type of discussion prevailing should be the argumentation. (Cohen 1989, 1997; Habermas 1993; Manin 1987; Bohman 1997; Gutmann and Thomson 1996; Dryzek 1990 and 2000).

- **Publicity**: Deliberation is a public, i.e. a collective, process of will formation. Contrary to the secrecy of aggregative mechanisms (like voting) every discursive preposition has to be publicly justified, which implies some specific constraints on discourse (for instance it is generally admitted that it is not possible to justify publicly a selfish position). (Manin 1987; Elster 1986, 1997, 1998; Boltanski and Thévenot 1992).

- **Inclusion**: Formally no one can be excluded from the deliberation. Discussions are open to any person independently of his/her motivations, origins, etc. (Cohen 1989, 1997; Habermas 1993; Bohman 1996, 1997; Young 2000).

- **Equality**: Every participant to a deliberation should have the same opportunity to speak up, make a proposal or criticize others’ positions. Independently of each member’s contribution to the discussion, its share of the decision should be equal. (Bohman 1996, 1997; Benhabib 1996; Gutmann and Thomson 1996 and 2002).

- **Consensus**: The regulatory-ideal of the discussion is the largest possible agreement amongst participants. According to the Habermasian influence on this model, it is assumed that without any constraint (such as time limits for instance), consensus is the ethos of discussion. Everybody agrees, however, on the necessity to vote when no consensus has been found, as long as it only comes once (after and not before) the discursive process has taken place. (Cohen 1989, 1997; Habermas 1993; Manin 1987; Benhabib 1996)

It should not be concluded from such a procedural definition that deliberation is a purely formal process. As stated earlier, deliberation has both procedural and normative features, the former being supposed to cause the latter. These procedural conditions should influence the legitimacy and the content of decisions. Decisions should be more informed, other-regarding and oriented toward the common good. This indirect effect is supposed to stem from the internal transformation caused by participation to deliberative processes. As we have now demonstrated that Argentine popular assemblies fit the social capital and deliberative paradigms, we can now hypothesize that their participants have been transformed in a democratic way, their values being oriented in the sense of the common good. This question will be evaluated in the following sections.

2. Schools of democracy?

A very widespread metaphor in the literature about deliberative democracy and social capital sees local participatory institutions and voluntary associations as “schools of democracy”. The Argentine popular assemblies could be, given their concordance with the procedural model of deliberative democracy, such schools. But what would be learned in this type of institution? Generally two types of developmental effects are put forward by proponents of participatory democracy: (1)
democratic skills and (2) civic virtues. These categories are obviously very broad. To test their potential development amongst popular assemblies’ participants, they need to be specified and operationalized. By democratic skills we therefore mean the ability to voice one’s opinions, propositions or criticisms, and the capacity to listen to others’ arguments. Civic virtues will be defined here as internal solidarity and empathy, and tolerance of differences.29

How can these variables be tested? As mentioned earlier, purely qualitative methods have been used in this research. Interviews were understood as a way to grasp individuals’ narratives about their own identity and empowerment. It seems to us that empowerment is more a subjective than an objective process. Rather than testing if participants have “objectively” changed, it seems more interesting to analyse under which conditions they feel to have changed.30 This epistemological position stems from an analysis of domination processes within – but also outside – political participation arenas. Symbolic power, as defined by Pierre Bourdieu, is a power that is not felt as such because it is internalized by the actors.31 Domination is thus linked more to subjective representations of reality than to objective structures of power.32 Actors’ narratives should therefore help to understand their own personal trajectories and subjective changes in the course of political participation. If one could objectively tell who is politically virtuous and competent – and therefore powerful – it seems nevertheless more interesting and innovating to focus on the way people internalize these power relationships, how they analyze them and see them change. Identity is largely a discursive process of affirmation and mutual recognition and even if the interview interaction can be part of these strategies of identity-building they remain the best way to understand these identity narratives.33 We will therefore try to evaluate this subjective process of identity change and to analyze its sources: is the physical co-presence of participants the main cause of individual changes or should other processes, such as discursive and cognitive interactions within the deliberative arenas, be also taken into consideration?

On the level of democratic skills, one could study objective improvements such as clarity of the arguments, logic of the propositions, tone of the voice, inference capacities, etc. It seems, nevertheless, that when it comes to voicing ones’ opinions within a deliberative arena, other types of domination processes have also to be taken into account. Deliberative theorists have very often put forward the “forceless” force of discursive interactions. The best argument is not considered to be imposed on listeners, as they accept it. What is at stake is the foundation of power not on force but on the legitimacy of accepted arguments. This stems from Habermas’ conception of language as a locus free of all domination. Deliberation, as a process of mutual conviction, would not imply any domination.34 Argumentative skills are, however, unequally distributed. A lot of objective structural conditions can explain these inequalities: educational and cultural capital, economic and social background, etc. Objectively, independently of the formal rule of inclusiveness, some speak more and are therefore more convincing than others. For instance, only 40 % of the participants spoke up during Argentine popular assemblies’ sessions I attended, which means that the majority remained silent during the meetings.35 Who speaks? A large over-representation of male speakers over female can be stressed: while men generally represent 57 % of the participants, they represent 61 % of the speakers. Verbal over-representation has thus to be added to the numerical and physical over-representation of men. Only few really active women speak during the assemblies: 36 % of female participants spoke up during sessions I attended. If this gender inequalities were easy to demonstrate quantitatively, other causes of social inequalities towards political speech were not so easy to show. We had therefore to go into the detail of our direct observations to point out the micro mechanisms of power and domination present in members’ interactions.

Domination is not only a question of who speaks and how much, but also of how one speaks. Generally, interventions by low resources members were short, less analytical and articulated. They were therefore less listened to, other members often starting to talk with their neighbours when some interventions became too confused. Whereas speech is almost sacred within the Argentine popular assemblies – no one being allowed to interrupt someone else and being on the contrary encouraged to listen – the few exceptions to these rules always happened when low resources members spoke up. They are sometimes cut short or even interrupted. Some participants allow themselves remarks that
can destabilize less confident speakers. Some examples are striking. Once, in the Cid Campeador assembly, Oscar – one of the most marginal member of the group, and who was accused of causing a lot of troubles in the assembly – started to speak up to answer the criticisms that were adressed to him. After a few minutes the reactions of the other assembleistas were rather harsh: “Speed up! Go right to the point”; “You already said all that”; “what is your point?” He never finished his intervention, and told me how frustrated he felt about it: “They are accusing me, and I cannot even answer. It’s unfair.” The public attention given to one speech is indeed a strong evidence of one’s ability to speak and convince others. However, everyone is not really listened equally.

These inequalities, that largely determine individuals’ abilities to speak in public, are then interiorized and incorporated; so that individuals deeply feel that they are not entitled to speak, that they are not allowed to. One could hypothetically say that with the same “objective” argumentative skills some would speak more than others, because they feel they have a right – a legitimacy – to do so. Lynn Sanders says that participants in deliberation have different “epistemological authority”, i.e. some are symbolically seen as potentially more persuasive than others. It is more likely to be men than women, white than blacks, etc. As such the development of deliberative skills should not concern so much the objective abilities than the feeling of being entitled to speak. As Iris Marion Young puts it:

“Deliberative theorists tend to assume that bracketing political and economic power is sufficient to make speakers equal. This assumption fails to notice that the social power that can prevent people from being equal speakers derives not only from economic dependence or political domination but also from an internalized sense of the right one has to speak or not to speak, and from the devaluation of some people’s style of speech and the elevation of others.”

The first thing to learn in “schools of democracy” should therefore be that, independently of individuals’ objective skills, everyone should feel as entitled to speak as anyone else. Teaching deliberative skills thus implies first bolstering the confidence of the most marginalized participants. This lack of self-confidence is clearly stated in Diego’s words, a 22 year-old participant from Villa Urquiza popular assembly:

“At the start I didn’t talk much. I do not talk much more today, but I am … when I want to say something, I go and I say it. But it is hard. In the middle of the assembly, when 100 persons are watching you, and that you have to pass in front of everybody to take the microphone and speak … It scares you, so that sometimes you say stupid things. We should … I’d like to change the organization: stop using the microphone, all sitting in circle, not using any speakers’ list, etc. According to me it should just be like when you sit down to talk with friends.”

He is obviously apprehensive by the formality of the procedures of the assembly. Oscar, the already cited member of Cid Campeador assembly, also evokes his difficulties of integrating in this group:

“No, no, it was not easy to integrate myself. It is not easy. More than that. […] Some people here don’t accept my integration. It is as if the oldest participants made you pay a toll right. You would have to pay because it is them who have had the patience and intelligence to gather together and to organize all that. […] It is not easy to speak up in the assembly. You have to fight against your own shyness. It is not easy. And I don’t like the system that they have with the speakers’ list and all that stuff. It is clear that it does not help you to speak.”
This example clearly shows how some participants can be symbolically excluded from the start. It takes time to get integrated and as such to be “allowed” to speak and therefore to be potentially convincing. When certain participants make you feel that you cannot speak, it has a performative power: you cannot. But even if integration can be difficult, it seems that an educative process took place within Argentine popular assemblies since, after a few months, participants felt much more competent to speak. Diego, for instance, feels more confident about speaking:

“It is obviously easier to speak now than at the beginning. It is not easy still, but you feel that you know these guys, that they can criticize you without being nasty. Most people are friends now for me, and it is easier to speak with friends than with strangers.”

He states that he talks more now than he used to. What has changed in the meantime? Now, he knows the other participants: a relation of trust, solidarity and mutual recognition has developed. Knowing people personally helped him to gain the self-confidence necessary to speak up in the assembly. Personal relationships therefore helped him to feel much more entitled to speak, and he thus felt empowered. He may not be more convincing in public than he used to be, but at least he feels that he can speak, which is already and important achievement. Alejandro, member of Corrientes y Medrano’s assembly, feels that he has changed:

“Yes, I have changed. I was much more inhibited before. I couldn’t talk in public, I thought it was reserved for educated persons. […] And finally I realised that everybody here could speak up and say what he had to say. I feel that I can speak and disagree and criticize people which are much more “important” than me now.”

Change does not only concern one’s ability or legitimacy to speak up, but also his/her capacity to listen to others’ arguments. In a way, it seems necessary that not only speakers feel more entitle to speak up, but also that everybody feels more ready to listen to each other. Speaking and listening are the two faces of the same coin, one cannot go without the other. As such, mutual listening is a necessary condition for the empowerment of the most marginal individuals. And once again, participation to the Argentine popular assemblies seems to foster one’s abilities to listen. Pablo, a young member of Villa Urquiza assembly, stresses this change: “It is sure that at the beginning I had a hard time listening to others’ opinions. I have rapidly fed up to listen to old guys arguing during hours. I came in [the assembly] for a few minutes, than went out to talk with friends or to smoke a cigarette. I clearly lacked patience.” But after 6 months of participation he feels to have changed his attitude:

“I was stupid. I realized how important it was. Sometimes I almost did not have followed the assembly’s discussions, and when I spoke up it was completely unrelated to what the others were talking about, or I was just repeating an argument stated an hour before. Sometimes I even voted for motions I didn’t had a clue about. I realized that if I decided to keep on participating, if I really wanted it, I had to do it seriously. […] I listen much more now. I am much more respectful. I think I can also learn a lot from the old guys. They have a lot of experience, and they don’t say bullshit.”

All these examples clearly reflect subjective changes that can have tremendous democratic consequences. Participants to the Argentine popular assemblies felt both more entitle to speak up and more ready to listen to each other. Political participation seems to be able, under certain conditions, to foster a more competent and democratic citizenship. Such a lesson is actually crucial for a democracy, since it could provide the basis of true equality, where citizens would speak up and make their voice heard, independently of their objective skills.

What about civic virtues? It seems that a form of internal solidarity and sense of tolerance developed through time amongst the participants of the Argentine popular assemblies. Again, it would not make any sense to talk about “objective” civic virtues. However, as long as people feel that they have changed and that they are acting in accordance with certain moral and political standards (to a greater degree than before), it already means a lot. Discourses about solidarity, tolerance or empathy
might very well be embedded in identity-building strategies and self-valorisation attitudes but they also evidence a process of (re)framing of one’s values and behaviour that is worth studying.

Carlo, for instance, a member of Villa Urquiza popular assembly, feels that he has experienced an intimate and personal transformation through his participation:

“It [participation in the assembly] changed me, that’s for sure. Even in the most private and personal details. I am going to tell you an anecdote that happened to me. I had made a bank loan to buy my apartment. But with the crisis, I was not able to reimburse the bank, so I stop paying them back. At the beginning I was scared. I was scared to be expelled from my apartment. But now, I know that with the assembly I am not alone anymore. There are people to help me, to support me, to fight with me, if they want to expel me. I always thought that we were forming a real community, united, and that individual solutions didn’t exist. But to live it, to experience it every day, in your personal life, thanks to the assembly […] It is impressive and it gives you strength and self-confidence. […] To begin to feel that we are not alone in experiencing those kind of things, it’s amazing. […] I have the impression that all that changed people a lot, the relationships between them, etc. To unite, in the neighbourhoods, and to rebuild a form of solidarity, it changes you.”

The popular assemblies made the expression of a form of solidarity possible. As this respondent said, he already had these values and beliefs before but never had any opportunity to express them. The possibility to live one’s commitments seems to carry a deep transformative power. Again, it seems that friendship and personal relationships play an important role in the development of these sorts of values and behaviours. As Sebastian – a young member of Corrientes y Medrano assembly – says it, you behave differently with people you know and you don’t know:

“My relations with people changed. Before, I had a kind of truly individualistic vision of life. I was a cool computer engineer, earning money … the usual story. And all this happened, the crisis, the kids dying of anger again in such a rich country. […] So I decided to quit my job and I started to go to demonstrations, assemblies, etc. It was really new for me. […] And honestly it changed me. I just realised I was not alone, that I was surrounded with really nice people. And that given the conditions we should help each other, otherwise … We have to stand together. And you know, when you start participating in an assembly, you meet people, you become more or less friends […] So, when one of them has a problem, with his job, his rent or anything, I am going to help him. He is not a stranger to me, he is a neighbour [“vecino”]. I have to show solidarity. And I hope they would do the same.”

Participation in Argentine popular assemblies not only helped to develop a sense of solidarity but also of tolerance towards other members. It is particularly true of leftist political party militants who participate to popular assemblies. As Andrea – activist in the Trotskyist party MST (Movimiento Socialista de los Trabajadores) and member of the Ayacucho y Rivadavia assembly – puts it:

“Not so long ago, we [MST militants] would never have accepted to participate in such an ideologically heterogeneous environment. We would have found people too “petit bourgeois” and reformist. We even thought about leaving at the beginning. […] But we finally realized that we had a lot too learn from “lay people”, i.e. from our neighbours. […] I am myself surprised at my own attitude. I can listen to arguments I wouldn’t have even accepted to hear a few months ago, for which I had no respect or in the past. I don’t agree but at least I understand what they feel.”

Basilio’s case is also very telling. A militant of the Argentine Communist party since 1985, he defines himself a “democratic Marxist”, but also a “revolutionary”. He also acknowledges that he has a “strong personality”, and that he can sometimes be “authoritarian and aggressive” when he disagrees with someone. For instance, he used to be part of a free local newspaper in Villa Urquiza in the 1980s but he left it in the 1990s because he felt the others were “too reformists”. His reaction to political disagreement was neither tolerance nor conviction but exit. Since then, he thinks he has changed:
“Before, I couldn’t talk about politics seriously with a reformist or right-wing person. Now I can. […] I think I am more mature politically, thanks to the assembly. It taught me to be more tolerant.” When he is asked what has changed in him, he answers: “I don’t know, I don’t know. Some people have changed a lot within the assembly. Comrades, neighbours, shop keepers, who used to have a completely ‘fascist’ attitude. […] The assembly opened more than one mind. For me, it helped me to see things … [hesitating] more openly, more democratically.” The move from exit, in the case of the journal, to voice and listening, within the assembly, is an expression of a deep personal change. His “learning” process is far from being over, yet he feels he has become more tolerant. He recognizes that he is more willing to accept doubts than in the past: “I doubt more than I used to. It might be linked with historical circumstances, I don’t know. […] Of course I still think I am right, but I don’t say that I have the truth on any topic.”

This more tolerant attitude does not only concern the militants of political parties. Someone new to politics like Jorge, from the Palermo Viejo assembly, feels he has changed a lot to: “I didn’t have any experience, and nobody did actually. It was a collective construction, a mutual learning. Each person has to learn to be more tolerant, to accept each others’ opinions. Something we are not really used to, given our political history. As stupid as it may sound, we have to listen to the other, to listen to him with respect, to take his opinion into consideration. It really was a collective process of mutual learning. […] And I feel – I have the impression – to have changed a lot on this path.”

It seems therefore that participation to the Argentine popular assemblies can teach democratic values to their members. By providing a feeling of empowerment and by developing internal solidarity and tolerance, this deliberative social movement seems to fulfil largely the expectations put in it. The identity discourses reflected in these interviews excerpts reflect the deep shift many popular assemblies’ members underwent along with their participation. It did not happen overnight, but on the long run their identity changed, making them – maybe – “better citizens”. They feel to have change along this path, and identity being largely a subjective process, one can say they did. Not only did they change, but they feel to have become “better persons.” As Sebastian once put it: “I feel to be a better person thanks to the assembly.”

II. Collective Identity Building: A bonding social capital?

It seems that one of the main explanations of this developmental process lies in the building of a new collective identity within the popular assemblies. Through a process of (re)socialization individuals’ identities underwent a process of alignment in keeping with the norms and values prevailing in the Argentine popular assemblies. This collective identity building was all the more powerful as it took place in a context of high risk/cost activism. Nevertheless, we will also show how this collective identity has closed the group on itself, building a bonding and exclusive social capital, rather than bridging across social and political cleavages.

1. Socialization in a civic virtue environment: a collective identity-building process

Argentine popular assemblies’ participants have experienced a process of secondary socialization. To integrate themselves, individuals had to accept certain norms and values prevailing in these institutions. To understand a social movement’s function as a process of secondary socialization is not new. Political parties, voluntary associations, etc. that is to say most of civil society institutions, fulfill a function of socialization for their members. By creating a relationship between former anonymous citizens, these institutions create social ties and shape individuals’ identities. However, the specificity of the Argentine popular assemblies lies in the type of norms and values they are promoting. They valorize mutual listening and understanding, tolerance, and altruistic behaviours.
As said earlier, the deliberative and democratic frame visible in actors’ discourses has shaped the formal organization of the assemblies. Through mechanisms of sanction and gratification, Argentine popular assemblies can shape individuals’ behaviours and values. To allow tolerance and listening, they are organized along a set of formal procedures: speakers lists, forbidden to interrupt a speaker’s intervention, time limit of 3 minutes by intervention, vote at the end of the sessions, etc. These norms have to be respected and followed by all the members, deviant behaviours being systematically penalized. For instance, an individual cutting somebody short in a middle of his/her intervention will immediately be interrupted by the other participants, who will ask him/her to remain silent and listen to the speaker. It is therefore a double sanction since the one who wanted to speak up cannot express himself and, in addition, he/she is enduring the criticisms of his/her fellows. If this kind of behaviour is regularly reproduced, this individual will acquire a bad reputation. He will be labelled “authoritarian” or “anti-democrat”, as it was the case of Oscar – evoked before – in the Cid Campeador assembly. On the contrary, the one who conforms perfectly to the norms of the assembly, being particularly open-minded, tolerant and ready to listen to others, will be highly praised within the institution. The case of Ezequiel, 33 year old member of Cid Campeador assembly, is a good example of this phenomenon. He is enjoying a very good reputation within the assembly, and is highly praised by his fellows. He is said to be “clever”, “reflexive”, “open-minded”; people believes he “thinks a lot before speaking up”. His good reputation allows him to be respected by the other participants, so that they listen to him when he speaks: “Yes, It is true. I feel well integrated here. I feel that I’m respected for what I am, that my ideas are heard.”

Behind these concepts of reputation and respect is thus the question of individuals’ integration. The more he/she respects the norms of the group, the more he/she will receive gratifications and be integrated. On the contrary, as long as he/she is regarded as an outsider, transgressing the rules, he/she will be penalized and excluded. Behaviours are shaped through these social interactions. These mechanisms constitute a strong incentive to conform to the dominant norms and values of the group and therefore to interiorize them. As such, this phenomenon of individual transformation cannot be analyzed as a superficial change. Norms are not only respected, they are also interiorized. It is not, of course, a linear and harmonious process, since the new norms and values very often enter into conflict with those previously inculcated by individuals’ primary socialization. Conflicts can sometimes be violent. Nevertheless, actors have the possibility to leave the game at any time. Unlike primary socialization, the one taking place in civil society institutions is partly voluntary. Hence, if an individual disagrees three solutions are open to him: he can (1) exit – it has actually been the solution adopted by a large number of the members after a few months of participation, popular assemblies’ attendance having decreased importantly between April and June 2002; (2) speak up, to express his disagreement, this is the typical political attitude; (3) or conform.

This process of socialization does not only concern democratic behaviours but also altruistic ones. Empathetic attitudes are indeed highly valorised within the Argentine popular assemblies. An individual will be all the more integrated if he/she has invested time and energy for others and for the group. The specific moment to express this gratification is the beginning of assemblies’ sessions when each commission announces its weekly activities. When they relate an action that can be qualified of “altruistic”, the other members often clap and greet the meriting individuals. Through a kind of theatrical ritual, individuals that have adopted “good” behaviours are symbolically rewarded. The speaker of the commission stands at the centre of the circle and, once his/her intervention is over, people clap, great, make ritual jokes, and sometimes start to sing traditional Argentine political songs or even their own anthem, “Que se vayan todos!”.

These types of ritual therefore fulfil a double function. They socialize and integrate individuals through a process of sanction/gratification. They also create a distinctive collective identity with its own symbols, rituals, memories, etc. Through the dialectic articulation of new “altruistic and democratic habitus” and social environments in which such behaviours are greatly encouraged it seems that Argentine popular assemblies make deliberation and empathy possible. In keeping with Pierre Bourdieu’s reflection about the possibility of altruistic acts, it seems that two conditions are necessary: individuals’ dispositions and corresponding political structures. “Ainsi, à la question de
savoir si la vertu est possible, on peut substituer la question de savoir si l’on peut créer des univers dans lesquels les gens ont intérêt à l’universel. Machiavel dit que la république est un univers dans lequel les citoyens ont intérêt à la vertu.”

It seems that Argentine popular assemblies are one such favourable environment for the development of civic virtue. They make civic virtue worthy – i.e. profitable – for individuals.

These conclusions are, furthermore, in keeping with a large part of social movements’ literature. Individual identity is shaped by political participation: “La situation d’action collective permet la fondation, ou la refondation de l’identité de l’acteur, qui le conduira à donner sens à ses choix et à ses calculs.”59 The research of Doug McAdam on the 1964 Freedom Summer is the most interesting on this point. He shows how high risk political participation shaped and radicalized individuals’ political values and preferences through what he calls “a process of personal change and political resocialization.”60 Even if it seems now impossible to draw conclusions comparable to McAdam’s ones, since we do not have the necessary historical distance to evaluate the long term influence of Argentine popular assemblies on individuals’ biographies and trajectories, it nevertheless seems that attitudes and behaviours were already significantly altered after 6 months of participation. Even if it is not possible to qualify it of “high risk activism” it can at least be called “high cost activism” given the necessary investments in terms of time and loyalty participation in popular assemblies require. Argentine popular assemblies cannot be reduced to a weekly 3 hours session. Besides plenary sessions there are also 5 or 6 commissions, meeting at least once a week. Recurrent mobilizations on the national, regional or local levels take place in addition to the weekly meetings, so that it is possible to participate to at least one demonstration a week. Apart from pure political work, there is also a lot of “social tasks” to fulfil: soup kitchens, free lessons for children, vaccination campaigns, cultural activities, night shifts in occupied spaces, etc. In the end, it seems possible for participants to be involved in assemblies’ activities every day. Participation is therefore highly involving for individuals, all the more that there is a strong incentive to always commit oneself more and more.

2. Excluding outsiders? A bonding social capital

If collective identity building (re)socializes individuals, it also excludes some of them. We will try to demonstrate what types of mechanisms are at work in these exclusionary processes, relating them to the temporality of the mobilization. The exclusion process seems to take two distinctive forms: it makes deviant members leave the assemblies and block the integration of new comers.

To understand how this exclusionary process works one has to return to the emergence of the neighbourhood assemblies in Argentina. They were created in the wake of the crisis, following weeks of intense mobilization and contention. When created, they gathered together highly heterogeneous individuals, tied by a common anger against the government and the “failure of the political system.” As such, the popular assemblies could be defined at the start as an “empty space”, where any claim or ideology could be expressed. However, after a few weeks or months, minority groups or excluded individuals left the assembly. Since, very often, no consensus could be reached, decisions were taken by the majority, excluding de facto a part of the members. Even though there is no official ideology or even a programme, a few propositions are generally shared by all the members: “Que se vayan todos!”, the proclamation of a constituent assembly, the cancellation of the debt, the refusal of public services privatization, the nationalization of bankrupt factories, free health and education services, etc. Such a programme cannot be said to be neutral or apolitical, as some actors claim it. Sebastian, from the Corrientes y Medrano assembly, is very clear on this point:

“One thing has to be demystified: I don’t think we can say that the assemblies don’t have their own ideology. Assemblies have an ideology and I would say that assemblies’ ideology is the sum or maybe the intersection of individuals’ ideologies. I wouldn’t say it is a leftist ideology, but necessarily a liberal one. […] Popular assemblies question neo-liberalism and many even criticize capitalism itself. It is
part of assemblies’ collective subconscious. If you ask what the ideology of the assemblies is, most people will answer that there is no ideology, whereas actually there is a lot. There are a lot of different positions, with a lot of nuances. For instance, everybody more or less agrees on the cancellation of Argentina’s foreign debt. It is a common denominator of the assemblies. The struggle for a decent salary, for jobs, health and education are common denominators. But who would disagree with that anyway?61

This excerpt tells much about what is going on in the popular assemblies. A lot of less liberal people left the assemblies when they discovered that most people disagree with them. Even if the collective identity, largely reflected in the programmatic lines, is not closed, it is clearly framed within a liberal interpretation of reality. Those who came to the popular assemblies to organize the community in a non-political way were just naturally rejected, because they were in a minority. Those who shaped the collective identity of the popular assemblies, be it the “majority” or an “active minority” (as the political parties activists within the assemblies are often accused of), framed it within liberal lines. This led a lot of people to leave the assemblies. Those remaining therefore created strong bonds between them. Friendships appeared among them and the assembly was increasingly associated with the image of a family. Diego, member of the Villa Urquiza assembly, states this very clearly: “Well, we are just like a great family. With all its problems, arguments, fights, … all the things that are not said, and that come out at some point. I really feel I belong to the family of the assembly.”62 These strong bonds allow solidarity within the group but also discourage dissent and criticisms. As Diego says:

“As I said before, the assembly is like a family. And in a family the son is not going to tell the father what he thinks about him, when he has a negative opinion. Just because he is afraid. It is not respect, it is fear. So you shut up. It is the same here. […] Everybody is very susceptible here. Once you say something there will always be someone to interpret it badly, to feel attacked, … They think you are against them, so they start defending themselves, and they speak and speak and speak, …”63

The building of a strong collective identity thus seems to close the group on itself, by either making the dissenters leave or by encouraging a silent loyalty over voicing criticisms. Hence the constant debate within the popular assemblies about how to grow. The very legitimacy of the assemblies and their very existence largely rely on attracting new members, nevertheless strong collective identity prevailing in most popular assemblies often constitutes a barrier to the integration of newcomers. One anecdote of what took place at Corrientes y Medrano popular assembly is very telling about this problem. One Thursday night, during the weekly session of the assembly, a young female student showed up at the meeting. It was easy to remark her as a newcomer as long as nobody neither knew her personally nor had seen her before. Surprisingly, despite her young age, she had the courage to speak up. At first, most participants were rather enthusiastic about this already “active” newcomer. Unfortunately, she did not say the “right” thing. Once again, the debate was about how the assembly could spread in the neighbourhood, and every speaker was giving his/her own analysis of the limiting factors for the development of the assembly; and the possible solutions. The young student, as she felt entitled to speak in the name of those who did not dare to participate in the assembly, started to harshly criticize the sometimes “sectarian attitude” of the assembly. She especially focused her criticisms on the behaviour of some political parties, particularly active in this assembly. In a word, as an outsider, she said openly what a lot of the members could not say. The reaction was, however, immediate. A lot of older male participants and members of various leftist political parties, felt directly attacked. They attacked her personally in response, arguing that despite all possible criticisms one could not deny the crucial mobilization and organizing role of most of the militants. New to these kinds of verbal battles she rapidly felt deeply embarrassed and ashamed. The result was rather straightforward: she never came back! This is only one example, but many others could be cited of the progressive closure of the popular assemblies following their collective-identity building.

It seems that to understand this phenomenon a temporal distinction is necessary. In the short term strong ties, such as political parties’ membership or friendship were necessary for the emergence
of the popular assemblies. Social networks and social capital were crucial in the mobilization and organization of the people. As mentioned earlier, these strong ties helped to build up rather heterogeneous and open institutions like the popular assemblies. In the long term, however, the progressive exit of most dissenters and the building of a strong collective identity closed the assemblies on themselves, impeding the spread and generalization of protest. One could therefore conclude that social capital, i.e. networks of personal relationships, was necessary at the beginning but that the social capital produced by the mobilization itself through collective identity, worked as a barrier to the further development of the movement. By bonding individuals together as they shared a common identity, social capital closed the movement on itself.

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<th>Temporality</th>
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Fig. 1. Effects of social ties through time

IV. Generalizing social capital virtues?

To summarise our observation to this point, one could say that the network of personal relationships created by the Argentine popular assemblies has had both a positive developmental effect on the participants and a negative effect in closing up the group on itself. Individuals became more empowered, tolerant and empathetic in their relations to each other but it is uncertain if they managed to expand these personal feelings outside the doors of the assemblies. The core question of this paper remains therefore open: can the civic virtues appeared within a closed group of personal relationships be generalized to more remote individuals and more globally to the whole society? We will try to show, by defining more precisely what is meant by generalization, that participation in Argentine popular assemblies did not lead activists to parochialism since they showed a great deal of solidarity for distant people and causes; but that this generalization of civic virtues did not affect the rest of society, the developmental effects being observed only for the participants. Finally, we will try to understand why some form of generalization was possible, but not the other.

1. A limited generalization

What is meant by generalization? Two things are usually confused under the term “generalization.” There is, on the one hand, the question of parochialism. It is assumed that trust and reciprocity generated within a group cannot be generalized to outsiders. I trust insiders because I know them, but since I don’t know outsiders or distant people personally I don’t trust them and don’t feel any obligation of reciprocity towards them. In this sense, generalization would take the following form: my friend is a man/woman, I trust him/her, and therefore I trust and feel empathy for any human being. On the other hand, there is a second meaning attributed to the generalization of the social capital civic virtues, associated to the spread of attitudes, values and behaviours formed within a
group. Generalization, in this sense, would mean that the types of norms and values developed within a given group could have an effect on, could be generalized to, the whole society, through a spill-over mechanism. In sum, local political participation could change a society’s civic culture. We will try to briefly evaluate these two types of generalization processes here.

Concerning the first type of generalization, the answer seems positive. The types of norms and values developed within the Argentinian popular assemblies are not exclusively oriented towards assemblies’ members. Values such as trust, solidarity and empathy, highly praised by the asambleistas are oriented towards their neighbours, their fellow citizens and especially the weakest of their compatriots. These empathetic attitudes are highly visible in the case of their relations with the piqueteros, these subproletarian inner-city unemployed Argentinians that started to organize themselves to obtain social welfare reforms and certain unemployment benefits. As outsiders to the popular assemblies they can easily be seen as “others”, towards whom the asambleistas could show some form of solidarity and empathy, generalizing the civic attitudes formed amongst themselves. It has to be remembered that most of the popular assemblies’ participants are middle-class, and that as a consequence their relationships with marginalized people are not naturally easy. The evolution of popular assemblies’ members towards the piqueteros can therefore be a good test of the generalization of the values of empathy and solidarity born within the asambleistas group.

Alejandro’s case – a member of the Corrientes y Medrano assembly – is maybe the most interesting. He explains the evolution of his attitude towards the piqueteros, and the progressive development of a sense of altruism and solidarity towards them. At the beginning he thought they were “lazy guys, that would be better off looking for jobs.” He could not understand “how some people can take a whole population into hostage by blocking roads, while drivers were just going to work or shopping […] It is true that piqueteros’ attitudes annoyed me. I didn’t understand them.” But his experience in Corrientes y Medrano popular assembly made him change. His judgment concerning the piqueteros became more empathetic: “I realized they were nice people as anybody. And when you see the conditions in which they live it hurts you. You cannot express anything but solidarity. You cannot remain indifferent.” This new judgment was manifested through a change in his behaviour. He initiated, with other members of the assembly, a piqueteros support group to help an organization from Solano, in Buenos Aires outskirts. He thus went a few Sundays every month to Solano with other asambleistas to help build infrastructures for the movement: houses, popular libraries, meeting rooms, soup kitchens, etc. He adopted an altruistic attitude towards a group that was neither from his neighbourhood nor from his own movement. This merely expresses an other-regarding attitude and behaviour that was not possible before his participation to the assembly. The generalization of the virtues born within the popular assemblies seems therefore possible.

More generally the very actions of the popular assemblies reflect the generalization, and thus the politization, of once personal-related attitudes. When one thinks of the soup kitchens, the vaccination campaigns, the cultural activities, etc. organized by the popular assemblies, he/she cannot fail to see how other-regarding this type of actions is. Most of these free social services actually help people who do not directly belong to the popular assemblies. Of course, the asambleistas also use this type of social actions to attract new members and to spur the growth of the assembly and sometimes this works. None the less, independently of the “true” motivation of these altruistic behaviours (strategic use of disinterest, ideological guided behaviour or true altruism) the important point is that the asambleistas directed their actions towards outsiders. Far from leading to parochialism, popular assemblies’ participation fosters the generalization of empathetic attitudes and behaviours towards the “least advantaged” and the community as a whole. Their territorial organization does not constitute an obstacle to this generalization. The neighbourhood level organization of the popular assemblies does not create any competition between divided communities but, on the contrary, allows an efficient local division of labour between activists. The popular assemblies are even highly cooperative, at least in Buenos Aires, to achieve the greatest possible success. Through the Interbarrial meetings, but also through the creation of city level commissions working on health or work issues, the popular assemblies manage to coordinate their mobilization. The food for the soup kitchen is, for instance, generally provided by some municipal services. Some representatives of the popular assemblies go
there to claim resources and make their food requests. The food is then attributed to the popular assemblies, who are responsible for the distribution. Even though this process is sometimes chaotic, no general principle of distribution being agreed upon among the assemblies, resources are generally “fairly” distributed between them. This is a clear example of cooperation, at odds with what is generally understood by parochialism. The neighbourhood organization, even if embedded in the popular assemblies’ ideology is, above all, a form of decentralization of a broader movement that allows a more efficient allocation of resources and division of labour.

Finally, the popular assemblies’ movement also expresses solidarity with remote causes, which can be understood as a form of “political altruism.”69 The feeling of solidarity expressed by the popular assemblies towards the Zapatistas in Chiapas, towards social struggles in Bolivia or Brazil, or the connection with the “new global movement”, are clear examples of the abstract feeling of togetherness and solidarity with remote peoples and individuals. Demonstrations, but also leaflets or debates reflect this global political awareness. The norms of trust and reciprocity created at the local level among these deliberative institutions allow participants to express their (abstract) solidarity at a higher and even remote level. There is a coherence between internal democracy (“horizontalism” they say), that makes inner norms of reciprocity appear, i.e. that fosters individuals civic virtues and participants’ political stances on most global issues. Norms generated by political participation within the group can be generalized because they have been internalized by most activists. Through an intense process of socialization at the local level individuals’ attitude change, their identity is transformed, so that solidarity can be expressed with distant individuals. Abstract solidarity effectively responds to an “imagined community feeling”, even though the imagined community is understood as humanity as such.

It has to be understood, however, that this form of generalization of internally-created norms of solidarity and political altruism do not necessarily lead to the second type of generalization. If these norms and values are generalized by participants to outsiders, this does not mean that outsiders themselves will change. There is a common hope among the Argentine popular assemblies movement that they could represent a form of vanguard leading to a broad social and cultural change in their country. The basic assumption is that Argentine political, but also economic and social, crisis stems from cultural biases carried on through the country’s history. Twentieth century in Argentina has indeed been marked by authoritarianism and a profound political instability. The last dictatorship – between 1976 and 1983 – is said to have deeply influenced Argentine’s civic culture.70 Guillermo O’Donnell is very clear on this: “My point is that Argentina was already [before 1976] authoritarian and violent. (…) Without having to go back any further than the period of rampant violence that preceded the coup of 1976, the absence of democratic values, discourses, and practices in politics, as well as in the principle organizations of society, was notable.”71 Authoritarianism and political violence seems, nevertheless, to have reached their climax between 1976 and 1983 with the “disappearing”, i.e. murder, of about 30 000 people. The aim of 1976 military coup d’état was indeed to bring authority back into a country where “the Christian and liberal” order was jeopardized by leftist “subversives”. According to Guillermo O’Donnell, it seems to have fulfilled its task perfectly: “The street and the school, the work place and the public office became places of submission and fear, or, to use a concept from political science, of the complete loss of citizenship.”72

It is this civic culture that the Argentine popular assemblies’ movement fights and tries to change. The “no te mete”73 legacy is framed as one of the main cause of the Argentine’s problems. Carlo, a member of the Villa Urquiza popular assembly is very clear about this process: “I think it is a personal problem, an internal struggle. One shouldn’t forget that we were formatted by this system, that we have largely interiorized all these destructive behaviours and this authoritarian culture, which always tries to impose itself. To change things we have first to win this struggle against oneself.”74 It is not the place here to enter in the debate about social movements’ consequences and effects and to evaluate the cultural outcomes of the popular assemblies’ mobilization. This would require an in depth analysis and a longer elapsed time. It can, nevertheless, be argued that since political participation – within specific type of deliberative institutions – is required to foster generalizable civic virtues, those who did not have the chance or the will to take part in this process would largely remain unchanged.
According to Jean Cohen, trust or reciprocity cannot be transferred *naturally* from interpersonal relationships to others or to other contexts without any medium of exchange:

“... one trusts particular people because of repeated interactions with them in specific contexts in which reciprocity is directly experienced. Interpersonal trust generated in face-to-face relationships is not an instance of a more general impersonal phenomenon. Nor can it simply be transferred to others or to other contexts. (...) Without mediations, there is no reason to expect that the forms of reciprocity or trust generated within small groups would extend beyond the group or, for that matter, that group demands would be anything other than particularistic.”

The metaphor of social “capital” would tend to imply that it is “generalizable.” Capital accumulated in one situation can usually be invested in another. Financial capital, for instance, can be saved, accumulated, exchanged and transferred because there is a universal equivalent for it: money. As the medium of exchange and the equivalent for all forms of wealth and capital, money solves the generalization issue. However, interpersonal trust is, by definition, specific and contextual. Without any universal medium it cannot be generalized. Such a medium exists, it is simply overlooked by Putnam and most proponents of the neo-Tocquevillian approach. As defined, trust pre-supposes predictability and the assurance that others will perform as they said they would. In modern societies, such predictability of individual behaviors is provided, according to Jean Cohen, by the law. Obligations and sanctions related to the rule of law foster the regularity and predictability of behaviors and, as such, develop universal trustworthiness. Since everyone knows that a sanction will follow any transgression of the law, they can enter into relationships of trust and reciprocity more easily. Juridical norms represent, indeed, strong incentives to conform, and to effectively orient people’s actions. As everyone is equal before the law, reciprocity becomes institutionalized as a universal norm of the society. By limiting arbitrariness and favoritism, the law, as institutionalized cultural values and norms, provides everyone with the same amount of trust impartially. Law and rights, as universalistic norms, perform as functional equivalents for personalized trust.

The mass media could also be, by definition, one of these media of generalization. Argentine popular assemblies did not have, however, much media support. The popular assemblies only mobilized a few thousands people, and even if their influence was noticeable in many Buenos Aires neighborhoods their audience in the media or on the political stage remains limited. One indicator of the “failure” of the popular assemblies to influence deeply Argentine civic and political culture are the results of the 2003 presidential elections. Even after a year of intense mobilization, where large changes were expected, the political outputs are rather disappointing for the activists. Nestor Kirchner, a member of the “Justicialist Party” (PJ), the Peronist organization, was elected without any real opposition. Lacking political opportunities, the Argentine social movements did not have any influence on the campaign. Even though one could claim that the outcomes of mobilization should not be looked for in the political competition but rather in the long term cultural changes, the “Que se vayan todos!” seems to have largely faded away with the election of one of the members of the traditional two-party system. The “Que se vayan todos!” which allowed the emergence of innovative democratic institutions such as the popular assemblies failed to be generalized to the rest of the society. This leads us to reflect about the process that has lead to one form of generalization but that impeded the other type.

2. What makes generalization possible?

Why did this second type of generalization fail? Why did personal-related civic virtues, or even only protest, fail to transform itself into mass mobilization? To understand this process one has to return to the nature-of-ties debate. If, at the start, strong social ties allowed the emergence of the popular assemblies, on the long term the creation of social capital and of a collective identity impeded the further development of the movement, which therefore started to close in upon itself. The closure of the group impeded the integration of new members, of potential outsiders, that could have fostered
the massification of the protest. These conclusions seem in keeping with those of Francesca Polletta on the nature of “free spaces”, who indirectly evokes a central debate of social capital theory.\textsuperscript{78} Her main point is that strong ties can limit rather than spur mobilization:

“Such networks [strong ties] may impede protest. This is partly because the absence of ties to outsiders may lead aggrieved people to interpret threats and conflicts in purely local terms […] rather than in terms of the broader identities and ideologies that are necessary to mass mobilization. […] Weak ties may facilitate it [mobilization], not only because they provide access to people and resources outside the community, but because potential insurgents may grant ‘known strangers’ the authority to challenge the bonds of authority and deference within the community that have kept people from overt defiance.”\textsuperscript{79}

She thus shows that “networks intersections” matter since the social distance of outsiders give them the opportunity of adopt a critical attitude towards the group. Polletta takes, among others, the example of the women at the 1964 SNCC annual conference who, thanks to their status of outsiders – i.e. new members – could challenge the dominant patriarchal relationships within the movement. This can be compared to the anecdote we gave before about the young female student who, as she first participated in the Corrientes y Medrano assembly, challenged the closeness and the “sectarian attitude” of the group. Outsiders can therefore constitute powerful critical resources for a social movement, even if they often have to leave (as in the case of the SNCC feminists) to further express themselves against some dominant norms and values. Francesca Polletta is arguing in favour of the virtues of distance and therefore against the “free space” but also against most of the social capital litterature, that focus on the virtues of face-to-face interactions and strong social ties. Nevertheless, one thing has to be underlined: even if social distance and outsider status might be a necessary condition for the growth of a social movement, the distance has to be put into presence to have any noticeable effect. Outsiders have to be brought face-to-face with insiders to have any significant effect on them. Social movements generally do not need any further criticisms from outsiders, as a lot is already provided by the dominant media or the institutionalized political and economic elite. Criticisms and challenges to social movements are plenty. They generally do not, however, have any effect on the movement, as they are understood as “enemy discourses.” To be understood, the criticisms have to be made within the frame of the organization’s discourse. Outsiders have to come towards the movement to influence it. The outsider cannot just be a stranger; he/she has to be a “known stranger.” Weak ties are, as a consequence, to be understood first as social ties, i.e. as concrete interactions. An intersection is still a physical connection.

The questions then become: how can outsiders be integrated to an in-group? How can strangers be introduced and retained? The core reason why the Argentine popular assemblies failed to grow is that once a collective identity appeared, few outsiders were integrated to the group. New members were seen as exceptions by most asambleistas and even sometimes as potential threats. The stability of the close group could have been challenged by newcomers and, as such, they were not especially welcome. The tension between the massification of protest and the development of a collective identity was never solved by the popular assemblies. Interestingly, nevertheless, they never felt into parochialism. How was the other form of generalization, this time achieved by the asambleistas, made possible? Does this stem from the deliberative and horizontal procedural organization adopted by the assemblies, as hypothesized at first, or do other reasons have to be taken into account?

Procedures by themselves cannot explain this process of generalization. It is not the deliberative organization of the movement that directly created solidarity with remote people and causes. When one tries to understand this feeling of solidarity by referring to actors’ motives, the same reason is always invoked: direct encounters with the other. Popular assemblies’ participation allowed remote people, strangers, to meet directly face-to-face. To return to the example of Alejandro who changed his mind about the Piqueteros movement, the direct encounter with them, facilitated by the assembly, is understood as the cause of his personal change: “At the beginning I saw that as a remote reality, through television or news […] And I didn’t understand them.” But the face-to-face encounter
changed his mind: “What marked me, is to have met them [...] To see them work, to know them in their daily life.”80 He insists on the visual experience of a hard and different reality. He saw with his own eyes what was first mediated by the news. He seems to have undergone the same process with the cartoneros81: “What made me change is to have seen them concretely. To see another reality. The assembly allowed me to come into contact with the cartoneros, with the soup kitchen and everything … Whereas before there were no contact at all. [He is insisting] To be in contact, to talk with them, to see the kind of work they do, to fight next to them … All this creates solidarity.”82 Alejandro’s explanations can be found in most asambleistas’ stories. Carlo, for instance, talks about “a change, not in the ideas, but in the reality, in the contact with others.”83 Ricardo, member of Villa Crespo popular assembly, talks about the visual experience: “To see that [he talks about poverty] is really powerful. To see that in your own city, in your own neighbourhood, even in your own street. It makes you indignant to see that [...] Even more than before when all this seemed so remote.”84 The direct contact, the presence of the other, allows one to see, to observe and therefore to inform his/her own judgment. Preferences are thus not only formed through mediatized information but by face-to-face interactions. The difference is paramount since when facing pain and poverty, in direct contact with them, it is not possible to remain indifferent and impartial. One necessarily empathizes with the other, be it a cartonero, a piquetero or any other person. In front of human pain there is a kind of obligation of commitment and action. This is what Luc Boltanski calls “l’interdit du tel quel”:

“Le spectateur de la souffrance ne peut parler de ce qu’il a vu dans des termes d’un objectivisme. (…) La raison en est claire. La description factuelle s’inscrit dans une économie de la représentation reposant sur un dispositif de type sujet-objet. Ce dispositif, qui convient à la représentation de la nature, mais qui est toujours critiquable au nom de l’exigence de commune humanité, lorsque la description porte sur des personnes, parce qu’il est asymétrique et qu’il distribue inégalement l’humanité des différents partenaires, est particulièrement vulnérable lorsque les personnes décrites sont dans la souffrance.”85

The Argentine popular assemblies thus allow their members to meet outsiders directly. They did not become insiders and their number was anyway too small to reach a true massification of the movement. However, this direct interaction with strangers, with others, allowed an enlargement of the members’ judgments, a generalization of the values of solidarity, reciprocity and empathy born within the group. This self-transformation cannot directly be attributed to the deliberative procedures, since the actors are very clear on the fact that this generalization did not stem from a discursive process of mutual conviction, but rather through an emotional mechanism of empathy. It is more the face-to-face contact allowed by the local organization of the assemblies than the deliberative procedures themselves that created an emotional commitment of the members towards the most marginalized of their compatriots. This emotional experience allows, simultaneously, a cognitive process to take place, since the actors’ judgments are informed by what they see. It also has to be underlined that this generalization process was made possible by the type of norms and values put forward by the popular assemblies. Not only the procedures but the substance of the movement allowed this generalization: as mentioned earlier, values such as altruism and tolerance were highly praised within the popular assemblies. Thus, there is a direct connection between the valorisation of altruism and the rejection of parochialism by a movement. The ideology of the movement could not lead it to focus exclusively on local community interests. More generally, it is the link between ideology and organization in social movements that has to be rethought, since the deliberative organization was a direct expression of the movement ideology and the prime marker of its identity.86

If this form of generalization was made possible through direct contacts with strangers, this cannot the cause of the solidarity expressed towards remote groups as the Zapatistas in Mexico or the Desobedienti in Italy, with whom contacts were almost inexistent. In this case, it seems that weak ties, or maybe purely imaginary ties, bind these people together. This is actually a frequent argument in the debate about social capital virtues generalization. It is argued that passive membership and weak ties would be more efficient in generalizing civic virtues such as trust and reciprocity. Members feel bonded together, not because of personal relationships, but from a common affinity to symbols and values. A common commitment to a cause creates a sense of solidarity and an abstract togetherness.
This form of trust and reciprocity may be transferred to several contexts and people, independently of their social, cultural, or ethnic origins, and possibly, to the society as a whole. The sense of community would come, not from personal and face-to-face interactions, but from an imagined feeling of togetherness. In the end, the widest modern communities, nations, are grounded on just such a mechanism of imagination. Ken Newton can thus conclude:

“Abstract trust is not built upon the intensive daily interactions of primordial society, not upon the more limited and sporadic contacts which takes place within the many overlapping formal organizations of industrial society. If thick trust exists between members of the same tribe, and thin trust between members of the same voluntary associations and community organizations, then abstract trust exists between acquaintances.”

It seems, therefore, that different types of social processes can lead to the generalization of the civic virtues born within a group. Both direct contact and imagined communities can create a sense of solidarity and togetherness.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Type of social ties</th>
<th>Direct</th>
<th>Imagined</th>
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<td>Indifference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strong</strong></td>
<td>Active membership friendship</td>
<td>Shared identity “comrades”</td>
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Fig. 2. Types of membership given the nature of social ties

Conclusion
**APPENDIX N°1**

**DIRECT OBSERVATION SUMMARY:**
Data related to participation and verbal interventions in Argentine popular assemblies

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<th>SPEAKERS</th>
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<td>Total</td>
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<td>1230</td>
<td>298</td>
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<td>488</td>
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<td><strong>Mean by Session in Absolute Value</strong></td>
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<td>56</td>
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<td>43%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>39%</td>
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## Speakers by Sex

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<td>520</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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## APPENDIX N°2
### INTERVIEWS SUMMARY

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<th>POL. PARTY</th>
<th>VOTE 1999</th>
<th>VOTE 2001</th>
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* Foreign members, who therefore could not participate in the Argentine elections. Jacinta is Bolivian, José Uruguay, and Joos is Swiss.

** Members who were under 18 at the time elections took place, and who thus could not vote.
Notes

1 A clear working definition of social capital to be used throughout the paper, is needed. Social capital’s definition has been from the beginning controversial. Its most prominent theorist, Robert Putnam, has been accused of offering a tautological or circular definition of his object of study. He defines the concept as follows: “social capital refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit.” Robert D. Putnam (1995) “Bowling Alone: America’s Declining social Capital”, Journal of Democracy, vol. 6, p. 67. Putnam thus offers a definition mixing subjective social norms (trust), objective features of society (networks) and positive outcomes (efficiency and cooperation). In this sense, trust and reciprocity would be both the sources and effects of participation in voluntary associations. Social capital would therefore be the whole process, from trust to engagement and from engagement to trust. As can be seen, defining social capital is not an easy task. As a consequence, I will opt for a rather minimalist definition. Social capital will be understood as the ties linking individuals through the creation of formal (e.g. associations) or informal (e.g. friends or family) networks. The question of the norms of trust and reciprocity is therefore deliberately excluded from this conceptual definition, their analysis being postponed to the interpretation of the sources and effects of social capital, which can only be drawn from empirical research. For interesting criticisms of Robert Putnam’s definition see Alejandro Portes, “Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology”, Annual Review of Sociology, 1998, vol. 24; J. Cohen (1999) “Trust, Voluntary Association, and Workable Democracy: The Contemporary Discourse of Civil Society”, pp. 218-219 in Mark Warren (Ed.), Democracy and Trust, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press; Margaret Levi (1996), “Social and Unsocial Capital: A Review Essay of Robert Putnam’s Making Democracy Work”, Politics and Society, 24.


3 From his research on Italian democracy, Putnam found a measure of “civic community” (which included association memberships) to be highly correlated with democratic institutional performance ($r = .92$). See Robert D. Putnam (1993) Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy, op. cit., pp. 97-98.


7 See Jon Elster “Argumenter et négocier dans deux assemblées constituantes”, Revue Française de Sciences Politiques, vol. 44, n°2, june 1994. In French this idea is perhaps presented more convincingly in a metaphorical way: “Il est impossible de défendre le bien commun du bout des lèvres.” Even though the argumentative mode is used in a strategical way, this hypocrite stance can have a “civilizing force”. This is what Elster calls the “civilizing force of hypocrisy.”


5 This research is based on an empirical field work led in Buenos Aires in summer 2002 and is essentially based on qualitative methods. Intensive direct observation has been led in 9 popular assemblies around the city, chosen given their own institutional, social, and political characteristics. 32 life-history interviews of participants have been realized and analyzed. They do not form a representative sample, but correspond to a will of diversity in the population studied. Interviews are available on request to the author.


8 Data from Argentine statistics institute Nueva Mayoria.
It seems necessary to give some data to evaluate the scope of the economic and social crisis that the country was experiencing at this time. GNP decreased of 3.5% in 1999, 0.3% in 2000 and of 1% in 2001. In December 2001, 5 million people were considered as extremely poor, which represented 13.5% of the total Argentine population (in December 2001 Argentina counted 37 million inhabitants). Unemployment concerned 3.2 million people, i.e. 20% of the country’s active population. The situation got even worse in 2002. Between October 2001 and May 2002, 5.2 million people passed under the level of absolute poverty, so that in August 2002 53% of the population was living under the poverty threshold in Argentina (data to be compared with the 27% of the population undergoing the same situation in 1998). Sources: INDEC (Instituto Nacional de Estatisticas y Censos), August, 22 2002.

See for instance Robert D. Putnam, “Turning in, Turning out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America”, *PS: Political Science & Politics*, December 1995, p. 665: “Social capital refers to our relations with one another. Sending a check to a PAC is an act of political participation, but it does not embody or create social capital. (...) The theory of social capital presumes that, generally speaking, the more we connect with other people, the more we trust them, vice versa.” My emphasis.

See for instance Robert D. Putnam (1993) *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, op. cit., p. 167 and 175: “Dense but segregated horizontal networks sustain cooperation within each group, but networks of civic engagement that cut across social cleavages nourish wider social cooperation. (...) If horizontal networks of civic engagement help participants solve dilemmas of collective action, then the more horizontally structured an organization, the more it should foster institutional success in broader community. Membership in horizontally ordered groups (like sport clubs, cooperatives, mutual aid societies, cultural associations, and voluntary unions) should be positively associated with good government.”

One criterion we do not take into account here, is the non-political nature of associations in Putnam’s theory. Putnam constantly devalues political associations and engagements. To him, participating in a soccer club is more efficient – in terms of democratic effects – than being a member of a political group: “These effects, it is worth noting, do not require that the manifest purpose of the association be political. Taking part in a choral society or a bird-watching club can teach self-discipline and an appreciation for the joys of successful collaboration.” Robert D. Putnam (1993) *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, op. cit., p. 90. His skepticism towards political associations comes directly from his neo-Tocquevillian approach. Like Tocqueville, Putnam fears that political associations, far from promoting trust and reciprocity among citizens, will divide into opposite factions. We do not, however, agree with him on this point, considering that political participation can have positive internal and external democratic effects. On see point see M. Foley and B. Edwards, (1996) “The Paradox of Civil Society”, *art. cit.*

The precise sociological analysis of Maristella Svampa seems to go in the same direction: “One of the distinctive features of the popular assemblies, which has not been stressed enough, is its social mixing [entrelazo social] We refer, here, to the fact that the popular assemblies, despite the clear over-representation of the middle-classes, are a place marked by social diversity.” in Maristella Svampa (Ed.), *Movimientos sociales en la Argentina de hoy, piquetes y asambleas*, op. cit., p. 23; and “It is a meeting place of social actors with different ‘life opportunities’” in id., Las dimensiones de las nuevas movilizaciones sociales, op. cit., p. 2.

In the first weeks the *Interbarrial* gathered together more than 3000 people.


As mentioned before, one of the first to use such a metaphor was maybe Tocqueville, and just after him John Stuart Mill. Participatory theorists then tried to conceptualize this approach more precisely. Sara Evans and Harry Boyte define their concept of “free space” in direct relation with this educative function: “It means also *schooling in citizenship* – that is, in the varied skills and values which are essential to sustaining effective participation. Democratic social movement, efforts whose goal is an enlarged democracy, are themselves vehicles for such *schooling*.” Sara Evans and Harry Boyte (1986) *Free Spaces. The Sources of Democratic Change in America*, New York: Harper & Row Publishers, p. 17, my emphasis. See also Jane Mansbridge (1999) “On the idea that participation makes better citizens” in S. Elkin and K. Soltan (Eds.), *Citizen Competence and Democratic Institutions*, Philadelphia: The Pennsylvania University Press; Carol Pateman (1970) *Participation and Democratic Theory*, op. cit.; Benjamin Barber (1984) *Op. cit.*.


We do not want to enter the endless controversy between structure and agency. Especially, our focus on representations and subjective power relationships does not deny the importance of structures, but rather emphasizes that those are all the more powerful that they are interiorized and “incorporated.”


For these data cf Appendix n°1.

Interview n°17.

Interview n°5.

Interview n°28.

Interview n°14.

Interview n°1.

Interview n°23.

Interview n°10.

He used this term 9 times in the course of the interview.

Ibid.

Interview n°16.

Interview n°1.

Primary socialization, taking place at school and in the family, and secondary socialization, at work or in civil society institutions, are analytically distinguished here. Daniel Gaxie offers an interesting definition of secondary: it is “le résultat de la trajectoire biographique (…), de l’appartenance à divers milieux (conjugal, familiaux, professionnels, amicaux, culturels, communautaires, confessionnels, associatifs, syndicaux, de voisinage ou autre) et des positions occupées dans l’espace social et les divisions du travail (notamment entre les sexes, les générations, les catégories sociales). Ces socialisations secondaires sont encore marquées par des aspects plus contextuels, par exemple, des situations de crise, de guerre, de mobilisation, etc.” in Daniel Gaxie, “Appréhensions du politique et mobilisations des expériences sociales”, Revue Française de Science Politique, April-June 2002, p. 148. On the concept of “secondary socialization” see Peter Berger et Thomas Luckmann (1966), La construction sociale de la réalité, Paris : Méridiens Klincksteck.

Interview n°19.

Ibid.

Interview n°25.

Interview n°11.

Interview n°32.


Interview n°1.

Interview n°20.
The piqueteros are social movements of unemployed workers, that appeared in the mid-1990s in Argentina. Their name is originated from the specific action repertoire they are using, “Piqueteros” comes from “Piquete”, which is an adaptation of the French expression “tenir un piquet de grève.” They are especially known for the road blockade actions they are organizing. They are particularly powerful in Buenos Aires periphery, and also in the North of the country, near the Bolivian border, i.e. in the poorest areas of the country. See Maristella Svampa in Movimientos sociales en la Argentina de hoy, piquetes y asambleas, op. cit.; Federico Schuster (Ed.), La trama de la crisis, op. cit., p. 11-13. See also Julien Talpin, “Bloquer les routes. Originalités et limites des Piqueteros argentin”, Vacarme, Winter 2004, pp. 36-39.

For an interesting attempt to mix self-interest and altruism see Laura Stroker, “Interests and Ethics in Politics”, American Political Science Review, vol. 86, n°2, June 1992, pp. 369-380. If their local organization did not lead them to parochialism, it does not mean that conflicts did not appear. They were, nevertheless, generally related to the political orientation of the assemblies, rather than to their local nature.


We use the term “civic culture” in keeping with the seminal definition offered by Gabriel A Almond and Sydney Verba : “The term political culture thus refers to the specifically political orientations – attitudes toward the political system an its various parts, and attitudes toward the role of the self in the system”: Gabriel A Almond and Sydney Verba (1963) The Civic Culture. Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations, Princeton, Princeton University Press, p. 13.


Means literally “Do not commit yourself.”


For the same king of argument see M. Levi (1996) “Social and Unsocial Capital”, art. cit., p. 48: “Social and Unsocial Capital”, art. cit., p. 48: “I believe trust is more likely emerge in response to experiences and institutions outside the small associations than as a result of membership. Expectations about the behavior of others form as a result of interactions among groups defined by ethnicity, religion, or some other shared value; confidence in a backdrop of third party sanctions, or sufficient costs to discourage the betrayal of trust.”


Ibid., p. 20.

Interview n°5. Emphasis added.

The cartoneros are unemployed inner city inhabitants who manage to survive through the informal recollection of any type of paper, cardboard, etc. Every night, thousands of people thus come into downtown Buenos Aires to
collect these materials, which will then be sold to recycling companies. There name comes from the materials they are collecting, mainly “carton” (i.e. cardboard).

82 Ibid. emphasis added.
83 Interview n°14. Emphasis added.
84 Interview n°21. Emphasis added.