COLLECTIVIST AND INDIVIDUALIZED
Links and political cultures behind these forms of participation in Italy

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WS # 5
Professionalization and Individualized Collective Action:
Analysing New “Participatory” Dimensions in Civil Society

Directors
Jan Van Deth (University of Mannheim)
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Introduction

Individualized forms of political action seem have become a sort of new frontier for citizen engagement in political life. This scenario suggests that the connection between civil society and the public sphere has changed – and hence, the way citizens contribute to democracy in modern times has changed.

Taking this development as its point of departure, this paper examines political participation in a southern European society: Italy. More specifically, it considers “political consumerism” and forms of “internet activism” as an emblematic model of individualized collective action. Consumers’ choices, in fact, reflect not only their social status or the economic rationality of their purchasing options; their choices also reflect their attitudes, and even ethical, green and political considerations. In other words, there is a certain segment of consumers who see, and are sensitive to, the “politics behind products”. And there is also a segment of citizens who are progressively using the internet to get information on politics and to express their concerns, political ideas and their protest actions.

A case study of Italy is of significant interest for two main reasons:

1. Southern European societies are latecomers to this phenomenon in comparison to North American or Northern European countries. But this style of participation and approach to everyday engagement - “lifestyle politics” - is rather widespread in Italy. At the territorial level, these individualized acts of “everyday-making” take different concrete forms and engage multiple organizations. People use their money ethically in a variety of modes, such as fair trade, critical shopping, ethical investment, green tourism, boycotting, charity donations, responsible purchase groups, etc. Recent research shows that about 30% of Italians say they have carried out some responsible consumption acts during the 12 months preceding the survey. Furthermore, the internet is progressively more predominant in Italian society and is being used as a political tool by certain citizens.

2. The political culture of Italian citizens, with its network of associations, is strictly linked to this responsibility-taking practice. Both the political culture and civil society organizations are marked by the (Catholic) religious dimension and by the leftist ideological orientation. This means that traditional elements of Italian politics and a new perspective (and practices) of citizens’ engagement are strongly connected in the individualized forms of participation. For this reason it will be interesting to examine data relating to the present trend in the Italian civil society, in order to uncover clues to the link between traditional and emerging forms of political participation.

The last point is rather interesting since scholars tend to talk about the subject in terms of “opposition” between these two modes of participation. The story is actually more complex than a pure replacement mechanism between these two forms of participation and these two types of involvement, in fact the same scholars also refer to the enlargement of the repertoire of collective action. Researchers are fully aware that the theoretical models and categories they use are necessarily much simpler than the complexity of the social reality they portray. In reality, activists are not split in two different and separate groups: on one side, citizens who “still” practise traditional forms of participation, and on the other side, those who are attracted by emerging modes and non-political - or “sub-political” - arenas. It is not a question of old venues (the streets, political parties...) versus new places (supermarkets, the world wide web, everyday life...). The literature reports what is already well known: citizens combine different political acts, sometimes showing a specialized style of participation. There is also a majority of citizens who are more peripheral when it comes to politics and political participation.

This paper will focus on the overlap between different models of participation, and in particular will investigate if there are different political cultures behind certain types of engagement. The change in political culture is in fact an important factor in the change in collective behaviour. Hence, in the paper, Italian citizens are going to be split into different types. These groups will be
based on the different models of participation practised (by using statistical procedures like explorative factorial analysis first and then a cluster analysis). The final result will describe their social profile and, more importantly, their political culture and attitudinal orientations. In sum, the paper seeks to answer the following question: is there a correspondence among diverse political participation models practised by citizens and their political culture, meanings, and kind of involvement?

**Individualized action and collective action**

Individual and collective is a pair of opposing concepts which belongs to the traditional vocabulary of the social sciences. To the guidance of Beck’s reflections, Micheletti introduces the category of *individualized collective action* which is defined as:

> [...] the practice of responsibility-taking for common well-being through the creation of concrete, everyday arenas on the part of citizens alone or together with others to deal with problems that they believe are affecting what they identify as the good life. Individualized collective action involves a variety of different methods for practising responsibility-taking including traditional and unconventional political tools. [Micheletti 2003, 25-26]

The idea expressed in this concept refers to the passage of society from first modernity – industrial society and the nation-state, and of its relevant forms of participation – to the society of second modernity – of reflective modernity, with changes that will also reverberate in modes of participation.

In the past, political participation took the shape of an action of a “collective” type (*collectivistic collective action*), because it was largely based on traditional ideological identities; tied to people’s position in the social and economic structure (social class above all), connected to institutionalized politics (party *membership*, lobbies, formal associations). These modes of participation felt the “organizational” element, and were based on loyalty towards the related institutional machinery. The weight of the *delegation* of responsibility to the elected representatives or to determined political points of reference constituted an element of great importance. In such a context, the costs of participation, for the individual actor, were high in terms of time to dedicate to activism, for socialization, in the relationship with the organization and its collateral activities.

In the current phase, of a modernity marked by the processes of globalization, other spaces are opened for political action, and these spaces in part redefine its form. Participation takes on the behaviours of individualized and collective action. Such practise takes into consideration the changes that have occurred in the social and political sphere and in means of communication. All this is reflected in the type of citizen involvement, giving substance to emerging forms of participation.

This individualized form of collective action, that includes critical consumption and forms of *e-participation* (through the internet), reveals some aspects that we find in the Micheletti’s definition cited above.

A segment of citizens aims to act politically, investing their everyday life, and thus the sphere of their private lives, in this choice. The division between the public and private dimensions is weakened, almost to the point of disappearing altogether. It must be said that the end of the “separation between the public and the private” – one recalls the slogan “the personal is political” – has already been indicated as a characteristic of the new social movements. [Melucci 1977, 152 and following], but with reference to the dimension of identity and to the object of conflict and mobilisation. Nonetheless, the space is thus opened for a sort of “personal and everyday” participation, where the action of political representation finds – among other things – a channel of expression that is individualized, but not individualistic, with the end goal of collective interests, and not particularistic interests.

In other words, it is a question of assuming a *political responsibility* in a personal way; without resorting to a formal delegation to other subjects, elected officials, leaders or political professionals. This assumption of responsibility brings together the “public sphere” (intended as a
common good and collective space) and the “private sphere” (a responsibility individualized in the everyday).

These committed citizens act in a “fragmented”, but not “solitary”, way because their domain of action is a network structure; they know that they are neither alone nor isolated. They are conscious of being a links, among others, that belongs to a greater network, and of being part of an opinion movement, though a niche movement, with a particular lifestyle and style of consumption. Even if this may not produce effective results in terms of influence on politics and the economy, it provides them resources of identity, which is an important aspect in the participative process.

This form of involvement is to a great extent supported by new information technologies. The internet plays a considerable role of connection and of transmission of information, but it also creates a sort of “unitive tension” among the organised actors [Forno 2008] and between them and more committed subjects. It is the logic of the network that marks the information society [Castells 1996]. One could say that the network is both the concept and the structure of this experience; it is a category that is found behind this model of responsibility, as we have sought to demonstrate.

The choices of critical consumption emerge as a form of participation that expands the repertoire of action and updates some of the traditional traits of collective mobilisation. Participation in this way loses its territorial mark; it is de-territorialized and does not need the physical presence of other activists or specific structures.

Nevertheless, certain places such as fair trade shops – or even the supermarket – perform an important function of defining and reinforcing the identity of critical consumers. The sub-political action, that is “under” the institutionalized places of politics, is made explicit in people’s everyday sphere, in settings that are so called non-political: making purchases in worldshops or boycotting a certain product in the supermarket or taking part in forms of e-participation, as long as such actions are supported by a strong motivation that is consistent with its political significance. The meaning attributed to such actions is in fact essential to defining the very nature of these choices put into action.

This connection between the undertaking of individual responsibility and the action of consuming is also interesting because it represents an example in which the market, generally associated with the rationality of a utilitarian nature, emerges as a place in which dynamics of a different kind develop: where individualism combines with solidarity and where logic and actions take shape that go beyond the reckoning of homo oeconomicus.

The cost of choices of critical purchases or non-purchases of certain goods, both in monetary terms as well as the discovery of products or of information about them, is often higher compared to the consumer’s other possibilities. And yet, this practice seems to enjoy considerable popularity in Italian society. Evidently, as much as there appears a cost under the profile of economic rationality, a factor of inhibition of such consumption preferences, it is reduced by specific incentives of sense and significance, which attribute their own rationality to these actions of “identity-based” consumption. We will now seek to delineate how Italian citizens are distributed according to the forms of participation and their orientations so as to have some clues to the features of their political culture.

Measures, forms and dimensions of participation

Political participation, as a long tradition of studies on the subject matter recounts, develops through different means: conventional, non conventional, with different degrees of organization and channels: parties, lobbies, social movements. Voluntary associationism and social participation represent an interesting domain at the boundary and intersection between the dimension that is more social and that of a more explicitly political nature. Today researchers studying emerging forms of participation refer to a new mode of political involvement, a new category: individualized collective action, as we mentioned earlier.

In order to have some information about these different forms of political action and to have some measure of the phenomenon, we refer to survey data recently collected in Italy that report the prevalence of different types of participation.
Table 1 and figures 1 and 2 report the frequency with which citizens had participated over the course of the year preceding the interview\(^1\) (conducted in November 2007) in a series of actions of engagement and participation. The activities that most involve citizens are those in sport, cultural and recreational associations (41%), volunteering (27%), those concerning local and city problems (27%), environmental issues (24%), and so on up to the participation in pacifist demonstrations (19%), political and party rallies (13%) and protest marches (6%).

With respect to “individualized” forms of engagement, we note that 22% of citizens affirm that they have signed a petition, and of these 5% have done so on the internet. Of those surveyed, 15% have boycotted a specific brand of product, while 28% stated that they have purchased goods based on ethical, political or environmental considerations.

**Tab. 1.** **With what frequency in the past year did you participate in the following activities?**
(percentage values, n=1300)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>At least once a year</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Once a year</th>
<th>Two or three times a year</th>
<th>Every month</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participated in cultural, sport, recreational organizations</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>59.2</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in volunteer associations</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>73.1</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved in initiatives for local or town problems</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved in initiatives for environmental or local territory</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>75.8</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in peace demonstrations</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>80.6</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boycotted a product or a specific brand</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in professional associations</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>86.1</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended party or political rallies</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>87.1</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in protest marches</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>89.5</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in acts of civil disobedience or public protest (occupation of buildings, blocking traffic...)</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>93.6</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Survey Demos/LaPolis for <<la Repubblica>>, *Report on Italians and the State*, November 2007

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\(^1\) The context is the annual report *Italians and the State*, directed by Ilvo Diamanti, with the tenth edition produced in 2007. The research was carried out by Demos & Pi, in collaboration with LaPolis – Laboratorio di Studi Politici e Sociali dell’Università di Urbino “Carlo Bo” (The Laboratory of Political and Social Studies of the University of Urbino “Carlo Bo”), on behalf of Gruppo L’Espresso. It is overseen by Ilvo Diamanti, Fabio Bordignon, Luigi Ceccarini and Natascia Porcellato. The research is based on a telephone survey undertaken 26-30 November 2007, by Demetra of Venice. Interviews were conducted using the CATI method (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing). The sample of 1300 people is representative of the Italian population above 15 years of age accounting for gender, age and geopolitical zone. For more information please see [www.demos.it/rapporot.php](http://www.demos.it/rapporot.php)
These data offer us a breakdown on the degree to which different actions considered by the citizens are put into practice. Nevertheless the data do not tell us how these actions are linked to each other. Indeed, the literature has highlighted how citizens prefer to combine certain actions and specialize under the participative profile, giving preference to specific activities [Verba and Nie, 1972; Kaase and Marsh 1979; Parry, Moyser and Day 1992].

Taking this as a point of departure, for our aims it is an important passage to see which models of participation are practiced by Italians and how widespread they are. We will do this by means of by using multivariate procedures such as factorial analysis and subsequently cluster analysis. Then we will submit the data of our survey relevant to participatory actions to a factorial analysis. The goal of this first procedure is that of exploring the latent dimensions of participation. From this analysis three different factors emerge (Tab. 2):

1. the first dimension – organized politics and protest – demonstrates a strong relationship between those actions of political engagement that have a connotation of political parties and of protest; for example, through parties and movements;
2. the second dimension – civic volunteerism – shows an interweaving among forms of engagement in social volunteering and of mobilization concentrated on the local context and territory, as happens in citizen committees;
3. the third factor – individualized engagement – instead recalls individualized forms of participation: boycotts, critical consumption and petitions, both in paper form and on-line.
Tab. 2 The latent dimensions of political participation (Factorial analysis)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Organized politics and protest</th>
<th>Civic volunteerism</th>
<th>Individualized engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participated in protest marches</td>
<td>.763</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in acts of civil disobedience or public protest</td>
<td>.698</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(occupation of buildings, blocking traffic…)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended party or political rallies</td>
<td>.636</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in peace demonstrations</td>
<td>.617</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in volunteer associations</td>
<td></td>
<td>.684</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in cultural, sport, recreational organizations</td>
<td></td>
<td>.647</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved in initiatives for environmental or local territory</td>
<td></td>
<td>.551</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved in initiatives for local or town problems</td>
<td></td>
<td>.509</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in professional associations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signed petitions (on paper and/or on the internet)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.681</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boycotted a product or a specific brand</td>
<td></td>
<td>.675</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchased products for ethical, political or ecological reasons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of variation explained</td>
<td>17,9</td>
<td>15,8</td>
<td>12,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of cumulative variation explained</td>
<td>17,9</td>
<td>33,8</td>
<td>46,7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** values of factor loading greater than 0,40 are reported. Method of factor extraction: principal component analysis; rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization.

**Source:** Survey Demos/LaPolis for <<la Repubblica>>, *Report on Italians and the State*, November 2007

Collectivist, individualized and marginal

Based on the results of this exploratory analysis, we select different modes of participation in order to subdivide citizens into different groups. We have therefore considered the following modes of participation:

- **1st dimension: “politics and protest”:**
  - political/party rallies
  - public protest demonstrations
- **2nd dimension: “civic volunteerism”:**
  - activities in voluntary associations
- **3rd dimension: “individualized engagement”:**
  - boycotts of products
  - critical consumption
  - signing petitions on paper and/or on-line

The procedure of constructing the clusters\(^2\) has brought us to choose the solution with five groups (Fig.3): 1) inactive, 2) passive, 3) oriented towards social participation, 4) oriented towards political participation, 5) oriented towards individualized participation.

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\(^2\) The analysis was conducted with the procedure Quick Cluster Analysis in Spss.
The first two types are made up of the subgroups of a larger segment, the majority segment, that we can define as marginal citizens. This group comprises 67% of the sample of Italians, and can be subdivided internally into two types:

1. The first is that of completely inactive citizens (26%), who are subjects who claim never to have put into practice any of the twelve participatory actions considered (Tab.3). They are subjects who at most go to vote in the elections. Their relationship with participation probably ends with this specific action. It is likely that they have some interest in politics and may speak about it occasionally, but as we will see from their profile, they are people with few resources in this sphere and certainly live their relationship with politics in a peripheral and detached manner;

2. The second segment of this large group is formed by subjects that we have defined passive participants (42%). These citizens perform, to a markedly lesser extent compared above all to the other three groups of citizens, the participatory actions and engagements considered. Table 3 clearly demonstrates how the participatory activities performed by this group are significantly below the average, and this is the case in all of the actions considered.

The remaining citizens (one in three), in different ways are characterized by being decidedly more involved in the political sphere and in participatory actions. In this case as well we can further break them down into different types citizens: the collectivists (25%) are composed of two subgroups of citizens (socially and politically oriented participants) that demonstrate specific means of political involvement. These subjects practice forms of engagement through different more or less structured organizations, whether they are social, political or linked to protest. They can be subdivided based on two different orientations of the actions practised (Tab.3).
3. socially oriented participants, 17%, are those citizens that demonstrate a tendency to be a bit active in all of the participatory actions considered, but in particular in volunteerism, in which all the components of this group (100%) claim to be engaged, and in the associationism that we can define as civic (sport, recreational, cultural, etc.) in which 61% of this group claims to take part. The participation in other initiatives – territorial or environmentalist on the local level, in favour of peace or also in critical consumption choices – are above the average level. This signifies a considerable degree of involvement by these citizens in activities in the collective interest;

4. politically oriented participants, 8%, have a relatively clear profile: they privilege forms of participation linked to parties (100% participated in political rallies and/or party rallies) and to protest (conventional 50% and non conventional 26%). They are also active in other forms of associational engagement, on local themes and in political consumerism choices (40% boycotts and 51% critical consumption);

5. and finally, we have individualized participants, 8%, those who instead combine in the first place boycotting 100% – which is the most militant form of political consumerism [Ceccarini 2008] – critical consumption (48%) and, at the same time, they also make particularly extensive use of the internet to sign petitions (14% vs. 5% average), therefore, plausibly also other e-participation actions.

From this initial analysis it is possible to observe that:

a) the majority of citizens, as the literature concerned reports, appear fairly marginal in respect to involvement in actions of a political nature. The commitment and assumption of responsibility towards questions of public interest, even with different levels and forms of specialization, remains a behaviour that nonetheless characterises a minority, even if considerable, of citizens.

b) This vast domain of marginality can be subdivided in turn into an area of inactivism (almost) complete and another instead of more limited activism, marked by detachment and by a lower degree of involvement, expressed in other terms by a passive orientation towards the political sphere and the participatory dimension.

c) The engaged minority, on the other hand, privileges specific forms of engagement that prefigure a sort of participatory “specialisation”, which is handled in the literature. This minority can in turn be subdivided into two different groups: i) that of subjects that are distinguished by practising “collective” forms of participation, oriented towards social and civic engagement, or ii) those who undertake actions that have a more explicit militant significance, of a conventional political type and of protest. We are dealing in both cases with an activism that has upstream the support of organisational forms: more structured, like parties or voluntary associations, or less organised as with the network of movements.

d) Beyond the forms of collective participation, it is interesting to note the presence of a group that privileges individualised forms of participation. These are citizens who, even though already participating in traditional ways, expand their repertoire of action with other modes, those that are personal and are part of everyday life. The modes happen within an extensive network composed of other participants, who are not physically present but who are, however, active and involved. These actions take place in sub-political domains, in places not traditionally delegated to political expression, such as the supermarket and the fair trade shops, and the internet is used to sign petitions rather than the classic gazebo operated by militants and promoters of a specific campaign.
One last point should be remembered. An evident and natural overlap exists among the different participatory modes. This indicates that the repertoire of collective (and individualized) action is utilized and combined in a personal way by citizens, based on the actual opportunities that they encounter in their experience, their individual interests and sensitivities, and the stimuli that are activated by the actors of social and political mobilisation.

Tab. 3 Participation in different actions based on citizen groups (percentage values, n=1300)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Marginal</th>
<th>Collectivist</th>
<th>Individualized participants</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inactive</td>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>Social participants</td>
<td>Political participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collective participation modes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political/party rallies</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiatives linked to neighbourhood/city problems</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>56.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiatives linked to territorial/environmental problems</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>53.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities in voluntary associations</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>40.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities in professional associations</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>29.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities in cultural, sport, recreational associations</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>60.7</td>
<td>63.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public protest demonstrations (movements)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>50.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrations and initiatives in favour of peace</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>62.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protest demonstrations against laws in force: occupying buildings, blocking traffic, etc.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Boycotting &amp; boycotting</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boycotting a product or a specific brand</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>39.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have purchased products for ethical, political or ecological reasons, in the last year</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>51.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Signing petitions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has not signed collective petitions</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>82.3</td>
<td>72.2</td>
<td>52.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has signed only petitions on paper</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>38.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has signed petitions only on the internet</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has signed both paper and online petitions</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey Demos/LaPolis for <<la Repubblica>>, Report on Italians and the State, November 2007
**The profile of participants**

The study of participation has shown how certain structural behaviours and other cultural behaviours are at the bottom of the explanation of the participatory potential of the citizens. Categories like centrality and peripherality evidence the weight of socio-economic status in determining people’s involvement in the public collective dimension, and thus in determining their participatory activism. At the same time, the presence or lack of recruiting structures in the territory – parties, voluntary associations, groups – or people’s ideological involvement, and the historical-political moment, are all factors that can influence high levels of participation [Verba, Schlozman, Brady, 1995].

Taking into consideration the socio-demographic characteristics of the various groups identified above, as we can see in table 4, well known and predictable behaviours emerge, already addressed and explained by the literature on this theme. Here below is a brief explanation.

The female gender has always constituted an element of difference and weakness in terms of political involvement. Though different studies have shown how this aspect is limited to traditional forms of political engagement, in emerging forms the *gender gap* is equilibrated, and women appear to be even more active in these types of individualised actions, in particular in political consumerism [Micheletti 2004, 245-264]. Our data confirm this point:

*i)* men are more engaged in forms of political action of the collective and traditional type (66% vs. 48% of men overall);

*ii)* women seem to be more present among inactive citizens (64% vs. 52% of women overall), which reminds us that political engagement continues to have a masculine connotation;

*iii)* in volunteering (57% vs. 52% of women overall), where solidarity represents a value that is particularly rooted in feminine culture;

*iv)* largely, and this is particularly interesting for our goals, in individualized forms (56% vs. 52% of women overall), in which even housewives demonstrate a certain degree of engagement (25% vs. 16% of housewives overall), beyond strengthening the component of the inactive (23%).

Older persons – 65 years old and above, pensioners – are predictably more present among inactive citizens (39% vs. 22% overall), yet those who are between 55-64 years old seem to be more engaged in volunteering (20% vs. 14% overall).

The youngest citizens, students and workers seem instead to be particularly active in forms politically connotative of participation, such as protest strikes and student mobilizations.

The factor of having a degree, which suggests the relevance of the SES model (Socio Economic Status model), is linked to reflexive forms of participation, for example individualized forms, as well as characterizing the profile of those who undertake politically oriented participation. Consequently, the socio-professional categories that mainly practise these forms of participation are more likely to be office workers, managers and functionaries, in particular those in the public sector.

It is worthwhile to remember two interesting aspects in Italian political culture, that we can define as “structural”, in order to give a better picture of the characteristics of the different types of citizens identified: the frequency of attending mass, which gives us an indication of the importance of the Catholic dimension, and the ideological self-placement of citizens. We will consider them jointly, given the close relationship between these two spheres.

Socially oriented participation demonstrates a close relationship with religious practice and with a political ideological identity in the centre. This is certainly tied to the associational and voluntary background that refers to the organized Catholic world, which offers opportunities for participation, identity and involvement (Tab.5).

The connotation of being on the left and not observing the Sunday rite of mass, on the other hand, is associated more so with *collectivist participation* of the political type. It should be noted that, in a certain measure, this behaviour also characterizes individualized forms of participation, where however the secularized component of citizens has less weight. Political consumerism is in fact organized in the territory by a network of Catholic associations, who are traditionally attentive to the problems of poverty, development and rights in the countries in the Southern hemisphere.
Furthermore, the data relative to subjects who do not place themselves on the left-right spectrum is understandable; there is a particularly elevated incidence among the inactive (35% vs. 14% of political participants or 27% of the overall population) which denotes and confirms the detachment and their marginal political culture with respect to politics.

**Tab. 4 Socio-demographic profile based on groups of citizens** (percentage values, n=1300)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Inactive</th>
<th>Passive</th>
<th>Social participants</th>
<th>Political participants</th>
<th>Individualized Participants</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>36.3</td>
<td>55.2</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>66.1</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>48.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>63.7</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>57.2</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>55.9</td>
<td>51.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-17</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-29</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-44</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 and +</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school or lower</td>
<td>52.8</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle school</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>41.8</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>38.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University degree</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic condition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue collars</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White collars, directors public sector</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White collars, managers private sector</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craftsmen, tradesmen, entrepreneurs</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housewives</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pensioners</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwest</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>58.6</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>43.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey Demos/LaPolis for <<la Repubblica>>, Report on Italians and the State, November 2007
Political culture and orientations

Faith in institutions and faith in others

In order to have some indication concerning the elements of social capital, we will consider the degree of institutional integration and faith in other people, in the general sense.

Faith in the institutions considered demonstrates overall an average of 29%. Citizens who demonstrate a greater degree of faith are those that we have defined political participants (33%), in confirmation that institutional integration and political involvement are expressions of the complex relationship between society and politics and of the idea of citizenship and belonging to a political community.

We find a percentage that is lower by a few points (27%) in inactive subjects, which reveals their political marginality, as well as in those who privilege individualized forms of participation (26%), which instead indicates a critical orientation for these politically sophisticated citizens [Norris 1999].

Examining table 6 we see certain differences: the inactive citizens generally attribute a low degree of faith in almost all institutions with an explicit political connotation, and only the church and banks seem to solicit in this group greater confidence.

Passive citizens demonstrate an institutional orientation practically the same as the average (which actually is the synthesis between engaged citizens and those who are more peripheral with respect to politics). This profile is not particularly different from that of citizens who are more oriented to practice forms of social participation.

The clearest differences are those that characterize citizens who embrace collective forms of engagement of a political nature (politically oriented participants) and those who practice individualized actions of engagement. The first group, in a consistent manner, is distinguished by a greater harmony with government institutions at different levels (the local/national/supranational) and towards those of political representation (parties, parliament), in addition to the state that represents the political community as a whole. Among these citizens a low degree of recognition of the Catholic church has been found, due to their leftist and secular orientation that represents a cleavage with respect to the Catholic tradition, its values and its organizational and associational structure.

For what regards individualized participants, we should note the low level of faith in government institutions (32% vs. 42% of the preceding group), in political representation (14% vs. 25% of the preceding group), in the state (33% vs. 48% of the preceding group), and in banks (11% vs. 17% of the preceding group). This is particularly interesting, given that financial institutions represent actors in the economy and in global development. Though under the overall average (equal to 53%), this component of individualized participants shows a greater harmony with the Catholic church (43% claim to have faith) compared to political participants who limit their degree of confidence to 38%.

Regarding the next dimension of social capital – faith in others – the citizens that display the greatest degree of confidence in other people are those who are inserted in networks of political participation (44% vs. 32% of the overall average), and to a lesser extent, but still substantial, those who practice individualized forms of engagement (37%). The rest demonstrate lower values, in particular the inactive citizens (28%).
**Tab. 5 Frequency of attending mass and ideological self-placement based on citizen groups** (percentage values, n=1300)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Marginal</th>
<th>Collectivist</th>
<th>Individualized participants</th>
<th>Tutti</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inactive</td>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>Social participants</td>
<td>Political participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequency of going to church</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>22.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almost never</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About once a month</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a week or never</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>27.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-placement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre-left</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre-right</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non placed</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know / Refused</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Survey Demos/LaPolis for <<la Repubblica>>, Report on Italians and the State, November 2007*

**Tab. 6 Faith in institutions and in others based on citizen groups** (percentage values, n=1300)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Marginal</th>
<th>Collectivist</th>
<th>Individualized participants</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inactive</td>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>Social participants</td>
<td>Political participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most people are worthy of faith</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>43.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local/national/supranational government institutions (municipality, region, government, UE)</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>42.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic representative associations (unions, entrepreneur associations)</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>27.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representative political institutions (parties, parliament)</td>
<td>7.25</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The State</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>47.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banks</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Catholic church</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>55.3</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith in institutions (average)</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>32.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Survey Demos/LaPolis for <<la Repubblica>>, Report on Italians and the State, November 2007*
Parties, democracy and politics

Some information that sounds out in greater detail the idea of politics, democracy, and its principal actors – the parties – can help us enhance the profile of Italian citizens and the political cultures behind the different manners of participation identified.

We should consider first of all the model of democratic government (Tab. 7). Democracy, as an idea, is predictably the form of government that Italians consider preferable (65%). The differences among the groups are interesting. We find a figure of more than 70% among those who are most active in the participatory sphere, both through collective modes as well as individualized modes. As one could expect, those subjects who are more marginal with respect to politics, the inactive citizens, are also those who attribute less value to the importance of democracy (55%).

In this predictable background data, however, is also contained some assessments of a certain relevance to our study, and which give further details about the citizens’ political culture and, at the same time, confirm the tendencies recorded above when we addressed the issue of institutional faith.

Parties are considered an important element in the democratic game most of all by those who practise collective forms of participation, such as political participants, 66%, who moreover value the idea of the party as an organization with a strong base, that is, the idea of organized participation and militancy in the traditional sense (68% vs. 54% on average).

The other citizens seem to reveal a lesser consideration of these organizations (the inactive: 42%; the passive: 53%). This orientation towards delegitimization of parties also involves individualized participants (48%).

Individualized participants, in addition to considering the parties relatively important, and therefore implicitly addressing their criticism to the party system, value democracy as a model and believe that the category left-right today still makes sense to understand the positions of parties and of politicians (58%, roughly equal to the level recorded among political participants, 56%, and well above the level observed among other groups of citizens). From this data we can read a targeted “dissent”, a citizen who is demanding and sophisticated, and critical towards the parties. This attitude is directed not so much at the party in itself, as an institution of democracy, but the current parties and their degeneration, which do not thrill this specific group of participants. Thus it is a question of a group of attentive, thoughtful and politically involved citizens expressing disapproval.

Tab. 7 Orientations and assessments of democracy and the parties based on citizen groups
(percentage values, n=1300)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of citizens who say they “agree” with the following statements</th>
<th>Marginal</th>
<th>Collectivist</th>
<th>Individualised participants</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inactive</td>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>Social participants</td>
<td>Political participants</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy is preferable to any other form of government</td>
<td>54.8</td>
<td>65.7</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>72.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without political parties democracy cannot exist</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td>58.7</td>
<td>65.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For a political party today it is best to have a base and members</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>54.9</td>
<td>56.9</td>
<td>68.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The concepts of right and left are always useful in understanding the positions of parties and politicians.</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>56.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey Demos/LaPolis for <<la Repubblica>>, Report on Italians and the State, November 2007
We will conclude this description of the principal results of the analysis taking into consideration some words and the reaction they provoked in the people being interviewed. The question posed was: “Could you indicate what feeling is provoked in you by the following words?” The possible responses were: very positive, fairly positive, fairly negative, very negative.

The responses were in reaction to direct stimuli comprised of words. Politics feeds off of meanings, and political actors transmit these meanings in a communicative dynamic. Words represent values, provoking in citizens feelings of closeness or of distance. Political debate and proposals revolve around key words, which in the citizens’ perspectives become semantic cleavages, compasses to direct them in their choices and assessments. They are used by political leaders who attribute them with a certain meaning and the key words become “information shortcuts” for citizens.

The analysis of these words seems to distinguish the perceptive models of the different groups in which we divided the people interviewed, and they provide other clues and confirm some orientations seen earlier.

Table 8 reports the differences in the percentage of positive sentiments and negative sentiments provoked by the single words. The value of the index, obtained by subtraction, assumes a positive sign when the reactions “very or fairly positive” are greater than the responses “very or fairly negative”.

Words such as parties and politics provoked in the population sampled particularly negative reactions (respectively -21% and -33%), but in the individualized participants these reactions are less negative compared to the sample average, less negative compared to marginal citizens, and less negative compared to those who put into action mainly models of social participation.

The only group in which these words provoked positive reactions is the group of political participants (+32% for parties and +18% for politics).

To go into greater detail regarding this aspect we can reference the words of political consumers collected in a qualitative study. A common element emerges from reading the interviews that runs through all the responses given by the political consumers: the feeling of disenchantment with parties and the scarce political responsiveness. Words such as <<egoistic>>, <<confused>>, <<distant>>, <<corrupted>> and also <<disgusting>> are often used to define the political system and its actors. The interviewees see traditional politics as something distant from social needs and citizens’ interests, something which has lost touch with society and its components. On the other hand, the hope that things will change also clearly emerges, thanks to these citizens’ responsibility taking in their everyday lives. Democracy is never called into question by respondents. With reference to politics an interviewee said:

It is a scandalous and sad situation, from which I hope we will soon emerge! There is great interest in the political seat and little interest in the people, people think more about stupid things than about serious problems… this is not good!!! We need a quick change, because if not I want to see where we are going to end up! Those who are in politics, at all levels, need to understand that they are undertaking a sort of mission in our name, and that they are not there to keep the seat warm or to live the worldly life, they need to return to a greater loyalty towards us citizens who by now no longer feel represented, who when we go to vote often are voting for the lesser of the evils. Politicians need to be better people, and discover that they have values and ideals to take forward, instead of having their sole preoccupation being no longer having their political seat under their bottoms! [Stefania, F, 53]

3 The question was designed to include the response “no feeling” but this was not proposed as a potential response to the interviewee, and only if it was explicitly cited was it recorded by the interviewer.

4 The qualitative interviews were conducted with consumers of fair trade products in the years 2004-2006. In total roughly 40 interviews were conducted following a semi-structured outline. I would like to thank Valentina Ferraboschi, Martina Di Pierdomenico, Edoardo Pappalardo, Elisa Petrini and Sandra Siricolo for having participated in the research, which is within the domain of the activities of LaPolis (Laboratorio di Studi Politici e Sociali - Università di Urbino www.unitur.it/lapolis).
According to the respondent’s perspective, that which is problematic are the political actors and the degeneration of political life.

In fact, the criticisms are mainly directed at parties and politicians, and are strongly self-referenced. The subjects of accountability and responsiveness emerge very often from the interviewees’ words and, sometimes, from their swearwords. But the use of this kind of language means that there is a significant involvement in politics, a sense of dissatisfaction and the presence of a demanding orientation within political consumers, and in particular boycotters.

Even though most of the respondents identified themselves in the leftist cultural area and some of them recalled Catholic values as an ideological reference, they did not show any remarkable party identification. They kept abreast of politics, by means of TV, newspapers, or the Internet, as was explicitly stated during the interview. They participated in social and political initiatives. Moreover, they pointed out that they always voted, but not as a choice to express an identity: they just voted << the lesser of two evils>>.

Currently there is not a party that I prefer, or that I could say is mine. My political orientation is leftist …but when I go to vote I just vote the lesser of two evils and that’s it. [Fausto, M, 43]

Politicians are seen as thoughtless, indifferent, without values and ideals, and the main reason for the <<scandalous situation>> in which politics is nowadays. And, at the same time, they express a strong demand for radical change:

[...] we need innovation at the political level, we need someone who governs with clear, strong and innovative ideals, which lead towards concrete solutions…and then we need politicians to stop thinking only about their interests and seats, they have to remember that they are in office to represent us, those who voted them in. [Andrea, M, 24]

In the end, politics nowadays is seen as something which is not able to represent people’s moral and political concerns; it is, in other words, an inefficient tool.

Above all, a critical mood towards political parties and their leaders emerges. Fair-trade boycotters are also frustrated with how politics works; forms of individualized political participation seem to be, in their perspective, the right choice to give a sense to their political involvement (and identity).

Unlike parties, other “words” are able to provoke positive emotions, like union (12%), a primary civil society organization and important actor in political mobilization, and state (32%), that represents the institutional dimension of the idea of political community. But also in this case participants who are individualized express a sentiment that is much more tepid and diffident compared to political participants. A reaction which instead unites these two groups is that relative to the word globalization (-9 and -10% respectively). The disenchanted and in certain ways critical approach towards globalization distinguishes them from what is recorded from the other groups.

Tab. 8 Positive and negative sentiments provoked by some words.
(data in percentages in the index, representing the difference between those who express a positive sentiment and those who express a negative sentiment; n=1300)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Marginal</th>
<th></th>
<th>Collectivist</th>
<th>Individualized participants</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inactive</td>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>Social participants</td>
<td>Political participants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>56.9</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parties</td>
<td>-26.5</td>
<td>-27.1</td>
<td>-25.5</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>-13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>-38.5</td>
<td>-37.2</td>
<td>-44.2</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>-15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Globalization</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>-1.1</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>-10.1</td>
<td>-9.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey Demos/LaPolis for <<la Repubblica>>, Report on Italians and the State, November 2007
Final considerations

The dis-organization of participation

At the end of this analysis, based on the data presented in the preceding pages, we propose a few more general considerations while also recalling some points that the scholarly literature has discussed about this subject.

Entering into the chasm of the relationship between society and politics and widening our perspective to include contemporary democracies, politological studies point out the profound transformations that have occurred in the last decades. Under the pressure of modernization a new demand for participation has ripened in citizens and therefore new styles of engagement take form [Dalton 1996; Inglehart 1997; Bell 1999], thus changing the political culture [Bettin Lattes 2001, 357-376].

According to different observers, the connection between politics and society has progressively deteriorated. In fact, the traditional and organized political actors are in crisis, as are the parties and the unions. To begin with, their models of inclusion are in crisis, centred as they are on a formal, bureaucratized mass structure.

Such organizations, in their “golden age”, were distinguished by their considerable capacity to mobilize their members and sympathizers, and to provide an identity and a sense of belonging. At the level of the political process, they were considered the principal instruments for the articulation and the aggregation of social demand [Almond and Powell 1978]. They positioned themselves as privileged interlocutors for society, addressing those needs that they then defined as the political agenda.

Citizens gave the delegation of responsibility to these actors. They contributed to the reproduction of the political sub-cultures, supporting through their network of collateral associations, the path of political socialization and the phases of the citizen’s political life, “from the cradle to the grave” as Neumann stressed. Today all this seems to have undergone marked transformations. Many indicators testify to the crisis in the relationship between society and politics, or at least to the crisis of that specific model of the relationship between citizens and the political sphere.

In reality, there are also different readings of this situation, and in some respects they are complementary. These readings stress how the crisis in the traditional modes of engagement does not automatically imply disinterest or apathy towards politics, and does not necessarily result in the unwillingness of citizens to become involved, and consequently the search for “happiness” in one’s own particular sphere, shrinking from the public arena [Hirschman 1982].

Certain scholars suggest that we are not in a phase of resurgence of the private sphere, but that it is necessary also to look, and orient research, in other directions – that is to say, towards other forms of engagement [Norris 2002]. For example, personal modes of responsibility-taking and engagement, along with individualized forms that also interweave citizens’ everyday lifestyles, should also be considered. Our sample among the other groups identified (marginal and collective participants) is composed of about 8% of subjects who seem able to be classified as individualized participants.

This assumes that there is also an activism that ties into traditional modes of collective mobilization and that also develops in settings that are different from the usual arenas of political expression.

Globalization, with its various repercussions, is felt as the backdrop – and a factor – of the “emerging” mode of involvement centred on consumption and/or on internet activism. Certain phenomena appear closely tied to globalization: the crisis of the nation-state model, the emergence of glocal scenarios, mobilization that looks with suspicion upon globalization, the role of specific international institutions in global governance (G8, IMF, UN, WTO, etc.), multinationals that have become the targets of protest.
This pushes individual responsibility-taking towards new types of arenas and styles of participation, that take place alongside of – and do not substitute – traditional forms [Forno and Ceccarini 2007]. From the data presented in this paper, we can observe that among individualized participants, such as political participants, there is a significant overlap in the modes of action practised. These subjects participate in initiatives promoted by the parties and take part in movements and non conventional forms of engagement, while they also adopt participatory styles, and lifestyles, that are marked by individual responsibility.

All this highlights the relevancy assumed by “personal” forms of engagement, marked by an “individualized” model of participation. It should not be forgotten that the actions in question are nevertheless connected to a vast and complex network. The actions grow on the wave of issues at the centre of new social movements’ protest, alongside the institutionalized organizations of political representation or interests – as, for example, consumer associations – or alongside opinion movements that express new sensibilities.

Political participants – those that come closest to the ideal-typical citizen model, the civis nobilis [Sani 2007] – overlap, in part, the modes of participation practised to those utilized by the segment of citizens who privilege individualized engagement. A sort of mosaic emerges, in which their action develops not only through traditional forms and places of engagement, but also in domains generally not recognized as spaces of political dialectic: the fair trade or worldshop, the supermarket, the personal sphere, the style of consuming, the internet.

The overlap of actions among collectivists and individualists, which is only partially corroborated, has behind it fairly diverse orientations and political cultures, as we have seen; in fact, the consideration of institutions of political representation and of the government, of the state, of globalization, and of the actors of the economy reveal different assessments.

The global scenario of the individualized participant

The world in which this type of individualized participant moves is clearly delineated. Some authors define this scenario the society of hyperconsumerism, in which there is also space for forms of alternative consumerism – such as critical, green, responsible and ethical consumerism. In this scenario one observes a fever pitch of consumption, through the commercialization of lifestyles and the individualization of purchasing choices. The critical consumer can also be seen as an <<exemplary manifestation>> of this society of hyperconsumers, rather than as a rival force engaged in overcoming it [Lipovetsky 2006].

Furthermore, the current period assumes a particular importance as a complex and hybrid culture [Canclini 1989], marked by social and cultural multi-affiliation; by numerous and diversified social ties, that are mediated and direct, fragile and specialized, in real and virtual places, with local and global horizons [Ascher 2001].

Lifestyle, as well as style of consumption, and thus of the engagement of individualized participants, is inevitably shaped by post-modern behaviours, and individualized participants feel more than others the complexity of the scenario and its problems.

The consumer at the end of the twentieth century can be distinguished from his/her predecessor, belonging to the society of mass consumption. A sort of epochal divide has taken place, as is sustained by those who look at this phenomenon through a historian’s lense [Trentmann 2005, 4-5]. A kind of break has taken place. Sociological studies on this topic today emphasize categories like reflexiveness, individualization, everyday lifestyle; in this scenario the traditional models of affiliation of mass society are overcome.

Therefore the consumer can also be seen in a different light. He/she is situated beyond the space of the market, in civil society, in the sphere of social and political citizenship. The consumer is always more of a subject, and thus not only an object, who enters into the processes of global governance. Frequently, at this point, consumption is interwoven into the debate on human rights [Micheletti and Follesdal 2007], as well as into the question of safeguarding public health and food security in our globalized world [Sassatelli 2001]. Hence consumption is also positioned as a space
of political protest [Tosi 2006, Forno 2007] and of opportunity for the construction of political
identities in civil society sectors.

And so it is possible to see an overlapping trend between two spheres that for a long time
have been considered distant, if not totally separate: the culture of consumption on one side and
political culture on the other. The two spheres are linked by this engagement that is individualized,
but not individualistic, and responsibility taking with respect to questions of collective interest.

The modes of participation in public questions are influenced by the dynamics of this
scenario. Observing the forms of involvement, we are able to obtain some clues to the
transformations that interest the broader relationship between society and politics.

The crisis between the subjects of political representation and the citizen highlights the
centrality of problems of global interest, marked by dimensions such as uncertainty and risk, and
the limits of political regulation enacted by actors at the national level. In this respect, critical
consumption modalities can also emerge as a civil society response. By means of these forms of
purchases, critical consumers actually express their commitment to and engagement in questions
that are within their horizon of reference, which more and more coincides with the entire world.
Individualized participants view with mistrust globalization, banks, and even government
institutions and political representation, unlike political participants who demonstrate greater
confidence. The assessments of individualized participants are very close to those of more marginal
subjects, despite their being competent and involved in politics. Hence the assessment expressed by
individualized participants should be understood as a cry from demanding and critical subjects; they
are critical because they are demanding. Their attitude towards parties and politics, which is
somewhat disenchanted, does not take on the meaning of “exit” but of “voice” [Hirschman 1970].
While they appear to be less integrated than political participants, they do not display the same
peripheral nature, apathy and disinterest as the majority of citizens who are distant from the political
sphere.

Post-democracy actors

It is in this competitive and pluralistic scenario, among differing interests, that the
significance of individualized political mobilization is being felt. Today the relationship between
politics and the economy seems to take on significance of particular interest for our aims. Crouch
[2003] refers to the category of <<post-democracy>> to define the changes that have happened in
the political sphere and in the logic of representative democracy.

According to this author, the market has progressively linked itself to the political sphere,
and thus to governance. The importance of the interests of the multinationals (a favourite target for
forms of critical consumption and certainly of individualized participants, even though we have
specific indicators in this regard), and their influential abilities has grown; the class structure
appears less and less clean-cut, leaving space for the definition of new identities; the parties are
transforming organizationally, and consequently changing the modalities by which they relate with
society and the territory; these actors have a reduced capacity to generate a sense of belonging, to
mobilize citizens and to provide representation aggregating and breaking down social demand.
Conversely, this situation stimulates the development of “cultural avant-gardes” [Ray, Anderson
2000].

The market is seen as a sphere that is more and more connected to politics and policies
based on these signs. This seems to be well discerned by those who put into practise individualized
actions of participation, that in many cases are interwoven into their everyday lifestyles (austerity in
consumption, etc). From this derives the interpretation of a democracy in transformation from its
traditional form, with its corresponding weight and influence of economic, business and
multinational interests, as compared to that of other social groups or traditional representative
actors, or even the nation-state itself.

This weakness of the political sphere emerges as a central point in the vision of those who
practise individualized forms of participation, as the reaction to certain words and meanings such as
globalization, banks, state. In our reading, we view this as a condition that likely stimulates the
response by civil society: by groups belonging to different cultures and political organizations, whether to the associational world of Catholic influence, or the left, or to environmentalist or consumerist spheres. However, at the same time it also encourages individual forms of engagement, those that are <<personal and from everyday life>>, exactly because to a certain degree they appear to be freed from the institutionalized politics that they consider ineffectual. Politics seems to satisfy less and less of these critical citizens, those citizens who are demanding and politically more sophisticated.

The phenomenon of globalization therefore represents the setting for these modes of involvement that are centred on consumption and on the internet. The crisis of the nation-state in tackling global problems constitutes a central feature of this scenario. Risk society – as the present phase is defined – is marked by environmental emergencies, such as the greenhouse effect, by food emergencies, such as mad cow disease, or by health emergencies, such as Sars. Risk society is also marked by financial crises, from that of Argentine bonds to that of American subprime mortgages. These are issues of global scope, perhaps not in the concrete effects, but certainly in the feelings of fear that are triggered in public opinion; individual and cognitive uncertainty profoundly typify this phase [Bauman 1998].

The effects of the neo-liberal economy raises for citizens a question of global social justice between the North and South of the world. This is a question that is being asked of actors such as multinationals, financial institutions and international organizations, and it is also being expressed through modalities of individual participation, such as through critical consumption in combination with the network of initiatives and mobilization campaigns of which it is part. The political use of consumption and forms of e-participation bear witness to the presence of new behaviours and styles in the cultural and political spheres, and which are developing in this framework of the risk society.

In other words, this is an example of what Giddens has defined life style politics, that is when the decisions and practices of everyday life assume a political significance. On this topic Norris refers to the politics of choice. It is in the spheres of the reflexive society and the process of individualization – a consequence of the loss of traditional sociocultural references [Beck, Giddens, Lash 1994; Kaase and Newton 1995] – that individual choices and actions linked to the consumer are used by citizens with the goal of also expressing opinions about political value and ethical meanings.

Thus the market – and in specific cases the supermarket or the fair trade shop or world shop – can become a place in which to carry out an act of engagement; it is politicized. It is a space that is situated outside of the traditional confines of the classic political sphere actors and the nation-state. The market becomes a sub-political arena, to recall Beck’s well known category.

A silent minority

Cultural models and forms of participation can be considered observation points, partial but relevant, through which to look at social change. Transformations in the cultural sphere develop over the long term and by means of a “silent” process, as is suggested by the famous interpretative perspective of Inglehart [1977]. This interpretation revolves around the idea of a profound change in the orientations of citizens in Western societies after the Second World War, which happened over a long period characterized by prosperity and security, and was also accompanied by a considerable growth in levels of schooling. According to this perspective, priorities shifted from fundamental or materialist needs, such as security and sustenance, towards a post-materialist social demand of a higher order, such as the satisfaction of needs of an aesthetic or intellectual type, or those concerning self-expression, safeguarding the environment, belonging and appreciation.

In other terms, the American scholar outlined a theory of cultural change with a generational basis, that invests both the systemic level and the individual dimension with important consequences concerning social and political participation. In fact, the new social movements and the climate that characterized the period at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s also
involved a different type of political participation as compared to the more traditional participation represented by the parties.

Jumping back to the present and to the subject of this paper, the general situation described by Inglehart continues to have value as a scenario. We rediscover certain behaviours in the use of individualized forms of participation. Behind this movement lies a post-materialist approach, which is complicated, however, by elements that are linked to the process of globalization. Today, more so than in the past, this cultural experience and mobilization knowingly takes as its horizon the global – and post-modern – panorama.

Contemporary democracies are experiencing transformations in the relationship between society and politics, which in certain ways seems to be deteriorating, or at least profoundly changing [Manin 1992; Eliasoph 1998; Dalton and Wattemberg 2000; Pharr and Putnam 2000]. But the crisis of the traditional models does not automatically imply an exit strategy with respect to politics. Other forms of engagement seem to be silently appearing on the public scene. We are not dealing with shouting in the public squares, even though these new forms are becoming interwoven with non conventional forms of protest.

At the heart of this picture is the idea that apathy is not the only response to the disenchantment towards “institutionalized” politics. Although the majority of citizens belong to the marginal group, this is a “natural” datum, where, however, a certain dose of apathy is functional to the system. A certain level of disinterest, indifference and detachment is important for the system, to the degree that not participating can also signify consensus with those who govern, and not only suspicion and disenchantment, as Seymour M. Lipset [1960] maintained. To the contrary, excessive participation and an elevated level of citizen engagement – especially considering forms linked to protest – can be a symptom of discontent. It may reflect the presence of widespread hardship, of feelings of dissatisfaction and of a society marked by features of social disintegration. Too much participation, therefore, could have a delegitimizing effect on the institutions and their representatives. Furthermore, an excess of participation could bring about a situation of functional overload of the political system.

We could also advance other interpretations of the relationship between society and politics. Behind the consumerist phenomenon we can also distinguish a sort of social creativity, intent on identifying new arenas in which to express identities and socio-political aspirations. Political consumerism can be understood in this sense, as a form characterizing the action of individualized participation, that broadens the modern repertoire of political action and entwines with the cycle of social mobilization [Forno 2006]. It opens spaces to a <<diffuse politics>> [Marcon 2005], an engagement from the bottom, molecular in nature. Trans-national campaigns, groups and associations for the defence of human rights, consumer movements, internet mobilizations (e-participation, culture jamming), boycotts and deliberative arenas today assume an important role in the domain of participatory forms, and thus in the redefinition of the relationship between society and politics. Nevertheless, there is another aspect that should not be ignored: these actions are also formulae for individual realization and expression, that denote a need for sense and meaning, and the desire for community that marks post-modern society [Canclini 2001, 159].

Voices from civil society

If, as a model of mobilization, individualized participation seems to be of a somewhat silent nature, as it is characterized first and foremost by a personal and everyday dimension, on the other hand these forms of involvement can also be interpreted as a voice coming from civil society. Today civil society is less and less a national community; people have different ways of being (global) citizens, and have at their disposal socio-economic and cognitive resources: they use the internet, they travel, they are simultaneously subjected to the same problems (greenhouse effect, financial crises, food insecurity). The crisis that has struck the role of the nation-state that must move in an international panorama, broadens the very confines of civil society, which sinks its roots into the global scenario. This implies a rethinking of the politics, participation and the idea itself of the citizen.
In the 1960s and 1970s, politics and ecology directed engaged consumers towards austerity, to limiting their needs, with the aim of squaring up to the society of mass consumption. Today this space of significance is redirected towards protecting the environment, the sustainable management of resources, recycling, organic and “slow-food”. In other terms, we have passed from the paradigm of “renouncing” consumption to that of “safeguarding” a patrimony that belongs to all, on a planetary scale, through consumption choices. It is an orientation that recalls the thesis of ecological modernization, which supports the feasibility of environmental reform from both an economic and political viewpoint.

Consumption today gives citizens, and those who participate through individualized forms, the basis for a shared action and identity. It is certainly difficult to say whether forms of participation or responsibility taking related to consumption will influence the construction of a global civil society. And therefore, who knows if these practises will have a profound effect on the idea of the citizen and on the redefinition of the public sphere (or if this is already happening). Thus it is difficult to say if and to what extent the number of subjects that enjoy fundamental human rights will increase, or if social injustice will be reduced, or if global solidarity will expand, thanks to the pressure exercised through citizens’ consumption styles. It is certain that today we cannot ignore the transformations at the heart of the repertoire of participation, despite the fact that the most involved and militant social components are actually a minority of a minority [Ceccarini 2008].

This message and its significance are circulating through society. The community of individualized participants exists, it has its spaces, its languages, its references, and its enemies. Global society refers to new codes of behaviour and communication also through the internet, making it possible for a multiplicity of subjects, groups and associations at the local, national and international levels to take part in moments of confrontation on issues concerning the environment, human rights and sustainable development.

For citizens this means having, also through the practise of consumption and activism online, an additional channel of opportunity to be (global) citizens, to feel part of a community and to participate in a shared system of solidarity.

But even though this dynamic becomes explicit in a scenario of broad frontiers, the local and national dimensions continue to weigh heavily. In the Italian case the traditions that have formed the political culture of the national society continue to have a role in both the organizational structure of critical consumption, as well as the individual orientations of engaged citizens. These behaviours have not spread with the push of the processes of modernization. They instead are channelled in the redefinition of the relationship between society and politics, tradition and innovation. That is to say, a sort of hybridization has taken place [Canclini 1989], that renders social actors complex figures: they incorporate elements of the past and the present, of local and global, individual and collective.
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