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**The Participatory Turn at Local Level in Time of Crisis:
Processes, Conflicts and Paradoxical Effects**

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Abstract

In the past decades, private, civil society and third sector organizations, or even the citizens, have been more and more involved within the decision-making processes. In the case of welfare policies, participation has gradually been considered a positive strategy at contrasting the crisis of legitimacy of the welfare states, to ameliorating the policy implementation in dealing with the new societal challenges, and to exploiting the informal resources of the grass-roots organizations.

Nevertheless, some controversial issues must be taken into consideration, because to date it is still hard to understand why participation has become so significant in public discourses, in which ways it affects the policy processes, what will be the effects of the economic downturn, which role will participation have to deal with its challenges.

The paper investigates these kind of issues in the case of the Tuscany (Italy) welfare reforms, strongly oriented to the participatory turn, and its developments in the urban area of Pisa, revealing a kind of participation that could be described as an ephemeral-decorative factor of the "new" institutional design, with a declining capability to move the institutional attention towards the various effects of the economic crisis and the other ongoing transformations of the urban context.

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1. The participatory turn: is it for real? For what? And how?

For many observers, during the '70s, the liberal-democratic institutions and the capitalistic order entered in a perverse dynamic of crisis (economic downturn, too many tasks and too high people expectations for the state, loss of effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy of public institution, ecc.) that could only push towards and an upheaval of the same order and, hence, to the "end of the welfare states"[1]. Since then, a lot of changes in the capitalistic societies have occurred but none of the worst predictions of the '70s has actually come true, but rather – in most scholars' opinions - a continuous, conflicting and diversified process of structural adjustment.

The public attention has been addressed to specific issues such as the shifting roles of states, markets, family and civil society organizations, the changes in their reciprocal relationships (e.g. the marketization and Subsidiarization of welfare) and in the ways to rule, run and practice policies (e.g. Activation and New Public Management), in a context of globalization and flexibilization of production and labour markets. The key words became containment, restructuring, retrenchment, recalibration (Pierson 2007).

It should however be emphasized that deeper changes in the conceptions regarding welfare societies occurred in the meanings of the same key words, variously adopted to describe policies, rights and duties, contexts, needs and people (Clarke 2004) and that these kinds of changes have produced as many types of consequences not always easily understandable. In this picture, the so-called participatory turn, and the role it has been playing in the liberal-democratic order, has got particular attention. Private for-profit, civil society and third sector nonprofit organizations, or even directly the citizens, have been more and more involved, in the past 15 years, within the public discourse and the decision-making processes in the socio-political and socio-economic field.

Participation has gradually been considered a positive strategy at promoting alternative eterarchical schemes to the growing inefficiency of the hierarchical governing approach prevailing in the so-called Keynesian National Welfare Regimes (Jessop 2002): first, to contrasting the crisis of legitimacy of the previous order (e.g.: Barnes et al. 2007); second, to ameliorating the institutional building and the policy implementation; third, to endorsing or exploiting the informal socio-economic resources of the grass-roots society, its views and capabilities; finally, to dealing with the new societal, political and economic challenges from a

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1   See the 'New Right' and the Neo-Marxist arguments (Pierson 2007).

more embedded viewpoint.

To date, the label "participatory turn" reveals a bit more complicated and controversial state of the art. First, the account of legitimacy has been questioned (Pierson 2007), while, as Newman and Clarke (2009) argue, it remains to understand why participation has become, at least apparently, so significant in public discourses and practices, considering the heterogeneous political projects that claim to look at it. Secondly, the effects on the policy processes and outputs are all but clear (notwithstanding the political investment and some very instructive experiment), particularly in relation to the inclusion of stakeholders', marginalized people, grass-roots organizations and beneficiaries in policy planning, delivery and evaluation. Thirdly, the recent economic downturn has put under a more complicated and different light many of the assumptions of the participatory turn, giving room to more risks of counter-intuitive effects of increasing democratic deficits within the governance structures responsible for finding solutions. Finally, not saying that, as Burton underlines, it is a mistake to assume that more participation it is necessarily better (Involve 2005).

Hence, the kinds of innovation in policies and practices within the European local contexts deserve to be further analysed[2] and so the effects of the economic downturn to understand if they are eventually pushing, undermining or distorting the potentials of participation.

For instance, under the so called above-mentioned containment, restructuring, retrenchment and recalibration strategies, it is easy to identifying at least six trends of change, that have a lot to do with participation but in many different and not so clear ways. The first regards the extent of the economic resource devoted to the social welfare[3] as a whole and to the specific policy fields, reforms and measures. The second one is the differentiation of criteria and modes of distribution and redistribution of economic resources[4]. The third concerns the type of institutional, social and professional actors involved, their roles and their reciprocal relationships. The fourth regards the types of power implied in these relationships and the fifth the principles of belonging that guide the criteria of inclusion and exclusion and the relations of rights/duties. The sixth, finally, includes the various attempts to change or innovate methods, means and measure of intervention.

All these constitute partly the assumption, partly the outcome and partly the correlated issue

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2 See the work of Barnes et al. (2007).
3 The definition "social welfare" aims at distinguishing between the wholes of the programmes designed to meet the needs of citizens and the ones designed to meet the needs of business. Of course, the distinction is conventional and need to be operationalised and investigated, also given the fact that the two kinds of welfare are not clearly separated by institutional actions and their effects (see Farnswoth 2012).
4 In this case, not necessarily meant as monetary resources.

of some definitions, slogans and categories that have marked the debate of the last twenty-five years, highlighting some or other kind of change of role, shape and functioning of the social welfare within the capitalist societies: (1) the transition from a traditional "repairing viewpoint" towards a "promotional welfare state"[5]. (2) The concept of social investment, inspired by Giddens (1998[6]) and embraced by many scholars - with different viewpoints – as an argument in front of the crisis of welfare state[7]. (3) The subsidiarization of welfare state (Kazepov 2010). (4) The idea of active welfare state, that indicates a 'shift from protection to activation and participation policies' and a 'displacement from government models to local governance forms' (e.g. van Berkel 2003). (5) The marketization or commodification of welfare systems steered by a widespread matrix of policy assumptions (the so called neo-liberal agenda) centred around ideas such as freedom of choice, liberalization of demand/supply relationships, privatisation, introduction of market mechanisms in the relationship between citizens and institutions, and of market incentives in the achievement of social rights.

All of them provide a tendency towards an extension of the kind and number of actor involved, and towards a more participatory role of non-state actors. At the same time, even the state actors are called to active themselves towards more flexible manners and means to meet the changing needs and the changing roles of all the other ones. Hence, prefiguring the development of a sort of active and dynamic welfare system by way of the so-called *participatory turn*.

Nonetheless, a lot of skeptical viewpoints and many critics underlines that these attempts at restructuring and recalibrating the systems have affected more the rhetoric than the practices, their doubtful effectiveness and the the fact that they mainly succeed in overshadowing the real politics of retrenchment and containment (e.g.: Clarke 2013). Part of the uncertainty connected to *what difference does participation make* is embedded in the interior institutional features and functioning of the welfare states, where the innovative attempts have to deal with both constraints and opportunities (e.g. Villa 2009). But, on the other hand, a wider and deeper consideration of the role of welfare systems in the capitalistic society open up also to the controversial relationship between economic development, social change and social

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5   See Villa 2009. This viewpoint is embedded in the Italian rhetoric referred to the social policy reforms of the
     period between '90s and the beginning of the 2000.
6   See Sipilä 2008.
7   The literature is extensive, with a lot of different approaches and critiques. See, e.g. Esping-Andersen 1996,
     Morel et al. 2012.

protection (Offe 1984, Castel 2003, Pierson 2007) where many other factors affect in many ways the effectiveness of the welfare reforms.

An example come from the critics to the activation and subisidiarisation approaches, where many researches have shown that activation policies seem to work better where a high level of expenditure in the passive misure is maintained (as far as integrated to the firsts), while the subsidiarisation approach seem to produce better outcomes where the state play a strong role at steering, supporting and financing social actors and their partaking in welfare actions (e.g. Kazepov 2010). Another one come from the reaction of the states to the economic downturn, when the firsts, in front of the high rate of jobs loss in the 2008-09, put on the table increasing levels of expenditure on social protection by passive forms (even if politically contrasted, downplayed or concealed).

While putting attention to more specific issues related to the topic of the paper, it is important to underline that the so called participatory turn, under the lens of a careful observation of the complexity of systemic interactions, pragmatic processes and contextual differences, assumes a partially different meaning with regard to every hypothesis of juxtaposition between old and new paradigms, approaches and schemes: participation seems to count where the processes of representative democracy and of building of social rights are strong enough to not be questioned in their essential functions and prerogatives, while are flexible enough to be positively transformed in the sense of a reciprocal reinforcement of representative and participatory instances. That is the hypothesis we are going to analyse and we shall return in the conclusions.

2. The participatory turn in the context of a regional welfare system reform

Since the middle of the '70s, many attempts to deeply change the assistance and health public Italian system have been put in practice, in accordance with three main principles: universality of the performances; territoriality and community based organization of care services; integration of knowledges, professionals and practices. All these have pushed a radical renewal and re-organization of the local welfare systems but, due to the shifting and conflicting political developments and momentums, health and assistance policies have been reformed in completely different periods: the first one in 1978 and the second in 2000. This created a sort of institutional mismatch among the respective regulation modes, structures and

governing and delivery logics[8], undermining the potentialities of some declared ideas and perspectives. For instance, while in the social-assistance reform of the 2000 (Law 328/2000), the principles of subsidiarity and of territoriality and community based organization went fully acknowledged, in the Health System, already since the beginning of the '90 the Local Health Authorities had to radically shifted their governance mechanisms to company-type ones, maintaining a public status, but replacing the governing role of municipalities with the more centralized one of the Regional Governments, within a rhetoric discourse fully consistent to the so called New Public Management.

Furthermore, the last federalist constitutional reform[9], the lack of definition of essential levels in the social assistance field[10] and the lack of coordination among the State and the Regions, have perversely helped along a growing level of fragmentation and of uncertainty.

Within this picture, issuing the Law n. 60/2008, the Tuscany Region has put on the field an advanced attempt to promote a new integrated approach at governing the Health and Assistance System, creating the the so called *Società della salute*, sort of public Wellbeing Community Corporation (since now on SdS). These are nonprofit public companies built up by the municipalities and the Local Health Authority (AUSL[11]), and designed in accordance to the administrative health sub-district boundaries, which main goal is to promoting integrated ways at planning and managing social services and primary health care. A first planning-act to implement the SdS design has been introduced in 2002, followed in the 2005 by a new one aimed at launch 18 local experiments (Pisa, among them). Three years after, the Regional Council approved a new law (Regional Law n. 60/2008) and promoted their development and institutionalisation all over the region.

SdS rationale moved on the general assumption that to pursue more efficiency, efficacy and quality it is important to enable local communities, to involve third sector organisations and to engage civil society agencies at assessing and planning health care basic needs, monitoring quality of delivered services, achieving budgetary equilibrium, promoting universality and

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8   That is nothing really new in the Italian case, due to the tendencially low level of awareness of the mutual interplay among the specific policy-making and reforming (see Ginzburg 2000).
9   That shifted a lot of legislative competences to Regions. See the Constitutional Law n. 3/2001.
10 The so called Liveas (livelli essenziali di assistenza). It is important to underline that, while in the health system the congruent essential assistance levels (Lea) are since many years clearly defined, this is not the case of the assistance system, where the policy-maker have desisted to try to implement them (see Costa, 2009 and 2012).
11 AUSL (Azienda Unità Sanitaria Locale) has the task both of governing and management the healts services and structures at local level.

equity. As a matter of fact, their institutional goal should not be merely delivering services[12], but mainly promoting social welfare and public health, including civil society into the governance processes, promoting the third sector organization capabilities, and facilitating professional integration and cooperation. To this aim, no change of the inner organisational and governing approaches of the different institutions involved have been pursued, while a completely new actor (the SdS) has been created, and different new bodies and levels of integration and coordination have been promoted.

Among them, at the focus of the research project, the so-called Participation Committees and Third Sector Councils have been established as permanent bodies within each Consortium. These were built to clearly distinguishing the role of the stakeholders directly involved in the management of public welfare resources (involved in the Third Sector Council), and of the representatives of rights and needs of citizens, users and communities (which can partaking in the Participation Committee)[13]. The idea stemmed from the presumed necessity to don't mix up these kinds of actors, their interests and their links with the public resources and aims, settling down a framework that in the Italian context was completely new.

3. Analysing the participatory turn in a regional context: methods, hypothesis and ongoing scenarios

The implementation of the Reform have had uncertain developments and outcomes. The idea to build a more active and integrated welfare system met many hindrances to the point that, the Regional government is now discussing the overcoming of the SdS project.

As early as 2010, the critical situation drove the Tuscany Region to sponsor a research project (subsequently jointly run by Volunteering and Participation Foundation and the University of Pisa) aimed at better understanding issues and conditions, strengths and weaknesses of the participatory approaches introduced at local level. Furthermore, it had the explicit pragmatic goal of providing usable knowledge (Wagenaar 2011) to help local actors in making participatory democracy work better.

The research team adopted an action research approach for at least part of the research, as it

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12 It is important to note that not all of the SDS have internalized the management of services.

13 The Participation Committees should accomplish the following tasks: (1) putting forward proposals concerning the planning acts and processes; (2) expressing advices on the contents of the the the so called Piani Integrati di Salute – PIS (Health Integrated Plans) and of the SdS annual report; (3) expressing advices and feedbacks on the effectiveness of the information produced and, above all, on quality and quantity of the delivered health and social services in relation to local needs; (4) draw up an own annual report to discuss the level of implementation of the PIS and on the general situation of local social services. The Third Sector Councils have the power to contribute to build up the PIS suggesting specific project ideas.

seemed more appropriate for many reasons well known in the literature[14]. It has been developed through five stages combining standard and non-standard methods, as follows: (1) Theoretical and methodological framework; (2) Preliminary study of the current state of the implementation of the SdS and the participatory bodies (survey and 24 semi structured interviews); (4) In-depth analysis on the functioning of participation in specific contexts by means of four case studies (interviews, work-groups and confrontation with the steering group and the local actors) and setting up of a "steering group"[15] in each context to share with the researcher the decision-making processes on issues regarding the relationship between methods, processes and contexts of research; (5) Restitution in progress of the outcomes at different institutional levels and in the four selected local contexts; (6) Final restitution and discussion with the Region and Supporting the latter in the construction of a toolbox on participation (methodological guidelines, glossary and comparative analysis on some main issues).

Practically, different inquiry cycles were set up, moving several times between action and reflection and using a variety of methods, also to sharing and discussing the findings with the participants and the local "steering group".

Theoretically, the research has considered participation under a logical-formal viewpoint as a relation of influence: *a process, of interaction, partaking in it, the actors exert an influence on the modes and results of the process itself and then, on the distribution and differences of power initially settled down* (Tomei, Villa 2012). This kind of definition has seemed useful to:

- comprehending the sociological conditions of the relation of influence among the actors;

- understanding how the latter affects a given context;

- operationalising the assumption that «participation could be either transitive or intransitive; either moral, amoral or immoral; either forced or free; either manipulative or spontaneous» (Rahnema 1993);

- not taking for granted the often hidden interplay among social, political, economical, cultural and moral variables.

It was also expected to be helpful to avoiding the reductionism of defining participation every form of presence and role of actors in a whatever activity, relationship and/or context,

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14 See Bonetti, Villa 2013. The proposal was accepted by the Region without any particular enthusiasm, but every ongoing decision and development has been since shared with the regional client.

15 For a discussion about role and functions of such an actor see for example, Wadsworth 1998, Trombetta, Rosiello 2000, Branca, Colombo 2003. The names adopted are various; e.g.: critical reference group, promoter group, group of action-research, etc..

regardless the degrees of influence and power exerted[16].

Moving from these assumptions, we tried to understand what kinds of participatory processes were affecting, in which way and to what degree the inquired welfare systems, observed in the sociological continuum among self, interaction and context (Goffman 1983) and in the logical continuum among the different level of context implied (Bateson 1972).

Seven different kind of factors have emerged in the first stage of the research and then more deeply analysed in the local case studies: (1) Relationship between norms, processes and outcomes; (2) Mechanisms, skills, tools for participation and evaluation; (3) Composition and positioning of participatory bodies established; (4) Construction of local governance and associative patterns; (5) Intervening factors in the process of integration between health and social policies; (6) Role of the Region and of the institutional governing system; (7) Transformations of the socio-economic context and social policy outlooks.

At the end, the research has brought out many controversial ongoing processes, paradoxical situations and mismatches between antithetical representations of participation[17]. If the innovative features of the SdS institutional design identified a complex and grand-ambitious system, its application - apart few isolated and not very successfull examples - didn't offer any pragmatic reference, any accessible and, at the same time, appealing vision of participation and of the instruments to support its building. The law provisions contained the formal requirements to get a role by the third sector and civil society organisations in the local governance processes, but structures and procedures through which the participatory bodies could work were left undefined. Furthermore, no investments were provided to support attempts and experiments, and/or to improve the capabilities of all the actors to deal with both the complex collective processes of participation and with the complex contents implied.

The comparison of the four local cases has revealed patterns and frames of practices and behaviours among the actors, showing some differences in the practices developed. However, in all the contexts, exchanges and relationships between local actors have disclosed to be mostly unproductive and the public activities of the participatory bodies viewed a rapidly decreasing number of participants. Particularly in one case, participants seemed unable to move beyond a sort of "original question": *"What is the SdS for? And what participation is expected to do?"*. And, the impasse they experienced was mainly interpreted as the consequence of a lack of regulation, for which they expected a new regulative action by the

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16 See Tomei, Villa 2012 for a detailed description of the formal-logical approach to the study of participation.
17 See Bonetti, Villa 2013 for the pros and cons of the use of an action research approach in this particular case.

Region (See infra, § 4.1).

Such a scenario had particular consequences on the definitions of problems to be tackled. The objects of participation (problems, issues) became difficult to identify, remained scarcely defined and had little meaning within the experience of the actors who were expected to participate. In some cases, it was the SdS management to propose issues and tasks for the agenda of the participatory bodies. But the kind of contents - inspired by the Regional Law[18] - were often beyond the capacity of control of the participatory bodies or simply too complex for them (i.e., defining key performance indicators, evaluating the social and health planning document), as well as perceived of little significance or unimportant.

Therefore, in the course of the years, the institutional functioning seems to have progressively lost - instead of learning - capability to put attention to data and feedbacks coming from the social contexts and the institutional system itself. The capacity of the participatory bodies to mobilize, and the possibility to exert influence over the system (or some of its parts) was strongly limited, generating a sense of futility. Encounters between officials, professionals, voluntary organisations and social firms often went round in endless circles, provoking waste of time and a high level of frustration. Eventually, local actors expressed a strong scepticism about the opportunities to participate and felt that nothing would have been possible without a complete redesign of the system. As a result, they ended up - at the same time - to not collecting issues, claims and stimuli from the local context, and to not dealing with the (too complex) institutional demands, to claim for a Regional intervention, and to complain for an excessive intrusion of the Region in local affairs. Hence, falling in a paradoxical vicious circle of lamentation.

4. The particiaption in the SdS of Pisa: the creation of a separation?

The idea to focusing our attention on the case of Pisa is based on two main reasons: (1) it has been one of the earliest and most advanced testing of SdS and (2) it allows us to studying the dynamics of participation in an urban context.

The SdS of Pisa incorporates the Local Health Aurhority (AUSL), the municipality of Pisa itself and eight others of the surrounding area. It has been formally constituted in the 2010, following a period of experimentation (2004 – 2009). At this stage, the SdS was seen as a «laboratory of innovation»[19] and the Pisan case, in particularly, considered a major source of

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18 See footnote n. 13.
19 Interview (social worker, third sector organisation).

best practices in the regional context. According to the interviewees, it enjoyed a long and positive experience of cooperative work between public institutions and professional and social actors, that led to some changes in the planning and management of social and health policies. Central roles have been played by the municipality, many social firms and voluntary organisations, and by an «important social support network of proximity services»[20]. The AUSL was the «operational tool»[21] to implementing interventions and services, while the social-assistance policies and services kept their autonomy from those of health, thanks to the joint effort of the municipality and the non-state actors.

After the approval of the Law n. 60/2008, an institutionalisation stage took up, sharply changing many conditions and relationships among the actors. A progressive centralisation occured, de facto strengthening the influence of the managerial government of the AUSL on the entire system, affecting the intervention approaches, the priorities of the planning, and the role of planning itsel. According to the interviewees, these changes implied a progressive exclusion of the network of proximity services from the decision-making processes, for the inability of the technical and political staff to integrate the new managerial procedures with the participatory processes, and to blend the administrative prerogatives with the informal knowledge, resources, skills and viewpoints of the grass-root organisations. As discussed, this trend was common in many SdS, but in Pisa it has assumed a specific relevance: for the accepted opinion that Pisa was an example of 'advanced best practices' and because this progressive loss of interest coincided with the emergence of controversial relationships between institutional actors and third sector and civil society organisations.

As the literature affirms, participation may or may not be «inclusive, empowering or egalitarian» (Silver *et al.* 2010 : 455)[22], depending on, for instance, on the use of participation the public authority does, on the mechanisms of citizens selection, on the ability to render the conflict a constructive tool, on the quality of governance and on the degree of representativeness and accountability of civil society organisations (Houtzager, Gurza Lavalle 2009). Then, to better understand the case of Pisa, it is necessary identify and take into account that kind of issues.

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20 Interview with the coordinator of the planning and participatory processes for the SdS of Pisa. The proximity or neighborhood services are built up by public and private bodies to providing social-assistance interventions at local level. They featured by strong connections with the territory and the citizenship, acting as mediators among the latter and the institutions. See the Regional Law n.60/2008.
21 Interview (*President of the Participation Committee*).
22 And it is important to be aware that, even if with different degrees «power inequalities between participants remain» (Silver et al., 2010).

In the next sections, we will consider three specific points: *the relationship between norms, process, contents and outcomes (§ 4.1), the change of the social and economic context (§ 4.2), the political dimension (§ 4.3)*. All of these, against the backdrop of the *urban dimension (§ 5.)*, constitute in our opinion the crux of the case of Pisa, which specific multi-faceted and complex setting[23] will be analysed, taking even account few data referred to the seven factors above mentioned (§ 3.).

4.1 The relationship between norms, process, contents and outcomes.

In the case of Pisa, the relationship between norms, process and outcomes is closely related to the *shape and the role of participation bodies*. As a matter of fact, from a regulative viewpoint the transition to the institutionalisation of SdS has implied more stringent criteria about forms and contents of the SdS themselves, and the constitution of the Participation Committee and the Third Sector Council (see above). The latter is perceived by the intervieews – as well as by many other observers and social actors - as a negative step. In the testing period the participation bodies were not so clearly distinguished: they often cooperated, worked together or even de facto combined into a single entity. Now the Regional Law imposes a clear distinction:

> «In the past we had a long experience of involvement. After the experimentation, there was a big afterthought, both of the structure of the SDS, and of participatory processes. Then we have, in some way, started over…or rather: we certainly had a moment of 'stop' and now we are trying to start again». (*SdS staff, coordinator for planning and participation*)

> «Compared with the experimentation, now we are in a situation of rebuilding. I am the President, yes, but we need to find new ways to work, and it is not easy! There is a great difficulty in engaging people, in helping them to figure out what participation in this context could be. There are no major signals, no excitement, we are really trying to get people to come. This is a difficult time because if people come and understands that their involvement does not produce any affect, they will not return…» (*President Participation Committee*)

> «With the advent of new regional law, which has allowed us to establish a legal status for the SdS, its whole structure has changed while the voluntary organisations are divided: those inside the Committee can not be in the Third Sector Council, because the Council is a higher body […] There is confusion between the twos» (*Member of the Participation Committee*)

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23 See. e.g., Castells 2004; Hirst 2005; Paone 2008, 2012; Kazepov 2005.

«The problem is the link between the two bodies: it is not easy because their roles are not clear. Now it is hard to understand the actual reach, what are the activities, how these are connected each other, and how to move forward». (*Social worker, third sector organisation*)

«During the experimentation we got access to some training courses; now the two participation bodies have been instituted, but we do not understand what they are…The feeling is... a sort of detachment from the reality» (*Social worker, third sector organisation*)

The mandatory definition of two different participation bodies has been seen as a limitation of the local freedom and as the main critical element for the improvement of the participation process: the juridical criteria tend to define *who participate* and *what is its role*. At the same time, the uncertain frame in which participation is addressed, produces distorted views and debates, where an assumed different degree of power prevails on the kind of the different functions[24]. The idea of an unbalanced distribution of power leads to a very controversial relationship between the two participation bodies: on the one hand, the members of the Third Sector Council see their functions reduced compared with what happened in the experimentation, feeling now less important than the one of the Participation Committee. On the other hand, the latter (where established) appears very weak and uncertain and does not yet seem have means and conditions (information, knowledge, competence) to accomplish its new tasks.

Furthermore, local actors have shown a sort of inability to learn and take advantage of the experiences of the testing stage, producing a drop in expectations and an overall sense of disorientation and frustration.

Finally, the attempt to promote participation by means of normative criteria, is going to risk to translate in a paradox of a *top-down model of participation*, where the latter is regulated and supported by the legal-formal point of view, lending no attention to the features of the process, the local context, the relationships.

In this regard, the analytical distinction between processes and norms (Bateson 1970) appears to be at least in part clarifying. In all the four cases included in the second stage of the research, we have found a lot of difficulties to differentiating between administrative procedures and participatory processes: the comprehension and promotion of the latter were often reduced to the definition and actualization of the former ones. Hence participation was located within a "bureaucratic framework", conforming to which the relationship between

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24 The consequence is a development of a sort of asymmetrical process, where some actors affect (or think to affect) more than other (Serrano 2004, 2007, 2009; van Berkel and Møller 2002).

actors, their knowledge, their patterns of behaviour and action were expected to be actualized on the basis of pre-set modes, procedures and goals. Namely, every area of uncertainty between the provision of the law and the action, was expected to be filled by further regulations, de facto reducing the opportunity for non-institutional actors to experiment, try, get in the game.

Furthermore actors have followed a representation of participation at least in part rooted in the structures and patterns of the representative democracy aimed at contracting, negotiating and bargaining among established and representative bodies within defined rules and binds. Under this view, emphasis has been pointed to the problem of agency and of bureaucratic means, while the spontaneous communicative action, the richness of emotions, the daily life experiences and the willingness to get involved of the participants has been suffocated and removed from the set of information considered important.

Such a prevailing representation seems to have fostered what Habermas (1992) calls a "frequent theoretical error", the tendency to predefine the shape of the concrete life of a particular social context, strongly limiting the possibility of actors to cooperate on the basis of felt needs and of mutual understandings. As a consequence, the possibility to promote and legitimate participatory democracy instances has strongly limited. Indeed, it must be considered that to promote and make effective participatory democracy, multiple relationships and versions of the world should be possible, conflicts should be admitted, and at least a little bit of uncertainty about the relationship process/outcomes should be accepted, even if what is at stake is the opportunity to build up shared and/or common meanings.

4.2 The change of the social and economic context

The transition towards the institutionalisation of SdS coicided with the advent of the economic crisis. The stabilisation of the consorzia and of the connected operations, as a consequence, had to take place under the pressure of critical socio-economic conditions, of an increase in social demand by the population and of a growing demand of the State and the Region to reduce the public expenditure. In particular, the latter, has fuelled a sense of urgency in an already frail welfare system, still deprived of a universalistic national measures[25] at contrasting the economic deprivation conditions and their consequences.

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25 This regards both the social assistance schemes and the labour market policies, where, for example, Italy is one of the two European countries out of 27 without every sort of minimum income scheme. The situation is different in the field of the health policies where essential levels of assistance regarding all the acknowledged health issues and deseases are theoretically guaranteed.

Increasing attentions have been absorbed at the aim to finding urgent answers to the daily problems, putting into a corner the institutional reform and the system-level issues. A generalised situation of dearth has produced severe strains in the reciprocal relationship among the actors, giving space to a heavily vindictive and resentful approach that have since characterised meetings and exchange opportunities[26].

> «Now we are in a war between poors: the service users will find more and more difficulties, because they [*local institutions*] do not have money, from the Region do not arrive founding as in the previous period, and it is clear that if in a local area as Pisa we lost two million of euro, the problem will be for the social sector and for all. The SdS is arguing what projects it can keep and what others it has to close. SdS will surely cut some projects and it will stop a lot of them, because it must find funding!» (*Member of the Participation Committee*)

> «SdS must trudge for a lot of administrative practices and of deadlines, overlooking the participation issues. In my opinion the current situation, with the crisis and few resources, is very hard and it prevents participation. Now they [staff of SdS] call us to say "there is not money".... Everything is even more difficult». (*Social worker, third sector rganisation*)

In such a situation, participation seemed to be perceived as a non-central or an ephemeral topic (or a luxury good), and it has not often considered a resource to deal with such problems. The economic crisis, indeed, impacts the participatory process with various – and even contradictory – effects. On one hand, it seems to reducing the space for participation because of the cuts, that erases every investment idea and that stop/limit many local projects and actions, which mostly involve - and are accomplished through - the contribution of third sector organisations. On the other, it weakens capabilities and resources of networks, relationships and social actors that play an essential role in the implementation of local welfare. Finally, it indirectly threatens the identity and the legitimacy of third sector. The latter, indeed, in order to protect its own business, its interests and a whatever role in the system, ends to agreeing to be involved in purely operational and management functions, giving up to claim a space in the processes of policy formation. In the case of Pisa this course seems particularly blatant, and the space of negotiation and the power of impact for the third sector organisations seems, to date, more and more reduced:

> «When third sector withdraws into the managerial level, it ends, it becomes as any private subject that provides educators and social assistants; but third sector is another thing: its

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26 E.g. growing pressures and tensions between different actors, apparent reduction of room for maneuver to discussing, negotiating and promoting innovation (See, e.g., Jepsen, Serrano 2005; Bonvin 2004; Benedetti 2011b).

peculiarity is that we feel actors protagonist in the town, where we are active, and regarding these topics I think we must play a battle». (*President of the Participation Committee*).

«I think our ability to carry on our interests as third sector is very important, but sometimes we are not able to do it, we are not up to the task […] As social firms our mission is the participation to the activities of our community and the promotion of collective welfare. We are not only managers and we do not want be only managers! Arguing about these topics would be interesting, but in a free manner, not under the aegis of SdS… but when you propose these things, always they have fear…» (*Social worker, third sector organisation*).

As discussed elsewhere (Villa 2011a), it doesn't make sense to think at third sector organisations as autonomous social actors, but as interdependent parts of a field forces that contribute to structuring specific kinds of relationship and logics of functioning. The interviews seem particularly stressing this point, underlining both the fundamental link with the public institution and with the local context (summed up in vaguely defined idea of city), almost like a sort of privileged position that may facilitate the matching between bottom-up and top-down instances. Notwithstanding, the capability to maintaining and exploiting this kind of role is strongly threatened by the economic crisis: the reason is that the growing importance of third sector in the welfare system in the course of years has produced a strong interdependence between them and the public institutions, a growing dependence from the public economic resources and, a weakening in the type and level of embeddedment in the local context.

In part this is a kind of transformation that many observers have highlighted in recent years in relation to the role of third sector organizations in all the western countries (see, e.g. Ambrosini 2005, Rochester et al. 2010). However, even in this apparently common trends, contexts matter, and the case of Pisa sheds light on its own characteristics and peculiarities. The same respondents, for instance, underline a sort of cultural approach and an attitude of withdrawal[27], that, in our opinion, it is possible to pinpont as possible "categories of contextual organization of behaviour" (Bateson 1979) and sets of habits that actors have learned over time. The crisis could have simply stressed the conditions in which this processes have taken place, intensifying the effects in terms of economic and political dependency, institutional internalisation and legitimation, weakening of the non-institutional

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27 Partly dependent on a sort of felt proximity to the political power, facilitated by continuity of government of centre-left coalitions at local and regional level in the Tuscany Region. See also the next section.

interdependences, connections and bonds[28].

The changes that results, transforms the participation of the third sector to the welfare system into something more like a mechanism of reproduction of the institutional logics, rather than a mean to make easier the expression of the territorial needs and demands. The consequence are: first, increasing limits in the capabilities of non-institutional actors to make emerge feelings, experiences, practical knowledge about the crisis and its effects in the context, and about the effects of the actions put in place by the institutions. Second, increasing limits in the possibilities to develop a collective reflexivity about the ongoing changes, and increasing risks to strengthening positions of the third sector as actors for mandate of the public and not as "active protagonist of the city".

In this frame, for some interviewees, participation is used in a functional and retoric manner for the only benefit of institutional prerogatives of the SdS: a means for governing the present difficult situation, aimed at delegating decisions and making cuts in a (only apparently) shared conduct. Participation, previously meant as a process of mutual learning, becomes more and more «a luxury that you can not afford» (*Social worker, Thir sector organisation*).

4.3 The political dimension

The controversial role of third sector organisations and the difficult economic circustances, coexist with a system of a growing fragmented relationship between politics and the policy-making.

> «the crux is the political dimension: if you feel that what arises from the bottom, from the territory does not arrive to the top level, participation will be discouraged. Here the quality of the policy is in play […] Participation is the possibility to affect the process, to build thoughts, ideas, with the adequate time. In my opinion this would make the difference also at the political level, but now policy coincides with the management, and there is not a culture, there is not time to reflect about the perspectives. And in doing so, policy loses its status» (*President of the Participation Committee*)

While for the President of the Participation Committee the political dimension should play a strong role in the ongoing situation, the distance between local policy making and the territory weakens the possibility to promote any kind of social change that is not simply an adaptation

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28 See e.g. LeRoux 2007 on the ambiguous effects of public founding on nonprofits' political-empowerment activities, and Villa 2011b on the performative effects of the institutional approach in acknowledging volunteerism by means of pre-structured criteria and categories (e.g. based on the so called *unpaid work or service paradigm*, Rochester et al. 2010).

to "external" or top-down forces and influences. In particular, the focus on the managerial mechanisms shifts the attention from the needs of citizenship, preventing the development of collective reflection and reducing the space for dialogue, interaction and cooperation (Rhodes 1997). For instance, during the interviews and the focus groups, the social actors underlined the lack of attention to the methodological issues, the resources and the skills linked to the promotion of participation; and underlined the emphasis placed by the political parts to the pre-definitions of administrative outcomes, with the consequent lack of space to learning and developing participatory methods and means[29]. Hence many different perceptions on what participation should be and would require, among the institutional and non institutional actors, have grown.

One of the most clear example regards the *time of participation*: while the time demanded by participation can be uncertain, lengthy, not statically repetitive, made up both of sudden acceleration (to meet unforeseen phenomena) and deceleration (to strengthening relations and share experience), the time set aside for planning is still organized according to the bureaucratic logic: attention is focused on the static repeatability of formal procedures, on the achievement of predetermined formal outcomes and not on the variability of processes and contexts[30]. As was stated by numerous respondents, these different ideas of time do not often harmonise, and a deep incongruity between the demands established by the institutional functioning and by the processes of interaction often occurs[31]. The lack of recognition of this differences strongly impacts the construction of participatory processes, from both

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29 Which brings us back to point referred to the relationship between norms and processes.
30 This knot appears particularly evident with the current economic situation, which requires quickand focused choices.
31 The Greeks expressed through three different concepts as many ideas of time: *Aion*, *Kronos* and *Kairos*. The first identified the eternal, infinite and motionless time, cyclic and wrapped on itself in its static repeatability. The second one marked the time as duration, with its dimensions of past, present and future: a sort of trajectory and linear process of transformation, from a starting point to a destination. The third one is a sort of "right time", the good chance to be seized, the time of sensitivity and empathy, [...] the aesthetic approach based on sensitivity to the circumstances and relations (Madonna 2010). Similar concepts come from many studies on the natural and social world such as the *cybernetics*, according to which, the systems should be observed considering the incessant evolution, the characteristics of irreversibility, the conflicts and tensions that arise from the interweaving of multiple levels and types of change running through them. However, it is almost exclusively the first of the three concepts mentioned above to dominating the institutional mechanisms. As pointed out by Mannheim (1953), the juridical and administrative logic processes static systems of thought continually seeking stability and predictability: by necessity of self-preservation and defense of shapes and equilibria (Simmel 1908) and for the need to giving names and classifying things. Hence, the emotion, the struggle, the expression of participatory processes and instances, the power of non-legitimate observers, the crisis and the diseases and many other key-components of existence, are difficult to be included, or simply considered, by the same logic. Then, the administrative logic can become the source of many paradoxes, if and when we resort exclusively to it in order to define, legitimize, regulate and structure the functioning, recognition and evaluation of events, life histories and contexts.

methodological and relational viewpoints, and hence strongly affects the kind of contents taken into consideration.

The political dimension emerges also as a problem of distribution of power between the political actors (Jessop 2000). With the consolidation of SdS, the relationships between the Health Authorities (AUSL) and Municipalities has undergone to a growing imbalance, due to the increasing influence of the managerial model of government - typical of health policies - on the whole system:

> «Compared with the experimental project of SdS, the law [60/2008] did not strengthen the participation of third sector and of municipalities. My feeling is that the institutionalisation gives more power to AUSL, while the third sector, that mostly interact with municipalities, is greatly weakened […] I liked more the experimental project than the final one: I liked the heavier role of municipalities and AUSL as an operational tool. Before, the Conference of Majors[32] had the power to take decisions, while now this mechanism is weaker». (*President of participatory Committee*).

> «The social sector is residual with respect to the health one. And here the political dimension strongly impacts. There are economic interests, resources at stake, …and then in the social sector we do not have the "essential levels"[33]. Here the attempt to protect interventions and to discern between projects and services have been done, at least at the conceptual level. But the problem is that social sector remains residual and this is produced by a wider setting». (*Social worker, third sector organisation*)

The consequences are, for the interviewees, an increasing distance between politics and territory, and growing risks of exclusion of the third sector organisations, their views and contributions. About the first one, the unbalance seems to translating into a slow disappearance of social policy in strictu sensu at the municipal level: under the weight of the managerial logic, and thanks to a sort of delegation that local politics seems to have attributed to the latter, too many social issues risk to be dropped out, simply because they do not seem adequate[34]:

> «In my opinion participation does not matter because of political troubles. The idea is that voluntary organisations should stay in their place, eventually they can help, but knowledge, skills and relations that these organisations have, are not exploited. Obviously, recognizing this

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32 The "Conferenza dei Sindaci" is a local political body that reunites the municipalities of a local district to coordinating their actions and decisions on common issues and policies.
33 See footnote N. 10.
34 «People and social actors should bring problems that are adequate», a SdS official said during a research meeting.

point, means recognizing the instances of the voluntary world, their needs… That means building a method of interaction. But this needs flexibility: you must understand that voluatary organisations are not your emanations, you must accept the conflict. And our politicians do not want it. They want 'yes men': in their opinion, you can participate, but you must say want they want, at most you can do some integrations; but you are at the margin, you do not affect the choices. Our organisation rejects this approach. Some time they [*political staff*] call us and they say "We would like you will participate!", than we explain our ideas, our purposes, we try to find solutions…but they get angry end they send us away!» (*Member* of *voluntary organisation*)

«First of all, I think it is wrong to make ideologies about these things. I understand SdS is politicized and I do not demonize it. But we must avoid the schizophrenia between the declaration and the practice of participation! We can find a compromise: we must recognize the value of participation and we must recognize the policy with its dynamics. Instead participation is claimed, but non practised! This is the first problem». (*Member of voluntary organisation*)

As a matter of fact, while the political staff and the AUSL emphasize the democratic and cooperative method chose by SdS, the non institutional actors (but also some officials and social workers of the SdS in touch with the territory) underline that actually it is translated in practices focused on the institutional mandate and without real power.

To summarizing, it is possible to affirm that politics in Pisa impacts the participatory process by showing an apparently cooperative method, while leaving de facto more and more room to the hierarchical style of leadership (Jessop 2000, 2002, 2003[35]) implicated in the increasingly stringent managerial logics. Because of the many issues at stake (the economic downturn, the new social phenomena and the growing hardship, the new law and its stringent criteria, the force of the managerial power, etc. etc.) and because of its incapability to deal with them, the politics is contributing at weakening the governance processes and is losing the link with the local context.

For the welfare system, the effects are describable as a sort of progressive fragmentation of the system itself and of a loss of capacity for self-reflection and change, to promoting activation and mutual learning among institutions, non institutional actors and citizens (Kazepov 2009; van Berkel 2002; van Berkel and Møller 2004; Revilla and Serrano 2007; Sabatinelli 2010). This is likely to weakening the ties of citizenship while, at the same time, representing a trap even for the same institutional actors, creating a dangerous distance between institutional aims and citizenship needs (Benedetti 2011a).

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35 See also Villa 2011c.

5. The problem of participation in a glocalised urban context

The issues so far discussed, contain the limitation of being related to the field of the actors more or less involved in the welfare system in place and in its transformations. And while important parts of this "field of inclusion" (Bourdieu 1997) risk - as discussed - to be increasingly marginalised or excluded, there are entire social issues, contents, actors and dynamics that never have been, and maybe never will be, involved in the social policy-making processes. Oddly enough, all these matters have a lot to do with the specific features of the local context of Pisa as a urban glocalised area. But, at the same time, it has to be said that the territorial and administrative boundaries of the SdS are not the ones of the town, but include other municipalities.

As pointed out elsewhere (Villa 2009), recent reforms of national and regional local welfare systems, while reformulating the institutional and spatial relations between different levels of government, do not bring any special considerations on the role of cities (medium-size or metropolitan ones), in terms of spatial organization, equipment and concentration of resources, attractiveness and influence on the surrounding environment, interconnection between local and non-local dimensions[36]. The general assumption of the social-health district or area as a unit of government and territorial planning remains therefore a generalised and accepted reference; and whilst this appears as a positive development compared to the "differentiated pulverization" of the previous single-municipal reference[37], in the absence of further considerations it can easily foster risks of oversimplification of territorial variables.

As a matter of fact, towns – as in the case of Pisa[38] – risk to be handled as if, as such, they do not matter in social and health policy issues. We will briefly discuss how about things appear a little different, with few consideration regarding three main nodes.

a) Political conflicts. Out of the institutional paths to participation up to here discussed, the local administration, for years, has "entertained" conflictual relations with certain groups and organizations active in the political and social life. These actors does not belong to the world of the third sector in strictu sensu, develop their activities mostly on a voluntary basis and promote political initiatives on various issues (environment, commons, rights, immigration,

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36 As indeed they do not bring considerations related to to the smaller towns and their possible characteristics (e.g., ageing population, isolation, deprivation of resources, etc.).

37 It is important to take account that in Italy there are 8.092 municipalities. Among them, there are 5,683 municipalities with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants, 1,116 with a population between 500 and 1,000 inhabitants and 832 with less than 500 inhabitants.

38 A medium-size one of about 90.000 thousands of inhabitants.

labor, quality of life, etc..)[39]. Numerous reasons are at the base of the confrontation with the municipality, and concern both issues related to concession, use, and management / self-management of public spaces, and the political issues mentioned above, about which, these groups bring an explicit critic to the way of governing the city and of dealing with the economic crisis[40]. The confrontation has grown up until a substantial break among the parts, that has been consumed in an increasingly explicit way up to the recent elections.

It is here interesting to note particular processes of differentiation and separation of networks and channels of communication. Here, the relationships between politics and territory seem, on one hand, developed on parallel paths with limited mutual influence; at the same time, it is possible to observe also overlaps and relational intertwining between formal and informal groups, clusters and networks, favored by personal relationships and multiple memberships, from multi-faceted "moral careers" and complex interactions between front-stage and back-stage spaces of the urban life (Goffman, 1961, Dickens 1990)[41]. In the official discourse entertained by public institutions, all of these, however, are treated as entirely separate phenomena and aspects of city life: first, trying to create an explicitly opposing vision on their respective values and meanings; secondly, exerting a certain pressure to not include - in agreement with the Management of the SdS - in the formal contexts of participation the actors perceived as more confrontational. Hence, operating a sort of selective internalization (Newman, Clarke 2009) of actors and objects to the aim of conflicts avoidance, and further reinforcing the separation between institutional process and social change.

In this case, participation is likely to increasingly become a system of legitimation and reproduction of the self-referring logic of institutions and, for this reason, risks to impoverishing itself in relation to the institutional expectations that have justified it at the beginning. On the other hand, the social actors included in the bodies, accepting the official definition of the situation proposed by the institutions, are likely to contribute to this kind of schizophrenic construction of the social reality, that sees them as protagonists, and to introject such schizophrenia in their own relational systems.

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39 They clearly do not belong to the kind of organisations recognizable under the *unpaid work or service paradigm* discussed by Rochester et al. (2010), while they could be better meant, even if carefully, as particular kinds of *civil society* organisations (*ibid.*).

40 About social movements and politics and forms of urbanisation in time of crisis, see e.g. Brenner, Marcuse, Mayer 2009.

41 For instance, it is not as infrequent to find well known social workers of third sector organisations that collaborate with public institutions, partaking in groups that fight with the same institutions on not so different local issues.

b) Extra-local dynamics and local society in Pisa. Despite being a medium sized city, Pisa is heavily crossed by extra-local dynamics that deeply mark the urban fabric and the social and economic development. First, it is a university town, whose student population is in the big part made of non-residents and reaches almost two-thirds of the total population, with major implications for the structural, economic, social and cultural development. Secondly, because it is a tourist attraction at global level, where the vast majority of the phenomenon tends to be transient and to have seldom standing characteristics. In addition, it constitutes an important logistic hub for its geographical position, the motorway and rail links, the proximity to some important harbours, and the international airport (the most important of the region). Still, the presence of a major U.S. military base, while apparently without direct impact on the city, places the latter – even if mainly symbolically - within some geopolitical global dynamics governed outside the city itself. Finally, also due to the above-described issues, the city is affected by strong and growing migration processes and by the development of economic and often informal or non-legal activities, associated with the transition and with the needs of livelihood of groups of population who can not easily find a place in the organised and "legitimated" local society. These dynamics have stimulated questions and debates but, to date, mostly developed around the alleged problems of "urban security".

All these phenomena are not yet adequately represented in the contexts of participation of the SdS. Here, only with great difficulty and in a very limited way social actors and public officials succeed to treat some partially connected occurences (trade of human beings, prostitution, begging and drugs), without be able to query the welfare system about the particular "glocalized" characteristics of the city and their repercussions[42]. At the same time, these features attract the attention of politics but in ways that obscure the local - extralocal interdependencies that produce the rapid transformation of Pisa (as discussed below). Again, a pattern of a sort of "ephemeral participation" seems to emerge, where the institutional governance processes appear to not be able to intercept and take charge of many important social phenomena that run through the city.

c) The whole city is changing but the participation. It is possible to make few suggestive examples of relationships between extra-local dynamics and local transformations with respect to which the institutional and participatory processes seem to have limited

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42   A point that leads back to a central issue of the participatory governance processes: the one of their eventual but always limited ability to include actors and objects (See e.g. Geddes 2000).

understanding or ability to act. The first could be the above-mentioned phenomena of trade of human beings, prostitution, begging, drugs, with various forms of racket and micro-criminal organizations and the big problem of unaccompanied minors, often the first victims of these kind of situations. The second is the strong dynamic of concentration of places and opportunities for consumption (more or less oriented to specific requests for tourists, students and workers, night-time city users, etc..), which are increasingly featuring some areas of the city, and in particular of the center, changing in part the appearance and the social dynamics, disconnecting social, consuming and economic habits and organisations, and creating tensions between city users and inhabitants (Martinotti 1993; see also Mazzette, Sgroi 2007, van der Wilk 2013). The third is the deep processing of some urban areas, for instance in the neighborhood of the station: here, the residential and commercial (formal and informal) transition and/or settlement of new groups of population have led, over the past ten years, considerable changes in the use and characterization of the territory, a strong internal migration, and changes in perceived identity of the area (Landuzzi 2003).

About all of this, the public policy appears limited and contradictory, while the participatory processes seem to have little power and capability to affect. First, there is a problem of limited and rather superficial knowledge of all these phenomena, given the lack of specifically dedicated an effective research activities, but also for the internal mechanisms of organizations of welfare system (both public and private-nonprofit)[43]. Secondly, as mentioned above, participatory bodies, for many reasons, are forced to pay more attention to the management of services and, therefore, seem more oriented to deal with the problems to the extent it opens the opportunity to get money for interventions. Hence, trasforming the emergence of a phenomenon in a question emergency. In addition, the local administration appears to be anchored to an idea of security that mainly deals with surface issues, more concerned with problems of perception and visibility, and hence of representation of the security, rather than of social phenomena that are changing the conditions of safety and quality of life.

6. Conclusions: ephemeral-decorative participation and institutional blindness

Studying participation means studying *the context* in which it takes place: modes, outcomes,

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43   Because of their internal fragmentation, they does not seem able to reproduce appropriate communication and processing between field workers and the various organizational and managerial levels (Villa 2011a, 2011c).

impacts, expected and unforeseen effects, strongly change in relations to various combinations of kinds and distribution of power, kind of actors, patterns of governance in the management of the relationship between norms, social processes and environmental features (Tomei, Villa 2012). The study of the context of Pisa, even on the background of other similar policy context in the same region, gives back many confirmation in this regard, highlighting how the contexts of policy-making are only a few of the logical types and levels of context implied by such processes; and pointing out that the latter act as connectors between limited or very limited parts of the processes of interaction and social organization. Thus, institutional participation can promote various opportunities for inclusion and at least as many probabilities of exclusion, separation or, at worse, mutual indifference.

Moreover, it gives back many controversial elements to discuss in relation to the question from which we started at the beginning of the paper: is it the participatory turn for real? For what? And how? Obviously it is not possible to give a response that is not simply indicative of the complexity that must be taken into account on the matter. On one hand we had clear confirmations that it is a mistake to assume that more participation it is necessarily better (Burton, on Involve 2005), because we should at least understand for what. This leads to what was claimed by Logan and Molotch (1987) in reference to the city government, according to which «the question who governs or rules has to be asked in conjunction with the equally central question "For what?"». The two scholars feared a social science that did not meant - not even apparently - «the place as a market commodity that can produce wealth and power for its owners». In the case of participation, not necesserily the wealth but a little power, legitimation, inclusion and accessibility to public resources, are the commodities at stake that risk to become a bargaining chip for who gets at least part of the "ownership informal rights" on the processes of participation. Thus, we should add a third question that is "For whom?", because, non automatically or necessarily, participation (processes and outcomes) becomes a *public* place or good, nor even a *common* one. The risk is the formation of participation as a sort, if not of a *private*, of a *club good*, at a high rate of excludability even if with low level of rivalry[44].

Then, the fourth question is "How?", about that it appears evident the necessity to at least clearly theoretically define what participation is in the research viewpoint: it is not said the every kind of collective situation has consequences in the distribution of power, in the

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44 See Ostrom *et al.* 1994.

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relations of influence and in which way. Taking account the different possible levels of participation about that we have no room to discuss the details[45], the case of Pisa, shows different situation and stages in which at least the building up of information and a part of the decision making process can be shared among a wider constellation of actors. But this is what has changed the most with the institutionalization of SdS, that seems to have moved away this opportunity, due to the strong impact of the managerial approach.

So, to briefly summarize, it seems possible to state that:

First, contexts matter, and for this reason it is important to observe the socio-economic features and dynamics, the cultures, the relationships and, above all, the habits and the learned ways to deal with the issues at stake.

Second, what the contexts are and they work, it is not as obvious. It is important to understand what kind of context we are going to discuss, in which way we limit and define them, and how we are able to take into account of (what kind of) the trans-contextual relationships (Bateson 1979) and their way to design and settle down specific binds, factors of distribution of power, opportunity, risks of exclusion, etc, etc..

Then, stemming from these assumption, we could further state that:

First, the problem of legitimacy seems to be really important, but no evidence emerges about the use of participation by public administrations and politics as a way to involve citizens in the decision-making processes. Rather, it seems that participation becomes a way to sharing responsibilities for uncomfortable decisions in order to avoiding the blame by interest groups to which, by the institutions, is attributed at least part of the legitimacy to represent the broader context, while excluding all the others. On the other hand it becomes a way for the same interests groups to be included in a system of relationships to get acknowledgment and legitimacy, even if without clear compensations, and to the risk of loss of role and identity (see the so called heterogenesis of the ends, Ambrosini 2005).

Second, the effects on policy outcomes are really difficult to assess, and a specific research should be necessary for this aim. It is clear, on the other hand, that the policy-making has changed in many ways, since the beginning of the experimentation phase to the institutionalisation of the SdS, while affecting the outcomes too. What emerges is a sort of separation between participation and the processes that, to date, count to building up the policies; up to the point that social policy in strictu sensu at the municipal level seems to

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45 For which we refer to logical scale of participation in Tomei, Villa 2012.

slowing disappearing under the weight of these transformations in the relationship with wider context. Here, the managerial approach has a very big role, also for the incapability of political actors to make possible any kind of blending of its prerogatives with the other sources and ways of policy-making and of institution-building.

Third, the crisis have a big impact, but this also depends on how it is defined and addressed in the contexts that matter (Gough 2011, Esping-Andersen 2009, Pierson 2007)). From this viewpoint, the crisis, whatever thing it could be, seems to be treated in a very passive way, accepted in the forms the official sources of information and legitimation defines it: chiefly, the most powerful one that come from the political, the media and the economic system. Hence, acting by the mere *retrenchment* logics, seems an evil as much obvious as inevitable, which only way to deal with is adaptation by reducing the worst effects, while changing as less as possible. Therefore, participation become the place where this low-intensity conflict that can be played with decent expectations of salvation. With all due respect to those who remain excluded. And the local context, the territorial variables, the everyday life histories, do not get any kind of important role in the discussions and definitions of the crisis, its consequences, its possible solutions.

Taking account what discussed in the introduction, the case of Pisa is part of a system where the processes of representative democracy and of building of social rights, at least, in the social assistance field, are not strong enough to not be questioned in their essential functions, while the latter are no longer flexible enough to be positively transformed in the sense of a reciprocal reinforcement of representative and participatory instances. That means that, as long as the participation is constrained in its closed, pre-structured and self-referring patterns of relationship, with low-levels of activation and involvement, its ability to act in the face of the crisis is likely to be very limited, or even negative. Where the latter risk is due to a double deficiency that weakens both the top-down and the bottom-up construction of the welfare system: the one of defined and eligible social rights, and the one of an effective embeddedment of the participatory processes in the changing social conditions. And it is from this viewpoint that we have to continue to go deep in the understanding of the role of participation in the wider context of the containment, restructuring, retrenchment and recalibration strategies; and, in this picture, of the peculiar multiplicity of urban contexts (logics, relationships, identities, epistemologies, etc.; see e.g. Healey 2007).

To conclude, the new phenomena and the urban transformation, paradoxically, seem to be

more easily expelled from the mechanisms of institutional representation the more the latter are sophisticated; as in the case of structures of participation. Precisely because of their presence, they are likely to reproduce the mechanism that Westrum (1982) and Weick (1995) defined "fallacy of centrality", in which the presence of a greater capacity of observation produces greater chance to not give credit to what is not coming from it, and less sensitivity to unresolved events[46]. Even when some attempts to connecting between different actors (which could develop greater sensitivity and capacity of information) are put in place, the same risk to be complicated by the usual bureaucratic mechanisms or simply disclaimed by the managerial system. When these attempts succeed at least in part in their task, the gathered information risk to be acknowledged and getting sense and legitimacy only in the limited context of the interactions between few actors, while hardly affecting the wider reproductive processes of sense-making at social organization level (Goffman 1983, Weick 1995). So, paradoxically, the building up of participatory process has provoked an increasing separation between the context and its representation provided by the participatory process itself, making the latter of very little significance and making the institutional system more and more blind in front of all the challenges at stake.

Then, the analysis of the relationships between regulated and institutional processes, third sector and grass-root mobilization forms, reveal in the case of Pisa a kind of participation that could be described as an ephemeral-decorative factor of the "new" institutional design, with a declining capability to move the institutional attention towards the various and not obvious effects of the economic crisis and of the other ongoing transformations of the urban context.

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