The Digital Citizen(ship)

To my elderly parents, fully offline citizens.
Forced to become digitizens thanks to the SARS-CoV-2 crisis.
The only way to meet their beloved E-grandchildren.

The Digital Citizen(ship)

Politics and Democracy in the Networked Society

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Introduction

What does it mean, today, to be citizens in the globalised world of the Internet age? The political culture is being subjected to significant forces of change. The public sphere and the workings of liberal and representative democracy are enduring impulses exerted by many different phenomena, from generational turnover to post-ideological practices to disintermediation, or rather 'neo-intermediation' processes, and above all to the technological development of communications. This has created a renewed media ecosystem which is central to a study of the theme of citizenship and its evolution. Moreover, the broadening of the range of modes, in terms of quality and quantity, of (e-) participation highlights a change in the citizens' way of being part of a given community.

All these elements express and spread the transformation of society and politics, and the relationship between them. They also influence the models of inclusion of citizens in the political system. The discussion developed in this volume relates to the dynamics of a scenario that is witnessing a reconfiguration of the very concept and practices of citizenship.

Citizenship and participation are closely related to democratic discussion. Democracy, indeed, is neither a static nor a universal phenomenon. It is a *time-sensitive* political form, an historical, political and cultural project.

It is a function of time, as is shown by the classical and well-known *waves* of democratisation discussed in the political science analysis.

It is a function of individual regimes, of institutions, of openness and closedness towards the inclusion of the citizens.

It is a function of values, political culture and social demand that come from below: from the grassroots level. But democracy is also, and perhaps above all, a function of the economy.

The political system, its actors and institutions are strongly conditioned by the macro-economic logic, in a special way within the global age. The formal prerogatives on the control of power are influenced by the dynamics of the market. The very opportunities of participation, and then communitarian inclusion, reflect this scenario.

It is within this multidimensional framework that the discussion developed throughout these pages is inserted, concentrating on the changes that have affected citizens and the expression of citizenship in modern Western societies.

Reconstructing the essential aspects of the concept of *citizenship*, this work provides some ideas for re-thinking this long-established socio-political concept, reflecting upon the implications traceable to the development of the Internet in the frame of *post-representative* politics. In particular, recalling authors and reference categories relevant to the theme, the work focuses on the connection between politics and the figure of the *good citizen*, the ideas of the *monitoring democracy* and the *monitoring citizen*, but also the practices of *counter-democracy* in the age of distrust and of the related political forms of surveillance and control on the holders of power.

An attempt will be made, therefore, in the various chapters, to provide a response, however open and provisional, to the question of how citizens live in a political community of our times, and to develop a line of reasoning on the relationship between politics and the Internet, focusing in particular on the issue of *citizenship*, that is the key concept of this book and that is understood in the broad sense.

The theme of citizenship has always been at the centre of politological reflection and political discussion, not least because it is such a multifaceted category and therefore remains, to a certain extent, undefined. Not that there are no definitions, but the conceptions of citizenship differ according to the perception of each individual discipline and then scholar.

This concept, indeed, has to do with rights and duties, with the idea of the *subject* who becomes a *citizen*, with the processes of inclusion in the political system, with civic participation in the life of a community and being a part of that community, but also with the process of inclusion in the mechanisms of security and social protection, and thus of the market and welfare. It is at the centre of a society's development, so it has to do with politics and policy making.

But citizenship is also a cultural element linked to individual identity. It is the feeling of *being a part* yet being *other* that underlies the processes of identification and differentiation.

This concept embraces, then, a wide range of meanings and interpretations, all legitimate and all, in a certain sense, limited.

For this reason, every approach towards the study of citizenship is necessarily partial and bounded. At the centre of the route we follow in the coming chapters, we shall find *participation* as it pertains to the sphere of politics and to that of *civil society*. Using this classical category, which underlies the ever-changing connection between society and politics, we shall examine the concept of *citizenship* intended as *civic agency* and hence not as an element acquired by the citizen, but rather as his/her *social action* as a citizen, with an involvement and activism in the community or communities to which s/he belongs.

This, too, is only a partial perspective – a conception – but it also provides a useful delineation of the field for a closer examination of the issue. The perspective adopted in the coming work, then, is that of considering the terms of citizenship within the framework of the new media and the new participatory dynamics of online citizenship. The Internet has gradually come to formulate an unprecedented public sphere, redefining the very form of public space, from its perimeter to its internal dynamics, deeply intertwining with the broader theme of representative democracy today, in the societies of the globalised world. It is a combination that affects the fundamental player in any political community: the citizen, and hence the idea of the good citizen. This is because behind everything there are always people, *social actors* and their individual identities.

What count are the values, creativity and aspirations with which people move in the global society, making good use of the technological innovations in the sphere of communication. What counts, too, is how the citizens interact with those who – formally or not, legitimately or not – make decisions on their behalf.

1. In the background

Various elements might induce us to re-evaluate the profile of a figure that could be defined as mythical: that of the *good citizen* in contemporary democracies. Some of these elements will be reviewed in the coming pages. They are changes that have already occurred or that are now occurring, strictly connected to the transformation of political culture.

In this frame, there is a range of civic attitudes and values such as political trust, tolerance, specific or generalised support of democracy and of course a set of norms of citizenship (van Deth 2007; Micheletti 2017, 38) which are an important prerequisite of a working democracy. Yet they are changing along with conditions of political socialisation, which is a fundamental process in this regard (see Chapter 2).

These civic attitudes refer to phenomena that have marked the political and social context and the relational network in which citizens move. They have redefined the cultural atmosphere in which these citizens have grown up and are now immersed. But there are also processes that have developed around these phenomena, and which have had important effects on the relational sphere directly. In particular, they are developments that concern the dynamics related to the new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), as well as to the evolution of the forms of communication, political and otherwise.

Both, indeed, appear strongly intermingled with the theme of citizenship, and hence with that of democracy. Moreover, we should not forget the transformations in the classical models of interaction between the main actors in a representative democracy, as well as the transformations that have occurred in the substantial and procedural sphere of democracy (Sartori 1957; 1995; Held 1996; della Porta 2011; 2013; Morlino 2011; 2003; Mastropaolo 2012).

In the background to these dynamics there are different issues that characterise the scene in which today's citizen moves. In the paragraphs of this introductory chapter these issues will be touched upon briefly, in order to sketch the background of the theme being discussed. The more specific contents and implications will then be explored in the successive chapters.

1.1 RE-THINKING CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship is a classical concept, widely used in the political studies and sociological literature (Bellamy and Palumbo 2010; Poguntke et al. 2015),

but numerous scholars have felt the need to reflect upon the theme and to reconsider its semantic contours (Moro 2020). The need has thus emerged to clarify the definition of citizenship in the light of current times. However, any operation of redefinition inevitably ends up making the outlines of this concept more complex. This happens also, and above all, in the light of the profound cultural and technological transformations taking place, to which the political sphere has not remained immune.

Throughout the pages of this work we are dealing with an enrichment of this notion: with a new facet that adds meaning to a concept that is already in itself prismatic and variously defined by scholars over the course of time and related studies.

The category of *citizenship*, as is well known, can be traced back first and foremost to the work of the English sociologist Thomas Humphrey Marshall, whose contribution dates to the mid-twentieth century. Such a category is focused on the idea of rights and duties. It is closely connected to the concept of *equality*, and hence to the individual in relation to the other members of a given community and its institutions. According to this perspective, the organised political community comes to be identified primarily with the nation-state model, which is an entity presently much debated.

Today this specific type of polity has fallen into crisis throughout the Western world. The development of supranational or even global powers, political, economic and commercial networks and systems, inevitably redefines the *national* setting in which the citizen moves, and in which s/he has progressively acquired the rights of citizenship. The extension of these rights on Marshall's trilogy – first *civil*, then *political* and, then, later, *social* – has become the essential presupposition for affirming citizenship. It constitutes a fundamental characteristic for assuring the inclusion of the citizen in the political system, thus rendering him/her a full member of the community, passing from being a *subject* to being a *citizen* (Zincone 1992).

Marshall himself, it should be specified, in his reflections on the concept of citizenship, went beyond the aspect of rights and beyond the juridical conception of citizenship that remains significant (Costa 2013). He emphasised, indeed, the relevance of the connection between the issues of citizenship and identity – that is, the sense of identification, on the part of the citizen, with the community to which s/he belongs. This was an aspect that later came to be widely taken into consideration, particularly regarding the *affective* dimension of citizenship (Coleman and Blumer 2009).

In his seminal work, Marshall also stressed the direct connection between citizenship and the possibilities of development and consolidation of democracy. Moreover, democracy and safeguarding the wellbeing of citizens present a strong correspondence that has maintained its relevance to the present day, as

witnessed by public concern, the considerations of pundits, and the evaluations by experts on the functioning of political systems.

Indeed, the connection between social justice and political freedom is present not only in Marshall's work, but also, to introduce an example that extends to the present day, in the work of Amartya Sen, whose economic and political thought focuses on an ethics of development that goes beyond the concept of economic growth. It considers the principles of an equitable and sustainable wellbeing related to such development. This kind of perspective has been embodied by transnational opinion movements and by *critical citizens* that propose and carry out new practices and formulas of citizenship in the framework of global society. It is enough to think about the debate concerning the (non) adequateness of the *Gross Domestic Product* (GDP).

A critical approach towards this indicator of economic development has led to the definition and consideration of a new index, as in Italy with the case of BES, *Benessere Equo e Sostenibile*: Equitable and Sustainable Wellbeing. This traces its origins to a type of evaluation and reflection regarding a broader idea of citizenship connected to social justice and to the wellbeing of a community.

Therefore, citizenship emerges as a complex concept and issue, rich in implications. For this reason, the work that follows adopts a specific perspective: in certain respects, it appears necessarily *partial* and selective, while in others, it is *extensive* and elaborate.

It is *partial* because it focuses first and foremost on the civic and affective dimension of democratic citizenship, which is but one facet, albeit an important one, of this concept. By its very nature, the idea of citizenship is located at the crossroads of various issues (Rodotà 2014), from the founding and cultural elements of a community, to the tangible and implemented services guaranteed by the welfare state, to the daily relationship between the citizen and the institutions of the polity of which he or she is a member. It is related also to social stratification and the rights of equal opportunity, and directly touches upon the issues of gender difference and the integration process of migrants, and thus of the connection between the 'foreigner' and the community that hosts him/her.

It therefore assumes an inevitably multidimensional nature. Moreover, as has been mentioned, the adopted perspective traces the complexity of a political system in the framework of *post-ideological* politics within the *post-modern condition* that is associated with incredulity toward metanarratives and the implications of the new information technologies already discussed by Jean-François Lyotard (1979) more than forty years ago in his 'report of knowledge'.

In order to further restrict the frame of reference, the route taken will concentrate on the reflections arising from the transformations occurring in the social and political sphere – that is, in the context in which individuals as citizens move. Particular attention will therefore be paid to the new models

of participation and inclusion in the political system, examining the specific implications. It is, without doubt, a limited aspect, but one that is fundamental for the idea of the citizen of our times.

It will be *extensive* because it is inserted within the wider framework of the political culture, of identity, and of the related transformations taking place in the 'affective' dimension. The aforementioned participatory practices are the reflection of the cultural dimension, of how the citizens experience politics. Adopting this *culturalist* viewpoint, we shall go beyond the sphere of the rights of citizenship – an area which, however, provides the fundamental and formal frame of reference in the relationship between the citizen and the political sphere. We shall thus dwell upon the approach through which the citizens interact with the political system and its institutions, and upon the meaning of the participatory practices adopted. In this sense, the modes of *taking part* and *being part* (Cotta 1979) become windows through which to view the citizens in the public sphere; they become the reflection of the new political identities.

The idea of citizenship, moreover, has been conceived over time as a progressive form of inclusion of the individual in a collective dimension. Participation and belonging – hence behaviour and attitudes – represent, in this perspective, pivotal, inextricably connected elements.

But today, more than in the past, citizenship appears as a diversified interweaving of formulas of inclusion, of active participation, of multiple identities and motivations.

Citizens exercise citizenship in many locations other than the traditional ones. The remarkable, rapid and endless expansion of political participation activities since the beginning of the new century has fostered academic discussion about the change in the norms of citizenship (Dalton 2008a; 2008b; Poguntke et al. 2015) and the conceptualisation of the participation phenomenon (van Deth 2014). The rise of creative and individualised forms of responsibility taking (Micheletti and McFarland 2011) along with the spread of technology of 'infocommunication' add a further element of complexity to this scenario.

> Political participation can no longer be purely defined in terms of high-effort, offline acts. Political participation now covers an array of forms, which includes traditional forms, such as voting, petitioning governments, contacting elected representatives, and taking part in demonstrations, as well as non-conventional acts performed using digital technologies, which appear geared more toward expressing a view, supportive or otherwise, than influencing decision makers. […] Most conventional acts can be performed using digital platforms; however, social media also allows users to create or join communities which transcend state boundaries, starting or contributing to discussions, advertising support for causes, and promoting the work of a range of national and global political organisations and campaigns. Digital technologies thus provide a range of new means for engaging in civically oriented forms of behavior. (Lilleker and Koc-Michalska 2017, 21–2)

Jan van Deth (2014) proposed a conceptual map of political participation that goes beyond the classical distinction of civic and political engagement, conventional and unconventional, expressive and instrumental, new and traditional, and above all without excluding the forms of participation yet unknown.

Within this framework, e-participation has become a much disputed concept among scholars. First the Internet and then the emergence of social media have given a new impetus to the discussion about the expansion of the definition of political participation in the digital age (Gibson and Cantijoch 2013; Cantijoch and Gibson 2019). It is not easy to define what political participation is, so that, today, there is not yet a widely accepted definition that accommodates recent technological and cultural change (van Deth 2016; Ceccarini 2021).

Communication is, indeed, at the very heart of social and political processes. In this sense, too, the perspective adopted towards the concept of citizenship is extensive, in that it crosses and widens the very idea of being part of a collective, recalling the models of relationships in social circles and networks. For this reason, in the chapters that follow, beginning with the recollection of classical contributions before moving on to more recent reflections, an attempt will be made to outline a discourse on the re-reading of the category of citizenship in the light of the transformations occurring in the media ecosystem.

The goal, as we shall see, is to locate such a concept, intended in its most politological sense, in the current stage: in the post-modern, post-ideological, post-representative political society; in the framework, as it were, of the global world in the Internet age.

1.2 THE INCLUSION OF CITIZENS

The *real democracies* – namely, the existing and concrete forms of representative government – are experiencing moments of tension and weakness; they exhibit signs of crisis as widely discussed in academic research. Scholars wondered how democracy 'can be saved' (della Porta 2013) and if democracy is a 'lost cause'; after all, democracy is a human imperfect invention, and then a historical fact, marked by paradoxes (Mastropaolo 2012).

The democracy of modern times, indeed, is being pushed and strained by various phenomena that call into question its basic elements and processes: above all, mediation and political representation (Pitkin 2004). Consequently, the intermediate bodies, or, rather, the leading actors in the process of mediation – mainly political parties – are directly involved in these transformations. They are transformations that lead us to ask: 'what will live broadcasting representative democracy be like, with participation via the Web, without parties and with the Internet becoming a direct means of information […]?' (Urbinati 2013, 17 [author's translation from Italian]).

The contribution of the leading scholars on the theme of political parties – in particular, Max Weber and Sigmund Neumann – underlines, in the very definition of the concept, the centrality of the function of *social integration* or *democratic* (or *total*) *integration* (depending on the author) carried out in the society and territory of these organisations. These scholars refer directly to the ability of the party, in the *ideal type* model of the *mass party*, capable of organising, mobilising and incorporating the new citizens in the political sphere.

The processes of democratisation have led to the formation of communities whose members have been able to take advantage of the extension of a series of inclusion rights, within the framework of a politics that has become increasingly, and not without difficulty, mass politics. The institution of the right to vote and the extension of institutional guarantees have been crucial steps in this regard. In these circumstances the parties have assumed the functional role of interpreters and transmitters of social demand towards the political system, assuring the integration of citizens in the community. Parties, as is well known, have traditionally carried out a function not only of *articulation* of social interests and needs – mainly carried out, for that matter, by interest groups – but, above all, of *aggregation* of this social demand in policies and general programmes (Almond and Powell 1978).

Today, however, in all modern democracies to some degree, the parties, which are fundamental actors in the democratic process, are raising feelings of disaffection, if not outright hostility. Anti-political attitudes in general, and anti-party sentiment, in particular, end up calling into question the *mediating* function of political parties in the democratic system, as if representative and liberal democracies could exist without them, as if the process of democratisation, and of development of citizenship, had not passed through the institutionalisation of *contentious politics*, phenomena of a 'movementist' nature, the demand for liberty and democracy, which then gave rise to modern party organisations (Alberoni 1977; Tilly 1978).

Anti-political sentiment and the expression of mistrust are common to many systems, as may be seen from election results and the continual formation of anti-party parties and anti-political bodies (Verney and Bosco 2014; De Petris and Poguntke 2015).

The process of democratisation has taken place, indeed, thanks to various stimuli. On the one hand, there are demands from *below*, with the action of popular and social movements; on the other, there are concessions from *above*, on the part of rulers, who – often constrained by pressure from below – have widened the mesh of political inclusion of citizens. Then, politics has gradually assumed a mass character.

The parties are, indeed, the fruit of socio-political divisions and *cleavages* that originated (a) with the *nation-building* process, – cleavages between the centre and the periphery and between the State and the Church – or (b) with the

industrial revolution – *cleavages* between rural and urban areas and between capital and labour – as highlighted by Stein Rokkan's (1970) theory. The parties are formed, therefore, on the basis of conflicts at the heart of society; they represent parts, portions, or sides, as the etymology of the word *party* suggests. They have followed the path of institutionalisation, becoming part of the political system, representing cross-sections of society and allowing the inclusion of citizens in the political sphere. These established and long-lasting 'frozen' cleavages have gradually been reconfigured, consequently losing the capability to provide sense to the political action of citizens and of the party organisations themselves (see Chapter 3).

The process of 'de-freezing' implies transformations in the dynamics of the political system, in voting behaviour, and in the sphere of the parties; that is, in the forms and institutions that are the expression of political citizenship. Some of the principal effects of the de-freezing of socio-political divisions are increased electoral volatility, decreased trust in, and identification with, political parties, a decline of the old and traditional parties in favour of the birth of new ones (i.e. pop-up or micro parties), organisational change, 'leaderisation', and the central place taken up by the (digital) communication strategy and political consultants.

1.3 THE END OF THE POLITICAL PARTY(?)

The party and the conventional participation linked to it has long represented the main instrument of the dynamics of democratisation and of the recognition of the principle of *political citizenship*.

The structure of interests, their organisation through pressure groups, social movements and other expressions of associational activism and collective action, to a greater or lesser extent institutionalised, should not be underestimated. They are particularly significant in the framework of the democratic dynamics interpreted from a pluralist perspective. But the parties are strongly intertwined with, and almost overlapping, the concept of democracy itself, giving substance to its most widespread conception: *representative* democracy. But different conceptions (and practices) of democracy can be distinguished and discussed (della Porta 2013).

Political parties have essentially provided, on a large scale, a conjunction between society and politics, between citizens and their own communities. Over and above the alleged 'golden age' of the parties, their integrative function today appears decidedly weakened.

The countless studies on the party, intended in the past as a space for identification and ability to awaken feelings of trust, for a long time now have highlighted a disenchantment spreading to some extent through all contemporary Western democracies (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000; Hay 2007).

The party is a complex entity that has, however, its own multidimensionality. Consequently, a crisis regarding one aspect does not necessarily imply a decline in other areas. The loss of social legitimisation and the unravelling of the symbiotic relationship with civil society do not lead directly to the weakening of the prerogatives of power and of control over either the mechanisms of resource allocation or the working of the state. On the contrary, the party has gradually become a *part* of the state rather than remaining its *counterpart*. Indeed, it has ended up assuming a 'state-centric' form (Ignazi 2017).

There are at least two areas in which parties have not lost their relevance (Manin 1997): parliamentary politics and electoral campaigning. Notwithstanding the *personalisation* process of politics and elections, and hence notwithstanding a change in the model of the relationship between the party and its leadership, where the leader counts much more, these political organisations remain the principal forces behind the figure of the leader itself. They support the political orientation in the actions of government and the functioning of the legislative power.

So, in this sense, parties have not suffered a widespread decline. They have changed their own organisational structure and even the approach to politics, but they remain strong as electoral and parliamentary organisations. There is a need, however, to mobilise the voters on some basis other than the sense of belonging, and to seek an accord with citizens' opinions and attitudes. The consideration of voters and citizens as a permanent *audience* – to use Bernard Manin's terminology – occurs not only in the pre-electoral phase. In times of *permanent campaign* (Blumenthal 1980), such as those experienced in modern democracies, this aspect constitutes a basic feature of politics, and is linked to the decline of the party in its traditional model.

The personalisation of politics constitutes a fundamental element in this framework (Barisione 2006; Calise 2010; Bordignon 2014; Poguntke and Webb 2005), as do the dynamics of media communication. The erosion of party loyalty entails a different relationship between the parties and society. The bond of identity is but one facet of the link between citizen and party. It clearly indicated the phase of *party democracy* when these organisations provided consistency, representation – and thus identity – to wide cross-sections of society; but it counts less in the following stage of *audience democracy*, according to the reconstruction proposed by Manin of the metamorphosis of the principles of representative government.

However, today it is evident that the party, after travelling a long road towards affirming itself and acquiring centrality in society and the system of mass politics, has a shortfall in some fundamental resources: trust and recognition of legitimacy on the part of citizens. The party, then, has lost the capacity to embody ideals and passions, and to provide support for the need to belong. It has lost, that is to say, Pizzorno's well-known idea of *identifying activity*

and its related capability that characterised the mass party and political organisation themselves (Pizzorno 1983). Two points are important in this regard:

(a) First, it does not mean that the contemporary political party does not have a hard core of 'loyal' voters, although the component of 'identity' voters is gradually being reduced, as the indicators of voting abstention and electoral volatility show.
(b) Secondly, parties are continuing to throw their weight behind the contemporary democratic systems, maintaining power and certainly not disappearing. They have changed over time, but their strength within the state institutions has surely grown. The literature on the theme emphasises, indeed, how the parties have created cartels in order to safeguard positions and prerogatives of power, which recalls the elitist Michels' perspective on *oligarchy*, assuming a 'state-centric' configuration. The *cartel party* (Katz and Mair 1995) acts in a rational way, like an economic enterprise when it finds itself in a market context that permits this kind of behaviour. It is known that it even forges agreements with its competitors in the electoral arena, as well as with allies within the institutional framework. Both of them are privileged interlocutors in the decisions on the allocation of resources such as public finances and also on the control of public service broadcasting organisations.

Allocation and control of resources are important actions, given that they influence the very survival of the party and then its presence in the political scene. They constitute a process that has come to reinforce the position of the parties (in the state), developing in a climate in which the political actors no longer have the status, public image and social role that they enjoyed in the past.

The (mass) parties, along with the political form of *party democracy* of which they were leading players, have undergone transformations that have had direct implications in shaping the relationship between society and politics.

This is a metamorphosis that has occurred over time, involving, in parallel, both the party organisation models and the profile of representative government. Alongside the development of the electoral and media-centred trait in the parties, there has been a reduction in both the ideological identity and the bureaucratic-organisational complexity that characterised the mass parties. There has been less reference to a specific *classe gardée*, and a growth in the 'catch-all' characteristic as discussed by Otto Kirchheimer (1966). In the new era, this party model can be renamed, like the significant case concerning the Five Star Movement, *catch-all (anti-party) party* (Bordignon and Ceccarini 2015, 44).

At the same time, the importance of membership has diminished considerably, which has limited the support arising from the base of the party, regarding finances and direct interpersonal communication with partisans and voters in general, in places where people live their daily lives. Above all, though, it has reduced the organised presence of the party *on the ground*, and consequently the voluntary work of militants. The electoral base of loyal voters was affected by this organisational change. These voters acted, indeed, as a source from which to draw candidates at various levels of the electoral assemblies.

The classical organisational structure of the party has been redefined over time (Poguntke et al. 2016). All this leads to repercussions in the dynamics of the party's internal power, which have ended up assuming a generally vertical and 'leaderistic' configuration. Another not-insignificant aspect has also grown: the role of media communication (Sartori 2002). *Party democracy* is being pushed in the direction of *audience democracy*, wherein the personalisation of the leader and the centrality of communication testify to the weakening of the ideological dimension and of conventional participation. This implies that the space for a new model of citizenship has been widening.

1.4 CITIZENS AS SPECTATORS

This new form of *representative government* directly overlaps with the fundamental issues of today's political citizenship.

The idea of *audience democracy* not only evokes a form of representative government, but also describes a model of the relationship between society and politics, between citizens and parties. And then, a model of the relationship between politics and its media ecosystem.

The very evolution of the party, transforming itself and redefining its organisational model over time, has progressively ceded space and centrality to the person – to the leadership intended in a personalised way. The public image of the leader thrives on private and personal traits. The post-modern leader is a *celebrity* (van Zoonen 2005). The dimension of communication, having been an important strategic element of political activity since the time of ancient democracies, has nevertheless progressively assumed unprecedented centrality. The various models of the 'electoral' party theorised since the 1960s – by Otto Kirchheimer (1966) and Leon Epstein (1967), then picked up again in later analyses – not only underline the 'electoralistic' profile of these organisations, but also recall the roles of communication, professionalisation and 'leaderisation' at the heart of the party. Angelo Panebianco (1982), considering the changes occurring in electoral behaviour and their interweaving with transformations in the model of political communication, underlined the change occurring in the very form of the party, emblematically defining it as an *electoral-professional* machine.

This kind of party model, among other organisational aspects, is characterised by a specific and highly professional expertise, as well as by the centrality assumed by the *issues* in the political discourse, rather than the ideological contents. This foreshadows a distinctive model of the relationship with the base of the party: the voters. It is thus a voting model that is decreasingly centred on elements of belonging.

Moreover, the leader and his/her charisma constitute a fundamental resource for this party model within a framework that differs from that of past times, although charisma is a characteristic that has always been at the centre of the political legitimisation process, as Max Weber recalls in the ideal-typical definition of 'charismatic authority'. In the 'golden age' of political parties, leadership and charismatic legitimisation were at the service of the ideological narration inherent in that type of party organisation: the mass party. In *audience democracy*, a sort of turning upside down of the terms has taken place. With the personalisation of politics, not only is the person pushed to the forefront, but the ideology and the collective identity are 'substituted' by faith in the leader, who guarantees, with his/her *persona*, the worth of the electoral project, of the political action, and possibly of government.

There has been talk, in this regard, of the 'americanisation' of politics and 'spectacularisation' of the electoral campaigns, and more in general of 'pop' political communication (Mazzoleni and Sfardini 2009).

In this framework, the political consultants and the expertise of the professionals, who control the marketing techniques and manage the political communication strategies, have gradually assumed a growing relevance in the organisation and managerial aspects of the party. The idea of the 'electoral-professional party' precisely accounts for this profile being increasingly centred on the figure of the candidate leader. And the 'media-oriented' and above all *permanent* (electoral) *campaign* becomes – according to Sydney Blumenthal (1980), who first introduced this category – 'the political ideology of our time'. The heated phase of campaigning develops in a continuous manner, beyond the pre-electoral period. Communication is then designed around the traits of the leadership and assumes an issue-oriented character. The idealistic vision of the world connected to great ideological narratives is left in the background.

Because the party is at the centre of the democratic model, this transformation inevitably reflects on the practices of democratic citizenship. In this framework, the base-level participation and militancy assume a lesser significance. In *audience democracy*, the theme of representation has been redefined, finding expression in a more direct relationship between leader and society, where 'society' means, first and foremost, 'public opinion', the audience of politics, as measured by opinion polls and pollsters. Citizens assume the role of *spectators*, and mass-communication tools mediate this relationship.

This metamorphosis of representative government is accompanied by the organisational change of the party form, and by a substantial weakening of the link on the ground. The presence of parties within society and the rooting of politics at a local level are scaled down (Ramella 2005; Diamanti 2009). Moreover, there is a loosening of the network of connections with various kind of groups, *flanking* associations and activities that once contributed to the reproduction of the traditional political and social identities on the ground: *political-territorial subcultures* (Trigilia 1986). This was a relationship structure that fomented a model of political citizenship intertwined with an institutionalised dimension of civic and political participation which was closely based on parties and other intermediate bodies such as unions or churches.

The parties have become ever less the expression of specific segments of a civil society that has gradually opened itself up to other, and more fragmented, channels for conveying the demands of the citizens. Civil society has experienced new formulas of involvement: opinion movements, including transnational ones, 'post-bureaucratic' (Bimber 2003) and 'post-ideological' forms of participation, in the frame of *fast* (and evanescent) politics. Also, at a local level, community action groups or committees of citizens which could take part in a broader organised collective action have been developed (della Porta and Diani 2004). Although these do not in themselves represent a novelty, especially in urban areas, they have come to be established in new contexts, in zones traditionally marked by the well-rooted presence of political-territorial subcultures; they thus testify to the weakening of the party and to transformations in the traditional model of citizenship. This change of scenario also affects other bodies of institutionalised representation and political intermediation, such as trade union organisations and interest groups.

In accordance with this, the party identification has shown clear signs of weakening, as testified by the falling rates of membership in modern-day democracies, the increase in electoral volatility, voting indecision, and other indicators that account for the de-freezing of the classical socio-political divides. The orientations and evaluations expressed by public opinion towards the parties and the political class reinforce this interpretation.

It is obviously difficult to establish the underlying causal order. The parties must necessarily be considered part of a dynamic and complex social framework involving a shift of culture and value orientations as well as economic development and its consequences. The transformation of the party models can also be seen as the reflection of a society changing over time in terms of modernisation and social stratification, and thus of the underlying cleavages and the meanings that have long been able to shape citizens' visions. But the change also affects the political culture: the system of values, civic *ethos*, and the process of *individualisation* that has profoundly marked the citizen of late modern times.

The transformation of the parties may be read, therefore, as a reaction to, and their ability to adapt to, the reference context. The parties may then be considered as a proxy for studying social change and, as far as the object of this work is concerned, for the relationship between citizens and politics, which has a central meeting point in the cultural dimension.

1.5 NEW VALUES AND POLITICAL CULTURE

In parallel with the development, during the last century, of the rights of social citizenship, welfare systems and, more in general, wellbeing in Western democracies, what came to be called a 'silent revolution' began. Concerning this, Inglehart (1977; 1990), dealing with the theme of young people's political culture – referring, in particular, to those socialised in a period of social wellbeing and economic growth, with real prospects of reaching high levels of formal education – proposes a reading in which the approach to politics is distinguished on a generational basis.

The theme of generations is fundamental in the perspective adopted by Inglehart. It directly recalls the process of political socialisation experienced in different historical times. For individuals, socialisation means entering into contact with values, norms and models of political behaviour (see Chapter 2). It therefore affects the orientations and the forms of involvement and participation: voting, civic engagement, the relationship with public institutions, and adhesion to the principles of democracy and community to which the citizen belongs.

It is a slow, under-the-radar, hence *silent* transformation, which has nevertheless produced a 'revolution' in the orientations and hierarchy of citizens' values. It has led the younger generations to develop a more tangible political culture directed towards post-materialist issues such as self-actualisation, the quality of life, esteem needs, aesthetic and intellectual satisfaction, and so on. At the same time, in this perspective, the prevalent materialist political demand linked to the traditional organised and 'bureaucratised' modalities for citizens' inclusion in the system has lost significance. This orientation is more widely shared by those cohorts who are socialised in a specific historic-political moment that has deeply marked the social and ethical context of these subjects.

In other words, having experienced a specific cultural climate has characterised these subjects' phase of entry into political life; therefore, this marks the construction of their socio-political identity and, consequently, the models of participatory behaviour, and thus their way of being citizens.

One such collective orientation has, in fact, accompanied the birth of what has been defined as a *political generation* (Mannheim 1952), which presents specific values and orientations in terms of politically relevant forms of behaviour. So, the segment of society that was socialised during a period preceding

that of the young protagonists of the 'silent revolution' – indeed, during a more difficult phase – has continued to attribute greater importance to materialistic needs and demands, thus marking a generational difference.

The experience of the new social movements in the late 1960s and early 1970s (della Porta and Diani 1997; Neveu 2000), in which the repertoires of participatory action were renewed through non-conventional forms (Milbrath and Goel 1977; Barnes et al. 1979), bears witness to this generational divide. The relationship of the younger generations with social institutions and with politics is rooted in this kind of culture. The wave of *new politics* that developed at that historical and cultural point in time has lasted until the present day, uniting innovative political cultures and participatory approaches. Today there is an interweaving of requests supported by movements critical of the neo-liberal approach to the economy and the consequences of globalisation on the environment, the safeguarding of common goods, social justice, and the defence of human rights.

The extent to which young cohorts constitute a *political generation*, sharing models of participation and of interpretation of citizenship, not only represents an element of great interest, but is closely linked to the evolution of the ideal-type of citizen. Young people born in the digital age, in a political climate succeeding that of international bipolarity, correspond to a specific segment of society (Bolin 2017). They have been socialised within the framework of the 'liquid society', within the horizon of post-modernity, in the so-called reflexive society that is subject to individualisation processes (Beck et al. 1994). This is a context in which traditional models of social belonging that are typical of mass society are overcome as part of a hybrid culture (Garcia Canclini 1989) in which individual orientations are marked by social and cultural overlapping membership involving, then, multiple identities; in which the links appear to be many and varied, and living spaces that are *interconnected* (Boccia Artieri 2012); in which 'real' social networks and digital social networks are intertwined with one another. And the relationships that develop in the offline and online spaces simultaneously combine local and global horizons.

This combination of local and global consists of a hybrid political culture sphere, marked by the process of modernisation of society, where the development of new political identities and a new demand for participation and modes of engagement unlike those of the past are taking shape.

Therefore we are faced with a new kind of citizen, particularly young people, brought up in a different political environment and in a 'network society' (Castells 1996), in a 'networked society' (Rainie and Wellman 2012) that has taken shape with the development of Web 2.0 and social media. These citizens live in a world in which the cost of instantaneous, horizontal, continuous transmission and retrieval of information (including political information) is particularly low, and where the organisation of collective action,

or at least the production and sharing of content and meaning within specific communities, becomes less burdensome. Citizens, in this scenario marked by *disintermediation* (or *neo-intermediation)* processes, become first 'prosumers' (Ritzer 2010), producers and consumers at the same time, and then 'produsers' (Bruns 2008), in the sense that various forms of cooperation, participatory and collaborative modes of user-led digital content production, non-proprietary platforms, *free* or *opensource*, were built.

This reflects on political culture and public life, on the modes of participative engagement, and therefore on the formation of political identities and reshaping of traditional ones. The formation of public opinion itself also develops in the shadow of social media, albeit with all the limitations, distortions and problems related to that instrument. The impact of Web 2.0 platforms has been such as to stimulate the interesting hypothesis of Facebook Democracy (Marichal 2012), in which the transformations induced by the use of social media in the public and private lives of citizens, as well as those of political actors, accompany the development of a form of involvement that favours the personal perspective: 'Facebook allows us to expand and deepen our personal network, not at the expense of public life, but in a way that encourages us to see the public through the lens of the private' (Marichal 2012, 57).

These technologies, therefore, do not imply a disengagement from public life. Indeed, according to José Marichal's understanding, social networks – especially Facebook, which is the object of his study and still today the most widespread – stimulate the involvement of citizens. But, in the frame of this post-modern scenario, political involvement reflects the relational logic in-built in these instruments, determining the feature of the engagement itself, which in turn loses its 'collective' trait (see Chapter 5). This is an interesting approach because it indicates a model of citizenship whose fundamental elements are the interweaving of the use of social media and the link between the Internet and democracy. However, another critical aspect of these dynamics should also be pointed out. In addition to the above-mentioned tendency of 'privatisation', towards which the approach to the public dimension seems to be pushed, the loss of deliberative spaces and rational argumentation potential should be highlighted. The dialogical practice is, in fact, a fundamental element founding the ideal-type of the *public sphere*, focused on the comparison – online, in this case – between citizens with different and therefore conflicting perspectives (Marichal 2012, 94).

1.6 TECHNOLOGY AND 'HYPER-DEMOCRACY'

Over time, therefore, there have been changes both at the individual level, in the political culture of citizens, and at the structural level, regarding the forms of communication and the relationships among the political actors. Attempts to

develop, including through the Internet, procedures of direct and participatory democracy, even via digital tools, testify to the questioning of the principles of representative democracy. These formulas that ultimately refer to disintermediation processes are founded on assumptions critical of representation and are sometimes based on anti-political and anti-party leanings. Various Western democracies are involved in this dynamic (Todd 2008; Diamanti and Natale 2014; Verney and Bosco 2014; De Petris and Poguntke 2015).

These are experiences that challenge the principles of mediation and representation, pushing the concept of democracy beyond the very concept of *post-democracy* (Crouch 2004; 2020). They incorporate both long-standing features and innovative drives; a mixture of old and new in which the relationship between new technologies and democracy changes the very terms of politics. As has been pointed out during the reflection on *hyper-democracy*, it is a development that should not be understood in a reductive way, or as if the technology offered only those

> means that render voting ever easier and more rapid and frequent. In such circumstances, a narrow vision of democracy would be recognised, seen not as a process of participation of the citizens, but only as a procedure of ratification, as a perpetual game of yes and no, played by citizens who nevertheless are extraneous to the preparatory phase of the decision, to the formulation of the questions they must answer. The conceptual and political change is evident. Direct democracy becomes solely a democracy of referendums, and at the horizon appears, rather, a plebiscitarian democracy. (Rodotà 2013, 6 [author's translation from Italian])

In order to escape this reductionist formulation between technology and democracy,

> it is necessary to go beyond the identification of the electronic democracy with a referendum-type logic, and to analyse the manifold dimensions of the problem, which concern the effects of the information technologies on individual and collective liberties; the relationships between public administration and those who are administered; the forms of collective organisation of the citizens; the modalities of participation of the citizens in the various procedures of public decision-making; the types of consultation of the citizens; the characteristics and the structure of the vote. These, however, are not separate matters but facets of a single theme […]. (Rodotà 2013, 6 [author's translation from Italian])

In other words, technology and its connection with democracy directly shape the theme of political citizenship and its expression. The evolution of modern democracies seems to push in the direction of a democracy that is *continual* (Rodotà 2004), *hybrid* (Diamanti 2014), 'audience(s)' (as it will be seen) (Manin 2014), *hierarchical* (Mounk 2018) and 'live broadcasting' (Urbinati 2013). Accordingly, the figure of a hybrid citizen emerges, located between

democracy and post-democracy (see Chapters 3 and 4), in the 'post-representative' domain (Keane 2009; Tormey 2015) and the 'counter-democratic' sphere (Rosanvallon 2008), but also between new and legacy media, between offline and online dimensions, between flash mobs and institutionalised forms of participation.

1.7 DISINTERMEDIATION AND INDIVIDUALISATION

Mediation, representation and responsibility are closely connected concepts (Sartori 1995). Their meaning goes beyond the 'mechanical' process of *articulation and aggregation* of the interests present in society, with the related transmission of requests towards the places of political decision-making. It concerns aspects of citizenship. The party is a fundamental actor of mediation and political representation, which simultaneously carries out an important integrative function in society (see Chapter 2). With the processes of democratisation and the advent of mass politics, the competition among the parties has become the natural framework in which the dynamics of mediation and representation are carried out. The parties move in the territory, connecting themselves with the organisations of civil society and with citizens. The link with the existing organisations becomes fundamental for representation and for electoral performance. This has a clear identifying meaning. Identity and participation, indeed, feed and reinforce each other reciprocally (Pizzorno 1983).

To mediate and represent therefore means offering the basis for citizens' identification with the system as a whole, and with the institutions that constitute it, rather than with only a specific political part. The sense of belonging to a collective is the bedrock of living in a political community. Identity and its identification mechanisms constitute a fundamental resource for integration. They reinforce the dynamics of solidarity, inspiring behaviour and actions coherent with it. The idea of *affective citizenship* falls within this framework.

However, the citizens of modern democracies have gradually become detached from the traditional formulas of involvement and participation, such as those offered by the parties, because they are considered too bureaucratic and not greatly representative of their individuality, but also because they are demanding and time-consuming. In participative logic, the traits of horizontality and flexibility are privileged with respect to the characteristics of verticality and rigidity. Consequently, the so-called *personal* participation in the everyday realm and daily practices tends to widen the range of actions offered by forms of traditional and conventional involvement. It should be noted, however, that there is an oscillation between the two poles rather than a complete break between the two. There arises, therefore, an effect of *hybridi-*

sation of citizenship rather than a clear transition from one to the other. Within such a framework the real commitment of the citizens tends to interweave the collective and individual dimensions – that is, the interest towards the common good is developed by adopting an *individualised* perspective. The Internet itself becomes a model and a concrete opportunity for this type of participation. Online activism represents both an actual and a conceptual window of opportunity.

With the aim of dealing theoretically with the features of the new repertoires of action, the concept of *individualised collective action* has been developed (Micheletti 2003). This is a category that allows us to distinguish the nature of the new forms of involvement from that of the traditional ones: *collectivist collective action* (see Chapter 5). In other words: 'participation 2.0' from 'participation 1.0' (Micheletti 2017).

With this distinction, the intention is to underline the growing relevance assumed by a type of post-modern involvement (Inglehart 1977; 1990), expressed, as Ulrich Beck has observed in relation to *risk society*, through the creation of everyday and *subpolitical* arenas of engagement. They are forms of activism that intersect people's lifestyles: *life politics*, according to the category conceived by Anthony Giddens (1991), or *lifestyle politics* as conceived by Lance Bennett (1998), wherein the connection with organised political structures has become progressively weakened.

It is clear how the demographic element of this aspect plays a significant role. The discourse regarding political socialisation and inherent in *political generations* has a fundamental importance (see Chapter 2). In particular, the youngest citizens constitute the central actors of the process of change, although age is not the only socio-demographic category involved. The younger generations are, by definition, post-ideological and native 'digital' citizens. They live in a globalised world and cannot but see in conventional politics – centred on the collectivist dimension and linked first and foremost to political actors such as the traditional parties – an element that is 'naturally' distant from their sensibilities, experience, feelings and political culture. Practices such as elections, delegation of voting within the ambit of the nation-state, are no longer able to awaken that sentiment of adhesion that they were able to provide to previous generations.

The practices of participation linked to that type of politics assume a reduced salience from their point of view; hence, young people appear more open to experiencing different formulas of involvement (Dalton 1996; Putnam 2000; Norris 2002, Grasso 2016; Bolin 2017). Young people's participation constitutes a form of activism that recalls a logic closely connected to the Internet configuration, in the ambit of a post-bureaucratic (Bimber 2003) and post-ideological mobilisation. This tendency pushes the idea of citizenship

towards other confines, no longer circumscribed within the nexus of citizens and state, or that of rights and duties.

This is a style of citizenship that is less *dutiful* and more *self-actualising* (Bennett 2008), where its modes of involvement do not necessarily take the path of the traditional political actors' delegation. Or, in the words of Pippa Norris (2002), activism has been 'reinvented', evolving from the 'politics of loyalties' to the 'politics of choice'.

1.8 THE RISE OF POPULISM AND ANTI-POLITICAL SENTIMENTS

Among the phenomena that challenge modern democracies and thus the idea of citizenship, we should not forget the various forms of populism and neo-populism (Canovan 1981; Mény and Surel 2000; Taggart 2000; Taguieff 2002; Mudde 2004; Laclau 2008; Tarchi 2015; Crouch 2020). Beyond being difficult-to-define phenomena that will barely be touched upon in this exploration of citizenship, they are certainly not new experiences in the history of political regimes, be they democratic or illiberal. However, on the wave of problems brought about by the process of globalisation, a new season has opened up, with novel forms, actors and contents in the populist mosaic.

The neo-populist message is tinged with xenophobic features, casting doubt upon the issue of cohabitation and integration into a collective already struggling with the global process of immigration. The question of identity is therefore driven by the populist experience and by its rhetoric. The symbolic construction of the community and its confines (which recalls the sovereignism issue), the definition of '*we the people*' and its enemies, and the distinction between *us* and *them*, are elements closely connected to the concept of citizenship. The contents and messages put forward by the protagonists of the populist phenomenon touch the very foundation of the idea of citizenship itself. Another aspect of major significance is the anti-political sentiment common in Western democracies, by means of digital communication and *webpopulist* expressions, as a vast body of academic literature has pointed out in recent years.

Moreover, with respect to the theme of mediation in the political process, populism incorporates the regard for, while not the exaltation of, the concept of *people* as the essential bedrock in the connection between leader and base. The rhetorical figure of the *people* thereby becomes a primary source of legitimisation, through a direct, unmediated appeal to this idea.

This logic damages the role of the traditional party as the principal actor of political and social integration, of mediation and representation, and hence the party as a place of argumentative discussion and deliberation aimed at the solution of problems. The (web)populist phenomenon is by definition a mul-

tifaceted entity. Criticism of political mediation and of the traditional actors represents one of its facets.

The traditional parties become, in this way, the target of this communicative rhetoric. In this regard, the (somewhat oxymoronic) *anti-party parties* existing in the political systems of modern liberal democracies convey a message characterised by the questioning of the very utility of the party actor in the democratic dynamics.

It is a phenomenon, then, that changes the logic of representative democracy from within, recalling, in many cases, the virtues of (online) *direct democracy*, without filters and mediations, wherein the charismatic leader rails 'against' elites, representative politics and the institutional bodies that interpret this scheme. It supports the idea that democracy can do without the function carried out by the party in the political system, resorting also to the web-based forms of democracy. Therefore, the variegated populist phenomenon intertwines with the anti-party thrust. At the same time, it feeds on those anti-political sentiments present in considerable measure in the public opinion of Western societies. As stated earlier, the anti-political movement and culture are rooted in a critical attitude towards, if not open protest against, the democratic decision-making method (Urbinati 2013, 71).

From this perspective, the parties become delegitimised and are considered to be inappropriate, antiquated, in collusion with *strong powers*, and far removed from the demands expressed by citizens, that is, social needs and will of the *people*. In other words, traditional political actors are considered to be increasingly weak in guaranteeing *responsiveness* – that is, the capacity to provide a response to the demands presented by the represented community – but also in assuming an adequate level of *accountability*, which in turn regards the complex issue of responsibility, intended as being accountable for actions on the part of anyone who holds a position of power, makes political choices and implements government actions.

The anti-party parties express an anti-system force adjacent to, when not strictly connected to, the multifaceted populist phenomenon. These political actors place themselves explicitly in contradiction to the system of traditional parties and to the meaning and process of intermediation that they represent and practise in the wider dynamic of the political process (see Chapter 2). But at the same time, illiberal democracies are rising in the world, even in the Western world, and citizenship rights themselves are now at risk along with established liberal democracies which are challenged by various forms of post-modern authoritarianism, as discussed by Yascha Mounk in his book, *The People vs. Democracy* (2018).

The appreciation of specific formulas of democracy, such as direct, participatory or deliberative (and frequently, *digital*) democracy, which place the *people* in a crucial position, can be seen as a consequence of the evaluations

expressed by anti-party parties and (anti-)political entrepreneurs. Both, in different ways, propose anti-system elements, then in contrast to those of the representative democracy model. The Internet, in this vision, becomes something more than a tool, more than a simple means. It constitutes a genuine structural element of a new conception of democracy. According to Stefano Rodotà (2013), the technologies, indeed, change the scheme of *democratic sovereignty* and the models of relationships among the various political bodies.

1.9 PERVASIVENESS 2.0

The Web has by now become an important presence in society at a global level. In 2020, according to the organisation Internet World Stats, Internet users[1] numbered more than four and a half billion, equal to 60 per cent of the world's population (Table 1.1). This figure was 42 per cent six years previously (2014) and 30 per cent in 2010. Internet users have therefore doubled in a decade. These data alone provide a measure of the relevance that the Internet has, and will have with its further development, on civil society and in the political sphere.

The highest levels of social penetration are found in the societies of North America (95 per cent of the population), Europe (87 per cent), Middle East, Latin America and the Australian continent (around 69 per cent). Asia and Africa rank below the global average, at 55 per cent and 39 per cent respectively. In only a few years, substantial growth trends have been observed, although these differ considerably among the world's geographical areas, as well as among individual countries.

The development trajectories traced are diverse, even if the common trend is towards growing diffusion. Figure 1.1 shows global Internet usage trends and those of some specific continental areas, as reported by data from the World Bank.[2] North America has a slightly higher social penetration of the Internet currently, but it also showed earlier development compared to Europe and the rest of the world. The global trends obviously have had repercussions for the potentialities of the Internet in terms of political citizenship. Some continental areas under this profile are disadvantaged with respect to the average North American and European citizen, who lives in a context in which there is

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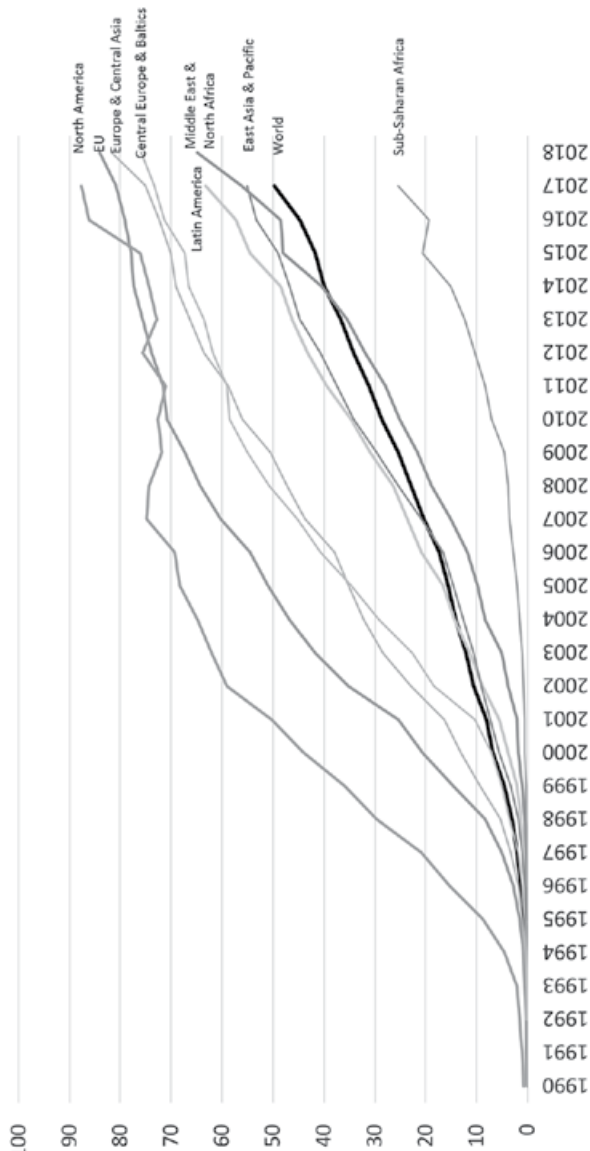
[1] Internet Usage and World Population Statistics estimates are for 31 May 2020. See https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm; accessed 18 July 2020.

[2] Internet users are individuals who have used the Internet (from any location) in the last three months. The Internet can be used via a computer, mobile phone, personal digital assistant, games machine, digital TV etc. (Indicator ID: IT.NET.USER.ZS). See https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS; accessed 10 February 2020.

Table 1.1 *World Internet usage and population statistics, 2020 Year-Q1 Estimates: comparison among the main world regions in the period 2000–20*

World regions	Population (2020 est.)	Population % of World	Internet users 31 May 2020	Penetration rate (% population)	Growth % 2000–19	Internet World %
Africa	1 340 598 447	17.2	526 710 313	39.3	11 567	11.3
Asia	4 294 516 659	55.1	2 366 213 308	55.1	1 970	50.9
Europe	834 995 197	10.7	727 848 547	87.2	592	15.7
Latin America / Caribbean	658 345 826	8.5	453 702 292	68.9	2 411	10.0
Middle East	260 991 690	3.3	183 212 099	70.2	5 477	3.9
North America	368 869 647	4.7	348 908 868	94.6	223	7.5
Oceania / Australia	42 690 838	0.5	28 917 600	67.7	279	0.6
World total	**7 796 949 710**	**100.0**	**4 648 228 067**	**59.6**	**1 187**	**100.0**

Source: Adapted from Internet World Stats.



Source: Author's elaboration of data from The World Bank Group.

Figure 1.1 *Internet users out of every 100 inhabitants (1990–2018)*

a larger number of Internet users and hence a greater possibility of creating a *critical mass* and online citizenship.

Online citizens, even if they use the Internet mainly for reasons other than civic use and political engagement, nevertheless represent a potential catchment area for which the online space can amount to a place for the expression of citizenship (see Chapter 6).

The monthly users of Facebook, the most popular social network, number approximately 2.6 billion, of which 1.7 billion are everyday users. In about five years this number has increased by about 1 billion users. Facebook is today the leading social network in 151 countries out of 167 (90 per cent of all world countries). They were respectively 153 and 92 per cent in 2019. Facebook lost its top position in Azerbaijan and Georgia, as reported in vincos.it analysis.[3] The global map of the diffusion of social media shows 'regional' peculiarities only in very few contexts where other local networking applications are preferred. This is the case for QZone in China, VKontakte in Russia and Odnoklassniki in some Russian territories and Instagram in Iran, which has replaced, as of 2017, Facenama, which was used because of the state censorship of Facebook. Within the space of only a few years, the multiplicity of social networks has reduced considerably, as demonstrated clearly in the maps reported on vincos.it, where data relating to social network usage are kept up to date. In particular, in June 2009 the map showed 17 leading social media networks in the various countries considered, whereas by July 2014 this number had fallen to five; since then the number has remained steady (see Figure 1.2).

The data relating to Iran is particularly interesting in that it links with the discussion on democratic online freedoms, which will be dealt with in the coming pages. The same source, regarding the map updated to 2020, compared with that of the previous year, reports that in Iran, where state censorship makes it difficult to access Western websites, a change of habits has been recorded. The use of Cloob declined in favour of another social network, Facenama, and then it was replaced by Instagram as the principal social network.

In the light of these data, which show a gradual and dynamic growth in the importance of the Internet and of social networks in people's daily lives, it is possible to assert that the relationship between citizens and politics also occurs more and more by way of the Web. This happens both in Western democracies and in countries in which democratic freedoms suffer from control by non-democratic regimes.

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[3] Maps and analysis are available at: https://vincos.it/2020/03/12/la-mappa-dei-social-network-nel-mondo-gennaio-2020/, accessed 21 July 2020.

Note: Google+ is not considered, as its usage is difficult to distinguish from that of Google's search engine.
Source: Alexa/SimilarWeb; Credits: Vincenzo Cosenza, vincos.it: licence: CC-by-BC.

Figure 1.2 *Map showing the most widely used social network in each country*

Moreover, disinformation campaigns are not carried out directly just by individuals but also by software known as bots that are programmed to distribute and repeat specific contents automatically.

This 'computational propaganda', as it was termed (Woolley and Howard 2018), by means of bots, fake accounts and trolls, relies on automation and platform manipulation and gives the illusion of a large-scale consensus towards a specific issue with the aim of influencing public opinion. According to Bruce Bimber and Homero Gil de Zúñiga (2020), the health of the democratic public sphere is challenged by the circulation of falsehoods.

This is, in other words, a new form of political communication that can be practised during election or referendum campaigns or throughout the political life of a community, both in democratic or authoritarian regimes.

It is worth highlighting again that the predominant use of the Internet has a nature that differs from political or civil engagement, but it is mainly used for working, studying or recreational activities. The Internet is of course also used for communicating and socialising, maintaining relationships, dealing with the necessities of daily life, finding various types of information, and e-commerce. But the Internet also represents a fundamental media channel in the frame of a renewed media ecosystem. That is, it serves to inform users on issues of general interest, but also to produce and share content in the frame of 'produser' logic (Bruns 2008) which is a central aspect of being a citizen in the global society.

The online society is based on 'a new social operating system' defined as *networked individualism*, which bridges all the spheres of social relationships:

> When people walk down the street texting on their phones, they are obviously communicating. Yet things are different now. In incorporating gadgets into their lives, people have changed the ways they interact with each other. They have become increasingly networked as individuals, rather than embedded in groups. In the world of networked individuals, it is the person who is the focus: not the family, not the work unit, not the neighborhood, and not the social group. […] It is also the story of the new social operating system we call 'networked individualism' in contrast to the longstanding operating system formed around large hierarchical bureaucracies and small, densely knit groups such as households, communities, and workgroups. We call networked individualism an 'operating system' because it describes the ways in which people connect, communicate, and exchange information. We also use the phrase because it underlines the fact that societies – like computer systems – have networked structures that provide opportunities and constraints, rules and procedures. The phrase echoes the reality of today's technology: Most people play and work using computers and mobile devices that run on operating systems. Like most computer operating systems and all mobile systems, the social network operating system is personal – the individual is at the autonomous center […]. (Rainie and Wellman 2012, 6–7)

This *individual* and *autonomous* dimension touches citizens in their own way by use of social networks and networking, but also in the way in which they relate to politics and democracy (Marichal 2012).

1.10 ONLINE DEMOCRACY: UTOPIA AND DYSTOPIA

The role of the Internet and social networks in the political sphere is arousing growing interest, as demonstrated by the number of publications on this theme. The scientific community is raising questions about the meaning and implications of the so-called networking democracy and networked politics. Democratic theory and practices are necessarily stimulated by the development of the Internet. The process of *mediatisation of politics*, which has accompanied the development of *democracy*, sees in communications technology a frontier of special interest. Society has, in the Internet, a fundamental communication tool that redefines the very form of society itself: the models of social relationships, the identities and the civic cultures present in it (Castells 1996; Dahlgren 2013).

This is happening thanks to the peculiar features of online communication, such as interactivity and velocity, but also forms of horizontality, polycentrism and pluralism, which are some of – and not the only – characteristic elements. The Web facilitates the de-structuring of the spatio-temporal barriers in the informational and communicational sphere. It simultaneously offers a new social and civic space, beyond the 'apocalyptic' or 'integrated' understanding of Umberto Eco (1964), or, to use a terminology more appropriate to the Internet age, cyber-pessimistic or cyber-optimistic.

There are, in fact, readings of critical orientation with regard to optimistic interpretations of the democratising virtues of the Internet. Cass R. Sunstein (2017), in his *#Republic*, for example, focuses on social media in general and on *echo chambers* in particular, and discusses their dangerous effects on public debate, and then on democracy itself. Evgeny Morozov (2011) several years ago focused on the dark side of Internet freedom, describing what he defined as the 'naïve belief' in the emancipatory nature of the Internet. He began with an analysis of the use of the Web in the illiberal countries of eastern Europe, of the 'Arab Spring', of the Middle East, and of China and the Latin-American countries. He focused both on the activists supporting democratic liberties and on militants, which are part of the authoritarian regimes. The latter situation and related use of the Internet are understandably in the interest of objectives characterised by the conservation of the illiberal *status quo*.

Finally, what emerge are potentialities, but also critical elements inherent in this technology applied to politics and democratisation processes. The Internet can be used by autocrats but also protesters; sometimes it may help liberali-

sation and then democracy, but sometimes the Internet fuels repression and stabilises autocrats. In other words, cyber-optimists and cyber-pessimists are both right in their views (Weidmann and Geelmuyden 2019).

Freedom House,[4] in this regard, in the report *Freedom on the Net 2019*, presents data collected with the aim of measuring the freedom of citizens on the Internet. For the ninth year running, with respect to the ten years of activity of this study of Internet freedoms, a declining trend was recorded.

This study on Internet freedom was carried out in 65 countries around the globe, covering 87 per cent of the world's Internet users. Among the countries that were assessed, 15 were considered *free*. Less than half, 29, were classified as *partially free*. Finally, 21 were defined as *not free* (Figure 1.3). Of the total number of countries considered in this study, 33 have been on an overall decline since June 2018. Only about half, 16, registered a net improvement. From the report it emerged that both in democratic countries and in authoritarian regimes legislative measures have been approved that restrain online liberty. The possibility of control has grown; that is, political authorities use the Internet to identify users and monitor their online activities.

Therefore there has been an increase in the number of citizens persecuted or detained for online activities considered illicit. More difficult conditions for expressing such liberties are then observed in non-democratic countries. The latest edition (2019, at the time of writing) has an emblematic title: 'The Crisis of Social Media' and the subtitle stresses this idea even more: 'What was once a liberating technology has become a conduit for surveillance and electoral manipulation'.

In certain cases, the punishments for online dissent are more serious than those for corresponding actions offline. The targets towards which these forms of control, influence and censorship are most explicitly directed are online journalists and bloggers involved in anti-government demonstrations, as well as independent websites critical of the regime.

The Internet, then, should not be understood only as an unquestioning place of liberty. It is subject to forms of close control on the part of rulers, becoming an ambiguous space with regard to democratic freedoms and civil liberties. The opportunities of inclusion clash with censorship, surveillance and repression. It is on the basis of these considerations that an interpretation of caution emerges against approaches such as cyber-utopianism and Internet centrism.

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[4] This is an *International Non-Governmental Organisation* (INGO) that carries out worldwide research on the diffusion of democracy, civil liberties and political rights. See Chapter 4 for other data published by Freedom House on the spread of democratic freedoms in the world.

Source: Freedom House, Freedom on the Net Report, 2019.

Figure 1.3 *Freedom on the Net in 65 countries (2019)*

The first of these embraces the idea that the Internet favours the oppressed rather than the oppressors, but it is an approach compromised by a 'naïve belief in the emancipatory nature of online communication that rests on a stubborn refusal to acknowledge its downside' (Morozov 2011, XIII).

The second is a pragmatic and not necessarily utopian approach: 'Internet-centrists like to answer every question about democratic change by first reframing it in terms of the Internet rather than the context in which that change is to occur' (Morozov 2011, XVI).

The socio-political context and the persons are, instead, fundamental – perhaps the true independent variable. Facebook, YouTube and now Instagram, which is the third most commonly used social network with one billion users worldwide, or even the 'elitist' Twitter are certainly functional in the growing demand for democracy in specific countries. They have represented and guaranteed a technological and communicative opportunity. They have stood out as leading instruments of revolts and 'Springs', but they amount to an intervening variable.

Morozov's criticism touches upon both cyber-utopianism and Internet centrism. It expresses, therefore, a parallel critical approach: towards an excessive regard for the contribution offered by the Internet, which ends up provoking an interpretive distortion of social reality along with its potentiality, and of political facts, such as those linked to the processes of democratisation in countries where civil society activism mobilises towards a demand of greater democratic freedoms. The adoption of this perspective would lead to an underestimation, in the analysis of the political phenomena, of the impact of cultural conditions, enhancing first the role of the Internet and online communication technologies.

Moreover, in the field of this critical understanding of the relationship between technology and politics, another distorting point in the manifestation of citizenship should be highlighted. That is, the online citizen risks identifying political action and engagement only with Internet activism. So, through the various forms of e-participation, such as supporting online campaigns and petitions, posting protest contents, and participating in discursive political consumerism actions,[5] one may end up considering this digital environment

[5] This dimension of political consumerism refers to actions of communication, *guerrilla warfare* and *culture jamming* consisting in practices aimed at challenging the media-diffused images, places and advertising slogans of various targets, and in particular of multinational enterprises. Such actions are realised through the deconstruction of the message content, which comes to be placed in an unusual semantic context, with a profoundly changed or even opposite meaning, rendering it paradoxical. Such an action is charged with critical meaning through parodies characterised by the logic of 'naming and shaming', with the purpose of undermining the public image, and hence the credibility, of the subject whose ethical, political or environmental conduct is being

as *the* political domain. Instead, there are 'no such things as virtual politics' (Morozov 2011, 201) and the traditional methods of doing politics, in the territory and the institutions, remain essential even in the age of the Internet.

According to these considerations digital activism would tend to be inscribed within the perimeter of 'couch activism', that is, a *lazy* or passive approach that sometimes, for example, is limited to donating money to a cause, often in small amounts, and there the involvement ends, as does the *responsibility taking*, which is why some campaigns, even sizeable ones, have begun to oppose the figure of the *slacktivist.* As well as marking the Visa and MasterCard logos with barred red circles, they call on online activists to participate, with explicit pleas such as 'DON'T DONATE; Take action' (Morozov 2011, 179).

So, the approaches are various; they regard not only the specific link between the Internet and politics, but also that between the Internet and society. Scholars of the digital phenomenon, in the political sphere, nevertheless point out how the pervasiveness of the Internet, and, in particular, of the platforms traceable to Web 2.0, have favoured the development of an unprecedented public space, which Manuel Castells (2007) defines as *mass self-communication*, emphasising the simultaneous presence of the *collective* dimension and the *individualised* character of the communication and engagement over the Internet. Castells stresses that with the advent of Web 2.0 a new form of civil society has developed. In this scenario the new media amount to an important resource to foster citizens' political interest and discussion. They spread information opportunities that reach the *networked* citizen directly and automatically, through the system of notification, for example, in some sense without the *cost* of searching for contents. Social media contribute to the organisation and management of public opinion campaigns. They stimulate attention and competence on general issues. They solicit the civic involvement of the citizen (Shah et al. 2005; Dahlgren 2009).

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attacked. They are actions that are carried out by, for example, movements criticising globalisation, for the Internet represents an important resource for organisation and mobilisation (Castells 2012). Today these initiatives are shared through the so-called new media, but they are rooted in the 1950s, when the practice of 'cultural interference' was enacted by the cultural currents of the time through significant channels and various artists. Beyond the *discursive* dimension there are two other modalities of political consumerism, which are: (a) the positive type, that is, *buycotting*, in which purchasing choices are based on rewarding a company or country's respect for certain ethical and social principles and practices in the production model and institutional behaviour; (b) the negative type, that is, *boycotting*, in which specific brands or products are not purchased, with an explicit punitive intention, based on the same ethical, environmental or political considerations (Micheletti 2003; 2004; Stolle and Micheletti 2013; Ceccarini 2008).

The process of disintermediation, and its implications in the framework of representation (see Chapter 6), therefore finds an ally and objective support in the fundamental feature such as the direct and horizontal nature offered by the Internet, and by the resources and potentiality made available by social media.

Finally, even if the negative potentiality of the Internet and social media in political life is a fact, it has also to be taken into consideration that digital platforms are not

> […] necessarily good or bad for liberal democracy. Nor is it that social media inherently strengthens or undermines tolerance. On the contrary, it is that social media closes the technological gap between insiders and outsiders. Until a few decades ago, governments and big media companies enjoyed an oligopoly over the means of mass communication. As a result, they could set the standards of acceptable political discourse. In a well-functioning democracy, this might mean declining to publish racist content, conspiracy theories, or outright lies – and thus stabilizing liberal democracy. In an autocracy, this might mean censoring any criticism of the dictator – and thus keeping liberal democracy at bay. With the rise of social media, this technological advantage has all but evaporated. (Mounk 2018, 146)

1.11 PUBLIC SPHERE(S) AND CITIZENSHIP

The public sphere, in its classical meaning, is a place of dialogue, a theatre of argumentation and counter-argumentation, and thus a space for the formation of public opinion. This has been affected by the pervasiveness of Web 2.0, as well as by the mechanism of disintermediation or rather 'neo-intermediation'. Consequently, the public sphere in the post-modern society widens its borders and multiplies its spaces. In this regard one speaks of *public spheres*, in the plural, marked by an ever-greater degree of interconnection (Boccia Artieri 2012; Manin 2014; Bentivegna and Boccia Artieri 2020). Within this framework are developed processes of inclusion of the citizens in the political system that differ from those of the past. Different mobilisation formulas are expressed, and hence different ways of being citizens and experiencing citizenship.

A useful interpretation in this regard is that proposed by Pierre Rosanvallon (2008) with the evocative idea of 'counter-democracy'. With this concept the centrality of the role of surveillance, in this case from the grassroots upwards, of the holders of power comes to the fore. Unlike what the neologism proposed by this author suggests, it should not be understood as the antithesis of democracy; that is, as its negation, anti-democracy. Rather, it should be considered as a mechanism that, being based on 'democratic distrust' in the holders of power, could reinforce and offer support to the concept and practice of representative government, improving its fundamental function. It is thus a corrective to democratic procedures in the hands of the citizens.

Counter-democracy is a model of civic involvement and democratic citizenship, complementary of the electoral moment. The elections, indeed, are necessarily episodic. For that reason, through the diffusion in society of *indirect powers* – above all surveillance – which are put into effect through the action of institutions, citizens' groups and civic associations, counter-democracy can strengthen modern representative democracies, improving their quality. However, counter-democracy – with its counter-powers – is also an ambiguous 'political form'; it can reinforce democracy, but, at the same time, it can also contradict it (Rosanvallon 2008, 24).

The action of surveillance and monitoring and the consequent publicity and discussion in the public debate constitute an activity that can be carried out by citizens individually, using, for example, the tools made available by the Internet (see Chapter 5), which comes to be described as one of these powers of control, and is considered one of the forms through which counter-democracy, and hence the idea of 'monitoring' in the hands of the citizens, is structured.

The 'individualised' feature is an extremely characteristic element of the models of citizenship behind this formula of political responsibility assumed by the digital citizen (Isin and Ruppert 2015). The resources of the Web render the sharing of information, including that covering the political community, to some extent less costly and more efficient (Tewksbury and Rittenberg 2012). Online action can be integrated, and then hybridised, with the traditional modes of participation carried out by the entities organised in the frame of civil society, such as the press and civic associations.

The Internet, according to this reading, comes to be defined as a political form, because it has the potential, in the counter-democratic approach, for the control and surveillance of the powers that be. Blogs, forums and online campaigns favour the creation of opinion movements. They can reinforce a deliberative, dialogue-based, argumentative logic in civil society in a granular way down to the local level.

Bernard Manin underlines the potential for change – for *metamorphosis*, as he puts it – inherent in the erosion of party loyalty and the transformations of the communication dynamic. The diffusion of the Internet and social media and the multiplication of television channels with digital technology lead to the overcoming of the *audience democracy*, of a single public, giving way to an *audiences democracy*, of several, and fragmented, publics.

On this basis, the new information and communications technologies can be seen as a tool that widens the public space (but makes it even more fragmented), supporting, either directly or indirectly, practices of confrontation, argumentation and counter-argumentation. They allow an acting space to be created, according to the well-known meaning discussed by Jürgen Habermas (1962), in which social and private actors give shape to their opinions and positions, discussing issues of general interest rationally and critically. The

exchange and hybridisation between new media and legacy communication tools (Chadwick 2013) amplify all that takes place in the online realm. The holders of power will have to take account of this in the sphere of the political process. The online dimension can thus be considered a new level of the public sphere that complements this direction, even if the online dynamics pose some structural restrictions regarding the forms of communicative interaction that develop in the physical space. The condition of 'communicative abundance' in post-modern society (Keane 2013), to which the Internet contributes in a considerable way, leads, precisely owing to an excessive wealth of information offered, to a decline in the role of the media as a system and structure of control and monitoring of politics.

1.12 POWER, COUNTER-POWER AND DISTRUST

The Internet is not immune to limits, simplifications and manipulations. This is an evaluation that is now well recognised, and it is an idea that is not recent, but widely shared by pundits and scholars of this phenomenon (Howard 2006; Morozov 2011; Wolton 2012). The above-mentioned data, yearly gathered by the think-tank Freedom House, further confirm that interpretation. The alarm raised by the hacktivist group Anonymous in July 2020 regarding the social media app TikTok charged with being malware controlled by the Chinese government to control users is a clue in that respect.

The actual critical issues that exist can be adequately considered if a 'cyber-realistic' approach is adopted. If the perspective is located beyond the utopic/dystopic dichotomy, it can lead to an attentive and detached analysis of the potential elements that might reflect upon the concept and practices of citizenship.

In the Internet, therefore, a mode of expression of civil society can be realised that can contribute to the spontaneous role of vigilance, denunciation and evaluation of those in power (see Chapter 5). This action of control from below can assume a relevant political meaning, becoming a 'political form' that inserts itself into the scenario that Pierre Rosanvallon defines 'the age of distrust'. It is a specific civic attitude, that of *democratic distrust*, which differs from the simple sentiment of disenchantment towards politics. It is a component element of political culture, which justifies attention towards and involvement in politics, and also justifies a continuous surveillance of those who govern. In this sense, the other facet of distrust is control, civic attention, and not disinterest, indifference, anti-politics. Behind this specific model of being part of a community there is the aim of making rulers feel the vigilant presence of civil society, in order that they may work for the common good.

Power and counter-power, moreover, represent the poles of a basic dualism in the democratic process: it is the system of checks and balances. Within this

frame, the citizen is not limited to being only a voter. The vote continues to represent the most visible and institutionalised form of political citizenship, remaining at the centre of the functioning of modern-day democracies. It is an essential ritual (and right/duty), a fundamental liturgy of representative democracy. But the citizen, according to this approach, can also be seen as an active and *critical* figure (Norris 1999; 2011). She or he goes beyond the elections, beyond the conventional political spaces, capable of practising diversified forms of involvement and actions: control, surveillance and alarm, in *subpolitical* and online spheres. At the base of this conception of citizenship are the ideas of *monitoring* democracy and the *monitorial citizen*, as John Keane (2009) and Michael Schudson (1998) respectively suggest.

Within this framework, even with all the implications of the case, political participation can be viewed in a different light. The widespread idea of the passive citizen gradually takes on fuzzier outlines. Yet the classic debate in political communication studies concerning the hypotheses of mobilization – that is, in our case if digital media use stimulates the participation of those who are not politically active – versus reinforcement – that is, the opposite situation – is still open and the causal direction quite hard to prove. The same applies for the third thesis described by Pippa Norris (2000), called a virtuous circle, where mobilisation and reinforcement effects are in a reciprocal relationship. Scholars are trying to study the causal direction by the meta-analysis of repeated-wave panel data (Boulianne 2009; 2015; Oser and Boulianne 2020). However, this research problem is still to be examined in depth.

Observing participation through categories other than those linked to the traditional forms of engagement, the paradigm that recalls the citizen's decline in terms of civic spirit and community involvement leaves room for diverse interpretations. It is a perspective that underlines a gradual transformation of the modalities used in civil society for *responsibility-taking* (see Chapter 5) on issues of general interest. The online–offline link is a fundamental release from these dynamics.

1.13 ONLINE AND OFFLINE

In the light of what we have seen in this first chapter defining the scenario, it would be reductive to consider the new technologies of the Internet – based on Web 2.0 – simply as tools for providing information or for organising political mobilisation on the ground (Bennett 2003). Their scope is not limited to an instrumental nature. Rather, they deeply concern the very redefinition of the concept of democratic citizenship (Bentivegna 2006; Hermes 2006; Rodotà 2013; Isin and Ruppert 2015), the dynamics in which citizens' opinions and methods of civic and political involvement are formed, especially those of the

younger generation, who are greatly affected by the digital element (Bennett 2008; Grasso 2016; Bolin 2017).

Technological innovation thus has to do with political socialisation and culture, and related transformations, but also with the change in the sphere of representative government. The interweaving between the online and offline modes of engagement is at the centre of this discourse. Ethnographic research shows that online spaces and groups, political conversation in various kind of forums regardless of the site's main purpose, foster political engagement that can generate offline political activism and mobilisation, where young people are more politically involved than much of the civic engagement literature suggests (Beyer 2014).

The online social space is a specific but important domain, allowing the collecting of some clues that are useful for understanding the connection between citizens and politics, between mediation and disintermediation, but also the junction between forms of collective participation and modes of individualised engagement.

The literature on the transformations that have occurred in the relationship between society and politics refers to categories and processes such as that of *individualisation* of the citizen-voter, delegitimisation of the traditional and institutionalised political actors (Eliasoph 1998; Dalton and Wattenberg 2000; Pharr and Putnam 2000), and the drop in civic involvement in modern Western democracies (Putnam 1995; 2000).

Many authors have dwelt upon these critical issues regarding the frailty of the democratic fabric. The expressions most frequently used for the analysis have been *disenchantment*, *decline*, *malaise*, *partisan dealignment* or *distrust* (see Chapter 3). These categories are first and foremost the result of the attention to the traditional modes of engagement and inclusion in the political community: primarily the vote and the parties, but also participation in the classical hierarchical organisations of political representation, based on delegation and membership. But the divide between citizens and politics, which many authors have emphasised, does not automatically imply the growth of indifference and apathy towards the public space. It does not necessarily lead to unwillingness to become involved on the part of citizens. If anything, the models of *taking part* are changing. Some interpretations go beyond the idea of revival in the private sphere, and they suggest that research should be steered in other directions (Norris 2002), adopting other paradigms and looking elsewhere, towards different and emerging forms of involvement (Dalton 1996; Inglehart 1990; Bell 1999; Ceccarini 2021). It is worth recalling the epochal shift from the 'politics of loyalties' to the 'politics of choice'.

It is from this point of view that the very figure of the citizen should be reconsidered, because political culture and the forms of participation are in continuous development, especially among the younger generations, who

are the protagonists of social change. They are more open to experiencing new forms of citizenship that intersect with their everyday lifestyle, based on personal and individualised modes of responsibility taking. *Life politics* takes form and assumes meaning in places where the border between politics and non-politics is ever more tenuous, and where the distinction between online and offline worlds is blurred by the process of *hybridisation.*

2. Citizenship, identity and political community

Citizenship is a polysemic concept. It assumes various meanings according to the perspective from which it is observed. It has a juridical nature, but also a cultural and identity-making profile, and is closely related to the ideal and practice of the democracy in whose sphere it is born and develops, and to which it is inextricably linked. It intertwines, indeed, on the one hand the procedural conception of democracy, and on the other the inclusion of citizens in the political system and the participatory practices.

The temporal factor, moreover, becomes a determining element in the redefinition of the very idea of citizenship. Time, indeed, brings transformations of political culture. The process of socialisation interacts with the trends of the different generations, regarding attitudes, methods of involvement and democratic practices. The issue of citizenship thus also assumes great relevance for understanding the ongoing changes in democracy itself.

The citizen, included in the political community, reflects, at least partly, the traits of the context of which they are part. S/he moves in that environment, in the day-to-day social interaction, which has its own political meaning. S/he participates, creating relations and social networks. In such a context s/he comes into contact with other political actors, and with the meanings transmitted by an interweaving of modes of communication: interpersonal and media-based, old and new. It is a dynamic world, made of social norms and values, experiences and feelings of belonging, but also conflicts and institutions, which shape and structure the organised political community. The question of citizenship should thus also be understood in its cultural dimension, and the citizen should be considered within the perimeter traced by the state, its institutional bodies, rules and practices. And also in civil society, which takes form with the activities put into practice by the citizens themselves.

2.1 A COMPLEX AND OPEN CONCEPT

The concept of citizenship and its conceptions, as we saw in the introductory chapter, is a complex issue. To speak of the 'rights of citizenship' creates some confusion also from a lexical point of view. It refers, indeed, to the necessary requisites for becoming a *citizen* of a given country, and thus to citizenship in

a *juridical* sense. This is certainly an important but not exhaustive aspect of the concept. A subject, however, may enjoy, at least in part, the rights of citizenship even if s/he is not a citizen of the country in which s/he lives. In many cases, foreigners may even, for example, exercise the right to vote in local council elections, or make use of specific welfare services and social protections, such as education, healthcare and social safeguards, even in the absence of a document that formally recognises belonging to the state in question.

But the rights of citizenship are something that goes beyond the juridical dimension and are inscribed within the framework of value orientations and the political culture of a community. This is the perspective primarily considered in this work. One observes, indeed, different grades of openness by various states towards the granting of juridical citizenship. The different political schemes also vary on the basis of the migratory traditions and experiences of these communities, as well as the immigration culture that has matured over time. The construction of different models of granting citizenship corresponds to this.

The debate, as is well known, revolves around *jus soli* and *jus sanguinis*,[1] the first of which is traceable to a more open idea of citizenship, whereas the second is adopted in countries that have more restrictive immigration policies. The ideas of openness and restrictiveness are reflected in the integration strategies that have developed within a community. As is well known, there are two main models about this issue: the *assimilationist* one and the *multiculturalism* one.

Both have to do with cultural traits, the secularity of the State and the social influence of the religious sphere of the more general reference context.

The paths to citizenship, then, are not limited to the procedural and juridical rules of coexistence but regard the cultural dimension and value system of a community. Citizenship, therefore, emerges as a fundamental element of the socio-political structure and living together. It regards directly both the hosting members and the hosted subjects and gives form to the integration model pursued by the institutions of a specific community.

Identity and value orientations, participation and inclusion, and communication and public opinion are the cornerstones on which the discussion developed in the coming pages will be concentrated. The juridical sense and the formal status – the means of becoming citizens and the procedures of inclusion – will be set aside to follow a path more consistent with the central theme of this work. Moreover, while recognising the importance of the connections with

[1] In the first case, citizenship is obtained by those born in the territory; in the second it is acquired by descendants of nationals.

other dimensions and disciplines, these will necessarily be left in the background, for reasons of coherence and to avoid dispersion.

Basically, the idea of citizenship that is considered goes beyond the concept of nationality. Moreover, the citizenship–nationality relationship has been defined as an intrinsically fragile and precarious equation, inasmuch as the form of the nation is only one of the forms that a community of citizens may take (Balibar 2015). The aim, therefore, is that of considering the citizen in the field of the junction between politics and society, but beyond the confines of the nation-state. In particular, we shall concentrate on the impact that the Internet has in the political sphere and the public space, specifically with regard to the practices of citizenship – with the result that the citizen himself or herself, prompted by the cultural change and the technological potentialities, should necessarily be understood in an ever more open and developing way.

2.2 CITIZENSHIP AND DEMOCRATISATION

Citizenship should, therefore, be understood as a prismatic concept, as well as one that is open and subject to a continual clarification of its semantic contours (Moro 2020). It is sufficiently complex to be described as an 'infinite and elusive theme' (Zincone 1992, 22). By its nature, it has to do with various types of level and perspective, and it ends up interweaving various issues. Consequently, studying it would necessitate an interdisciplinary skill in economics, law, social history and the history of political thought, but also in political philosophy, sociology and political science. Such a range of knowledge would be difficult for any single scholar to acquire. For this reason, it will be useful to define, by means of a more analytical manner than we have used so far, the contours of the idea of citizenship that we shall be referring to.

The perspective assumed by the observer is, as ever, fundamental in a process of analysis. If one adopts a perspective from above, the idea of citizenship from this perspective embraces the systemic dimension of politics. Or rather, real democracy and the set of constitutional guarantees to safeguard citizens and their inclusion in the political system are taken into account more carefully. If one instead views citizenship from below, one focuses attention on the everyday life of citizens in the community of belonging, and on the way in which citizenship is actually exercised in the structures of society. It goes without saying that the combination of the two perspectives allows a complex and well-structured view of the phenomenon in question.

First of all, it should be said that democracy and the process of the *first wave of democratisation*[2] appear closely connected to the theme of citizenship and to that of citizens' inclusion in a given political community. Stein Rokkan's theory, in this regard, portrays the path of democratisation adopting the image of 'institutional thresholds'. There are four fundamental stages that are described as critical phases of the development and structuring of competitive mass politics in the countries of Western Europe (Rokkan 1999).

The first threshold is that of *legitimisation.* With the overcoming of this step a regime recognises *civil rights*, such as the freedom to criticise, protest or demonstrate against it.

The second threshold is that of *incorporation.* With the overcoming of this step, a space is constructed for recognition of the rights of *political citizenship*, at the basis of which there is the enlargement of suffrage.

The third threshold is that of *representation*, which is the condition in which barriers to the rise of opposition movement activity and new parties are lowered.

Finally, the fourth threshold is that of *executive power.* This is overcome when parliamentary force is translated into direct influence on government decisions. So, the decision-making bodies undergo lobbying from parliament, which is the expression of citizens through the mechanism of electoral representation.

These stages enlarge the participatory citizens' space and the practices connected to them. The classic reconstruction of democratic development proposed by Robert K. Dahl (1971) also recalls the idea of a path with various stages, in which the question of citizenship assumes a central relevance. As is well known, in the representation of the process of democratisation, two fundamental dimensions are crossed: that of *public contestation* and that of *inclusiveness.*

The first refers to the rights of opposition and the admission of dissent and competition among the political forces; it is the level of liberalisation assured by a regime.

The second recalls the extension of the ownership of the rights of participation for citizens, and thus an increase in the proportion of the population

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[2] By *waves of democratisation* is intended a series of transitions from authoritarian regimes to democratic ones, concentrated in a well-determined period during which the number of phenomena produced in the opposite direction (from democratic regimes to non-democratic ones) is significantly lower. Such shifts also include processes of liberation or partial democratisation that do not necessarily lead to completely democratic contexts. Huntington's reconstruction (1991) identifies three waves of democratisation (1828–1926, 1943–62, and 1974 onwards) due to a combination of various influences, interspersed with two waves of back-flow.

that has the concrete possibility of participating in and being integrated into political life.

The extension of these two dimensions in a political system leads to the ideal-type of the regime called *polyarchy*, as the liberal democracies are defined by Dahl. They represent an institutional context in which rules are established and in which a set of bodies operates that guarantee respect for political rights and the possibility to transform the orientations and demands of the citizens – the *inputs* – into responses – the *output*s – on the part of the system throughout the *political process* (Easton 1953).

Participation is at the centre of these dynamics, and, over the course of time, from the *first wave of democratisation* to the present day, it has profoundly changed. The modes of expression of citizenship, from the vote to the variegate forms of heterodox and grassroots activism, and, today, emerging formulas tend to reform the traditional and conventional repertoires. In some cases, they are made possible by technological development, which introduces forms of engagement and participation online. They constitute additional opportunities for the inclusion of citizens in the community and hence in the political system. Information, elections and online protests are today's expressions of citizenship. They emerge as possibilities, for civil society, to have a *voice* in politics (Hirschman 1970). And citizens practise *voice* quite often, given today's difficulty in expressing *loyalty* towards political bodies, as will be addressed in the next chapters.

The idea of citizenship combines, therefore, the reality of democracy and the dynamics of power, which are manifest in the political sphere. The citizen and his or her way of relating to the public dimension are located at the centre of this frame. The prerogative of democracy to confer power, rights and duties upon citizens lies at the base of this conception. But citizenship should also be considered as *affective*, belonging to a democratic political collective that is not necessarily a nation-state. A town, city or sub-national or supra-national political and administrative entity may represent this community in which one expresses democratic citizenship.

2.3 DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP

In the wake of the above general considerations, we shall seek to briefly outline the concept of democratic citizenship, with reference to classical contributions. It has already been mentioned that this substantially consists of being part of a democratic political community. Approximately two out of three of the world's countries are democracies, according to the study of Richard Bellamy (2008, 3). They are regimes in which citizens, through the vote, have the real possibility of creating an alternative to governments supported by different party coalitions.

At the base of this, there is the concrete recognition not only of the entitlement to rights, but also of principles of reciprocity, equality and solidarity, which are fundamental elements of this conception of citizenship. Democratic citizenship develops, then, in parallel to the recognition of a set of rights and duties, to the guarantees of liberty, to the entitlement to benefits and social protection, in the framework of the system of social security and individual protections of a democratic regime. But just as important is the cultural dimension – *affective citizenship* – that is the sense of belonging to a given community, and hence the type of connection with the actors of the political system and with the institutions that structure it. According to Bellamy, citizenship

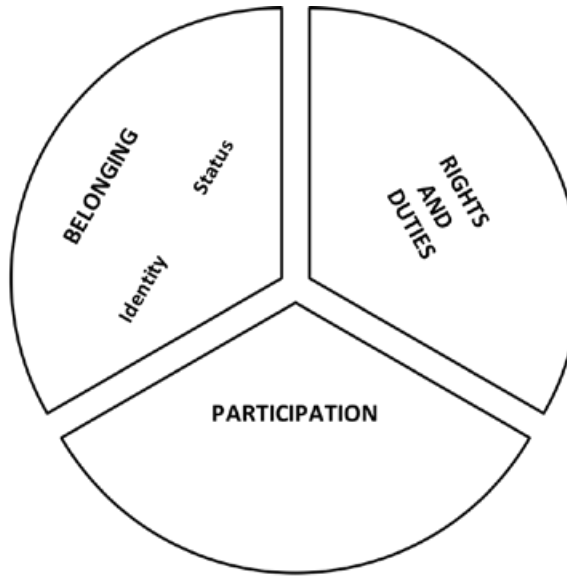
> […] has an intrinsic link to democratic politics. It involves membership of an exclusive club – those who take the key decisions about the collective life of a given political community. And the character of that community in many ways reflects what people make it. In particular, their participation or lack of it plays an important role in determining how far, and in what ways, it treats people as equals. Three linked components of citizenship emerge from this analysis – membership of a democratic political community, and participation in the community's political, economic, and social processes – all of which combine in different ways to establish a condition of civic equality. (Bellamy 2008, 12)

The membership or belonging component of citizenship could be divided into two distinct aspects (Figure 2.1): status (closer to the juridical dimension) and identity (linked to the symbolic dimension), as discussed by Moro (2020, 38–41).

Democratic citizenship is all this. It is inserted into the framework of a system that is based on the foundational elements of democracy, which guarantee a stable political and normative context, regulating the social and economic life in the community itself. It is, therefore, a process of a subject's inclusion in – *being part of* – a collective of citizens that goes beyond a series of entitlements – that is, of civil, political and social rights that recall the classical tripartition proposed by Marshall, who defined citizenship as 'full membership of a community' (Marshall 1950, 8).

Marshall's Three Elements

The political systems, in their democratic evolution, have first recognised the *civil rights* that have constituted, in their turn, the necessary basis for the extension of *political rights,* which have guaranteed a context favourable to the confirmation of *social rights.* It is a sort of incremental path. The recognition of the prerogatives of citizenship, therefore, marks the evolutionary process towards a system that assumes a democratic profile. But this path develops historically with different methods, times and effects in the various political



Source: Moro (2020, 39).

Figure 2.1 The components of democratic citizenship

systems, as well as with regard to the consolidation of common freedoms, obligations and safeguards for citizens.

We need to remind ourselves, briefly, what the three 'parts' or 'elements' that Marshall (1950) indicates as basic dimensions of citizenship consist of. They need to be delineated in their theoretical construction and historical reconstruction, which begins with the revolutions of the eighteenth century – first in America and then in France – and arrives at the definition of the welfare measures implemented after the Second World War. The *civil* element, he writes, 'is composed of the rights necessary for individual freedom, liberty of the person, freedom of speech, thought and faith, the right to own property and to conclude valid contracts, and the right to justice' (Marshall 1950, 10).

By the *political* element, he means 'the right to participate in the exercise of political power, as a member of a body invested with political authority or as an elector of the members of such a body. The corresponding institutions are parliament and councils of local government' (Marshall 1950, 11).

Finally, in relation to the *social* element, he refers to

> the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in the society. The institutions most closely connected with it are the educational system and the social services. (Marshall 1950, 11)

In the past, he argues, these three elements of citizenship were fused together. 'The rights were blended because the institutions were amalgamated' (Marshall 1950, 11). In feudal society, the status of *citizen* was a token of class, which is something very different from the status of citizen as intended in the modern meaning. Nowadays the idea of being a citizen is based on one's belonging to a society, to an organised political community. It is thus a status that unites those who belong to a collective, albeit within a differentiating social stratification.

The very status of citizenship, in the past, was a measure of inequality. In ancient Greece, for example, the Athenian *polis* – always considered as a place of democratic experimentation – was based upon serious limitations to citizenship. It was reserved solely for men whose parents were already citizens. Women could not play any public role in the workings of the *polis*, and neither could slaves or foreign residents. The very presence of slaves allowed the elite of the *polis* to have time and space to be able to dedicate themselves to public life (Finley 1985), which underlines how particular and limited the concept of *inclusion* was.

Over time, with the diffusion of rights of citizenship, inclusion has become an element of guarantee and safeguarding of prerogatives of equality within a community. Institutions, indeed, since the end of the eighteenth century, have begun a course of 'geographical fusion', as Marshall himself points out. There has been an overcoming of the diversities historically defined on a local basis. These dynamics have left a growing space for a 'functional separation' of institutions and of their organisation at a national level. Those rights that were once blended within an institutional order whose component parts overlapped and then were scarcely definite have gradually taken independent paths, and the local prospect has widened to a national level. The course of citizenship has been touched by this process of differentiation, typical of the modern age. Political institutions – like constitutions, courts of justice, parliaments and the bodies of government – have assumed a national relevance. In doing so they have been liberated from those constraints that secured them to the local sphere and to the elitist social groups of that specific context, to submit, instead, to the national system framework.

On this basis, the rights of citizenship have gradually crystallised, assuming the tripartition on which the reflection on this theme is still founded today. A broadening of rights has occurred over the past few centuries: *civil* rights in the eighteenth century, *political* rights in the nineteenth century, and *social* rights in the twentieth century. Obviously, this periodisation should be viewed with a certain amount of flexibility due to the internal differences in various political systems concerning the development of such processes.

Citizenship, according to Marshall's perspective, is a set of rights established and acquired over time. These rights refer to a mixture of benefits that derive from the inclusion of an individual in a political system. The gradual extension of the rights of citizenship is a process that has ended up changing the structure of social inequality. The principle of equality has thus assumed a concreteness and meaning that differ greatly from those of the past.

This, however, does not preclude the fact that there are still problems related to being a *citizen*, intended in the wider sense of the term. Indeed, the fact that

> citizenship is not a package of equal rights for all and it is not an exception, it is the rule […]; the historical reconstruction of its genesis and of its evolution falsifies the assertion according to which normally fellow citizens enjoy the same rights […]. The contemporary democracies, like ancient ones, still have their *metœci* (their resident aliens without rights of citizenship). […], the problem is not posed in simple terms of *in* and *out*, of being or not being holders of rights of citizenship, but of the quantity, the quality and the specificity of these rights. (Zincone 1992, 9; author's translation from Italian)

Such a notion, though, does not preclude the idea that the figure of the citizen, after a path set out upon over two centuries ago, has assumed its own physiognomy, first in the sphere of the national community – that is, within the framework of the nation-state – and then in the global society of the post-modern era. And it is on this idea of the citizen, in the Internet age, that the 'extensive' conception of citizenship already referred to, which incorporates both cultural and technological dimensions, should be shaped, going beyond the formal idea of the concept.

2.4 BEHIND THE FORMAL DIMENSION

Citizenship, in the classical conception, has been intended as a package of formal rights and duties that sustain democracy in the framework of the nation-state. The principles, and the requirements, of universalism, equality and wellbeing are closely connected to it. Various authors, however, have highlighted the necessity of going beyond the formal and institutional aspects of citizenship. They urge the consideration of an additional 'part': a cultural one. This implies the consideration of the *affective* dimension of citizenship.

Citizenship is, indeed, something very fluid, and can be dealt with by considering three distinct levels. Beyond the *juridical* and *political* levels, of substantial importance is the level of

> affective citizenship which is primarily concerned to mobilise feelings of civic belonging, loyalty and solidarity. It was with a view to cultivating this kind of affective attachment that the Italian nationalist, Massimo D'Azeglio declared, soon after the national unification of Italy, that 'We have made Italy; we now have to make Italians'. (Coleman and Blumer 2009, 5)

Belonging, loyalty and solidarity are sentiments of the citizen that manifest themselves in the affective dimension of citizenship, which goes beyond the formal (juridical) and institutional (political) sphere. The debate on the theme has urged the necessity to consider the relevance of this further 'element', also given the aspect of complexity introduced by the multicultural character of global society (Stevenson 2001). Widened in this direction, the idea of citizenship makes more articulate the concept itself and the profile of inclusion of the citizen in a given community, and it is enriched with an additional element of a *cultural* nature. Moreover, the *political community* has, over time, extended its boundaries. Its nature has been complicated by the pressures induced by globalisation and social modernisation processes. With the development of the global society, it has witnessed a relative weakening of the nation-state. The Internet and digital technologies are challenging the working of state institutions. The traditional nation-state system has long controlled the national and international sphere by a subsequent multinational system based on the concentration of power in the state. But today, the way in which the global world works has deeply changed the scenario and is disrupting the institutions that once held a monopoly of power and controlled international affairs (Owen 2015).

Consequently, the confines of the polity have been redefined and have widened the scenario in which the citizen moves. This aspect involves both the cognitive profile – thus the individual sphere – and the political profile – that is, the institutional dimension and its systemic structure.

The very notion of citizenship has been affected, consequently, by these transformations. The domain of the *second modernity* – as defined by Beck – manifests itself in the information society, which marks the superseding of the industrial society, and is associated with the processes of cultural transformation, such as individualisation and reflexivity (Beck et al. 1994). But models of the 'hybrid culture' (Garcia Canclini 1989) and multiple social belonging (Ascher 2001) are elements that have found room in the globalised world and risk society, in which the sentiments of uncertainty are particularly widespread in late modernity society (Giddens 1991; Bauman 1998; Beck 1986). In this

framework, the traditional references and models of identification are reconsidered and made more complex under the impulse of social change, as is captured by Bauman's concept of the *liquid society*.

The differentiation on the cultural level is associated with the concept of citizenship and takes shape in the process of the social construction of (political) identities and affiliations. This is an aspect of citizenship that was even recalled by Marshall himself, although it was not at the centre of his discussion. When one recalls the differences of value, the various social ties and memberships and the question of identity, one associates a culturalist trait with the issue of citizenship. It is an approach that leaves the formal dimension and the safeguarding of individual liberties in the background, bringing to the foreground the element of communication and the sharing of information, and thus the transmission of meanings. The public sphere, intended as a setting for discussion on issues of public interest and a place for the formation of public opinion, is placed at the centre of this viewpoint.

The sharing of rituals, values and symbolic elements is the bedrock of living in a community. The common references underlie, indeed, the social construction of a community and its public dimension. In this sense, *cultural citizenship* becomes a kind of complement to the classical tripartition proposed by Marshall. It emerges as an extension that has in the dialogical process one of its cardinal points. While formal institutions and the procedural practices of democracy remain fundamental, civil society distinguishes itself as an essential entity. The communicative element, which characterises civil society in the field of the political system in which it acts, is essential.

Citizenship, then, is not summed up exclusively by the formal dimension of rights, but also becomes, according to this perspective, a matter of communication, belonging and participation: one's *feeling part* of a political community. The reference is therefore to identity, to action and to the theme of responsibility; to the way in which the citizen, as a social actor, relates to other members of the community and to the political institutions. The cultural dimension of citizenship is therefore connected not only to the construction of a community but also to the social ties that develop in it.

It is in this sense that the idea of cultural citizenship should be understood – an extension of the path traced by Marshall – but it must not be confined to, and confused with, only the ethnocultural dimension of the rights of minorities in a global and cosmopolitan society. It is certainly this too, but it recalls a wider discourse that pertains to the experience of the members of a community themselves.

The area of communication – from the legacy media to the Web 2.0 platforms – is closely connected to cultural citizenship. In the age of globalisation, the frame that surrounds this notion of citizenship must embrace a vast horizon that goes beyond the borders of the nation-state. The natural environment

becomes that of digital information, the online society (Castells 1996; 2012), which is by definition global and instantaneous.

Being part of a community should, therefore, be considered in its civic sense as well as its political one. This consists of paying attention to the issues of public life, becoming active, respecting the written and unwritten rules of the community, and even participating in the various forms of political engagement. Citizenship can be seen more than in terms of *received* citizenship to the *achieved* citizenship, as Dahlgren (2009) suggests – thus an idea of citizenship as 'civic agency',[3] which can be closely connected to the domain of the Internet.

> The notion of achieved citizens, something beyond the received, formal status, is an important opening, and leads us forward to the idea of citizenship as a form of social enactment, that is, as civic agency. I suggest some of civic identity is a precondition for such agency, and I look to the traditions of republicanism and civil society and public spheres to see how we might formulate civic agency as something that has its grounding in everyday horizons. Civic identities emerge through doing, through experiences in both the public and private spheres of life. (Dahlgren 2009, 7–8)

In the scenario of the networked society, the forms of involvement of citizens in public spaces have changed, especially for the younger generation, who have developed specific political cultures (Bolin 2017; Grasso 2016) that differ from previous ones. Being a citizen and the practices themselves of citizenship refer, indeed, to the system of values that they are inspired by. The change in the 'norms of citizenship' (Dalton 2008a; Dalton and Welzel 2015) leads to transformations of the way in which citizens relate to politics and vice versa (Moro 2020, 75–90). There is a strict interaction between norms and actions that implies repercussions at the systemic level as well as at the level of individual behaviour and the behaviour of social groups. In short, political culture and political participation are two faces of the same issue.

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[3] With the concept of *agency* in sociology it is intended to consider the actions of individuals in contrast to the vision of the subject proposed by approaches such as structuralism. And in this sense, it deals with a theoretical construction, inspired by political activism directed against the traditional power structures, which intends to assign a different and more significant role to the potentialities of social action. Anthony Giddens was the first to use this term, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, in his *structuration theory*, with the conceptual aim of combining individual action and social structure, micro and macro-level analysis, intended as closely linked and reciprocal elements.

2.5 CIVIC CULTURE AND CITIZENSHIP

Some of the classical categories, which refer to the functionalist theoretical perspective, can help us to understand the cultural and identity-related dimension of politics. It underlines the relevance of the interaction between attitudes and behaviour, between culture and structure[4] in the study of a political system. The expression *political culture* may be defined as the set of attitudes, beliefs and feelings about politics current in a nation at a given time. This political culture has been shaped by the nation's history and by the ongoing processes of social, economic and political activity. The attitude patterns that have been shaped in past experiences have important constraining effects on future political behaviour. The political culture affects the conduct of individuals in political roles, the content of their political demands, and their responses to laws (Almond and Powell 1978, 25).

According to this author's perspective, it is fundamental to identify the underlying model of inclinations that gives form to, and takes form from, the ongoing activities of political life. It is an 'individual' scheme[5] of approach to the objects of politics, which passes through the fundamental process of (political) socialisation. Socialisation assumes a central role because it manifests itself in the formation of the political culture of a collective (Almond and Verba 1963). But it is also reflected in the construction of individual political identity, which, at least to a certain extent, can be considered the product itself of socialisation.

Political culture, according to the classical approach, consists of three mutually interdependent sets of individual orientations: (1) the cognitive; (2) the affective; and (3) the evaluational one towards political objects such as the 'general' political system, the specific roles or structures in the system (i.e. legislatures and bureaucracies), the incumbents of roles (i.e. monarchs and legislators), and public policies (decisions or enforcements of decisions).

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[4] At the base of the concept of *political structure* Almond and Verba (1963) place the concept of *role*: a model of behaviour, defined by personal and social expectations, held by actors and institutions that exercise specific functions. The number of political structures is vast. They range, for example, from the voter – at the moment in which s/he goes to vote, thus carrying out a particular political role in a democratic context – to the economic, religious, cultural or explicitly political organisations, such as the parties, for example, which are complex structures incorporating, in turn, various roles: leader, activist member, voter and so on.

[5] This underlines the *individual* dimension of the orientation towards politics, inasmuch as Almond and Powell (1978) also distinguish the systemic dimension of political culture, referring to the concept of legitimacy and the support, on the part of the citizens, for the political authorities and their activities.

It is on the basis of these three dimensions that we can interpret the relationship between citizens and politics, and thus the cultural foundations of the practices of citizenship:

- The *cognitive* orientation is the knowledge of politics and belief about the political system, its actors, its themes and its mechanisms: inputs and output. Thus, an individual may have a relatively high degree of accurate knowledge about how his whole political system works, who the leading figures are, and what the current problems of policy are.
- The *affective* orientation is the dimension that refers to emotionality, wherein the individual might have feelings of alienation or rejection toward the system. Perhaps his family members and friends have long been holding such attitudes and feelings about the political system, its roles, personnel and performance.
- The *evaluational* orientation is the dimension of 'judgements and opinions about political objects that typically involve the combination of value standards and criteria with information and feelings' (Almond and Verba 1963, 14). The citizen may have some moral evaluation of the system. Perhaps his democratic norms lead him to evaluate the system as not sufficiently responsive to political demands, or his ethical norms lead him to condemn the level of corruption.

According to this perspective, the cultural dimension has, as a whole, a great influence upon the functioning of a political system. The changes at the level of value orientations are reflected in citizens' behaviour and thus at the level of the system. The traits of the political culture of a community and the identity of its citizens are expressed in the voting choice, in the style of participation, and in civic involvement. The attitude of trust towards the political institutions or the legitimisation credited to the public authorities push towards civic behaviour: respect for the laws, acceptance of the decisions made by the political class, the degree of interest and concrete engagement of the citizen.

On the empirical research front, the combination of these three orientations has allowed the delineation of the traits of three ideal-types of *civic culture*: a localist and provincial orientation, in which these citizens come to be defined as *parochial*; an attitude of subjection towards politics, personified by the *subjects*; and that of an active and involved citizen: the *participant*.

This last is the ideal-type of the good citizen, the expression of a participative political culture, distinguished by a high level of information, awareness and sense of political efficacy.[6] The expectations regarding the political

[6] By *political efficacy*, according to Campbell et al. (1954) is meant the sensation that individual political action has, or can have, an influence on the political process;

actors and institutions also make these citizens attentive to the input of the political system. They mobilise on the side of social demand through participation opportunities and processes. They are citizens who express an active engagement in the community and cover roles in different kinds of political organisations.

2.6 CONSTRUCTING POLITICAL AND SOCIAL IDENTITY

At the individual level, it is the issue of personal identity that is posed as a fundamental element. Identity represents the image that one has of him/herself with respect to the social world. Therefore, specifically, it is possible to say that having a clearly-defined *political identity* allows an individual to define him/herself with respect to the community of which s/he is part; in the political-institutional context and with respect to the prevailing social and cultural trends; to the groups to which s/he belongs or refers; to the specific social institutions, norms and regulation mechanisms operating on the society.

In order to understand personal identity, an individual must be part of the context and references in which s/he recognises him/herself, in which s/he develops his/her relationships, in which s/he *defines the situation* and confronts with the meanings of this *own* world. It is there that one's image of politics matures (Dubar 2000). Socio-political identity is acquired, therefore, along the continuous path of socialisation that leads to a cognitive elaboration of the political world, which comes to be defined by way of the logic of 'us' and 'them'.

In the process of identity formation, two different components can be distinguished: that of *identification* and that of *individuation.* With the former, the individual comes into contact with elements and characters towards which s/he has a feeling of continuity and similarity, and hence a strong bond. Identification promotes a sense of belonging, of inclusion, with respect to specific social environments and collective entities, such as the political community, groups, but also such as political institutions, ideological orientations, political parties or leaders. Affective affinity can be summarised well by the idea of 'us'.

The second component in the formation of socio-political identity, that of *individuation*, fuels, instead, a sense of detachment and exclusion. People

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that is, that it is worth doing one's duty as a citizen. The literature, however, refers to different types of the sense of political efficacy: the *internal* or *personal* type, defined above, and the *external* or *systemic* type, which consists in the evaluation of political institutions in responding to the political and social demand of the citizens.

make reference to those traits that distinguish them culturally from other subjects: institutions, orientations, groups, parties and organisations. It is the 'them' perspective that is expressed through this second component, which refers, essentially, to an attitude of opposition and distance.

These two mechanisms define the identity profile of the citizens, intended as subjects included in the political system. They are dynamics that lie at the base of *feeling part* of an organised political community, and hence of the very process of citizenship. The political activism of the citizens takes form, indeed, on the basis of specific identitary schemes. And it is also through collective action, online and offline, that political identities find both a channel of expression and further reinforcement. Various authors have pointed out this strong reciprocity between the dimension of acting and that of identity: identity stimulates the action of political participation but taking part in collective action also reinforces the political identity of the subject who participates in it. A sort of circular path is thereby established that contributes to the definition of the identity itself (Pizzorno 1966; Melucci 1982).

2.7 SOCIALISATION AND POLITICAL GENERATIONS

Identity takes form during a continuous mechanism of learning from the experiences of daily life, through contact with those actors – institutions, groups, associations and persons – which transmit contents of more or less explicit political meaning. Obviously, the structural conditions (socio-economic position, social and territorial mobility), environmental conditions (living in a subcultural and traditionally rooted, religious, political or civic context) and relational conditions (family orientations, social circles) in which the individual finds him/herself immersed will have a significant influence.

Political socialisation is fundamental. It refers to those processes and influences that ensure that an individual becomes a political subject. A citizen is a figure that is part of a democratic system who (1) accepts the rules and mechanisms of the system itself; (2) has the ability to recognise his/her position in the wider scheme of interests, making use of the available resources useful for enhancing such awareness; (3) has faith in her or his political behaviour, and thus in the efficacy of his or her actions aimed at influencing those who have the power to make decisions regarding the collective (Oppo 1980).

The above-mentioned attitudes are based on the assumption that the social role of the citizen is achieved through the political socialization process. However, this process should be understood as being continual and cumulative; not only socialisation but also re-socialisation reinforcement of pre-existing values and attitudes, along lines consistent with cultural orientations already structured in the past (Rush 1992). The issue of the persistence of orientations

in the course of time refers back to the impact of pre-adult experiences upon adult life. This links political culture to the idea of *generations*, and in particular to the concept of *political generation.* With this element, the picture of the citizen is further complicated. Behind the concept of *generation* is the idea that identity, political culture and behaviour change according to the *time* variable, intended as the events and social and political climate that mark a given historical phase. Underlying the difference between the generations, there is the conviction that the subject's framework of perceptions and values is constructed in the early years of life, adopting the political climate of that specific historical and social moment. Once structured, such an ethical scheme would tend to persist throughout the subject's life. The result is a collective orientation that would lead to the birth of that which has been defined as a *political generation*. Cohorts of citizens sharing specific political orientations would, therefore, be created, due to the process of socialisation that has developed in a specific *moment* that has strongly marked their social and relational context. The experience of such a specific climate has characterised the phase of entry of the subjects into social and political life, profoundly marking their identity and thus their way of being citizens.

In the post-modern era, the socialisation process is strongly accelerated by technological change and by new models of social relations that distinguish this society and its media generations. Besides, given the diffusion and ease of use of social media, as well as instant messaging apps (IM), this ephemeral space is going to end up affecting not only the younger generations who are naturally suited to this kind of communication, but also other segments of the population who are less skilled in the use of those tools, thanks to the user-friendliness of them. For this reason, the traditional theory of generations – developed first by the Italian historian Giuseppe Ferrari (1874) and over the twenties by the German sociologist Karl Mannheim (1952) and the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset (1931) – combined with the far more recent discussion on the media landscape and its role in generations formation – as examined by Göran Bolin (2017) who discussed the idea of *media generations* – permits an understanding of the ongoing shift that has been affecting contemporary democracies. In fact, the 'objective' media landscape can be considered a contextual structure that, together with the political and cultural realm, affects generational identities and their perspectives and guides citizens' action towards politics.

The media landscape in its totality has then become a very formative component for young citizens and their experience. They are naturally socialised with new media technologies which can be used as a tool to be part of the political community and to participate within it. Embracing a generational perspective allows scholars to understand the ways citizens gather general and

specific political information, and then how they are going to seek it in the future (Bentivegna and Ceccarini 2013, 196; Ceccarini 2018, 82–6).

Besides, this perspective also allows us to know how they take and how they will take positions on issues of public and political interest, and the possible shift from past and mainstream media users.

2.8 CITIZEN BETWEEN STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Beyond the interpretations that underline the crisis of the national state, this organism continues to represent the principal reference institution and framework for the issue of citizenship. It defines the basic link between society and politics as a whole. It constitutes the channel in which the citizenship develops, although its confines are becoming ever more permeable today.

On the one hand, political citizenship interweaves the formal face of the community in which it develops, and therefore touches the public nature of the state, the rulers and the typical dynamics of power. On the other hand, it is expressed in non-institutional but equally important places such as civil society.

No less than other fundamental concepts of politics, *civil society* appears as a notion with blurred outlines. Nevertheless, it is an object that continues to remain at the centre of politological discourse, arousing the attention of different disciplinary perspectives. The idea of civil society, unlike that of the state with which it is usually contrasted, is characterised by a substantial indefiniteness due to the various elements that it touches. Indeed, it is closely linked to individual liberties, competition among groups, and confrontation between different interests, values and cultures. These characteristics of civil society recall the basis of the rights of citizenship.

It is an ambit that is inextricably connected to the capitalist world and to the consolidation of *bourgeois* society and liberal democracy. Civil society constitutes, moreover, the backbone, as it were, to the *public sphere*, in the sense that Habermas has attributed to this concept – that is, the place in which critical public opinion develops in a dialogic way. Civil society constitutes, therefore, a sort of framework within which the citizens, various bodies and social institutions move, deprived, however, of formal political authority. These actors are regulated and safeguarded by the state through its laws. The actors of civil society, and in the final analysis civil society itself, are shaped by the political culture in which they are placed. At its base lies the idea of *sociability* – that is, the experience of staying together with others in a political and social community in which the presence and prerogatives of the state are fundamental.

The positioning of this concept, which is found at the junction between society and politics, makes it a theme of particular interest, but also one that is

subject to different philosophical currents and various conceptions of political thought. Generally, civil society is intended as a part of society that is independent of, and differentiated from, the state. It defines those institutions that have political relevance whilst not having *political authority*, in contrast to the state institutions. Consequently, it constitutes a sort of space inserted between, on the one hand, the *individual* and *private* dimension, and, on the other, the *public* and *national* dimension. It is a wide and variegated social environment. In it, the individuals pursue autonomously, without state interference, their own private interests, which are not necessarily, and exclusively, of an economic nature. Through rules, rights and measures of protection the state guarantees personal activities that touch diversified spheres, which can also assume a political value within a community.

Traditionally, according to sociologist Salvador Giner (1972), civil society can be defined as a sphere historically constituted of individual rights, voluntary liberties and associations, whose autonomy and reciprocal competition in the pursuance of their own private interests and desires are guaranteed by a public institution, called the *state*, which abstains from intervening politically in the internal life of the said sphere of human activities.

It should be understood, then, as a complex sphere of networks of relationships, practices and organisations that give form to human social activities. In order to provide greater substance to such a concept, we may recall the institutional elements that constitute it: kinship ties and familial structures, religious organisations, educational and training institutions, the media system, social and economic relations and bodies, interest groups, parties and social movements, voluntary, philanthropic and third-sector associations, to name the main ones.

Civil society is then a sort of puzzle that can be seen through different perspectives: as associational life, as good society, as public sphere (Edwards 2014). Nowadays, it overlaps NGOs, social media networks, voluntary citizen action in the global time and space, various forms of social enterprises, street protests in world politics and so forth. Civil society even in the post-modernity era can play an important role within the political realm such as addressing social problems like injustice and inequalities, rebuilding the community, deepening the quality of democracy that is a fundamental issue in our troubled times (Diamond and Morlino 2005).

And in this sense, institutions can be seen as ‘entities’ that are located between the spheres of the state and the individual, giving consistency to the fabric of civil society and form to the traits of the political culture of a given community. They offer, at the same time, an opportunity for participation. They favour the process of inclusion, urging citizens to *be part* of the political community, as stakeholders of economic interests, cultural orientations and politico-ideological visions.

2.9 CITIZENS AND THE POLITICAL PROCESS

This interstitial ambit between the private sphere and state dimension, identified in civil society, becomes a fundamental element in the relationship between citizens and the political space. In it, indeed, the practices of citizenship are made explicit by the *inputs*: on the one hand the selection and transmission of *social demands*, and on the other the *support* towards the political system and its components.

Parties, groups, movements, public opinion and the media are important actors that move in this space. They represent, transmit and mediate the requests coming from civil society towards the political authorities and the public debate as well. They emerge as gatekeepers, which carry out a function of access regulation about the claims directed towards the 'black box' that represents the political system, as conceived in the classical model proposed by David Easton (Figure 2.2).

These *demands*, assuming political relevance, become *issues* and impart dynamicity to the *process* that develops between the political system and its environment. The social demands transforming themselves into political inputs will stimulate responses – the outputs – on the part of the system itself, which will produce intervention measures and public policies (Mény and Thoening 1989). Political parties and interest groups carry out a function of *articulation* and *aggregation* of interests. They *articulate* social needs and problems to place them on the political agenda. Therefore, such claims are *aggregated* into a more complex political project, to create an output through the production of *policy.*

But the political organisations not only address demands and claims. They also guide the consensus or the support towards the system. Consensus should be understood in a broad sense, thus not only in electoral terms, which are an important expression of it. The *support* has a symbolic nature and is directed at the system and its components, such as attitudes of loyalty, legitimisation, identification and trust.

These traditional political actors, to which can be added, in our perspective, the so-called *watchdog groups*, *civil society monitors*, mobilise citizens through various and new participative modes, aimed not just at the selection of 'rulers' but also to influence those choices that affect the entire political community, such as Internet activism, e-petitions, public opinion campaigns, deliberative e-democracy arenas and so forth. Democratic innovation and participatory democracy initiatives are part of this dynamic.

Politics, according to Easton, consists, indeed, in the *authoritative allocation of values*, goods and resources. And it is exactly this nature of the outputs that renders the process political. In its conception of politics, the authoritative

Source: Adapted from Easton (1953).

Figure 2.2 *'The political system' of David Easton*

dimension constitutes the central element: in short, that which distinguishes the political system from other types of system is the fact that through its functioning it leads to decisions accepted, most of the time, as binding by the majority of the members of a society or collective (Easton 1953).

In this respect, in addition to the classical political organisations (notably the parties), institutions such as the networks of civic, religious and bureaucratic associations assume great importance. The media system, integrated with the presence and role of the so-called new media, remains fundamental. Moreover, the social and cultural fabric present in a community is central. These are elements closely linked to the modalities of citizens' participation and involvement in the decision-making process, as well as to the formulas of inclusion provided by the experiments of deliberative democracy (Elster 1998; Fishkin 1991) and initiatives of e-democracy.

The traditional scenario is called into question by different but connected phenomena that have an impact on the democratic innovation processes, as discussed by Gram Smith (2009).

There is a shift in citizens' political culture, especially among young generations, and increased innovation (not to say revolution) in ICTs which is strictly related to the 'civic and political use' of the Internet. There now exist e-democracy procedures, taking part in deliberative arenas and also in open government initiatives as well as various modes of e-participation such as becoming informed and fostering mobilisation. All of these might strengthen and innovate the relationship among citizens, institutions and the political process itself within the frame of representative forms of democracy in crisis (De Blasio 2014; 2018; Sorice 2014).

Citizenship today develops within a framework that is decidedly more complex than it once was, where the confines of the nation-state have loosened, and where the technology has assumed a key role in the public discourse and democratic practices. The idea of community remains of greatest relevance, represented by those links that assure resources of integration to the nation-state's individual and institutional components.

2.10 PATHS OF INTEGRATION

The theme of a collective involved in the political community recalls the fundamental problem of the relationship with the political-institutional sphere. It is the basic issue of *integration* and cohesion within a community, an aspect that refers to, among other things, the symbolic and affective elements: the feeling of trust and identification between citizens, and between them and the political sphere is the core element of a cohesive reality. It refers, moreover, to the sense of belonging to a community and to its institutions, which is

a fundamental dimension of citizenship: affective citizenship (Coleman and Blumer 2009).

At least two closely related perspectives need to be addressed in this regard to frame our discourse. On the one hand, there is the 'rediscovery' of the role of institutions and their 'integrative' function within a political community. On the other hand, there is *social capital* as a factor and resource for the cohesion of a community and the quality of democracy. Both directly affect the issue, meaning and practices of citizenship.

These two theoretical approaches look at the relationships between society and politics from different points of view. The first, *neo-institutionalism*, is a top-down perspective. It focuses attention principally on the capacity of institutions to transmit values, norms and meanings to society. The politically relevant attitudes and behaviour are 'modelled' also on this basis and contribute to defining the political culture of a society. The second, the presence of *social capital*, orients its gaze, instead, in the direction of the network of social and associative relationships that develop from the bottom up, from the community with reflections on the institutional level. This perspective focuses attention on the practices of reciprocity, the fiduciary aspects, and the horizontal relationships among the members and organisations that compose social reality. Civic activism itself and the shared norms and values in a given context fall within the idea of social capital, guaranteeing cohesion in the political community.

Rediscovering Institutions

The 'return' of institutions to the panorama of study and political research occurred towards the end of the 1980s. There was, that is to say, a relaunching of the classical perspective of the institutionalist politological approaches, but by way of a different interpretative formula. Political science during its disciplinary development has progressively enriched its method of investigation, initially linked to the juridical-institutional perspective, aimed at the analysis and description of political institutions (state, government, parliament, bureaucracies, and so on), opening itself to the influence of research approaches belonging to the social sciences (Hague and Harrop 2010). Political studies began to pay major attention to the sociocultural context in which the institutions move. Formerly these institutions had been conceived as elements shaped by the environment in which they were inserted: that is, as dependent variables.

James G. March and Johan P. Olsen (1989) considered the *rediscovery of the institutions*, throwing new light on the originary institutionalist perspective. The institutions were no longer seen as entities subordinate to exogenous forces, lacking the ability to determine and modify the motivations of individuals. They came to be evaluated as important actors of the political system, able to influence political life; to be considered as autonomous and independent

variables, where the political institutions react to their environment but at the same time, they create it.

From this viewpoint, the Internet, in a logic of reciprocal influence with the other actors of society and politics, can become a reference for the members of a community. It can assume a political significance and intervene in the context in which it is inserted; the global phenomenon of the *social street*, which sprouted from Italy, is an example of this kind of involvement in issues of public concern.

Institutions can emerge as the primary factors of social experience and collective resource: *trust.* Trust can create social cohesion and generate the *community.* A lack of trust on the political level, which is recorded when the institutions do not know how to nurture this community-binding resource, generates democratic 'tiredness' (de Saint-Victor 2014). It opens potential spaces of degeneration in the democracy itself: populism, authoritarianism, anti-political sentiments, valuing forms of leadership based on the figure of the *strongman*.

Institutions are fundamental for providing consistency to the matter of citizenship. They are tools that a community has given itself in order to organise the coexistence and cohabitation of people. They carry out a socialising function producing and transmitting values, norms and visions of the world. In other words:

> Institutions define individual, group, and societal identities, what it means to belong to a specific collective. […] Without denying the importance of both the social context of politics and the motives of individual actors, therefore, institutional analysis posits a more independent role for political institutions. The state is not only affected by society but also affects it. Political democracy depends not only on economic and social conditions but also on the design of political institutions. Bureaucratic agencies, legislative committees, and appellate courts are arenas for contending social forces, but they are also collections of standard operating procedures and structures that define and defend values, norms, interests, identities, and beliefs. […] The claim of institutional autonomy is necessary to establish that political institutions are more than simple mirrors of social forces […] Thus, political institutions define the framework within which politics takes place. (March and Olsen 1989, 18–20)

Social Capital and Political Community

With ever greater frequency, beginning in the 1990s, in the ambit of the political and social sciences recourse has been made to the expression *social capital*:[7]

> together with civil society, community, civil religion, it is part of a constellation of terms that designate, with wide areas of mutual overlap of the respective meanings, aspects of social life that are not traceable directly to the political-institutional sphere, but which have precise consequences on the political order and the legitimacy of the institutions in a local or national ambit. (Cartocci 2000, 423, author's translation from the Italian)

Social capital is connected to the problems investigated in the past by classical authors such as Alexis de Tocqueville on the associative network and civic voluntarism, as central elements in the functioning of democracy in America; such as Émile Durkheim on the issues of *mechanical* and *organic* solidarity or social cohesion; such as Ferdinand Tönnies, who defines the antinomic couple *community* and *society*; such as Georg Simmel, who, in his *formal* sociology concentrated on the implications of modernity in the process of social interaction, focusing attention on the role of social groups and related relations; and Max Weber, who dealt with the issue of ethics of responsibility, values and trust that widen from the associative level to the context and end up shaping social relationships.

This concept, moreover, extends into the ambit of a series of politological categories, contiguous to the idea of *community*, which are often used as synonyms of *social capital*: trust, civic culture, participation, social cohesion, cooperation, associationism.

The reflection that has developed on social capital has its foundation in these classical contributions. Associative networks and widespread social ties, trust as community resource, but also norms and shared values, lie at the heart of the order of a society and constitute the basis of social capital. These three dimensions of social capital also constitute the fundamental features of the political community and are a resource for the citizen and citizenship.

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[7] The concept of *social capital* is generally associated with James S. Coleman's *Foundations of Social Theory* (Coleman 1990), but the same author mentions the economist Glenn Loury as the scholar who introduced the term (1977), albeit with a different meaning. Also, in the 1970s, Pierre Bourdieu reflected on the idea of social capital. A parallel notion designated 'axiological capital' has also been proposed by Giovanni Sartori (1979, 145–50). Other scholars (Putnam 2000) date the term to 1916, in the work of Lydia J. Hanifan (1916), a state school superintendent in Virginia.

The category of *social capital* was introduced into the lexicon of political and social studies thanks to the work of James S. Coleman (1990). It was then used to indicate a public good that can be enjoyed but not exchanged. It is differentiated from private goods in that they are divisible and alienable. Social capital, instead, is characterised by its 'practical inalienability': 'it is a resource that has value in use, it cannot be easily exchanged. As an attribute of the social structure in which a person is embedded, social capital is not the private property of any of the persons who benefit from it' (Coleman 1990, 315).

Coleman's intention was that of considering, in addition to the social variables, the relational dimension in the study of rational action of individuals, and thus of the citizens. It is interesting to note that this scholar, while basing his ideas on economic approach, went beyond the classical idea of rational choice and *homo oeconomicus*. He replaced the idea of an actor who acts independently of others with the aim of reaching his/her own objectives on the basis of a rational calculation of convenience. The social actor, the citizen, is instead inserted into a network of social relationships. Of particular importance is the conditioning that such a relational structure may exercise on his/her individual choices, by creating, for example, a contextual atmosphere characterised by the sharing of norms, motivations and expectations, as well as actual practices.

Social capital is therefore seen as a sort of civil 'virtue'[8] of a society – which echoes Niccolò Machiavelli's *civic virtue*, the civicness of a social formation and the idea of the (good) citizen, integrated into his/her political community, participating in the collective life. It is a model of community that underlies the civic spirit and the performance of the democratic political system (de Tocqueville 1835–40 [2012]; Inglehart 1990; Putnam 1993).

Social capital is a supporting element of the political community, with implications that go beyond politics itself. The presence or absence, and then the availability of this resource on the ground also exercises a significant influence on economic development (Fukuyama 1995). It affects people's daily lives and the quality of their lives (wellbeing). Its lack leads to situations of social closure and distrust. Particularism and disintegration fuel a specific communitarian *ethos*, which a classical sociological study has defined 'amoral familism' (Banfield 1958); in this family-centric society the individual tends to pursue self-interest, paying attention to the family network or of a restricted circle of persons near to him/her, to the detriment of the common good and of the attention to the community.

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[8] There are also negative effects of social capital that lead to the dissolution of those virtuous aspects of its positive potential, which will not be dealt with in this work.

In such a context social relationships are based on an absence of morality – thus of categories such as right or wrong, good or bad – and presence of distrust and suspicion towards the individuals who belong to the community context in which they are inserted; the moral aspect is instead reserved for the inner group or the nearer relational context.

The consequence of such a system of social relationships is traceable to a practice antithetical to the idea of the *citizen*, concentrated on the search for personal advantage, which dominates the collective good and public interest. In such a context the availability for engagement with regard to issues of general interest will be limited, as will citizens' civic actions of *surveillance* and *monitoring* of public bureaucrats and political administrators (see Chapter 5). Respect for rules and laws will be less widespread. The public officials themselves, not identifying with the mission of the organisation they serve, will be more inclined to corruption and making use of their institutional position for personal benefit. There will be a wide detachment between the universalist ideals and the civic values on one side and the everyday practices on the other.

Voting, a fundamental element of *citizenship*, comes to be used to ensure, and to exchange, short-term material and personal advantage; vote buying and political patronage. The electoral choice does not reward those who have worked for the collective interest, but punishes, rather, the political sector that has brought about damage to the personal interests of the voter.

Political participation and enrolment in the parties rely on considerations of a specific nature. Attention towards the parties is attracted by those more favoured in the electoral contest or who hold positions of power, who are more likely to benefit. Political instability is the fruit of this underlying development, producing a vicious circle.

The idea of social capital is connected, therefore, to the practices of citizenship, intended as the propensity to cooperate and realise different forms of solidarity, in the territory and in the light of general interest. This contributes to reinforcing fiduciary expectations and social and associative connections. The social norms shared in the context attribute relevance to the collective dimension and maintain an ethics of involvement in public life. They reinforce citizens' identity and identification in the community itself. From these premises emerges the idea, and the ideal, of the *good citizen*, attentive to and engaged in the collective sphere, and then what is at the basis of the democratic experience.

3. Citizens: dealigned and critical

The transformations of citizenship reflect the changes that have occurred both in the value system of the citizens and in the features of their social and political environment – that is, in the context in which they move. Various sources refer to the syndrome of decline in civil life and the premises of public spirit. There are opposing interpretations that view with a certain caution the idea of the passive citizen detached from his/her political community. These understandings tend to value elements of civic involvement and 'participatory creativity' on the part of the citizens, in the moment in which they come into connection with the public dimension and, specifically, with the political sphere. The idea of the monitoring citizen is based on this background, going beyond the traditional logic of engagement.

3.1 DECLINING TIES

The category of *partisan dealignment* offers an interesting picture of the change in the very meaning of political citizenship. It summarises and represents the evolution of the traditional relationship between society and politics (Dalton 1994; Dalton and Wattenberg 2000). The capacity of action of politics and its principal actors – mainly the parties and politicians – in part because of growing social complexity, finds ever greater difficulty in responding to social demand (Flinders 2012). Besides, there has been a crisis of party legitimacy and a progressive fall in election turnout, further discrediting their role (Pharr and Putnam 2000). The idea of 'dealignment' is an evocative category of this tendency.

Underlying such a concept is the reference to a growing loosening of those ties of subcultural and ideological belonging that had instead marked the underlying logic of *party democracy* – that is, of a reality in which representation was strictly hinged on the mass parties, which were located at the centre of the social and political dynamics. The identities were structured around these actors, which were rooted and organised on the ground. Real 'social formations' had appeared, intertwined, at the local dimension, with the economy, politics and society (Bagnasco 1977; Trigilia 1986; Diamanti 2009).

The parties enjoyed a base of volunteers, militants and members spread throughout the territory, with the addition of an extensive and institutionalised professionalised political class.

Moreover, the parties' connections with the network of *flanking associations* provided 'structure' and social rootedness to the parties themselves. Value-based ideology and structural organisation represented the elements characterising the mass-membership party. In this scenario elections emerge as a fundamental ritual; the candidates were chosen on the basis of ideological proximity with the party and its fundamental orientations; the voters shared its imprint and thus recognised themselves in the identity expressed by the reference party. Identification with the party constituted one of the basic presuppositions. But this type of long-lasting link has been undermined by significant social transformations traceable to the wider process of 'cognitive mobilisation' (Dalton 1994; Inglehart 1990). The increase in education in modern democracies and the spreading of a series of other interlinked conditions including the sharing of post-materialist values have weakened the traditional cleavages. They have made possible an *individual self-sufficiency* in evaluating politics.

At the systemic level, in Western democracies, we are witnessing a slow but continuous process of *de-freezing*, to use a well-known metaphor of the change occurring. We are witnessing, that is, the weakening of the classical socio-political divide and the structure of relationships connected to it. These lines of conflict remained frozen for a long time, assuring political stability and reproduction of the consolidated mechanisms in the social and political life of Western democracies. The parties were able to reproduce, for decades, those contrapositions that had been at the base of their very genesis. Those lines of conflict remained important references for the political divisions, and thus at the base of citizens' identity. Only subsequently, in a slow manner through the process of social modernisation, did the change become explicit. The transformations affected the relationship between society and politics, and particularly between voters and parties. They therefore involved the fundamental turning point in the practices of political citizenship.

3.2 BELONGING AND (DE)FREEZING

Party democracy recalls a model of the relationship between society and politics founded on a shared values system, hinged upon the great ideological narratives. At the level of electoral behaviour that modality of being a citizen was expressed above all by the *vote of identification* (Parisi and Pasquino 1977).

The mass integration party emerges not only as an identity reference, but also as a social actor in the various levels of living in a political community. In such a context the *sense of loyalty* between voter and party is considerable, and is based on cultural and normative elements, which reinforce the degree of stability of electoral choice. They thus favour a rather limited fluctuation of the vote between the elections.

In this scenario the voter appears to be largely indifferent to the programmatic and operative tendencies of the parties. Under the profile of political culture, the vote of identification represents an 'act of faith'. It reflects, that is, a conflictual integration of the subject in the political and social system, which is characterised by the presence of deep ideological and socio-political divisions: *cleavages.* Politics and society mirror each other: politics reflects society and vice versa. Bernard Manin insists on this aspect when dealing with the metamorphosis of representative government, and refers to the principal freedom of public opinion[1] in the *party democracy* era. He stresses that this model of representative government is fully represented by the parties themselves. In such a sense there is a connection between the various perspectives present in society and public opinion on the one hand, and the differentiation of the political subjects in the party system, on the other.

Society, in that context, is then largely represented by political forces. The citizens in *party democracy* are immersed in a conflictual scenario. Rokkan, together with Lipset (Lipset and Rokkan 1967), setting out the 'freezing' thesis of the party systems with their internal fracture lines, aim to explain the stability of the national party structures between the 1920s and the 1960s. These political actors were born and raised on the principal social interests and conflicts that divide society. On those *cleavages* were born the party formations, as reconstructed by Rokkan, examining the state formation and nation-building process in Europe.

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[1] This is the third of the four principles around which Bernard Manin elaborates the thesis of 'representative government' and that of its metamorphosis. Its theoretical construction is based on four points which, according to this interpretation, characterise what is called the 'modern representative democracies' (vs 'ancient direct democracies'). From the end of the eighteenth century to today, according to this scholar, these principles in themselves have never been questioned, although their historical expression has changed.

> Four principles have invariably been observed in representative regimes, ever since this form of government was invented: 1. Those who govern are appointed by election at regular intervals. 2. The decision-making of those who govern retains a degree of independence from the wishes of the electorate. 3. Those who are governed may give expression to their opinions and political wishes without these being subject to the control of those who govern. 4. Public decisions undergo the trial of debate.
>
> The central institution of representative government is election […] (Manin 1997, 6)

Despite the stability of these principles there have been profound changes in representative regime. Its mode of operation has changed, which, according to Manin, has shaped, over time, three different types of ideal-type of representative government: 'parliamentarianism', 'party democracy' and finally 'audience democracy'.

Politics became institutionalised and the community was formed precisely on the basis of these cultural and social divisions. The 'freezing' is easily observable, and measurable, in terms of strength and stability of the voters' orientation. Indeed, a low level of electoral volatility characterised the Western democracies for a long time (Rose and Urwin 1970). The political parties themselves emerged as actors capable of consolidating the structure of the conflicts in society and the political system. The classical division between employers and workers is a case in point. This line of conflict would be reproduced in the course of time thanks to the distinction – on a cultural level and on that of the party supply and substance of policies – that runs along the ideological drive between left and right.

The interplay amongst (mass integration) parties and various side organisations linked to specific policy areas – trade unions in the first place, but also religious associations and economic, cultural and recreational representative organisations – allowed the shaping and control of the conflict. The social conflict was contained within the institutional and democratic sphere, through a process of 'encapsulation'. This helped to stabilise over time a model of citizenship based on a conflicting integration of the citizens in the political system. The pivotal junction of the 'old' mass party, through its bureaucratic organisation present in society and on the ground, allowed the reproduction of a specific political citizenship model.

The changes brought by the new politics and the birth of 'new' *single-issue* parties – such as those belonging to the family of green parties (von Beyme 1985) – and the decline of traditional political forces born on classical divisions – of religion and class – support the hypothesis of a redefinition of the model of citizenship. And, at the same time, they support the idea of the 'de-freezing' of the traditional cleavages structure. Within this development, which deeply touches political culture and is reflected in the electoral orientation as well as in the opening towards new forms of political participation, citizens emerge as actors increasingly free from the traditional legacies. Besides, Ulrich Beck (1992), in discussing second modernity and the risk society, emphasised the spread of self-expressive values, individual and political liberties.

3.3 COGNITIVE MOBILISATION AND OPINIONS

The weakening of that relationship model leaves room for the development of a different kind of voter, and thus a different way of interpreting political citizenship. The new figure of the citizen is less bound by traditional references. The voter, in other words, is 'individualised'. The 'reflexive' traits become more important in his/her perspective. The 'cognitive' dimension has assumed greater importance in the participatory sphere. In this regard, we have already referred to 'cognitive mobilisation'. The category of the 'vote of opinion' (vs.

the vote of identification), defined by Parisi and Pasquino (1977) offers a representation of such dynamics of change.

This type of voting is characterised by a deep *sense of responsibility* towards the political system and by the awareness of the importance of the political role of the citizen, starting from voting as a fundamental mechanism of political expression. It is based on a type of voter who becomes a *judge* of the political programmes and policies implemented by rulers. The vote became a kind of *sign* used as approval, punishment and warning towards the political parties. *Opinion* voting does not represent a stable electorate, but, in some sense, is changeable because it is based upon the conjunctural phase, varying between parties in a way that favours contiguity in the political space. At the systemic level, the vote becomes more fluid. Electoral volatility is, in fact, the result of the crisis of party affiliations and identifications. But it is also fuelled by a voting choice that is mostly built on contingent assessments, on the stakes at every election. Electoral support is then increasingly an 'individualised' choice, where *individual* identity counts more than the wider and collective *social* identity.

In the past, mobile voters tended to be less informed individuals, not greatly interested in politics and generally of a low educational level. The floating electorate whose increasing role is observed today is instead an informed electorate, interested in politics and relatively well educated. There exists today, it seems, also a mobile electorate that tends mainly to reflect before voting: it does not decide according to previous and external judgements, but according to images and different topics to which it is exposed during each election (Kaase and Newton 1995).

This type of voting is developed owing to the availability of substantial 'cognitive' resources on the part of the voter – that is, of a high level of knowledge and information. The use of media tools and participation in associations independent of the party network assume a central character to this end. They constitute important channels of information and expression of civil society, detached from a direct connection with the parties. The consequence is greater attention towards issues of a collective nature and towards the ability fully to understand matters of public interest.

The political-cultural trait of this voter presents a profile of a sophisticated subject, rich in resources and cognitive skills: a *civis nobilis*, to use a typological definition coined to define the figure of the citizen that is closest to the model described in civics books (Sani 2007, 302). His/her level of integration into the political community is high. S/he also has a considerable *sense of political efficacy*; believing that s/he can effectively influence the surrounding political reality is a precondition for the engagement.

The educational processes are strictly related to the growing presence of a type of citizen that sees a weakening of the 'traditional' ties and a strength-

ening of resources of a 'cognitive' nature, which are then used in political engagement. This is a form of 'mobilisation' that has grown over time, developing in parallel to the processes of 'dealignment' solicited by the generational turnover. As a result, there is a development of an awareness of post-materialistic goods and meanings. Changes on the cultural front are combined with technological development, particularly those concerning communication. Together they create a window of opportunity for the development of new modes of engagement on the Web, but also in *subpolitical* spaces, which appear consistent with the model of engagement of this type of citizen.

In such circumstances, the profile of a critical and monitoring citizenship gradually assumes greater clarity, as will be shown at the end of this chapter.

3.4 'BOWLING ALONE'?

The reconstruction of the theme addressed so far attributes great importance to the cultural dimension. It maintains that the changes in the sphere of values and individual reference standards are reflected on a broader level, inducing alterations in the model of citizenship at a systemic level.

Scholars propose different, and in some respects conflicting, visions of it. There are those who consider the practice of involvement of citizens to be subject to a metamorphosis, which is understood in the etymological sense of the term: acquiring another, different form. It is thus a change that does not necessarily have to consider an interpretation in terms of decadence for democracy. This type of approach, unlike others, does not highlight the decline of citizenship by resorting to data on the decline of social and political participation, but focuses attention on the changes in the citizen and on the new modes of expression of citizenship.

It is a reading that differs with respect to a troubled vision of the endurance of the civic foundations of the community. It is known that the latter is a perspective that nourishes a certain anxiety for present-day democracies and is based on interpretative categories that recall the growing disenchantment of citizens with regard to the processes, rites and fundamental actors of politics. This type of interpretation finds support in indicators which report an ever-decreasing diffusion of participative involvement, associated with the weakening of the civic dimension. The work that represents this interpretation perhaps more than any other is 'Bowling Alone' (Putnam 1995; 2000). The author highlights the decline of social capital in American society, and hence the role and relevance of social capital in democracy.

According to this thesis, democratic politics and citizenship are kept alive by a series of *bonds*: associative structures and relationships based on trust that are present in the community. The title 'Bowling Alone' neatly sums up the observed drop in membership of organised bowling associations since the

early 1980s. This trend regarding membership, however, occurred within the context of a substantial continuity in the number of people going bowling. That is, there has been a fall in the number of enrolled members of associations in the sector, but not in the number of players. People continue to play, but without participating in associative life. In this way, the assumption of responsibility and commitment is removed.

However, there are answers and interpretations that are different from those conclusions. 'Kicking in Groups' was the title of a work which, among others, was critical of that understanding and conclusions. Instead, the growth of participation in the game of football was highlighted in order to provide a different interpretation (Lemann 1996).

Beyond the specific academic dispute, what is interesting is the interpretative scheme that underlies these readings. A working democracy requires a profound and lively civic atmosphere, based on social cohesion and citizens' attention towards the general interest. The availability of a series of social and relational resources aimed at forming the (good) citizen is fundamental. In this context, social capital directly affects the theme of democracy, and more specifically is connected to the problem of democratic stability.

'Bowling Alone', although criticised, represents an interpretative model of the relationship between society and politics, extended also to contemporary democracies other than the American one. The hypothesis of the decline of citizenship, on which it is based, is not a new idea. Indeed, it has its roots in a not-too-recent past. Jean-Jacques Rousseau himself, in 1750, in *A Discourse on the Moral Effects of the Arts and Sciences*, states that 'We have physicists, geometricians, chemists, astronomers, poets, musicians, and painters in plenty; but we have no longer a citizen among us'.

This was an idea that also developed during the years that followed. Alexis de Tocqueville in the story of his journey to the new world, the two-volume *Democracy in America*, which he wrote around 1830, not only shows his appreciation for 'the spirit of association' and the potential of the associationism expressed in the development of American society. In the second volume, he remembers that even the Americans 'do not have time' to discuss issues of public interest, preferring to focus on the private sphere or to devote themselves to work.

And so, later, in the twentieth century, in 1922 Walter Lippmann published the influential volume *Public Opinion*, after his experience as undersecretary in the American government, and after analysing, from a strategic point of view, the dynamics of communication in an advanced society such as that of the United States. Addressing the issue of the relationship between democracy and public opinion, he underlined how the model of the 'omnicompetent' citizen does not work in the context of a complex society.

The considerations of these distinguished observers refer to the presence of a certain *malaise* with respect to the ideal of the *citizen* and its concrete presence in history, which not only affects the current democratic societies, but has its roots in past realities that have been the cradle of modern democracy.

3.5 'SINGLE' AND 'POST'

Following this perspective, it is also interesting to take into consideration interpretative lines that differ from those that embrace the idea of the decline of the citizen and foreshadow the decadence of the community. These readings start from the analysis of a series of indicators regarding participation. They recognise in it the trend, which unites modern Western democracies, of growing detachment in certain forms of involvement. But there is not just that. At the same time, they emphasise how ways of participation are developing that are different from the traditional modes of engagement (Dalton 2008a; Norris 2002; Zukin et al. 2006). Therefore, the adoption of a different interpretive perspective leads to recognising the growing relevance of other forms of activism implemented by citizens. This prefigures a kind of metamorphosis in the practices of citizenship.

A historical examination, referring to the American case, shows how a reading that underlines the progressive worsening in terms of involvement in the life of the community is not taken for granted. In this regard, Michael Schudson (1998) retraces the steps of American democracy and civil life in this society, from the first forms of participation developed by the settlers, to the 'mediatised' politics of the modern era. It should be said that in the past, during the phase considered the golden age of American democratic development – of which Tocqueville exalted the extraordinary nature of the 'art of joining' of the citizens to achieve the community goals – there were nevertheless still problems of conflict and disaffection.

Moreover, it should be emphasised that the indicators used by Putnam to support the thesis of 'Bowling Alone' would offer only a partial representation of society and its evolution in relation to civil and political spheres. If, on the one hand, social capital has certainly weakened, as has electoral turnout, there are indicators that point in the opposite direction. Citizenship also develops in spaces other than the usual ones. *Lifepolitics* and the *subpolitical* dimension refer to these places. The involvement of the citizen also takes place through 'individualised' forms and 'creative' actions, disengaged from a widely structured and institutionalised approach (see Chapter 5), and it does not take shape only in the electoral moment or through the representative process carried out by the great and traditional political organisations. The good citizen, according to this perspective, would still exist; but the good citizenship norms have changed over time as a result of the connection between period, age and

generation effect. Moreover, the transformation in the political culture and political socialisation process is the other side of this question and reflects the erosion of the notion of what it means to be a good citizen today (Jennings 2015; Bennett 2008).

The good citizen would always take part in the life of the community, but in a different way from that in the past. That is to say, the form through which civil involvement and attention to the community are practised has changed. It is therefore not correct to say that the civic vibe in society has diminished, because, instead, a different idea of citizenship would have been set itself, and hence a new citizen, with 'critical' and 'monitoring' mood (Norris 2002; Schudson 1998).

The decline in electoral participation and party membership is a fact confirmed by research results. This also applies to the identification of voters with regard to this political subject, the political party, and with respect to the ideological meaning of which it is the bearer. Deep changes have also taken place in Europe, where the parties have occupied a different role compared to that seen in the United States, because they are characterised by a greater territorial rootedness and a widespread presence in the everyday life of communities.

From this point of view, attention was drawn to the need to consider forms of engagement that are expressed through *direct* and *individualised* actions – actions, that is, which bypass the party structure or in any case the traditional organisations of representation of the interests. A monothematic activism has developed, in single-issue groups, in local interest groups or committees of various kinds; or a kind of activism developed by means of petitions or participation in online opinion campaigns, but also through actions that fall within the sphere of political consumerism or other forms of commitment attributable to Internet activism.

The e-participation phenomenon can be framed within the wider idea of digital democracy, or e-democracy, and its various *positions* – according to Lincoln Dahlberg (2011) – that provide a general categorisation of empirical cases of rhetoric and practice. These positions are the following and give the idea of the complexity of these initiatives and understanding: (a) liberal-individualist; (b) deliberative; (c) counter-publics and (d) autonomist Marxist. These categories were reconstructed considering the related conception of democracy (which are respectively: *Competitive-aggregative*, *Deliberative-consensual*, *Contestationary*, *Commons networking*) – and the democratic affordances of digital media technology.[2]

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[2] The digital democratic affordances in the four e-democracy positions are the following: (a) *Liberal-consumer*, aggregating, calculating, choosing, competing, expressing, fundraising, informing, petitioning, registering, transacting, transmitting, voting;

Those four e-democracy positions draw attention to what extent digital media can foster the quality of (representative) democracy and the diverse possibility for citizens' empowerment, involvement in the discussion, cooperation activities, civic or political participation, or better *to be part* of their own community in the time of the Internet.

The Internet, moreover, by its nature, urges the creation of reticular organisations of a *post-bureaucratic* type (Bimber 2003). But collective action also takes place within this kind of organisation, by definition 'lightweight', which fits into a network of relationships and links with a low degree of structuring. This is especially when *collective* action takes the form (and the logic) of *connective* action, according to Bennett and Segerberg (2012), in which *digitally networked action* (DNA) is at the core of this kind of activism. Personalised communication, organisation based on digital media, leader-less structure, weak organisational control, private/public boundary and symbolic construction of a united 'we', self-motivation, affiliates rather than members, and hybrid networks of organisations are the main organisational elements, and principles, of the *connective* participatory mode.

In this framework, mobilisation takes on a different form from that in the past: more fragmented and less pyramidal. It is linked to campaigns launched on delimited issues. To follow the suggestion of Bruce Bimber, many experiences of mobilisation become a *single event* that pushes forward the idea of *single-issue.* This also implies moving further away from traditional modes of engagement, and hence far away from a model based on more structured and hierarchical bodies, which propose a wide and universal type of response, and refer to a defined vision of the world.

Only in specific situations can civil concern remain high and activism develop. It is a way of experiencing citizenship that embraces a different perspective and at the same time it bears witness to the transformation in the political culture of citizens (Dalton and Welzel 2015). The classical modes of participation and the conventional places of politics open up to subpolitical spaces. They involve the habitual dimension and the personal sphere of involvement, recalling the idea of *lifepolitics.*

This is a type of engagement that extends the repertoires of action of the citizens, including, through new methods, in the public and civil life of the community to which they belong. These are forms of commitment that often take on a dis-intermediated character, as they do not resort to the traditional

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(b) *Deliberative*, agreeing, arguing, deliberating, disagreeing, informing, meeting, opinion-forming, publicising, reflecting; (c) *Counter-publics*, articulating, associating, campaigning, contesting, forming groups, identifying, organising, protesting, resisting; (d) *Autonomous Marxist*, collaborating, cooperating, distributing, exchanging, giving, networking, participating, sharing.

actors of political representation (parties, interest groups), but they still allow the citizen to assume a form of responsibility with respect to matters concerning public interest (see Chapters 4 and 5).

At the same time, these modes of action are configured as an expression of civil and political involvement; they are morphologically different from the traditional formulas, and in particular from those defined as *conventional*. It should be considered that this form of activism, although fragmented and individualised – but also post-modern, post-ideological and post-bureaucratic – has its own potential in bringing certain issues into the public debate. And, at the same time, these actions are able to give expression to and to shape the identity of citizens. In fact, the opening towards new forms of participation denotes a change in the 'norms of citizenship' (Dalton 2008a; Jennings 2015), strengthened by the parallel weakening of the link between citizens and parties, and of the relative traditional forms of participation.

The scenario in which these transformations take place is that of 'post-democracy' (see Chapter 4), a context in which the sense of citizenship is subject to relevant changes (Crouch 2004; 2020). Focusing on politics understood above all as an electoral and party struggle implies a risk: that of losing sight of the complexity of the meaning of citizenship, especially in the current phase, defined as 'post-representative' (Keane 2009). In fact, it is important to consider the creativity of the citizen who develops even in spaces that are distant and different from the conventional arenas.

3.6 THE CRITICAL CITIZEN

We now need to introduce the *critical citizen*. This is an ideal-typical figure that has now acquired 'citizenship' in the politological literature. S/he is a subject who moves within the framework of Western democracies, where his/her support for political institutions and government – in terms of trust, deference and consensus – tends to weaken. But it is also a model of a citizen that does not necessarily have to be portrayed as a subject poorly integrated into the political system and disenchanted regarding democratic mechanisms and principles. Thus, the fundamentals of democracy remain strong points of reference in the perspective of this figure. But his/her support for the political system seems more articulated than is reported in the classic version proposed by David Easton.

More specifically, s/he shows a critical attitude towards the institutions of government (regime institutions). This is an aspect of considerable importance, as these organisms are fundamental institutions in the functioning of a State. And they, therefore, place themselves at the centre of the organised political community. For these reasons, the idea of a critical citizen directly interweaves with the question of citizenship and its evolution. According to

Donatella della Porta, 'critical citizens do not see reasons for *loyalty*, but often practise *voice* rather than *exit*. In fact, in the contemporary world, citizens are politically active, even if less so in conventional forms and more so in unconventional ones' (della Porta 2013, 188).

The critical citizen proposes, in fact, a model of support for political institutions that is different and specific with respect to the traditional one. The tripartition elaborated by Easton regarding the classical components of the political system – authority, regime and political community – is expanded in the theoretical proposal by Pippa Norris (1999), who defined the profile of this type of citizen. The recipients of the support are, in this case, five different institutional elements:

- *political community*: the community in general, concerning the question of identity, the feeling of belonging to the nation, the national pride of citizens;
- *regime principles*: refers, instead, to the consensus towards the basic democratic ideals of the political system;
- *regime performance*: concerns the dimension of satisfaction towards the functioning of democratic institutions;
- *regime institutions*: recalls attitudes towards institutions such as government, parliament, the legal system, police forces and armed forces, the bureaucratic apparatus, political parties;
- *political actors*: refers to the evaluation of specific political leaders or political-institutional authorities.

In the dynamics of Norris's revisited political process, these different institutional contexts require a certain degree of support from citizens. But the various groups present in the community allow a different kind of support to these institutional elements. This outcome depends above all on the role and activities of these institutional bodies in society, on the stock of social capital present in the community, and on the features of the political culture of the reference context.

It is above all in relation to the main institutions of government, and then the rulers, that there is a growing critical tendency on the part of citizens. Over time, in fact, a review of attitudes and assessments has been observed, whereby the degree of support towards this institutional dimension appears to be declining significantly. The critical citizen is described as a dissatisfied subject, who has developed a gradual sense of disappointment with respect to the expectations and the ideal of the democratic regime. But being dissatisfied means expressing an *evaluation*, which is a component part of political culture, as we have already discussed. The critical citizen is a *demanding* citizen, who asks the political institutions for adequate responses to the complex problems

of global society and those that affect him/her more directly. In other words, it refers to the classical problem of *responsiveness.*

Some authors, in fact, trace the decline of trust in government institutions to the perception, on the part of citizens, of the deterioration of the configuration and performances of the institutions themselves (Newton and Norris 2000). On the other hand, the climate in which the rulers and the ruled are moving is certainly made more difficult by the conditions and consequences induced by globalisation, which makes government action particularly complex (Pharr and Putnam 2000). We are faced with a global scenario, which specifically affects the modern representative democracies, where the critical tendency is more widespread.

In this regard, Ronald Inglehart traces the critical citizen back to his classic theory on the long-term development of post-materialist political culture. It is a system of values that marks the individual identity and participatory practice of a specific political generation: that which has become socialised in the Western democracies since the second post-war period, during a phase of prosperity and development. The post-materialist perspective suggests that the 'silent revolution', bringing transformations in the value system of large segments of the population of post-industrial society, has urged the development, in contemporary society, of a figure like that of the critical citizen.

On the wave of this cultural change, tendencies that call into question the deferential attitude towards political and social authorities and institutional bodies have strengthened. So the governments – but also the armed forces or religious organisations, to give some examples – are traditional and hierarchically structured institutions which end up inspiring less confidence than they did in the past, in particular within the *critical* component of citizens.

Parallel to this transformation in the perspective of values, conventional political participation also weakens: first of all, party and trade union membership, but also electoral turnout. For traditional party membership, there are segments of citizens who prefer modes of political activism of a new type; actions linked to (general) direct democracy such as referendums, petitions, voter initiatives or the systems of *recall* themselves (Milligan 2016), but also concerning lifestyles and strong expressive content. With the spread of the Internet and the Web 2.0 platforms, forms of e-participation have developed that refer to this type of activism. The change brought about by the so-called 'post-modern shift' at the social level, in terms of values, economic development and wellbeing, has contributed to re-elaborating the cultural perspectives of citizenship. This is associated with an erosion of trust and deference towards the authorities and rulers but not towards democratic principles. In fact, in general, in advanced societies, there is growing support for democratic values in opposition to authoritarian forms of government (Inglehart 1990).

3.7 THE (GOOD) MONITORING CITIZEN

The idea of the critical citizen emphasises how distrust in the institutions of politics, and in particular towards certain specific bodies, does not prejudice the recognition of the value of democratic principles. Nor does it undermine civil involvement and engagement in forms of political participation that develop through modes distinct from the traditional models of political activism. The practice of citizenship in post-modern times is stimulated by new global scenarios and technological development (Isin and Ruppert 2015).

There is a link between the *critical citizen* and the suggestive intuition of the *monitorial citizen* proposed by Schudson in his work on historical reconstruction of American civil life. The affirmation with which the final chapter of the volume opens is particularly emblematic: 'Citizenship in the United States has not disappeared. It has not even declined. It has, inevitably, changed. Past models of citizenship have not vanished as newer models became ascendent' (Schudson 1998, 294).

Therefore, behind this hypothesis, there is the belief that the old models of citizenship have not been undermined by the new ones, but they continue to live together and exert their influence in public life. In this regard, Zizi Papacharissi, discussing 'affective publics' and how citizens use media to feel engaged with everyday politics, says that

> Technologies network us but it is narratives that connect us to each other, making us feel close to some and distancing us from others. As our developing sensibilities of the world surrounding us turn into stories that we tell, share, and add to, the platforms we use afford these evolving narratives their own distinct texture, or mediality. In doing so, media do not make or break revolutions but they do lend emerging, storytelling publics their own means for feeling their way into the developing event, frequently by making them a part of the developing story. It is this process of affective attunement and investment for publics networked digitally but connected discursively that I am interested in exploring further with *Affective Publics*, energized by sentiment and energizing a new political. (Papacharissi 2014, 5)

However, the institutional structure, the system of government and the constitutional principles remain an important reference in post-modern society. Involvement and participation in the community represent a recognised value. And beyond the decline in voter turnout recorded in contemporary democracies, the vote continues to stimulate a sense of civic duty; it refers to the norms of citizenship and the image of a 'good citizen' (van Deth 2007). Protest voting still has a meaning simply because voting itself matters. The relevance of the electoral moment and the awareness of the value of the rights of political citizenship persist in the cultural vision of the post-modern citizen.

The very ideal of a citizen informed on issues of public interest, that is, 'omni-competent' and participant, continues to act as a reference rhetorical figure. The good citizen is the result of a normative approach, but it is difficult, if not impossible, for the contemporary citizen to get informed in the manner prescribed by this (ideal) model. These are considerations already expressed by Lippmann in his seminal work on public opinion written about a century ago, in which he says that:

> the doctrine of the omnicompetent citizen is for most practical purposes true in the rural township. Everybody in a village sooner or later tries his hand at everything the village does. There is rotation in office by men who are jacks of all trades. There was no serious trouble with the doctrine of the omnicompetent citizen until the democratic stereotype was universally applied, so that men looked at a complicated civilization and saw an enclosed village. (Lippmann 1922, 273)

It is evident, according to this reading, that democracy and the public life of a complex political community cannot be founded on an ideal of an (omni) informed citizen. There is no real possibility of being such, given the objective difficulty in realising this model of citizenship in everyday practice. Michael Schudson himself asserts that 'Walter Lippmann was right: if democracy requires omnicompetence from its citizens, it is a lost cause' (Schudson 1998, 310). But he also reiterates another important aspect: 'the obligation of citizens to know enough to participate intelligently in governmental affairs be understood as a monitorial obligation. Citizens can be monitorial rather than informed' (Schudson 1998, 310).

This idea of citizenship refers to the model of *citizens* who 'scan (rather than read) the informational environment in a way so that they may be alerted on a very wide variety of issues for a very wide variety of ends and may be mobilized around those issues in a large variety of ways' (Schudson 1998, 310).

The idea of the *monitoring citizen*, with a disposition towards surveillance rather than omni-competence on aspects of public life, reveals a fundamental feature of post-modern citizenship – namely, the importance of the action of surveillance and warning on the part of the civil society with respect to the environment in which the (good) citizen moves. The opportunities to collect and share information, thanks to the pervasiveness of new media, provide support to the involvement and awareness of the citizen who lives in the *networked society*, and they are a prerequisite for the spread of this model of citizenship.

The possibilities offered by technological infrastructures, combined with transformations in the sphere of political culture, show themselves to be strictly consistent with this 'monitoring' form of citizenship and then politics. The Internet, by making the sharing of information on the network of 'individualised' communities or citizens less costly, creates a favourable condition

for monitoring practices. This, at least potentially, widens the possibilities for citizens' surveillance of politics. But it must also be considered that *information overload* can also produce inhibition of the forms of surveillance. That is:

> communicative abundance does not automatically ensure the triumph of the spirit or institutions of monitory democracy. The diffusion of digitally networked media tools and techniques is a contradictory process. Within many settings around the world, its democratic potential is threatened by the troubling growth of *media decadence*. (Keane 2013, 112–13)

The interweaving of the new media and the legacy media, the interpersonal discussion in everyday social relationships and on online platforms, can be seen as places for developing 'monitoring' citizenship formulas. The very idea of democracy is affected by these dynamics. Indeed, the monitorial citizen participates in a democratic form that moves in the direction of landing-places marked by common elements: such as 'monitoring democracy' (Keane 2009) and 'counter-democracy' (Rosanvallon 2008).

4. Participation and (post)democracy

The discourse on political citizenship has ended up intertwining the main critical considerations around which, today in particular, the debate on representative democracy and its crisis has developed, as evidenced by the huge number of academic books on this topic. The procedural dimension of democracy and the electoral bond are considered insufficient to guarantee the full expression of the democratic principles.

Voting – inasmuch as it is a democratic ritual and fundamental right of modern political citizenship – is considered an essential moment within the continuous flux of the link between citizen and political community of which the citizen is a part. The process of representation, the cornerstone of these dynamics, with the evolution of the democratic political form, is empowered by the potentials of 'surveillance' and 'monitoring'. Citizens, in a direct way – be it individual or associated – can trigger themselves as actors of this mode of expression of citizenship.

4.1 THE CRISIS OF REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY AS A FRAME

A complex notion by itself, representation also has a problematic relationship with democracy. Representation and democracy are an 'Uneasy Alliance', as stated by Hanna Fenichel Pitkin (2004) in a self-proclaimed 'slightly revisionist' but also quite pessimistic essay about[1] representation. After her seminal book – *The Concept of Representation* – first published in 1967 and now a classic work of political theory, she again highlights how complex this notion is:

> (t)he concept of 'representation' is puzzling not because it lacks a central definition, but because that definition implies a paradox (being present and yet not present) and is too general to help reconcile the word's many senses with their sometimes conflicting implications. Representation has a problematic relationship with democracy, with which it is often thoughtlessly equated. (Pitkin 2004, 335)

[1] Author's elaboration of data from Eurobarometer Standard opinion pool, which is usually carried out twice per year in spring and autumn waves.

Like other eminent scholars such as Bernard Manin (1997) or Alessandro Pizzorno (2017), Pitkin reaches the conclusion that representative government is a new form of oligarchy with ordinary people excluded from public life. Representation has had a sort of backward effect on democracy itself where one of the three obstacles to a genuine participatory democracy concerns ideas and their formation in the age of electronic and digital media. Citizens 'become habituated to the role of spectator. The line between fantasy and reality blurs […] As for those who set policy and shape the images, insulated from any reality check, they soon become captive to their own fictions. All this does not bode well for democracy' (Pitkin 2004, 341–2).

In this framework, the Internet plays an important role in the political and public sphere. The digital revolution has been working in the direction of fragmentation of the audience and public opinion space (Manin 2017, 45). The different theoretical perspectives proposed by scholars have not yet come to a common conclusion, in part because of the difficulties in measuring and empirically verifying the possible proto-political effects this kind of connection could have (Dahlgren 2009). In the meantime, empirical research has not found any negative relationships between the use of the Web by citizens and their civic involvement (Christensen 2011). The discussion about its impact on the political sphere is, therefore, still open. Underlying this discourse, however, there is an important question that must be considered – that is, the malaise of representative politics, the so-called *demopathy* which is due to the convergence of diverse phenomena: cultural, political and technological (Di Gregorio 2019).

Representation is a conceptual model, but it is also an inherent part of the democratic process. It has both theoretical elements and political practicality, and so many other implications (Pitkin 1972).

On one hand there is nothing new in this regard. It is a sort of truism in some respects. On the other hand, this situation is closely connected to phenomena that have a great influence on the democratic innovation processes (Smith 2009; Sorice 2020) and on citizens' political culture, especially among young generations in the 'civic and political use' of the Internet such as e-democracy procedures, online deliberative arenas as well as various modes of being digital citizens.

From this standpoint, it is the concept of democratic representation as a whole that shows clear signs of trouble being stimulated, or better challenged, by the populist phenomenon and by the idea of an anti-establishment and direct (or 'immediate', that is, without mediation) politics. The combination of important processes, such as the weakening of the nation-state – which for a long time has framed traditional political participation – and the growing international interdependence of political, financial and economic interests make global governance ever more complex. From environmental problems

to financial flows, from the issue of migrants and refugees to the risk of international terrorism, political questions today are (about) closely linked issues. Rulers today face more difficulties in outlining future scenarios and making choices in ways that are consistent with social demands, changing political culture, and identity within the context of the globalisation backlash as understood by Colin Crouch (2018; 2020).

Moreover, the progressive rise of populism and sovereignism, with its related political forces and fostered by the sentiment against the political establishment, is rooted in this framework of limited *responsiveness* and weak *accountability*. Thus, it has become increasingly more problematic for politicians – belonging to both the so-called mainstream and anti-establishment parties – to respond to voters who voted for them on the basis of election promises made during the electoral campaign.

Campaigns are now technology-intensive, where digital media, data and analytics are at the forefront of contemporary electoral dynamics (Kreiss 2016; Gibson 2020). In addition, they have become progressively more dramatic both in tone and content. Consequently, once in public office, it is very difficult for candidates to put into practice promises they have made: they become prisoners of their communicative rhetoric and storytelling.

Moreover, the global world consists of both a complex network of international interests and new kinds of problems, where economic-financial powers hold a position that highlights a sort of structural weakness of the political sphere. Thus, the institutions of political representation and mediation of interests – such as political parties, trade unions, but also parliaments – are actually the political bodies most affected by the crisis of representative democracy. Populist discourse takes place within this frame. Without mentioning it directly, Pitkin herself affirmed:

> (D)espite repeated efforts to democratize the representative system, the predominant result has been that representation has supplanted democracy instead of serving it. Our governors have become a self-perpetuating elite that rules – or rather, administers – passive or privatized masses of people. The representatives act not as agents of the people but simply instead of them. (Pitkin 2004, 339)

The populist style adopted by various political actors based on the widespread anti-political sentiment of citizens, the revaluation of (online and offline) direct and deliberative democracy, as well as practices like the referendum (Milligan 2016; Qvortrup 2018) are all connected to the possibility of popular control and reshaping democratic mechanisms.

With the coming of social media the very presence of the model of personalised, if not 'personal' parties (Calise 2010; Bordignon 2014) has led to the stage of politics the complex and articulated figure of the 'digital prince'

(Calise and Musella 2019). This development recasts the notion of representation itself and thus the specific concept of representative democracy. This state of affairs has also led to a rethinking of the broader concept of democracy, progressively enriched with prefixes and attributes in recent political literature.

These re-conceptualisations include *hyper-democracy* (Rodotà 2013), *counter-democracy* (Rosanvallon 2008), *post-democracy* (Crouch 2004, 2020), *monitoring democracy* (Keane 2009), *hybrid democracy* (Diamanti 2014), *audience democracy* (Manin 1997), *live broadcasting representative democracy* (Urbinati 2013), even *stealth democracy* (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002) and, of course, *e-democracy* (Chadwick 2009; Coleman and Blumer 2009) to mention a few.

They also include 'immediate' democracy, meaning a kind of referendum democracy with weak mediation bodies, a democracy in the framework of post-representative politics (Tormey 2015). In other words, it is the sign of a mutation underway in the form of representative governments: the 'peoplecracy' (Diamanti and Lazar 2018).

The theoretical discussion on democratic dynamics focuses on the pivotal process of disintermediation, which implies re-intermediation through new actors and mechanisms. This could be termed 'neo-intermediation' and is a category that was already used with reference to new media and social networking (Giacomini 2018, 87–114). Yet it might also be extended to the logic and transformations of the political scenario.

The Internet, and more specifically Web 2.0 – social media and mobile connection – has contributed to shaping a specific model of community. The 'traditional' model has gradually turned into the network (or platform) society, as defined by Jan van Dijk (1991, 2006) and Manuel Castells (1996) over the 1990s.

However, the concept of social interactions had already been discussed more than a century before by the classical social theorist Georg Simmel. In his well-known work titled 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', he focused on the modernisation process of his time and related effects in shaping the new forms of human relations. In this regard, referring to the role of ICTs in late modernity, Rainie and Wellman (2012) discussed three revolutions – (1) the rise of social networking; (2) the consolidation of the Internet; and (3) always-on connectivity of mobile devices – that have strongly contributed to re-design the contemporary society's 'operating system' and have changed the traditional and established patterns of social relationships.

The present world has increasingly been marked processes – in the plural – of globalisation and has changed vastly over the last few decades (Steger 2017). A citizen of a global society is definitely a new actor. S/he is an individual who approaches everyday (political) life with the strategies of disintermediation (i.e. individualised collective action as discussed below) and

s/he is also approached by political leaders through the same model of direct communicative interaction (due to social network platforms). Meanwhile, neo-intermediation structures have been created, especially within the Internet arena, in which new and digital intermediators have undermined traditional ones.

In terms of political culture, citizens are reinventing the forms of participation in order to be part of the political community to which they belong. For this reason, the relationship between citizens and their political community is becoming a fundamental question for discussion.

In the post-modern era, the socialisation process is being greatly accelerated by technological change and by new models of social relations that distinguish this society and its media generations (Bolin 2017). Classical mediation bodies have resided within representative democracies, but political parties have also undergone huge changes at the organisational level in terms of communication strategies. Of course, even in the *audience democracy* (Manin 1997) the party apparatus continues to have significant weight in the party itself, but the leader's public image and thus their political fortunes are built mostly by means of a direct relationship between leader and voters, where different types of media are used to reach the audience without intermediation.

4.2 BEHIND DEMOCRATIC REPRESENTATION

Never before has the democratic ideal been shared and spread in the architecture of the political regimes of the various countries present in the world. In fact, many political systems have opened up to the institutionalisation of civil liberties over recent decades. However, it must also be said that the most recent tendency is towards scaling down and marking time. According to the 2020 edition of the 'Freedom in the World' report, 43 per cent of the 195 countries in the world are included in the group of so-called 'free countries', and 32 per cent are ranked as 'partially free'. Thus, 25 per cent are reported as 'not free' political systems.

Populations that live in a free country are a minority of approximately 39 per cent of the total world population. Using different indicators and ranking scales, a similar figure is also presented in the Democracy Index constructed by the Economist Intelligence Unit. Both analyses reach the same conclusion: there is a 'deterioration of trust in democracy' as DemoIndex stated, or there is a phenomenon of 'Democracy in Retreat', as reported in the Freedom House analysis. Something similar comes from the report 'Freedom on the Net', issued by the same organisation.

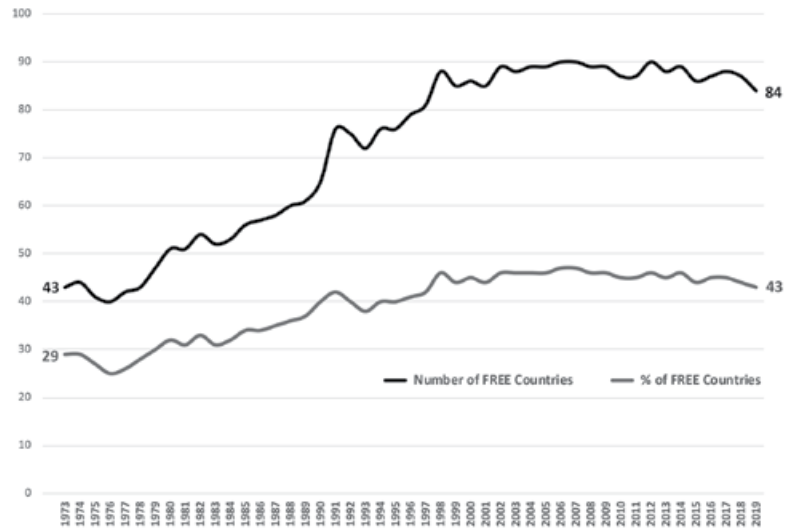
According to Freedom House,[2] at present the free countries – those, that is, marked by a high level of democratic liberties – number 84 out of 195. In 1973 there were fewer countries in this group: 43 countries out of 150 (Figure 4.1). The trends show a general growth in this type of political system worldwide. Yet, at the same time, the indicators adopted by 'Freedom in the World', that is, civil liberties and political rights, have recorded a global decline for 13 consecutive years: from 2005 to 2019 as can be read in the 2020 Freedom House report. This trend is defined as a 'widespread problem' since it has touched all parts of the world and affected Free, Partly Free, and Not Free countries alike.

So, behind the progressive extension of democracy, if examined in depth, the problem of the disaffection of citizens towards democratic regimes is equally evident. Feelings of mistrust are directed towards elected representatives, widening the 'void', as highlighted by Peter Mair (2013), between rulers and ruled, within a frame that affects not only the *old world.* Non-democratic practices and political (and populist) actors are multiplying and gaining the stage of politics, contributing to the undermining of representative democracy. Behind this critical attitude there are problems related to *responsiveness* and *accountability*, and hence linked, respectively, to the capability of politics, and politicians, to give adequate and prompt answers to the *social demand* expressed by the citizens, and to the claim of *political responsibility* of both towards the actions implemented and the actual results obtained.

The inefficiency of democratic systems and the problems related to democratic quality (Diamond and Morlino 2005; Morlino et al. 2013), but even the complexity of global issues that are increasingly difficult to be tackled, lend themselves to negative evaluations on the state of democracy and on the degeneration of the basic objectives of politics. Modern democracies are failing to avoid the widespread sense of malaise and disappointment of citizens (Norris 2011). This is a deteriorating process that ends up involving the role of some political institutions like the ones closely connected to representative democracy, such as political parties, parliaments and governments. However, this kind of relationship is a very complex one and can be understood from diverse points of view. Taking into consideration data related to the *old world*, the European polity, only half of its citizens express satisfaction about the functioning of democracy in their respective countries (Figure 4.2).

Findings from the Eurobarometer opinion poll show that European citizens' satisfaction with the way democracy works at the individual national level has slightly increased between 1976 and the autumn of 2019. The proportion of European citizens who claim to be satisfied has been quite stable at 53 per cent over the last ten years of data collection. Considering all the 70 times and more

[2] Data available at www.freedomhouse.org.



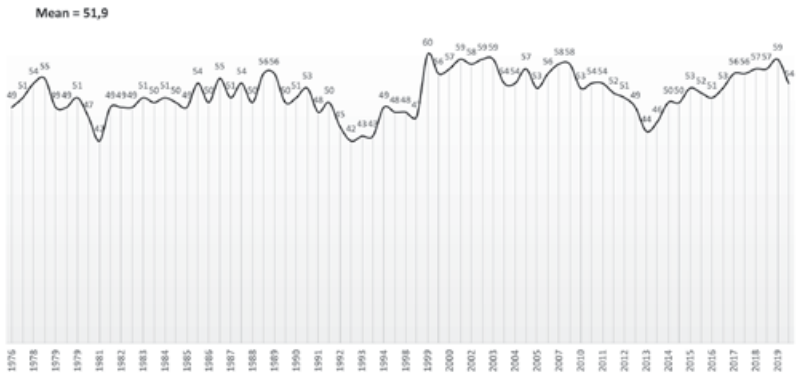
Source: Author's elaboration of data from Freedom House.

Figure 4.1 *'Free countries': countries with a high degree of democratic freedom (absolute values and percentages based on the number of countries existing in the reference year; historical series 1973–2019)*

this indicator has been collected in recent decades, the overall mean is around 52 per cent. In the end, this means that almost half of all Europeans are not satisfied with how democracy works in their own countries.

However, conceptualised both as a founding principle and as a method of government, today democracy finds an even broader consensus in European and global public opinion. The desire for democracy has fostered citizens' mobilisation to gain civil and political rights in different parts of the world. This was the case from the 'Arab Spring' (Howard and Hussain 2013) to the events known as 'Occupy Central' in the two waves of protest in Hong Kong (Lee and Chan 2018), not to mention many other episodes throughout the world in which the Internet was an important 'tool' for organising and communicating those events to global public opinion, bringing out 'the logic of connective action' in the contentious politics of the contemporary era (Bennett and Segerberg 2012).

In the global scenario, there are trends which underline how the 'critical citizen' directs his/her support differently. The democratic ideal remains



Source: Author's elaboration of data from Eurobarometer.

Figure 4.2 *European citizens satisfied with the functioning of democracy in their respective countries (percentage values, time series 1976–2019)*

important for a majority component, but the institutions that lie at the junction of the representative pact suffer from a low level of approval. In various countries, the idea and the role of political parties themselves have come to be questioned.

The populist and neo-populist phenomena and the electoral success of anti-party parties and anti-political sentiment are a testimony to this malaise afflicting advanced democracies and their citizens. Populism can also be seen as an expression of the crisis of legitimation of Western democracies and represents a challenge to those intermediate bodies that lie at the base of the representative model. The degree of distrust towards the main actors of politics not only touches the political class and the parties, but also intercepts institutional subjects such as governments and parliaments, which are important structures of party politics.

4.3 PARTIES, VOTING AND DEMOCRACY

The expression of the vote is the pivotal element of representative democracy, but growing electoral abstention has become a phenomenon that not only arouses discussion in the public debate but is also a classic object of study. Researchers have analysed the trends of the phenomenon over time and in a comparative way in space, between the different political systems. They have

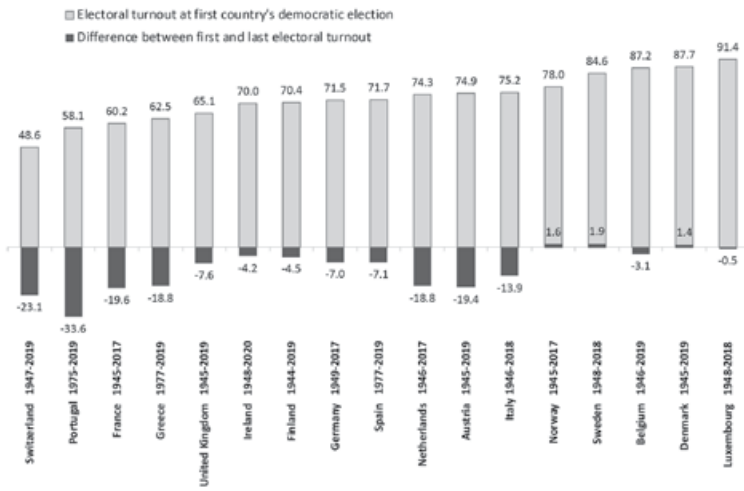
also deepened the different meanings attributed to the non-vote and the various reasons behind this choice.

From the *rational choice* theoretical perspective, the individual vote has, in fact, no weight, because it necessarily ends up getting lost among the other millions of votes cast by voters who go to the polls. Therefore, considering this point of view, the single vote emerges as an 'irrational' action, in the sense that it does not guarantee any benefit in terms of influence on politics, policy decision making or selection of the rulers. However, behind this action there is not only an instrumental calculation, which refers to individual rationality: it also has important meanings for the citizen, in terms of personal identity, feeling part of a community, and so on. Voting, in other words, also has an expressive meaning. This, however, has not prevented the occurrence of a decline in electoral turnout in almost all major European democracies over the last few decades. And it is a trend that shows different measures in individual nations. Figure 4.3 shows the turnout data in 17 European countries in the period from 1944 to 2020 (or to the most up-to-date data). The average figure for electoral participation during the last election is 70.9 per cent. The fall, during the analysed period, is instead around 12 percentage points.

Beyond the trajectories and measures of individual countries, the trend shows a similar development in many Western democracies. All in all, elections remain a fundamental ritual of the democratic process, but the periodical cadence configures them as a form of 'momentary' power in the hands of the citizen. Over time, this instrument has lost social recognition owing to the reduced popular appreciation enjoyed by the parties. Elections are considered an essential moment in a representative democracy and a fundamental expression of political citizenship, but they are also considered an inadequate instrument for obliging the elected representatives to maintain their commitment, respecting the common good and the popular will that has designated them as representatives.

The risk of not being re-elected at the next elections for not having kept electoral promises remains very low. It is a weak element of the dynamics between voters and those they elect – between ruled and rulers. It is not only the institutional practice of voting that involves citizens less and less. Parties also show signs of weakness if they are observed in terms of membership (Bardi et al. 2007). Indeed, compared to the past, parties are able to recruit members in a significantly reduced way. Figure 4.4 shows the difference in the late first decade of the twenty-first century rate of social integration (M/E)[3] – which is an indicator of the presence of parties on the ground and in society – relating

[3] The M/E index is calculated as the ratio between the number of party members and the number of voters multiplied by 100.



Source: Author's elaboration of data from Parties & Elections.

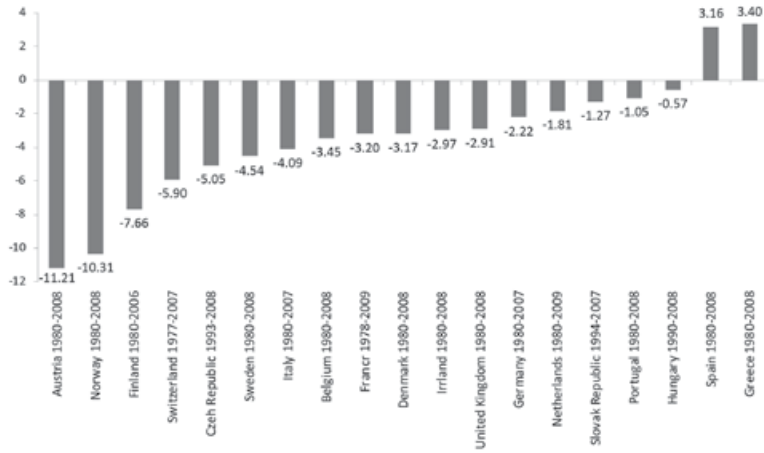
Figure 4.3 *Electoral turnout (in percentage values) in 17 European democracies over general elections and differences (in percentage points) between the first and the last election (historical series 1944–2020)*

to 19 European countries, compared with the figure for the 1980s. Apart from Greece and Spain – relatively young democracies in southern Europe – in all other countries, including the post-communist systems of central and eastern Europe, the number of party members has substantially reduced over time (Bosco and Morlino 2007).

From this point of view, the 'golden age' of the traditional model of political parties has definitively vanished. According to conclusions reached by distinguished scholars on party organisation, the analyses of the Political Party Database Project[4] (PPDP) have demonstrated that:

> […] the main indicators of party organizational capacity such as party members, staff and finance, all evidence points in the direction of continuing trends that have been diagnosed for many years. Comparisons with previous studies clearly show that in most cases party membership has continued to decline, while financial resources and paid labour have continued to grow. (Poguntke et al. 2016, 673–4)

[4] Data available at www.politicalpartydb.org; see also Scarrow et al. (2017).



Source: Our adaptation from van Biezen and Poguntke (2014, 207).

Figure 4.4 Difference in the rate of social integration (M/E) between the most recent data and 1980s data (percentage values)

This, of course, does not mean that the political party itself is over. It means that the nature of representative politics has been changed over time and new kinds of party have emerged. The transformations in the party-based democracy have opened up space for a *new* party-based democracy made by an unmediated style of political interaction and by 'post-party' forms of direct democracy, pop-up parties, micro-parties, anti-party parties (against representation), along with '[…] proliferation of new actors, including NGOs, "citizens' initiatives", celebrities, DIY politics, direct action, alter-media, transnational flows of people, ideas, movements, (that) are really a threat to democracy or the basis for a new kind of democracy' (Tormey 2015, 120).

The nature of the relationship between citizen and party has changed profoundly over the years. The phenomena represented in the graphs bear witness to a dual development.

On the one hand, democracy, on a global level, has become increasingly widespread, as highlighted by the *Freedom House* analysis that has classified countries having guarantees on democratic freedoms (see Figure 4.1).

On the other hand, the relationship with those political-institutional subjects that constitute the fundamental actors of the representative democracy – the

political class, parties, parliament, governments – seems, by contrast, decidedly more difficult. Over the past few years, a different and *critical* approach and a relative conception of citizenship have gradually developed in Western countries.

Democratic systems arouse in their own citizens a sentiment of deep dissatisfaction with regard to concrete functioning and the quality of the political process (Flinders 2012). An ever-increasing 'void' between demos and party politics has been developing in Western democracies.

The political establishment is subject to different kinds of pressures. Social support for institutions has weakened in terms of political legitimation by citizens. At the same time, from the perspective of represented and ruled citizens, real democracy presents problems of responsiveness and accountability. In other words, representative politics does not meet the expectations of citizens who have become gradually more critical of governmental performance and the political elite that represent them. This situation is complex and, in some sense, ambiguous.

Democracy assumes a significant meaning in the global citizenry perspective (Doorenspleet 2019), but meanwhile, the delegitimating process of the main democratic and representative institutions is effective, as witnessed by the worldwide populist challenge, which combines the defence of territorial state democracy with political criticism of globalisation.

Responding to a fundamental question in the digital age is central for the discourse embraced by this book. To what extent could the Internet be a safety-net for representative democracy in crisis (Coleman 2017; Ceccarini 2020)? Scholars are wondering whether 'democracy is in decline' and citizens are living a kind of democratic recession (Diamond and Plattner, 2015).

In order to deal with this issue it must be considered that politics and technology are dialectically intertwined. Citizens are living within a sort of 'democratic limbo' after the rise of the Internet, since the 'transition to something different seems to be still radically incomplete' (Coleman 2017, 83). The crisis of the representative democracy approach frames the whole study and some key issues will be discussed in the next chapters. In order to understand citizens' engagement and discuss various aspects of the digital disintermediation created by the media technology revolution, we need to focus on the metamorphosis of Western democracies towards a post-representative politics.

4.4 DISTRUST AS A POLITICAL RESOURCE

The doctrine of representative governments has contemplated, from the beginning of its theoretical elaboration, an action of democratic and institutionalised *control*, parallel to the moment when the vote was placed in the hands of the citizen-voter. Control over the holders of power is considered a necessary

mechanism and an integral part of this dynamic. The basis of this approach is a fundamental element: 'distrust'. This is the other side of control and is rooted in the theory of democratic-representative government. In this regard, a distinction between liberal distrust and democratic distrust should be emphasised (Rosanvallon 2008).

The liberal conception of distrust is based on a cautious, if not pessimistic, view of democracy. According to this perspective it is the potential despotic drifts that are considered alarming. Thus, distrust is deeply oriented towards the protection of the individual and his/her freedom from the power of public authority and rulers. Thinkers of liberal doctrine and founding fathers of modern constitutions such as Montesquieu and Benjamin Constant, or John Stuart Mill and James Madison – to name some of the main leading figures – have always considered the relevance of control systems and then their intrinsic value. At the heart of this, there was the intention to place limits on the democratic mandate, with the aim of circumscribing the power and freedom of action of the elected representatives.

The foundations of this type of orientation derive from concern for the accumulation of power and the potential despotism related to it, which is synonymous with tyranny, Caesarism, anti-liberalism. From this point of view, every democratic constitution is de facto 'an act of distrust'. The lack of confidence towards power is, therefore, an 'old' element that has continued to project itself upon constitutional engineering and on the political culture of the 'modern' age. Hence, the system of *checks and balances* is the basis of any democratic system.

The democratic approach to distrust instead directs its attention and concern towards the 'surveillance' of power so that it remains faithful to the pursuit of the common good and applies itself in this direction. The crisis of social legitimacy that affects the main democratic institutions, and in particular the political parties and class, can also be seen as an expression of this specific attitude of lack of trust. Among the various measures in the sense of democratic distrust must be remembered the formula, included in constitutional law, of the *imperative mandate.*

Generally speaking, this constraint has not shown any particular efficacy in ensuring the link between the voter and the elected, avoiding the betrayal of political and electoral platform promises made during the campaign. Moreover, in the constitutions of the majority of modern representative democracies, the *imperative mandate* is not only not contemplated, but its opposite is explicitly affirmed: the *free mandate*. That is, the freedom of the elected in the performance of their institutional function, in the general interest, not restricted to exclusive actions to defend the interests of the reference constituency. The imperative mandate, indeed, would not give the representative adequate freedom during the *deliberative* stage – that is, during the discussion

and the vote regarding legislative measures. Others are forms of control and 'surveillance' celebrated as actions aimed at curbing 'representative entropy', or, rather, the drift towards a more and more detached relationship between elected representatives and citizen-voters.

Concern for the inefficiencies of democratic systems and the lack of legitimation of politics is linked to consideration of the limited potential of the citizen's deciding role in the political and institutionalised life of the community. Through the voting procedure, citizens are able to influence the political process only partially, and this also foments the feeling of dissatisfaction with the broadest decision-making dynamics.

On this basis, different readings emerge from various scholars. Sometimes these are approaches that recognise a negative potential and that are based on an emotional approach concerning contemporary democratic systems. This is the case, for example, for the orientation, veined with a certain pessimism, that emerges from the reading provided by Colin Crouch on *post-democracy*, which will be addressed in the next section.

Other authors adopt instead an approach that, while warning against possible degenerations of democracy, tends to enhance the idea of possible spaces for reinforcement. This could occur through practices of *counter-democracy*, as emphasised in Rosanvallon's vision (or in Keane (2018) when he talks about 'humble democracy' as a possible evolution of *monitoring democracy*). Democracy can improve, according to Rosanvallon, who refers to the role of counter-democratic powers and agencies in the age of 'distrust'. He deals with the question of democracy in a historical-philosophical key, but focuses on the contemporary phase, in which the citizen exhibits a growing disaffection towards, generally speaking, the democratic political system: its dynamics, the main actors and institutions. This is a fundamental issue for the current time scenario, where a lack of confidence is a cultural trait of citizenship.

The citizen, based on the feeling of distrust – reinterpreted through a specific interpretative key – can put in place surveillance actions and hence promote pressure actions towards politics. These forms of contrast could stimulate and extend the effectiveness of modern democracy. Thus, the discontent is not seen only as a vector of passivity, which only fuels an anti-political sentiment and pushes towards populist shortcuts (even if this is a possible and concrete risk), but is mainly understood, from this point of view, as a stimulus to civic activism, a counter-democratic mode of engagement that would lead to make it a complete democracy rather than eroding its foundations.

Participation thus becomes an expression of civic involvement, and citizenship refers to the idea of civic agency (Dahlgren 2009). This can occur through an active civil society and, in the first place, a *monitoring* sense of citizenship.

In his monumental reconstruction of the history of democracy, John Keane (2009) deals with the development of a new democratic form, which he defines

as 'post-representative'. According to this scholar, the evolution in this direction is prompted by, among other variables, the transformations taking place in communication processes. The new forms of communication would guarantee important opportunities for the development of so-called *monitory democracy*, notwithstanding the risk that the monitoring element in such a democracy could end up losing its effectiveness due to a context and an age characterised by a situation of 'communicative abundance' (Keane 2013). Attention is turned towards the figure of an active citizen who, thanks to new information technologies and a different cultural approach to the political sphere, helps to shape a new model of citizenship (Tormey 2015).

Beyond the *sentiment* that accompanies the various approaches, it is important to underline certain common and recurring elements in the discussion of these authors. They insist on the value of widespread and unstructured citizenship practices. They emphasise the relevance of actions, actors and models of engagement that move in parallel to the more traditional and institutionalised formulas of participation, but in new and different settings.

This participatory reality is considered a 'political form', a prerogative of power that resides substantially in the hands of the citizens. Moreover, in a more or less explicit way, these authors see in the Internet, and therefore in the redefinition of the post-modern public sphere, a fundamental area and resource for the citizen who is responsible, active and attentive to issues of public interest. The dimensions of monitoring and responsibility-taking become important in defining the new forms of citizenship (see Chapter 5).

4.5 (POST-)DEMOCRATIC PARABOLA AND *POSITIVE CITIZENSHIP*

Democratic systems have traced an evolutionary path over time, transforming themselves, according to Colin Crouch, into *post-democracies*. This conception develops around the idea of a political system which, while respecting democratic norms, has lost its basic references. This is a critical interpretation in which, however, there is no mention of an *anti-democratic* system. Rather, there is a critical approach towards a condition where participation and political practices are emptied of their constitutive principles in favour of a *decisionist* drift. In post-democracies, a fundamental role is played by bureaucracy, by technocrats, by lobbies and intergovernmental institutions, to the detriment of the centrality of the citizen, who becomes, in this scenario, a passive figure – an audience, in some respects, who is limited to reacting to stimuli without putting in place initiatives that attribute centrality to politics and bring the decision-making process onto a visible and participatory plane.

According to this reading, democratic politics and the political/policy choices would remain in the shade, in the private sphere and in the hands

of the oligarchies that manage the resources of power and indeed control it. According to this thesis, representative governments would have gone *beyond* democracy in the classical sense, towards a phase characterised by 'post': democratic and representative. This has occurred after the zenith reached in the second half of the twentieth century; that is, when egalitarian policies had their maximum affirmation. Today, citizens are moving in the wake of a post-democratic politics, such that the evolutionary trend is inevitably also reflected in the change in the sense of 'citizenship'.

This is a transformation that delineates a syndrome that has struck representative governments in current times. These regimes, after having touched the 'best' point of their existence, today are presenting contradictory signs. They are experiencing a phase characterised not only by profound transformations (Urbinati 2019; Diamanti and Lazar 2018; Todd 2008) but also by noteworthy paradoxes.

On the one hand, indeed, it is possible to observe how the forms of democracy have reached their maximum spread in the global scenario and found great favour among citizens. Political freedoms and civil rights are part of a wide number of institutional systems in many countries. Such prerogatives have strengthened over time, particularly for the electoral moment and therefore for the role of the citizen as voter.

On the other hand, though, politics and 'post-democratic' governments leave a large margin of freedom to the power of lobbies that represent specific and strong economic interests. Using Crouch's terminology, post-democracy implies a process of 'commercialisation of citizenship', and consequently disrupts the scheme elaborated by Thomas H. Marshall. Thus, the rights and guarantees closely linked to the 'status' of citizen, common goods and services – such as the welfare state – which are essential elements in the process of democratisation and inclusion, have progressively opened up to reforms in the direction of free markets and privatisation.

In this framework, the attractiveness of arguments in favour of egalitarianism, which have marked the development of citizenship rights and the birth of the idea of the *citizen* to the detriment of the figure of the *subject*, diminishes. According to this reading, there is a disruption of the idea of citizenship and the democratic rights related to it. The citizen would lose power within the framework of a three-way relationship, with the rulers on one side and the private providers of services on the other.

The connection of citizenship between citizen and government (local or national) remains firm and direct through the political–electoral dimension. The government, for its part, has a link with the private provider of public services (that is, an economic contract), but the citizen has no direct relationship, either of citizenship or of trade, with this actor that has been awarded the contract and manages these services. Thus, there is a condition in force in which

it is more difficult to raise questions about common goods that are managed by this third party.

As a result, the government becomes accountable to the demos only for policies in general, and not so much for the actual provision of services. The state that 'outsources' these assets stops intervening directly in the lives of citizens. Thus, a different structure of relationship with politics emerges, a different geometry that leaves spaces and opportunities for economic lobbies, from multinational corporations to local power groups that manage those services.

These are, moreover, entities that are sometimes targeted by campaigns and forms of mobilisation, online and offline, on the part of citizens. However, by extending and complicating the chain of the public good, the connection between citizens and rulers becomes weakened, and the potential for control of elections assumes an increasingly less clear and effective profile. Crouch affirms, in this regard:

> while elections certainly exist and can change governments, public electoral debate is a tightly controlled spectacle, managed by rival groups of professionals expert in the techniques of persuasion, and considering a small range of issues selected by those teams. The mass of citizens plays a passive, quiescent, even apathetic part, responding only to the signals given them. Behind this spectacle of the electoral game, politics is really shaped in private by interaction between elected governments and elites that overwhelmingly represent business interests. (Crouch 2004, 5)

Therefore, in the framework of post-democratic politics, the voice of the ordinary people, the demos, weakens. An asymmetry is created in which the position and the potential for influence of the economic and oligarchic powers are strengthened. Consequently, according to this reading, this idea of citizenship changes. The evolutionary path thus traces a parabola, and the democracy of the present time returns, in some respects, to the past. The relationship between citizens and politics takes on some traits it had before the advent of the democratic age, in which the inclusive potential of the system was materially less open. This is obviously not a 'pure return' to the situation of that time, now far away for modern democracies. Tracing a parabola means, in fact, moving forward along the timeline, trailing the legacy of the past behind, while tracing, as in this case, a descending curve in terms of citizens' inclusion.

However, Crouch also emphasises that in the scenario of modern democracies we find more than the impasse for issues relating to citizenship and the pessimism of an interpretation that sees a shift towards post-democracy. In the discussion on the evolution of democratic systems, the relevance of forms of *positive citizenship*, gleaned from the liveliness of a microcosm of groups and movements of citizens, is also underlined. There are resources of civic and political engagement that are expressed through different formulas, including the development of issues and public opinion campaigns. As part of

this formula of *positive citizenship*, 'modern means of communication like the internet make it ever easier and cheaper to organise and co-ordinate new cause groups' (Crouch 2004, 6).

It must be emphasised that the political party and its function cannot be replaced by interest groups or opinion movements; this would entail stretching democracy still further and strengthening the 'post' trend in progress. However, in this era that is not only post-democratic, but also anti-political, the party, understood in terms of its traditional organisational model – bureaucratic and of mass membership – is superseded by history and by the very evolution of party models. Crouch himself underlines the trends that are underway and addressed in the literature: the party has redefined itself by adopting lighter and more flexible forms of organisation; the forms of leadership have been 'personalised'; the role of communication and political consultants has become central to the life of the party itself. The 'digital party' analysed by Gerbaudo (2019) or the idea of the 'digital prince' according to Calise and Musella (2019) are concrete results of this more general trend towards *platform* politics.

In addition, an important aspect regarding the formulas of online citizenship is observed. The parties – but also politics as a whole – can be stimulated from outside, subjected to the pressure of advocacy groups and civic organisations to avoid being sucked into a post-democratic logic that contrasts with the ideal of egalitarian citizenship and safeguarding of the common good. This entails the involvement and participation of the citizen, so it requires a demos that does not want to remain indifferent and passive, but wants, instead, to be on the alert and to initiate surveillance practices towards politics.

Crouch, ascribing value to the potential of an active and involved citizenship, proposes the overcoming of the 'myth of the passive citizen', highlighting some points in common with the reading provided by Rosanvallon (2008). In particular, he emphasises that even in the post-democracy era, new social identities can find channels of public expression. Such potential, upon unfolding, would bring a 'disruptive creativity' into the demos, offering perspectives of innovation for the future of democratic systems. Social movements represent a model of mobilisation that provides an expression of this social dynamism and the leading role of 'cultural creatives' (Ray and Anderson 2000). Crouch's appreciation of this creative potential balances, in a certain sense, his own reading, which tends to paint the citizen as a subject marked by passivity under the post-democratic era.

The instances conveyed by these experiences of *positive citizenship* can have a stimulating effect on civic spirit, interacting with organised practices of involvement and mobilisation. They can, therefore, become important moments of development and redefinition of the very meaning of citizenship.

4.6 INTERMITTENT, 'SINGLE' AND DIS-INTERMEDIATED PARTICIPATION

The development of forms of political participation that go beyond classical voting in elections may transform representative democracy rather than putting it in crisis. It brings elements of cultural change and changes in citizens' civic and political practices. The 'critical citizen', being, in fact, critical of the functioning of democracy and its main actors, does not, however, disregard its principles, with respect to which s/he continues to direct his/her support. S/he expresses, first and foremost, a certain degree of dissatisfaction with 'real' democratic politics. The idea of 'stealth democracy' (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002) builds on this basis.

The withdrawal of support, if anything, affects party loyalty. The 'hard-core' of the electoral base is gradually eroded. But the party, as a political organisation, continues to have strength and power, even if it has lost social legitimacy (Ignazi 2017). Politics, moreover, does not end with the existence of parties, although they play a fundamental role and have an important place in the sphere of power. Manin, in the afterword, titled 'Audience democracy revisited', published in the Italian translation of his book, writes that in the context of *audience democracy*, there are 'two areas in which the parties have not lost strength and remain crucial actors: parliamentary politics and electoral campaigns' (Manin 1997; author's translation from Italian version 2010, 270).

In this context, citizens tend to formulate and convey their demands in a different way from that which happened in the previous model of representative government. The modalities of non-institutionalised political participation can also be understood as a consequence of the erosion of party loyalty and the dealignment process. An increasing number of citizens prefer to take part in demonstrations, sign petitions or submit their demands directly to those who decide (Manin 2010, 281–2).

This activism, variously called 'unconventional' participation or simply 'political protest', consists of non-institutionalised forms of collective action. These are actions that imply the manifestation of a state of uneasiness and dissatisfaction towards the system, when not of outright disapproval and open opposition. These are ways of influencing the political authorities and the decision-making process. Various international opinion polls, such as the surveys produced by the Eurobarometer project in the European context, or the World Values Survey carried out on a global level, have highlighted this trend in advanced democracies (Norris 2002, 198; Ceccarini 2015, 123). This

activism is distinguished by three main characteristics, as has been underlined by scholars (Manin 2010, 283–4):

1. The *intermittent and irregular* nature of participation leads to a kind of activism that develops when the windows of the political opportunity structure are open, i.e. objective conditions favourable to the explosion of specific instances, in many cases through *contentious politics* (Tarrow 1998; Tilly and Tarrow 2015).
2. Mobilisation is achieved by focusing on a specific issue: it becomes a *single issue*, if not in small, granular and scattered groups which are organised in a flexible way even around a *single event* (Bimber 2003). This implies the presence of different types of activists and audiences whose composition varies according to the issue at stake. This signifies, among other things, that there is a fragmentation through which post-modern political participation develops and, in turn, mirrors the complexity of the socio-political environment in which citizens live.
3. *Disintermediation* is expressed through the direct transmission of social demands to those who decide: the rulers. The traditional and institutionalised structures of mediation are overridden by modes of engagement that embrace a logic in which the mechanism of representation is scaled down in favour of a direct dimension. In other words, it can be said that this genre of participation mirrors and fosters the crisis of representative democracy. In this dynamic a sort of 'revolution against intermediate bodies takes place', as stated by Nadia Urbinati. The demand for a new kind of participatory democracy, called 'live broadcasting representative democracy', is a politics that has been further developed in the digital frame, where the potential of technological means of communication makes participation less dependent on traditional resources, like those related to socio-economic status or financial resources. The Internet is considered a factor that supports the process of democratisation itself and the base of the current wave of challenging the representative democracy. It is a participation based on public opinion vs political parties; a *discursive* democracy against an *institutionalised democracy* (Urbinati 2013, 179–82). Targets, places and forms of political participation are deeply affected by those changes.

The nature of political expression changes and takes new shapes, other than the traditional ones. New targets, spaces and modalities of participation are affected by these transformations, and consequently the ideas of citizenship and the public sphere also change, being enriched, but even made more complex, by the opportunities offered by the technological Web 2.0 platforms

(Roberts 2014; Powell 2013; Cable 2016). The mainstream media are supplemented by the new media, creating a diverse and hybrid media ecosystem.

The same is true of the more traditional and institutionalised channels of political activism. Participation becomes a more articulated concept than it was in the past. This is due to changes in the more traditional offline realm – some actions are declining while others are gradually developing – and to the expansion of the repertoires of action in the online sphere, thanks to the information, communication and organisational potential offered by Web 2.0.

4.7 MEDIA, INTERNET AND CITIZENSHIP

The progressive differentiation of the modes of expression, also thanks to the development of the Internet, ensures a more articulate, fluid and fragmented possibility of interacting with the world of politics. It is an opportunity structure that gradually takes shape, and, in general, it makes the so-called *mobilisations informationelles* (Granjon 2012) and participatory action for specific segments of society less costly. The democracy of post-modern society is in itself more inclusive than its predecessor (in particular of that of the age of Pericles in the Athenian polis), since it is based on law and the principle of equality, and not so much on ethnic or social strata belonging. The political representation in modern democracies, however, reduces the direct participation of citizens. Representatives in power are legitimised to carry out decision-making procedures appointed through the delegation body. The development of the media has encouraged democratisation. The development of technology has always been associated with hypotheses for the growth of democracy, participatory opportunities, free public debate and improvement of the relationship between citizens and politics.

Historically, the media have enriched democracy: first with gazettes and printed newspapers, then with radio and TV, and finally with the Internet. The media, placing themselves between citizens and institutions, took on a role of mediation, becoming themselves intermediate bodies. Traditionally they have also played a role of control over power, as recalled by the *watchdog* journalistic genre.

The technological revolution and the development of the Internet involve major transformations on this front. In fact, the dimension of interactive communication belongs more to the Web than to the old or legacy media. The ease of access and the lowering of costs, not only for acquiring information, but for giving citizens the possibility to produce it, are a fundamental trait. The citizen transforms from an audience, that is, from a passive receiver, to the very agent of information: a *prosumer* (Ritzer 2010), which is a category closely linked to the disintermediation process. This led to the development of the idea of the *produser* (Bruns 2008) that is in its turn closely related to the forms of the

collaborative participation process of user-led content creation. The *produser* also has the ability to bypass professionals and production and information control structures. This is a passage of great significance. Beyond the actual development of these potentials, the Internet pushes the idea of citizenship beyond the frame of *audience democracy*. In that model of democracy:

> media are responsible for the decline of representative politics because they have subordinated the need for information and *monitoring* of power to economic reasons of media audience and broadcast ratings: a way to increase their popularity as journalistic publications and their economic revenues, to the detriment, however, of the service of *watchdog*. (Urbinati 2013, 188–9, author's translation from the Italian, italics added)

The Internet revolution – while considering all the necessary cautions, limitations and contradictions (Wolton 2012; Keane 2013) – would foreshadow the birth of an original public space. The Web, indeed, would provide the basis for a review of representative democracy itself, leaving more room for direct elements of participation. The reaction against the intermediate bodies, towards not only the parties but also the mainstream media, represents, at the very least, a change in the logic of the relationship of citizenship with regard to communication, politics and citizens.

As a result, potential spaces for inclusion are opened up to the citizen – from below, on the Internet, through an 'immediate' way, that is with no mediation – while other modes of organised and pyramidal scheme mobilisation lose their meaning. This, however, does not necessarily imply a parallel extension of those who actively participate in the public life of the community. The most active, however, remain a minority of citizens. But the potential of a less costly sharing of information calls for a more widespread knowledge and awareness on the part of citizens on issues concerning the community. This is important because the cognitive dimension underlies the sense of political responsibility.

The redefinition of democratic involvement over time is a trend that has been clearly taken and discussed in the conclusions of an important research work. This comparative study on contemporary democracies has been given an emblematic title: *Democratic Phoenix.* The author, referring to the involvement of citizens, emphasises the following:

> rather than eroding, political activism has been reinvented in recent decades by a diversification in the *agencies* (the collective organizations structuring political activity), the *repertoires* (the actions commonly used for political expression), and the *targets* (the political actors that participants seek to influence). The surge of protest politics, new social movements, and Internet activism exemplify these changes. If the opportunities for political expression and mobilization have fragmented and multiplied over the years, like a swollen river flooding through different tributaries, democratic engagement may have adapted and evolved in accordance

with the new structure of opportunities, rather than simply atrophying. (Norris 2002, 215–16)

5. ‘Monitoria’ and responsibility

Citizen activism has reinvented itself over time, experiencing different and new logics and forms. The traditional political organisations have lost their appeal, and the connotation that in the past distinguished them as a central reference for participation has gradually weakened. Generational change, the redefinition of political culture, and the technological revolution are transformations that have contributed to intensifying the trend of social delegitimisation of these traditional actors. The question of citizenship and the revisiting of the concept of representation are closely linked to the social changes that have occurred. The idea of a new kind of ‘direct’ democracy or, in a sense, immediate democracy, which revolves around the process of disintermediation, imposes itself as a substantial element in the redefinition of the relationship between citizens and politics. Citizenship practices change from a qualitative point of view, taking on new ‘political forms’. They embrace modes that recall the power of surveillance. The Internet, among other agencies disseminated in society, could be considered one of these powers of control and monitoring, one of the political forms through which ‘post-representative’ formulas of democracy are structured; ‘monitoring democracy’ and ‘counter-democracy’ refer directly to this scenario.

The basis of such conceptions is the critique of mediation and intermediate bodies. For this reason, the role of surveillance on the holders of power is enhanced. It is an action that citizens can carry out individually and directly – in the sphere of everyday life – using mainly the potential of the Internet and the channel of the new media. The citizen can thus become an actor, an agency, just as much as organised entities such as the press and associationism can. The interaction between citizens and the political system, made possible by technological tools, can develop continuously, without waiting for the moment of the elections in order to intervene with regard to those who manage the common good.

5.1 DEMOCRACY, DISTRUST AND SURVEILLANCE

Democracy is a permanent activity, subject to continuous interaction between politics and society, between power and citizens. The growing complexity of the social sphere is inevitably reflected in political life. In modern democracies the need for the renewal of rules, and procedural and representative

mechanisms of institutions, is particularly felt. Public debate and the concrete initiatives of the rulers concerning *constitutional reforms* are a testimony to this. However, the question of citizens' involvement in the decision-making process is also understood as a fundamental opportunity for being part of the community and also for the process of *democratic innovation*. In particular over the deliberative step – hence the discussion and confrontation among stakeholders – that precedes the political decision itself. This aspect is confirmed by the development of deliberative arenas due to the conception of participatory democracy. These initiatives take shape at various levels, in particular in local contexts: participatory budget, citizen juries, deliberative polls (Elster 1998). But the need for a renewal of the democratic pact between citizens and government is also evidenced by the promotion of forms of direct democracy, participatory democracy (Menser 2018) and the increase of direct action across the world (Milligan 2016). Discussions on the reconfiguration of the powers of the state, on the redefinition of electoral laws or the discussion around the mandates of the elected (duration, limitation, repeatability), in which the advanced democracies are variously committed, are going in the same direction.

This kind of perspective, when extremised, leads also to the democratic voting procedure itself being questioned (Przeworski 2018), arguing that elections are no longer democratic and that there are better ways to give voice to the people and select the ruling class: sortition for example (van Reybrouck 2016). Considering the drawing of lots, as practised by ancient Athenians in their city-state, means actually that, unlike the past, the election is no longer a synonym of democracy. The matter of trust, and above all of distrust, towards the ruling class – which administers politics being delegated by voters, interprets democracy and represents the institutions – is a political issue of great importance for a community. It is the fulcrum around which the possible unravelling of community ties rotates. Widespread disenchantment with politics is, in fact, closely intertwined with the issue of distrust in institutions.

This attitude, as has been said, is a fundamental resource in social life. It is at the base of the model of the relationship between the individual and institutional actors within a community (see Chapter 2). However, as has already been mentioned, the lack of confidence in the rulers not only has a history within the tradition of liberal political thought, but it is also a valuable element in democratic doctrine. In the first approach, distrust is the basis of institutional mechanisms of control of power aimed at protecting the liberty of the individual. In the second perspective, distrust is instead considered as the prerogative of the citizen addressed to the control of elected representatives and the exercising of power through participatory democratic procedures and bottom-up

institutional instruments. Regarding the sense and practices of citizenship, major comparative studies on contemporary societies:

> have shown that diminished trust in others is closely correlated with growing distrust of government. […] Thus democratic distrust coincides with and reinforces structural distrust. Taking all of these factors into account suggests that contemporary society can be described as a 'society of generalized distrust.' This type of society forms the social backdrop to the transformation of democracy […]. (Rosanvallon 2008, 11–12)

These transformations lead to the development of the so-called 'counter-democracy'. With this neologism the author does not mean the opposite of democracy, anti-democracy, that is, its denial. Instead, the term refers to a political form that reinforces and offers support for representative democracy, which remains at the centre of political discourse. The democracy of 'organising distrust' becomes a complement to the democracy of electoral legitimacy. The moment of voting is necessarily episodic; in Rosanvallon's perspective 'episodic democracy' is the usual electoral-representative system. The democracy of 'organising distrust' builds its structure through the diffusion in society of indirect powers – of surveillance – such as institutions, groups, associations and advocacy groups. It can be considered a *political form* because it produces effects in society. The Internet is described as one of these powers of control, so it is considered one of the political forms through which the same counter-democracy is structured.

However, it must also be said that according to this perspective, counter-democracy – with its counter-powers – is an ambiguous and in some ways unstable political form. It can reinforce democracy, but it can also contradict it. The appeal to the people, the desire to interpret the will of the people in an absolute and perverse way, runs 'the risk that counter-democracy will degenerate into a destructive and reductive form of populism' (Rosanvallon 2008, 299). For this reason, the counter-democratic function should have a *plural* character. Understanding how counter-democracy is structured, and in particular what forms of surveillance there are, in the very framework of (post-)representative democracy, becomes a fundamental step. It allows us to understand how the figure of the citizen, active and participant, changes, and how citizenship is changing in the time of the Internet. Besides, Rosanvallon himself says that 'we need an authentic new understanding of the true nature of politics' (Rosanvallon 2008, 299).

5.2 THE DIMENSIONS OF 'COUNTER-DEMOCRACY'

The Internet, according to the reading provided by Rosanvallon, can be defined as a *political form* because, in the (counter-)democratic framework, it has a high potential for control over power. Blogs, forums and online campaigns encourage the emergence of opinion movements and offer a sort of infrastructure for the potential of popular control and *positive citizenship*. They strengthen the deliberative and participatory logic in civil society and the local dimension. Specifically, the democratic counter-powers that have taken shape in the shadow of electoral-representative democracy and in a climate of democratic distrust can be expressed and organised in a variety of modes, mainly of three diverse types: *powers of oversight*, *forms of prevention*, and *testing of judgements* (Rosanvallon 2008, 8). Together they give form and substance to counter-democracy (Figure 5.1).

The first dimension is that of *surveillance*, an action that is not new in political history, already exalted during the French Revolution, as Rosanvallon recalls. It has always been exercised by citizens and civil society:

> the term 'surveillance' lost its luster when it came to be associated with tyranny exercised by revolutionary clubs and committees and was subsequently stricken from the political lexicon. Yet if the word disappeared, the thing remained. In one form or another, civil society continued to inspect, monitor, investigate, and evaluate the actions of government. Indeed, the powers of oversight expanded con-

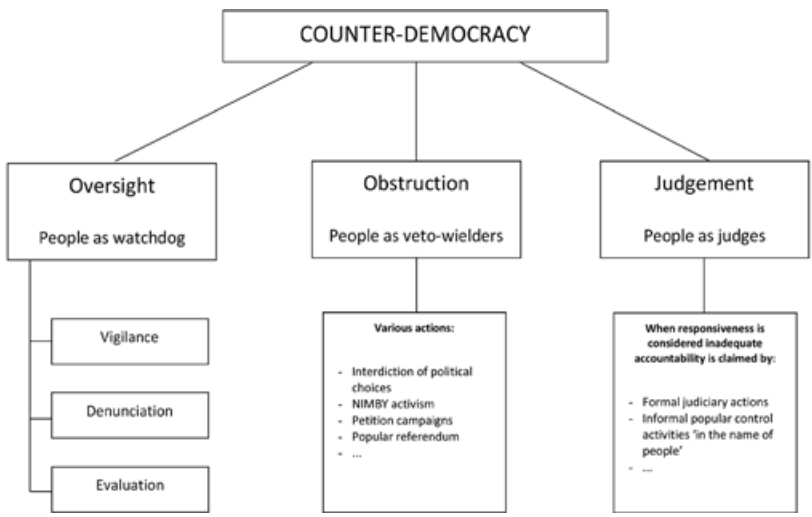


Figure 5.1 The dimensions of counter-democracy

> siderably. Although the institutions of democracy have remained more or less stable for two centuries (with respect to the conception of representation, the exercise of responsibility, and the role ascribed to elections), the powers of oversight have grown and diversified. (Rosanvallon 2008, 13)

It is the idea of the *people as watchdogs* that is linked to the three primary modes of oversight: vigilance, denunciation and evaluation. All of this is strictly referring to this type of counter-power and bodies in society such as associations, supervisory authorities and the Internet itself. The latter, with its ability to impose issues on the public debate, bypassing the traditional structures of news-making such as press agencies, becomes an actor in this counter-democratic dimension.

The second element that structures counter-democracy refers to the multiplication of powers of sanction and interdiction, that is, the action of *obstruction*. The limited ability of citizens to direct politics and its executive arm, the government, to make certain decisions and provide responses consistent with social demand has led them to elaborate mechanisms of sanction for power. This is a form of 'negative democracy', to distinguish it from the 'positive' one, which Rosanvallon refers to as electoral expression. It is, in other terms, an act of interdiction towards the choices and decisions of the rulers. These actions produce particularly visible results when they enter the media circuit and public debate. Pressure actions, such as *Not In My Back Yard* (*NIMBY*) activism, but also petitions, campaigns or formulas of direct democracy such as popular referendums (Qvortrup 2018), can be part of this dimension of organised democratic distrust. The idea of the *people as veto-wielders* is that which provides consistency to this second counter-democratic dimension. It is through social groups and political and economic forces on the ground that this type of action develops, and enters the dynamics of the political process and produces its *counter-democratic* effects.

The third factor, in the constitution of counter-democracy, is closely linked to:

> […] the advent of the *people as judge*. The judicialization of politics is the most obvious manifestation of this. It is as though citizens hope to obtain from a judicial process of some sort what they despair of obtaining from the ballot box. Judicialization should be seen against the background of declining government responsiveness to citizen demands. As *responsiveness* declines, the desire for *accountability* increases. *Democracy of confrontation* gives way to *democracy of accusation.* Over the past twenty years, it has become commonplace to remark on the increasing prominence of judges in the political order. (Qvortrup 2018, 16)

In the age of democratic distrust, therefore, there is a loss of centrality of the *people as voters*, which is strongly associated with the democracy of electoral

legitimacy. A space has come to be created for different and active figures, going beyond the (myth of) the passive citizen: the people as watchdogs, the people as veto-wielders, and the people as judges. The effects produced by the actions of these different faces of citizenship provide concreteness to the exercising of an 'indirect' sovereignty – that is, a counter-democracy of indirect powers that takes place outside the formal procedures laid down in democratic constitutions and democratic activity. The traditional definitions of democracy – that is, real and formal, direct and representative – appear rigid in this context, making it difficult to define the multifaceted ideas of democratic activity, put into effect by active citizens, who live, as it were, in the age of 'organising distrust'.

The theme of counter-democracy and the reflection on the organisation of its democratic counter-powers is part of the argument developed in the previous chapters on the redefinition of the concept of citizenship. It also urges us to reconsider the discourse on the civil passivity of citizens and their withdrawal to the private sphere. Moreover, various studies and trends are moving in the direction of the 'myth of the passive citizen' or the 'active spectator'. The very forms of participatory democracy and in particular the deliberative arenas are examples oriented to the appreciation of formulas of citizens' involvement in the democratic process. Deliberative democracy and the various 'positions' of e-democracy can be seen as an alternative model between plebiscitarian and technocratic drift of representative democracy on one side and the attempt to restore revisited forms of direct democracy on the other (Floridia 2018; De Blasio 2019).

On the Web, 'produsage' and information sharing, online discussions, and mobilisation campaigns on issues of public interest testify to this specific character of active citizenship. And it is interesting to note that:

> the rise of participatory democracy is closely related to the growth of associations at the local level, resulting in what has been called a 'descent toward the local.' One scholar who has observed the decline of large national associations and the rise of advocacy groups and other local civil-society associations in the United States has gone so far as to describe the result as 'diminished democracy'. (Skocpol 2003, 297)

This scholar was Theda Skocpol (2003), who contributed to the current debate on social capital and federated membership associations, and then wrote about the public power exercised by these large organisations, highlighting the change in civic life in the United States since the 1960s. However, her understanding is not hopeless. In fact she underlines the vital democratic activism at the local level which is not confined to local issues and is fully consistent with nationally focused activism, thereby demonstrating a potential democratic energy.

In other words, it is possible to see not only apathy and disenchantment in the relationship between society and politics, but also the development of new structures and dynamics, which can be traced back to the counter-democratic conception of democracy, based on 'organising distrust' and on the role of the digital media, among other agencies and actors.

5.3 SURVEILLANCE AND THE INTERNET

Surveillance is a central element in the online citizenship perspective and can be expressed in three forms: *vigilance*, *denunciation* and *evaluation*. The Internet is configured as an important tool for democratic counter-powers, but it becomes something more than a medium. Rosanvallon defines the Internet as not just a *social form* – which means a pure circulation, a free interaction consisting of a series of engagements, each of which holds the possibility of branching out into a series of other engagements – but a true *political form.* It is considered an opportunity for the counter-democratic formula of citizenship. It is, in a sense, an expression of oversight democracy. Of course, other aspects must also be taken into account, because, as with any instrument, it depends on how it is used. It obviously also lends itself to deviations from the perspective of supervision of power on the part of citizens. It can, indeed, become the opposite of an instrument for promoting democratic freedoms: a system of functional control for illiberal governments (Morozov 2011). And ultimately, the Web, in the political domain, can be considered:

> an open space for oversight and evaluation. The Internet is not merely an 'instrument'; it is the surveillance function. Movement defines it and points not only toward its potential but also toward its possible subversion and manipulation. It is in this sense that the Internet can be regarded as a true *political form*. Other organized modes of surveillance have also emerged, however. Institutions of a new type have been established in many countries, along with independent oversight authorities. Their purpose is to monitor government activity in many areas. (Rosanvallon 2008, 70–71)

Civic vigilance. This is an essential attribute of citizenship. Given the intermittence of political elections, it provides continuity to the role of the 'good citizen', or in some sense the 'active spectator', ready to take action when the surveillance activity reveals elements of concern regarding the common good. This type of vigilance, which manifests itself through diversified actions, online and offline – petitions, protest actions, taking a stance in the media, civic and political activism of groups and associations – takes on a communitarian significance. Thanks to the development of the Internet, the content of oversight activities regarding political actions or institutional structures is more likely to become public. It is easier to share information, even specialist

information, on government activity and information regarding collective services, such as transparency of data, reports, evaluations procedures, and surveys.

To this we may add two related phenomena that have already been discussed (see Chapter 3): the growing *cognitive mobilisation* and the reduced deference towards the political class on the part of *critical citizens.* These phenomena stimulate the feeling of democratic distrust in society and its counter-democratic practices. They constitute a development that ends up fuelling social attention practices and supporting the citizens' potential influence and political *agenda setting*. Thus, the figure of the citizen-watchdog has gradually assumed more defined contours, while those of the citizen-elector have lost their original clarity.

Denunciation. Not only vigilance, but also denunciation is an element of counter-democratic oversight. The basis of this point is letting people know, publicising, unveiling. The tabloid press, which highlights the vices and shortcomings of a political system and its ruling class, fits into this framework. It is defined as 'exposure journalism', but it could also include investigative journalism and the journalism of redemptive denunciation. The 'literature of exposé', with the uncovering of scandals, is intertwined with the response to the demand for greater transparency in political activity and meets the expectations of an attentive public opinion. In addition to the civil push, behind these communicative actions there is the strategy of targeting reputations. The value of public image is a resource of great importance in politics also, and not only in the economic-commercial sphere, in which the logo represents a product or a company and all that lies behind it. Many initiatives of denunciation are based on the well-known logic of *naming and shaming*, generally adopted in the repertoires of protest, and practised also in the forms of political consumerism such as *boycotting*. Indeed, trust in a political leader and a party, as with the approach regarding a brand or slogan of a multinational company, is based on a good reputation that is an adequate public image.

The *personalisation* of political leadership represents a peculiar trait of *audience democracy*. The connection between citizen and leader is built around the principle of personal trust and on the basis of public image. Electoral choice itself is influenced by this type of link with respect to the previous stage of democratic metamorphosis. In *party democracy*, political loyalty was based on the ideological dimension, on the party organisation and on what it represented from the symbolic and identitarian point of view. In *audience democracy*, the deferential approach, which characterised the phase before *party democracy*, is instead 'recovered'. Personal trust and direct acquaintance constituted, indeed, the basis of the link between voter and candidate in the phase preceding mass

politics and the extension of suffrage, during *parliamentarianism*[1] (Manin 1997) at the time of the *cadre* party. Thus, '[i]n the "new" politics, reputation is the principal medium of trust. A politician's reputation becomes his *certificate of warranty*. Reputation, one might say, is the cardinal principle in democracies of opinion, in the sense that it acts as an internal social regulator that superimposes itself on strictly institutional effects' (Rosanvallon 2008, 49).

The Internet, therefore, offers opportunities to both the personalised leader – who in the platform society (and politics) assumes the form of the *digital prince* (Calise and Musella 2019) – and ordinary citizens, who can enjoy the opportunities of denunciation empowered by the new technologies of communication.

On the Web, indeed, actions of *culture jamming* take shape. These initiatives aim to attack the image and reputation of political or economic actors, turning them into targets of guerrilla communication campaigns. These are certainly not new actions in the protest scene, but they can be traced back to the end of the 1950s, and give shape to *political consumerism* mobilisation. Moreover, in 1989 the leading magazine *Adbuster*, born in Canada, started giving expression to an environmentalist critique of commercial consumerism and brand advertising by means of the culture jamming discourse. With the arrival of the new media this kind of protest activity has gained momentum.

The goal is generally to go beyond the product itself, to denounce the behaviour of the targets, considered by the activists as unethical, disrespectful of human rights, and concerning the environment, food safety and other issues of public interest. These images circulate on the Web through social media, on specialised websites. They are easy to share and offer opportunities for interpersonal discussion. In the context of *audience democracy*, the application of the denunciation of politics, through the attack upon the reputation of its main players – leaders and parties – may have a substantial effect on the targets of these campaigns, which is potentially even more serious than an electoral defeat.

Evaluation. The third form of control and surveillance of power is that of evaluation. It consists in giving technical advice and documented opinions on specific intervention measures or on more general political policies, at a local level, but also at higher levels. The practice of oversight, then, also passes through techniques of monitoring and evaluation of public policies, which are nowadays increasingly subjected to this type of analysis. The policy evaluation culture is fundamental for the decision-making process since it supports the improving competence of the policy makers through a kind of permanent

[1] See Note 1 in Chapter 3.

control mechanism. In this frame the relationship between citizens and rulers is redefined by reducing, at least theoretically, the asymmetry among them.

This evaluation process, dealing with the implementation and effects of political decisions, also involves bureaucracy. In particular, the inclusion of *open government* formulas, hence transparency and open-data, would help this participation and monitoring activity. Public administration, indeed, is at the centre of institutional relations between groups that are an expression of the complex network of interests in society and of the political system as a whole. The increasing complexity of the context in which it operates requires the presence of bodies with consultative and control powers. Surveillance forms can develop from these third parties, rich in expertise, which perform evaluation activities. Through this activity a new form of power, direct and without representation (immediate), takes shape: it is a sort of disintermediate action.

The growth of knowledge and expectations in society among citizens in general, but specifically among those who are more informed and attentive, who are also the most active with regard to certain policy areas, is the result of the growth in the level of education (which is at the basis of *cognitive mobilisation*). Increased availability of technical or specialist information and its greater accessibility triggers a mechanism consistent with citizenship. It pushes those who govern to make *authoritative* decisions, to be more regularly *accountable* for their choices and the consequent effects upon stakeholders and the reference subjects, which primarily means audiences. These dynamics end up attributing a greater degree of subordination of rulers' choices to public opinion. In this sense, public opinion itself can also be considered a surveillance mechanism, due to this potentiality. It becomes the equivalent of a new power that exerts influence on the political sphere.

5.4 NEW POLITICAL ACTORS AND MONITORING ENGAGEMENT

The democracy of 'organising distrust' is expressed through actors and actions that are certainly different but not particularly new compared to the past. The various forms of indirect power are at once pre-democratic and post-democratic. Historically, these practices of surveillance are affirmed by a many-sided activism, typical of civic mobilisation, within civil society. With the structuring of the public space, media activity appears as an expression not only of liberty, but also of counter-democratic power. The Web has helped to provide opportunities for the development of this form of citizenship and for the logic of surveillance.

The actions of vigilance, denunciation and evaluation have also been carried out by actors other than the media. The growth, in modern democratic systems, of a whole series of independent authorities, of ombudsmen, of structures

of mediation, but also of evaluation bodies, as well as of auditing practices, provides a structure for this oversight practice. In post-modern society, new frontiers of conflict have opened up, prompted by the process of globalisation and its consequences, which make new issues urgent and of primary consideration. In the perspective of citizens – or of the most active component of these – human rights, global social justice, job insecurity, economic uncertainty and food insecurity acquire salience.

The *new activism*, as Rosanvallon defines it (2008, 61), consists of groups (advocacy groups, watchdog groups), organisations (NGOs, observatories or public agencies of various kinds), opinion campaigns and diverse initiatives that to a certain extent are different from those of the past. And their places of meeting, discussion and mobilisation are found on the Web at the local, national and global level (for example, the *MeetUp* or *FixMyStreet* platforms, new-generation lobbying models like MoveOn.org and so on). It is a new militancy, fragmented and dynamic, marked by the 'glocal' trait:

> new social movement organizations often function as 'watchdogs' in their specific policy areas. The vocabulary of social activism reflects this fact. For instance, 'whistle-blowers' are people or groups that call attention to certain types of problems. Whistle-blowing has become so widespread that a new field of sociology has developed to study it. […] Organizations of this type rely on functional expertise (in practice, counter-expertise, to do battle with experts from the other camp) and research. In many cases advocacy groups therefore play a dual role, operating as both think tanks and pressure groups. (Rosanvallon 2008, 63–4)

Therefore, there is a whole series of active and attentive committees that deal with areas such as consumption, food safety, health security, education and the umbrella issue of the environment, to mention the main ones. Among them, there are also global organisations. For example, concerning corruption, Transparency International regularly publishes reports on this issue, as does Freedom House on civil liberties among world states and on the web (already mentioned in this book). Another NGO, Oxfam, publishes a yearly report concerning poverty and inequalities in the world.

This new activism, made up of think tanks, NGOs, local civic associations, advocacy groups, campaigning, social movements, and citizens' action groups, is generally the expression of an (online) active segment of society, and by their very nature adopts a reticular configuration, other than the pyramidal configurations of the preceding age. The presence of this type of activism highlights a sort of 'tension' between electoral and representative democracy on the one hand, and counter-democracy on the other. These groups are characterised by a high level of fragmentation under various profiles – territorial, temporal and ideological – and by the determination of their actions; but they are also marked by a highly flexible nature.

Moreover, they are oriented to specific issues or even events, not only at the global level, but also at the local or micro-local level. 'Power-monitoring mechanisms also assume different sizes and operate on various spatial scales; they range from "just round the corner" bodies with quite local footprints to global networks aimed at keeping tabs on those who exercise power over great distances' (Keane 2018, 113–14).

They are radically different from large, bureaucratic, hierarchical organisations with extensive membership, because there are no members at the base. These 'organisations' very often are informal – they just have a Facebook page linked to other social media or maybe they have a website – and do not seek members to affiliate, but participants to be involved in initiatives of various kinds. So they do not defend institutionalised interests, but are committed to specific single-issue or single-event causes, which give a good idea of this nature of involvement. They do not follow the path of negotiation. More than combining interests – as in the neo-corporative logic – they highlight problems and raise an alarm on the issues that they consider important and on the basis of which these groups are born. More than representing, therefore, they aim to influence and to alert public opinion.

This kind of activism also shows a detachment and disillusion from an oligarchic and hierarchical traditional conception of public space, wherein political organisations and leadership are at the top, while society and the majority of those belonging to it are at the bottom. The trade union collateral position relative to parties has weakened and, in parallel with the transformations of the political party itself, it is no longer able to provide the permanent sense of belonging that it did in the past.

All this reverberates as a political culture in the making. Changing the political culture, the characteristics and practices of citizenship take on other configurations. The Internet, in this scenario, represents a social form and, more importantly, a political form, as already highlighted. It helps to build the community with its own ways and rationality. But above all, as far as the path of this work is concerned, it contributes to the definition of a political collectivity with its counter-democratic elements of surveillance and monitoring.

5.5 POST-REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY AND THE MONITORIAL CITIZEN

Democratic citizenship, as has been emphasised, is not made explicit only in the electoral moment. The vote is a fundamental rite in the life of every representative government, and continues to be so in contemporary democracies. The role of the parties remains fundamental, notwithstanding the growing phenomenon of voting abstention in advanced democracies, and the disenchantment of citizens towards these subjects of mediation and towards

the political class itself. The act of voting has assumed a different meaning over time. It is less and less configured as an 'act of faith', based on a deep sense of belonging and of identification, and more and more an *individualised* expression of an opinion.

In the scenario of advanced democracies, the link between society and politics, between citizens and parties, has profoundly changed. The relationship with the party formations has progressively weakened, and the resulting detachment has given rise to talk of 'parties without partisans' (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000). This formula sums up the transformations that have taken place in the models of real representative democracies. Post-modern society is a complex and constantly evolving reality. On the one hand, the parties continue to assume the traditional, fundamental role of organising electoral practice and structuring the political process. On the other, this happens within the framework of a different model of citizenship and relationship with the supporters and the electoral base. At the same time, democratic life and citizens' political practices continue to take shape beyond the space offered by the parties. They also take place, obviously, between one election and another, finding modalities of expression that differ from the traditional ones. Technology stimulates this and urges the idea of *continuous* versus *intermittent* democracy (Rodotà 2004). These modes of participation rotate, indeed, around actions, organisations and institutions that go beyond universal suffrage and beyond the institutionalised forms of political inclusion. Within this framework, marked by a widespread disenchantment regarding the functioning of democracy, citizens seem to value the (indirect) powers of counter-democracy.

In doing so, they contribute to giving substance to the idea of 'monitory democracy'. This conception of democracy, proposed by Keane (2009, 688), is based on the criticism of the well-known 'third wave' of democratisation processes[2] discussed by Samuel Huntington (1991) and of the 'end of history' (Fukuyama 1992). Those readings would not have grasped in depth the extent of the transformation and birth of a new, 'post-representative' form of democracy, which would have started in the second half of the twentieth century and would still be underway. The development of this new form of democracy, different from those of the past, is the expression of a post-parliamentary politics. It is due to the rapid growth of extra-parliamentary mechanisms of

[2] According to the theorising of democratic processes proposed by Samuel Huntington, the 'third wave' started in the mid-1970s, with the end of dictatorships in Portugal, Greece and Spain, and then developed during the 1980s, with the departure of the generals in Latin America and subsequently with the crisis of the Soviet system.

surveillance of governmental authorities. And it has been defined as 'monitory democracy', in which:

> in the name of 'people', 'the public', 'public accountability', 'the people' or 'citizens' […] power-scrutinising institutions spring up all over the place. Elections, political parties and legislatures neither disappear, nor necessarily decline in importance; but they most definitely lose their pivotal position in politics. Democracy is no longer simply a way of handling the power of elected governments by electoral, parliamentary and constitutional means, and no longer a matter confined to territorial states. […] In the age of monitory democracy, the rules of representation, democratic accountability and public participation are applied to a much wider range of settings than ever before. (Keane 2009, 689–90)

This author lists in two pages, by way of example, a long list of 'monitoring' institutions (Keane 2009, 692–3): citizen juries, assemblies of citizens, democratic audits, local community consultation bodies, consensus conferences, forms of civil disobedience, online petitions, chat rooms, watchdog organisations, deliberative polls, focus groups, weblogs (blogs), associations for human rights and consumer protection and a whole series of other civil society organisations oriented towards the surveillance of those who handle power and monitor its uses and abuses.

This historically new form of democracy, which is based on the concept, of medieval origin, of monitoria,[3] implies an idea of citizenship oriented towards organising forms of control, to express admonishment towards rulers through old and new channels of civil society such as civic or explicitly political associationism, the press and the legacy media, but also the new media and social networking apps. Moreover, the intertwining of these resources becomes fundamental in the development of opinion campaigns and mobilisation initiatives.

The Internet and the Web 2.0 platforms are configured for this purpose as fundamental tools for the activism of the 'good citizen', but also as a place for discussion among citizens on different issues, including those concerning the community. In this regard, various authors have identified on the Internet – chatrooms, forums, communities, social networks – an update of the theorisation of Ray Oldenburg's 'third places' (1991): 'Cafés, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts'.

The *first* place refers to the family context, while the *second* relates to the workplace where the citizens spend most of their time. The *third* place is the one in which predominantly informal interactions develop. It is a sort of

[3] This derives from the Latin *monitorius*, from the verb *monere*, 'to admonish'; that is, which tends to admonish, which has a character of admonition. For further information, see the note reported by Keane (2009, 688).

neighbourhood in which talk, information, aid and cooperation are exchanged (Rainie and Wellman 2012).

This space is configured as a place of 'anchoring' of the citizen to the community, a place where interactions are stimulated and relationships can be extended to the communitarian context. Online conversations, like those offline, revolve around issues of various kinds, including politics. Opinions are shared on current topics up to the broadest visions of the world. Offline conversations, in particular, develop in the first two 'places', in the family, at work and in friendship circles (Delli Carpini et al. 2004; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Campus et al. 2008). These are discursive opportunities that help to consolidate or redefine political identity. The role of discussion on these issues in informal circles is an important element for democracy and for the relationship between citizens and politics. It constitutes a *third space* that is relevant in the process of political socialisation. Civil society associations also, and in particular those operating in the local dimension, use the resources made available by the Web to convey information (FixMyStreet, MeetUp, Social Media apps or the neighbourhood IM chat groups and Social Street phenomena are examples of this). They highlight certain problems, support campaigns – opinion, crowdfunding, protest – and promote mobilisation on specific subjects such as through flash mobs. The questions thus enter the circuits of public debate.

The underlying logic refers to the idea of 'supervising', through *warnings*, the holders of power regarding their political decisions and policies. This interweaving, however, does not only connect the advocacy groups present in the territory and the resources present in the online sphere. It also concatenates old and new media in a *hybrid* logic. The success of these practices occurs when instances that start online and from the bottom – grassroots – acquire public visibility and impose themselves at a broader level.

The distinction between old and new media, as well as between offline and online citizenship practices, gradually becomes less clear, moving towards the dissolution of these boundaries within a hybrid logic (Chadwick 2006; 2013). In the framework of monitoring democracy, the *citizen-voter* makes way for another ideal-type of citizenship, that of the *citizen-watchdog*, not because the vote is unimportant in political dynamics or is not considered a fundamental moment of democratic life, but because the process of transformation of democracy progressively moves towards a 'post-representative' character, "a variety of 'post-electoral' politics and government defined by the rapid growth of many different kinds of extra-parliamentary, power scrutinising mechanism" (Keane 2018, 111). So those institutions such as political parties or parliaments, which in the previous phase enjoyed greater centrality and deference, lose the political 'grip' that qualified them, and the citizen is receptive to new spaces of citizenship: in terms of basic logic behind this

approach, in relation to the role played in civil society, and with respect to the practices put in place in the community. The *citizen-watchdog* takes shape, therefore, within the framework of a deeply changed political culture, where the relationship with the representatives of citizens is more detached and less deferential, where the younger generations, 'digital natives', in addition to having a different (political) cultural orientation, naturally have the ability to use new information technologies since they have grown up in the digital era.

5.6 THE POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY OF MONITORING

The distinguishing traits of a post-representative democracy imply a more complex model of relationships among the actors in the field, compared to what was observed in the past. The image of representative democracy consists, in fact, in a tendentially linear mechanism of interactions encased within the territorial state framework (Figure 5.2a). The context consisting of institutional actors and political relations structures – the 'political geography', as defined by John Keane – shows a rather simple dynamics: the citizen, within the borders of the nation-state, follows the electoral campaign and on election day casts a vote. The results will lead to appointing elected representatives who will form the elective assembly for which they voted and then the executive bodies that rule society.

The behaviour will vary depending on the role played by the elected representative. If they are part of the ruling majority, they will carry out their work following the line of the party they are part of, engaging in government activity. Or, if they are in the minority party, they will be in opposition.

If part of the majority the representative will follow the implementation of government policies with the aim, and hope, that these are appreciated by the largest number of citizens represented. At the end of the mandate, their experience can end as a representative. Or they can run another election campaign with the goal of re-election.

Vice versa, if the representative is in a minority party, they will count on the recognition of its opposition role to the government's measures. S/he too can end the political experience or engage themselves through a new application.

The new historical form of democracy – that of 'monitoring' – is made up, in continuity with that of the past, of the fundamental elements of representative democracy: legislative assemblies, parties and elections. And, as in the past, within these institutions conflict situations are reproduced. The political life of the parties and elected representatives, even in the context of representative democracy, was complicated by non-parliamentary actors such as the media, by interest groups such as trade unions, or by other institutions such as religious ones, and so on. However, as can be seen in Figure 5.2b, in the

Source: Keane (2013, 87–8).

Figure 5.2 *Graphic representation of representative and post-representative democracy models: (a) Territorial-bound representative democracy; (b) Monitoring democracy*

monitory democracy every political community is at the centre of a decidedly more complex and fragmented network of relationships.

It should be understood that the two graphic representations reproduce an extreme simplification of the political-institutional reality, which aims to highlight the greater complexity of the 'political geography' in a monitory democracy (and post-representative) compared to the dynamics of the (traditional) representative democratic system. It is not only the quantitative aspect that determines this greater complexity of the structure by increasing the number of mechanisms and actors that carry out monitoring actions. From a qualitative point of view, in fact, there is a growing intertwining of old and new media that ends with a hybrid media ecosystem. The birth of civil society monitors and government watchdogs, more detached from traditional political ideologies and related organisations, complicates and redefines the framework of this type of democracy, where 'power-scrutinizing institutions are less centred on elections, parties and legislatures; no longer confined to the territorial state, and spatially arranged in ways much messier than textbooks on democracy typically supposed' (Keane 2018, 697).

This is an interesting consideration because it recalls the importance of an activism, and thus of rules of political citizenship, which finds different spaces, methods and forms of logic compared to those of the past. About the involvement of citizens on issues of public interest, for example, *creative* modes and *new* forms of political engagement develop, as certain types of participation have been defined by Michele Micheletti and Andrew S. McFarland (2011). Manuel Castells (2009), moreover, uses the adjective *creative* to indicate the presence of an audience that develops specific forms of communication through the use of new media, which go beyond the traditional, top-down, broadcast media model, and adopt horizontal practices of discursive interaction between users, in addition to the possibility of creating – and sharing – their own content.

5.7 POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY-TAKING AND CREATIVE PARTICIPATION

With regard to participation, the reference is to the modes of taking political responsibility and to forms of attention to common goods that break the usual patterns. The consolidated model of engagement in a representative democracy is integrated, and innovated, by creative participation formulas. In this change of perspective, monitoring and surveillance take place through diversified initiatives that develop in 'subpolitical' areas, embracing 'lifepolitics' practices. This is a form of activism that does not remain inscribed within the framework of national boundaries or the local or nation-state dimension, but also develops in a global scenario (Micheletti and McFarland 2011). The space in which to

identify targets is therefore widened. The national (or sub-national) level of (local) institutions extends to the supranational level; international organisations or multinational companies are among the targets. In this context, the campaigns are aimed at raising awareness of global public opinion, and recall the idea of a global civil society (Keane 2003; Bennett 2004). The forms of creative political participation have as their fundamental characteristics:

> the de-emphasis of the parliamentary or governmental arena as the only central sphere for political action, the blurring of the division between public interest and private conduct, the infusion of politics into daily lives, and the way in which creative participation allows individuals to combine their own life courses and self-seeking goals with service to the common good. Creative participation differs, therefore, from conventional political participation, which is represented by such political acts as voting, political party activism, political protest demonstrations, and the joining of large membership-based civil society associations. (Micheletti 2011, 2)

From the theoretical point of view, the placement of these forms of 'creative' commitment poses major problems (Schlozman 2011). The *hybridisation* between everyday and institutionalised spheres, between public and private realms, between the dimension of the individual interest and attention to the common good of these actions distinguished by porous boundaries, implies the risk of bringing the reflection on participation 'Toward a Theory of Everything' (van Deth 2011, 149).

However, in a globalised and progressively more complex world, many problems cannot be addressed by local or national governments. The solutions require coordinated action by different actors – even at the global level, that is, *International Governmental Organizations* (IGOs) – corresponding to different territorial levels, where the same practices of participation have changed over time.

Political culture, following historical evolution and generational change, has taken on new features. Lance W. Bennett underlines, in this regard, how the *demographic* element, connected to the transformations of citizens' value perspective and the development of online communication, reflects on the characteristics of political citizenship.

The traditional, *dutiful* style – which refers to a sense of moral obligation in the practice of involvement – tends to assume the contours of *self-actualising* citizenship. A metamorphosis has occurred, from the *deferential* citizen to the *self-realised* citizen. This different style of involvement refers to individual creativity, which leads to realising, independently, choices and practices of citizenship. The younger generations, according to this author, are not distinguished because they reproduce a classical model of involvement based on social class and traditional groups of civil society; they seem to assume a dif-

Table 5.1 *The changing citizenry: the traditional civic education ideal of the Dutiful Citizen (DC) vs. the emerging youth ideal of self-Actualising Citizenship (AC)*

Actualising Citizen (AC)	Dutiful Citizen (DC)
Diminished sense of government obligation – higher sense of individual purpose	Obligation to participate in government-centred activities
Voting is less meaningful than other, more personally defined acts such as consumerism, community volunteering, or transnational activism	Voting is the core democratic act
Mistrust of media and politicians is reinforced by negative mass media environment	Becomes informed about issues and government by following mass media
Favours loose networks of community action – often established or sustained through friendships and peer relations and thin social ties maintained by interactive information technologies	Joins civil society organisations and/or expresses interests through parties that typically employ one-way conventional communication to mobilise supporters

Source: Bennett (2008, 14).

ferent form of responsibility towards issues of public interest. In other words, they develop an *individualised* sense of citizenship and build different identitarian models, also using tools such as social networks (Bennett 2008, 14):

> In short, there is a broad, cross-national generational shift in the postindustrial democracies from a dutiful citizen model (still adhered to by older generations and many young people who are positioned in more traditional social settings) to an actualizing citizen model favoring loosely networked activism to address issues that reflect personal values. […] This citizenship transformation is by no means uniform within societies. Where traditional institutions of church or labor remain strong, more conventional patterns of civic engagement prevail, and moral conflict may erupt. Other citizens lack the skills and background to engage civic life at either the group or the individual level, and actively avoid politics altogether. However, two broad patterns do seem to mark a change in citizenship among younger demographics coming of age in the recent decades of globalization.

Table 5.1 shows the main features of what the author defines as two styles of citizenship. These modes of engagement are typical of the globalised world, and of the logic of the Internet, where the problems develop within much more extended boundaries. The post-modern context and the risk society are the background to these forms of commitment that can be placed in the category of individualised collective action. This allows us to distinguish them from the traditional modes of political participation: those conventional and unconventional commitment actions that are included in the category of *collectivist collective action* (Micheletti 2003).

5.8 POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY-TAKING AND POST-MODERN CITIZENSHIP

With the transition to late modernity, the style and sense of citizenship have evolved. The political scenario has profoundly changed over time and the post-modern phase implies innovations and transformations in individual references value system. This dynamic implies a change in the political culture of citizens, which inevitably falls on public behaviour. The long wave of the diffusion of post-materialist attitudes reflects on the dynamics of political conflict and the relative stakes. Added to this are the processes of globalisation and individualisation, which are configured as factors driving a model of responsibility that differs from those of the past. The outlines of *individualised responsibility-taking* have gradually been defined, which refer to a style of active citizenship, in which personal and everyday life choices can take on political significance. Two aspects must be specified.

First, there is a matter of form. The *individualised* character of taking on political responsibility differs profoundly from the notion of *individualism*. There are diverse motivations behind it that do not refer to orientations and codes of practice stimulated by personal and particular interests.

Secondly, it must be emphasised that the *individualised* trait of collective action does not imply the overcoming of the traditional – and *collectivist* – form of participation. These experiences, obviously, do not disappear, as Bennett recalled in the quotation cited above. If anything, they have progressively weakened and find it harder to be attractive and to provide references of sense and meaning for the (good) citizen. Consequently, greater scope has developed for experimentation with other forms of political involvement and citizenship practices. The repertoire of collective action has been enriched by an individualised type of political responsibility, which differs from the more traditional and collective ones. In contemporary democracies, individualised responsibility-taking and the related style of behaviour have gradually taken on greater centrality. Analyses on citizens' involvement and theoretical considerations:

> suggest that individualized responsibility-taking might be a rising phenomenon in Western democracies. Whereas governments and conventional political institutions might not be able or willing to adequately address various current global problems, some citizens invent and create new approaches and solutions to global problem-solving and take over responsibility themselves. (Stolle and Micheletti 2013, 25)

In a symmetrical way, different arenas have developed in which to be citizens and practise new forms of citizenship. Spaces that go beyond the borders of the

nation-state and the traditional civil society organisations have opened up. The subpolitical arenas become, in the phase of reflexive modernity, an important space for citizens' involvement in issues concerning the common good.

The critical attitude towards state inefficiencies, within the frame of the increasingly unpredictable and uncontrollable events of the risk society, erodes the degree of legitimacy of this and other public institutions. The growing difficulty in providing guarantees and protection to citizens in a situation of uncertainty lies behind this attitude. This also occurs with government institutions, which face increasing difficulty in managing global processes and in implementing intervention measures aimed at limiting their problematic effects. The SARS-CoV-2 crisis is an interesting case in which single states, world geopolitical areas, supranational entities such as the European Union (EU), and IGOs like the World Health Organization (WHO) have shown great uncertainty in managing the dramatic situation of a global pandemic in a united fashion.

Owing to the complexity of the problems inherent in the post-modern phase, governance processes, aimed at ensuring the wellbeing of citizens, tend to include different subjects active in the territory: institutions, associations and groups. As a result, the intertwining and interdependence between these actors intensify, and the scenario in which they both develop becomes gradually broader, with global boundaries. Food safety, epidemics, immigration, financial crises, and natural and environmental disasters, to mention the most important factors, arise as elements that generate a global uncertainty. Reference has been made to the Butterfly Effect in this regard: given the close connection between the different realities of the globalised world, a wingbeat eventually produces concrete, as well as unpredictable, consequences in parts of the world far from where it actually occurred.

In such conditions of objective difficulty in the actions of government, situations of stalemate and weakness develop. On the citizens' front, the feeling of dissatisfaction and the critical attitude towards government institutions increase. But, at the same time, we observe a willingness to take on political responsibility through direct and disintermediate ways. The daily and personal participatory sphere, which develops in subpolitical arenas, is invested by these specific formulas of citizenship. As a result, new modes of engagement end up enriching the repertoire of collective action.

Research on civic engagement, studies on social capital and on the evolution of civil society highlight the way in which citizens have over time changed their way of approaching politics and moving in the public arena (Stolle and Hooghe 2005). In advanced democracies political culture, in the wake of the *silent revolution* initiated during the 1960s, has continued to redefine itself over time to the present.

Citizens view and participate in politics in a different way compared to the past. They consider the traditional formulas too hierarchical and bureaucratic, as well as expensive in terms of time devoted to them. These participatory practices limit the possibility of their *personal* expression. They also lack the sense of directness that actions of political consumerism or, more specifically, Internet activism can provide to the subject who puts them into practice. These forms of engagement succeed, at least, in giving the impression of concreteness (Urbinati 2013). Clicking 'Like' in a post, sharing an advocacy campaign on one's social media profile, and boycotting or buying a product based on critical or ethical considerations, are everyday and individualised actions. They feed the *efficient* meaning of the action – in the sense given to this category by Alessandro Pizzorno – put into play by the citizen. The citizen seems drawn by informal and fragmented actions, appreciating modes of participation which, being less institutionalised, leave more space for individual expression of involvement. They are more flexible forms of engagement that are combined with the practices of everyday life. But, at the same time, they embrace causes of great political significance: environmentalism and sustainable economy, social justice and human rights, defence or conquest of democratic liberties.

These forms mostly attract younger citizens (Bennett 2008). The generational turnover, in this regard, is a demographic process that favours the transformation of meaning and practices of political citizenship. But it also appears as an important factor in rebalancing the gender gap for this type of involvement (Micheletti 2004). Actions of political engagement have, in fact, traditionally shown asymmetry in favour of the male gender and those subjects less socially 'peripheral' (Milbrath and Goel 1977).

5.9 OLD AND NEW (IDEAL-)TYPES OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

To better understand what lies behind the evolution of the collective action model, we can use the description of the features characterising the concept of *individualised collective action*. The scheme proposed by Michele Micheletti appears particularly useful, as it contrasts the ideal-type of collectivist collective form of involvement, that is, traditional political participation, both conventional and unconventional, with the individualised collective action. It is what she later termed, respectively, 'participation 1.0' and 'participation 2.0'. Those two categories:

> borrowed from the evolution of the World Wide Web from the more linear and static Web 1.0 to the more socially interactive and flexible Web 2.0, are coined to reflect similar developments in participation, and also to underscore their significant ideal-theoretical differences. 'Participation 1.0' represents 'old school' yesteryear's

> collectivist and elite-dominated participation culture: 'participation 2.0' is the term for the new generation of participation with looser, more plural, elite-challenging and individualised elements. (Micheletti 2017, 31–2)

Table 5.2 recalls the ideal typical features of these two models. The first column refers to the collective action of first modernity – that is, to the framework of the classical liberal and representative democracy. The second, instead, refers to late modernity, when democracy has made explicit its post-representative character and when new styles of citizenship have found expression. In it, the identity of the citizen appears to be less and less *unitary*, less and less a manifestation of self-recognition in the traditional references of social and political belonging: first of all in class position. The identity becomes progressively more articulated: *multiple*. Multiple-belonging and hybrid cultures mark this scenario (Garcia Canclini 1989; 2001).

The three words that define this ideal-type of political involvement – *individualised collective action* – have been carefully chosen (Micheletti 2003). As we can see, there is no explicit reference to the term *political*. Indeed, neither individualised political participation nor individualised political action was chosen to denominate this category. Instead, the collective dimension of the action is underlined in both categories. In this way, the boundaries of the scenario of political participation towards a wider horizon and subpolitical nature are widened. In this case, the forms of engagement considered can be activated in a variety of arenas that go beyond the traditional political ones, without obviously contradicting them. These citizens are, in fact, in a sense, hybrid figures; they practise both types of action, collectivist and individualised – but also offline and online, conventional and of protest, inside and outside the perimeter of the political system:

> Political engagement and citizenship is, thus, a task that people must deal with on an increasingly individual basis. It is not laid out as in the first modernity (industrial society and nation-state dominance) in which citizens define themselves more directly in terms of established institutions and social positions. […] It is 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 practicing responsibility-taking including traditional and unconventional political tools. (Micheletti 2003, 25–6)

The *individualised* approach to citizenship practices is distinguished by its not being rooted, as it was in the past, in large *membership-based* political organisations characterised by a hierarchical and bureaucratic nature. Examples of these are the mass political parties and trade unions, but also interest groups or large organisations of civic associations; that is, the typical actors of the

Table 5.2 The ideal-types of collectivist and individualised collective action

Collectivist collective action	Individualised collective action
First modernity collective action: identity with structures and social positions, *unitary identity* that follows life paths, role models	*Late modern* collective action: identity and social position not taken for granted, map out your own life path, be your own role model, *serial identity*
Participation in *established political homes* such as membership-based interest groups and political parties	*Use of established political homes as base and point of departure* to decide own preferences and priorities and create and develop individualised political homes (e.g., via social media and life-style politics)
Participation in *territorial-based* physical structures focusing on the *political system*	Involvement in networks of a variety of kinds that are not based in any single physical territorial level or structure, *subpolitics*
Participation that is channelled through *grand or semi-grand ideological narratives* (traditional political ideology)	Involvement based on self-authored individualised narratives (*self-reflexivity*)
Participation in *representative democratic* structures *Delegation* of responsibility to leaders and officials	*Self-assertive* and direct involvement in concrete actions and settings Responsibility is not delegated to leaders and officials, it is taken personally and jointly, *self-actualisation*
Member interests and identity filtered, adapted and modelled to political preferences of these interest *articulating and aggregating* institutions, *socialisation* *Loyalty to established structures*, acceptance of organisational norms, values, standard operating procedures, and so on	Dedication and commitment to *urgent causes* rather than loyalty to organisational norms, values, standard operating procedures, and so on *Responsibility-taking* for urgent causes, *active subpolitics*
High thresholds for active participation in established organisations; *high costs* for active involvement in terms of time, seniority, socialisation, and other resources	*Everyday activism* in variety of settings; *low thresholds* for involvement; urgent involvement may be *high cost* in terms of being time-consuming and requiring considerable effort on the part of individuals

Source: Micheletti (2003, 27).

articulation and *aggregation* of social demand. They filter and then aggregate the multiple requests coming from the environment and intervene in the policy-building process shaping the output, but even offering symbolic and organisational references to traditional political identities. Being part of these associational bodies and being included in the dynamics of this model of representation means first of all accepting their top-down organisational

logic, and therefore also their bureaucratic rigidity. It means having to share the values, rules and priorities for political action and policy implementation chosen by the government organs of these structures.

For a long time these types of organisation and the model of involvement represented by them have played an important role in linking society and politics, providing opportunities for citizens to participate. But in late modernity, such dynamics have been influenced by substantial changes. An innovative way of being part has developed which, although starting from the consolidated and traditional structures, has extended in other directions.

The everyday and personal dimensions of the citizen, and his/her individuality, are directly impacted by these new forms of involvement and participation. This is a mode of expressing citizenship that, in its actual practice, differs from the preceding one in several ways. Not only does it show greater flexibility and fragmentation, but it also has an Internet-based structure and intermittent participatory actions. At the same time, it implies a wider freedom of choice, for citizens, on the issues with which they engage themselves.

The difference with respect to belonging to a structured organisational body is quite evident: the institution of *delegation* – towards figures such as political leaders or party officials, or representative structures and related mechanisms – loses the relevance it had in the past. That dutiful sense in approach with the institutions of politics is also lost. Consequently, spaces are opened up in favour of direct responsibility-taking. This means that spaces of involvement based on elements of *self-assertiveness* are also opened up and are able to guarantee expression of the self and to respond to the demands that proceed from a complex post-modern society. Besides, the contemporary citizen favours arenas where it is possible to express oneself in a more autonomous and personal way than in traditional political structures.

Citizens aim at self-fulfilment through their own concrete, personalised actions of involvement in the everyday dimension. They support formulas of everyday activism and reproduce the logic of *do it yourself* (DIY). The basis of this logic is the hybridisation between individual and collective responsibility-taking about the issues that from time to time are considered important and worth taking action on.

Consequently, the coordinates of the space in which citizenship practices are developed also change. The *territorial* dimension, as the real place of politics, is strongly affected. The mass party recalls spaces such as *local branches*, the scope of flanking associations, the physical places where the institutionalised and parallel initiatives take shape and citizens, voters and militants are accompanied 'from the cradle to the grave'.

Social movements are associated with the *square*, the natural space of political protest: a place of collective effervescence and the '*statu nascenti*' of a possible change. The movement can be seen as a node of a networked reality

that expresses an antagonist identity and stimulates the process of 'production' of society according to Alain Touraine (1973).

Interest groups associate themselves with *lobbies*, that is, to the corridors (of power), the antechambers of the halls of power, places where those with interests to protect meet the actors of the decision-making process on which to exert pressure.

With post-modern society, new spaces come into play where citizens' engagement is expressed (Ceccarini 2008, 92; Mosca and Vaccari 2011). In the past, representation, mobilisation and participation had their fulcrum in organisations deeply rooted in the territory and oriented towards the traditional places of the political system. Collective action in late modernity has developed by invading the *subpolitical* sphere: going beyond, or better *below*, the traditional and institutionalised areas of politics. This concept, elaborated in the discussion on the risk society, recalls a series of global issues. It implies an inevitable extension of the boundaries of collective action. Politics understood as *polity* is affected by this.

The nation-state no longer represents the frame within which political decision making and government action develop. Moreover, the nation-state is no longer configured as a privileged place for the thinking and constructing initiatives to control the citizen's sense of uncertainty, unsafety and insecurity stimulated by the globalised world and its consequences (Bauman 2000). Global issues need global understanding, analysis and policies.

The subpolitical arenas, which act as a theatre for new forms of involvement, multiply the plans with which the 'creative' participation of the citizen can be developed. Responsibility-taking has as its frame of reference the everyday horizon, where public space and private sphere meet. In this new configuration of political involvement, traditional ideological *narratives* leave wider margins for the issue of *reflexivity* and for an individualised approach, typical of late modernity: the classic references of meaning lose meaning. Long-term *loyalties* to traditional political structures are weakened.

The shifting in societal values and norms also affects political procedures and standards, and changes them as well. In the past those loyalties were built through the process of socialisation, which took place in a fixed climate where ideological narratives offered certainties and proposed an *absolute* vision of the world. That 'moral' mechanism of social regulation has been decisively weakened in post-modern society. A feeling of uncertainty and a state of fragility characterise the 'liquid modernity' of our day, as defined by Zygmunt Bauman.

In the fluidity which characterises this new scenario, citizens' engagement is focused on urgent issues as a consequence of a fast politics and unpredictable world, where responsibility-taking is oriented towards specific causes, through single-event participation initiatives and flexible organisations.

The discontinuity with respect to the rigidity of the bureaucratic institution of the past is clear. From the perspective of citizens and new forms of citizenship, an everyday and 'personal' type of activism is highly valued. It poses lower barriers to involvement and reduces the costs of inclusion. It also produces a kind of intermittent and 'liquid' participation, unlike the permanent and institutionalised character of the mass party politics in the era preceding post-representative democracy.

6. Going beyond mediation

The label *Web 2.0* comes from the evolution of the World Wide Web in recent years. This category was created in 2005 and refers to new instruments but, above all, to a new logic that has deeply transformed the way in which the Internet has been used by people in comparison with the past, known as the *Web 1.0* era. It should be said that ever more frequently Web 3.0 is mentioned as a new frontier of the digital realm, but this is not yet well defined.

However, as is well known, Web 2.0 provides platforms, *apps* and methods of usage that allow in the first place a higher level of *interaction* among users, and also between them and the organisations and institutions present in the Web. This renewed media ecosystem favours a sort of horizontal exchange and also allows a personal production of contents – as discussed in the previous chapters for what concerns the category of *produser* – and then not just a *passive* usage of this digital resource.

These opportunities were something unthinkable during the early 2000s when this silent, but epochal, change developed and turned the 'static' Web into something different with many more potentialities for interaction and user-led contents production. As we know, the present-day most popular social media were born starting from that period: in 2004 Mark Zuckerberg launched Facebook, Jack Dorsey established Twitter a couple of years later, and then, in 2010, Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger opened Instagram. More recently, in 2016, TikTok showed up on the global stage and it appears that this specific form of social media is becoming a leader amongst groups of young people. But this platform has already been used for political and electoral communication by politicians and candidates as well.

Thus, a new media ecosystem has gradually taken shape, changing the frame in which the previous and traditional phase was located. It also affects, in turn, digital communication and interaction styles on the Web. It is clear that this echoes the fundamental matters of our interests of democracy and citizenship in the digital age. And, more specifically, it affects the idea of the *monitoring citizen* where, in this peculiar digital setting, there is an additional opportunity to exert 'indirect counter-powers' actions, thus going beyond traditional mediation procedures.

6.1 THE MEANING OF ONLINE COLLECTIVE ACTION

Studying contentious politics and collective action, in the long run, provides some valuable clues both on the type of regime which marks a specific political system and transformation processes that have affected society, its related political culture and modes of engagement. In the first place *conventional* forms of participation and party politics, like voting in elections, have been experienced in several countries since the mid-twentieth century and even before. Between the 1960s and 1970s the world witnessed an explosion of *unconventional* activism practised by social movements and their militants. Over the 1980s and 1990s, first civic voluntarism and other forms of engagement, such as local citizens' committees or community action groups, grew in importance amongst Western democracies. Afterwards, (online) deliberative arenas, *social forums* and various participatory democracy procedures became significant in shaping the national public debate and even affecting the policy-making process, mainly at the local level, with *pros* and *cons*, as witnessed by case studies research in established democracies (Bartoletti and Faccioli 2016).

The Internet's civic potentialities have progressively been recognised by scholars and political research. In particular, this potential is considered to be *proto-political* for its capability to foster citizens' engagement (Dahlgren 2009). The Web, owing to its digital resources, is now considered an instrument closely related to the style of political citizenship and civic engagement (Wells 2015). Much time has passed since the events occurred in Seattle in 1999. At that time anti-globalisation protesters necessarily had to use Web 1.0 tools to organise the 'Battle of Seattle', surrounding the WTO Ministerial Conference, demonstrating in favour of the defence of human rights, against worldwide social inequalities and the dramatic effects of globalisation.

The Internet and its 2.0 apps now have a diverse and greater 'anchoring' potential between the citizen him/herself and the political community to which s/he belongs. As already stressed, citizens' engagement trespasses traditional borders, heading towards *subpolitical* spaces and fostering *individualised* forms of participation. In that regard, political consumerism is an interesting expression of responsibility-taking where the *discursive* mode – as compared to *positive* and *negative* forms[1] – is centred on digital communication and could have a global impact in damaging targets' public reputation and their popularity at the global level.

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[1] See note 4 in Chapter 1.

The famed episode of the Nike Email Exchange in 2001 is very significant in this respect and occurred long before Web 2.0 was developed (Peretti, with Micheletti, 2004). These days emails have, in some sense, lost their centrality in the function of sharing content, as they have very recently been replaced by new tools. Social media posting and direct messages, uploading and sharing various kinds of content or circulating *memes* by *instant messaging* apps have replaced older modalities and have a greater potential to become viral in the *glocal* society, both within specific chat/action groups around the world and within defined local territorial areas interested in those contents and issues.

It is enough to look at the past decade to realise that several wide-scale campaigns have emerged on different topics and against diverse targets that differ compared with Nike or other multinational commercial companies. To name just a few: SHAC, Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty related to animal rights and promoted by Huntingdon Life Sciences group; the NOH8 Campaign in favour of civil rights, where the claim 'NOH8' not only is used to evoke the sound of 'No Hate' but also to reflect *Proposition 8*, which was a Californian referendum proposal to abolish same-gender marriage. This specific campaign has gradually widened to include activist groups and participation initiatives against various forms of discrimination. So, there is a variety of areas in which this type of involvement fosters citizens' engagement.

Around the late 2000s *great global recession*, the occupiers of Zuccotti Park in New York, known as the Occupy Wall Street movement, and the Indignados in Spain should also be mentioned because digital communication played a key role in their recognition on a global level, their organisational structure and communication activity. The same goes for the #bringbackourgirls campaign against the Nigerian jihadist terrorist organisation led by Boko Haram or the two waves of the Occupy Central protest in Hong Kong. Moreover, soon after the Charlie Hebdo terrorist attack #jesuischarlie was at that time one of the historical records of hashtag circulation via Twitter: more than 2 million *tweets* blended emotional participation as a result of the tragic event with political content. Moreover, Twitter was a fundamental tool used in the Arabic Spring revolts calling for democratic reforms, but the same microblogging platform was used by democracy's opponents within other illiberal political systems around the world.

New digital ICTs have now become a resource for civic and political responsibility-taking on the part of citizens since they allow content to be exchanged in a very fast and inexpensive way and even in a much more efficient and effective manner in comparison with the recent past. These digital resources are also pushing the communicative (and *connective*) action into a new participative atmosphere.

Meanwhile, this landmark change provides a stimulus for discussing the very meaning of the controversial issue termed *disintermediation*. Perhaps

it should be understood in terms of a 're-intermediation' or 'neo-intermediation' process, as discussed by scholars of the political impact of new media (Bentivegna and Boccia Artieri 2019; Giacomini 2018).

We should also credit this type of technology and the related communicative form with its capability to involve – even though in an ephemeral and fragmentary way – young people and also those who are placed in a 'peripheral' position concerning information and discussion concerning public issues. Using online social networks, along with everything else, also represents an opportunity for citizens to be (politically) informed by *notifications*, for example, or *memes* or also by receiving frivolous messages directly into their own cellphone. It is quite clear that this kind of information is not just fragmented. In many cases, it is also led by 'obscure' algorithms whose profiling procedures and content transmission are controlled by the major social media companies.

In this regard, the debate has been dominated by a critical approach, where opacity and secrecy are pointed out as the main peculiarities, hence sentiments and attitudes of suspicion are prompted. It is also fair to say that the patent law protection issue and the technological complexity of the algorithm itself, consequently, make its functioning hidden and suspicious.

However, the matter is more complex than appears at first sight, as highlighted in Taina Bucher's work. Understanding algorithmic power and politics in everyday life, and the way they reproduce the world implies a new perspective other than the idea of the algorithm as a static object. Algorithms matter under certain circumstances, not always and in all conditions and not for every social media user or purpose. In other words, the algorithm exists and operates at multiple levels: it is 'part of a much wider network of relations and practices' (Bucher 2018, 20). Moreover, even if its functioning is non-transparent to the public and the algorithm controls the flow of information towards the user, the role of this figure should not be overlooked. Algorithmic power and its functioning are strictly connected to the user him/herself, his/her inputs, and the software and hardware used. So, this relationship is a kind of 'construction' where users – as reported in Bucher's work – are able to resist and not just to passively accept what the algorithm proposes or imposes.

However, the possibility of living 'always-on' thanks to a global mobile connection is something concrete in citizens' everyday life within the frame of the *networked society* (Rainie and Wellman 2012).

A very profound change has taken place over the last two decades in our society: the transformation from a *participatory culture* to a *culture of connectivity*. This has been due to the impetus provided by social media, as stated by José van Dijck (2013, 5). According to her work, an 'ecosystem of connective media', based on social and cultural norms, has been realised. In other words, the 'platform society' emerges as a social form, a sort of global social form

that is closely linked to digital infrastructures and websites, their interactions and interdependency.

In this perspective, digital platforms are more than simple tools, applications or social media. They are not even neutral intermediaries, but they play a role in shaping social life. When platform logic is applied to the public sector (i.e. news media and journalism, health or education) and, more specifically to politics and to government activity, it is easy to understand that, in a way, digital platforms are assuming a regulatory role in post-modern society shaping a particular 'ecosystem'.

Hence, this has to do with democracy and its functioning, and with fundamental sectors in which public and private interests are at play. And this has become a rather delicate matter thanks to the central role played by the big companies that dominate that 'ecosystem of connective media' in which they are not simply players, but also act as gatekeepers able to control the algorithmic selection process, as argued by van Dijck et al. (2018). This new social form is based on the centrality of digital platforms that operate a regulatory mechanism in society and have a public role in shaping cultural, social and political life.

However, nowadays it is much easier to become informed, starting from a notification received in one's cellphone, by clicking on a link to connect to other pages such as journalistic or fact-checking portals, satirical or militant websites or even civil society monitors, government watchdogs, as well as taking part in opinion campaigns or an (ephemeral) online political discussion, also by means of instant messaging apps (Valeriani and Vaccari 2017). And finally, signing a petition, participating in e-audit or e-democracy procedures or forwarding content with a 'civic' (or political) meaning to someone else who is believed to be interested in it, now have a lower cost.

This kind of involvement is something concrete and relevant even if it is truly marked by problematic issues which have been challenging the specific role of the Internet as a civic society instrument. In addition, it should be added, there are disputed elements such as the fragmentation of digital content, the ephemeral nature of the Web, the dissemination of fake news – or better dis-, mis- and malinformaion – the spread of slacktivism, the tendency of 'donating *without* acting' and so forth.

However, at the same time, there are no reasons to disregard the potentiality of this specific way of exchanging content among citizens and its impact on the political realm, both in favour of democracy – for improving the quality of living in a polity – or against democracy, as highlighted in the report *Freedom on the Net* (see Chapter 1). After all, 'digital populism' is not a sort of imaginative construction but is instead a fact and even a politological category which comes from the analysis of current reality in many advanced democracies.

Digital ICTs are important not just regarding the *cognitive* dimension, but they are also significant tools for promoting political action offline as well as supporting the trade-off between the online and offline realms. Those instruments, in fact, could be used to foster electoral participation, movements' mobilisation such as massive street demonstrations, and specific and short-lived flash mob activism. The effects of these political pressure actions will be more successful if the *hybridisation* process takes place: this is the case when a participatory event happens offline in the street and is 'covered' by both *new* and *legacy* media. This informative intertwining rebounds within the wider online sphere in the frame of the new media 'ecosystem'. Thus, it mirrors public debate and, in turn, it comes down to the grassroots level offline, affecting face-to-face discussions, and then back to online, with instant messaging chat groups, blogs, social media and so forth.

6.2 POLITICAL INFORMATION IN THE NEW MEDIA ECOSYSTEM

Given the above, Web 2.0 platforms can be seen not just as a contentious political space, but also as a place where an informal interaction develops among citizens. Of course, it is not only issues of public interest that are debated in this space but also many other topics are discussed. Online thematic forums, blogs and social media are indeed considered to be an extension of Oldenburg's 'third places' (1991) in the age of the Internet (see Chapter 5). Thus, the Web 2.0 realm can be understood as an area where public space takes form and discursive practices of argumentation and counter-argumentation take place.

The *public sphere*, according to Jürgen Habermas, is the space in which public opinion is constructed by means of citizens' rational discursive action. *Coffee houses* have long been traditional places where social and private actors belonging to the bourgeois society used to discuss rationally and produce opinions publically and to take a critical position on matters of public concern. Since then, the role played by means of communication, and their technological transformation, has been essential in circulating and amplifying those discursive contents among the whole society.

Today, legacy media and new media operate in a *hybrid* scenario marked by a two-way flow of information with no rigid sequence. Social television, live-tweeting on Facebook and *live* performances in other online social media are used by candidates in elections, politicians and MPs, and end up creating a common space with so-called old and new media, as well as direct, and *personal*, interaction with their audiences and more specifically with their constituencies. Citizens do the same by posting content and discussing among themselves or replying to those leaders in favour or against their position statements. Bloggers, influencers and celebrities are new actors in the digital

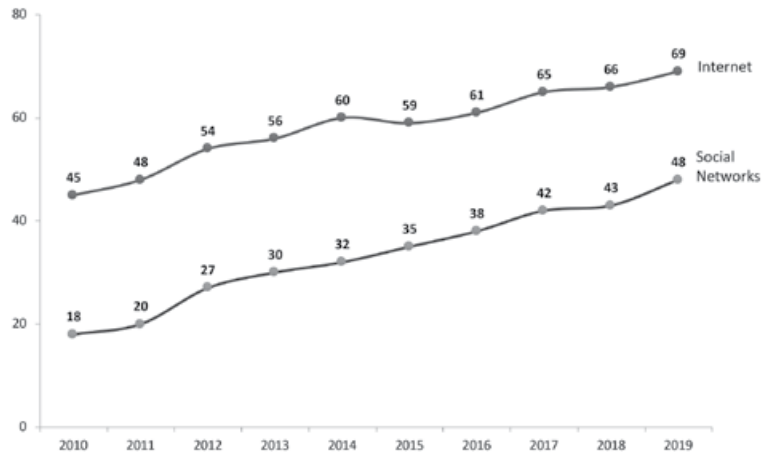
communication environment who produce a permanent information flow never experienced before, if only for the huge amount and variety of content shared daily worldwide. This reinforces the idea of the age of *communicative abundance*, which affects the field of politics as well (Keane 2013).

Research outcomes concerning citizens of the European polity are showing an increasing trend in the use of the Internet and online social networks. Eurobarometer's polling waves report that between 2010 and 2019 the Internet's 'frequent users' have grown from 45 per cent to 69 per cent. By referring to online social networks, their users have more than doubled during the same period: from 18 per cent to 48 per cent (Figure 6.1). And there are, of course, also Europeans who surf the Web less frequently. Concerning the Internet, 8 per cent log on two or three times a week, and a tiny minority, 3 per cent, about once a week. Online social networks are used two or three times a week by 11 per cent of European citizens, whilst 5 per cent access it roughly once a week. Those who never use these digital resources are respectively 14 per cent (for the Internet) and 28 per cent (for social media). Looking at the trend outlined and considering the figures just mentioned above, it is clear how relevant the potentiality of the Web on political citizenship is, and the actual concreteness of the so-called platform society.

Moreover, other interesting data provided by the EU public opinion survey show from what sources Europeans get most of the news on their own national political issues. It is interesting to see how far the use of websites and online social networks, taken together, has spread over the last few years: from 41 per cent in 2014, it increased sharply to 62 per cent in 2019 (Figure 6.2). In more detail, online social networks have doubled, from 10 per cent to 21 per cent over the same period, whilst websites have reached a level of 41 per cent from 31 per cent.

At the same time, the other sources of political information have been marked by minimal change or substantial stability, as can be seen in the same figure. In fact, television remains the most important channel of political information, keeping its traditional *mainstream* feature for three out of four European citizens; it has lost just a few percentage points: −6 in about five years (from 82 per cent to 76 per cent). A similar order of shrinkage, in terms of points, is recorded for the written press (−6 points). However, the relative weight of this loss is significantly higher: from the 41 per cent recorded in 2014 the most updated data collected by Eurobarometer has scaled down to 35 per cent. Thus, web communication is progressively approaching the level of television; the gap was 41 percentage points in 2014, yet, during a period of only five years, it has shown a drop of 14 percentage points.

These figures can certainly be considered as another clue to be added in support of the thesis of the Web's great impact on political information and then, in turn, on discussion and engagement among citizens. This trend relates



Source: Author's elaboration of data from Standard Eurobarometer.

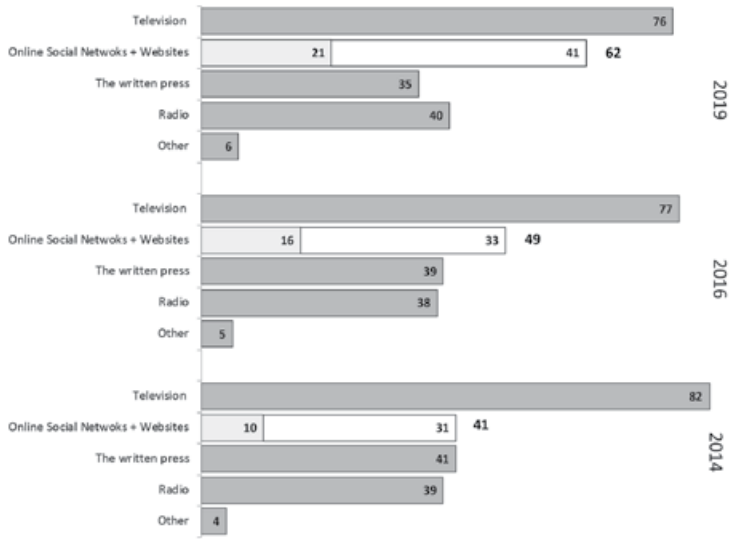
Figure 6.1 *Internet and online social networks frequent users amongst European citizens (time series 2010–19; % of everyday/ almost everyday use)*

to an important polity such as European democracy, but it goes without saying that even among other Western political systems this transformation has taken form.

One more element has to be added to conclude this point. Young people are the main protagonists in this shift that is re-shaping democratic societies but also, to a certain extent, it affects the illiberal political systems in which they are the most active militants against the holders of power.

6.3 OPINIONS ON NEW MEDIA AND POLITICS

It is now possible to say that over the years the Internet has become an *opportunity structure* for citizens' engagement. As discussed above, in modern democracies, like the European ones, the Web is being ever more used by a significant share of citizens to keep abreast of issues of political or general interest. The transformations in the way in which the citizenry become informed, discuss and participate, are shaping new forms of civic and political engagement and then the very concept of citizenship. Dahlgren (2009) suggests that the idea of *received* citizenship should be replaced by the



Source: Author's elaboration of data from Standard Eurobarometer.

Figure 6.2 *The main sources of political information amongst European citizens (time series 2014, 2016 and 2019; % of multiple answers)*

notion of *achieved* citizenship, within which the citizen can be understood as an active subject. In this frame, the idea of citizenship assumes the contour of a *civic agency* in which the participation style is re-invented within the digital scenario in which websites, online forums, information portals, 2.0 platforms and the like, operate.

Citizens' cultural approach toward the Internet and social media is the substratum on which new modes of engagement and inclusion in the political community can grow and proliferate. Thus, if the focus is moved from behavioural data to attitudes and opinions towards online social networks, it is possible to complete the frame sketched through the section above. Even in this case, the time series gives the idea of the trend concerning the role of social media, in a double sense.

On one side, the proportion of European citizens who consider online social networks a good tool for *having a say* on political issues has risen from 41 per cent in 2010 to 54 per cent in 2018 (Figure 6.3). A similar trend is also seen with regard to opinions on the possibility of *getting interested in politi-*

cal affairs by social media (from 41 per cent to 59 per cent). These attitudes highlight the Web's 'proto-political' feature according to citizens' perspective. In other words, these digital tools have a civic potential in Europeans' vision.

However, data included in that research report did not have the aim of demonstrating any empirical evidence about the relation between the role of the Web (as an independent variable) in promoting people's engagement. Yet the fact itself about the Internet that is perceived as an instrument linked to the idea of the good citizen in modern (and mediatised) democracies is very interesting to underline in our discourse.

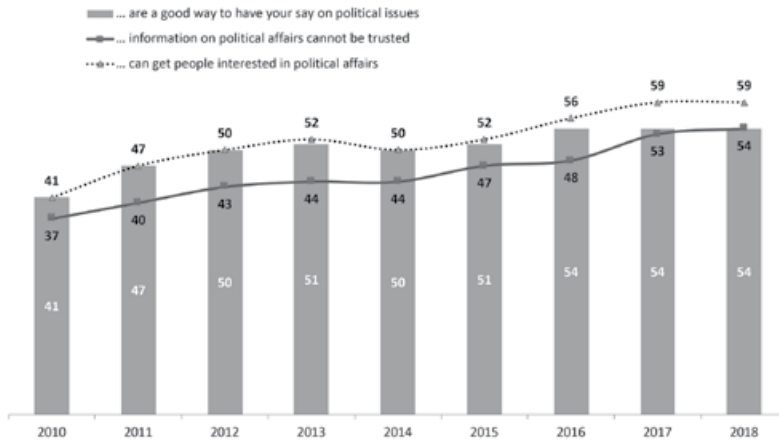
On the other side, there are also problematic issues to be considered in connection with this. The distrust of political information provided by online social networks has grown during the same time period: in 2010 this opinion was shared by 37 per cent of interviewees, but in 2018 it reached a majority equal to 54 per cent. This trend, of course, can be understood as a result of two factors: a direct consequence of the structural progression of social media usage in democratic societies, on one hand, and the dissemination of fake news episodes and the concern about it, on the other.

As may be seen in Figure 6.4, new media, unlike legacy media, enjoy a lower level of general confidence from European citizens: the Internet ranks at 32 per cent and social media are trusted by 20 per cent of Europeans. Besides, these data show a slight decrease compared with data gathered some years earlier by the Eurobarometer research programme.

Furthermore, considering the so-called 'traditional' media, which are now deeply renewed and fully digitalised, they enjoy a higher level of confidence on the part of citizens. Around six out of ten interviewees trust the radio (57 per cent), about half of them value the television (49 per cent), and the written press ranks just below, at 46 per cent.

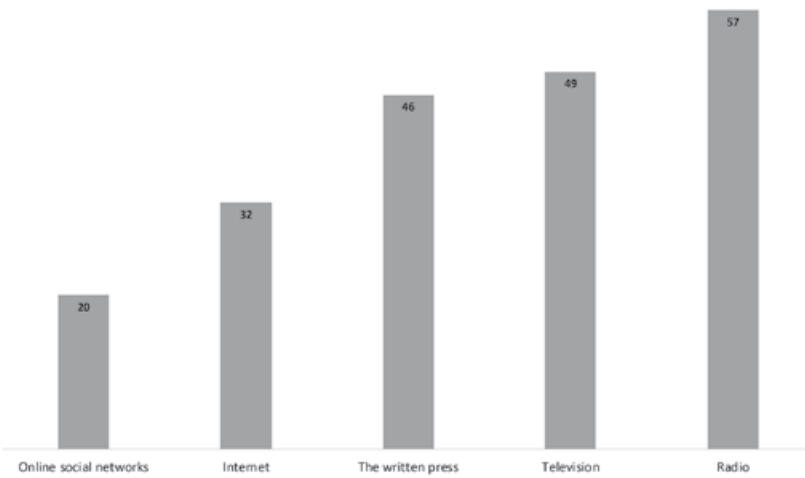
Even though people's attitudes value the Internet and social media political information less if compared with other media, there is no doubt that, without ignoring lights and shadows, these platforms are now part of both the cultural perspectives and the objective everyday life of European citizens, as well as citizens who live in many other areas of the world, as can be seen from data discussed in Chapter 1 and by the ideas of the ecosystem of connective media culture and platform society, mentioned above.

The *mediatisation* process of politics has been marking contemporary democracies, and digital communication configures itself as a fundamental fact in this regard. Young people are not just present-day citizens, they will also assume over the near future a more central role in the coming *civil*, *political* and *digital* societies. The so-called *Dot.Net* generation (Zukin et al. 2006) or *Digital natives* (Prensky 2001), *Gen Next*, *Digitizen*, *E-Generation* – just to mention a few categories (Velliaris and Breen 2016, 5) – are understandably



Source: Author's elaboration of data from Standard Eurobarometer.

Figure 6.3 *European citizens' opinions about online social networks (time series 2010–18; % of those totally/tending to agree)*



Source: Author's elaboration of data from Standard Eurobarometer, November 2019.

Figure 6.4 *European citizens' trust of some media bodies (% of those tending to trust)*

highly-skilled and natural users of these technologies. Platforms are going to form their idea of citizenship.

After all, Internet communication, thanks to peculiarities such as, for example, interactivity and velocity, has re-shaped the very form of society, and also the relations and identities present in it. Digital technology also has other characteristics such as horizontality, polycentrism and pluralism (even though these features should always be taken with a 'grain of salt'). Traditional barriers such as time and space are now highly de-structured within the new communicative ecosystem. And then the Web is broadly seen as a democratic place – even if it is not free from critical aspects – where a *digital user* has the opportunity to become (but it doesn't mean s/he will become) a *digital citizen*.

6.4 BEYOND MEDIATION: REFERENDUMS AND PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

Transnational phenomena like the Occupy movement and that of the Indignados are two recent and topical examples – among others around the world – of a trend that underlines how the mechanism of representative politics is changing, the party-based democracy is weakening, and 'the end of an aura(?)', according to Simon Tormey (2015, 141), is taking shape. 'Representative democracy is becoming the basis upon which the frustrations of citizens are played out: via micro-parties, anti-party parties, anti-political politicians' (Tormey 2015, 142). Hence, elections are now less a moment to express a sentiment of closeness or belonging, a way to be *for* something, but an occasion to convey a stance *against* something. Representative democratic principles remain broadly shared by (critical) citizens but the apparatus of representation and how it works is now widely questioned by the same citizens of established democracies.

However, if representative democracy, on one side, suffers from a deep crisis, on the other its potential of resilience should also be acknowledged. Representative democracies are not about to perish but are changing their fundamental mechanism, whilst opening up to alternative visions of the future of democracy.

For example, e-democracy, and participatory and democratic innovations procedures are designing new modes of citizen participation and related institutions required to regulate these specific forms of civic and political engagement (Smith 2009).

Today, democracies offer a greater opportunity to participate in deliberative democracy arenas, such as citizens' juries, forums and panels, but also participatory budgeting, online polls or voting in various kinds of referendum, including the citizen-initiated ones. The potential for political influence is, to

a certain extent, in the hands of ordinary citizens, in their activism and capacity to mobilise democratic societies from below (della Porta 2013).

The use of referendums in representative democracies is an interesting fact to consider alongside, and in interaction with, the crisis of representative democracy and the rise of the neo-populist phenomenon. Referendums and plebiscites, in fact, have become increasingly linked with populism in the academic debate, giving rise to the comment 'the myth of populist referendums' (Qvortrup 2018, 66). But referendums can perform a vital function for democracy, being used (but not always) to keep elected politicians in check or as a 'people's veto' institution.

> From a comparative perspective, the overall development is that the referendum – as general rule – has performed a healthy function in democratic countries. […] while there has been an increase in the number of referendums, most of these have […] been held because written constitutions require that votes should be held before irreversible changes are made to the political system. In most cases, the referendum had not been a tool in the hands of the elite but a people's shield. (Qvortrup 2018, 83)

The referendum is an institution which can be considered part of the direct conception of democracy. It is known that sometimes the referendum has been tactically used by politicians but the outcome was not always the one expected by the political area that called or initiated it. 'Yet those who claim that it is a populist sword wielded against the largely ignorant masses, forget that those who live by the referendum often die by the referendum' (Qvortrup 2018, 82). Recent referendums held in 2016 such as Brexit in the United Kingdom or the Constitutional referendum in Italy are probably good examples of this.

Moreover, modes of participation without *mediation* imply two fundamental conditions. First, the disavowal of the traditional actors of political representation is implicit. The second refers to a growing sense of discontent, if not open disapproval, with the political system as a whole. This kind of activism is distinguished by three main characteristics, as clearly highlighted by Bernard Manin (see Chapter 4): the logic of dis-continuity, the single-issue approach and, finally, the dis-intermediated structure.

The public sphere is enriched by the opportunities available on the Internet and more precisely on Web 2.0 apps. This mediatised public space, which was first connected to the mainstream media, is now *hybridised* by new media (Chadwick 2013). The same has happened around more traditional and institutionalised forms of political activism. Engagement is becoming more articulated and *fragmented* than in the past. It has assumed forms of *individualised collectivist action* and sometimes even *creative* modes of political participation.

Today, studying how citizens become part of a political community has to take into consideration new paradigms and then new analytical categories for

better framing and understanding what is going on in the relationship between society and politics. If scholars remain anchored to traditional theories, models and indicators, they fail to fully grasp the extent of the transformations underway, their consequences in civil life and therefore in the evolution of modern democracies.

The process of transmitting information has changed rapidly due to the boost in communication through *new media*. However, digital activism is not definitively able to replace offline participation activities, which remain the fundamental realm for citizens' engagement. It does, however, expand participation in a two-fold way. On one hand, digital citizenship enlarges the repertoire of collective action and on the other, it is a fundamental element that links online and offline engagement.

Whether the scientific process continues to look at citizens' engagement and public opinion formation with the 'lenses' of the past, the risk is to be unable to observe and grasp what is truly happening in society. Hence, conclusions drawn would refer only to categories such as disenchantment, decline and malaise. These also exist, but they are just a part of the story. Consequently, the outline drawn would be inaccurate and, therefore, the resulting representation would be limited and even distorted.

Given the above, citizens in the post-modern society might be called *individualised* actors. Consequently, new models of citizens' participation have emerged and have spread into *subpolitical* arenas. This has happened through direct and reticular forms of engagement, but also through 'personal' and fragmented modes of participation in the *liquid society* – which refers to the concept of *individualised collective action* as mentioned in the previous chapter. Forms of discontinuous engagement are also fostered by the very nature of the Web opportunities for engagement and find room to develop within styles of individualised forms of participation and *lifestyle politics*.

But there is both light and shadow in digital 'disintermediation': fake news, slacktivism, audience fragmentation and the like.

6.5 FACT-CHECKING AND 'MONITORIA'

'Communicative abundance', as addressed by John Keane (2013) in the book *Democracy and Media Decadence*, and the digital disintermediation that marks present society make the exchange of information easier, with lower costs for the citizen. However, this also implies some risks to the democratic process. Just think of the debate around *disinformation* spread via social media and the dispute about the issue of *post-truth* that exploded during 2016 after the vote on Brexit in June, the election of Donald Trump in November, but also in the aftermath of the Italian constitutional referendum held in December. In November Oxford Dictionaries named *post-truth* the 2016 'word of the year'.

Public debate about this era in which actual facts and experts are replaced by feelings and fake news, and academic dispute around this issue and its implications for democracy have taken place since then (McIntyre 2018; Davies 2018). More in general: 'Contemporary democracies face additional challenges, including new and bitter controversies concerning the role and legitimacy of expertise in democratic politics' (Keane 2018, 473).

Besides, to take another example about *fake news*, two weeks before the 2019 European election-day, Facebook Italia, following a complaint from Avaaz[2] Ong, disactivated 23 pages (with 2.4 million followers) because they were spreading *disinformation* and *hate speech*.[3] That document reports that approximately half of the pages were close to the Five Star Movement or Lega. 'Fake news' has become a post-modern category that labels an ancient and articulated phenomenon involving events based on political calculation.

So, this does not concern only the Web and social media, even though it must be considered that this kind of news goes viral quickly in the *networked society* because of the potentiality of the Internet itself. On the other hand, the Web is also the main channel through which citizens who had believed real *fake news* can debunk them. In Italy, for example, recent research[4] has shown that more than half of Italians (56 per cent) had considered false news that they read on the Internet to be true, and 23 per cent say they had shared *fake news* they believed to be true. Yet, one out of three Italians has also had the opportunity to realise in the new media that news was false – *vs.* one out of four in the *legacy* media. So, the Web is both the place of the fallacy but also the place of demystification, once more underscoring the ambiguity of the Internet.

At the same time, *fake news* drives (online) civil society monitors to face, or at least to discuss[5] this complicated issue concerning the quality of democracy and the public sphere and then the formation of public opinion (Bimber and Gil de Zúñiga 2020). Those watchdog entities indirectly enhance the function of the scrutinising bodies through *fact-checking* bodies in the main consolidated democracies.[6] This kind of activism is strictly linked to the 'rate' of trustworthiness of the news and of those news sources and journalists that disseminate

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[2] The Avaaz report is available at https://avaazpress.s3.amazonaws.com/ITNetworks-ExecSumm-11_05_2019.pdf.

[3] The Avaaz report states that there is a wider disinformation network that includes 104 pages and six groups, with a total of 18 million followers and 23 million interactions over the three months before the report was presented (3 May 2019).

[4] Survey carried out by Demos&Pi in December 2017, available at http://www.demos.it/a01462.php.

[5] See the civic campaign about fake news, supported by communication studies scholars, on http://www.digitaltransformationinstitute.it/2017/12/05/fakenews/.

[6] For the Italian case see fact-checking platforms such as *bufale.net*, *disinformatico.info*, *factchecking.it*, *pagellapolitica.it* and *smask.online.*

or uncover them, with positive repercussions for their public image. This is consistent with the orientation of European public opinion, as reported from recent research 'Special Eurobarometer 503' in December 2019 on the 'Attitudes towards the impact of digitalisation on daily lives'.[7] The majority of Europeans (62 per cent) think the media should be the first ones responsible for combating fake news and in particular disinformation (Public authorities 53 per cent; Social media platforms 48 per cent). In other words, this has to do with the verification of sources and the content of the news, which is a typical and essential practice of good journalism.

> This leaves the press, serving as epistemic editors, as the crucial players in the future of problems of truth and as the key actors around whom explanations of differing outcomes in different countries should be developed. The diffusion of social media has shed light on a function of the press—epistemic editing—that was to some extent easy to take for granted during the era of mass media dominance. This is no longer the case. (Bimber and Gil de Zúñiga 2020, 711)

In the digital era, there are also other players. The responsibility of the large media companies, such as search engines or social media apps, is called into question for implementing surveillance strategies in order to ensure the quality of the information provided (or how personal information is used by third parties, as shown by the story regarding the big data company Cambridge Analytica). News from these sources enters the political debate and contributes to the formation of public opinion as well as to voters' reasoning about their choices in elections.

For example, one of the most recurrent issues during the first part of the Italian pre-electoral debate in the run-up to the 4 March 2018 general election was devoted to fake news. The Democratic Party has begun to publish a periodical and partisan report that, so far, has been issued four times. It was named the *Disinformation Report*,[8] and it accuses the Democratic Party (PD)'s competitors, such as the League and particularly the Five Star Movement of being the two main fake news producers against the PD via several Facebook groups which supported those parties.[9]

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[7] The Eurobarometer report is available at https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/ResultDoc/download/DocumentKy/89800.

[8] Available at https://www.democratica.com/focus/quarto-report-pd-fake-news/, accessed 28 February 2019.

[9] Press investigations made by *Buzzfeed* and then deepened by *The New York Times* a few months before the Italian general election of 2018 concluded that there was a connection between those parties and some partisan Facebook pages involved in online disinformation.

6.6 THE OTHER SIDE OF THE INTERNET

The Internet also has another, less dark side in terms of how citizens can gather information. Today looking for news on collective interest subjects, at local, national or global levels has a decisively lower cost even in comparison with the recent past. Moreover, citizens also have the opportunity to play an active role in this regard, both *personalising* the information obtained through notification systems, and using online participation opportunities for their own political and civic *responsibility-taking*.

Information circulates with particular dynamism. It is fast, viral and even *on-demand*. There is a real possibility for citizens to personalise their media diet, breaking time and space limits thanks to streaming services or choosing which notifications to receive from specific *news web portals*. Digital dis-intermediated communication systems expand the models of circulating information, which is no longer just a *one-to-many* transmission scheme but includes the *many-to-many* logic. Social networks are at the centre of a tangle of new and legacy media entities where the *hybridisation* process takes place.

Moreover, content spreads directly or indirectly on the Web and reverberates through interpersonal discussion in everyday life, affecting public opinion formation (Campus et al. 2015) and shaping voting choice. In the digital realm, un-searched information also reaches citizens (or at least their mobile devices) through the continuous flow of *notifications*. Furthermore, an increasing proportion of Internet users are *always-on* via portable devices that allow them to use a mobile connection to the Internet.

In the online dimension, this type of media environment objectifies the already discussed category of the (offline) *third place* (see Chapter 5). Given the diffusion and ease of use of social media, as well as instant messaging apps (IM), this ephemeral space has ended up affecting not only the younger generations, who are naturally suited to this mode of communication, but also people less skilled in the use of those tools, thanks to user-friendliness.

6.7 ONLINE PUBLIC SPHERE?

The growing pervasiveness of the Web also pushes scholars to re-think the classical problem concerning the *digital divide*. Studies in this field have developed various models through which citizens with different skill-sets use the Internet. Thanks to new online platforms and the latest generation devices (smartphones in the first place) the gap in accessing and using the opportunity of the Web is to a certain extent mitigated. Increasing user-friendliness, which is helpful even for citizens with fewer skills, is fostering this trend. Social networking and notification systems allow users to be reached directly and

favour exposure to content of political interest, in some sense as in a traditional (online) *third place*.

Furthermore, the controversial issue concerning the effects of *echo chambers* and *filter bubbles* does not seem to be particularly widespread and influential under this point of view. This is primarily because citizens use and combine multiple sources of information, such as new media, legacy media and face-to-face communication to acquire information and shape their political opinions. Besides, citizens who discuss politics via blogs or social networks are a minority of the population. The number of citizens who are engaged in political discussion offline is much higher. Of course, they are involved in a different form of interaction. It is not the same thing to have a face-to-face conversation as to discuss issues via online devices.

Furthermore, and particularly important, empirical studies report that there are no significant differences in terms of internal homogeneity in political orientation between offline and online social groups in which politics is discussed. Respondents who say that most of the components in their discussion groups share the same degree of political orientation amount to about one in three in both groups (Ceccarini 2020; Legnante and Vaccari 2018). This means that most citizens interact in online political discussions where the heterogeneity of the political view is concrete – exposing members to differing viewpoints (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995). A certain degree of political homophily of discussion networks is then a trait that also concerns offline social groups, and not just those citizens active in Web discussions.

Moreover, the process of public opinion formation is by its nature something complex and not limited to the influence of only one source of information. This will certainly not correspond entirely to the normative idea of the Habermasian *public sphere*. If anything, it refers to its ephemeral conception. The *eco-chamber* effect, relating to political background homogeneity of online communities where citizens are engaged in political discussion, must also be assessed in the light of these data that, at least, characterise Italian societies, but it goes beyond that.

6.8 THE INTERNET AS CIVIL SOCIETY MONITOR

In this situation, *monitoring power* can be seen as the other side of distrust. The very concept of distrust can have various connotations, as seen in the previous chapter. It has usually been understood as the basis of political disenchantment and disengagement, and it is closely related to the decline of civic potential within a political community. Yet it can also be understood differently: as a stimulus and a fundamental premise of democratic control initiatives. The idea of *counter-democracy* considers built-in Web opportunities a key element on which is founded the meaning *democratic distrust*. The Internet is seen as

a 'political form'. In the constellation of *supervisory* powers, the Web can be used to play a helpful role in improving the quality of (representative) democracy in the age of distrust.

Within this framework, through intermittent participation and within *post-bureaucratic* organisational forms (Bimber 2003), civil society monitors as well as mobilises organisational activities facilitated by the potential of the Web, constituting a democratic space that is complementary to the elections, which are, by their own nature, necessarily episodic. The citizen as a watchdog and his/her activism can be seen as a corrective of 'representative entropy' in the hands of supervisory citizens who activate themselves directly, online and offline. These kinds of citizens make use, at the local level and not only at this level, of specialised websites for implementing online petitions (e.g. change.org). They also use the most widespread social networking to organise diverse types of campaign. Platforms like *Meet-up* or *FixMyStreet* are fundamental tools for these purposes, including MoveOn.org, which represents an interesting experience to study new-generation political advocacy groups and lobbying models: a new way in which to organise political pressure tactics. This is because 'the real impact of the new media environment comes not through "organizing without organizations," but through organizing *with different* organizations'. (Karpf 2012, 3).

This leads to a kind of involvement called *analytic activism* (Karpf 2017), which is a tool of large, established advocacy groups and consists of a 'new approach to citizen-driven politics that makes use of the affordances of digital technologies to fashion new strategic interventions in the political arena. It is a change in organizational structure, processes, and work routines' (Karpf 2017, 4).

One implication about analytic activism should be noted: not all digital activism is analytic activism. Moreover, individual citizens and viral social movements also benefit from the affordances of the Internet.

The digital platforms mentioned above are good examples of tools for Internet-mediated participation that can be used as civil society monitors to tackle the basic problem of controlling elected officials and rulers, since elections

> *can* be a democratic method if those elected are regarded as 'agent, proxies, or servants,' that is, if they are treated as 'dependent delegates'. This, however, implies that elections are aristocratic if representatives are independent in the sense that constitutional theory gives to the term – that is to say, if they are not bound by instructions or imperative mandates. (Manin 1997, 152)

The Internet, of course, on its own guarantees neither a better trade-off between representatives and represented nor the affirmation of a *civis nobilis*

2.0 engaged in post-modern civil society. Moreover, this 'online citizen' would not be an authentically new type of citizenship, but rather the *digital* empowerment of an ideal-typical model already discussed in the political literature: the *civis nobilis* according to Giacomo Sani (2007).

6.9 SLACKTIVISM AND BEYOND

Moreover, the Web itself could also lead to the downfall of civic and political engagement, as argued by Evgeny Morozov on the risk of slacktivism for citizens politically engaged online:

> Thus, many of them join Facebook groups not only or not so much because they support particular causes but because they believe it's important to be seen by their online friends to care about such causes. In the past convincing themselves and, more important, their friends that they were indeed socially conscious enough to be changing the world required (at a minimum) getting off their sofas. Today, aspiring digital revolutionaries can stay on their sofas forever – or until their iPads' batteries run out – and still be seen as heroes. (Morozov 2011, 186–7)

This specific kind of clicktivism is an approach that may have no impact on political life and politics itself, but it only satisfies the lazy activist, who through a simple *click* believes s/he has engaged her/himself in a collective interest issue. In doing so, this active citizen would not contribute beyond their ephemeral and fragmented action. Sometimes s/he would not transcend even a single event, taking part only with a simple donation, *posting* or *liking* an online content, which is something different from authentic on-the-ground civic or political engagement and in the traditional places of civic and political participation. For these and other reasons the digital democracy has been outlined as a *mith* (Flinders 2012). Beyond these fair critiques of the logic of social media and its embedded individualistic if not 'narcissistic' nature, the following should be also considered:

- The *expressive* dimension of participation – vs. the *instrumental* dimension – is a fundamental element for both the individual's involvement in politics in general and, in particular, for being part of the community and participating in civic or political engagement projects towards it.
- Social media allow forms of *expressiveness* – vs. *deliberation* (development is certainly limited by the online platforms because of the very nature of this media) that facilitates the circulation of political information and opinions, which is the essence of any form of participatory involvement and connection between online and offline realms.
- Finally, it should also be emphasised that this mode of engagement is expressed through a *micro-activism* carried out by small, scattered,

informal, decentralised groups acting with limited resources online and offline at local, national or international levels. These may be Facebook group activities, digital democracy and deliberative arenas, civic monitoring initiatives, locally based or wider, global campaigns. They may also be re-tweeting practices or political content sharing in the various social media platforms available on the Web and among citizens within the offline realm. This kind of micro-activism differs from traditional forms of engagement oriented toward the mobilisation of citizens. The extensions of citizens' involvement and the goals of those initiatives are in some sense delimited and scattered on the ground (Marichal 2013). Even for these specific features, however, social media engagement represents an important participatory dimension within the frame of a post-modern political community.

6.10 THE NEED FOR NEW 'LENSES'

Political parties reflect social change and transformations in citizens' political culture. Studying party transformation gives us the opportunity to shed light on the relationship between society and politics. It also allows the understanding of how citizens have been reinventing their political activism.

Political Citizenship in the Post-modern Era

Citizens' engagement has also changed. Voters are now living in a disenchanted relationship with political parties. Party identification was stronger in the past, as discussed above (see Chapter 3). The vote is an essential ritual that belongs to the mechanism of representative democracy, even though criticism of this process of selection is widespread in public debate. In this regard, a debate can also be seen on the rediscovery of democracy based on the drawing of lots to select rulers, as in the past (Manin 1997; Van Reybrouck 2016). From the perspective of citizens who live in Western democracies, the meaning of the vote is different today from in the past. Voting has lost its relevance and its 'sacred' nature from the contemporary voters' viewpoint. The decline of voter turnout and the growth of electoral volatility are common features that characterise modern democracies and are clues concerning the broader on-going change.

Likewise, citizens have also changed the ways they engage, mobilise and gather information. 'Cognitive orientation' is a fundamental dimension of a *participatory* political culture and is also a central element for defining and re-thinking the modern concept of political citizenship.

The redefinition of citizenship norms has an impact on the ways in which citizens activate their political *responsibility-taking* (Micheletti 2003). Likewise,

it has an impact on participation in a political community and on the forms of participation – which are not declining but merely changing. Citizenship norms have shifted from a pattern of *duty-based* citizenship to *engaged* citizenship (Dalton 2008a). In this regard, Pippa Norris (2002) talked about the 'democratic phoenix' to address the evolution citizens have demonstrated in reinventing political participation modes.

In some respects, citizens today appear more demanding, critical and undoubtedly distant from traditional politics and particularly from its main reference points – such as so-called *mainstream* political parties.

In the political landscape of post-modernisation, of the risk society and globalisation, citizens' political identity assumes multiple, more flexible and hybrid forms than in the past – for example, at the time of *first modernity* when this notion had been intended as *unitary*, created through participation in and belonging to well-established institutions, first political parties and unions, oriented to the political system and its apparatus.

By contrast, over late modernity, *responsibility-taking* for common wellbeing embraces forms of democratic citizenship and political engagement which are increasingly founded on an *individual* basis. This reflects the processes of *individualisation* described by scholars such as Antony Giddens or Ulrich Beck who first studied the consequences of globalisation.

Participation in the Post-modern Era

However, according to Micheletti's analysis (2003, 24–34), this kind of societal atmosphere leads to the creation of *individualised collective actions* modes that can take place in a variety of *subpolitical* places (Beck et al. 1994), interlacing *self-assertive, self-actualising* and *self-reflexivity* traits which characterise some contemporary forms of political engagement. This shapes a sort of direct involvement based on both *everyday* and DIY activism, as stated by Lance Bennett (1998) and Antony Giddens (1991), when they respectively talked about *lifestyle politics* and *life politics*. Citizens are in a convenient position to create their own political home, skipping *established* and territorially based structures such as membership-based organisations like traditional political parties and interest groups.

In the *liquid modernity* society, as described by Zygmunt Bauman, social relationships are more fluid and unanchored by traditional and strong collectively shared identitarian references. All of this has an impact on how citizens approach politics and on the role played by *subpolitical* arenas, which have become increasingly relevant to political participation. That is, new and different political spaces have emerged, giving unprecedented room to the manifestation of civic and political responsibility-taking concerning public interest issues.

Traditionally, political participation has always had dedicated places in which to develop, such as: polling stations during elections, public squares for contentious politics, party headquarters for political meetings, electoral committees for working for a candidate during campaigns, lobbies for lobbying and so on.

The crisis of mainstream political parties and the shift in political culture have both affected modes of citizen engagement. *Individualised* forms of participation can be seen as indications that major transformations have taken place in contemporary societies. This framework includes the *critical citizen* which is a kind of *ideal-type* of social actor, critical of the performance of the democratic government and its main institutions and open to new forms of political engagement. This kind of citizen does not disregard the very democratic principles in which s/he continues to believe. Instead, s/he expresses dissatisfaction above all with concrete governmental policies that are implemented, and with democratic representative bodies that are strongly delegitimised by citizens themselves (Norris 1999).

This stance targets specific actors and elements. For example, party loyalty is first affected by this attitude. The hard core of parties' electoral base has gradually been eroded over time. The same has happened to their membership, which is now very much reduced. But, as structures of power, political parties continue to have strength and centrality despite having lost legitimacy with citizens. Political dynamics are broader and go beyond parties, although they continue to play a fundamental role even in situations in which representative democracy is in crisis. There are specific domains in which parties remain crucial actors, such as parliamentary politics and electoral campaigns. Citizens, however, tend to *articulate* and then transmit their demands differently from the former model of *party democracy*: 'together with the erosion of loyalty to parties, the other salient change that has taken place in recent decades is the advent of non-institutionalized political participation. More and more citizens participate in demonstrations, sign petitions or submit their petitions directly to those who decide' (Manin 2010, 281–2).[10]

6.11 TOWARDS A POST-REPRESENTATIVE (DIGITAL) POLITICS?

The topics discussed in the previous chapters, such as the growth of micro-parties, pop-up parties or anti-party political actors in modern liberal

[10] This excerpt is the author's translation from Manin's Afterword, titled 'The Audience Democracy Revisited', to the Italian translation of *The Principles of Representative Government*.

democracies, disaffection towards traditional mediators no longer legitimised by those represented, anti-political sentiment and, more specifically, anti-establishment orientation spread among citizens, foster direct and *personalised* appeals by the representative to the electoral base with no mediation. All of these push citizens to embrace an *immediate* conception of democracy. The decline of the parties, which are the cornerstones of representation and mediation in politics, is pushing scholars to re-think the fundamentals of (liberal and) representative politics (Tormey 2015). Donatella della Porta (2013) wonders if and how democracy can be saved. A possible way out given the challenging time in which liberal and representative democracies are living is to bring together other and different conceptions of democracy. Key concepts such as participation and deliberation, and then the ideas and practices of participatory and deliberative democracy, can converge in favour of representative democracy to overcome a situation of weakness. New technologies provide tools for democratic innovations even though there are limits and risks, and not just opportunities.

It is necessary to point out again that it is not politics in general that is being rejected by (critical) citizens. It is mainly the political actors of representative politics in its current formula that are criticised by the governed. In this context of spreading disenchantment, the category of *post-representative* democracy could be very useful for understanding the political order of contemporary societies. Even though it sounds like a real oxymoron, this idea of democracy shows indeed how complex existing forms are. Democracy itself is de facto conceived as representative in current Western political culture.

Yet this concept does not refer specifically to the crisis of the traditional parties and their ideological narratives, to the decline of attitudes of deference towards the political class, to the weakening of the meaning of elections and the conventional forms of participation. It suggests that a change of paradigm is needed to observe political reality better. The coexistence of old and new political logics involving citizens in their political community must be considered within this new paradigm, where the former logic has been losing its (symbolic) attractiveness in favour of the latter. This means that non-bureaucratic formulas of mobilisation agencies, individualised engagement, and direct and tendentially leaderless action are becoming more attractive.

New forms of engagement are also reticular and scattered in their shape. A low level of institutionalisation characterises micro-activism initiatives, which are emphatically far distant from the traditional actors of the political arena. Overall, those traits are becoming the modes that feature citizens' responsibility in post-modern society.

Variable geometry is the basis on which this kind of mobilisation dynamically self-composes and re-composes. It develops within national borders and also goes beyond those of the nation-state. Global campaigns, national or local

petitions, NGOs, bloggers, advocacy groups, and watchdog organisations are manifestations of this mode of political activism, and ICTs are a fundamental resource. ICTs are, in turn, interwoven with the change in citizens' political culture. In this scenario, the ideas of *monitoring* (Keane 2009) or *surveillance* (Rosanvallon 2008) democracy are fostered by the civic use of the Web and support the interpretation of a change of paradigm.

Thus, at the heart of this framework lies a specific model of citizenship, the *monitorial* one, which goes beyond the 'theoretical' (and unlikely) model of the *omni-competent* citizen as stated above. Furthermore, this specific style of citizenship finds a place where citizens are only intermittently engaged. What emerges is an area for practices of civic *surveillance*, based on attitudes of 'democratic distrust', that enhance attention to issues of public interest and of the *common good*, both locally and globally.

This is a citizen who acts only when s/he deems it necessary. That is, when s/he considers that his/her action is relevant and appealing, and that it is worth taking action in a given social and political situation. Yet that is not an *exit* strategy, understood in its classical meaning, but it can be seen as a kind of *voice*, since s/he does not see reasons for *loyalty.*

In this regard, it is interesting to consider the relevant turnout in the Italian Constitutional referendum of December 2016. Turnout was 68.5 per cent, much higher than for the two previous referendums (2001: 34.1 per cent and 2006: 53.8 per cent) and very close to that of the 2018 general election (72.9 per cent). These data offer some significant clues. Recent referendums held in Europe are a direct and widely participated channel of expression that political party leaders had promoted in order to gain direct support from electors to legitimise their policies and to reinforce themselves. Sometimes, however, referendums have generated the well known *perverse effect* (the heterogenesis of purposes), creating an anti-establishment meaning against their original promoters.

This is one interpretation of the success of *leave* – in the UK's June 2016 Brexit referendum. As well as the result, it should also be considered that the referendum turnout was higher than the turnout for the previous general election. We can understand the significant participation in the 2 October 2017 Italian regional consultative referendums held along 'institutional' lines. They were promoted by the Northern League regional governors of Veneto and Lombardy to ask for more autonomy from the central state, which is traditionally considered and identified as an expression of *the establishment*.

Unlike the (former) Northern League, Italian parties that have never had an autonomist political culture or request also embraced those referendums. This is the case of the Five Star Movement, which, however, has made *direct* contact with *the people* a central point of its conception of democracy.

The constitutional referendum and successive ones demanding a higher degree of autonomy were seen as two opportunities for *direct* participation methods that offered citizens themselves a chance and an institutional tool to channel critical sentiment towards the political elite.

7. Conclusions

The scenario laid out in this book sets out an increasingly complex framework marked by even softer lines of demarcation, where citizens practise new modes of participation and overcome the apathy behind which they seemed to have hidden. The figure of the critical citizen is not necessarily a disaffected and apathetic citizen.

However, citizens have often been depicted as a passive audience. But now they have experienced the opportunity to embrace a participatory approach that is different from the traditional role. This new role is characterised by intermittent, and at times individualised, dis-intermediate or, even better, neo-intermediate, mobilisation initiatives.

Sometimes these initiatives have been realised through new post-bureaucratic *political entrepreneurs* following the path of *democratic innovation* based on digital platforms (Sorice 2019; 2020; Smith 2009), online and granular networks of active citizens' groups devoted to petitions, local or global campaigns, flash mobs, checking *open-data*, (discursive) political consumerism and so on.

Those engaged citizens remain emotionally far distant from traditional political actors, as the declining membership of political parties and trade unions, and even electoral volatility, demonstrate. Casting a vote in an election, which is the fundamental ritual of representative politics, is practised less and less in modern democratic systems. This kind of citizen has embraced *liquid* forms of responsibility-taking, different from the *solid* forms of the past that were connected to institutionalised and traditional mediatory bodies. Approaches towards this kind of *post-modern* participation are partly fostered by information often accidentally found on the Internet, as well as by the continuous flow of notifications coming from the Web. All of this 'hybridises' the information transmitted by the legacy media and creates a sort of new media ecosystem in which diverse generations are differently involved.

Furthermore, this kind of citizen makes the symbiotic exchange between online and offline realms the factual place of his/her style of engagement, which is by definition *hybrid*. Monitoring rulers from the time they were candidates running in campaigns when electoral promises were communicated is a way to control them regarding their mandate. This could improve *responsiveness* and *accountability*. It is known that the problem of controlling the elected is a fundamental question in the debate about representation, as

stated by Bernard Manin: 'Representative systems do not authorize (indeed explicitly prohibit) two practices that would deprive representatives of any kind of independence: imperative mandates and discretionary revocability of representatives (recall)' (Manin 1997, 163).

The way citizens relate to politics has been reconfigured over time. Transformations on the citizenship front are following a slow and long-term course, accompanying social change and political change. This process is inevitably intertwined with the metamorphosis of the democratic profile, the development of new communication technologies and the redefinition of political culture. Thus:

1. the term *democracy*, having lost clarity, has ended up incorporating some specific lexical values and has been enriched with new prefixes;
2. the representation of the citizen, understood normatively as the *good citizen*, has taken on different traits with respect to the original ideal-typical figure;
3. citizenship finds ways of expression in increasingly borderline spaces – that is, in interstitial places that attribute a *hybrid* character to the profile, practices and very meaning of being citizens in the age of the Internet.

Post-Representative Democracy

In the previous chapters, reference was made to the post-representative trait that democracy has embraced over time. The various theoretical contributions and the categories mentioned refer, also from the lexical point of view, to this transformation and the phase that (post)modern democracy is undergoing. The related lexicon has been enriched with prefixes that aim to specify its assumed form: *post-*, *counter-*, *hyper-*. But it is also associated with other attributes of the term, such as *audience*(*s*), or *continuous*, *hybrid*, *live broadcasting representative*, *surveillance* and *monitoring*: attributes and specifications that become the essence of the word 'democracy' and its meaning.

The progressive importance of media communication in society and political practice lies at the bottom of this (post)representative government conception. In particular, this concerns the role of the Internet, as a space for extending the public sphere and possibilities for deliberation, in which forms of monitoring citizenship can develop, pushing the concept itself beyond its traditional configuration. The Web, in fact, with all its limitations – government control and censorship up to 'privatisation' of public responsibility, or forms of slacktivism, the spread of fake news, echo chambers, filter bubbles as algorithms effect – nevertheless presents a potential for interaction with democratic discourse. It can offer opportunities for citizen involvement in the political community, even simply through the continuous flow of information

on issues of public concern notified as they happen, increasingly accessed from mobile devices.

Furthermore, the watchdog function, traditionally associated with investigative journalism and therefore linked to 'legacy' forms of mediation, finds with the Internet the opportunity to express itself in a direct, punctual and plural way in civil society. That is, it can develop in the hands of citizens themselves, in a single or associated form, at the grassroots level, within the framework of the dis- or re-intermediation process.

The Internet can therefore also be seen as a potential instrument of active citizenship. The surveillance actions towards politics and politicians can be configured as a stimulus to the work of the power holders in the interest of the common good. The hybridisation between new and legacy media, with communication flows that are no longer centralised and unidirectional, and whose contents can be constructed, appears to be consistent with the interweaving of watchdog journalism and online citizenship. Interaction effects can be produced, leading to mobilisation in favour of the quality of real democracy. However, a society marked by a *communicative abundance*, thanks also to digital channels, can produce 'perverse' effects for the ideal of monitory democracy. This condition can indeed produce inattention and distraction, in the citizens, regarding events and matters of great importance. Thus, in the reality of modern democracies, the gap between surveillance and the free challenging of power can widen, involving pluralism of opinions to such a point that the decline of the function of the media can intertwine with that of democracy.

In this scenario the traditional model of citizenship, centred on parties, on the electoral dimension and on deference to institutionalised politics, is weakened. Moreover, it must be considered that the wider framework within which the citizen moves has profoundly changed: the nation-state is no longer the reference that it was in the past. At the same time, the meaning of civic duty has changed, the very idea of the political community has changed, and civil society has consequently widened its borders in the sphere of globality.

'Good' Citizenship

Attention to collective action and political culture has offered a limited but useful perspective for understanding the transformations that have marked the practices of citizenship. The profile of the citizen has been redesigned, maintaining elements of continuity with the past but incorporating innovative features. With the transition to the post-modern age, some of the cornerstones of the nexus between society and politics, as they were consolidated in early modernity, were greatly weakened. To some extent in all democracies there has been a loosening of traditional identity and loyalty. Asymmetrical rela-

tionship structures are no longer able to elicit the traditional deference of the past, and the bureaucratic bodies of representation have a lower intermediation capacity. Hybrid and flexible identity forms, marked by multiple-belongings, have instead assumed greater weight in the dynamics of political citizenship and in the political culture itself.

Citizens' involvement formulas are therefore open to less rigid and hierarchical methods. They are more individual-centred and reflexive. These are the typical features of post-modernity and an increasingly privatised social life. Behind these changes lies the thrust of generational turnover, which not only has demographic implications, but also feeds transformations of a cultural nature. By changing political culture, the meaning and practices of political citizenship change.

The *network*, understood as the model and structure of sociability, is supported by the same Internet technology that provides the foundation for the *networked society* and the peculiar model of relationship that develops in it, a new *social operating system* according to Lee Rainie and Barry Wellman. The Web and social media are configured, in fact, as tools for promoting this relational structure, with effects on public space in general and on the political dimension in particular. The fluidity of social relationships, the engagement in subpolitical places, and the individualised forms of participation mark this way of experiencing political citizenship in the post-modern era.

However, the collective significance of personalised involvement practices is not compromised. The individualised forms, in fact, do not correspond to the protection of specific individualistic interests, but blend with the assumption of public responsibility. The logic of the network makes these personal participatory actions *collective*, and even when there is no visible 'collectivism' in their everyday expression, these modes of engagement, entering a space of mobilisation of a reticular shape, take on a public meaning, because they are aimed at the common good.

The Internet has important potential in this logic. Allowing the sharing of information and the possibility of low-cost involvement stimulates citizens with a different profile compared with the past. The good citizen has, indeed, gradually assumed the traits of a figure *dealigned* with respect to the traditional elements of anchoring to the political sphere. S/he has taken on *critical* and monitoring orientations towards the power institutions. The practices of digital citizenship do not lead, however, to the materialisation of that ideal and ideal-typical figure of the good 'omni-competent' citizen in the sense discussed by Walter Lippmann. Despite the potential of information sharing, it has expanded greatly with the spread of the Internet and Web 2.0 platforms, and is combined in a manner consistent with the orientations that derive from *cognitive mobilisation*. But a citizen with a higher degree of attention and distrust (in a *democratic* sense according to Pierre Rosanvallon) than in the

past emerges: one who is not only critical but also sensitive and open to civic surveillance involvement.

Monitoring engagement, which distinguishes him or her, ends up eroding the centrality of the traditional figure of the citizen-voter in favour of a profile of the monitoring citizen, who exhibits a weaker bond towards permanent and institutionalised forms of engagement. But, at the same time, owing to this surveillance attitude, s/he appears ready to take action, in the (sub) political space, whenever it seems appropriate, acting on post-ideological and post-modern bases, taking action in favour of specific issues and sometimes even in *single-events*.

The risk is that of sliding towards solitary participation and individual involvement that focuses mainly on fragmented events, fuelling couch activism that contrasts with the ideal-type of *civis nobilis*. Thus, the *responsible* citizen would not be stimulated. Instead, the ephemeral interest of a *liquid* citizen involved in single events would be mobilised, which, thanks to the interweaving of the network and the legacy media, acquires a broad, but temporary, public visibility.

The Hybrid Spaces of Political Citizenship

At the end of the path developed in the previous chapters, some common features have to be mentioned since they are particularly important for citizenship and politics in the time of the platform society. These are spaces strictly connected to the discourse on the change of the concept of political citizenship. They are *interstitial* places where today, more than in the past, the connection between citizen and political community is in the making.

These spaces have a hybrid character, as they are located in the cracks of a multifaceted social reality, which is never as clearly distinguished as the analytical categories adopted by scholars to approach reality. Moreover, social, cultural and technological transformations have made these spaces of citizenship even less defined in the post-modern age.

A first place in which citizenship takes shape is that which is located between the personal and *individualised* dimension, on the one hand, and the *collective* sphere of participation, on the other. It is a space that combines conceptually separate elements but is empirically intertwined in the norms and practices of citizenship, particularly in the time of the Internet.

We must also recall the *fluidity* trait due to the liquid and fragmented society that the logic of the Web contributes to feeding. This is opposed to the dimension of the *solidity* of the relational structure of social life, which has certainly not disappeared in the post-modern age and still remains important in society and in the experience of post-modern citizenship.

Social networks are closely connected to the previous point and are the basis of citizens' involvement in the communities to which they belong. These types of social ties refer to a supposed *horizontality* of the relations that are distinguished from structural formulas marked by *hierarchical* and vertical elements. But the latter continue to maintain their place in the political and social context, even if they are less and less valued by the new citizens in their practices of participation.

Local, global, national and transnational dimensions blend in a plastic way, in the continuous flow of information and activism on the Web. A *glocal* space is created that is the result of a dialectic exchange between different but increasingly interconnected planes, inherent in the process of globalisation, and therefore in glocalisation.

Finally, the alleged *online* dimension and the *offline* dimension should not be forgotten. They are opposites that, in the scientific lexicon, have by now replaced the real–virtual antinomic pair relating to reality. Online and offline represent, indeed, different faces of the same dimension, strongly intertwined in the practices of political citizenship. Furthermore, citizens' *always-on* connectivity, due to mobile connection, makes the distinction between the space inside and outside the Web less and less clear and osmotic.

The Value of the (Good) Citizen

Citizenship at the time of the Internet goes beyond the right/duty to participate, and it goes even further than the conventional ways and places of citizens' inclusion. As was pointed out at the beginning of this work, it must be understood in an extensive sense. Consequently, today's citizenship has assumed a less clear-cut and more porous character. It is, in some respects, personalised and strongly interconnected with other realms of social life. Web politics has a naturally limited presence in the political realm. However, this does not diminish the potential of the Internet for the inclusion of the citizen in the political community and public life. The Internet is, increasingly, an integral part of the space – termed 'ecosystem of connective media' (van Dijck 2013) – in which the citizen is included, where *collective* action takes the form of *connective* action, as suggested by Lance Bennett.

In conclusion, it seems that in this state of affairs, *monitoring* – from the local to the global level – could be a possible option for collective engagement in post-modern society, where the role of the Internet can be understood as a *political form* through which *counter-democracy* can self-structure.

In this condition, the Internet – e-participation and digital democracy, with their heterogeneous forms – has great potential for citizens. It could strengthen and offer support for representative democracy. Representation could become more 'direct' and even closer to citizens. Participatory initiatives and delib-

erative arenas could become more distributed on the ground and practised by citizens themselves also thanks to new technologies.

But it must not be forgotten that there is also a dark side to this story. *Counter-democracy* and particularly counter-powers are ambiguous entities that can also contradict democracy itself, and not just innovate it. It is clear to everyone that the current populist wave uses the digital media ecosystem as a resource to strengthen its role in society. In order to highlight the inherent ambiguity of the Web, the Internet itself is a multifaceted reality that could both disrupt a democracy or destabilise a dictatorship.

Finally, in the broad world of the Internet and the complex and ambivalent intertwining of online engagement, it is possible to see (but it doesn't mean that it is) the Internet as a *safety-net* to curb the progressive decline of representative politics. All of this is taking place within the framework of a political culture that has already dramatically changed and that is moving towards further alteration.

At the same time, there is no doubt that the Web alone is not able to cushion the fall of modern (representative) democracy. Beyond this, first there must always be the active role of the (good) citizen, with his/her attitudes, his/her creativity and his/her public ethics. The ethic of 'humble democracy', as suggested by Keane, is an interesting option where democracy is a political form which is understood not just as a set of institutions but even as a whole way of life: as 'the condition of possibility of values and valued forms of life. […] It recognises and fosters the need to understand that multiple and different forms of power-sharing, power-restraining democracy are thinkable, and practicable. […] Monitory democracies also need democratically virtuous citizens. Virtues are the substructure of a peaceable monitory democracy' (Keane 2018, 468–70).

Thus, this is closely associated with people, and how (good) citizens see their own world, how the medial ecosystems and political leaders 'construct' their own world. After all, citizens' behaviour is shaped by the way they understand their *lifeworld*.

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